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Views and Opinions.

Another Day of Intercession.

A new Government has been formed, and we are officially informed that the whole strength of the nation is to be mobilized to the one end of finishing the War. If it can do that, it will have earned the gratitude of all intelligent and right-minded men and women. Week after week the awful tale of slaughter goes on, until we cease to think of the figures as representing so many human beings, but only as items in a huge arithmetical total. Only so could human nature bear the impact. To realize that every item in these totals is a sentient fellow human being would drive one to insanity. We bear the load of horror in virtue of an acquired inability to realize its nature. War begins by killing husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, friends. It continues by merely providing a different set of figures as representing the inhabitants of a country.

* * *

Slighting the Clergy.

One method of bringing the War to a successful issue is to mobilize the whole resources of the nation. A Minister has been appointed for food, for labour, for agriculture, for a dozen and one other things. But I notice one very serious omission. Nothing has been said about mobilizing the praying force of the country. Were the new Prime Minister a Freethinker, the omission would be easy of comprehension. But he is a Christian, a regular—or fairly regular—attendant at chapel; and the omission is, therefore, the more startling, the slight the more cruel. It cannot be that Mr. Lloyd George is unaware that the leaders of the "Black Army" would cheerfully have responded to the call for help. They have, indeed, worked hard to impress the nation that their help was essential to the winning of the War. The slight appears to have been deliberate. Mr. Lloyd George asked everybody to give assistance cheerfully to help the country get over its difficulties. The one thing he did not ask for was the prayers of the Churches. Evidently he thinks we can win the War without that.

Praying for Peace.

But the clergy will not be denied. As no one else asked them for their help, they have asked themselves. December 31 has been fixed for another Day of Intercession. The Established Church led the way, and the Free Churches have followed suit. The day is to be spent "in prayer for the speedy ending of war and bloodshed, the incoming of the reign of righteousness, freedom, and brotherhood, and the preparation of ourselves and our fellow-citizens for the tasks of the new time." Quite a praiseworthy purpose; only one bears in mind the fact that the Churches have been praying to that end ever since the War began. And it is quite evident that, up to the present, prayer has not brought any striking response. The War has gone on, and is going on, as though it had become a permanent institution. And if two years and four months of prayer have neither ended the War nor brought in the reign of righteousness, will an extra day of united prayer bring about either result? Does anybody believe it will have that effect? Certainly the clergy do not say so, and I fancy the laity do not believe it will either. It is all an elaborate piece of fooling, and at a time when, if ever there was need for it, we should indulge in as little self-deception as possible. * * *

The Meaning of Intercession.

Let us assume for a moment that these prayers for intercession were of value. God is asked to intercede—to what purpose? To end the War? But we have it on the highest authority that the only way in which this War can be ended is either by killing a large number of German soldiers or by starving a number of German civilians—or by a combination of the two methods. "Oh, Lord," cry our British Christians, "help us to kill a sufficient number of your children in Germany to persuade the survivors to speedily sue for peace." There is no other defensible meaning to the prayer. They are not asking that God shall so influence Germany that she will see the error of her ways, and at once make peace on terms suitable to the Allies. That would imply a miracle—and miracles do not happen. They are praying for the end of the War, and most people are convinced that the only way to end the War is by decimating the German armies. During the Franco-German War, *Punch* satirized the German Emperor's piety in the well-known lines:—

I write, my very dear Augusta,
We've given the French an awful buster.
Ten thousand Frenchmen sent below,
Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

So our intercessionists offer prayers for slaughter, and will thank God for his mercies if the prayer be granted. Would it not be more complimentary to God if he were left out of the business altogether?

* * *

Does God Need Asking?

But suppose God *could* stop the War by any other method than that of slaughtering a large number of German soldiers—which involves the killing of the soldiers of other nations as well. What kind of a

God is it that needs to be asked before he will act? Suppose any human being possessed that power. Would *he* need to be prayed to month after month before he would exercise it? Why, if any human being had that power, it would be exerted without a moment's delay, not merely without his being petitioned, but in defiance of attempts to prevent its manifestation. A prayer to God to end the War is a reminder of a duty neglected. We are asking God to do *his* part in putting an end to the War. "We beg to remind you, oh Lord, that all Europe is at war, and that it is within your power to bring this strife to an end." That is the sum and substance of a Day of Intercession. And a God who needs such a prayer is one that a decent and intelligent person would think twice about before offering him worship. * * *

Our Civilized Savages.

It is difficult indeed to realize and appreciate the frame of mind that can honestly and intellectually join in a Day of Intercession. Of course, it is quite consonant with the existence of people who believe that this War has been "permitted" because of our "national sins," because we have forgotten God, disestablished the Church in Wales, or contracted the habit of visiting a picture-palace on Sunday. An uncivilized inhabitant of Central Africa would not find it difficult to understand this type of mind, because, in this respect, it is akin to his own. When *he* goes out to war he prays to *his* deity for victory, and even carries it with him so that it may record all that is going on. And there are cases where savages have thrashed their God when, instead of bringing them victory, he has suffered them to experience defeat. But this only occurs with savages. Civilized man never talks back to his God. The worse God treats him, the more he abases himself. A savage who had been fighting an enemy for two years without gaining victory would, in all probability, be looking out for another God of a more satisfactory kind. But, then, he is only a savage. Being civilized, we thank God for his goodness because he has done nothing, and exhibit our superiority over the benighted savage by praying to him for a victory which everybody declares will come from superiority in men, munitions, and money. And man is defined as a rational being. * * *

A Suggestion to Mr. Lloyd George.

Because of the War the nation is being urged to practice the strictest economy, to shun all luxury, to utilize national energy in productive pursuits alone. Why not make a start with the Churches? No one pretends that the Churches will win the War, or that we cannot win the War without them. If we have nothing and no one but God to help us, then it is, indeed, "God help us!" Many millions have been spent upon the upkeep of religion since the War commenced. Thousands of churches are using large quantities of coal and gas which householders are implored to use economically. There is a paid Chaplain to the House of Commons, who prays that its members may be endowed with wisdom—without very obvious results. Let Mr. Lloyd George abolish him. There are thousands of chaplains being paid to preach to soldiers and sailors who, for the most part, do not need them. Let them be abolished also. Let everybody stop paying their parsons until the War is over, and let the parsons, for once in their lives, be turned on to some useful labour—agriculture, for example. If we must cut down our expenditure upon such necessary things as food and clothing, if we are to be bidden by law to restrict our expenditure upon these things, if we must close museums and art galleries, and curtail the money spent on educa-

tion because of the War, closing churches and conscribing the labour of the clergy would seem to be no more than an act of national common sense.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Watchman, What of the Night?

THIS is a time of mourning; many valued treasures, won through years of stress and struggle, having vanished, and not a few others, no less precious, being in the act of disappearing. In the sad circumstances of this strange time, nothing else could be reasonably expected; and yet it would be the quintessence of folly to fall into despair. It is night-time, and the darkness is at times both bewildering and dangerous; but we must not forget that the stars are still shining with undiminished splendour and dignity. Possibly, the worst is not over yet, but midnight is past, and our faces are set towards the morning of a new and glorious day. The watchman in the twilight may not be able clearly to discern either light or darkness; but he knows that the twilight in which he finds himself prefigures the rising of the sun. Progressive ideas have received a serious check during the last couple of years, but progress has never moved in a straight line, nor is it likely to do so in the near future. Ideas may, and do, experience temporary backsets and repulses, but they cannot be crushed. There are times when nations, like individuals, go stark mad, and we are passing through such a time now. The War signifies a reversion to the savage state, the horrors of which are enormously intensified by the mechanical achievements of civilization. Our comfort, however, lies in the fact that such deplorable reversions are not permanent. Humanity has a wonderful knack of recovering from all its relapses and of reaching a higher point of mental development than had ever touched before. Fits of insanity are succeeded by longer spells of growing health. Such has been the history of progress hitherto, and there is nothing to indicate any radical departure from it in the time to come.

Even the War itself is not an unmix ed evil. While it has dealt a severe blow to Christianity, it has rather helped than hindered the cause of Freethought. Had the Cross been the love-sowing and peace-making power which it has always claimed to be, there would have been no war to its discredit. Not only it has not been able to prevent war, it has even fostered it on a large scale, with the result that many of the wars of history may accurately be described as Christian wars. But had the nations been really governed by the law of reason, instead of nominally by that of Christ, all differences and disputes between them would have been adjusted by arbitration. It is impossible to carry on "this game of beasts" within the bounds of reason. Brutality of all sorts and degrees is essentially unchristian, but by no means unchristian. Indeed, in the days of its power, the Christian Church systematically practised the lowest forms of savagery as a token of loyalty to its Divine Head. Its love to him demonstrated its reality by its vehement hatred of all those who called any of its dogmas in question. The Pope of Rome never listened to reason, but was guided in all his official relations by faith and prejudice. Herein is the explanation of the Inquisition and all its terrible deeds. The same remarks apply to the Genevan Pope and his unspeakable doings. Servetus very kindly wrote to him on forwarding him the MS. of his books, and Calvin not only replied in a spirit of hostility, but in a letter to Farel, written the same day, he said: "If he come, and my influence can avail, I shall not suffer him to depart alive." The

penalty for being Calvin's opponent poor Servitus paid with his life at the stake. Writing of him ten years after burning him, Calvin said: "This obscene dog barks." Erasmus was to some extent a Rationalist, and condemned persecution without mercy, and for his pains evangelical Luther called him an enemy of true religion, a slanderer of Christ, an Epicurean, and a Lucian. Of course, Martin Luther was an exceptionally loyal and consistent Christian. The burning of Giordano Bruno in the Field of Flowers at Rome was a horribly brutal action, but it was a fine exemplification of the Christian spirit.

Now, judged in the light of its history, Christianity would have performed a miracle had it prevented the present War. Such an intervention would have thrown an entirely new light upon its character. As a matter of fact, Prussianism, which in this country is held responsible for the War and declared to be a body of callous Materialists and Atheists, is a definitely Christian institution. All German military officers must be professors of religion. Had Dr. Campbell Morgan and Mr. Spurr been anxious to know the truth about Germany this might have been common knowledge with them before the War broke out, because it is on official record that in 1913, in answer to a petition that the law might be so modified as to admit non-religious men into the Army, the German military authorities positively declined to entertain any proposal of the kind. Consequently, every military officer in Germany must not only be a Christian, but also a member of some Church, Catholic or Protestant.

We are now faced with the fact that, with the single exception of Turkey, all the countries participating in the War are decidedly Christian countries. Great Britain, in particular, claims to be fighting for Christ and his kingdom. In reality, it is a Holy War all round. Our young men are said to have heard the call of the Saviour and gone out to draw the sword in his name and for his glory. Those who fight in this spirit, whether from Germany or elsewhere, if they live to return to their homes, will doubtless become more fervent and anatical Christians than ever they had been before. This is to be expected, and need cause no surprise. But there are multitudes of others, who never were believers after the order of the Bishop of London and Dr. Horton, upon whom the War has come as a startling and staggering revelation. It has opened their eyes to the solemn truth that this world cannot be under the government of an all-wise, all-good, all-loving, and all-powerful Deity, whose offspring our race is. Just here the divines interject the observation that the anomalies rendered so emphatic by the War, have been in active existence, on a larger or smaller scale, all through the ages. Granted; and it was the consciousness of that truth that converted some of us to Atheism many years ago. We saw then what many of our young men are only finding out today. It is not alone in connection with the present War that Christianity has been so signal a failure, but all through its long history. Even as a system of morality with supernatural sanctions and aids, it has never been a success. The Ages of Faith were ages of unspeakable moral rotteness and wickedness. Fervent piety bore very little, if any, practical fruit in moral and social reforms. Being fundamentally false, the Christian religion has done absolutely nothing to justify the absurd claims which it has always made for itself. This is the discovery which such large numbers of thoughtful young men are now making for the first time; and their chief surprise is that they did not make it long ago.

On the whole, then, the prospects of Freethought are brighter and more encouraging at present than they have been for years. For a time after the War there

may be a recrudescence of superstitious beliefs and practices, a consummation upon the realization of which most parsons are concentrating all their efforts; and probably they shall have their reward, for a season. Emotional preachers, like the Rev. Thomas Phillips, of Bloomsbury Chapel, have pleasant dreams of an all-glorious future, when once more the Church will be a power in the land. In his little dream, Mr. Phillips saw "Europe weltering in blood and groping in wild dismay," and he also saw that "a whole continent was hungering to hear the authentic will of God proclaimed by his servants." We gladly give Mr. Phillips the credit of being sincere when he makes some of his silliest statements; but we must remind him of two things of which he seems to be totally blind, namely, first, that God's so-called servants have been proclaiming what they regard as his "authentic will" in all ages; and, second, that the continent of Europe has never taken either them or their proclamation at their own valuation. In other words, Europeans have been gradually learning that the men and women who have the audacity to call themselves God's servants are either conscious impostors or the dupes of a supreme illusion.

That is a conclusion to which the thoughtful everywhere are coming. The parson's is rapidly becoming an antiquated profession, to the performances of which the public at large pay no serious heed. Humanism is steadily undermining supernaturalism, and some of the clergy are simple enough to imagine that Humanism is another and improved version of Christianity. Into this error the public will not follow them. What may happen immediately after the conclusion of the War we do not pretend to be able to foresee; but it is beyond all controversy that hitherto no war has permanently benefited religion. On the contrary, it is indisputable that every past war ultimately weakened its hold upon the hearts and minds of the masses, and that the trend of things seems to be towards a purely secular philosophy of life. As Freethinkers, we have, therefore, every reason to take heart and be of good courage, and wish one another every possible happiness in the service of the "Best of Causes" in the coming NEW YEAR.

J. T. LLOYD.

Nonconformist Nonsense.

Prophets, Priests, and Kings. Pillars of Society. The War Lords. By A. G. Gardiner.

Books are often produced in a hurry, and writers have lately developed a reprehensible habit of reprinting newspaper articles in book form with catchy titles, and without sufficient revision. One remarkable example is Mr. A. G. Gardiner's *Pillars of Society*, a collection of personal sketches of men and women who happen to have been in the public limelight. In their original newspaper form these articles were tolerable; but placed together in a volume with an imposing title, they lack distinction, and remind the reader of a Cook's excursion through contemporary society. For example, these *Pillars of Society* include an archdeacon, a foreign actress, an eminent tradesman, a titled actor, and several deceased gentlemen, besides a miscellaneous collection of notoriety who were better away. The title is singularly inappropriate. The writer, be it noted, is the Editor of the *Daily News*, the Nonconformist daily newspaper, and wields a facile pen; yet he is willing to challenge the verdict of the more serious reading public in this way. Nor is this all; for the articles themselves are not matured judgments of men and things, but journalistic vapourings which, however delightful in the columns of the press, are somewhat startling in the

pages of a volume which is widely advertised as having some claims to be considered as literature, and which, its publishers tell the public, has been sold by thousands.

Mr. Gardiner has frequently expressed his severe disapprobation of sensationalism and frivolity in the Press, yet he is himself not unconscious of a desire to "tickle the ears of the groundlings." In a personal sketch of the King he writes as follows:—

He is the first English King to belong to the working classes by the bond of a common experience. He moves among them not as a stranger from some starry social sphere, but as one to the manner born. He has reefed the sail and swabbed the deck and fed the fire. He has stood at the helm through the tempest and the night. He knows what it is to be grimy and perspiring, to have blistered hands and tired feet. In short, he knows what it is to be a working man. He has the mechanic's interest in things, and one learns without surprise that his presents to his children are largely mechanical toys.

One rubs one's eyes at the printed words. Now, listen to Mr. Gardiner's remarks on the Queen:—

The Queen, like her husband, has the middle-class seriousness and sense of duty. She is almost the only woman in society who cannot be called "a society woman." When she pats an orphan on the head or gives sixpence to a beggar, I do not think she would want half a column of laudation in the newspapers to commemorate the fact that she shares the common sympathies of humanity.

What can one say of writing such as this? It is a habit with Mr. Gardiner, for in a companion volume, entitled *Prophets, Priests, and Kings*, he has some remarks to make on the Kaiser which read like the deadliest irony in the light of subsequent events. This is the way he doles out his soothing-syrup for Nonconformist intellectual infants:—

The Kaiser is easily the foremost man in Europe. He is a king after Charles the First's own heart, "a king indeed," the last that is left, the residuary legatee of the divine right. The cause for which he fights could have no more worthy protagonist. He is every inch a king. Divest him of his office and he would still be one of the half dozen most considerable men in his empire. When the British editors visited Germany they were brought into intimate contact with all the leaders of action and thought in the country, and I believe it is true to say that the Kaiser left the sharpest and most vivid personal impression on the mind. No man in history ever had a more God-like vision of himself than he has. His cloud of dignity is held from falling by the visible hand of the Almighty. He keeps his powder dry and his armour bright. But he stands for peace—peace armed to the teeth, it is true, peace with the mailed fist; but peace nevertheless.

Indeed, the volume, *Prophets, Priests, and Kings*, is open to much criticism. Eliminating the monarchs, the "prophets" and "priests" include Dr. Clifford, Mrs. Pankhurst, the Bishop of London, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, Dr. Horton, Rudyard Kipling, G. K. Chesterton, and about thirty other persons of more or less importance. If Mr. Gardiner wrote his character sketches with his tongue in his cheek, then your hat flies off to him as an astute man of business. But it is far more probable that he regards himself seriously, and is capable of admiring these books had they been written by another hand. His atmosphere is heavy with the sentimentalism of the Free Churches. Witness his account of Dr. Clifford's theological views:—

His own faith is still as clear and as primitive as when, sixty years ago, he sat a boy in Beeston Chapel, in much mental anguish, and, in his own words, experienced conversion in the midst of the singing of the verse:

The soul that longs to see My face
Is sure My love to gain;
And those that early seek My grace
Shall never seek in vain.

A third volume, *War Lords*, is more happily named; but, critically speaking, there is the same gush of sentimentality and beautiful nonsense. It reminds us of the story of a counsel who, in addressing a jury, characterized the defendant in the case as a "naufragious ruffian." His junior asked him afterwards what the expression meant. The counsel retorted, "I haven't the least idea, but it sounded well, didn't it." Mr. Gardiner's articles read well, but his ideas are as shallow as a saucer. The books are compacted of battered and threadbare conventionalities, and it is difficult to believe that he has ever studied life outside a Nonconformist chapel, for where else could he stumble upon the conversion of Dr. Clifford. But is it not playing it a little low down on the British Nonconformist thus to take advantage of his ignorance of life and his lack of experience? When the Education Act has run another half century, the readers of newspapers, perhaps, will cease to hunger for sawdust, and will prefer the bread of knowledge. And yet, if Mr. Gardiner would but forget his Nonconformist audience, his books and his articles would be so much better. Writing of the legend of the Russian Army in England, he has some very pertinent remarks:—

The true interest of the legend is psychological rather than historical. It offers the most striking instance in our time of the growth of a myth, and it throws a curious light on the origin of the myths that have developed in the past out of the terrors, anxieties, and hopes of peoples fumbling darkly for an explanation of an inexplicable world. It could only have survived in circumstances in which the Press had become artificially silent and had ceased to bring rumour to the challenge of definite proof. For the true twilight of the gods came with the printing press. Mythology and the newspapers cannot co-exist.

In sober truth, and not in the cant of journalism, let us wish for the recovery of Mr. Gardiner. There are many editors for whom the inscription, "Died of the Christian Fallacy" is good, and good enough. But the man who occupies the seat formerly used by Charles Dickens; the man who writes for the great newspaper which numbered Harriet Martineau among its contributors, should not be one of these. So desperate is the dilemma that almost is one persuaded that British Nonconformity has declined upon a future of hypocrisy and vulgarity.

MIMNERMUS.

The Epithet "Christian."

THE way the epithet "Christian" is prostituted by writers and speakers, as well as in ordinary conversation, is an indication of the state of hopeless chaos in which Christian thought and thinking are always involved. The meanings attached to it are not only different and divergent, but are often so wholly inconsistent with each other as to be mutually exclusive. There is, however, a tacit concensus of opinion that in strict logic the term should be confined exclusively to original characteristics—a fact that explains why reformers and innovators almost invariably betray a fervid anxiety to prove that their reform or change is a return to the pristine cult. Nevertheless, the word is daily applied, without apparent thought of the way it is being outraged, to a vast multitude of ritual and credal departures and innovations absolutely incongruous with the doctrine and spirit of the original creed, and often wholly subversive of its fundamental aim and mission.

Let me instance a few of the main departures which stand relative to the host of minor accretions and changes as mountain ranges do to their vast offspring of hills and mountains.

Though Christianity at its inception was essentially an emphatic revolt against ritual and "the works of the law," yet the vast tumulus of rites and ceremonies observed by the Greek and Roman Churches is called Christian worship!

Again, though Christianity was originally a religion which renounced the "world" in its totality of wealth, pomp, and pleasure, yet the epithet Christian is unblushingly appropriated by a Church that wallows in wealth and that exults in its worldly glory and power. It is impossible to conceive of a travesty more grotesque in its perversion.

Similarly, though the credal contents of primitive Christianity consisted of myth, magic, and miracles, yet there is a *Christian* sect from whose creed nearly all superstition has been banished—a departure that is, more or less, shared by most of Protestant Churches.

Equally ludicrous is the misapplication of the term in the phrases "Christian morality" or "Christian morals"—phrases that play such a conspicuous part in current apologetics. They obviously tend to convey the idea that the Christian religion had a system of morality of its own, either as a characteristic code or as ethical principles, out of which such a code could be framed or evolved. The assumption, however, is absolutely without any foundation in fact. Christianity never had or *presumed* to have any such code or principles. If honesty had a voice in the selection of an appropriate epithet to describe the recent humanistic awakening within the Churches, the term selected would have been "heretical" or "Atheistic," for it received its inspiration and stimulus not from Christianity or the Church, but from the world of doubt and unbelief.

It may sound strange to many, but it is a demonstrable truth that morality in the sense of a system or scheme for the regeneration of humanity or the amelioration of its social conditions is absolutely *anti-Christian* in spirit and aim. Christianity did *not* seek the well-being of mankind in *this life*; its sole concern was its eternal welfare in another world. It is probably the most pronounced other-worldly religion the world has ever known.

That man needs morality in this life as much as he was supposed to need faith for the other, was only very slowly and reluctantly recognized by the great Church. This recognition was made in three successive stages or periods.

1.—The first was a long period culminating in the Reformation. During this time many a reformer, always branded, of course, as heretic, attracted unwilling attention to the fact that "mystic" union with Christ at the new birth was *no guarantee* for moral conduct or character. So the Church, especially the Protestant section, included the inculcation of moral duties as part of its mission and function in the world. Any reader wishing to have a vivid glimpse of the final phase of this period should not miss a perusal of Mr. McCabe's historical sketch in the new *R. P. A. Annual*.

2.—Then science, especially biological science, blasted away the Genesis myth of man's origin and history. This robbed the Christian Creed of its very foundation. The whole superstructure came down with a crash. The "fall" was shown to be a primitive myth; so that "salvation," "redemption," "atonement," and the like, became terms with absolutely no meaning left in them. The Churches were therefore deprived of any pretence of a reason for existing. So, with the instinct of self-preservation, the pulpit gradually ceased to disparage or denounce moral conduct as "mere morality," and began to patronize movements which had social betterment and human welfare as their objects.

3.—As soon, however, as Secular Education loomed large on the social horizon, threatening to rescue the

child from the clutch of the priest, the Church was filled with sincere alarm. It now took morality under its ægis and loudly claimed it as its divinely appointed charge. Ethical conduct was no longer "mere morality," but an asset of "supremest" importance to the race.

In this way the word Christian came to be applied as an epithet to morality, as taught and observed in modern Christendom. But it is as outrageous a prostitution of the term as it is to apply it to the gorgeous ritual of the Catholic Church, or to an institution that luxuriates in colossal wealth.

KERIDON.

Pagan and Christian Morality.

X.

(Concluded from p. 827.)

The Christian Church has not saved the world. Christianity lives upon the falsification of history in the past, and irredeemable promises in the future. Its apologists have systematically blackened the ancient civilizations; they have taken credit for such improvement in human society as was inevitable in the progress of two thousand years; and against the objection that the world is still in a very wretched condition; they have replied that Christianity has not had time enough to produce all its beneficial fruits. Give it *another* two thousand years, and it will turn the wilderness into a paradise, and make the desert bloom with roses!—G. W. Foote, "*Will Christ Save Us*," p. 23.

The Roman law, upon which the jurisprudence of every civilized country is still based, first took coherent shape in the reign of Hadrian; and Ulpian's fundamental maxim that before the law all men are free and equal was founded on a conception of the rights of the individual very different from the Oriental notion that all subjects, high and low, were the chattels of the king. In these circumstances, new ethical ideals had arisen which affected all classes of the State. As Sir Samuel Dill has said in his charming sketch of Roman manners under the Julian, Flavian, and Antonine emperors, "It has perhaps been too little recognized that in the first and second centuries there was a great propaganda of pagan morality running parallel to the evangelism of the Church."¹ But this ethical propaganda was an entirely lay affair, and the work not of the priests, but of the philosophers.—Legge, "*Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*" (1915), pp. 86-7.

THE historian Gibbon says of Marcus Aurelius, this greatest of all rulers, "his life was the noblest commentary on the precepts of Zeno. He was severe to himself, indulgent to the imperfections of others, just and beneficent to all mankind. He regretted that Avidius Cassius, who excited a rebellion in Syria, had disappointed him, by a voluntary death, of the pleasure of converting an enemy into a friend; and he justified the sincerity of that sentiment, by moderating the zeal of the senate against the adherents of the traitor. War he detested, as the disgrace and calamity of human nature; but when the necessity of a just defence called upon him to take up arms, he readily exposed his person to eight winter campaigns, on the frozen banks of the Danube, the severity of which was at last fatal to the weakness of his constitution. His memory was revered by a grateful posterity, and above a century after his death, many persons preserved the image of Marcus Antoninus among those of their household gods."²

Dignitaries of the Christian Churches vie with Free-thinkers and Atheists in lauding the character of the Pagan emperor. We have cited the testimony of the great Cardinal Barberini who declared that his soul blushed "redder than his purple at the sight of the virtues of this Gentile." Here is the tribute of a clergyman of the Established Church. The Rev. Wolfe Capes, speaking of the book of *Thoughts*, says, "Written here and there in the moments of leisure, sometimes on the

¹ Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, p. 346.

² Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. iii., p. 31, 1830 edition.

eve of battle in the general's tent, sometimes in the dreary monotony of winter quarters and by the morasses of the Danube, they have little nicety of style or literary finish, they contain no system of philosophy set off with parade of dialectic fence; but there is in them what is better far, the truthful utterance of an earnest soul, which would lay bare its inmost thoughts, study the secrets of its strength and weakness, and be by turns the accused, the witness, advocate, and judge."¹

Ernest Renan, who from a Catholic priest became a Freethinker, and wrote a life of Jesus in which he discarded the miracles and the supernatural, reducing the life of Jesus to a poetical novel, which one of his critics declared "smelt of patchouli." Renan placed the *Thoughts* higher than the Gospels. He says:—

Fortunately the little casket which enclosed the thoughts by the banks of the Gran and the philosophy of the Carmoute was saved. It came forth from this incomparable book, in which Epictetus was surpassed, this manual of resigned life, this Gospel for those who do not believe in the supernatural, which could not have been better understood than it may in our days; for it affirms no dogma. The Gospel has aged in some portions; science does not permit any longer the admission of the artless conception of the supernatural which makes its basis. The supernatural is not in the *Thoughts*, except a little insignificant spot which does not mar the marvellous beauty of the whole. Science may destroy God and the soul, while the book of the *Thoughts* remains young yet in life and truth. The religion of Marcus Aurelius, as was occasionally that of Jesus, is the absolute religion—that which results from the simple fact of a high moral conscience placed face to face with the universe. It is neither of one race nor of one country. No revolution, no advance, no discovery can change it.²

Marcus Aurelius lived between the years 121 and 180 after Christ, but that he owed anything to the Gospels is demonstrably untrue. If we are to believe the unscrupulous and untruthful early Christian writers, he was a great persecutor of the Christians. Mr. George Long, who has made the best translation of the *Thoughts*, and who seems to be akin in mind to the great emperor, deals with this point in his introduction to the *Thoughts*. He says: "Besides the fact of the Christians rejecting all the heathen ceremonies, we must not forget that they plainly maintained that all the heathen religions were false. The Christians thus declared war against the heathen rites, and it is hardly necessary to observe that this was a declaration of hostility against the Roman government, which tolerated all the various forms of superstition that existed in the empire, and could not consistently tolerate another religion, which declared that all the rest were false and all the splendid ceremonies of the empire only a worship of devils" (pp. 20-21). If the Christians had been content to live and let live, they would have been as free to practise their religion as any other religious body in the Empire; but they were a set of fanatics who would not allow others to practise their religion in peace and quietness. Moreover, as he further points out, Marcus Aurelius "did not make the rule against the Christians"; his predecessor, the Emperor Trajan, did that. And he concludes that "Marcus Aurelius knew nothing of them except their hostility to the Roman religion, and he probably thought that they were dangerous to the State, notwithstanding the professions, false or true, of some of the Apologists" (pp. 21-22).

The great emperor was fully justified in regarding Christians as dangerous to the State; they were dangerous to the State, and history attests that they contributed largely to the decline and ruin of the greatest empire the world has ever seen.

¹ Wolfe Capes, *The Roman Empire of the Second Century* (1880), p. 121.

² Renan, *Marcus Aurelius*, p. 156.

Tried in all the duties and responsibilities of life—as a son, as a husband, as a father, as the ruler of a mighty empire, by means of which he could, if he wished, have gratified every sensual whim and caprice to which human nature is subject to the utmost limit—Marcus Aurelius came us near perfection as it is possible to attain. There is no Christian emperor worthy to compare, even remotely, with him.

Compare his life with the life of Jesus. According to the Gospels, Jesus was far from being kind and considerate to his family—in fact, quite the opposite. He never took up the duties and responsibilities of marriage, and therefore set no example to parents. He was never in the position of a ruler, and when his hour of trial came he weakly prayed that the cup might pass from him, finishing with the despairing cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

"But," argues the Christian, "you must admit that we are much better morally, intellectually, and materially than these Pagans, and for this we have to thank Christianity."

In the first place, if it were true that we are better than the old Pagans, it should cause no surprise that humanity has made some progress in the course of 1900 years. We *ought* to have made some progress during such a period. But as a matter of fact what progress we have achieved has been neither moral—as we have shown—nor intellectual, as the Greeks in the time of Pericles (450 B.C.) were in every way our equals in intellect, and in art were our masters. Our sole progress has been in science—and even here we built upon the foundations laid by the Greeks—science, which Christianity crushed out of Europe when it had the power, and still opposes to the limit of its opportunities. Science owes nothing to Christianity.

As for being better off in a material sense—that is to say that we are happier, better ruled, or more secure in our life and property—it is not true, and we have the very highest authority for the statement. Theodore Mommsen, one of the very greatest historians of Rome, declared: "If an angel of the Lord were to strike the balance whether the domain ruled by Severus Antoninus was governed with the greater intelligence and greater humanity at that time or in the present day, whether civilization and national prosperity generally have since that time advanced or retrograded, it is very doubtful whether the decision would prove in favour of the present."¹ Gibbon, the greatest English historian, in his magnificent history of Rome, goes further than Mommsen; and Lecky, the historian of European Morals, is of the same opinion, as we shall see in future articles.

W. MANN.

The Instinct for Association.

It is curious how, in their strenuous efforts to prove that religious belief is compatible with a state of society in which men will have outgrown ignorance and superstition, religious "scholars" are able to swallow propositions that are mutually destructive. These "scholarly" swells are getting to be a bit of a nuisance. Their main function seems to be, in the majority of cases, to obscure rather than to enlighten. And we need not be surprised at this when we consider that they waste so much time and energy in trying to reconcile things that are irreconcilable. Christian preachers are never done expatiating on "the simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus." They emphasize the fact that the wayfaring man

¹ Mommsen, *The Provinces of the Roman Empire* (1886), vol. i., p. 5.

though a fool cannot err therein. And we have often heard clergymen belittling the pursuit of physical and intellectual strength, and with emotion declaring that the greatest person they knew on earth was some poor, lone, ignorant, weak old man or woman living in a garret, who was rich in "spiritual" experience—whose "spiritual" strength was gigantic. The ecclesiastic, with admiring awe, *envied* the state of that old creature. But he did not say that he would change places.

These futile attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable have made the religious "scholars" of to-day. "The simplicity of the truth as it is in Jesus," strangely enough, has to be inculcated and explained, and communicated to outsiders, by the verbose dissertations and disquisitions of the theologians, filling hundreds of fat tomes, the very appearance of which is enough to depress the wayfaring fool who was guaranteed simplicity.

There has been published a translation (at 15s. net) of *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, by Emile Durkheim, Professor of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Paris. This volume is an apt illustration of the self-contradictory character of religious "teaching." Why "religious sociology," for example? The learned Durkheim spends much time in studying the Australian aborigines. His main thesis is that man's *instinct* for association with other men is, above all, a *religious* instinct! Man is religious because he is gregarious! What impels the members of the Executive of the National Secular Society to meet together periodically is a religious instinct, is it? If so, what we understand by the adjective "religious" must have become very much diluted since the Middle Ages. But look at the argument from another standpoint. Prince Kropotkin, in his work *Mutual Aid*, gives numerous instances of this "instinct for association" with their kind among the brutes. On what grounds can it be held that *their* instinct for "association" is *not* religious?

Professor Durkheim allows his preconceptions to run away with his common sense. Men in association may be superficially religious; but those who are *profoundly and intensely* religious crave solitude, where they may be alone and have communion, not with their fellow-men, but *with God*. In his survey of primitive religions, the Professor falls into the greatest absurdities. Naturally, he has nothing in common with Grant Allen or John M. Robertson, and it is scarcely necessary to say that he is totally unable to attain that unprejudiced clarity of mental vision which one sees exhibited in the *Golden Bough*. He appears to imagine that he will succeed in an appeal to modern minds by subordinating in his theory of religion the ideas of awe and wonder, and even worship, to communion. But, as we have indicated, communion between human beings does not necessarily involve the acceptance of religion or belief in the supernatural or "super-individual." Of course, the greedy and self-centred may be guilty of anti-social conduct; but the most profoundly religious individuals are the monastics. Freethought is quite ready to meet Professor Durkheim on the platform he has constructed for himself. It will at once be seen that he is not particularly cordial, or even complimentary, to God. He relegates the elements of awe and wonder and worship to subordinate places. Surely this is giving God the cold shoulder! But we do not find that the Professor has much light to shed on the twentieth-century Deity. Indeed, one is free to believe that he is willing to let us moderns make our gods for ourselves. He declares that "the believer who has communicated with his God is not merely a man who sees new truths.....he is a man who is *stronger*." Marvellous! There you have it. Mystical dogmatism is the one thing needful—the pearl

of great price. Religion, according to this "scholar's" conclusions, demands and regulates action, enriches and organizes thought. Through it again will come "those hours of creative effervescence, in the course of which new ideas arise and new formulæ are found which serve for a while as a guide to humanity."

We have quoted these passages to illustrate the Professor's essentially rhetorical and essentially illogical cast of mind. Let us ask: What *facts* exist which can be adduced in support of the fantastic conclusions he draws? None whatever. The victories of Humanity have been the defeats of religion. The emancipation of man is being slowly but surely won, not by religion or religious belief, but in spite of it—by deliverance from the bonds which it imposes. Religious belief has its place in primitive minds. Its decay is to be observed with the advance of civilization.

IGNOTUS.

Acid Drops.

We have often had occasion to comment upon the unlovely side of the religious character, but as poor a specimen as we have come across for some time has been sent us by a reader. It consists of two four-page leaflets, reprints of letters from a Private A. S. Dolden, and we are quite at a loss to see why they have been printed—particularly as there is no publisher's name on them. The writer describes his experience in several attacks on the German lines; and if one wished for evidence of the moral effects of war, he certainly supplies it. Private Dolden is not surprised at his own escapes—that was "not strange, really, for before starting, and during the advance, I commended myself to the Almighty," and his escapes "only strengthened my faith in the Almighty the more." The egotism of it is superb. There is no regret over the other people who were killed—perhaps, as they had not commended themselves to the Almighty, they could not expect to be saved. Or perhaps the Almighty was too busy guarding the precious life of Private Dolden to attend to the others. A different kind of person might have prayed for the rest of the regiment. Private Dolden only prayed, "Oh, Lord, look after *me*." And the Lord did so. Which says little for either party concerned.

We should be loth to think that Private Dolden was a fair specimen of the British soldier—in fact, we know he is not. He is only a specimen of the pious egotist. So far as the average returned soldier is concerned, nothing has struck us more than his lack of bloodthirstiness and vindictiveness. Very seldom does he speak of the enemy with bitterness or hatred—that seems reserved for the civilians. They are all soldiers, out to do their work; and our men, on the whole, take and give as part of the business in hand. And against the religious gloating over "the lead pumped into the Huns," one may put a sentence from an uneducated soldier cited in Patrick Macgill's *The Great Push*: "Some'ow a dying Allemong don't seem a réal Allemong; you ain't able to 'ate 'im as you ought." We much prefer the *human* sentiment of this to the greasy piety of thanking God for one's own preservation amid the dead bodies of one's comrades.

The Rev. J. R. Edwards, pastor of Kenyon Baptist Chapel, Brixton, has been appointed an Army chaplain. Most of his professional brethren prefer to pray for the soldiers in the security of their own homes.

In a criticism of an illustrated edition of *The Book of Job*, the dear *Daily News* complains that the artist has depicted Job "as a clean-shaven young man, who looks like a picture-postcard actor, rather than a tragic figure." The same criticism might be levelled at artists' endeavours to portray the hero of the Gospels.

According to the clergy, Atheism leads to suicide; but these good men are as mistaken about this as they are con-

cerning the "Atheism" of the Germans. As a fact, more clergymen commit suicide than Freethinkers, the latest case being that of the Rev. H. Wilkinson, of St. Peter's Church, Worcester, who shot himself through the head.

"Christianity did not forge instruments of war," says Bishop Welldon. Exactly! But Christians forged the Gospels and other manuscripts.

Bishop Welldon says that education has sapped the vitals of the Germans, and led to their undoing. Science, too, has proved itself a curse. The Bishop might reflect that the Old Testament peoples were good-sized scoundrels without the assistance of science or education.

The Lord's anointed do not seem to fare any better than rank outsiders. Recently, the Rev. W. C. Stocks, Rector of Foston, Leicestershire, fell down a lift-well and was killed. Had he been a Freethought lecturer, there would have been a fearsome moral.

Mr. H. A. Vachell, the novelist and dramatist, says, "We are not a thinking nation." That is precisely the reason why the Christian superstition still flourishes.

A good story is told in an evening paper. A precocious six-year-old was saying her prayers, and added, "And please, God, do help mamma find a servant."

Another story tells of a boy who told his father that God loved fleas. The parent was nonplussed, and asked the boy why he thought so. "Because he makes so many of them," was the reply.

The Bishop of London seems incapable of perceiving and speaking the truth on any subject whatsoever. In an address given at St. Alban's, Holborn, the other day, he described the Church, when it first appeared, as being "absolutely united," "absolutely loving, without taint of party spirit or bitterness." Employing his lordship's own adjective, we unhesitatingly pronounce his picture of the early Church "absolutely" false. The bishop adduces no evidence of any kind to substantiate his statements, simply because there is none available; but there is abundant proof of the utter lack of unity in the Apostolic Church. Paul informs us that in the Church at Rome there were those who caused "divisions and occasions of stumbling" (Rom. xvi. 17) - that even at Ephesus, where the most peaceful and best loved of all the Churches existed, there were those who taught "a different doctrine" and gave "heed to fables and endless genealogies, the which minister questionings," "whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, wranglings of men corrupted in mind and bereft of the truth" (1 Tim. i. 3, 4; vi. 3-5); and that in the Corinthian Church there were four irreconcilable factions in a state of never-ceasing strife (1 Cor. i. 11-13). In the face of such unequivocal testimony the Bishop of London has the audacity to affirm that the early Church was "absolutely united," "without taint of party spirit or bitterness," thereby giving the lie direct to the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

In the same address, and with equal disregard of the facts, the Bishop referred to the German "Pagan Gospel which had caused the War." Here again the evidence is entirely against his lordship. Again and again have we been assured, from reliable sources, that for some time before the War broke out, there had been going on throughout Germany a wonderful revival of evangelical religion. Once a lie starts on its nefarious career, however, it is next to impossible to arrest its progress and give it its quietus.

The Rev. A. D. Belden, of Westcliff-on-Sea, has been complaining of vulgarity in the streets on Sundays. He had no word of condemnation for Salvation Army bands playing music-hall tunes, or for itinerant evangelists yelling at street corners of hell and its horrors.

A Sunday newspaper states that Mr. Caradoc Evans, the Welsh novelist, has been denounced as an "Atheist" by Nonconformist ministers in the Principality. He must have been treading on their clerical toes.

The Rev. Thomas Phillips wishes that statesmen would "look at things from the standpoint of the Kingdom of God." Unfortunately, that "kingdom" is not in the ordinary maps.

Dr. W. E. Orchard, in the *Daily News*, pleads for the pulpit "to do something to lift our thoughts above mere diplomacy and politics." People, however, are too busy just at present to listen to dissertations on "Jonah and the whale" or "Adam in Eden."

The *Guardian* complains that Mr. Lloyd George can review the course of the War "without once glancing at the overruling of God, and without even mentioning His name." Whereupon the *Christian World* retorts that Mr. Lloyd George, being a Nonconformist, is debarred "by the very reality of his religion" from using the "sacred Name" for political purposes. So, if Mr. Lloyd George uses the name of God, it may be taken as proof of his religion. If he does not use it, that is also proof of his religion. Heads I win, tails you lose! We beg to suggest that Mr. Lloyd George does not appeal to God because he feels how useless such an appeal is. We do not mean that he has an intellectual appreciation of this, but he knows it to be so in dealing with practical affairs. And in that he resembles most other people.

There has been a great deal of talk these last few weeks as to the future peace of the world. We beg to suggest that it would be a step in the right direction if in each country only those over fifty years of age were allowed to enter the army. That would be the finest guarantee of peace we could have. As it is, old men make wars and young men fight them. The direction of the world's affairs is mainly in the hands of old men, and they bring to the task minds filled with ideas that are not strictly applicable to contemporary life. It may safely be said also, that in nearly every billigerent country the thought of the younger men was sufficiently modernized to perceive the futility of warfare—or sufficiently so to make war an improbability. But the statesmen and diplomats of Europe are mostly living—mentally—a couple of centuries ago. Hence the main cause of the trouble.

Speaking at Southend-on-Sea, the Rev. A. J. Waldron, formerly Vicar of Brixton, said he wanted clergymen to remember that ninety per cent. of the people did not attend any church or chapel on Sundays. Just so! And it is this ten per cent. of pious folk who wish to impose their antiquated views on the majority.

The dear Bishop of London says that fifty years of higher criticism had left the Bible stronger. We wonder if his lordship winked when he said it.

There is one "padre" at the Front who has discovered a revival of religion, but one would have liked his evidence to be more definite. Mr. J. Golder Burns says, in his *Through a Padre's Spectacles*, "There is a distinct revival of religion among the troops in Flanders." There is, he says, "an interesting service every evening," which we do not question, and at these services "over 500 men have made profession of the faith." The number does not greatly impress us. Five hundred professing the Christian faith among many thousands of men does not seem like a result worth shouting about; but clergymen now are thankful for the smallest mercies.

Mr. Burns also is greatly affected by the fact that ministers and members of different denominations will actually worship together. A very striking thing, truly. It is particularly striking when one recalls the fact that the only consideration that will stop Christians fighting amongst themselves is when they are united for the purpose of fighting someone else. And when the War is over they will, we expect, resume their old fighting as vigorously as before.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

January 14, Nottingham; January 28, Swansea; February 4, Abertillery; March 11 Birmingham; March 18, Leicester.

To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 31, Abertillery. January 14, Leicester.

W. L. AND J. S. W.—No doubt you are correct in your belief that if we kept the Sustentation Fund open longer, subscriptions would continue to come in. But we do not like this task of collecting money—it is the one unpleasant feature of our work, and we think it best to adhere to our original closing date.

L.—Lines received, and shall appear. Thanks.

B. DUNLOP.—Next week.

S. AMES.—The real difficulty with the children of Freethinkers seems to us wholly one of environment. If, for instance, there were a sufficient number of Freethinking families in a given area, there would be no trouble whatever. It is not the loss of religious training that is ever felt; it is always the loss of companionship. Where that is forthcoming, no trouble is felt. And we are glad to say that this difficulty grows less year by year.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—Walter Stewart, 2s.

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Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C., and not to the Editor.

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Sugar Plums.

Owing to the Christmas holidays, we are obliged to go to press with the present issue of the *Freethinker* on Saturday, December 23, although it is not published until the 27th. But Christmas involves our getting out two issues of the *Freethinker* in the one week, and this will explain the scarcity of paragraphic material.

As we go to press so much earlier this week, we are withholding acknowledgments of the few subscriptions to hand to the Sustentation Fund until next week. We hope we shall not be thought importunate if we take this occasion to remind our readers that the Fund closes on January 14. That means there are two more issues of the paper in which acknowledgments will appear, and we hope to hear from a goodly number of our readers before we write "Finis" to the list.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd lectures to-day (December 31) at the Tillery Institute, Abertillery, Mon. In the afternoon at 3 the subject is "Self-Reliance versus Trust in God," and in the evening at 6, "Heroes of our Faith." There are a host of Freethinkers in and about Abertillery, and we hope there will be a good muster at Mr. Lloyd's meetings. They could not close the Old Year in a better way.

We are pleased to see Professor Graham Kerr, of Glasgow University, calling attention to the fact that something more is needed than the recent movement for the application of science to trade, if we are to successfully cope with Germany

after the War. Real scientific progress is not made by paying men to work with an eye to commercial exploitation, and valuing their services only so far as this end is achieved. Broadly speaking, all scientific developments have resulted from the sheer love of investigation for its own sake. It is so much to the good when commercial firms employ trained men to consider the application of science to their particular industry. But this is not encouraging the development of science. No great scientific discovery has been made in this way. It is the State encouragement of pure research that is needed, and we doubt if either the Government or the people of this country are yet alive to this truth.

We quite agree that the point at issue is not that the Germans are scientific and we are not. There is nothing that Germany has done in this way that Britain cannot do. The real distinction, as stated by Professor Kerr, is that "Germany realized, and had long realized, that science, and especially pure science, pays; that, however vast the sums expended upon the encouragement and development of science, they would, in due course, be returned to her a thousandfold." That is the truth in a nutshell. But instead of realizing this, we have our bishops pointing to scientific education as the curse of Germany, and very many of our laymen backing up their foolish chatter. Knowledge always pays—even in a material sense, and the best of knowledge is that which is gained from a pure love of its acquisition.

The Vitality of Freethought.

Who shall discover to us the mind, and give a precise diagram of its activities? Our bodies may be in chains, our physical limits defined, the supply of food good or bad to keep the clay carcass alive, yet who shall curb our imagination—the soul of the mind? Kings, princes, tyrants, and gaolers, with their gold, their power to elevate the contemptible, their domination and supervision—with their clumsy hands shall they batter at the door of imagination in vain. In vain shall they seek to enter the kingdom where men and women are made free by the truth. Truth, when not in mourning, is out of fashion. It may not always be recognized. The serpent of wisdom may easily be mistaken for the scorpion of falsehood. We shall not find truth where pomp and display, and the ridiculous fussiness of shallowpates, gather together to impress the ignorant. Truth comes in a sober dress. Truth holds out to us a few flowers gathered from the garden of eternity. Truth brings contentment, but the path of truth is not strewn with roses.

If we stand back from life like a traveller, and take a view of the progress of mankind from the time when Jehovah's voice was in the thunder, to the present, when it is in the voice of a parson turned Sunday journalist; when we have suppressed our smiles and rearranged our faces — We think we had better commence another sentence. The civilized aspect of the Christian God is worse than the Hebrew conception; a Deity with a voice like thunder, if he did exist, is something to command respect. But when his spokesman is to be found hitching his waggon to the printing press, and speaking six feet above contradiction in a picture paper, we confess to mumbling in our waistcoat, How are the mighty fallen! With these remarks we approach an examination of the vitality of Freethought.

At the outset, there is one very prominent feature in connection with a negative attitude towards commercial religion. For good or evil there is no career, taking the word in its peculiar and particular sense. Let no man who would walk in purple and fine linen lend his ears to the whisperings of Freethought, for they tell him nothing of the way to regal majesty in power and place. There is also no place for him where a frown may cause

the mighty to tremble. Neither shall he be in a position to move multitudes. How can truth be popular? The applause of the multitude; what is it? Simply collective mediocrity, and nothing more; and for that reason alone Freethought cannot become popular. Therefore, abandon all hope of a career, all ye who would serve Truth.

Another aspect of this subject is to be found in the fact that the bubbles of pleasing illusion do not exist for those who walk in the light of reason and tolerance. Is this life question still to remain some fantastic scheme whereby the good shall be rewarded and the bad punished? That system, to our mind, represents the action of men who have not grown up, transferring the ethics of the nursery to the universe. For that reason do we condemn it, and place it aside as having outlived its day. On a firmer basis than that must we build our hopes of man's ethical progress. The labourer is worthy of his hire. We agree. Like so many Biblical aphorisms, it is capable of more than one interpretation, and the meaning we attach to it will not please our friends the enemy. Payment for service is equivalent to heaven for the good. Let us consider one moment what number would labour in the Church if the monetary incentive was taken away. The remaining few would represent the genuine type of Christianity, and with these Freethought has a direct issue. At this point we must digress a moment to relate a story which we believe to be true. It is to the effect that a young Christian soldier in camp, on kneeling down to say a prayer before retiring, was interrupted in his devotions by a boot aimed at his head. This story was related to the present writer to prove what disreputable people they are who disagree with Christianity. We cannot for one moment believe that any person of sense would hope to convert a Christian in the manner described. We do not forget that a passion for martyrdom is inherent in the followers of Christianity, and the chances are that a flying boot would only add to the fervour. The only point in the story is, that history records worse deeds of vigour to those who *would not* kneel when this form of superstition was all-powerful, and we believe that the trouble commenced when people were not free to dissent from this form of worship. If Freethinkers can push aside the lollipops of Paradise, alike can they abandon with a light heart those peculiar forms of ritual loved by old men and women, and unwillingly performed by children.

It is a significant fact that herd morality finds a fitting expression in Christianity. If you do as others do, then no one will notice you. If you care to stand alone and think for yourself, then look out. Excommunication by the tame mice of orthodoxy will quickly follow; you shall go to your end in ignorance of the joy and bliss of local tea-fights; in sorrow shall you mend your ways, without the honour of subscribing to the fund for that organ which is in a constant state of repair. There are many more penalties to be paid for the price of self-reliance, and until recently the Church held the bag of tricks. In local, and particularly in personal affairs, whatever happened, the clergyman was bound to be there. In a classical epigram we might say with the one-time purveyor of sweetstuff, wherever you broke the rock you saw the bogey man. In nine cases out of ten he was in evidence there merely as a figure. In the tenth he would pop up on some committee to oppose the granting of two shillings per week to some reckless soul of the parish who had exceeded the speed limit in affairs mortal or divine.

Now that we have struck out of the rational man's life these matters which merely amuse us, what is there left? In the words of Montaigne, "You must no longer seeke what the world saith of you, but how you must speake

unto yourself: withdraw yourself into yourself; but first prepare your selfe to receive your selfe: and it were folly to trust to your selfe if you cannot governe your selfe." Ingersoll hit the mark when he described Christianity as the crutches of mankind; when a man has come face to face with his real self, he may cast aside the symbols of weakness. Freethought, in the midst of circumstances trying alike to body and mind, has held its own. If the world ends to-day, we can say that we had no gods to flatter or appease; we served Truth to the best of our strength; we laughed at the follies of mankind; we ridiculed what threatened to choke us; and, to the eternal glory of our cause, £15,000 per year could not buy those tolerant truths, or all the knowledge which make life endurable, and in the Nietzschean sense, a precious gift.

WILLIAM REPTON.

Is God Doing His Best?

The name of God

Has fenced about all crime with holiness;
Himself the creature of his worshippers;
Whose names and attributes and passions change—
Seeva, Buddh, Foh, Jehovah, God or Lord—
Even with the human dupes who build his shrines,
Still serving o'er the war-polluted world
For desolation's watchword; whether hosts
Stain his death-blushing chariot wheels, as on
Triumphantly they roll whilst Brahmins raise
A sacred hymn to mingle with the groans;
Or countless partners of his power divide
His tyranny to weakness: or the smoke
Of burning towns, the cries of female helplessness
Unarmed old age, and youth and infancy,
Horribly massacred, ascend to heaven
In honour of his name; or last and worst,
Earth groans beneath religion's iron age,
And priests dare babble of a God of peace
Even whilst their hands are red with guiltless blood,
Murdering the while, uprooting every germ
Of truth, exterminating, spoiling all,
Making the earth a slaughter-house.

—Shelley, "Queen Mab," p. 35.

THE thought uppermost in the minds of most men at the present time is, What is God doing in these terrible days, with war raging furiously over almost the whole of Europe, young soldiers shedding their life's blood like water on the numerous battlefields, while non-combatants are menaced by Zeppelins from above and shortage of food for wife and children at home?

Freethinkers are not the only ones who are asking their Christian friends for some explanation of God's inaction in these matters; and Christians themselves find it very hard to explain to their own satisfaction what their kind Heavenly Father is about to allow all these horrors to go on unchecked, when, if he chose, he could stretch forth his Almighty arm and stop them in an instant. If the Christian turns to his Bible, he will find that the old God of the Jews—Jahveh—bad as he was in many respects, was ever ready to show his willingness to overwhelm and crush the enemies of his chosen people; but the God of modern times remains in his home above the clouds and looks on complacently at all the horrid scenes of bloodshed and carnage that move like a panorama over the face of the earth, with supreme indifference, and is neither moved by pity nor remorse to try and mitigate the sufferings of his poor, unfortunate, if misguided, children.

The God of the Bible was undoubtedly a personal God—a magnified man-like being, with all the attributes of man infinitely extended and developed. He was not only infinitely wise, but infinitely good, and infinitely powerful. There was nothing too great for him to

accomplish. But the new God of the theologians—the spiritual Being—who has neither eyes with which to see, nor ears to hear, nor brain with which to understand, how can such a God be of any service to mankind?

Such a God is no more worthy of worship than that of Mr. George Bernard Shaw, which is represented as the life-force of the universe. A force of any kind cannot be regarded as a living, intelligent being, capable of hearing the powerful appeals of human beings, or answering them by intelligent, well directed action. In fact, such a force is essentially Atheistic. Even the Rev. R. J. Campbell can see this, and is as dissatisfied with the God of Mr. Shaw as he is with that of Mr. H. G. Wells, which is an indefinable force, and in no sense a personal Being like the God of the theologians.

Years ago, John Stuart Mill, in his great essay on *Theism*, said that he was often surprised to find that modern theologians did not advance the theory that God was all good, but not all powerful, and that he was doing the best he could with the material at hand under very trying circumstances. In other words, that God was doing his best, but the best he could do did not meet with our approval. In such a case, God would need our sympathy and commiseration. Indeed, Mr. Campbell goes so far as saying that God needs our help.

If this be true, what a poor, miserable, weak creature this God must be! He sees the soldiers on all the battle-fields destroying one another by shot and shell; he sees them plunging their bayonets into the quivering flesh of their opponents; he hears their awful groans; he sees them lying on the field of battle unattended for hours, sometimes for days, and can give them no relief.

He sees their wives being ill-treated in their homes, sometimes ravished in the presence of fathers and mothers who have no power to help them; this God looks on, desires to help, but finds himself unable to render any material assistance. What kind of God is this? Is he not the most miserable and contemptible creature in the universe?

Throughout the whole of this barbarous and brutal War, God has been silent as well as inactive. The other day I met a young soldier whom I knew very well as a lad. He had received a little less than three months' training in England, and was going over to France in a few days to get the finishing touches in the art of killing the foe, before being sent into the trenches. "I shall do my best," he said, "for my country, and leave the rest to Providence"—or, as he said, "the Chap Upstairs." "But do you know, my friend," he said, confidentially, "when I think of the horrors of warfare, I sometimes doubt whether there is a God who is looking after us at all." I did not tell this youth that I was a Freethinker, and that I had no belief in a good, kind, Heavenly Father who was constantly watching over the interests and wellbeing of his children. But evidently he was driven by the logic of facts to doubt the existence of such a Being. And he was only one out of tens of thousands who are in a similar mental condition; and when they "go over the top" of the trenches and meet the foe, and hear the shrieks of their comrades, and witness the savagery of the soldiers on both sides, they surely have enough evidence to confirm their doubts, and despise the teachings of their spiritual pastors and masters.

As George Jacob Holyoake puts it in his masterly work (*The Trial of Theism*, p. 198):—

Where the intellect fails to perceive the truth, it is said that the feelings assure us of it by its relieving a sense of dependence natural to man. How? Man

witnesses those near and dear to him perish before his eyes, despite his supplications. He walks through no rose-water world, and no special Providence smooths his path. Is not the sense of dependence outraged already? Man is weak, and a special Providence gives him no strength; distracted, and no counsel; ignorant, and no wisdom; in despair, and no consolation; in distress, and no relief—in darkness, and no light. The evidence of God, therefore, whatever it may be in the hypothesis of philosophy, seems not recognizable in daily life.

But is not a Being who can render no assistance to his children in distress a dismal failure, by whatever name you call him? When the young and beautiful Miranda, in Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, saw a ship wrecked, she turned to her father Prospero, and exclaimed:—

If by your art, my dearest Father, you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them;
The sky it seems would pour down stinking pitch
But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek
Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer! a brave vessel,
Who had no doubt some noble creatures in her,
Dashed all to pieces. O, the cry did knock
Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perished!
Had I been any God of power I would
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or e'er
It should the good ship so have swallowed, and
The freighting souls within her.

And that is the natural thought of every man or woman with a spark of humanity in them. But when the vessels are put down by submarines, and hundreds of brave sailors go to a premature and watery grave at the bottom of the sea, no matter how fervent their prayers or ardent their appeals for help, no God has ever been known to help them. No; the only help they ever get comes from their fellow-man. Let man, therefore, cease to babble about the goodness of God, and turn his attention towards civilizing his fellow-man. All warfare is murder; all warfare is madness; but while man has the fever on him, his fellow-man is bound to defend himself.

That is the evil of the whole thing. We are driven into fighting in sheer despair of the future of the rising generation. Our object should be to civilize the race, so that all international disputes in the future should be settled by arbitration. History has demonstrated beyond dispute that Christianity has failed to civilize mankind; that it has not only sanctioned warfare among nations in all ages of its long history, but has very often been the chief cause of the wholesale butchery of people professing the same religion, the same creed. Let us, therefore, try and establish a nobler faith—a faith based upon reason and knowledge, a faith that has for its object the higher cultivation of the race, of knitting together mankind into one great brotherhood for the furtherance of peace and concord among all the children of men.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Science as the Servitor of Man.

V.

(Concluded from p. 822.)

SHEET-GLASS, so serviceable for admitting light into our dwellings, is prepared in a special manner. The molten glass is arranged into a long hollow roller-like form, and the ends of this hollow cylinder are then cut away. Then a diamond is employed to cut the cylinder lengthwise, and it is introduced into a furnace heated to the melting point of the glassy material. The cylinder commences to unroll, and is then flattened out into a sheet-like mass.

At this stage of its production the glass is not perfectly level, but is dotted with little elevations and depressions, and would therefore prove unsatisfactory for its projected

purpose, as objects viewed through it would seem more or less distorted. With plate-glass this blemish is removed by grinding and polishing. Patent plate-glass, largely used in framing pictures, is likewise prepared by this process.

When glass commodities have thus been fashioned, it becomes necessary to re-heat them to their softening point and then transfer them to the annealing chamber, where they slowly cool. Glass imperfectly annealed is apt to break. When the tops of tumblers fall away in rings, or when glass bowls or dishes burst asunder, if these articles are subjected to the slightest scratch, such fractures are due to bad annealing of their material. When properly annealed, such stresses and strains as set up fracture are removed, as these are caused by the too rapid cooling of the glass. When, at the Restoration, Prince Rupert brought "Rupert's drops" into England, they aroused considerable curiosity, and were regarded as a kind of natural miracle. But these drops are purely normal products, which serve to illustrate the foregoing facts. Rupert's drops are obtained by dropping molten glass into hot oil, which is thus suddenly cooled. This glass is intensely tough, and will withstand hard hammering, but if once the "tail" or "tear" of the glass drop is broken, or if the drop be scratched with a sharp instrument, the entire drop is reduced to powder.

As a result of a most extensive series of investigations into the influences exerted by various substances upon the properties of glass, several scores of vitreous materials have been fabricated, and their optical and physical characteristics studied. Many of these have already materially promoted scientific and social advance, while others are potential human benefactors.

Common glass bottles are distinctly green, and this coarse colouring may be detected in almost all old, and in much of the inferior window glass now on the market. This ugly shade is due to the presence of iron derived from inferior substances utilized by the glass-maker's. But this blemish may now be banished by adding a black oxide of manganese. A leading chemist states:—

The amethyst colour which is thereby produced neutralizes the green due to the iron, and a white glass is obtained. The amethyst or purple colour due to the manganese becomes evident when such glass is exposed for a lengthened period to bright sunlight.

Then there is the beautiful crystal glass, so fair to look upon and so delicate to the touch. A blending of red lead and potash is fused with silica, and the luminous crystal arises. Well shapen in good moulds, or better still, cut upon a wheel and superbly polished; by these means, dainty crystal vases, splendid suites of table glass, and other excellent articles are manufactured. An even more brilliant glass is produced by replacing some of the silica in this crystal substance with boric acid, and in this way boro-silicate glass is rendered available. This possesses a powerful lustre coupled with high refractive qualities, and when this glass is appropriately cut it scintillates in countless colours. This material is prostituted to the purpose of counterfeiting diamonds, and, when suitably coloured, other rare gems as well.

The art of the glass stainer and colourer must not be forgotten. Stained and coloured glass owes its existence to the introduction of certain small amounts of given substances into the molten mass of silicates. Just as iron imparts a green tint to glass, so, when manganese oxide is added to the vitreous mixture, glass assumes a purple hue. A yellowish green appears with the addition of salts of uranium, and these salts are extensively utilized in the production of fancy glass. Ruby glass derives its magnificent colour from the presence of gold, while cobalt oxide gives rise to a rich, dark blue. Boro-

silicate glass, or "paste" as it is termed in the trade, when made blue with cobalt, or coloured red with gold, serves to imitate the costly sapphire and ruby stones. But these artificial stones are usually much softer than the genuine gems, and by this may be detected.

As a rule, the colour of glass is traceable to the presence of coloured silicates of various kinds, but with ruby glass the fine colour arises from the existence of exceedingly tiny particles of metallic gold. If a small amount of metallic gold be added to molten glass, the metal dissolves, much as salt dissolves in water, and when the glass is rapidly refrigerated, it becomes either colourless or displays the merest yellow tinge. When, however,—

this glass is re-heated, or if the molten glass is allowed to cool slowly, metallic gold begins to separate out in very minute particles. As the particles increase in size the colour deepens, and different shades may be obtained by careful regulation of the heating and cooling.

These gold particles are in reality so remarkably minute, that they are not only invisible to the sharpest eye, but remain unseen under the most powerful microscope. But if anything beyond a given quantity of gold be present, the metal may separate out into visible particles, and then the glass becomes opaque.

A museum or other inspection of the quaint metal mirrors so precious to our ancestors will speedily convince the observer of the immense improvement made by the glass mirrors of modern use. In these we obtain a lifelike reflection of form and feature. To gain this advantage it is essential to avoid distortion of the mirrored object, and perfectly polished plate glass is requisite to secure this end. Also, one side of the glass must be "silvered." At one time, glass was silvered by covering the glass with a mixture of mercury and tin; but mercury being an expensive material, as well as involving the risk of mercury poisoning to the workers in the industry, it has been abandoned, and silver has taken its place. Silver is not only innocent of all danger, but its employment permits the production of a purer reflecting surface. And by adding ammonia and caustic soda to a solution of silver salt (silver nitrate), a solution is formed from which the silver can be easily induced to separate out through the addition of certain substances such as glucose. After a thorough cleansing, the surface of the looking-glass is laid on the silver solution, and, if the process is successfully conducted, the silver gradually spreads out, and forms a stable and highly reflective coating to the glass. And despite the fact that silver still remains one of the precious metals, the quantity required is so small that the surface coating of a large mirror may be laid on at the cost of a few pence.

With primitive peoples throughout the earth, weird superstitions are associated with the well-being of an image cast by the stream or any other reflecting surface. And to lose to an enemy a portrait of himself is, to the savage, tantamount to sacrificing his soul. Among our emancipated and enlightened selves, and in the peerless twentieth century, to allow a mirror to fall and break, although perhaps less seriously regarded than formerly, is still felt to be distinctly unfortunate to those concerned. Even the great Napoleon appears to have been afflicted with this morbid fancy, for Constant tells us that:—

During one of his campaigns in Italy he broke a glass over Josephine's portrait. He never rested until the return of the courier he forthwith dispatched to assure himself of her safety, so strong was the impression of her death upon his mind.

In Rome and Greece divination by water was performed with a mirror, while crystal-gazing is at the present moment an extensive and highly lucrative profession in the cultured and refined West End of our own

up-to-date metropolis. There, in hundreds of heavily rented premises, in the most fashionable quarters, the credulous and ignorant well-to-do can have their fortunes told, or their friends found, by the ingenuous and obliging seers and seeresses, through the agency of Indian mirrors and common crystal-gazing, for quite a moderate fee.

This crystal-gazing craze found an apologist in the late Andrew Lang, who was prepared to certify concerning its genuineness. Apart from the impudent and eminently successful knavery of the business, which is practised with impunity on the upper, middle, and lower class mob alike, by the professors of these swindling devices in their artfully furnished chambers of mystery, an advertisement issued by "A London Publisher of Books on Mental Science" makes one wonder whether we have really emerged from the Middle Ages. The crystal-gazing outfit complete is priced at 3s. 6d., post free 3s. 9d. A bargain, undoubtedly, particularly when we learn that:—

It is well known among psychic investigators that Crystal Gazers often see visions of a clairvoyant or telepathic nature. For instance, the experimenter might see in his Crystal a moving picture representing a distant friend in a most exciting situation.....This is a mere suggestion of the many interesting phenomena developed by Crystal Gazing. It is a harmless, amusing pastime.

As a matter of fact, the Crystal is a beautiful ornament, and is worth its price as a paper weight.

And, to be sure, it is the best and cheapest crystal ever offered to the public. Presumably, the gaping people who purchase these marvels, when they fail to see the wonderful pictures promised, are the more easily persuaded to consult the charlatans who live in clover at their dupes' expense. Two well-meaning ladies with whom the writer is acquainted, having suffered a bereavement owing to the War, vainly sought solace from a crystal, and even after visiting one of the professionals, and parting with their money, returned as wise as they went. No wonder that the philosophic author of *The Golden Bough* is driven to suggest that possibly the only explanation of the countless follies of humanity lies in the saddening circumstance that there is no conceivable limit to the stupidity of mankind.

T. F. PALMER.

Bogus Lessons of History.

A Reply to a New Contemporary Journal. SOMEBODY has written that history is "the finest example of fiction," or words to that effect; and it is a fact that much of what is called history has been invented.

The common type of history gives little information regarding the life of the people or the effect of the various forms of government upon the individual or the State. It is, therefore, very difficult to draw conclusions, and certainly foolish to make assertions in a dogmatic fashion upon what history teaches, or does not teach. Moreover, if the object of citing history is to reach a full measure of truth, the quoting of mere expressions of opinion, reported to have been made by men who lived ages ago, is one of the most unreliable methods which one could adopt. For we must remember that errors occur in translation, mistakes in copying, and serious alteration of the text by interpolations and omissions, made for the purpose of supporting arguments and the like.

The above ideas have occurred to me on reading in *British Supremacy* an article wherein the writer draws the conclusions from various sources that all ancient States lost cohesion because:—

- 1.—They were democratic.
- 2.—They neglected to prepare for war.

I have no hesitation in saying that the writer is not justified in either of these claims.

Let us first look at the politics of some of the nations of the world at the present time. England and Italy may be termed limited democracies; France, Portugal, and the United States unlimited democracies; Russia, Turkey, and Germany are autocracies. All these appear to be the best at the moment for the people they govern, and certainly the English form of government is that which suits, as no other could do, the British Empire. I challenge anyone to show that it has been unsuccessful; yet the writer referred to would abandon "a form of government which has proved its inefficiency since the dawn of history." He apparently wants to see a dictatorship set up in England, in spite of the disastrous ending to the experiment of Oliver Cromwell.

Numbers of instances could be given of the States and Empires which have fallen in the past, which were not democracies and were warlike throughout their existence, to mention only one, that of Turkey. Here is an autocracy which has been fully armed throughout its existence, always prepared for war. How is it ending?

It has been almost continually attacked, and the near future will probably see it sink into a helpless appendage to one of the less warlike European nations. Its downfall is clearly produced by lack of inventiveness and freedom.

In England; freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to govern themselves have been won by continuous effort of the people. Autocracy and militarism have destroyed many States; they have never saved one from destruction when its course was run. Let us, therefore, loyally support the English constitution in the present crisis of its fate. The practical working of the departments may not be all we would wish; but if we look the world over can we see any better, or, indeed, any other, form of government which is as good from our point of view? The present time is the very worst to propose a change. To do so is not only unpatriotic, it is positively insane.

BON GRE.

Strike Home.

Why should we shrink from striking home the blow
That may destroy our neighbour's faith in God?
Why shirk a path the brave old heroes trod
Who boldly moved to meet the priestly foe
Against the threat of death and endless woe?
To-day Freethought is rising like a flood,
New, great ambitions agitate men's blood,
All ugly useless things rock to and fro.

Be not afraid, then, young Iconoclast;
Stand by the Truth and curse the brainless Creed;
Rob men of fear and let religion die.
Yes, cry aloud, spare not, your work is vast,
Teach men the True: this is the world's great need,
For man's day breaks and heaven's vain shadows fly.

H. V. S.

Taking advantage of the normal conditions of war-time, the clergy of Southend-on-Sea and neighbourhood have attempted to force a more rigid observance of Sunday. At a large meeting of townspeople held at the Kursaal a resolution was carried, with only two dissentients, deprecating the discussion of Sunday observance at such a time as the present. An amendment by a local clergyman was ruled out.

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