

# The FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### The War and Freedom of the Press.

Freethinkers have taken too great a part in the fight for freedom of publication in Great Britain not to feel keenly interested in the discussion over the War Office ban on the exportation of the *Nation*. The freedom of the press is a subject which concerns everyone, and we do not, therefore, lay ourselves open to the charge of interfering in political questions in recurring to the matter. As an exhibition of policy it was ridiculous, and as a sample of authority, autocratic in the last degree. It was too much for even the present House of Commons, although that body really forfeited its right to complain when it surrendered its powers in the beginning and during the early months of the War. If the sacrifice of all the liberties that have been sacrificed is necessary to the conduct of the War, there is in that fact one fresh proof that a nation at war descends in the scale of civilization, and all the talk of a nation finding itself through war is pure humbug. It is possible for a nation to enter a war from motives of the highest character, although the cases are rare; but once engaged in war, the descent is unpleasantly easy and fatally rapid.

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### Reaping the Harvest.

But a Freethinker may be excused a certain malicious satisfaction on reading the complaints made by some papers, and by some people, against this limitation of the press. Some of these lament that they are only allowed to publish such news as is agreeable to the authorities; that things are suppressed not because they are untrue, but because their publication would be inconvenient. And they further add that a press shackled in this way cannot but mislead the very people it is expected to enlighten. All this may be true enough; but is it anything new in the history of this country? Quite the contrary; it is the settled policy of the British press in relation to certain forms of opinion. It is particularly so in relation to Freethought. What certain papers are suffering from "for the duration of the War," Freethought has suffered from during the whole of its existence. To suit its own purposes, the British press has

established a close boycott on all anti-Christian news. It has deliberately and systematically helped to build up an opinion which it—for the most part—knew to be false, by the policy of excluding all information that would tell against it. If it had worked to create a stronger and more informed public opinion, it would now have a better public opinion to which to appeal. It is reaping as it has sown. It has treated the public as something to be guarded against the truth, and it does not lie with the British press to protest too loudly when the Government treats it as it has treated others.

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### The Press and Religion.

We say that in the main the press of this country in relation to religion—we are not here concerned with any other issue—has deliberately fostered the growth of beliefs which it knows to be false, and it has done this by methods of suppression and falsification. For all the general public may gather from the public press, a deliberately organized attack on the Christian religion does not exist. So far as the press is concerned, the public would be unaware of the fact that a large proportion of our public men in literature, in art, in science, and in politics have ceased to be Christian in any genuine sense of the term. With rare exceptions, no reports of Freethought meetings are published, no reviews of avowedly Freethought works are permitted to appear, and when a Freethinker's work in social or political life compels an obituary notice, the fact that he was an anti-Christian is carefully suppressed. The consequence is, that, save for those who are brought into direct contact with Freethought propaganda, the public is either unaware of its existence, or is taught to regard it as the mistaken hobby of a harmless handful of cranks. They are kept in leading strings by the priests, largely by the interested connivance of the public press.

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### Fostering a Delusion.

This silence of the press on the one side is accentuated by its readiness to boom Christianity on all occasions. Let a clergyman announce his qualified disbelief in a literal hell or heaven, or in the virgin birth, or in the resurrection of Jesus, and he is written about, interviewed, and proclaimed as a "daring thinker"! Why, these are not things for disbelief in which a man should be acclaimed; they are things for believing in which a man ought to be heartily ashamed. That numbers can still solemnly discuss, week after week, such colossal absurdities as the reservation of the Sacrament, makes one wonder by what right these people call themselves civilized. Such doctrines do not belong to civilization at all. Their proper habitat is the wigwam of the primitive medicine man. And for the continuance of this frame of mind the press of the country is largely responsible. The public is kept in ignorance—deliberately kept in ignorance—of the facts. It is fed with false news, or with one-sided views. It sees, or fancies it sees, the old beliefs still endorsed by leading men and women; it is not aware that they have been



seriously attacked, or are open to serious question. In the greatest reform of all, the creation of an informed public opinion, the British press plays but a sorry part.

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#### A Conspiracy of Silence.

We say this, not because we have a disbelief in the power of the press, but because we have a profound belief in its power for good or evil. Our complaint is that the press lends itself to a conspiracy of silence, and to a policy of suppression such as it now complains at the Government exercising during the course of the War. One consequence of this policy is not far to seek. It not only encourages a condition of complacency on the part of ignorant believers, it induces silence and hypocrisy with thousands of non-believers. Unaware of the number of people who are of the same opinion as themselves, they are overawed by the apparent strength of the forces against them, and, as it is said, keep their opinions to themselves. As though an opinion which one keeps hidden is worth having. Opinions, like money, are made to spend. It is the only way in which they can be made to return a dividend. Even the press itself falls eventually a victim to its own policy. Editors and writers, not themselves Christians, refrain from attacking Christianity because they are afraid of the consequences. If an epidemic of mental honesty were to sweep over the country, these classes would be astonished at their own strength, and at the discovery that the strength of their opponent was largely derived from their own timidity.

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#### The Way Out.

From this state of things there is only one way of escape, and it rests largely with Freethinkers to avail themselves of it. The public is always inclined to take a party at its own valuation, and Freethinkers have for too long, in deference to this or that reason, practised the policy of keeping their opinions, as Freethinkers, in the background. They have made many movements in the social world, only to find them in the long run captured and claimed by Christians. We suggest it is time that this policy should cease. There is no earthly reason why the possessor of a set of beliefs which represent a survival into civilized times of savage ideas should be treated with special deference. If Freethinkers make it a rule to express their opinions freely and without disguise, and quite as a matter of course, we have little doubt but that large numbers of Christians will take this difference of opinion for granted. Personally, we have always adopted that policy, and we have never experienced any unpleasantness worth bothering about as a consequence. And there was never a better time than the present for putting that simple policy into operation. The War has given organized Christianity a shaking greater than most of its followers realize, and it will be well for Freethinkers to take advantage of the upheaval. At any rate, we advise all to try the experiment, and observe the result. And the press—well, the press will behave with greater courage and honesty just so soon as it discovers there is a large public to appreciate those qualities.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## The Roots of the Christian Tree.

### V.

It is customary in many religious circles to characterize the period previous to the appearance of Christianity as pre-eminently dark. When Christ was born it was still night, with only a few stars shining dimly, but his advent was the breaking of the dawn. The late Dean Farrar wrote a long novel, entitled *Darkness and Dawn*,

in which that view of history found eloquent expression; but it is a fundamentally erroneous and misleading conception. If there are theologians who verily believe that when Christ came the world was dark, they certainly can find no honest escape from the conclusion, arrived at by every ecclesiastical historian of ordinary fairness, that it grew steadily darker for eleven miserable centuries subsequent to his entrance upon the scene. As every enlightened and unprejudiced student of history is aware, however, the light of knowledge and virtue had been shining brightly for countless ages before our era commenced; and the younger and more advanced generation of divines is beginning to recognize this fact. The late Dr. George Matheson, the blind poet-preacher of Scotland, published a book in which, whilst claiming absolute supremacy for Christianity, he frankly confessed that he discovered elements of truth in most of the other religions of the world. Since his day it has come to pass that practically every scholarly theologian boldly speaks of Christianity as one of the great syncretic religions which for centuries systematically borrowed their ideas and customs from one another, and which were at the same time rivals for the suffrage of mankind. These scholars openly avow the indebtedness of their religion for literally all its dogmas and rites to older and rival cults. God, Saviour-God, sin, redemption, heaven, and hell, are all candidly acknowledged to be borrowed and adopted dogmas. That is to say, the supernatural in Christianity was taken over entirely from various older religions.

Now, the amazing fact is that some of those who thus unhesitatingly recognize the indebtedness of Christianity to other religions for its supernatural features, have yet the hardihood to maintain that it possesses a moral code unequalled in all history, and on that account perfectly unique. The so-called Liberal Christians are followers of Christ who regard the teaching attributed to him in the Gospels as constituting the sum and substance of the religion that bears his name. Even on the assumption that they are right, the question instantly arises, To what extent, or in what sense, can this teaching be accurately characterized as unique, or wherein does its originality consist? Whatever estimate may be formed of its quality, what sort of a title has it to the distinction which originality bestows? We venture to affirm that every saying ascribed to the Gospel Jesus can be paralleled several times over from either Jewish or Pagan literature, and the majority of them from both. Many of them are quoted almost *verbatim* from the Old Testament; others from the Talmud; and others from various works by famous Rabbis. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth," says the Gospel Jesus; but a Psalmist had expressed the same sentiment long before, saying, "The meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. xxxvii. 11). Says the Gospel Jesus: "Swear not at all.....But let your speech be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; and whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one" (Matt. v. 34-37). That saying has two distinct sources. In Ecclesiasticus xxiii. 9, we read: "Accustom not thy mouth to an oath, and be not accustomed to the naming of the Holy One," while in the Talmud we find these words: "Let your nay be nay. Let your yea be yea." We might go through the whole of the sayings, paralleling them in this manner, a task which M. Hippolyte Rodrigues exhaustively accomplished in his *Les Origines du Sermon de la Montagne*, thereby destroying for ever any claim to originality made for the teaching of the Gospel Jesus. Indeed, the impression created by a careful study of the alleged records of it is that it was never uttered as it stands by an historical teacher, but was, rather, patiently culled from all available sources, more or less altered in



form, added to or subtracted from, according to requirement, and then ascribed to an imaginary Immanuel or God-Man, by a succession of the early framers of the Christian cult.

That is one cogent argument against the claim to any uniqueness or originality for the Christian moral code; but there is a much stronger argument still, which we wish now to elaborate. Let it be clearly understood that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a distinctively Christian moral code. What passes under that name does not contain a single ethical principle or precept which was not already ancient when Christ is supposed to have lived. With this fact as thoroughly established as it can be, it is most extraordinary to find that some people are still able to affirm that pre-Christian days were days without a sun. Had Christianity lived up to its exalted pretensions, that assertion ought to and would have been fully justified. In the circumstances that have hitherto prevailed, it is the very opposite of true. Curiously enough, Professor Sayce, the distinguished Egyptologist, though an orthodox divine, frankly admits, in his *Monumental Facts and Higher Critical Fancies*, that the world was anything but dark four and five thousand years ago. Even so far back as that, he informs us, on the evidence of Egyptian hieroglyphics and Babylonian cuneiform writings, discovered and almost wholly deciphered during the last fifty years, that already mighty civilizations of high literary and moral culture had come and gone. He says that "the Proverbs of Ptah-hotep, though written more than five thousand years ago, represent the close of a period in the history of Egyptian literature." Then he observes:—

They had been preceded by earlier books, many of which survived to a later day. One of them has come down to ourselves in a mutilated form. It is a moral treatise, the work of a certain Qaqemna, who lived in the remote age of the Third Dynasty. But even then there were already schools and libraries in Egypt stored with papyrus books written in a running hand (pp. 30, 31).

He asserts that "the Babylonia of the (traditional) age of Abraham was a more highly educated country than the England of George III." With Dr. Sayce's silly prejudice against the Higher Criticism of the Old Testament we are completely out of sympathy, but we entirely agree with his remark that "as compared with the cultured inhabitants of the Babylonian Empire, the Israelitish tribes for whom Moses legislated were in a backward state." Such a testimony coming from an orthodox Anglican divine is all the more significant.

We now turn to a witness of an entirely different character, namely, the late Mr. Winwood Reade. In his celebrated work, *The Martyrdom of Man*, this man of genius, treating of the influence of the Church in ancient Egypt, by which he means the reign of the priests, he says:—

Their power was immense; but it was exercised with justice and discretion; they issued admirable laws, and taught the people to obey them by the example of their own humble, self-denying lives. Under the tutelage of these pious and enlightened men, the Egyptians became a prosperous, and also a highly moral people. The monumental paintings reveal their whole life, but we read in them no brutal or licentious scenes.....The Egyptians granted honours to those who fought gallantly against them. The penalty for the murder of a slave was death; this law exists without parallel in the dark slavery annals both of ancient and of modern times.....It is a sure criterion of the civilization of ancient Egypt that the soldiers did not carry arms except on duty, and that the private citizens did not carry them at all. Women were treated with much

regard. They were allowed to join their husbands in the sacrifices to the Gods; the bodies of man and wife were united in the tomb. When a party was given, the guests were received by the host and hostess seated side by side in a large arm-chair. In the paintings their mutual affection is portrayed. Their fond manners, their gestures of endearment, the caresses which they lavish on their children, form sweet and touching scenes of domestic life (pp. 16, 17).

Another witness to the same effect is Dr. Wallis Budge, an eminent Egyptologist, who assures us that, some two thousand years before Christ, Egypt had formulated a code of morals second to none of the numerous codes which have appeared since. The same is true of Buddhist India, the whole of which land was dotted with hospitals for the treatment of all human and animal diseases, and in which peace and good will reigned supreme fully two hundred years prior to the opening of our era. Dark periods were interspersed with the bright ones it is true; but never was there such dense intellectual and moral darkness in the ancient Pagan world as that which overshadowed Christendom in the centuries between the fourth and the twelfth; and was there ever a darker period than the one through which we are now passing, after nineteen centuries of the so-called Christian morality?

Our present point, however, is that Christian morality even in its very best features, possesses no uniqueness, no originality whatever, but is an eclectic product whether good, bad, or indifferent.

J. T. LLOYD.

## Swinburne: Man and Poet.

### II.

Master who crowned our immelodious days  
With flowers of perfect speech.—*William Watson*.

Swinburne was the greatest of our lyrical poets—of the world's, I should say, considering what a language he had to wield.—*George Meredith*.

FROM the first Swinburne's genius was unmistakable. In *Atalanta in Calydon* the strain of clear, soaring song proclaimed a real poet. *Poems and Ballads* was a masterpiece among masterpieces. There are pieces which, for distinction of melody, even their author has never surpassed. *Itylus*, *Laus Veneris*, *A Match*, the *Hymn to Proserpine*, and, above all, *Hesperia*, that lovely lyric where the gloriously moulded lines recall the magnificent rolling of the full-flushed waves.

Later came *Songs Before Sunrise*, which roused men like a trumpet-blast. Throughout this volume resounded the cry of liberty, the utter abhorrence of tyranny of every kind and in every shape. To compare *Songs Before Sunrise* with *Poems and Ballads* is to see how far the poet had advanced in the interval. In melody, it is true, progress was hardly possible, but, music apart, the change is indubitable.

The advance is from the pining of youth to the passion of man. The verse sings and glows with love of freedom. It echoes the thunder of the surges and the clarions of the storm. No poet since Shelley sings more loftily, or with more fiery passion, or with finer thought, than Swinburne when he is arraigning Priestcraft at the bar of Humanity. His most heretical poems will be found in *Songs Before Sunrise*. The *Hymn to Man* is frankly, even triumphantly, Atheistic. In the prelude he writes:—

Because man's soul is man's god still,  
What wind soever waft his will  
Save his own soul's light overhead,  
None leads him, and none ever shall.

In another passage he treats the priests with fearful derision. He represents them calling on their Deity, and



he says, "Cry aloud, for the people blaspheme," and he concludes:—

Thou art smitten, thou God ; thou art smitten : thy death  
is upon thee, O Lord ;  
And the love-song of Earth as thou diest resounds through  
the wind of her wings—  
Glory to man in the highest, for man is the master of  
things.

In his lines apostrophizing Christ on the Cross, he says with Voltairean bitterness:—

Thy blood the priests make poison of,  
And in gold shekels coin thy love.

The poet's scorn draws no distinction between the priests and their Deity. The lines addressed to Jesus are the quintessence of satire:—

Thou bad'st let children come to thee :  
What children now but curses come ?  
What manhood in that god can be  
Who sees their worship and is dumb ?  
No soul that lived, loved, wrought, and died,  
Is this their carrion crucified ?

Swinburne regarded prayer as folly, and he vents his scorn in music:—

Behold there is no grief like this ;  
The barren blossom of thy prayer,  
Thou shalt find out how sweet it is  
O fools, and blind, what seek ye there,  
High up in the air ?

Ye must have gods, the friends of men,  
Merciful gods, compassionate,  
And these shall answer you again,  
Will ye beat always at the gate,  
Ye fools of fate ?

In the *Hymn to Proserpine*, he sings:—

O ghastly glories of saints, dead limbs of gibbeted gods !  
Though all men abase them before you in spirit, and all  
knees bend ;  
I kneel not, neither adore you, but standing, look to the  
end.

In another poem, *Song in Time of Order*, he sings:—

We have done with the kisses that sting,  
The thief's mouth red from the feast,  
The blood on the hands of the king,  
And the lie at the lips of the priest.

As a singer, Swinburne deserves the tribute of George Meredith, that he was the greatest of our lyrical poets. From the simplest measures, he ranges through the most elaborate. He can charm you with a lyric, such as *The Ballad of Dreamland*; and he can thrill and inspire with the great war-song in *Erectheus*, where the turmoil of battle is rendered in unforgettable language. Above all other English poets he is the singer of the sea. His love of ocean is not merely sensuous. That delight he has rendered wonderfully in his *Tristram*; but his finest sea-pieces are born of imaginative sympathy and insight. None has so vividly rendered the magic of the dawn breaking over the fields of the deep, or the terrors of the trumpets of the night, and the lightnings of the tempest. Among the cruellest abstractions of the cosmos he exults; he drinks the ether of space as men drink wine. He was also a rare critic, and an accomplished scholar. Observe his masterly essays on Shakespeare and the Elizabethans, and his beautiful renderings of Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and Villon. Swinburne could write a lovely Northern song, with the perfume of the heather clinging to it; and he could lower his high cadences to the ear of little children without loss of the omnipresent beauty of his incomparable style.

One quality of Swinburne's writing leaps to the eye of the dullest reader. It is his enthusiasm for right causes. The warmth of his praise is an endless delight. Such tributes as he has paid to the great apostles and champions of Freedom have a generosity and enthusiasm unequalled even in poetry. How he has sung the praises of Cromwell and Milton, of Shelley and Landor,

of Whitman and Victor Hugo, is well known. More enduring than the marble of the Genoese monument are those lovely lyrics of which Mazzini and the cause to which he dedicated his life were the inspiration. The love of Liberty has been a common possession of our greatest poets, and hardly one of them has failed to give splendid expression to the feeling. But Swinburne has surpassed them all in the ardour of his devotion, and in the rapture of his praise:—

The very thought in us how much we love thee  
Makes the throat sob with love, and blinds the eyes.

It comes to this in the end. The greatest poet of our generation was an avowed Freethinker and unabashed Republican. It is not strange, for poets have long since ceased to gain inspiration from Christianity. Byron was a thorough sceptic; Shelley was a convinced Atheist; Keats was a perfect Pagan; and Edward Fitzgerald as epicurean as Omar. Tennyson was heterodox, and Matthew Arnold was Secularistic. James Thomson was a militant Freethinker, and George Meredith and William Morris were both sceptics. Thomas Hardy, the most distinguished of living writers, is a Freethinker. Christianity no longer attracts men of genius, and therein lies its doom. The genius of modern times is enkindled at the altar of Humanity, which was standing before any other was built, and will endure when every other has crumbled into dust.

MIMNERMUS.

## Science and Spiritualism.

### VII.

(Continued from p. 246).

There seem to be a considerable class of persons who believe that natural laws are insufficient to account for their personal experiences and those of others, and who temporarily or permanently incline to a spiritualistic hypothesis in preference to any other.....It is a weak though comprehensible nature that becomes bewildered in the presence of a few experiences that seem homeless among the generous provisions of modern science, and runs off panic-stricken to find shelter in a system that satisfies a narrow personal craving at the sacrifice of broadly established principles, nurtured and grown strong in the hardy and beneficent atmosphere of science.—*Professor Jastrow, "Fact and Fable in Psychology" (1901), pp. 16-17.*

To surround anything, however monstrous or ridiculous, with an air of mystery, is to invest it with a charm and power of attraction which to the crowd is irresistible. False priests, false prophets, false doctors, false patriots, false prodigies of every kind, veiling their proceedings in mystery, have always addressed themselves at an immense advantage to the popular credulity, and have been, perhaps, more indebted to that resource in gaining and keeping for a time the upper hand of truth and common sense, than to any half-dozen items in the whole catalogue of imposture.—*Charles Dickens, "Barnaby Rudge," ch. xxvii.*

In 1871 Mr. Crookes (later Sir William) announced that he had succeeded in demonstrating the existence of a hitherto unknown force, and had measured the effects produced. Again through the medium of Daniel Dunglas Home. An apparatus was constructed that would register alterations in the weight of a body, and is described as "a mahogany board 36 inches long by 9½ inches wide and 1 inch thick. At each end a strip of mahogany 1½ inches wide was screwed on, forming feet. One end of the board rested on a firm table, whilst the other end was supported by a spring balance hanging from a substantial tripod stand. The balance was fitted with a self-registering index, in such a manner that it would record the maximum weight indicated by the pointer. The apparatus was adjusted so that the mahogany board was horizontal, its foot resting flat on the support. In this position its weight was 3 lbs., as marked by the pointer of the balance.

"Before Mr. Home entered the room the apparatus



had been arranged in position, and he had not even the objects of some parts explained before sitting down."<sup>1</sup>

Besides Mr. Crookes, four other persons were present, including Dr. (later Sir William) Huggins and Serjeant Cox, who afterwards attested the accuracy of his report.

After some preliminary operations with an accordion, attention was turned to the apparatus, Mr. Home placing his fingers lightly upon the extreme end of the board furthest from the balance, Dr. Huggins and Mr. Crookes sitting on each side and watching. The index of the balance moved several times, the greatest downward pull registered being 6 lbs.; the index, of course, showing a total weight of 9 lbs., as 3 lbs., the weight of the board, was already registered. The investigators declare that at no time were Home's fingers advanced more than 1½ inches over the end of the board—that is, the width of the strip forming the feet, by which the end rested on the table.

The few scientific men who criticized the experiment contented themselves with pointing out possible defects in the apparatus employed. Professor Balfour Stewart and Mr. E. B. Tylor suggested that the investigators might be under the influence of mesmeric illusions produced by Home on the minds of sensitive spectators. This was explaining one marvel by another quite as marvellous. But, as Mr. Podmore points out, there was no need for such a drastic solution. To begin with, we are told that all present guarded Home's feet and hands; but, as he further observes:—

It is pertinent to point out that a duty for which the whole company were collectively responsible may well at times have been intermitted. Moreover, Dr. Huggins and Mr. Crookes had to take notes. Again, the experiment described was not the first of the kind; it occurred in the middle of a long series. It is, indeed, stated that Home was not familiar with the apparatus employed. But as similar apparatus had been employed probably at previous trials by Mr. Crookes himself, certainly by earlier investigators—amongst them Dr. Hare, with whose published writings on Spiritualism we cannot assume that Home was unacquainted—the statement carries little weight. Further, a point of capital importance, there had apparently been many previous trials with various modifications of the apparatus and many failures; in Mr. Crookes' own words, "the experiments I have tried have been very numerous, but owing to our imperfect knowledge of the conditions which favour or oppose the manifestations of this force, to the apparently capricious manner in which it is exerted, and to the fact that Mr. Home himself is subject to unaccountable ebbs and flows of the force it has seldom happened that a result obtained on one occasion could be subsequently confirmed and tested with apparatus specially contrived for the purpose.

The real significance of this statement is that Home—a practised conjurer, as we are entitled to assume—was in a position to dictate the conditions of the experiment. By the simple device of doing nothing when the conditions were unfavourable, he could ensure that the light (gas in the present instance) was such and so placed, the apparatus so contrived, and the sitters so disposed, as to suit his purpose, and that in the actual experiment the attention of the investigators would necessarily be concentrated on the wrong points. Under such conditions, as ordinary experience shows, and as experiments described in the last chapter have abundantly demonstrated, five untrained observers are no match for one clever conjurer.

The word "untrained" in this connection may seem to require justification. Of Sir William Crookes' high distinction in many branches of physical science there is no need to speak here. But his previous training did not necessarily render him better qualified to deal with problems differing widely from those presented in the laboratory. To put it bluntly, if Home was a conjurer,

Mr. Crookes was probably in no better position for detecting the sleight-of-hand than any other man his equal in intelligence and native acuteness of sense. Possibly in a worse position, for it may be argued that his previous training would prepare the way for Home's efforts to concentrate attention on the mechanical apparatus, and thus divert it from the seemingly irrelevant movements by which it may be conjectured the conjurer's end was attained.<sup>1</sup>

As to the actual means employed by Home to move the index of the balance down, Mr. Podmore has no doubt that Home accomplished the trick by passing the loop of a fine black thread over the hook of the balance, the other end being attached to his clothes—probably at the knee. Mr. Podmore points out that the amount of light in the room during the experiment is not stated, but that at a similar experiment given a few weeks later, "the light, by Home's order, was so diminished that at the first trial 'there was scarcely light enough to see the board and the index move.'"<sup>2</sup> Under these conditions a black thread would be quite invisible.

Mr. Podmore also thinks that Home used fine black thread to support the floating lath in the air, and to prevent small objects from sliding off a tilted table. Mr. Davey, who surpassed the mediums in their tricks, and beat them at their own game, employed a hair or thread to move bits of coloured chalk under a glass tumbler, when the eyes of all present were concentrated upon the spot; and would even by similar means cause a tumbler to glide across the table. As we shall see later on, it was with a black thread that the notorious Eusapia Paladino, the medium who tricked so many famous scientists, including Sir Oliver Lodge, operated on the letter balance.

In cases where exceedingly small particles have to be weighed, the balance is enclosed in a vacuum, this is to do away with the pressure of the air. The balance is placed in a glass vessel and the air pumped out by an air-pump. As a chemist, Sir William Crookes was well acquainted with this apparatus, and if he wanted a real test of this spiritual force, why did he not ask Home to move the balance when it was enclosed in a vacuum? Perhaps he did, and this was one of the many failures of which he says: "it has seldom happened that a result obtained on one occasion could be subsequently confirmed and tested with apparatus specially contrived for the purpose."

To deal with all the phenomena produced by Home at his seances would take too long, but the reader may be referred to Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism* for further details. The one that has, perhaps, made the greatest impression, owing to the high social position of the witnesses, is the account given by the Master of Lindsay (afterwards Earl of Crawford) of how Home, in the presence of himself, Viscount Adare, and Captain Wynne, floated out of the window of one room and in at the window of another room seven feet away, eighty-five feet from the ground.

Now, first of all, there was no light in the room; but the Master of Lindsay says that the moon was shining full into the room. The value of this statement may be gauged by the fact, pointed out by Mr. Podmore, that on the date given the moon was only *two days old*—so there was not much illumination from that, even on a cloudless night; and we have no information on that point. Further, the Master of Lindsay was seated with his back to the window; so he could not possibly see Home float in. And, lastly, no one saw Home float out of the window of the other room, as they were seated at a table, and could not possibly see what went on in the other room. What happened was this:

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii., pp. 239-240.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 241.

<sup>1</sup> Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii., p. 237.



According to Lord Lindsay, Home went into a trance, and walked out into the hall. The Master of Lindsay then heard a voice whisper, "He will go out of one window and in at another," which he communicated to his companions. They heard the window of the next room opened. Then the Master of Lindsay, sitting with his back to the window, saw the shadow of Home on the wall in front of him, and found Home was in the room.<sup>1</sup> Probably it was not Home at all who entered the next room and made the noise of opening the window. No doubt Home, under cover of darkness, had regained admission to the room, perhaps by another door, and was concealed by the window curtains, and at the appropriate moment made his appearance. This trick had been prepared and worked up beforehand. As Podmore points out: "A few days before, in the presence of two of the same witnesses, Home had opened the same window, stepped on the ledge outside, and remained standing there, to the great alarm of Lord Lindsay, looking down at the street some eighty feet below. The medium had thus, as it were, furnished a rough sketch of the picture which he aimed at producing."<sup>2</sup> Lord Lindsay himself was subject to hallucinations. At an earlier period of the same evening he had "seen an apparition of a man sitting in a chair"; and as for the titles and social distinctions of the witnesses, they carry no weight in investigations of this nature. One Maskelyne at a seance would penetrate more mysteries than the attendance of the whole House of Lords.

Then there was the feat of handling red-hot coals out of the fire. This, like the floating in the air and elongations of the body, says Podmore, "was only vouchsafed to a few privileged and, if the word may be allowed in this connection, 'trained' witnesses." It failed on two occasions at Glasgow because the conditions were "too positive," or the witnesses had too little faith.<sup>3</sup>

We are in a position to see now how it was that Home never suffered exposure like all the other mediums. He would never perform in the presence of sceptics, and when he could not get rid of them, he did nothing. Charles Bradlaugh was one of the committee appointed by the Dialectical Society to inquire into the phenomena attributed to Spiritualism in 1873. Bradlaugh records: "I am bound to say that Mr. Home met me in the frankest manner possible. He told me I was one of the few people he wanted very much to see.....I met him in the same frank spirit; and as he offered every opportunity for investigation, we took it"—with the expected result; "we had not the scintilla of anything. I sat with Mr. Home night after night till Mr. Home was tired."<sup>4</sup>

Charles Bradlaugh was a powerful and determined man, and Home dared not try any tricks on him. Moreover, Bradlaugh would not allow his critical faculties to be disarmed by Mr. Home's frank and open manner, which imposed on so many others.

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

## Dry-Rot in the Churches.

For many years past, even before the War, the congregations in the churches and chapels of England and Wales have been steadily declining in numbers. Ten years ago I pointed out in a contemporary that the vast majority of the people had ceased to support the parsons, and, as the years pass, the secessions have increased more and more rapidly. The War has been the last

straw. Instead of adding to the adherents of the sects, as some expected, it has helped to destroy a creed which teaches the pernicious belief that the world is governed by an all-wise, loving God.

Here are some figures which both Christians and Atheists may read with interest. They are compiled from returns made by the various denominations:—

	LOSSES IN 1916.		
	MEMBERSHIP.	MEMBERS.	SCHOLARS.
Church of England ...	2,359,599	85,515	58,903
Catholic ...	1,885,655	(?)	(?)
Wesleyan Methodist ...	464,055	5,040	29,246
Congregationalist ...	453,138	1,645	10,823
Baptist ...	388,252	1,931	13,253
Primitive Methodist ...	198,805	1,744	10,690
Calvinist Methodist ...	185,278	1	4,234
United Methodist ...	141,336	7,591	6,333
Presbyterian ...	87,424	742	3,691
Salvation Army ...	110,438	(?)	(?)
Other Denominations ...	67,029	977	(?)

The adult population of England and Wales was thirty-seven millions, so it will be seen that the number attending religious places was only 17.14 per cent. of the people, and the losses during the year amount to 1.61 per cent. of the membership a year ago. The Catholics claim to have increased, but they have no cause to rejoice over their accession of strength. The priests know perfectly well the reason, namely, that a large number of Catholics have come from France and Belgium owing to the War, and have, naturally, joined up with their fellow-"sheep." It is to be expected, of course, that the priests would misrepresent the facts.

Atheists have no misunderstanding about the decrease. The dying of Christianity will, doubtless, be long drawn out, like all religions in the past. The Egyptian cosmogony is believed to have lasted four thousand years. The Christian has only existed half that term, and it is now disintegrating. Lies have charmed lives when they are useful to a class, and priestcraft is a trade particularly difficult to scotch. All the same, we may be assured that the days of the faith are numbered, and, in its place, men will have healthy minds with which to rely upon themselves, instead of upon a figment of the imagination. Gods, Saints, Saviours, Devils, and such supernatural beings will, in due course, follow the wizards, witches, elves, gnomes, and other queer fancies, into the limbo of childish errors, and Science will be supreme in caring for the well-being of Humanity.

E. ANDERSON.

## Acid Drops.

We are a Christian people, and the War is "God's cause." Both statements rest on excellent authority but doubtful evidence. Perhaps, of the two, the first is the more doubtful. We are a Christian people only in the sense that the majority profess the Christian faith, and, therefore, our being a Christian people must be taken with certain reservations. But all the belligerents—with the exception of France, who leaves God out of it altogether—say they are fighting God's cause; so that on this point there is a fairly general agreement. This being so, it is not surprising that America's joining with the Allies should have served as the occasion for a special service at St. Paul's Cathedral, with the King and Queen, the American Ambassador and his wife, and other notabilities in attendance. God was thanked for his share in the War, the Allies were praised for theirs, and both Britain and the United States praised to the skies—the former as being "well skilled in self-sacrifice," the latter as making "its act of self-dedication to God"; the whole, perhaps, to be taken as a commentary upon the Christian text, "If any smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also."

<sup>1</sup> Slight increase.

<sup>1</sup> See the two accounts given in Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii., pp. 255-256.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. ii., p. 263.

<sup>4</sup> *Life of Bradlaugh*, by his Daughter, vol. i., p. 344.



All the same, one wonders what God had to do with the business? Did he really move the heart of President Wilson, or was it the German campaign of submarine "frightfulness"? Would he have moved the President's heart if Germany had kept to the rules of the game? And if he really does move people's hearts, why did he not move the heart of the Kaiser in August, 1914, so as to secure peace? And what is the matter with the organs of the rulers of Bulgaria, and Greece, and Turkey? As we did not thank God for moving the hearts of Italy, and Roumania, and Japan, and China, etc., are we to conclude that he had nothing to do with their action? Anyway, America is in; so thank God for America—and the submarines.

Bishop Brent, who preached the sermon, referred to the "Altar upon which we lay our lives and *fortunes*" (italics ours). And all the worshippers who had invested in War Loan at five per cent., and who will take their share of the three hundred millions annually that will have to be paid after the War, and all those who had made huge profits on food, and on leather, and on coals, and on ships, and on munitions, responded with a very loud "Amen." They lay their fortunes on the altar, and if the Government would only issue a loan at ten per cent., they would deposit them with still greater thankfulness to God.

The way in which the lion and the lamb will lie together "after the War" is foreshadowed in an advertisement issued by National League for Opposing Women's Suffrage, calling upon every one to write to their member of Parliament opposing the giving of votes to women. It objects to the measure now before Parliament—among other grounds—because "the best of our manhood is abroad." All we can say is that if the "best of our manhood" declines to treat woman as an intelligent human being, we hope that it will elect to remain abroad. But the statement that the men abroad are all on the side of the National League of British Back Numbers is too ridiculous to need serious disproof.

A Scotch paper publishes the following revised version of one of the Beatitudes—"Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called up."

The translation of the Bible into Mandarin Chinese will be completed by June. Three hundred million of Chinese will thus be able to read the Christian Scriptures in the vernacular. They have already had Christian opium, guns, rum, cotton goods, etc. They will find that Christians do really believe "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." And they will note that all Christian Europe is practising it.

In an article on "Woman Worship," in the *Daily News*, Miss Rebecca West says, Women are merely expected "to sit still and be as female as they can, taking as their ideal, not the untiring Saint Teresa, but the Sacred Cow of the Universe." The latter is a brilliant addition to theological terminology.

Jack Cooke, the evangelistic boy-preacher, has died in a Chicago hospital, and the religious papers add, "he was to have joined the Royal Flying Corps." Some pious folk will believe that Jack has flown to heaven.

The tears of Beckenham church-folk are falling fast. The parish magazine, after appearing for forty years, has ceased publication owing to the paper shortage.

The few clergymen who are at the back of the fighting lines appear to retain their gospel-shop habits. A chaplain on the West Front has sent home £13 collected from the troops.

Glancing at an article by Canon C. H. Robinson, we noticed the expression "a happy Atheist," and we thought that at last the clergy were getting generous to their opponents. But it was only a phrase taken from Mr. Wells'

novel, *Mr. Britling*. Meanwhile, the clergy prefer their Atheists to be gloomy and garrulous.

A Sunday paper has offered a prize for the oldest mother, and, so far, the oldest applicant has been one aged 51. The editor might have remembered the Biblical heroine, Sarah, who had a son at 90 years of age, her husband, Abraham, being then 99.

Mr. Fisher, President of the Board of Education, laid his proposals for educational reform before the House of Commons on April 20, and all that can be said for them is that they are "promising"—we hope they will not be merely so. But we shall see when the main proposals become embodied in an actual Bill. Meanwhile, it may be noted that nothing was said on the religious question, and to ignore it will not do. It may be politic to attempt it, but it is not heroic, and it is foredoomed to failure. Mr. Fisher would do well to follow the example of our French Ally, and secularize the schools. After all, Secular Education is all that the State is concerned with, and for an Education Minister to saddle himself with religious instruction is to pave the way for comparative failure.

As a commentary upon the cant about democracy that is so prominent with politicians just now, we may note that Mr. Fisher does not propose to abolish fees for secondary schools. This is because, he says, it would involve an expenditure of £1,000,000 a year. Frightful! We are spending seven millions a day on war, but cannot think of spending another million on secondary education, *even when the War is over*. So much for the genuineness of the interest in democracy, of waging a War for the freedom of democracy, etc. For what justification is there—save a caste repugnance to allow children of the "lower classes" free access to secondary education—for abolishing fees in elementary and retaining them in secondary schools? Mr. Fisher proposes increasing the number of scholarships. But scholarships will not do, for various reasons. Education, in both elementary and secondary schools, should be free if it is to be really democratic. Mr. Fisher would do well to defy class influence, and go the whole hog.

Superstition dies hard, and much of it is prevalent in Christian England to-day. At the Newington Public Library, London, S.E., there is an exhibition of soldiers' and sailors' mascots, and other strange survivals, among which may be mentioned crosses and religious medals worn by fighting men, infants' caul carried by sailors as a protection from drowning, besides hag-stones to warn off witches. A notable exhibit is a sheep's heart pierced with pins and nails, and used by a woman who practised witchcraft as late as 1908. Small wonder that the Christian superstition still flourishes in such a soil.

Dr. Saleeby says: "I have heard more bad music at temperance meetings than I knew the world could contain." What would the doctor have said had he attended Salvation Army and revivalist meetings?

Dr. Jowett, we are told by the *British Weekly*, "has preached a great sermon in New York"; but its greatness seems to consist in its blind optimism. Optimism is a splendid thing when rationally cherished; but an optimism founded upon a pious sentiment only cannot conduce to human progress. It proves rather a clog upon the wheels of the progressive car. Dr. Jowett is reported to have said, for example, that "the men in the trenches were thinking more about God than ever before." According to the testimony of chaplains and others, repeated again and again, that statement is conspicuously false. We are assured by those who are on the spot that the men in the trenches are thinking most about the end of the War, and the return to their homes; that there are no signs whatever of a revival of interest in religion among them; and that their chief cheer comes, not from attendance at religious services, but from entertainments, and particularly the singing of comic songs.



Now, if Dr. Jowett's information upon matters so close at hand is so inaccurate, how can we trust him when he treats of events of long ago? He said that after the destruction of Jerusalem the light shone brighter than it had ever done through the darkness; but which light was it, and where did it so shine? Was not Titus, the destroyer of Jerusalem, succeeded by Domitian, who exiled Epictetus and other philosophers from Rome; who, as Gibbon says, "on a slight pretence," condemned and executed his nephew, Clemens, and banished Domitilla, his wife, to a desolate island on the coast of Campania; who passed sentence of death or of confiscation upon a great number of persons, the vague charge against whom was that of Atheism and Jewish manners; and whose memory was publicly execrated and condemned by the Senate? There was a decided improvement under Nerva, Tragan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius, it is true; but those were Pagan Emperors, and Dr. Jowett's true light could certainly not have shone brighter during their reigns.

Once more. Dr. Jowett told his congregation that the light shone brighter than ever after the mediæval reformation and the French Revolution; but if he means by the former the Protestant Reformation, we are bound to characterize the statement as flagrantly false. In reality, the Protestant Reformation was a movement away from the light of the Gospel and towards that of emancipated human reason, though not so intended by its promoters or their successors; and the same can be said of the French Revolution, out of which has issued the largely sceptical and atheistic France of to-day, which God is said to be now punishing for her disloyalty to himself by means of the present War. Undoubtedly, the trend of modern history has been increasingly away from the light of Jesus Christ, as Dr. Horton, in particular, was in the habit of sorrowfully pointing out before the War.

In an obituary notice of the late Lord Allerton, a Sunday paper called him "a self-made man." This reminds us of Voltaire's jest concerning a man not remarkable for his good qualities, and of whom the same remark was made: "This removes a reproach from the Almighty."

To minimize the consumption of food there will be fewer Sunday-school treats this year. This will cause a slump in religion among young people.

The *Daily Telegraph* states that the whole congregation at a service in the parish church at Beaconsfield consisted of four clergymen. At two other services the only person present was a clergyman's wife.

The non-military "General" Booth announces "Two Days with God" at the Congress Hall. The Kaiser will be green with jealousy.

A new book bears the strange title, *Before Adam*. Sounds as if there was "nothing doing."

Among the candidates for confirmation at a service at Tenterdon, Kent, were four women who were grandmothers. Maybe the other girls had the consolation of reflecting that the aged ones were in their second childhood.

The effect of Zeppelin raids, the bombarding of undefended towns, the sinking of unarmed passenger vessels, and, worst of all, of hospital ships, has been to rouse the indignation of decent-minded men and women everywhere against Germany. All these barbarous acts did Germany no good, and—in the wider sense—did the Allies no harm. But the Government has now seen fit to resort to a policy of reprisals, and the university town of Freiburg has been bombed, resulting in the deaths of women and children. Whether this will have the desired effect we greatly doubt. The people who suffer are not the authors of the outrages, and we are quite sure that it is not a job which our airmen will gladly undertake. It is far more likely to be used by

the German Government to stiffen opposition to the Allies, and although Germany led the way in this, she will not fail to retort that we are no better than she is in the matter.

We protested against this policy of reprisals when it was first suggested, and we see no reason to alter our opinion now. To be logical, it means that we must out-brutalize the Germans. Our chastisement must be more effective than their outrage. If they kill one prisoner, we must ill-treat more. If they murder a dozen women and children, we must murder a score. So step by step the nations descend the scale of civilization in this War which so many tell us is animated by the loftiest of ideals. Already Germany has compelled us to follow her in the use of gas and other devices that have made War more than usually horrible, and now we are following her example in this last respect. For that is what reprisals mean. We set our standard by the lowest instead of by the highest. And the men of God with the talk of "God's cause" on their lips, and the cant of Christian love, are dumb.

The Bishop of Ely deserves a word of acknowledgement in having—one amongst so many thousand of priests—protested against the policy of reprisals.

At Hemsworth, the local branch of the Yorkshire Miner's Association, have raised objection to certain clergymen working in the mines, thus taking the place of men with families who have entered the Army. As a consequence, the parsons have returned to labour in the Lord's vineyard.

The Vicar of Northfield has recently refused to allow the following motto to be inscribed on a tombstone in "his" churchyard: "To live in the hearts of those we leave behind us is not to die."

A correspondent in a Catholic weekly points out that relics of the old faith in England may be found in public-house signs, such as "Angel" taverns, and "Salutation" inns, and one which is unique, "The Virgin," outside Worcester city. This association of things spirituous and spiritual is decidedly interesting.

"Lost to the sense of Christian morality, she (Germany) has plunged Europe into a maelstrom of suffering." Yet every German soldier has the motto "God with us" on his uniform.

Mr. Horatio Bottomley really deserves that more notice should be taken of him by the Churches. In *John Bull* he notes that "another chaplain has fallen on the field"—not a wonderful thing when one remembers how many others have also fallen. This time it is a Roman Catholic priest, and Mr. Bottomley cries "All honour to his memory, and to the great church of which he was a priest." Honour to his memory, if you please, but why to the Church? What has that to do with it? In the face of such bids for favour, it is pathetic to see how coolly the Churches have treated this illustrious consent. Mr. Bottomley's conversion may have been noted in heaven, but no one appears to know about it on earth. And yet one hesitates to say that it was of no earthly use.

Is the Christian God a German spy? He has struck the Royal Aircraft Factory at Aldershot with lightning, and injured four men. Perhaps the Almighty is contaminated with the blood of the "All-Highest," like the rest of the European Royal Families, and so family considerations influence his actions.

The humourist who called churches "gospel shops" was wiser than he knew, for places of worship do not appear to be more favoured by Providence than any other houses. For example, St. Andrew's Church, Bromley, Kent, is to be closed until after the War—just as if it were a stewed-eel bar.

Protests against wholesale sparrow slaughter have appeared in the papers, but no reference has been made to the special care of Providence for those birds.



## C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

April 29, South Place Institute, South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.

## To Correspondents.

- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—May 6, South Place Institute, South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.
- "KERIDON" draws our attention to a misprint in his last week's article. The word "good" should have been "God." The sentence then reads: ".....its God perforce dies with it."
- H. BUNTING.—The address of the Rationalist Peace Association is 38 Cursitor Street, London, E.C.
- E. B.—Arrived too late for use this week. We have printed the War Office notice enclosed on two previous occasions, but it will serve a useful purpose in printing it again.
- A. RADLEY.—We have no idea who is behind "The National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage." Thanks for cutting.
- S. LENARD.—We have never found bigotry give way to tolerance because it met with no opposition. The better plan is to face it. You may have trouble either way, but it is surely better to have the trouble through defending your own opinion than have it while professing the opinions of other people.
- O. E. K.—The information required is being sent you. We should be pleased to arrange meetings in your locality if anyone could be found to look after local arrangements.
- AYRSHIRE.—Please send on your proposals. If practicable, shall be pleased to do as you suggest.
- J. THACKRAY.—Thanks for verses, which we much regret we are unable to use.
- R. OGDEN.—We have handed your remittance to Miss Vance, who will deal with it. We are not surprised you enjoyed reading about Voltaire. So soon as circumstances permit, we intend publishing a rather lengthy selection from his writings about religion. Our best wishes to your two boys in the Army. The parody you enclose has already appeared in the *Freethinker*.
- A. G. HANN.—Next week.
- G. N.—Certainly "some people" may have called George Jacob Holyoake an Agnostic. All we need say in reply is that, although charged with "Blasphemy," Holyoake himself described his trial as a trial for "Atheism."
- H. W. EDWARDS.—Thanks. We hope to make use of your communication at an early date.
- ROBERT MORELAND.—Article safely to hand, all the way from the Front. You are not alone in thinking "it's a jolly good victory that the paper has survived during the War." But the War is not over yet, unfortunately.
- J. A. REID.—Should be very pleased to send a copy of the *Freethinker* to every newspaper editor, schoolmaster, etc.—if we could afford it.
- H. G. FARMER.—We received article, for which, thanks. Also letter, which will appear next week. We agree with you that Mr. Arch's articles on the Revolution deserve republication in pamphlet form.
- OWING to unexpected demands upon our time, we are obliged to hold over until next week a number of letters, as well as several paragraphs that would otherwise have appeared.

## Sugar Plums.

The course of Sunday evening lectures at South Place Institute will be opened to-day, April 29, by Mr. Cohen. His subject is "Religion Before and After the War," and should provide ground for profitable discussion. Mr. Cohen will be followed by Mr. J. T. Lloyd and Mr. Harry Snell, the titles of whose lectures are announced on the last page of this issue. The chair will be taken each evening at 7 o'clock.

Admission to these lectures is free, but there will be a collection towards the expenses, and we hope our friends will bear in mind that these meetings are not arranged without incurring outlay. We trust also that London Freethinkers are doing their best towards making the meetings known among their friends. There are small slips announcing the lectures which may be had either at the *Freethinker* office, or of Miss Vance, the N.S.S. General Secretary. Next week we hope to be able to announce that the course has commenced well. In that case better will be bound to follow.

We bring to a close this week the excellent series of articles on the French Revolution, by Mr. Robert Arch. They have, we know, been followed with much interest by a large number of readers; and we are pleased, for many reasons, that this has been so. For, when all is said, the French Revolution of 1789 remains one of the greatest events of modern times. The recent Russian Revolution was of importance, and current events have induced many to recognize this. Still, in its world-wide influence it can hardly attain the importance that properly attaches to the upheaval of 1789. It provided the world with ideals that have never lost their potency. It gave modern Europe, for the first time in its history, the inspiration of a human society resting upon Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. And the measure of its influence for good is the hatred with which vested interests everywhere regarded it.

Will all branches and members of the N.S.S. please note that all resolutions for the Conference agenda should be in the Secretary's hands with as little delay as possible? Reconstruction and reorganization is in the air in all directions, and some useful suggestions ought to come in if only to serve as a guide to the Executive.

Owing to the dropping of "Always" in our reply to H. T. D. in last week's issue, we were made to say not quite what we meant. Religion does not *always* offer direct encouragement to dishonesty, but it does usually encourage a frame of mind that eventuates in dishonesty. And this dishonesty is the more dangerous because it does not generally come within the cognizance of the law.

The Newcastle Branch of the N.S.S. has arranged a series of fortnightly meetings in the Collingwood Hall, Clayton Street, on Sunday afternoons at 3 o'clock. To-day (April 29) the speaker is Mr. Bryce, who will take for his subject "Individual Effort." Newcastle Freethinkers please note.

Mr. Lloyd has written a reply to the Vicar of Bromyard's article in our issue of April 15, which we should have published this week, but are obliged to hold it over owing to its not having reached us in time. Nowadays one posts letters when one can, and the post-office delivers when it will. And there is small comfort in swearing at an official who is not present to get the benefit of one's exertions.

Many of our readers will be pleased to learn that we received a brief note the other day from Mr. R. H. Rosetti. He writes that he is keeping well, and at the time of writing was engaged in pioneer navvying, and that he and his "pals" were being favoured with the attention of German snipers and occasional machine-gun fire. We hope that the snipers and others will continue to miss our friend "for the duration of the War."

We are pleased to see that the Rationalist Press Association has raised a warning voice against an anticipated attempt of the Papacy to be represented at any forthcoming Peace Congress to be, not alone represented there, but also to use its representation as a means to regaining some of its lost credit and power. The warning has been addressed to the Freethinkers of all the Allied nations, and is strongly supported by the Italian *Associazione Nazionale del Libero Pensiero*. It has already been anticipated by the organized Freethought parties in France and Switzerland, and by the authorized protests of the Spanish and Portuguese Freethinkers. We have no doubt the Freethinkers in the United States of America will endorse the attitude of their comrades and Allies in Europe against any proposal to rehabilitate the Pope in his old capacity as the wielder of temporal power.

The new Manchester Branch was definitely formed at a meeting held at the Manchester Hotel, Oldham Street, on Monday, April 16, when Mr. H. Black, 446 Great Cheetham Street, East, Higher Broughton, was appointed Honorary Secretary. Will all intending members who have not yet handed in their names please communicate with him



at once? Mr. S. Pulman was elected President, Mr. J. H. Langford, Treasurer, and a working committee appointed for the next twelve months.

It is quite evident that educational reformers will need to be on the alert to prevent the movement for educational reform degenerating into a merely technical education designed to capture German trade "after the War." If for that reason alone, we cordially commend to the notice of our readers *British Education After the War*, by Mr. F. J. Gould (Watts & Co.; 1s. 6d. net). Mr. Gould speaks as a practical teacher and an enthusiast in the cause of education, a combination that makes for both balance and breadth. The six chapters into which Mr. Gould divides his book provide, apart from a general sketch of education, a scheme of instruction from the earliest years through the elementary schools, on to the secondary schools and universities. The aim of the book is education for service, and the chief point to which criticism may be directed is, we fancy, the keeping of the ideal of the British Empire too clearly before the mind of the developing boy or girl. It is true that Mr. Gould does not quite lose sight of what he calls "the march towards unity on the largest scale"; but for our own part, we are afraid that to emphasize this "nationalist reconstruction"—to use another of Mr. Gould's phrases—will tend to dwarf the larger aim. And, quite frankly, we have no greater love for the Imperialism of Great Britain than for that of Germany. Naturally, we prefer the former to the latter; but it is useless disguising or ignoring the fact that it is largely to their conflict that the world owes the present tragedy of war. Apart from this, Mr. Gould's contribution to the work of educational reconstruction deserves the highest praise and the most careful study. There is a lively preface to the book by Dr. Hayward, who gives Mr. Gould high praise as an educationalist, and properly emphasizes his services and sacrifices in that cause.

## The French Revolution.

### XI.

#### CONCLUSION.

(Concluded from p. 251.)

IN the preceding articles I do not pretend to have given a full history of the French Revolution. Readers "in the know" will perceive that many interesting persons and things have been left without mention, or passed over with a scanty reference. I shall have achieved my object if I have induced some readers of the *Freethinker*, who may, perhaps, have taken previously little interest in the Revolution, to turn to the real historians and read this great story for themselves.

The English classic on the subject is, undoubtedly, Carlyle. Unfortunately, Carlyle was credulous and uncritical, and on political and religious issues was about as muddle-headed as any writer with a reputation can contrive to be. He had a bilious hatred of democracy, which he called "anarchy," and his religious views, in spite of his rejection of Christianity, retained such a thick coating of mystical Puritanism as to make him incapable of treating an Atheist with even common fairness. About the best English work on the Revolution is by an American, Mr. H. Morse Stephens, who, unhappily, only completed two volumes of his history, and left his readers stranded in the middle of the Reign of Terror. The works of Mr. Hilaire Belloc, especially his lives of Danton and Robespierre, are worth reading, as also is Mr. Belfort Bax's *Marat: the People's Friend*—a careful rehabilitation of the most maligned of all the Revolutionists, and a book to which I hereby record my deep indebtedness.

A work well worth perusal by those who do not mind long digressions on the economic side is Prince Kropotkin's *The Great French Revolution*. Kropotkin writes as

an Anarchist, and, as such, has little good to say of any political leader in any party, and this bias must be allowed for.

Naturally, it is to French writers that one must look for the best work on the Revolution. Mignet's *History* is to be recommended to those who appreciate brevity and fairness. Lamartine's *Histoire des Girondins* is a sentimental romance more than a history. The most important modern work is the monumental *Histoire Politique* of M. Aulard, Professor at the Sorbonne, which is available in an English translation.

These are but a small fraction of the enormous literature on the French Revolution; but a study, even of this fraction, is especially desirable for English readers, in view of the systematic way in which English writers, especially novelists, have poisoned the atmosphere with prejudice in this connection. Nearly all English writers seem to start with furious Royalist prejudices, and to have only the most superficial acquaintance with the facts. The palm for sheer tosh must be awarded to the Baroness Orczy, whose *Scarlet Pimpernel* series of novels appears to enjoy a popularity which speaks badly for the intelligence of her readers. The only good novel on the subject I have ever read is Anatole France's *Les Dieux ont Soif*, which is almost beyond praise, and neither "extenuates" nor "sets down in malice" anything about the Revolution.

So much for the literary side. Let us now return to the point at which we began, viz., the permanent significance of this great upheaval.

The Revolution is significant, less for the results it achieved than for the principles it proclaimed and the movements it inaugurated. Those principles are conveniently summarized as "liberty, equality, and fraternity," which means, in explicit terms, *the maximum possible freedom of every human being from domination by other human beings*. In economics, this is expressed as the abolition of the exploitation of the worker; in politics, as the acceptance of consent rather than force as the basis of government—the corollary of this being universal adult suffrage; in religion, as the repudiation of all interference with liberty of thought and expression, the abolition of all sectarian privileges—such as "establishment"—and the right of every child to be brought up free from speculative bias, until he or she is of an age to judge rationally on such matters.

Needless to say, the Revolution, though all these principles were voiced in the course of its development, achieved little of them; indeed, as I pointed out at the beginning of these articles, the main thing to remember about it is that it is not finished. Economically, the solid result of the French Revolution was the abolition of feudal rights and restrictions, and the creation of a preponderant class of peasant proprietors in France. This achievement is much belauded by certain writers in this country, such as Mr. Belloc and Mr. Chesterton, who seem to think that the only thing necessary to establish economic beatitude is to make most people peasant proprietors. As to this, Prince Kropotkin points out, that the application of the principle in France was very partial; that in large districts, such as La Vendee, where the peasants were "loyal" (in the Royalist sense), the principle was not applied at all; that where it was applied, the better-off peasants got the lion's share; and that, in any case, the fact that a large number of peasants had managed to become freeholders could be no consolation whatever to the urban workman, who found himself at the end of the Revolution helpless in the hands of his new masters, the *parvenu* middle class. Politically, as we have seen, universal suffrage was swept away in the "Thermidorian" reaction, and was not recovered until 1848. Here,



however, at any rate, the ground lost has been recovered, though slowly and with much vicissitude; and though the third French Republic does not enjoy so democratic a Constitution as that of 1793, the conquest of universal suffrage seems to be permanent. In the religious sphere, the principle of the separation of Church and State, first recognized after the fall of Robespierre, was overthrown by Napoleon, and has had to wait until the twentieth century for its reassertion. As it is the fashion in some quarters to regard Napoleon as the champion and continuer of the Revolution, it is as well to put it on record here that his re-establishment of Catholicism in the "Concordat" was undertaken avowedly with a Conservative object. Napoleon is recorded to have said: "You cannot have property without inequality, and you cannot have inequality without religion"; in other words, Catholicism must be used to bull-dose the working-classes into submission to their masters, the *parvenu* middle-class, who had called in Napoleon to protect their property. Napoleon also said, *apropos* of Atheism: "Ne me parlez pas des hommes sans Dieu; j'ai connu les hommes sans Dieu en 1793; on ne gouverne pas ces hommes-la, on les fusille." He was referring to the democratic "dechristianizers," his old comrades in arms at Toulon, whom he had basely betrayed, and now wanted to put under the Pope and the priests again. When Napoleon was crowned Emperor in 1804, the Republican General Augereau said, alluding to the magnificence of the ceremony: "Nothing was wanting — nothing but the million or so of men who had died to put an end to all that."

But, as I have already said, the French Revolution is not an event only in French history, but in world-history. The Radical movement in England and Scotland took its rise, no doubt, from the conditions resulting from the Industrial Revolution, which created a cleavage between the interests of the artizan and labourer on the one hand, and those of the capitalist and landlord on the other; but it owed much intellectually to the wind that blew from the Channel. The ideas expressed academically by Godwin, popularly by Cobbett, or poetically by Shelley, were the ideas that had agitated the "sections" of Paris, and the people's clubs of France. From the early Radicals they passed into the Chartist Movement, from the Chartists into the Republicanism of the seventies, and so into modern Socialist and Labour politics.

The superficial reactionary is apt to hold up the French Revolution as an example of the inevitable failure of all attempts at the practical realization of ideal aims. How often, in one's youth, has one heard one's elders say: "Look at the French Revolutionists! They began all very finely, with 'liberty, equality, and fraternity,' but they ended by chopping off each other's heads!"

Now, it should be obvious that this kind of sneer (the kernel of which is the inevitable contrast between any ideal aim and its application in a conditioned world) can be levelled against any historical movement whatever. One can easily say of Christianity: "It began all very finely with 'the kingdom of God,' and it ended in their burning one another alive." Christianity has had just fifteen times as long to work itself out as the Revolution has had, and it has caused more suffering and unnecessary bitterness, and led to less amelioration in man's lot, than the Revolution. Christianity was able, after two or three centuries of propaganda, to impose its doctrines on the world. From that day, for more than twelve centuries, its principles were unchallenged in most of southern and western Europe. In those twelve centuries, commonly called the "Dark Ages" and the "Middle Ages," the aspiration of Lord John

Manners was fulfilled in anticipation: "art and science, laws and learning," died, and Europe was left, not, indeed, with an "old nobility," but with a new caste of barbarian ruffians, balanced by a turbulent priesthood, for whose maintenance the tillers of the soil were compelled to set aside so many days' labour every week. And then the admirers of this state of things have the impudence to charge modern reformers with seeking to establish the "Servile State"!

Christianity, then, may fairly be judged and condemned by its results. The Revolution, however, has never had a chance to show what it can do, having been engaged for 127 years in an uphill struggle against the forces of monarchical absolutism, clerical dogmatism, wealthy class interest, and sheer human stupidity. People talk of the Reign of Terror as though that were the typical achievement of the Revolution; but they ignore the fact that, but for the infamous war waged by the backward monarchies of Europe, aided and abetted by William Pitt and the English landed and moneyed classes, against the French people "rightly struggling to be free," there would have been no Reign of Terror.

It is true, of course, that the Democratic Party in France went astray; they lacked, in the broadest sense of the word, *experience*; not only personal experience in political matters, but the necessary data of social science to cope with the *causes* of the servitude and injustice against which they fought. The sciences of political economy and sociology, in the course of the nineteenth century, have placed at the disposal of democracy a wealth of knowledge which was not available at the French Revolution; and the application of science to industry has rendered possible a vista of security and leisure for all, which was only dimly grasped by a few then. But whatever tools and weapons we use, it is still the old principle which we have to further by their means: the principle that no restriction of man's liberty of thought, word, and deed, is to be suffered, which does not justify itself by guaranteeing to him a greater measure of liberty than that which it takes away. "Ni Dieu ni maitre," no supernatural dogmas, no reverence for ancient institutions, no vested interests, no "sanctity of the family," must be allowed to stand in the way of the one end of society, the liberation of the individual human being to think his own thoughts and live his own life; and all machinery, political and economic, must be made a means to that end.

ROBERT ARCH.

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## The Monarch of Cereals.

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V.

(Continued from p. 253.)

IF adequately watered, vast territories in the States may be placed under permanent tillage. When Dickens wrote *Martin Chuzzlewit* the great Mississippi valley was a wilderness. But as the population streamed westwards immense areas of this naturally fertile river region were brought under the plough. Man, then, passed beyond the well-watered Mississippi and lower Missouri lands towards the eastern slopes of the Rockies. This invasion of the normally arid West coincided with a succession of seasons in which the rainfall was more copious than usual. The accepted view was that with the advance of civilization the rainfall in these regions had permanently increased. This theory suffered a severe shock through the weather conditions of subsequent years when the average rainfall (10 to 20 inches) decreased nearly one half. Owing to the intense heat



and drought, millions of acres of corn crops shrivelled into skeleton stalks. Scores of thousands of settlers were reduced from prosperity to abject poverty and misery. Prayers, and by no means perfunctory prayers, were offered for the sweet showers of heaven. Dynamite was exploded to bring down the supplicated moisture. But the gods proved deaf to man's entreaties. And, we are told:—

The blunt fact remained, and still remains, that many millions of acres were dead, vacant, and profitless, simply because of their aridity. This land has little value now, for in many places a whole section does not yield enough to keep a fleet-footed sheep from starving.

All that is required for this and other areas is irrigation. Lands adjoining the Colorado, Columbia, and Missouri streams would support millions of people while adding considerably to the world's wheat crop were they watered. Several millions of acres are already irrigated, and ample water exists in the environing rivers to irrigate many millions more. Irrigation also fertilizes the soil. The sediment deposited by the Nile in its annual flood adequately maintains the richness of the Egyptian soil. The waters of this celebrated river deposit large amounts of nitrogen, while other famous streams, such as the Rio Grande and St. Lawrence, hold in solution invaluable substances extremely beneficial to vegetable life.

The plant which provides the staff of life is subject to innumerable adverse influences at the hands of cold and dispassionate Nature. In addition to the disasters which overtake the cereal in seasons of excessive rainfall, gales, drought, and cold, there exist various diseases and insect enemies which flourish at the plant's expense. Vegetable pathology is a recently developed department of science. In 1885 four institutions only were engaged in the study of plant maladies in the United States. In 1895 over one hundred expert investigators were actively occupied in this field of research, while fifty agricultural colleges were seeking to solve the economic and botanical problems involved. Weeds, again, choke the crops and impoverish the soil. The so-called Russian thistle, which is really a saltwort, has shown itself a hardy enemy to the husbandman. It was unknown in the United States until 1873 when it was unwittingly sown with flax seed imported from Russia. Dakota, where it was accidentally planted, is an ideal habitat for the weed, and it spread rapidly in succeeding years. Within a couple of decades "it infested a continuous area of about 35,000 miles, and caused at least 1,600,000 dollars damage to wheat every year." By 1895 this weed had invaded a vast territory, and its depredations assumed very serious proportions. As the average Russian thistle produces from 20,000 to 30,000 seeds, while some giant specimens have been estimated to carry as many as 200,000, its powers of reproduction are immense. In its native land this weed is a positive curse, which worsens as the years pass away. Indeed, in the Caspian region, large and important tracts of land formerly cultivated have become so overrun that they have been abandoned. Science, however, has arrested the thistle's advance in America, and, no doubt, it will soon be reduced to the level of an ordinary weed. Wild garlic, cockle, true thistles, darnel, and other forms of "plants in the wrong place" when present in the wheat fields, are a serious eyesore to the farmer, but good husbandry produces heavy crops, and heavy crops keep down the weeds.

Painstaking inquiries in America and elsewhere acquit the birds of the charges made against them by sundry writers. Among all the feathered creatures frequenting the grain lands not one species can be said

to be entirely harmful. In sober truth it is ascertained that—

the good that many of them do by destroying injurious insects and seeds more than counterbalances the damage occasioned by the eating of grain. At least fifty different birds act as weed destroyers, and help to eradicate nearly 100 species of noxious plants. The number of weed seeds eaten is enormous, one bird eating a thousand seeds of some kinds for a single breakfast. The insects eaten by these birds are also generally noxious. There is usually an equilibrium of organisms in Nature, and birds become harmful only when they disturb this proper balance by increasing out of proportion to their environment.

Among the fungoid pests of wheat are "glume spot," wheat scab, smut, rust, blight, and mildew. Smut is a fungoid disease of a serious character, and two kinds of this ailment attack wheat. In Greece and Rome this malady was common, so that it is an ailment of long standing. The amount of damage due to "stinking smut" varies. As the parasite lives exclusively at its victim's expense the crop is injured in proportion to the number of infected wheat plants. The spores of the fungus discharge an offensive odour, hence the term "stinking smut." In bad cases from 50 to 75 per cent. of the heads of wheat are diseased while the remainder becomes so contaminated as to be worthless as flour, and positively dangerous as seed. This disease is widespread, and unless it is dealt with it increases in intensity. Loose smut is not so repellent, and leads to smaller loss, but it will injure the crop in normal instances as much as 10 per cent., while, at times, it will ruin half the harvest. Science has provided various remedies for these diseases which, when properly applied, have yielded satisfactory results. But many farmers refuse to adopt them, with the consequence that in the States, Canada, and in Europe, the ravages of the smut maladies are still very great.

Wheat rust is also due to the presence of parasitic plants on the cereal. In Northern America this disease inflicts heavier losses on the wheat raiser than any other fungoid or insect foe. It is estimated that the monetary value of the wheat ruined every season in the States alone totals twenty million dollars. Terrible is its toll in Russia and other lands, while in moist warm climates, such as prevail in parts of China and Japan, rust disease is one of the main obstacles to the growth of the grain. Even in an old agricultural country like England, rust in some seasons represents a very grave loss to the wheat producer. There seems no certain remedy for the pest save, perhaps, the evolution of rust proof varieties of the plant.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued.)

## A Story Without a Title.

BY VLADIMIR KOROLENKO.

IN the fifth century, even as nowadays, the sun rose every morning and set every evening. In the dew-besprinkled morning his first beams saluted each other, the earth awakened, and the air was filled with gladness and hope and delight. In the evening the earth had had time to sober down again, and went to sleep in gloomy darkness. One day was made in the likeness of another day, and one night of another night. Sometimes the clouds gathered overhead, and the thunder rattled noisily and angrily. Sometimes a wandering star would drop from the sky, or a monk white with fear would rush in and tell his brothers how he had seen a tiger not many paces from the monastery. And then once again the days resembled other days, and the nights other nights.



The monks worked hard, and said their prayers. The old abbot played the organ, wrote Latin verses, and composed music; for the wonderful old man had marvellous gifts. Even the oldest monks, whose sensitiveness had become dulled by age, could not keep back their tears when the sounds of music-making came from his cell. When he spoke of the most ordinary things—the trees, the sea, or God's creatures, the animals—it was impossible for them to listen without smiles or tears. It was as though the chords of the organ were repeated within his soul. But when he was angry, when he gave himself up to excessive joy, or when he began to talk of things terrible or great, then he was overcome by a passionate inspiration, tears welled in his eyes, his face flushed, his voice thundered, and the monks felt that their souls were aflame with his inspired words. At such great and wonderful moments his power was limitless, and if he had ordered his brethren to throw themselves into the sea they would have hastened to carry out his commands.

His music, his voice, his verses in which he glorified God and heaven and earth, were a fountain of contentment and joy for the holy monks. It did happen at times that, with the monotony of their life, they grew weary of trees and flowers, of spring and autumn; the unceasing murmur of the sea and the singing of birds became a burden to them, but the precious gifts of their aged abbot was their bread of life.

Decades went by, and still one day resembled another day, and one night another night. Saving the wild birds and beasts, not a living thing was to be seen around the monastery. The nearest city was a long, long way off, and you had to journey across a hundred miles of desert to reach it. Only men who hated and had renounced life, and who entered the monastery as a living tomb, only these had the courage to cross the desert.

What was the astonishment of the monks when one night they heard a loud hammering at the monastery gates! It was a man, a dweller in the city, an ordinary sinning mortal who loved life. Before he asked the abbot's blessing, he called for food and wine. When he was asked how he came from the town to the desert, he answered by telling a long story. He had gone out hunting, had drunk too much, and had lost his way. When they wanted him to become a monk and save his soul, he said with a smile: "I am no fit companion for such as you."

His hunger and thirst being satisfied, he looked round at the monks who were waiting upon him, and shook his head reproachfully. "You monks," he said, "do nothing. You only know how to eat and drink—nothing else. Is this the way you save the soul? While you are sitting here in peace, eating and drinking, and dreaming of everlasting bliss, your fellow-beings are perishing and going post haste to hell. Look at what goes on in the cities! Some are dying of hunger; others, not knowing what to do with their money, wallow in debauchery, and perish like flies in honey. Men have no faith, no truth. Whose business is it, then, to save them? Must I do it? I, who am drunk from morning to night. Has God given you faith and loving hearts for you to stay here within four walls, and do nothing?"

The drunken words of the townsman were rude and distasteful. But in some strange way they affected the old abbot. He exchanged glances with the monks, turned very pale, and said:

"My brothers, this man speaks truth to us. The poor people, in their unwisdom and weakness, are perishing through wickedness and unbelief while we stir not from our seats. Why should I not go out and tell them of Christ, whom they have forgotten?"

The old man was carried away by the words of the townsman. The next day he said good-bye to his brethren, took his staff, and set out for the town. And the monks were left without his music, his eloquence, and his verses.

Wearily they lived through one month and then another, and still the old man did not return. At last, when the third month had gone by, they heard the well-known knocking of his staff on the monastery gate. The monks rushed to greet him, overwhelming him with questions. But instead of rejoicing with them, he wept bitterly, and refused to answer their many questions. The monks saw that he had aged very much, and had grown thinner. His face was weary and expressed deep sorrow, and when he wept he had the appearance of a man who had been insulted. The monks wept in sympathy with the old man. They asked him why his face had become lined with grief. But he made no answer to their questions, and locked himself in his cell. For full seven days he sat in his cell, eating and drinking nothing, and weeping unceasingly. When they knocked at his door and besought him to come to them and share his sorrow with them, his only answer was a profound silence.

At last he came out. Gathering the monks around him, his eyes red with weeping and his countenance full of sorrow and indignation, he told them of what had happened to him in those three months. His voice was calm and his eyes smiled when he described his way from the monastery to the town. On his way, he said, the birds sang to him, the brooks murmured, and young and sweet hopes stirred within his soul. He was a soldier marching to battle, confident of victory, and so light was his heart that the long journey seemed but a very short one.

But his voice shook, his eyes flashed, and he was full of wrath when he began to speak of the town and its people. Never in his life had he seen or dared to imagine what he saw when he went through the town. Now, for the first time in his life and in his old age, did he see and understand how powerful the Devil was, how beautiful evil was, and how weak, cowardly, and insignificant was our common human nature. By an unfortunate accident, the first house he visited was a house of ill-fame. He found men and women eating and drinking without measure. When they were drunk with wine they sang songs, and boldly uttered terrible and disgusting words which no God-fearing man would dare to say. Immeasurably bold and free and happy, they had no fear of God or the Devil or death, but spoke and did anything they wished, and went wherever their lusts led them. And the wine, clear like amber and flashing with golden sparks, must have been strangely sweet and aromatic, because everyone that drank of it smiled blissfully and craved for more.

And the old man, becoming more and more enraged, and weeping with anger, continued to describe what he had seen. On a table among the feasters was standing a half-naked harlot. It would be difficult to find in nature anything more beautiful, more ravishing. This serpent in a woman's form was young, with jet black hair, sparkling eyes, and full red lips. Shameless and naked, she smiled as though she would say: "Behold how immodest and how beautiful I am!" A silken gauze fell in lovely folds from her shoulders, but her beauty refused to be concealed by the drapery, and, like the young, green blades of grass, easily broke through its sheath. The shameless woman drank wine, sang lascivious songs, and gave herself to those who desired her.

Then the old man, stamping his foot with anger, described the chariot races, the bull fights, the stage



plays, and the studios of the artists, where naked women were painted or modelled in clay. He spoke of these things eloquently, with inspiration, and the monks listened greedily to his words, breathless with a strange excitement!.....After describing all the charm of the Devil, the beauty of evil, and the ravishing loveliness of the loathsome body of woman, the old man cursed the Devil and all his works, and turned round and went back to his cell.

The next morning, when he came out of his cell, not one monk was to be seen in the monastery. They had all rushed off to the city.

(Translated from the Russian by)

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

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## Correspondence.

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### CHRISTIANITY AS FACTUALITY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As one who has been deeply interested in this controversy, I should like to express my great approval of the admirable spirit manifested by both gentlemen concerned in it.

But Mr. Powell's last article seemed to contain one or two faulty points.

He objects to Mr. Lloyd's assertion that "the world is chock-full of evils and wrongs" if meant in any absolute or ultimate sense.

In what way are we to judge of right and wrong, truth and justice, except relatively to our standards?

Mr. Powell appears to suggest that God's standard of morality may in the ultimate not be ours at all, and if this is so, he cuts the ground from under his feet when he stands up in his own pulpit.

And, again, how can Mr. Lloyd be dogmatic in asserting what every one knows to be a truism, that the universe is "infinite in extent and eternal in duration"? This seems to savour of quibbling. The question of whether there is a God or not does not seem to me as important as the uses to which the belief in God is applied. If the God of Science (as in Mr. Powell's sermon) is deaf to prayer and praise, what is the use of worshipping a "Father-heart"?

Mr. Powell is one of the new school of theologians, and we, as Rationalists, are proud to think that his views are the result of the magnificent work of the grand pioneers of Freethought, but he has a little bit further to go before complete emancipation is attained from the shackles of past ages.

It will come in time; but, for the present, I am content to welcome with a good heart all work such as Mr. Powell's from *within* the Church.

JOHN BREESE.

P.S.—Your readers may be interested to know that Mr. Powell has a "Chart of the Ages" hung in his church from which he teaches the children *the truth* regarding Man and the Universe. Rationalists could not wish anything better than this. Gain the child, and we have gained the day.—J. B.

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The preacher was having a sort of test meeting by asking the congregation questions on their conduct. "Now, brethren," he said, "all of you who pay your debts will please stand up." In response to this there was an apparently unanimous uprising. "Now," said the preacher, asking the others to sit down, "all those who do not pay will please stand up." One man alone rose. "Ah, brother," said the preacher, "why is it that you, of all this congregation of brethren, should be so different?" "I don't know, parson," he replied, slowly, as he looked around over his friends and acquaintances in the meeting, "unless it is that I'm not a liar, and 'cause I can't get what the people round me owe me."

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice" if not sent on postcard.

### LONDON.

#### INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE INSTITUTE (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 7, Chapman Cohen, "Religion Before and After the War."

MR. A. D. HOWELL SMITH'S DISCUSSION CLASS (N. S. S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street): Wednesday, May 2, instead of Thursday, at 7.30.

#### OUTDOOR.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station): 7, E. Burke, a Lecture.

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Messrs. Saphin and Shaller; 3.15, Messrs. Dales and Hyatt; 6.30, Messrs. Kells and Yates.

### COUNTRY.

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NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE (Collingwood Hall, Clayton Street, opposite end of Nelson Street): 3, Jos. Bryce, "Individual Effort."



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