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Views and Opinions.

Agnosticism Once More.

We were quite alive to the consideration that in dealing with Agnosticism *versus* Atheism we were inviting comment, and arousing dissent. But that is not a bad thing, even among friends; and it would be a queer kind of Freethought which could not indulge now and again in a dispute without the sacrifice of good temper or without gaining a clearer conception of the point at issue. So we do not regret that our reply to Mr. Clodd in the *Freethinker* for September 9, with the couple of "Acid Drops" in the issue of September 16, have caused several readers to write us on the subject, the general tenour of which communications is well represented by Mr. J. Blair Williams' letter on another page. For these correspondents, and we daresay for many others, the matter remains where it was. It may remain in the same position even after another, and for the time being final, attempt; but an endeavour to induce clarity of thought—with either writer or reader, or both—can never be quite wasted effort.

* * *

Clearing the Ground.

Let us clear the ground a little by pointing out that the dispute is one that is forced on the Atheist by the Agnostic; it is not the other way about. "Atheist" is a very old word with a very definite meaning. "Agnostic" is a very new word with a very ambiguous meaning. And the Agnostic forces the Atheist to defend himself by declaring that "Agnostic" is a more correct, a more philosophical, description of the non-theistic mind. It is on this point that the Atheist joins issue. He asserts that the older term is a quite correct one; that "Agnostic," *in relation to the belief in God* (we wish to emphasize this) is "Atheist" over again, and that the Agnostic only produces an apparent justification of a preference for the new word by misrepresenting or misunderstanding the older one. We do not, of course, mean that the misrepresentation is deliberate; but it is there all the same. And the proof is that, whenever

the Agnostic attempts to justify his rejection of belief in "God," he is forced to restate the atheistic position, and whenever he attempts to justify his repudiation of Atheism, he invariably misstates it. As to the Christian Theist, he is a past master of misrepresentation, and one takes his conduct as a matter of course. But one may be excused looking round for a bludgeon or a whip when avowed Agnostics like Mr. William Archer—in the midst of an attack on Mr. Wells for not thinking clearly!—talks of those who deny progress as "the true and irredeemable Atheists." One cannot but feel suspicious of this readiness to join with Christians in tacking "Atheist" on to everything that is considered objectionable.

* * *

A Suspicious Origin.

Now, it is difficult for anyone who considers the way in which the word "Agnostic" gained currency in this country to resist the conviction that the underlying motive was to find a word that should not be offensive—or not so offensive as "Atheist"—to the religious ear. Spencer presented the religious world with his "Unknownable" as an object of worship—one of the greatest jokes in the history of philosophy. Huxley, always with a hankering after the "respectable," says he invented the word because he wished to proclaim that he knew nothing about "God." And a very acute French observer of English life, M. Emile Boutmy, has well pointed out that in France both Spencer and Huxley would have called themselves Atheists, and no one would have dreamed of calling them anything else. And it must be observed that on the Continent there is no vogue in Agnosticism. That remains substantially an English commodity. This cannot be because the Continent is behind England in philosophic strength or subtlety. French observers would not hesitate to say that in these matters English timidity is notorious.

* * *

Agnosticism and Atheism.

Mr. Williams does not agree that in relation to the belief in God "there are only two positions—either one believes in a God and is a Theist, or one does not believe in a God and is an Atheist." And he grounds his disagreement on the fact that before one can disbelieve one must have some idea of what is the subject of our disbelief. Granted, with all my heart. And that is precisely what every responsible Atheist has always said. When a Theist has come along and assured the Atheist that there exists a God who is omnipotent, or omniscient, or is a "First Cause," or who is "pure mind," etc., the Atheist has replied "I disbelieve in any such existence, because its existence is as impossible as a square circle or a round triangle." These things are all unthinkable. And if the Theists asks further do you believe in any "God," the reply of the Atheist has always been that "God" by itself means nothing at all. And of that which carries no meaning, neither affirmation nor denial, neither belief nor disbelief can be admitted. Both etymologically and philosophically an Atheist is one without belief in a God. The Agnostic is also without God. And we

are still waiting to discover the difference between the two. It is not we who say that the Agnostic is wrong in being without a belief in God, it is the Agnostic who says the Atheist is wrong and attempts to prove it by stating Atheism in a way which all Atheists repudiate.

* * *

The Origin of God.

But our principal complaint against Agnosticism is that it so often connotes hesitancy where hesitancy ought not to exist. Mr. Williams rests his Agnosticism on the ground that "God" is a meaningless term, and with that we agree. But there are others who treat it as a case of suspended judgment. These say they neither affirm nor deny, they simply do not know. And we have been for years asking this class, and now ask again, what will they do with all that we know of the origin of the God-idea itself? Let it be remembered that the belief in God did not commence as an abstraction. Primitive gods are concrete enough in the minds of their worshippers. They only become abstractions as the process of development shows the original ideas to be quite untenable. But here is the question to which we desire to direct attention. Knowing, as we do, the conditions that gave rise to the belief in gods, we also know that the belief in gods represent a mistaken interpretation of known facts. These facts are still with us. But they are differently understood. But if this be admitted, what other basis is there, or has there ever been, for a belief in God? We know of none. And must not the Agnostic, who, with the Atheist, accepts the statement that the belief in gods sprang from a misunderstanding of natural facts, subjective or objective, physical, mental, or social, must he not dismiss the whole belief in God or gods as pure myth? There is really nothing to suspend judgment about. It is not a case of the Agnostic saying to the Atheist or the Theist, we confess our ignorance of what you are quarrelling over. The present state of knowledge concerning the origin and development of the gods gives the fullest warranty for dismissing the theory of God as pure delusion and nothing else. No one professes Agnosticism in relation to witches, or wizards, or fairies, or gnomes. Will someone explain what better foundation there is for the belief in gods, or why the same mental attitude is not correct in all these instances?

* * *

The Simple Issue.

For the rest, while we quite agree with Mr. Williams that before a proposition admits of belief or disbelief, its terms must be realizable in thought, we do not see that this has any special claim to be called Agnosticism. It is a rule of mental guidance; or, if you will, a law of thought. Agnosticism implies this, as does Atheism, as does all thinking, for the thinking which ignores it is only pseudo-thought. In the sense with which we are concerned with the word, Agnostic is only of significance in relation to the belief in God. And here the matter resolves itself into a simple and definite issue. All the gods of the various religions are to Atheist and Agnostic alike admittedly myth. There is no hesitation here, there is no room for suspension of judgment, there is no room for doubt. We can say with absolute certainty that we disbelieve in their existence. Our correspondent will, we doubt not, say so, Mr. Clodd will say so, so would Huxley, or Spencer, or Stephen. And, with regard to any other conceivable Deity, the position is the same, for so soon as the proposition is stated within the limits of conceivability, it is seen to be on all fours with asserting the existence of square circles or four-sided triangles. Once more the Atheist and the Agnostic are at one. And in relation to anything else, *i.e.*, some unknown inconceivable sort of existence, no one can

believe or disbelieve, because no one knows what is affirmed. Thus, so far as "God" is used in a legitimate manner, and so far as it falls within the limits of conceivability, belief or disbelief follows. We can see no room for any middle term. And for the Agnostic to say that his Agnosticism implies want of knowledge of, or want of belief in, something which defies conception, would be to make Agnosticism more absurd than its bitterest enemy has yet asserted.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Reformation in Scotland.

II.

OUR main and most essential contention is that the Protestant Reformation was an exclusively human movement, being a revolt against ecclesiastical tyranny and corruption. In Scotland it was an aristocratic movement, designed to crush the combined power of Church and Crown, because the supreme object of both was to demolish the nobility. It was simply in self-defence and in order to wreak vengeance upon their tormentors that the nobles became Protestants. The Earl of Angus was banished and his estates were confiscated, while the Earl of Caithness had to confront an expedition sent out to destroy him. The Douglas family endured ruthless persecution at the hands of James V., and all members thereof were forbidden to approach "within twelve miles of the king, under pain of death." Buckle says:—

In 1531, the king deprived the Earl of Crawford of most of his estates, and threw the Earl of Argyle into prison. Even those nobles who had been inclined to follow him, he now discouraged. He took every opportunity of treating them with coldness, while he filled the highest offices with their rivals, the clergy. Finally, he, in 1532, aimed a deadly blow at their order, by depriving them of a large part of the jurisdiction which they were wont to exercise in their own country, and to the possession of which they owed much of their power. At the instigation of the Archbishop of Glasgow, he established what was called the College of Justice, in which suits were to be decided, instead of being tried, as heretofore, by the barons, at home, in their castles. It was ordered that the new tribunal should consist of fifteen judges, eight of whom must be ecclesiastics; and, to make the intention still more clear, it was provided that the president should invariably be a clergyman (*History of Civilization in England*, vol. iii., pp. 56, 57).

It was such royal deeds of deliberate persecution, done at the suggestion and with the full approval of the Church, that converted the nobles to Protestantism, rather than any disinterested desire to reform the Church. After they had adopted the principles of Protestantism, they were persecuted as heretics, not merely as political enemies. On this point Buckle is most emphatic:—

The love of innovation was encouraged by interested motives, until, in the course of a few years, an immense majority of the nobles adopted extreme Protestant opinions; hardly caring what heresy they embraced, so long as they were able, by its aid, to damage a Church from which they had recently received the greatest injuries, and with which they and their progenitors had been engaged in a contest of nearly a hundred and fifty years (*Ibid.*, vol. iii., p. 58).

Keith, in his *Affairs of Church and State*, states that "several of our nobility found it their temporal interest, as much as their spiritual, to sway with the new opinions as to religious matters."

By the year 1560 the Reformation had been well established in Scotland, after a long-continued and painful struggle. In connection with the movement, two men stand out from among the crowd as born

leaders, namely, Cardinal Beaton and John Knox. Beaton was eleven years older than Knox, and his public career closed tragically when the other's was about to open. The Archbishop was one of the ablest and most cunning men of his day, and his loyalty to the Catholic Church was beyond question. His enemies describe him as an unprincipled man, and by their testimony even Buckle is not uninfluenced. That he was immoral cannot be denied, for, though a bachelor, he was the father of many children; and of this fact he was by no means ashamed. In the year 1546, he gave his eldest daughter in marriage to the eldest son of the Earl of Crawford, and in the marriage articles, signed with his own hand, he boldly called her "my daughter." And there are evidences not a few that he was dishonest, even a forger. Like most men in authority at that time, he was capable of the most horrible cruelty to Protestant heretics. George Wishart (1513-46) was a Lutheran divine, who, in 1543, went on tour through Scotland, preaching Protestant doctrines. At Dundee, Montrose, and other places he made numerous converts. The Cardinal pursued him with biting hostility, and ultimately had been arrested at Ormiston. The poor man was kept in prolonged captivity; but in 1545, or 1546, he was tried and sentenced to death as a vile heretic. From a window in the castle the Archbishop witnessed the burning of the man he so cordially hated. The persecution was carried out on an extensive scale, but the majority of those who suffered were nobles.

George Wishart was the "spiritual" father of John Knox, "the most conspicuous character of those troublous times." In the estimation of not a few people, John Knox occupies a niche by himself in the Temple of Fame as the greatest Scotsman that ever lived. We readily admit his sincerity, fearlessness, outspokenness, and incorruptibility; but Lecky does not hesitate to speak of him as "this apostle of murder" (*The Rise and Influence of Rationalism in Europe*, vol. ii., p. 44). It is well known that in the spring of 1545, a conspiracy to assassinate Archbishop Beaton was formed by the leading Protestants; but it was not until a year later, May 29, 1546, that the foul murder was actually committed "under circumstances of horrible mockery and atrocity." Protestant historians are very fond of relating that the Cardinal passed the night before his assassination with his mistress, Marion Ogilby, who was seen leaving his chamber shortly before the murderers, Norman Leslie and Kirkaldy of Grange forced their way into the castle; but they are not so ready to admit that when the French came to arrest his assassins who held the castle, John Knox was among them, and was taken as a prisoner to France. The fact is that he gave his sanction to the dark deed performed, and was, to a great extent, responsible for it. Nor are we surprised at this, for his whole life bears witness to his sternness, brutality, and unrelentingness. With what undisguised delight he stigmatized "the pestilent Papists and Masse-mongers" as "adulterers and whoremasters," whom he perpetually pointed at as objects of execration and ridicule. "One mass," he exclaimed, "is more fearful to me than if 10,000 armed enemies were landed in any part of the realm." Not only were priests prohibited from celebrating, but worshippers were by law prohibited from hearing mass, under pain of the confiscation of their goods for the first offence, of exile for the second, and of death for the third. The permission given to the Queen of Scotland to hear mass in her own private chapel was publicly characterized as an intolerable evil. John Knox was of opinion that those who were guilty of idolatry might justly be put to death, and for his authority he fell back upon the Old Testament. Listen to the following extracts from his *Appellation*.

None provoking the people to idolatry ought to be exempted from the punishment of death.....The whole tribes did in verie dede execute that sharp judgment against the tribe of Benjamin for a lesse offence than for idolatry. And the same ought to be done wheresoever Christ Jesus and his Evangill is so receaved in any realme province or citie that the magistrates and people have solemnly avowed and promised to defend the same, as under King Edward of late days was done in England. In such places, I say, it is not only lawful to punish to the death such as labour to subvert the true religion, but the magistrates and people are bound to do so unless they will provoke the wrath of God against themselves.

Then he called upon the nobles of Scotland not to spare the sword of justice, but to pay due heed to his accusation against the "bishops and the whole rabble of the Papistical clergie of idolatry, of murther, and of blasphemie against God committed."

After the assassination of Archbishop Beaton, Knox was condemned to the French galleys, and he was a prisoner in France for eighteen months. On his release, on the recommendation of Edward VI., he came over to England. When Mary Tudor ascended the throne he went to Geneva, where he stayed for nearly eighteen months, visiting such centres as Zurich and Frankfort-on-the-Main. In 1555 he returned to Scotland, where his advocacy of Protestantism was so full of bitterness and bigotry that he was compelled to quit the country. He sought refuge once more at Geneva where he spent some three years. During his absence the nobles worked hard in the dissemination of the new doctrines. They drew up a covenant, in which they vowed to stand by one another in their resistance to the tyranny that threatened them. Then they asked John Knox to return, which he did not do till 1559, by which time the nobles had practically won the victory for Protestantism. One of the first things the Reformer did after his arrival was to preach a sermon at Perth, which was followed by a riot resulting in the plundering of churches and the destruction of monasteries. Then a war ensued between the two religious factions which ended in the triumph of the Lords of the Congregation. Perth, Stirling, Linlithgow, and Edinburgh fell into their hands. Ere long the Protestant religion gained the supremacy in Scotland.

With such a history in mind who can honestly believe that the Reformation in Scotland was the work of God? It was simply a violent contest between two sets of superstition which differed but little the one from the other. Other struggles followed between Presbyterianism and Episcopacy, and between different schools of Presbyterianism. But in none of the religious revolutions and sectarian disputes through which Scotland has passed was there the slightest evidence of any supernatural interference. Scotland is still in the throes of a mighty conflict, not between two types of ignorant and superstitious faith, but between reason and credulity, between natural knowledge and supernatural belief, and we are confident that the outcome of it will be the complete downfall of supernaturalism, and the happy enthronement of the natural.

J. T. LLOYD.

No great improvements in the lot of mankind are possible, until a great change takes place in the fundamental constitution of their modes of thought. The old opinions in religion, morals, and politics are so much discredited in the more intellectual minds as to have lost the greater part of their efficacy for good, while they have still life enough in them to be a powerful obstacle to the growing up of any better opinions on those subjects.—J. S. Mill.

Richard Carlile. 1790-1843.

I pray thee then,

Write me as one that loves his fellow men.

—Leigh Hunt, "Abou Ben Adhem."

"THE old guard dies, but never surrenders." The famous saying leaps to the memory at the mention of the name of the lion-hearted Richard Carlile. The story of his struggles is a part of the history of Freethought, and it is a romance of a hero fighting at fearful odds against "the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely," and leaving an imperishable name. Carlile's was the true soldier's temperament, supported by the unshakable principles without which no great purpose can be achieved. No misfortune disconcerted him; no defeat cowed his indomitable spirit. He could not be bullied or frightened, although Freethought was fighting for its very existence in the days when he fought the good fight. Superstition, effectively disguised in the ermine of the judge, was strong in the land, and contemptuous enough of the little band of heroes and heroines, whose evangel has revolutionized every branch of knowledge, and rewritten the intellectual history of the world. In the darkest days of the Freethought Movement, Carlile and his colleagues never lost courage, for they knew the longer they lay in prison the greater triumph would be won for the cause they had at heart.

Think of it! Richard Carlile himself suffered nine and a half years' imprisonment for championing freedom of speech. His wife and other members of his family, and shop assistants, divided among them fifty years' confinement in gaols. And what a man was the leader, that vivid, vital, radiant, restless, dynamic personality; all aglow with enthusiasm, who diffused energy all about him, and whose very presence caused stimulation.

A son of the West Country, Richard Carlile was self-educated. As a boy, he collected faggots to burn in effigy "Tom Paine," the Guy Fawkes of that period, whose virile writings were in after life to influence him so greatly. For he was twenty-five years old before he began to read Paine, whose books roused Carlile like a trumpet-blast. Henceforth he was the dauntless champion of Freethought and free speech. Taxes were then placed on knowledge, and fine and imprisonment faced all who dared to speak or write of religious or political liberty. England was then ruled by a crazy king, a profligate regent, and a corrupt government; but Carlile, a poor man, defied the Cerberus of Authority, and broke the fetters of press despotism. For, remember, the press to him was not a mere purveyor of news and dirt and scandal. It was a vehicle of ideas, a pulpit from which the evangel of liberty could be proclaimed with tongue of fire, a trumpet whose clarion note would summon men and women to the unending battle against wrong.

Alive in every fibre, Carlile was the very man to carry a forlorn cause to victory. Handcuffed and imprisoned, he roused the public conscience, and compelled the all-powerful authorities to cry "halt." It was impossible to suppress him; it was but punching a pillow. When a score of his assistants had been sent to prison for selling Freethought literature, the prosecuted books were sold through an aperture, so that the buyer was unable to identify the seller. Afterwards the volumes were sold by a slot-machine, probably the first of its kind. Among the books for sale were Paine's *Age of Reason*, Annet's *Life of David*, Voltaire's pamphlets, Palmer's *Principles of Nature*, and many other thunderous engines of revolt. When his stocks were seized by the authorities, Carlile read nearly the whole of Paine's *Age of Reason* in his speech for the defence, so that additional publicity should

be given to the matter which was sought to be suppressed. Nor was imprisonment the only punishment inflicted, for fines, amounting to thousands of pounds, were imposed. To annoy his persecutors, Carlile dated his letters from gaol "the era of the carpenter's wife's son." Superior folk may lift their eyebrows at such audacity; but the fiery, restless courage which accounted for it is a quality which the world can very ill spare. What it can achieve needs no record; it is recorded on history's page in a life and actions as courageous as any recorded in the immortal pages of Plutarch. Fighting the embattled hosts of superstition, the victory remained to Carlile. Writing from gaol in the sixth year of his imprisonment, he was able to say, "All the publications that have been prosecuted have been, and are, continued in open sale." What matchless courage! "The sound of it is like the ring of Roman swords on the helmets of barbarians." Small wonder that the two greatest poets of his time, Keats and Shelley, recognized that he was a true hero battling for intellectual liberty.

Carlile's victory over his opponents was so complete that his later years were spent in comparative peace at Enfield, where he died in 1843. True to the end in his devotion to science and humanity, he bequeathed his body to Dr. Lawrence for the purpose of dissection and the advancement of knowledge. His funeral at Kensal Green Cemetery was the occasion of an exhibition of clerical spite. At the interment the Rev. Josiah Twigger appeared and insisted on reading the burial service. "Sir," said the eldest son, Richard, "we want no service over the body of our father; he lived in opposition to priestcraft, and we protest against the service being read." The clergyman persisted, and the last insult of the Church was hurled at the dead hero. Carlile's brave wife survived him only a few months, and she was buried in the same grave. Thus ended the career of one who, as Browning has it, was "ever a fighter," strenuous, eager, unsparing, often bitter and hard; but he had, as was said of Byron, the "imperishable excellence of sincerity and strength."

Such heroism was not without result. Twenty-three years after Carlile's death organized Freethought was an accomplished fact, for, in 1866, the National Secular Society was founded, the first President being the able and courageous Charles Bradlaugh. Under his leadership, and that of his brilliant successors, this Society has ever been in the vanguard of progress, sheltering behind it all the weaker heterodox people, who otherwise had been crushed by the weight of orthodoxy. Behind militant Freethought all forms of advanced thought have advanced to some measure of freedom. It has been a prolonged battle against enormous odds. As the little *Revenge* earned an undying name by hurling herself against the great battleships of Spain, so the Secularists have displayed extraordinary courage in attacking the tremendous armada of superstition. The greater the perils, the greater the victory; and in the ripe years to come recognition must be given to the superb courage, which, disregarding any reward, was satisfied with the proud knowledge that their action would diffuse the blessings of liberty to countless thousands. For in that happy time the stormy note of struggle and contention will be changed to the unfaltering trumpet-notes of ultimate victory. In that hour Carlile's noble dream will have come true, and the National Secular Society will share with him a lasting place in the history of intellectual progress by bringing it within the realities of life. So true is it:—

The greatest gift the hero leaves his race
Is to have been a hero. Say, we fail?
We feed the high tradition of this world,
And leave our spirits in our children's breasts.

MIMNERMUS.

The Rise and Progress of Mental Power.

VIII.

(Concluded from p. 604.)

PARADOXICAL as it may appear, the unit of language is not the word, as we understand that term, but the sentence. Thus the sentence is older than the words which compose it. But this apparently puzzling assertion loses much of its novelty when we discover that every separate term was primitively a proposition, because it constituted by itself, and of itself, a sign capable of conveying an affirmation. The sentence-word of aboriginal man, like the terms employed by our children, formed the raw materials from which the later parts of speech were developed. When infants commence to speak, as even Max Mueller recognized, a word such as "up" is to the child's mind "noun, verb, adjective, all in one. If an English child says Ta, that "ta" is both noun (thanks), and a verb (I thank you)." Another sentence-word is the infantile Ba-ba for sleep. But, as Prof. F. Mueller points out, this sentence-word "does not mean sleep only, as a particular kind of repose, but rather also all the circumstances which appertain to sleep, such as cot, bed, bolster, bed-clothes, &c." Infants and the uncivilized eke out their crude sentence-words with gestures which help to indicate the different meanings they attach to the same term.

As languages are traced further and further backwards their structures steadily become simplified. Suffixes, affixes, prepositions, in fact all those parts of speech which denote relationship between the several parts of a sentence, progressively shrink and disappear. When all these relational words have vanished, objective terms and their adjuncts alone remain. Gradually even the verb becomes indistinguishable from the substantive, while the adjectives become completely fused with the nouns. As we wander back in time, then, the more closely we approach the period when our various parts of speech were simplified into the primitive sentence-word. This last was the nucleus from which all the involved grammatical structures of the higher languages have arisen. Or, as Geiger puts it, "language diminishes the further we look back in such a way, that we cannot forbear concluding it must once have had no existence at all."

All contemporary philologists would, probably, subscribe to the foregoing reflections on the natural genesis of languages both living and extinct, and increased light is thrown on the problem by the study of the speech of savage man. That first-hand student of uncivilized tongues, Dr. Bleek, became convinced that all primitive words were concrete in character, and that every abstract term is the result of later growth. The evolutionist anticipates that the earliest language signs were concerned with those physical phenomena directly presented to the senses. Now this is exactly what he does find, while the more complex symbols arose with an advancing civilization. It is noteworthy that the famous John Locke, in his work on *Human Understanding*, foreshadowed more recent conclusions in this matter. For he states that:—

It may lead us a little towards the original of all our notions and knowledge, if we remark how great a dependence our words have on common sensible ideas; and how those which are made use of to stand for actions and notions quite removed from sense, have their rise from thence, and from obvious sensible ideas are transferred to more abstruse significations, and made to stand for ideas that come out under the cognizance of our senses.

Even in a highly specialized tongue, such as English, the relics of gesture language still linger. The word supercilious, for instance, literally means a man who raises his eyebrows. As Clodd observes, from A to Z, our dictionaries are crammed with examples of the concrete roots from which ethical and philosophical terms have arisen. The highly abstract term "time" is related to the physical act of stretching an elastic body. Mallery and others adduce innumerable evidences of the same character from the languages of savage races. As a matter of fact, no word is known whose etymology can be traced which is not derived from a concrete root.

Further testimony is supplied in existing speech, for the Society Islanders use separate terms for sheep's-tail, dog's-tail, bird's-tail, etc., but have no word for tail itself. The Mohicans possess words which signify different modes of cutting, but are without the verb "to cut." The Eskimo, the natives of Australia, and numerous other races are remarkably deficient in abstract terms, and despite all the disadvantages of their lumbering languages the concreteness of their speech seems positively requisite to their rude intelligence. And this poverty of abstract words is more than compensated by a multiplicity of objective terms. While the Tasmanian tribes had a distinct name for each kind of tree—gum-tree, wattle-tree, etc., no term for tree itself existed in their tongue, "nor could they express abstract qualities, such as hard, soft, warm, cold, long, short, round." (*Vocabulary of Aboriginal Tribes of Tasmania*, p. 34). As Sayce sums up the subject:—

All over the world, indeed, wherever we come across a savage race, or an individual who has been unaffected by the civilization around him, we find this primitive inability to separate the particular from the universal by isolating the individual word, and extracting it, as it were, from the ideas habitually associated with it.

The prodigious part played by the sense of sight in the progress of human brain power has been noted by several naturalists who have surveyed the subject from the standpoint of anthropology. Geiger reached the same conclusion from the view point of the linguist. It is not claimed that human or semi-human vision is necessarily superior to that of birds or quadrupeds but that man, owing to his erect posture and other attributes, more constantly employs his eyes than other animals. The experiences of infants are enriched as they gaze intently at objects placed in their hands, or follow with their eyes the moving existences within their range of vision. To an animal so observant as early man, thought Geiger, it became natural to employ gestures and grimaces for purposes of communication, and that from these arose movements of the mouth of a sympathetic character which, in turn, gave rise to sounds to which some special significance became gradually attached. In any case, it is certainly suggestive that the creature to which the visual sense is most important is also the creature which has enormously outdistanced all others in the sign-making faculty. Articulation once attained, however rudimentary its form, the path was clear for future progress. When once begun, this advance would, probably, proceed at an ever-increasing rate; gesture and vision would constantly supplement each other, while the division between man and his closest kindred would widen more and more.

Darwin's wonderful powers of penetration are splendidly shown in the appended passage from his *Descent of Man*. "I cannot doubt," he says,

that language owes its origin to the imitation and modification of various natural sounds, the voices of other animals, and man's own instinctive cries, aided by signs and gestures.....Since monkeys certainly understand much of what is said to them by man, and, when wild, utter signal cries of danger to their fellows;

and since fowls give distinct warnings for danger on the ground, or in the sky from hawks.....may not some unusually wise ape-like animal have imitated the growl of a beast of prey, and thus told his fellow-monkeys the nature of the expected danger? This would have been a first step in the formation of language.

Conceivably, song also may have assisted in the evolution of articulation. Some of the apes utter what to them seem musical sounds. Calls, cries, shouts, and sounds expressive of endearment when embracing the female were other factors involved in the genesis of speech. It is certainly significant that all sounds which express purely emotional states proceed from the throat and larynx with small, if any, assistance from the lips and tongue. The earliest efforts towards articulation were, probably, chiefly composed of vowel sounds, and from these the liquid and, finally, the lingual consonants very gradually emerged. It is worth noting in this connection that in our own language it is quite impossible to pronounce the name of a single consonant without the aid of vowel sounds.

Clicks, again, must have formed a conspicuous part of all primitive speech. The clicking noises so prominent in the languages of the Bushmen and Hottentots of South Africa were carefully investigated by Dr. Bleek, and this authority states that the clicks which occur in most of their words are so important to the anthropologist that their thorough study is essential if science is to possess "even an approximate idea of the original vocal elements from which human language sprang." Prof. Sayce is convinced that these savage clicks still show how the sounds of speechless man could be employed to embody and communicate ideas. For when we bear in mind the Bushman's inarticulate clicks "it would seem as if no line of division could be drawn between man and beast, even when language is made the test" (Introduction to the *Science of Language*, ii., p. 302). After deprecating the comparative neglect among naturalists of the study of monkey language, in a letter to Dr. Bleek, Haeckel remarked that among the numerous sounds made by apes he had himself "frequently heard in zoological gardens, from apes of very different species, remarkable clicking sounds, which are produced with the lips, and also, though not so often, with the tongue."

In view of the preceding considerations, we may justly infer that given an animal slightly, or not at all superior to the higher apes in intelligence, but more erect in posture, and possessed of stronger social instincts than they; then the genesis and development of that speech which has played a part so tremendous in man's progress is fully accounted for without the least necessity for any mystical intervention whatsoever.

T. F. PALMER.

Voices.

I HAVE been reading Byron, and I am again impressed with the thought that the Shakespeares and the Byrons are more honoured in the breach than the observance. The Bible is not the only neglected book. We honour the pigmies and slight the giants—all those unresentful dead, and over whose marble brows no hectic of a moment passes, but yet who win a terrible and undesired revenge; witness the War and the warriors, the widows and orphans; the pomp and circumstance, the misery and woe. Burns wished,—

That I for poor old Scotland's sake
Some usefu' plan or book could make
Or sing a song at least.

Ours is, as perhaps was his, a wider wish. Cervantes smiled Spain's chivalry away. O for a new Cervantes to rid the world of this—this—this.....

I have been listening to the wind. There is wisdom in it—I speak metaphorically. It sounds every note, harmonizes every discord of life, rebukes every folly, and goes its viewless, careless, austere, incalculable way. Solemn in the echoing rumble in the chimney-top, in the solemn mood, as the Thinker sits by the fire that lips and whispers as its red glow turns to grey, silent at last and dead while the requiem sounds, or we list the menacing march of the hosts of the air onward from and to all time and all eternity, under the black flag and stars of night or day's bright banner of blue. Robust and rousing at times, soothing and sweet, tender and tuneful, it is yet of the melancholy wind I speak, the prophetic, because remembering, the wise old wind! It goes for ever, and for ever comes, crooning its deathless lament, mingling with the memory of the long martyrdom of man, visiting every field of the dead, straying in every churchyard. Behold they know not anything, these dead; but even from the tomb the voice of Nature cries, and the wind grows yet more pregnant, poignant with the stilled yet clamorous innumerable voices of the past, and of those millions freshly slain.

Nor will the ocean yield its dead. As the first drowned seaman slept, he is sleeping now; the last will sleep as long.

With Earth's first Clay they did the Last Man knead,
And there of the Last Harvest sowed the Seed:
And the first Morning on Creation wrote
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.

But the tides remember, and the waves recall their sea-green sepulture; and, in the majesty of the ocean's voice, the silent sleepers, in hyaline halls and caves, become articulate for evermore!

And meanwhile the priestly *Hence* is growing more shadowy and dim, or vulgar and grotesque. It is lost in the noise of the winds and the waters of the present, in the thunders of cannon, the crash of wreckage, the yells of exultation and of agony; and in the midst of all the pious landshark prowls, grinding the faces of the poor. *Now* is the accepted time; here and now is the place and time and *need* of salvation. Awake to the perils of to-day, ye dreamers of to-morrow!

It is the sweet o' the year, and I have also been consulting the flowers. The yellow, sun-loving dandelion in hosts, and be vies of beauty by the rough line-side. Rude slag and iron contrasting with an enchanted atmosphere of green and gold. These, too, will pass like all the loveliest and best. But riches fineless are as poor as winter to him that ever fears he shall be poor; and so we e'en make the most of what we may yet spend. Nature, in due course, will stow us all away, and out of our crude clay may fashion more beautiful things. Meantime we may acquire—as a writer in the *R.P.A. Annual* suggests—that toughness of mind upon which the reasoning processes depend. In the words of John Keats—and one wonders how so young a mind could be so sage—we must learn,—

To bear all naked truths,
And to envisage circumstance all calm;
This is the top of sovereignty.

ANDREW MILLAR.

Let us recognize the plain truth then, that it is these super-natural ideas that have obscured morality, corrupted politics, hindered the advance of the sciences, and extinguished happiness and peace, even in the very heart of man.—*Holbach*, "System of Nature."

Acid Drops.

The German reply to the Papal peace note is what might have been expected. Christian cant is answered by Christian cant. The Pope's Christian heart is torn at the sight of Christian nations butchering each other. The German Government's Christian conscience, after the sinking of hospital ships, the bombing of hospitals, air-raids over open towns, etc., yearns for a time "when moral strength" will take the place of "the might of arms." Cant meets cant, and then goes on its way, behaving in every respect as of old. And people ask, "Is Christianity a failure?"

And while these two Christians are exchanging hollow professions, another pietist, Mr. Horatio Bottomley, visits the Front, and comes back with the following:—

I was talking with a young university undergraduate. He had left his college because his King and Country called him. "Shall you go back after the war?" I asked. He smiled, and pointing to the scene around us—we were in the trenches—said, "Go back? Isn't this a sufficient education for any man? *I knew nothing before the war.*" There you have it. Neither did I. But in one week I have had *my* education. I know all I want to know—of life and of death.

Assuming the incident to be a genuine one, if we were as pious as Mr. Bottomley, we should say, "God help the nation in which its young men regard the education of the battlefield as of more importance than that of the university!" Fortunately, the men who are going through what Mr. Bottomley calls "Hell" have for the most part drawn a different moral from their experience. Were it otherwise, it would indeed represent the supreme triumph of Prussianism—education in war the supreme thing in life. Mr. Bottomley himself is on a different level. The War brought him to God; it convinced him of immortality. Therefore he is thankful. Let's hope God is equally so.

A "Padre" writes to the *Daily Mail* complaining that in two plays now running the parson is represented as "a sort of village idiot." He complains also at Captain Bairnsfather not finding a better type of parson than he puts into his plays. All we can say is that Captain Bairnsfather is at the Front, and knows the average parson. "Padre" points to the casualty and honours lists. But we do not see that these disprove what is alleged to be the *general* type of parson in the War.

The Woolwich Crusade, under the control of the Bishop of Southwark, has been a stupendous failure. Among those taking part in it were the Archbishop of Canterbury and nine Bishops, who between them receive salaries amounting to upwards of £40,000 a year. There were three canons, seven noted clergymen, and over 150 other speakers. This illustrious galaxy of parsons' and their satellites selected Woolwich for their objective as being "in some sense a testing-ground, upon the success or failure of the Church's great enterprise in which operations of far wider scope and importance depend." It was essentially a clerical or professional campaign, laymen being conspicuous by their absence. A *Church Times* report said that "lay speakers, men who can and will speak plainly to their brethren about the things that matter, bearing witness for God and his Church, are lamentably few in the ranks of the Crusaders," and that "their absence is disastrous."

In the *Church Times* for September 14, the report of the mission was not at all optimistic. Reference was made to "the Church's failure," and to "the appalling mass of indifference and ignorance which the Church has to meet and overcome before she can even begin to touch and convert the people of England." In the same journal for September 21, we are informed that "the stage of indifference has passed," and that now "the workers of the country regard the Church with undisguised hostility." The writer admits failure, but claims that "it is the failure—not of the Church, of course; she can never fail—but of men and women who represent her in their day and generation." We,

for our part, confess our utter inability to distinguish between the Church and the men and women who represent her, for, surely, without such men and women there would be no Church.

The most noteworthy fact in connection with the Woolwich Crusade is that the Woolwich people actively resented and resisted it, regarding it as a brazen insult to their intelligence. When the Churchmen held open-air meetings in Beresford Square, the workmen held opposition meetings, and great was the ensuing turmoil. Even Bishops were asked awkward questions which they had not the courage to answer. Every now and then a speaker was asked, "Are you a workman?" "Are you a democrat?" The answer being in the affirmative, the next question was: "Then why don't you support your own class?" "The poor Churchman's efforts to justify himself were met with a continuous fusillade of, 'What about the Bishops' £15,000 a year?' 'What work have they ever done?' 'Look at 'em: never done a day's work in their lives.' 'Got soft jobs and we have to find the money.' 'Why are they trying to get at us now? They never troubled about us before. They're frightened the game's up.'"

The *Church Times* is entirely mistaken on two points. The Church is the most colossal failure in history. From the very start until now she has never been what she claims to be—a supernatural, world-renewing institution; she has always been, on the contrary, a world-disturbing and war-inciting factor. Another error fallen into by our contemporary is that there is or can be a Christianity apart from the Church, for the former is, without a doubt, the creation of the latter, and both, being equally false, are doomed to perish together. They who desert the Church renounce Christianity. Like most sensible people, the Woolwich workmen are hostile to the parsons because they are the official champions of an effete system, the fancied need for which we have outgrown.

A "Jewish Rabbi," aged nineteen, was handed over to the military authorities, and fined forty shillings, at the North London Police Court. In cross-examination the "minister" said that when he registered he described himself as a dealer in crockery, but he had never done any dealing, and did not intend to. It was also stated that the Chief Rabbi had no knowledge of the defendant. The ennobling effect of religion is sufficiently apparent in this case.

"It is a bad year for kings," says a writer in the *Daily News*. Including, presumably, God, the Invisible King.

Bishop Welldon persists in regarding Germany as anti-Christian, and says she is "the enemy of all Christian civilization." Yet a schoolboy of fourteen ought to know that Germany, Austria, and Bulgaria are all Christian nations, and the former the home of the Protestant Reformation.

N.C.O., who is probably a parson, writing to the *Ardrossan Herald* on the superstition of "The Evil Eye," remarks that the evil eye (or jealousy) was not unknown even in the "glorious company of the apostles." "But for 'the evil eye,'" he says, "there might have been no tragedy of the Cross." And therefore, of course, no "salvation of the world." Of two tragedies choose the least; but it seems to us the comedy overwhelms both.

We congratulate the *Isle of Man Weekly Times* on some of the articles appearing in its columns. In one of a series of articles on the "History of Douglas," the writer has some asides which will probably rouse the anger of Christians of all denominations. Thus, *apropos* of the effect of the War on religious belief, the writer of the articles says:—

When, in the hour of trial and sorrow, the people should have returned in vast multitudes to the faith of their fathers, the tide has been all the other way. And no wonder. Have we not seen the Head of the largest Christian congregation in the world, so far from raising a voice for his suffering children in Belgium, siding—cruelly, painfully, and obviously siding with the oppressor? At home, have we not heard the black-

clothed advocate of conscription for the other chap, calmly taking shelter himself behind the barrier of his priestly caste, and avoiding, with the connivance of his Archbishop, all share in the active forces of his native land?

We said at the time that the clergy made a terrible blunder in demanding exemption while acting as recruiting sergeants, and events have quite justified what we said.

Here is another paragraph from the same article:—

The war, therefore, so far from strengthening religious conventions, has weakened them. At the outbreak of hostilities our Bishop traced the fault to a material-minded Germany, wholly oblivious to the fact that in no other land in all the world are the people so well grounded in Bible knowledge and Christian observances as they are in Germany; oblivious, too, of the fact that every evil act of the Kaiser in Belgium was an expression of exact obedience to the injunctions laid down by the God of the Bible. On the other hand, France, Agnostic France, where no Roman father is permitted to harry the sick and dying, as is the rule with our men, has conducted her warfare on lines that accord with modern civilization, not with the dark ages or the outrageous injunctions of the God of the Israelites, as expressed, sault, in 1 Samuel xv. or Psalm lviii.

The simple truth is that the war has shaken the foundations of all our faiths, and the inability of preachers to answer any one of the questions with which they have been deluged, has had its inevitable results. The priests' game is up. To-day we have no more faith in the Kaiser's God than we have in the God about whom Samuel spoke so glibly to Saul in Israel.

When articles of this description are admitted to the ordinary newspaper press, we may well count ourselves on the eve of a Freethought revival.

The late Rev. Dr. Hunter, formerly of the Weigh House Chapel, London, has been eulogised as "a pioneer of the New Theology." The most notable thing about the New Theology was that many of its points were anticipated by Paine and other Freethinkers a century earlier.

Many hard things have been said of science and its relation to the present War, principally by the clergy and their followers. It is, therefore, pleasant to find the *Sunday Pictorial* drawing attention to what science is actually doing. Our contemporary says, "The (British) Medical Service knows neither race nor colour or creed." The same thing could be said of the Medical Service in other armies than the British. What a contrast to the treatment of patients at some religious convalescent homes where they are forced to attend services.

The clergy prate of the blessings of poverty, but have no personal objection to substantial banking accounts. The late Rev. George Millar, of Pimlico, left £28,260. Another parson, Canon Edwards, of Lambeth, left £12,037.

It is said that, as shown by the returned papers, over 50 per cent. of the people lack either intelligence or education enough to fill up the sugar forms properly. One needn't go further for an explanation of the prevalence of Christianity and other things.

The City Temple has now a regularly-appointed woman preacher in the person of Miss Maudie Royden. There is quite a rollicking sound about the name, although we dare say the lady is demure enough. We would suggest to Miss Royden that a very interesting subject for a series of discourses by her would be the position of woman under the Christian Church from the fourth to the nineteenth century.

Mr. Arnold Stephens, of Sutton, Surrey, is a Christian who has had the temerity to write to the *Christian World* for September 20 in decided depreciation of prayer-meetings, and in justification of non-attendance at them. He even ridicules the idea of meeting on Saturday night to "ask God a dozen times to bless the services of the coming Sabbath." He even casts doubt upon the efficacy of prayer, saying: "Many humble congregations in town and country continue in prayer, and also continue to see empty seats, because they lack the human conditions of success." We congratulate Mr. Stephens upon the manly courage and good sense dis-

played in his fine letter. What will Mr. Spurr have to say to it?

We don't know anything of the Rev. O. Rhodes, of Morpeth; and, judging from the sample lying before us, we have no great desire for enlightenment in that direction. In the *Church Magazine* for September, this gentleman says:—

There are heaps of people in lunatic asylums, and there are heaps of people who can see no further than their nose. Such are the people who do not see their way to go to church.

When a man talks in that fashion, he is in a bad way. And we must remind Mr. Rhodes that people in lunatic asylums do not object to going to church. All lunatics are religious. An atheistic lunatic is unknown. We do not mean by this that Atheists do not go insane; only that they are not Atheists afterwards. And as for stupid people—well, whoever heard of stupidity as being a bar to church attendance? Many a man has been turned out of church for being too wise; but when was one turned out for being too stupid? And is not Mr. Rhodes himself in "Holy Orders"? It is bad to set up a thesis when one stands as its living disproof.

The officials of the British and Foreign Bible Society report that none of its branches in any enemy country has been closed during the War. Considering the statement, so widely circulated, that Germany had deliberately repudiated Christianity, simple folk will be surprised at the news. Others know the statement to be a deliberately concocted falsehood. Germany is as Christian as ever. If it were really less Christian, it would be far better than it is.

Charles Newland was, last week, sentenced to three years' penal servitude for bigamy and theft. Newland had been a "missioner" to marryings, and had often preached at services. Judge Rentoul said it was the worst case he had ever tried. We hope Judge Rentoul will bear this and other cases in mind when he has occasion to reflect or remark upon the relations of morality and religion.

The creation of a Jewish regiment appears to be as wise as to enrol a regiment of Catholics or of Wesleyan Methodists, or Plymouth Brethren, or Swedenborgians, or Muggletonians. In any event let us hope that the Jewish soldiers do not emulate the military heroes of the Old Testament.

Providence doeth all things well.* The *North China Daily News* states that, owing to floods, three millions of people are homeless and destitute, and the number drowned cannot be estimated.

At the request of the Government, Doctors' Commons is granting marriage licenses "three at the price of one," says a newspaper paragraph. Does this suggest a return to Old Testament ideals of marriage?

The Advisory Committee of Coalville, Leicestershire, Tribunal are stated to have gone on strike owing to the War Office having secured exemption for six able-bodied monks at Mount St. Bernard Monastery, three of whom were passed for general service, and three for home service. Why is the War Office so solicitous concerning these monks when lay Christians receive such scant courtesy? Already 50,000 ministers of religion are exempted.

The clerical mind is deserving of attention on account of its infantile qualities. The Rev. A. M. Mitchell, Vicar of Burton Wood, near Warrington, writing in his parish magazine, says, "At an appalling time like the present, the fourth year of war, when parts of Europe are literally drenched with blood, some of the more superstitious among us would not be surprised to see blood-rain fall from the clouds." We wonder how many Christian folk look up to the Rev. A. M. Mitchell as a pastor and master?

"A man of seventy-two is not old nowadays," said the Chairman of the City Tribunal. In the giddy days of Adam and Methuselah he would have been still younger.

To Correspondents.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

September 30, Swansea; October 7, Failsworth; October 14, Leicester; October 21, Manchester; October 28, London; November 4, Abertillery.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—October 7, Birmingham; October 14, Swansea.

D. GOUDIE writes: "Allow me to congratulate 'Mimmermus' on his well written and pointed reply to H. G. Wells." We pass on the congratulation with the utmost pleasure. Mr. Wells must have felt himself in a bad way to strike out as he did. Writing for the religious, he probably felt anything would do. But he should have remembered that others might read him.

S. CLOWES.—We have no intention of altering the price of the *Freethinker* unless something quite unexpected and serious occurs. As you say, we must not lose a single possible new subscriber. We thank you for what you have done and are doing to gain new readers. We are much encouraged by your letter, as by the many others we have received during the past week or so.

J. ROSEBERRY.—Your letter proves that you have grasped the essence of what constitutes a Freethinker. A man may be as much a bigot on the right as on the wrong side. It is not what a man believes, but how he believes, that makes for intellectual salvation.

E. THURLOW.—We are flattered at you thinking no other man "could or would" stand the strain of present circumstances. We prefer to think that many *would*: and as for *could*, that is a question of endurance, and we have strong hopes in that direction also. A great idea finds a suitable instrument sooner or later.

W. J. HEPWORTH (Johannesburg).—Pleased to know you received parcel safely. Delays are unavoidable nowadays. Thanks for cutting.

L. EDMUNDS (Hong Kong).—We have a number of readers in various parts of China, but no regular agent there for this paper.

C. HARPUR.—If we are right in defining Atheism as being without belief in God, and Theism as having a belief in God, how can we be accused of "cocksureness" in writing as we did?

G. RULE.—Thanks for report. It is like the resurrection of one's dead sins, but in this case we are glad to see them.

ALAN TYNDAL.—We quite share your appreciation of T. H. E.'s neat disposal of Dr. Robertson Nicoll.

J. H. ENGLISH.—We only know one way of stopping a parson talking nonsense, and that is to enlighten his congregation. Thanks for papers.

SAPPER CHEETHAM.—We are glad to have your help, and hope that peace will soon release you for other work.

G. F. LAWES (Vancouver).—The travelling evangelist is much the same everywhere. And that is not surprising, seeing that he can only appeal to the same class everywhere. An intelligent man would never undertake the job, or if he did, would soon give it up. Pleased to hear from you.

C. D. WESTON.—Paper is being redirected as requested. We saw the cutting you were good enough to enclose, but did not comment on it at the time.

C. W. MARSHALL.—Thanks for the good work you are doing in spreading abroad the *Freethinker*.

W. J.—It is not a question of attractiveness but of accuracy. And we think the word selected precisely defines what is the scope of this paper.

THOTH.—Chained Bibles were once very common—at a time when books were both scarce and expensive.

H. SHAW.—Shall appear. Thanks.

J. BURY.—Exactly, "every drop" tells, and many bearers help to lighten the burden.

J. GIBSON.—See "Acid Drops." We may return to this gentleman later.

H. BLACK.—Sorry we wrote "March 21" as the opening date of the Manchester lectures. It should, of course, be October 21.

E. B. sends us the following version of the lines quoted in last week's *Freethinker*, and which he says he has had by him some years. We think them an altogether better version:—

"And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth."—Genesis ix. 1.
King Solomon and King David, they both led naughty lives;
Each had three hundred concubines, and eke one hundred wives.
When they arrived at riper age, they both were seized with qualms,
So, one he wrote the Proverbs, and the other wrote the Psalms.

A. J. MARRIOTT.—The worst of opening such a discussion would be, that if it were thorough it would carry us into questions that lie outside our legitimate purpose. Other matters are receiving attention.

C. BARTRAM.—Glad to hear from you and to know that you are well. Try and keep so.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.

Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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"Freethinker" Sustentation Fund.

WANT of time and space prevents our printing more than a bald list of subscriptions this week. We have a number of letters from which we should like to quote, but they must of necessity wait for our next issue. And for the reasons already given we must bespeak the patience of a number of correspondents whose letters, for the moment, remain unanswered. Meanwhile, it is pleasing to note that our subscription list is a very representative one, although I am sure there are very many more who mean to figure therein before we write "Finis" to the Fund.

Third List of Subscriptions.

Previously acknowledged, £226 19s. 4d. J. G. Dobson, 5s. J. Hall English, 2s. J. R. (second subscription), 1s. R. Bell, 5s. Alan Tyndal, 5s. K. J., 2s. 6d. E. W. (Manchester), 5s. C. D. Weston, £1 1s. Mathematicus, 10s. H. Good, 10s. Mr. and Mrs. W. Waymark, 2s. 6d. Jersey, £1. Mr. and Mrs. Gorrie, £1 1s. W. Mather, £2 2s. J. Kilpatrick, 5s. T. Dunbar, 2s. 6d. J. O. Restall, 5s. "Thoth," 10s. G. H. Murphy, 2s. C. W. Marshall, 10s. A. W. Coleman, £1 1s. Sam Healing, 2s. 6d. J. Brodie, 3s. J. Molyneaux, 2s. 6d. H. Silverstein, 5s. J. R., 1s. W. H. Hicks, £1 1s. B. R. Godfree, £1 1s. Juliet and Julian, 9s. 6d. W. C. Dodd, 2s. 6d. J. Edmonds, 5s. J. Bury, 2s. John McMillan, 2s. 6d. W. M. (Southfield), 5s. Per A. Wildman, 9s. An Essex Tommy, 3s. 6d. H. E. Latimer Voight, £2. H. T. Oatfin, 10s. J. T. Hellwall, 5s. A Friend, £2 2s. W. E. Hickman, 2s. 6d. J. Hamon, £1. M. T. 10s. W. G. Harris, 5s. W. H. Knight, 10s. Vera, 1s. Total: £246 7s. 4d.

Correction—"F. C. Willis, 5s." in last week's list should have read "F. E. Willis 10s."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Sugar Plums.

The Birmingham Branch of the N. S. S. opened its season with two fine meetings in the large town hall on Sunday last. Mr. Cohen's lectures were listened to with evident appreciation, and, it is to be hoped, will lead to new members for the local Branch. A new departure is being made in the arrangement for four Sunday evening meetings in the Repertory Theatre Station, Market Street. This course will be opened on October 7 by Mr. Lloyd, and will be closed by Mr. Cohen on November 18. Mr. E. C. Williams will lecture there on October 21, and Mr. F. C. Willis on November 4.

To-day (September 30) the Branch is holding a social evening in commemoration of Charles Bradlaugh, at the Cafe Oriental, Hill Street, at 6.30. There will be speeches, and light refreshments will be served. The meeting is not reserved for members. Friends will be warmly welcomed.

To-day (September 30) Mr. Cohen lectures twice in the Dockers' Hall, High Street, Swansea. The hall is a large

one, and we hope local Freethinkers will do their best to see that it is filled. The afternoon subject, at 3, is "Christianity Before and After the War"; the evening one, at 7, "Do the Dead Live?" Admission is free, with a charge for reserved seats.

In the *Freethinker* for September 16, when referring to the death of the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Harden, we gave his rank as captain. In this we were in error, his rank being that of lance-corporal, D.C.M. The statement appeared in citing from a letter in connection with the Sustentation Fund. We regret the blunder, although we have no doubt that had Lance-corporal Harden lived to see further service, our description would have been anticipatory.

Liverpool Freethinkers are asked to note that a meeting to consider work for the winter season will be held at the Clarion Cafe, Cable Street, at 5.45 on Saturday, September 29. It is probable that many of our readers will receive their paper in time for the meeting, and we hope they will make a point of being present.

We fancy that our readers would be surprised did they know how many copies of this paper are with the British troops on the fighting fronts. Indeed, we might be surprised ourselves. We know that we have sent out, and are still sending, a goodly number, and that we should have sent many more had means permitted. We have good reason for knowing that copies of the "One and Only" are welcomed, widely read, and well discussed. We shall be greatly surprised if, when peace comes, it does not bring us many new readers and warm friends.

One of our readers, who receives the *Freethinker* regularly from home, writes his father:—

I am enclosing a couple of pages of two different *Freethinkers*, both of them carried over the top, one of the 7th June and the other 16th August. On neither occasion, I can honestly tell you, did my opinions alter for one moment. Some people tell you that before going over, the biggest Atheist will send up a prayer, and all that rot. Don't you believe it. I suppose this last time over I had as narrow an escape as I ever wish for, but even at that terrible moment I trusted to a clear head and sane thinking, and put on one side all thoughts of God or the Church.

We are glad to learn that carrying a copy of the *Freethinker* over the top had quite as preservative an effect as the traditional copy of the Bible. Some time ago we sent this correspondent our best wishes for his safety, and we are flattered by his saying that he would sooner carry this paper into action than the best prayer-book ever issued.

A reference to our Guide Notice will show that from the platforms of all the London Branches of the N. S. S. the subject of "Charles Bradlaugh" will be dealt with from various aspects. Charles Bradlaugh was born on September 26, 1833, and died, all too soon, on January 30, 1891. As the number of those who had the honour of knowing him personally of necessity grows smaller, the influence of his life and work increases, and the world at large is just beginning to realize what a power he was for good in the cause of Progress.

We are asked to state that the Whist Drive arranged by the North London Branch N. S. S. as taking place on October 3 has been postponed. Notice will be given when a new date is arranged.

If you must pray.....pray for a healthy mind, for healthy limbs, courage, contempt of death, a Soul that deems mere length of days to be the least and last of Nature's gifts, a Soul that is steadfast under the heaviest load, that never knew anger, has no desires, and would go through the griefs and savage toils of Hercules rather than court vice, banquets, pageantries. That which yourself can for yourself procure, I show you. One road, one alone, is sure to end in peace of mind. It is the road of Virtue, free to all of us. No God is wanting if the man be wise and good. Fortune is not a Goddess on a throne in heaven. That's an invention of our own.—*Juvenal, Satire 10.*

A Note on Wilde's "De Profundis."

II.

(Concluded from p. 605.)

THE amazing importance Wilde gives to sorrow as a factor in life and art is only the outcome of his personal experience unchecked by reason. Had he not been the victim of enraged British virtue, we should have heard little about the wonderful virtue of sorrow. His work is in itself a plain refutation of his assertions. It is fairly arguable that the best side of it is in its blitheness, its expansiveness. But let us see how far he can go in the way of paradox. "Prosperity, pleasure, and success," he tells us,

may be rough of grain and common in fibre, but sorrow is the most sensitive of all created things. There is nothing that stirs in the whole world of thought to which sorrow does not vibrate in terrible and exquisite pulsation. The thin beaten-out leaf of tremulous gold that chronicles the direction of forces the eye cannot see is in comparison coarse. It is a wound that bleeds when any hand but that of love touches it, and even then must bleed again, though not in pain. When there is sorrow there is holy ground.....Sorrow and all that it teaches is my new world.....I now see that sorrow, being the supreme emotion of which man is capable, is at once the type and test of all great art.....There are times when sorrow seems to me to be the only truth.

He points to passages in his books whereby this so-called truth is prepared or foreshadowed. It is incarnate, he tells us in the prose-poem of the man who, from the bronze of the image of *Pleasure that liveth for a moment*, has to make the image of the *Sorrow that abideth for ever*. "It could not be otherwise," he goes on; "At every single moment one is what one is going to be no less than what one has been." M. Andre Gide, however, has pointed out this prose-poem (*The Artist*) embodies a truth diametrically opposed to that of the *De Profundis*. It was out of the bronze of the image of *sorrow that endureth for ever* that the artist fashioned an image of *Pleasure that abideth for a moment*. How pathetically eloquent is this curious lapse of memory of a mind overwrought by sorrow! Wilde's insistence on the spiritual value of humility is, I think, only another indication of a slackening of nervous tissues, of failure from sheer weariness. We see nothing of the old Wilde, in spite of his claim to individualism, in this passage:—

I find hidden somewhere away in my nature something that tells me that nothing in the whole world is meaningless, and suffering least of all. That something hidden away in my nature, like a treasure in a field, is Humility. It is the last thing left to me, and the best; the ultimate discovery at which I have arrived, the starting point for a fresh development.....It is the one thing that has in it the elements of life, of a new life, a *Vita Nuova* for me. Of all things it is the strangest. One cannot acquire it, except by surrendering everything one has. It is only when one has lost all things, that one knows that one possesses it.....My nature is seeking a fresh mode of self-realization.....I hope to be able to recreate my creative faculty.

The creative faculty of Wilde was to be recreated once more, and once only in the moving *Ballad of Reading Gaol*. The dominant notes of this great poem is not a Christian and servile humility, the negation of sane individualism, but, rather, a fierce demand for "common justice and brotherhood." What is more, the careful reader will find even in the pages of *De Profundis* itself many proofs that the old natural spirit of pride was not extinct. How little humility is there

in this indictment of people who hounded him to death:—

Many men on their release carry their prison about with them into the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things, creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong, of society that it should force them to do so. Society takes upon itself the right to inflict appalling punishment on the individual, but it also has the supreme vice of shallowness, and fails to realize what it has done. When the man's punishment is over, it leaves him to himself; that is to say, it abandons him at the very moment when its highest duty towards him begins. It is really ashamed of its own actions, and shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay, or one on whom they have inflicted an irreparable, an irremediable wrong. I can claim on my side that if I realize what I have suffered, society should realize what it has inflicted on me.

There is no perverse Christian doctrine of self-sacrifice or humility here, for Wilde was, what so many members of the Roman Catholic faith are, a natural Pagan, for whom religion had no meaning. "The faith that others give to what is unseen," he tells us,

I give to what one can touch, and look at. The gods dwelt in temples made with hands; and within the circle of actual experience is my creed made perfect and complete.....When I think about religion at all, I feel as if I would like to find an order for those who *cannot* believe; the Confraternity of the Faithless, one might call it, where on an altar, on which no tapir burned, a priest, in whose heart peace had no dwelling, might celebrate with unblessed bread and a chalice empty of wine. Agnosticism should have its ritual no less than faith. It has sown its martyrs, it should reap its saints, and praise God daily for having hidden Himself from man. But whether it be faith or agnosticism, it must be nothing external to me. Its symbols must be of my own creating. Only that is spiritual which makes its own form.

The idea Wilde has of the real or mythical founder of Christianity, the Jesus of the Gospels, is as fanciful as that of Renan, whose *Life of Jesus* he wittily describes as "that gracious fifth gospel, the Gospel according to St. Thomas." For Wilde, as for Renan, Jesus was a divine dreamer, a poet of whose company are Sophocles and our own Shelley. To hold up their Lord as the supreme type of the artist must seem something very like blasphemy to all good Puritans if they happen to overcome their natural distrust of art and glance at Wilde's writings. They see in Jesus only the hard moralist, the forerunner of Jonathan Edwards, just as for our friends the Christian Socialists he is a sentimental Communist, the prototype (shall I say?) of Mr. Phillip Snowden. For Wilde, as also for many of us who avoid Socialism as we would the plague, he is an Individualist, like every artist who has imposed his vision of things upon the world. Not only was he an artist—he was also a Jew. And the Jew, with his vivid consciousness of racial difference, of the peculiar value of his contribution to the world's thought and work, with his intense pride of possession, intellectual and material, does not seem to be cut out by Nature for a Communist. If he has at times become the prophet of socialistic millenniums, it has been invariably in the interest of some revolutionary cause. I can hardly imagine a company of Jews, even the least sophisticated of the race, as quietly agreeing for one day to share all things in common; but I can imagine the more sophisticated ones using their persuasive eloquence to turn their enemies into Socialists. However that may be, Jesus was bracketed with Heine as a good Communist. But as, for Wilde, Communism was merely a prepara-

tion for a sort of artistic anarchism, and not an end in itself, there is not much gained, from the point of view of Socialism, by claiming Jesus and Heine as Communists.

Wilde was a Catholic, and for that reason more than half a Pagan. Catholicism, we are told by Remy de Gourmont, "is Christianity paganized." "A religion," he goes on to say, "at once mystic and sensual, it can satisfy and has satisfied for ages, the two primordial and contradictory tendencies of human nature, which are to live both in the finite and the infinite, or to put it in more acceptable terms, both in sensation and intelligence." De-paganized Christianity, or Puritanism, with its virulent hatred of every expression of the joy of life, every artistic impulse, Wilde distrusted as essentially unsocial. Instead of the Pagan miracle, the work of art—the only miracle upon which Wilde and we Free-thinkers set any value—the Gospels give us the unnecessary miracles of raising a man from the dead, the bacchic conjuring of water into wine, the stupid bedevilment of an innocent drove of pigs, and suchlike pieces of trivial irrealism. The Christian miracle is a reality for those only who have never got beyond childhood; the Pagan miracle, a play by Sophocles, an ode by Catullus, take on a new meaning, a new beauty, as we ourselves grow in wisdom. The teaching generally of the Gospels exasperated and tormented the humanist in Wilde, and his most mordantly ironic parables were written to discredit in every sense the idealism of Christianity by setting it over against the naturalism of Pagan thought. This attitude is brought out clearly in one of the prose-poems, "The Doer of Good," which has not a little of the subtlety of symbolism we admire in Nietzsche and Baudelaire.

It was night-time and He was alone.

And He saw afar-off the walls of a round city and went towards the city.

And when He came near he heard within the city the tread of the feet of joy, and the laughter of the mouth of gladness and the loud noise of many lutes. And He knocked at the gate and certain of the gate-keepers opened to him.

And He beheld a house that was of marble and had fair pillars of marble before it. The pillars were hung with garlands, and within and without there were torches of cedar. And he entered the house.

And when He had passed through the hall of chalcidony and the long hall of feasting, He saw lying on a couch of sea-purple one whose hair was crowned with red roses and whose lips were red with wine.

And He went behind him and touched him on the shoulder and said to him, "Why do you live like this?"

And the young man turned round and recognized Him and made answer and said, "But I was a leper once, and you healed me. How else should I live?"

And He passed out of the house and went again into the street.

And after a while He saw one whose face and raiment were painted and whose feet were shod with pearls. And behind her came, slowly as a hunter, a young man who wore a cloak of two colours. Now the face of the woman was as the fair face of an idol, and the eyes of the young man were bright with lust.

And He followed swiftly and touched the hand of the young man and said to him, "Why do you look at this woman, and in such wise?"

And the young man turned round and recognized Him and said, "But I was blind once, and you gave me sight. At what else should I look?"

And He ran forward and touched the painted raiment of the woman and said to her, "Is there no other way in which to walk save the way of sin?"

And the woman turned round and recognized Him, and laughed and said, "But you forgave me my sins, and the way is a pleasant way."

And he passed out of the city.

And when He had passed out of the city he saw seated by the roadside a young man who was weeping.

And He went towards him and touched the long locks of his hair and said to him, "Why are you weeping?"

And the young man looked up and recognized Him and made answer, "But I was dead once and you raised me from the dead. What else should I do but weep?"

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

Biddy's First Communion.

ON the first Sunday of last May, little Biddy Murphy made her first communion. It was a beautiful morning, and as I was going for a stroll in the warm sunshine, I met Biddy and her mother coming home. I had never seen the child in anything else but rags and hand-me-downs, and here she was, all in spotless white, a very blushing bride. I gave her a sixpence, and told her how beautiful she looked, and to be sure to let my children see her pretty dress.

Biddy is not convincing as a bride. Her rosy cheeks, straight black hair, and roguish eyes seem to ask for scarlet and yellow, beads, sequins, bracelets, and a general appearance of the world and the flesh, of gratification and indulgence instead of self-sacrifice, renunciation, of God and the cloister. Now, had it been my Margaret, that would have filled the picture, for she has golden tresses, cerulean blue eyes, a delicate skin, and an ethereal expression—surely that's the correct combination for something angelic. If I were a scoundrel, I would paint a picture of Margaret in her nightie, kneeling at a bedside in a room in which was prominently displayed a framed portrait of a soldier, a beam of light from a mysterious source falling on the sweet upturned face and irradiating her hair. The title of the picture would be "Our Father," and it would carry conviction to thousands of hearts.

Now, to be truthful, Margaret is a perfect little devil (bless her!) with not the faintest spark of reverence in her composition, and Biddy may be naturally pious for aught I know.

I could see at a glance the tawdry nature of the dress; but after all, hadn't she everything complete—white shoes, gloves, stockings, veil, etc.? Biddy was delighted with the sense of her own importance, and her mother was too proud of her to think anyone could possibly be nicer.

The Murphys live above us, in the same house as we do. They occupy what is known as the "two-pair back," while we, being quite "classy," occupy the front and back "drawing-rooms." Only those who have experienced the advantages of the Dublin tenements can appreciate the social distinctions involved.

There being a rule that tenants perform some communal cleaning, and as my wife won't do it, as I'll be damned if I'll do it, and as Mrs. Murphy asks to be allowed, for a consideration, to do our dirty work, then she "does" the stair regularly. Not that it is any cleaner after she is finished, but it is probably as badly done as it deserves to be.

Mind you, Mrs. Murphy is not a professional char-lady. Her husband, however, a hard-working man, does not "earn" enough to keep his wife and six children in a sufficiency of bread and margarine. Therefore, that she may care more for the kiddies, the mother neglects them early and late, to earn coppers by the equal distribution of mud, ironically called "cleaning." Mrs. Murphy always wears dark clothes—they "don't show the dirt," and are, in consequence, more hygienic than light garments—and, poor soul, is very shabby.

There is one thing I have never ceased to marvel at during my sojourn in Dublin slums, and that is the simply wonderful way mothers dress and turn out their children from homes that are a disgrace to civilization. What a brave face these women put on their poverty, and how grossly they are labelled for the acts of the few for whom the conditions are overpowering!

On that beautiful Sunday in May, I saw scores of little children, of the class of Biddy, walking out with their proud grown up relatives, and I did not see a mother who was even tolerably well clad. And yet they were done up in their best. Although the day was oppressively hot, the long coat concealing any amount of raggedness was much in evidence. Hats of a few seasons ago had been faked up to make them presentable. Travesties of creations in all conscience, but now quite bizarre when rejuvenated with bits of obviously new and incongruously coloured trimmings. The feet were frowsy. Low shoes are not for the poor, as poverty uncovers a multitude of shins. Altogether, the mothers were a grotesque collection, and one who did not understand might be moved to merriment. But I have known too much to make a jest of tragedy. To my æsthetic perception, even the best dressed of the children was but in better or cleaner shoddy than the others, and the difference between the way the women were clad and how they might have been with a pound or two more would be trifling. But, when we think that each of those poor Dublin mothers might have been "dressed like a lady" had she not scraped up everything to deck her child out for her first communion, we can then appreciate the mother-love of these women. Priests may assure us that it is the solemnity of the occasion that calls forth the self-sacrifice, but observation proves that the instinct to see her child decorated and beautified actuates the mother most, and that the Church merely uses human vanity—as she uses everything—for her own ends.

Margaret thought Biddy's dress was "awful beauty," and asked wistfully, "Couldn't I be a first communion, daddy?" I am afraid she would cheerfully subscribe to any creed that offered a chance of a pretty frock.

The young communicants had a red-letter day, for every sane being likes to see a child happy and to help in that happiness, and pennies were plentiful. Biddy and her brothers and sisters had a glorious beano. I know that she had, among other things, pop-corn, chip potatoes, ice-cream, monkey nuts, liquorice, winkles, and fruit cakes. By all the rules of healthy well-being—made by the medicine-men, for whom it is a necessity that stomachs be turned into rubbish-heaps, requiring to be cleansed and purified by their obnoxious potions—Biddy ought to have been seriously ill; or, at least, discreetly bilious. But I fear she is a bold girl, for her "little Mary" didn't seem to have turned a hair.

Well, Biddy Murphy, at the age of seven, has been initiated in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Now a communicant of the One True Church, she is supposed to have arrived at an age when she can discriminate between good and evil, is accountable to God (and incidentally to his earthly representatives) for her every action, and is under the dread threat of eternal hell fire for one unconfessed "mortal" sin. Quite a cheerful outlook on life for seven years old! In olden times the bodies of men were sold in the market-place in Rome. But a study of history shows us the progress we have made in a thousand years, for the souls of children are now given in the tabernacle. And when I think of the demands of the Church in attending services, in fasting and "mortification of the flesh," I am not sure but what the body is also given to Rome.

I think back to my first and subsequent communions, and I feel proud that my youngsters need not leave their comfortable beds to go out, without food, in the early morning to receive the Bread of Life, which has even less nourishment than the War commodity.

But I don't want my children to grow up free-minded in a nation of slaves; I want all to be freethinking men and women. Little short of a cataclysm can now save poor Bidly. She will grow up as other Catholics, accepting unquestioningly every *ipse dixit* of the priest, imbibing, as she blossoms into womanhood, the "morality" framed by sex-perverted men and women, and she will be ignorant of all that life really means—the joys to be tasted, the pitfalls to beware of; for her mother, blind fool, will keep her "innocent," and leave her to God's mercy!

She will, of course, be a "good" girl, unless she has become contaminated by the suggestive literature in the "examination of conscience," or set wondering by leading questions or innuendoes in the confessional. But the chances are that she will be too stupid to take any meaning whatever out of this ritual, and will just continue in her "duties" in a mechanical manner. She will marry quite young, and, of course, a good Catholic young man; the priests will see to that. No long courtships with them, no scandals, no War babies, or other irregularities—love doesn't even matter in Ireland, where they arrange marriages on a cash basis, the priest demanding his percentage on the sale—and get children quickly; that's the racket for Mother Church, and that's all mapped out for little Bidly. In all probability her life will be as dirty and dreary as that of her mother, and as socially demoralizing.

Hardly entreated Bidly! would that, even yet, you could be saved; for we who are Rationalists also know the value of the childish mind. But, unlike the priests, we do not want to "capture" the children; our work is to liberate them. We would talk to them of love and laughter, of beauty and the fairyland of Nature; of knowledge of living things, of music, dancing, kisses, and fine clothes, and precious little about "good and evil." We would not be unmindful of their "morals" as the years went by; but, as our ethics are based on naturalism and physiology, we would place no barriers in the way of their free development, nor would we, being wise from experience, disguise real dangers from them. Our object would be that each would seek happiness in his own way, but we would teach nothing of "sin" and all the other dismal doctrines of the vampire celibate "fathers" who grasp in their holy and unclean tentacles the bodies and souls of sweet little infants of seven.

J. EFFEL.

Correspondence.

ATHEIST OR AGNOSTIC?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As one who calls himself an Agnostic, may I be allowed to defend my position?

I cannot believe in anything of which my mind has no conception; but, on the other hand, neither can I disbelieve in it, for to do so I must first have some idea of what it means—in other words, some conception of it must be present to my mind, which, *ex hypothesi*, is not the case. This, I take it, is philosophic Agnosticism; and with all respect to you, Sir, I think it can be applied to the word "God."

Of the wonder called electricity, science has given me some idea: I can definitely say whether I believe or disbelieve in it; even of so elusive a thing as the ether I can form some conception, however inadequate, and accept it provisionally as an explanation of certain phenomena; Goodness, too, the abstract idea as mental integration of all that

is good, I can conceive and enjoy; Truth and Beauty, likewise, I know, and my soul (not ghost-soul) can delight in. But what is God? Is he discarnate personality? disembodied mind? universal spirit? What, then, are all these things? I know them not.

I cannot agree with you that "there are only two positions—either one believes, and is a Theist; or, one does not believe in a God, and is an Atheist." There is a third: The Theist says, I believe in God; the Atheist says, I do not believe in God; the Agnostic answers, I do not know what either of you is talking about.

J. BLAIR WILLIAMS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your essay under the above heading in this Sunday's issue confirms an opinion I have long held that most men, and not least newspaper editors, as a class, are arrant cowards in regard to conventional religion, and slaves of phrases. In *Reynolds'* newspaper of a fortnight ago an article appeared from Professor A. A. Cook, under the heading "Politics in the School," in which he urged, *inter alia*, the teaching of "Theism." I wrote the subjoined letter to the editor of *Reynolds'* on the same day, but it has not appeared. Only those who, like myself, indulge occasionally in newspaper controversy as recreation, have any conception of the inflexible opposition of the press, as a rule, to the insertion of anything not strictly religiously orthodox. You, Sir, have more moral courage, and need it, than all the other editors combined. Anybody can shout with the mob:—

POLITICS IN THE SCHOOL.

TO THE EDITOR OF "REYNOLDS'."

SIR,—I am not unaware that it is somewhat temerarious to challenge the dictum of a professor, especially one with quasi-editorial authority, for it is not an unreasonable presumption that the article under the above heading, by Professor A. A. Cook, in *Reynolds'* of this date, has editorial sanction, if not editorial endorsement. Without any pretension to the academic status of the writer, I should like to offer a word of criticism. I can understand his advocacy of ethics, philosophy, economics, and sociology, and his arguments in support of them. These are based on universal experience, but why "Theism"? This rests on no clearly defined basis. It is an axiom of sound education that nothing should be taught that cannot be demonstrated. Theism, at best, is purely speculative, and its effect in all ages has been destructive, disruptive, and disintegrating to the social structure, as history testifies. It has retarded, as nothing else has, intellectual progress. It challenges science and philosophy alike. It rests on an inconceivable postulate, and demands support from an impossible, endless chain of cause and effect. It is a scientific as well as a philosophical axiom that every effect is the result of an antecedent cause. It is not less axiomatic that every effect is a cause. It follows, therefore, as night the day, that there could be no first cause. If there could be an exception to this law, why not a million, or an endless series of exceptions? Either human philosophy is a paradox, and yet all human conduct rests on it, or Theism is an impossibility. Even the nomenclature, as well as the thing itself, is an uncertain quantity, and "God" has been a title for potentates and those in authority from the earliest time. Why then waste time in teaching anything so grotesque, on which anything even approaching agreement is impossible, and at the same time so prolific in mischief as the bitter wranglings of the Theists have been in all ages? The daily practices of professed believers being a flat contradiction of their precepts. Nor is a belief in *Theos* by any means essential to the most perfect ethical code, adapted to every purpose of life—or death. Education, to be real and useful, must rest not on poetic fancy or idle speculation, but on the various factors constituting our political and social life.—Yours truly,

Eastbourne, September 9.

GEORGE E. QUIRK.

INFANT MORTALITY AND SANITATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As one who believes that at least 75 per cent. of the infant mortality is caused by bad and insanitary surroundings, I am inclined to disagree with your correspondent, J. McGhee, in the *Freethinker* for September 16; for, in the first place, I reside in a village of 4,000 people, *i.e.*, Fodgate, which has the unenviable reputation of having the largest infantile mortality in the county, the County of Durham. Now, the

population of this place is composed, for the most part, of Irish people, not that I attribute to them (the Irish) anything better or worse than others; I am simply trying to point out the fallacy of Mr. McGhee's arguments in respect to this class of people. It is well known (and upon this I base my contention) that the houses for the working-class in this locality are the poorest and most insanitary in the kingdom, belonging, as they do, to a rich and prosperous iron company; they have been stigmatized as a disgrace to civilization; hence my contentions and conclusions that bad housing and worse sanitary conditions are responsible for most of the infant mortality. The above can be proved and verified by statements from Dr. Hill, Medical Officer for the County of Durham.

R. BELL.

COMMUNION WITH THE DEAD. TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In reply to the criticism by Mr. Hubert Wales, in last week's issue, I can only say I regret that I have not succeeded in convincing him from my point of view. I should much like to have enlisted the pen of so brilliant a novelist in our cause; one, moreover, who does not bow the knee to the idol of British Respectability. His novel, *The Yoke*, may fairly be said to have turned "the pudic snows of Mrs. Grundy's countenance to scarlet," to use the illuminating phrase of Mr. Gosse regarding the effect of the early poems of Swinburne upon the British public.

Mr. Wales says that I am prejudiced in my views. I will not retort the charge, as that would, probably, only lead to recriminations and personalities, in which our readers have not the smallest interest. Besides, I do not see that prejudice is wrong if it is well founded; nobody condemns a man for being prejudiced in favour of morality and virtue.

A more serious charge is that concerning my "selective methods" as exemplified by the Blavatsky case of thirty years ago. But Madame Blavatsky was the only one who succeeded in founding a new cult, the Theosophical Society, which to-day is a wealthy and flourishing concern. And if it happened thirty years ago, all the more reason the younger generation should be informed of the facts, which very few have the opportunity or the leisure to find out for themselves.

As to my selection of "spirit messages," they are nearly all cases relied upon by Sir Oliver Lodge as demonstrative proof of communion with dead, or of communications through Mrs. Piper, who Sir Oliver Lodge vouches for, and I selected them because everyone is asking: "How about Sir Oliver Lodge?" and I thought I would just show what his evidence amounted to. Did Sir Oliver, then, choose the weakest examples to prove his case? In justice to Sir Oliver Lodge, I must admit that the cases he brings forward are no better, or worse, than the bulk of the others, and if the rest were subjected to a similar analysis they, too, would appear weak and foolish. And if Mrs. Piper fails, as she does, where is the medium who can compare with her?

The case for telepathy and communion with the dead is on exactly the same footing as the case for miracles; there is an enormous amount of testimony to prove them, thousands of books have been written in their defence, but when you ask for the repetition of a single one, before a competent scientific commission, you cannot get it!

W. MANN.

When the time comes for us to take command of our own intellectual faculties, we are always impeded by a dust of early training and associations, which, without giving heed to it, without examining it to see if it be good or bad, sound or silly, we have allowed to settle about our minds, until in the course of time it has become encrusted. An enormous mass of what most people consider their opinions or beliefs or instincts have rusted upon them in this way. It accounts for almost everybody's religion and for almost everybody's politics. Nothing is more difficult to eradicate, even when it has become recognized as prejudice. Some people make no effort to dislodge it; or, if they do, soon give it up; they placidly accept their slavery.—Hubert Wales, "The Rationalist."

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.

MR. A. D. HOWELL SMITH'S DISCUSSION CLASS (N. S. S. Office 62 Farringdon Street): Thursday, Oct. 4, at 7.30.

OUTDOOR.

BATTERSEA PARK BRANCH N. S. S. (Battersea Park Gates): 11.15, a Lecture.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 5, P. S. Wilde, "The Influence of Charles Bradlaugh."

FINSBURY PARK N. S. S.: 11.15, H. V. Storey, "Charles Bradlaugh."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill): 4, Miss Kough, "Charles Bradlaugh: 'Lest we Forget.'"

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (corner of Ridley Road): 7, R. Miller, "The Life of Charles Bradlaugh."

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S.: 3.30, G. Rule and H. B. Doughty, "Some Incidents in the Life of Charles Bradlaugh."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3, Victor Roger, "Some Reminiscences of Charles Bradlaugh."

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE (Collingwood Hall, 12A Clayton Street, East): 3, "An Hour with Charles Bradlaugh."

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GOD AND THE AIR-RAID.

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