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## Views and Opinions.

### The New Bishop of Hereford.

Quite a storm is raging over the appointment of Dr. Hensley Henson to the Bishopric of Hereford. The quarrel is largely a domestic affair, and a Freethinker can hardly be expected to contemplate the rumpus without considerable amusement or a certain amount of contempt. Dr. Henson is denounced for his heretical and liberal views, although both his heresy and his liberality exist only because there are still large numbers of people calling themselves civilized while holding beliefs that properly befit men of the Stone Age. In such an environment, the reputation for being a liberal thinker is easily attained; and we have no doubt that many people in the position of Dr. Henson would be surprised if they could only be brought to realize how very old-fashioned they are. The heresies *they* propound, with quite an air of dashing adventure, are now such commonplaces with Freethinkers that they are very often thought of as unworthy of mention.

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### The Absurdity of Christianity.

It must be due to our having escaped the misfortune of being either born a Christian or trained as one, that we find it a matter of the greatest difficulty to treat grown-up men and women who hold beliefs such as form the subject of controversy between Dr. Henson and his critics with any degree of gravity. The charges against Dr. Henson are that he does not believe in the Virgin Birth of Jesus; he thinks there was no resurrection of the body of Jesus—or that it is, at least, open to question; he does not believe in the miracle of the marriage feast at Cana, etc. But these are really not things that a man should be attacked for not believing; they are things that any sane person should be ashamed of having it said of him that he does believe them. Any sensible person who knows the constituents of wine and water, *knows* that to transmute water into wine is a sheer impos-

sibility. It can no more be done, in fact, than a conjurer can produce eggs from a silk hat without putting them there beforehand. When we see eggs produced from a hat, we may not know how it is done, but we laugh at those who accept the trick at its face value. And so of those who believe the things that the new Bishop of Hereford is attacked for doubting. They may have a certain claim upon our sympathy; they have none on either our gravity or respect.

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### Fraud or Folly.

Let us try to put the matter quite plainly. Just at the moment there is a deal of discussion on the question of Spiritualism. Mr. Edward Clodd, in a just published volume, after a most elaborate examination of the evidence, comes to the sweeping conclusion that it is, in the main, a case of folly or simplicity, misled by fraud. And in that conclusion thousands of Christians will agree with him. But is there any reason why we should be less plain of speech, with regard to Christian doctrines, or to those who believe them and those who teach them? When a man comes along and professes to believe that, of all the myriads of people that have been born, one, and one alone, was born without the co operation of a male human being, and that after being truly dead, he arose from the grave, what reason is there for our not saying that this is a case of pure folly or pure fraud? Can anyone even *think* of a child being born without a father? The birth of a child is no longer a mystery. We know all the stages from conception to birth. How, then, can anything else than folly or fraud believe or profess to believe in the hocus-pocus of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation? And so with the resurrection, the raising of the dead, and similar doctrines. It is not that we simply do not believe these things for want of evidence, we *know* they are not true. We are as certain of this as we are that two and two did not make five in ancient Judea, any more than in modern London. We can assume either folly or fraud on the part of Christians. We cannot credit them with sincerity and intelligence in relation to Christianity and still retain our own reputation for sanity.

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### Christianity a Survival.

A passage cited against Dr. Henson from his public writings is as follows. It deals with the events of the life of Jesus, including his alleged divine birth and resurrection:—

If a nineteenth century observer had been present he would have given a different account of the occurrences from that which has come down to us.

This passage contains an important truth, but also a very serious error. It implies that a nineteenth century observer would have seen many things quite plainly that were not there to be seen. No one could have seen the divine birth, no one could have seen the resurrection, or the walking on the water, or the feeding of

the multitude, or the turning of the water into wine, or the raising of the dead. No one could have seen these things, because they were never there to be seen. What a modern observer would have seen is that these things were believed. And if he had been properly equipped for writing home a report of his experiences, he would have pointed out that in believing these things the Christians were exactly on a level with a great many other people in the world. He would have noted the numerous stories of virgin love-saviours and of resurrected gods. He would have pointed out that the social atmosphere was thick with stories of the miraculous, and that all these beliefs were contemporaneous with an absence of scientific knowledge. He might have seen religious teachers casting out devils, and he would not have hesitated for a moment in describing these possessed people as epileptics or lunatics. Of course, we have no report from a nineteenth century observer on the spot, but we have reports from modern observers on these ancient beliefs, and they are clearly expressed on these lines. And the truth in the sentence cited is that the whole question is one of historical development. Go amongst the primitive peoples of the world to-day, and you will find flourishing the state of mind out of which the Christian Church grew, and on which it is built. Our modern Christians are, when they are sincere in relation to their religious belief, on the level of savages. Mr. Clodd has well pointed out the relation of modern Spiritualism to primitive savagery. And all he there says applies with equal truth to Christianity as a whole. Modern Christianity is an elaborate, an expensive, and a socially disastrous survival of primitive savagery.

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#### The Road for Honest Men.

Nothing of what is said above is new to Freethinkers. But is it new to Christians? There's the rub. To some Christians it is, of course, new—so new that they would reject it with the readiness with which the religious mind always repudiates an unusual truth. But to other Christians? To the clergy, for instance? Is it new to them? For our part we find it almost impossible to believe that a large number of the clergy are not as familiar with what has been said as we are. The truth about religion is too well known, the proofs are too close to hand, they are too accessible in scores of volumes, for these gentry not to know that Christian doctrines trace their ancestry straight back to primitive animism. Christians do not believe in miraculous births, risen corpses, or in miraculous acts anywhere but in the Bible. And this is not the attitude of honest belief. When a man honestly believes an absurdity at home he will believe it abroad. He can have nothing against it. But when a man professes to believe a story in one place, and the moment he is told a similar story elsewhere, condemns it as a lie or a fraud, he pronounces judgment on his own sincerity. And from that point of view we sympathize with Dr. Henson's critics. If Dr. Henson does not believe in the stories of Christ's life as actual, historic events, he has no moral right to remain an officer of the Established Church, drawing its money, and professing himself a Christian clergyman. His place is outside the Church. He should follow the example set by many honest men. And it is certain that affection for the Church, as a Church, need not restrain him. There will be plenty left to look after its welfare. Fat salaries and easy posts, place and power and distinction will continue to form sure baits for many. But for honest and intelligent men there is only one course open. Folly may continue to believe, fraud may continue to profess, honesty and intelligence should take their way along the broad road of human development.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## Jesus and His Words.

THE Rev. W. Garrett Horder, who has been minister of the Ealing Congregational Church for upwards of thirty years, is exceedingly well known as a great authority on hymnology, and has edited an excellent hymn-book. He is also regarded as a preacher of more than average ability. One of his sermons was published in the *Middlesex County Times* for December 29, 1917, and is eminently deserving of a critical notice. It is based on three texts in which Jesus is represented as the source of life and light to mankind, and as having left "us an example that we should follow in his style." Mr. Horder begins by stating that "the question as to whether Christian people should take part in war has been debated almost entirely on the words of the Master," and that "on that question words from his lips can be found both for and against participation in war"; but he maintains that such questions cannot be settled by an appeal to the mere words of Christ. He draws the well-known distinction between the letter and the spirit of Biblical terms, calling special attention to the Apostle Paul's declaration that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." In reality, the distinction is largely false and misleading. There is no legitimate method of getting at the real meaning of any statement except through the words employed. Mr. Horder's tirade against literalism misses the mark altogether, because if we do not take the words of Jesus according to the letter, their interpretation will be determined by the idiosyncrasies of different interpreters. The great fault of Tolstoi, we are told, was that he was a literalist—that is to say, that he had the temerity to take Jesus at his word, or to cling exclusively to his "mere precepts." The truth is that many of the precepts in the Sermon on the Mount are so incapable of translation into conduct that they cannot be treated seriously until they have been judiciously interpreted. Innumerable are the interpretations already in circulation, with the result that scarcely any two Christians are agreed as to the duty enjoined in any commandment of Jesus. Mr. Horder says:—

The fact is, the best interpretation of the precepts of Christ is to be found, not in the minute exegesis of commentaries, but by finding out how Christ lived out his own precepts. The Life shows the precepts in action. In the Life the precepts live before our eyes.

Did Jesus live out his own precepts? If we accept the historicity of the Gospels, our answer must be in the negative. As Tolstoi points out, on one or more occasions he flagrantly violated his own principles. But let that pass.

Mr. Horder's discourse is by no means complimentary to Jesus as a teacher. Referring to non-resistance to evil, going to law, giving, and lending, he says:—

These are tremendous demands. Taken in the letter no one has ever obeyed them. They would absolutely overturn the proper order of the world. Taken as an Oriental would take them—as exaggerated expressions of things, which at their heart are virtues, for all oriental speech is to the prosaic Westerner immensely exaggerated—those precepts point to ways that are possible, but in which men are unwilling to go. But taken as Tolstoi and the non-resistants take them, in their letter, it may be confidently asserted that Christ did not follow his own precepts.

If the Gospels are in the least degree reliable, it is absolutely certain that Jesus was not a conscious exaggerator. He tells us distinctly that his words were to be done by all, and that the doing of them was an incarnation of highest wisdom. He pronounced the doer of them a wise man who built his house upon the

rock, and the non-doer of them a foolish man, whose house, founded upon the sand, could not withstand the storms of life. To him there was no distinction between the letter and the spirit of his sayings, which he treated, not as counsels of perfection, but as rules for daily conduct. Nothing in the world is easier than to wax hilariously merry over the case of Count Tolstoi; but few seem to realize how much he gave up in the attempt to walk in Jesus' steps. It is perfectly true that when the commandments of Jesus are presented just as they are, men express their revolt, saying, "Oh, this is visionary; this is no religion for us;" but the clergy endeavour to make the Gospel acceptable to outsiders by averring that Jesus did not mean what he said, but that, like any Orientalist, he deliberately exaggerated, with the result that most of his sayings stand in need of interpretation. Dr. D. W. Forrest, of Edinburgh, published a volume of more than four hundred pages, entitled *The Authority of Christ*, in which he interprets the Sermon on the Mount in the hope of making its teaching authoritative for the twentieth century. Christians boast that they see God in the face of Jesus Christ, but they might with even greater truth confess that they see Christ in the face of this or that divine; while, as a matter of fact, they see neither God nor Christ save as imaginary portraits painted by artists of different schools.

Like all his brethren, Mr. Horder pretends to be on exceedingly intimate terms with God, but he judges the Divine Being by himself. He also agrees with Mr. H. G. Wells, "who would have a God who would not suffer crucifixion, but would resist it; who would have a God presented as strong with immortal youth." He even admits that many of the precepts of Christ do lean in the direction of what may be called the softer virtues. Of course, he understands why Jesus did not name and expatiate on the sterner and more manly virtues, and he has considerable sympathy with the people who, in consequence, characterize Christianity as "a soft, unmanly religion." He goes the length of avowing that "a good deal of preaching about love in God is so one-sided and unbalanced that it makes the Christian Faith well nigh impossible for strong and vigorous natures." Then he adds:—

The love of God is represented as like the love of many foolish parents, whose love leads to the spoiling of their children, and renders such children almost unbearable in their behaviour—parents who "love not wisely but too well," to use a common phrase. But the wiser teachers of Christianity have already had a truer and fuller vision of love in God. They saw clearly enough that love of the highest type, as it must be in God, sometimes leads to discipline, to chastisement, to sternness; that it does not always express itself in softness or yielding, but often by sternness and unyieldingness.

All that is true enough as applied to human love, Undoubtedly the two types of affection do exist and manifest themselves in human life; but Mr. Horder oversteps the limits of his knowledge when he describes God as loving in either sense. What he does is to paint God in his own image, and after his own likeness. Being of a strong, manly character himself, he takes it for granted that the same is true of the Heavenly Father. No doubt love is sometimes at its highest and best when the rod is in its hand. The preacher's object in thus dwelling on the character of God is to convince his hearers that Christ is God manifested in the flesh, and that we are to interpret his teaching in the light of his character. And yet we are assured that "a pedantic following of the steps of Christ is as foolish as a pedantic obedience of his words." At this point we are

confronted with the preacher's Christian bias. He says:—

Now I suppose it may be said that the life is more unique than the precepts of Christ. Probably, from the other sacred books of the world you could make a collection of precepts falling not very short of those in the Gospels. But the figure of Christ, the life of Christ that cannot be paralleled—that is the unique part of Christianity. There is the light for our way.

Of course, such a passage could only fall from the pen of a believer in the impeccability of the Gospel Jesus, a belief which has no other support than two bare assertions, the one by Paul that "he knew no sin," and the other by Peter that he "did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." From those two assertions the Church elaborated the dogma of the absolute sinlessness of Christ. And yet even the Gospels do not portray a perfect, spotless character. Jesus' treatment of his mother, on several occasions, was anything but faultless, and much of his teaching was immoral and anti-social. To his disciples he promised peace, and yet he declared that it was not peace, but a sword that he brought to the world. He disapproved of family affection by claiming for himself the supreme place in every heart. He came before parents, wife, and children; and without the surrender of all for his sake discipleship was impossible. Furthermore, the Gospel Jesus is a wholly impossible character. We know to a certainty that no such person ever lived at all, or ever can live. His very existence would have been a setting aside of the inexorable laws of Nature.

Mr. Horder must be aware that neither as teacher nor as Saviour has Christ been a success. Theoretically his teaching is eulogized as the truest and noblest in the world, while, practically, it is universally ignored. Theoretically his praises as Saviour of the world are enthusiastically sung throughout Christendom; but, practically, even Christendom still wallows in its sins. In this unspeakably horrible War millions of men have already been killed in his name, and for the establishment of his kingdom. Mr. Horder admits that words uttered by him can be found both for and against participation in war; and, as king of men, he was powerless to prevent the frightful conflict, and is equally incapable of ending it.

J. T. LLOYD.

## Death, and After.

*The Question: If a Man Die Shall He Live Again?* By Edward Clodd. Grant Richards.

THOMAS CARLYLE'S unaffected tribute to brave Walter Savage Landor, "the unsubduable old Roman," comes to mind on seeing Mr. Edward Clodd's critical examination of Spiritualism, *The Question: If a Man Die Shall He Live Again?* (Grant Richards). At a time of life when most men think only of slippered ease, Mr. Clodd is busy with his pen on behalf of the cause he has so much at heart, and to which he has rendered such unselfish devotion for so many years. The old energy of style, the tremendous vitality and interest in men and things, remain unimpaired, and the veteran watches events as keenly as ever, and comments on them with his customary robustness and independence of mind. A man who has seen so much of the world as he, and who has been mixed up for so many years with the developments of thought, religion, and literature, and has met the leaders in these fields and in the society of his time, has enjoyed unusual scope for observation. Already he has dispensed from his treasures with a royal hand, but he has plenty in reserve, as is proved by the contents of his latest book.

Sir Oliver Lodge's *Raymond* has given a new impetus to Spiritualism, of which the astute dabblers in the occult have taken full advantage. Indeed, the name of Sir Oliver has been exploited as a triumphant proof of the existence of spiritual phenomena. Hence Mr. Clodd's brilliant examination is both timely and necessary.

With the exception of the Christian religion, there is, probably, no other cult whose history is so steeped in fraud as that of modern Spiritualism. The fraud is "gross as a mountain, open, palpable." Even Spiritualists have to admit it, and are driven to argue that the detection of fraudulent mediums is no proof that all manifestations are unsatisfactory. Mr. Clodd's inquiry is very exhaustive. He must have read many books and pamphlets, and he has overlooked nothing of serious importance. He examines in detail the cases of detection ranging from the time of the Davenport Brothers, the Fox Sisters, down to the day of Madame Blavatsky, Eusapia Palladino, and others. The methods of the famous Mrs. Piper are analysed, and Sir Oliver Lodge is also subjected to the ordeal of criticism. As the result of his examination, Mr. Clodd considers that spirit survival has not been established. It is not his fault that, though the book is primarily concerned with the question of man's immortality, it is full of talk of telepathy; it is about the soul of man, and full of chatter of clairvoyance; it is of matters religious, and discusses automatic handwriting. In the last analysis, the Spiritualists base their case for the soul's immortality on these things, and Mr. Clodd but follows their lead.

In this volume, Spiritualism appears in its best clothes, and is seen at its bravest. Yet Mr. Clodd's verdict is "not proven." As explained by this relentless critic, the new Spiritualism is very like the old. Behind all the verbiage of telepathy, clairvoyance, automatic handwriting, precognition, and the like, there is always the furtive figure of "Sludge, the Medium." This is clearly seen by Mr. Clodd, and it says much for his restraint that he writes calmly throughout. His book is the deadliest criticism of Spiritualism that we have seen. He shows that the "spooks" have contributed nothing to human knowledge. This is the purport of his volume, and it is written with knowledge and balanced judgment.

Spiritualists are not the only folk who profess to have dealings with the "supernatural." The clergy are as much interested in "spooks" as the mediums. They babble of "gods," who get angry with us; of "devils," who must be guarded against; of "angels," who fly from heaven to earth. The Bible is a spook-book, and belief in spirits is an integral part of the Christian religion. Nearly fifty thousand clerical gentlemen are engaged in this spook business, to say nothing of their lay assistants. The "spooks" of the clergy are no more real than the "bogeys" of the Spiritualists. The clergy, however, are wiser than the mediums. They know that if a showman never lifts the curtain, it does not matter whether he has anything or nothing on the other side.

In spite of the clergy and the mediums, the riddle remains unanswered, the sphinx is still silent. Couched in plausible and semi-scientific language, presented with all the resources of men who have devoted their lives to the subject, this plea for survival is, in the last resort, but an appeal to emotionalism. The poet Heine hit the right nail on the head where he suggested, smilingly, that the idea of immortality may have suggested itself to a lover in the arms of his mistress, or to some worthy burgher sipping his beer on a summer's evening. It is, in the last analysis, but a desire for personal continuance, to be for ever as we are. In spite of man's importunity, "the rest is silence."

The new Spiritualism gives no better answer than the older creeds, and the later messages from the "other

side" are as unconvincing as the earlier. The poor Indian dreams of his happy hunting grounds; the Mohammedan pictures his Paradise peopled with houris; the prosaic Christian looks for the jewelled streets of the New Jerusalem; and Sir Oliver Lodge believes that "spirits" smoke cigars made of essences, ethers and gases. The world is no nearer a solution than in the far-off days of old Lucretius, or in the still earlier time when primitive man cowered in his dug-out in mortal fear of the lightning. The oracles are contradictory with regard to a next world.

All we know for certain is that man is mortal, but nature is immortal. The world grows old, and we grow old with it; but nature is ever fair and young. The white flowers of the spring return year by year; lads and maidens are ever wandering at eventide. The love of husband and wife is ever consecrated by the coming into the world of the beautiful new life springing from their own. Though our personality be blotted out by "the poppied sleep," our influence goes to swell the volume of humanity.

After all, death is not so much our concern as life. The men of to day have shown the greatest courage and the highest disdain of death ever shown. It is our present fate, smoky with clouds that hide splendour or doom, to be living at the very apex of the world's history, and in the zenith of man's challenge of fate. The secular solution is the best. All sprang from Nature, and have their day, and all return for sleep. Fear should have no place: "Into the breast that gives the rose, shall we with shuddering fall?"

MIMNERMUS.

### Distressed Dualists.

THE walls of Modern Athens had scarce ceased to echo the flourish of trumpets which greeted the announcement of "General" Booth that he had decided to make Scotland a unit of the Salvation Army's life—an announcement, by the way, received in silence by Edinburgh's men of God—when a body of men calling themselves "The United Free Church Office-Bearers' Association" took sweet counsel together, and decided upon a conference on the subject of "Spiritual Quickening," which conference was duly held upon the 22nd day of December, in the year of grace (or disgrace) 1917.

This gathering was presided over by Sir David Paulin, a genial insurance manager; but, unlike "General" Booth's meeting, the clergy—and big guns at that—were in the very forefront of the proceedings. The principal speakers were Dr. W. M. MacGregor, a leading divine of the U.F. Church, and Dr. Wallace Williamson, ex-Moderator of the Established Church of Scotland. The newspaper report of the meeting is, to the extent of five-sixths of its space, taken up with the speeches of these reverend doctors, who trounced the Scottish laity for making Christianity merely an extraneous thing—a "trimming" to their lives. Dr. Wallace Williamson said: "The war was profoundly a spiritual war, and would be won only if the nation could stand firm to the eternal principles of Jesus Christ." Both divines insisted upon a "real rededication of the national life"—surely a tongue-twisting resolution for a Scotsman to take on New Year's Eve! A hint was given that a special effort was to be made with the objective of "spiritual quickening" in February, 1918. No precise information about this effort was furnished, but it was agreed to hold another conference, at which a more particularized plan of campaign may be forthcoming. Dr. Wallace Williamson desiderated "a God-fearing Scotland which would show its fear of God in being a clean, honest, sober Scotland." And Dr. MacGregor

flatly declared that "they were not going to put their trust in what people call a 'social gospel.'"

All which would appear to indicate that there is substantial agreement between the spokesmen of the U.F. Church Office-Bearers' Association and the platform supporters of "General" Booth. The names of the latter were not so much as mentioned at the conference. Notwithstanding, here we have further gloomy testimony to the decadent state of "Puir Auld Scotland." How many conferences will be needed before she is spiritually convalescent? Her self-appointed spiritual guardians are wonders at conferring and at the preparation of elaborate reports. The late Dr. Parker, once invited to attend a Free Kirk General Assembly, after listening to the reports of a large number of committees, got upon his feet, and electrified the "House" by exclaiming, "Mr. Moderator, I should now like to hear the report of the Devil."

There is a certain type of medical man who encourages the crotchets of his hypochondriacal patients. Similarly, there are clerics who profess to admire the church member who is ever bewailing his moral degeneracy, and his lost and undone condition. In each case this habit of mind is either the outcome of disease or hypochondriacal affectation. But there are other Scotsmen, like David Deans, in the *Heart of Midlothian*, whose pessimistic lamentations are not merely individual and subjective, but also national and objective. To such minds, of course, a "Social Gospel" is necessarily abhorrent as a means of salvation.

Such minds to dispassionate philosophers are bewildering contradictions. You will please understand that the Scottish Church member, who is for ever denouncing himself as the vilest sinner, is, in reality, the holiest saint. So we may not be without justification in thinking that, by a parity of reasoning, Scotland is, after all, not so black as she is painted by such Scotsmen. With such men social and secular improvement is always suspect. No such improvement can be for the benefit of the people unless it receives the approval and benediction and *imprimatur* of the Church. At present we are all much concerned about the provisions of a new Scottish Education Bill which has just been introduced. Many of us look upon it as an epoch-marking event, and of the most vital interest to the community. But it does not appear to have occupied two minutes time of the conference on "Spiritual Quickening." The great panacea for Scottish ills in the estimation of our pastors and masters is not knowledge but belief.

Introspective morbidity is certainly harmful; but when to that is added the objectionable nose-poking habit of looking for the faults and vices of other people, the subject is on the high road to mental disintegration. Sane and balanced judgment is impossible to vigilance society experts. They are out to find mankind bad, and are never pleased when they are disappointed.

The Chairman, in opening the conference, to which we have adverted, made a notable, and to Freethinkers a welcome, admission. He said there had been "a regrettable increase of Materialism." And it is this remark which has induced the adoption of the title of this article. This U. F. Conference platform sends out its S.O.S. signals because of that terrible thing Materialism. Ah, these deluded spiritualistic dualists! They seek to split the universe into two distinct sections—the material and spiritual, secular and sacred, human and divine. What does this inevitably tend to? Surely to duality, division, disunion, dissension. The Monist is he who believes in harmony, union, co-operation. His duty is to strike off the fetters from the minds of men. Change men's minds and you change everything. IGNOTUS.

## Illusion.

It is not often a modern article does not contain the word "illusion" or "delusion," or both. Compare the following, culled at random from recent issues:—

(1) In all great upheavals and calamities in the world's history there has been a growth of delusions.....if anyone imagines he has heard the last of the Welsh Church spectre, he is likely on the return of peace to be disillusioned.

(2) Neither the clergy's enormous wealth, nor their arrogance, nor prestige.....can avail to give them even the illusion of progress.

(3) Men in crowds are swayed by a collective logic which has its roots in mysticism and illusion.

(4) War is one of the many illusions and delusions which have come down to us from the ignorance and stupidity of the past.

(5) The illusions of the childhood of humanity were harmless in comparison with the aberrations of later periods.

Here we have the illusion of progress, of collective logic, and of childhood; war is both an illusion and a delusion; while upheavals give rise to delusions, one of which is apparently the illusion of having laid the Welsh Church spectre.

Turning to Whately, we learn that "illusion is an unreal image presented to the bodily or mental vision, as fancy, hope, appearances," while "delusion is a false show which cheats the fancy or senses; an erroneous view, for instance, of politics or religion." From which we gather they are two aspects of the same thing; delusions are illusions to us, or else we should not hold them, and illusions are in reality nothing but delusions. In other words, our errors as to appearances or phenomena, politics and religion, are subjectively illusions, and objectively, as others see them, delusions. Thus, an author's pleasing illusion as to the value of his work may be viewed by the editor as a pure delusion; the bloom on a maiden's cheek is illusion when not the work of health, and delusion when not the work of Nature; the South Sea shares were an illusion when they were being bought, and a delusion when they and their owners were sold. It is high time we called our harmless or pleasing illusions and childish ignorances by their proper names—dangerous delusions. Like More, we may lose our heads over our Utopias.

To take Whately's three suggested topics—first, the world of appearances. We are at the outset pulled up sharp by the idealist, who tells us that all phenomena are illusions. If he is right, these remarks need go no further; life, thought, and everything else becomes meaningless for us. But at the risk of being called "vulgar realists" and "no philosophers," we must submit that the delusion is here on the other side. Everything is a delusion to somebody; to the scientist supernaturalism is discredited, to the theologian science is bankrupt, to the supernaturalist Materialism is vicious, to the man in the street philosophy is taboo; and if it comes to the question which suffers from the fewest illusions, we may fairly claim that, from his very constitution, it is the Secularist. If it should be proved, after all, that life is an illusion, we may still fall back on Metchnikoff's argument that death (so-called) is a delusion, and wish our opponents joy of their theory when arterial sclerosis, caused by that same illusory life, in the form of phagocytes, carries them off.

Illusion is common to the unregulated imagination and emotions of childhood, such as love and hope. Shaw is unfortunately right in saying that it is the main-spring of all human action, but, happily wrong in adding that there can no more be illusion without a reality than

a shadow without an object. It is the absence of reality that causes the pain of disillusionment which is inevitable sooner or later, as in the case of the boy with the memory, who used to think the slender tops of the fir-trees were close against the sky, and on growing up "found it little joy to know that heaven was further off than when he was a boy."

But it is religion and war, especially in company, which are the great illusion-makers. The great illusions about war have been sufficiently pointed out of late, *e.g.*, that armaments can be amassed, and a whole nation learn the arts of war without using them; that conquests of territory and indemnities are intrinsic gain; that war creates as much good as it destroys; that war can ever end war, etc. Whether its abolition by an international ethics bureau is also an illusion awaits the test of time, but there can be no question as to the widespread disillusionment which the last three years have brought about.

To give an instance from the Bible. Abraham was promised by God that he should possess the land of Canaan, yet died without owning more of it than his wife's grave, for which, after the usual Jewish offer gratis, he paid the full price. This may be taken as a specimen of the promises of "Revelation." Or take the illusions of three typical recent "conversions," Mr. R. J. Campbell, after doing a large trade for several years in a humanized religion which denied any real reality to sin, a divine Jesus, atonement, and miracles, and obtaining thousands of adherents to a League of Progressive Thought, has now found that a rationalized religion is impossible, and declared his conversion to traditional Christianity. This return to the illusions of despair we can understand, but the second conversion, that of Mr. Wells to Godism, is not so innocent. "God, the Invisible King," is well described by Mr. A. S. Tom's as literary tosh, destitute of the least moral or spiritual meaning. Mr. Archer's full examination of this hocus-pocus of hallucinations is one of the brightest pieces of writing of the year.

And now we have Sir A. Conan Doyle's conversion to Spiritism. "A new revelation," he says, "is in process of delivery, with a body of fresh doctrine already accumulated from automatic writing, direct voices, and other sources." "The world beyond is a definite reality, attested by an irrefutable body of evidence, etc. Let those who must play tricks with themselves, for the uninitiated the age-long delusions of superstition merely inspire a life-long protest.

That a Moloch worship of this kind should be the story of our race, and command the adoration of millions for its fictions of blood; that the martyrdom of man over every square inch of the earth's surface should have had a mere nightmare for its sufficient explanation and countenance; that papacies and inquisitions should have been able for so long to clothe themselves with the glamour of this *ignis fatuus*; that tyrannies should have found a sanction for every vice and crime in the mere invocation of the "divine" name, and the appeal to its malignancy and terror; that under other names and forms its desolating delusions should still germinate; and that any kind of charlatanry and spirit-jobbery should be able to find a respectable name under which to harbour, is indeed appalling.

Countless explosives have been hurled in our day by illusion-freethinkers against these entrenched deceptions, till the empty husk of miraculous revelations, provident gods, bodiless spirit theories and the rest, line the shores of the dead seas of thought; but while we continue to palter with admissions that beliefs may be false and yet do no harm, and that to attack creeds may be productive of moral injury; in fine, as long as the

*exitialis superstitio* of Christianity finds its Constantines, so long will illusion masquerade as saving truth.

But the conjuring tricks of the clergy, those princes of illusion are less and less holding the imagination of their followers. There is every hope to-day of undrugged humanity coming to its own. It is the inherent pessimism of religion, in teaching, for instance, that happiness and justice are not attainable in this life, that is the worst of delusions. Even Mr. Balfour admits that it is a strong point of naturalism that it has no sympathy with those metaphysical systems which regard all life as illusion, and all desires as wretchedness.

VESCOR.

## Is There a Hell?

THERE was momentous news in the issue of the *Daily Chronicle* of December 22, 1917. Therein we are told that Lord Hugh Cecil says that hell does exist, but hell-fire, as Lord Hugh understands it, would not hurt a fly; it simply means "a state of non-existence for the obstinate and wilfully wicked." What a change by the sea of thought! The mental nostrils of Lord Hugh abhor the smell of theological sulphur; but although the smoke of everlasting fiery torment has been smothered, the hobs of hell are still pointed to with pride. "Belief in hell," concluded Lord Hugh, "brings before us God once more as the Father of all mercies, not in spite of but because, he is the architect of hell." What a thing is Christian imagination! It is like a monk of the Inquisition showing a visitor the torture-chamber and, while regretting its disuse, dwelling lovingly on its devilish ingenuity. And who but a Christian could call the architect of hell the Father of all mercies? Why, no man could commit a crime deserving as punishment that of eternal torment, and this new-fangled explanation of hell-fire as a state of non-existence is a recognition of the fact.

"The view of eternal destruction must be admitted to be the most natural and the most complete solution of the problem of evil." Thus Lord Hugh. Now, what is the problem of evil? According to the fantastic Christian scheme of things, evil is the outcome of the sin of Adam and Eve in partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. In other words, to be more profoundly ignorant than the priest makes the worshipper the more easily imposed upon by the hocus-pocus of theology. So, in order to save Christians from hell-fire—that is, the evil which is the result of the sinful fruit-eating of their first parents, a human sacrifice to God had to be made, which was effected in the crucifying of Jesus Christ. As a consequence, the Devil, God's hangman, was thrown out of employment by God's son. But the Devil was still given a chance to ply his trade, but was always liable to bankruptcy if his victims called upon the name of their Redeemer. The Christian scheme of things is puerile, still has in it the reek of the animistic, primitive savage, evinces the handiwork of anthropomorphic guessers, and only maintains its position by reason of its highly ornamented covering of modern apologetics.

That there is evil in the world goes without question, and men generally think of evil as that which is harmful or fatal to their welfare—that is, they figure evil variously as lack of food or shelter, storm and flood, pestilence, attacks by wild animals, failure of harvest, etc., and have personified evil under numerous names. Set was the name of the Evil One to the ancient Egyptians; the Assyrians knew him as Tiamtu; to the ancient Persians he was Ahriman; the Jews knew him as Azazel; to the Buddhists he is Mara, and the old

Scandinavians and Teutons knew him under the name of Loki. To Christians he is Satan, the Devil, Old Nick, Old Harry, the Foul Fiend, Lucifer, the Prince of Hell, and the patron saint of lawyers.

Having imagined the Devil, the Christians had perforce to imagine an abode for him, and the conception of hell was the result. This does not mean that the Christians were original in their ideas of devil and hell; they simply elaborated on previous notions of the like; in short, they put a more frightful face on the bogey, and said that their hell was bigger and hotter than any hell that ever was. Notwithstanding the assertions of the Christians, the notion of hell did not at first imply that it was a sort of superlative kitchen fitted with multiple roasting-jacks. Primarily, hell simply meant the abode of the dead. In it the members of the great majority spent their time for ever doing nothing. It was the place of eternal rest; its inhabitants had been in the rack and turmoil of earthly life, and had dropped out of it into nirvana. Those who thought of the dead thus were kindly, but along came the prototypes of the Christians and flung terror into the place of the dead, and the Christians have easily outdone their tutors in the art of theological frightfulness.

Thus does Omar Khayyam address the "Father of all mercies, who is the architect of hell":—

What! out of senseless Nothing to provoke  
A conscious Something to resent the yoke  
Of unpermitted Pleasure, under pain  
Of Everlasting Penalties, if broke!

What! from his helpless Creature be repaid  
Pure Gold for what he lent him dross-allay'd  
Sue for a Debt he never did contract,  
And cannot answer—Oh the sorry trade!

Old Omar Khayyam thus answers the question, Is there a hell?

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,  
Some letter of that After-life to spell:  
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,  
And answer'd "I Myself am Heav'n and Hell.

JAMES H. WATERS.

## Acid Drops.

This from the leader-writer of the *Times Literary Supplement*:—

The Kaiser's God is one who approves of German conduct. It is impossible for us to believe in a God who does that; but, if our hope fails us, we may believe in a Godless universe to which the Germans are better adapted than any other people; and we may see in all their successes and our own failures and blunders a proof that they are better adapted. That is the state of mind that they wish to produce in us .... and we can defend ourselves against it not by cultivating particular hopes as a help to victory, but only by means of a universal hope opposed to their universal despair. With that hope we shall believe still, in spite of particular disappointments, that the nature of things is with us, not against us; that it is our enemies, not ourselves, who are living and acting against the grain of the universe.

If there is a God, and if he has a sense of humour—Sir Oliver Lodge believes he has—this is the sort of thing that will afford him cause for laughter. It is impossible for us to believe in a God who favours Germany. Granted; but then it will be equally impossible for Germany to believe in a God who favours us. And the logic of the situation on both sides is that both are warning God that if he wishes for the support of Germany or the Allies, he must make up his mind which he will help. He must make up his mind to lose one, and if he persists in a neutral attitude he looks like losing both.

The suggestion that, if brutality pays, it must be a "Godless universe" is in the true style of Christian advocacy. The thesis is: "If you don't believe in God, you must believe

in brutality; and if brutality pays, the universe must be Godless." This is the gutter method of Christianity in high places. And it conveniently ignores the fact that the greatest of all brutalities has been because of the belief in God. After all, the brutalities of Germany do not exceed those which the Biblical Jews perpetrated by the direct command of God, and the Germans will have to work very hard indeed to exceed the barbarities committed by one section or another of the Christian Churches.

The truth is, of course, that brutality does not pay; not because there is a God, but because the nature of human and social evolution is such that the dice are loaded against it. It is not the "grain of the universe" that is in question—that is a wholly stupid expression—but the structure of human society. And in a social structure, the parts of which are more or less interdependent, all conduct which excites an emotional and intellectual reaction is bound to yield to conduct that excites feelings of approbation. There is nothing occult or supernatural in this; it is a question of social efficiency. It is no more than the social parallel that the biologic law of an organism in which the laws are not well adjusted to serve the interests of the whole is doomed to disappear. The pity is that such a pretentious piece of ignorance as the example cited should find a leading place in one of our leading papers.

The farcical character of the apostolic succession of bishops is emphasized by a bold advertisement in the daily press, issued by the English Church Union. The notice asks those who wish to protest against Dr. Henson's appointment to the bishopric of Hereford to write to the Prime Minister. It looks as if Mr. Lloyd George, who is a Welsh Baptist, has a voice in nominating the successors of the apostles.

Mr. Edward Clodd, in his searching examination of Spiritualism, the *Question*, has some excellent stories. One of the best is that of the Christian Scientist lady who called to see a sick friend. To the servant who answered the door she said: "Your mistress is not ill; she only thinks she is." She called again, and, in reply to her question, the servant said: "My mistress thinks she is dead."

Men of God nowadays will discuss anything on earth except the one thing that matters, as far as they are concerned, namely their religion. Christian ministers will discuss Socialism, the War, or anything else that happens to draw audiences. They make their services attractive by including such things as organ recitals, orchestras, and solo singing. But if they are asked to discuss Christianity, they answer: "No, thanks; we're not having any."

Quite a number of churches in London refrained from holding "Watch Night" services on December 31. Perhaps it was for fear of air raids, for prayers are a poor protection against bombs. Perhaps it was because they wished to reserve the full force of the prayers for the National Day of Prayer, and it would have been unwise to bombard the Lord thrice in one week. Any way the services were dispensed with. And no one was any the worse. Perhaps the example will be followed on other occasions during the year.

We are glad to see the President of the Transvaal Teacher's Association, as reported in the *Rand Daily Mail*, speaking out plainly against an attempt to further clericalize the schools. He says:—

For ages the teacher has been looked upon as the factotum of the parson. His has been the duty of running the Sunday schools, of training the choir, of playing the organ, and generally of being at the beck and call of the parson. The recent incident on the East Rand, where an attempt was made to coerce Government teachers to do these very things, shows that this idea of the position of the teacher still holds the field in many quarters.

Whatever may have been the case in the past it is no longer the case that the teacher is in any way inferior to the parson. On the contrary, he is frequently superior in education and outlook; he is engaged in a nobler and more useful work;

and he is not inferior in morals, industry, and the conscientious discharge of his duty.

We have before noted the different signs of a Freethought advance in South Africa. We do not think we shall be wrong in taking this as another symptom.

In his prayer at the City Temple on Christmas morning, 1917, Dr. Fort Newton said the following: "Surely Thy goodness and mercy have followed us all the way, even running ahead of our need, anticipating our prayer, and making our loftiest dreams come true before we dream them." What an utterance in this time of war-bread, long and often vain waiting to get a few ounces of margarine, shortage of meat, and the fiendish sacrifice of millions of young men on the altar of the God of Battles.

The London *Evening News* of January 1 states that "house-to-house invitations to the watch-night service were sent out by a South London church." What a change from the time when attendance at church was compulsory and abstention meant a fine!

The same paper states "the Nonconformist bodies of Waltham Abbey have agreed to unite in a joint service with the Anglicans in the Abbey Church on the National Day of Prayer." This does not mean that Anglicanism has capitulated to Nonconformity, or that Nonconformity has surrendered to Anglicanism. It means simply that their customary acerb relations have been sweetened enough to allow of their joining for one hour in the hocus-pocus of prayer.

The same newspaper reports of Dr. Taylor Smith (Chaplain-General to the Forces) that, when asked at a united thanksgiving and intercession at Queen's Hall, What won Jerusalem for us last month? replied: "The same thing that won Jericho in days of old. Not by men, not by munitions, not by money. It was the Household of God who prayed and who hoped that before Christmas Jerusalem might be ours. The prayerful Commander marched in, led by the Lord of Hosts." Munition makers and workers will go into a blue funk when they hear of this. Incidentally, it shows that the modern priest is still the ancient witch-doctor but thinly disguised.

"There is no peace outside heaven," declares a Sunday paper. Unhappily, heaven is not in the atlases.

So we are being warned that the decisive factor in winning the War will be food. And that is what the glory and greatness of war comes to in the face of hard facts. Can the Germans and Austrians starve the women and children of the Allies until they bring the men-folk to peace? Can the Allies starve the women and children belonging to the enemy until he sues for peace? So much for the chivalry and greatness of modern war! A competition as to which can starve the other soonest! If hard facts like these don't disgust the world with militarism, and show it for the mean, brutal thing it is, nothing will.

This is not alone what modern war has come to; it is what war between Christian nations has come to. Divided only by a narrow sheet of water, German Christians can read with gratification of the probable starvation of forty or fifty million people in Great Britain. And here British Christians can read, with a sense of something good accomplished, of millions of Germans suffering death and disease from a shortage of food. And each knows quite well that in this game of starving out it is the weakest that will suffer first. So long as there is food, the wants of the fighting men will be supplied. It is the children, the delicate, that will have to suffer before others. And only when their suffering has reached the point that strong men can endure the sight of it no longer, will the game cease—to be followed by thanksgiving services to God for having granted the winning side so glorious a victory. So much for all these centuries of the Christian religion.

January 6, 1918, was, by Royal appointment, a Day of Prayer to God by the British people. In this connection the

following list, published earlier in the War by the *Philadelphia North American*, containing descriptions of the Deity by several of the belligerents, is not without interest:—

God of our Fatherland.—NICHOLAS.  
 God of our Dear Fatherland.—WILHELM.  
 God of all French.—POINCARÉ.  
 God our Defence and Bulwark.—FRANZ JOSEF.  
 God of our race.—GEORGE.  
 God our Right Arm.—ALBERT.  
 We can take care of ourselves.—SERBIA.

On Prayer Sunday—we suppose we may call it—the Edinburgh Food Control officials had the courage to work, with voluntary assistance. When the intention to do this was announced, however, the Rev. G. W. Taylor, of Leith, condemned the proposal in respect that the day had been set apart as a National Day of Prayer. A compromise was arranged. The Food Control people had an interval in their work, when a service was conducted by Bishop Walpole. But why not the Rev. G. W. Taylor?

We have the following story from an "Official" source. There are between 500 and 600 officers at Eastbourne Command Depot. As it was the Day of Prayer last Sunday, and the Mayor was holding a special service, he asked that seventy-five officers should attend. Only twenty-three volunteered out of 600. Then the authorities ordered a Church parade and detailed enough to make up the required seventy-five. We venture to say that a deal of what these conscripted worshippers did say during the service was *not* in the prepared prayers. But what God must think of the Eastbourne Command must be very distressing. It would serve these officers right if the Bishop of London was brought down to preach to them.

Among other by-products of the War, according to the Bishop of Durham, is the turning of Sunday into a day of unrest. In a New Year message to the Lord's Day Observance Society, he says: "Munition work and alleged necessities of military drill have contributed to the break-up of Sunday. Yet let us not lose heart. I, for one, am sure that a strong tradition of reverence for the Sabbath still lives in the common English heart, and is open to appeals." Doubtless the bishop does not despair of the full attainment of the English Sunday with all shops closed, happily Nonconformist chapels as well, and everybody compelled to attend church, in spite of the Protestant doctrine that God endowed man with free-will.

Mr. Horatio Bottomley, writing on New Year resolutions, says that the "greatest of all" religions is "that which finds its expression in the service of man." This is a long way from the popular Christian ideal of saving men from "the immortal fry, of almost everybody born to die."

What is coming to the *Daily News*? In its issue for January 4 it published the following four quotations:—

The act is in God's hand, as is our whole struggle. He will decide on it and we will leave it to Him. We must not argue with His ordering.

We owe it to those who have given their lives in the holy cause to endure to the end and to abstain from grumbling, pessimism, and carping criticism, taking as our watchword "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

Because the cause in which we are fighting is the cause of right, we may fearlessly ask God to pardon our faults and to bless our efforts.

We stand firm, faithful to our task and to the fulfilment of our duty. There is no doubt on which side lies the right. Therefore this conflict has become a holy conflict.

Two of these are from the Kaiser's speeches, and two from Captain Guest's hints to clergymen, for use in their sermons on January 6. The *Daily News* invites its readers to try and pick out the Kaiser's words from Captain Guest's. We think they will be puzzled to discriminate. When it comes to pietistic humbug, the Kaiser and our own religious "Prussians" run neck and neck. But what made the *Daily News* publish them? Has its religion also been shaken up by the "Holy War"?



## C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

January 13, London; January 20, Southampton; January 27, Swansea; February 3, Birmingham; February 17, Leicester.

## To Correspondents.

- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 20, London; January 27, South Shields; February 3, Failsforth; February 10, Swansea; February 24, Manchester; March 17, Abertillery; March 24, Leicester.
- "FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND, 1917.—G. Wallace, 9s.; P. Lamb, 8s. 9d.; Pte. G. H. Harrison, 2s. Per H. Courlander—T. A. Batten, £1 1s.; A. Phillips, £1 1s.; H. Courlander, £1 1s. Per F. Rose, Bloemfontein—Nicolaison, 10s.; F. G., 10s.; A. C., 5s.; S. C., 5s.; N. G., 10s. 6d.; E. W., £1 1s.; B. E., £1 1s.; H. M., £1 1s.; I. B. C., 10s. 6d.; B. Gluck, 10s. 6d.; Mr. and Mrs. F. Rose, £1 1s.
- MAJOR WARREN.—MSS. received, with thanks. We have had it on our mind for some time to write on Hammond's book, which is really an important piece of work. We may fulfil our intention very shortly.
- (MRS.) E. TAYLOR.—We were both pleased and interested in your letter, and regret not having the pleasure of meeting you on Sunday at Manchester. Your stand for your opinions does you credit, although it has doubtless brought a great deal of satisfaction—in spite of the annoyance to which you may have been subjected. Nor is it surprising that you have gradually won the goodwill of your neighbours. In such cases character usually tells.
- C. F. J.—Received. Shall appear as early as possible.
- DIE PROFUNDIS.—We do not mind sending any of our own publications for use in the hospital in which you are placed.
- S. L.—The hypothesis of evolution is itself subject to growth, and during the last twenty years there have been very considerable advances made, which involve some modification in its statement. But the principle of evolution is in nowise affected thereby. That remains a datum for all useful scientific work and thought.
- W. ROWE.—Received. The matter is quite all right.
- E. B.—You are quite correct. We have written the party concerned.
- F. ROSE (Bloemfontein).—Draft received, and apportioned according to instructions. When you say that your opinion of our conduct of the *Freethinker* is shown by getting as many new subscribers as possible, you are returning thanks in the form we most desire. The new subscribers are having their papers sent them.
- T. C.—The drawing together of the Churches is, as you suggest, an indication of their weakness, since only the feeling that they are getting too weak to stand alone, would lead to such a move. On the other hand, it contains a threat to all reformers, since their united strength is still enough to threaten real freedom and progress. Our best reply is to go on making more Freethinkers.
- G. WALLACE.—It is cheering to have the opinion of a twenty-five year's reader of the *Freethinker* that there is "no paper or magazine published at present of so much importance." It will not be our fault if a much larger public than it addresses at present does not arrive at the same conclusion.
- DR. B. DUNLOP.—Subscription received with thanks. The expression you note is rather cryptic, perhaps we had better not venture an explanation.
- D. H.—Pleased you found our notes on religion in history so helpful. We have had in contemplation a small volume on that topic, and may do it one day.
- C. MEADOWS.—You say that no one could ever convince you of the reasonableness of Atheism. After reading your letter we agree that the task would be an impossible one.
- J. REES.—We do not know of any book on the same lines as the Bible Handbook dealing with other religions. Will send specimen copies of *Freethinker* to address given.
- W. FITZPATRICK.—We intend raising the whole question in the *Freethinker* before long. Thanks for notes.
- W. BAILEY.—Papers are being sent. Sorry a cold prevented you being at Manchester. Hope the indisposition will soon pass.
- N. STRIEMER.—Next week.
- H. IRVING.—See reply to E. B.
- MRS. J. M. HINDLEY.—Looks like a patent medicine advertisement. But prayers are very often funny things. Glad to find you appreciate "Views and Opinions" so much.
- N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: J. Pendlebury, £2 10s.

G. R. HARKER.—Thanks for quotation. You do not say what use we are to make of the enclosure.

H. LIBRENTEN.—A good and useful letter. Will use later.

F. W. A.—Will hand on the information.

J. BARTRAM.—Your clerical correspondent evidently doesn't understand the bearings of Utilitarianism. He evidently possesses the wisdom of discretion.

*Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4 by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.*

*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.*

*The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*

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

*The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.*

## Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen had two fine meetings on Sunday last. The evening meeting was the largest held in Manchester for some years, and the lecturer's comments on the futile imbecility of a Day of Prayer met with the keenest appreciation. There was a good sale of literature, some new members made, and the energetic Secretary, Mr. Black, was as busy as ever, and evidently gratified with the results of his labours.

The second of the course of Sunday afternoon lectures at the West Central Hall, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road, will be delivered by Mr. Cohen. His subject is "Some Curiosities of Christian Evidence." The lecture commences at 3.15. Freethinkers would do well to bring along a Christian friend—or two.

Mr. Cohen will address two Freethought meetings at Southampton next Sunday (Jan. 20), the first delivered there for many years. A Branch of the N. S. S. has been formed, and Mr. A. Wildman, of 100, Clovelly Road, Southampton, will be pleased to hear from any one wishing to become a member or to help in any other manner.

Mr. Lloyd opened the new course of lectures at the Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, on Sunday last, with a crowded house. This is as it should be. And we are not surprised to learn that, as Mr. Lloyd was in his best form, the audience was delighted with his address.

The *Shields Daily Gazette* reports that a meeting of the Tyne Dock Branch of the National Union of Railwaymen passed unanimously a resolution in favour of the restriction of education in all State-aided schools to subjects defined as "secular" in the Education Code. We notice the name of our old friend Mr. R. Chapman as one of the speakers to the resolution. This is good work, and we hope Freethinkers everywhere will see to it that similar resolutions are carried wherever possible, and moved whether carried or not.

At a not very distant date we hope to deal with the whole question of the part that might be played by Freethinkers in connection with public affairs. It is quite certain that much could be done; and it is certain that if applied Freethought, if one may use the expression, is to operate, it can only be by Freethinkers everywhere expressing their opinions as Freethinkers. This would be educative so far as Christians are concerned, and helpful in breaking down whatever boycott exists.

It is early yet to record the response to our appeal for a New Year's gift in the shape of a thousand new readers, but we are glad to note that some letters have reached us to the effect that a start has been made. A Bristol friend writes that he secured two new readers before the old year had

expired, and from Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Cambridge we have also good news of fresh readers. So it is clear our friends are on the move. And we daresay those who try will be astonished at how many readers may be obtained at the price of a little effort. For, after all, there is only one *Freethinker* in England. And if there is another journal in England with more "fundamental brain power" than this one, we have yet to come across it.

The *Daily News* has at length decided, in view of the scarcity and cost of paper, to double the price at which it is to be sold. This is only one of quite a number of papers that have taken, or taking, a similar step during January. One of these is the *Schoolmaster*, which, we believe, is subsidized by the Union of Teachers. Meanwhile, we are wondering how much longer we can struggle along unchanged. The task gets steadily harder, and even from a personal point of view we are beginning to feel the pressure. But we don't like to give in if it can by any means be avoided.

We hope we may be excused pressing the claims of the Fund to meet the expenses incurred in fighting the L.C.C. We are a little disappointed in the response given by London Freethinkers and London reformers generally. The matter, while having a very general application, should appeal with special force to them. It was a very important fight, and we won a very decisive victory. All interested in outdoor propaganda ought to help. In any case, we think we ought to close the Fund within the next two or three weeks.

Swansea friends will please note that Mr. Harry Snell lectures twice to-day (January 13) in the Docker's Hall, High Street. The lectures are under the auspices of the local branch of the N.S.S., and we hope to hear that Mr. Snell has the audiences he deserves.

We congratulate Mr. John Galsworthy on his refusal to accept a knighthood in the New Year's Honours (?) list. Titles have long since ceased to afford any presumption of personal worth or of national service. Good men who accept such distinctions are only helping to keep alive a source of corruption and demoralization. The whole system of titles is in the nature of a survival from barbaric or semi-barbaric times, and men of worth should leave them severely alone.

We venture to again draw attention to the fact that all N. S. S. subscriptions are now due on the first of January of each year. We hope that all members who have not yet remitted to the General Secretary should do so. And if they are moved to send in addition to their usual subscription, as a kind of thank-offering for "Providence having preserved the N. S. S. during the War," so much the better. A Society, such as the N. S. S., can always do with an enlargement of its financial resources.

## Fund for Fighting the L.C.C.

THE purpose of this Fund is to raise the balance of expenses—estimated at between £80 and £100 incurred in defending the right to sell literature at public meetings in the London parks. On the initiative of the N.S.S. a Protest Committee was formed, and after carrying the question into the High Court, the London County Council was induced to rescind the offending resolution. It was a splendid victory, and one which should specially appeal to all Londoners.

Previously acknowledged:—£34 10s.; J. Neate, £1; West Ham Branch N. S. S., £1 1s.; Anno Domini, 9s. 6d.; W. R. Munton, £1; F. W. Lloyd, 2s. 6d.; H. Bull, 2s. 8d.; O. Friedman, 10s.; F. H. Dell, 4s.; Willesden Freedom League, 5s.; W. Benn, 5s.; Mrs. E. Taylor, 2s.; L. Berryman, 10s. 6d.; Miss Harriet Baker, 1s.; Ed. Parker, 5s.

## The Morality of Robert Burns.

Born January 25, 1759; Died July 22, 1796.

Of these am I, Coila my name.—*The Vision*.

IN Scotland and elsewhere the annual spate of post-prandial oratory is somewhat diminished by the exigencies of the "great War." Such things, like clouds, obscure the stars. It passes, and the heavens are clear again, and brighter than before. The constellations are undimmed. Not a star has fallen from the sky. But even during the War the "Immortal Memory" will be pledged over many a cup, and, in annual resurrection, the poor ghost must listen to those "interminable—not eternal—speeches," full of fulsome adulation, mouth honour, breath, which the poor heart would fain deny but cannot.

Do not let the awkward squad fire over me, he is said to have remarked, with almost his last breath, referring to the local volunteer corps; but the poet has suffered since from the blank cartridge discharge of many a feeble volunteer. No hectic of a moment clouds the marble brow of the unresentful dead. No; not even when the orator sorrowfully pauses to refer to that blot on the escutcheon of Bonnie and pious Scotland—the morals of Robert Burns! Totally misunderstanding the "virtues" of his hero, he, of course, as completely misunderstands his "vices"; and he forgets that, even in the sphere of morals, he is, perhaps, not fit to tie the shoestrings of the wicked bard. One would think, to hear those rustic moralists and reverend purveyors of pious platitudes, that Burns was not only his country's greatest poet, but its greatest sinner, which is false, of course; but even were it true, his virtues would still outweigh those of the purest pietist the world has ever seen. In sense and worth he was always supreme. What faults he had—and he advertised them well—were the mere excess and overflow of an immense and vigorous vitality. Let it more greatly be said of his, as of the morals of Voltaire, "Is it strange that a vessel which has taken the ocean aboard should have battered decks and broken masts?" (M. Mangasarian). And further, as the same writer says:—

Even as a great chimney consumes its own smoke, a great man—a Goethe, a Voltaire—converts his own defects into fuel for his genius. Genius is intensity in seeing, feeling, and doing. The genius is ourselves—on a larger scale. He has our virtues and vices—but so much more of them. He thinks, speaks, and acts with a thrill. The blood boils in his veins. "Daily his own heart he eats." Let us understand before we criticise.

Or, as the poet himself puts it, laying the responsibility at the proper quarter:—

Who made the heart, 'tis he alone  
Decidedly can try us;  
He knows each chord—its various tone,  
Each spring—its various bias;  
Then at the balance let's be mute,  
We never can adjust it;  
What's done we partly may compute,  
But know not what's resisted.

Burns sensed Determinism, and was on the brink of a great discovery when he wrote of erring humans:—

One point must still be greatly dark,  
The moving *why* they do it.

Religion was conventional with, rather than credible to, Burns; at best a loyalty to an ancient and native tradition. There was no greater doubting Thomas than he. This paradoxical utterance proves it. Questioning the reality of Christ and heaven, he wrote to Mrs. Dunlop these burning words:—

Would to God I as firmly believed it as I ardently wish it.

But the strong mind of the reasoner would not allow the wish to be father to the thought. That ardent wish, and not a selfish and particular one, only put him on his guard against a too facile credulity.

But Burns shone at his brightest when, like Omar, he had divorced old, barren Reason from his bed, and sent the beldame theology packing to bear her uncongenial company. Then came *The Vision*, clothed in an atmosphere transcending both reason and religion, glowing with the light that never was on sea or land, in heaven or hell; but illumining, permeating, transforming the crude material of one poor clodhopper of the Ayrshire fields, making the man a god; and who rose up mightily, and henceforth poured his soul in song. He had found his true *Metier*. He had dimly glimpsed his own greatness. And yet the light was from himself, or focussed in him from all time, all space, and all experience. Talk of the fierce light that beats upon a throne! and, compared with this, you talk of a rushlight shining on a bauble. First and foremost always was the light of love, and its twin-soul liberty, and mingled in one serene splendour with humanity, friendship, true patriotism, courage, independence; with lightning gleams of humour, pathos, irony, and scorn—all as those elements so mixed in him; or personified in that "tight, outlandish, hizzie brow," whose "half a leg was scrimply seen," and who confessed:—

Of these am I, Coila my name.

"And wear thou this," she solemn said,  
And bound the holly round my head;  
The polish'd leaves, and berries red,  
Did rustling play;  
And, like a passing thought she fled  
In light away.

COILA.

## New Testament Legends for Young Readers.

### IX.—NEARER THE CROSS.

WHERE palm-trees spread their fans, and balsam-trees produced sweet ointment, and water-springs bubbled down slopes, the city of Jericho stood; and many were its white villas; and the land on one side was the flat vale of Jordan, and, on the other, cliffs and hills rose up.

A crowd followed Jesus into Jericho. The Twelve were with him also. Some say that Judas, the worst man of the Twelve, was born in this city.

"Son of David, son of David! help me, son of David!"

This yell came from a blind man, seated at the wayside. He had heard the tread of a host of feet, and asked the reason, and had been told that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. He called to the Wonder-worker, as if calling to a king, the son of a king.

Presently, the wayside beggar was marching with the rest along the high street of Jericho; he had received his sight.

As Jesus walked by a shady tree, he saw a man sitting astride of a bough. It was the tax-gatherer, Zacchæus, who, being short, had not been able to see the Prophet over the heads of the crowd; so he had climbed the tree.

"Quick, Zacchæus!" said Jesus, "hurry down; I am coming to your villa."

Down the little man scrambled; and he ran to his house, and bade the servants spread a good table; and he felt as proud as an emperor as he sat with the Son of David and the Twelve Messengers. Of course the Lecturers and Pious Men murmured jealously.

Zacchæus stood, and said,—

"My lord, I do what I can in my humble way. I give half my income to the poor folk; and, if ever I find I have collected more than the just tax from any citizen, I give him back four times as much as I took."

"Salvation has come to this house," exclaimed Jesus to the people around, "this man is a true Jew; he is a son of Abraham. Some of you count him as a lost soul; but I came to seek the lost, and to save them."

A few hours later, the procession of country folk that had gathered in the train of Jesus was tramping along the narrow pass among the high rocks which led from Jericho to Jerusalem. 'Twas the road where the Good Samaritan assisted the man who had fallen among thieves.

At length, they saw the walls, the towers, the roofs of the Holy City, and the spires of the Temple of Yahweh glittered in the sun; and they began to swarm over the Mount of Olives, and some peeped over the fences of a pleasant garden, where olive groves grew dense. This was the Garden of Gethsemane.

Two of the Delegates ran in front, found a young ass tied to a post or wall, begged the owners to lend it for the Lord, David's son, and, before long, Jesus the Master of the jinn and Preacher of the Kingdom, was riding along the mountain pathway towards the gate of Jerusalem. The peasants pulled cloaks and tunics from their own shoulders, and flung the garments on the stony way, for the royal rider to pass over. A roar of cheering and praise echoed across the valley, and was heard in the city streets,—

"Glory, glory! Hail, hail! Blessed is the King that rides in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven! glory in God's high heaven!"

"Sir," cried a group of Pious Men, "tell your people not to call you by such divine titles."

"They *must* shout," replied Jesus. "If they did not, the very stones would shout. It is the moment for a shout."

He paused when he saw all the ramparts and turrets of Zion, the City Beautiful, so beloved of all Jews; and his friends saw tears trickling down his cheeks.

"The day will come," he sighed, "when men of war will batter these walls to earth, and not leave one stone upon another."

Then on the multitude swept, across the valley, up the slope, through the gate, along the street to the Temple. At that point, the Preacher of the Kingdom leaped from his ass, and rushed into the fore-court of the House of Yahweh. Men were busy at tables and stalls, selling and buying such articles as country visitors to Jerusalem might be attracted by. The place was like a market or a fair, and Jesus was greatly angered.

"Out, out, you thieves and profiteers," he commanded, as he struck right and left. "This is a House of Prayer, and you have made it a Den of Thieves!"

Much racket and hustling followed; tables rattled to the ground, and the marble floor was littered with this, that, and the other. When all was quiet again, the King from Galilee was telling parables to the listening crowd, and the Pharisees and Lawyers looked on, grim and scowling.

Day after day, this scene was repeated.

The scribes were furious when they heard the Preacher say to the people,—

"Beware of the learned Lecturers on the Law. Have a care, good folk! These pompous scholars strut in long robes, and love to be salaamed to in the market-place, and they sit themselves down in the grandest seats in the synagogue, and they shove themselves into the front seats at feasts. The miserable make-believes that they are! They squeeze the last farthing of rent out of poor widows; and then they come out in the

street, and bawl long prayers to Yahweh for you, my friends, to listen to. I tell you that, in good sooth, their doom will be hard and stern."

But very different was his voice when he watched an ill-clad, pale woman go up to the collecting-box in the Temple porch, and quietly drop in two very small coins.

"Did you see that?" he asked his disciples. "Rich men threw in handfuls of gold and silver. That widow gave two copper mites for the service of God. I tell you, she really gave more than all the rich gave, for she gave her little all."

The Lecturers, Temple-Clergy, Long-Prayer-Makers, and Talkers about Yahweh hated the preaching of Jesus; and they held meetings to discuss what to do. This fellow, they agreed, was an agitator, a shaker-up of the common folk, an over-turner of good manners; he must be got rid of. The Roman Governor Pilate must take him in hand as a rebel. Yes, Governor Pilate; and no doubt King Herod, the slayer of John the Baptist, would be ready to crush this pretended King from Galilee! A man who talked of a Kingdom as this agitator did must be an enemy of Cæsar and the Romans. Once let the Romans think this ranter and shaker dangerous, they would soon hang him, or behead him—or hammer him to a cross!

As thus they talked, there came in a man with stealthy glance, and a curious pursing of lips. It was Judas Iscariot. Why he had turned against the Master nobody knows. He told in a low voice how the Prophet went out to the garden of olive trees at dusk with a few comrades, and how easily he could then be captured.

The bargain was soon struck. Thirty pieces of silver would be paid down as soon as Jesus was arrested.

One day Peter the Pilot and John the Fisherman followed a man who bore on his head a water-pot; they tracked him along a back street of the Holy City till he halted at a humble house. The Wonder-worker had told them they would see such a man, and he—being a friend of the Kingdom—would let them have a large upstairs room in which the board could be laid for the supper of the Spring-festival, or Passover. In the evening, Jesus and the Twelve Apostles reclined on seats at this table. The Jews would usually have roast lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened cake, sweet sauce, red wine. Peter and John seem only to have provided wine and bread.

"I very much wished to eat this Passover with you," said the simple King. "This is our last supper before the Kingdom comes."

They all sat silent,

"We thank thee, O Father, for the Holy Vine," murmured Jesus.

Then he filled a cup, and bade all the Twelve drink from it.

Again he spake thanks as he broke a cake of bread, and he gave morsels to his friends, saying,—

"This is my own body. Eat."

They ate without a word.

"Your hands," he said, "rest on the table. One of those hands will betray me."

They looked at one another anxiously. Who could the traitor be? Judas gazed blankly, as if he was the most innocent man on earth.

"Lord," cried Peter, "have no fear. I, for one, will go with you, if need be, to prison, or to death."

Jesus smiled sadly.

"My good Peter, before the sun rises and before the cock crows, you will three times swear that I am no friend of yours."

"Here are two swords, Master," exclaimed one of the Apostles. "We can defend you."

"Two will be enough," he said.

Oh, yes, two would be quite enough, when only one man among them would be ready to draw a sword for defence.

\* \* \* \*

Love feasts, or suppers, were held by societies of Romans and other people, who had joined together in friendly guilds or burial clubs (for paying funeral expenses of members), or religious companies. Old Roman pictures found in the underground passages (catacombs) of Rome show men seated at supper tables, on which lie fowls, fishes, and bread-cakes crossed like our Good Friday buns. And Roman soldiers often held meetings for eating bread and drinking water in honour of the God of Light and Life, Mithra.

An ancient book, called the "Teaching," speaks of pious folk meeting for a meal which was begun with a Eucharist, or Giving-of-thanks, thus: "We thank thee, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David thy servant."

When the Gospel of *Luke* relates how Jesus said: "This bread is my body," it makes us think of many religious customs of olden times.

People thought of trees and corn plants as having a living soul inside them, and just as one man may be kind or unkind to another, so the tree-spirit or corn-spirit might be kind to give sap, or juice, or grain, or withhold the precious food and drink from hungry man and his children. So people tried to please the spirit or god by offering gifts in sacrifice; first, human sacrifices, and, afterwards, when people's feelings rebelled against this dreadful sort of offering, they would make imitation sacrifices, such as puppets of dough. Even till our modern times, country folk in Sweden would, in the days of harvest, bake a loaf in the shape of a little girl, to be eaten at the harvest supper. In Mexico, before the Spaniards arrived, the Aztec people would make bread images of their great god twice a year, and eat the bread in a very solemn supper. And such things have been done in many parts of the world. People would think that, in eating these sacrifices, they were doing what they wished the god to do, and so, in a way, they were made one with the god, and were even eating his food, and eating him. This is why learned men speak of Early Men, and of savages in our own day, as "Eating the God."<sup>2</sup> And, of course, the sap or juice of plants, such as the vine, would be thought of as the blood of the god. Thus, when the followers of Jesus set up a custom of the Eucharist, and ate the body and drank the vine-blood, they were doing, in a new manner, what was done in many religions in various regions of the earth.

F. J. GOULD.

## Correspondence.

ST. GEORGE OF ENGLAND.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Someone has been good enough to send me a copy of your issue of December 9, in which a contributor, who hides his identity under the pen-name of "Mimnermus," offers some disparaging remarks concerning St. George and his identity. I need hardly say that his statements and surmises are not only stale and unprofitable, but lacking in originality. Now, one who would instruct others should surely take the trouble to gain all possible information concerning his subject. But your contributor, presumably a Freethinker, allows his judgment to be biased and fettered by the opinions of Gibbon and by those who, like himself, have adopted that great historian's fallacies concerning the patron Saint of England. A Freethinker should surely be a fair thinker, a searcher after truth, striving to enlighten.

<sup>1</sup> The *Didache*.

<sup>2</sup> A chapter is so entitled in Sir J. G. Frazer's *Golden Bough* series. See vol. ii. of the *Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild*.

and not to obfuscate, the intelligence of those possibly as ignorant and careless as himself. Smartness may make good "copy," but abuse, while it may occasion merriment, is neither fair nor honest, and without educational value.

If, on some future occasion, you will allow me the hospitality of your columns, I shall be happy to tell, more especially your English readers, something about St. George, and why he is held in such veneration and associated with the rapidly growing observance of "England's Day."

HOWARD RUFF, *Hon. Sec.*,  
Royal Society of St. George.

[Our columns are open to Mr. Ruff for a brief statement of the case for St. George.—ED.]

SOCIALISM AND MALTHUSIANISM.

SIR,—I trust you will find room for a protest against Dr. Drysdale's assertions, coupling, as he does, all Henry George's doctrines—true and false—together. I am a Socialist and a Malthusian, and while I admit that Socialism, apart from an immediate and practical application of the law of population, would be necessary when any socialistic system of society is attempted, or else I believe full use is certain, I do not admit that there are any failures in the doctrine of Socialism. Many Socialists are of my way of thinking, but deem it best to lie low at present about the matter. I don't. I think it very urgent. The bulk of Socialists, I regret to say, are violent opponents of Malthusian doctrines. They will have to learn by experience, as John Stuart Mill points out.

A. J. MARRIOTT.

SIR,—When Malthusians say that, if population increases without limit, there will not be food enough to go round, they state what is perfectly obvious. I will even go further and say that, especially under the existing capitalist system, the restriction of the family by every married couple of small means is, in their own interests, highly desirable. Where I disagree with Malthusians (or the majority of those who write on their behalf) is in their apparent use of this doctrine as an argument against Socialism.

If it is true (and I do not admit that it is) that the food at present producible on the earth, under peace conditions, is insufficient to maintain the present population of the earth in moderate comfort, then it follows that the earth is like a besieged city, and should, in the interests of humanity, be treated as such: the available food being rationed, even in time of peace, among the population. This can only be done on Socialist lines.

If, on the other hand, all Malthusians maintain is that the present rate of increase in population will, if continued, outrun in a certain time, the possible increase in the production of food, then two things are necessary: (1) the restriction of the increase in population, and (2) the increase of food production up to the limits of physical possibility. (1) I understand, the Malthusians propose to achieve by propaganda. Vain talk! The middle classes already practise family limitation: the excessive increase, of which complaint is made, occurs, as a fact of common observation, principally among the very poor. Now, what do Malthusians think they will gain by going and telling the very poor to limit their families? You have a class who, thanks to your economic arrangements, are perforce deprived of all the pleasures of life except two—the pleasure of convivial drinking, and the pleasure of connubial intercourse. Teetotalers want to take away one, and Malthusians (in effect) propose deprivation of the other. Naturally the very poor answer, as one of them answered a good lady of whom I know: "What, ain't we to enjoy ourselves?" It is no use telling very poor people that they may, if they like, enjoy themselves without resultant offspring: people who have to count every halfpenny they spend are not in a position to purchase what middle-class people, and even skilled artisans, can afford. Mere Malthusian propaganda, then, is clearly no use.

Only two things can meet this difficulty; a general levelling-up of poverty by Socialism, when the same forces that operate to limit the birthrate among the middle-classes will

be free to operate among the (present) very poor; and the economic independence of women, which will enable women, without exception, to choose for themselves whether they will have children, and, if so, how many, since unlimited child-bearing will no longer be, for the majority of women, the sole means of livelihood.

The remaining desideratum, the maximum public increase of food production, equally presupposes a Socialist reconstruction of society. Under the existing system of production for profit, production is only undertaken if there is an "effective demand" for the commodity to be produced, *i.e.*, if there are people with money to pay for it. The allocation of labour is thus determined by the distribution of wealth; and there is no doubt whatever that much labour is now directed to the production of luxuries for the rich which, given a more nearly equal distribution, could and should be employed to produce food, clothing, and decent comfort for all.

The Malthusian theory, therefore, so far as it accords with facts, is not destructive of Socialism, but corroborative of it. Unfortunately, many Freethinkers seem to have inherited from Charles Bradlaugh, besides his great and excellent qualities, his one unhappy defect, which was his total failure to understand Socialism. Otherwise we should not find Dr. Drysdale seriously writing in the *Freethinker*, as if Socialism meant the destruction of capital in the sense of "dwellings, factories, tools, railways, ships," etc. And, by the way, Henry George was not, and did not profess to be, a Socialist.

ROBERT ARCH.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE.

SIR,—The following extract from the *Town Labourer, 1760-1832*, by J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, recently published by Longmans, Green & Co, throws a bright light on the teaching of Malthus and its baneful results: "We are concerned not with what Malthus taught the world, but with what the upper classes learnt from him. For them his teaching was simple and soothing enough. The doctrine that poverty was inevitable and incurable put a soft pillow under the conscience of the ruling class. But his teaching offered still greater consolations to the anxieties of the benevolent, for it seemed to show that poverty was the medicine of nature, and that the attempts of Governments to relieve it were like the interference of unintelligent spectators with the skilful treatment of the doctor. The relief of poverty meant the increase of poverty, for if the conditions of the poor were improved, population would quicken its pace still further....."

For some years the influence of Malthus was supreme and fatal. Shelley, in his preface to his *Prometheus Unbound*, says that he had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon than go to heaven with Paley and Malthus. It was a strange heaven that Malthus, as he was interpreted by the rich, offered to the poor."

Your readers will do well to study this book and also *The Land and Revolution*, by R. L. Outhwaite, M.P., if they want to understand the actual facts as regards the unnecessary starvation of the people by the infamous Enclosure Acts, whereby they were deprived of access to the old common lands. And, in the *Times* of 3rd inst., Mr. H. M. Hyndman indicts the Duke of Montrose and his fellow-landlords for playing the game of the Huns in bringing scarcity, and probably famine, upon our people.

G. O. WARREN, Major.

Society News.

In spite of the counter attractions provided by King George, and the unreasonable behaviour of the weather on Sunday afternoon, the West Central Hall was well filled.

Mr. Harry Snell was in his happiest mood, and, at the close of an excellent address, received a perfect ovation of applause. Many questions were asked, and the audience generally expressed the hope that it would not be long before Mr. Snell lectured for us again. Friends are requested to note that these lectures start at 3.15, and that a general

movement of chairs after the lecture has begun is disconcerting to the speaker.—E. M. VANCE, General Secretary.

North London Branch.—The debate of Sunday evening last was a huge success both in point of attendance and of quality. On Sunday, January 13, our genial friend, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, opens a discussion on Freewill. Opposers, please note! On Thursday, the 17th inst., a new departure will be made by a week-night debate in the large hall of the St. Pancras Reform Club, when Mr. Colette Jones, N. S. S., will meet Mr. Horace Leaf, of the Spiritualist Education Council. A large attendance of both Spiritualists and Freethinkers is expected, so come early. All seats are free, but we shall take up a collection for incidental expenses.—H. V. LANE, Hon. Sec.

### Credulity.

PLEASE don't unveil the naked truth,  
To which mine eyes are closed, forsooth!

I do not care to see  
Obtrusive facts that would impinge  
Upon my mind, and quite unhinge  
My bland credulity!

Don't let me see where I have erred  
In holding views that are absurd—  
Withhold such truths from me.  
Hard facts, 'tis said, "are stubborn things,"  
And truth, unveil'd, disaster brings  
Upon credulity!

The sweets of life are truly grand!  
And *heaps* of lucre are at hand—  
To which access is free  
For those who trouble not in mind  
Concerning truths that are unkind  
To my credulity!

Now go thy way, O man of light!  
Thy truths are vivid—much too bright.  
As hostile aircraft flee  
Into the darkness of the sky  
Before the searchlights, so does my  
Dismayed credulity!

My thoughts lay bare *this* view of you:  
You cutely weigh the false and true  
In scales of scrutiny;  
And thus you probe and nose about  
For findings which you mean to flout  
At my credulity!

From thought-provoking fuss depart!  
For Thought will sever head from heart,  
And make them disagree;  
Then Doubt, with all his weight and stress,  
Will make, indeed, a sorry mess  
Of my credulity!

J. F. CORDON.

The clergy used to assert constantly that England's greatness depended on Sunday observance. Now that the British armies are so busy on the Sabbath, as on other days, they observe a discreet silence.

The Pope has sent a protest to Vienna against the destruction of two churches at Padua by aeroplanes. Poor old Providence is too old to safeguard his own houses.

Oh, those journalists! A paragraph referring to the Archbishop of Paris's announcement of special prayers for the Allies was headed: "France's Day of Prayer."

The playfulness of Providence has not been affected by the World-War. Guatemala city has been destroyed partially by earthquake, and 125,000 persons rendered homeless, and thousands killed.

### 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.

LONDON SOCIETY, Morality and Nature (31 Alfred Place, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road, N.W.): 3.30, Mr. Dribbel, "Germany as Seen by a Neutral." Lecture in French.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, C. Ratcliffe, "Freewill." Open Debate. Thursday, January 17, "Does Man Survive Death?" Affirmative, Horace Leaf. Negative, Colette Jones.

WEST CENTRAL HALL (31 Alfred Place, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road, W.): 3.15, Chapman Cohen, "Some Curiosities of Christian Evidence."

##### OUTDOOR.

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Mr. Saphin; 3.15, Messrs. Dales, Kells, Swasey, and Shaller.

#### COUNTRY.

##### INDOOR.

SWANSEA AND DISTRICT BRANCH N. S. S. (Dockers' Hall, High Street, Swansea): H. Snell, 3, "The Nation's Prayer Day: Sense or Nonsense"; 7, "Secular Education—The Priest and the Child."

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