

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Truth and the Press.

A great many hard things have been said lately concerning the present quality of the English newspaper press, and he would be a rash man who dared say they were undeserved. During a time of War one excuses much, and when, in addition, we have a Government-controlled press—openly controlled so far as the issue and suppression of news on an all-engrossing topic is concerned, and, probably, controlled to a very much greater extent, non-dependence on the information supplied becomes general. A controlled press—no matter by whom controlled—must become an untrustworthy press. It may be telling the truth, or it may be telling a lie. No one can be sure. In such circumstances a newspaper surrenders its primary function of conveying news, and becomes an agency for the coercion, the suppression, or the artificial creation of opinion. It becomes as unreliable as a politician, and as unvarnished as a professional evangelist. Freedom is the essential condition of much, it is certainly a prime condition of speaking the truth.

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### An Evil Environment.

Having said so much, it remains, however, true that the faults of the English press did not commence with the War, they have only been accentuated by it. Nor are these altogether the faults of the press; they are largely the faults of an unhealthy state of public opinion. This was expressed, in a way, by Mr. Birrell in the course of a recent address, in which he remarked of our newspapers: "If they had been allowed to tell more truth, it is only creditable to suppose they would not have told so many lies." That, we think, puts the matter on a fair basis; and it applies almost as much to individuals as to newspapers. Taking men and women on the average, we do not think they will go out of their way to tell a lie; but neither will they subject themselves to a serious inconvenience in order to tell the truth. Few people may be capable under ordinary conditions of strict accuracy, since that comes of training and education allied with native disposition; but if people were allowed to tell the truth there would certainly be considerably less lying. In most cases people lie for a purpose—to escape inconvenience or to reap a profit, and all that we can do is to see that the incentives to truth are the more powerful. As things are the induc-

ments seem mainly in the other direction. Daily experience shows that in this religion-soaked society of ours, mental honesty and truth-speaking are the most expensive of luxuries. Lying is lamentably common, and the suppression of truth commoner still. And the man who will have the truth at all costs promises to die with no better epitaph than "Here lies a Crank."

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### Press and Public.

Now, newspapers may be able to create what is called an opinion in favour of this or that. But the general tone and character of the public mind is not formed by newspapers, it is that which they exist to serve which determines the character of the papers. Generally speaking, the object of the proprietors of newspapers is to sell their wares. It is only a paper, such as the *Freethinker*, which makes sales a secondary consideration. And, taking people as they are, what Mr. Birrell said of the press, with the Government censor in his mind, may be said with regard to the relations between the press and the general public. If the papers were allowed to tell the truth they would not print so many lies. But that supposes the existence of a public that has a genuine interest in and attachment for truth, for freedom, for liberty. And that public is represented by but a small minority. Nothing has struck us more than this during the past three-and-a-half years. We have had to surrender much during that period—one hopes for "the duration" only. We have given up the freedom of the press, of speech, of the platform, even those two old boasts, *Habeas Corpus* and "An Englishman's home is his castle." It is not surprising that people should have surrendered these things in view of what they conceived a larger purpose. The surprising thing is the very few people one meets who seem in the least conscious that they have lost anything worth troubling about. As they did not value freedom when it was theirs, it is not surprising that they attach little importance to its absence.

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### The Press and Religion.

Newspaper writers are not really different from other men. The unsigned article or the editorial "we" usually covers a quite ordinary—often a quite commonplace—personality. But like most others, whether they are intellectually honest depends merely upon whether they are allowed to be so. So long as the general public make the path of the liar pleasant and that of the truth-speaker painful, things will remain as they are. In his satirical defence of Lord Northcliffe as Minister of Propaganda, Mr. S. L. Hughes told the House of Commons that if what was wanted in war was a man who did not stick at the truth, no better man could be found for the job. That was more than a covered charge against Lord Northcliffe; it was a charge against the British public. Again, we have been lately advertising this journal in several provincial papers. But in two or three cases the advertisements were refused. Why? Not, we know, because the proprietors personally objected to the advertisement; nor that they did not want

advertisements. It was simply that the public—some of their public—might take offence. As Mr. Birrell says, they go on publishing lies because they are not allowed to publish the truth. And a newspaper must publish something.

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#### A Christian Product.

Now, it is not possible to dissociate this condition of the public mind from the influence of Christianity. For it will be observed that it is precisely those faults of the press of which Mr. Birrell and others complain that are most characteristic of Christian methods of teaching. No religion has ever shown a more complete disregard for truth, a greater determination to suppress facts inconvenient to itself, or to disseminate information of a quite misleading character, than has Christianity. The Roman Church has its official Index; the Protestant Churches have no official Index, but they have an unofficial one of extraordinary efficiency. It is in virtue of this unofficial Index that reports of Freethought meetings are boycotted, newsagents who display Freethought papers often warned that they will lose trade unless they mend their ways, and editors of newspapers threatened with a loss of circulation unless they play the religious game. It may or may not be true that a people always has the government it deserves; it is certainly true it will always have the kind of newspaper press that suits it. For the press has to deal with a public that is mentally emasculated by centuries of Christian training and influence. The press is a reflection of the public mind. And if we would have a different press, we must see to it that we have a different public. In other words, we must do away with the occasion for so many lies by making it possible to tell more truths.

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#### Christianity's Greatest Crime.

When the evils that Christianity has inflicted on the world are finally tabulated, we are convinced that its ill effects in the world of mental life will be accounted the greatest. It commenced with a theory that damned people for wrong belief, and so made the critical use of the intellect the most dangerous of occupations. So soon as it possessed the power, it added terrestrial punishment to celestial damnation. It burned, it tortured, it imprisoned, it boycotted; it suppressed truth and circulated lies. For generations, the most dangerous thing in Christendom was to think. The fool could always make sure of heaven; the thinker always ran a great chance of hell. The thousands who had died at the stake or suffered in Christian prisons for heresy deserve our sympathy, but the general public demand it still more. For the essential evil of Christian rule rested not so much with the people it killed as with those whom it left alive. It separated the sceptical goats from the believing sheep, it bred from the poorer stock, and so lowered the whole level of mental life. It created and perpetuated a social environment in which thinking was at a discount and credulity at a premium. It is from the effects of this heredity we are suffering to-day. We can have more truth and fewer lies in the press if we demand it. But to make that demand effective we must break the influence of a Church whose rule has been one of the greatest blights in the history of the modern world.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

We daily make great improvements—there is one I wish to see in moral philosophy—the discovery of a plan that would induce and oblige nations to settle their disputes without first cutting one another's throats. *There never has been, nor ever will be, any such thing as a good war or a bad peace.* When will mankind be convinced of this, and agree to settle their differences by arbitration?—*Franklin.*

## Shaking Off the Beast.

THE Rev. John A. Hutton, D.D., of Glasgow, is a deservedly distinguished member of the clerical profession. He has carefully studied and thoroughly mastered the great art of luminous expression. As a preacher he occupies the front rank, and as a writer of newspaper articles he enjoys considerable popularity. It is in the latter capacity alone that he is known, at first hand, to the present writer. In the *Christian World* for March 7, there is a notable contribution from his pen, entitled "He Shook Off the Beast," which is eminently characteristic of his style both as preacher and writer. He bases his remarks upon an alleged incident in the life of St. Paul, recorded in Acts xxv. 1-5. There had been a shipwreck, and the rescued people were on an island called Melita, where they were shown great kindness by the inhabitants, politely called in the narrative "barbarous people." Out of a bundle of sticks, gathered by the Apostle, when laid on the fire, there sprang a viper which fastened itself on his hand; but he "shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm." As it stands, it is clear that this simple story has no moral whatever, nor any other significance than the one which it naturally bears. But this is how Dr. Hutton looks at it:—

I have the feeling again and again, especially when he (St. Luke) tells a story, that he is telling the story first of all, of course, as part of his narrative, but also for the sake of a deeper significance which the story has the moment you sit down and think of it. St. Luke was, as we know, a physician. He was a physician certainly with a most remarkable gift for writing. He is not the only physician who in the history of literature has revealed the same excellence.

Then he goes on to say how Sir Thomas Browne, a physician of Norwich, wrote a marvellous classic, called *Religio Medici*, and how "in our own day, the moralizings of Dr. Paget have a simplicity and depth and charm which must be the despair of many a man to whom writing is a lucrative business." Next he indulges in a bit of moralizing of his own, to the effect that a good doctor possesses qualities which are calculated to make him a good writer. This is the pulpit style to perfection—the rhetorical trick of reading into the text what, as it stands, it does not even suggest. The truth is that the preacher must exploit his text-book in this fashion, for otherwise he would soon come to the end of his tether. Nor do we quarrel with Dr. Hutton for adopting this highly convenient method. What we maintain is that there is absolutely nothing to indicate that the author of the Acts, in relating that incident in the Apostle's life, "gave it a particular turn in order to embody in a few sharp outlines an abiding fact and principle." However, on the assumption that St. Luke did so, Dr. Hutton adds: "He shook off the viper, and took no harm." That, in a sense, is the claim of Christianity, that man may shake off the beast, and, far from taking harm, for the first time begin to be man." Rather than find fault with the reverend gentleman for pursuing this homiletic plan, we prefer to treat the assumption as if it were legitimate, and to examine this so-called claim of Christianity in order to ascertain whether or not there is any truth in it.

Dr. Hutton makes a bad beginning by laying the blame for the present War at the door of the philosophy which, he says, was dominant in Germany at its outbreak. According to him, the fundamental principle of that philosophy was "that man simply could not dispense with the beast, that if he 'shook off the beast' he would take harm"; and then he refers to one of the philosophers who spoke quite frankly of man as the "blonde beast, hungry for prey," giving a long quotation

from Nietzsche. It is wholly immaterial, in this connection, whether the quotation is a correct representation of the Nietzschean attitude on the subject of war or not, the point to be emphasized at present being that German philosophers generally have always repudiated the teaching of the Basle Professor. Besides, he who announced without apology that "war is a biological necessity," is a Christian, who has the support of Luther when he oracularly declares that war is not anti-Christian. By war, Luther and Bernhardt mean the shedding of blood on brutal battlefields in the interests of some strong, ambitious State; but in the true Nietzschean sense war signifies struggle against weakness, ignorance, and error. With this Dr. Hutton is in substantial agreement, for he says:—

A man is at his best when he is pulling against the stream. Deprived of the necessity for struggle, man loses his virility and endurance, begins to live too exclusively by his wits; later, begins to pamper himself, to become aware too pointedly of his body, to become an epicure in his food, more complicated and inventive and diabolical in his pleasures.....It is true and always will be true of man that he must have an active and aggressive principle of life. The day when he ceases to get beyond himself is a day when he begins to shrink.

In war as thus understood there is nothing lowering or bestial. It is in the purely military sense alone that war deserves to be condemned as a mark of the brute; in the sense of an appeal to physical force for the settlement of national or international disputes; or as an instrument in the service of the lust for power and dominion, as it has for the moment been successfully employed by Germany and Austria-Hungary against an exhausted and helpless Russia. In this sense war is the hideous beast in humanity which needs to be shaken off at all cost, or to be "cut out as with a surgeon's knife from the growing organism" of our race. But the crucial question is, "where are we to get the moral equivalent for war" in this signification of the word? "How are we to maintain within ourselves the fine ferment of aspiration and moral activity, the climbing, enduring, hardy attitude?" This is Dr. Hutton's own question, and the following is his answer to it:—

I do not think it is a difficulty which will ever really arise in men and women who believe in God. To believe in God—that of itself when we ponder its implications—will set man an ever ascending task, and the best men in the world will die like that list of heroes in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, with the thing they have lived for all their lives still unachieved, still "star-like ever luring them on to its exclusive purpose." Men who believe in God as Christ has made him known to us will always have enough to do, enough to do within themselves, to bring harmony between the fine deepening demand of Jesus upon us all and our own poor and inadequate performance.

Such is the reverend gentleman's moral equivalent for war—the belief in God. Unfortunately, however, the belief in God, like prayer, has always lacked efficacy. Like the deities of ancient Greece those of Christendom have been constantly at war among themselves. It may be retorted that Christians profess to be Monotheists, and that their divines have written bulky tomes in defence of that profession. For argument's sake, granted; but is it not an incontestable fact that their versions of that one God in three have been and still are practically innumerable; and that the champions of those versions have often fought to the death for their respective idols? Why, only the other day, Dr. Campbell Morgan publicly declared that he, an orthodox Trinitarian, could never enter into any sort of religious co-operation with a Unitarian, however good and noble he might be. Were you to tell the Trinitarian that he believes in three Gods,

he would instantly get into a fighting attitude and denounce you as a liar; and it is not so long ago that slight deviators from the dominant Trinitarian position were savagely attacked and burnt alive. The thirty years bloody war in Germany was waged on behalf of different versions of God and his Church. All the warriors were firm, passionate believers in a Supreme Being, but, instead of serving as a moral equivalent for war, their belief irresistibly drove them to furious battle after battle. Does Dr. Hutton deny the truth of this statement? Every believer paints his own picture of God, which only expresses his conception of what a Divine Being should be. The militarists of the present day are no less ardent believers in God than the Pacifists; while, as a matter of fact, there are many Pacifists who are avowed Atheists. No one can be a more passionately zealous believer in a Supreme Being than the German Emperor is, and the God he worships is the one Christ is supposed to have made known to the world. The Kaiser is not only a believer in God, but also an evangelical Christian, as his numerous published sermons abundantly testify. It is his boast that his soldiers are Christians, and that no one is permitted to become a military officer in his dominions unless he is a Church member. And yet this orthodox believer in God, this preacher of the Gospel of salvation through faith in Christ alone, is also a War-Lord, who regards the sword as a Divine instrument for the establishment of what he characterizes as the kingdom of God on earth. Surely, neither Dr. Hutton nor any other British divine has any more right to call the Kaiser, who justifies all the horrors and atrocities of war on the German side, than he and his representatives have to call us a nation of hypocrites. Doubtless there are hypocrites in both countries, but the fact remains that in neither nation has the belief in God, with its varied and often conflicting implications, acted as a moral equivalent for war.

Dr. Hutton's teaching, when we ponder its implications, throws anything but a favourable light upon the character of the God in whom he urges us, with such strenuous insistence, to believe. Take the following illuminating passage:—

There will be wild thrusts from our past life, belches upwards of an unholy steam from the central fire of our natural origins; there will be flashes of the ideal from the future, memories of loved ones who have gone from us, high words, delicate insights, an army of the living God and an army of the Prince of the Power of the Air—these will always be about us making our life a good fight of faith.

That extract embodies a considerable amount of truth, on the assumption that life is an evolutionary process, conducted under strictly natural laws; but our distinguished divine, while evidently accepting the theory of evolution, is of opinion that its course has been powerfully affected by the action of two outside armies, the one friendly and the other hostile. On the one hand there has been the army of God, on the other, the army of Satan, in violent conflict with each other, and eventually producing the mixed results described in that quotation. How did the Prince of the Powers of the Air come to be? Was he also an evolutionary product in some mystic supernatural sphere, or was he created out of nothing in order that God's life, too, might be full of bracing struggle? It seems that every now and then God steps aside from the conflict to watch what progress it makes without him. Does such a conception reflect credit upon the wisdom and goodness of the Lord who is said to sit as king for ever? As for us, we prefer to be in the hands of physical and chemical laws which operate, if unconsciously, with perfect impartiality, and under the operation of which has arisen,

at last, that degree and quality of intelligence which, if allowed fair play, and not handicapped by alleged supernatural interferences, will socialize and moralize human life to such an extent that wars, even hostile competitions, shall cease for ever.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Decline of Devotional Literature.

The creed of Christendom is gradually melting away, like a northern iceberg floating into southern seas.—G. W. Foote.

WE hear much of the output of books, of the glut of the literary market; but with all the activity of authors there is one department of literature which shows a falling-off. During the past half century a great and continuous decline has taken place in the production of religious books. To what is this decline due? There are several reasons; the first, and the most potent, being the indifference of the reading public to religion. The tide of religion is now at the ebb. In his day, Macaulay noted the singular periodic manner in which the British Public took up questions of religion and morality. John Bull no longer remembers that he has a soul to save—indeed, he is indifferent as to whether he has a soul or not. Meanwhile, he reads novels and newspapers, especially newspapers. Another reason is the lower mentality of the clergy. There are no longer any great ecclesiastics; and it certainly cannot be said that the Churches show intellect in the production of religious books. Not for present-day clerics are the rolling harmonies of Jeremy Taylor, the subtle cadences of Milton, the chastened utterances of Newman. They cannot even echo Baxter or Bunyan. There is not an original idea in their books. Everything is second-hand and threadbare, and the paucity of the prose emphasizes the emptiness of their heads. Yet another cause of the decline of religious literature is the growth of Free-thought. The ordinary man is no longer content to be blindly led by the parson. The force of Puritanism has spent itself; it no longer inspires, but merely irritates.

The decline began a half century ago. About that time there was a real and unmistakable interest in devotional literature. The Rev. J. R. Macduff rivalled the foremost novelists in popularity. The sale of his works was to be reckoned in hundreds of thousands. He was, in fact, the Dickens of Orthodoxy. For years Dean Goulburn's *Thoughts on Personal Religion* had an annual sale of many thousands, and Bishop Oxenden's works were equally popular. Newman Hall's publications ran into a sale of millions. Spurgeon's sermons sold like hot rolls, and Dr. Joseph Parker had hosts of admirers who bought his books eagerly. In looking through the old publishers' catalogues, one is surprised at the number of works of a devotional nature. Familiar as household words a generation or so ago, how many of these are known even by name to the present generation? The greater part of the Victorian era was, indeed, a golden age for religious books.

Not only was there a constant demand for the works of individual authors but for such libraries as *The Biblical Cabinet*, *Sacred Classics*, *The Christian Family Library*, and many other series. The taste for such books has gone for ever. Nor is it to be supposed that fresh life can be given to works like Gladstone's *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, which served a temporary purpose, and, having served it, have passed from men's minds. In the many volumes on Victorian literature which have appeared no mention is made of numberless religious or devotional books which were once thought indispensable in tens of thousands of homes. The

circumstance is highly significant, and illustrates with startling clearness the changed attitude of the reading-public towards religious literature.

The real meaning of this change is that the Christian superstition is crumbling. Everything eventually crumbles which is not true. Never was there so little religion, never so much Secularism, as at the present time. Never have men attended churches and chapels so little; never have they attended hospital and charity meetings so assiduously. Christianity is in the melting-pot, and Secularism is permeating everywhere. The Christian religion no longer satisfies. No faith can accept upon mere trust the religious misbeliefs of their remote and ignorant ancestors. Over the pulpits of the fast-emptying Churches is inscribed: "To the glory of God." That is the voice of the past. Secularism sounds the vibrant and triumphant note of the future: "To the service of man." Based on fables, supported by brute force, trading on ignorance, the Christian religion at length finds the conscience of the race rising above it. The voice of reason has been a still small voice, sometimes almost inaudible, though never quite stilled; but now it is swelling into a volume of sound which will overwhelm the din of sects and threats of priests.

MIMNERMUS.

## Who Killed Christ?

A JOLLY jack-tar came on shore and went to church for the first time in his life. The sermon was on the Crucifixion. The preacher waxed eloquent on the sufferings of Jesus and the frightful sin of his "murderers." Indignation glowed in the bosom of the honest salt, who felt his fingers itching to thrash the wretches. The next day he was looking in a shop window at a figure of Jesus on the cross. "Poor young fellow," he muttered, "poor young fellow! What a damned shame! Just then a Jew came up and looked into the window. "Do you know *him*?" asked the sailor, pointing to the crucifix.

"Oh, yes," answered the Jew, "dat's Jesus."

"Oh, you know him do you," said Jack, "then take that," giving the Jew a blow which knocked him down.

Picking himself up, and chafing his sore limbs, Mr. Isaacs asked, "Vat's dat for?"

"Ain't you a Jew," said Jack, "and didn't you crucify Jesus?"

"Oh," exclaimed Mr. Isaacs, "dat vas 'undreds of years ago."

"Was it?" said Jack. "Well, never mind, it's all the same; I only heard of it yesterday."

That unsophisticated salt acted like the vast body of Christians, who persecuted the Jews century after century for the alleged crime of killing Christ, and hardened their hearts against the evidences of his divinity. It is no exaggeration to say that the sufferings inflicted on the Jews by the disciples of the religion of love form the most appalling chapter in history. No ignominy, no outrage was neglected. They were degraded, disabled, robbed, tortured, and butchered wholesale. Yet they always remained obstinate; their miseries never converted them; and who can help thinking, with Diderot, that the grand miracle of history is not the Resurrection, but the incredulity of the Jews?

We deny altogether that the Jews did kill Christ. We say that he was actually executed by the Roman governor, and virtually killed by himself. His death was a species of suicide. His fate might have been averted by the slightest exercise of common sense.

Had Jesus been killed by the Jews, he would have been stoned. That was their method of execution, as may be seen in many passages of the Old Testament. Indeed, in the early part of his ministry, his countrymen *did* try to stone him, but he escaped from them; and Stephen, the protomartyr, whose death is recorded in Acts, was killed in that way. Being

crucified, Jesus was, of course, executed by the Roman law, as is further attested by the report of his trial. He was not even executed for a religious offence. It is perfectly true that he was charged before the High Priest with blasphemy, but the accusation had to be changed when he was brought before Pilate. The Roman governor looked upon "blasphemy!" and such cries as mere squabbles between Jewish sects. Like Gallio, he cared for none of these things, and he would have discharged Jesus had there been no other indictment. But he was bound to try Jesus on the charge of sedition, although he certainly did his best to get the poor fellow acquitted. "Art thou the King of the Jews?" asked Pilate, with mingled pity and derision. Jesus answered, "Thou sayest," which was simply pleading guilty. Setting himself up as King in a Roman province was sedition. He may have been unaware of the fact, but Pilate could not help that, and the rash enthusiast paid the natural penalty of his ignorance or his presumption. Indeed, the very inscription on the cross clearly showed the nature of the offence for which he perished. Surely, then, it is idle to make the Jews responsible for his want of gumption. That he had enemies, and powerful enemies, we have no doubt; and his conduct in Jerusalem before his arrest was calculated to exasperate instead of conciliating them; but they could not have compassed his death, except by assassination, if he had not played into their hands in a manner which can only be understood on the theory that he was half insane, or that his faculties were paralysed by danger.

Suppose, however, for the sake of argument, that the Jews did kill Jesus. Suppose he was put out of the way, not only by a powerful party at Jerusalem, but by the unanimous vote of his countrymen. We still insist that they were not to blame, if Jesus and they both believed (and we have *his* assent) that the law and the prophets declared the will of God. He had set himself up to be God, saying that he and the Father were one. Such language was shocking to an orthodox Jew, and on consulting his Scriptures he found the clearest instructions from Jehovah how to deal with the utterer of this blasphemy. God's order is contained in the thirteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. The words are perfectly plain. A child could understand them:—

If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Now we should like to know the ground on which Christians deny the propriety of the Jews carrying out this sanguinary order. The Old Testament, as well as the New, is a part of the Christian Bible, and it is the same God throughout, from the curse on Adam and Eve to the brimstone lake of Revelation. Freethinkers may object to the whole business, but how can a Christian do so without the grossest hypocrisy? The supposition that Jesus was God only makes the case worse, for then he was literally dished in his own sauce. *He* told the Jews how to serve those who sought to divide their attachment to Jehovah; *he* prescribed the stoning to death; and *he* was the chief victim of his own brutality. His own curses came home to roost. It was a splendid case of poetical justice. Were Jesus very God of very God, the Crucifixion was a play of "Tit for Tat, or the Biter Bit."

(The late) G. W. FOOTE.

### Te Deum Laudamus.

PRAISE God  
Whose all-wise world economy  
Caused rain to fall upon the sea!

G. H. B.

### Acid Drops.

Teetotalism brings its trials to the ritualistic Christians. One of the American States—Oklahoma—has prohibited the use of alcoholic liquor of any kind or for any purpose. But, as the *Church Times* says: "Bread and wine are the matter of the sacrament, and by wine is meant the fermented juice of the grape, and not any substitute or make-belief." So the Oklahoma Christians are in a quandary, and some priests have been "driven to the necessity of conveying wine surreptitiously into the State." With this smuggling the *Church Times* sympathises, because, as it remarks, the forbidding of all wine involves "dishonour to our Lord." We wonder what the other Christians who have argued that the Bible forbids the use of strong drink think of this? Perhaps they will feel towards "our Lord" as the old Scotch lady did when she was told that Jesus walked about on the Sabbath. "Mebbe he did," she replied; "but I think none the better of him for it."

At the National Free Church Council, a Baptist Army Chaplain, the Rev. D. J. Riley, said the soldiers were out of touch with the Churches. They did not like the narrow views of the Churches, nor their attitude to amusements. This does not promise well for the delayed revival of religion.

Christians have quaint ideas of getting labour cheap, but the following advertisement in an Essex newspaper is quite noteworthy in its way: "Leigh-on-Sea Baptist Chapel. Wanted organist, Christian, no salary, honorarium given. Write Secretary."

Mr. Horatio Bottomley is getting quite an adept at tickling the ears of the groundlings. Writing in the *Sunday Pictorial*, he declares "you can't conduct a big war on the cold and hopeless principles of a blank religious negation. Fighting and Faith must go together." Mr. Bottomley might have learned that Napoleon and Frederick the Great were both Freethinkers, and they conducted big wars successfully. Fighting and Faith do go together, unhappily, for the simple reason that religious folk are always quarrelling.

The Rev. Pedr Williams, after some years' sojourn at Durban, Natal, has now, in response to a Divine call, settled down at Swansea, where the rest of the clergy, with his valuable help, will "endeavour to uplift the banner of morality." Poor old Swansea! Although it has been crowded with churches and chapels for countless generations, it is only now, with the advent of a new minister, that it is going to "endeavour to uplift the banner of morality." We suppose that this is tantamount to a notice to quit to the wicked Freethinkers.

In spite of all appearances to the contrary, British Christians still profess to believe in the justice as well as goodness of the Governor of the Universe. After a very long silence on the subject, the Prime Minister expressed that belief before the Free Church Council the other day. And yet, though we claim to be fighting for God and his righteousness, the Germans unblushingly declare that, thanks to his direct aid, they have won a glorious victory in the East, and are on the eve of the final one in the West.

There is every likelihood of a bad attack of caterpillars on fruit trees this year says the Board of Agriculture. Maybe the Archbishop of Canterbury will draw up a dainty form of prayer to meet the situation.

A daily paper referred recently to the former pastor of Newington Tabernacle as Charles *Adam* Spurgeon, whereas the name should have been Haddon. Had the old Boanerges been alive he would have consigned that editor to the place so often mentioned in his sermons.

Bold advertisements asking for support for the new Education Bill have been published in the newspapers, and stress is laid on the inefficiency of the present system. Nothing is said, however, of the wasting of the time of the scholars by

teaching such nonsense as the stories of *Noah's Ark*, *Jonah and the Whale*, and other Biblical legends.

An elderly woman stated at Clerkenwell County Court that she caught a cold through holy water being sprinkled upon her at the time of an air-raid.

Dean Inge has told us why women wear hats in church. Speaking at Holy Trinity Church, Sloane Street, he referred to the Bible passage in which Saint Paul exhorted women to cover their heads in churches. That could only have been on account of the angels, the Dean said, for Paul thought that the passions of those spirits might otherwise have been excited. Oh, those naughty bogeys!

Parsons are very hard driven in order to attract congregations nowadays, and a North Country vicar announces special services for allotment holders, and even invites workers to come in their working clothes. Perhaps the vicar selects suitable subjects for his addresses, such as "The Garden of Eden," and "Eve and the Apple," and "Ezekiel's Cookery."

Sometimes the men of God give their game away with delightful simplicity. The other evening, a Wesleyan minister was suddenly called upon to lead a crowded audience in prayer. He was fluent, eloquent, and very much to the point. He bewailed the miseries, sins, and sufferings of life, and expatiated, in moving tones, upon the horrors and abominations of the War. Then he paused, and significantly added: "And yet, O Lord, thou art doing thy very best for this world of thine." What a compliment to the God of holiness and love!

The Rev. Dinsdale Young, one of the most popular of Wesleyan ministers, is an invincible optimist. In a lecture he assures his hearers that, in every department of life, "the best is yet to be." We agree, but repudiate Mr. Young's limitation—"for Christians only." For Christians the best has already been. The Golden Age of Christianity is a thing of the past. The reverend gentleman admits that this is true, if we judge only by appearances; but he pins his faith in the prophetic word and omnipotent love of Christ, both of which history has completely falsified. We believe "the best is yet to be," because Supernaturalism is passing, whilst Nature and Humanism are coming to their own.

The *Daily Express* declares that Mormons are active in Liverpool, and that 384 women missionaries have lately been appointed to Great Britain. There should be a boom in Joe Smith's religion shortly.

The dear clergy will not fight, but they are up in arms concerning the *maisons tolerees* in France and elsewhere. Perhaps they find it difficult to reconcile the idea with "a holy war."

To meet the increased cost of living, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have decided to raise the stipends of all incumbents of parishes with a population of 300 or more, and £35,000 will be so spent. The incomes of curates has also been dealt with. The Commissioners are keen business men, and know that reliance on prayer alone is mere folly.

Among the 30,000 men at Camp Lewis, near Tacoma, Wash., 113 different creeds are represented. Nearly one-fourth are Roman Catholics, and rather more than one-seventh Methodists. Baptists come next, then Presbyterians, Campbellites, and Congregationalists. There are not far from 200 Freethinkers, 153 of whom report themselves to be Atheists. Eight take the name of Freethinkers, 6 of Agnostics, 36 of Infidels. There is one Materialist, also one Spiritualist. One man is a Fatalist, one is Equal Rights. The Mormons have a contingent of 1,114, and a peculiar people called New Sectarrians (possibly an error for non-sectarians) supply 2,616. New Thought gets mention with 6, the same as, the Holy Rollers. An Occultist, a Yoge, a Swedenborgian, a New Idealist and a "Rosechucionse" (Rosicrucian?) are counted. The two Confucians, it is

presumed, are Chinese, and the nine Buddhists, East Indians. The Theosophists supply a troop of 17. The way the denomination of soldiers is arrived at in some instances is peculiar. One man at Camp Sherman in Ohio relates that when an officer asked him what his religion was he replied that he had none. "What is the church in your neighbourhood?" was the next question, and "Methodist" was the reply. "Then," said the officer, "you are a Methodist," and he stands so recorded.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

The Church of England is determined that the Fancy Religionists are not to have things all their own way, and the rivalry between the Church Army and the Y.M.C.A. is very pronounced. At the new and luxurious Church Army Club, at Marble Arch, titled ladies act as waitresses, and are daintily dressed in pink. Will the Nonconformists respond with pink dominoes?

The following is given in the *Daily Mail* of March 21 as an actual experience of a Church Parade and its sequel:—

"Church of England, stand fast! Wesleyans, fall out on the left!"

It was Sunday at the training depot, and the sergeant in command was forming parties to march to church or chapel. I hesitated.

"What are you?"

"Congregational."

"You go with the Wesleyans. You—next man—a Baptist? You do the same. What are you lot?"

"Presbyterians," replied one of a file of Scotsmen who were fading rearward.

As there was no church handy approximating to this denomination, this move was checkmate.

"All right. You five dismiss."

The following Sunday the Scottish sect had trebled its adherents. So they were put on fatigues for the afternoon, which had the effect of shrinking next Sunday's Presbyterians to five.

So much for the religious spirit of the Army!

The Rev. Llewellyn Jones, of Newport, Mon., thinks that "we may be on the edge of a great Religious Revival"; but we may not. We think, on the contrary, that we are not only on the edge, but in the midst, of a great Religious Decline, a decline that has been more or less steadily going on for a hundred years, and which is destined to continue until this baneful superstition has entirely vanished.

We wonder who the tame scientist is the Government keeps on hand for consultation! The other day we saw an announcement from the Ministry of Food that "scientific opinion is unanimous that extra rations are not needed for brain workers, because a man does not need more food because he works with his brain than he would need if he were not working." Wonderful! Brain-working does not use up energy; it makes no demand upon nerve tissue. Something is being created out of nothing at last! The age of miracles is not past. But we should like the name of that Government scientist. The only explanation we can see is that the statement was issued after a careful examination some of the Government offices.

Rev. H. P. Denison, Prebendary of Wells, appears to have got very near to the truth in a recent book, entitled *The Making of Gods*. He remarks that "Movements towards political liberty have always coincided with the failure to recognize just dues as belonging to God," and also that "The democratic movement is always marked by the revolt against the authority of God." We should not have put it quite that way, but should have said that as people put aside the ideas of the authority of God and dues to God, democracy and liberty develops. Still, it is very near the truth—and from a parson, too!

Rev. Douglas Roper, of Norwich, was charged with having broken into Heningham Church and stealing from the offertory-box. The accused said "it was wise he should make no observation," and was remanded. We presume that is what is meant by maintaining a "dignified silence."

### C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

March 31, Pontycymmer; April 7, Falkirk; April 14, Liverpool;  
April 21, Goldthorpe; May 5, Abertillery.

### To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—April 28, Nuneaton.

H. A. FELL.—Too lengthy for our columns. Thanks, all the same.

R. M.—The use of human excrement in early religious ceremonies is well known. One writer—J. G. Bourke—has written a large volume on the subject. The title of the work is *Scatologic Rites*.

F. L. POLAND (Ohio).—Paper is being sent. We have many readers in the United States, and after the War we hope to properly organize our sales on your side the Atlantic. There is no reason why the *Freethinker* should not have ten times the subscribers it has in America.

R. E. MASON.—We have handed on the information you give.

H. C. HEBLES.—We cannot place the reference at the moment. Can you give us the date of the article. We may then be able to find what you want?

A. MILLAR.—Hope to see you when we travel North.

A. C. APTED.—We may deal with Mr. Kidd's book later. We wish you success in your new departure. Have you anything in view?

G. RULE.—Thanks for suggestion, but there would be nothing saved in altering the size of the *Freethinker*, unless the pages were exactly halved.

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

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### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen lectures to-day (March 31) at Pontycymmer, South Wales. The meetings will be in the afternoon and evening, and a good rally of Freethinkers from the surrounding districts is anticipated. Mr. Cohen will be glad to meet as many of these as possible, with a view to future propaganda. Time and place of lectures will be found in the Guide Notices.

We have received a number of encouraging letters concerning the enforced reduction in the size of the *Freethinker*, for which we tender our thanks. But some of our correspondents appear to be under the impression that we are "downhearted." We beg to assure them that is not the case, even though the burden and the worry increases weekly. We do not, of course, like the change; but we held on longer than nearly everyone else, and the change we have made is less than that made by any other paper—particularly those of a propagandist character. We are facing the future quite cheerfully, but we recognize that the great thing is to keep the *Freethinker* going. We think we may say, without undue glorification, that the *Freethinker* has kept militant Freethought alive during the War, and that its continued

existence is vital to the future of the Movement. In this we are certain our readers will agree with us.

While on the subject of paper it is significant that while the Government long ago fixed a maximum price for the sale of waste paper to the paper makers, they left the price at which the makers might sell paper to the public quite open. That is, on the one hand it guaranteed the makers against paying an excessive price for materials, and then said to the manufacturers "You may charge the public as much as you like." And they have done it. Fortunes have been made in the paper trade, and some makers have asked prices that represented sheer exploitation. And, as was to be expected, it is the poor, struggling papers that have been hardest hit.

A very able and sympathetic address was given before the North London Branch by Mrs. Seaton Tiedeman, on "Divorce Law Reform," on Sunday last. Mrs. Seaton Tiedeman is Secretary of the Divorce Law Reform Union. N. S. S. Branches would do well to invite her to address them on what is certainly one of the most important questions of to-day.

The new Manchester Branch brought its winter's work to a very successful close on Sunday last with two lectures by Mr. Cohen. Nearly a hundred members have been enrolled, and all are in the best of spirits over the work done, in anticipation of what will be done when the work recommences in the autumn. The sale of literature has been excellent at all the meetings, and this means a very real enforcement of the message delivered from the platform.

All the committee and members of the Branch are loud in their praise of the industry and ability of the Branch Secretary, Mr. H. Black, and at the evening meeting Mr. Cohen was asked to present the Secretary, who was also the chairman of the meeting, with a fountain pen as a mark of the esteem in which all hold his services. The presentation came as a complete surprise to Mr. Black, but was welcomed for the spirit in which the present was made. We congratulate the Branch on having so efficient a Secretary, and can heartily add our own appreciation of his work, and also of the spirit in which the Branch is working. While that continues success is assured.

Mr. Percy Wilde gave a much appreciated lecture before the South London Branch on the "Descent of Man" with lantern illustrations. We understand that Mr. Wilde is willing to lecture on the same subject with the same illustrations before other Societies. Those who require particulars should write Miss Vance for particulars.

Is not the time come when the powerful countries of Europe should reduce those military armaments which they have so sedulously raised? Is not the time come when they should be prepared to declare that there is no use in such overgrown establishments? What is the advantage of one power greatly increasing its army and navy? Does it not see that, if it possesses such increase for self-protection and defence, the other powers will follow its example? The consequence of this state must be, that no increase of relative strength will accrue to any one power, but there must be a universal consumption of the resources of every country in military preparations. *They are, in fact, depriving peace of half its advantages, and anticipating the energies of war whenever they may be required.* I do not mean to advocate any romantic notion of each nation trusting with security the professions of its neighbours; but if each country were to commune with itself and ask—What is at present the danger of foreign invasion compared to the danger of producing dissatisfaction and discontent, and curtailing the comforts of the people by undue taxation? The answer must be this—That the danger of aggression is infinitely less than the danger of those sufferings to which the present exorbitant expenditure must give rise.—*Sir Robert Peel.*

## The Queen of Night.

### IV.

(Concluded from p. 182.)

SUSPENDED in space at a distance of a quarter of a million miles from our planet's surface, the orb of night tends constantly to fall towards the earth. But at a distance so great, in falling in the direction of the earth, the moon travels round it.

With a powerful telescope, the thousands of miles which separate us from our satellite are reduced to hundreds. This implies that, in the observatory, the lunar landscape is seen as if it were distant about 240 miles, and the objects on the moon's surface appear much as objects would be seen if viewed at the same distance with the unaided eye. Huge masses such as mountains, or broad expanses such as plains or dead oceans, may be rendered conspicuous, while a giant structure such as a cathedral would be visible; but smaller features elude observation. So far as direct observation informs us, the moon might teem with life without our knowledge. But there are other ways of determining the presence of organic bodies on the moon. Air and water are alike indispensable to the existence of floral and faunal entities on our globe. Therefore, in the absence of water and air on the lunar orb, the existence of life, at least as we know it, is completely precluded. Cogent reasons there are for thinking that, even if water be present on the moon's surface, it remains constantly congealed. Traces of water may possibly survive in the moon's interior; for, as the lunar world cooled down, its liquids penetrated the moon's mineral masses. But it is practically certain that the lunar surface is, and has been for ages, quite destitute of water.

The existence of a thin lunar atmosphere is still undecided; but if any atmosphere there be, it is so highly attenuated that no earthly organism could breathe in it. Gases environ Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, and the other planets, while the solar orb itself is encompassed by an enormous atmosphere, although its constituents are widely different to the oxygen and nitrogen which so largely enter into the composition of our planet's envelope of air. In this respect, the moon seems distinctly different to all the other members of the solar system available for purposes of study. Aside from the circumstance that some astronomers have detected faint indications of the existence of gaseous substances in depressions on the lunar surface, there appears not the slightest evidence of any lunar atmosphere whatever. Certainly it could be urged that it is impossible to view a translucent envelope. But, in the presence of any atmospheric covering, various phenomena might justly be expected; yet, as these are all absent, the hypothesis of a lunar atmosphere meets with small acceptance.

As the moon wanders round our earth, it occasionally passes between our planet and a star. The star is thus occulted or eclipsed by the moon. When an occultation is predicted, the observer notes our satellite's approach to the star, and immediately the moon moves in front of it, the star is extinguished. But the star's disappearance is so sudden that the moment of extinction may be precisely determined. Now, it is obvious that were the moon encircled by an atmosphere, then a star could not be occulted with such startling suddenness. For, if a lunar atmosphere remotely resembling the earth's atmosphere in density existed, a star would steadily fade and become invisible before it reached the moon's edge. The faintest atmosphere would not only suffice to displace the star, but its appearance would be materially affected by refraction. Such phenomena as these, did they occur, could scarcely escape notice.

Similarly, at times of solar eclipse, the lunar disc always appears clearly cut against that of the sun. And there are no traces of twilight on the lunar landscape, nor is there any softening at the shadows' edges, and both these effects would be observed if an atmosphere existed.

A world without water and destitute of any appreciable atmosphere is something entirely alien to us. The earth's mantle of air shields us from the scorching heat of the sun, and keeps the earth temperate during the night by hindering the rapid radiation into space of the warmth accumulated through the sunlit hours. But during the lunar day the solar rays make the moon's surface insufferably hot, although the heat is radiated away with great rapidity. The lunar night is pitilessly cold. The temperature of the moon in daytime probably attains our boiling point of water (212 deg. F.), while the frigidity of the night is probably twice as great as that of our polar regions.

Many superstitions are associated with the moon. In our Midland counties and elsewhere it is thought unlucky to kill pigs in the waning of the moon. Throughout Western Europe the belief is almost universal that the varying aspects of the moon affects the weather. But, as Dolmage reminds us, the moon is constantly changing during the whole of her monthly revolution. "Besides," he remarks,—

the moon is visible over a great part of the earth at the same moment, and certainly all the places from which it can be seen, do not get the same weather. Further, careful observations, and records extending over the past 100 years and more, fail to show any reliable connection between the phases of the moon and the condition of the weather.

It may be interesting to anticipate the emotions of the aviator of the future were he to successfully accomplish a voyage to the moon. Our airless and desolate satellite is a world of endless calm. No sound breaks the silence, no rivers run, no changes of any kind occur. The solar rays strike down upon a wilderness of barren rocks, and black shadows shroud the valleys. The stern contrasts of this barren globe are utterly unrelieved. The craters of the moon would present a melancholy picture of former glory, and the prophet Jeremiah mourning amid the ruins of Jerusalem may, perhaps, serve as an earthly parallel of the feelings likely to overpower an imaginative and sympathetic terrestrial visitor as he surveyed the silent memorials of a once active orb.

The moon's weight is only about one-eightieth part of that of our planet, and therefore the weights of lunar objects would be merely one-sixth part of the weight they possess on our globe. If our adventurous airman were a man of twelve stone, his weight would be reduced to about two stone. He would be able to jump a twelve foot wall as readily as he vaulted a two-foot wall on earth. Buildings could securely rest on the moon were they six times the height of terrestrial structures without exercising any heavier strain on their foundations. We may, therefore, without wonder, regard the fact that lunar elevations attain an altitude exceeding our loftiest mountain peaks. Mount Everest is the mightiest of the earth's elevations, and reaches a height of 29,000 feet. Lunar mountains of this height are numerous, while in one range known as the Leibnitz mountains there are several peaks which soar aloft to nearly 30,000 feet. One majestic peak of this lunar range ascends to an elevation of 36,000 feet.

Still more remarkable are the extinct volcanoes of the moon. Their craters are sometimes many miles in diameter. Indeed, the enormous craters of the giant volcanoes form chasms 100 miles across. The earth's leading elevations are huge mountain masses such as the Andes and Himalayas. On the moon, however, the



crater type is predominant, and in past times our satellite must have been the theatre of stupendous eruptions. Lunar craters to the number of 3,000 have been mapped already, and Professor Pickering assures us that there are more than 200,000 craters visible on that hemisphere which the moon displays to our planet. Unlike terrestrial volcanoes, those of the lunar orb lie in superficial depressions on its surface. But so immense is their diameter that a dozen of our largest volcanoes could be placed in one of the lunar rings or craters without filling it.

The height of the moon's mountains is determined by means of the shadows they cast. The length of a shadow is ascertained from the position of the sun. Shadows are at their shortest at noon, but the shadows lengthen as the sun descends to his rest. The altitudes of the lunar elevations are measured by first ascertaining the solar elevation above the horizon of the position occupied by the mountain. The shadow's length is then determined, and, consequently, the height of the object capable of casting a shadow of a given length in miles when the sun is situated at a certain position in the sky is easily established.

It has been scientifically known for several centuries that the moon is always present in the heavens in the form of a globe. Yet there are multitudes of people, even in our own enlightened Isles, who appear to imagine that the moon really increases and diminishes in size. It is true that Coleridge made his "Ancient Mariner" see a star lying within the horns of the crescent moon, and the idea that a star may be visible through what is in reality the dark body of the lunar orb, is still quite general even among "educated" citizens. Pictorial advertisements are sometimes displayed on the hoardings in which stars appear in that part of the sky where the opaque body of the moon is always present in a state of Nature. As the moon is sufficiently dense to eclipse the sun, it should be capable of blotting out the stars. It is a serious reproach to our modern educational methods that even the ancient Babylonians surmised that the moon's phases were caused by its illumined hemisphere emerging more and more into view as our satellite travelled through the heavens. This was also known in classic Greece, and Aristotle asserted that the moon was a dark object of spherical form lit up by the effulgence of the sun.

T. F. PALMER.

## Tales of Our Times.

### IV.

THE Cannibal King was at lunch when the German missionary was announced, but the latter, being no stranger, was graciously accorded an interview. He found the monarch squatting on a lion's skin with a huge dish of raw meat in front of him, and vigorously gnawing at a bone.

"Good afternoon," said the King cordially. "Take a mat and make yourself at home. Have a chop?"

"No, thanks," said the Missionary, eyeing the dish with some suspicion. "What I called to see your Majesty about is a rumour I have heard that you are getting up a war expedition against the Pongowongo tribe. Is there any truth in it?"

"There is," answered the King. "Most of my fighting men have already assembled, and we start for Pongowongoland early next week."

"What are you going to fight for?"

"Meat," replied the King.

"Meat!" exclaimed the Missionary, again glancing at his Majesty's lunch with evident disfavour. "I

should have thought that meat was about the last thing you needed."

"War-meat," explained the King: "the flesh of brave and powerful warriors slain in battle. You, of course, understand that we don't look upon war-meat merely as food. We regard it as a means of gaining strength, courage, and proficiency in war. The fact is that we Nyamnyams have experienced such a long period of peace that we are getting thoroughly slack. War and war-meat are absolutely necessary to maintain the strength, bravery, and all the heroic and manly virtues of a nation. A people that doesn't frequently engage in war is bound to degenerate and become weak, effeminate, and cowardly."

"There is certainly much truth in what you say," observed the Missionary, "and many soldiers and writers in my country would quite agree with you—except, perhaps, as regards the war-meat."

"We believe thoroughly in it," said the King, "though I am sorry to say my fighting men haven't tasted it for so long that I am beginning to be seriously doubtful of their courage. I, myself, feel that I am degenerating, though I try to keep up my old ferocity on a sort of make-shift diet. Now, what do you suppose this is that I am eating?"

"Haven't the least idea."

"Rhinoceros," said the King. "Now that you white men have killed all the lions in our country, the rhinoceros is the fiercest beast we have, but his flesh is, after all, a poor substitute for the real thing. Anyhow, I try my best, but old Whangbango, the General of my army, is becoming a regular slacker. He is practically a vegetarian now, and pretends that meat gives him indigestion. Fancy the Generalissimo of the Nyamnyam complaining of *indigestion*!"

"Deplorable," assented the Missionary. "But now, your Majesty, I want to make a suggestion to you. Instead of marching against the Pongowongos, why not make an alliance with them, and in co-operation with the troops of my august master the All-Highest, invade the British territories to the east of us? The great Kaiser intends to bring the whole of Africa under his dominion, and your Majesty's sound views on the advantages of war and the evils of peace—which are practically identical with those of our own great Von Bernhardt—mark you out as his natural ally. The Nyamnyams and the Pongowongos, numbering together, I understand, about a hundred thousand warriors, would be of great assistance in our coming campaigns; and when the conquest of Africa is completed, as it certainly will be in time, I can promise that your Majesty would be established as chief potentate on this continent under the gracious suzerainty of the All-Highest."

"It is a tempting proposal," said the King reflectively as he picked his teeth with a splinter of rhinoceros bone. "It would no doubt be a supreme honour to be chief potentate under your great Kaiser, and the conquest of all Africa certainly affords a prospect of unlimited war-meat. But I am afraid I cannot give you a definite answer just yet. Fact is, I can't quite see my warriors fighting side by side with the Pongowongos at such short notice, after we have been consistently fighting and eating each other for centuries. Besides, the Pongowongos already know of our intention to attack them, and have been mustering their fighting men as busily as we have, so I am afraid it is too late now for fraternizing. But after this little picnic is over there may be a chance of an alliance. The Nyamnyams and the Pongowongos are never so disposed towards friendliness as immediately after one of these little scraps, so that would be the time to try and put your proposal into practice, and I promise to do my best in the matter."

After a few mutual compliments the interview came to an end, and next day the supposed Missionary—who was, by the way, no missionary at all, but a political agent in disguise—sent a despatch to the chief of the Secret Service Department in the Fatherland. In it he stated that the All-Highest's schemes for the conquest of Africa were progressing favourably, and that he had practically secured the alliance of a powerful and enlightened monarch who, despite a tendency to look at military questions from a rather gastronomic point of view, showed a quite intelligent grasp of the leading principles of German kultur.

A. E. MADDOCK.

### Writers and Readers.

IN the first article of this series I mentioned that I would be glad to have any "relevant comments" on my remarks. The word "relevant" may have frightened those of my readers who stand in need of information which has no immediate relation to the subjects in hand. Let me say that I invite not only relevant comment, but also questions bearing upon literature, and the literary and historical aspects of Free-thought. Where, in my opinion, the subjects suggested, or questions asked have a general interest, I shall take the opportunity of answering my correspondents through the paper, and where the interest is merely personal, I shall reply direct. The most pressing need of a paper whose attitude to life and thought is opposed to that of the majority of people, and depends so much upon moral courage, is the cultivation of a more intimate relation between writer and reader. The benefit, let me remark, is by no means on one side. The reader stands to profit by the wider experience of the writer, who will profit equally, if not more, by the suggestion of new points of view, and by the raising again of questions which, he thought, had been answered once for all.

A correspondent who writes me an interesting letter from "Somewhere in France" tells me that he shares my admiration for G. H. Lewes. He seems to have missed Lewes's little book on *The Spanish Drama*, and asks for information about it. It is a 12mo. volume of 253 pages, published by Charles Knight in 1846, and may not infrequently be picked up for sixpence on the bookstalls. Although written so long ago, it is still a good popular introduction to the subject. It deals in a bright and lively way with the origins and characteristics of the Spanish theatre, and then analyses at length the best plays of Lope de Vega (1562-1635) and Calderon (1600-1681). Lewes's same criticism is a rebound from the hyperbolic eloquence of the Schlegels who claimed to find Calderon more philosophical than Shakespeare, whose irreligious humanism had no solution for the problems of life. Calderon, a devout Catholic, and an Inquisitor, who would have cheerfully burnt heretics like our own Marlowe, is praised for solving the riddles of existence in terms of Catholic dogma. Surely the least expensive of solutions! In opposition to the German Romantic critics, for whose hazy metaphysics he had a robust contempt, Lewes stresses the contrast between the intellectual and moral ideals of the religious drama of Spain and the irreligious drama of Elizabethan England. In the one there is no attempt to portray character, human nature is looked at from the outside, the pivot of the drama being the play of external events, of mere intrigue. In the other it is pre-eminently the individual that counts; it is the complex mentality of Hamlet that converts a drama of murders and intrigue into a subtle presentment of human life. Another point Lewes insists upon is the ethical contrast. Homicide, adultery, perjury, and other unsocial actions, are mere venial offence for the Spanish dramatist; the one unpardonable crime is denial of the deity. In Calderon's *Devotion to the Cross* there is a typical religious scoundrel named Ennio. "He recounts," says Lewes,

a few exploits which have distinguished him, such as the murder of an old Hidalgo and the abduction of the daughter; stabbing another Hidalgo in his nuptial chamber and carrying off his wife. He sought refuge in a convent, and seduced one

of the nuns. This apex of his villainy revealed to him the existence of his only virtue. He has a virtue, and one popular enough to cover a multitude of sins. His seduction of the nun stung him with remorse, and the first pangs of conscience he had ever felt. This glimpse of the true faith saved him. The terror of the offended Church and tribute to her awful power is the cause of his salvation.

Yet there is the lyrical side of Calderon's genius to balance his want of the higher objectivity. The gorgeous and luxurial imaginary, the iridescent colours, the subtle sound-patterns did not appeal to the somewhat pedestrian taste of Lewes. If any reader wants a sympathetic study of Calderon as a poet he will find it in Archbishop Trench's *An Essay on the Life and Genius of Calderon* (2nd edition, 1888). But, better still, because to read a book is always preferable to reading about it, he will turn to Shelley's translation of parts of *The Wonder-working Magician*, and to Edward Fitzgerald's *Six Dramas of Calderon Freely Translated* (1853). He will there find material which will help him to appreciate the truth of Lewes's indictment of the Roman faith as a hindrance to dramatic truth. He will also see what it is in Calderon that aroused the enthusiasm of Byron, Shelley, and Goethe.

One of the natural results of periods of great mental and emotional stress is a revival of the grosser forms of superstition. It cropped up everywhere in the Napoleonic period. A belief in "spooks," the communication of the dead with the living, is nowadays the unphilosophical side of a tendency to discredit reason in favour of instinct or intuition. An unconsciously amusing instance of this new necromancy is giving our ready journalists a chance of spreading themselves in non-committal praise or censure. An architect and archæologist, a Mr. F. B. Bond, has just published a book called *The Gate of Remembrance* (Oxford: Blackwell). It is the history of a psychological ("spookological" would be a better word) experiment which led to the discovery of the Edgar Chapel of Glastonbury. The chapel, I am assured by sceptical archæologists, might easily have been discovered without the assistance of monastic "spooks," for its position in relation to the main building is precisely what one would have expected from other early English structures. The chapel is mentioned in early documents, and there appears to be little doubt that Mr. Bond would have excavated where he did even if he had had no ghostly instructions. The "spooks," I am afraid, were worked in to sell the book, which, as a mere archæological monograph, would have attracted only the antiquarian specialist.

The method is interesting, and seems to have been something like this. The business is done by two persons who are either adepts in necromancy or practical jokers. On the whole, I am inclined to think that the book is a rather heavy joke; but mine, I may say, is not the general opinion. One of the persons is a specialist in archæology, with a knowledge of every fact about the Abbey; the other is an automatic writer, a spiritualistic medium. The operator, as it were, sends out a spiritual wireless, calling for help to discover the Edgar Chapel. The message is received by some monkish "spooks" who had been attached to the Abbey, and they are glad of an opportunity to talk on a subject they have at heart. Sometimes the ghostly monks are out in their reckoning, especially with regard to measurements, but correct themselves when sharply taken up by the operator. The unfortunate thing is that they do not tell Mr. Bond anything he did not know before; but, of course, there is no reason why they shouldn't, and an intelligent "spook" with exclusive knowledge of the subject could relieve us of no small part of our ignorance. And another objection to ghostly communications is that you may get on to a jocular spirit, who will amuse himself by pulling your leg. Yet there are any number of people who read this "psychical" rubbish with bated breath, and who groan with horror if you suggest a hoax.

Still, the method is one that might be used with effect if one could only get on to the right sort of spook. If Mr. J. M. Robertson, with the help of a medium, could have a long conversation with Robert Greene, George Peele, or

Christopher Marlowe, he would be able to re-write his book on *Titus Andronicus*, and would settle the question of the Doubtful Plays once for all. The ingenuous reader will at once see that the method only needs to be applied to produce the most startling results.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

## Correspondence.

### CONSCIOUS VILLAINY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I always look forward with such pleasurable anticipation to "Views and Opinions," which I invariably read more than once, and sometimes more than twice—and never fail to find stimulating—that I may, I hope, be pardoned a word of criticism on the first paragraph, in the issue of the *Freethinker* for March 17. The Editor says:—

In judging the evils current in any state of society, there is always a tendency to consider the class that profits from their existence as deliberately and consciously perpetuating them. This view, however, involves a totally false estimate of the quality of the social forces and of human nature. Conscious villainy is not a powerful factor in human affairs. The number who can plainly say, "Evil, be thou my good," is never more than a very small minority. Paradoxical as it may sound, deliberate and conscious villainy implies a degree of *moral* courage possessed by few, etc.

As a holder of the view which, the Editor declares, involves a "totally false estimate of the quality of the social forces and of human nature," I respectfully beg that my dissent may be recorded. I could not love our paper less, loved I not Freethought more.

I may not, of course, be right; it may be that there is some perverse residual religious element in my bones; but if I am wrong, I should like to be convinced of it. Constitutionally, the Editor differs from many of us in one very material respect. He never was a Christian. This may enable him to exercise a judgment more detached, and more impersonal and philosophical, than is possible to ex-Christians; but I venture to think that the observation and experience of very many will endorse my opinion, which is that the Editor has "got the wrang soo by the lug," or, as they say in Aberdeen (varying the metaphor), "tittit the wrang towie," this time.

I can understand it may be argued that lack of intellectual perception takes away consciousness and deliberation from villainy; but I should require very clear evidence to satisfy me that the class that profits from the existence of the evils current in society are such intellectual moles as acceptance of the Editor's proposition would condemn them to be. Villains who feel the need of religion betray their consciousness of the villainy of their depredations by their varying attitudes under varying conditions:—

When the devil was ill the devil a monk would be;  
When the devil was well the devil a monk was he.

A religious person cannot escape the admission that evil is "ordained" or "permitted" by his deity for some mysterious "purpose." It is no disproof of consciousness and deliberation in villainy that the villains, because of the opportunities furnished by wealth and comfort, engage in social activities of different kinds. Indeed, these activities are generally directed to the buttressing and perpetuation of conditions, institutions, and a system under which villainy in different forms is legalized and legally protected. Social pirates, plunderers, and profiteers are out to keep "evil" as far away from themselves as they possibly can. Divinely ordained evil is for the "other fellows." And society has sustained great loss by the enforced inactivity of many potentially useful individuals who are the victims of adverse conditions inflicted by the evils current in our state of society.

No doubt there is to conventional minds difficulty in separating and distinguishing activities which are purely religious and activities which are purely secular. But to the professional religionist all secular activities which are not sanctioned by, and do not subserve the interests of, religion are valueless. Nay, they are in his estimation, positively hurtful. And yet the professional religionist can find justification for any kind of villainy so long as it subserves religious

interests (*cf.* the case of Rahab the harlot). How can we say there is no deliberate hypocrisy in the attitude of the religious man, who has had the benefits of a good, all-round secular education, and takes this course? We have even known of clergymen who banned with one hand what they blessed with the other. The most eloquent clerical advocate of prohibition of alcoholic liquor does not refuse to accept pay partly contributed by brewers, distillers, and publicans.

My point is that professional religionists *consciously and deliberately* dose the common people with their narcotics. They are thus as the henchmen of the governing and wealthy classes of society *deliberately and consciously* trying to blind the poor to the injustices from which they suffer. So long as the poor majority are content to believe that all is for the best in this best of possible worlds, what object has the rich minority in trying to do anything to bring about radical changes? That minority may engage in social activities, but it is all *camouflage*. These activities are *consciously and deliberately* directed not towards effecting fundamental changes, but towards maintaining the *status quo*.

Finally, I demur to the suggestion that deliberate and conscious villainy implies a degree of *moral* courage possessed by few. Why should such courage be required by any one whose villainies are not punishable by any legal penalties?

IGNOTUS.

## 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.

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

#### COUNTRY.

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SWANSEA AND DISTRICT BRANCH N. S. S. (Dockers' Hall, High Street, Swansea): J. C. Thomas, B Sc. ("Keridon"), 3, "Lessons of the War—Industrial, Social, and Religious"; 7, "The Return of the Gnostic, or the New Epoch of God-making."

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