

The FREETHINKER

FOUNDED · 1881

EDITED BY CHAPMAN · COHEN ■ EDITOR · 1881-1915 · G · W · FOOTE

VOL. XXXVIII.—No. 15

SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 1918

PRICE TWOPENCE

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page.
<i>Religion and Death.—The Editor</i>	217
<i>The Christ-Myth.—J. T. Lloyd</i>	218
<i>"The Saint Paul of Darwinism."—Mimnermus</i>	219
<i>The Mechanism of Man.—T. F. Palmer</i>	220
<i>To the Members and Branches of the National Secular Society.—Chapman Cohen</i>	224
<i>Mr. Maskelyne and the Spirits.—W. Mann</i>	224
<i>The Blank Wall.—Arthur F. Thorn</i>	227
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions.

Religion and Nonsense.

We said last week that nothing seemed strong enough to stop the clergy talking nonsense. And the statement applies with equal force to religious writers as a whole. Presumably it is the fault of the subject. One cannot touch pitch and remain undefiled, and one cannot preach on a nonsensical subject and talk sense. When Charles II. was asked how he could account for the popularity of a certain shallow-minded preacher, he replied that "His nonsense suited their nonsense," and the reply serves as an explanation of much that occurs to-day. Anyway, we had hardly got rid of last week's notes before we came across another illustration of what we had said, this time from the *Times*, which provides its readers with a weekly religious article from an anonymous correspondent. The article is entitled "The Easter Assurance. An Answer to a Moral Demand." Where the moral demand exists it is impossible to say. It is as imaginary as the assurance is doubtful. Those who find comfort in the writer's "assurance" will quite justify Charles's explanation—His nonsense suits their nonsense.

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A Satire and an Absurdity.

What is the "Easter assurance?" What is "the moral demand" to which an answer is given? The Easter message is, of course, the resurrection. "Christ has risen"! And that follows upon the Christmas message of Peace on earth, good will to men! The first part of the message is a satire, the second is an insult to civilized reason. Think of "Peace on earth" when the nations who accept and profess the message are engaged in more ruthless slaughter than the world has yet seen, when the deaths of only a few hundred men are summed up in the laconic message "All was quiet at the Front yesterday"! When has there been peace on earth during the whole period of Christian history? Christian peace is like Christian veracity: it is something peculiar to itself. There is nothing like it in the world. And it is well for the world that there is not. It would be better still for the world if neither were so general. And the satire is equalled by the insult. A resurrection from the dead is beyond human belief, because it is outside the power of human conception. No one can believe it to be true, one can only say one believes it. The savage

credits it because he is ignorant of the processes of life and of the nature of death. The civilized man cannot because his knowledge of life and death—imperfect though that knowledge may be—excludes real belief. A mere formula is made to usurp the place of reasoned conviction. The modern Christian does really try hard to remain a savage, but he is not altogether independent of his environment. The modern man will out, and the faith of the savage is apt to wear thin when it runs up against the insistent pressure of civilized life.

* * *

A Useless Example.

The *Times* writer is concerned with the many thousands of young men who have died and are dying during the War. To them and to us, he says, "faith in the resurrection assures us that those who have passed out of our sight have lost nothing that made their life true and beautiful." How so? Faith in the resurrection of Jesus can prove nothing so far as we are concerned. If Christ was God how can what happened to him be any indication of what will happen to us? On the Christian hypothesis he belonged to an altogether different order from that to which we belong. His resurrection may prove that Gods will not remain in the grave, it has no bearing upon what will happen to man. And he did many things that are beyond our power. To commence with, he got himself born without an earthly father. How many of us can accomplish that? He fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and had more food left at the end of the meal than he had at the beginning. Not even the Government Food Controller can do that. He walked on the waves, stilled the tempest with a word, cast devils out of men and women, converted water into wine. How many of us can do these things? And if we cannot imitate him in these things, why should we be able to imitate him in rising from the dead? His end matched his beginning. Both are equally reasonable; and the man who begins by crediting the one has naturally, no difficulty in accepting the other. If he was a God his example is useless to us. If he was a man his birth, life, and resurrection are, in the light of reason, a tissue of fantastic absurdities.

* * *

Morality and a Future Life.

The Christian doctrine of a future life, we are told, answers the moral demand that good shall prevail. It does nothing of the kind. The moral demand is that right shall prevail, not somewhere else, but here. And a postponement is not an answer. When a wrong is done, the moral demand is not satisfied because someone is punished for it. The moral demand is that it shall not occur at all. Man's faith in God is strained because the wrong occurs; it is not strengthened by being told that in some place God has straightened it all out again. That is merely stupefying the moral sense with the narcotic of faith. And reason is apt to reflect that, if there be a God, he made this world as well as the next. It would surely have been as easy to him to so arrange this world that the reasonable demands of the moral

sense should be satisfied. The plea of another world in which God has made things right, is an admission that in this world he has made them all wrong. It is bringing God under the jurisdiction of a First Offenders Act. God is given another chance to redeem his character—somewhere else. He has admittedly forfeited it *here*; he will reform, and vindicate it *there*. Man is very forgiving to his gods. He excuses their blunders and palliates their iniquities. He *hopes* that God will behave himself better in the next world. He *knows* he has conducted himself but poorly in this. A future life in which the thousand-and-one injuries of this life are to be removed is the hypothesis of a knave that will satisfy only the credulity of a fool. * * *

Can the Future Atone?

The future cannot undo the past. An injustice once done, remains an injustice for ever. Think of the folly, the criminal folly, of telling the people of Belgium, or Siberia, or Poland, who have seen their homes ruined, their sons and brothers and fathers killed, their daughters, sisters, and mothers outraged, that justice will be done in the next world! Revenge—natural, inevitable revenge—may be gratified; but will that restore the life of the one or the honour of the other? How can the next world make good the loss of the many thousands of young lives that might have been spent in labour to make the world better worth living in? It is this world that mourns their loss; it is this world that is the poorer for their going. Poorer it might have been had they lacked the courage to face the prospect of departure; but the loss remains a loss none the less. Our grief over their death bears witness to the loss we have sustained, and it gives the lie to the pulpit theorizing of these pious traffickers in human sorrow. It is bad enough that our moral sense should be outraged by the slaughter of the world's youth, but surely there is no need to outrage our reason by this attempted justification of their death. * * *

Away with Cant.

Death sits crowned in thousands of homes to-day, and will sit enthroned in many more with the passing of each day's sun. The fact is before us, gross and palpable, and we all face it with what resolution we may. But it is surely unnecessary to pretend that this world-disaster is a blessing in disguise, and that childish faith in a fantastic future life compensates for the loss the world is experiencing. It is a lie to say that those who have died "have lost nothing that made their life true and beautiful," even though it may be true they would have lived a poorer life had they lacked the courage to lose it. They have lost all. If there is a gain, it lies with those who remain. The profit from the dead lies with the living; but it need not be the base gain of these profiteers of the pulpit. Our young men have faced death with their heads up and their eyes open, and we only show ourselves worthy of their sacrifice when we clear our minds of cant and face their loss with something of the same courage with which they faced their end.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The God of the Bible is an old Jew. A maniac, and even a monomaniac.....A furious sort of fool who passes his time in grumbling, threatening, howling like an angry wolf, and spending his time in a delirium of rage shut up in his cloud. He is a fool who thinks himself Judge, Public Accuser, and Executioner all in one. We are amazed at the tenacity of his hatred, which fills the Bible with bloodthirsty murmurings.—*Romain Rolland, "Jean Christophe."*

The Christ-Myth.

II.

(Concluded from p. 207.)

SOME theologians make a distinction between Jesus and Christ. A few maintain that Jesus became the Christ as an historical character, and generally speak of him as Jesus Christ, whilst others regard the Gospel Jesus as a Divinely endowed human being, and Christ as a purely theological creation. Such thinkers as Dr. Anderson, of Dundee, however, deny the historicity of both the Gospel Jesus and Christ, and yet worship the latter as the completest manifestation of God. We are in full agreement with Dr. Anderson as to the unhistoricity of both Jesus and Christ, but differ from him absolutely in his estimate of Christ as a veritable revelation of any super-human being, our contention being that no such personality has ever existed, and, consequently, that no revelation of him is conceivably possible. And yet there are divines not a few who still believe that Jesus and Christ are two names of one historical character, who lived on earth in the capacity of the God-man. They assume an air of superiority, and refer contemptuously to such Biblical critics as Strauss and Bauer, declaring that they have outlawed themselves "in the sight of all sober judges. What did Bauer, for example, say about the Four Gospels? Simply that they contain not so much history, serving as a basis for dogmas, as dogmas or abstract conceptions turned into history." Bauer says:—

We have shown that all that which constitutes the historical Christ, what is said of him and what we know of him, belongs to the world of conception, and indeed of Christian conception, and consequently has nothing to do with a man belonging to the real world.

Surely that is a sane and safe position to occupy, against which no valid arguments can be advanced. Henry C. Sheldon, an American, has published *A Critical History of Unbelief in the Nineteenth Century*, which, though weakly critical, is in no true sense a history. With the pseudo-historical aspect of it we are not now directly concerned; but as a criticism of the anti-Christian theories of last century it is a highly amusing failure. Strauss is pronounced an unreliable critic of the Gospel Jesus, because in his later years he plunged "into the abyss of materialism and negation." That fatal plunge, the author admits, did not "immediately discredit" his critical work; "yet this dismal transition cannot be wholly put out of sight in the estimate which is to be formed of the competency of Strauss to deal successfully with the deeper problems which belong to the history and philosophy of religion." It is beyond all doubt that such an illogical and immoral insinuation puts Mr. Sheldon entirely out of court as an honest and competent defender of the Christian faith. Were such a canon of criticism to be generally accepted all unbelievers in the inspiration of the Bible and the truth of the Gospel narrative would be excluded from the list of "sober judges"; and this is the kind of exclusion in which Mr. Sheldon unblushingly indulges throughout his book, thereby disqualifying profound scholars like Mr. John M. Robertson and Professors Gilbert Murray and Bury for a seat among "sober judges." Merely to state such a pretension is to condemn it. And yet all Mr. Sheldon's attempts to refute the arguments of unbelieving critics are laughably futile. Assuming the existence of the Heavenly Father and the absolute perfection of the character of Jesus he says:—

To take Jesus for the ideal means, in short, little else than to accept the historical demonstration. Men

simply find it impossible out of all the resources furnished by the annals of the past to paint in the abstract an ideal which can take precedence of that which stands forth in concrete form in the Gospel story. No theory about the necessary imperfection of the individual can be permitted to contradict the well-attested fact that in Jesus Christ the real and the ideal found their identity.

Now, as a matter of fact, we do not admit the ideal perfection or sinlessness of the Gospel Jesus. Brief as the alleged record is, it presents him as vain, conceited, claiming equality and even oneness with God. No sane believer in a Supreme Being would have spoken about himself as he almost invariably did. To believe in him was man's chief duty and privilege, while not to believe in him was to be damned for ever. Obedience to his commands was the sole condition of continued acceptance with Heaven. If a person ever lived who made such wild claims for himself, the only sensible inference we can draw is that he was a more or less mad visionary. Then, on the practical side of his character, he was anything but ideal. He even disowned his mother and brethren, who regarded him as beside himself. His one ambition was to be followed as he wandered up and down the country, passionately urging people to leave everything and go after him. "Suffer me to go and bury my father first," one pleaded; but Jesus angrily answered, "No; let the dead bury their dead, but come thou and follow me." With all these strange characteristics in his mind, Strauss spoke of Jesus as a problem, an enigma; but Mr. Sheldon asks, "Why should one who has so powerfully affected the course of history be accounted a perfectly unsolved problem? Is not such a conclusion a virtual judgment on the criticism of Strauss?" For once we are forced to take Mr. Sheldon's side. Jesus is not an unsolved problem, but a burst bubble; not an unread riddle, but a spent illusion. That he has powerfully affected the course of history cannot be disputed; but it is equally certain that he has affected it largely to its detriment. When he came to power under Constantine, the clock of progress not only stopped, but was turned backwards several long hours. His history has been one of turmoil, cruelty, and war. The Church herself has been a well-nigh continuous battle-field, party rising up against party, and faction crushing faction, love being conspicuous by its absence. Mr. Sheldon adds that "a valid criticism surely ought to make of Jesus something better than a mere enigma"; but is a sheer myth of any more value than an unsolved problem? Christ is a myth, and in reality has never done anything, either good or evil; but the Church has wrought mightily in his name, and naturally held him responsible for all. She has opposed social reforms and justified slavery in his name; she has tortured, burnt, and beheaded whom she called heretics to the glory of his name; and she has engaged in many bloody wars in order that his so-called kingdom might come. But at last both the myth behind the Church and the Church herself are being increasingly seen in their true light, and are slowly disappearing. To day's cry is for realities, not dreams; for the light of reason, not the vagaries of faith; for the kingdom of man, here and now, not the kingdom of God in a world to come.

J. T. LLOYD.

CHRISTIANITY A FAILURE.

Ah! how true it is that Christianity has not, as you say, Christianized the world! There is something curious in the spectacle of the embarrassment of every sect of Christians in accounting for this fact. I know no subject on which there is more miserable floundering among incompatible views and untenable assertions.—*Harriet Martineau.*

"The Saint Paul of Darwinism."

The distance, and as it were the space around man, grows with the strength of his intellectual vision and insight; his world becomes profounder; new stars, new enigmas, and notions are ever coming into view.—*Nietzsche.*

GRANT ALLEN deserved well of his generation, for his finest and most suggestive work was that of a popularizer of science. He fell early under the domination of the master minds of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, and he never tired of bringing their teaching before popular readers. He was not a specialist, but he had a complete acquaintance with science, and he had a splendid and attractive gift of interpretation. "The Saint Paul of Darwinism," someone dubbed him, and certainly his power of popularizing the master's teaching was very remarkable.

Whatever Grant Allen wrote was always pointed and illuminative. This was, in part, due to the variety of his early experiences. Before he was twenty-five he knew Canada, England, and the West Indies. He was educated in America, in Dieppe, in Birmingham, and at Oxford. He also had some experience in the Indian Statistical Department. And all this varied experience of men and affairs was turned to account in his writings. His papers on biology, philology, the evolution of species, and kindred subjects, were bright and readable, even at times amusing. As a rule, when serious scientists try to be humorous, the result is "too deep for tears." This racy gift of Grant Allen's made him suspect in some scientific circles. Serious pedants professed to scorn his scientific journalism. They despised the star-gossip of Richard Proctor on the same grounds, preferring, presumably, the scholastic and unbearable simplicity of the lamented Dionysius Lardner, whose chaste volumes used to cumber booksellers' fourpenny boxes, alongside such light reading as Zimmermann *On Solitude* and Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs*. Whether the scientists felt that, having gained their knowledge by years of work, it was prodigality to give it away so easily, or whether the old clerical spirit had found a new lodgment in scholastic circles, may be an open question. Nothing appeared to irritate some of the authors of ponderous monographs so much as having their life-work made intelligible to the masses. But Grant Allen hoisted the engineers with their own gunpowder. He opened up a new universe to tens of thousands, with a charm all its own.

Who that came fresh to the study of science could ever say an ungrateful word of the author of *Carving a Coconut*, *The Aesthetic Analysis of an Egyptian Obelisk*, *The Romance of a Wayside Weed*, *The Daisy's Pedigree*, and scores of other delightful and informative papers? He awoke a new interest, and, unconsciously, led the unsuspecting reader through a course of Darwin, Spencer, Tyler, and many another disregarded author. In entrancing chapters, Grant Allen led the large reading public to understand the mysteries that, expressed in the esoteric terminology of scientific language, else had remained comparatively unknown. Now, thanks to Grant Allen, the ordinary reader has a clear idea of the labours of the great thinkers of our time, and, it may be, see more clearly the tendency of those movements than those who, with technical knowledge, dissect the old faiths whilst still worshipping the Goddess Grundy.

Grant Allen was more than an amateur, but he carried his weight of learning gracefully. Though prejudiced against the classics, he produced a translation, with an anthropological introduction of Catullus's most famous poem. From the lofty region of thought and scholarship it is a sharp curve to turn to Grant Allen the

novelist. In the days of threadbare plots, when all the old devices that were as embroidery to well-spun stories, were worn to skeletons of construction, it was a pleasure to find Stevenson and Rider Haggard rivalled in their romances by facts from the laboratory, and problems from the researches of philosophers. Towards the end of his career Allen wrote certain "Hill-top" novels, penned purely for didactic purposes. *The Woman Who Did* and *The British Barbarians* did not set the Thames afire, but, owing to clerical influence, they caused a drop in the sale of Allen's other novels. The Irish booksellers, as was no doubt natural in a priest-ridden country, refused to sell these books, and Allen found, to his cost, that propagating advanced opinions was not "roses all the way."

Theology has always met strange bed-fellows, and one is not surprised to find the versatile Grant Allen among the theologians. He was rightly proud of being one of the first to apply seriously evolutionary theories to the belief in deity. In his preface to his masterpiece, *The Evolution of the Idea of God*, he said:—

It contains, I believe, the first extended effort that has yet been made to trace the genesis of the belief in God from its earliest origin in the mind of primitive man up to its fullest development in advanced and etherealized Christian theology.

It was an honest attempt to explain a big matter, and Allen had his reward. The book made a deep impression, and Herbert Spencer wrote: "I congratulate you on its achievement. I had no idea you had been devoting such an immensity of labour and research to the subject. The bringing together of the evidence in a coherent form, and showing its bearing on the current creed, can scarcely fail to have a great effect." The tribute was deserved. In Allen's fine book the whole theistic question is discussed in a nutshell. He shows quite clearly that the Christian idea of deity is but a residuum. The attenuated deity is what is left when the other gods of the Pantheon are broken to pieces and ground to powder; simply the abstract form and general designation. A bubble is blown with real soapsuds, but it grows ever thinner and more transparent, and is most beautiful when it is at the point of breaking. The beauty does not save it, it breaks and disappears.

Allen met with great opposition on account of his book. Publishers, who were simply tradesmen, feared to offend their customers, and would not allow him to give full expression to his ideas. Science, pure and simple, did not pay; and novel-writing, to which he was compelled to turn, had to be carried on within absurd and galling restrictions. The publishers wanted "smooth tales, generally of love." The last kind of work in which he exercised his versatile pen was art criticism and guide-book writing. His papers on Italian art are as valuable as they are interesting, and in his series of *Historic Cities* he showed us what a guide-book should be.

No religious ceremony was permitted at his funeral. It would have been an outrage on his life and teaching if any theological invocations had been intoned over his dead body. His life was a battle against creeds and conventions; he lived free of such bonds and he died free of them. "The rest is silence."

Below all the strife of opponents the quiet growth of appreciation, silent but real, gathers strength. For in the heart of the democracy his lessons have sunk deep, and if professors frown and undergraduates sneer, it is something to have helped the people to grasp the teachings of science. Allen called himself a humble disciple of Darwin and Spencer, but, in popularizing the work of these masters, he made an enviable reputation, and what writer desires more?

MIMNERMUS.

The Mechanism of Man.

PHYSIOLOGY, although a quite modern study, has made enormous progress, and the functions of the body, both in health and disease, are now extensively understood. But much remains to be accomplished before this far-reaching department of biology can more than approximate to exactitude. Anatomy preceded physiology in order of historical development, and when we recall the obstinate and vindictive antagonism of the Church towards the pioneers of anatomical inquiry, we cease to wonder that our knowledge of the workings of the animal organism remains incomplete. But the advances of the science of physiology are now much greater than at any earlier time. Improved methods of investigation are to-day employed in all the leading medical and biochemical colleges in the civilized world. From Tokio and Calcutta to Paris, London, and Vienna; from Cambridge and Edinburgh to the up-to-date laboratories of America, legions of workers are engaged in mastering the problems presented by the marvellous organic substances of Nature.

Many years ago Huxley discerned in protoplasm the physical basis of life. The life and growth of the human organism, in common with the life and growth of all other animals, depends upon the activity of the living material termed protoplasm. And this is equally true of the entire vegetable kingdom. Protoplasm is contained in minute bodies called cells, and one of the single-celled creatures, the tiny amœba, is a fair example of the myriads of cell-units which build up the bodies of multicellular animals such as fish, birds, reptiles, and mammals. A thousand amœbæ arranged in a row would barely measure an inch. Yet each amœba is a complete animal, although, when viewed under the microscope, it seems a mere jelly speck. Still, this primitive creature will protrude any part of its surface so as to secure a fragment of food, or, if the nutrient particle is in contact with the amœba, the unicellular animal closes round the material and absorbs it. Any part of the amœba's body functions as a mouth. It has no organs of any kind, and breathes from all areas of its body surface. Having grown to a given size, it reproduces itself by splitting into two parts, and this process of reproductive division constantly proceeds.

Countless millions of cells similar to those that form amœbæ enter into the architecture of the higher animal body. The human skin, nerves, blood, bone—indeed, all our organs—are constructed by cells. Like the simple amœba, the human body-cells are perpetually changing with the activities of life. Moreover, in the blood-stream of man and the lower animals reside vast colonies of colourless cells—the phagocytes—whose function appears to be that of warriors, for they promptly attack and devour any detrimental substances which invade the circulatory system. The resemblance of these white phagocytes to the amœba is striking, although, unlike the amœba, they are confined to the higher animal blood. Our body-cells multiply by means of division, and thus growth takes place, and injuries to the organism are repaired. The somatic cells absorb the nutrient substances conveyed by the blood, utilize it, develop, and reproduce themselves. New tissue is thus formed. All living Nature, from the lowliest organism to the majestic oak and lordly mammal, consists of cells.

The biological cell is a protoplasmic fragment containing a nucleus, which usually carries a smaller body, the nucleolus. But protoplasm forms the chief material of the cell, which is generally enclosed by a cell-wall. A speck of protoplasm bearing a nucleus is the simplest mode of life positively known to exist. The plasm of

the cell-body is termed cytoplasm, while that of the nucleus is the nucleoplasm.

Just as a society is composed of social units, so is the organism constituted of cells. In the amœba we find that all areas of its body-surface function more or less alike. But in the higher living realms a physiological division of labour has been evolved. This differentiation has immense advantages. Not only are specialized organs more efficient in fulfilling their functions, but in the progress of life these peculiar structures have become specially fitted to their work. The chief function of the cells is to build and repair the tissues. They are thus occupied from the cradle to the grave. In one body-region the busy cells are eliminating waste products, in another they are active in restoring with living substances the places vacated by dead material.

Of tissues seven kinds are known. The muscular and nervous tissues—the master tissues—are instrumental in consuming and controlling the energies of the body. The remaining five tissues are the supporting tissues. These furnish energy to the master tissues, sustain them in position, feed, and guard them. The muscular tissue mainly consists of cellular layers arranged end to end. These cells possess the important property of becoming widened or shortened when stimulated by nerve impulses. Nerve tissue is composed of delicately branched cells. The fibres or branches of some nerve cells reach a length of several feet, and may extend from the vertebral column to the foot. The nerve fibres which conduct impulses to the nerve cells are termed sensory fibres, while those which transmit impulses from the nerve cells are the motor fibres. The organs of the body act in response to the impulses sent through the motor fibres.

Connective tissue is also constructed by cells generously furnished with delicate fibres. These last are of two kinds—attenuated and rigid white fibres and coarser yellow fibres which are extremely elastic. This tissue is present in all parts of the body, and connects the other cells and tissues. The muscle cells are interlaced with it, while the tendons at the terminations of the muscles are almost entirely made up of it. As a matter of fact, if all the non-connective tissue were taken away, the connective tissue would provide a complete model of all the animal organs. As Coleman remarks in his excellent *Biology*: "How abundant this tissue is in the skin may be known from the fact that leather consists entirely of it."

Oil is deposited in the connective tissue cells, and this gives rise to fatty or adipose tissue. The epithelial tissue is formed through one or even several layers of cells lying in close contact. This form of tissue is devoid of connective tissue, and, indeed, of any fibres, and is therefore the simplest of the tissues. The outer layer of the integument or skin—the epidermis—is composed of epithelial tissue, as is also the mucous membrane which lines the interior of the body. Epithelial tissue is destitute of blood vessels, and the epithelial cells derive their nourishment from blood liquids which ooze through the adjacent tissues. These cells are mostly transparent, and the redness of our lips and gums is due to the blood which lies beneath their mucous membrane. The nails of our fingers and toes consist of epithelial cells, and, when clean, are practically transparent. And, in shaving, as Huxley once said, so long as we do not penetrate the epidermis no bleeding results.

Another kind of epithelial cell serves as a glandular lining. Glands secrete useful fluids, and likewise form noxious excretions which, in healthy conditions, are expelled from the body. Then there is cartilage or gristle—a tough if pliable tissue. Cartilage is extremely useful in easing jars and jolts, and in the case of moveable joints in diminishing friction.

When scrutinized under the microscope the hardest bones are seen to contain small cavities. Within these cavities the bone cells lie immured in mineral matter. The stone-like bone is developed by the living bone cells which deposit phosphate of lime and limestone around themselves, and thus build themselves a prison. The imprisoned bone cells are sustained by nourishment which passes to them through minute channels. The duration of cell-life varies considerably. Bone cells remain alive for years, while other cells are born and die in the space of a few short hours.

(To be continued.) T. F. PALMER.

Acid Drops.

We really sympathize with Mr. Bottomley over one incident connected with the recent German advance. The hanging Virgin of Albert, which was secured in its place by mechanical means, but which Mr. Bottomley "boomed" as a miracle, has now fallen—taken down or shot down by the Germans. So, bang goes another miracle. After doing so much to help God during the War, it would only have been gracious of God to have helped Mr. Bottomley a little. The legend was that the War would end on the day the statue fell. But it is a big blunder to date a religious prophecy. It should have run simply "after the statue falls."

The truth about the Virgin of Albert is that it was fixed in its leaning position by British engineers. Every soldier who had been in Albert knew all about it. The very surprising thing is that Mr. Bottomley, who said he had been in Albert, knew nothing about it. Such want of observation is very regrettable.

The Rev. Professor David Smith, in his Correspondence Column in the *British Weekly* for April 4, tells an inquirer who doubts the justice and goodness of God that it is not his true self that is speaking, but a lower and less worthy one. All doubters are mad. Scepticism is a form of insanity. It is that kind of silly talk which is making unbelievers by the thousand; and if he but knew it, Dr. Smith is doing our cause incalculable service by flinging such senseless expressions into circulation.

Providence is as careless of its churches as of its children. Iver Heath Church, Slough, has been broken into by thieves for the sixth time.

Londoners were startled on Good Friday by heavy rolls of thunder, but considerable relief was experienced when it was realized that it was only "Heaven's artillery," to quote a newspaper phrase.

Oh, the glorious free press of England! In the case in which the Rev. Sir Douglas Edward Scott, Bart., was charged with bigamy with a barmaid, a number of papers suppressed the fact that defendant was a clergyman. And the dear clergy so seldom pay for advertisements.

The *Ashton-under-Lyne Reporter* contains a smart passage of arms between the Rev. Mr. Cannings and a Rev. Mr. Parry who had objected to State help being given to poor children. Says Mr. Cannings:—

Within a stone's throw of Mr. Parry's door there were little children living in wretched slums, ill-clad and insufficiently fed, and very many of them needing medical treatment. Mr. Parry, as a beneficed clergyman, enjoyed a secure position, his food and shelter safely provided. The progressive merely asked that the same security that the State gave to the clergyman should be given also to needy childhood, and that provision should be made for these helpless victims of unjust social conditions. And to foam against these humane and reasonable requests, and ridicule them as "State Pap" was to reveal one's-self as out of touch with the modern demands of reason and humanity.

The only comment we have to make is when Mr. Cannings sees so much, it is a pity that he does not pitch the rest of his religious lumber overboard and have done with it.

Canon Burroughs asks all Christians to stay away from theatres that openly flout "all that we stand for." The world would be a pretty place if some of these clerics had their way. There would be a committee of clergymen sitting to decide which plays should be produced, and they would probably enforce the singing of a hymn before the curtain rose, and a collection in aid of the Churches after the performance closed.

Canon Burroughs, in an Easter message to the *Daily News*, quoted a passage from an officer's letter at the Front, "Come on! Be a man and fight like hell." This is precisely what the dear clergy will never do. They much prefer to console the girls left behind by the fighting men.

Principal D. L. Ritchie, in an article entitled "An Epochal God," which appeared in the *Christian World* for March 18, informs us that hitherto we have had two kinds of God, namely, the intellectual and the sentimental, and that now a brand new Deity is about to put in an appearance, who will be known as the moral God. Thus we learn that the Divine Being is a moulded, not a moulding, character—man's creature, not his Creator. That is to say, man has made God in his own image, not God, man's. We have been saying this for many years; but it is a new and most refreshing thing to find it so clearly expressed by a clergyman, and a trainer of clergymen, as well.

The Rev. Mark Guy Pearse, the popular Wesleyan minister, tells us that what we need most at present is a new religion, the old one being out of date and impotent; and the great refrain of a lecture recently delivered by him was: "O, God, when will it come?" Christianity, as we know it, has had its day, and even its ministers are looking for its successor. At any rate, Mr. Pearse is said to have held his audience spellbound as he flung orthodoxy to the background and made "a living humanitarian religion his outstanding theme." The world is moving after all.

After extolling the "noble art of self-defence" at a boxing show at Birmingham, Bishop Wakefield said he had just challenged Sir John Holder, the brewer, to stand up in a bout. The Bishop added, "Sir John has given me best." What a pity the contest did not take place! In the event of victory, the Bishop might have aspired to the Boxing Championship.

Sir William Robertson Nicoll declares that "in the new world of Christ and nowhere else is there any hope." Then this world is, indeed, absolutely without hope, for "the new world of Christ" is a sheer myth, and they who believe in it follow the veriest will-o'-the-wisp, though the majority of them know it not.

Sir William's credulity is a perfect marvel. Speaking of the resurrection of Christ, in the *British Weekly* for April 4, he says: "Who could have imagined the story of his resurrected life if it had never been? Who could have contrived that unimaginable blending of heaven and earth?" Why, the truth is that the world literally teemed with Saviour, God and resurrection stories. At that time of day there was no need to create or imagine anything, but simply to arrange and adapt materials that were already in existence in superabundance. The Christian myth is only one of a great multitude of similar ones.

We are fast approaching a religious agreement as to the cause and perpetuation of the War. We have several times cited religious speakers and writers in this country who said that God allowed the War to spiritually purify us, and permitted it to continue so that we might become religiously clean. Now, the Ex-Chancellor of Germany, Dr. Von Michaelis says that the German people were also becoming spiritually corrupt, and "God desired to preserve us from complete materialism." So it's all for our good. We should be duly thankful!

Rev. W. A. Duckworth, Lord of the Manors of Frome and other places, died leaving an estate valued at over £186,000.

Of course, this money did not come from his profession as a clergyman, but it is clear that being a clergyman, offered no bar to its possession. So "Blessed be ye poor."

The Church Missionary Society is appealing for £10,000 to Christianize Palestine. After promising to found a Jewish State, a vigorous attempt is to be made to turn it into a Christian one. Of course, the Jewish State is a myth; the most that can happen is a State in which a large proportion are Jews, and in which Jewish freedom is secured. But it is not playing the game to ask British Christians to supply £10,000 to undermine the Jewish State before it is established. And there really are quite enough Christian States in the world. That is one cause of the present trouble. A few more non-Christian States might make things a little pleasanter.

The dear clergy are always assuring the faithful that religion is without money and without price, but ecclesiastics are not innocent of finance. In a recent Chancery law case, the payment of a legacy of £100,000 by the late Baron Llangattock to the Welsh Church was ordered by the Judge. The touch of irony was added, for the followers of the Prince of Peace were instructed to invest the sum in War Loan.

Two women have been admitted as deacons by the Bishop of Llandaff. As most congregations are composed of ladies, Christianity promises to become almost entirely a feminist movement.

£117,503 was raised in the Salvation Army Self-Denial Week. This should have the pleasing result of keeping hell alight a little longer.

Rev. Fort Newton said at the City Temple the other day that "the greatest teacher of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness was Shelley." The peculiar thing is that this "greatest teacher" should have written himself down an Atheist. The truth is that what Shelley saw was the evils of malignity and of the spirit of revenge. Forgiveness is no more Christian than is gravitation. And of vigorous haters and practisers of revenge Christian nations are easily first.

Some of the Good Friday newspapers were rather startling. One had a leading article, "The Day of Calvary." What was that editor thinking of to print "news" two thousand years old?

A Sunday paper declares that Father Bernard Vaughan "makes his own bed and sweeps his own room." Millions of people do the same, but they do not get flowers thrown at them.

The *International* (Johannesburg) of February 8 publishes the following:—

A coloured man was going along an East Rand Suburb one Sunday morning. He saw a number of people entering a Church, and as he was far from home he mingled with them intending to spend the hours in worship; but no sooner than he was inside he was jostled out. A policeman was hailed, and he spent the next hour in the Charge Office instead of the church. On Monday he was convicted and fined £1 for trespassing in a private place—a church. We cannot wonder at that man turning round and saying, "I shall have no more of your religious mockery with its theoretical 'Come Unto Me,' and your practical £1 or a month with hard labour.

But what would you? Even in Christian America the white man will not usually worship in the same church as the black one. Christian brotherhood has its limitations.

Owing to the demand for War-news, the newspapers were published on Good Friday, and the obsequious editors did their best to put a little piety in their columns. One pen-pusher wrote, "London was mostly at church," undismayed by the headline in the same page, "Seaside Resorts Packed."

The Bishop of Birmingham declares that "England needs to be aroused by suffering." Indeed! It is a pity that the clergy evade their share of hardships.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

April 14, Liverpool; April 21, Goldthorpe; May 5, Abertillery.

To Correspondents.

- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—April 28, Nuneaton.
 "FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—E. J. Pearce, 2s. 6d.; J. Maclachlan, £1; J. S., 2s. 6d.; W. Booth, 5s.
- MRS. E. TAYLOR.—Very pleased to hear from you. Such heartfelt letters as yours does one good to read. We agree with you that nothing can exaggerate the horrors of the old English Factory System. And you have placed your finger on its greatest evil—it has accustomed generations to live in a way that should be impossible in a civilized country.
- G. F. LAWES (Vancouver).—We were not thinking of, nor were we concerned with the personal character of the man. We were only interested in the nature and influence of the forces set at work. And we have seen nothing in the course of events to seriously change our opinion. Great ideas have a way of over-leaping the character of those who express them.
- D. McDERMOTT.—The poem is an imitation of Burns, but *not* by a master hand, although the topic commends itself to Free-thinkers. We have noticed what you inquire after in the journal indicated.
- BERT OLDS.—The number of clergymen of all denominations in Britain is probably about 50,000. As you say, the casualties amongst them are not striking. But then, as a class, they are exempt. We wish that all parents would follow your example in bringing up their children. The letter by "W. Sivertson" is quite a good one.
- ROBERT PARKER (Glasgow) writes that he is trying to show his gratitude for all we have done in keeping the paper going during the War, by putting it into as many new hands as possible. That is the kind of gratitude we want. When we are at liberty to write the story of *how* we managed, it will form quite a tale of adventure.
- H. DAWSON.—Glad to hear your son and his comrades find the *Freethinker* so interesting. As you say, it will tell its tale "when the boys come home."
- W. BOOTH.—Your requirements have received attention. As you say, the difference between a German shell falling on a church and on a Freethought hall is considerable. One is an outrage; the other would have been a divine judgment.
- We have to acknowledge several letters of thanks for parcels of literature sent to soldiers for distribution. We rejoice to know these have been found useful, and shall be pleased to send more, so far as we find it possible.
- A. HINDLEY.—Sorry we cannot answer your questions at length. (1) Not received. (2) Shall be pleased to have an account if anything improper occurred when you asked to affirm. (3) We do not know the age of the person mentioned. (4) Certainly, in our opinion, the Bowman judgment legalized all bequests to any Freethought Society. (5) You will only find what you require in the twelve-volume edition of Ingersoll's Works. Thanks for your good opinion of our work.
- GENERAL FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—Bethnal Green Branch, 5s.; Manchester Branch, £1 4s. 10d.; "In Memoriam" Emma Theobalds, £2; Charles Day, 2s.
- BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—Bethnal Green Branch, 5s.; Manchester Branch, £1 4s. 10d.
- J. MASTERS.—Thanks for securing two new readers, with a promise of more. Paper has been sent.
- H. AMEY.—Get your friend to have done with generalities, and ask him where, and in what way, Christianity acted as the champion of women.
- The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*
- 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.*
- Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*
- Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.*
- 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 visits Liverpool to-day (April 14), and lectures there in the hall of the Clarion Cafe, 25 Cable Street, at 3 and 7 o'clock. The Liverpool "saints" have been much troubled lately over the shortness of suitable halls—all being taken up in other directions for the War. Mr. Cohen hopes to see a good gathering, however, of all his Liverpool friends.

Our readers will be interested in the news that Mrs. Francis Gordon Foote, wife of our late editor's only son, presented her husband with a daughter on December 29, 1917. Mr. and Mrs. Foote reside at Berkley East, South Africa, hence the time between the event and the announcement. We congratulate the parents, and wish the young lady a safe and comfortable journey over the hills with which nature so thoughtfully provides newcomers.

The Executive of the N. S. S. has decided that the Annual Conference shall be held in London on Whit-Sunday, for which purpose the Queen's Hall has been engaged. Railway travelling is not over-pleasant under War conditions, but we hope that provincial Branches will make a special effort to send delegates. The business will be important, as will be seen by reference to another column in the present issue.

The *Manchester City News* for March 30 publishes a report of Mr. Cohen's last lecture in that city. The report is a very good one, and we notice it here in order to record a departure which is a welcome sign of the times. Reports have been much more frequent of late than they were, but there is still room for improvement. We are late in noticing the matter, but the fault is not ours. A copy of the paper has only just reached us.

The leaflet on *God and the Air-Raid* has been out of print for several months owing to delay connected with the shortage of labour. We have now a fresh supply, and they can be secured at 1s. per 100, postage 2d. extra. The leaflet has been found very useful, and the two editions that have been issued brought plain truths before Christians in a striking manner. We hope our readers will see that this edition gets the rapid circulation it deserves.

We are asked to announce that a debate between Mr. M. Maubrey and Mr. E. Bury has been arranged to take place at the Caxton Hall on April 17, at 8 o'clock. Subject, "The Ship Without a Rudder." Admission is free.

"Tab Can" writes:—

I have noticed that in Europe, these last few years, the word "Pagan" is coming into employment. The population is slowly dividing, not into sects, but into Christian and Pagan. This shows advance. Gradually, I hope that the Christians will slip back into a comparatively small minority, holding their own laws, morals, and customs, but unable to impose them upon the nations by force.

Only, I would that those who are not of them (I am an Agnostic-Deist) should come forward, and boldly declare that all who accept Authority against Reason are intellectual enemies of mankind—for such they certainly are, however well-meaning.

Whatsoever nation should get the start of the other in making the proposal to reduce and fix the amount of its armed force, would crown itself with everlasting honour. The risk would be nothing; the gain certain. This gain would be the giving incontrovertible demonstration of its own disposition to peace, and of the opposite disposition in the other nation in case of its rejecting the proposal. *The proposition should be made in the most public manner*—should be an address from nation to nation. This, at the same time that it conciliated the confidence of the nation addressed, would make it impracticable for the government of that nation to neglect it, or to stave it off by shifts or evasions. It would sound the heart of the nation addressed. It would discover its intentions, and proclaim them to the world.—*Jeremy Bentham.*

To the Members and Branches of the National Secular Society.

DIRECTLY after my re-election as President of the N. S. S., I said that in my opinion the time had arrived for an overhauling of the machinery of the Society. Further experience has served to confirm the opinion, which, indeed, is widely held throughout the country. I have no desire to dwell upon the defects of our organization—they are fairly apparent to those conversant with the N. S. S. My suggestions take the more positive form of reconstruction. And I am printing them here—preparatory to their being brought before the Conference—because I wish to give all the members and Branches of the Society ample time to reflect upon them and to digest them. I shall also be pleased to receive suggestions for improvement before they are placed on the Agenda.

My suggestions, which are governed by the ideas of securing a more efficient organization at headquarters and of giving all parts of the Society a more direct control of, and greater interest in, its work, are as follows:—

1. That the Executive consist of ten members, elected at the Annual Conference. Not more than one member of a Branch to be eligible for election. Members who do not belong to a Branch must belong to the Society for at least three years before being eligible for election on the Executive.
2. After the Conference of 1918, the names of all candidates for election, with the Branch—if any—to which they belong, shall appear on the Agenda, which shall be issued one month before the Conference.
3. The present Conference (1918) to nominate and elect the Executive.
4. An Annual Report and Balance Sheet shall be issued to all members of the Society.
5. Each Branch shall appoint a Corresponding Member of the Executive, who shall receive a report of all business done by the Executive, and be advised of any special and important business coming before the Executive.
6. In places where no Branch of the N. S. S. exists the Executive shall have power to appoint a representative who shall keep the Executive informed of all events touching the work and welfare of the N. S. S.
7. Branches to be grouped over given areas and an organizing secretary appointed as early as possible.
8. There shall also be appointed, as early as possible, an organizer for the whole of the country, with such duties and on such terms as shall be afterwards decided.
9. Either in conjunction with, or separate from, other officials there shall be appointed local press representatives, and a general Press Representative at headquarters, his duties to consist in watching all matters connected with Freethought work which may arise in the public press.
10. That it shall be an instruction to the Executive to appoint a Finance Committee and a Propagandist Committee.
11. That in place of the Interim Conference ordered by the Conference of 1917, the Executive be authorized to call an annual meeting of members and unattached Freethinkers for the discussion of such subjects as are of general interest and importance.
12. That the place of the Annual Conferences shall be determined by a vote of the Branches, the Executive having first ascertained what places are prepared to receive the Conference, and that the Conference shall not be held in the same town more than once in four years.
13. That whenever possible the Executive shall require a prospective member to be proposed and seconded by two members of the Society.
14. That at an early date steps be taken to (a) combine the N. S. S. and the Secular Society, Limited, under the general title of the National Secular Society, Limited, or (b) convert the N. S. S. into an incorporated body.

I am convinced that the above suggestions contain the skeleton of an organization that will consolidate the work done. During the two years I have been President of the N. S. S. I have spared myself in no degree. What has been done is before the party. The N. S. S. is stronger than it has been for years. Branches have greatly increased in number, and the membership has been almost doubled. Naturally, I am anxious that the results achieved should be conserved, and, I believe, this can best be done along the lines suggested. I hope, therefore, that Branches of the Society will give the whole matter their serious attention, and that the Conference of 1918 will mark the beginning of a new and flourishing era in the history of the N. S. S.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Mr. Maskelyne and the Spirits.

II.

(Concluded from p. 212.)

During the past 40 years I have investigated the manifestations of every Medium of note who has appeared in this country, and I have found nothing but fraud.—*J. N. Maskelyne to Mr. E. Smedley, March 31, 1906.*

HAVING obtained his flukey verdict over Mr. Maskelyne, Archdeacon Colley, of course, made the most of it. He gave lectures in different parts of the country, at which he made statements that Mr. Maskelyne regarded as distinctly libelous; and, in a letter to Mr. Smedley, he declares his intention of sending a shorthand reporter to take notes of Colley's statements. In another letter to Mr. Smedley (December 3, 1907), Mr. Maskelyne complains: "He (Colley) entirely suppresses the fact that the Jury gave a verdict against me solely because they thought I should have made the spirit disappear, and immediately I announced my intention of doing this he withdrew his challenge. One of the Jury also informed me that ten of them held out for two hours for a farthing damages but two cranks would not agree to less than £75. Colley claimed 3,000."

Mr. Maskelyne employed a private inquiry agent, who made some astonishing discoveries in Colley's past career, but as the Archdeacon is now dead—he died in October, 1912—we will bury the details with him.

Mr. Maskelyne, commenting on his death, observes (October 7, 1912), "He (Colley) was going to preach Spiritualism at the Church Congress, where he was generally laughed at, and I think the excitement was too much for his weak heart. He was awfully afraid of being buried alive, and directed that his body should be dissected at Birmingham Hospital and cremated."

In a letter to Mr. Smedley dated September 25, 1913, Mr. Maskelyne observes:—

.....With reference to the address of Sir Oliver Lodge to the British Association, he has said nothing new. For many years he has believed in Spiritual Manifestations upon insufficient evidence. I have sat with him and Sir William Crookes at *Seances* and have seen them puzzled by the simplest tricks. The minds of Scientists are quite unsuited to such investigations, sharp school boys are much better. You often find that persons who are exceedingly clever in some respects are exceedingly foolish in others. One faculty appears to be enlarged at the expense of others.

But the most interesting letter of all is one dated April 15, 1909, it deals with Home, Dr. Wallace, Mrs.

Guppy, and the Davenport Brothers. It runs as follows:—

St. Georges Hall, Langham Place, London, W.,
April 15th, 1909.

DEAR MR. SMEDLEY,—In reply to your letter of the 12th inst., I must tell you that I never had an opportunity of attending Home's *Seances*. He was a great swell and never gave public *Seances* and never made a charge for his services but always expected a present worth 4 or 5 times more than he could charge as a fee. I have been told by persons who know him well that he used hypnotism largely, he could do very little with those he could not get under control. If you read reports of his *Seances* you will find that he went round the circle and made passes over each sitter. You must always bear in mind that a medium can produce an effect upon some persons that no Conjuror can produce. A Conjuror says I am going to show you a trick. A medium says I am going to raise the spirits of the dead. The effect upon persons who believe such a statement is very great, in fact they become hallucinated and can be made to believe almost anything.

There is no doubt about the sincerity of Dr. Wallace, but if you knew him personally you could not fail to see that he is just the kindly confiding gentleman that can be imposed upon. Some people, such as Mr. Stead, humbug themselves. He can sit down with a pencil in his hand and allow his subconsciousness to run riot and believe that spirits are guiding his hand. I know an old gentleman who could sit and think instantly of his dead wife until he could see her sitting in her empty chair. This gentleman had the good sense to know that it was simply an illusion conjured up in his imagination.

The trick of producing flowers has often been exposed. Females usually perform this trick; they carry the flowers between their legs and the dew is produced by a small bottle of water. Doubtless Mrs. Guppy worked the trick in this manner. She was a fat, vulgar woman. I once advertised a pair of old houses for sale and Mrs. Guppy (then Mrs. Volckmann) came to my house to see them. We struck a bargain and had a glass of wine together afterwards. I asked her how the spirits were getting on, and she gave me a knowing wink and burst out laughing. She had given up Spiritualism then.

As regards the Davenport Brothers, one of them died in Australia many years ago, and shortly before he died both brothers confessed that all they did was trickery.

It is quite untrue to say that all great thinkers who have studied Spiritualism have become believers, it is only those who believe that are paraded by the wire-pullers of the fraud. Thousands of great men have investigated the subject and have turned away in disgust. You should read the "Report of the Seybert Commission on Spiritualism."

I could give you facts that would fill a book but must conclude for want of time.

With kindest regards, Yours sincerely,
J. N. MASKELYNE.

The statement about Home bears out what I have stated in previous articles to be the reason why Home was never publicly exposed. His good social position and his refusal to take a fee gave him the power to exclude from his *seances* all those, like Mr. Maskelyne, who he feared exposure from. Mr. Maskelyne says he never had a chance to attend one of Home's *seances*. But if Home's manifestations were really genuine, he would not only have welcomed investigation, but he would have challenged it.

Of Mrs. Guppy, as Mr. Maskelyne remarks in his little book on *Modern Spiritualism* (pp. 99-100), "the great marvel by which she obtains a niche in the Spiritual Temple of Fame is that she was taken up from her household accounts, *en deshabille*, at Highbury

Hill Park, and carried by the spirits to 69 Lamb's Conduit Street, where, when she dropped through the roof and through several ceilings (without leaving any apertures), she came down 'plump' upon the centre of the table, the ink with which those 'household accounts' were being made up still wet in the pen!" The last word, uncompleted, was understood to be "pickles."¹ The distance between the two points travelled is three miles, and as only three minutes elapsed between the wish for her appearance and her arrival, she must have travelled at the rate of a mile a minute. As she was said to have been the heaviest woman in London, it is a wonder she did not knock the house down. She must have been a pretty good handful for the spirits. The cover of Mr. Maskelyne's book is adorned with a picture of the event, entitled "A Moonlight Transit of Venus." Two female spirits and one little sprite, seated on a spirit-bottle, are engaged on the operation. Mrs. Guppy, represented as a fat, middle-aged woman, attired *a la* middle Victorian, is holding a quill pen in her outstretched hand. In the background looms a public-house, bearing the legend, "Gammon, Importer of Spirits." The moon, wearing a human face and a monocle, looks down smilingly on the scene. *Punch* satirized it as follows:—

There is a lady, Mrs. Guppy—
Mark shallow scientific puppy!—
The heaviest she in London, marry,
Her, spirits three long miles did carry.

Upon a table down they sat her,
Within closed doors. What! you know better,
And we're all dupes and self-deceivers?
Yah! Sadducees and unbelievers!

Mrs. Guppy was, however, very jealous of her rivals in the medium business, and, says Podmore, "on more than one occasion, assisted in exposing or embarrassing rival pretenders to mediumship. She subsequently married Mr. Volckman, the gentleman who seized the 'spirit' at Miss Cook's *seance*."²

It was during a *seance* given by Herne and Williams, in June, 1871, that Mrs. Guppy performed her aerial feat which landed her on the *seance* table. Now, this Herne and Williams were both impudent frauds. In 1878, at Amsterdam, Williams was caught in the act of producing fraudulent phenomena, and upon being searched there was found, says Podmore, "on Williams a dirty black beard with brown silk ribbon, and several yards of very dirty muslin—the simple ingredients which represented the spiritual make-up of the repentant pirate, John King—together with another bottle of phosphorized oil, a bottle of scent, and a few minor properties."³

This spirit of the pirate, John King, was the same spirit on duty at the *seance* in 1871, although it was another spirit named "Katie" who did the donkey work of conveying Mrs. Guppy across London. We give an extract from an account of the proceedings:—

John King's voice was a very deep one, while Katie's was more like a whisper, but perfectly distinct.....When asked if she would bring us something, she said, "Yes, yes." One of the visitors (a confederate, evidently), in a joking sort of way, remarked, "I wish she would bring Mrs. G(uppy).".....Upon which another said, "Good gracious! I hope not; she is one of the biggest women in London." Katie's voice at once said, "I will, I will," and John's rough voice shouted out, "You can't do it, Katie," but she appeared to chuckle and repeat, "I will, I will." We were all laughing and joking at the absurdity of the idea, when John's rough voice called out, "Keep still, can't you?" In an instant somebody called out, "Good God! there is something on my

¹ Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii., p. 83, says "other accounts" give the word "onions." Perhaps it was "pickled onions."

² *Modern Materialism*, vol. ii., p. 79.

³ *Modern Materialism*, vol. ii., p. 111.

head," simultaneously with a heavy bump on the table, and one or two screams. A match was instantly struck, and there was Mrs. G(uppy), standing on the centre of the table, with the whole of us seated round the table, closely packed together, as we sat at the commencement. John King's voice shouted out, "Well, you *are* clever, Katie."¹

It is amazing that people could be made to believe that such puerile hooligan antics were the work of spirits.

In conclusion, it may be said that Mr. Maskelyne, by his public performances at the Egyptian Hall, and afterwards at St. George's Hall, did more than any other man to discredit this pernicious superstition; and our thanks are due to Mr. Smedley for allowing the late Mr. Maskelyne's letters to be made public.

W. MANN.

Correspondence.

CONSCIOUS VILLAINY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The question raised by "Ignotus" regarding conscious villainy among professional religionists seems to me, as an "ex-Christian," of vital importance to the cause of Freethought—and, indeed, it must decide whether Truth shall triumph soon or only after prolonged struggles. For, if we are opposed to a group of religionists who "*consciously and deliberately*" assist in what, in the end, amounts to villainy, then we might well abandon the strong cudgel of Reason and try less abstract methods. And by new tactics we could speedily wreck the last hulks of religion. Indeed, so much worthier would our opponents (in my opinion) be, that the fight would be short and sharp, and could only result in universal Freethought. Such, however, is not the case.

Without considering the phenomena of religious mentality or the general trend of human nature towards folly, "Ignotus" has crowned religious practitioners with really undeserved honours—for there is merit in being *deliberately and consciously* bad or good. He appears to forget that conscious villainy must have opportunity and incentive, and that given such, it is, at the most, a powerful minority in human affairs. And without unconscious folly—where is conscious villainy?

There is, in my opinion, insufficient *sub-conscious* villainy prevalent to warrant the assertion that "professional religionists *consciously and deliberately* dose the common people with their narcotics" in order to help maintain an unjust *status quo*. That in this respect there are a handful of consciously villainous clerics I do not deny, but as with similar human fallacies undergoing the test of time—the main body of them are *dosed by their own narcotics*, and, being mentally chloroformed from the clerical cradle onwards, are peculiarly prone to the unscrupulous few—who are, of course, of great social influence, and have deeply rooted interests in almost every phase of modern life. But even this villainy is not a predominant cause; it only exists after folly, and decides nothing, and may, all along, have no immoral basis whatever—some of the greatest minds are prone to intellectual perversity.

It is passing strange that "Ignotus" should need clearer evidence of the strength for harm of rampant folly when utilized by villainy than the present War. The parallel is there. Men, far from "intellectual moles," have justified any diabolical deed, and, no doubt, felt anything but conscious of villainy. Nor does "intellectual perception," at its highest, always analyse the moral groundwork of any of our cardinal obsessions to-day. A few scoundrels may pervert the whole mind of a nation; and, from not insignificant intellects, obtain "highly moral" justification.

Far from having the "wring soo by the lug," the Editor's assertion that "conscious villainy is not a powerful factor in human affairs" must surely be the wider view, and the most worthy of Freethought. After all, though intellectual stupidity is more formidable than rank villainy, we shall not attain the goal by denouncing the lesser evil, in the belief that there lies the root of the trouble. On the contrary, and whether right or wrong, such a proceeding makes the going

¹ Podmore, *Modern Spiritualism*, vol. ii., p. 82, quoting from a letter in the *Echo*, June 8, 1871.

harder and creates more stupidity where mental clarity is direly wanting.

Finally, "Ignotus" misvalues the quality of *moral* courage when he thinks that, without legal penalties, it is not implied in conscious and deliberate villainy. It depends, of course, upon the condition of the mind at the moment of decision or inception. Given a certain rectitude or habit of mind, a flash of moral courage is undoubtedly necessary, and generally present, when conscious and deliberate wrong is "wireless," as it were. But if such rectitude be absent, both the consciousness of villainy and the moral sense are either partially impaired or entirely absent. Even so, the *moral* courage, living and dying, primarily and upon the inception of thought, is not influenced in the first place by a sense of one's immunity from, or liability to, punishment. "And the man who will have the truth at all costs promises to die with no better epitaph than 'Here lies a crank'"—the whole human tragedy in one anguished sentence, Sir. Truly, this Freethought is a hard but *magnificent* cause! Oh, for a millionaire!

In closing, may I—a very recent recruit in your ranks—also record my profound appreciation for the ever-welcome and always re-read "Views and Opinions."

W. O. PARKER.

SIR,—May I suggest to your correspondent "Ignotus" that the examples of "villainy" which he adduces as "conscious" do not bear out his contention. "Villains who feel the need of religion" do, as a matter of fact, show the exact contrary very vividly. Their awakened consciousness brings with it repentance and, as a corollary (perhaps temporary), abstention from villainy; and though they return to their vomit again, it is not until their consciousness has been once more lulled into slumber by force of habit or by renewed temptation. It must be borne in mind that few of us are capable of steady, consistent thinking. We act on the thoughts of the moment, and neither remember that those of the past have been different, nor foresee that those of the future will be. We do not even correlate such thoughts as we entertain at any given moment, with a view to their mutual consistency.

Again, "Ignotus" says: "The professional religionist can *find justification* for any kind of villainy....." Do not those two words which I have italicized destroy his argument? Has he never heard of self-deception? The religionist (and he is not alone in this) has deluded himself into believing his own justifications; that is the truth of the matter. Those who forged apocryphal gospels must have known that they were telling lies, and those who burnt men and women for a difference of opinion must have known that they were killing their fellows; but they glowed with conscious virtue—not villainy—nevertheless.

That the governing classes have often deliberately perpetuated evils is undeniable; but that does not prove that they believed them to be evils. We are all of us too apt to think that what we should not like is nevertheless very good for others. Those who "dose the common people with their narcotics" do often believe that these are beneficial medicines, or at least not harmful. If it be argued that men wilfully and deliberately remain blind—that they will not examine and consider lest they should be compelled to amendment—I am in agreement; but does not this show that they could not continue their villainy, did they become truly conscious of it?

CHESTER KEITH.

Obituary.

Another link with the age of Bradlaugh has been broken by the death of Mrs. F. W. Theobalds, of Leyton, who was buried in Chingford Mount Cemetery last Saturday. Mrs. Theobalds was born at Kettering in 1850, and joined the N.S.S. at the Hall of Science in 1884. She was a hard-working wife and mother, striving and cheerful to the last hour in spite, or rather because of her lack of religion. She brought up seven children, three of them, it seems, for the War. Two are still at the Front; one has been discharged, a grandson has been killed. Her calm and noble life through sorrow, struggle, and storm will be a ceaseless inspiration to her husband and family. The Secular Burial Service was read at her grave by the undersigned.—H. V. STOREY.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON APRIL 2.

The President, Mr. Chapman Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Braddock, Brandes, Eagar, Gorniot, Leat, Neate, Palmer, Roger, Samuels, Silverstein, Thurlow, Wood, Miss Kough, Miss Stanley, Mrs. Rolf, and the Secretary.

Minutes of last meeting read and confirmed.

Monthly cash statement presented and adopted.

Twenty-five new members were admitted for Goldthorpe, Manchester, Nuneaton, Portsmouth, Swansea, West Ham, and the Parent Society.

Application was made for the formation of a Branch in Portsmouth, and the necessary conditions having been complied with, permission was granted.

The President reported the opening of new ground in Pontycymmer with two highly successful meetings.

A letter from the Birmingham Branch expressing their willingness to make arrangements for the Conference and a similar letter from Manchester, subject to the possibility of procuring a hall for the public meeting, were both discussed. Finally, in view of the increasing difficulties of railway travelling, further augmented by the rationing system, it was resolved that the Branches be thanked for their invitation and the Conference be held in London.

The Secretary was instructed to proceed with the usual arrangements.

Messrs. Eager, Palmer, and Roger were elected as an Agenda Committee.

Grants were made to various Branches for propaganda purposes during the coming year, and the meeting adjourned until April 25.

E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary.*

The Blank Wall.

XI.

MOST people who think at all about anything must have realized by now that the distinctions in society between aristocrat and democrat, rich and poor, were essentially artificial distinctions dependent upon the possession of money and the fineness of wearing apparel. The real distinction, that is the mental distinction, is negligible. The rich are quite as stupid as the poor, the West-end clubman is on a mental par with the L. C. C. dustman; if there is any superabundance of mental vitality it will probably be possessed by the latter, because he is more closely in touch with the realities of human life, and is unprotected from certain ugly truths by large, soft cushions, etc. A man is sometimes forced to think because his stomach is empty, or because the conditions of life are abnormally vile and unpleasant. Nothing is more certain than that the distinctions between rich and poor are artificial distinctions. The same fact may be observed in military caste. The sergeant we may call the working-class; he is the backbone of every army, and without him no great military project would be possible. Yet, the mere accident of birth and education (the latter often nothing more than the development of a bored and delicate series of mannerisms), these things, allied with the power of money and social influence, enable a man with no practical experience of either men or war to become an officer, who is set in authority over the sergeant. His blood is much bluer than the sergeant's language. He is a higher type; he represents the aristocratic caste.

The sergeant can never hope to feel like a "real gentleman"; not even if he wins the Victoria Cross and gains a commission. There will always remain in his consciousness the fact that he is not the social equal of an officer who has been given a commission without any specific effort, and as a result of class right. The two men may be equally brave; take them as men and they are magnificently heroic, but the caste idea prevails. It is a tremendous reality is the caste idea, just as real as the facts of heroism and gallantry. It is artificial, and at the same time a most dreadful reality. It constitutes that fixity of social relationships which thwarts progress and goes largely to make humanity a failure.

ARTHUR F. THORN.

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 based on the Laws of Nature* (West Central Hall, 31 Alfred Place, Store Street, Tottenham Court Road): 3.30, M. Montbars, "The Philosophy of Art." Lecture in French.

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GOLDTHORPE BRANCH N. S. S. (14 Beevor Street): 3, Mr. Thos. Swift, "A Half-Hour from History."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Operetta, "The Wishing Cap." Performed by children of the Secular Sunday-school. Silver Collection.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Clarion Cafe, 25 Cable Street and 30 Lord Street): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "Do the Dead Live?" 7, "Why Men Believe in God."

SHEFFIELD ETHICAL SOCIETY (Builders' Exchange, Cross Burgess Street): 6.30, Coun. W. Appleyard, "Where To? and What To?"

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Hall Buildings, second floor, Fowler Street): 6.30, Mr. J. Hannan, "Why I am an Atheist."

PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS. New Issue. 1. *Christianity a Stupendous Failure*, J. T. Lloyd; 2. *Bible and Tectotalism*, J. M. Wheeler; 3. *Principles of Secularism*, C. Watts; 4. *Where Are Your Hospitals?* R. Ingersoll; 5. *Because the Bible Tells Me So*, W. P. Ball; 6. *Why Be Good?* G. W. Foote. *The Parson's Creed.* Often the means of arresting attention and making new members. Price 9d. per hundred, post free 1s. Samples on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—N. S. S. SECRETARY, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.

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