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Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, etc.

Views and Opinions.

Freethought and Morals.

In dealing with the morality of Freethinkers, Christians have employed, and still employ, three arguments. First it was said the foundation of unbelief was ill-living. But it was always puzzling in what way unbelief made immorality easy. A man can be a scoundrel and pious with much greater ease than he can combine rascality with unbelief. A profession of piety is a valuable asset for anyone out to swindle the public, and a complete record of the world's scoundrels would show a quite overwhelming proportion of fervent believers. The second argument is that if unbelievers are not bad, at least they would be if they carried their beliefs to a logical conclusion in practice. This argument is advanced by a higher order of writers than the first one, although all that it really amounts to is "As without certain beliefs *I* should be a scoundrel, seeing that you repudiate those beliefs *your* blackguardism may be taken for granted." If the blackguardism is not apparent that is because the Freethinker does not see the logical implication of its principles. His morality is saved at the expense of his intelligence.

* * *

The Christian Tradition.

From these two arguments there develops a third. If unbelievers are in practice as good as believers, this must not be attributed to greater intelligence or better character, it is due solely to the fact that the Freethinker is born of a Christian ancestry, lives in a Christian society, and so becomes unconsciously influenced by Christian principles. This is substantially the position taken up by two such writers as Mr. A. J. Balfour and Mr. W. H. Mallock. We cannot tell what the ethical consequences of Atheism are because no country is free from the purifying influence of Christian teachings. We cannot separate ourselves from either the power of Christian influence or the "stream of Christian ideas." So runs the argument, and its suicidal nature is obvious. It proves too much, and so destroys itself. For if Freethinkers are the product of a Christian ancestry, Protestants are equally the product of a Catholic ancestry, and Christians generally the product of Pagan forbears. We could go further back still, and prove that the virtue of the whole race was resident in the primitive savage, and so show that all progress is pure myth. For unless one generation can lift itself above the moral and intellectual level of its predecessor there could be no such

thing as either progress or development. Each generation builds on the experience of those that went before, and *we* are utilizing that experience in discarding the myths and puerilities of Christian theology.

* * *

Christian or Non-Christian ?

It would be quite easy to say, and far from difficult to justify the statement, that instead of the goodness of Freethinkers being the result of a Christian training and a Christian environment, the comparative purity of modern Christian ideas, and the more liberal conduct of modern Christians, are due to the influence of the few that have shaken themselves free from the "stream of Christian ideas." During the whole history of modern Europe there is not a single progressive idea—not a single established truth in science and philosophy that has not had to fight for its life against Christian feeling and teaching. The stream of Christian ideas was on the side of Ptolemy and against Copernicus. It was for a flat earth and against a round one; for miracle and against causation. It was for whipping devils out of lunatics and against mania as a product of neural derangement, for creation and against evolution. The list might be extended indefinitely, and it can be exemplified even in the sphere of morals. It was not Christian influence that made Christians cease burning heretics or gloating over the torments of the damned. Developing knowledge on the one side forced Christians to surrender their absurd teachings in the region of science. A more humane social life on the other side forced them to drop their savage doctrine of eternal damnation. When men, like Morley and Mill, and women, like George Eliot, denounced the inhumanity of Christian teaching, it was not because of Christian influence, but because they had shaken their minds free from it. It is never religion that moralizes man, it is always man that moralizes religion.

* * *

The Power of the Past.

There is, of course, a sense in which the present can never wholly escape the influence of the past. The power of the dead hand is very real in all human society. But it is one of the damning features in the history of religion that it has used the past only as a means of enslaving the present. The great aim of religion, now and always, is to chain man to the past, and to prevent his experiencing the full influence of contemporary life and knowledge. That is the bottom reason why we employ in religious services an archaic form of speech use an archaic dress, perform an archaic ceremonial. In the civilized world the priest stands in a privileged position. Why? Only because he is the lineal descendant of the primitive magic-worker, who, by his magic, was believed to have power to coerce or persuade the tribal deities. Just as behind the god is the ghost, so behind the priest is the medicine-man, and so behind the elaborate ceremonial of the modern cathedral there are the magic-working ceremonies of the primitive savage. All religion strives to keep the past alive because its real life belongs to the past. There is no hope and no justification for it in the present.

Prospective and Retrospective.

But we are told that we cannot tell what would be the effect on society of the wholesale adoption of Atheism, because no society professing Atheism has ever existed. True, so far as the latter part of the statement is concerned; and yet, if Christianity has an advantage over Freethought in this respect, we imagine it is one that Christians would often like to be without. So far as social control is concerned, the Freethinker must look to the future. The Christian can only prophesy what Freethought will do. But with Christianity there is no need for prophecy. Its record is before us; its influence and the results of its control are matters of history. And we know that the period during which the influence of Christianity was strongest was the period of civilized history when intellectual life was lowest, morality weakest, and the general outlook most hopeless. Christian control gave us heresy-hunts and Jew-hunts. It gave us burnings for witchcraft, and magic in place of medicine. It gave us the Inquisition and the *auto-da-fe*, the fires of Smithfield and the Night of Bartholomew. It gave us life without happiness and death cloaked with nameless horrors. It gave us the war of sects, and it contributed largely to establish the sect of war. Certainly, the Christian record is before us, and it is such that every Christian Church blames all the others for its existence. Quite as certainly we cannot point to a society which has been dominated by freethinking ideas; but we can point to their existence in all stages of civilization, and can demonstrate that whatever improvement has been effected must be attributed to their presence. We can show that advanced ideas have always originated with the least, and have been resisted by the most, Christian section of society; that freedom of thought and speech, increased purity and truthfulness of spirit, have always been forced upon the Churches from without. What Christianity has been, we know. What Freethought will be, we can only guess; and we can speculate cheerfully in the conviction that honesty is possible without the lie of religion, and that duty may still be done with no other incentive than its visible consequences on the lives of those around us.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Cross of Christ.

II.

IN estimating the evidences of either the triumph or of the defeat of Christ's Cross in history, it is essentially necessary to bear in mind the radical distinction between the primary and the secondary objects for the realization of which it is said to have come into existence. Both objects are distinctly stated in the New Testament, though in the great Creeds only the primary aim occupies the forefront of importance. In the Pauline Epistles the Cross is God's message of reconciliation to a world at enmity with him. Believers are represented as saying that when they were enemies they were reconciled to God by the death of his Son. The primary effect of the Cross, therefore, is reconciliation, not between man and man, but between man and God. As a secondary effect comes the brotherhood of believers, not of mankind. This brotherhood is described as a new creation in Christ Jesus. That is to say, those who become reconciled to God by the death of his Son enter into a bond of union and harmony among themselves. They alone are "the brethren" who are earnestly exhorted to love one another, while all the rest of mankind constitute what is called "the world," which is not an object of love. In John's Gospel, God is represented as loving "the world," so that those in it who believe may not

perish but have everlasting life; but in John's First Epistle the brethren are forbidden to love the world on the assurance that "if any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him." According to Calvinism, which in the Catholic Church is known as Augustinianism, Christ died only for "the sheep," the elect, and it is they alone who can be saved. Be this as it may, the fact that stares us in the face is that the reconciliation effected by the Cross has never been realized except by a comparatively small percentage of the human race. Christendom itself, at its very largest, has formed but an insignificant fraction of the world. Surely, this fact is totally ignored by those who so confidently declare that the Cross has triumphed, or that Christianity has conquered the world.

What has the Cross accomplished in Christendom? Nominally, it has produced the Church, though in strictest truth the Church has produced the Cross. At first the Church was the smallest and feeblest of institutions, of which Paul, its chief founder, was often profoundly ashamed. For the first three centuries the brethren comprised not many wise men, not many mighty, not many noble, but were noted, as Paul tells the Corinthians, for their lack of wisdom, for their weakness, insignificance, and even baseness. The Corinthian converts, at any rate, did not even love one another, but were divided into several contentious parties or factions. It is true, however, that, as a rule, they did display, especially in times of persecution, considerable loyalty to one another, but for the Pagan world round about them they entertained bitter hatred and undiluted contempt. The Master's commandment: "Love your enemies," was systematically disregarded by them. Even the great Apostle of the Gentiles did not seem to be aware that such a commandment was in existence, for of Jesus he says that "he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." When, under Constantine the Great, the Cross became a power in the Roman Empire, it was by no means the power of beneficent love, but of the material sword. Paganism was suppressed by force of arms. The Cross won its nominal victory in the West, not by fulfilling the royal laws of love, but by inducing the State to crush all rivalries beneath its iron heels. But what did this nominal victory of the Cross really signify? Not the advent of righteousness and truth as regnant factors in social life, not the overthrow of the powers of darkness by the omnipotence of holy love; but, rather, the establishment of the Church as the lowest and most cruel tyrant the world had ever seen. The history of the Middle Ages is practically the history of one form of oppression struggling with all its might for the subjugation of another form. Dean Milman's *History of Latin Christianity*, as well as Bryce's *Holy Roman Empire*, show with the utmost clearness that the most fondly cherished ambition of the Church was to gain absolute supremacy in Europe, to be the sole arbiter in politics as well as in religion, and to exploit the State to its own advantage. For a time that ideal was on the point of being realized, both in England and on the Continent. Emperors and kings there were who recognized the superiority of the Popes.

Now, the truth is that when the Church was at its highest and strongest, the Cross was at its lowest and weakest. The plan of the world's salvation through faith in the crucified and risen Christ has never been fulfilled, even on the smallest scale. This is virtually admitted by Christians themselves. "Of course," they say, "the Churches have failed. Had they succeeded, it would have been a bigger miracle than any recorded in the New Testament." In that strange admission it is forgotten that the world's redemption was to be the biggest miracle in history, God's own masterpiece. The

Gospel Jesus predicted that his crucifixion would result in drawing the whole human family to himself as Saviour and Lord. The Church claims to be a supernatural institution, the very body of Christ on earth, or the temple of the Holy Ghost, and it naturally follows that its failure is nothing less than the failure of the Holy Trinity. Of course, the success of the Church would have been the most stupendous of all miracles; but was it not in order that such a miracle might be performed that Christ promised to indwell it to the end of time? Was it not for the purpose of achieving that end that he promised to send the Holy Ghost to be its life and power? If we accept the New Testament interpretation of the Church's mission, there is no possible escape from the conclusion that the collapse of the Church represents the downfall of the supernatural principle. It is immaterial whether we distinguish between the Church and Christianity or not, or between organized and unorganized Christianity; the vital point being that the Church is the Divinely appointed agent or instrument chosen by the Redeemer to do his redemptive work, and that its impotence undermines the whole supernatural system. Principal Forsyth, without intending it, confirms this view when he observes that the conditions of life in this world are so hopelessly bad that even theologians "are driven into a new belief in another world, in Immortality." He says:—

We are driven to find more meaning, and perhaps spend more time, in God's realm of eternal lordship by love, his righteousness perfectly holy, and his universal grace. It would be impossible to believe in his love or his kingdom if we could not call in another world to redress the balance of this, or rather to answer its groaning prayer (*The Justification of God*, p. 157).

J. T. LLOYD.

The Clerical Offensive.

If I had been a bishop, with an income of five to fifteen thousand pounds a year, I should have had an inexhaustible source of rejoicing and merriment in the generosity, if not in the credulity, of my countrymen.—*John Bright*.

WHEN the World-War started the clergy hailed the event as the happy harbinger of a spiritual awakening, but subsequent events have discounted the hope. The War, which has tested so many men and institutions, has not spared the Christian Churches. It has, indeed, brought out strongly the unselfish sacrifice of hundreds of thousands who were utterly indifferent to the Churches, but it has also revealed, on the part of the clergy, and their leaders, a spirit of cant, compromise, and cowardice, that must tend to lessen what influence the Black Army possessed with the mass of ordinary citizens.

Freethinkers do not need to be reminded that this clerical influence is diminishing, and has long been a slowly vanishing quantity. And the clergy themselves have not been slow to perceive the waning allegiance of their flocks, and the high sniffing contempt of people who do not often trouble the pew-openers. A speech just delivered by Canon Meyrick, of Norwich, shows which way the wind of opinion is blowing, and is likely to provoke discussion on a question which cannot be reckoned as of small importance. Realizing the growing disfavour of the clergy, and the anachronism of mediæval prelates in a democratic country, Canon Meyrick seeks to restore the Church's balance of power by the creation of "many more Bishops and no more prelates." The Canon, naturally, wishes to keep the present bench of bishops to safeguard the political position of the Government religion; but he would curry favour with the democracy by the creation of many more new bishops, presumably to act as assistants to the

titled and begaistered prelates who have brought the Church to its present position of impotence. Canon Meyrick asserts that the present bishops are overworked, and that they are aloof from the rank and file of the clergy, and that they have no sort of understanding of the laity and the general public. The creation of an entirely new class of working bishops, leaving the existing bench of bishops in their places, would do much to increase the Church's hold on the masses.

Canon Meyrick's attitude shows how far removed the Church of England is from democratic hopes and ideals. In the piping times of peace the anachronism of a clerical caste in our midst passed almost unnoticed, but the War has brought out in strong relief the position of the selfish and skin-careful clergy. All can recall the fervent appeals made by these priests, coupled with the fact that they have been themselves exempted from military service, and are free to tread the primrose path of dalliance. Is it strange that there should rise a note, not so much of remonstrance as of revolt, which suggests that the nation is dissatisfied with the behaviour of the clergy, from the wealthy bachelor occupant of Fulham Palace to the rotund tenant of Little Pedlington vicarage, who have equally proved themselves out of touch with the general life and aspirations of the nation. At a time when the civilized world is in convulsion, the Bishops have found time to discuss the claims of Charles the First to the highest rank of saintship. They have busied themselves in the important matter of altering the "vile body" of the Burial Service to "this body of our low estate." And they have found time to gloss the barbarities and indecencies of the "Psalms" of the Holy Bible. But on the great issues of the present day, how incomparably great should be clear to the thickest heads, they have shown a complete and shameless indifference, except to their own interests.

Canon Meyrick lays stress on the proper functions of statesmanship of the Bishops, but he had better have left that matter severely alone. The votes of the Right Reverend Fathers in God in the House of Lords is sufficient to rouse the lasting hostility of all right-thinking citizens, and their shameful opposition to all progress shows how hopelessly the Church of Christ is out of touch with democratic issues.

The Bishops voted against admitting Nonconformists to University degrees, and against the removal of civil disabilities from Catholics, Jews, and Rationalists. They opposed the introduction of Free Education, and voted against the admission of women to London Borough Councils. None voted for the abolition of flogging women in public, flogging women in prison, or the use of the lash in the Army and Navy. Scores of measures for the bettering of the conditions of the working classes have been opposed by these mediæval and reactionary ecclesiastics, and their political record is sufficient to carry its own condemnation.

This new bid for popularity on the part of the Bishops is foredoomed to failure. Few worse misfortunes can befall any people than this of possessing a very powerful ecclesiastical institution in its midst that saps the very springs of morality and humanity, that permits mental and moral confusion, and that constantly hinders and hampers the wheels of progress in the way that the Church of England does. It is a survival from the past, and the enemy of democracy, and must be fought until it is no longer a power for evil. For the Church is opposed to the spirit of liberty, which animates the progressive peoples of the world.

MIMNERMUS.

The love of others has the same necessary foundation in the human mind as the love of ourselves.—*William Hazlitt*.

The Mechanism of Man.

VIII.

(Concluded from p. 305.)

DURING the progress of digestion in the small intestine the chyme becomes thoroughly mixed with both the bile and the pancreatic secretion. The chyme is thus reduced to a creamy condition. At this stage it is known as chyle. Having been subjected to the action of all the intestinal juices, the chyle journeys through the small intestine which contracts gently and rhythmically with a worm-like movement termed peristalsis. These digestive processes completed, the labour of absorption begins.

The duodenum is prolonged into the jejunum, which is eight feet in length. From the jejunum proceed the remaining twelve feet of the small intestine—the ileum. This part of the small bowel terminates at the ileo-cæcal valve which opens into the large intestine. The large bowel extends from the ileo-cæcal valve to the anus where the waste solid substances—the excrementary matters—are discharged.

The first part of the large intestine is called the ascending colon, and just below this lies the cæcum, from which the vermiform appendix proceeds. The cæcum is much larger in herbivorous mammals than in man. In fact, it forms the second stomach in ruminating animals—those that chew the cud. The ox, deer, and sheep are well-known instances of these. In man, the apes, and monkeys, and other mammals, this organ persists in a dwindled state. With them it is a vestigial organ, and points to their descent from herbivorous ancestors. The vermiform appendix is, in man, about four inches long. It is a small blind tube devoid of utility in the higher mammalia, but, unfortunately, its inflammation proves the occasion of the frequently fatal disease of appendicitis.

Immediately it issues from the lesser intestine the large intestine passes upwards on the right side of the abdomen. Hence its name of the ascending colon. As it approaches the gall bladder, the ascending colon pursues a horizontal course, and then becomes the transverse colon. Having travelled across the abdominal cavity from right to left, it commences to descend when it nears the spleen, and passes down on the left side of the abdomen. This section of the gut is termed the descending colon, and it curves at its lower end before passing into the rectum, which forms the last part of the large intestine. At the lower region of the rectum there is a strong muscular ring, the sphincter ani, which relaxes periodically while the function of defaecation is being performed.

Not merely must the food be digested, but it must also be assimilated if it is to furnish the requirements of the organism. Before absorption can take place two conditions are indispensable. Food substances must be rendered soluble in the blood plasma and its derivative, the lymph, and they must become capable of diffusion through an animal membrane.

The chief centre of absorption is the small intestine, while there are two ways in which nutrient matters may be assimilated. These are absorbed, both by the blood vessels, and the channels of the lymph. The portal vein is formed by the junction of the various veins proceeding from the digestive viscera. These veins arise from the blood capillaries in the bowel, stomach, and other visceral organs. These capillaries directly absorb sugar, salts, water, and the peptones. In this manner these materials immediately enter the general circulation. The portal vein thus carries to the liver several food-stuffs including sugar. This last is stored in the liver, while

the other nutrient materials travel to the hepatic veins, and from them to the heart.

The membrane which lines the small intestine contains large numbers of tiny projections termed villi. Each villus possesses a lacteal, and as the chyle passes over these projections part of it exudes through the epithelial surfaces of the villi into the lymphoid tissue lying below, from which it passes into the lacteal, and then the nutriment enters the lymphatic circulation. A small quantity of peptone is absorbed through the villi, but their special foods are fats.

Water permeates any part of the lining of the intestinal canal. Soluble salts are absorbed by the vascular vessels of the stomach as well as some forms of sugar. It is concluded that 20 per cent. of the nitrogen present in food is actually absorbed in the large intestine. We may briefly state that "Proteids as peptones, sugar, salts, and water are absorbed by the blood vessels, and fats by the lacteals."

In the tissues the capillaries form a close meshwork, and part of their contained blood plasma passes through the delicate capillary walls, and thus conducts its nutritive materials to the cells of the tissues. This fluid which passes from the capillaries to the tissues is the lymph. Lymph is a pale liquid, and is chiefly water holding proteids and other substances in solution. Unlike blood, the lymph contains no red corpuscles, although it possesses colourless corpuscles in abundance.

The lymph occupies the spaces between the cells of the tissues. These spaces are drained by a network of minute lymphatic vessels, which gradually join up into larger channels, which convey the lymph from its tissue. The lymphatic vessels from the various organs of the body become linked up into increasingly larger vessels, which ultimately pour their contents into the thoracic duct. This main lymphatic organ is situated in the trunk, in front of the vertebral column. As stated in Foster and Shore's *Physiology* :—

It lies in the thorax on the front of the dorsal vertebræ, passes through the diaphragm, and extends down the abdomen to the level of the lumbar vertebræ, where the lymphatics from the legs and lower part of the trunk open into it. The lymphatics from the intestine and the other abdominal organs also open into it, so that the lower end of the thoracic duct is larger than the rest of it, and is called the receptaculum chyli.

From this chyle receptacle the thoracic duct advances upwards through the abdomen and thorax to the left of the esophagus or gullet. Finally, the duct opens into and discharges its lymphatic fluid into the blood-stream at the root of the neck, where it enters the large jugular vein at that vein's junction with the left sub-clavian vessel, the leading vein of the left arm. Thus the lymph, after passing through the walls of the vascular capillaries into the lymphatic channels, becomes restored by the lymphatic vessels and the thoracic duct to the blood system.

Although the blood nourishes and sustains the organism as a whole, still, save in the spleen, the vascular fluid itself never directly enters into the vital cells of the various tissues of the body or brain. The lymph serves as the blood's instrument in fulfilling this function. The lymph vessels are amply provided with valves which assist the flow of the lymph towards the veins that receive it, but which would open to obstruct its passage in the opposite direction. The lymph courses through its channels as a result of pressure. This pressure is maintained by the lymph which is constantly forming in the vessels which spring from the capillaries, and this pressure, aided by the valves, easily overcomes any resistance presented by the blood vessels into which the lymph is discharged.

Solid, and usually bean-shaped, bodies, which vary considerably in volume, are seated in the lymphatic system. A lymphatic vessel is occasionally obstructed in its course by a lymphatic gland, and this impediment must be passed through before the lymph can continue its journey. A gland of this character acts as a filter, and prevents microbes from entering into the blood system, while it is also the birthplace of the white blood corpuscles. Each of these glands consists of a network of delicate connective tissue, in which immense numbers of lymph corpuscles lie crowded together. These leucocytes, or white corpuscles, are smaller than those found in the blood. In truth, they are baby corpuscles, that are continually dividing and re-dividing, and thus increasing in number. As the lymph pushes itself through the lymph-gland's network, and then flows onward, it carries with it a fair proportion of these infant corpuscles. In this manner is the blood supplied with its colourless corpuscles. As we have seen, these little bodies are largely essential to the well-being of the organism, as they prove formidable foes to the baleful microbes which invade the animal system. All these colourless corpuscles appear to be generated in lymphatic glands, or in tissue of a kindred character situated in other parts of the human body.

T. F. PALMER.

Acid Drops.

At the request of the Pope, the Allied Commanders agreed not to bomb Cologne on Corpus Christi Day. So the Cologne on that day were able to go about their religious performances with easy minds. But the big German gun continued bombarding Paris, and on Whit-Sunday London was raided by German aeroplanes. Such are the amenities of Christians at war. For nearly four years millions of Christians have been engaged in killing each other by some of the most brutal and most horrible methods conceivable. Christian belief could do nothing to bring war a day nearer the end, but it could hold up the bombardment of one city out of respect for a religious festival. This triumph of Christian belief is remarkable.

It is a strange thing, said Mr. Smallwood, M.P., that after nearly four years of war, the Churches are empty. We think the strange thing would be if they were full. Four years of this War are not likely to impress any sensible person with either the truth or utility of religious beliefs. The German attack on Belgium destroyed more than a "scrap of paper"; it was the beginning of an awakening for thousands who had hitherto troubled themselves but little about religion. The War has made them think, and that process is always more or less fatal to religious beliefs.

A panic was caused in a church near Subiaco, Italy, by a woman shouting, "Save yourselves! Help!" Nearly 200 people were killed or injured. The woman was found to be suffering from delusions. But if all those suffering from delusions stayed away from church, very few would attend.

Providence does not appear to have any great regard for religious buildings. A fire took place at the St. Joseph's Convent, Hackney, and one of the inmates was fatally burned. At St. Cuthbert's, Bowes Park, fire caused damage amounting to £600.

A profane story was printed recently in the *Evening Standard* (London). A Canadian soldier was so ill that visitors were denied. This restraint proving irksome, he induced another patient to get him some telegraph forms. Next day the nurse found on his bed the following official wire: "Your crown is not ready. No hurry. Gabriel, Heaven." The Archangel is still waiting, as the patient recovered.

"The strange thing about the Churches to-day is that after nearly four years of war they are empty," says Mr. E. Smallwood, M.P. It would be a stranger thing if the Churches were full.

The Roman Catholic procession of the Society of Our Lady of Lourdes, which took place at Westminster, is a further proof that the Catholic clergy are making a bid for popularity. The London press gave a lot of space to this revival of superstition, but their accounts differ considerably. One paper declared that 20,000 persons took part, and another 12,000; but all were exceedingly polite. What a lot of water has passed under London Bridge since the old anti-Popery days.

The *Church Times* says that during the past few days some Parisians have been wearing little green and yellow dolls as protectors against bombs and shells. It adds, sarcastically, that "while it is legitimate mascotry to wear these, it is drivelling superstition to set a little figure of St. Christopher on a motor car or to invoke St. Genevieve, patroness of Paris." We quite agree there is no distinction between the two, although our point of view is different from that of the *Church Times*. We believe the *Church Times* would agree with the invocation of saints, while we hold that the wearing of the yellow doll is quite as good as that of prayers to St. Genevieve. The real moral is that there is an immense amount of latent superstition among the people, and under emotional tension it will out. That, indeed, is an ever-present danger facing civilization.

About sixty parsons in London have "expressed their intention of joining the Army for combatant service." It is a dazzling record—after nearly four years of a world-war. "Onward, Christian soldiers!"

A correspondent of a London paper describes a sermon of Billy Sunday's as "the most athletic speech" he had seen. Surely this describes to a nicety the perambulations of this pious, perspiring, peripatetic, pulpit-puncher.

Dr. Jowett, speaking at Westminster Chapel, compared the Church of Christ to a "great shining light" throwing its beams over a very naughty world. Unfortunately, few consider the Church's wax candles as being a modern illuminant.

A correspondent wishes to know whether the Bishop of London ever issued a public statement of his income and expenditure? Such a statement was issued by the Bishop towards the end of 1904. Here it is:—

	£	s.	d.
Fulham Palace and London house rates			
taxes	848	12	6
Queen Anne's Bounty	422	4	7
Income tax	500	0	0
Household expenses, including the keeping up of a house with 44 bed-rooms and the entertainment of candidates for ordination	1,678	9	5
Repair of houses	1,190	7	3
Coal, gas, and electric lighting	379	9	5
Stabling account	895	0	4
Garden and farm	723	9	6
Stationery, printing and postage	388	9	4
	7,026	2	4

So that after deducting the cost of rent, rates, taxes, garden, food, postage, etc., all the poor Bishop has left is a paltry £2,973 17s. 8d.—presumably, for pocket-money.

The innocent manner in which the clergy often give their case away is highly amusing as well as deeply significant. Preaching in London recently, the Bishop of Oxford said that "power" is "the last word which we should naturally choose to describe the Christian Church in the whirl of our present civilization." What a terribly humiliating confession for an orthodox bishop to make! Did not his lordship realize that he was undermining the belief in the proper Deity of Jesus Christ as well as that in the Divine origin and authority of the Church?

Of course, Bishop Gore *explains* the present impotence of the Church; but his very explanation is even more damaging to the cause than the confession itself. His lordship's strange contention is that in apostolic times the Church possessed and exercised supernatural power, but that in these modern days she has lost it. What he does not see is that the Church's impotence disproves her Divinity as well as the truth of her Founder's brilliant prophecy concerning her victorious career in the world.

Mrs. Despard, President of the Women's Freedom League, placed a laurel-wreath on the statue of John Stuart Mill in Temple Gardens, to commemorate the fifty-first anniversary of his championship of the women's cause in the House of Commons. A tardy recognition of the work of the man whom Gladstone called "the saint of Rationalism."

A star-turn at the West London Mission recently was Mr. F. W. Murtfeldt, Secretary of the American Y.M.C.A.

The will of the Rev. H. A. Starkie, of Settle, Yorkshire, has been proved for £293,922, and the late Rev. J. Chapman, of Retford, Notts, left property to the value of £49,210, whilst the Rev. H. L. Fanshawe, of Chilworth, Oxfordshire, left £24,389. All should have a very warm reception in the next world.

We see from the *Poor Law Officer's Journal* that the Mayor of Bishop's Castle, at a recent meeting of the Board of Guardians, moved that, in view of the need for economy, a paid chaplain is no longer justified, and that any such services required be of a honorary character. But the chaplain declines to resign, and it seems that the guardians have not the power of dismissal. So there the matter stands, and one may trust parsons to hang on to jobs where any salary is attached. For our part we see no reason why, when religious services are needed in workhouses or other public institutions, these should not be undertaken by "nearby" clergymen as part of their ordinary duties. In the majority of cases, these religious services are not demanded by the inmates, they are forced on them. And the clergy are foremost in seeing that the pressure is maintained. They are equally insistent that the public shall pay for their services.

The promised revival of religion is long overdue, but there is a noticeable friendliness between the ministers of the Government religion and the Free Church clergy all over the country. So true is it that adversity makes strange bed-fellows.

Parents no longer give their children Bible names as they used to, and people are unfamiliar with them. A witness in a law case at Willesden remarked that he was baptized Jehu, but folk made such a mess of it, so he called himself John.

Canon Meyrick, speaking at Norwich, pleaded for simpler bishops. Isn't the Bishop of London as simple as a South Sea Islander?

From the *Greenock Telegraph* of May 28, we learn that a speaker at the U.P. Assembly declared that "men in the dug-outs in France were living under happier conditions than some of the families in this land, and that a South African kraal was no worse than some of the houses in the Western Isles." We do not doubt the substantial accuracy of these statements, and as they stand they throw a strong light on the professed interest of the Churches in the welfare of the working classes. In any but a Christian country, such things would have been—to Christians—proofs of the need of Christian teaching. What is the moral in this country?

The Bishop of Durham, in inviting the younger clergymen to volunteer, declared that if he had been twenty-five years' younger he would have offered himself for service. The Church is generally too late.

The Irish Presbyterian Church has had a pleasant wind-fall of £6,000 from the estate of the late Mr. J. C. Fulton, of Armagh. The "Chinese Presbyterians" will be jealous.

Field-Marshal Hindenburg's daughter, Elsie, has written a hymn, beginning "Christ Jesus gave His life for me," and containing the line "He (Jesus) to the bayonet thrust gives vigour." Another striking example of German "Atheism."

Religion is not always a blessing and a comfort as the clergy pretend. In the case of Florence Hazell, a domestic servant, whose body was found in the Bell Weir, Egham, it was stated that she suffered from religious mania. The jury returned a verdict of "suicide whilst of unsound mind."

On the authority of Lady Hope, a religious publication recently asserted that Charles Darwin abandoned his Agnostic position. A copy of the publication was forwarded to Sir Francis Darwin, who replied in the following letter to M. A. Leivre, Secretary of the Protestant Press Bureau:—

Lady Hope's account of my father's views on religion is quite untrue. I have publicly accused her of falsehood, but have not seen any reply. My father's Agnostic point of view is given in my *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*. You are at liberty to publish the above statement. Indeed, I shall be glad if you will do so.

We are afraid that "lying for the greater glory of God" is still too vigorous a profession for us to hope that this particular falsehood will cease to be told. All experience proves that religious writers will go on lying just so long as it pays them to do so.

Ordinary Christians appear to strongly object to their co-religionists who possess consciences, and Conscientious Objectors at Wakefield have sent a letter of complaint to the Home Secretary and some Members of Parliament, setting out the difficulties they have to encounter. They object to being badgered to make a Wakefield holiday.

Sir William Robertson Nicoll is of opinion that "the best thing we can say about God is that he is like Christ." Unfortunately, nobody knows what Christ was like, for the pictures of him are innumerable, and they are all fundamentally different. To which of them is God like? The only rational inference is that both Christ and God are purely imaginary beings, of whom no knowledge is procurable on any terms.

Church Bells.

If Life were Joy: if Truth relieved the Earth,
And fat stupidity, deprived of breath,
Gave place to Mirth—
And Man had conquered Death.
The Church, with solemn majesty would tell,
How "God" had died, and ring its little bell.

If multitudes of Life-starved, simple folk,
Were blessed with Reason, and a sense of Right,
To cast the yoke—
Of "Sin" into the night.

The Church would hope that all might yet be well,
Would drape the Cross, and ring its little bell.

If War was vanquished, or the Sword laid down,
And dreams of human Liberty were born,
While every town—
Laughed servile fools to scorn,
The Church would pray "Deliverance from Hell,"
Would play a tune, and ring its little bell.

ARTHUR F. THORN.

The necessity for external government to man is in inverse ratio to the vigour of his self-government. Where the last is most complete, the first is least wanted. Hence, the more virtue the more liberty.—*Coleridge*.

Concerning the "Freethinker."

A NEW Paper Order prohibits the sending out of any paper or journal "on sale or return." This means that all who want a paper must order it beforehand, for news-agents will not stock papers if there is a chance of their being left with unsold copies.

This will not greatly affect the present circulation of the *Freethinker* (it is likely to suffer far more from the wholesale call up of men for military service), although it is pleasing to record that more and more news-agents are displaying this paper. But, then, we are not satisfied with the present circulation of the *Freethinker*, and should not be if it were five times as great. The new Order will prevent one method of securing new readers—and it is new readers that an Editor is after all the time. So we venture to suggest a plan whereby, at the cost of a couple of coppers per week—and probably without any cost at all—the *Freethinker* may continue to appear in the windows of as many agents as will display it.

We want in every town two or more readers of this paper to enrol themselves as members of a *Freethinker* League. We will then see that they are made acquainted with each other. That done, let them see which news-agents who already supply the paper on order will take extra copies and display them for sale, the members of the League buying back the unsold copies. By this plan the newsagents will be guaranteed against loss, and the guarantors will at most have to pay a copper or so per week, and most probably nothing at all. For where the *Freethinker* is displayed, it soon secures purchasers.

Another way would be for the members of the League to themselves act as agents or distributors of the paper among their friends. This is a most effective way of gaining new subscribers, and is already being done in many cases.

Yet a third plan. Members of the League should send us the names and addresses of all whom they consider likely to become subscribers. We will then send them specimen copies, free, for six weeks. If they do not subscribe by the end of that time, we give them up as hopeless.

Our readers have helped so well in the past that we count on their help here with confidence. Some time back we asked for 1,000 new readers, and we got them—we mean that the circulation actually increased by 1,000 per week. Then we asked for a second thousand, and we have made some progress in getting that number. Now we are guarding against losing, and are out for a still further increase.

There is only one *Freethinker* in the world for all who know it. We think we may all safely claim that it is doing a great work in the country, and that its influence bites as deeply as any journal published. We are working like the proverbial "nigger" at our end, and under conditions of unprecedented difficulty. We therefore feel warranted in asking all who value the paper to do what they can on the lines suggested.

So please send along your names and addresses as volunteers for the *Freethinker* League, and we shall then hope to soon announce that we have added a full second thousand to the circulation of a paper that plays to no party, and fans no passion save that of truth and justice.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

When shall the saner, softer politics
Whereof we dream, have play in each proud land,
And patriotism, grown God-like, scorn to stand
Bondslave to realms, but circle earth and seas?

—Thomas Hardy.

To Correspondents.

T. FOWLER.—Thanks. We hope to see the Coventry Branch very active during the coming autumn. If we can help in any way, please let us know.

W. BARTON.—Paper being sent to the soldier's address supplied.

E. TAYLOR.—We are glad to learn that the Huddersfield paper reprinted our notes on "Man Power and the Clergy." We, of course, prefer that, in such cases, acknowledgment of origin should be made; but the chief thing is for the opinions to gain publicity. Your own letter, however, corrects the omission, and adds some shrewd and well said comments on your own account. We agree with what you say as to the influence of politics on intellectual candour. The one is usually fatal to the other. We also agree that the cause of Freethought can never be advanced by coarseness or vulgarity. Such things attract a class that any movement is better without.

J. H. LANGFORD.—Your good wishes and congratulations are greatly appreciated.

R. J. BENSON.—Sorry we do not know enough of the system about which you enquire to express an opinion.

PTE. J. MORGAN.—Sorry that want of space prevents printing your interesting letter. We have kept it, however, with a view to future use. You have made a brave stand for your opinions, and we feel sure must have gained the respect of the best of the men around you. You have our admiration at all events.

E. L. LINTHORNE.—We fail to catch the drift of your letter.

E. E. STAFFORD.—Thanks for portrait. Hope you will continue to keep "fit" to the end.

R. NEWTON.—Pleased you have found the tract *What is the Use of the Clergy?* so useful. We should like to see a hundred thousand in circulation within the next three months.

T. DENNIS.—Glad to know you had a good meeting last Sunday. Sheffield badly needs rousing.

G. E. RULE.—Pleased to learn that you had a good meeting at Victoria Park, and to know that you are keeping active in other directions.

G. T. WHITEHEAD AND W. BRIDEN.—Have sent on your names to the correspondent. Thanks.

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible.

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.

Owing to the new postal rates, every copy of the *Freethinker* sent through the post must have stamped on it the name of the paper. If this is not done, the postage will be one penny. We shall continue sending out copies in the ordinary way, except in such cases where the extra postage is prepaid. This will mean 2s. 2d. per year, or total subscription 12s. 8d. Those who do not mind the name of the paper being displayed on the wrapper will receive it at the ordinary rates.

A curious blunder occurred in last week's "To Correspondents." Mr. A. S. Pickering wrote us, forwarding on Sir A. Griffith Boscawen's statement that "We have all got to be Christians if we are going to win the war." Mr. Pickering's comment was that for all to become Christians would be as great a calamity as Germany winning the War. We wrote

that we agreed with the comment; but, by the omission of a few words, we were made to say that winning the War would be a great disaster. Which is quite the reverse of what we meant. Most of our readers will, we have no doubt, have detected the nature of the blunder.

We have received a number of soldiers' addresses for the thirteen weeks' free copies of the *Freethinker* that was recently offered by one of our readers. The number to be paid for was twenty-one, and we still have several vacancies. If more than that number is received, we will send them on our own account. So no one need hesitate to send the name and address of a soldier to whom a copy of the *Freethinker* would be acceptable. Our offer of sending a small parcel of literature, free, to the troops also holds good.

We are glad to learn that the new Portsmouth Branch is planning some serious and sustained work. An inaugural meeting is to be held to-day (June 9) in the Trades' Hall, Fratton Road, at 6.30. Mr. F. N. Crosby will address the meeting, and important business is to be transacted. May we ask all Portsmouth Freethinkers to make a point of being present. Mr. Crosby has hitherto acted as Secretary, but owing to his many engagements, Mr. F. C. Ryan, of 48, North End Avenue, has undertaken the post of Honorary Secretary for the time being.

The Swansea Branch of the N. S. S. is desirous of availing itself of the services of any Freethought speakers who may be near that district during the summer months. Their services are required for open-air work. Will any who are spending a holiday in the neighbourhood of Swansea be good enough to communicate with the Secretary of the Branch, Mr. B. Dupree, 12 Short Street, Swansea?

We publish this week *The Philosophy of Secularism*, by the late G. W. Foote. The pamphlet has been out of print for some years, and we feel sure that its reissue will be appreciated. It is among the finest and the most dignified writings of one whose power as a writer was admitted by his enemies and warmly admired by his friends. It is an altogether admirable exposition of the groundwork of Secularism, and should serve as a useful propagandist pamphlet. It is issued at twopence, postage one halfpenny. In these days of dear labour and costly paper, this is practically bidding farewell to anything in the shape of profit; but we never hesitate to sacrifice profit to propaganda. Every *Freethinker* reader should send at once for a copy of this pamphlet.

The West Ham Branch has arranged for an outing to Epping Forest to-day (June 9). Members and friends will meet at the "Bakers' Arms," Leyton, at 10.30, and will then proceed to Chingford Mount. It has not been found possible to arrange anything in the shape of refreshments except hot water and milk; so those who join in the outing must bring their own rations.

By the death of Mr. Thomas Christian Andersen, an Australian member of the National Secular Society, the Secular Society, Limited, and the Rationalist Press Association are made joint residuary legatees to the deceased's estate. The residue is expected to be nearly £4,000 which will be divided between the two societies.

Popular Tales for the Copts.

THE Copts represent the ancient Egyptians modified by intermarriages with neighbouring peoples. When the Christian legend first made its way into Egypt, it received a philosophic form among the learned circles of Alexandria, but the Coptic multitude had no brains for that type of religious speculation, and preferred stories that were vivid and picturesque. To meet this simple taste, the story-writers of the early Christian centuries

—corresponding with our novelists and ballad-mongers—prepared such tales as we find in the Coptic manuscript, *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles*. A complete copy has not yet come to light, but a considerable number of fragments have been translated and printed by various scholars since 1900. I give here a few notes on Dr. Revillont's edition.¹

This Gospel gives details concerning Judas the Traitor which would naturally interest the Egyptian crowd. For example, when the people are about to be fed by Jesus in the wilderness, all the apostles receive bread for distribution, except Judas; and Jesus, in a sort of stage whisper, tells Andrew that the omission was intentional. Later in the story, we hear that Judas was led into sin by a wicked wife. It was she who gloated over the money which he stole from the common purse of the Twelve Apostles. When he came home without loot, she ridiculed him. It was she who put it into his head to betray his Master to the Jews for thirty pieces of silver. To her Judas took the money, and through her his soul dropped into Amenti,—that is, the Egyptian hell.

We have all heard of Doubting Thomas. In the Coptic legend, Thomas is curiously introduced into the account of the Raising of Lazarus from the dead. The Doubter was not satisfied with having seen the widow's son at Nain restored to life. He wanted a severer test of the Wonder-worker's capacity. He demanded that Jesus should raise up a man whose body had already (unlike the widow's son) begun to decay. So, at Bethany village, where Lazarus was entombed, a crowd assembled to see the experiment performed, and Thomas was himself appointed to remove the slab of stone which covered the entrance to the sepulchre. It is said that Thomas wept as he obeyed, for he now felt ashamed of his unbelief.² Of course, he is convinced (more or less!) when Lazarus issues from the tomb, and the people swarm round (as this popular Evangel expresses it) like bees round honey.

A somewhat mysterious anecdote is inserted about an Imperial officer, who had travelled from Rome to Judæa by order of the Emperor Tiberius, and who had been commissioned to choose a fresh king in place of the incompetent Philip. The officer, named Carios, heard of the miracles worked by Jesus, and rather hastily concluded that this Man of Prodigies would very well suit for the vacant throne. (The unlearned Copts would find no difficulty in such a legend, for it was exactly the way they would themselves have acted!) However, when Carios began to collect evidences, he found that Jewish priests told one tale, and Joseph and Nicodemus, personal friends of Jesus, told a contrary tale. On the whole, Carios was inclined to report to the Emperor in favour of Jesus; but a golden bribe from King Herod (Philip's brother) closed the project, and Cæsar never read the interesting report.

Much importance is attributed to the apostle Peter. To him are entrusted the Keys of Heaven; on him, as a rock, the Church will be built. When these privileges have been announced, Peter looks up, sees the seven heavens opened, and vast troops of angels flying down to salute him, and also sees Christ lifted to the sky by a sudden motion and sitting at the right hand of the "Good Father." Angels and æons (a Gnostic term) then cried,—

"Holy, holy, holy Peter, High-priest!"

Whereupon the face of Peter shone like the face of Moses.

¹ Issued in French (1904) by Dr. E. Revillont, Professor and Conservator at the Louvre; in vol. ii. of the series *Patrologia Orientalis*.

² The Gospel of John states that Jesus wept.

When the Twelve Apostles sat at the table for the Last Supper, Matthias placed a dish before Jesus. On the dish was a cock.

"Rabbi," said Matthias, "here is a cock which I killed. When the Jews saw me killing it, they taunted me, and threatened that my Master would be killed in the same manner."

"Yes," replied Jesus, smilingly, "it is true; and I shall rise again from the dead like this creature."

So saying, he touched the cock, and the bird flew from the chamber.

Owing to the fragmentary character of the remains of this Gospel, we have only a very disconnected narrative of the Crucifixion. The romantic portions that have survived make us wish (so Coptic are some of us!) to hear more. For instance, take the legend of Ananias of Bethlehem.

No sooner had Jesus died on the Cross than Ananias rushed forward from among the multitude and clasped the body of the martyr. He held the hands of the dead in his own, he pressed his living heart against the dead heart, and then he shouted to the hostile Jews:—

"Liars and lewd men! Kill me, for that would be better than to kill my Lord and God. He is the Christ!"

Then a voice came from the crucified body promising that the soul of Ananias should not go to Amenti but rise to Paradise.

The mob stoned Ananias but could not kill him. They kept him in a fire three days, but he was not burned. Finally cold steel dispatched him, and the Saviour carried the soul of Ananias to heaven.

The last fragments of the Gospel, now extant, relate the story of the Assumption of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In what is, apparently, an appendix, we have the report of supposed eye-witnesses who say: "We," "we saw," "we heard," and so on.

They affirm that a tremendous noise occurred at the Virgin Mary's tomb, and a sweet odour was exhaled. Fire flashed around, and the blare of trumpets sounded. A chariot of light and flame descended from the sky:—

We looked. We saw the Lord Jesus stretching forth his right hand. He embraced us. He pronounced peace upon us. After that he called towards the tomb: "Mary, my mother, my place of repose in which I once existed, rise! Leave the grave-clothes and come! As my Father raised me so do I raise thee in order to lead thee forth with myself." We beheld, and lo! Mary carried the cerements in which she had been wrapped. And the Lord Jesus gave her his hand and drew her into the chariot of light; and choirs of angels went before them even into heaven..... We, the apostles, testify these things.

Certain traditions point to the existence of a *Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* at so early a time that the author of *Luke* may have had it in mind when he spoke of many persons undertaking the task of writing orderly histories of the life of Jesus. It would not follow that this Coptic form dates so far back; that is to say, so far back as *Luke's* time in the first half of the second century. But some of the legends contained in it may have been current as folk-tales then, or earlier. The story of the resurrected cock is a sort of fireside or evening entertainment legend; but one would suspect the stories of Peter's Transfiguration and of Mary's Assumption to be later additions. One singular anecdote of the Devil fishing in a dry desert, and carrying on a half-chaffing conversation with the apostles, is, unfortunately, broken off in the middle, and one hardly knows whether to class it as a folk-tale or an allegory invented for use in the pulpit.

I have always esteemed the author of *Luke* as one of the most judicious and tasteful writers in the Biblical library. Out of a mass of popular legends he selected those which appeared to him as most instructive and the most free from crudities. I believe he did this as spontaneously and consciously as Bunyan did when choosing illustrations and metaphors for his *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Holy War*. In other words, the author of *Luke* was an artist and a poet. So far as he and the authors of the three other now-accepted Gospels (*Matthew*, *Mark*, and *John*) displayed superior literary judgment, to that extent they justify their reception as "canonical." The Four Gospels of the New Testament stand on a higher level than the many pamphlets on the same subject which the Catholic Church finally declined to recommend, but which, nevertheless, often enshrine isolated passages of excellence. Except, however, for such considerations, I perceive no difference in historical value between the so-called Canonical Gospels and the so-called Apocryphal Gospels.

F. J. GOULD.

Writers and Readers.

As a relief from more necessary, if more tedious, literary tasks, I have been reading Mr. Asquith's *Occasional Addresses* (Macmillan), which represents a politician's intellectual interests during the last twenty years. Among other things, they have set me wondering why men of literary and philosophical tastes have, as a rule, given practical politics a wide berth, and contented themselves with leaving the good things they bring with them to dull lawyers and duller business men. There is surely no easier way of making a more or less honest living, if you are not anxious for great riches; and even if you are, the £400 a year provided by the grateful taxpayer is not only a good stand-by, but it is a sure stepping-stone to higher things. All you need do is to satisfy the party you elect to serve that you are quite safe; that you will give those important gentlemen, the Whips, no trouble; that you will never ask awkward or pertinent questions—in fact, that you are content to have no mind of your own. The promises you have made to your constituents need not trouble you, for no intelligent elector will expect you to do more than silently support your party. There is one drawback, however; you cannot get someone else to do the work for you. But although you have to be on the premises, there is no reason why you should not spend your time in the library, working out a new theory of "Natural Ethics" or the "Influence of Marlowe on the Early Plays of Shakespeare." As a relaxation from the mental strain of your studies, you have billiards and other harmless amusements. Indeed, for the average man of letters, membership of the House is just an ideal job; far preferable to the Education Office or the Board of Trade, where you are expected to do a little work. With a measure of healthy cynicism, the responsibility of making a country's laws will sit lightly on your shoulders, and you will see the foolishness of working hard for an easy-going master.

In the early eighteenth century the man of letters was alive to the advantages of political occupation. Dozens of minor poets, essayists, and dramatists had pleasant little sinecures under the Government. Addison, Gay, Congreve, Prior, Vanbrugh, secured the big prizes. Nowadays, the man of letters seems to be less ambitious or (shall I say?) more conscientious. Out of the six hundred and odd members of the House, there are, perhaps, a dozen men of letters of more or less distinction. Mr. Asquith, although by profession a lawyer and politician, is by nature a man of fairly broad humanistic culture. His addresses here reprinted are carefully written studies in criticism, admirably adapted to the different sorts of audiences before whom they were delivered. His style is natural and easy, at times a trifle rhetorical and full—super-fatted, I might even say; but if he does not always go to the bottom of a subject, he is never irritatingly superficial, like Mr. Birrell, who gives us the im-

pression of being terribly at ease in the Zion of letters. The addresses cover a number of interesting subjects: Criticism, Biography, Culture and Character; the English Bible; Omar Khayyam, Benjamin Jowett, and others.

The address on "Criticism" was delivered to the students of the London Society for the Extension of University Teaching (1898), and is in itself an excellent example of what criticism ought to be. The criticism Mr. Asquith has in mind is not merely the criticism of literature, but that of philosophy, sociology, and religion; that is, criticism in the broadest sense of the word. He begins by telling us that it is not an attitude of disparagement, a science of finding fault. This is a common, but stupidly erroneous, notion. It is sometimes the duty of the critic—to some of us it is often a pleasure—to show a writer that he would be more profitably occupied in weighing up pounds of sugar; but this is far from being the whole of criticism, which should be interpretative rather than denigratory. Another delusion is that criticism is not constructive; that it is opposed to creative work. We ought, then, to have periods of criticism alternating with periods of creation. But really they coincide. The great ages of English Literature—the Shakespearean, the Augustan, the Romantic Revival—were periods both of critical and creative expansion. This truth is so obvious to anyone who knows the history of our literature that it would be tedious to support it by examples.

Criticism (Mr. Asquith says) in the true sense has a positive as well as a negative function.....It performs the double duty of solvent and stimulant. To take a single example, it was the essentially critical speculations of Hume which, as we know from their own avowal, awoke Kant from his "dogmatic slumbers" and first "caused the scales to fall from the eyes" of Bentham, and thereby became, at any rate, the indirect occasion of two rival schemes of constructive philosophy. There is no emptier fallacy than to suppose that criticism is merely a form of intellectual gymnastic—the appropriate pastime of epochs of temporary stagnation—the business of second-rate minds in the relatively barren intervals which separate the great vintage years in the history of human culture.

This is a fine tribute to the seminal influence of the critical method employed by one of our greatest philosophers, and most thorough-going of Freethinkers.

Mr. Asquith is pleased to fall foul of æsthetic criticism which is often enough mere vague and eloquent balderdash; but there is no reason why it should be condemned wholesale. In the hands of a Lessing (another robust Freethinker) it has helped many of us to clarify our notions on art and letters. Ruskin's impressionism, certainly, has done not a little harm; yet there is little of what is called the scientific method in the critics for whom Mr. Asquith has strong, if not unqualified commendation. De Quincey had too good a conceit of his own opinion to be an impartial judge; Hazlitt sacrificed truth to acrimony and epigrammatic points; Arnold's sympathies were too limited; and R. H. Hutton who is strangely singled out as the greatest of Victorian critics, never really came within sight of literature. It is characteristic of the narrow outlook of the academically trained mind that it can praise the dull editor of an influential paper at the expense of Pater and J. A. Symonds. There is nothing in Hutton, or even in the much greater critic Stevenson (another of Mr. Asquith's favourites) to compare for genuine insight with James Thomson's studies of Shelley and Blake.

In another of his addresses Mr. Asquith's affects not to understand the force of the word "academic" as applied to much modern criticism. It implies that a writer is both pontifical and not over-intelligent. His own judgment on Hutton is a good example. The curious in these matters can amuse themselves by looking out equally good examples from the Cambridge *History of English Literature* or the works of Mr. Saintsbury. Mr. Asquith gives instances in which good critics have gone wrong through a lapse of the sympathetic imagination, without which there can be no criticism worth having. Voltaire wondered how any man in his senses could prefer what he called the "bouffonneries" of Shakespeare to the plays of Corneille and Racine. Goethe found "the

Inferno of Dante abominable, the *Purgatorio* dubious, the *Paradiso* tiresome." Lamb saw nothing in *Faust* but a vulgar melodrama of seduction. Dr. Johnson fell foul of Lycidas. Joanna Baillie was for Scott, in 1810, the highest genius of the century. We recall the vinegar, vitriolic, abuse of an infinitely greater poet—Whitman, by Swinburne, when his literary judgment was controlled by that complacent prig, Watts-Dunton. Admiration for Poe's stories was for Henry James clear evidence of literary incompetence. M. Anatole France assures us that we may take it from him that Flaubert had no intelligence. Perhaps the most wrongheaded judgment ever made was one by Robert Buchanan, an erratic Scotsman, who was half Freethinker and half mystic. He wanted to discredit Ingersoll's attitude to Religion and Science. Ingersoll was no poet, and to "understand Religion a man must have the heart of a poet," or a Buchanan; and science the benighted Atheist confused with mere invention, the hard-working handmaid of science. Then comes the conclusion which was to finish poor Ingersoll. "But Invention-worship is fetish-worship, and Colonel Ingersoll is a fetish worshipper—that is to say, an individual exactly at the savage state where neither religion over science begins."

The address on *Biography* is noticeable for the attention it draws to the autobiography of Haydon, a bad painter, but a particularly acute appraiser of human character. The other addresses to University students at Glasgow and Aberdeen are eloquent pleas for a humanistic culture, for disinterested study of literature and history. On such a subject Mr. Asquith writes with conviction, for on many occasions in his political career has he turned from the worries of office, the barrenness and unreality of political debate, to the quiet pleasures of the library. It is noticeable that it is literature that affords the solace when the waters of life are troubled—not religion. There is no doubt that this attitude is partly due to the influence of Jowett, the Master of Balliol, who could reject or explain away every dogma of Christianity and yet lay claim to a belief in what he called its fundamentals of the creed. I cannot understand the tribute Mr. Asquith and others pay to Jowett's wisdom. He had certainly a pragmatic wisdom, but that is not what is implied. It is hard to understand how Mr. Asquith, who is no bad judge of men, cannot see that Jowett was a "trimmer" in religion, and socially a plebeian with the plebeians irrational worship of a lord. You remember the answer of a Balliol man who had been asked by a friend if he had been intimate with Jowett's "Good God, sir!"? He said: "What do you take me for—a peer or a pauper?" There is the same non-committal attitude to religion in Mr. Asquith as in Jowett. It is hard to say what he is on the face of his writing. Anyhow, he is a man of culture and refined tastes, which is something to be thankful for.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

Confidence.

THERE is no despot like want of confidence. How well the plunderers of the poor know it! Nothing more depressing was to be observed in the Victorian era than the abject and stupid reverence which parents in what are known among the *elite* as the lower-middle class and the working-class inculcated in their offspring for "constituted authority." This, combined with a poor education, rendered the average lad in the humbler walks of life a ready prey to petty tyrants, and often a life-long victim to a sordid and ill-paid vocation. Even if he had ambition, it seldom soared above being a petty tyrant himself. When he met his "betters," his right hand involuntarily sought his forelock, and he was ill at ease. He felt his want of confidence because he was in the presence of people who had *more knowledge and power* than he had.

The nobility and gentry are at pains to make *their* offspring feel that their rights and responsibilities carry with them as an essential to the proper exercise of power—confidence—confidence in the presence of all, with the addition of conscious superiority when they are exercising *judicial*

power in determining as to the crave of the timorous bucolic suppliant that cap in hand awaits the decision of the greater than he who, by divine appointment (or the accident of birth), is invested with this potent superiority.

Free men's minds, and you open their eyes to the glory of an enlarged liberty, in which cringing and toadying find no place. Free men's minds, and you free all their faculties for natural use in an enlightened world. Free men's minds, and the bogeys of superstition and fear and submission and servility and charity vanish in the dawn of a new age.

Christianity has been guilty of many social crimes, but none so heinous as that of making impossible the possession by men of respect for their own manhood. With the decay of Christianity, we see a nobler idea of man's individuality taking root in many minds. Mutual aid and mutual service become imperative duties in the age of Humanism. But it is a condition precedent that man shall respect man—neither bully nor cringe to him. He cannot do the one or the other if he respects himself. In the Golden Age only justice will be recognized—charity will be unknown.

Religion has for countless ages been utilized by the "Upper Ten" to keep the mass of the people "in order." It has built fences to restrain them, and wrought cunning goads to drive them withal. But the fences are rotting—the hands that once grasped the supernatural goads are relaxing. People are no longer sheep to be shepherded. They are growing out of the puny conceptions they were taught in the Victorian era. And as they grow, their knowledge increases; their horizons enlarge and expand; their resolution to secure individual independence may not be gainsaid; and this because they have learned, or are learning, *self-confidence*.

IGNOTUS.

Correspondence.

GOD IN GERMANY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—A fellow-passenger in the train regaled me with the assertion that the Germans had forgotten God. When I reminded him of the Kaiser's constant efforts to keep the name before his people, he retorted that at least the Kaiser was not referring to the God we worshipped, for it would be noticed that the Kaiser never mentioned Jesus Christ.

But can the Kaiser help including Jesus Christ when he speaks of God? In the Creed which we thundered forth in unison in our best Gregorian last Sunday (Trinity Sunday), Saint Athanasius bade us say that "the Father is God, the Son God, and Holy Ghost God, and yet there are not three Gods but one God," "None is afore or after other," "In majesty co-equal," etc. If the Kaiser is not referring to the same God as ours (just as when he speaks of the sun he refers to the same sun as ours), surely we shall be forced to admit that he is more liberally endowed by Providence—that he has at least one God to the good. For there must be in Germany (1) the Catholic God, whose Corpus Christi procession through Cologne the Allied Governments agreed to respect, and (2) the Kaiser's God, to whom he has so generously given the credit (overlooking the poor deluded common Fritzes) for the recent "victories." We might, perhaps, add (3) Allah, the God of the Balkan peoples. Upon that showing, the Central Powers are watched over by three gods.

"And yet there are not three Gods but one God," thunders Saint Athanasius. It is all very puzzling to the simple Chorister whose only god is

A MUSICAL SERVICE.

Society News.

The Secretary of the North London Branch reports that Mrs. Rosetti is setting a good example to out-door speakers by giving special attention to the question of Secular Education. This lady gave a spirited address on Parliament Hill on Sunday last to a large and attentive audience, which resulted in an improved collection. I take this opportunity of reminding all Branches that any report

of work, present or future, intended for this column, should be sent direct to me not later than the third Monday in each month. The *habitués* of Regent Park are requested to note that future meetings will take place at 6 p.m. instead of 3.30.—E. M. VANCE, *General Secretary*.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, Edwin Fagg, "Tradition in War Pictures."

OUTDOOR.

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

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 6.15, Mr. E. Burke, A Lecture.

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (Corner of Ridley Road): 11.30, Mr. G. Rule, "Christian Inconsistencies."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 3.15, Mr. H. B. Johnson, A Lecture.

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S.: 6, Messrs. Yates, Norman, and Doughty.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, F. Shaller, A Lecture; (Clapham Common): 6.30, F. Shaller, A Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Maryland Point Station): 7, A Lecture.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

PORTSMOUTH BRANCH N. S. S. (Trades Hall, Fratton Road): 6.30, Important Business. Address by Mr. F. N. Crosby.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. Ramble.—Meet "White Hart," Cheadle, 10.30 prompt; Motor 'Bus to Handforth, Styal, Oversley Ford; Lunch 2.30, 1s. 9d.; plain, 1s.; Castle Mills, Altrincham, Home. James Langford, Smithfield Market, Manchester.

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