

The

FREETHINKER

FOUNDED - 1881

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

Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper.

VOL. XXXVIII.—No. 24

SUNDAY, JUNE 16, 1918

PRICE TWOPENCE

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Views and Opinions.

Religion in the School.

A few weeks back we warned Freethinkers that movements were going on behind the scene concerning the maintenance of religion in State-supported schools. We have not had to wait long for confirmation of what was then said. The Bishop of Oxford, in a "Charge" to the clergy of his diocese, says much which bears out what we said, and hints at still more. The Bishop points out that the Education Bill now before Parliament does not directly affect religion, but "the Government are understood to be anxious for an agreement if possible between the different religious bodies as to the lines of re-settlement, so far as religious education goes." That is substantially what we have said was taking place. The Government has been "pulling the strings" in order to get the various denominations to establish some sort of a concordat; then, when the present Bill is out of the way, the Minister for Education will come forward with a measure which it will be pretended all the sects have agreed to suggest as a basis of settlement, and a new bar will be set up to the secularizing of the schools. France, after its defeat in 1870, paved the way for a re-birth by curtailing the power of the priest in the school, and by finally abolishing him altogether. English Conservatism—the craftiest in the whole civilized world—aims at turning the War to its own advantage by giving the priest a still firmer hold on the mind of the child.

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The Bishop of Oxford's Scheme.

The Bishop of Oxford gives some indication of the form the agreement between the sects is likely to take. He suggests the establishment in each district of an "interdenominational Council," which is to be given statutory powers, and which is to have the controlling power over religious instruction in both schools and training colleges. It is to be made obligatory on every school, elementary and secondary, to assign "a reasonable time" every week to religious instruction, the religious instruction to be given by a teacher of "certified competence." (At present religious instruction is not obligatory. Any Council may, if it thinks fit, eliminate it altogether.) The obligation to confine religious instruction to the first or last hour of school time is to be abolished; it may be given at any time. This means

in practice a policy of permeation, the creation of a religious atmosphere which would quite do away with the protection of the "Conscience Clause." If this plan is adopted, it will represent "a very great gain," and would give "a basis on which further teaching in church and Sunday-school could be built." So that while in Germany the schools were made "training stables for the Army," with liberal doses of Christian theology—the results of which are now before the world—in England, while our militarists are aiming at military drill in the schools, our parsons will do their best to see that every child leaving school offers suitable material for church or chapel. Nor would it be surprising to find that militarists and pietists are working together with all their old-time friendliness and co-operation.

* * *

A Parson's Question.

This is a parson's proposal. It is suggested by a parson; it is an appeal to parsons; none but parsons and the interests of parsons are considered. The Bishop says that "the number of parents who are prepared to demand any particular kind of religious instruction for their children is lamentably small." And although "the rights of the parents" has been one of the cries of the clergy, the Bishop of Oxford admits that "the claim for parents' rights has not been made good among the population generally." The overwhelming majority of parents do not care whether their children get religious education or not. They do not see the dangers of religious education, but they certainly cannot see any obvious benefits therefrom. They are content if their children get a decent education, and we venture to say that those who care most for genuine education bother least about religious instruction. It is a parson's question. They must get the children ready for the operations of church or chapel or they lose the adult. They are not really interested in the child, they are not really interested in education. They are interested in getting supporters for their Churches. The professional interest is open and avowed. As our militarists are interested in the child only as he promises material for the Army, so the clergy are interested in the child only so far as he may be turned into material for exploitation in church or chapel. It is a sordid struggle for power and pelf.

* * *

The State and the Child.

Naturally, the Bishop of Oxford quite fails to realize the higher and better aspects of the question. To him it is a sectarian question. It concerns the various sects only, and it may well be that if "Churchmen and Non-conformists had reached agreement, and their agreement had been ratified by the Government," many people would regard the question as closed. But the question is larger than the trickeries and back-stairs policies of the Government and the Churches. The demand for Secular Education in State schools is not based upon the necessities of sects but upon the rights of citizenship. It is a question of the modern versus the mediæval State, of a conception of the State based upon

the equal rights of all citizens, versus that of privilege for this or that sect. And, as Freethinkers, we are far more concerned for the genuine rights of the child than we are for the assumed rights of the parent. The fundamental claim of the child is for protection—not merely protection for the body but also for the mind. The one should be encouraged to grow as healthily and as vigorously as the other. And an interdenominational council decreeing the imposition on children of doctrines which are at best unverified and unverifiable speculations, which are rejected as false by millions of educated men and women all over the world, represents as gross an outrage on the helplessness of childhood as anything that can be conceived.

* * *

A Time for Action.

The question is one immediately for Freethinkers, since they, of all classes in the community, are most alive to the nature and dangers of clerical aggression. But ultimately it is one that concerns all parents and all citizens. And the danger, we must again point out, is real and pressing. The Bishop of Oxford's address confirms what we said as to the arrangements that have been proceeding, unknown to the public, between the Government and the Churches. At the proper moment the final arrangement will be produced—and the Government will be greatly "surprised" at the agreement brought about between the sects by its own connivance. If Freethinkers and reformers are not to be caught napping they must bestir themselves. They must make the demand for Secular Education as forcible and as widespread as possible. Members of Parliament can be written to, and the Press can be utilized by letters urging the justice and benefits of ending this sectarian squabble once for all. We have been using this latter channel of publicity ourselves, but we have not the time to do all that might be and ought to be done. Freethinkers all over the country can do something to counteract the underhand activity of the Churches. We claim that our soldiers are fighting for the benefit of civilization abroad. We ought not to be found wanting in our efforts to guard the welfare of civilization at home.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Christian Otherworldliness.

CHRISTIANITY is pre-eminently an otherworldly religion. Even in the Sermon on the Mount the whole emphasis is laid upon the world to come. Virtue's reward is to be reaped, not on earth, but in heaven. The kingdom of heaven, so earnestly preached by the Gospel Jesus, was declared not to be of this world, and entrance into it was possible only at death (Matt. vii. 21-23). The sayings of Jesus were to be done simply in order to inherit endless bliss beyond the tomb. In a Manual of Membership, entitled *The Religion of the Church*, the Bishop of Oxford teaches that the Christian life "is to draw all its motives and power from that heavenly place where Christ is seated at the right hand of God," and this is in full agreement with St. Paul's teaching in Colossians iii. 1-4. On one point, however, the Bishop is at variance with the Apostle. His lordship maintains that all this otherworldliness, so far from making Christians "indifferent to this world, is only to make them feel the importance of everything that happens in this world, because of its divine origin and eternal issues"; but St. Paul holds that the affairs of this world are not worthy of the least attention, heavenly things alone being of real value. Surely, Dr. Gore cannot be ignorant of the fact that the Apostle is merely echoing his

Master's saying in Matt. vi. 19-21. Ideally, the believer's only treasure is in heaven, where his heart also must be.

Chapter vi. in the Bishop's Manual is devoted to what he calls "Christian Morality." Curiously enough, his lordship admits that Jesus "never occupied himself with social legislation or reform," "said nothing to inspire patriotism or to justify war," but claims that "what he sets himself to do within the Jewish people is to restore and perfect the spirit which lies behind legislation—the spirit of humanity." In substantiation of this claim, however, the Bishop advances neither argument nor illustration. We contend that nowhere does the Gospel Jesus endeavour either to restore or to perfect the spirit of humanity, or even show that he possessed such a spirit. As a matter of fact, the Sermon on the Mount is full of legislation, not for human society as such, but for the subjects of the kingdom of God. Dr. Gore attributes to the Gospel Jesus ideas and ideals which he himself harbours in this twentieth century, his only argument being that there is no evidence that Jesus did not cherish them. The Bishop says, for example:—

It seems to me to be idle to argue from what our Lord says about personal submission to injuries that he would have refused to allow a man to defend either his wife and children or his country.

To others, on the other hand, it seems equally idle even to imagine that resistance of any kind can be in harmony with the disposition which he both enjoined and exemplified. Now, while admitting that "so far as he contemplated the future, he (Jesus) seems deliberately to have abstained from making laws for his disciples in the main," Dr. Gore asserts, in the absence of all evidence, that "he intends his society to legislate in his own name and Spirit after he should have gone out of sight." Consequently, by Christian morality the Bishop clearly understands the moral code formulated, in the course of history, by the Christian Church. What Jesus presented to the world was not Christian morality, but the moral spirit. What the moral spirit, as distinguished from the moral act, is, we are not told. Of course, everybody knows that moral acts are but so many expressions of a moral disposition, in the absence of which we do not usually find them; but we are too apt to forget that the connection between them was clearly recognized thousands of years before Jesus was ever heard of, and is being emphasized to-day in many entirely non-Christian communities.

In point of fact, there is no such thing as Christian morality. Morals are not even exclusively human. They are common to all stages of social life, animal as well as human. Without morals, social life would be absolutely impossible. In Egypt, two thousand years before our era began, morals were very highly developed, and moral standards existed not one whit inferior to the most perfect to be found in Christendom at the present time. Both Confucianism and Buddhism, which are two thousand and five hundred years old, are moral systems of astounding perfection; and it is a well-authenticated fact that the followers respectively of Confucius and the Buddha have in all ages been noted for the exceptionally high tone of their moral character. To a certain extent the same thing is true of the Greeks and Romans prior to the appearance of Christianity. Impartial students of Greek and Roman history are profoundly convinced of the essential injustice of representing either nation as ethically inferior. We have the highest warrant for affirming that brotherhood and universalism were the two main planks in the Stoical platform, while slavery was denounced as a crime against Nature. And yet Dr. Gore has the audacity to assert that "it was the love of Christians for one another—the care of all for each—

which was one chief cause of the rapid spread of the Church." He adds: "Men were drawn out of a loveless world into the warm and comfortable fellowship."

In the chapter on "Christian Morality," the Bishop makes many statements, which are either tragically or beautifully true; but his theory of morals is fundamentally false. It is simply not true to say that "all real morality lies in a right relation to God in the heart." All real morality lies in a right relation of man to man. It has nothing to do with God at all, either directly or indirectly. Jesus taught neither the universal Fatherhood of God nor the universal brotherhood of man. Most angrily did he decline to acknowledge any brotherly relationship between himself and the Pharisees. He could find no terms scathing enough to denounce them as the offspring of the Devil. The Bishop tells us that "he loved every man," but his lordship is as fully aware as we are not only that he did not love, but that he hated with perfect hatred, the Scribes and the Pharisees, and positively refused to gather them to his bosom as deeply loved brothers. Indeed, neither Jesus nor his apostles evinced anything like "a positive enthusiasm for humanity—for every man as such." Man as man is not a child of God, for "the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is the possession of each member of Christ, is the gift of liberty and Sonship." What is brotherhood?

The principle of brotherhood means that there is to be asked of each the utmost service which each can render, and that there should be given to each according to his need, because if one member suffer, or is in want, the weakness or suffering of each is the weakening of the whole body. Suffering indeed will be the lot of the whole body and of every member of it, but not the misery of being forgotten or despised by the brotherhood (*The Religion of the Church*, pp. 111, 112).

To that definition of the nature and obligations of brotherhood we have no objection to offer, but the Bishop does not omit to assure us that "the Christian Church is 'the body,' or 'the brotherhood,' because here only, where the Spirit dwells, can men realize in sonship to God the brotherhood which is meant for all." The Bishop's view, we grant, is in strict accord with Scripture, according to which God is by nature only our Maker and Preserver, and becomes our Father only in Christ, and in him only when we accept him as Saviour and Lord. There is, therefore, no such thing as the natural brotherhood of man, but only the brotherhood of believers.

After all, otherworldism is the only thing that really matters in the Christian religion. We become brothers only when we realize our heavenly citizenship. This earthly life has significance only as an introduction to and preparation for the eternal life. Christianity is the direct negation of Naturalism, and, as such, it does the greatest injustice conceivable to our own nature. It teaches us to neglect and despise the only world of which we possess any knowledge, and to set our affection upon and live alone for things of which we know absolutely nothing. Those who profess to accept that teaching become, of necessity, despicable hypocrites, because they pretend to be what, in the nature of things, it is impossible for them ever to become, and almost wholly neglect the only duties for the discharge of which their very constitution qualifies them. Even this terrible War testifies to the absurdity as well as essential insincerity of religious professions. It was undertaken and is being consistently prosecuted in the name and for the glory of God, and it is largely the belief that God is in it, and will end it in his own good time that is responsible for its continuance.

J. T. LLOYD.

Thomas Scott, of Ramsgate.

Ireland is still Catholic: the Cevennes still Protestant. It is not a basketful of law papers nor the hoofs and pistol butts of a regiment of horse that can change one tittle of a ploughman's thoughts.—R. L. Stevenson.

At a time when the Secularists had started their modest task of converting the English-speaking world to Free-thought, a kindly, handsome Englishman conceived the idea of devoting himself to Rationalistic propaganda among what has been called the "hupper suckles" of society. This man was Thomas Scott, of Mount Pleasant, Ramsgate. He had charm, he had that chivalry for principle which represents the highest manhood, and he did his work joyously. His memory is kept green for what he was; his memory is treasured for what he did; and the record of his life's work lifts the mind like the sound of martial music.

Thomas Scott had an adventurous career. Born in 1808, he was, in his youth, a page to King Charles X., of France. A great traveller, he journeyed in all parts of the world. Well educated, he knew the world of books, and he also knew the book of the world. In the later years of his life he devoted his leisure, money, and abilities to the furtherance of Free-thought, and proved himself a prince among propagandists. During the years 1862 to 1877 he issued from his pleasant seaside home a very large number of pamphlets, printed and distributed at his own expense, the total collection making twenty stout volumes. The writers he gathered about him were men of outstanding ability, and among them were Moncure Conway, John Addington Symonds, Sir R. D. Hanson, Judge Strange, Dr. Zerffi, Bishop Hinds, and Sir G. W. Cox. Mrs. Annie Besant contributed an *Essay on the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth*, "by the wife of a beneficed clergyman." This led to the Rev. Mr. Besant insisting on his wife taking the communion, or leaving, and, brave woman that she was, she chose the better course. Afterwards she wrote more tracts for Mr. Scott, since reprinted in *My Path to Atheism*.

It is difficult to imagine now the flutter caused in sheltered homes and country vicarages by Thomas Scott's persistent propaganda. In the "stormy seventies" of the last century, Free-thought views had an air of novelty, and the clergy had not then realized that discretion was the better part of valour in their particular case. For Scott levelled his guns at the clergy, and bombarded them through the post with pamphlets and tracts. One of them was entitled *213 Questions*, to which answers were respectfully asked, and each one was well calculated to turn a clergyman's hair white, and curl it afterwards. The most ambitious work Scott issued was the *English Life of Jesus*, which was designed to do for British readers what Renan had done for France and Strauss for Germany. It was a "thunderous weapon of revolt," and was written in conjunction with Sir George Cox, who, being a Bishop of the Established Church, was unwilling to put his name to the volume. In laying down his life work, Scott said: "The only true orthodoxy is loyalty to reason." He died at Norwood in 1878, and he deserves a niche in the Free-thought pantheon because in his day he did valiant work for human emancipation. Animated throughout by high ideals, and supported by a strong character, he had the true courage which sweeps away selfishness, weakness, and fears in discharging what he felt were moral obligations.

The work done by Thomas Scott and his circle of friends is an important chapter in the history of the popularizing of Free-thought principles. During the forty years which have elapsed since Scott's death, great and far-reaching changes have taken place. The most

important are the safeguarding of bequests to Free-thought; the right of Freethinkers to sit in Parliament without taking an oath; the right of affirmation, and the ever-increasing number of ladies associated with its propaganda. In the days of Holyoake, Southwell, and Bradlaugh the audiences at Freethought meetings were almost entirely composed of men, whereas to-day the position is very different. Under Mr. Cohen's administration, the Freethought Party is increasing in numbers and influence. Owing to his enterprise, too, in the most difficult period of its history, it is still in the vanguard of progress, sheltering behind it all the weaker heterodox people, who otherwise had been crushed by the weight of orthodoxy.

Secularists have a right to be proud of their history. As the little *Revenge* earned an undying name by hurling herself against the great battleships of the Spaniards, so the Freethinkers have displayed extraordinary courage in attacking the heart of the more formidable Armada of Superstition. The greater the perils, the greater the victory; and in the ripe years to come recognition must be given to the superb courage, which, disregarding any reward, was satisfied with the knowledge that their action would diffuse the blessings of Liberty. For in that happy time the stormy note of battle will be changed to the triumphant music of victory.

MIMNERMUS.

A Search for the Soul.

IN commencing this quest, the first point to be noticed is that Christian preachers and writers never define what they mean by the "soul" or "spirit," but take it for granted that their hearers or readers know what that supposed indwelling entity of the human organism really is. The same is the case with the New Testament statements; no definition or description of this alleged immortal portion of the body is anywhere given. Looking through a commentary of the Four Gospels, we find the same reticence; evidently the writer knew nothing definite about the matter. Turning next to a dictionary, I read: "Soul, the spiritual part of man, the seat of reason and conscience; the intellectual principle, or understanding, the vital principle; spirit," etc. Lastly, opening the last tract sent by an old friend for my conversion, I find the following:—

What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?.....But the better to understand our Lord's words, it is necessary to ask, What is the soul? The soul is the spiritual and immortal part of man, capable of the most perfect happiness or intense misery, and exists eternally. Such a treasure every child of Adam possesses, but few are sensible of its worth, or the danger of its being lost.

In the foregoing quotation from the New Testament the word "soul" is *psyche*, and signifies "life"; it is so translated in the Revised Version. Thus, so far, we have no answer to the question, "What is it that believers in immortality think will survive death?" To say that it is "the spiritual and immortal part of man" displays no knowledge whatever, and merely begs the whole question. Science knows nothing of any such "spiritual and immortal part" of man. What is there, then, in the human organism which we are asked to believe will survive death? There exists, we are told, something called a "soul" or "spirit," apparently without any material substance; that is to say, a kind of phantom, which has a human form and personality, a memory of the past, consciousness, and the power to think. Though without any physical sense-organs, vocal organs, nerve substance, or brain, this apparition is assumed to be

able to see, hear, feel, think, and perhaps even to speak, just the same as when it was in the body during life. Nothing, in fact, is too absurd to be imagined by the credulous people who believe in an "immortal soul." If they only took the trouble to think, they would soon perceive that no action of what is called "the mind" can be performed without material organs, and would then understand that a soul without a body, or a spirit without tangible substance, could no more exist without the cerebral organ than gravitation could continue to act without the existence of bodies which mutually attract each other.

Christian believers have very little to say about the soul or spirit save that it is something immortal within the human body which survives death; but those among the Spiritists who claim to have the "gift" of clairvoyance profess to be able both to see and receive messages from this discarnate "spirit-form," notwithstanding the fact that it is invisible to all other persons who do not possess that "gift." Thus, in a pamphlet by the Editor of the *Two Worlds*, the writer says:—

Andrew Jackson Davis has described what he observed of the process of dying.....He tells us that the central pivot (really the point of consciousness) emerged from the *superior* brain, and attracted to it the ethereal elements constituting the *supra* body. That these enveloped the head of the dying form, and presently this sunlike halo assumed shape and form. In appearance this form, Davis tells us, was human.

Andrew Jackson Davis was a religious crank and Spiritist in America, who lived more than half a century ago. He claimed to have clairvoyant visions, and is said to have written twenty-seven volumes of spiritistic nonsense, an epitome of which has been recently published. In the Spiritist organ called *Light* (Feb. 24, 1917) there appeared a short article, entitled "Through Death to Life," by a lady (name not given) who is stated to be "one of a large number of persons in whom psychic powers have awakened spontaneously." From this article I make the following extract:—

There is no death; what seems so is transition. This is a plain statement of fact. That transition I have often seen. For something like a score of years I was a professional nurse. Many deaths I witnessed. And many times I beheld the spirit-body rise from the discarded earthly body, in appearance an etherealised glorified replica of it. No trace of suffering or disease did I ever see on the radiant faces of those thus transformed.

This lady further said that she had also seen some of "those who have come from the realm of spirit-life" enter the chamber of the dying person just before a death. Of these ministering spirits she said:—

Clearly visible they have been to me, though unseen by the other human occupants of the room or hospital ward, save by the dying persons, who have often recognized them as friends or relations who had preceded them to the other world, and have greeted them joyously.

The most charitable view to take of these statements is that the visions mentioned were purely subjective. But for the lady having taken up with Spiritism, she would probably never have imagined that she saw what she describes. Again, one may see at a modern spiritist meeting a lady or gentleman, professing to be a clairvoyant, who declares from the platform that he or she sees a discarnate "spirit" standing behind the chair of one of the persons present, and then, after naming the sex, goes on to describe the apparent age, height, dress, and general appearance of the alleged apparition. This performance is repeated in the cases of several other persons seated in the room; so that there would appear to be a number of "spirits" present who had come direct

from "spirit-land"—wherever that may be—in order to be "seen" by the clairvoyant and their presence made known to the relatives behind whose chairs they stood. Needless to say, no one among the audience see any of the so-called "spirits." This is one of the many weak points in modern Spiritism; for no satisfactory or adequate reason can be shown why the "clairvoyant" is able to perceive what no other person in the room has the power to see. Neither physically nor psychically has the medium keener sense of vision, or higher mental faculties than many of the educated people present. I should not have referred to this matter but for the fact that no other believers in immortality have ever claimed to have *actually seen* the supposed disembodied soul or spirit.

Another point in this connection which should be noticed is, that not only is the discarnate spirit said to be an exact representation of the deceased body in form and feature, but, like the body, *it wears clothes*. In all the descriptions of the spirit-forms in the lecture-room the "spirits" are assumed to be dressed in similar clothing to that worn by the persons from whom they have emanated, and this outward dress is often described. On October 25, 1917, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle delivered an address on Spiritism, which was noticed in the *Daily Express*. Some days later, in reply to criticisms in that paper, Sir Arthur said: "The reason spirits wear clothes is because modesty does not cease with this life." This statement implies that the spirit-form is an exact counterpart of the body; if, however, we consider a moment, we shall see that this idea is simply ridiculous. What is called the "soul" or "spirit" is said to be an immaterial entity; that is to say, it is more attenuated and rarefied than the air we breathe. But the atmosphere, though rarefied, is a form of matter; the spirit-form must, therefore, be of a still more rarefied nature, and, to prevent being dispersed, it should have some kind of outer covering corresponding to the skin of the discarded body. When this integument is added—and the "spirit" could not hold together without something of that nature—the spirit-form would then become visible to every one in the meeting-room; and if to this the clothes be added, the phantom would be still more plainly perceived. Since, however, it is not visible, it is "something which is really nothing."

Again, when the spirit left the body it had no clothes: where did it get them? It could not make them itself for many reasons—one being that it had no muscles, and was unable to move any of its intangible limbs. Moreover, it did not need clothes, for having no organs of any kind, it would be a sexless phantom, powerless to do anything whatever. Hence, the "immortal soul" of the Christians, and the "discarnate spirit" of the Spiritists may be set down as pure nonentities; both are unthinkable as sentient beings.

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

"THE PARAGON OF ANIMALS."

Like the Roman emperors, who, intoxicated by their power, at length regarded themselves as demigods, so the ruler of the earth believes that the animals subjected to his will have nothing in common with his own nature. Man is not content to be the king of animals. He insists on having it that an impassable gulf separates him from his subjects. The affinity of the ape disturbs and humbles him. And, turning his back upon the earth, he flies, with his threatened majesty, into the cloudy sphere of a special "human kingdom." But Anatomy, like those slaves who followed the conqueror's car crying, "Thou art a man," disturbs him in his self-admiration, and reminds him of those plain and tangible realities which unite him with the animal world.

—Broca.

Acid Drops.

When the War is over, Mr. Lloyd George may, perhaps, find time to brush up his knowledge of history. In that case he may be prevented rushing into the absurdities he did in the course of a speech delivered on June 7. Then he informed his audience that the Christians once before saved civilization by stemming the tide of Saracenic invasion, which left behind it ruined cities and destroyed civilization, etc. Mr. Lloyd George has evidently got gloriously mixed up between the early Saracens and the later Turks, and, as they were both Mohammedans, lumps them into one whole. Which, as anyone who knows could have told him, is absurd.

That is why we say that when Mr. Lloyd George has the time to read a little on the subject, he will know better than to talk in that loose way. As a matter of fact, for several centuries the only civilization in Europe worth talking about was "Saracenic." The Saracens provided the rest of Europe with the starting-point for the Renaissance. They preserved and revived the science of antiquity, which the Church was trying to destroy. They were the teachers of Christendom in chemistry, in astronomy, in ship-building, and in various sciences. They practised religious toleration while Christendom practised persecution as a religious duty. They were civilized while the rest of Europe were next door to savages. If Mr. Lloyd George can find time to glance at the pages of Buckle or Draper, or look through Lea's *Moriscos in Spain*, he will hardly venture to speak of mediæval Christians as the champions of civilization against a "Saracenic" invasion.

A soldier, who was tried at the Old Bailey for bigamy, was stated to have given his age at his first marriage as twenty-four. At the second marriage, which took place seventeen years later, he stated he was twenty-two. A man who grew younger in this fashion might have emulated the Bible Melchisadech, who had neither beginning nor end of days.

The Salvation Army has had its War flag days under royal and distinguished patronage, and it is now trying to raise the wind in other directions. Advertisements have appeared in the press headed "The End of the War," and informing the generous alms-giving public that the Salvation Army is still grappling with the "Old Social Evils"—presumably on the old familiar cash basis.

Providence, according to popular belief, has a peculiar fondness for stone statues and religious relics in the fighting lines, but this tenderness appears to be limited to inanimate objects. During the annual pilgrimage near Subiaco, Italy, the Church of the Trinity was the scene of a panic, in which seven persons were crushed to death and 120 injured. Afterwards it was found that the panic was caused by a mad woman suffering from delusions. "His tender mercy is over all his works."

The clerical attitude to the War has aroused much feeling, and even archbishops are not above criticism. Dr. Lang, Archbishop of York, is quite irate with his opponents, and points out that he resents being attacked for opinions he never held. It is a novel position for a parson of his rank, but many will see the humour of an engineer being hoist with his own petard.

"If the Church keeps aloof from questions of social reform," said Canon Adderley, "it won't be listened to any longer." Unfortunately, when the Church does interfere with social matters, she is always on the wrong side.

The clergy are always insisting that religion is a great consoler, but it is not all Christians who take this view. An advertisement, in a provincial paper, refers to a theological lecture, entitled "God to Destroy the European Nations." Lest any of the faithful should be unduly despondent, the notice adds: "All seats free. All cordially welcome."

Man's first disobedience was occasioned by an apple, but to-day there are so many stumbling blocks. The dear clergy, for example, constantly ignore the injunction concerning the laying up of treasure. One of the latest cases is that of the late Rev. W. Lenwood, a Congregationalist minister, of Sheffield, whose will was proved for £51,833.

A conscientious objector, just released from Wormwood Scrubbs, has been on hunger-strike since January, 1917. This seems to upset the record of the founder of Christianity.

Marvellous stories of the miraculous deliverance of religious statues on the Continent are printed in parish magazines, pious periodicals, and other repositories of wisdom. Sir R. M. Hyslop, however, states that many churches are in ruins in the War zone, and soldiers have used some of them as stables for their horses.

In an appeal for the support of the public, the Salvation Army claims to have ministered to thirty millions of soldiers. It reminds us of the modest claim of an obscure provincial paper, which used to state that it circulated among three millions of people.

According to ecclesiastical tradition, Saint Boniface was canonized for converting the Germans. It is a pity that the saint cannot meet those dear clergymen who maintain, with unblushing effrontery, that the Germans are Atheists.

A religious contemporary contains the information that the output of coal in the United Kingdom during 1917 was 248,499,240 tons. Considering the audience, information concerning the output of coal in Hades would have been more to the purpose.

Bold advertisements: "Christ is Coming," appeared in the newspapers recently. It was disappointing to find that they referred to a series of addresses at a London hotel.

What heroes the Bishops are! The Bishop of Peterborough announces that he contemplates another pilgrimage this month—in his own diocese.

A really good story of conversion was told at a recent Mansion House meeting by the Archbishop of Westminster. A soldier on the West Front told a chaplain he intended to marry a French girl. The padre remarked that she must be a Catholic. "Well, sir, she was," replied the soldier, "but I made that all right. I took her into a church and showed her the statues, and said, 'Napoo, pas bon!' And now she's a Protestant."

The Advisory Committee of the Military Tribunal of Penzance passed the following resolutions on May 25:—

(1) That the Advisory Committee to the Military Tribunal for the borough of Penzance fully endorse the popular resentment against the action of H.M. Government in withdrawing from the Military Service Act of 1918 the clause, introduced by themselves, to secure the military services of the clergy and ministers of religion, thus granting complete and unqualified exemption to a whole class of the community; and they protest against a continuance of so undemocratic a policy as that of selective privilege, through the period of the acutest crisis humanity, with its civilization, has been called upon to face and to overcome.

(2) That, consequent upon the inequality in the incidence of service protested against in the foregoing resolution, the Advisory Committee hereby place on record their sense of the increased difficulty attaching to the just discharge of the duties entrusted to them.

The resolutions were adopted unanimously. We should like to see other Committees and Tribunals follow this excellent example.

The Bishop of Oxford, in a University sermon, asked whether the attitude of Christ towards patriotism would escape the attention of D.O.R.A. (the Defence of the Realm Act). Frankly, we give it up. Christ and Dora is too much for us.

Sometimes pious penmen let the cat out of the bag without realizing it. Describing the Mohammedan pilgrimage to what is called, facetiously, "the tomb of Moses," a writer in the *Daily News* says: "In the past the time of the pilgrimage was one of danger, for there was a great influx of Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem, and there was apprehension among the Moslems lest the Christians should take advantage of their numerical superiority for acts of hostility."

Clerical humour is not so robustious as it once was, but a story told by the Rev. G. W. Leachman is good. A church had a splendid new banner, flashing with gilt and tinsel, and with the design of the Lion of Saint Mark, depicted as a ravenous-looking brute, upon it. Below the design was the text, "Suffer little children to come unto me."

An Italian editor informs his readers that Signor Bioti, the creator of "Mefistofeles," is dead. We may next hear that the Devil himself is dead.

Plain speaking is sometimes indulged in by parsons. Canon Adderley says that "Christian congregations are not remarkable for their charity and loving action." The Canon ought to know, for he has been in touch with Christians all his life.

A writer in a daily paper refers to militarism as "the medicine of God." Some critics prefer to regard it as a pill to purge pietism.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who is a Spiritualist, considers that the next life is both shorter and happier than this, and is a step to still another future life. The distinguished novelist might send Sherlock Holmes to find out fuller particulars.

In view of a recent lawsuit, it is amusing to find a daily paper referring to a librarian who indexed Oscar Wilde's *Importance of Being Earnest* as theology.

Finance and faith often run in double harness. At the Liberation Society meeting it was pointed out that when the Royal Assent was given to the Welsh Disestablishment Act the value of each £100 of tithe rent charge was £74, and to-day the value was £109, and within two years would increase to £130. Thus, owing to War conditions, the money paid to the Church authorities would be half as much again as was intended. The dear clergy will forget these figures when they next parade their "poverty."

United intercession is extremely likely to end in something very like comedy. The latest victims of this pious craze are Irish women who are petitioning the Throne of Grace for deliverance from conscription.

The faith of some Christians is quite simple and childlike. Sir Donald Maclean says that "the only thing that can heal the woes of this world is the Gospel." The quaint thing is that the celestially minded Christians will enforce the Beatitudes at the point of the bayonet.

As an offset to the booming of the clergy who are entering the Army—mostly as non-combatants—the Rev. Thomson, of Glasgow, declared that the younger men "seemed to prefer working with a corkscrew and a lemonade bottle in Y.M.C.A. canteens." He would refuse, he said, to fill the pulpits with such men. Plain speaking of this kind from the pulpit is as welcome as it is uncommon.

From the *Daily Chronicle*:—

The Bishop was addressing the Sunday school. In his most expressive tones he was saying: "And now, children, let me tell you a very sad fact. In Africa there are 10,000,000 square miles of territory without a single Sunday school where little boys and girls can spend their Sundays. Now, what should we all try and save up our money and do?" And the class, as one voice, replied in ecstatic union: "Go to Africa!"

To Correspondents.

C. F. BUDGE.—Readers who send us newspaper cuttings are always conferring a favour and helping us with our work.

H. HIGGINS (Motherwell).—Shall be pleased if you will act for your town as you suggest. We lectured in Motherwell some years ago, and hope to do so again. When we next come to Glasgow we will try and arrange for several week-nights in the district.

F. A. OVERIN, A. D. CORRICK, AND OTHERS.—Paper is being sent to the soldier's address as given.

V. H. SMITH.—Thanks for what you are doing on behalf of the *Freethinker*. For the moment the situation is a little more troublesome than usual, but we are not at all discouraged.

H. HIGGINS.—The authentic history of Babylonia goes back to about 1,200 B.C. Professor Petrie places the first Egyptian dynasty at about 4,777 B.C. Chinese and Indian history also takes us farther back than the date you name. *A Short History of Ancient Peoples*, by R. Souttar, will supply you with all the facts you need.

T. MORLEY (Wigan).—Your suggestion is a good one, and, as you will see, we have acted on it. Three new readers in a month is very good work. Hope you will soon better it, though.

J. S. N.—Thanks for cuttings. Very useful.

G. B. TAYLOR.—A capital plan. We know we can depend upon you doing your bit. And years are nothing so long as one feels young.

E. E. STAFFORD.—Sorry your paper has not reached you. It is sent regularly, so the fault is not ours. Will see what can be done.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges:—Mr. M. J. Charter, 10s.; Mrs. F. Whatcott, 5s.

N. S. S. GENERAL FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges:—Mr. M. J. Charter, 10s.

H. DAWSON.—Quite acceptable. Many thanks.

W. E. BRUCE.—The Secretary of the Liverpool Branch is Mr. W. McKelvie, 21 Globe Street, Liverpool.

W. TAYLOR.—Sorry, but we know no more than the announcement disclosed.

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.

We have had a gratifying number of replies to our article last week on the formation of a *Freethinker* League. Quite a number of towns are represented, and more will, we are sure, be coming along in the course of the next week. When we get a further instalment of names, we will commence classifying and arranging them, and the League can commence its work. And there is no reason why there should not be representatives of the *Freethinker* in fifty or sixty towns in Great Britain. Next week we will write more fully on the matter, and also on the way in which our readers may help towards guaranteeing a future supply of paper where-with to print the *Freethinker*.

An Exeter reader sends us £1 10s. to be expended on the distribution of 2,000 copies of Mr. Cohen's Pioneer Tracts—*What is the Use of the Clergy?* and *What Will You Put in Its*

Place? We propose sending them out in parcels of not more than 200—100 of each sort.—We shall be pleased to receive postcards from readers who will undertake their distribution.

The Pioneer Press has added to its list of books for Free-thinkers three volumes of special interest. *The Grammar of Life*, by G. T. Wrench, aims—to use the author's words—at giving "a complete but short exposition of the principles of life in all its bewildering vicissitudes." And the programme is well realized. The work covers every aspect of life, and is uncompromisingly freethinking in both spirit and substance. The volume was published at 6s. net, and is being sold at 2s. 6d., postage 6d.

Those who are familiar with Mr. Carveth Read's *Natural and Social Morals* will not need much pressing to secure a copy of his *Metaphysics of Nature*. To those interested in the more fundamental questions of science and philosophy, we commend this volume as a thorough-going piece of work. It is uniform in appearance with *Natural and Social Morals*, was published at 10s. 6d. net, and is being sold at 3s. 6d., postage 6d. The third work is Mr. H. Croft Hiller's *Against Dogma and Free Will, and For Weismannism*. This is an ably written and suggestive work, and contains in an appendix the author's discussion with Mr. J. M. Robertson on Weismannism. Originally published at 7s. 6d. net, the price is now 2s. 6d., postage 6d. Only a very limited number of each of the above three works are available.

We have received a number of new addresses of soldiers who are to receive free copies of the *Freethinker* for thirteen weeks. One of our readers was good enough to pay for twenty-one copies to be sent in this way. That number is now completed, but we do not mind adding a few more on our own account. We are sure it is an excellent method of propaganda.

The New York *Truthseeker* reprints our "Views and Opinions" of March 31, on "Truth and the Press," with due acknowledgments. We are glad to see the *Truthseeker* is getting through the War period with little apparent discomfort, although we have no doubt that, behind the scenes, it has its share of anxiety. Only those "in the swim" can properly appreciate the worries involved in carrying on a weekly Freethought paper, even in peace times. Still, New York without its *Truthseeker* is as inconceivable as London without its *Freethinker*; and when the War is over, we have every confidence that each journal will be able to congratulate the other on having survived.

We are asked to call the attention of Freethinkers to the fact that the Kingsland Branch of the N.S.S. has changed the time of its Sunday meetings from evening to morning, and that many of the usual attendants do not appear to have accustomed themselves to the change. There was a good meeting on Sunday last for Mr. George Rule, and we hope that Freethinkers in the locality will support future meetings as well as they can. There ought to be a goodly number of Freethinkers in this district, and an hour devoted to propaganda once a week will be time well spent.

The friends of South Shields Branch have dismissed *pro tem.* all more important and weighty matters, and to-day (Sunday, June 16) have arranged to foregather at Dee Street Car Stage, Jarrow, for a short summer evening ramble by St. Bede's Well, Monkton Gardens, Hedworth Hall, and home, in place of the usual indoor meeting. Mr. J. L. Carr, 37 Britisher Street, Helbron, acts as leader, and the party will be whipped in by the Secretary and other local veterans. Visitors and old acquaintances are sure of a hearty welcome.

No answer has come through the ages
To the poets, the seers, and the sages
Who have sought in the secrets of science
The name and the nature of God. —John Hay.

Chance and the Cosmic Process.

THE universal operation of law in the natural world has become such a common conception in modern thought that few, even among theologians, now venture to question it. No advocate of the "Design" argument (except, perhaps, an occasional Christian Evidence lecturer) now imputes to the Rationalist the fallacy of holding that the cosmic order has been brought about by "chance," meaning by this a negation of law. All persons with any pretensions to philosophic thinking acknowledge that there is no such condition or agency—or rather, absence of agency—as chance in this sense. On the contrary, they are ready to agree that chance or probability, in the scientific sense of the term, so far from assuming a negation of law, is based on a recognition of it. For the chance or probability of an event is merely our ground of expectation of its occurrence under conditions in which the operation of a causal law or laws may, so far as we know, bring about several equally likely results. It is, therefore, not an expression of a belief in the absence of law, but an expression of a belief that the laws governing the results apply equally to all cases, and may, therefore, be expected to bring about results which are equally likely or probable.

Yet, though this conception of chance is so widely recognized, its recognition is frequently accompanied by a curious fallacy. This takes the form of an assumption that any result brought about under conditions of chance, even as thus scientifically understood, must always be of an irregular and capricious character—that merely because we happen to be ignorant of the exact conditions governing a set of causal operations, and have, therefore, no ground to expect one result more than another, such results can in no case be expected to exhibit the characteristics of law or order, but must always present an appearance of fortuity or accident. And, of course, the conclusion drawn from this assumption is that a result which *does* present this condition of order, harmony, and fitness for the development of moral and intelligent beings must have required for its production some further cause, different in kind from all the others, viz., an intelligent "design" or "purpose." Thus the theologian, while acknowledging, perhaps, the universal supremacy of law and causality, and while agreeing that among the uncountable millions of nebulae and stellar systems scattered throughout space, evolutionary results of numberless kinds must be brought about, yet insists on the necessity of "intelligent design" to account for the one evolutionary result he happens to know, merely because it presents what he understands as a physical and moral "order." And he may, perhaps, attempt to clinch his argument by bringing forward that time-honoured illustration about letters of the alphabet being thrown down at random, and the absurdity of supposing that they would ever be found grouped in such an order as to form a "poem." This is a favourite illustration with the Christian Evidence lecturer, and is supposed to result in the immediate collapse of any Rationalist within hearing. Nevertheless, I cheerfully proceed to take up the challenge.

In the first place, it has to be observed that since, in the scientific view of probability, all the possible events or results contemplated are regarded as equally probable, it is obviously inadmissible to regard any one result as less probable than any other. In the second place, it must be observed that, whatever the value of the probability may be, this value approaches certainty as the number of instances under consideration increases, and would reach absolute certainty if the number of instances became infinite. The argument falls under these two

heads, and it will be made clearer by a simple illustration.

Suppose someone shuffles a pack of playing-cards and lays the fifty-two cards out in a row. The order in which he shall lay them out is strictly determined by law. Given the weight, the thickness, the smoothness, etc., of each card, the sensitiveness of the dealer's fingers in touching them, the firmness of his muscular movements in shuffling them, and so on, some definite order of disposal in the pack will be the sure and inevitable result. Yet, to us, in our ignorance of these antecedents, any one order of arrangement out of all the possible orders is as likely to result as any other, for unknown and incalculable though the several sets of causal antecedents themselves are, we know that the conditions of their operation apply equally to any given instance. The case, therefore, comes under the theory of chance, for chance or probability may be described as an estimate based on an equality of conditions governing a known number of possible events, whence it is concluded that the occurrence of any one of these events is equally probable with that of any other. In the case of our illustration, the chance that any given order of sequence will occur among the fifty-two cards is expressed by a fraction of which the numerator is unity, and the denominator is the whole number of possible sequences of the fifty-two cards. This is a number of such enormous magnitude that no real conception can be formed of it, but some dim idea of its vastness may be derived from the statement that the number of seconds in a million years would form but a very small fraction of it. Yet of course it is a *finite number*, and moreover an easily calculable one, being merely the product of all the integral numbers from one to fifty two.

Now, supposing that the cards, on being laid out on the table, become ranged in a regular order of succession—say one suit following another in an unbroken group, and each of the four suits having its thirteen cards in serial order from ace to king. Very few people would fail to express utter incredulity as to this result having been due to chance, or would hesitate to attribute it to a deliberate "design" on the part of the person who shuffled the cards. And if he had had the temerity to lay bets on the occurrence of this particular result, the "purpose" attributed to him would certainly not be of "moral" character—indeed, it would take a deal of persuasion to convince the losers of the bet that he was not a cardsharp of the sharpest description.

And yet the arrangement of the cards in this orderly sequence would not have been a whit less probable than any other arrangement, and therefore should not have excited any unusual surprise at its occurrence. The "orderliness" of the arrangement would have nothing whatever to do with the probability of its actual occurrence, for this "orderliness" is merely something which is imputed to the arrangement by the spectators themselves. The particular order in which the cards have become grouped *happens to correspond with an ideal order existing in the minds of the spectators, and thus gives rise to the notion of design.*

We now come to the second consideration mentioned above, which deals with the number of instances involved in the occurrence of a chance event. The intrinsic probability of the occurrence of such an event on any one occasion has just been referred to, but a chance can also be expressed in terms of the probability of its occurrence once, twice, thrice, etc., in some given number of trials. It is obvious that a probability as thus expressed increases with the number of instances considered; and as this number approaches infinity, the corresponding probability approaches an actual cer-

tainty. Hence, to revert to our illustration, if the process of shuffling and laying out a pack of cards could be repeated "to infinity," the probability of their orderly arrangement in suits and sequences would be increased to an indefinite extent. Or if we wish to pay the theologian the compliment of using his own illustration, we may say that if an infinity of Christian Evidence lecturers, provided with bags containing all the letters of the alphabet in, say, Milton's "Paradise Lost," were to employ themselves for all eternity in scattering these letters out in rows, that celebrated, if somewhat tedious, poem would stand a good chance of being produced. For the number of ways in which the letters might happen to fall, however vast, is still a finite number; and every finite number shrinks into insignificance in comparison with infinity.

In the light of these considerations, the notion of design in Nature seems to lose even the fictitious plausibility which the theory of chance is mistakenly supposed to allow it. In the first place, the necessity of positing the existence of a controlling purpose, which is alleged to be imposed on us by the order prevailing in the minute portion of the universe within our ken—is seen to be due to a mere fallacy of thought. We ourselves being part and product of this order, it appears to us to occupy a unique position, and to stand on a different footing from any other set of causal sequences, while in truth it is no more exceptional and no more in need of special "explanation" than any other manifestation of the cosmic process. In the second place, the infinitely vast scale on which this process operates profoundly affects the question. When we realize that it is without beginning or end—is infinite in space and time—we see that the evolution of any possible order or mode of being passes from the region of probability to that of certainty. Whatever result the cosmic process *can* achieve, that result, somewhere and somewhen, it *will* achieve, for its field of operation is the infinity of existence.

But none the less do we recognize that this aspect of the question in no way precludes our belief in the existence of universal law—in now way negatives that grand conception of the fundamental unity of Nature which forms the basis of our Monistic philosophy. The sphere in which chance may be said to operate lies amid the infinite complexities and diversities, the numberless mutual actions and reactions of causal processes. But every deepening of our knowledge of Nature strengthens our conviction that underlying all these complexities and diversities there exists one supreme and eternal law—some one primordial Law of Energy.

A. E. MADDOCK.

A Little Homily.

I READ in an old book many years ago—an ancient primer whose secular page has become sacred in my eyes, and on which is founded as upon a rock all my wisdom, virtue, learning, and philosophy. My *all* of such things may be very little; that is not the point. The lessons found there, confirmed by experience, adapted and assimilated by the passing years, accompany me still on my journey, a very present help in time of trouble; and the more I ponder each wise remark, the more I am inclined to say, This is a faithful saying! I read this in the old book long ago. I quote from memory:

Form the most amiable opinions you can of nations, of communities, and of individuals; if they are good, you do them only justice; if they are not, you yourself are the more lovely for entertaining such sentiments.

There, you see, is the skilled appeal to self-approbation; but as the mind matures, it would extend the reasons for this gentle judgment. Men, in their moral and intellectual

qualities, are not distinctively black and white, but rather of a mixed grey, shading off into what they are. So it is not only that we ourselves may be the "more lovely," though that vanity is a universal and wise provision of Nature, but that we ought to make the best of our fellow-beings as we find them, always remembering that we ourselves may not be quite perfect specimens of the genus *homo*. Burns was a great philosopher in little. For instance:

Then gently scan your brother man,
And gentler sister woman;
Tho' they may gang a kennan wrang,
To step aside is human.

Rash judgments are to be deprecated, as we will find they are nearly always to be deplored—even from our own selfish point of view. The old book says: "A word dropped by chance from your friend offends your delicacy. Beware of opening your discontent to the first person you meet. When you are cool it will vanish and leave no impression." But what hurts even more than that is our occasionally bitter and barbarian attitude towards certain quite amiable persons who happen to be diametrically opposed to us in matters of sentiment and opinion. As a writer quoted lately in the *Freethinker* from Voltaire: "It is the part of a wise man to have preferences but no exclusions." But not only in our anger or dislike are some of us prone to ill-considered (sometimes ill-conditioned) speech and action, but in our loves and confidences and conceits we often "give ourselves away."

And here, again, the philosopher in fustian comes to the rescue. Says Burns:—

Aye free offhand your story tell,
When wi' a bosom cronie;
But aye keep something to yoursel'
Ye wadna tell to ony.

The conclusion of the whole matter seems to be that, while the cold, calculating, crafty, cryptic, cunning mind is unpleasant at the one extreme, the rash, sweeping, dogmatic, condemning, or too-confiding, incontinent mind is foolish at the other. But, as Burns said to my unknown namesake long ago:—

Adieu dear amiable youth, (and age!)

Still daily to grow wiser;
And may you better reck the reed
Than ever did th' adviser.

To complete the thought, and round off the idea, it ought to be added that quickness and *correctness* of judgment, and even instant decision, are not incompatible with this cautious and kindly attitude of the really cultured man. The latter is born of knowledge, experience, and understanding, and grows with practice till it becomes a second nature, or new and higher kind of "instinct" itself.

A. MILLAR.

To the Owl.

DEAR MR. OWL,—I have long respected you. In my world of fancy you have always appeared to be the emblem of wisdom. My earliest recollection of you was when you calmly volunteered to dig the grave in the great tragedy of "Poor Cock Robin," and my respect for you was heightened. All my life I have wanted to commune with you; I felt as though you knew such a lot of things. I have seen you in various places, but you never anywhere seemed very different. You seemed to bear the change from the aviary to the museum as well, if not a good deal better, than your neighbours. In either place, I have always viewed you wistfully. But I have had a somewhat rude awakening. You spoke to us in the *Freethinker* on May 19, 1918. The Editor must have had similar impressions to mine, and so could not resist you. But I want to tell you candidly that I am entirely disillusioned; you are an old croaker. You ask us, "What is Nature?" and then you proceed to answer it very confusedly. Poor old bird! You say you don't want to "follow Nature." You are indeed in a quandary. Are we to suppose that you will look "beyond the clouds, beyond the tomb," as so many misguided beings have looked in vain through the ages,

I have heard that your favourite haunt is an old steeple; and perhaps you have lived too long with the people:—

Ah! the people,
They that dwell up in the steeple,
All alone,
And who, tolling, tolling, tolling,
In that muffled monotone,
Feel a glory in so rolling
On the human heart a stone.

I would like to hear you again after you have shaken yourself. I believe you are all right at bottom; something has gone temporarily wrong—"a rather tough worm," or something of that sort. You say that Nature is "the sum-total of things," "Nature is what brings the flowers in the spring-time, and the rain, and the fruits, and all the sweet things of life." And yet you don't want to follow Nature. You are indeed a puzzle—a "Riddle of the Universe," in fact. You say that to an educated man, Nature means the observed order of things. But you again say "there is no law." What do you mean? I am inclined to think you are overfeathered. What harm is there in assuming our existence to be in accordance with law? Listen to what Ruskin says:—

Do we want to be strong ... We must work.
To be hungry ... We must starve.
To be happy ... We must be kind.
To be wise ... We must look and think.

Surely these are laws self-evident and imperative enough. Not human made, true; but unmistakable, not whimsical as based upon intelligence. Dear old biped, I would not flurry you, but I would earnestly rally you. You do not seem to have fully appreciated the work of Secularism; you rather petulently set yourself up to be the measure of things. Perhaps a few words of the dear old Pearsian may convey a few seeds of wisdom to you:—

And the inverted Bowl they call the sky,
Whereunder crawling coop'd we live and die,
Lift not your hands to it for help—for it
As impotently moves as you or I.

You personify Nature and label her as "horribly cruel." You rail at her because she is "red in tooth and claw," and you inconsistently refer to the "law"—"eat or be eaten." You say that that Nature has no blind asylums or benevolent institutions. "There is no Namby-Pambyism about Nature." "She's a real dandy." Wonderful bird! I think we shouldn't complain about her want of "Namby-Pambyism." I would suggest that when you resorted to the personification of Nature, you may as well have described her as "wondrous kind." Has she no blind asylums or benevolent institutions? If not, how do all the little blind things survive? Lots of things are born blind. How does that most helpless of beings—the human child—survive? Have you overlooked that great principle of motherhood, among the fishes, the birds, and, in fact, all over the world, as well as human life? A contemplation of which always sends a thrill through our frames. And while we are on that line, may we not as well remember the long story of humanity—all in Nature—not that childish story of tradition which, like you, as it were, has to have a super-Nature, but as told by the great benefactors of the race too numerous to mention, but should be tolerably well known to a Secularist, especially to a writer in the *Freethinker*, even though a bird. I hope you will "look and think," and write again for our future edification. Cynicism is a doubtful exchange for superstition; it may be a "getting rid" of some illusions, but we should be careful that other and even, perhaps, more dangerous illusions do not take their place. Secularism faces all the facts; it is a message of joy and hope to humanity, otherwise we may as well hold our peace, and let the race tread its more weary path with all its perplexities. It is useless to throw epithets at Nature, she is our only hope and guide, all else is illusion:—

— Nature is made better by no mean,
But Nature makes that mean; over that art
Which you say adds to Nature, is an art
That Nature makes.

Secularism is the most ambitious movement in the history of the world; it asks humanity to shed its illusions. Secularism thus asks the best of its followers, each of which must look carefully to their equipment.

J. FOTHERGILL.

Correspondence.

DIVORCE AND THE CHURCHES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR.—Now that all the bishops and clergy have been heard on the grave and growing problems of the Divorce Laws, and have frankly stated the attitude of the Churches on this question, and towards "the few and exceptional" cases of extreme suffering, it is due to Divorce Law Reformers that their position should be presented to the large public which will ultimately have to decide what it requires of its representatives in Parliament, when the matter of the reform of the existing law is before the House of Commons, as it must be in the near future.

It should be perfectly clear to anyone who reads the daily papers that this question, so far from affecting a very small minority of the people of the country, is one that is ruining the lives of countless thousands, and it must be handled without prejudice, and with a view to sweeping away the mass of corruption and hidden vice which is the result of our rigid Divorce Law.

While I think it extremely unwise to augment the discussion of the operation of the Divorce Laws in America, I feel justified in quoting some remarks made to me a few days ago in a conversation with Judge Lindsey, the eminent authority and promoter of some of those laws, the founder of the Juvenile Courts of America, on which our own have been modelled, and the Courts of Domestic Relations, which we so sadly need to establish in our great towns.

Judge Lindsey emphatically declared that the extension of grounds for divorce in America had unquestionably established a cleaner and more wholesome national life, in that a vast amount of corruption and hypocrisy had been swept away, and he expressed himself as strongly opposed to the proposed unification of the laws governing the various States.

Judge Lindsey is a representative of the United States Government, and an honoured visitor to our shores. The attacks made on the Divorce Laws of America have induced him to promise to speak on this subject before his return.

The Divorce Law Reform Union, in proposing to break up the system of permanent separation without the power to remarry, has only taken action on one of the findings of the Majority Report of the Royal Commission, viz., that:—

The conclusion of the Commissioners is that the remedy of judicial separation is an unnatural and unsatisfactory remedy, leading to evil consequences, and that it is inadequate in cases where married life has become practically impossible.

The importance of this finding was shown when, at the commencement of the War, Mr. Asquith found it necessary to ask Parliament to pass a measure to provide a separation allowance for the many thousands of unmarried wives of the men joining the Army.

It is inconceivable that an organization such as the Divorce Law Reform Union should be charged with a desire to promote periodic marriages of three years.

The demand that separation of three years and upwards should be a ground for divorce was based upon the most careful consideration of the facts of thousands of cases examined by them, in which there was ample proof that reconciliations were very rare after three years of complete separation, and that the dangers of prostitution, promiscuity, irregular unions, and illegitimate births often appeared at that period. Large numbers of deserted men, and still larger numbers of women of the working classes, with young families, have struggled under great difficulties to keep home and family together for two or three years, when failing health and desperation on the part of the women, and a desire to get their children cared for on the part of the men, has led to irregular unions and illegitimate births. These people, to-day, are praying that the Bill will pass which will allow them to marry; it is a cruel lie that they are satisfied with their condition.

The opponents of the measure know full well that the case is not overstated, and to say that these people are living in sin is to beg the question.

If a marriage "is really the Union of two souls in Love,

sympathy, and agreement with one another," to quote the Bishop of Birmingham, then certainly no extension of the Divorce Laws can affect it one way or the other; but where a marriage is marriage in name only, where drunkenness, cruelty, vice, insanity, or hatred, have effectively destroyed the possibility of a common life, and where an atmosphere has been created in which children are permanently maimed physically, mentally, and morally, then, surely, in the interests of the highest morality the marriage should be dissolvable.

The Churches appear to have a very great fear that a measure which would give new life and hope to a large section of the community would open the door to abuse by the remainder.

The hold of the Churches on their members must be very slight indeed, if they truly believe that "any extension of the grounds for Divorce will be the end of Christian Marriage." No more ridiculous supposition could be put forward than that persons accidentally separated by reason of absence through "unavoidable causes" under the proposed measure will be certain of turning such a separation into a Divorce. In every case either party must present a petition to the court, and the presiding judge must be satisfied that there is justifiable reason for the application.

That the demand for greater facilities for Divorce has been established no one will deny in face of the number of cases disposed of by Mr. Justice Horridge during the past three weeks, and the number is small compared with the need. The majority of the cases have been undefended, brought by husbands, and this fact has been largely commented on in the Press. Women are said to have used the absence of the men at the Front to indulge in every form of license and vice, but it must be understood that there are thousands of women sufferers in the country who could bring actions if offence and relief were equal as between the sexes.

Let us rid our minds of all cant and hypocrisy on this question, and recognize that there are many causes which as effectively break the contract of marriage and make a common life impossible, as the one which is at present the only ground on which an action can be brought.

The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1884 abolished the power of enforcing a decree for Restitution of Conjugal Rights by attachment of the person. Men and women cannot be compelled to live with their spouses; when this is recognized it will be seen that the tendency is towards more and more separations.

During the War large numbers of young people have married who are already separated, and if permanent separation is to continue these people are a menace to society.

Every measure for the true welfare of the community has been opposed by the Churches. We are only asking for a remedy for a cancer that exists in our national life. We want cleaner marriages, fewer or no irregular unions, and a legitimate birth-rate, instead of opposing a reform of the present iniquitous divorce law, and advocating the perpetuation of a system which is responsible for a vast amount of avoidable misery and crime, the Churches would, indeed, do well if they would forthwith undertake to educate the young children and adolescents that come under their influence into the true meaning of marriage, in its physical, mental, and spiritual aspects, then we shall have reason to hope that the higher ideal of marriage, about which we are as keen as they, will be realized.

Ours is the remedy; theirs the opportunity.

M. L. SEATON-SIEDEMAN, *Secretary*.

Divorce Law Reform Union,
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