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Views and Opinions.

A Great Anniversary.

This week's issue of the *Freethinker* bears a date that is among the most important—if not *the* most important in history of modern Europe. It is the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, a building which stood in Paris—but to the whole of France was a symbol of privilege, extortion, and wrong. The taking of the Bastille was not a great event in itself. It was defended by only a handful of old soldiers with but little in the shape of armament. But the dramatic sense of the French people saw it for what it was—the symbol of the death of autocracy in France, the birth of the people as a recognizable and recognized force in social and political life, and has ever since celebrated it as the National Fete Day of France. Other Governments dreaded its influence, as well they might. British Conservatism and British religion for long loved to depict the revolution as an orgy of bloodshed and a carnival of obscenity. Such it still remains to those who draw their philosophy from Christian tracts and their history from *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. To saner people the revolution of 1789 stands out as one of the most magnificent expressions of the human spirit in all history.

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Pre-Revolutionary France.

What was France before the Revolution? It was a nation of serfs, of a people without power, governed by a class that ruled in the name of privilege. All political power was centralized in the King's Council at Versailles. The nobles were a distinct class in the State, and all born noble remained noble, each administering justice on his own estate. The nobles and bishops—for the bishops ranked as nobles—possessed the exclusive rights of fishing and hunting. They could order marriage between the children of their serfs, and they possessed the infamous right to demand the wife of the peasant for the first twenty-four hours after marriage. For ordinary criminal offences there was torture before trial, and mutilation afterwards, without the protection of any public statement of offences committed. For religious offences there was loss of eyes, tongue, or limbs, breaking on the wheel, or burning alive. *Lettres de Cachet*—a simple order signed by the king authorizing imprisonment—were numerous. They were frequently issued with the signature, and all else blank. In forty years 45,000 of these warrants were issued. Just before

the Revolution the taxation of the country stood at sixty millions, not more than half of which was spent on the public service. And nearly all the taxes were paid by the non-privileged classes. The theory was that the nobles defended the State with their swords, the priests by their prayers. Therefore, they paid a "non-collectible" tax—in other words—what they pleased. The Church possessed a revenue of £8,750,000, which supported about 130,000 priests and their establishments. The Archbishop of Cambria was the lord of 75,000 people. The Archbishop of Toulouse, beside his ministerial salary, received £54,000, of Rouen £20,000. The Bishop of Troyes received penitents in confessionals lined with white satin. The Church owned nearly a fourth of the land. No wonder the Churches and the aristocracies of other countries were afraid of the influence of the Revolution! Revolutions are apt to become epidemic.

* * *

A People's Wrongs.

The people sweated, the Church preyed, the nobles pillaged. The tax-gatherer was everywhere. There were taxes on bridges, paths, fairs, markets, foods, clothing. After the King came the Lords, after the Lords the Church. Even Alison points out that if the produce of an acre of land equalled £3 2s. 7d., the King took £1 18s. 4d., the lord, or bishop, 18s., the peasant received 5s. And here are a few reports from various sources that will give some idea of the state of the people. In 1662, 300,000 people were reported starving in the Champagne; 1675, Colbert, the Minister of Finance, reports that in one province the people had been living on roots and grasses; 1694, "Your subjects, sire, are dying of hunger"; 1707, "Two millions of the people are starving." In two months, in 1753, 800 people died of want in Paris. Nothing can exceed the horror of the picture drawn by Arthur Young in his travels through France. "It reminds me," he said, "of the misery of Ireland." And this with a king drawing eight millions annually, a nobility thirty millions, and the Church another eight millions. If ever revolution was justified anywhere it was in France in 1789. And if ever the influence of a revolution brought benefit elsewhere it was that one. During this past four years thousands of Englishmen have learned to appreciate France, who never appreciated it before. It would be well if these would trace out the fructifying influences of the Revolution on the rest of Europe.

* * *

The Power of Ideas.

For that Revolution did really stand for an idea. The want and misery of the people only gave the idea visible form. Church and Government saw this well enough, and for nearly a hundred years before the Revolution actually broke out were engaged in trying to suppress the growth of ideas they saw were fatal to their rule. Men wrote, and the Government suppressed. Thus, several of Diderot's works were suppressed, and the author imprisoned. Voltaire suffered the same fate for writing history. Helvetius wrote on the mind; the book

was burned. De Lolme wrote on the British Constitution; book burned. Buffon wrote on geology; his book was burned as heretical, and the author forced to recant. In 1775 the Government, by a sort of a Defence of the Realm Act, decreed that "All who wrote books that would disturb the peace of the realm would be punished with death." And only nine years before the Revolution broke out, the Government proposed abolishing all private presses and setting up a Government press, under the control of the magistrates. But ideas are not killed in this way. There is only one sure way of killing an idea, and that is to disprove it, and so provide room for a better one to develop. It was long the habit of English Christians to hold up the French Revolution as a bugbear to frighten people away from Freethought. It is one of the glories of Freethought that it was chiefly instrumental in lifting the French people out of the bog of misery in which they were plunged.

* * *

The Birth of a New Order.

Many eminent men—Kant in Germany, Wordsworth in England, and Paine—recognized at once in the Revolution more than the outbreak of a hungry and ill-used people. They saw it was the close of an old era, and the opening of a new one pregnant with great possibilities. Excesses there were—but these came later, and were as nothing compared to the centuries of wrong that had preceded them. The Revolution was more than French; it was European. Fight as some might against it, the ideas and principles of the Revolution gained ground everywhere. It entirely swept away the notion that government existed in virtue of privilege or by divine command, and made common the idea that government existed only by the will of the people and for the benefit of the people. It cleared France of its feudal land laws, and left the cultivator really master of his own land and of the products of his labour. It gave France a code of laws which, in spite of faults, remains the best model for a code in Europe. It taught that popular and complete education, the upkeep of hospitals, art galleries, asylums, museums, were all belonging to the essential duties of an enlightened Government. It preached Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, and it believed in them. Even to-day there is a greater moral equality in France than in any other country in Europe. And wherever the French Armies went, they carried these ideas among the nations. It is not, then, for nothing that France holds July 14, the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, as its national day. When that fell, the old order fell in France, and its fall reverberated throughout the world. And if to-day privilege is less blatant in its claims, vested interests less arrogant in their pretensions, and the will of the people more potent in its expressions, we have largely to thank the men and women who gave to the world the soul-stirring Revolution of 1789.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Side-Lights.

THERE are many extremely familiar facts in human life which, for various reasons, are practically ignored, and whose real significance is, on that account, scarcely ever discerned. Their constant recurrence throughout the ages has blinded the mind to their momentous importance. This is specially true of a number of religious facts with which we come into well-nigh daily contact. It may not be that in this connection familiarity breeds contempt, but it is undoubtedly responsible for considerable neglect of much highly valuable evidence as to the nature and utility of religion. For example, nothing is more common, in Christian circles, than the insistence

upon the need of systematic instruction in religious matters. In the *Church Times* for June 28 a paragraph in the Summary is devoted to this subject. It says:—

About a year ago an experiment was tried in South-wark diocese with the object of instructing people in the faith. For this purpose a diocesan committee opened two Church Tutorial Classes, and the results of their first year's work are said to be most encouraging. So good a plan as this ought not to be confined to one diocese: it is worthy of adoption generally. We are glad to call attention to the representative meeting which was held last week at King's College, London, with the Bishop of Oxford in the chair, to discuss the question of establishing Church Tutorial Classes throughout the other dioceses.....His lordship advocated the method of the Workers' Educational Association, which brings people together to listen and discuss, with a view to studying the intellectual grounds of social organization. The same thing, he remarked, could be done in regard to the intellectual grounds of religion. In view of the pathetic ignorance of the ordinary layman and laywoman, coupled sometimes with a sincere desire to learn if only a teacher could be found, something ought to be done at once, and the proposed Tutorial Classes would seem to offer the very opportunity for instruction that is so desired.

Nothing could be more profoundly symptomatic than the curious information suggestively brought to our notice in that extract. The underlying fact is that Christianity has been in the world for nineteen centuries. Then comes a second fact, that the Church is in its very nature a teaching institution. The purpose of all its ministrations is to instruct its members in the doctrines of religion. Fact number three is that the Church, so soon as it came to power, abolished Secular Education. All schools became its handmaids, and all education was saturated with religion. All religious sects are agreed, at the present time, that religion must be taught in all day-schools, because otherwise it would certainly come to naught. We are now face to face with a fourth fact, which is that for nearly a hundred and fifty years there has been in existence an institution whose sole object is to impart religious instruction. It is eminently noteworthy that multitudes of parents who never darken church or chapel doors regularly send their children to Sunday-school. Thus in one way or another, directly or indirectly, Christianity makes its appeal to all alike within the bounds of Christendom, and so the facts just mentioned are of prime importance. And yet the Bishop of Oxford speaks of "the pathetic ignorance of the ordinary layman and laywoman." Of course, his lordship means ignorance of even the very rudiments of the Christian creed.

Dr. Gore is, theoretically, to the very core of his being a Supernaturalist. He has full confidence in the omnipotent and omnipresent love of God, in the all-conquering, sin-annihilating grace of Christ, and in the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost. In his sermons he often dwells with moving, melting eloquence upon the transforming efficacy of the Gospel, as well as on the infinite nearness of the Divine Being to every human soul. Beautiful beyond compare is that theory, and the only fault one can find with it is that it completely breaks down in practice. Here, as in many other connections, theory and practice are not on speaking terms with each other. Practically, his lordship publicly pins his faith in machinery. He has no patience whatever with the policy of Secular Education, but advocates, in season and out of season, the preservation of all Government schools as mills to grind Christian doctrines for consumption by youthful minds. To his machinery there is no end. Of course, behind, in, and through all the machinery works God—Father, Son, and Spirit; but apart from the

machinery, even the Holy Trinity can apparently do nothing. The deplorable inefficiency of the machinery hitherto is abundantly attested by "the pathetic ignorance of the ordinary layman and laywoman" in this nineteen hundred and eighteenth year of our Lord. Deeply sensible of this lamentable fact, his lordship of Oxford is all eagerness to set another machine in operation in all British dioceses. We can confidently assure him beforehand that Church Tutorial Classes will ere long be as conspicuous failures as all other ecclesiastical machines have been.

As the sweet hymnologist, Isaac Watts, puts it:—

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

That is to say, God has tied himself down absolutely to natural law on the one hand, and to the Church on the other. He cannot even interfere with the weather, except through Nature, nor save a soul, except through the Church. He is so limited as to the extent and degree of his action that there is not a single shred of evidence that he acts at all. Neither the physicist nor the biologist can hit the trail of his activity at any point; and psychology also is now developing fast into an exact science. The tendency of every science is to eliminate Divine agency from the conduct of the Universe, and of every theology to limit it in the sphere of the Church. In theory, God may have direct dealings with every human being, but in practice he works exclusively through the Church, which is a purely human machine. When asked why God does not exert himself more effectually to secure the welfare of the world, the answer the divines generally give is that he cannot transcend the capacities of his instrument, which is only a polite way of bowing him out of the very organization which is theoretically of his own founding.

Christianity has always been hopelessly handicapped ever since it entered upon the stage of human history, by the irrational claims made on its behalf on the one side, and by the nature of its achievements on the other. It has not done what it originally promised to do, and it has actually accomplished what its early founders would have looked upon with heart-breaking disappointment and burning shame. In the twentieth century Christianity is the worst of all anachronisms; and God is dishonoured most by those whose profession it is to defend him. During the last four years, in particular, the divines have made him look so ridiculous that thoughtful people can do no other than give formal expression to their long-cherished unbelief both in him and his Church. As a matter of fact, the War has so completely puzzled the theologians that in the attempt to explain it in the light of God, or God in its light, most of them have entirely lost their heads, and, as a consequence, the Church is visibly languishing.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Fragment.

I THINK I saw you at St. Paul's last night:
The Bishop really was *quite* at his best.
There is no doubt that what he says is right,
He puts his congregation to the test.
And *didn't* you enjoy the Anthem, dear?
Those Choir boys' voices *always* sound so clear.....
The War drags on—and Peace seems far away.
I had a Post Card last week from my son.
And Freddie went to Aldershot to-day,
To see if something really can't be done
To get commissioned in the R.F.A.
It's *better* food, you know, and *higher* pay.

ARTHUR F. THORN.

Shelley's Masterpiece.

Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever!

—Robert Browning.

O heart whose beating blood was running song,
O sole thing sweeter than thine own songs were,
Help us for thy free love's sake to be free,
True for thy truth's sake, for thy strength's sake strong,
Till very liberty makes clear and fair
The nursing earth as the sepulchral sea. —Swinburne.

It is related of Robert Browning that, as a young man, he one day passed a bookstall, and saw a volume advertised as "Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poems, scarce." Badly printed, shamefully mutilated, these discarded blossoms touched young Browning to new emotions. This contact with the dead singer was the dawn of a new life to the clever lad. From that time Browning's poetic production began. This result was not surprising. Shelley is one of our greatest poets. To him song was natural speech. With a great outlay of labour, special education, and careful selection of circumstances, many have purchased their poetic rights as the chief captain bought the name of Roman, but Shelley was poet born. Many of his contemporaries who overshadowed him whilst he was living have almost faded into mere names, but Shelley has a message for generations unborn.

Shelley sang of a golden age. Long will it be ere the time when men "shall not learn war any more," or "live and move harmonious as the sacred stars above"; long ere the human countenance so radiates with intelligence and love that the air around it shall be "bright as the air around a star." Society was perfectly agreed that such ideas were but a mad illusion. And society denounced him accordingly, and fined and imprisoned the men and women who sold the poet's *Queen Mab*. Florence to the living Dante was not more cruelly unjust than England to the living Shelley. Not until thirty years after the English poet's death was his poetic glory widely acknowledged, and even at the Centenary Celebration at Horsham most of the speakers referred discreetly to Shelley's Freethought and Democratic opinions, and emphasized his claims on the Sussex county families.

Shelley's subjects were not *Hours of Idleness* nor the amours of *Don Juan*, but the perfectability of human nature. It is the alpha and omega of his poetry. In the splendid rhetoric of *Queen Mab*, in the nobler music of the *Revolt of Islam*, in his masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound*, its expression glows with the solemn and majestic inspiration of prophecy. And Shelley meant every word that he wrote. Shortly before his own untimely end, he said to his friend Trelawny, "I am ninety," meaning he had lived and felt so intensely that he felt older than his years. Nor was it an idle boast, for he was himself the Julian of his poem:—

Me, who am as a nerve o'er which do creep
The else unfelt oppressions of this earth.

Shelley lived like a Spartan. A hunk of bread and a little fruit served him for a meal. "Mary, have I dined?" he once asked his wife. His income was spent on the poor, on struggling men of genius, and on necessitous friends. To help the needy and to relieve the sick seemed to him a simple duty, which he carried out cheerfully. He inquired personally into the circumstances of his charities, visited the sick in their homes, and kept a list of poor persons whom he assisted. At Marlow he suffered from acute ophthalmia, contracted whilst visiting the afflicted lace-makers in their cottages. So practical was he that he even went to the length of attending a London hospital in order to acquire medical knowledge that should prove of service to the sick he visited.

Because of Shelley's Atheism society gave the poet a bad name, and would gladly have imprisoned him, as it actually imprisoned the men and women who sold his *Queen Mab*, which was not the juvenile work that orthodox critics pretend. During the last years of his life, when his intellect was mature, Shelley told Trelawny that the matter of that poem was good; it was only the treatment that was immature. Shelley's masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound*, written in the meridian of his splendid genius, deals with emancipate Humanity no less than the earlier work. The glorious speech which ends the third act describes "thrones, altars, judgment seats, and prisons," as parts of one gigantic system of misrule, and pictures man "sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed," and only hampered by "chance, and death, and mutability" from overswearing.

The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

The poet springs from the earth like his own skylark. And the same magnificent idea finds expression at the close of the fifth act:—

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory!

This is the keynote of this masterpiece. "*Prometheus*," said Shelley himself, "is my favourite poem. It is, in my judgment, of a higher character than anything I have yet attempted. It is original, and cost me severe mental labor." He was right. His picture of emancipated humanity is noble and inspiring in its scope and significance, and grandly conceived. It is thronged with shapes of the utmost majesty and loveliness, and is full of swift and thrilling melody. It is the finest triumph of Shelley's lyrical genius, and one of the glories of a thousand years of English literature.

What Shelley might have been we cannot conceive. At the age of thirty he was drowned in the sea he so loved. His ashes rest beneath the walls of Rome, and "*Cor Cordium*" ("Heart of Hearts") chiselled on his tomb well says what all who love Liberty feel when they think of this Atheist-poet who gave his life to Humanity, and whose splendid genius was as free as an eagle above the clouds with outstretched wings.

MIMNERMUS.

Writers and Readers.

LIKE poverty, war makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows. Or, to vary the metaphor, it is a fire over which is brought to boiling point the mixture of virtue and vice, passion and prejudice, that makes up our average human nature, the impurities coming to the top in an unsightly and malodorous scum. It has forced up the execrable food-fakers and the shamelessly cynical unconscientious objectors. It has given us the water-crankers who shout "Traitor!" and "Pro-German!" at us because we refuse to clog our systems with cocoa, as if anything but dulness could be the result of such a muddy beverage. It has sanctified that erstwhile candid Pagan, Mr. Bottomley, who has now forsaken Newmarket for the New Jerusalem, and put most of his money on the Lamb of God. It has given us women-novelists in the last stages of erotomania, who debauch the young mind with fiction compared to which Balzac's *Droll Stories* are innocence itself. It has also given us prurient old maids and parsons, nosing about among the garbage of sexual diseases, and a stupid dramatic censor who removes the ban from Ibsen's *Ghosts*, and thoughtfully permits the adult-in-the-street to see *Damaged Goods*, a pamphlet in the Shaw

manner, as dull as it is inconclusive. But, unfortunately, these are not the worst elements of civilization brought to the surface by the present War: the amazing Billing case has made it clear not only that one of the chosen representatives of the people may be a fool, but also that thousands of men in other respects intelligent enough are thrown off their balance by hysterical claptrap. What a spectacle of British ignorance and hypocrisy, naked and unashamed, to put before the unprejudiced and intelligent neutral!

I understand that Mr. Chesterton, from whom some of us expected better things, is vastly delighted with the amazing verdict, not because he thinks it the right one, but partly because it went against Mr. Grein, who had the bad taste to be born of Hebrew parents, and partly because it was a slap in the face for our naughty artistic aristocrats. It was the voice of that virtuous person, the average sensual man, reproving blackguardism in high places; in fine, the verdict was democratic. Certainly it was democratic; but in the worst sense of the word. The uneducated mob, in the person of twelve honest and patriotic burgesses, decide that the cultured aristocrats must be moral perverts, since they prefer Wilde to Sir Henry Arthur Jones; the wicked artist to the virtuous literary bag-man. But what in the name of common sense and common honesty have Wilde's nasty propensities to do with his art? If I were setting up for a moral censor—a part I have always disliked because it implies a priggish superiority—I should not be slow to blame him for his evil deeds, and I should try to strike a balance between what I found good and bad in him. But for the life of me I cannot see how I am to set his shortcomings as a man—as a social unit—over against his virtues as an artist. Surely there is no common measure. I challenge anyone to point out the faintest trace of moral depravity in the radiantly witty farce, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in the sane paradoxes of *Intentions*, or in the finest of modern ballads, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*. Blinded with reactionary prejudice, you may have made up your mind to loathe Wilde and all the things he stood for. That is your loss; you wilfully deprive yourself of an exquisite æsthetic pleasure because you are so foolish as to confuse two things which have nothing in common. You depreciate an artist's work because you know him to have been a bad citizen, an unkind husband, or a neglectful parent. But are you justified? Do you really find less magic in the verse of Coleridge, or a poorer quality in the rhetoric of De Quincey, when you know that they were but poor creatures from a moral standpoint? If we reverse the proposition, we see the absurdity of moral criterion of art. The ethically estimable Southey was a greater poet than Byron, and his prose finer than Lamb's, who wanted the virtues of the orthodox Tory Christian. But what place has Southey now in English letters? None at all. His works died with him, or perhaps before him. It is the characteristic of great creative art that is immortal; it is what is good in man bursting into flower—the flower of the mind. Art is its own justification; it is beyond good and evil.

In the belief that we are thereby helping to crush Prussian militarism we have, without undue grumbling, done many things which, at other times, we should have thought foolish and servile. The assumption seems to be that we are not likely to resent any form of interference which is supposed to be good for us. And, now, at the bidding of Messrs. Billing & Bottomley, it would appear that the placemen who run the country will try to force us for the good of our moral health to buy nothing more dangerous than the fiction of Miss Corelli and the poetry of Sir Henry Newbolt. Very soon no patriotic and self-respecting bookseller will stock the works of Mr. Hardy, Mr. George Moore, Mr. Bennett, and the soul-corrupting Wilde. They have really been at a discount with freedom of thought and expression since the memorable summer of 1914. An instructive thing happened to a friend of mine a day or two ago. He happened to visit the Leicester Lounge when the "loungers" were discussing the Billing verdict, and was foolish enough to defend *Salome*. Thereupon an excited gentleman made an obscure reference to those who give their nights and days to wallowing in Kraft-Ebbing, and suggested that my friend's name would be found

among the notorious 47,000. Another good citizen thought that my friend's defence of Wilde was a public insult to a young lady known as *Dora*, who, by the way, seems a very touchy flapper. However, the lesson is not lost on my friend. He now takes care to hide his admiration of a poet's work when the characters portrayed are not *nice*, for fear of upsetting the delicate moral balance of people who take their ethical principles from Mr. Bottomley and Lord Alfred Douglas.

Let us look for a moment at *Salome*. It was written at Torquay in the winter of 1891-2. It was composed in French prose, and was not intended for the stage. It was not written for Sarah Bernhardt. It was suggested, we are told, by a series of pictures by Gustave Moreau illustrating the subject. Wilde owed little or nothing to Flaubert's short story *Herodias*, although he got some of his material from that writer's *Temptation of Saint Anthony*. His debt, however, is greater to Holy Writ, which is common property; and, in spite of Mr. Justice Darling, Wilde is not a more bare-faced plagiarist than Shakespeare, who boldly transferred to his own account other people's ideas and phrases. The simple syntax of *Salome* is, of course, that of Maeterlinck, and the form of the dialogue is borrowed from a writer of European reputation—the great Ollendorf—to whom the Belgian dramatist is equally indebted. It is curious that the finest image in the play comes from a speech by John Bright.

Salome was shown to Madame Bernhardt in 1892 when she was running a London season at the Palace Theatre. Preparations were made to produce the play; it was even rehearsed; but the Censor refused a licence, not because it was immoral, but because it brought Scriptural characters on the stage. It was produced privately for subscribers, but with no great success. The critics fell foul of it, one of them describing it as "the debased language of decadence," a passage literally transferred from Holy Writ. The English version, published in 1894, was illustrated by Beardsley in a set of drawings that was a satirical comment on the play and the writer. They are frankly pornographic, and are sufficient to account for the perverse immorality generally, if stupidly, associated with the play. In 1901, *Salome* was played for the first time in Berlin, and ran for two hundred nights. It became a part of the repertory of the German stage. Strauss' operatic setting was produced at Dresden in 1905, and some German critics were no more intelligent than Mr. Billing. They openly insulted both the composer and the singer in the best Clement Scott manner. This should commend them to Mr. Bottomley, who seems to think that there are no German Philistines. I am told that, exclusive of the French texts, there are forty different translations and versions. These include German (ten), Czech, Dutch, Greek, Italian, Magyar, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Yiddish versions, in all of which languages it is performed.

Surely the wiser course for Mr. Billing and his friends to have taken would have been to laugh at the delicious absurdity of taking coals to Newcastle, of introducing English drama to neutrals by means of a play which they better than we know *Charley's Aunt* or *The Private Secretary*. *Salome* is not a great play; it is rather a frigid and brilliant *tour de force*—an effort of the literary imagination with little emotion and no atmosphere. But to say that it is corrupt, and to argue those who admire it are corrupt, is to write yourself down an ass. I could say more, but I leave it at that.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

THE MASTER SPIRIT.

Give me a spirit that on life's rough sea
Loves to have his sails fill'd with a lusty wind,
E'en till his sail-yards tremble, his masts crack,
And his rapt ship run on her side so low,
That she drinks water, and her keel ploughs air.
There is no danger to a man that knows
What life and death is: there's not any law
Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
That he should stoop to any other law:
He goes before them, and commands them all
That to himself is a law rational.

—George Chapman, "Byron's Conspiracy."

Acid Drops.

The King has been pleased to order August 4, the anniversary of the outbreak of War, as a day of intercession and prayer. We have had quite a number of these days of intercession without anything happening. One would have thought the times serious enough to have done with this pious tomfoolery.

We hear much of this War being a war of ideas, and so it is, for the reason that all human conflicts are conflicts of ideas. But it may be questioned whether our Government has any real appreciation of the value of ideas in human affairs. It has, for instance, always been a reproach to the country that important works are published at a price that place them beyond the reach of men and women of modest incomes. We speak feelingly on this point, as we have been a constant sufferer. But now we see the Luxury Tax Committee intends placing a tax on books. They are to be treated as a luxury. Cheap novels will escape, but serious works on literature, science, and philosophy will have to suffer. Hall Caine and Marie Corelli and Charles Garvice will be left untouched. Those who do not cater for the crowd, and deal with life from the standpoint of science and philosophy, will suffer.

If that were the way to beat Germany, no one would complain. But is it? Every sensible person, we should imagine, knows that merely winning the War will not defeat Germany. If we wish to establish British supremacy, and maintain it, it can only be done by keeping the British public at a better educated and higher level than Germany. We have suffered in the past because we failed in this respect, and all the talk of German misuse of education is beside the point. It is in the world of ideas and of intellectual achievement that we must establish our superiority, if it is to be done at all. And to commence with a tax on books as a luxury is suicidal. Whatever else a good book may be, it is not a luxury. It is a necessity to every thoughtful man and woman, and it should be a necessity in every home. If the Government is really anxious to do the country a service, it might devise some plan by which good books could be placed within reach of young men and women. Most people will read good works if they commence at the right age. It is because rubbish is so cheap and so easily obtained, and good literature so dear and so apparently inaccessible, that the taste for it is never acquired.

John Frederick Hill was sentenced to twenty months' imprisonment for converting to his own use £50. He had collected the money for a naval officer's orphaned children. Hill was wearing an emblem of a Christian guild, and had said it was his duty as a Christian to help others. So it was, but a safer plan is to start a mission and put yourself down liberally as expenses. Hill will, doubtless, know better next time. We all have to pay for experience.

In order to cheer us all up in these dismal times, a kindly Providence has given us an epidemic of influenza which is very infectious.

The possession of a conscience in a Christian country is fraught with real danger. Mr. G. A. Sutherland, a former master at Harrow, who has already served three sentences of hard labour as a Conscientious Objector, has been sentenced to a further two years' hard labour.

How terribly handicapped the Almighty has been throughout the ages! However eager he may have been to come to men and do wonders in answer to their prayers, he could not have done so for lack of highways along which to travel. After a crowded intercessory service held at Queen's Hall, London, a week ago, however, he will have no excuse for his ominous inactivity. "We are here," said Dr. Jowett, who acted as chairman; "we are here to cut highways for the Lord; we are here to cut prayer tracks along which the forces of the Almighty may flow." What a miraculous meeting it must have been!

We are informed by the *British Weekly* that "Dr. Jowett's address from the chair inspired a marvellous confidence in the power of prayer." This is not at all surprising, for Dr. Jowett was there for that very purpose; but it would startle the world if "something tremendous" were to happen because of that intercession. It is so easy to say that "when we offer prayer we are handling forces that can change the face of the world"; but the fact that stares us in the face is that the world has never been transformed in answer to prayer. No one knows this better than Dr. Jowett himself.

It is simply astonishing how mawkishly sentimental the greatest of preachers may become at a crowded prayer-meeting in a time of national panic. On the occasion described in another paragraph, Dr. Jowett excitedly asked, "What would you like my Saviour to do through you for Ireland?" Is he not aware that there are two sets of Christians who would like their Saviour to do two entirely opposite things for Ireland, and that there is no likelihood of such a Saviour doing anything at all for that sadly troubled land?

We are informed by the *Daily News* that the Presbyterians are filling a large place in the direction of the War. "Sir Douglas Haig is a Presbyterian, of course, and Marshall Joffre is a member of the Reformed Church of France, which is nearest to the Presbyterian Church. General Pershing and his Chief of Staff, General Peyton C. Marsh, are Presbyterians, while both President Wilson and Mr. Lansing, the Secretary of State, are Presbyterian elders." Thus do they conscientiously justify the teachings of the Prince of Peace, which they profess to follow.

The Bishop of Sheffield complains that he has only 196 clergymen left for 171 parishes. He will, therefore, only recommend that eight of these be advised to go into the Army. But quite a number of businesses, on which the future of families depend, are being closed. Why not close a few of the churches? If God is on our side, he will not mind.

Darwen (Lancs) is holding a series of open-air prayer meetings to help win the War. At one of these gatherings the Rev. J. Hodges said that, on reflection, he was convinced that God had not yet forsaken us. What *we* are waiting for is some indication that God is going to help us. The Rev. J. Blackburn Brown, on the other hand, said he "was absolutely certain that God has kept the control of the War in his own hands." The "control of the War." Now we know who to blame for everything that has occurred.

A sage old proverb bids a cobbler to stick to his last. Its application is lost upon Mr. Harry Lauder, who is passing popular as a comedian on the music-hall stage. Speaking of the Pacifists, Mr. Lauder said: "these people ought to be run into the Thames. To cut their throats would be too quick for them." Surely, Mr. Lauder is straining his fine wit too far. Most people prefer him when he is funny without being vulgar.

While people are mourning over the comparatively early death of Lord Rhondda, who was a man of exceptionally brilliant gifts, and whose signal success as Food Controller everybody admires, it is an eminently noteworthy fact, though ignored by the press at large, that his lordship was a thorough-going Secularist. So far as we know, the *Monmouthshire Evening Post* is the only newspaper that has recorded this interesting information. In a lengthy obituary, which appeared in its issue for July 3, our contemporary says:—

He summed up his philosophy in a speech at Cardiff some eighteen months ago: "I may tell you my religious principles in a nutshell. It is a good old world, and I shall be very sorry to go out of it, because I don't know what it is going to be in the next. Anyway, I believe in getting as much pleasure and happiness as possible out of this world while you are in it, so long as you do not interfere with the happiness and pleasure of other people. And as a corollary to that I believe in giving as much pleasure as possible to other people as long as it does not interfere too much with your own enjoyment." A

writer in a fairly prominent review based a very critical article on this, denouncing the cynicism of it all. Well, the last sentence is cynicism naked and unashamed, but its very frankness was disarming, and taking the world as it is and men as they are, there are far worse philosophies of life. We believe it correctly summed up the man.

The Secularist philosophy, however mildly held, is fundamentally irreconcilable with belief in any fairly orthodox version of the Christian religion.

A fine example of the "Irish bull" is presented in the *Freeman's Journal*. Following Lord Curzon's statement that the Catholic clergy of Ireland had advised their flocks, under the penalty of damnation, to resist conscription, his lordship sends an explanatory letter containing quotations from sermons delivered in Ireland. One priest is reported as having said, "God would cry to Heaven for vengeance." This gem would be hard to beat.

In the fourth year of the War, the National Free Church Council is discussing the question of part-time War-work for the clergy. These gentry will be almost ready to start when the War is quite over.

Scotch folk shed their prejudices very slowly. Glasgow Corporation, after a lively debate, sanctioned a Sunday performance in Kelvingrove Park by the band of the Scots Guards. At this rapid rate of progress it should take Glasgow several centuries to reach Continental ideas of Sunday relaxation.

A correspondent of the *British Weekly* writes, that in view of the shortage of teachers, why could not ministers of religion be utilized in the schools? We have no doubt many of them would do this, but it would be a bad day for English education if this plan were adopted. We suggest sending parsons into the Army, and relieve the teachers this way. We are glad to see that the *Schoolmaster*, in noting the suggestion, reprints our remarks—from a recent issue—with acknowledgment of origin—by way of comment: "22,000 out of 42,000 elementary schoolmasters have joined the Army, and 5,000 more have been called up. What a contrast to that of the clerical profession, which has so far been exempted from military service."

Since his conversion to Spiritualism, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has begun to use the old, old vocabulary so long used by the orthodox. For instance, he refers to the "cheerless beliefs" of materialists. It must, of course, lighten the burden of life to realize that spirits smoke cigars in another world.

The newspapers made a lot of fuss because a service at Westminster Abbey was held in the Welsh language. The dear editors have never noticed that Gibberish has been spoken there for many years.

Spiritual unrest has spread to the workhouses. The Brentford Board of Guardians has instructed the chaplains to give notice of any changes in religion on the part of the inmates. What a flutter would be caused by a widespread religious revival among the guests of the ratepayers.

"He doeth all things well" is a sentiment treasured by the pious, although facts are against the idea. Out of 228,000 children medically examined at the London County Council Schools, 89,000 required treatment. More than 10,000 little ones attended consumption dispensaries.

The clergy are almost as acute as pill advertisers in seeking public favour, and they have not hesitated to exploit the War. An advertisement in a provincial paper, issued on behalf of a church, contains the following: "Have you suffered bereavement by the war?" "Your loved ones are still living."

To Correspondents.

- WILL J. O. CONNOR please send the Editor his address. He wishes to write him on the subject of his enclosure of July 5.
- H. POOLE.—We have returned the print, which is curious, but we do not think it has any special meaning. It looks to us like a frontispiece to some old volume of astronomical divinity, somewhere about a century old, and its special meaning would depend upon the book itself.
- A. H. PALMER (Madeira).—We will look out the missing numbers for you. Your newsagent was in error in reporting them all out of print. We will consider your suggestion of "linking up *Freethinker* readers."
- E. GASCOYNE (Chesterfield).—Canon Shaw is true to the traditions of his order. When public opinion changes you may rely upon his "Message" changing too.
- H. SCUDDER (Alnwick).—We saw the reprint. We are glad to say it is becoming increasingly common for reprints from this paper to appear in newspapers, and—better still—usually with due acknowledgments.
- SERGEANT R. LEWIS.—*A Short History of Ancient Peoples* is published by Hodder & Stoughton. We think the published price was 10s. 6d. It is probably more now, as most publishers have taken advantage of the War to do *their* bit, and have raised the price of all their old stock.
- PTE. T. BATE.—We are sending free copies of paper to address given.
- C. E. JOHNSON.—Mr. R. Chapman, 6 Wenlock St., Simonside, South Shields, will be pleased to give you all the information you require. Pamphlets have been sent. You are right in thinking our great need is more capital, but that will come one day, perhaps, and then we shall see things.
- W. SMALLRIDGE.—The literature and circulars served out by missionary societies are so many insults to anyone outside an asylum—or a Church. They are indications of the mental level of the people who *honestly* support them. Pleased to hear that your son finds the *Freethinker* eagerly read among his fellow-soldiers.
- A. J. WILLETTTS.—Thanks. Shall appear. Thanks for what you are doing on behalf of paper.
- A. ATHERTON.—Mr. Cohen has written you.
- PTE. J. MORGAN writes from Ireland quite endorsing the letters published in reply to Mr. Comley on "Religion in the Army." We have had many other letters of a similar kind for which we deeply regret our inability to find space. But we are pleased to find agreement that the circulation of our literature is doing great good to the cause.
- J. BURRELL.—We are greatly obliged for all you have done in the past, and feel certain that we can depend upon you for the future. New opportunities will present themselves to one who is so alert as yourself.
- G. GROVE.—Thanks, papers are being sent.
- R. H. NISBET.—Crowded out at present, will try and find room later.
- H. C. HEBBES.—Sorry we have no space for your letter. We agree that the medical profession has been, and is, for that matter, "guilty of astounding blunders," and we are with you in opposing blind support of authority of any kind.
- PTE. D. T. EVANS.—Received, and will be acknowledged later.
- Z.—MSS. received. Will publish as early as possible, but we are much in arrears with accepted articles just now.
- R. PARKER.—We are very pleased to have the Foulis Catalogue. They were great printers, and a credit to eighteenth century Glasgow.
- H. J. CARTHY.—Our experience of doctors does not agree with yours. We should say the profession contains a large number of *Freethinkers*, and there is an old maxim: "Out of three doctors two *Atheists*."
- W. J.—We have no objection, as you rightly assume. But you must first catch your capable Christian who is agreeable to a set discussion with a leading *Freethinker*.
- 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.

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."

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 publish elsewhere in this issue a letter from the Rev. Dr. Lyttleton, late Headmaster of Eton, suggesting the discussion of various points that are at issue between *Freethinkers* and Christians. We cheerfully fall in with this suggestion; and we feel assured that such a discussion can produce nothing but good. Presumably Dr. Lyttleton himself will lead off in this general discussion, and we await his first communication with some interest.

South Wales *Freethinkers* are in earnest about "the Cause," and are setting to work in the right spirit. A Conference of *Freethinkers* is being called at the Wyndham Hotel, Bridgend, Glam., on Saturday, July 20, at 5 o'clock, to discuss the prospect of organization. This is an entirely independent effort on the part of our South Wales friends, but Mr. Cohen has been asked if he will be present and address the meeting. He has agreed to do so, and it is probable that he will also lecture on the Sunday at Maesteg. We shall be able to give more definite particulars next week.

We are receiving many promises of supplies of waste paper from readers in both London and the provinces. We are pleased to record this, as we need all the paper we can get. The paper supply gets shorter, and the price gets higher, and one is compelled to look some distance ahead. We are also glad to say that the *Freethinker* League is getting many new adherents. The practice of getting newsagents to display an extra copy of the paper, with a promise on the part of the member of the League to purchase it if unsold, is working well, and finding many new readers. We are fortunate in our friends, and we owe them much for their help during a trying time.

We are asked to announce that Mr. Bowman, newsagent, of 38 Leicester Road, Higher Broughton, Salford, Lancs., supplies all our publications, and has undertaken to exhibit the *Freethinker* for sale. Local residents will please note.

We were pleased to see a smartly written letter in the *Chiswick Times* by "E. L." on Secular Education. We hope our friends all over the country will keep the agitation going.

On Friday, July 19, our contributor, Mr. T. F. Palmer, opens a discussion at the offices of the Christian Evidence Society, 34 Craven Street, Strand, on the subject of "Does Scientific Materialism Best Account for the Universe?" The meeting is open to all, and the speaking commences at 8 o'clock. We daresay that many of our readers will make a point of being present. The discussion is certain to be interesting. Mr. Palmer is also opening a discussion on July 16, at 8 p.m., on "The Birth and Death of Worlds." Admission is free.

A correspondent writes:—

In the course of my own work I came upon the following, which may be of use to the sane and admirable *Freethinker*: "he [Abelard] had dared to bring all things in heaven and earth to the test of Reason." "For his conservative opponents that was heresy" (I think the word is that, but I can't always read my own writing) "enough"; "to accept the doctrines of the Church because they were rational was hardly less offensive than to reject them as irrational."—(Dean) H. Rashall, *Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages*, vol. i., p. 55.

The Story of the Tea Plant.

IV.

(Continued from p. 370.)

THAT pitiless struggle for existence everywhere manifested in the organic realm is strongly in evidence in the case of the tea plant. In company with all the nobler forms of floral life this shrub is extensively devastated by parasitic organisms. In Assam, a root fungus which flourishes on the decaying stumps of trees extends its attacks to the young tea plant with fatal consequences. The damage caused by this fungus is, fortunately, restricted to the area occupied by the rotting roots, but a space of some score feet in diameter is rendered desolate, and barren patches may disfigure the plantations throughout their extent.

Only too true are the poet's words:—

Nature is one with rapine, a harm no preacher can heal;
The mayfly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd
by the shrike,
And the whole little wood where I sit is a world of plunder
and prey.

In their standard work, *The Pests and Blights of the Tea Plant*, Sir George Watt and Dr. Mann instance and describe a mighty host of insect and other enemies of the tea bush.

The injurious activities of vegetable pests are apt to be intensified when plants are placed under cultivation. In a state of Nature the indigenous tea plant is scattered here and there in the virgin forest, but, when grown in gardens, enormous numbers of bushes are planted together, and when predaceous organisms meet with a permanent supply of the nutriment to which they are best adapted they multiply at a prodigious rate. Unlike an annual plant, the tea shrub remains evergreen all the year round, and as the months roll by its assailants are afforded full facilities for depositing their eggs or spores on or near their victim. They thus ensure a constantly increasing multitude of descendants to renew their baneful activities in the coming season at the expense of the unfortunate tea plant.

Although this shrub has suffered less severely than many other cultivated crops, the perils to which it is exposed have necessitated the scientific study of tea pests so as to protect the planter from their ravages. One authority asserts that: "Were it not for the natural checks to which most blights are subject, the tea plant would soon be devoured off the face of the earth." In some seasons various most important plants are seriously damaged by blights, caterpillars, and other foes, while, in others, the weather conditions prove very unfavourable to some at least of these pests. Adverse seasons are reinforced through the presence of numerous carnivorous and parasitic enemies of floral pests, and their activities are such that in normal years they more or less succeed in keeping tea blights and other destructive organisms under control.

Red spider is a perpetual enemy of the tea bush. All sorts of desperate attempts have been made to overcome this pestilent insect, but hitherto with small success. In the spring the eggs are hatched out in countless numbers within the leaves, and so soon as they emerge, the tiny spiders everywhere infest the foliage. This parasite exhausts the sap of the leaves, causing them to shrivel and fall. Even heavy rainstorms render little help, for the minute spiders seek safety on the underside of the leaves ready to reappear when the weather improves. So serious are the ravages of red spider that the invaded shrubs steadily weaken with each attack, and subsequently become an easy prey to morbid fungoid growths.

Red spider is usually most baleful on China bushes, while the pink mite, another parasite, ravages the choicer tea shrubs, notably, the celebrated Assam species. It was formerly supposed that the superior varieties were deciduous, for, occasionally, large groups of plants appear almost destitute of leaves. It is now known, however, that this results from the activities of the pink mite which sucks all the juices from the leaves, which thus cease to function, and then wither and fall. Much to the planter's annoyance and loss, the foliage thus discarded forms the newly ripened leaves of the early flush which would have produced the finest tea. Bushes growing in shady situations seem less liable to attack than those planted on more open ground. As a remedial measure flower of sulphur is employed, and this is said to expel the parasite for the whole of the ensuing season.

The mosquito is another formidable foe which, at one period, menaced the Indian tea industry with ruin. Its depredations in the late 'eighties in the Darjeeling district were responsible for the bankruptcy of several fine estates. The life cycle of this exasperating insect is now nearly known, and its doom is merely a matter of time. The tender tea leaves are destroyed by the mosquito in July in some regions, at the very period when the plant should appear at its best. Usually, however, the most serious blight occurs in September and early October until the close of the season.

Although a noxious creature, the presence of the green fly promotes the production of choice flavoured teas. Fortunately for manufacturing purposes, this fly does not injure the foliage unless its visitations prove abnormally severe. Then its sinister activities retard all growth, with calamitous consequences to the cultivator. An expert informs us that:—

The green fly feeds upon the watery fluid of the young leaves, and extracts it in such a way as not to injure in any degree the tissue itself, or the actual juice or sap of the plant; thus the juice, by losing nearly all its water, becomes greatly concentrated, and the whole leaf is proportionately contracted in size. Planters all know the peculiar stunted appearance of green-fly leaf, and if the bushes are of the small China variety, the leaves in these circumstances are so small as to be very expensive and difficult to gather; they have also the light yellowish colour indicative of fine quality, and the sap is thick and sticky, being really a concentrated essence of tea.

Many other insect enemies infest the tea plant. Then there are many parasitic plants that entwine themselves around the bark, branches, and leaves of the bush, thus excluding light and air, while depriving their host of access to soil and moisture. In these several ways climbing plants arrest the growth of, and sometimes even strangle, the tea shrub to which they have attached themselves. Moreover, numerous fungoid diseases afflict the plant. Sickly shrubs are subject to the growth of lichen, while healthy bushes, when invaded by this parasite, soon lose their vigour. Not only does this growth sadly handicap the tea shrub with its unwelcome embrace, but its scaly surface provides a habitat for several species of insects detrimental to the plant's prosperity.

So far, no satisfactory machine has been devised which plucks the leaves from the bush. Where coarse tea is produced, and the leaves are gathered at random, a plucking machine serves very well. But the desideratum is a contrivance that will select the leaves essential for the preparation of high grade teas, while leaving on the bushes the foliage not desired.

When the leaf-buds peer forth in spring, the tea plant is said to flush. It is stated that from ten to fifteen flushes during the season form a fair average from strong and healthy shrubs, although the pickings number as

many as thirty, or even thirty-five. The separate shoots are in different stages of development at each gathering, and in successful tea-plucking each leaf must be encouraged to grow until it is at its prime, and then promptly picked. Hand picking is therefore necessary, and cheap and abundant labour is indispensable to the planter. On a thriving estate of 1,100 acres the various requirements involved compel the services of a staff of "at least 2,000 people of all grades, who must have the necessary fuel to cook their food and for domestic purposes generally."

Experimental tea-growing in America has been in operation for many years, but, except in South Carolina, with small success. Insufficient rainfall and the high cost of labour combine to prevent the warmer regions of the United States from entering into serious competition with India and Ceylon.

When the leaves have been gathered, the first stage of manufacture begins. This is the withering process, which precedes the rolling of the leaf. It is considered that, were rolling to take place prior to withering, the precious leaves would be torn to tatters, and the greater part of their juice lost. About seventy-five per cent. of the green leaf consists of water, even in dry weather, and nearly half of this moisture must be evaporated if the leaf is to be rolled without fracture. Also, during the withering stage a striking chemical change occurs. The natural enzyme or fermenting principle of the foliage is augmented, and this increases both the flavour and strength of the manufactured commodity.

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

The War and God.

A CONFESSION OF FAITH FROM THE NORTH SEA.

HUNTING about the North Sea in all weathers, and under present War conditions, in one of the Ocean Dragons—a big T.B.D.—does not give much opportunity for the exercise of that weapon which is (sometimes) "mightier than the sword." But, even in that life, with little sleep, less comfort, and no warmth, there are some moments of leisure. Then one naturally reverts to the more peaceful past times—so far as these can be indulged in. Thus it was that this was originally written to an intimate, but still orthodox, friend. I have been induced to send this copy to the old *Freethinker*, thinking it might be of interest, and of some little value, to a wider circle than the individual friend to whom it was at first addressed.

In passing, I may say (as one who has been "serving" since almost the very outset of the War) that my *Freethinker* is much in demand among many shipmasters—as it was with many comrades on land. Not only that; it is read by "the man in the street" (now the man in the Service) with an interest greater than "before the War"—and with a "more open mind."

A word of explanation, before proceeding with the transcript of the letter, may help to a clearer understanding by the reader—be he "saint" or otherwise. I sent a card of greeting (and of mourning for a very bitter loss) to this friend, last Christmas. He twitted me, in a letter, with conforming to orthodox Christmas observances; and (with underlying seriousness) insinuated that I—even after my more than twenty-six years of philosophic Atheism—had been compelled by the War to reconsider my philosophic values!

That could not be allowed to go unchallenged. So I wrote again, pointing out that "Christmas" was a Pagan festival, pinched by the Christians, and was a widespread public festival to-day (though with but little chance of

"festivities" for many of us). I referred to a few of the facts from comparative mythology; and I mentioned that these facts were admitted, even by many Christian scholars.

Following upon that, I received the letter to which this (exact) transcript is my reply. My friend's arguments may be enumerated thusly:—(1) He liked to hear from me, but preferred "ordinary" letters; (2) What I had said was "pure piffle"; (3) I shouldn't try to ridicule a religion which had "stood the test of centuries," in spite of all the many attacks upon it; (4) Abundant proof had been published that the War was bringing people back to religion, and compelling them to believe in God; (5) I had had more and better chances in life than he (referring to education, etc.), but I had done much "worse" in life (presumably owing to my Atheism); and (6) There was little prospect of happiness for me so long as I remained an Atheist.

Not a very formidable attack from a rationally argumentative point of view. But very typical of the usual Christian criticism.

What follows here is a literal copy of my reply. All quotations and references are from memory, as the only book I have with me is a well-conned copy of the *Rubaiyat* (apart from fiction and magazines).

DEAR FRIEND,.....

I cannot finish this letter without some reference to the more "serious" subject touched upon in some of your more recent letters. The "last word" is not only the woman's prerogative, but also the right of him who "replies" in a discussion. You opened it. So, 'tis only fair that I should close it. It is, of course, a matter of taste; but I feel a greater pleasure in writing about such "serious" subjects, than in merely chronicling the small beer (which we never see!) of our daily round. Still, after this, I shan't pursue the subject (or any other "serious" one)—if you don't start it!

You rightly say you were brought up a Christian. So was I. But I studied Christianity (and other religions) pretty thoroughly, and with great earnestness. You did not. Had you and I been born and brought up as Mussulmans, you'd probably be still a Mussulman, and probably I should not.

I never tried to ridicule your religious beliefs; though ridicule (within reasonable limits) is a perfectly justifiable weapon, and one which the professional "witch-doctors" use, or try to use, *ad lib*. I merely pointed out some incontrovertible facts about the Pagan origins of Christianity—many of which are admitted by Christian scholars.

The Christian religion (or religions) has, most emphatically, *not* "stood the test of centuries." In my own lifetime I have seen it (or them) *forced* to abandon doctrine after doctrine—position after position. It stands (if it stands) to-day vastly different to what it was thirty or more years ago—when I started to study it. These changes constitute in themselves a measure of the efficacy of the Freethought attack. (And proud am I of having done my little bit in compelling those stragetic movements to the rear on the part of Christianity.) I can remember when "Plenary Inspiration" was almost generally believed in. To-day it is not—not even in Scotland! I don't suppose even the "Wee Free" diviner believes the commas are verbally inspired—especially as there was no punctuation at all in the Hebrew!

I am old enough to remember Robertson Smith being excommunicated (by the Free Kirk, wasn't it?) for saying that "Isaiah" was not all written by one and the same said prophet. But I have lived to see scientific criticism (merely the development of the great Thomas Paine's

Age of Reason) do the same deadly work on the "New" Testament that it had already done on the "Old." And much of that *inside* the Churches! The late Rev. Dr. Bruce practically abandoned the "Divinity" of Christ and was *not* excommunicated. Hensley Henson does not believe in the physical resurrection of Christ, etc.—and has just been made a Bishop. That's not standing the test of thirty years—let alone centuries. A few years ago, the Rev. Dr. Anderson, of Dundee, said "we" (Christians) had to abandon the "Historical Christ"; and we had to create an ideal ("Christ") out of the good, the true, and the beautiful. And he (Dr. Anderson) still draws his screw as a parson. That is "standing the test of" years in a kind of "Kamerad! Hands up here!" spirit indeed.

I can remember the stir caused by Tyndall, Huxley, Spencer, and others; and read all through the controversies in the *Nineteenth Century* and elsewhere. And I remember poor old W. E. G.'s frantic efforts to save his creed and his Gods. To-day, evolution is almost universally accepted (even by Christians), and the "impregnable rock" has gone the way of all sandstone under continued water-action. Nay, admission after admission has been made by representatives of all denominations (especially in recent years) that Christianity has *not* been holding its own. "Standing the test" in *that* way is a German victory indeed!

ATHOS ZENO.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

A PROPOSAL.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I have a proposal to make to you in consequence of a request made by one of your readers, whose name, age, and sex are unknown to me. This gentleman or lady—to be referred to for the purposes of this letter as the former—kindly sent me the same numbers of your journal, with sundry passages marked in ink. On the margin he had written a strongly worded suggestion that I should take note of these passages. So much for the external advice received.

On looking at the passages marked, I at once resolved to act on this friendly but anonymous hint, so far, anyhow, as to feel your editorial pulse on the question of starting a discussion by correspondence in your columns. My reasons for mooted this project are as follows:—

(1) It is refreshing always to come into contact with a mental atmosphere very different from the one a clergyman ordinarily breathes.

(2) Especially when it means reading disquisitions on matters of vital importance written with conspicuous sincerity, clearness of thought, and desire to arrive at truth.

(3) I have formed a hope that if certain conditions are observed the result of such a discussion, as I anticipate, would be something like a cordial *rapprochement* between myself and sundry of my fellow-Britons from whom, largely through my own fault, I have become estranged.

Other reasons might be added; but I must pass on to speak of necessary conditions, and of what I am prepared to offer if those conditions be observed.

All I ask is that, if any of your readers honour my letters with their notice, they would join me in an honest and persevering effort to be perfectly courteous and perfectly candid. Nobody, of course, is *perfectly* either the one or the other; but that is no reason why we should not try.

I shall therefore begin to keep up my end, as we used to say in our cricket matches, by avoiding so far as I can every phrase which would be likely to give offence, and every form of words which would obscure my meaning or my genuine opinion. Courtesy, frankness, honesty; these ought to be within the reach of us all; and so far as a rapid glance at your columns allows me to judge, you are showing how they are, even in a "religious" discussion, to be maintained.

If, on the other hand, by blundering or bigotry, or any other tomfoolery, to which we parsons are occasionally prone, I gall any of your readers to exasperation and heat of language, I shall do all I can to make amends; but, thenceforward, shall leave unnoticed whatever the particular disputant may say. I have reached an age when personal abuse has not only lost its power to excite, but even to stir the faintest flicker of emotion. It strikes me as unutterably dull.

If, therefore, you give me the opportunity I will send you some observations on what you have written with the object of pointing out grounds of agreement between two points of view apparently irreconcilable.

E. LYTTLETON.

(Doctor of Divinity and late Headmaster of Eton.)

THE SOUL.

SIR,—I always find "Abracadabra's" articles interesting and instructive, but his treatment of the expressions "soul" and "spirit" are not entirely satisfying to me. For many years I have been mentally teased by the use of these terms by Christians, as though they were synonymous, and this week "Abracadabra" writes: "these are merely *names* of two imaginary entities (or two aspects of the same entity)."

I suggest that at some early age there existed a cult of the threefold, but I have had no time nor opportunity of verifying the idea. But I think that, in a superficial view of Nature, it would be noticed that three is repeatedly exhibited. We have:—

Sun, moon, and stars;
Earth, air, and water;
Animal, bird, and fish;
Man, woman, and child, etc.

So in after-life belief there would arise:—

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost;
Heaven, hell, and purgatory;
Body, soul, and spirit, etc.

The last two appear to me to represent two distinct entities in the mind of early man; Soul (Sol—the sun) being the body-heat; and Spirit (Spiro—I breathe) the breath. If we could refer back far enough, perhaps we should find that originally there were reasons for these separate terms, which were sufficient for the people who held them. Can "Abracadabra" clear up my indecision?

E. ANDERSON.

CLEANLINESS AND GODLINESS.

SIR,—*Apropos* the reference in "Views and Opinions" of June 23 issue to Thomas Becket's hoary clothing, recalls the influence of the Church at that time, and the simplicity of kings. Becket, as keeper of Henry's privy seal, rose high in the King's favour, and is described as being a tall and handsome man; eloquent and witty, fond of all games of skill and sport. In short, his real "sportive" instinct appeared endearing to all the young nobility who "gathered round" his table. But so soon as the Church and the sanctity of office adorned his person, his palace was no longer the abode of the happy and the gay. Becket became a changed man. He was stern and quarrelsome, relentlessly haughty, and put forth his claims with such boldness of spirit as to leave most of his quarrels unsettled. Despite this fact, his journey to Canterbury appears to have been one triumphal procession. People shouted "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord!" All this after six years of exile, coupled with the excommunication against the Bishops of York, London, and Salisbury because they had dared crown Prince Henry at the King's request during his exile, goaded the King into having Becket removed.

Certain laws in favour of the King and opposed to the Church, in that the Church tribunals dealt too lightly with the very serious crimes of the clergy, led Becket to agree, under threat of violence from some of the barons, but to eventually flee to France. The Pope released him of his promise, and refused to recognize the Constitution himself. However, Becket was soon to pay the penalty, and the poor King did penance on his tomb for the crime.

D. O.

SUNDAY BANDS IN GLASGOW.

SIR,—It may interest your readers to learn that a military band performance was given on Sunday, June 30, in Kelvin-grove Park, Glasgow. This is stated to have been the first band performance to take place on Sunday in a public park of Glasgow. The event drew a huge crowd to the park, and is worth putting on record as showing that even in Scotland we are gradually humanizing the Sunday.

GEORGE SCOTT.

GHOSTS' CLOTHES.

SIR,—In my paper of June 23 I left two questions for Spiritists to answer—first, where did the imaginary "spirit," which they say leaves the body at death, get its membrane or outer covering? and second, where did it get the "spirit-clothes," which their clairvoyants profess to see? Mr. Harper, in his reply, has answered neither.

To illustrate the first of these questions I may point to a balloon sailing through the air. Take away the outer covering which holds the large quantity of gas together, and every particle of the latter will be immediately dispersed. While the gas was confined within its envelope, it might be said to represent a personality; without its covering, it is at once scattered to the four winds, its particles never to be gathered together again. So must it be with a "disembodied spirit," assuming such an impossibility to exist. Mr. Harper has not mentally visualized this question.

Again, Mr. Harper quotes me as saying that "æther is many million times thinner than air." What I said was that "ether is supposed to be many million times thinner," etc. I used the words here italicized for the simple reason that, in my opinion, what certain scientists say about ether is pure theory; also, my reference was not to the ether obtained from alcohol and sulphuric acid, but to the extremely attenuated gaseous substance which is supposed to fill all space, as mentioned by Sir Oliver Lodge.

ARRACADABRA.

Society News.

A meeting of the South Shields Branch, N.S.S., to consider various urgent business matters took the place of a country ramble at short notice. A vote of condolence with the relatives of our oldest member, Mr. J. T. Horsman, was passed, and it was decided to start a Freethinker Fund to develop and maintain local sales, and, from a suggestion of the deceased member, to institute a waste paper department and a collector was duly appointed. One new member was made. Branches will do well to follow the example of our South Shields friends.—E. M. VANCE, *Gen. Sec.*

Better for us, perhaps, it might appear,
Were there all harmony, all virtue here;
That never air or ocean felt the wind,
That never passion discomposed the mind.
But all subsists by elemental strife;
And passions are the elements of life. —*Pope.*

Obituary.

Mr. John Thomas Horsman, the oldest member of the Branch, and once a familiar figure at the Annual Conferences, died suddenly, aged fifty-seven, on July 5, and was buried at Harton Cemetery on Monday last, Mr. J. Fothergill giving an impressive reading of the Secular Burial Service. Deceased followed his usual employment as a locomotive engine driver for the N.E.R. Co. on the day prior to his death. His conversion to Secularism was due solely to Bible reading, and during his long connection with the South Shields Branch he was a regular and persistent worker in a quiet way. Conferences, from Glasgow to London, and even to Brussels, were an annual pilgrimage for Mr. Horsman until recent years; until he died he was always highly respected by his colleagues, his fellow-workmen, and the railway officials.—R. C. (South Shields).

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, Laurence Housman, "Crime and Punishment."

OUTDOOR.

BATTERSEA BRANCH N. S. S. (Battersea Park Gates, Queen's Road) : 11.45, Mr. G. Rule, A Lecture.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand) : 6.30, Mr. Shaller, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields) : 3.15, Mr. E. Burke, A Lecture.

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S. : 6, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park) : 3.15, Miss Kough, A Lecture ; 6.30, Miss Kough, A Lecture.

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

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

PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS. New Issue. 1. *Christianity a Stupendous Failure*, J. T. Lloyd ; 2. *Bible and Teetotalism*, J. M. Wheeler ; 3. *Principles of Secularism*, C. Watts ; 4. *Where Are Your Hospitals?* R. Ingersoll ; 5. *Because the Bible Tells Me So*, W. P. Ball ; 6. *Why Be Good?* G. W. Foote ; 7. *The Massacre of the Innocents (God and the Air-Raid)*, Chapman Cohen. *The Parson's Creed*. Often the means of arresting attention and making new members. Price 1s. per hundred, post free 1s. 2d. Samples on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—N. S. S. SECRETARY, 62 FARRINGTON STREET, E.C. 4.

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