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## PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page.
<i>Christianity and Morals.—The Editor</i> - - - -	385
<i>Anglo-Catholicism.—J. T. Lloyd</i> - - - -	386
<i>Under the Red Flag.—Mimmermus</i> - - - -	387
<i>A Search for the Soul.—Abracadabra</i> - - - -	388
<i>The War and God.—Athos Zeno</i> - - - -	392
<i>Playing at Sunday-School.—Joseph Bryce</i> - - - -	393
<i>Thoughts Awheel.—Andrew Millar</i> - - - -	394
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, etc.</i>	

## Views and Opinions.

### Christianity and Morals.

A Christian reader of this paper—there are quite a number of them—writes that, however much we may dissent from Christian doctrines, we cannot deny that Christianity brought a new moral force into the world, and that this showed itself clearly in the lives of its followers. Well, but this is what we do deny, and we believe we can make our denial good by an appeal to facts. We know that the opinion voiced by our correspondent is one that is fairly common, and exists with many who do not call themselves Christians. But this we regard as either pure cant or the hypnosis produced by mere assertion. And it will be noted that the claim is not made on behalf of contemporary Christianity. It never is. When Douglas Jerrold was told that the weather at Christmas was not what it used to be, he replied, "It never was." Christian writers always find the wonderful moral regeneration effected by Christianity in some period preceding their own. Or else it will produce a moral re-birth in some time that is yet to come. The dream of the visionary or the unverifiable guess of the prophet.

### A Vain Search.

Now, religions never get truer to themselves as they grow older. They are at their truest when they are youngest, at their falsest in their old age. This is because as religions grow older, they become more subject to the play of social forces, which leads to a dropping of many things that are morally objectionable or useless. And the emphasis laid now upon morality by teachers of Christianity is no proof that it was their chief concern in the early centuries. Moral teaching is, in brief, the camouflage adopted by religions that have reached senility, in order to disguise their real nature from contemporary eyes. And there is really no proof that primitive Christianity aimed at the moral improvement of people in any other sense than that in which systems are compelled to inculcate certain moral duties. Salvation by belief, not regeneration through moral conduct, was the aim of Christianity. Pagan contemporary moralists and writers are never struck by the morality of Christians; what impresses them is their narrowness, their fanaticism, and their intense superstition. Against the assertions of Christians there is the broad fact that conduct did *not* improve with the

growth of Christianity. On the contrary, it deteriorated. Charges of the most serious character were brought by Christians against Christians; not merely charges of doctrinal laxity, but also of moral turpitude. Even Dean Milman was forced to admit, on a survey of the facts, that Christianity gave to non-Christians no more than its own superstition and hatred of heretics and unbelievers. And Professor Dill, writing of the fifth century, says: "The picture which St. Jerome draws of female society is so repulsive that we would gladly believe it to be exaggerated. But if the priesthood, with its enormous influence, was so corrupt, it is only too probable that it debased the sex which is always most under clerical influence." And one may here recall the speech made by Cardinal Hugo on the departure of Pope Innocent IV., in 1251, from the city of Lyons: "Friends, since our arrival here, we have done much for your city. When we came, we found here three or four brothels. We leave behind us but one. We must own, however, that it extends without interruption from the eastern to the western gate."

\* \* \*

### An Orthodox Witness.

But instead of multiplying these testimonials, let us take the evidence of one witness. And let that be not a Freethinker, but a Christian—no less a person than the reverend and learned Dr. Mosheim. In his *Ecclesiastical History* he deals with Christian history century by century, and his summaries on the moral regeneration effected are instructive. Thus:—

*Second Century.*—After pointing out that many "learned men" consider the Christian writers as "the very worst of moral instructors," he adds: "the cause of morality.....suffered deeply by a capital error (ascetic doctrines) which was revived in this century."

*Third Century.*—Church rule "was soon followed by a train of vices which dishonoured the character and authority of those to whom the administration of the Church was committed."

*Fourth Century.*—"When we cast an eye towards the lives and morals of Christians at this time, we find a mixture of good and evil, some eminent for their piety, others infamous for their crimes. The number, however, of immoral and unworthy Christians began so to increase that the examples of real piety and virtue became extremely rare."

*Fifth Century.*—"The vices of the clergy were now carried to the most enormous lengths, and all the writers of the century, whose probity and virtue render them worthy of credit, are unanimous in their accounts of the luxury, avarice, arrogance, and voluptuousness of the sacerdotal orders."

*Sixth Century.*—"The various orders of the clergy were infected with those vices that are too often the consequences of an affluent prosperity. This appears with the utmost evidence from the imperial edicts and the decrees of councils."

*Seventh Century.*—"The progress of vice among the subordinate rulers and ministers of the Church was at this time truly deplorable."

*Eighth Century.*—"In the Western world, Christianity was disgraced by the lives and actions of those who pretended to be the luminaries of the Church. The clergy.....were distinguished by their luxury, their gluttony, and their lust."

*Ninth Century.*—"The licentiousness of the clergy arose, at this time, to an enormous height."

*Tenth Century.*—"Both in the eastern and western provinces, the clergy were, for the most part, composed of the most worthless set of men, shamefully illiterate and stupid.....equally enslaved to sensuality and superstition, and capable of the most abominable and flagitious deeds."

*Eleventh Century.*—"All the records of this century loudly complain of the vices that reigned among the rulers of the Church.....The inferior clergy were also licentious in their way; few among them possessed any remains of piety and virtue, we might add of decency and discretion."

*Twelfth Century.*—"Wherever we turn our eyes among the various ranks and orders of the clergy, we perceive the most flagrant marks of licentiousness and fraud, ignorance and luxury, and other vices, whose pernicious effects were felt both in Church and State."

*Thirteenth Century.*—"Both the Greek and Latin writers, provoked beyond measure by the flagitious lives of their spiritual pastors and instructors, complain loudly of their licentious manners; nor will their complaints appear excessive to such as are acquainted with the history of this corrupt and superstitious age."

We do not think it is necessary to continue the record up to date. It could be done, but we hope we have given enough evidence to justify our denial that Christianity ever brought moral regeneration to the world. That belief is sheer superstition. It rests on no better evidence than the word of Christian writers, and modern ones at that. It was not, indeed, within the power of Christianity to do anything of the kind. A religion which involved a reversion to the beliefs of savages could not make for moral progress. It could only make for degeneration. And the history of that degradation is there for anyone who runs and reads. Fortunate it is for the Church that the majority neither run nor read. Still less do they *think*. If they did the reign of Christianity would be short indeed.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### Anglo-Catholicism.

THE religious press abounds with all sorts of illusions concerning the present conditions and prospects of the Christian religion. Prominent clergymen confidently affirm that, in its effect upon religion, the War has already proved the greatest possible blessing in disguise. It has deepened and intensified the spiritual life of the Churches, and enabled them to perceive, with greater clearness than ever before, the nature and scope of their mission in the world. Everywhere we discern unmistakable signs that the people generally are recovering their sense of dependence upon and responsibility to God, and showing an increased interest in and eagerness to hear and heed the Gospel message. Both in the Army and the Navy men are turning to God in ever-growing numbers, realizing that in him alone can they find the succour and inspiration of which they stand in such dire need in these distressing times. On the other hand, we are informed by the same press that churches and chapels are empty, that a lamentable religious indifference prevails, and that the Gospel of Christ no longer attracts the masses. The optimists are evidently buoyed up by illusions, by hopes kindled by beliefs

which scorn facts, while the pessimists judge by what they see and know to be true. The optimists seem to be governed by the principle, avowed and gloried in by Eusebius, the father of ecclesiastical history, "that he would relate all that was to the credit, and pass lightly over all which was to the dishonour, of the Faith," forgetting that such a principle in action can only result in grievous injury to the cause it seeks to serve. Commenting on Eusebius and other primitive Christian writers, Dean Milman says:—

Strict impartiality could not be expected from a Christian writer of that day; and probably Eusebius erred more often from credulity than from dishonesty. Yet the unbelief produced, in later times, by the fictitious character of early Christian History, may show how dangerous, how fatal, may be the least departure from truth. On pious fraud read Mosheim, Diss. i. 206, et seqq. (*The History of Christianity*, vol. iii., p. 361).

It may be conceded that present-day optimists "err more often from credulity than from dishonesty"; but it is incontrovertible that their conduct benefits the cause of Freethought much more than it does their own, because the facts are wholly against them. Whilst the Rev. Dinsdale T. Young, for example, has been going up and down the country, treating crowded and cheering audiences to eloquent accounts of the present power and brilliant prophesies of the coming triumph of the Cross, an influential committee of his Church has been conducting a careful inquiry into the present position of Wesleyan Methodism, and now presents what the *Daily News* describes as "a disturbing report," which that newspaper summarizes thus:—

One hundred and fifty selected churches in a great industrial district show an average attendance at morning service equal to 17 per cent. of the sitting accommodation, and 29 per cent. at the evening service. Central town churches are maintained by two or three devoted members and attended only by a few score people, while new and commodious churches in "villadom" have never attracted those for whom they are intended. In the last few years the membership has declined 28,571, and this decrease is most marked in districts where Methodism had been strongest, e.g., Leeds, Hull, York, Halifax, Cornwall, and Lincolnshire. Ten years ago there were over 1,000,000 Sunday scholars. This number has fallen by nearly 150,000, and there are about 100,000 fewer children between the ages of 7 and 15. The report also acknowledges a decline in evangelistic activity. "Evangelistic fervour now burns low. Here and there the flame burts out; but it is fitful, and hardly flares ere it begins to falter."

The preachers and the statisticians glaringly contradict one another, and this statement applies practically to all the Churches in Christendom. The clergy are notorious boasters, most of them, no doubt, as Milman says, "more often from credulity than from dishonesty," but all of them in shocking disregard of the facts.

But why is it that the Christian Church is so conspicuously on the decline? For several scores of years the majority of the sects have had to record serious decreases both in membership and attendance, and the Sunday-school has been visibly losing its hold upon the children. It is generally put down to a rapidly growing indifference to religion, which is certainly true; but the indifference is a symptom, not a cause. Loss of interest in religion indicates a corresponding lack of faith. No one can really believe in God, and Christ, and a future life who spends his life in complete forgetfulness of them. The truth is that the day of superstition is past beyond recall, and that it is with the utmost difficulty that any belief in it is kept alive. How many thoughtful people are there who verily believe in and rely upon the Supernatural? Is it not undeniable that the very multiplicity of different and mutually exclusive denominations

constitutes a formidable argument against the truth of Christianity? Are not the doctrines of all the sects in their very nature absolutely unbelievable? The authors of *Christianity in History* are convinced that "the tide is setting towards Reunion"; but the following is their summing up of the situation:—

One must sadly admit in the light of the recent past, as well as of the long persistence of exclusive, often mutually exclusive, attitude of the several forms of "Catholicism"—Roman, Orthodox, and also Anglican—that divergent conceptions of "Apostolic" orthodoxy and authority, of orders, and, above all, of valid Sacraments, are likely long to keep the bulk of Christians apart for conscientious reasons (p. 604).

Recently the Rev. N. P. Williams, R.N., delivered an exceptionally lucid sermon, entitled "Reunion with the North," at All Saint's, Margaret Street, London, in which he expressed a strong desire for the reconciliation of the East with the West, and of both with the North. Belonging to the Catholic Party in the Anglican Church, Mr. Williams lays down the conditions on which he thinks the Established Church of Scotland ought to be received into union with the Church of England. As is well known, the Established Church of Scotland is Presbyterian, while that of England is Episcopal. Mr. Williams regards the Anglican Church as a normal institution, taking no note of the fact that the Church of Rome looks upon it as heretical and schismatical. The Church, he tells us, includes both a "nucleus" and a "penumbra," or "fringe"—"the nucleus consisting of normal, or orthodox, baptized persons, and the fringe consisting of those who have indeed been baptized but are unorthodox and excommunicate." Mr. Williams graciously grants that the Scottish Church consists of persons who have been baptized, but reminds it that it is only a penumbra, or fringe, by no means a nucleus. Now, the following is the style in which they of the nucleus approach them of the fringe:—

The contrast between you and ourselves is not a contrast between black and white; it is a contrast between grey and white. The difference between you and ourselves is one of degree, and not of kind.....We recognize that you believe such and such Articles of Faith; what we wish to point out to you is that there are certain other Articles of Faith which we should like you to believe; we also wish to point out that there is a Divinely appointed governing power in the Church with which we should like you to establish regular relations, so as to legitimate your position.

At present the only merit attaching to the Established Church of Scotland is that it consists of baptized persons; but it does not include a nucleus, but only a penumbra, or fringe. In order to be reunited with the true and orthodox Church, it must adopt Episcopacy and Catholic order, repudiate Calvinism, and "restore the Lord's Supper to its central position as the chief function of Sunday." There is a party in the Church of Scotland, no doubt, which, led by Dr. Cooper, would be willing to be united with the Anglican Church on such terms; but we do not believe there are many in that communion who are prepared to acquiesce in the classification of it as merely a penumbra, or fringe, or a heretical and schismatical organization.

Our present point, however, is that the claims which the Catholic Party makes for itself are so fantastical or whimsical that it is no wonder so many people are turning their backs upon all forms of supernatural religion, and insisting upon being treated as outsiders. Mr. Williams, by such sermons as the one under consideration, which extends to five columns of the *Church Times* for July 5, will make more Atheists than Christians. Evidently agreeing with St. Cyprian's famous saying: "He who has not the Church for his mother, cannot

have God for his Father," he necessarily alienates intelligent, self-respecting people, and helps them to realize the true nature and purport of all supernatural pretensions. Mr. Williams ought to have lived five or six centuries ago, when he could have been of genuine service to a dominant Church. To-day he is an anachronism, and consequently promotes the interests of a cause he holds in derision.

J. T. LLOYD.

## Under the Red Flag.

*Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and a Late Victorian.* By Ernest Belfort Bax. (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd.; 1918.) 7s. 6d. net.

THE whirligig of time brings strange revenges. All that the Philistine disclaimed some years ago your middle-class gentleman adores to-day. Walter Crane's beautiful designs have long been accepted at their true value. In music, Wagner has arrived, and is, indeed, on the eve of his departure. But nowhere has the reversal of positions been so rapid or so absolute as in literature. The Socialist writers ran a great risk. They were odious, unpopular, and were supposed to exhibit all the worst features of narrow, political propagandists. William Morris is now a classic, Edward Carpenter has a large and ever-increasing audience, and Bernard Shaw is one of the foremost literary figures in the public mind. "It is roses, roses all the way."

It is men and women who make movements interesting, and Mr. E. Belfort Bax's *Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian* is a very welcome addition to the literature concerned with Socialism. We hope that it will not be the last of its kind from Mr. Bax's pen, for it throws much light on the characters of the Socialist leaders, and it tells us much of the trials and struggles of the early days. Although primarily an autobiography, Mr. Bax's unique sketch of men, manners, and movements from the "sixties" of the last century to the present time, should prove of interest to all who care for the intellectual and political life of an important period of history.

To Freethinkers the most fascinating of Mr. Bax's pages will be those dealing with the religious views current in the later years of the Victorian era. Says Mr. Bax:—

It was my lot to grow up under no very favourable conditions for intellectual development. The subjects talked of in the family circle were mainly connected with religious dogma, or the sectarian interests of the various religious bodies. Preachers of the pure quality of their orthodoxy, as opposed on the one side to "Romanism" and on the other to "Latitudinarianism," bulked largely among the topics of conversation with ours as with other middle-class families at the time. A severe censorship in the matter of literature that was allowed into the house was maintained. As usual with the bulk of early and mid-Victorian middle-class society, the theatre in all its forms was banned. In fact in many cases, ours among them, any form of amusement was supposed to savour more or less of godlessness.

This Puritan tradition of family life is nearly extinct, and few survive who think it wicked to be happy. Dreadful shadows indeed! And millions have been reared under them. They still hover over tin-tabernacles, Salvation Army barracks, and other places of worship of the intellectually lost.

Mr. Bax is himself a Freethinker, but he wears his "rue with a difference." He even suggests that the work of the earlier Secularists was "crude and coarse." As if any reform was ever instituted, or abuse swept away, without wounding the susceptibilities of some ignorant or bigoted persons. It is better to let every

soldier of progress do what he can. It is idle to quarrel with another for being different. The bolder are apt to despise the less bold as wanting in courage, but that is usually a mistake. The less bold are still more apt to sneer at the bolder as vulgar and froward, which is usually a greater mistake.

Here is what Mr. Bax has to say of the later aspects of popular Freethought:—

It was not till the early eighties and the prosecution of Foote for blasphemy that the better educated middle classes began to have sense and justice enough to see the movement from below for freedom of thought, commonly known as Secularism, for what it was, namely, the plucky effort of men of the small middle and working classes to emancipate themselves, up to their lights, from the thralldom of an encumbering and galling superstition, fatal to all advance in knowledge and to all independent intellectual effort.

This testimonial is very different from Mr. Bax's criticism of the older Secularists. It reminds us of the clergyman who, when invited to say grace before dinner, always began with "Bountiful Jehovah" if he saw champagne on the table, but moderated his transports in the presence of claret.

It is not as a Freethinker, however, but as an apostle of Socialism that Mr. Bax will be remembered. The story of the early struggles of that movement, as unfolded by him in these pages, reads like a romance—a romance of brave men and women fighting at fearful odds, and ultimately triumphing. His association with the Socialist movement brought with it introductions to men of genius, which, in many instances, ripened into friendship. One gets many pleasant glimpses of Bernard Shaw, William Morris, Friedrich Engels, Jean Jaures, August Bebel, Prince Kropotkin, and a whole host of famous men. These vignettes are etched with an engaging frankness, as when he tells the story of Bernard Shaw borrowing half-a-crown of him, and his returning the money next day. Bax rallied him on his promptness and scrupulosity. "Oh," said Shaw, "it is my habit to show punctilious accuracy in small money matters, so that when the time comes I may pull off my big coup with success."

The veteran Mr. H. M. Hyndman's fondness for "the frock coat, the pot-hat, and the linked shirt-cuff" is duly noted by Mr. Bax, who adds: "nothing would induce me to don this hideous and sordid uniform." Mr. Hyndman not only wore it bravely and constantly, but even sold Socialist papers in the Strand and Fleet Street whilst so garbed. Mr. Cunninghame Graham, on the other hand, is mentioned as having a "passion for fashionable dress," and as bearing a resemblance to Charles the First. Readers should turn to Mr. Bax's volume for themselves. It is a fascinating book, forcefully and modestly written, and ought to be read by all those who care about the betterment of the conditions of the majority of their fellow-men. It should also remind Socialists that Clericalism is the real enemy. Doubtless, in time, Socialists will yet discover, like Red Riding Hood, that the Church is not a grandmother but a wolf.

MIMNERMUS.

He says I'm no use! but I won't reply.  
You're lucky not being of use to him!  
On week-days he's playing at Spider and Fly,  
And on Sundays he sings about Cherubim!  
Nailing shillings to counters is his chief work;  
He nods now and then at the name on his door:  
But judge of us two at a bow and a smirk,  
I think I'm his match: and I'm honest—that's more.  
—George Meredith, "The Beggar's Soliloquy."

## A Search for the Soul.

V.

(Continued from p. 369.)

IN May, 1903, Lord Kelvin, a distinguished physicist, made some remarks at a meeting of the Christian Association at University College, which were reported in the *Times*. This was followed by a letter, in which, after speaking of "the coming into existence, or the growth, or the continuation of the molecular combinations presented in the bodies of living things," that scientist said: "Here scientific thought is compelled to accept the idea of Creative Power.....Modern biologists are coming once more to the acceptance of a Vital principle." This remarkable statement produced replies from several eminent biologists and scientists, including Sir E. Ray Lankester, Sir W. T. Thiselton-Dyer, Sir J. Burden-Sanderson, Professor Karl Pearson, and others—who all repudiated or condemned Lord Kelvin's unauthorized statement. The following are extracts from the reply of Professor Ray Lankester, which I take from the Appendix to his *Kingdom of Man*:—

Lord Kelvin seems to have formed the conception of a creator who, first of all, without care or foresight, has produced what we call "matter," with its necessary properties.....and then, as a second effort, has brought some of these elements together with "creative and directive purpose," mixing them, as it were, with a "vital principle" so as to form living things.....I do not myself know of any one of admitted leadership among modern biologists who is showing signs of "coming to a belief in the existence of a Vital principle.".....Modern biologists do not accept the hypothesis of "telepathy" advocated by Sir Oliver Lodge, nor that of the intrusions of disembodied spirits pressed upon them by others of the same school.

No one of any note appears to have taken the side of Lord Kelvin in this controversy; but five years later Sir Oliver Lodge published his *Man and the Universe*, in which the repudiated "Vital principle" figures as an apparently scientific fact.

We will now look at what Professor Huxley has called "the physical basis of life." When a seed is placed in the ground and well watered, it soon begins to draw into itself nutriment obtained from the earth, the air, rain, and sunshine, which substances are all non-living and contain no vital properties whatever; then, by some chemical process, it combines them all into one substance, known as protein or protoplasm, which is capable of sustaining life. Upon this subject Professor Huxley says:—

This "physical basis of life" depends upon the pre-existence of certain compounds; namely, carbonic acid, water, and ammonia. Withdraw any one of these three from the world, and all vital phenomena come to an end. Carbon, hydrogen, oxygen, and nitrogen are all lifeless bodies. Of these, carbon and oxygen unite in certain proportions, and under certain conditions, to give rise to carbonic acid; hydrogen and oxygen produce water; nitrogen and hydrogen give rise to ammonia. These new compounds, like the elementary bodies of which they are composed, are lifeless. But when they are brought together, under certain conditions, they give rise to the still more complex body, protoplasm, and this protoplasm exhibits the phenomena of life.

Here it should be noted that the difference between plants and animals, in the matter of food, is that plants are able to draw the protoplasm necessary for their growth and development out of inorganic substances, whereas animals (including man) are unable to do so, and are obliged to obtain the protoplasm they require ready made, either in the form of grass or other vegetable substance, or the flesh of other animals. Both Professor

Huxley and Tyndall reject the idea of a "vital principle," as do also the great majority of other scientists. In his essay on "Vitality" (1863) Professor Tyndall says:—

To account for the origin, growth, and energies of living things it was usual to assume a special agent, free to a great extent from the limitations observed among the powers of inorganic nature. This agent was called "vital force"; and under its influence, plants and animals were supposed to collect their materials and to assume determinate forms.....In tracing these phenomena through all their modifications, the most advanced philosophers of the present day declare that they ultimately arrive at a single source of power, from which all vital energy is derived.....The source of power consists in the forcible separation of the atoms of compound substances by the Sun.....The building up of the vegetable, then, is effected by the sun, through the reduction of chemical compounds.....The primary action of the sun's rays is qualified by the atoms and molecules among which their energy is distributed. Molecular forces determine the form which the solar energy may assume. In the separation of the carbon and oxygen this energy may be so conditioned as to result in one case in the formation of a cabbage and in another case in the formation of an oak.

Here we see that so long ago as 1863 Sir Oliver Lodge's "vital principle" was rejected by the most advanced scientists of that day as purely imaginary. The real agent is the sun, which, by breaking up the atoms of compound substances, enables the plant to draw into itself the carbonic acid, water, and ammonia necessary for its life and development. There remain now in this connection but two points to be noticed. The first is that the matter constituting the organisms of both the animal and vegetable kingdoms is precisely the same as that which forms the inorganic world. There is no substance in the animal or vegetable tissues which was not, in the first instance, obtained from the earth, the water, and the air. The second point is that it is the compounding of forces belonging to the inorganic world which gives rise to the mystery called "vitality" in the organic. Before the compounding they are all lifeless (carbonic acid, water, ammonia, etc.); after the compounding the new compound is found to possess new properties, one of which, in the case of protoplasm, is the vitality which sustains life. We thus arrive at the fact that the so-called "vital principle" is simply a property of a certain complex form of inorganic matter; so that the agency of what believers in immortality call "Creative Power" is shown to be wholly unnecessary.

Before closing this paper, I must make one more extract from *Man and the Universe*, in order to indicate more clearly what is Sir Oliver Lodge's true position. That scientist says (p. 58):—

My contention is that Life is, from the mechanical point of view, not a force nor an energy, but only a guiding and directing principle.....It directs terrestrial energy along a certain channel.....A railway guides a train to its destination, while the engine supplies the energy and propels it. Any force exerted by the rails is perpendicular to the motion and does no work.....Life and Mind have determined where the rails shall be laid down, and when and whence and whither the trains are to be run, but they exert no iota of force upon them..... A path can guide a traveller to his destination without exerting any force upon him at all.

In the foregoing paragraph we have a truly novel idea. We are told that in the human organism Life and Mind direct the cells of protoplasm in the formation and development of that organism. This is done by making grooves and channels and slits and slots and rails and paths along which the cells are to work. But in the case of a railway-train Sir Oliver ignores the fact that

rails could not be laid down without "work," and that this had to be done before any trains could run. When Life and Mind had "determined" where the rails and grooves had to be placed for the building up of the organism, who did the work of laying them down? Sir Oliver does not say. Life, not being energy, could not do it. During the gestative period and that of early childhood, Mind was not in existence; and when, at a later period (after the brain had developed) it may be assumed to be in being, it had no definite knowledge of any of the internal organs of the body or of their functions. Who, then, made the slits and slots and rails which Life and the then non-existent Mind had "determined" should be laid down? Do the cells first prepare and arrange the preliminary framework of their future constructive work? If they do, how do Life and the unexistent Mind direct them? If they do not, how can Life and the unborn Mind guide them into the non-existent rails and slits and grooves along which they are to go? Is it not clear that Life and the not yet developed Mind should do something more than merely look on, if they are to guide and direct? And is it not equally clear that the idea of Life and Mind guiding and directing the building up of the human organism, or guiding anything whatever, is pure nonsense? As we have already seen, Life and Mind do no guiding or directing in the process of building up the physical body; Sir Oliver's theories, then, are not in harmony with facts.

(To be continued.) ABRACADABRA.

## Acid Drops.

We are inclined to think that the *Freethinker* was pretty well alone in having a leading article pointing out the real significance of the French National Day. All the newspapers wrote on it, but carefully steered clear of saying that it was the anniversary of one of the greatest and most beneficial revolutions in human history. Some of the papers left one wondering what the day really did celebrate. And the *Daily Telegraph* leading article took easily first place. For reading it one was almost bound to come to the conclusion that the French National Day was to "celebrate" France's entry into the War in 1914. The Revolution of 1789, with all that it meant for France and the world, didn't even get honourable mention.

Now, we do, of course, honour France for the stand she made in 1914, and for the stand she has made since. But those who remember the services of France to the world honour her the more because in this matter she has remained true to herself, to her fine instinct for right, to her readiness to sacrifice in the pursuit of an idea. All the more regrettable it is that English "society" has not yet found itself able to celebrate the French National Day on the proper date, July 14. In the first year of the War, 1915, some aristocratic ladies—duchesses and other society odds and ends—arranged for a flag day on July 7, in spite of there being one already arranged on the proper date. This year some one is responsible for having fixed it for the 12th. French people, who have a sense of humour, will note these things with a shrug and a smile. For ourselves, we are left wondering why if fighting to ward off tyranny in 1918 is a good thing, we cannot frankly acknowledge the benefits of a similar stand made in 1789? Is it because to be celebrating the anniversary of a Revolution is considered dangerous?

France, of course, kept its National Day on the proper date, July 14. And America, we see, celebrated it as "Bastille Day." That is a better acknowledgment of its origin than writing as though the main purpose was to keep the public in ignorance of the cause of the birth of Modern France.

The Archbishops' Second Committee of Inquiry on "The Worship of the Church" will arouse mixed feelings among

the faithful. The astute ecclesiastics recommend ten-minute sermons, the greater use of the best classical music, the curbing of clerical authority, free and open places of worship, and other measures for the popularizing of the Church. In plain English, the secularization of religion is proceeding rapidly.

As in a lady's letter the postscript is often the most important item, so the appendix to the Archbishops' Report is very illuminative. Three Army Chaplains declare that the Prayer Book authorizes and perpetuates a view of the Bible which is "untrue and offensive to any lively conscience or intelligence." Those Army Chaplains are to be congratulated. Let us hope that they will convert their clerical brethren to the same healthy views. The Prayer Book does present the Bible in a sense that has died out of the minds of all decently educated Christians.

In a well-written article on "The Unmarried Mother," the *Daily News* quotes the terrible indictment: "There are few darker blots upon Christianity than the way in which illegitimate children have been sacrificed in the name of religion and morality." Remembering the origin of the Founder of Christianity, the admission is all the more remarkable.

The Rev. F. C. Unmack, Rector of Horsley, relates, as an instance of answer to prayer, the recovery of his bicycle, which was stolen last February. Police investigation failing, he prayed for months, and finally found the machine at Leatherhead Station. Brother Unmack is too late with his testimonial to the value of prayer. Is there one church that shows so much belief in prayer as to dispense with a lightning-conductor?

But while the Lord was hunting round after the missing "bike," seven of his Churches have been destroyed around Mackay, Queensland, by a cyclone. To save a bicycle and lose seven churches, doesn't seem very wise economy. The *Church Times* is opening a fund to make good the Lord's carelessness in Queensland.

Columns were printed in the Press concerning Independence Day. The pressmen had much to say concerning Washington and his colleagues; but they all forgot to mention Thomas Paine, the man who first wrote the words "The United States of America," and whose virile pen was as instrumental in forming the great Republic of the West as the swords of Lafayette and Washington.

During the last ten years the United Methodist Church has had a net decrease of 10,000 in its membership, the present total church roll being only 153,268. To that total we are informed that, during last year, twenty adult members were added. Thus we see that this sect, like the Wesleyan Methodist, fails to establish its divinity by any phenomenal success.

The Rev. Thomas Phillips, of Bloomsbury Chapel, London, pictures the Agnostic as "wistfully and blindly groping after the unknown God," thereby showing most clearly that about the genuine Agnostic he knows absolutely nothing. We know it to be an incontrovertible fact that the overwhelming majority of so-called Agnostics are perfectly contented without any God at all, and that they are not lower, to say the very least, in the scale of character than the most ardent believers. Mr. Phillips seems to be incapable of doing the simplest act of justice to those who do not share his fanatical beliefs.

Rev. C. A. Frith, former Curate of Stavely, was cast in £150 damages for having slandered the Headmaster of Stavely Church of England School during the course of a sermon. Mr. Justice Lush said it was a monstrous thing for a minister to use the pulpit to attack the character of people. In defence of Mr. Frith, we beg to point out that this has always been the practice of the pulpit, and it might well have been thought that this conferred immunity on a clergyman. Some of the worst of slanders have been voiced from the pulpit. And the fault is really due to the training Christian ministers receive. Still, we are pleased to see one

parson brought to book. It may teach others to be more careful; although on that point we have our doubts.

Falstaff and his men in buckram were heroes compared with the clergy. At the City Temple (London), recently, an American parson appeared in the pulpit in full khaki uniform. Then the hero of a hundred tea-fights fought the Devil for an hour, and the victory was as shadowy as the spiritual opponent. Let us hope that the girls and grandfathers in the pews were duly impressed.

Miss Rebecca West, in a review of a book on Russia, declares that some writers, when dealing with that country, have the "remarkable conviction that any idiot using a religious vocabulary is the mouthpiece of divinity." This idea is by no means restricted to writers on Russian subjects. The phenomenon may be witnessed much nearer home.

Thirty Church of England training colleges are to be placed under the control of a Board of Supervisors, in order to modernize the buildings and to develop the religious instruction. It would be far more to the purpose if the instruction was modernized as well as the bricks and mortar.

The Bishop of Hereford hopes "The God of Love and Justice will be with us in our effort to answer His declared will by drawing His servants together." Meanwhile, his servants are having a row as to what is his declared will. What the Bishop should do is to ask "Him" to send someone along to give an authoritative statement as to what the dickens he really desires.

The *Irish News* of July 6 contains an account of another death of Atheism in France. But Atheism has died so often that one may regard this as quite a normal condition. This time the account is taken from Madame Suzanne Duprees, an actress. This lady writes that—"Atheism, which never gnawed more than skin-deep into the average Frenchman, has been swept clean away." The War has done it, apparently. The soldiers have seen the French priests in the ranks, etc., and the War has "swept France clean of Atheism." In that case, the duty of our own clergy is plain. Let them all join the Army, fight as common soldiers, and then England will be swept clean of Atheism. We present the tip to our bishops. But they may reflect that imagination is a good quality in an actress.

The worst of it is that it makes the French people such idiots—and we certainly never took the French people for fools. We never heard that millions of people called themselves Atheists in France because they were dissatisfied with the priests, but rather because they were dissatisfied with the priests' religion. And whether a particular priest turns out a blackguard or a hero can't make the slightest difference. A priest dying in the trenches—when all has been said—can't prove the truth of the Virgin Birth to a logical-minded Frenchman; nor will the administration of the Last Sacrament on a battlefield prove the resurrection of Jesus. The kind of thing retailed by Madame Duprees is good enough for an English audience—when told of France; but there is no need for her to paint her compatriots as fools. When a man becomes an Atheist by reasoning, he is not likely to recant from funk.

The new Bishop of Hereford says that he accepts the Creed *ex animo*. The *Church Times* wants to know what Dr. Henson really means by *ex animo*. English Church liberals complain that he has "said too little as to the sense in which he recites the Creed"; while Dr. Kirsopp Lake, an American, accuses him, in the current number of the *Hibbert Journal*, of having said too much. Dr. Lake, speaking for American Church liberals, declares that they do not accept the Creed *ex animo*, his contention being that they have entirely outgrown it. They recite without believing it, merely "as a matter of Church discipline and custom." Theological leaders being thus confessedly hypocrites, is it to be wondered at that the trend of the age is emphatically away from all religious rites and ceremonies, even from every form of supernatural religion itself?

## To Correspondents.

- E. STURGISS.—Your suggestion is a good one, but until the resources of the *Freethinker* enable us to get regular help, we don't know how we could find time to carry it out. We already work from breakfast till bed-time, and the only way we can see how to do more is to knock off the bed-time.
- R. DAVISON.—See "Acid Drops."
- A. P. BROOMFIELD.—It is absurd of the *Daily Chronicle* to say that they do not publish correspondence of a religious nature, particularly when your letter was a comment on a bishop's speech reported in that paper. What the editor probably means is that he does not care to publish anything that attacks Christianity. And that is the policy of most of the London newspapers.
- W. BARTON (Ipswich).—(1) Both books are out of print. (2) Securing two new readers in a week is good work, and your newsagent displaying the paper and chalking the contents outside is capital. We also dream of a *big* circulation one day, and it will not be our fault if we do not get it. (3) Pleased you found the Pioneer Leaflets useful. We are sending on a further supply.
- H. BULL.—Humbugs all—or nearly all.
- R. ELIOT.—We have been considering reprinting, but cannot say when. It means a considerable expenditure, and that spells capital. Our great difficulty at present is just that, but we are doing our best. Perhaps one day we shall be better off, and can then do more.
- MR. HOWARD RUFF, Secretary of the Royal Society of St. George, writes that the rejoinder of "Mimnermus" in our issue of July 7, in no wise refutes the statements made by himself. Mr. Ruff complains that "Mimnermus" merely repeats the statements made originally by himself, without dealing with the objections raised to them.
- T. MAIR.—Pleased you found our notes on France "inspiring." But you are a little out in your chronology. In 1791 Burke wrote to the English Minister at Turin, suggesting the restoration of the Monarchy, and added that "nothing else but a foreign force can or will do. In this design, too, Great Britain and Prussia must at least acquiesce." Burke's reason was that "if they are suffered finally to triumph in France," they may "extend themselves to us, and blast all the health and vigour of that happy Constitution which we enjoy."
- L. MYERS.—We have given the approximate numbers in our leaflet, *What is the Use of the Clergy?* a parcel of which has been sent you. We do not think exact figures are available.
- B. F. B. writes, *apropos* of our notes on "Religion and Medicine," that the praiseworthy work of medical men among the troops is accompanied by payment of a fixed salary. In private practice a doctor depends upon fees, which discriminates in favour of the wealthy. He thinks doctors should be paid in peace as they are in war, from the State Fund raised by a "Health Tax."
- MAJOR HUNTER.—Thanks for journal. We are glad to have your appreciation of our editorship.
- T. A. MCKEE.—We quite appreciate your comment on articles, and are glad you find the paper so interesting. The initiative in the discussion rests, of course, with Dr. Lyttelton. We have no doubt but that it will prove instructive.
- H. AUSTEN.—Pleased you found our notes on the French Revolution so useful.
- A. STOCHARD.—Sorry we are unable to find space for your letter.
- J. ROBINSON.—The Act you inquire about is the 29th of Charles II. *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.

A conference of South Wales Freethinkers will be held on Saturday, July 20, at the Wyndham Hotel, Bridgend, at 5 o'clock. The meeting will be addressed by Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd. The immediate topic of the conference will be "Christianity and Freethought," and, it is hoped, the conference will lead to serviceable developments.

On Sunday Mr. Cohen will lecture twice in the Gem Cinema Palace, Maesteg, at 2.30 and 7.30. July is not the best of months for indoor lectures, but the friends thought it a pity not to have some lectures while Mr. Cohen was in the neighbourhood, and he agreed to deliver them. There will be nothing in the way—except faulty train service—of friends coming from a distance.

The Manchester Branch undertakes its next "Ramble" to-day (July 21). Members and friends will meet at the Mosley Street end of Piccadilly, or Altrincham car terminus. Tea will be provided at Ashley. Committee meeting after tea.

We have just received the Fortieth Annual Report of the Malthusian League, copies of which can be obtained at one penny from the Society's office, 48 Broadway, Westminster. The League faces the work of driving sane ideas into the head of the none too pervious British public with its usual courage, and is evidently making progress. The Report notes that the opposition of the Churches is weakening; which, of course, means that Malthusian opinion is gaining. For the Churches never retreat nor reconsider until forced.

A very large number of papers and magazines have ceased to exist in consequence of the War, and nearly all have had their appearance and price considerably altered. We have watched the disappearance of many without concern, but we do regret that *Notes & Queries*, a most valuable medium of information for all students, is now appearing only monthly instead of every week. Saturday's *Daily Chronicle* reported that several hundred newspapers had also ceased to exist in the United States. So the question of the price and supply of paper is making itself felt there as well as here.

## MORALITY INDEPENDENT OF THEOLOGY.

To place anything in God, or to derive anything from God, is nothing more than to withdraw it from the test of reason, to institute it as indubitable, unassailable, sacred, without rendering an account *why*. Hence self-delusion, if not wicked, insidious design, is at the root of all efforts to establish morality, right, on theology. When we are in earnest about the right we need no incitement or support from above. We need no Christian rule of political right; we need only one which is rational, just, human. The right, the true, the good, has always its ground of sacredness in itself, in its quality. Where man is in earnest about ethics, they have in themselves the validity of a divine power.

—Ludwig Feuerbach.

## Obituary.

We deeply regret to announce the death of a young and promising Secularist, Annie Hypatia Margaret Harwood, at the early age of eighteen. The deceased was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. George Harwood, of Tottenham, who for upwards of thirty years have been strenuous supporters of our Movement in Northern London. The immediate cause of her death was gastric trouble, accelerated by influenza. The funeral took place at Tottenham Cemetery on Thursday, July 11, when, by special request, a Secular Burial Service was read by Miss K. B. Kough. The profoundest sympathy of all who knew them is extended to her grief-stricken parents and family.—E. M. VANCE.

## The War and God.

### II.

(Concluded from p. 382.)

IN the early days of the War many professional Christians claimed that it was bringing people back to God—and, of course, they always meant *their* particular Christian God. (The process was generally stated to be going on in some other part of the world than that in which the assertion was made.) More recently, parsons (and others) of all denominations have been forced to admit this is *not* so. And they have lamented it. I could quote you articles and books galore in which these admissions are made. Quite recently a book was published, written by an Army officer who is evidently an earnest Theist, if not a Christian. Going over his own experiences in the Army, he *laments* that, beyond a vague belief in some nebulous kind of a God (who doesn't appear to do much good), there is very little religious belief in the Army. A kind of Fatalism is the nearest approach to any widespread religious belief amongst men engaged in the War. That is quite an understandable phenomenon—quite common in similar circs.—and is not, perhaps, a bad belief for the ordinary fighting men, though a rotten kind of testimonial to the “benevolence” of the God who directs that fate. I, myself, have had fairly good opportunities of observation in the Army, in France, in the Navy, and amongst “civvies” (both in Britain and France), since the War began; and I am a keen observer. All my experience more than bears out the admissions made by these various “believers.” From the beginning till now, I have seen only one man pray before turning in. He was a young sailor in barracks. You know the story of our half-hour on the deck of a sinking boat in a mid-winter storm—with no hope whatever—until the last few moments. I heard no prayers, and certainly “Nearer, my God, to Thee” was *not* sung. “What the Captain said” when the boat received its final “damage” was not a prayer! Nor were the utterances of the engineer below. I know how few would attend Church Parade were it voluntary, and really voluntary, as it ought to be. The Chaplains, who follow a God of Peace, Poverty, and Humility (but who do so in a Sam Browne belt and with a Captain's commission) like compulsory Church parades (naturally), because thus they have bigger audiences than they have ever been able to get in recent years.

Remember, I am not saying that the great mass of men, either in or outside “the Services,” are definite Atheists from intellectual conviction (though the number of *them* is greater than *you* think). There are not so many who can say they have been Atheist, with a philosophy based on reason and knowledge, since 1891 (as I can). And that philosophy is stronger to-day than ever. Unfortunately, the sway of reason has not yet become anything like general; but the bulk of people, so far as my experience goes, realize in a dim kind of a way that this War, with all its attendant horrors, is only a complete *debacle* for Christianity, but is utterly irreconcilable with the idea of a Personal God, omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent, creator, and director of the universe, and all that therein is. This dim conviction with the mass is emotional rather than intellectual or rational. But it is a great advance. After all, it is the only position.

To postulate such a personal God as the cause of all phenomena (and such a phenomena as the War) is to make a fiendish nightmare of life, and is the worst of blasphemies. It is a far more horrible belief even

than that which Rabbie so finely satirized when he sang—

O! Thou, wha' in the Heav'ns dos't dwell,  
Wha', as it pleases best Thysel',  
Sends yin ta Heav'n, an' ten tae Hell,  
A' for Thy Glory,  
An' no for ony guid or ill  
They've dune afore Thee.

In the last analysis the great majority of decent people, no matter what religious belief they profess, are Atheists in their daily life. Apart from such religious observances that may be still maintained in greater or less degree, they conduct their lives, they base their morality, on reason and knowledge. They are, in a practical sense, Rationalists. (And Rationalism is only the positive side of Atheism). It is like poor Sir Oliver Lodge, who believes so earnestly in spooks, that he is not ashamed publicly to assert that his son, Raymond, smokes spook cigars and drinks spook pegs in the “Summerland.” Yet, when, as a physicist, he enters his laboratory or study, he carries on his work as the veriest Atheist, and quite ignores the pair spooks in experiment or calculation. Only on that basis of Atheism can a sane, quiet, practical, and rational Meliorism be built up; a philosophy that can give us some hope for men and women, and some satisfaction in life.

Tennyson was not an Atheist. He *wanted* to believe; but he had to admit that “nature, red in tooth and claw, with ravine shrieks against the Creed.” The most he could do was: “Oh! yet we *hope* that somehow Good will be the final goal of ill.” Old Omar's braver hope was—

Ah Love! Could you and I with Him conspire  
To grasp this sorry scheme of Things entire,  
Would not we shatter it to bits—and then  
Remould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!

These hopes can only be realized in any measure by the steady and growing co-operation of men and women in rational and practical betterment of the here and now. Whether there be one God, many Gods, or no God; whether we be mortal or immortal, we can (and we will) make this world far better than it is for men and women, and happier. That is Atheism, Rationalism, Humanism, Secularism, Meliorism—call it what you will.

And in striving towards that, we must destroy alike the fanatic, brutal, military, megalomaniacal religion of the Germans, and the servile, Pacifist, Resist-not-evil, Impossibilist religion that is the predominant brand preached in Britain.

France has borne herself in this War with greater courage, calm, and determination, than ever before. France, from the outset, has been *The* nation that has been resolved this ghastly struggle must be the end of militarism. “Jamais encore” is the cry in France, as in no other country (except, perhaps, now the U.S.A.). That has been done under the ægis of Atheism. It was under the same auspices, led by Emile Zola (Atheist), that Dreyfus was vindicated, the Clericals routed, the Army purified and re-organized. And it is Anatole France (Atheist) to-day who, more than any other, voices the aspirations of France—nay, of Europe.

So, looking around, even during this tragic time, I can see the increasing bout of Christianity and Theism. I can mark, with satisfaction, the advance that has been made, and the steadily growing success of Freethought since I joined in that “best of causes” in 1891. Much remains to be done to complete the task, *écrasez l'infame*, but I can see the sun of victory rising in gradual, growing, glow on the banner of Freethought.

Before I close this somewhat lengthy epistle, just one word on the personal factor in the equation. In your references thereto, you appear to mix up “success in



life" (from the orthodox point of view) with "happiness in life." But, perhaps, that *is* the orthodox view, though strangely contrasted against the life, teaching, and example of the reputed Christ of the Canonical Gospels!

My life has not been an unhappy one. I have done many things I ought not to have done, and many of the things I ought to have done have been left undone. Just as the principles and ideals of Rationalism are so much grander than those of Christianity so are my shortcomings the greater. While regretting the "lapses" 'twere foolish, as futile, to be "unhappy" on that score. The rational thing to do is to try to use them as stepping-stones to higher things. Happiness is a personal matter. It is difficult (if not impossible) to measure or compare the quantity and quality of happiness in different individuals. So far as that can be done, my life has been in quality, certainly, and in quantity, probably, a happier one than yours. I have done much, seen much, and been through a lot. But my Humanism has enabled me to preserve a certain philosophic imperturbability and calm happiness that one could never hope to have, if one *really* believed in the Christian God. What sustained the noblest of the human race as Socrates, Lucretius, Omar, Bruno, Marcus Aurelius, Ferrer, or Tyndall when his wife accidentally poisoned "her poor John," has never failed me in my tinpot way. In the few instances of acute unhappiness in my life, religion has played not a little part. In any case—

To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow  
Creeps in this petty pace, from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time.  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death.  
Out! Out! Brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow;  
A poor player who struts and frets his hour  
Upon the stage, and then is heard no more.  
It is as a tale told by an idiot—  
Full of sound and fury—signifying nothing.

Last point of all that ends this story—my "failure" to use the "chances" that I had, my lack of "success." But have I failed? A verdict of failure or success in life (or in any venture) must depend on what the objective was at the start. I don't suppose you have any idea of the utter contempt with which I regard conventional standards of success and "successful" men. In this (as in so many other things), the views I held in 1891, are sound to-day, and still hold good. Even from the conventional point of view, I cannot be convicted of failure in life when, at the outset of the War, I was fit to "do my bit," and ever since have done it both by land and sea.

But, apart from the War, the wealthiest merchant prince, or the biggest pedigreed ('tis a good word!) "nobleman" in Scotland (or elsewhere), or the greatest king that may be, or any such person, has nothing that I envy. I have much that they have not.

Or if I look at "successful" statesmen (Where?) or politicians (of *any* party) to-day, or even, parsons, what pair, pair, stuff! More than their feet are fit to "stop a hole to keep the wind away" *before* they're dead. What low ideals should I have to envy them. *Their* "success" would be rankest failure to me. Soldiers (from the private to the top), sailors (of all ranks and ratings), munition and other workers, have been "successful"; but, largely, just as conventional standards of success have been disregarded or scrapped. You may call this swank (probably will), but 'tis sober truth. At least, I have the success (or satisfaction) of saying "I told you so." For many of the things I said, and many of the ideas I advocated many years ago, have been accepted since—some since the War began. "'Tis true, 'tis pity; and pity 'tis 'tis true," that such a ghastly tragedy as this

War should be the means of confirming those philosophical and sociological ideas that I (one among a comparative few) held so many years ago.

And still, to-day (touched, perhaps, with a *healthy* cynicism), I have as much zest in life, as much *joie de vivre* (and *savoir vivre*!), as much interest in life, as ever I had, and I've had not a little.

I have lived with the real "immortals" all along. My greatest pride and satisfaction in life has been, and is, that I have fought as a soldier in the Grand Army of Freethought—have enjoyed the comradeship of the noblest of the human race. *La verite oblige* is the unequalled motto of *that* comradeship.

Worthily to bear my part in that grandest and "best of causes" (as George Meredith called it) is the greatest aspiration that I have ever had. To HAVE borne it is the greatest success that I could reach.

With best wishes to yourself and family, I remain, with imperturbability, that combination of *beau sabreur* and philosopher, your old friend,  
ATHOS ZENO.

### Playing at Sunday-School.

I HAVE always had a fondness for stories relating to Virginia. It may have been the romantic adventures of Captain John Smith and the wonderful story of the Pocohontas maiden that first aroused that interest. Or I may have inhaled it from the fragrant weed for which the State of Virginia is so justly famed. I cannot say. But Thackeray's *Esmond* and such tales as *By Order of the Company* have always specially interested me, and so, when I first came across *The Valiants of Virginia*, it was a foregone conclusion that I must sample its pages. And when I had read it I was ve-e-ry glad. It is not only an interesting and thrilling tale, but one of the chapters—the heading of which might justly be altered to "Playing at Sunday-School"—contains one of the funniest missionary stories that I have met with.

The reader may try and imagine an old Virginian garden which has been allowed to go to wreck and ruin through long years of neglect, and a group of children, under the leadership of Miss Rickey Snyder, gathered to amuse themselves according to whatever whim or fancy seized them.

"It was Sunday afternoon, and under the hemlocks Rickey had gathered her minions—a dozen children from near-by houses, with the usual sprinkling of little blacks from the kitchens." And after some little altercation between Rickey and Cozy Cabell and Greenie Simms, one of the number proposed to play something—King, King Katiko for preference. One little urchin objected to this on the ground that they were forbidden to play anything but Bible games on Sunday.

"Well," decreed Rickey, "we'll play Sunday-school then. It would take a saint to object to that. I'm superintendent, and this stump's my desk. All you children sit down under that tree."

They ranged themselves in two rows: the white children, in clean Sabbath pinafores and go-to-meeting knickerbockers, in front; and the coloured ones, in gingham and cotton print, in the rear—the habitual expression of a differing social station.

After some little further parley as to classes and lessons, the self-constituted superintendent silenced the meeting in her peremptory way.

"The lesson is over," Rickey said, "and I've just rung the bell for silence. Children, this is Missionary Sunday, and I'm glad to see so many happy faces here to-day."

Getting her eye upon an indolent little darkie in the back row, she said, sharply:

"Sit up, Greenie. People don't lie on their backs in Sunday-school."

Greenie yawned dismally, and righted herself with injured slowness. "Ah diffuses ter 'cep' yo' insult, Rickey Snyder," she said. "Ah'd ruthah lose mah 'ligion dan mah laz'ness."

"Let us all rise," continued Rickey, unmoved, "and sing 'Kingdom Coming.'" And she struck up lustily, beating time on the stump with a stick:

"From all the dark places of earth's heathen races,  
O, see how the thick shadows flee!"

And the rows of children joined in with unction, the coloured contingent coming out strong on the chorus:

"De yerf shall be full ob de wunduhful story  
As watahs dat covah de sea!"

"We will now take up the collection," said Rickey. "Remember that what you give to-day is for the poor heathen in—in Alabama."

"That's no heathen place," objected Cozy, with spirit. "My cousin lives in Alabama."

"Well, then," acquiesced Rickey, "anywhere you like. For the poor heathen who have never heard of God or Virginia. Think of them, and give cheerfully."

After severely reprimanding one of the children who had put a toad on the piece of bark used as a plate, Rickey announced:

"The collection this afternoon has amounted to a hundred dollars and seven cents. And now, children, we will skip the Catechism, and I will tell you a story."

Her auditors hunched themselves nearer, a double row of attentive black and white faces, as Rickey, with a preliminary bass cough, and in a drawling tone, whose mimicry called forth giggles of ecstasy, began to spin the following yarn:—

"There were once two little sisters who went to Sunday-school and loved their teacher ve-e-ery much. They were always good and attentive—not like that little nigger over *there*! The one with his thumb in his mouth! One was little Mary and the other was little Susy. They had a mighty rich uncle who lived in Richmond, and once he came to see them, and gave them each a dollar. And they were ve-e-ery glad. It wasn't a mean old paper dollar, all dirt and creases; nor a battered silver dollar; but it was a bright, round, gold dollar, right out of the mint. Little Mary and little Susy could hardly sleep that night for thinking of what they could buy with these gold dollars.

"Early next morning they went down-town, hand in hand to the store, and little Susy bought a bag of goober-peas, and sticks and sticks of striped candy, and a limber Jack, and a gold ring, and a wax doll with a silk dress on that could open and shut its eyes.

"Huh!" said the captious Cozy, "you can't buy a wax doll for a dollar. My littlest, littlest one cost three, and she didn't have a stitch to her back!"

"Shut up!" said Rickey, sharply. "Dolls were cheaper then." She looked at the row of little negroes, goggle-eyed at the vision of such largess.

"What do you think little Mary did with *her* gold dollar? She loved dolls and candy, too, but she had heard about the poo-oo-r heathen. There was a tear in her eye, but she took the dollar home, and next day she went to Sunday-school and dropped it in the missionary-box."

"Little children, what do you reckon became of that dollar? It bought a big satchelful of tracts for a missionary. He had been a poor man with six children and a wife with a bone-felon on her right hand—not a child old enough to wash dishes, and all of them young enough to fall in the fire—so he had to go and be a missionary.

"He was going to Alabam—to a cannibal island, and he took the tracts and sailed away in a ship that landed him on the shore. And when the heathen cannibals saw him they were ve-e-ery glad, for there hadn't been any shipwrecked sailors for a long time, and they were ve-e-ery hungry. So they tied up the missionary and gathered a lot of wood to make a fire and cook him.

"But it had rained, and rained, and rained for so long that the wood was all wet, and it wouldn't burn, and they all cried because they were so hungry. And then they happened to find the satchelful of tracts, and the tracts were ve-e-ery *dry*. They took them and stuck them under the wet wood, and the tracts burned and the wood caught fire, and they *cooked* the missionary and *ate* him.

"Now, little children, which do you think did the most good with her dollar—little Susy or little Mary?"

Whatever difference of opinion there may be as to the ethics of such a ticklish question, there is no doubt that the verdict of the heathen cannibals would be in favour of little Mary.

JOSEPH BRUCE.

### Thoughts Awheel.

..... and dear the schoolboy spot

We ne'er forget, though there we are forgot.—Byron.

It was Sunday, and early in the present summer—too early in fact; we had hoped, even planned, that the sun would be shining full in a valley far away, and it was so; though, at starting, the skies were overcast, and the north wind had a wintry sting, the sun shone warm in the sheltered vale. One could even bathe in the dappled amber stream, and afterwards recline in Pagan state upon a bank of flowers—and my lady would just be home from prayers!

They were Freethoughts and happy thoughts; the day was fine, and the wheel was free. You pick them up as you go these thoughts, or they awaken in the mind as you speed along, as scene after scene unfolds itself as the wheelman warms to his work, as freedom and action and fresh air chase the last phantom from his brain, and his whole being shouts hurrah! These are great moments. Life was made for joy after all. One feels one in ten thousand, and one is. The "Great War" seems so negligible, crude, and obscene, remote, absurd, impossible, so stupid, brutal, and ugly. Life was made for love, and joy, and happiness. And yet, just in front, at the foot of a short, sharp, sylvan declivity, are the cot, the mill, the sandstone cliffs, the trailing woods, and the solemn, slumbrous, Ayr, stealing slow along, sounding, one would think, in long drawn-out monotone, the everlasting music of its name, and there at the heart of the valley the little sylvan alluvial "holm," where, tradition says, Burns pondered and composed "Man was made to Mourn" after his meeting with the "reverend sage" on this same Barskimming Bridge. As the present writer has said in another place, this dirge-like poem is a sublime presentment of the dark half of life's medal, as true, nay, more significant than the brighter side. Our poet had known and felt both. The poem was the result of a peripatetic reverie: There was the hermit stream, the solemn waving pines, and central, in the mental and material scene, the old, old man, in whose person and condition, "Age and want, oh, ill-matched pair," stood forth revealed. The chords trembled, the harp awoke, and the poet bowed himself before this revelation:—

and broke forth

In the resistless eloquence of woe.

You can picture the scene as you pass: the lonely figure in "hodden grey"—the poet who should have been ploughing. What business had he to be bothering about social questions? He should have left these things to his betters. And yet the damned, idle peasant has become a king of men beside whom such betters are but dust and vermin. And yet he never fired a shot to kill a man, much less a million, in his life! What was Fame thinking about?

As the wheelman came through the famous village of Mauchline a passing lady suppressed the ghost of a sneer at the dusty pilgrim; and yet she was the "savage" going to her Joss House, and the wheelman the "civilized" person intent upon a wider, more exalted, worship.

But those thoughts, how they swarmed like chemist bees, finding arts nectar in the weeds of common things (Ingersoll). Minutest blooms were noted in the swarming herbage of the hedge roots, the wild strawberry and the violet blooms, small, but perfect things, insistent, redeeming the waste places, breathing life and beauty, romance, and dream, memory and forgetfulness! reminding one of the little *Freethinker* in its wilderness, perfect too in its way, and for which it is a pride and a pleasure to write.

We hurry on. The sun, as arranged, shone warm in our happy valley, where we bathed and basked on flowers, and our lady would just be home from prayers.

Returning *via* Ballochmyle, we traversed the road along which we used to creep miserably enough to school. The hive swarmed again, and, though mutely, the wheelman was mightily happy now. To sit on the dry grass—green still mixed with sere—to note the budding hedgerows and trees he used to know; to list the strident rustle of the lone brown beechen leaves astir, while the eye wandered over the landscape of old association and the mind dwelt in the charmed atmosphere of an old joy; there seemed to him in that hour no pleasure like to this.

At Sinclairston, the solemn loch is a deep, deep, beautiful blue as it reflects the skies in its quiet hollow of the grey-brown rather than green fields, and laps a copse of willows on its leeward shore. "The Island" is still there, the goal of schoolboy emulation for slide or swim, a mere bunch of willows, and its only treasure an occasional water-bird's nest. But the boyish mind can magnify and make miraculous the meanest object of existence. And the boy still left in the man makes him exult, but more, over similar common things—that it may be fulfilled, as they say in Scotland, that "there's nae fules like auld fules." Byron and Burns were both much prone to a majestic dirge-music. For instance, the former:—

No more—no more—oh! never more on me  
The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,  
Which out of all the lovely things we see  
Extracts emotions beautiful and new,  
Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee:  
Think'st thou the honey with those objects grew:  
Alas! 'twas not in them, but in thy power  
To double even the sweetness of a flower.

It was a psychological moment; and this passing glimpse, under rarest conditions, of the lonely, lovely tarn, though brief, is everlasting in its refreshment and inspiration; nor time, nor distance, nor cares, nor despairs, nor pleasures, nor any other creature or creation, can dim for a moment the impression of that tranquil lakelet, lying there so still, under the sunlit skies, in its hollow of the hills!

Small but majestic mountain ranges bound the horizon hereabouts, and on the clear skyline stand out serenely grand. There was the distant smoke of heather fires, a copse, some ruined gables in a wood on a hillside, a hundred varied objects of interest and beauty, all limned and softened in that crystalline atmosphere. Soft shadows fell among the thick-set woods of Ballochmyle, though the sun, white and dazzling, was still high, and wheeled, with ours, his chariot behind the trees. This, oh this, is a delectable denizen. But we had grown tired; sixty miles at "fifty" is no joke. We swore we would not do it again.

Repentance oft before I swore—  
But was I sober when I swore?

Home, and full of tired bones and the memory of old joys. The latter are very precious things; but, considering the fatigues and pains and risks, the occasional deep sadnesses, solitudes, and desolations of these sentimental journeys, we said: No, we will not do it again; heaven itself is not worth it. But we will!

ANDREW MILLAR.

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