

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Christianity and Cleanliness.

No one can be more averse than ourselves to the paying of mere compliments, but it would be ungracious not to acknowledge the altogether admirable tone and form of Dr. Lyttelton's Rejoinder in last week's *Freethinker*. We may from that take it for granted that neither of us are out to score mere debating points, but are both desirous of discussing broad issues that are merely illustrated by the particular points on which the discussion may turn. But it is necessary, we find, to add one more word concerning the topic of "Christianity and Dirt." Dr. Lyttelton is quite right in saying that, in our view, the neglect of cleanliness for some centuries among Christians was a direct consequence of Christian teaching; but we did not say, nor are we aware that we implied, that there was a "necessary connection between Christianity and Dirt." Had we contended for this, it would have been necessary for us to prove that this connection existed wherever Christianity did; and that is clearly not the case. Therefore, we questioned the relevancy of Dr. Lyttelton citing the conduct of the last 150 years, and suggested that the altered conduct of Christians within recent centuries might well be attributed to the influence of those forces that have brought a modification of Christian teaching in other directions. That does really bring us to a vital issue. And this issue is, if we may put it in a sentence: In a society in which Christianity is only one of many factors, what part has it played in social life and teaching?

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### Asceticism.

Dr. Lyttelton's contention that asceticism was not peculiar to Christianity may be admitted—we believe we said as much in our original article. We can also accept the statement that asceticism meant—under certain conditions—no more than voluntary hardship endured for the sake of securing efficiency. That meaning still remains embedded in the word. But, as Captain Cuttle remarked, the value of the word lies in the application thereof. The modern athlete endures voluntary hardship and abstains from certain pleasures in order to secure physical efficiency. Or we have the training of the student to secure mental efficiency. And, yet again, the rigorous self-denial of the Indian Fakir to secure what he conceives to be spiritual efficiency. Asceticism, in the sense in which Dr. Lyttelton and

myself may agree to use the word, may not be a bad thing in itself; but it is clear that whether we pronounce it good or bad must be determined by the end sought and the relevancy of the means adopted. The contention of the *Freethinker* here is that Christian asceticism was bad because Christianity both misconceived the nature of the human problem and adopted means that were certain to lead to gross evils.

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### The Flesh and the Spirit.

What, now, was the directing motive of asceticism as understood by the very earliest body of Christians? It was clearly not physical efficiency; no one has ever proclaimed the Gospel Jesus, or any other Christian leader, as visibly concerned with that. It was certainly not mental efficiency; orthodox and historic Christianity have always been sadly deficient in lending encouragement to that. Nor was it social efficiency; for the corporate social life is substantially ignored in the New Testament, although at a later period the Church was driven to pay some attention to it. The Christian was striving after "spiritual" efficiency, and that meant an efficiency which would secure salvation in another life. But it was also held that there was an irreconcilable opposition between the world and the flesh on the one side, and the claims of the "spirit" on the other. To attend to the claims of the one meant to neglect those of the other; nay, the more one was starved the greater chance of the other flourishing. And it was simply in accordance with the working out of this belief that there existed a preaching of celibacy as superior to marriage, an endorsement of fasting, and of maceration of the body as favouring the development of the "spirit." We do not claim that any one of these forms is *essential* to Christianity, or even to asceticism. Our claim is not that any one is essential, but that all are the logical consequences of principles taught by the Christian Church in the very earliest ages, and never absent from its history down to our own time. The principle of the thing was in the Christian Church, whether it expressed itself, and how it expressed itself, could only be determined by existing circumstances. If we may say so, Dr. Lyttelton seems to have given too much attention to these defining circumstances, and not enough to the tendencies and potentialities of early Christianity.

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### Christianity and Happiness.

Rather too much has, we think, been made of the relation of Christianity to dirt, owing to our having used that *apropos* of a police court incident which led to the writing of the original article. But this was, again, only an illustration; other things would have served as well to illustrate the principle above indicated. We might have taken celibacy or fasting—both practised by the Gospel Jesus; or, we might have taken the more modern example of Puritanism. In Puritanism, with its dislike to Sunday games, its hatred of the theatre, its creation and perpetuation of a day of rest from which all healthy human enjoyment was banished, there was another illustration of the same principle that led Christians to

preach the mortification of the flesh, which placed Stylites in his column, and led also to the practices, a description of which started the present discussion. Macaulay expressed the same thing in a witticism when he said that the Puritans hated bear-baiting; not because it hurt the bear, but because it pleased the spectators. And the cardinal principle running right through the Christian ages has been that mere human enjoyment is inimical to the life of the "spirit." This is not peculiar to Christianity, it is common to ascetic religious teachers all over the world. And that seems to us to make our case the more conclusive. For when we do find this conviction and these practices outside Christianity, is there any justifiable reason why we should interpret them differently when we find them within the Christian Church?

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#### A Necessary Distinction.

Let us assure Dr. Lyttelton that we have no inclination, nor are we in the habit of condemning Christianity, "because an undefined number of its votaries have played the fool." The case for Freethought is too strong to need that kind of argument, although the number who do play the fool is certainly a reflection on the restraining influence of Christianity. But we hold Christianity responsible for the conduct of Christians precisely so far as it can be shown that there was a reasonable working out of the principles involved in Christian teaching. And that rule we apply in both directions. If it relieves Christianity of responsibility for all the harm done by its votaries, it divests it of praise for all the good they may have accomplished. If some of the folly and harm done by them may not be due to Christianity at all, it is at least equally probable that the good may be the product of non-Christian forces. This is a point that one can seldom get Christian controversialists to face, and it is a good omen that Dr. Lyttelton shows no inclination to evade this issue but every desire to come to close quarters with it. In this connection Dr. Lyttelton's illustration of a ship impeded by incrustations round the keel is a good one—from his point of view—but we should differ as to the nature of the incrustations. He believes the ship to be good, and its bad sailing due to the incrustations; we believe the vessel to be a bad one, and that these incrustations have somehow managed to plug the holes and so prevent its foundering. In other words, we believe the Christian ship to be socially unseaworthy, and if it is kept afloat it is only because of a number of additions that form no part of its original and essential structure. A discussion of that issue will, we think, cover the question with which Dr. Lyttelton concludes his article—"Why Christianity has been so often misunderstood and corrupted, and has done so little good."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### "Our Holy Mother Church."

IN the New Testament the Christian Church is invariably represented as an institution founded by Jesus himself, in which he promised to dwell to the end of time, and to which he undertook to send the Holy Ghost immediately after his death. There is here a curious inconsistency, not yet noticed by the divines. In St. John's Gospel, prior to the crucifixion, Jesus repeatedly refers to his approaching departure, saying: "It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you." In St. Matthew's Gospel, however, after his alleged resurrection, he is made to say: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Was the dispensation of the Holy Ghost to endure only during the brief interval between the

crucifixion and the resurrection, or are we to understand that we are living under a dual dispensation? At any rate, there is a grave discrepancy on this point between the Fourth Gospel and the First. In the Pauline Epistles the Church is described as "the body of Christ," which he loved, and for which he gave himself, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." There are many other statements of the same import, and from all of them the only rational inference is that the Church is a supernatural organization, indwelt by one, if not by two, supernatural beings. Well, thus founded, guided, and governed, the Church ought to be, not only of the most perfect moral character, but also all-powerful, absolutely irresistible, with the result that even "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It is as such that its ministers usually speak of it, especially in the Catholic Church and in the Catholic section of the Anglican Communion. They characterize it as our Holy Mother Church, to which we owe docile submission and glad obedience. Now, as a matter of fact, there never has been a period in its history when the Church was either holy, or acted the part of a tender-hearted mother. At the commencement of the eleventh century, when Leo IX. was pope, the morals of the clergy were at their lowest ebb. This was true of the monks and the secular clergy throughout Christendom. Their vices were of the most depraved and disgusting order. There were women whose calling it was to minister to the sexual lusts of the men of God. Milman says:—

But these were not the worst of the vices of the clergy. The stern ascetic, Peter Damiani, who now comes forward the absolute unswerving model of monkhood, presented a book to the Pope, the title of which expressed in the coarsest form the unnatural vices widely prevalent among the monks as well as the secular clergy, a book which would shock a more sensitive age, but was received by the Pope as an honest and bold exposition of the morals of the times (*History of Latin Christianity*, vol. iii., p. 371).

Let us now concentrate our attention upon the state of the Church at the close of the fourteenth century. Pope Gregory XI. had just died. His pontificate had been replete with troubles and disasters. By no means a bad man by nature, his chief fault was weakness, which betrayed him into many pitfalls. Who succeeded him in Peter's chair? The conclave for the election was about to open in the palace close to St. Peter's. The hall was crowded to suffocation. The sixteen cardinals who formed the Conclave would not be allowed, it was evident, to permit the Holy Ghost to have any say in the election. The men who thronged the room looked fierce and dangerous, and were armed to the teeth, being determined to overawe the electors. "A Roman Pope! we will have a Roman Pope," they kept shouting. Both within the hall and outside the cry was to be heard, "A Roman Pope! if not a Roman, an Italian." The cardinals were threatened with assassination if they disregarded the demand of the Roman people. What were they to do? They made a show of heroic loyalty to the spiritual world, saying: "We are in your power; you may kill us, but we must act according to God's ordinance. To-morrow we celebrate the Mass for the descent of the Holy Ghost; as the Holy Ghost directs, so shall we do." The French wanted a French Pope, and were defiant; but the Roman populace were more defiant still and exclaimed:—

If ye persist to do despite to Christ, we will hew these Cardinals and Frenchmen in pieces.

Eventually, the hall being cleared of all those unruly partizans, the Cardinals, instead of letting the Holy

Ghost have his way, began to wrangle and intrigue among themselves. The following is Dean Milman's description of the scene:—

All the sleepless night the Cardinals might hear the din at the gate, the yells of the people, the tolling of the Bells. There was constant passing and repassing from each other's chambers, intrigues, altercations, manœuvres, proposals advanced and rejected. Many names were put up (*History of Latin Christianity*, vol. viii., p. 37).

When they came to the nomination, they bickered and haggled over several names until, at last, by acclamation, Bartholomew Prignani, Archbishop of Bari, was elected. By now the rabble was furious, knocked madly at the gates, and vowed they would kill all the Cardinals unless a Roman Pontiff was at once elected. To save their lives, these men of God compelled the old Cardinal of St. Peter, to put on what seemed to be the papal stole and mitre, and present himself at the window; and the mob, beside itself with joy, thundered out: "We have a Roman Pope, the Cardinal of St. Peter's. Long live Rome! long live St. Peter!" It was some time before it leaked out that Bartholomew Prignani was the elected Pope. He assumed the name of Urban VI. He was of low origin, uncouth, coarse; and on his elevation, divested himself of his former humility, and became insulting in his manners and tyrannical in his rulings. In the end, the Cardinals who had elected him declared that it was a forced election, that they had acclaimed him Pope simply to save their lives, with the result that Robert of Geneva was elected Pope in the presence of all the Cardinals, with one exception, who had previously chosen Urban. This was the beginning of the notorious schism which cursed Western Christendom for thirty-eight years. For that length of time there were two rival Popes, who anathematized each other in the name of the Lord.

The effect of the schism was to discredit Christianity itself in the eyes of thoughtful people. Whilst the strife of Pope and Antipope went on with inconceivable violence, the New Learning was advancing with irresistible energy, and men everywhere were beginning to think for themselves, and the arguments and counter-arguments of the rival Popes fell on deaf ears. As Milman puts it:—

Christendom heard these arguments and recriminations with mortifying indifference. That which some centuries ago would have arrayed kingdom against kingdom, and divided each kingdom within itself, the sovereigns against the hierarchy, or the hierarchy in civil feud, now hardly awoke curiosity. No omen so sure of the decline of the sacerdotal power; never again had it vital energy enough for a schism (*Ibid.*, vol. viii., p. 411).

How utterly false, how wholly absurd, the Pauline conception of the Church has proved itself to be. How ludicrous, how entirely incredible, is the claim that it is the dwelling-place of the Prince of Peace, or the temple of the Holy Ghost. Even to-day the factions within it are a disgrace to humanity. Not only do the divines of one country disparage the Christianity of other countries, as those of Germany and Great Britain are doing just now, but we have the more amazing spectacle of religious leaders in our own land contradicting one another on almost every question, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury and Dr. Horton, Dr. F. B. Meyer and Fathers Vaughan and Adderley, on the rightness or wrongness of work and play on Sunday.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Philosophy of Secularism.

By G. W. FOOTE.

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## The Whitman Centenary.

Have the elder races halted?

Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the seas?

We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,  
Pioneers! O, Pioneers! —Walt Whitman.

FIFTY years ago an obscure American writer was dismissed from a Government position because he had written a book of verse, entitled *Leaves of Grass*. What would Walt Whitman have said could he have foreseen that his little book would be treasured by posterity, and that, amid the distractions of a World-War, preparations would be made for the celebration of the centenary of his birth. For next year Whitman will be celebrated as the most notable among the men who laboured to lay the foundations of a national literature for America, and as the poet of Democracy.

Emerson's tribute to the value of *Leaves of Grass* is an historic utterance. "I find it," said the great Bostonian, "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I greet you at the beginning of a great career." Three generations later all the auspices seem in favour of Whitman's permanence in literature. It is the old, old story of the fate of pioneers. First, the neglect of his own countrymen, tempered by abuse, then the recognition by a few of the keener minds and brighter intelligences, and then the slow emergence into appreciation as the singer of Democracy. For not only were Whitman's ideas unconventional, but his work is unlike anything else in poetry. It was not the freak of a writer trying to be eccentric at all costs, but a new and extended criticism of life. If Whitman had merely re-arranged the old poetic materials, such a departure would in no sense be remarkable. He set himself the Herculean task of dealing with the nineteenth-century world without any regard to convention. His cultured contemporaries were content to carve cherry-stones, but this self-educated man elected to hew granite.

Possessed of a remarkable personality, Whitman expressed himself freely in *Leaves of Grass*, and he insists on the supreme value of individuality. Shakespeare had asked: "Which can say more, than this rich praise, that you alone are you." Shakespeare was addressing a beloved friend, but Whitman says the same thing to the whole world. Of mankind the great American poet has nothing to say. In his universe there were only individuals. The man who held such ideas could not help being audacious, for this superb egoism is the centre from which Whitman's morality radiates. Morality to Whitman is simply the normal activity of a healthy nature, not the product of tradition and conventionality:—

I give nothing as duties  
What others give as duties I give as living impulses,  
Shall I give the heart's action as a duty?

It is this idea, that whatever tastes sweet to the most perfect person is finally right, that underlies the most-abused poems of *Leaves of Grass*. It is the antipodes of the Christian ideal, and is, in some measure, a return to Nature. Whitman speaks of man's life in terms of Nature's life, and mingles them together. All the functions of human life are dear to him, because they bear about them a savour of the things that are sweet to him in the world:—

Of the smell of apples, of lemons, of the pairing of birds,  
Of the wet of woods, of the lapping of waves.

From this exalted vantage-ground Whitman always wrote. His was a manly attempt to raise noble functions, for twenty centuries tainted with obscenity, to their true dignity and natural relation to the universe.

Emerson's praise was not overcharged when he commended Whitman's courage and his free and brave thought. The poet was no scientist, yet it is impossible to question that he had divined scientific truths of the utmost importance. Take his attitude towards sex and the body. For the lover there is nothing in the beloved impure and unclean. This conception of purity is but a poetic rendering of the purity and beauty of organic life. It is a lesson most sorely needed in our overstrained civilization. "Dismiss whatever insults your own soul" is Whitman's insistent cry.

Whitman was a true singer of democracy. He had the keenest sympathy with life, and all activity interested him. This world-wide love is the key to those poems of his in which he seems to catalogue human occupations, merely naming the singing of the stevedores, the raftmen sounding their bugles, the Arab turning to the East. He gave other men credit for a sympathy as tireless as his own. This intense sympathy, which was his natural gift, was reinforced with emotion, sometimes very startling, as in his significant words, addressed to a prostitute, "Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you." In all the poems on slavery and war he lost himself in the great moment, and the claims of humanity are eternal in his songs. There is no false rhetoric or brazen bravado in his beautiful lines, "Dirge for Two Veterans":—

The moon gives you light,  
And the bugles and the drums give you music;  
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,  
My heart gives you love.

"You who celebrate by-gones," Whitman says defiantly to the historians, "I project the history of the future." And it will be long ere the Great Republic of the West will be able to realize his gorgeous dreams of an emancipated race.

For thousands of years countless numbers of poets have sung and wept and echoed the old, hopeless, immortal song of death as the last enemy; but Whitman's is a far other strain. The contemplation of death as a deliverer, dis severed from any thoughts of future rewards or punishments, exalts him to ecstasy. He enforces the idea of death as of a dark, warm tide, silently rising and sweeping away the agonies of sentient existence. No poet or philosopher peers with such longing and audacity into "the superb vistas of death." The awful dreams that may come in that sleep of death have no terror for him. The dead are made one with Nature. Death is "lovely and soothing," and the body, weary of life, turns like a tired child nestling close to the bosom of its mother:—

Dark mother, always gliding near with soft feet;  
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?  
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all.

Truly, this "tan-faced Poet of the West" was a pioneer, and he has left the priests and their superstitions far behind. Beyond the fabled hells, the tiresome purgatories, and the tawdry paradises, the resplendent vision of the great poet floods the sky and pours its serene splendour over the world.

MIMNERMUS.

I have all my life been on my guard against the information by the sense of hearing; it being one of my earliest observations, the universal inclination of human kind is to be led by the ears; and I am sometimes apt to imagine, that they are given to men, as they are to pitchers, purposely that they may be carried about by them. This consideration should abate my wonder to see the most astonishing legends embraced as the most sacred truths, by those who have always heard them asserted, and never contradicted; they even place a merit in complying in direct opposition to the evidence of all their other senses.—*Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.*

## A Search for the Soul.

VIII.

(Continued from p. 425.)

It is time now that we looked at the materialistic hypothesis of the relation of body to mind. That is, that the mind is only a function of the brain-cells. In his Address on "Scientific Materialism," delivered before a section of the British Association in 1868, Professor Tyndall, speaking of the correlation of the action of the brain and thought, said:—

The relation of physics to consciousness being thus invariable, it follows that, given the state of the brain, the corresponding thought or feeling might be inferred; or, given the thought or feeling, the corresponding state of the brain might be inferred.

From this statement it would seem perfectly clear that thought and feeling arise as the result of the activities of the brain-cells; but in the next sentence our very conscientious professor modifies the meaning to be attached to "inferred." He says: "But how inferred? It would be at bottom not a case of logical inference at all, but of empirical association." That is to say, this very obvious conclusion rests only upon observation and experiment, and these methods are apparently deemed to be insufficient. In explanation, our professor says:—

The passage from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness is inconceivable as a result of mechanics. Granted that a definite thought and a definite molecular action in the brain occur simultaneously, we do not possess the intellectual organ, nor apparently any rudiment of the organ, which would enable us to pass, by a process of reasoning, from the one to the other. They appear together, but we do not know why. Were our mind and senses so expanded, strengthened, and illuminated, as to enable us to see and feel the very molecules of the brain; were we capable of following all their motions, all their groupings, all their electric discharges, if such there be; and were we intimately acquainted with the corresponding states of thought and feeling; we should be as far as ever from the solution of the problem "How are these physical processes connected with the facts of consciousness?" The chasm between the two classes of phenomena would still remain intellectually impassable. Let the consciousness of Love, for example, be associated with a right-handed spiral motion of the molecules of the brain, and the consciousness of Hate with a left handed spiral motion. We should then know, when we love, that the motion is in one direction, and when we hate, that the motion is in another; but the "why?" would remain as unanswerable as before.

After reading these astonishing statements, it may perhaps appear that they voice unreasonable objections which tend to impede the progress of rational thinkers. But this, I think, is mainly due to the presentation of the problem in terms of dualism, which apparently assume or imply that the mind and the brain are related as objects in space. Our professor speaks of "the passage" from "the one to the other"; that there is a "chasm between the two classes of phenomena," and that the "physical processes" are "connected" with the "facts of consciousness." Two things appear to be spoken of as existing apart, yet also as "connected," though we know that there is really only one—which is looked at from two different points of view.

Assuming that thought is generated by the molecular action of the brain, in conjunction with the energy associated with that action, Professor Tyndall says that we do not possess an organ capable of *understanding* how such an action can produce the effect we experience; and then he speaks of passing by reasoning from one mode to the other. This is something like asking, How

is gravitation "connected" with the earth? or, How are Love and Hate connected with the brain? Are we in reply to say that we do not possess the intellectual organ which would enable us to pass, by a process of reasoning, from "gravitation" to the "earth," or from "Love and Hate" to the "brain"? Would it not be more rational to ask, in each case, Has the earth power to attract external bodies towards it? Can the brain experience such sensations as Love and Hate? Setting aside the "why," the answer to each question is in the affirmative. Hence, the objection that we do not know why certain activities of the brain cells are "connected" with certain states of consciousness is futile. We do not know *why* oxygen unites with hydrogen to form water, or why the first-named gas unites with nitrogen to form the atmosphere; yet we know perfectly well that these are undoubted facts. What we want to know, in the first instance, is not *why* certain things are so, but simply is it a fact that they *are* so.

There are two bushes in my garden, one of which bears roses and the other black-berries; but the bush on which the roses bloom never bears black-berries, and that with the black-berries never bears roses. If I were to ask a gardener why this is so, he would tell me (after carefully looking at the leaves of each) that the reason is, because one is a rose bush and the other a black-berry bush: that is to say, he accepts the mysterious influence of heredity to be an undoubted fact, though he has not the smallest idea of the reason why. We thus get along very well without knowing the why or the wherefore.

In his address at Browning Hall, in 1914, Professor Bottomley said: "Science deals with the 'how,' and not the 'why' of things.....It does not tell us *why* the earth describes a certain course round the sun. The 'Why' is not the business of science." Just so; but the theory that the mind was a function of the brain was so generally denied in Tyndall's day that that Professor, though he firmly believed it to be true, could not bring himself to assert positively that such was the case until he was able also to give the why. The problem he set himself to solve was: "How are these physical processes *connected* with the facts of consciousness? The solution is that the "physical processes" referred to *do* actually give rise to consciousness, and that these processes are *felt* by us, not as molecular movements, but as consciousness and thought. In the few cases known, in which the brain has been closely observed while thought was taking place, nothing has been perceived apart from the molecular action of the cerebral organ itself. This action, then, or rather the energy associated with it acting upon the molecules, evidently *was* the thought; we know of nothing else.

Christians and Spiritists are, of course, at liberty to imagine an invisible, intangible nonentity, which they call the mind, soul, or spirit, and to fill it, like a bag, with all kinds of attributes which have no existence apart from matter, and even to declare these activities or qualities to collectively constitute an entity that will survive the destruction of the brain which temporarily created them. This, as a simple matter of fact, they have done in the past and still do, and they will, no doubt, continue to do so until all scientists worthy of the name unite and boldly tell the unthinking and credulous public the simple truth.

The molecular action of the brain when generating thought can, I think, be better understood if we look at the modern gramophone. In the latter we see a cylinder or disc in motion and a stationary needle which lightly touches the record. As a result we can hear a speech or a song by a well-known speaker or singer, loud and clear, exactly as delivered, even to

the tones and inflections of the voice. And this is all produced by the needle passing smoothly over a multitude of microscopic inequalities on the surface of the record. The trumpet is of use only to magnify the sound, and the machine to keep the record in motion. We have thus only a needle gently touching matter in motion; or, what would amount to the same thing, the matter might be stationary, like the strings of an æolian harp, and some kind of energy might play upon it, as do the rising and falling currents of air upon the cords of the lyre. In the brain also, we have a multitude of microscopic molecules, which, in a certain sense, may be said to be in motion, and cerebral energy passing over them or working through them. In any case, the creation of thought is not so inconceivable as Professor Tyndall supposed. The gramophone certainly shows that there can be two aspects of the same thing.

(To be continued.) ABRACADABRA.

## Acid Drops.

The *Church Times*, while welcoming the new Education Act, "cannot accept as final a Bill of which the most that can be said is that it makes the religious situation no worse than it was already." The various denominations, we are told, "are united in their anxiety to stem the drift towards Secularism," and they are clear "that another Bill embodying a solution should quickly follow.....Given an agreed scheme capable of incorporation, Mr. Fisher will be ready enough to introduce it." This, it will be noticed, follows exactly the plot we said some months ago was in operation. First, an Education Bill leaving religion alone; then a series of semi-private conferences to draw up an "agreed" plan of religious instruction; finally, a short Bill brought before the House of Commons as embodying that in which all parties are agreed, to be passed by a House unequalled in English history for its docility and obedience to Government orders.

Once again we urge upon all interested in education to be active and alert. At the moment when Christianity is losing its hold on the adult life of the nation, we have this carefully engineered plan for entrenching it still more solidly in the schools. There is only one fly in the ointment, as it appears to the *Church Times*. The teachers are averse to giving the clergy control over the schools. They know full well what that means. But, says the *C. T.*, "He needs to be sharply reminded that the teacher exists for the children and the schools, not the children and the schools for the teacher." To that we agree; and we are as firmly convinced that the schools and the children and the teachers do not exist for the Churches; and that is the end aimed at by the religious parties in the State.

The growth of the British Empire is sapping the insularity of Englishmen, and the dullest of orthodox folk must recognize the importance of other religions than the Christian. A sign of the times is the proposal to erect a mosque and a temple in France as memorials to the Indian soldiers who have fallen during the War. A good memorial would be one inscribed over the graves of the dead, "To the God who took no heed."

Mr. Silas K. Hocking, who was formerly a minister, says "the masses of the people do not look to the Christian Church for either light or leading. It has stood too often on the wrong side, or been silent when it should have spoken." What will Brother Hocking's former colleagues say to this?

A daily paper quotes a schoolboy's definition of "Piscatorial" as "The Established Church." Some grown-up folk regard the Church of England as a "fishy" institution.

The secularization of the Young Women's Christian Association has upset some of the women who worked for that organization before the War. In the old days the members

were drawn almost exclusively from domestic servants and shopgirls: but that is all altered now, and the new members are carrying all before them. It looks as if, instead of the Christians converting the world, the world will convert the Christians.

Devotional services will soon be undistinguishable from Sunday League concerts, flavoured with a little piety. At the War Commemoration Services, held under the auspices of the Young Men's Christian Association, the attractions included the London Opera House Orchestras, the Kingsway Quartette Party, and a lady soloist. A millionaire and a Colonial Prime Minister acted as chairmen. All this array of talent was paraded to remind people that there was a War on, and, incidentally, to advertise the Y.M.C.A.

Christians will find themselves once more in the Middle Ages if they permit themselves to be led by the dear clergy. War shrines are erected everywhere, prayers are offered for fair or wet weather, and the Bishop of London blesses flowers in Hyde Park and music is provided by a Salvation Army band.

When Charles Manser, of Wood Green, found his wife one night with a Walter Hills, Mrs. Manser said she loved Hills "with a Christian love." Evidently that kind of love was open to suspicion, for Mr. Manser instituted proceedings, and the judge granted a divorce.

We are discovered! But a long way off—Wisconsin, U.S.A., to be exact. Someone has been sending the Rev. T. W. Gales copies of the *Freethinker*, and in the *Appleton Crescent* that gentleman decides that we ought to go to a farm to spend a vacation. Really we should not mind, if we had the chance; and, curiously enough, our own doctor gave us the same advice quite recently. He, however, thought that rest was necessary, and would make us more fit for work. Mr. Gales thinks it might stop our writing altogether. But even about that he is doubtful, because we might, owing to our vitiated taste, prefer to grovel "where all the refuse of the stable was cast." All of which means that the *Freethinker* is not to the taste of Mr. Gales. And after reading his article, we are glad of it.

Mr. James Fenwick Beveridge, retired wine and spirit merchant, Burleigh, Beveridge Park, Dunfermline, has left £44,230. Of this, Mr. Beveridge has left £250 to Victoria Road U.F. Church, Kirkcaldy, for investment for congregational purposes. It will be interesting to know whether the church will accept this bequest, especially when one considers the source from which this money has been obtained.

According to the *Evening News* a soldier stopped a service at the Lee United Methodist Church, S.E., because he thought forgiveness for Germans was being urged. He threatened to bring enough soldiers to wreck the place. This is, indeed, a novel departure. All the threats, hitherto, have come from the pulpits, not the pews.

The clergy in America are as careful of their skins as their brethren in Britain. The *Truthseeker* (New York) points out that the clergy have demanded and accepted exemption from military duty for themselves and for students in their colleges. While they have not proffered to the Government the financial support that could be given by submitting Church property to taxation, they have raised enormous sums from the public for sectarian effort. In short, they have put the Cross above their Country's flag. It will be noticed that the leopard does not change his spots.

The Poor Clergy Relief Corporation is appealing for funds "to enable the poor clergy to obtain a few weeks' rest and change." As ministers are exempted from Military Service, they are already relieved from much of the stress and strain to which their fellow-citizens are subjected. Yet they wish to have prolonged holidays at other peoples' expense. It is appropriate that the President of this Society should be the

bachelor Bishop of London, who "takes up his cross and follows his Saviour" on a salary sufficient to keep fifty families in comfort.

The Pope is sending parcels containing food and chocolate to Italian prisoners of war in Germany. If there is a spark of truth in Christianity "God's viceregent on earth" should be able to do more than this for suffering humanity.

A speaker at the Wesleyan Conference referred to President Wilson as a "saint of God." It is always safer to reserve such compliments until a man has finished his career.

The Rev. F. B. Meyer has been writing to the press denouncing recreation for soldiers on Sundays, which will mean, he adds "a very serious and permanent change in our national life." "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" Does Mr. Meyer think the War is to last for ever?

Speaking in the House of Lords, the Archbishop of Canterbury declared that the Church had always been solicitous for the education of the poor. Indeed! In 1818 it was found that more than half of the children were growing up without education. A few years later it was noticed that of all the persons who came to be married, one-third of the men and one half of the men could not sign the register.

The Vicar of St. Mary Magdalene, Wandsworth, is another gentleman who thinks God has a mighty purpose to fulfil in the War. Writing in the *Church Monthly*, he says that before the War "God was being forgotten; God was being ignored; God was being openly defied." So, we presume, God arranged this little rumpus to call our attention to his existence. Quite a pretty little plan. On the same lines, if a man is ignored by his neighbour, it would be justifiable to drop a bomb on his roof. And the numbers who have been killed? How are they to amend their ways? It looks as though God kills the soldier in order to teach the man at home to correct his ways.

Providence was too busy watching the fall of the sparrows to notice a fire at the Methodist Chapel, Bellenden Road, Peckham.

The new President of the Wesleyan Conference, the Rev. Samuel Chadwick, urges "an old-fashioned revival" in order to stir up the faithful. It cannot be done. All the clergy of Europe cannot keep hell alight.

"Jesus Christ," says the Rev. R. W. Seaver, of St. John's, Malone, Belfast, "was the Prince of Freethinkers." Now, that used to be the title pious people gave to the Devil. If things go on at this rate, we may find heaven and hell amalgamating, and the whole concern turned into a joint stock company. The War, adds Mr. Seaver, has made men think. That is true, and the course of their thinking is not very favourable to the Churches. Mr. Seaver says the War has greatly upset the religious belief of those who never thought for themselves. Again, we agree and add, that a large number of those who did think for themselves had done with Christianity before the War commenced.

The British and Foreign Bible Society and many Church of England institutions benefit to the extent of nearly £150,000 by the will of the late Lady Pearce, who left £335,409. Pearce and plenty!

At Christie's Sale Rooms a single-row pearl necklace was sold for £47,500. For the jewels sold on the same day over £90,000 was paid. This happens in a country which professes to worship a carpenter-god.

The Rev. J. McNeill, who has returned from Palestine, tells a story of a soldier who said to him: "Is this the Promised Land? I don't know who they promised it to, but I don't want it."

### To Correspondents.

A. G. DALE.—We have sent on your letter to Mr. Farmer. Thanks for congratulations on the way the *Freethinker* has been kept going. It has not caused us sleepless nights—sleeplessness not being one of our complaints, but it has caused us many anxious days. The appreciation of our friend is stimulating.

We have to acknowledge the sum of 4s. 6d. from Mr. R. Wilson, 10s. from Dr. R. T. Nichols, and 3s. 6d. from Mr. S. Pulman, received towards cost of literature sent to soldiers. We are constantly sending these parcels, and are always ready for the addresses of those to whom our literature is likely to prove useful.

J. A. REID.—We have no knowledge on the subject ourselves, but it is not difficult to get a thing boomed if there is money behind it.

S. ROBINSON.—Colonel Ingersoll wrote on and about Talmage several times. These writings are contained in the Dresden edition of Ingersoll's work, but have not been reprinted otherwise.

WRITING from a hospital ward, R. B. wonders what on earth the people who organized the Day of Prayer were praying for, and what they expected. He thinks that many on the "Day of Remembrance" will have remembered that this War has occurred in a world where Christianity is one of the dominating influences, and that kind reflection will not be very helpful to the Churches.

C. MARTIN.—The man who told you Mr. Cohen received ten guineas each time he lectures has a fine imagination. Mr. Cohen would not have any objection to its being true, but, as a matter of fact, he never stipulates for any lecturing fee whatever, and often enough none is forthcoming. The great thing is to get the work done. We should not refer to this subject here, but it is as well to kill these stories in public.

R. L.—Glad you found the form of letter we sent you so useful. Always bear in mind that all editors like brevity and point in letters that are sent for publication. Will write you on the other matter so soon as we can find time.

L. J. ROE.—The *Darwin's Life and Letters* is published by John Murray. The work can be ordered through any bookseller.

T. RAWLINSON.—Considering that Mr. Cohen has been writing regularly in the *Freethinker* for over twenty years, it is rather staggering to be asked whether we once made a certain statement therein. If you give us some idea of when the alleged article appeared. We will look the matter up.

H. E. (Exeter).—Certainly; as the documents are of importance, the safest plan will be to register the packet. The matter will be treated with the strictest confidence, and the papers returned so soon as read.

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*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.*

There is neither virtue, utility, nor courage, in attacking prostrate opinions; nor generosity in disturbing the tranquil contented ignorance, which reposes in silence upon exploded dogmas. It is living, thriving, mischievous error which calls for refutation; it is corrupt, profitable, and intriguing misrepresentation which should be fearlessly attacked.

—Sir T. C. Morgan.

### Sugar Plums.

Letters reach us every week concerning the position of the *Freethinker* in the Army, and although we have published the information several times, the last reply to these communications is to again state:—

- (1) Soldiers have the same right as civilians to affirm where an oath is required. This right is conferred on them by the Oaths Amendment Act of 1888.
- (2) By a War Office Order, No. 179 of January, 1916, men on joining the Army must have their answers concerning religion taken as given without question. They must be entered as Atheist, Agnostic, or any other title by which they describe themselves.
- (3) Where a wrong description is entered, owing to misapprehension, application should be made to the recording officer, and failing redress to his superior. But we do not know how far this would apply to a wrong description given by the recruit himself. A deal would depend here upon the good will and courtesy of the officer.

We take this opportunity of thanking those who have forwarded parcels of used magazines, newspapers, etc., and assure them we deeply appreciate the help thus given. It is very important that as much waste paper as possible should be sent to us. We will forward labels or sacks on application, and full prices will be paid.

Mr. G. Rule, of 96 Ingelow Road, Battersea, has kindly undertaken to act as collector on our behalf for South London. If friends and sympathisers in the district who have waste-paper for disposal will communicate with Mr. Rule he will see to its collection and delivery at this office.

Mr. Horace Dawson writes to a Wood Green paper pointing out that the editor had omitted to note in his account of Lord Rhondda that the late Food Controller had little or no belief in Christianity. Unable to deny the truth of the statement, the editor retorts that "private religious belief" had nothing to do with improvement of the food supply. Now, had Lord Rhondda followed the example of Lloyd George, and preached occasionally in chapels, we should have been told that he owed his success to his profound faith in Christianity, etc. Heads I win, tails you lose.

The Manchester Branch takes another of its "Rambles" to-day (August 18). The Marple district has been selected, and the members and friends will meet at the Picadilly Corner for Reddish Car at 10.30. It will be advisable for each member of the party to carry his or her own provisions.

We are asked to announce that the *Freethinker* and all Pioneer Press publications are displayed for sale at The Reform Bookshop, 103 Kirkgate, Bradford. The manager is Mr. E. H. Driffill. Restricted space has prevented our publishing a full list of newsagents who supply this paper, but we shall return to the practice as early as is possible.

Among the recent resolutions in favour of Secular Education sent to Mr. Fisher is one from the Newcastle Branch, N.S.S., and another from the recent meeting of South Wales Freethinkers. Both have been formally acknowledged with the intimation that they would receive attention. Many other resolutions have been sent to the Minister of Education, although we have not been informed concerning all of them.

In the long run, genius and wit side with the right cause. And the man fighting against wrong to-day is assisted, in a greater degree than perhaps he is himself aware, by the sarcasm of this writer, the metaphor of that, the song of the other, although the writers themselves professed indifference, or were even counted as belonging to the enemy.

—Alexander Smith.

## A Strange Vision.

PERIODICALLY I pay a visit to the West End of London when bent on recreation. I like to watch the people in these stirring times as they go about in the performance of their daily work or pleasure, and, especially, to take notice of the vast number of men in khaki of various ranks and nationalities, representatives of our Allies from over the seas. These things interest me amazingly, and supply me with constant food for thought. Sometimes in these short excursions I go for a journey on the Tube, and come out of a station on the revolving staircase: To me it is a perfectly delightful experience, and, as such, I enjoy it, just as I used to enjoy a ride on the switch-back railway years ago at the Crystal Palace. A few evenings ago I had a journey on the Tube, and came out at Oxford Circus on the revolving staircase. A few nights later I had an attack of the new complaint—"the Spanish 'Flu"—and when I retired to bed I was very restless and feverish. My rest was disturbed by dreams—not always unpleasant—but in most of them I found myself on the revolving staircase, sometimes running up the stairs, sometimes standing still, and being carried to the top by the perpetual movement of the stairs.

And in one of these dreams I saw myself stepping off the stairs with the wrong foot. I don't know how I came to do it, but I did, and falling on the back of my head at the landing-stage. I saw numerous stars, and for a very few moments I seemed to lose consciousness, but after a while I beheld a vision. And in this vision I saw the strange figure of a man with a long-flowing beard. He was clothed in a white raiment, and wore a shining helmet upon his head. I have said that he had the figure of a man, and yet he was not a man, for he said, in answer to my questions, that he was "the ghost of an old Pagan god," and was doomed to pass his time upon the everlasting moving staircase that took him higher and higher into the heavens; but, apparently, supplied him with no landing-place upon which to plant his unsubstantial and shadowy feet. His figure was most majestic, and he carried a wand in his hand; and as I watched him I could not help thinking that he looked somewhat like my old friend, the late Tom Mead, the famous actor of the old Lyceum Theatre, in the good old days of Sir Henry Irving, in the part of the "Ghost of Hamlet's Father"; but he did not possess such a fine, deep, sonorous voice as the old tragedian. Sometimes, indeed, his voice was rather weak, and whistled and piped like that of one of the characters in *The Seven Ages of Man*, in *As You Like It*. There was a sadness in the expression of his face, "a pale cast of thought," as though he was conscious that there was something wrong in the affairs of the world that he would fain put right if he had his way. When I first began to interrogate him he was mute; he looked upon me with a piteous eye, but answered not a word. At length, however, he gave heed to my questions and answered most cheerfully. At first he appeared to be speaking in blank-verse, but after a while he dropped into ordinary prose and became much more at ease. When I wanted to take down what he said I could neither find my notebook nor my pencil, though I searched for them most diligently, and, therefore, I cannot pretend to furnish a full report of the conversation; but, so far as I remember, I will give the substance of his narration. He told me that he was a very old god, and that he had quite forgotten his name—a failing to which old persons are very subject, and from which old gods are, apparently, not exempt; but he remembered quite distinctly that he played a most important *role* among the gods of his day. And he wished it to be understood that though all the

gods had their own separate department to attend, none of them tried to usurp the position of the other, and except that, at times, they had some little differences among themselves, there was a general agreement among them as a rule.

All of them had large powers; some could perform stupendous miracles, such as commanding the sun or moon to stand still, and they would obey. Others could only perform smaller wonders, such as healing the sick, making the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. But most of them lost their powers so soon as they got out of the environment most suited for their existence. And after all, the priests and parsons were their greatest enemies. They declared that the gods had unlimited powers—that they were all-powerful as well as all-good. Well, as a matter of fact, they were neither; and when the people began to discover this fact, their belief in them began to weaken, and gradually to die out altogether. That was the way, in fact, that his godhead lost its power, and that he died the death of all the other Pagan gods. Since he had been merely the ghost of a god, he had wandered about over the earth, and had witnessed most of the sights in the world's happenings that were worth seeing; but now he had got right out of his environment, and things seemed to have lost most of their interest. Before he got on to this perpetually moving staircase, he had wandered about Regent Street and Oxford Street, but he could neither admire the costumes of the ladies nor the deportment of the gentlemen. He preferred the picturesque attire of the ladies of ancient Greece and Rome, and the fine manly bearing of the philosophers and citizens of those ancient cities. The theatres and music-halls, as a rule, were no attraction to him, though he confessed that he laughed heartily over the eccentricities of Little Tich, who was a very quaint and genuine comedian, and was the "star" turn at the Palladium on the occasion of his visit. In fact, he never saw a funnier little man. He did not, however, care to go to a theatre or music-hall. Everybody looked at him, and thought he was one of the characters from *When Knights were Bold*. But he was a great lover of opera, and he had witnessed some excellent performances of the Beecham Opera Company at Drury Lane. He had no prejudices against German music—he could enjoy Wagner as well as Verdi or Puccini, and Mozart as well as Bizet and Thomas. What interested him most, however, since he had been in London, was the large number of soldiers—many of them wounded—that were constantly walking about the streets; and he grieved to think of the poor fellows who had lost a limb. These were sights that were never to be seen in Greece and Rome two thousand years ago. Of course, he had heard of the great War; but as he had not paid a visit to France or Flanders, he had no personal knowledge of the great tragedies that were being enacted on the field of battle in those two countries.

Several people had asked him what the modern gods were doing, and why they had not interfered to stop the War. There was only one answer—they really had not the power. They might desire to put an end to the whole brutal and bloody business—he made no apology for the use of the sanguinary adjective, which, he understood, was not only a favourite expression of Shakespeare, but also of another distinguished dramatist named Bernard Shaw—but the gods of all nations were really powerless in the matter. Some of the gods were very good indeed—others were merely "goody-goody"; but as they were, for the most part, merely the creatures of the priestly imagination, it was left to the priests to explain and justify their actions according to their own sophisticated methods. And it was really strange that these methods satisfied the masses of their credulous



followers. Indeed, he was only reading in the *Freethinker* the other day —

At the mention of this journal I had a violent fit of sneezing, which broke the spell—and I awoke.

I looked about the bedroom. Although everything had a greenish appearance, the ghost of the strange vision had vanished, and on the drawers on my right stood the miniature statue of Charles Bradlaugh. And I found upon reflection that, in my delirium, I had been supplying arguments and narratives for an ancient god who had no existence apart from my poor troubled brain. And so the vision vanished, as all such visions do, when the reason resumed its normal condition; and once more the ghost departed into oblivion. ARTHUR B. MOSS.

## The Dark Diamonds of the Earth.

To the Titan Prometheus, the classic Greeks attributed the theft from the sullen gods of their jealously guarded secret of kindling flame, in order that humanity might use it for their own benefit. Modern science, however, assures us that the discovery of the value of fire, and the acquisition of the power to generate light and heat, possess an entirely different history. Primitive man probably secured his first fire from volcanoes and flaming vegetation. Then he learnt the art of producing flame from the friction of sticks and stones. Dried leaves and dead branches were constantly at his service for use as fuel for his fires, and even in Europe, right down to recent centuries, wood and peat were the chief materials employed for purposes of combustion.

How, or when, coal first came to be utilized as fuel, no one can tell. In Britain, mining on a small scale appears to have been conducted during the Roman occupation of the island. As early as A.D. 852 the Anglo-Saxons fed their house-fires with coal, and there are sound reasons for thinking that England was the first European country to burn coal to any material extent. In the reign of Richard I., coal was raised in Durham. In the thirteenth century, in Scotland, charters were granted for the digging of coal. The fuel was well known in the periods of the Yorkist and Tudor monarchs, and, according to Anderson's *History of Commerce*, was sent by sea from the North to London at the opening of the fourteenth century. It was then known as sea-coal, and is mentioned as such by Shakespeare in his *Merry Wives of Windsor* over two centuries later.

When coal entered into common use in the Metropolis, it was adversely regarded by the more conservative. In the days of Edward I., the Lords and Commons in Parliament assembled petitioned the King to prohibit the use of coal; but as wood was scarce and dear, the consumption of coal increased. Long after coal fires had become common in London, a Crown proclamation was published by Elizabeth, forbidding the burning of coal in London during the Parliamentary session, as its fumes were thought dangerous to the health of the members. Doubtless, the smoke and stench ascending from the rude hearths, and emerging from the sooty and draughty chimneys of that age, were markedly malodorous. Even at the date of Charles the First's execution, in 1649, Parliament was again petitioned by London citizens, both of credit and renown, to prohibit the use of coal on account of its abominable odour; but in that and in succeeding centuries the consumption of coal assumed ever-increasing proportions.

The modern exploitation of our coal measures has resulted in a social, industrial, and commercial revolution probably without parallel in the world's history

Steamships, railways, factories, and workshops; all our immense electrical undertakings, are based on energy supplied by coal; while the vast cotton, woollen, and other textile industries repose on a basis furnished by the same fuel. Also, our gas and electric light, and cooking appliances, as well as all our heating arrangements, are derived from the combustion of coal.

In the grey dim past, in ages immeasurably remote, when the floral and faunal kingdoms were vastly different from those of to-day, our planet's coal deposits were formed. Immense stretches of our earth's surface were tropical bogs and swamps. In deltas and lagoons in the vicinity of river systems sluggishly wandering towards the sea, plants of a luxurious and rapidly growing character abounded, which season after season cast down their dead materials to constantly accumulate as a consolidated medley of vegetable remains. These floral forms were of primitive pattern, for the vast majority were members of the Cryptogamic order, and their leading representatives were club-mosses, horse-tails, sedges, noble ferns, and magnificent tree ferns of majestic proportions.

As time rolled on, these deposits of departed plant life were subjected to great compression. The lake, the stream, and the ocean covered them in turn, and mantled them with mud, sand, clay, and other sediment, until they became once more raised above water-level, when another mass of plants arose and flourished, but destined, as time sped on, to share the fate of their predecessors, and to lie long submerged by the encroaching waves. Many alternations of this character occurred until with the lapse of geological ages, changes in climate and modifications in the distribution of sea and land led to pronounced departures in the animal and vegetable realms.

Continent and ocean triumphed in succession in the regions where the coal forests had for protracted periods enjoyed their intermittent reign. Hundreds, or even thousands, of feet of sedimentary substances were subsequently deposited over the now deeply buried plant remains, and their intervening layers of sandstone, limestone, and clay.

The earth's leading coal measures were formed in the Carboniferous Age, and since that ancient period, the immense mechanical pressure of the superincumbent rocks, assisted by chemical decomposition, has served to transform these antique plant remains into that hard opaque substance which we classify as coal. It is frequently assumed that coal is no longer in process of formation, and that this fuel was first produced in carboniferous times. The Carboniferous epoch was, undoubtedly, distinguished beyond all others by a combination of events which culminated in the deposition of the most opulent and extensive coal-fields. But, as the late Professor Meldola reminds us:—

In the very oldest rocks in Canada and the Northern States of America in strata which take us back to the dawn of geological history, there is found abundance of the mineral graphite, the substance from which black-lead pencils are made, which is almost pure carbon. Now, most geologists admit that graphite represents the carbon which formed part of the woody tissue of plants that lived during these remote times, so that this mineral represents coal in the ultimate stage of carbonization. In some few instances true coal has been found converted into graphite *in situ* by the intrusion of veins of volcanic rock (basalt), so that the connection between the two minerals is more than a mere matter of surmise.

In Scotland coal occurs in beds of old red sandstone which are of earlier date than the carboniferous deposits, while coal formed subsequently to the Carboniferous era exists in Bavaria, Yorkshire, and other

districts. So geologically recent as the Eocene Age coal was formed in the Northern Tyrol, and still later brown coal was evolved in Belgium and Austria, while in quite modern geological times—in the Mid-Tertiary—the mineral was fashioned from vegetable remains in the now Arctic area of Greenland. Moreover, peat is being formed to-day in Ireland and elsewhere, and in various territories the first stages of coal production are in ceaseless operation where delta jungles and mangrove morasses abound.

Those British coal-fields that have proved a source of wealth so vast to our country are entirely of carboniferous origin. The coal reposes in the mines in layers separated by beds of shale, sandstone, and other sedimentary substances that were deposited over the plant materials at periods when neptune rolled or the rivers ran over the depressed forests. The seams of coal invariably rest on a couch of clay which is all that remains of the soil in which the prehistoric vegetation once rooted. In this layer of underclay the fossilized roots and lower trunks of ancient trees sometimes stand erect in the position where they once flourished.

In the course of millions of years most of the original features of the plants since transformed into coal have vanished. Yet, one has only to note the layers in a burning lump of coal to observe a striking resemblance to those of a heated wood-block. Fragments of desiccated foliage, ligneous fibre, and the outlines of fern fronds may occasionally be seen, while in some coal the spore cases of extinct club mosses are so numerous that the coal appears almost entirely composed of them.

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

## Presbyterian Piffle.

### II.

(Concluded from p. 430).

AGAIN, "the fathers of the Church" are "still struggling with the spiritual difficulties that beset younger men." They fear that "the impression (is) widely spread of the Church's insincerity in proclaiming her message." That is natural; for a large body of young men would be a fine business asset to the Presbyterian concern. Still, business has its jealousies. God is a jealous God, and Presbyterians are, presumably, jealous also; at any rate, it would appear so, for they are striving "to supply the definite denominational teaching for lack of which our young people are largely going over to the Church of England." And, as usual, it all needs the backing of a Sustentation Fund—one, of course, that needs a substantial backing itself at a sound British bank. Credits drawn against the Bank of Heaven are useless. Hard, crisp "Bradbury's" is "the only way" of getting over the difficulty. They ought to try prayer, and remember that everything comes to those who wait. Some of them, though, seem to be very dubious about it, for when—

A very tender and impressive Service of Intercession and Commemoration followed. It was a disappointment that so many left before this began. The hour was late. But the question could not help rising in some hearts: Do we really believe, do we *all* believe, that prayer is worth while?

Yes, *that* is the question; and there are thousands who have answered it "in the negative," not the least of these being "somewhere in France." Prayer is nothing more than the modern prototype of the medicine-man's weird incantations and mystic exorcisms. Still, some of the sharp words uttered regarding the collapse of the £800 in the collections ought to hurry along the laggards. It is not stated whether all and sundry were

reminded that trouser buttons were of no use as a War bonus, though they may certainly be more useful than prayer—for breakdown jobs especially. Besides, even the mentioning of such a matter ought to perform wonders, for "a sense of humour is a great help to holiness." It is. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow: trousers buttons and hard-baked dough."

It is good to hear that "there was no clear sign of a religious revival." No doubt they would dearly like a business boom throughout the country. This would enable them to make quick profits. The Sunday school business is too slow and utterly disappointing, for—

Twenty years ago a large percentage of non-church-going parents wanted their children to come to Sunday-school; ten years ago they were indifferent; to-day they are largely hostile, mainly for selfish reasons because the Sunday-school hours do not fit in with meal hours and household tasks.

It is to be presumed that this is *not* to be taken as an insult to the parents, nor yet to the intelligence of the "elder" that uttered it. *Verb sap!* These parents will surely be damned if they don't send their children to Sunday-school, though one can hear the parents retorting, with Ingersoll, that they'll be damned if they will.

What can these Church dignitaries expect when they treat 50 per cent. of parents as having no rights of equality with the other 50 per cent.? Everywhere it is "Fathers and Brethren." Have they not yet learned that the fairer sex have now earned their right to equal liberty and freedom with their brothers, and that a long overdue reward has at last been partially granted them? Not a word about mothers and sisters! But what can be expected of them when they have only just decided to include women members in their Foreign Missions Committee? "Woman what have we to do with thee?" Very little. Still, they are concentrating their attention on the Report of the Divorce Commission. So one may look out for a "star" programme at the next annual chin-wag.

Another point which is troubling them is the Military Service Act. A report on this question "dealing with the relation of ministers to the man power of the nation received anxious and careful discussion at considerable length." One might have been quite sure of *that*, though they could find no time to deal with "such a 'live' subject as Education" which "had to be passed with little more than a glance." No wonder intelligent people are forsaking the pews! However, the topic of military service led to a discussion over the phrasing of the statement that "the Synod *does not approve* the exemption of ministers of religion from military service" (*italics in the original*). The resulting vote decided by a majority of one only, to delete the words italicized! Verily a concession to the public opinion of those parents whom they have taken to task for minding their own business in their own ways. But there is still a ray of hope for some of them, for "the Y.M.C.A. were anxious at present for twenty-five men who would sign for a year or till the duration of the War." It is to be hoped that there wasn't a crush, and that the queue didn't cause any public annoyance—or hilarity.

A correspondent in the same issue throws an interesting side-light on the peculiar patriotic conscience of some ministers and their employers. He says:—

The Synod has adopted the policy of putting moral pressure upon the younger ministers of the Church in order that they may join the Army. At the same time, the Synod has adopted the policy of welcoming ministers of military age coming from other denominations, and placing them in positions left vacant by the absence of our own patriotic men on National Service.

What a fine example of contemptible Christian tactics? One might make allowances for a cute layman on the same dodge—but parsons! When will sensible people, with Shakespeare, insist and demand that these black-coated fraternity shall “Avaunt and quit our sights”?

Presbyterians have not yet risen above the level of savages in their conception of Deity. He is still the Big Man of the Universe—with back parts in proportion. He has a personality as distinctive as any Tom, Dick, or Harry. He must exist only some five miles off, for “clouds and darkness are round about Him.” This, however, may only be figurative, though to suggest that that he, also, is imaginary would be profane. He revels in blood just like a tiger or a spider, so it is not likely that he is going to make any attempt to stop the slaughter here below. He is a spectator on high, and, doubtless, enjoys the carnage. Still, the boys, “Somewhere in France,” may be comforted to know that theirs is a—

Sacrifice fulfilling what God saith  
Of need of blood to cancel human guilt.

In case there may be another interpretation the poem is appended herewith:—

THE RED THREAD OF WORSHIP.

Abel received it in the hand of Faith,  
And Heaven's Fire confirmed his offering:  
And, through the four millenniums following,  
The Chosen Race held fast the Scarlet Thread,  
In Sacrifice fulfilling what God saith  
Of need of blood to cancel human guilt,  
So the red life of Offerings was spilt.  
Until God's Lamb hung on the Cross-tree dead,  
Still the Red Sign fills our Faith's hand to-day,  
Christ's precious Blood our plea whene'er we prey.

Just exactly what it all means God only knows. One may hazard a guess based on some not too pleasant reminiscences of childhood, but that is all, though one perceives a belief in the Adam and Eve myth together with the absurd Biblical chronology of a six-thousand year old earth. It is a typical specimen of prehistoric numbo-jumbo couched in a weird rigmarole of modern clerical jargon.

Enough. There is plenty of room for reconstruction now without waiting until the end of the War. When it does come these pious hussies will have to give a very convincing account of their stewardship, and answer for that of their Heavenly Father also.

“Z.”

Wrapped up in gray cloud-garments,  
The great Gods sleep together;  
I hear their thunder-snoring,  
And to-night we've dreadful weather.

Dreadful weather! what a tempest  
Around the weak ship raves!  
Ah, who will check the storm-wind,  
Or curb the lordless wave?

Can't be helped though, if all nature  
A mad holiday is keeping;  
So I'll wrap me up and slumber  
As the Gods above are sleeping.

—Heine (Leland's translation).

Obituary.

On August 1 Mr. Henry Harrison, age sixty-six, gilder and bootmaker, for thirty years resident in Marylebone, passed away after a long and painful illness, which was softened by the constant and tender care of a loving wife and family—all Freethinkers. He was a zealous supporter of the late Messrs. Bradlaugh and Foote, and the present Editor of the *Freethinker*. Deceased was interred at Willesden Cemetery on August 6. A Secular Burial Service was read. He was respected and beloved by all who knew him.—E. D.

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

OUTDOOR.

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

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NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 3.15, Mrs. Rosetti, A Lecture.

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S.: 6, Mr. H. B. Doughty, “Good—but Ungodly.”

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Maryland Point Station): 7, Mr. Rule, “The God Idea.”

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GOLDTHORPE BRANCH N. S. S. (14 Beaver Street, Goldthorpe): 3, Mr. S. Copley, “Theoretic and Practical Atheism.”

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