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Views and Opinions.

Spiritual Vision.

In one of his writings Mr. G. K. Chesterton says that the real question at issue between the Christian and the Freethinker is, "Are there or are there not certain powers and experiences possible to the human mind which really occur when the mind is suitably disposed? Is the religious history of mankind a chronicle of accidental lies, delusions, and coincidences, or is it a chronicle of real things which we happen not to be able to do, and real visions which we happen not to be able to see?" As is not unusual with Mr. Chesterton, he succeeds here in saying nothing in particular, while apparently expressing a deal in a small compass. For, far from meeting the case of the scientific Freethinker, it shows no real appreciation of it. Mr. Chesterton's case is that the Christian saint or mystic is, by the exercise of certain spiritual experiences, brought into another world of being. The Freethinker does not deny the experiences—without the qualifying "spiritual"—but he submits there is another and more rational explanation at hand.

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Witnesses to the Unseen.

Let us take a few examples. The Catholic Church will produce clouds of testimony from men and women to the effect that certain visions were seen in certain circumstances. These circumstances are usually long vigils, fasting, praying, a more or less solitary life, and constant meditation upon mystical matters. The witnesses will dilate upon the feeling of exaltation that accompanied and preceded such visions, and will describe the subjective experiences with all the detail that one might use in describing a fit of indigestion, or an attack of the toothache. Now, no Freethinker who understands his case would say these witnesses were all liars. Nor would he say that they were *all* insane in the general sense of the word. Neither would he deny that under the same conditions he himself would in all probability experience much the same kind of visions and feelings. What he would say, and what he does say, is that all this religious testimony can be explained on pathological grounds as due to an unwholesome nervous strain. If any modern cares to try the experiment, and sit, like some Hindoo fakir, for so many hours per day contemplating his stomach, and repeating the sacred word "Om," we do not hesitate in saying that he too

will see visions; and in that case he need not cite a "cloud of witnesses"—he can cite himself.

Spirits and "Spirits." * * *

Delirium tremens is not a spiritual, although it is a spirituous, complaint. Yet the visions seen by people in this state—the devils and curious animals crawling and rushing in and out—are as real as anything seen by St. Theresa or St. Anthony. But we do not suppose for a moment that anyone will argue that beer or whisky has the power of unlocking a new and real spiritual world to which ordinary people are dead. He will say, of course, that these people *are* real enough to the people who see them, but that they are in fact the creation of a brain and nervous system disordered by excessive alcoholic indulgence. But will he, or will anybody else, point out the essential difference, if any, between the visions of a St. Theresa and those of a confirmed dipsomaniac? It is beside the point to run off with the remark that the comparison of a "saint" with a drunkard is degrading. There is nothing degrading in a scientific inquiry; and in all seriousness we assert that the visions of saint and dipsomaniac, the exaltation of the religious mystic, and the exaltation of the opium-eater or whisky-drinker are in all essential features identical. They are each induced by excessive indulgence in one direction, and by the exclusion of counteracting agencies. The dipsomaniac enters into communication just as much, or just as little, with an actual spiritual world as does the Christian saint. And, as a matter of fact, a man suffering from *delirium tremens* would, in the Middle Ages, have been placed on the same level as the "saint." His visions would have been of the lower world exclusively; but there would have been no other distinction. All sorts of lunatics were also placed upon the same level. And we would suggest to Mr. Chesterton that any lunatic asylum would furnish him with quite as many people who have "certain powers and experiences when the mind is suitably disposed" as he can find in "the world-old chorus" of religious witnesses.

* * *

The Influence of Environment.

And here is another aspect of the matter that appeals to one conducting a really scientific inquiry. The Christian "saint" sees visions. So, too, does the Hindoo fakir and the Mohammedan dervish. On Mr. Chesterton's hypothesis they are each catching a glimpse of the spiritual world from which the more materialistic evolution of others has shut them out. Yet the Hindoo never saw the Christian form of the spiritual world, the Christian never saw the Hindoo form, the Mohammedan never saw either. Each sees his own, or, to put it in another way, each sees what his education has led him to see. And while there is such an obvious explanation of these facts so ready to hand, it is almost insanity to propound such a fantastic hypothesis as that of a new spiritual world unlocked to the view of certain highly-favoured individuals. There is also the modern form of this spiritual exaltation. This no longer takes the form of

visions. The man who nowadays went round seeing visions and hearing voices and fighting with the Devil, as did Luther and others, would soon find himself in a lunatic asylum. Nowadays people say they *feel* the influence of a spiritual world. They have left off seeing it, and have come down to the more general sense of feeling it. People are no longer moved to rush off to the wilderness, abandon soap and water, and even clothing, for their spiritual welfare. On the contrary, they talk much of the gospel of social work, of sanitation, advocate the building of work-houses for the greater glory of God, and behave in such a way that the earlier "saints" would, if they were here, denounce them as children of the Devil.

* * *

The Old and the New.

Why should the "spiritual vision" have undergone this change? If it teaches the holiness of social work in the twentieth century, why should it have taught the exact opposite in the tenth? Surely anyone whose mind is not given over to the fruitless labour of hatching ingenious theories to amuse an idle hour or to fill a couple of columns in a newspaper, must see that the whole explanation lies in the difference and influence of environment. The present day Christian, living in a community that calls itself Christian, coming of an ancestry that has been Christian, operated upon by the eloquence and influence of people whose business it is to see that he remains Christian, clothes his social feelings and his morality in a Christian dress, as naturally as he—in this country—expresses his thoughts in the English language, and for exactly the same reason. But his feelings and his morality are no more due to Christianity than his thoughts are due to his use of English. Both are mere accidents of the environment. If he did not think in English, he would in French, or Russian, or German, or some other language. And if his social instincts did not express themselves in Christian dress, they as certainly would in some other manner. The Freethinker does not, therefore, put on one side the "evidence" brought forward on behalf of religion. He accepts it and shows its real nature. The visions of the mediæval saint or mystic exist to-day, but they are differently understood, and differently explained. The "spiritual vision" of Jesus casting devils out of an epileptic, and the methods of the modern physician dealing with a similar case, represent the difference between the old and the new point of view. The modern world is hardly likely to go back to the standpoint of Jesus. Devils once exorcized by science never return. And that camouflaged mediæval delusion—"spiritual vision"—is doomed to one day follow the way of other superstitions.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Experience as Argument.

A vast amount of importance is now being attached to religious experience, especially by those who no longer treat the Bible as an infallible document. Time was when the Protestant divine finally settled every religious dispute by stringing together as many proof-texts as he could find, bearing, however slightly, on the points at issue. Except for a steadily dwindling minority the Word of God has ceased to be, and in its place has arisen the admittedly not always accurate Word of Man about God and destiny. Argument, too, has at last lost its clinching efficacy, and few theologians resort to it. In an interesting article in the *Christian World* for October 24, the Rev. F. Townley Lord, B.D., describes "the

increased demand for reality, and the complaint, heard in many quarters, that so much of our time is spent in theological disputation and so little in experiential religion." What does Mr. Lord mean by "reality"? Sometimes it signifies sincerity or single-heartedness, and sometimes that unknown, possibly unknowable something, which, by many philosophers, is supposed to underlie all phenomena. In the latter sense reality is not a commodity for which there is any general demand; but it is incontrovertible that the theologians spend most of their time in vain disputation. Every believer in God is to that extent a disputatious person. Has a preacher of the Gospel ever appeared who did not dispute with unbelievers? So-called experiential religion is rooted and grounded in beliefs which are in their very nature debatable. Mr. Lord is entirely mistaken when he affirms that "religion begins in experience." The present writer is acquainted with scores of persons who have never entertained a single supernatural belief, and not one of them has ever had any religious experience. One of the commonest forms of religious experience is prayer; but prayer is an appeal to, or fellowship with, something which is supposed to be an objective reality. Belief of some sort necessarily precedes and accompanies prayer. "He that cometh to God," we read in Hebrews, "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." Mr. Lord himself virtually admits this in the following passage:—

In the first dim beginnings of tribal religion we find an Animistic conception of the world combining with the experimental factor to form the beginnings of religion.

The conception antedates the experience just as it antedates theology, while both experience and theology develop together and usually in the same proportion, being but too closely allied off-shoots of the same stem. Belief is the offspring of ignorance energized by fear, not of the consciousness of "some Greater which is conceived as ministering to the needs of life." The appearance of a Benevolent Greater marks a later stage in the evolutionary process. Mr. Lord is somewhat vague in several of his statements, as proved by the following passage:—

On this Mount of Experience the great stream of our religious life took its rise. The great institutions of religion—Bible, Church—began here. This was the starting-point of Theology, and all the musty volumes which grace our libraries received their birth in experience.

There is, of course, some truth in all that. It is possible to conceive of ignorance and undefined dread as phases of experience; but, surely, Mr. Lord would not dream of dubbing that experience religious. In this connection reference is made to William James's *Varieties of Religious Experiences*; and all readers of that remarkable work are aware that the pragmatist philosopher depicts therein an experience he himself did not share in any of its varieties. He did not believe in the existence of a personal God, nor in that of the human soul. He believed neither in the spiritual world nor in immortality. Like Browning, he was an Agnostic, and, like Browning, he could accurately delineate beliefs and experiences of which he had no direct personal knowledge. He was merely a skilful psychologist. Speaking of personal religion all he maintains is that it is more fundamental than either theology or ecclesiasticism, and was the primordial thing with the founders of every Church who represented themselves as living in real communion with the Divine. But of necessity those founders believed in the Divine before they could have had fellowship with it. In reality, James does not support Mr. Lord in the least.

It is contended that the varieties of religious experience "reflect the free movement of the human soul

towards the Divine"; but, generally speaking, such a movement has never been quite spontaneous and free, but painfully constrained, against the grain, a severe violation of the natural order. The natural trend of the human mind is away from, not towards, the Divine. By Nature we are all alike Atheists. Sainthood is a profession carried on by never-ceasing effort. Augustine, A Kempis, and Bernard, three of the most illustrious saints, experienced unspeakable difficulty in realizing the gracious nearness of their Divine Redeemer. Because their nature rebelled against God and religion they insulted it and its Maker by calling it corrupt, depraved, and lost, because of Adam's sin. To be natural was to be non-religious, ungodly; therefore, to be natural was the greatest conceivable offence against God. Religion was and is a perpetual fight against Nature, and the greatest saint is he who is most successful in subduing it. It is in order to counteract and overcome the natural resistance which the human mind offers to the appeal of religion that Christendom teems with crafty priests, Catholic and Protestant; but so powerful is Nature's antagonism to the heavenly calling, that their ministrations, so far from prospering, are becoming more and more futile each succeeding generation. Mr. Lord complains that the religious life is to-day far from what it ought to be. He says:—

One cannot help feeling that too many to-day are content with the repetition of religious formulæ, and the observation of religious ceremony, without the all necessary life of which these are but the expression..... The same applies to all forms and ceremonies, which retain their power only in the measure in which they touch our lives.

Mr. Lord is convinced that the War is having the effect of reviving people's interest in religion, which may be true in a few instances here and there; but we have the testimony of several chaplains at the various fronts and at home that on multitudes the effect is of an entirely opposite character. This is how Mr. Lord states the case:—

Religion, to be real, must be first hand. On this ground we are encouraged when we hear of men, hitherto careless of God, but now in these days of sore distress feeling in the depths of their being the inflowing of the Divine tide. At last many are beginning to hear the still small voice, and they can hear the tone above the din of battle. In their hearts they feel that thrill—the pulsation of the Divine heart. Life is becoming transfigured with new meaning, and words and things and values cast away before are appearing in their true colours. If there should be any revival of religion, it will begin here—not in acceptance of a statement previously rejected, but in a new impulse, a new force surging through the soul.

The writer of that passage evidently belongs to the so-called non-dogmatic school of theologians; but in reality there is no such school. Theology, of necessity, treats of God, including his being, his attributes, and his relation to the world and human destiny, and every statement concerning him can be no other than a dogma, a metaphysical speculation. Even the article we are now criticizing is of a highly speculative, hypothetical character. Whenever a man turns religious it is because of the stirring within him of a certain emotion or impulse as the result of his acceptance of specific declarations made in the name and by the alleged authority of God as revealed in and by Christ. By pure speculation Jesus blossoms into the Eternal Christ, his death into a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and his Church into the temple of the third person in the Holy Trinity. Supernatural religion cannot even exist at all apart from dogmatic theology. Our contention is, however, that all theology, the New no less than the Old,

concerns itself about nothing but its own creation, the objective non-existence of which is demonstrated by the fact that it appeals only to those who are superstitious enough to believe in it. To all others it is as if it were not. Somebody has said that God does not reveal himself to fools; but even the admission that there are fools is in itself a powerful argument against the existence of a personal God. The most illuminating of all facts is the fact that no Deity exists save as an object of faith. To the non-believing he is profoundly and eternally silent, and as inactive as he is silent. The tremendous significance of this fact has never been sufficiently emphasized by the advocates of Freethought; but its weight is being appreciated more and more by crowds of thoughtful young people as this terrible War drags on. Questions are being asked and answered. What is he doing? Nothing. Where is he? Nowhere. A few ardent believers in Germany, in France, in America, and in Britain, exclaim at one and the same time: "He is on our side, fighting for and with us." Surely, this is the very climax of absurdity, the repetition and circulation thereof being the best indirect service that can possibly be rendered to "the best of causes."

Meanwhile, the people who glorify religious experience, regarding it as the only effective argument for supernatural religion, are almost daily decreasing in number.

J. T. LLOYD.

Out of the Night.

A world in the hand is worth two in the bush. Let us have to do with real men and women, and not with skipping ghosts.—Emerson.

After all, a book (the Bible) cannot make a stand against the wild, living intellect of man.—Cardinal Newman.

THE name of Cardinal Newman is known the world over; that of his younger brother, Francis Newman, is known to but few. Yet Francis did substantial good during his lifetime, which extended almost throughout the nineteenth century. Born at the beginning of the century, he lived until near its close, working, as he himself said, in a letter to a friend, to do something for the good of those who had fewer advantages than himself.

Francis William Newman was born in a religious family, and he had the same early training as his elder brother, who became a Cardinal of the Catholic Church. Educated at Oxford University, he was elected to a fellowship at Balliol College, but resigned, being unable conscientiously to comply with the regulations of the Test Act, then in force. After journeying into Syria as a missionary, Francis Newman abandoned all thoughts of taking holy orders as he had contemplated. While his brother, John Henry Newman, was attracted by the authority of the Church, Francis found himself seceding more and more from her, drifting slowly but surely into Freethought. The Church's loss was the world's gain, for the good work he was to do was not within the narrow confines of the cloister, but in the busy world. He became Classical Professor in Manchester New College, and subsequently Latin Professor at London University. By the middle of the century he had given up Christianity, and had written his memorable *Phases of Faith*, a work which still lives, and will continue to live, as an expression of a remarkable personality and a "human document" of extraordinary interest.

The book is a veritable pilgrim's progress from Christianity to Freethought. It is a plain unvarnished account of the reasons why Francis Newman gave up his belief in orthodoxy. Beginning as a believer of the narrowest type, he shows, step by step, how he relinquished

article after article of his creed. Its great merit is the transparent honesty of the writer, which shines on every page. It needed courage, too, to write such a book, for Newman was a university professor and ran the risk of dismissal from his post. Indeed, ostracism was then, as now, a formidable weapon in the hands of the Church. A work which, for the first time, put the arguments for evolution in popular language, the *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), had to be issued anonymously, or its author would have been ruined. Professor Newman had more courage than Robert Chambers. Referring to his youthful creed he said plainly:—

I knew not then, and I know not now, why bishops, as such, should be more revered than common clergymen; or clergymen, as such, more than common men.

It needed audacity to write such things. Such a declaration, over the signature of a university professor, was not pleasant reading for the orthodox. It was written in a way that all could understand, and not in the veiled language of the learned. Plain speech is not esteemed at its proper value. Ruskin once said, laughingly, that people no longer thought him a fine writer, because, if he thought a man's house was on fire, he only said, "Sir, your house is on fire," whereas formerly he used to say, "Sir, the abode in which you probably passed the delightful days of your adolescence is in imminent danger of conflagration."

Like so many Freethinkers, Francis Newman was a zealous reformer. No sooner did his eye alight on an abuse, or he became aware of a canker in society, than he burned to remedy the one and pluck out the other. In every civilization there will always be found, sheltering under the wall, evil things not yet brought to book, not yet revealed in their true nature, but still dragging back the wheels of progress and the betterment of humanity. Four of such evils Francis Newman spent years of his life in combating: cruelty to animals, intemperance, militarism, and the harshness of the criminal code. Newman was no half-hearted reformer, and he wielded a swift, live pen. How pertinent is his question, "Why does one murder make a villain, but the murder of thousands a hero?" And again, "Why do princes and statesmen, who would scorn to steal a shilling, make no difficulty in stealing a kingdom?"

Newman was a determined opponent of the system of long terms of imprisonment, and pointed out the evils that arose from the offences of one bringing in their train the pauperizing of many dependent on the criminal. His strenuous advocacy of land reform was by no means the least service rendered by this noble-hearted enthusiast. Hear his words:—

That a man should be able to buy up large tracts of land, and make himself the owner of them—to keep them in or out of culture as he pleases—to keep or open roads, and dictate where houses should be builtthis is no natural right; but is an artificial creation of arbitrary law; law made by legislation for personal convenience—certainly not for the benefit of the nation.

This country is far behind the Continent in this matter. "We know not whither, beside England," he wrote, "to look for a nation living by wages, and divorced from all rights in the crops which they raise."

Brave old man! His famous brother, the lonely Cardinal of a reactionary Church, may be better known to the world, but to us Francis Newman is the greater and nobler man. He was of the stuff of which heroes are made. Always boldest where there was a cause that needed fighting for, or on behalf of fellow-citizens who were powerless to right their own wrongs, and who required someone to voice them, his pen was tireless on behalf of progress. We salute the memory of one who,

in the midst of difficulties, and breathing an atmosphere heavy with superstition and corruption, yet showed himself a good and a wise man:—

O framed for nobler times and calmer hearts!
O studious thinker eloquent for Truth!
Philosopher, despising wealth and death,
But patient, childlike, full of life and love!

MIMNERMUS.

Religion and Life.

SIR,—I discern a danger ahead. A young philosopher of to-day has been criticized by his friends because, when he is tired, he has a way of repeating an argument which has been controverted in the same words but in a louder tone of voice. Have you not, in your last, girded at me again for not saying what I mean by God, without noticing the reasons for reticence which I have given? They amount to this: that it is a question of personal knowledge of an invisible spiritual Being, and such knowledge cannot be acquired second-hand. I should be glad if you would refer to what I wrote on this topic. This much, however, I will add. Any Christian to whom religion is a reality has learnt that the Being whom he worships can only be known by those who wish to know Him. We don't quarrel with this law, because it is bound up with the fact of our friendships with each other. If A gets leave to introduce B to C, it is because C wishes to know B. If C denies any such wish, A will be well advised to save himself the trouble of an introduction, because he knows C will not get to know B even if he is introduced. Still less would he get anything out of the introduction if he started with the conviction, or perhaps only the affirmation, that B had no existence. I once knew man who met an acquaintance in Bond Street, and the latter, after shaking hands, said, "Do you know, it is a funny thing, but I thought you were dead." A tactless remark, you will admit, and it led to their intercourse ceasing. The other man judged that if his acquaintance knew and cared so little about him, it would be a waste of time to continue any further relations. But if this gentleman had been convinced from the start that the other didn't exist at all, the acquaintance would never have got so far as it did; and no amount of well-meaning talk on the part of a third party would have helped matters in the least. That is how we stand. You assume that what we mean by God is a projection of our minds which, like other such things, we could explain if we liked. I ask you to consider that to us He is a Person, infinite and unspeakably wonderful, and that the account of Him given by many that He is a projection of our minds is wrong, because it contradicts our consciousness; just as it would have been absurd if anyone had told Disraeli that Gladstone was a projection of his brain. I daresay Disraeli often wished it were so; but none the less he would have thought the statement so mad that he would not have dreamt of trying to prove the opposite by any explanation whatsoever.

There is a further reason. Suppose the man who was told Mr. Gladstone did not exist was a passionate admirer of his, would he not feel that to controvert the allegation by descanting on his character, or his influence, or his personality, would be a gross violation of the respect due to a great man?

"Very well, then," you will say, "if I know nothing about God and you can't tell me anything, our friendly controversy comes to an end." Not so. I am only just coming somewhere near the heart of the positive side of the matter. So far I have been speaking from the bare Theistic standpoint. If that were all, I should go on to show that in your own convictions there is a great

deal of unconscious Theism. But your repeated challenge induces me to leave that very interesting and relevant topic and give you a more definite answer from the Christian point of view. Vague as my answer has hitherto been, it is as clear, I fancy, as that of any of the greatest Pagans. You would get very little more from Plato.

But when we come to the Christian Gospel a profound change comes over the situation. Jesus never explained anything in order that an unsympathetic audience should be convinced against their will, that was the last thing he wanted, because He knew it would do far more harm than good. He is the greatest force for good in all history, because He dealt with men as free persons, and only drew them by persuasion; and His persuasion was amazingly powerful because it was the expression of a limitless love for man. His character is so sublime that among all nations and peoples it has been worshipped as divine. Those of us who reckon Him as divine—that is, God Himself become Man—are no longer groping in darkness as to the attributes and qualities of God the Father. We take it for granted that the justice, the love, the severity, the amazing combination of womanly tenderness and heroic courage which Christ showed are qualities which belong to the Deity; but being exhibited as they were by the human Jesus, they become tokens to us of what human nature at its best can achieve.

That is one point, only one, which makes the whole difference to our outlook on life. By itself it is enough to irradiate the prospect with a boundless hope. But in persuading men to conceive of God as a Personal Father bent on saving mankind, or rather, on enabling mankind to work out its own salvation, Christ appealed to a quality in us which he called Faith. What is faith? I promised to tackle this question.

Let us define it as the power to believe the best of persons and things and to act on the belief. It is the power which is at the back of every good action and every sympathetic thought, and every tactful word. It also is the secret of every friendship, of all good management of men, of every discovery in science, and in fact of civilization itself, for it inspires all noble endeavour and counteracts men's inherent tendency to conflict and distrust. It is essential to the whole higher life of humanity. Christ offered the Jews this higher life on certain conditions. That life is offered to us now, and men vary strangely in their answer. Two men once lost their way in the forest, and after wandering till they were terribly hungry, stumbled upon a cottage. No one was inside, but they saw a loaf of bread on the table. One says: "Here we are; this will keep us alive, anyhow." The other, who had been familiarized with the frequent harm done by people jumping to conclusions, said: "Wait a bit: there is no proof that that is not poisonous." The other replied: "Certainly, there is no proof; but if we wait for one we shall die. You may do what you like, I shall eat." Thus the quality to which Christ appealed is simply the opposite of lunacy in ordinary life; and though He offered something infinitely greater and better than rescue from starvation, where that quality were wholly wanting, He could do nothing at all.

E. LYTTETLTON.

Why, why was I born a man, and yet see the sufferings of wretches I cannot relieve! Poor houseless creatures, the world will give you reproaches but will not give you relief. The slightest misfortunes of the great, the most imaginary uneasiness of the rich, are aggravated with all the power of eloquence, and held up to engage our attention and sympathetic sorrow. The poor weep unheeded, persecuted by every subordinate species of tyranny; and every law which give others security becomes an enemy to them.—*Goldsmith.*

Acid Drops.

Now that Dr. Liebknecht has been liberated it looks as though in the Germany of the near future he will occupy a very high place. Cheers have already been given him as the President of the future German Republic. Dr. Liebknecht is a Freethinker, he has been a consistent opponent of militarism all along, and he will be remembered for telling the Prussian Diet a plain and wholesome truth, that "the militarizing of schools converts them into training stables for war. You educate your children to be war-machines." We said at the time that these were golden words, and we repeat that now. And we commend the saying to those of our own country who are so anxious to introduce military drill into *our* schools. Hands off the child is wholesome advice to both the soldier and the priest.

Said Sir Oliver Lodge at the Liverpool Royal Institution:—

"Man's soul consists of the ether which holds the material body together. When the material body is worn out the ethereal body is as good as new, and by putting on some material concomitant can communicate with us still.

We congratulate Sir Oliver on having solved a very vexed question. If only we knew how he knows, and what precisely he means now he does know, we should be more content.

Mr. R. D. Holt, M.P., is either a humourist or one who understands human nature. According to the *Daily Express* of October 30, he told the Unitarian Association at Manchester that "One way to secure larger congregations would be to offer a glass of beer to every person who attends service devotedly and respectfully. The question seems to us to resolve itself into "How much beer is required to induce a properly respectful feeling towards a Church service?"

Just as we expected, the Sunday Observance Committee are protesting against Sunday band performances in the Glasgow Parks. They want to have the monopoly of providing entertainment for the people in the shape of Church services, a form of entertainment which is not appreciated by the majority of the citizens.

The band performance on the Glasgow Green last Sunday was well attended. The audience was orderly, and seemed to appreciate the music provided. A performance is to be given on the Green each Sunday afternoon up till November 17. Why should they not be continued in the Winter Gardens during the winter? It is to be hoped last Sunday's experiment will convince the Town Council of the demand for Sunday band performances in the parks during the summer months.

Speaking at Coatbridge at a meeting of the Hamilton Branch of the E.T.S., Mr. Anderson, Stonehouse, said that the Shorter Catechism should be at once abolished from the schools. Its doctrines were antiquated, its teaching method was unsound, and it was no help in attaining the real object of religious training, namely, the improvement of character. Mr. Anderson strongly objected to the teaching of dogma or speculative opinions. The meeting passed a resolution opposing any attempt to impose religious tests on teachers.

Under the auspices of the New Operatic Club an excellent concert was given in the Albion Theatre, Glasgow, last Sunday evening in aid of the Glasgow Prisoners of War Fund. Sir John Ure Primrose, Bart., in moving a vote of thanks to the theatre management and performers, expressed the belief that such a delightful performance as they had listened to consecrated the Sabbath, and that, in any case, the cause for which it was promoted fully justified it. The theatre was filled to overflowing, and hundreds were unable to gain admission. Were there any Churches in the district crowded out last Sunday?

Lying before us as we write is an official account of five punishments inflicted in one camp during October on men

for offences connected with Church Parade. Three are cases of men who returned to barracks without going to church; one absented himself; the other laughed on Church Parade. Evidently the officer thought religion no laughing matter. He probably agreed with the clergyman who thanked God there had never been a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon in his church. We hope all these five will be duly impressed with the importance of religion

The Congregational Board of Wolverhampton has written to the Town Council protesting against its erecting a War shrine provided by public subscription. We welcome the protest. This is one of the many dodges of the Church to exploit a public occasion in its own interests. People subscribe because they are desirous of expressing their appreciation of those who have fallen in the War. Then a Church shrine is erected, and the result exhibited as a sample of attachment to the Church. It is really an exhibition of the crafty and unscrupulous methods of modern religious organizations.

In Wolverhampton some of the Free Churches are following the Sunday evening picture performances with a religious service. We should much like to hear the comments of the audience.

The Rev. David Watson, of St. Clement's, Glasgow, writing to the Press, says while the Church must always remain non-political and non-partizan, it is in full sympathy with the just and legitimate aspirations of organized labour, and necessarily so, seeing her membership is so largely composed of the industrial classes. A perusal of *Christianity and Slavery* might enlighten the Rev. David Watson as to the attitude which has been adopted by the Church in all ages towards a betterment of the conditions for the working classes.

Professor Henderson asks: "What is your gospel which you wish to preach? Are the Churches themselves agreed as to what it is? Is there, then, no message with which the Church of Christ can with one trumpet voice proclaim as its message to this war-torn world?" What a wail after two thousand years of Christianity! Why doesn't he join the Secularists, and work for the uplifting of Humanity, which proclaims the message of love, brotherhood, and liberty?

Principal Sir Donald MacAlister, Glasgow University, says that the missionary efforts in China and Japan will receive new opportunities and a warmer reception than heretofore. Does he think China and Japan will forget all about the Christian barbarities of the War? He may be right about a warmer reception.

From the *Daily Express* :—

An Army chaplain, meeting a Jock who had taken "a drop too much," offered to guide him to barracks. On the way Jock became discursive. "Ye ken, chaplain," he said, "ma father is a very releigious man, and I'm that way inclined masel'. Noo I'd like to ha'e a bit argument wi' ye on predestination."

The padre was much amused. "Hadn't you better wait until you are sober, Jock?" he replied.

"Hoots, mon," said the Scot, "I don't care a d— about predestination when I'm sober."

Considering that, on the authority of the Bishop of London, this War is God's War, and, on the authority of nearly all the clergy, we are fighting God's fight, Providence has behaved very shabbily in giving us the present epidemic of so-called influenza. And, strangely enough, it appears to be more fatal to those below thirty years of age—the fighting age—than those above it. That is God's way of showing his appreciation of our efforts. Some Christians will doubtless get consolation from the fact that people are suffering worse in Germany and Austria. But it is poor comfort, anyway, and we pity the mind that sees comfort in that direction, just as we pitied those who were gloating over the increasing number of child victims in Germany due to the blockade. These things are inevitable in war-time, but we ought at least to have decency enough not to rejoice at their happening.

The clergy emphasize the blessings of poverty in the pulpit; but they prefer the fleshpots of Egypt in private life. The late Rev. E. W. Tarbox, a Baptist minister, of Winchester, left £13,564, and the Rev. F. Bishop, of Torquay, left £11,927. These amounts are not large, but they do not spell poverty.

Mr. H. G. Wells may be religious, but he "wears his rue with a difference." In his latest novel, *Joan and Peter*, he says: "Progress is a religion in itself. Work and learning are our creed. We cannot make terms with any other creed." And, again: "Every step on the way to the world state and the real unification of men will be fought by the priests and the stagnant men." There will not be much joy in heavenly circles over this repentant sinner.

"The Christian religion is two thousand years old," said the parson, proudly. "Just so," replied the sceptic; "it looks its age, and needs re-upholstering."

With the object of increasing the stipend of a Surrey vicar, an effort is being made to raise £5,000 from among the parishioners. Prayer, it is said, can move mountains; but it cannot "raise the wind."

Rochester Cathedral has now a lady bell-ringer, a lady organist, and a lady verger. Presumably, the congregation is mainly composed of ladies also.

The Rev. Dr. Kelman, Edinburgh, in addressing the Office-bearers' Union of the Glasgow U.F. Church, said that, believing as he did in the reality, and the worth and the permanence of the Church of Jesus Christ, he could not be blind to the fact that in all our cities there were vast numbers who passed through their lives without knowing anything of the Church, and who did not wish to know anything about it. People to-day were not compelled to go to church, as in past generations, and that was a healthier state of society. It seemed to him there must be something wrong somewhere when such vast masses were passing the church door. He believed the cause of non-churchgoing was that they in the Church did not manage to interest vast numbers outside it. The whole atmosphere of our Church somehow had failed to catch their imagination. The secret of reality was intelligibility. How often had the Church kept dangling over our masculine young men a heaven they did not care about. Until the heaven the Church taught the young men to aspire to had got some young blood in it, and was a heaven that would make them feel strong and free and glad, it would never interest them. What a scathing indictment of the Church from within while others are proclaiming to the world that the War has been the means of causing the people in general to look to the Church for guidance in their spiritual troubles! The fact is, the Church is at sixes and sevens, and doesn't know where she is; but she is making a bold effort to be on the winning side, as usual.

Defenders of the Design Argument will read with interest that at an inquest at Grimsby it was proved that the deceased had an enormous heart, weighing over two pounds as against the normal eleven ounces.

The late Dr. W. Boyd Carpenter, formerly Bishop of Ripon, was buried in Westminster Abbey. Some years ago, when it was suggested that George Meredith should be buried there, the dear clergy informed the public that the place was "full up."

The Guild of St. George will be distressed to hear that the new ten-shilling Treasury note contains a picture of Britannia in place of the "C 3" saint.

At an inquest on a Chelsea resident it was stated that the deceased had been treated by Christian Science practitioners, and that the treatment consisted of prayer. At the last an ordinary doctor was sent for, but did not reach the house until death had taken place. It was admitted that the Christian Science practitioners were paid for their services.

The "Freethinker" and the War.

WE are writing what follows in redemption of a promise made several weeks since to friends and readers who were wondering what we would do in face of the last advance in wages and prices.

When these advances occurred we thought that at last we should be compelled to vary our policy, and increase the price of the *Freethinker* to threepence. But during the past three or four weeks a change has come over the situation. The War seems nearing the end, and peace is likely to break out at any hour. In these circumstances we have decided to keep the *Freethinker* at twopence. We have held it at that price during more than four years of War, and it would be a thousand pities to have to give in at the end. We do not like giving in.

But on this decision there are several things that may be said. Heavy as the expenses have been hitherto, they will be heavier during this last year; for even though fighting ceases at once, there will be no drop in prices for some time. Wages will certainly not drop for nearly a year—if at all. And paper looks like being dearer in the immediate future. Our pre-War price for paper was just over £20 per ton. Our last paper was bought at over £130 per ton, with a warning that the next lot would be £10 per ton dearer.

Altogether the *Freethinker* is costing between £800 and £900 per year more to produce than it did when War broke out. This will give readers some notion of the difficulties we have to face—and overcome.

Thanks to our many friends these difficulties are being met. Those who have been sending along their waste paper have been giving us very real and valuable help. And we still need all we can get.

The Sustentation Fund has been well supported, as will be seen. The response has been better than last year, and we may be excused the conceit (if it be conceit) of taking this as a renewed expression of confidence in our work and general management. We appreciate this confidence more than can be put into words, all we can do is to transform appreciation into deeds.

The deficit of last year has been more than cleared off, and we should, following our usual rule, have closed the Fund by now. But so many of the subscribers have urged us to keep the Fund open longer, on the ground that it will ease the burden by meeting some of the loss as it accrues weekly, that we have decided to do so.

We still feel that the resolve to keep the paper at its old price was a sound one. The proof is that the circulation steadily improves. When we wrote in September, we mentioned that the circulation, besides making good all losses, was some 1,300 copies weekly better than it was in 1914. We have now improved on that, and are steadily climbing towards the completion of our second thousand new readers. And we don't intend to stop there.

The great thing we have kept before us is the fact that the *Freethinker* exists mainly as an organ of propaganda. And it has done more in this way than many people realize. It gives its services and space to all Freethought propagandist work absolutely free, taking nothing in the shape of subsidy or payment from any source. In addition, it has distributed large quantities of literature to soldiers and sailors, as our readers know, with good results. The publishing side of the work has also been resumed and extended.

For myself, I have the utmost confidence in the future of the paper—so much confidence that I have sunk a very large sum of money for use in purchasing supplies, and in issuing new publications. When I say that, it must not be understood that I am a man of means, although what little I could scrape together has gone that way. But it is chiefly borrowed capital, for which I am personally responsible. That, indeed, is one of the pressing difficulties—want of capital with which to undertake fresh enterprises. One cannot buy stocks of paper and issue new publications without capital, and I am pleased and proud that friends have had confidence enough in me and my plans to advance funds sufficient to meet immediate needs. As the plans I have in view are worked out, all this will right itself in time.

So the *Freethinker* will, short of something in the nature of a catastrophe, remain at twopence. Nothing will be placed in the way of its increasing sales, or its increased usefulness. All over the country friends of the paper are working with a will. We cannot mention them all by name; they are too numerous. But what has been done could not have been done without their help. We are all fellow-workers in a great Cause; the prominence of some is, perhaps, accidental; and when the War is done, and we get back to normal conditions, we are sure we shall all have reason to rejoice at the result of our united efforts.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

November 10, Liverpool; November 17, Birmingham (N. S. S. Conference); November 24, Leeds; December 1, Ferndale; December 8, Leicester; December 15, Nuneaton; December 22, Glasgow.

To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—November 10, Sheffield; December 1, Swansea; December 8, Ferndale.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £411 11s. 7d. Clifford Williams, 10s.; R. Hankey, 9s. 6d.; E. Elmes, 5s.; H. R., 2s. 6d.; T. Jones, 2s. 6d.; R. Benn, 3s.; "Ajax," 2s.; New Reader, 3s.; W. Berry, 5s.; L. Morgan, 2s. 6d.; D. Hayes, 1s. 6d.; L. H., 2s.; Ex-Wesleyan, 3s.; T. Underwood, 1s.; W. T. Phillips, 6s. 6d.; W. Wilson, 5s.; T. Murphy, 2s. 6d.; E. J. Brown, 9s. 6d.; Three Troedyrhiw Readers, 13s.; S. Chapple, 5s.; Tom and Tim, 5s.; Swansea Branch N. S. S., £1; Per Sec. Manchester Branch, 10s. Total, £418 0s. 7d.

MR. CLIFFORD WILLIAMS, of Birmingham, and one of the Society's Vice-Presidents, in forwarding his contribution to our Sustentation Fund, says that in his opinion the response to our appeal is an indication of the advance we are making. He adds: "The foregoing, coupled with the opening of new Branches, the increasing interest manifested (especially here in Birmingham), shows conclusively how we are progressing; and the barometer of public opinion, so steadily rising in our favour, proves how well justified has been your enthusiasm and optimism, backed up by your ability."

J. HARDIE.—We take the will for the deed, and know you *are* doing all you can. No one can do more. We are glad to hear that by your outspoken confession of belief you have broken down a deal of opposition. We venture the opinion that something depends here upon character. With a poor character, frankness invites attack; a better one defeats it.

G. FINCH.—We are greatly obliged for your letter. We will bear the matter in mind and write you when the proper occasion arrives.

E. J.—Send in the names of the soldiers and we will see to the rest. Of course, our parcels are sent out post free.

T. ZEISS (Shoreham).—There is no Branch of the N. S. S. near you. We are sending parcels to address given.

R. BERRY.—We have the *Bible Handbook*, *Infidel Death Beds*, and a number of other things marked for reissue so soon as circumstances allow us do so.

G. E. WEBB.—We quite endorse all you say as to the relative value of the Freethought *versus* the Christian ideal. But have you not missed the sarcastic note in our comments? For the rest our argument was that the same fundamental human nature is common to both Christians and Freethinkers, and that the better aspect of the Christian's nature is really injured by his devotion to Christianity, and by the influence of supernaturalistic ideals.

W. H. BRIDEN.—Parcel sent. Hope it will prove useful.

R. ROBERTS.—We know nothing of the value of Pelmanism. It is well advertised—whether that shows virtue or enterprise we are unable to judge.

W. J.—We don't see how the question can be further discussed with profit to anyone concerned.

J. GRIFFITH.—Something of what you desire is being done. Mr. Cohen is quite willing to pay Merthyr a visit if a suitable hall can be obtained. Thanks for good wishes.

E. LYTE.—We have handed your letter to one of the parties concerned.

J. CHAPPLE.—Please send the papers along. We are obliged for good wishes.

WE have another offer from a reader who is desirous of sending a weekly copy to someone who is not already a reader. We shall be glad to receive an address.

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

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

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

Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.

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

Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d. three months, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Cohen lectures to-day in Liverpool, at the Clarion Cafe, 25 Cable Street. The meetings will be at 3 and 7 o'clock, and there is likely to be discussion on both occasions. It has been found impossible to secure a larger hall, owing to the occupancy of other places by the military, etc.; but the Clarion Cafe is a good-sized, comfortable hall, and at any rate is the best that can be obtained in present circumstances. There is room for a strong forward movement in Liverpool, and after the War we feel sure it will be attempted.

This is the last opportunity we shall have of calling attention to the special N. S. S. Conference at Birmingham. A good gathering of delegates and members is expected, and we think all Branches will be represented. The meetings will be held in the Repertory Theatre, Station Street, Birmingham. The morning meeting opens at 10.30, afternoon at 2.30.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd visits Sheffield to-day (Nov. 10), and lectures in the Builders' Exchange, Cross Burgess Street, at 6.30, on "The Value of the Bible in National Life." Admission is free.

The freedom of the press is with the *Freethinker* a vital principal, and we have never concealed our dislike to the way in which the censorship of books and pamphlets have been carried on during the War. We have received from the Glasgow Socialist Labour Press, a statement which deserves some public attention. According to the statement of the Secretary to the Press, over three months ago the Press was raided, and the place closed for merely printing, not publishing, some works to which the military authorities took exception. Mr. Bell, the Secretary, affirms that no explanation of this action was furnished until October 8; even then, it is claimed, the reasons given were of a misleading character. At any rate, the policy of seizing printing plant and closing printing offices is of a very questionable character. It is punishing for an offence that might be committed in the future. Hitherto, English law has proceeded on the principle that an offence must be committed before a penalty can be inflicted. And any other policy in relation to publications is a covert attack on freedom of speech and of the press. To close a man's business and seize his printing plant because he has printed something to which objection is taken, and to do it without open trial, is a travesty of justice.

Thirty-nine new members were admitted to the N. S. S. at the last Executive Meeting, and permission given to form a new Branch at Rhondda. This makes the fourth Branch of the Society started in South Wales within the last two years, and there are more to come. At the end of the month Mr. Cohen is lecturing in new districts in South Wales,

which will, probably, lead to further good results. When the War is over, and something like normal conditions return, an equally determined attempt at organization must be made in Ireland and Scotland. Both places are ripe for it.

The success of the two Pioneer four-page leaflets, *What Will You Put in Its Place?* and *What Is the Use of the Clergy?* has been so pronounced—large editions of both have been sold—that Mr. Cohen has written four more, making six in all. These are now in the press, and we hope to issue them in the course of a week or so. They are all specially written with a view to propaganda.

The Rationalist Press is issuing a very useful tract for use during the forthcoming General Election, on the question of Compulsory Church-going in Army and Navy. The tract calls attention to the injustice of compelling men to attend a religious service in which they have no faith, and cites from various chaplains and others as evidence of the feeling of the men against the practice. We wish the tract the widest circulation, and feel sure it will do much good. At present soldiers and sailors are the only ones who are compelled to attend a religious service, and we see no reason why enlistment should rob a man of what is regarded as a right in all civilized countries.

Mr. Percy Muir, of the Christian Evidence Society, who was announced to speak for the North London Branch last Sunday on "Internationalism" was, unfortunately, prevented owing to a bad attack of influenza. Mr. Storey, at practically a moment's notice, threw himself into the breach. He was opposed by Mr. Kelf, and a brisk discussion followed. It is hoped that Mr. Muir is making a good recovery, and will be able to deliver his lecture some time in the New Year.

South Wales friends will please note that Mr. T. F. Palmer is lecturing to day (November 10) in the Workman's Hall, Ogmores Vale, at 2.30, and in the Gem Picture House, Maesteg, at 7.30.

Mr. John Drinkwater, whose play, *Abraham Lincoln*, has just closed a successful run at the Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, is lecturing in the same building for the local Branch of the N. S. S. on "Poetry and Conduct" this evening at 7 o'clock. We trust there will be a first-rate audience to receive the lecturer.

We note the death, on November 4, of Andrew D. White, ex-Ambassador of U.S.A., and author of *The Warfare of Science with Theology*. This work is in two large volumes, detailed and scholarly in character, and provides a very armoury of facts for all interested on the subject.

The Greed of Gold.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.—*Matthew vi. 19-21.*

I AM not fond of attending funerals. In the course of my career I have had to attend a good many; I have always gone, however, as a matter of duty, and never out of any desire on my part for visiting cemeteries or taking part in the ceremony connected with the burial of the dead. Indeed, although I live within easy walking distance of three large cemeteries, sometimes an interval of as much as a year or more will elapse between my last visit and the call of duty to attend again. A few months ago I received an invitation to attend a funeral which I could not very well decline. A distant relative of mine had died, and Uncle Joe and I were requested to attend the funeral, seats in one of the

coaches being reserved for us. And let me say just here that the business of an undertaker has always appeared to me to be a very melancholy one. No matter how he feels, whether cheerful or sad, he always has to wear a woeful countenance. He must not smile while in the performance of his duty; and while trying to cheer up the bereaved mourners, he must be careful that he says the right word in the right place, and in the proper tone, or he may offend those whom it is his greatest concern to please.

We have witnessed many funeral reforms during the past fifty years. I am old enough to remember when "mutes" were employed to stand outside houses from which the body of the "dear departed" was to be taken to the cemetery. Two of these gentlemen with top hats stood there for an hour or two, each holding a staff in one hand and a truncheon in the other, and looking as miserable as they could, with often a group of youngsters on the pavement as spectators. All the male mourners also were expected to wear great, heavy, black cloaks and top hats with big black bands round them, and streamers hanging down their backs; dingy black gloves, that had been worn by hundreds of mourners, were served out to the male followers, and large handkerchiefs with thick black borders were used on such occasions; and I was quite glad when my eldest brother, at my father's funeral, declined to wear either the cloak or the long streamer round the hat, although I remember this action on my brother's part grieved my dear mother very much. But action of this kind was needed to lead to reform, and reform came in time, though it seemed a long time in coming. When, however, it did come, reforms came rapidly, and funerals are not such painful performances as they were in my youth.

It was a fine afternoon last July when Uncle Joe and I attended the funeral in question. The deceased gentleman, who was an uncle of mine on my mother's side, having been a Christian and Churchman all his life, was buried in "consecrated ground," and the Church of England Burial Service was read over his remains.

After the service, we returned to the house, where a good tea awaited us. There were no "funeral baked meats" that Hamlet refers to as being customary in his day. We were living in War-time, and our coupons did not admit of us faring too sumptuously. But I remember in my youth that after a funeral the mourners were supplied with a "high tea," and fared like aldermen at a banquet. In fact, it reminds me of the old lady who boasted that she had buried ten members of her family, and "every one of 'em, thank gawd, was buried with a 'am." After tea, there was the usual conversation, and then we all sat solemnly round the drawing-room table, while the will of the deceased old gentleman was read. It was very brief. He did not leave much money, but all he had he left to his widow, with the earnest wish that if any of the children, who were all married and fairly advanced in life, should need any assistance, that it should be provided at the discretion of the widow. Now, that is the sort of will, as they say in the legal circles, "without any complications." When this little ceremony was over, Uncle Joe started the first topic of conversation by telling us about the will of a rich employer of his when he was quite a youth. This employer, who had amassed a considerable fortune by sharp practice, made a will in which he left several large sums to charitable institutions, a large sum to the church of which he was a member for a stained glass window, but he left very little to his widow and children; but, instead, he left a large sum to a lady to whom he had been paying a good deal of attention, and a further sum to the two illegitimate offspring of the aforesaid lady.

When Uncle Joe had finished his interesting narrative, I thought I would have a sly dig at my respected relative's religious beliefs; so I pointedly asked him if he considered that his old employer was really a Christian.

"A Christian!" exclaimed Uncle Joe, "of course he was; a nominal Christian—and a bad one at that. Of course, there are bad Christians, just as there are bad Freethinkers. You will not deny that there are bad Freethinkers?"

"Certainly not. But if a Freethinker is bad there is no hope for him in this world, and he does not expect any in another. Every man has to suffer the consequences of his own misdeeds. In the case of the Christian, he hopes to get forgiveness in the next world, and a promise is held out to him in the words of Scripture: 'There is more joy in heaven over the return of one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentence.'"

"In this case," responded Uncle Joe, "there was no evidence that my old employer ever did repent, and the probability is that he went his way to perdition."

"What, after giving a stained glass window to the church? Surely, not?"

"Oh, but the Church could not give him pardon for his offence. Don't you remember those lines of Claudius in *Hamlet* :—

May one be pardon'd and retain the offence
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may shove by Justice;
And oft the wicked prize itself buys out the law,
But it is not so above. There is no shuffling,
There the action lies in its true nature,
And we ourselves compell'd
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence.

"A fine passage, indeed, Uncle Joe. I did not think you were a student of Shakespeare. I am glad, however, to know it. But remember, Claudius was a villain and a murderer, and in that very speech was arguing for the efficacy of prayer to blot out sin, even the crime of which he was guilty. But we were talking about Christians amassing large fortunes contrary to the teachings of their Lord and Master."

"I know we were," said Uncle Joe. "Christians are like other people, they have their weaknesses as well as their strong points."

"I have observed that very often. Why some of the bishops have left enormous fortunes, notwithstanding the injunction of their Master to 'Lay not up for themselves treasures on earth,' etc. And many of the clergy have accumulated large sums, and in their wills have left none to charitable objects."

"Yes, I know it, and I deplore their inconsistent conduct."

"They seem to forget altogether the teaching of Jesus—I went on: 'Blessed be ye poor'; 'Woe unto you rich'; 'It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.' Some of them assuredly seem to think that the camel will be able to squeeze his hump through the needle's eye. Or do they really in their hearts say: 'A bird in the hand is worth two in a bush.'"

"Oh, don't say that. That is a very old joke—in fact quite a chestnut," said Uncle Joe, rather maliciously.

"Very likely; but it's true nevertheless. Why, only a week or two ago my friend, 'Mimmermus,' gave a list of amounts left by ten bishops and two archbishops in the *Freethinker* amounting in the aggregate to the large sum of £611,154, certainly a considerable burden for these poor divines to stagger under while preaching the doctrine of the blessedness of poverty to their credulous followers."

"Yes, that's the sort of ridicule one expects from Free-thinkers. You never hear that kind of thing from Christians."

"Oh, indeed; that shows that you are not acquainted with the methods of the Christian Want-of-Evidence Society and other similar bodies. But suppose we leave the bishop and the clergy out of the question, and deal only with the ordinary layman—look at the colossal fortunes many of them lay up? Take all their investments in 'War Loans,' all their deposits in banks, all their insurances, etc., surely all these are in direct opposition to the teaching of making no provision for the future? 'Take no thought for the morrow what ye shall eat, what ye shall drink, or wherewithal she shall be clothed,' etc. The fact is we must make provision for the future or we should perish. And, therefore, the Christian, like the Freethinker, ignores such teachings in his daily life, and acts upon teachings that are more practicable and suitable for the times in which he lives."

At this point we branched off into a discussion on food prices and the War, in which the ladies present took part, then a little port wine for one's stomach's sake for those who cared to imbibe, a nice refreshing cup of coffee for those who were total abstainers, a little further talk on various subjects and we rose to take farewell of my dear old aunt, the widow, who had lost one who had been a partner to her through a very long and happy life, and the members of her family who had lost a good father, and the community a very honest, straightforward, and respected citizen.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Soldiers of Freethought.

And if ye cannot be saints of knowledge, then, I pray you, be at least its warriors. They are the companions and fore-runners of such saintship.—*Nietzsche*.

AMIDST the hatreds and rancours of this World-War, Nature, to the thoughtless, irritates and provokes with her impassive "neutrality." There is an almost irresistible impulse in every man, which only *true* education can remove, to regard himself as nature's apex, and the world as his justification. This is a well-known characteristic of the child-mind, and unfortunately for civilization, the majority of us remain "children," thanks to "pap" served out to us in press, Parliament, and pulpit.

True knowledge, again, begets humility of intellect; the seeker after truth, if he is honest, realizes the elusiveness of his quest, and is content to follow the lonely dark pathways, leading he knows not whither, handing on the torch which lit him to posterity. The thinker grapples with Nature's problems, and himself her manifestation, knows from his studies, that if he and his kind only *will*, she can be made to attain greater heights. The danger lies in this latter class abnegating their natural instincts, and relegating to the "mob" the most important functions conducive to the life and progress of society. This reticence, this "conspiracy of silence" on the part of the more thoughtful is a real menace to the future.

We listen in vain for the views of a John Morley. On the greatest of issues we are treated to the unceasing platitudes of the Bishop of London and Mr. Bottomley. I must confess to a bias in favour of what is termed "Apostolic favour" in religious parlance. A Bradlaugh will effect more change in a lifetime than a score of his more compromising brethren. Unfortunately, *iron men* are as rare as candour in a priest, but we weaker ones, in our acquiescence in the present order of things, do not encourage their production. The great liberations of the past will have lived and suffered in vain if we fail to continue their work in the same fearless spirit and remain "slackers" to the cause. To live comfortably and happily is not the ideal of the *true* Freethinker, in fact he cannot be "happy" unless he is striving—striving for what—for that serenity of spirit which can brave bigoted, derisive,

mobs, and can suffer poverty, sickness, and even death, in his lonely search for richer worlds. It is the distinction of finer spirits to find joy in such a life, as the applause of the gallery, and "saved souls" is the "joy" of men like the Rev. Dr. Sunday and Mr. Bottomley. Life, bounding, red, radiant, life must be our war cry; let us shout it in the ears of the preachers of death!

Religion in the past has proved itself a deadly enemy of life; it sucked dry the noble forms of the ancients, and left a crafty, cunning, anæmic, priesthood to sing their mournful songs of death through the dark ages. Once, again, it extinguished with its book-worship the promise of the Renaissance. History affords us countless examples of the danger of that "latent superstition" Mr. Cohen so gravely warns us of. Do not let us share the complacency of the consumptive who is most hopeful when death is near. Read the jesting criticisms of the "Nazarenes" by the great Pagans of antiquity—where is their jesting now? A repetition of an historical catastrophe, such as the worst periods of the Middle Ages, is improbable; but who, bearing in mind the prosperous army of star-gazers, Spiritualists, and Catholic journalists, can say it is impossible?

In the work of our little paper lies the nucleus of a healthy endeavour for even the most obscure. In that way will saner influences sweep through the land, overwhelming the tottering strongholds of priestcraft, statecraft, and hypocrisy—that is, if every man to himself "be true." The answer to Chesterton's cheap gibe at Swinburne's *Songs Before Sunrise*, "the sun which never rose" rests with you.

E. A. (Johannesburg).

Correspondence.

HERBERT SPENCER AND THE UNKNOWABLE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Without presuming to intervene in the discussion between Dr. Lyttelton and yourself, may I point out that Dr. Lyttelton is mistaken in supposing Spencer was unable to see that the statement, "God is unknowable," involves a contradiction? Spencer admitted the contradiction, and endeavoured to explain it. In *First Principles*, Part I., chap iv., he quotes with approval the arguments of Hamilton and Mansel to show that the Absolute is unknowable, but to these he adds a qualification, which is, briefly, as follows: Though these propositions must be accepted in their entirety when viewed from a purely logical aspect, when contemplated from their psychological aspect, they are found to be imperfect statements of the truth. Besides that *definite* consciousness of which Logic formulates the laws, there is also an *indefinite* consciousness which cannot be formulated. Besides complete thought and incomplete thought admitting of completion, there are thoughts impossible to complete which are yet real in that they are normal affections of the intellect. "To say that we cannot know the Absolute, is, by implication, to affirm that there is an Absolute. In the very denial of our power to learn *what* the Absolute is, there lies hidden the assumption *that* it is."

In the Postscript to Part I., Spencer is still more explicit. After referring to criticisms of the assertion that the Ultimate Reality is unknown and *unknowable*, he writes:—

.....The second objection is not thus easily met. It is doubtless true that saying what a thing is not, is, in some measure saying what it is;.....Hence it cannot be denied that to affirm of the Ultimate Reality that it is, in a remote way, to assert some knowledge of it, and therefore involves a contradiction.

But against this he contends that, as our intelligence is limited to the relative, and we are obliged to use words moulded to it, we cannot speak of the non-relative without introducing into our propositions meanings connoted by those words—meanings foreign to a subject-matter which transcends relations.

Much as we may admire the great work of Spencer, probably most of us find it difficult to adopt his Agnostic position, as, if we take this standpoint, everything becomes mysterious, inscrutable, and contradictory; nothing is intelligible. For example, Spencer tells us that the man of science, more than any other, truly *knows* that in its ultimate nature nothing

can be known; that things in themselves cannot be known to us, and that knowledge of them, even if it were possible, would be useless. Again, having given an example to illustrate the meaning of such words as "explanation," "comprehension," "understanding," etc., and having clearly shown that they all involve merely the successive inclusion of special truths in more general truth, he concludes that the deepest facts cannot be understood. For, if the process is unlimited, then, since infinite time would be required to reach it, an ultimate explanation cannot be reached. While if, on the other hand, the process is limited, then, since the most general truth does not admit of inclusion in any other, it does not admit of interpretation; explanation must finally bring us down to the inexplicable, and comprehension must become something other than comprehension before the ultimate fact can be comprehended.

The mistake here appears to me to lie in supposing that when all facts have been included in some general truth, there still remains something to be done. Instead of regarding the most general truth as inexplicable, we should surely regard it as the *end* of explanation. We have completed what we set out to do. Beyond this point explanation becomes, not impossible, but, in the terms of the case, simply meaningless. If, when this point has been reached, the mind is still unsatisfied, it must seek for satisfaction in something other than explanation; comprehension must, indeed, become something other than comprehension, but *not*, as Spencer contends, for the ultimate fact to be *comprehended*. He seems to have forgotten the canon he has laid down.

J. A. TOMKINS.

THE TASK OF FREETHOUGHT.

SIR,—I note that in the *Freethinker* for October 20 there is another letter bemoaning the lack of constructive policy on the part of the Freethought movement. Might I point out that those who indulge in so many regrets about the critical methods of Freethought are evidently taking a wrong estimate of the matter? True criticism, and that is what all serious Freethinkers aim at, is not entirely destructive. The object of criticism is to destroy the worst and bring into relief the best that is to be found in the subject under criticism. And in order to do this it is frequently, if not always, necessary to add fresh knowledge to what is saved from destruction, or it is necessary to give a new interpretation to facts from which false interpretations have been cleared.

It should not be very difficult for the average Freethinker to realize that in clearing his mind of obsolete and illogical interpretations of the known facts of the universe, and replacing them by accepting rational interpretations, he is doing something constructive as well as destructive. It is this double-sided critical work which the Freethought Movement aims at on a large scale. That much has been accomplished in this way can be realized by those who will read the works of Draper, Buckle, Lecky, or the masterly *Short History of Freethought*, by J. M. Robertson. Surely the circulation, throughout society, of the results of modern science and of rational views of life, is a constructive work of which Freethinkers may be proud.

That much improvement in the conduct of our meetings is to be desired I think most of us will admit. But that is a matter which rests very largely with each Branch Society, and will be determined to some extent by the material resources of each Branch.

We must not allow lack of ceremony at meetings to blind us to the fact of the great constructive work which is being done on intellectual lines. A work which has made itself felt in society, and will continue to be of social benefit.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

Obituary.

Death is busy in our midst, and it has dealt a heavy blow to Mr. and Mrs. James Neate in the death of their only child, James Albert, at the age of seventeen and-a-half years. Delicate from his birth, the boy's parents had given themselves to their son's upbringing, and no child ever had more devoted parents. The reward of their efforts lay in seeing many of

the dangers of their son's early childhood overcome, and the promise of a healthier maturity given. Unfortunately, he was stricken with the prevailing epidemic on October 25, and succumbed to pneumonia on the morning of November 2. Mr. Neate is a very old and one of the most devoted members of the N.S.S., a member of the Executive, and of the Board of the Secular Society, Limited. Friends can offer nothing but sympathy in the face of such a tragedy, but we are sure that they will possess that in full measure from all who read these lines. Owing to the pressure under which undertakers are working, we are unable, at the time of going to press, to give either the time or place of the funeral.—C. COHEN.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, F. A. Davies, "A Visit to the Western Front."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Free Trade Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W., near Kennington Oval Station): 7.30, Mr. E. C. Ratcliffe, "God, Freewill, and Immortality."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, Miss Margaret McMillan, "New Elements in the Education Bill."

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Repertory Theatre, Station Street): 7, Mr. John Drinkwater, "Poetry and Conduct."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Good Templar's Hall, 122 Ingram Street): 12 noon, A Lecture, "Moral Sentiments and Religious Beliefs."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Sydney A. Gimson, "A Confession of Faith."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Clarion Cafe, 25 Cable Street): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "God and the State"; 7, "The New World and the Old Faith."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Baker's Hall, 56 Swan Street): 6.30, Mr. St. Rhone, "How to Improve the Relationship of the Sexes."

SHEFFIELD ETHICAL SOCIETY (Builders' Exchange, Cross Burgess Street): 6.30, Mr. J. T. Lloyd, "The Value of the Bible in National Life."

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