

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Do We Know God?

There is an important distinction between describing symptoms and diagnosing causes. If I go to a doctor and tell him I have a pain in the head, or in the stomach, he will listen to me with respect and take my word for it. But if I proceed to tell him precisely what is the cause of my pain he will, in all probability, treat my diagnosis with contempt. When the founder of Christian science informed the world that a boil on the back of the neck was unbelief made manifest, she described a fact and expressed a conviction. The fact was the boil, the personal conviction was that the boil was an expression of unbelief. No one would question the fact or the existence of the conviction. They would say that the conviction was a mistaken one. Sitting quietly in my room I may have a conviction that someone is in a neighbouring apartment. The conviction is genuine, but it may be due to no more than an attack of "nerves." States of mind are indisputable and ultimate psychological facts. It is their trustworthiness, their correspondence with an external reality that furnishes the occasion for doubt or denial.

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### Hallucination or Truth.

Now, in the discussion between myself and Dr. Lyttelton, we appear to have reached a point where what has just been said seems relevant to the question at issue. Dr. Lyttelton says that the question of belief in God is that of "personal knowledge of an invisible spiritual Being," and that such knowledge "cannot be acquired secondhand." Well, there is a sense in which all knowledge is and must be of a personal character—that is, the thing to be known or the idea to be accepted as true, must be brought into direct personal relation with my consciousness. But, then, I fancy more than this is meant. What is meant, it seems to me, is that I must accept the existence of God as being a fact, because some Christian informs me that he has direct personal knowledge of such a being. But in that case am I not accepting a belief in the existence of God at secondhand? Am I not doing exactly what Dr. Lyttelton says cannot be done? Either that or the matter is ruled as altogether outside the realm of discussion. For you cannot discuss the *existence* of a personal conviction.

If a man has a personal conviction that the moon is made of green cheese, there is no room for discussion on that. If the Kaiser really was convinced that he was God's agent on earth, or our bench of bishops convinced that this position was reserved for England, we cannot question the genuineness of these convictions; we can only discuss their rationality, or how far the conviction can be proved to be in harmony with fact. And if we cannot bring a personal conviction to some such test as this, in what way are we to discriminate? How are we to distinguish a conviction that expresses a truth from a delusion or an hallucination?

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### Conviction versus Accuracy.

Now, it would clearly be both useless and impertinent for me to deny that Dr. Lyttelton has a conviction that he possesses personal knowledge of "an invisible spiritual Being." On that head he must be the supreme authority. So, also, if we were writing in 1618, instead of 1918, we should have to make the same concession in face of the assurance of certain people that they had personal knowledge of "Old Nick." But the existence of a conviction is one thing, the reliability of that conviction is another and a different thing. If I did not take it for granted that Dr. Lyttelton has the conviction he states, this discussion would never have commenced. But, equally, if the reliability of the conviction is not to be called in question, discussion is impossible or unprofitable. The illustration concerning knowledge of a fellow human being seems beside the point. If I do not wish to make the acquaintance of B through A, certainly A would be foolish to introduce B. But there is no question of B's existence; or, if there is, A can soon settle that, leaving it open whether I desire a further knowledge of B or not. But, in the case of God, it is the very existence that is in question. And it is surely unsatisfactory to be told that someone else has knowledge of his existence, but that knowledge cannot be imparted, nor even be made the subject of discussion—it must be taken for granted, or accepted by C because D affirms that he is in personal touch with him.

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### Freethinkers versus Christians.

I have said before that in the Freethought philosophy of life there is a logical place for the Christian; but in the Christian philosophy of life there is no room for the Freethinker. Dr. Lyttelton's insistence upon a personal knowledge of God for all who desire it is an illustration in point. When will Christians bear in mind that in dealing with Freethinkers it is not a question of adepts *v.* the uninitiated, of adults *v.* children, or of a higher civilization *v.* a lower one? When will they realize that we understand their position in a way in which they cannot understand ours? We have been where they are; they have not been where we are. We do not represent a stage in a mental pilgrimage, the end of which is Theism. It is they who stand for a stage in a mental pilgrimage, the end of which is Atheism. The Christian can tell us nothing concerning his faith that we have

not felt and experienced. And we know that this sense of contact with an "invisible spiritual Being," such as exists in the finer type of Christian, is no more than an expression of a sense of identity with a larger social whole. In political life we see the same thing expressed as patriotism, and, in sociological jargon, in a sense of "solidarity." It is again a question of, first, a wrong interpretation, and, second, an exploitation of a common human quality. A sense of a larger life which carries us outside the range of narrow egoistic desires, and a consciousness of being part of that larger life, are good things. And the Atheist knows that in divesting these evolutionary products of a wrong interpretation and in freeing them from harmful associations, he is giving them freer scope and more profitable action. We know exactly how the Christian feels in these matters. His position represents a past stage in our own mental development.

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#### The Exploitation of Man.

May I say without offence that I quite fail to see the bearing of the eulogy of Jesus, and the definition of faith, on the present discussion? That Jesus was "the greatest force for good in all history" is a statement that Dr. Lyttelton would find it hard to justify, I think. And that "His character is so sublime that among all nations and peoples it has been worshipped as divine" is hardly in accord with fact. The historic fact is that it is not the *character* of Jesus, but his *power* to save people from damnation, that has been the principal feature of the Christian crusade through the centuries. And if we are to accept the definition of faith (it is, I think, open to question) as "the power to believe the best of persons and things," we can agree that this is all Dr. Lyttelton says it is, so far as its good influence on human relations is concerned. But what has this to do with faith in the Christian *Christ* or belief in the existence of God? Our quarrel with Christianity is not that Christian teachers have not appealed to good, and sometimes the highest, qualities of human nature, but that they have exploited these qualities, and squandered them in a useless or injurious manner. Without trust and confidence in one another, social progress is impossible; but this trust and confidence has no necessary connection with religious belief. It is rooted in the gregarious instinct of the race, it is strengthened and developed by the work of every generation, and it will remain even though every spark of religion dies, as it now remains with those who have definitely discarded all belief in God and a future life. Faith in man is historically not the outcome of belief in God; it is rather its negation. So long as man believes in the overruling power of the gods, he remains a slave mentally and socially. It is only as belief in his own powers and capacities develops that belief in gods weakens. And part of that development is expressed in the discovery that qualities which have hitherto been interpreted in terms of belief should be properly expressed in terms of the common social life of the race.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

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Your very citadel is but a mud fort, fenced about with a few rotten bamboos; it is taken, and in its very midst we have planted the flag of truth, and it flies there and has not been touched.—*Charles Bradlaugh.*

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The philosopher Antisthenes, as the priest was initiating him in the mysteries of Orpheus, telling him that those who profest themselves of that religion, were certain to receive perfect and eternal felicities after death: "if thou believest that," answered he, "why dost thou not die thyself?"

—*Montaigne.*

## Futile Claims.

THE Rev. Dr. J. A. Hutton, of Glasgow, enjoys a great popularity both as preacher and writer of religious articles. Scarcely a week passes without a contribution from his pen gracing the columns of one or other of the Nonconformist journals. The organ most frequently favoured, perhaps, is the *Christian World*, in the issue of which for November 7 there appeared a notable article by him, entitled "A Light in a Dark Place." All Dr. Hutton's articles are based upon or suggested by some Biblical incidents or passages, and, as a rule, the papers open with a few general observations. That is true of the article just mentioned. We are told, indeed, that the Bible is "a book of guidance, a book of moral navigation" in a world which is denominated "a dark place." To this general observation we unhesitatingly return a general denial. In point of fact, the Bible is not "a map of life, a chart of the sea of things, with all the rocks and sandbanks marked," nor is it consistent with itself in the guidance it offers to the pilgrims of the earth. It contains two conflicting ideals of life, the sacerdotal and the ethical, and both are recommended with equal fervour. Naturally, Dr. Hutton ignores the discrepancies and contradictions of Holy Writ, which the Higher Critics delight in pointing out, and quite as naturally he summarizes in his own words what he wishes us to regard as the gist of the Book's message on the subject of life. According to him, God in the Bible assures us that we are "perfectly safe if we keep to the rules," or, in other words, if we "remain humble and do not presume." Among other things, God is represented as saying to us:—

When you are at a loss or at a standstill, do not lose courage. 'Tis downward-looking that makes men dizzy. At such a moment, some sign will be given you, the flashing of some light at sea, or the appearing of some friendly star, some sign which you will understand.

The fundamental idea is that this world is a dark place that must receive light from another sphere; "a place of sicknesses and obvious cruelties, a place of apparently unjust and careless events, a place in which things go on and on in a horrible callousness, in which tides ebb and flow, and the sun rises and sets, and stars look down, with no apparent concern for our personal feelings, with no sympathy or respect for our tears and agonies and cries."

Having admitted so much, Dr. Hutton is fully aware that he is face to face with a puzzling problem. If the world in itself is thus dark and miserable, though it is God's world, and if man, though God's child, is incapable of directing his steps in and out of it, what about the essential goodness and love attributed to the Maker of both? This is how the reverend gentleman endeavours to meet the difficulty:—

If the Bible bids us believe in God's love for us and interest in us, it does so with its eyes open and aware of all that passes in this world. Whatever the faith be which the Bible urges upon us and beseeches us to make the light and principle of our life, it is something which has taken account of the evil that is in the world, the pain, the disease, and the cruel play of chance. Therefore, let no one suppose that the evil which he sees in life, or the hard things which he himself has experienced, may be given as a reason for denying God, or hesitating to believe. On the very contrary, it is because life holds these difficult and staggering things that, by an impulse of heart, we protest that there is something more and something other, and we lift up our eyes in faith.

Surely, Dr. Hutton does not expect that anybody in his senses will be convinced by such flimsy argumentation. "Something"—always undefined—is a favourite term

with the reverend gentleman, which occurs several times in every article he writes, and which he offers as an explanation of some terrible and very clearly defined reality. It matters not how strongly or how bitterly we may protest against things as they are, the fact that we protest affords no indication whatever that there is "something more and something other" in store for us. Mere protests are worse than useless unless they ripen into determined action or translate themselves into resolute upward-gazing and stepping. To describe the very protest against things as they are as "the breaking of the sea of eternity over the threshold of time" is at once to employ an unfortunate metaphor and to be hopelessly vague, for in the next sentence the spiritual life is likened to "a fire which glows within our hearts," which fire the waters of the eternal sea would naturally extinguish. Besides, "for every fire there is needed the dull material for burning, but there is needed also a wind from heaven," not waves from any ocean. Now, assuming the existence of "the fire of a believing life," of what practical use has it ever been or ever can be? Things are what they are in spite of the fact that a believing life has been burning for thousands of years. The Gospel Jesus predicted that, if he were lifted up on the Cross, he would draw all men unto himself. The record tells us that the lifting up actually happened, but the confidently promised result has not been realized. Christianity has been a woeful disappointment both as to the extent of its expansion and the benefits it has bestowed upon the regions where it has outwardly triumphed.

Dr. Hutton's reasoning at this stage is obviously fallacious. In his estimation the supreme thing in human life is the fire of faith, and man's chief duty is to get that fire duly kindled and to keep it burning brightly to the end; but this cannot be effected without the "dead difficulties of the world and of experience." These dead difficulties and obstacles exist, seemingly, for the sole purpose of producing the life of faith and piety; and in the overwhelming majority of instances they exist utterly in vain. Only in an insignificant percentage of the human race does the fire of faith burn at all, and even the few in whom it may be said to be "gloriously kindling" do not show any moral and social superiority over the huge majority who know it not. Dr. Hutton informs us that a world which presented no difficulties to faith would destroy faith itself; but he omits to explain how and why, in a world teeming with all sorts of difficulties and obstacles, the fire of faith is conspicuous only by its absence. Thus the theological argument is as absurd as it is fallacious. Take the following sample:—

The Christian faith in God is the energy of God within us playing upon the contradictions of this present world. Faith is the indomitable perseverance of love, feeding on all things and triumphing over all things. It is the song of the nightingale out of a dark world. It is the spirit of music, of hope and gratitude and reconciliation, which, far from being quenched by life's darkness, in life's darkness finds its purest understanding of itself. Let no one say that life and the world contradict faith. It is not so. What they mean who say such a thing is that life and the world, considered by themselves, are dark. But faith is built upon darkness. Faith is the final wisdom of the soul—its escape in God when the dark waters would overwhelm it.

What gives character to that extract is the strange mixture of truth and error contained in it. Nothing could be truer than the admission that "faith is built upon darkness"; and the darkness remains and increases in consequence. It is equally true that faith is a cowardly attempt to escape from the evil that is in the world without abolishing it; but such an escape, when most successful, is purely emotional, imaginary, not real.

True life consists not in fleeing from difficulties and obstacles on wings of supernatural faith, but in waging a deadly war against them, in heroically endeavouring to roll them clean away. Theoretically, at any rate, a Christian is a person who takes shelter behind a God of love and mercy that he may not perish with the wicked world, a modern Noah who sails in a Divinely devised ship and therefrom beholds the destruction of an ungodly race in the dark waters of a wrathful flood. It necessarily follows that the escape is not only sought in a cowardly spirit, but also of no genuine benefit to anybody concerned. The world's betterment is an extremely slow but perfectly natural evolution, the very opposite of a mighty miracle wrought by supernatural grace. Sometimes Dr. Hutton himself seems to recognize the truth of this statement, as, for example, in the following passage:—

Life for you and me and all of us, one by one, is a pathway, a road from one place to another, from the cradle to the grave, and it is a road which leads right through the heart of the world. Our business is to get through honourably, learning all the way. We are born with the instinct to walk. We are born with the desire to set out. We are, that is to say, a bundle of coiled-up springs of action. We are each a home of energy, purpose, life.

But that is only a gleam, a moment's flash, of common sense, which soon gives place to the orthodox attitude of loyalty to the superstitious Word which has done so much to retard the genuine progress of the world. Dr. Hutton is professionally the slave of the Bible, and he always starts from and never fails to return to it. He believes in two worlds, the actual and the ideal, and so do we; but he believes further that both are of Divine origin, that both were created by the God of love who is now urging us all to flee from the one and find our home in the other. To us, on the contrary, the actual world is the ideal in the making, the sole makers thereof being ourselves.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Perils of Thought.

Understand that well, it is the deep commandment, dimmer or clearer, of our whole being, to be free. Freedom is the one purport, wisely aimed at, or unwisely, of all man's struggles, toilings, and sufferings, on this earth.

—Thomas Carlyle.

MR. CHARLES T. GORHAM has put Freethinkers under another heavy obligation. In a previous work, *The Spanish Inquisition*, he has already told of the disastrous effects on social life and intellectual progress which were produced by its organized cruelty. In the present valuable and scholarly treatise, *The Mediæval Inquisition* (Watts & Co.), he again goes deeply into the subject, and gives us the result of his long and laborious study. No such history has till now been issued in England in so easily accessible a form. To his special knowledge of his subject, Mr. Gorham adds a wide range of general reading, and in this work he writes with a lucidity and a precision that adds materially to its attractiveness.

Few books that I have read have so entranced me; so lifted me up at times in admiration of man's heroism; so thrown me down at the vision of his ignorance and cruelty. The acts of the Inquisition are realities that no special pleading can remove. To read the tale makes one shudder, as if awakened from an awful nightmare. The Church of Rome made laws in the thirteenth century, enacting that heretics should be outlawed, that those who did not recant should be burnt. From that time onward the stake was a familiar form for the suppression of heresy, until the heretics became too

numerous to be murdered. It was not until the nineteenth century that the Inquisition was abolished in Spain.

The enlightenment of the Inquisitors was only equalled by their humanity. Pope Innocent VIII. issued a Bull in which he asserted that plagues and storms were the work of witches. The Church condemned the theory of the Antipodes, and the books of Copernicus, and other scientists, were placed on the Index. Anatomy was forbidden. Out of this terrible twilight of knowledge a few great intellects shine like beacons: Roger Bacon, Giordano Bruno, Galileo. Their names flame out now to accuse their persecutors.

Mr. Gorham bids us face the conclusion that civilization was long retarded by the action of the most powerful Christian Church. Here are his words:—

To us who live in the twentieth century it may appear very plain that priestly domination could not be favourable to improvement in morals or in knowledge. Prevent people from thinking, and you prevent them from improving. They lose the desire to improve; they become incapable of improvement; they neither know nor care for the pleasures of knowledge; they relapse into a state resembling that of animals. Can it be supposed that this has no effect upon their morals? And the class which puts forward the claims in question becomes equally debased. Selfishness, ignorance, and cruelty become as marked in the shepherds as in the flocks they are supposed to lead, with the additional vice of a tyrannical arrogance born of class privilege and the claim to superhuman authority.

This is Mr. Gorham's theory, and it has been carefully worked out with much learning and ingenuity. The chapter in which he deals with Catholic criticism, and which he heads, "The Gentle Art of Whitewashing," is of extreme interest. And his clever rejoinder to Catholic apologists should help to direct more attention to a writer who deserves an extended popularity. Historical writing, except that undertaken by university professors, is not too common in England. Mr. Gorham's brightly written volume, a noteworthy contribution to the subject on which he writes, should ensure a welcome that may induce him to further efforts in the field he has so fruitfully explored.

MIMNERMUS.

### Religion in the Schools.

THE educational authorities of a large city in the provinces have recently established a day trades technical school for boys of ages varying from thirteen to sixteen years. Unlike other schools of a similar type, this one is opened with prayer. How long it lasts, how it is performed, and in what manner its efficiency is intended to be ascertained, the writer is unaware, though perhaps the latter will be worked out on one of the efficiency ratio machines installed in the mechanics laboratory.

However, some one in high circles has seen fit to condone, and very likely compelled, the giving of instruction to these youths, in the very questionable art of leaning upon the Almighty for guidance. As the school is understaffed, it might be that He is being politely requested to act as a "stop gap" until, as Micawber would say, "Somebody turns up."

How it is expected that these incantations will influence the welfare of the youths for good against evil it is impossible to say. Ostensibly these youths are to be given some kind of a useful scientific training to fit them for gaining a livelihood in the years to come. Now the nature and character of this training is based on the results of sound science, and the accumulation of a vast experience which has withstood the test of time and service.

How much, then, has prayer contributed to the progress of either? Do our scientific and commercial men *pray* for results? (The reason for the italics is that some people

might hastily conclude that the latter certainly *do pray* for results). Would a physicist, for instance, go down on his knees and pray for supernatural inspiration in order to be able to solve, say, problems in low temperature research, or in the structure of the atom, or in the nature of solid and liquid solutions? Would an engineer pray for a solution to his difficulties with steam turbines, or electric motors, or petrol engines, or stresses in bridges, aeroplanes, docks, etc.? Of course not.

Everybody knows that prayer is never invoked under these and similar circumstances, for the simple reason that nobody believes it to be of any value whatever. What irony it would be to *pray* for the practical solution of, say, a thousand bullets, a second machine-gun, or a gyroscope that will be supersensitive to the vibration of an enemy ship's screw propeller going "dead slow" a hundred leagues away!

Yet if the leaders, and lesser men, too, of science and industry never require the services of the shaman's art, why do some pious hussies persist in thrusting it into the minds of schoolboys as a necessary corollary to their other studies? Do they think the youths will thereby be better able to solve, or puzzle out, the intricacies of quadratic equations? And how much assistance will it give them when they come "up against" a stiff piece of differentiation or integration, or (if they proceed that far) a knotty differential equation?

Will it make the mysteries of "work" any easier for them? Or will it enable them to understand the difference between "work" and energy—or laziness either?

Fancy a schoolboy praying for the solution of the bending moment of a loaded beam, or a pulley block and tackle, or geometrical plans and elevations, sections, and developments! He is more likely to get inspiration (in the "seat") from the business leg of a pair of compasses. Tom, Dick, and Harry, who have done their work, would laugh at Omega invoking the aid of the gods, and they would most likely tell him he ought to have gone in for a parson, and not an engineer. Most probably he would be sent to "Coventry," with the present of a soother as an indispensable companion.

And the reference to parsons shows that verily the mind of youth sometimes gives utterance to the most astute and ironical truths; for *they* seem to estimate pretty accurately, somehow, the value of a parson's services in civil life.

Evidently, then, prayer is not the stuff to give to growing youths. When they begin to realize that they are passing into the stage of manhood, they feel a healthy need for independence and self-assertion. Such virtues are a sign of physical, mental, and moral health, and they should be encouraged and developed so far as is humanly possible.

The way to do it is to develop their education along lines that will engender self-confidence and self-respect in their own power to say "I conquer." Explain to them the principles of Science—Geometry, Physics, Mechanics, Mathematics, etc.—by all means; help them when necessary to clear difficulties away; but don't warp their developing understandings by hinting to them, in the course of a preliminary canter in the hocus-pocus of prayer, that anything will come (from the Almighty) to him who waits, without the fundamental necessity of hard and strenuous thinking and reflection beforehand. As one who has been through the mill can safely prophesy, "It won't": and the Almighty will never get a correct answer to any problem for them unless they first obtain it themselves by their own exertions. More briefly, God helps those who help themselves; but God help those who don't.

S. C.

Can you tell me why a sectarian turn of mind has always a tendency to narrow and illiberalise the heart? They are orderly; they may be just; nay, I have known them merciful: but still your children of sanctity move among their fellow-creatures with a nostril snuffing putrescence and a foot-spurning filth.—Robert Burns.

It is curious to remark that nearly all men of sterling worth are simple in their manners; and yet nearly always simple manners are taken as a sign of little worth.—Leopardi.

### Acid Drops.

The War is at an end! God's day, to quote the Bishop of London has come to a close. For over four years the world has been illustrating on a gigantic scale the failure of Christianity as a civilizing force. Nations nurtured on Christianity, saturated in the Christian tradition, have shown how little Christianity did to smother the primitive savage in humanity. It is hard not to believe that some good will come out of the four years of horror. Thrones have vanished, and others are insecure. The king business has undergone a decided slump, and the Christian Churches have had one of the severest blows ever dealt them. The hollowness of their claims have been made plain to thousands, and their faith will have departed for ever. The king and the priest, springing originally from the same nest, are alike under a cloud, and the one institution cannot long survive the other. The two together contain the seed-plot of Militarism. The three have flourished together; let us hope they will perish together. The way should now be clear for the advent of man.

The War is over, said Mr. Lloyd George, "Let us thank God." In the name of man, for what? Are we to thank God for the twenty millions of deaths the War has cost the world? Or for the fact that we have had over four years of one of the most brutal wars in history? What has God done in the War, anyway? When homes were being burned and women outraged, God was silent. When passenger ships were torpedoed, God remained dumb. Human endurance, human perseverance, and human bravery have brought the War to an end. For all that God did, the War would have gone on for ever. A God worth talking about would have prevented the War ever occurring. Our priests will tell us that God worked by moving men's minds to crush the German peril. The defence is an accusation. If God could do that, why could he not order the minds of the creators of the War to move in a different direction? Really, the less said about God the better. God does nothing. That is certainly one of the lessons of the War.

Immediately after the Prime Minister had announced to Parliament the terms of the Armistice, the House of Commons adjourned to St. Margaret's to return thanks to God for the victory. We suggest that a fitting memento would be a record in all the churches of the millions of killed and wounded, with photographs of the ruined, shattered countryside, as evidence of God's fatherly care for his children. There is reason for the Allies feeling grateful to those who achieved the victory. There would have been reason for the Germans feeling grateful had they been victorious. But God is the Father of both Germans and British. And imagine the absurdity of thanking him for helping one lot of his children to slaughter another lot. Such conduct on the part of an earthly parent would land him in a police-court.

The War is a punishment for our sins say the dear clergy. The Law Courts show that bigamy charges and crimes of violence are largely on the increase.

The late Dr. Boyd Carpenter, formerly Bishop of Ripon, was a royal favourite, and was much in request at fashionable weddings. He used to say: "I am not only a carpenter but a joiner, too." In this he resembled the founder of his religion.

"Which business takes the greatest variety of coins over the counter?" asks a London editor, and adds: "the Young Men's Christian Association's record in France would be hard to beat.

The following "In Memoriam" notice appeared lately in a Scotch daily: "No news, none at all. He's dead. That's all." Very true, when you come to think of it.

Glasgow Branch of the Scottish National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, in a report, point out that last year 19,814 ill-treated and neglected children were protected by the Society's Inspectors. And this is supposed to be a Christian country. How does this record compare with the countries that have not adopted Christianity as their standard?

The Very Rev. Dr. Wallace Williamson says the day after an effective armistice was declared every church in the country should be opened and the people invited to enter and render thanks to God. He looked forward with grateful and hopeful heart to the proclamation by the Government of a day of thanksgiving and dedication after peace was signed. Wherein do the people of this country owe thanks either to God or the clergy? Does the Rev. Dr. Williamson already forget that the clergy got themselves exempted from doing their share to help the country during her hour of need? If so, the people are not likely to forget the sorry figure cut by the young, able-bodied ministers strutting about the country while they allowed others to go forth and die in order that they might live.

Now we are getting at the truth regarding the great part played by the Y.M.C.A. At Lanark Presbytery meeting. The Rev. Mr. Hunter said the appeal for more help for the Y.M.C.A. huts should be made to men who had some knowledge of the grocery trade and were able to hand out provisions and wash up floors and counters, and not to ministers who had not been accustomed to this kind of work. He did not complain so much of the kind of work as the amount of work he got to do. If he wasn't content to serve and wash up for Tommy, why didn't he go and fight alongside of him?

A writer in a London newspaper suggests that the Junker press used to scream against "the decadent French" years before the War. Maybe, that was so; but the French clericalist press did so for a generation.

Lloyd's Sunday News tells a story of a child who, looking out of the window on a wet day, asked: "Mother, what does God have on when it rains?"

"Never in the world's history has Christianity been practised on such a scale as in the trenches," say the Daily Mail. Does our contemporary imagine that the opposing soldiers are kissing one another?

"It is beyond the power of God himself to make that which is past as if it had never been." This pretty piece of theology appeared in the Daily Chronicle over the signature of Sir Hall Caine.

The newspaper press is supposed to have some slight educational value. A leading London paper recently had a lengthy paragraph concerning the "luckiest destroyer" in the Navy, and suggesting that this immunity from disaster was due "to the ship's mascot, a monkey known as Jenny." Is it not clear that the editor's concern is not education, but circulation?

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is the creator—after Edgar Allen Poe—of Mr. Sherlock Holmes. And a facility for writing detective stories and unravelling self-created mysteries seems to have placed him in a position of authority with regard to what will happen to man after death. At least, that is the only reason we can discern for his utterance of Spiritualism being taken so seriously by the newspapers. Sir Arthur has informed us that he can produce a number of parents who are convinced that they have held converse with their sons killed during the War. We are not at all surprised. Mothers sorrowing for the loss of their children, and already believing in a future life, strike us as admirable material for the spiritualistic medium; but an impartial outsider will hardly take them as valuable or impartial witnesses. It is as clear a case of the hope and the wish being father to the thought as one could desire.

Sir Arthur says that he has been on the quest for thirty years, which would imply that he was hoping to find what he has found. With so many people dying every day of our existence, it appears to us that the fact of a continued existence—which must be either true of all or none—should, long before Sir Arthur was born, have been one of the accepted and unchallengeable convictions of the human race. That it is not so makes it at most a questionable hypothesis. Sir Arthur says that Spiritualism is the greatest revelation of the last 2,000 years. We would remind the author of *Sherlock Holmes* that supposed converse with the dead is not a new thing. The belief exists with savages, and we know the grounds on which that was based, and how mistaken these people were. If the belief was not justifiable then, and was not justifiable at later periods, we really see no reason for accepting it as sound now.

We agree with Sir Arthur that religion has broken down. We would prefer to put it that it has been found out. It broke down long ago. But it is almost comic to find this used as a stick wherewith to belabour Germany. We are told that Lutheranism has given us "these Prussian devils" and Catholicism "has given us the Bavarian." But it was only the other day that Luther was the great heroic figure of Protestantism. Both that and Catholicism exist outside Germany. We are the last to deny that the influence of both forms of religion have been bad; but why restrict the evil influence to Germany? Or, if it has been bad there, how comes it that it has been good elsewhere? As a reasoner, Sir Arthur strikes us as decidedly poor, and his efforts are not calculated to impress one with the value of his judgment in matters connected with a supposed life after death.

In a case concerning a horse at Bristol, it was stated that the animal, which was described as a "jibber," in a fortnight ate the cushions of a trap, two rungs of a ladder, a halter, some webbing, and a whip. This record was beaten by the whale mentioned in the Bible, which swallowed a prophet and provided him with unfurnished apartments for three days and nights.

Canon Hannay, in his new book, *A Padre in France*, tells the story of a chaplain who preached to a battalion before going into the firing line, and who selected for his subject "Tithes Considered as a Divine Institution." Canon Hannay adds that he is sure the story is not true, but he regards it as significant that it should be told at all.

The *Daily Chronicle*, referring to the Revolutionary Period of 1848, stated that many of the European thrones rocked, and "even the Pope fled disguised as a footman." It must have been a shock for His Holiness to leave off his petticoats.

In the Prisoners' of War debate in the House of Commons, Captain Craig, referring to those who object to reprisals, said: "In times of peace Christian ideals are all right, but ——" The concluding words were inaudible in the general laughter aroused by the frank admission of this facing-both-ways of Christians.

The Rev. T. R. H. Stebbing is ambitious. He has written a book on *Faith in Fetters*, in which he appeals to the "National Church to purify itself from a dense load of ignorance and prejudice." He will be delighted to hear that Freethinkers have been engaged in this pleasing pastime for centuries.

At a meeting in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, called for the purpose of considering ways and means to increase the wages of the Scottish ministers, it was resolved that the meeting do everything in its power to raise the salaries of the clergy to at least £250 per annum with a free manse or sum equivalent. A discharged soldier enquired: "What about the discharged soldiers who were in the workhouse after having been invalided in the service of their country?" No notice

was taken of this pertinent question, and now we have the spectacle of the men who fought and bled for their country being neglected while the clergy who stayed at home to keep the women company are to have an increase to their salaries. Is this how patriotism is to be rewarded?

The creation of bishoprics goes on apace, and we are wondering if the astute ecclesiastics perceive the coming of Disestablishment, and probable compensation. If they do not stop, the Church will resemble the Army of the Principality of Monaco—more officers than men.

The late Canon Cooper-Marsdin left the residue of his estate (about £10,000) for the founding of a new bishopric in Yorkshire. Perhaps he thought that would save him from the fate of poor old Dives.

What curiosities these Christians are! The Church Army is appealing for waste paper; the Salvation Army wants money; and the Young Men's Christian Association will be grateful for anything from billiard-tables to bank-notes. They all use the medium of advertising, just as if they were ordinary tradesmen or theatre proprietors. And, with characteristic modesty, they publish their good deeds before men in the largest type they can command.

The Bishop of London is visiting the troops in Salonika. An inspired correspondent in the *Church Times* says he intends to give to the soldiers "a message from God." We fancy they would prefer a packet of cigarettes, but what will happen if some soldier asks the Bishop to authenticate his message?

Preaching at Stevenage Parish Church, Canon Morgan Smith paid a tribute to the religious character of the *Times*' articles, and also to those "behind the great newspaper." The religious nature of Lord Northcliffe's operation is, we hope, widely recognized.

The long-advertised revival of religion appears to be taking some extraordinary shapes. Among the new publications of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge is a series, entitled *Pioneers of Progress*, and the books include monographs on "Galileo" and "Alfred Russel Wallace." At this rate of annexing famous names in support of Christianity, we may expect to find Bradlaugh and Ingersoll included among pillars of the Church.

Pastor Fort Newton, of the London City Temple, says "God is more popular to-day than he has been for a long time." Which "god" does the pastor mean?

It is not an extravagant calculation that, in England alone twenty millions a year are spent on religion. The figures fall glibly from the tongue, but just try to realize them! Think first of a thousand, then of a thousand thousand, then of twenty times that. Take a single million, and think what its expenditure might do in the shaping of public opinion. A practical friend of ours, a good Radical and Freethinker, said that he would undertake to create a majority for Home Rule in England with a million of money; and, if he spent it judiciously, we think he might succeed. Well, then, just imagine, not one million, but twenty millions spent every year in maintaining and propagating a certain religion. Is it not enough, and more than enough, to perpetuate a system which is firmly founded, to begin with, on the education of little children?

Here lies the strength of Christianity. It is not true, it is not useful. Its teachings and pretensions are both seen through by tens of thousands, but the wealth supports it. "Without money and without price," is the fraudulent language of the pious prospectus. It would never last on those terms. The money keeps it up. Withdraw the money, and the Black Army would disband, leaving the people free to work out their secular salvation, without the fear and trembling of a foolish faith.—G. W. Foote, "*Flowers of Freethought*."

## C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

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.—December 1, Swansea; December 8, Garw.
- C. F. BENNETT.—We do not think a leaflet on the Church of England's appeal for five millions would repay trouble of printing or of distribution. It would not get into the right hands. Your experience of Church schools in the case of your boy is not encouraging. But is there not a public school in your neighbourhood? Letter returned.
- G. CROOKSON.—We are continually worrying agents for their delays in distributing the *Freethinker*. It is due to no fault at our end, and their excuse is "shortage of labour." However, will write about the delay.
- R. GUNN.—We are pleased to have your appreciation of our work.
- A. RADLEY.—Thanks, may write on the matter, but there are many things claiming space and attention at the present. We have to acknowledge the sum of £2 10s. from Mr. F. J. Gould, to be spent in distributing parcels of literature among the troops. We shall be pleased to receive names and addresses to which these will be acceptable.
- S. CLOWES.—We are used to struggle, but such letters as yours does what can be done to make the fight easier. One doesn't work for appreciation, but it is none the less cheering when it is spontaneously offered.
- C. H. HILL.—The comments were based on a report in a newspaper sent us by one of our readers. We do not preserve these after use, and so are sorry we cannot give the date you require.
- J. O. M.—We deal with the Bristol slave trade in our *Christianity and Slavery*. We do not think the books you name have any commercial value, and books on chemistry should be of a very recent date.
- J. JAMES.—See "Acid Drops."
- J. H. KENNARD.—Florence Nightingale was not a declared Freethinker, but her views on religion were of a very heterodox character, and her beliefs were denounced by Catholics and Protestants alike.
- H. P.—We note your remarks about the French sceptics. We were talking over the matter with one of our contributors a week or two ago, and may do something in the near future.
- W. J.—Perhaps you had better take our reply to Dr. Lyttelton in this week's issue as an answer to your friend's question.
- MRS. H. ROSETTI.—We are sending literature to addresses given.
- F. W. LLOYD.—See "Acid Drops." Sir Oliver Lodge only adds more words, without adding any verifiable facts.

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.

## "Freethinker" Sustentation Fund.

Previously acknowledged, £418 os. 7d. Artisticus, 5s.; F. J. Gould, £2 10s.; T. Teasdale, 2s.; S. Clowes (fifth sub.), 3s.; R. Gunn, 5s.; Philip Weines, 2s.; J. Pugh, 5s.; G. Smith, £3 3s.; T. Griffiths, £1; H. Bull, 2s. 6d. Total, £425 19s. 1d.

Correction.—"Per Sec. Manchester Branch," in last issue, should have read "E. C. Turner, per Sec. Manchester Branch."

This Fund will close on December 17.

## Sugar Plums.

The War is over. That is the great fact of the moment. When a certain character at the close of the French Revolution, and who was full of reminiscences of the period, was asked what he did, his reply was: "I lived." So the *Freethinker* may say: "We have lived." There are still hard times ahead, but the *Freethinker* has lived through the hardest period ever experienced by any Freethought journal, and comes out of it stronger than it was at the opening of the War. It has a larger circulation and a more assured influence than ever. For this we have to thank our readers who have helped loyally and generously. The War of brute force is over. The war of ideas goes on.

Next Sunday (Nov. 24) Mr. Cohen lectures at Leeds. It is a long time since Mr. Cohen visited that city, and large meetings are anticipated. The meetings will be held, afternoon and evening, in the Victoria Hall, which, we are informed, seats about 2,000 people. Admission is free, but there will be a number of reserved seats. Mr. Cohen hopes to meet a great many Freethinkers from surrounding districts.

We are pleased to say that the sales of Mr. Cohen's *Christianity and Slavery* has established a record. A first edition was printed, large enough, it was thought, to last until normal times returned. The demand during the first two or three weeks' issue was, however, so great that a second edition was prepared, and is now on sale. Of the first edition, published two months ago, a very few copies remain. And we are glad to note that the booklet is still selling steadily. The work evidently met a real need among Freethinkers and inquiring Christians.

From Salonika, Private Kennard writes:—

With reference to religion in the Army, I am happy to state that I have invariably been excused Church parades, and my identity discs were stamped "Atheist" after calling the officer's attention to Army Council Instruction, No. 179, Jan., 1916. I look forward to the dear old *Freethinker* each week, and after reading it pass it along to my chums. It has led to many interesting discussions, especially in hospitals, where soldiers get more leisure to read and think about philosophical matters. Sometimes one comes across an amusing case. Here is an instance. I had a chat with a comrade who stated that he had practically given up Christianity but refused to even look at the *Freethinker* because he did not wish to lose what little faith he had got! Such a person seems hopeless to me, but it shows only too well what religion can do in the way of cramping a man's intellect and moral courage.

S. M. R. writes:—

Now that the War is over, I hasten to congratulate you and the *Freethinker* staff on having so successfully weathered the storm. The conduct of the paper under your guidance, and through such a trying time, has been admirable. A broad human sanity has marked it, that must have gained many new friends, and still further endeared it to old ones. It required no small amount of courage and ability to face the situation that is now happily at an end, but you have shown yourself equal to the occasion. You already have the confidence of Freethinkers, and have fully earned their congratulations and thanks.

We can only repeat what we have already said—we did our best. And we hope we shall never be found doing less.

We have decided to fix December 17 as the closing date for the Sustentation Fund. This is a month longer than we intended, and we have delayed the closing date at the request of friends. But by December 17 we have no doubt that all will have sent who intend sending. And some always wait till the end.

No power of genius has ever yet had the smallest success in explaining existence. The perfect enigma remains.

—Emerson.

## A Naturalist's Paradise.

### IV.

(Concluded from p. 573.)

THE avifauna of Borneo embraces the Argus pheasant, flamingos, parrots, peacocks, pigeons, eagles, vultures, and many melodious songsters, with the swift celebrated throughout the Eastern World as the builder of an edible nest. This structure is immensely appreciated by the Chinese as an ingredient of soup. Three species of swifts prepare these remarkable nests, but the nest most highly prized is that of *Collocalia fuciphaga* or *esculentia*. This nest is a cup-shaped structure, and consists entirely of "a tough, gelatinous, translucent substance, which exudes from the bill of the bird as it builds." The physiological processes involved in this singular form of nidification are not yet understood.

Much as our swallows nest under the eaves or in chimneys, the Bornean swifts construct their cradles on the walls and roofs of caves. These favoured retreats form part of the native estate inherited by descendants. The white nests—those most valued—are usually found in low sandstone caves. The inferior nests are dark in colour, and are mostly erected in the capacious limestone caves at a height of about 100 feet from the surface. Three times in one season the birds are deprived of their white nests, while the darker nests are gathered twice only. During the nest harvest the natives dwell in temporary houses within the caves, and when their collections are complete the Chinese merchants purchase them. Dr. Hose states that the price paid for the black nests is about 100 dollars per hundredweight, while the white nests realize the princely sum of thirty or forty shillings per pound.

Human sacrifices to the spirits were once common among the Pagan peoples, and, apparently still, these occasionally occur, although now strictly forbidden. The Kayans formerly sacrificed slaves at the demise of a chief, so that they might accompany his spirit on its perilous voyage to the other world. As human victims are no longer available, the matter is compromised by placing a man's effigy at the head, and that of a woman at the foot of the chief's coffin as the ruler rests in state before burial. A third figure is commonly attached to the tomb, and this simulates the slave who paddles the chief's canoe to the spirit land.

Like the ancient Hebrews, the Kayans were long accustomed to the employment of a living human creature as a firm foundation for a new habitation. Into the opening designed to receive the first pile of the edifice, a fowl is now cast, and then the end of the pile is thrown on the fowl and kills it. The bird is a substitute for what was once a girl sacrifice, and, even now, declares Hose, "Kenyahs and Klemantans sometimes carve a human figure upon the first of the main piles of a new house to be put into the ground."

Independently of European influence evidences of the humanization of their religious rites may be detected among the native tribes. It is highly probable that human beings were once offered to the gods to secure a good harvest of edible nests. Buffaloes and birds are slain and deposited in the caves where the swifts place their nests. In one season of scarcity the natives returned to their darker superstition, and a slave was sacrificed as a propitiary offering in Brunei. In other parts of Borneo the human victim has been replaced by pigs and buffaloes at times when the gods are appeased.

The savagery so long associated with the head hunting observances of the native races was mainly religious in character. The sea Dayaks are certainly

a remorseless people, but the fiendish customs so freely attributed to other Bornean stocks appear grossly exaggerated. Most merciless cruelty has disgraced religion even among ourselves, and were we solely judged by the torture and persecution of past ages, Europeans would seem as ruthless as the head hunters of Borneo. As Dr. Hose and Professor McDougall reminds us:—

After our own race had professed Christianity for many generations, the authority of Church and State publicly decreed and systematically inflicted in cold blood tortures far more hideous and atrocious than any the Kayan imagination has ever conceived.

Like other uncivilized peoples, the Pagan Kayans populate their environment with spiritual entities of good and evil intent. Some of these ghostly beings are embodied in plants and animals, while the mountains, streams, caverns, and other natural phenomena are also the habitats of spirits. Animism is universal, and the fertility of the soil, lightning and thunder, storm and sunshine, disease and disaster, are all the handiwork of the ubiquitous gods.

In addition to these lesser divinities that preside over the course of Nature, and decree the prosperity or poverty of the people, there reigns a supreme regulator—Laki Tenagan—whose position above the inferior deities is similar to that occupied by the Greek Zeus and the Roman Jupiter in relation to the minor gods of the ancient world. Some of the departmental deities appear to be divine ancestors, and various sub-tribes still claim descent from these spirits. Chiefs recently dead are regarded with reverential awe, but those that died long ago are viewed as spiritual beings of more exalted rank. Hose and McDougall favour the theory that the Kenyah thunder-god is a deified chief. This noisy spirit is known as Balingo, and "all the Kenyahs and many Klemantans seem to claim some special relation to Balingo, while one Madang (Kenyah) chief at least claims descent from him" (*Pagan Tribes*, vol. ii., pp. 11, 12).

Possibly the leading god, Laki Tenangan, himself has been developed from a defunct chief. We naturally expect the customs of the island to be transferred to the ghostly realm. In Borneo, in addition to the local village chiefs, there is a supreme ruler whose will is law in times of strife. It is, therefore, no source of surprise to discover that "The social system of the superior powers should be modelled upon that of the people who acknowledge them."

Despite the terrible depredations of the ferocious crocodiles which infest the rivers and lagoons, the attitude of the tribes of Sarawak towards these dreadful creatures is more or less friendly. Superstition is mainly responsible for this, and excuses are usually made for the sanguinary reptile when he seizes a human creature. Either the guilty crocodile has been incensed by the misconduct of his victim, or the outrage has been committed by some strange reptile, and not by the friendly crocodiles resident in the neighbouring waters. Yet, with naive inconsistency, the crime is regarded as something demanding reprisals. The blood feud is aroused, and the reptile's aggressive action must be atoned for by the death of at least one of the crocodiles. The animal has the strange habit, it is said, of clutching the corpse of its victim for a short period before devouring it, when it carries its prey into a swampy inlet of the running river. A party vowing vengeance now explores the neighbouring creeks, and measures are devised to prevent the homicidal creature from escaping into another stream. Should the crocodile be discovered in company with his prey, he is promptly slaughtered, and the blood feud ceases. But when the hunt proves abortive, the natives scour the river, and usually succeed in

slaying one or more of these beasts. The criminal, they consider, has now been punished for his transgression. But, save in circumstances such as these, the Kenyahs never molest the crocodile, and its flesh is strictly sacred.

The white-crested carrion hawk is a bird of profound importance in Borneo. This hawk is addressed and invariably referred to among the Kenyahs as Bali Flaki, and it is always consulted by the natives before they embark on a distant journey. Very elaborate are the rites associated with this ceremony, but no European can divine their precise meaning, supposing them to possess any. We gather from careful observers that the views of the natives themselves on these subjects "are hardly less vague and diversified than those of more civilized worshippers."

Two images of Bali Penyalong, a supreme divinity, stand near together, and before one of these the high priest postures and mutters, and then decapitates a fowl and smears its blood on the image. Other fowls are successively sacrificed, and then one of the priestly attendants gashes the throat of a young pig, and as its blood spurts forth, the priest scatters it over the image. Meanwhile, writes Dr. Hose,

the score of men standing round about put their hands, some on him, and some on one another; maintaining in this way physical contact with one another and with their leader, they joined in the prayer or incantation which he kept pouring forth in the same rapid mechanical fashion in which many a curate at home reads the Church service.

Other rites of a kindred character having been concluded, the party arranged for the projected journey is deemed secure from disaster, and the priest departs to cleanse himself from the blood with which he is liberally adorned. Thus is the favour of the hawks secured, and they will certainly protect the travellers from danger and death.

The majority, and perhaps all uncivilized peoples, attribute to the lower animals, or even to plants, such mental qualities as they themselves possess. The hawks and other Bornean birds are regarded by the natives as omen animals, and the hawk appears to officiate as a messenger to the principal god. Before the ceremonies already summarized begin, the flight of the hawks is eagerly observed; and the requisite omens obtained, the ceremonial is performed. The hawk's pre-eminence among birds in the native religion has doubtless arisen from its weird and mysterious habits.

It has been contended that the hawk's sudden emergence from the deepest blue of the heavens, its hovering instincts, its habit of circling in the sky in a seemingly purposeless manner, its custom of flying onward in front of a boat as it moves along the river, or rapidly sweeping through the air towards the boat, screaming as it approaches, all support the theory that these combined peculiarities suffice to explain why the natives, whose lives from the cradle to the grave are ceaselessly environed by virgin forest, waterfalls, and treacherous streams, should attach undue importance to the hawk and other mysterious creatures.

The Bornean theology is largely a reflection of the experiences of the people in their primitive home. As the authors of the *Pagan Tribes of Borneo* conclude, we are studying savages who are "extremely ignorant of natural causation, yet intelligent and speculative, and always looking out for signs that shall guide them among the mysteries and dangers that surround them." It is a fair inference that the people regard the hawk as an emissary of the supreme sky god.

For this being is vaguely conceived by them as dwelling in the skies whence the hawk comes, and whither

he so often returns. And then we may suppose that the messenger himself has come to be an object of worship in various degrees with the different tribes, as seems to be the rule in all religious systems in which servants of a deity mediate between him and man.

T. F. PALMER.

## Some Reflections on a Recent Tract.

THE National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases, a responsible body recognized by the Government, has, with commendable courage, inserted in an evening paper, a little treatise on the danger of venereal disease, setting forth the value of early treatment. Such facts as are contained therein cannot have too wide a publicity; but the publication of this little document should help, in some degree at all events, to discredit in certain circles some rather widely held points of view.

There is a type of mind which insists that the ills of man are a device of the Almighty invented for the purpose of effecting the moral governance of the universe. To persons who hold this philosophy of history venereal disease has always been one of God's masterstrokes.

If we are to believe these singular people we must suppose the methods of the Creator to be as follows. With the admirable intention of maintaining the race, the individual is endowed with a set of instincts which allows him to take an intelligent interest in this plan of the ages. But, alas, some people become too enthusiastic in this work, and they are neatly laid by the heels, and their ardour is cooled in a manner that may be read up in expensive medical works, but which can hardly be described in these pages.

The world is kept morally clean and sweet by the activity of an army of microbes, which, directed by the generalship which cast Satan out of heaven, attacks men, women, and children with a malignancy the militarists may admire and copy, but can never hope to surpass. It is a little strange that the Kaiser has never tried to inspire his soldiers with a quasi-Biblical quotation like: "Consider the gonococcus and be wise."

But it appears from the pamphlet that the little germs require time to effect their work. And here it is that the methods of Providence (if venereal disease is one of the methods of Providence) may be made of non effect. The Committee do not put much trust either in prayer or repentance, although, of course, these sources of solace are not forbidden to the victims. The words of the Council are so admirable that I shall quote them. "The table also shows, 'the longer one waits, the greater the risk.' It is far better not to take the risk at all, but those who succumb to temptation should immediately seek medical advice."

It appears, then, that moral laws may be broken in two ways; that is to say, if you are foolish enough to indulge in this rather irrational proceeding. You may do so blindly and ignorantly, when they are very like to break you; or you may be circumspect, and, like the one thousand one hundred and eighty mentioned by the Council, seek the doctor one hour after your fall. If you do this, the chances are that God's battalions will be broken up by the doctor's barrage. And even if, as happened in one case reported in the pamphlet, the enemy succeeds in breaking through, he can be counter-attacked by the man of science, and within two days thrown out.

Such facts make it impossible for some people to believe that God works by means which can at once be so fiendishly cruel to the ignorant and so easily circumvented by the wise. Yet it would be a mistake to think

that this particular delusion of mankind will die either easily or quickly.

It can be argued that science may hoodwink God in time, but not in eternity. His plans may be laid in ruins here, but not in heaven. And it is as well to remember that the belief in heaven is a belief of a majority in these Islands, and is likely to remain so. And when we reflect that many of these people honestly think war has been sent by God as a judgment on the wickedness of man (and science has not yet been able to find the antidote to this particular poison), the only effect of such a pamphlet as that of the National Council for Combating Venereal Disease is to make the greater part of our believing countrymen tremble at the thought of what will happen to those poor fellows who evade the just punishment of God in the consultation rooms of a doctor, when finally they come to stand before the Great White Throne.

W. H.

### Notes From Ireland.

If there are any Freethinkers in Ireland they are mostly daubed a sickly white with the hypocritical veneer of acquiescence, as men hide diamonds, pearls, and precious things in ugly, untouchable safes. But they are the body of an organization that has yet to be moulded, directed, consummated. At present they are inaudible for their silence. But the unseen workings are in readiness to pump the vital blood of infinitude through the arteries and capillaries of the soul. All that is required is a Bradlaugh and a Foote and a Voltaire. Whoever he is must be plucky. Wanted a leader! a leader powerful enough to overcome the Almighty at his best; no salary, no war bonus, no commission, no thanks; a popped grave. Any takers?

You people in England cannot even dimly realize the extent of the religious blight that hinders the efflorescence of the soul of this little nation. One has got to attend any service at any chapel on any Sunday to form a conception of the horrible credulity that obtains even in the capital. Mass is held every half-hour on Sunday, yet the chapels—and our chapels are vast—are full to overflowing at each oblation; every pew is crammed, every passage and aisle and porch is crammed with silent worshippers standing. The men behind the *Leader*, the *Irishman*, and all the rest of the Sinn Fein publications are members of the One True Church almost to a man. But there is hope in one or two directions. There is a tiny coterie of poets, painters, artists, and literary men in Dublin, every one of whom is a "free lance." But the arrows of their talent are never pointed openly against the Church; they are afraid of their reputation being jeopardized.

There is, however, one chink that permits the ingress of modernism—the Abbey Theatre. Not a few of the plays produced at this theatre are alarmingly heterodox. A week ago we had Shaw's "The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet." By Jove, how the clerical stomach must have experienced the pangs of indigestion and heaved some of its greasy cargo of luscious complacency at this sermon against religion! The plays of J. M. Synge, too, are barbed with the wittiest and most beautiful irony—an irony more delightful, because less bitter even than Hardy's. He speaks of—

Prayers ascending naked to the saints of God.

Referring to the souls in heaven, he describes them as—  
Gazing through the bars of paradise.

With regard to the Pope and celibacy, he makes one of his characters say—

Shure, the Holy Father must be very lonely on his golden throne.

We quaff a glass to the health and continued vigour of the manager, Fred O'Donovan, and his little band of courageous, pioneer actors.

Romish priests have succumbed to the "Flu."

DESMOND FITZROY.

### To a Bereaved Mother.

[In the summer of 1885 a San Francisco mother lost her son, an only child, who had gone on a brief journey. His death was sudden, and the mother was apprised of it by telegram. Having been brought up in the Calvinistic creed, her natural sorrow was turned into an agony of grief by the fear that her unconverted son was suffering in hell. Her friends were apprehensive that her reason, if not her life, would be destroyed. One of them begged Colonel Ingersoll to write something that might possibly relieve her mind, and the result was the following letter, which she read "through blinding tears," and which brought her (in her own words) "the first peace I have known, real peace, since the terrible blow."]

MY DEAR MADAM,—Mrs. C. has told me the sad story of your almost infinite sorrow. I am not foolish enough to suppose that I can say or do anything to lessen your great grief, your anguish for his loss; but maybe I can say something to drive from your poor heart the fiend of fear—fear for him.

If there is a God, let us believe that he is good; and if he is good, the good have nothing to fear. I have been told that your son was kind and generous; that he was filled with charity and sympathy. Now, we know that in this world like begets like, kindness produces kindness, and all good bears the fruit of joy. Belief is nothing—deeds are everything; and if your son was kind, he will naturally find kindness wherever he may be. You would not inflict endless pain upon your worst enemy. Is God worse than you? You could not bear to see a viper suffer forever. Is it possible that God will doom a kind and generous boy to everlasting pain? Nothing can be more monstrously absurd and cruel.

The truth is, that no human being knows anything of what is beyond the grave. If nothing is known, then it is not honest for anyone to pretend that he does know. If nothing is known, then we can hope only for the good. If there be a God, your boy is no more in his power now than he was before his death—no more than you are at the present moment. Why should we fear God more after death than before? Does the feeling of God towards his children change the moment they die? While we are alive they say God loves us; when will he cease to love us? True love never changes. I beg of you to throw away all fear. Take counsel of your own heart. If God exists, your heart is the best revelation of him, and your heart could never send your boy to endless pain. After all, no one knows. The ministers know nothing. And all the Churches in the world know no more on this subject than the ants on the ant-hills. Creeds are good for nothing except to break the hearts of the loving.

Let us have courage. Under the seven-hued arch of hope let the dead sleep. I do not pretend to know, but I do know that others do not know. Listen to your heart, believe what it says, and wait with patience and without fear for what the future has for all. If we can get no comfort from what people know, let us avoid being driven to despair by what they do not know.

I wish I could say something that would put a star in your night of grief—a little flower in your lonely path—and if an unbeliever has such a wish, surely an infinitely good being never made a soul to be the food of pain through countless years.—Sincerely yours,  
R. G. INGERSOLL.

### "The Curate."

SEE how he trots, emBibled—saintly man!—  
To meet "deserving poor" at Sunday-school;  
Anon he sits with spinsters, on a stool,  
Smelling a "will," as any lawyer can;  
Rubbing his hands, he works his wily plan.  
You'll hear his voice wherever ladies are,  
His silly talk delights the gay bazaar,  
Giggling, he finds the apples in the pan.  
"Endue thy ministers with righteousness"  
He drones, as if it broke his heart to say't;  
At "O Lord, save the King," he's simply great;  
With genuflexions, rather more than less,  
He circunnavigates the silver plate,  
The dregs of wine he drains with eagerness.

D. V. T.

James Albert Neate.

By His SCHOOLMASTER.

THE news of James Albert Neate's death stunned me. I saw him last on the 11th of September in front of the Royal Exchange. He was very anxious to know how I was getting along, and seemed concerned because I was wearing glasses. His sympathy was quite characteristic. Little did I think as I bade him good-bye that I should never see him again. I was fond of Albert, and I admired him greatly; he was so considerate, so transparently sincere.

When he came to my school he was very nervous, and physically weak. His health had been, and was then, I imagine, the despair of his parents. Love and money had been lavished upon him. His mother told me of her belief that Albert would one day be quite strong. I doubted it. For a short time in school he was quite a recluse. I was his only chum. Little by little, however, his nervousness disappeared. He began to enter into games with zest, and rapidly became a favourite. A nickname was given to him, "Old Nattie" (Nattie being another word for neat in school parlance).

After the free spirit of the school had removed his nervousness, the intellect of the lad began to assert itself. His mind advanced at such a rate that at times I feared it. Normally he was, as we North Country folk say, "old-fashioned."

But his thinking was abnormal. I don't think I ever met a youth with such an assimilative brain. He had an unusually large head. Had he been physically as well as mentally strong, he would have made himself useful in the world. Another noteworthy feature in his composition was courage. Albert at once condemned a thing if he thought it to be wrong. And there was no lack of reasons in the condemnation either. In this respect I saw in him a budding Free-thought propagandist, a chip off the old block. Mr. Cohen said: "No child ever had more devoted parents." Let me add: No parents ever had a more devoted son. I knew how they loved him, and I knew how he loved them. This blow is a terrible one to Mr. and Mrs. Neate.

Having done the best that could be done they will be resigned, I quite know. That so many fondled hopes and such deep devotion be devoured by death is a terrible tragedy. He will live on the treasure-house of memory. Alas! what a number of my scholars are no more. Many are now lying somewhere in the graveyard of Europe. A good deal of my thirteen years of loving labour lies buried as a secular teacher there.

W. H. THRESH.

Birmingham (N.S.S.) Conference.

DELEGATES and members are reminded that the morning session of the Conference to be held to-day, November 17, at the Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, will commence at 10.30 sharp. The entrance is in Hinckley Street. The meetings are for members of the N.S.S. only. Delegates must show their credentials and members their current cards of membership at the door.

I am advised that it will be prudent for visitors to Birmingham to bring travellers' ration cards, which can be obtained from their local food controller, as, owing to War conditions, the supply of manna cannot be relied upon. I invite them to meet the President and myself at the Queen's Hotel, New Street Station, on Saturday evening at 7 p.m., when I shall be glad to give them any further information. Don't forget to wear the pansy badge.—E. M. VANCE, General Secretary.

Population Question and Birth-Control.

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Obituary.

Our readers will regret to learn that Mrs. G. W. Foote has experienced another loss in the death of her niece at the age of twenty-six, and who had been a member of her household since her girlhood. The deceased was of a bright and cheerful disposition, capable, and for some time had been engaged in one of the departments of the War Office. Returning from business a few days before her death, she complained of violent pains, took to her bed, and, in spite of all the most careful medical attention and nursing could do, died on November 6. Both Mr. and Mrs. Foote were greatly attached to her and she to them. Her death leaves a sad gap in the home of which she was a member. The remains were cremated at the City of London Crematorium on November 11.

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, C. Kelf, "The League of Nations." Open Debate.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, near Kennington Oval Tube Station): 7.30, Mr. F. Shaller, "Freewill."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "William Morris and the New Industry."

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BARNSELY BRANCH N. S. S. (Irving's Studio, 48 Sheffield Road): Wednesday, November 20, 7.30, "Thomas Hardy."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): Meeting cancelled owing to the Influenza Epidemic.

MAESTEG BRANCH N. S. S. (The Gem Cinema, Maesteg): Mr. J. C. Thomas (Keridon), 2.30, "The Art of Squaring the Circle, or Solving the Insoluble"; 7, "Why Truths Die Hard."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Baker's Hall, 56 Swan Street): 6.30, Miss Constance Brooks, "Ivan Turgenev."

RHONDDA BRANCH N. S. S. (Morley's Restaurant Perth): Important Meeting, preparatory to Mr. Cohen's visit.

SHEFFIELD ETHICAL SOCIETY (Builders' Exchange, Cross Burgess Street): 6.30, Mr. W. C. Anderson, M.P., "Charles Stuart Parnell—The Uncrowned King."

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