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The
FREETHINKER

FOUNDED · 1881

EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN ■ ■ EDITOR · 1881-1915 · G. W. FOOTE

Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper.

VOL. XXXVIII.—No. 47

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1918

PRICE TWOPENCE

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Views and Opinions.

The War After the War.

The War of armed force is ended; the war of ideas is about to begin. This war calls for not less courage and persistency than the other, but more of both qualities. For it is folly to assume that these four years of strife, ending as it has done with a sweeping triumph over the Central Powers, have destroyed that antagonism of ideas which existed before the European War opened. So far as this is concerned, the War is no more than an interlude. Absorption in the War, its dominating presence, may have blinded many to this; but the state of war is not and cannot be permanent. A war may rage round fundamental issues, but when the war is over the older and permanent conflict is resumed. The destiny of a political group may be determined on the field of battle; but the destiny of the race is determined on a battlefield where ideas take the place of high explosives, and ideals that of opposing armies. On the one side, our task is now to harness energies for four years spent on war to the more profitable arts of peace. On the other hand, we have to lift the fighting capacity of man from the level of brute force to that of ideas and ideals.

* * *

The War and the Churches.

Ours is the best of causes, and we are fighting the worst of religions. In fighting Germany, we were at war with a people that had been under the influence of Militarism for half a century. But the countries which waged that war, and which, by their policies of conquest and intrigue, and the piling up of armaments, had been for generations sowing the seeds of war, have been under the dominating influence of the Christian religion for over fifteen centuries. If two generations of training had sufficed to make Germany what it was, what might not more than thirty generations have made the world had the influence of Christianity been in the right direction? But when the War came it is safe to say that, while laymen were shocked at the outbreak of such a War, the Churches, both here and in Germany, took it with a callousness that carried its own condemnation. Both here and in Germany the clergy threw themselves into the War with an energy that surprised their friends and disgusted even their enemies. They showed the reality of their gospel of love by the readiness with

which they preached the gospel of hate. They might have made it their business to stand as the representatives of those higher aspects of life that are always endangered during a time of war; they left the leadership in these things to other hands. With rare exceptions, the pulpits have, during these four years, pandered to passion and catered for prejudice. They have preached rigorously from the prophets, but have remained silent concerning the profiteers. They did advise us to cultivate potatoes in our back gardens, but they said nothing as to the need for a revision of the whole English land system. We hope Freethinkers will see to it that the record of the clergy during the War is not forgotten. They will do their best to bury it as the War recedes into the past. We must see to it that it enjoys a "blessed resurrection."

* * *

"Reconstruction" and the Churches.

It will not be denied that up to the present the Churches have lost heavily by the War. That is admitted, and lamented, on all hands. But it is certain that they will make desperate efforts to recover some of their lost ground; and already the air is thick with schemes and talk of Reconstruction. At the moment Churches are busy with thanksgiving services, praising God for ending a war which no God worth a shillingsworth of incense would ever have permitted. The Church of England is appealing for five million pounds, and the perennial fool-crop, combined with those interests which desire the people to be kept religious, may well supply a large part, if not all of this sum. How much the Archbishops of York and Canterbury intend subscribing out of their annual £24,000 we are not told. Nor the Bishop of London, out of his £10,000. But we recall that this latter gentleman explained that he had invested all he had in War Loan, and thus with rare Christian patriotism preserved his capital, and placed an extra tax of five per cent. on the community. And when the Church gets its five millions it will, as announced, use it for providing more clergymen—when already there are more than needed; for paying workers among the poor, who will thus play the game of doles and palliatives and so prevent radical reform; and maintain its schools, and give an inefficient Sectarian Education as against an efficient State system. In other words, the nation is invited to contribute five millions to be used against the best interests of the nation itself.

* * *

Freedom for All.

Now it seems that with the General Election upon us there is an opportunity for Freethinkers to help, as Freethinkers, in the work of "Reconstruction," about which so much is being said. Whatever is the ultimate form of Government adopted in Russia (one would like to get at the truth about the situation), it is fairly clear that a State religion there is doomed. And in a reconstructed Germany there will be no State religion. A State religion has already been abolished in France, with benefit to the nation. Is there any reason why England should not follow suit? In the modern

State a governmental religion is an anachronism. Religious equality means the absence of State patronage of religions. And Freethinkers when they are asked, as they will be asked, for their vote, might legitimately make the removal of this injustice one of their test questions. Only one, because there are others. But if that one is answered satisfactorily it will logically lead the way to a satisfactory answer to others. It would probably mean the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, and would leave God to look after his own offended majesty instead of that duty being undertaken by a policeman. Blasphemy laws are always cruel: we have reached the stage when they have become supremely ridiculous.

* * *

Religion in the Army.

There is also the question of religion in the Army. There are two ways of dealing with the soldier. The fashionable method is to be interested in the man because he is a soldier. We prefer to be interested in the soldier because he is a man. And there is a world of difference in putting either the uniform or the man in the first place. Ever since the War broke out we have protested publicly and privately against the stupid and objectionable Church parades in the British Army. Soldiers themselves object to it. There is more cursing when soldiers are marched to church than over any other Army function. A soldier may dispense with the religious oath of allegiance when he joins the Army, and has the right to be registered as Atheist or Freethinker. Thousands have taken advantage of both regulations, and it has had quite an educational influence. But to take a man into the Army as an Atheist and then march him to church as a Christian is a piece of absurd tyranny that could only flourish in this country. In a civilized country freedom of worship is the right of every civilian. Is there any reason why a soldier should be treated as less capable than a civilian of selecting his religion? Soldiers now have the vote, and we suggest they should use it, and civilians should help them use it, in extracting a pledge from Parliamentary candidates that joining either Army or Navy shall not rob a man of the elementary right of deciding for himself whether he will go to church or stay away. This election is certainly the most favourable opportunity for raising the point, and we hope it will be raised all over the country.

* * *

Religion and the Child.

Then there is the question of Secular Education. And here another factor comes into play. Woman has now a vote, given to her by Christians, under pressure, on the avowed ground that she has helped in a War. And the Christian view of woman as an inferior being is so ingrained that even now she may not vote until she is thirty years of age. Still she has the vote, and if anyone is more than another directly interested in the training of children it is she. We have, we are pleased to say, a large number of lady readers, and they are not the least zealous of our helpers. To them, and of course, to the men, we would earnestly appeal to see that this question is brought before the candidates. Bearing in mind the plans of the Government with regard to religion in the schools, it is imperative that as large a number of members as is possible are returned to the House of Commons definitely pledged to Secular Education. And the case of France will help them here. France owes its recovery from the catastrophe of 1870, largely to its acceptance of Gambetta's message "Clericalism, that is the enemy." We must have the resolution to do ourselves what France has already done. Clear the priest out of the schools. We are asking for no sectarian or party advantage. And we desire none. We

believe in the power of education, and we believe in the prevalence of justice. If the world is really to be made "safe for democracy" we must say to both the priest and to the militarist "Hands off the child." Give the child a chance; for in the child lies the hope of the future.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Theism.

DR. F. L. PATTEN, a distinguished American divine, treats Theism as if it embraced Polytheism and Pantheism as well as Monotheism; but the late Professor Flint, of Edinburgh, in his scholarly work, entitled *Theism*, excludes from his definition of the term both Polytheism and Pantheism, maintaining that there are but three Theistic religions—the Mosaic, the Christian, and the Mohammedan. According to Dr. Flint, Theism provides Nature with a Creator, the nations with a Governor, and men with a Heavenly Father and Judge. Doctrinally, that is perfectly sound, no doubt; but doctrinal soundness does not necessarily carry with it its own truth. In the latest and best accredited science there is absolutely no room for a Creator, the fact of evolution implying the denial of the idea of creation. The history of the nations negatives the hypothesis of a Divine Governor, however earnestly a few individuals here and there may believe in his existence; and surely, if there is no moral Governor to keep the Universe in order, men cannot legitimately boast that they have a Heavenly Father and Judge on whom they may rely for a just and loving treatment. An entirely logical dogma may yet be utterly false. Never was a more logical body of divinity elaborated than Calvinism, but the defenders of Calvinism are to-day few and far between even among the most orthodox. As a doctrine, Theism may be beautifully self-consistent and have much to recommend it to certain temperaments; but of its truth there is no convincing evidence whatsoever. There are those who assert that they possess and enjoy personal knowledge of an invisible spiritual Being, whom they love and worship as ideally perfect, but they frankly admit that this is a knowledge which they are powerless to communicate to their fellow-beings. Curiously enough, however, such people completely fail to verify their claim to such knowledge by the display of either intellectual or moral superiority to those who indulge in no like profession. Their contention is that God can only be known by those who wish to know him. We allude to that contention merely for the purpose of remarking that it does but scant justice to the so-called invisible spiritual Being. By what right does anyone lay down terms on which alone he can be known? If there be a God who is the loving Father of all mankind, is it not his bounden duty to make himself known to every one of them? Is it conceivable that *he* does not wish to reveal himself to the offspring of his heart? As a matter of simple fact, that is absolutely inconceivable, and its inconceivability involves the non-existence of such a Father.

The all-significant fact is that no God has ever done anything to justify the belief in him, or to justify himself as an object of belief. The Old Testament was composed by men who believed that Jehovah was the greatest and mightiest of all existing Deities. In early times it was universally taken for granted that they were all equally real, though not all equally powerful. Like all other mythological writings, the Bible abounds in descriptions of the wars of the Gods, in which Jehovah was not always victorious. On one occasion, at any rate, he was made a prisoner and carried off to a hostile land, where terrible disasters overtook his captors. In

the sixth chapter of the Book of Judges a highly suggestive instance of the rivalry between Jehovah and Baal is recorded. Gideon built an altar to Jehovah and called it "The Lord in Peace"; but his father followed the cult of Baal, and had raised an altar to his name. Jehovah, being very jealous, is represented as commanding Gideon to throw down the altar of Baal and cut down the tree or pole under which it lay. Poor Gideon lacked sufficient courage to perform the nefarious deed by day, and so he went and did it at dead of night. The devotees of Baal, when they discovered in the morning what had been done, were furious, and, on learning who the culprit was, angrily demanded his life. Their interview with Gideon's father is exceedingly instructive:—

Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring unto thy son that he may die, because he hath broken down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the asherah that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal; or will ye save him? He that will plead for him let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning; if he be a God, let him plead for himself, because one hath broken down his altar. Therefore on that day he called him Jerubaal, saying, Let Baal plead against him, because he hath broken down his altar.

A true philosophy underlies those words so solemnly uttered by Joash. Largely influenced, no doubt, by parental affection, he perceived the essential injustice of his undertaking the responsibility of punishing a sin, if a sin, against Baal. The wanton destruction of the altar was clearly an act of persecution. Jehovah is portrayed as anxious to establish his supremacy by violence, to suppress all rivalry by brute force; that is, to forbid, in the most autocratic fashion, the exercise of any religious liberty whatever. In Joash's opinion that was the quintessence of unfairness. He himself believed in and worshipped Baal, the pulling down of whose altar was certainly an insult to all his followers; but the fact that the offender was his own son opened his eyes to the truth that vengeance belonged alone to the Deity concerned. *If he be a God let him plead for himself.* Unfortunately, no invisible spiritual Being has ever done that. Such a convincing proof of divinity has never yet been given. God is eternally silent and inactive, profoundly unconcerned amid the most horrible happenings. Men may bless or curse him, praise or blaspheme his name, affirm or deny his existence in any terms they please, and he utters not a word, affords not the least sign of approval or disapproval. The amazing thing is that the writers of the Bible even assert the truth of this statement concerning every deity but their own. It is Jehovah alone who is pictured as performing silly and sometimes cruel miracles in proof of his divinity. But in those ancient miracles only an extremely small number of theologians believe to-day, though they are all still convinced that they, and they alone, must plead for God. When asked for some evidence that they have really been entrusted with so tremendous a mission they can adduce none. Though they pretend to speak in God's name and by God's authority of their appointment as Heaven's ambassadors, they hold no certificate, no form of authentication, beyond their own mere word. Neither by their superior knowledge, nor by the transcendent wisdom of their declarations, do they furnish the slenderest evidence that they are authentic spokesmen of a Supernatural Being.

Besides, both professors of divinity and preachers of the Gospel disprove their own claim by their fundamental disagreements with one another. Scarcely any two of them see eye to eye on the most vital points. The multiplicity of theological schools or factions discredits every one of them; and they all alike ignore the great

principle so clearly stated by Joash: "If he be a God, let him plead for himself." Full well do they know that he either will not or cannot do so, with the result that they appoint one another to plead for him, which they do in a ridiculously contradictory and self-condemnatory manner. The God they thus undertake to defend never breaks his silence, never interferes, never shows his hand. The Kaiser called him his "avowed Ally," and the *entente* nations declared that he was fighting with them; or, rather, that they were fighting with him, while he gave absolutely no sign. Divines, like Professor David Smith, unblushingly maintained that the Allies were but the vultures by means of which he was punishing the German nation. The heartlessness of the Christian God none can fathom. We have been repeatedly assured that the adoption of the policy of Secular Education in the Government schools would result in the conversion of the British nation to Atheism, and in its consequent reversion to the worst forms of barbarism. In reality, God is the creature of the theologians, made in their own image and after their own likeness, and it is they alone who produce and perpetuate the belief in him. Our only consolation is that, in spite of all their frantic efforts, the God-idea has just been dealt its deadliest blow and suffered its most terrific setback.

J. T. LLOYD.

Mother Church's Modest Request.

In England men are full of opinions and empty of information.—*Eden Phillpotts.*

DROPPING their role of splendid isolation, the authorities of the National Church have decided on a newspaper campaign in order to raise money, and Canon F. Partridge has kindly consented to act as treasurer. He has not the happy knack of the astute advertising staff of the Young Men's Christian Association, or of the Salvation Army, but he is quite as thoroughgoing in his zeal for the preservation of privileges, and his pious platitudes should be welcome reading to the zealous churchpeople who read the newspapers. With all the glory of Gothic capitals, he assures the public that "The Church of England is the Church of the Nation," and he asks for a very modest minimum subscription of five million pounds, so that the Church can "extend its religious activities as they require to be extended."

Five million pounds is, we are reminded, "the smallest sum which will enable the Church to bring the funds for its normal work up to an efficient figure," and one of the most important items in the programme is the matter of religious education. The Church wishes to maintain her schools—at public expense—because such schools aim "to produce good Christians, and in the effort produce good citizens." The Church further holds "that education without a definite religious basis is no education at all."

Further, the advertisements state that "the Church is understaffed. Its clergy are underpaid. There is no monetary attraction to draw men to the ministry of the Church. The War has deprived the Church of more than 2,000 clergy." The advertisements make no mention of the fact that thirty-nine ecclesiastics of the Church share £180,700 annually; the majority of them having seats in the House of Peers, and being addressed as "my lord." The clergy pretend, professionally, to be entirely uninfluenced by financial motives. Yet the vast majority of these manage to evade the blessings of poverty, and to leave large sums of money when they die. Recently, in this paper, a list of the wills of a dozen ecclesiastics was published, amounting in the aggregate to £611,154; and it is a matter of common

knowledge that the vicarages are by no means the worst houses in any towns.

As for the claim that "the War has deprived the Church of more than 2,000 clergy," it must be remembered that there are about 25,000 Church of England clergymen, and that they were exempted from military service. A caste apart, when they joined the fighting forces, they did so as Army chaplains, with officers' pay and safe duties. One result of their appearance in the Army and Navy is that the soldiers and sailors are the only British subjects forced to attend religious services; a piece of petty tyranny that is more worthy of the twelfth century than the twentieth.

The circus rarely fulfils the expectations of the rainbow-hued posters on the walls, and the rosy testimonials of the value of the Church as an educationalist are discounted by the report of the Archbishop's Committee on *The Teaching Office of the Church* (published by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge). This committee included two bishops, a number of clergymen, and some saintly ladies associated with religious institutions, and the report is sufficient to turn the raven hair of any Anglican clergyman snow-white, and curl it afterwards. The committee points out that "there is much truth in the charges of intellectual and social failure on the part of the clergy:—

Freedom of research has been discouraged, the minds of the clergy have been cramped, and their authority weakened. Many people, especially among the clergy, owing to intellectual sloth and indecision, never seriously endeavour to make up their minds on disputed questions—such, for instance, as Biblical criticism. Sometimes they shut their eyes and refuse to allow that such questions exist at all.

Referring directly to the question of religious education the Committee says:—

We have failed also to discriminate sufficiently between the Christian standards of character and conduct and those displayed in the historical books of the Old Testament. As a child's religious conceptions deepen, many of the Old Testament stories challenge his developing conscience.

The report of the Archbishop's Committee is like the skeleton at the Egyptian feast. It discounts the fears so vividly expressed in the display advertisements. Indeed, we may well begin to wonder if the dear clergy are not needlessly alarmed about Secular Education, as they are unnecessarily worried about clerical poverty.

To give an additional five millions to the National Church is simply to perpetuate a priestly despotism. Under the glamour of the Gregorian chants, wax lights, stained glass windows, antiquated liturgy, and vestments, is a tyranny none the less real because thatched by ecclesiastical stage properties. Such despotism meekly accepted by tens of thousands of nerveless Christians cannot be lightly regarded, especially when the average worshipper deems it profanity to call an ape an ape, if it but wear a clerical collar. The Established Church is no less intolerant than the Roman Catholic Church, and is as hostile to all modern impulses. A Church which includes King Charles the First among its "saints" and prays for fine and wet weather, is not entitled to the respect of liberal-minded men and women. A mere glance at the Parliamentary record of the Lords Spiritual is sufficient to carry its own condemnation. They voted against admitting Nonconformists to the Universities; against removing the civil disabilities of Jews; against abolishing compulsory Church rates; against permitting burial without Church service; against free education for the people. None voted for the abolition of flogging women in public, flogging women in prison; or flogging in the Army and Navy.

With such prelates and such a record the Church of England has no right to ask for a minimum subscription of five million pounds. It is this record of reaction, coupled with a two-thousand years' old superstition, which explains the manless congregations of this country. To give millions of money to such an institution is simply to clang massy gold gates against the hopes and aspirations of the enlightened citizens of a civilized country.

MIMNERMUS.

Modern Methods of Salving the "Soul."

III.

(Continued from p. 574.)

LET us next examine the logical barrage which Dr. McDougall sets up to ward off hostile attacks. His first "argument" is a question-begging metaphor, to wit: That the brain and its system of nerves correspond to an electric battery and its system of wires; that the mind is the magnetic field created by the passage of neural currents through them; and that the "soul" is the *ether*—the *medium*—which makes the creation of such a field possible.

Had this simile been put forward with an honest desire to assist the reader to form a conception of how consciousness arises, one would have welcomed it with gratitude. Though I am not a metaphysician, pure or impure, *who can slur over*, as if it had no significance, the fact that "organization" is a prime factor and a *sine-qua-non* condition of the evolution of life; yet I cannot believe that mind can arise from a substance which has *only physical* attributes. The "raw material" or essence of mind must, therefore, be either in the substance itself or in the medium in which it is developed. So the idea of a psychic ether would be quite a helpful conception if it had not been prostituted, in the act of presenting it, to the blind gropings of barbaric ages. That Dr. McDougall's motive is not to illumine but to obscure and mystify is obvious from the fact that he calls this psychic ether the "soul," and that despite the fact of his professed dislike to using compromising terms!

In fact, the application of this term to the medium is so distorting in its effect as to rob his simile of all logical justification. One is at a loss where to look for a supposed similitude, whether to the ethereal medium or to the magnetic field. The "soul" is usually assumed to possess individuality, immortality, fixity, and initiative power. The ether has no individuality, and, so far as we know, is entirely passive, while the electric field has no immortality or fixity—it ceases to exist when the currents cease and moves as the wires move. He apologetically admits that his simile is somewhat "crude." Crude, indeed, as used by him, it is not an analogy at all, but a farcical travesty of one.

And he is apparently conscious of it all, for so soon as the simile has done its assumptive and suggestive work, he flings it to the winds and goes off at a tangent to ask question-begging queries which belie every attribute of his analogical hypothesis. And well he may, for if he consistently carried out the analogy he propounds, he would have razed his "soul" castle to the ground. For if the mind be evoked into existence, as in the case of the magnetic field, by the passage of currents through the wires disposed in it, so must it, if there be any genuine analogy at all, vanish when the currents cease. Why, in the name of all reason, should there be any resemblance at the start and none at the finish? It would be difficult to beat this as an example of unabashed mystification, and only he who is hindbound in a

pre-possession could ever be guilty of it. His question-begging queries are obviously intended to divert attention away from the natural lessons of his simile and to forestall them.

Had he desired a consistent metaphor to convey the implications of the term "soul," he would have found a gramophone more to the point. He could get out of that some kind of individuality, immortality, and fixity, without distortion or desertion. Or had his object been to illustrate the Buddhistic Nirvana, the phenomenon of magnetic induction, would have been more or less apposite. But to exemplify a "soul" with it, it is probably the most unsuitable metaphor that physical science could supply him for the purpose.

He had obviously forgotten or overlooked his oracular dictum that "mental structures precede bodily structures" when he requisitioned magnetic induction as a metaphor of the "soul." The magnetic field surely does not *precede* the starting of the current!

But there; a metaphysician, like a triune God, is not subject to the laws of logical or arithmetical consistency. Self-contradiction will be "accounted unto him," by believing Spiritists, for profundity of thought! Even a "believer" *without* evidence was pronounced "blessed"; a believer *against* evidence must be the very embodiment of bliss.

Let us now come to his question-begging epithets, phrases, and assumptions.

He speaks of "interaction" in the most naive manner, as if that did not beg the very question in dispute.

"Interaction" should be discussed *after* proving the *existence* of the alleged "interacting" objects. To talk about the "interaction" of imaginary entities is a piece of palpable question-begging sophistry.

"Interaction" is a *How* problem. And a "how" problem does not arise until its two terms—cause and effect—are demonstrable and indisputable facts.

When he has proved the existence of a "soul" entity, he may then, without disingenuousness, discuss its "interaction," and not till then.

KERIDON.

(To be continued.)

The Prayer of the Righteous.

THE fields are ripe to harvest—
The poppies, crimson, flare;
O Lord of *Peace and Beauty*,
Hear thou our *righteous* prayer.

From stately hall and palace,
Ancestral country seat,
O Lord of Death's red harvest,
We come, with praises meet.

Lo, here is peace eternal,
Marred not by hand of man;
And Beauty reigns supernal
Farther than eye can span.

This Paradise of Beauty
Is ours by lordly right;
We may not *fight* for Freedom,
But *hear* the guns at night.

Thy ways, O Lord, are wondrous,
Beyond the ways of man;
The chords of Hate's orchestra
Drown the sweet notes of Pan.

In Flanders, life's rich harvest
Falls 'neath thy sickle red;
Jesu, hear *our* righteous prayer
For blind, and maimed, and dead. P. A.

Acid Drops.

Inferentially the Church of England being established by law is, in the eye of the law, the only true religion. And the King is perforce a member of the Church of England. In his case the religion goes with the post. It is not selected by him, it is chosen for him. So the King went to St. Paul's to thank God for having ended the War after permitting it for four years. Then having prayed with the legally true Church, the King next goes to the other Churches—the Free Churches—and prays with them. Now, there are still Mohammedans, and Jews, and Roman Catholics, and numbers of other sects in the country, and we see no reason why he should not go and pray with the rest. One appreciates the intense religious conviction there must be behind this indiscriminate and commercial-traveller kind of piety. And if there's a God, one wonders what he thinks of the whole business. Will he be bored, or amused, or just disgusted with this saddling him with the responsibility for the four years of war?

A Thanksgiving Service was held in Paris at Notre Dame. The Archbishop of Paris, preaching, said:—

It is to be regretted that our own Government is not represented. A few days ago the British Premier, after announcing the Victory, cried, "Let us proceed to church to give humble and reverent thanks for the great deliverance of the world from its great peril." All the members of Parliament followed him to Westminster.

We quite imagine the Archbishop's regret at the French Government not imitating the stupid mumbo-jumboism of the English Prime Minister and the Members of Parliament. But France is France, and having won the war without God there was no need to thank him at the end. But England is England, and without a display of pious humbug some of us would feel that something serious had happened to the old country.

How the clergy have entwined themselves in social life is seen in a paragraph in an Essex newspaper, which announces that a clergyman is removing to another living. It adds that he is a member of the Board of Guardians and District Council, a member of the Tribunal, and Vice-Chairman of the Food Control Committee. Quite an example of Christian humility!

Mr. G. H. Roberts, Minister of Labour, speaking on the ultimate effects of War-work, said some people thought there might be the development of a definite third sex, something neither man nor woman. On the Continent, priests have been called the third sex for generations.

The piety of the Sunday papers is peculiar. Here is a quotation from a leading article in *Lloyds*: "1914 took this easy-going life of ours by the scruff of the neck, and rammed its nose against the Sign-Post of The Great Cross-Ways, with a thunderous Up—or down? Heaven—or hell? Choose! and choose quickly!" Even the Christian Evidence lecturer who spoke of "the footprints of an Almighty Hand" could not beat this outburst.

Christians are enjoined that when a man steals their cloak they are to offer the offenders their coats also. It may be that Benjamin Small had read this when he stole a bishop's surplice. If so, he has had a disappointment, for a Christian magistrate has sentenced him to three months in a little room in which to meditate on the difference between Christian theory and practice.

The Rev. J. Petrie, of the Glasgow Evangelistic Council, says that, in the midst of all the problems facing the Church, that of exercising the best and strongest influence upon the youth, especially about the age of fourteen and upwards, should not escape notice. There seemed little doubt that if the Church failed to provide adequately for the well-being of the young, guided and guarded by religious influence, the State would step in to undertake the work on a purely secular basis. Is this not already being done by the Welfare

of Youth Scheme, which is already in operation in many of the public works, but which is not generally run on evangelistic lines, recreation and sport being the incentive to better conduct.

The Glasgow United Free Presbytery has passed a resolution expressing thanks to Almighty God for the signal victories achieved by the forces of the Allies and for the signing of the Armistice. On what particular occasion did God give the Allies his special help during the course of the War? Was it when he sent the fogs to cover up the tracks of the Germans when they played the tip and run game on the coasts of England?

The Glasgow Presbytery thinks also the establishment of a League of Nations would safeguard the best interests of the nations and promote the extension of the kingdom of Christ. How these ministers do love to drag Christ into matters he has nothing to do with. Was it the clergy or the politicians who first thought of a League of Nations? As usual, the clergy were left behind, but no doubt they will claim the honour. The real spiritual father of Wilson's celebrated fourteen points is Thomas Paine. Jesus Christ has about as much to do with them as Nebuchadnezar.

The Bishop of Peterborough says: "All countries are now acknowledging and doing homage to the democratic ideals for which Great Britain has always stood." Coming from a clerical member of the House of Lords the remark is not without humour.

"Church and dissent," states the Rev. R. F. Horton, "to use the old phrase, have found out, each for itself, that it has failed." This is very like killing two birds with one one brick.

The news of the Armistice filled nearly everyone with gladness, but there was at least one person who felt sorry. A writer in the *Parish Paper* of St. Jude's-on-the-Hill, Hampstead, said:—

To me last Sunday was—what shall I term it?—a peculiarly distressing day. I mean, to see the eagerness and the hope expressed in so many people's faces and voices at the prospect of an immediate peace. Well, it was painful. I tell you that *any* parley with the enemy at this moment is a crime before God, and an armistice a cruel mockery of the dead—and of the living. America fights by our side. And on the shoulder straps of her men are three letters. Those three letters must be America's only answer to Germany as they are ours—Unconditional Surrender—Absolutely. Let Hindenburg and Ludendorff publicly surrender their swords and the Allies occupy Berlin and Vienna. If this be refused, then, by all that is holy, Fight on! Fight on!

Fight on! The slaughter of a few more thousands, the devastation of more miles of territory matters nothing. Fight on! It is much easier to rouse the beast in man than to put it to rest. And religion only aggravates its restlessness.

The Rev. Dr. Watson, Glasgow, says they would be insincere if they did not plainly say that they believed God had led them to victory. What about the generalship of Marshal Foch?

The Glasgow Corporation Libraries are now to be open on Sundays. Why not the picture-houses also?

Bernard Shaw once said that the only excuse for beating a child is that one does it in a temper. There is a Liverpool society—the Corporal Punishment League—that thinks otherwise. A circular we have received obligingly lays down regulations for the whipping and smacking of children. You are to whip the children over your knee, and in a "humbling way," so that the child "will feel shame as well as pain." You must take time in uncovering the child, "so that it may feel the disgrace the more." There should be intervals between the whippings, and a "short, broad, medium strap" may be used. Above all, "the only sure way to make your children have respect and obedience is to whip them."

The leaflet is not a humorous essay; it is written in all seriousness. The address of the Society is 121 Limekiln Lane, Liverpool, and help is solicited. Testimonials from unnamed mothers are also given. No names are given—nothing but the "Hon. Director, to whom letters are to be addressed." This same gentleman says "that his views and his methods have "had the approval of clergymen of all denominations." The last is illuminating. And we feel as though we should like to convert ourselves into a Corporal Correction League for the benefit of the Director and his backers.

"Flag-day" collections appear to be a better way of "raising the wind" than reliance on prayer. At Southend-on-Sea recently a day was devoted to the "Southend Town Missionary Saturday Collection."

Truth crushed to earth will rise again. Sometimes it gets up in quite a hurry. Then Mr. Bonar Law says "Economic policy is not a religion. It is a question of common sense." The exclusion of religion from the sphere of common sense is delicious. We wonder whether he reads the *Freethinker*? He might do worse.

Bigotry is not dead, but only sleeping. A new Ethical Society at Blackwood, Monmouth, has been refused the use of a building in which to hold meetings. Gallant little Wales should be more progressive than Dunhill-on-the-Snazle.

The following news item should flatter the clerical doves: "Taken ill in his room at the Law Courts, Captain Crawford, an elder Brother of the Trinity, died shortly afterwards."

The Salvation Army is concerned with many things besides salvation. Commissioner D. C. Lamb, head of the Emigration Department of the Salvation Army, has just returned from a visit to the United States and Canada, and will report on emigration schemes for women and ex-service men.

Speaking at Westminster Chapel on the subject of Temperance, the Rev. Dr. J. H. Jowett said: "I pray the Church will come to have fire and flame enough to burn it to death." Will the Church commence with the "communion port"?

The retiring Lord Mayor, speaking at the Mansion House, said he was in favour of stricter Sunday observance. Isn't the City dull enough on Sunday?

Now is the Time.

THE War has given the Churches one of the greatest shocks they have ever received. Thousands have, in consequence, definitely left it for ever, and other thousands are in the act of breaking away. The Churches are lamenting their plight, and not without reason.

But their adversity is our opportunity. Of the many thousands who have broken with Christianity, we have captured a number, but these represent but a small percentage of the whole. And we want them all, every one; male and female demand we them.

And this is where every one of our readers can help. Every one of them knows someone who is a likely subscriber to the *Freethinker*. See that he, or she, gets a copy without delay. Or send along the address, and we will see to it. It is really not difficult to secure new readers, and most of them will rise up and call you "blessed."

We are in for a season of mental readjustment. Old beliefs are in the melting-pot, and people's minds will be more than usually receptive to new ideas. Now is the time for us to strike; we shall not have so favourable an opportunity for a long time, and we must make the most of it.

We want those new readers, and we want them at once. We are getting them all the time; but our appetite grows constantly. And every fresh reader means a new helper in the cause of human progress.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

November 24, Leeds; November 30, Maesteg; December 1, Ferndale; December 2, Llwynypia; December 8, Leicester; December 15, Nuneaton; December 22, Glasgow.

To Correspondents.

- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 1, Swansea; December 8, Garw.
- L. J. LEE.—We are sending parcel of literature. Pleased to learn that the *Freethinker* is so eagerly read in your camp. Thanks for your promised help in the future.
- R. LEE BLISS.—A capital letter, but we don't suppose it will have much effect on the Canon. The only way to stop him is to cut off his supplies by educating the people.
- W. BARLOW.—It is the spirit that counts, and you have nothing to reproach yourself with on that head.
- E. B. SIDE.—We value congratulations from you and yours.
- A. B. HARDY.—There are some points in your letter than can only be decided by yourself. But so long as teachers are compelled to give religious instruction the plan you adopt appears to us the best in the circumstances. The injustice is done, both to teacher and child, by having religion in the schools at all. Anyway, we are very pleased to see you are doing what you can towards popularizing the cause of secular education, and wish that all teachers had the same courage. We hope to visit Edinburgh one day, and to have the pleasure of meeting you.
- H. BULL.—Improvements in our meetings, such as you suggest, are mainly questions of organization and growth in numbers. Something in the line you desire may develop as the first grows and the membership becomes more numerous.
- J. F. CORDON writes that it was only on changing his newsagent that he overcame the delay in getting the *Freethinker* delivered, and advises others to adopt the same plan where the paper is not regularly delivered. We hope that our readers will bring some pressure to bear. The *Freethinker* is published at a regular time, and delays in delivery are in no way connected with the office.
- H. O. BOGER.—It is rather difficult to say how much of the profession of faith in the Bible, or the Church, or miracles, by men like Galileo, was due to caution in offending the Church. One must bear in mind the convenient distinction that a thing might be true according to theology and false according to science.
- F. W. WALSH.—Shall appear next week.
- W. J.—We cannot undertake to answer a questioner until he is satisfied with the answer. That is a quite hopeless proposition.
- W. (Glasgow).—See this week's "Views and Opinions." We may deal with the subject next week.
- 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.*
- 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.

To-day (Nov. 24) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Leeds Town Hall. The hall is a very large one, but the local Freethinkers seem determined to fill it, and we hope they will be successful. Admission is by silver collection, but there are reserved seats at 1s. and 2s. 6d. There will be two meetings, at 3 and 7 o'clock, and arrangements are being made to accommodate with tea those visitors who come from a distance. Those who wish to join in the tea should write Mr. A. Radley, 9 Grosvenor View, Blackman Lane, Leeds.

Next week Mr. Cohen visits South Wales. He is to lecture in the Town Hall, Maesteg, on November 31, at Ferndale on December 1, and Llwynypia on December 2.

We summarise elsewhere the proceedings of the Special Conference held at Birmingham on Sunday last. It says something for the revival of interest in the work of the N.S.S. that so many delegates travelled—under existing hotel and railway conditions—from so far North as Glasgow and West as S. Wales, to be present. The interest is there, and it must be made the most of; and there seems a common resolve to do this. The arrangements made for the Conference by the Birmingham Branch were excellent, and it added to the indebtedness of the Conference to find a tea provided at the expense of the Branch. In these days, the act showed a thoughtfulness that was greatly appreciated by all present.

The tract on "Compulsory Church-going in the Army and Navy," issued by the R.P.A., is now ready, and can be had on application to 17 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, E.C. Copies will be sent post free, and it is hoped that use will be made of the tract during the Election.

The Manchester Branch is holding its first Social at the Small Hall, Downing Street, on Saturday, November 30, at 6.30. Whist drive, music, and dancing. Tickets 2s. each, including refreshments. Members' friends welcome. Will intending patrons please drop a p.c. to the Secretary, 446 Gt. Cheetham Street, E., Hr. Broughton?

Mrs. Seaton Tiedeman, who is the Secretary of the Divorce Law Union, and a prospective Parliamentary Candidate, will open a discussion at the St. Pancras Reform Club under the auspices of the North London Branch of the N.S.S. on "Marriage and the Church." The subject in this lady's hands is certain to be dealt with in an able manner, and we hope North London Freethinkers, particularly ladies, will see that the meeting-place is crowded. The discussion commences at 7.30.

We are asked to announce that Mr. E. C. Saphin lectures to-day (Nov. 24), at the Waverley Hall, St. Mary's Street, Southampton. His subject in the morning is "The Sun, or Genesis and Jesus"; evening, "Christian Ritual and Art Explained." We trust that Southampton Freethinkers will do their best to make the meetings a complete success.

We are sorry to see that our admirable contemporary, the *New York Truthseeker*, has been getting into trouble with the Censor. Under the special law of May, 1918, no less than three issues of the paper have been withheld from dispatch through the post. This is a serious matter to a paper which depends largely upon the post for its circulation. The action has been taken on the ground that the paper was prejudicial to the conduct of the War. As the *Truthseeker* has been avowedly and fervently pro-War right through, and has supported all important Government measures, we think with editor Macdonald that religious influences are simply utilizing the War as an occasion for injuring a Freethought journal. We can rely upon our American brethren putting up a good fight in defence of their paper, and now that the War is over, the bigots will have to find some other mode of attack. It is useless expecting them to use honourable methods while dishonourable ones are available.

We are asked to announce that our contributor "Keridon" will be lecturing at Salford, Manchester, on November 27. Subject: "Why Faiths Die Hard." We are unable to give fuller particulars as none are to hand.

The Repertory Theatre, Birmingham, is occupied this evening (November 24) by Mr. Clifford Williams, who will lecture on "The Madmen of the Gods." Freethinkers should make it a point of bringing along a Christian friend or two. The meeting commences at 7 o'clock.

Owing to various circumstances, we are withholding until next week acknowledgments of contributions to our Sustentation Fund. Intending members will please note that this Fund closes on December 17.

The N.S.S. Special Conference.

THE Special Conference of the N.S.S. ordered to receive and consider the report of the Special Committee appointed to draw up a constitution for the Society met at Birmingham on Sunday last. There was a good attendance, the Society's Branches being well represented in addition to individual members. This, in spite of the difficulties and inconveniences attending travelling at this period.

With one or two minor alterations the report was adopted by the Conference. There is no need to print here the full constitution, much of which of necessity follows the usual lines. Moreover, these rules will be printed and available. The important alterations are: (1) All officials will, in future, be elected by the Annual Conference. The source of authority thus becomes in fact, as well as in theory, the whole body of members; (2) The country is mapped out in geographical areas, each area nominating either one or two members for the Executive, whose election will lie in the hands of the Conference. A Treasurer will be appointed, and the accounts will in future be audited by a certified accountant. The constitution also provides for the appointment of a press representative, and general and local organizers.

It is hoped that by grouping the country into areas closer co-operation between the Branches in each area will follow, and thus result in more sustained and effective work.

The Executive will in future (after the Whitsuntide Conference) consist of not more than fourteen members, with President, Treasurer, and Secretary. I think everyone will agree this is quite large enough for real business.

I feel sure that the constitution as drawn up provides the basis for a healthy and progressive organization, and that all well-wishers will do their best to make it a complete success.

CHAPMAN COHEN, *President, N.S.S.*

Religion and Life.

SIR,—I am sorry that the slowness of our War postal service made my last letter late as it must have given you some extra work. Your article, however, contains an indictment of Christianity too common to pass over, though I cannot, at present, give to it more than a brief notice.

You speak of defending Christianity by pointing out that Christians are not worse than other people, though they sometimes talk as if they were. In other words, you assume, as very many critics do, and as you began this discussion by doing, that the one grand test of a religion is the character of its votaries. But on what is this assumption based? You will observe there are two ways of dealing with your contention. One would be by arguing that Christianity has produced a special and noble kind of virtue which cannot be ascribed to any other influence. I have avoided this plea so far, because to defend it adequately would be a very lengthy business. But I cannot help referring you to a booklet by the Rev. J. K. Mozley, called *The Achievements of Christianity*, which can be bought for 1s. 6d. from most booksellers (S.P.C.K. The Haymarket). I appeal to the fair-mindedness of yourself and your readers not to neglect this temperate, well-written essay. We are, all of us, I hope, in quest of truth, and here is a statement in its defence too weighty to be ignored.

The other way, which I propose to adopt, is to consider the *relevance* of the test of character. I must remind

you that I have twice invited you to answer my rejoinder, viz., that you employ this particular test for Christianity or Theism without scruple or hesitation, though you do not employ it for such a creed as Patriotism. Perhaps I have not made my argument clear. You may object that Patriotism is not a fair parallel because it only professes to produce patriots, not virtuous men; but Christianity, if it does not produce virtuous men, produces nothing. Now, granting this for the moment, I repeat that you single out religion for a test which ought consistently to be applied to Patriotism, and that the latter is an exact parallel to the former for the purposes of this argument. For consider: we reckon Patriotism a good thing. Then, supposing a vast number of patriots behave abominably, we still reckon Patriotism as good though we detest these particular patriots. Would you not call the sixty millions of Germans patriots? Would you not admit that many of them in the name and in the sincere service of Patriotism have behaved infernally, and brought their country to ruin? Certainly you would. That is to say, you discriminate justly between the wrong-headed and the right-minded votaries of Patriotism, and no matter how numerous the former may be your belief in Patriotism is just where it was before. As a principle it is sound, and its soundness is not undermined by the hideous things done in its name. I call that good sense, but why do you draw exactly the opposite inference in the case of religion?

At the same time, I am not disposed to press for an answer, because this is only an interesting bit of logomachy, not really so near the centre of the subject as we were last week. In other words, it is not a necessary tenet of Atheists that Christianity has failed to produce virtue, though a great many may think so. But, as I hope to show later, my plea is not part of the defence of religion on which I rely. It is a challenge of your intellectual consistency on a side issue, and I am anxious to get back to my main business which is to show what the Christian Gospel is, only remarking that the Founder of our religion evidently thought that His doctrine rested on other foundations than the character results on His professed followers, for he prophesied that there would be a great deal of sham Christianity. Thus the decay of Christian faith is not a proof of the falseness of His teaching but rather the reverse. It should be noted also that no other founder of any religion, or even religious sect, has ever begun by telling his followers that much of the support which was going to be given to the movement would prove to be hollow and insincere.

In your last issue you raise another point where a correction is needed. You justly remark, in reference to my argument about introducing one person to another, that the belief in A of the personal existence of B is no proof of that existence being a fact. The belief may be an hallucination. Certainly. But I used the illustration for a different object. It was to explain why I did not accept your invitation to state what I meant by God: not at all as a reason why you should admit the existence of God. My plea was that any such statement, even in the case of human personalities whose existence no one doubts, would be a waste of time.

Now for a different part of our vast subjects. I cannot state what I mean by God, but I can point out what the belief in Him, purified by the teaching and work of Christ, has done for mankind.

It produced a new virtue, in that perhaps the most loveable of all. We call it Humility. What I have to say on this point is supplementary to Mr. Mozley's book, and is an answer after all to your first challenge.

What is Humility? It is a quality, the absence of which causes any character, no matter how gifted, or how useful it may be, to be instinctively disliked by all

of us in our sanest moments. Where it is present it disarms opposition, exercises a powerful influence for good, and enables A to take the mote out of B's eye without hurting him, because it ensures that there is no beam in his own. It is, in short, a supremely attractive quality. But it was so rare before the time of Christ that there was no word for it in Greek, and no evidence that the quality was exhibited clearly enough to be recognized by anyone. Take, for instance, Aristotle's well-known sketch of his ideal man, whom he calls the Man of Great Soul: it is powerfully drawn, and not ill-equipped with graces, but wholly lacking in Humility. Yet we find St. Paul, directly after Christ's work was finished, steeped in the thought of Humility, exhibiting it most beautifully in his own character, and urging on his followers to strive unceasingly after it: though he was obliged to employ a word which had the sense of "mean-mindedness." But the thing denoted was so winning and loveable, and so new, that it triumphed over the disability of this inauspicious start, and won its way to general recognition.

Now, what are we to make of this? I can imagine that some would minimize the phenomenon and dispose of it by airy denials: pointing to the number of people who are free from conceit but are not professing Christians; refusing to regard St. Paul or St. Ignotius as more humble than Socrates. Or, again, there might be the usual quasi-scientific explanation, assimilating the extraordinary to the ordinary, as if some rather obscure cause like suggestion or telepathy had been at work. What is the Christian explanation, and how far does it fit the facts?

We say that no amount of subsequent failure can alter the fact that at the time of the infant Church a new ideal of character came before men's minds: and that some astonishingly potent spiritual influence was at work not only presenting the ideal, but enabling man, in spite of his propensity or haughty self-assertion, to approximate to it in several instances and achieve it in a few: and that this triumph over human arrogance has been won not by coercion but by persuasion. How?

Simply because the conviction that God humbled Himself from infinite glory to the lowest abasement to save us, as soon as it becomes living in the mind, makes conceit impossible. We bow before the manifestation of limitless Love and Power, and are fain to renounce all self-congratulation, when we realize that by the gift of a higher life we are given the power to rise above ourselves, yet remaining morally free.

Observe that the whole power of the appeal depends on the belief that He who died on the cross was divine: the Creator of this world. If He is regarded as not more than a supremely good man no explanation of the facts is possible: for if Jesus was only a good man, he was not an example of humility but of colossal arrogance. Only the full Christian doctrine could have worked any such result. Moreover, to deny this claim is to fly in the face of the only evidence in the matter which is worth anything; namely, the testimony of the "holy and humble men of heart." That testimony is invariable. Whatever conquest over pride they have secured they one and all refer to Christ, and what right have we to say they are wrong?

E. LYTTELTON.

There are states of moral death no less amazing than physical resurrection; and a church which permits its clergy to preach what they have ceased to believe, and its people to trust what they refuse to obey, is perhaps more truly miraculous in impotence, than it would be miraculous in power, if it could move the fatal rocks of California to the pole, and plant the sycamore and the vine between the ridges of the sea.—*Ruskin.*

What is Nature?

Who'll dig his grave?
I said the owl
With my spade and shov'l,
I'll dig his grave.

Ornithologists say that the owl is a wise bird.....He certainly is a very solemn 'un.....Thus "The Owl" on the sum-total-of-things discussion.

SIR,—Mr. J. Fothergill's letter which appeared in the *Freethinker* (June 16) was very welcome, and gave me great hopes for the future. If he came to Aussie-Land, I would be very glad to see him, indeed, and I trust that he would be able to fulfil all his highest desires. What a wonderful man he must be! He is as delightful as Charles Lamb, as impressive as Carlyle, and as pessimistic as Schopenhauer, with, I may add, a good deal of his brilliant lucidity.

I have been giggling in a quiet way ever since I tried to explain the mystery of the universe, and when I wrote my short article on "What is Nature," I also tried to explain that the more you know, the more you find you don't know; or, as Herbert Spencer puts it: "The explanation of that which is explicable but brings into greater clearness the inexplicableness of that which remains behind."

But let us "get back to Nature"—an expression I have often heard people use, and I wanted to know what it meant. The answer isn't so easy as you might think. However, I ran a string of talk through it, and when you come to think a thing like this out, you soon get bushed, for you find it's a good deal of a tangle, but we ought to try and think it out, for the conduct of life hangs to it. I used to think I knew a lot, and by reading and studying hard, I would find out a lot more. But when I first discovered my vast ignorance, I sat me down and wept. I had no idea I was so ignorant. I wanted to know what all this muddle of things meant. But now I laugh, laugh, laugh consumedly, for I have discovered the jest of life. It is a wonderful jest, indeed, and I don't worry any more, either about my ignorance, or anything else. In Mr. Fothergill's words, I am "indeed a puzzle—a 'Riddle of the Universe,' in fact." I admit this. We talk about Nature as if we knew what "nature" meant. But do we? I made the "unmitigated staggerer" that "Nature's Laws are phrases with contents that differ according to the intellectual status of the people who use them," and, I added, "there is no law." But what is law? Is law anything, really, except what always happens? You will need to think that out. Nature to an educated man means the observed order of things. But there is no "law!" All we can understand is that Nature is at work, and the man who talks about the laws of Nature as a pivot upon which to hang his whole philosophy is simply groping round in a metaphysical fog of his own devising.

I would like to discuss mind as a function of the brain, but I had better leave that for the present. Any form of thought apart from the brain is more than I can understand. But it may be owing to some weakness in my brain centres; you never can tell. The scientist tells me that the paper upon which I write is a mass of dancing electrons. Well, it does not look like it. Experience seems all against it; but I can only believe on the principle of coherence of experience, and this philosophy is strong enough to make me doubt all the seeming evidence of my senses. "Are things what they seem, or are visions about?" When one looks around and critically examines his position in the world, he finds, firstly, that it is impossible to prove the very existence even of himself; and, therefore, that it is impossible for

him to verify any evidence of external objects that may come to him. Let my friendly critic look into his mind rigidly and critically; he will find nothing but a series of recollections and presentations. As for anything he can label "J. F——" as such, anything of his own, and quite distinct from other men or other objects, he will look in vain for it. He will find that his every action is dependent upon some cause preceding it. If, therefore, "J. F——" can find no honest proof of his own existence, how can he be presumed to postulate Nature's laws, which only means that the same effects follow the same causes all the time?

The fact is that we appear to be in the grip of immeasurable and incomprehensible forces which we call Gravitation, Heat, Light, or more generally Energy, and that these forces go on their way with a supreme disregard of our convenience. If we oppose our little bodies to them, they silently destroy us. They have brought us into existence; they help us to live a moment; we grow old; they slay us, and we perish. Our own observation of a single day's newspaper shows the gruesomeness of it all, and that the unseen powers, so far as we can tell, appear to take no notice of us. A millionaire crushes thousands of people, robs millions, and accumulates every pleasure and comfort that this world can offer. An innocent little child wanders near a savage mastiff, and is horribly destroyed. What justice is there in it all?

The fact is that all thinking men sooner or later return to the despairing words of wise old David Hume. The whole thing is "a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery"; and if we open our eyes candidly to the truth, we shall see that Hume was right, for no one can thoroughly understand the miracle of life—the romance of existence.

Yes, Nature is kind, but she (or it) is also horribly cruel:—

It spreadeth forth for flight the eagle's wings
What time she beareth home her prey; it sends
The she-wolf to her cubs; for unloved things
It findeth food and friends.

It is not marred nor stayed in any use,
All liketh it; the sweet white-milk it brings
To mother's breasts; it brings the white drops too
Wherewith the young make stings.

Sydney, N.S.W.

THE OWL.

God's Church.

"OH! there's the old lady going to church; or, I should say, chapel."

There was no reply.

"She's eighty years of age."

"Well! I suppose I shall be thinking of going to church when I am eighty."

"Yes, I expect so."

"But to-day I am going to the best church God made; the one with the blue sky over it instead of the vaulted roof."

An hour or so later the male speaker got out of a train at a little station, and walked into the road. It was just an ordinary road, with a few more or less tumble-down cottages on either side, and here and there, further on, a new villa or so. Still, the few people and the cottages were rural and pleasing, although the sky was dull, and not at all blue.

Down the road, over a little bridge, and along the side of a golf-course, thoughts of human company still spoiled the air. Cyclists passed, leaving dust and movement behind them. The walker hurried on, and tried to forget the road. Still, links and wayfarers were troublesome, and even two sparrows on the top of a gate, pecking

craftily, did not rouse him. A crossway made more traffic and movement again. Energy was needed to decide which road to take, but one chosen haphazard led to a promise of quiet, bringing him at last to a foot-path. No cyclists and golfers there! He passed a farmhouse with a gate bearing a warning to beware of the dog, which barked harshly, and through a field in which some full-blooded horses were galloping here and there. Then through another very large field with a sort of banked path. Not a soul or animal in sight! He breathed deep the soft, damp air. The sun tried to shine out for an instant, but failed. Grey clouds made the grass seem more green, and little pools from the heavy rain reflected the attempted glitter of the sunbeams and the greyness of the clouds.

At the other end of the field a railway embankment crossed it. Gates had to be climbed and men again to be met, but gratefully a still larger expanse of meadow spread away with the path through it. A humpy meadow! Water shone in the hollows and where the bank was broken, mud and slime lay thick. All things end, and tall hedge-row trees in the distance gave warning of a road. In the next field, too, were people. They were doing; only a short half-hour's respite!

Road again! Houses and human beings! Sbrill voices of children! A crowd of cyclists, dusty, but happy! Gregarious these, and loving to recreate in crowds. Again an effort to choose a way, but soon a lonely path was reached again. A clump of elms, a stile, a narrow field! Another stile, a finger post! Decision! The clouds fly low, smoke-coloured and threatening. A thrush sings in one of the trees, which all are singing their own lay in the cool strong breeze.

Half-way over the next field a surprise is. Men have been doing, and are going to be doing here. A line of labelled pegs mark out some avenue in a new "estate." Estate forsooth, and it means the destruction of these tall hedges of hawthorn, and that great elm at least. Why must you be building ugly streets of uniform houses and gravel roads where once there were fields, my brothers? Is improvement so necessary?

Paths lead everywhere from these fields and one which leads to a church and house is chosen. Food is necessary, though the grey down of the clouds is floating by. Food is near a church, if it is not the universal church of God, and after food is the promise of a glorious afternoon. Away, then, to the church and consequent houses and "pub." Food and rest! The sun shines out on the whitey-yellow road. The passers look more cheerful.

More miles across fields, through muddy by-paths, where a primrose or two were found. Hedges in deep green! Sky blue, flecked with dark and light cloud! Road at last again! Cyclist, movement, and dust! A railway station with another incipient new estate. At last that feeling of fatigue so joyous that even human society is not disagreeable. A seat on a stile! A question of a passing rustic, genial beneath his tan and the touch of earth about him! Two more miles "across the field what I've just come thro', keeping to the right."

A melancholy railway station. Drab journey, and entry into home where everyone is "just going out." Thankful solitude again, and more food. Time for thought of the great religious service through which he has passed this day, and the weary footman sinks back into an easy chair, satisfied.

G. E. FUSSELL.

What is called a new philosophy or a new religion, is generally not so much a creation of fresh ideas, but rather a direction given to ideas already current among contemporary thinkers.—Henry Thomas Buckle.

Correspondence.

EXPERIENCE AS AN ARGUMENT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In these days when metaphysical research is occupying so big a place in the Western hemisphere it is curious to find Mr. J. T. Lloyd placing it on a level with "dogmatism." This attitude, to a reader of not very long standing, seems symbolical to the weakness of the "Freethinkers" position.

It cannot be denied that, even in the present age of scientific progress, there are certain facts that can only be investigated metaphysically. Is it not something more than a possibility that at the root of all religion lies a dim perception of those infinite things that we to-day are unable to comprehend, and cannot conceive of as being ultimately comprehensible.

It is impossible for us to conceive of space and time as finite, and yet the Infinite is necessarily beyond our knowledge. To this same sphere—that of the conceivable but incomprehensible—appear to belong love, life, truth, goodness. We do not and cannot know those in the absolute. That they are real forces is evident, and that they have actuated men of all times to pursue courses that have not demonstrably added to the sum-total of human happiness, and yet have, amid great physical torture, brought a sense of exhilaration to the sufferer, is admitted.

The great mistake of the rank and file to-day, as formerly, is the attempt to define the Infinite through a confusion of "consciousness" with "personality" and a belief in the permanence of the former (as little scientifically grounded, but as well metaphysically as the belief in infinite space) we have the origin of the belief in a personal God. This mistake has not been committed by the great teachers—Christ, Buddha, Confucius, etc. Insofar as they give us any definition at all, they are in such terms as love, truth, good—themselves indefinable.

Certain it is that for the thinker of to-day who flies to religion for a solution of such problems as the reason for the persistence of absolute memory in the subconscious mind, and the utility of a lifetime experiences if the *ego* on death ceases to be, you have nothing to offer.

Whilst the value of your attempt to shatter the fetters religion has placed on the average mind is apparent, it seems a pity that the *Freethinker* should be as dogmatic on matters outside the scope of mere rationality as are the religions it condemns.

J. DOWELL JONES.

"The True Believer."

HE breathes the air as other people do,
Likewise he sleeps and dreams the happy dream;
Yet, somehow, it is hard to catch a gleam
Of reason why he's not like me or you.

He walks and eats; he reads the papers, too;
In outward parts he *seems* like other men,
And yet there's something funny, now and then,
Some oddity that's ever peeping through,

What is this queer peculiarity?
Some explanation, surely, can be found;
In organ, limb, he's absolutely sound:
I wonder,—is it his mentality?

Alas! it is. It is, alas! too true:
He "looks to Jesus"—not like me or you.

D. V. T.

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LONDON.

INDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Mrs. Seaton Tiedeman, "Marriage and the Church." Open Debate.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, John Russell, M.A., "Arms and the Child."

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Repertory Theatre, Station Street): 7, Mr. E. Clifford Williams, "The Madmen of the Gods."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Good Templar's Hall, 122 Ingram Street): 12 noon, Delegates Report of Conference.

LEEDS SECULAR SOCIETY (Town Hall, Leeds): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "The Challenge of Unbelief"; 7, "Is Christianity Worth Preserving?"

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Geo. H. Swasey, "My American Experiences."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Baker's Hall, 56 Swan Street): 6.30, Mr. J. Sanders, "A Visitor from the Beyond." Music and Songs.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE BRANCH N. S. S. (12A Clayton Street East): 3, Members' Monthly Meeting.

SHEFFIELD ETHICAL SOCIETY (Builders' Exchange, Cross Burgess Street): 6.30, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "The Conservative Creed of Nationalism."

SOUTHAMPTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Waverley Hall, St. Mary's Road): 10, Members' Meeting, Important Business; Mr. E. C. Saphin, 11, "The Sun, or Genesis and Jesus"; 7, "Christian Ritual and Art Explained."

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