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Views and Opinions.

Folk-Lore in the Old Testament.

To his monumental work on comparative mythology, *The Golden Bough*, Professor Sir James Frazer has just added a worthy appendix in *Folk-lore in the Old Testament: Studies in Comparative Religion, Legend, and Law*.¹ To say that the work is thoroughly well done, is almost unnecessary. But it might easily have been either larger or smaller. It could have been smaller by giving the analogical evidence supplied in less detail, and it would certainly have been larger had Sir James given a complete account of all the survivals of savagery to be found in the Old Testament, which have come down to us in the Christian religion. But for these other evidences he refers his readers to the eleven volumes of his chief work, and those who have already gone through them would probably have complained had they had the same things served up again. Still, as it stands, the work is a mine in which for years students will dig, and never with disappointment at what they find. This time it is the Old Testament. We hope that before long Sir James will issue a companion volume dealing with the New Testament. For the material there is of the same kind; and one very real value of the work of this author, as that of Tylor and others, is the light it sheds on the great enthroned superstition of to-day.

* * *

Religion and Savagery.

At the outset it may be noted that Sir James calls his work *Studies in Comparative Religion*. We may take it that the word has been chosen deliberately. There is no pretence here of saving the face of contemporary religion by calling his work studies in comparative mythology, or comparative theology. The favourite distinction between theology and religion is quite fanciful and wholly false. There is no religion without a theology, there is no theology without a religion. In practice the two things are identical, and the distinction may safely be ignored. All civilized races, Sir James believes, have emerged from a state of savagery, and all civilized races carry with them survivals of their savage origin in the shape of customs, institutions, and beliefs. And prominent amongst these survivals in the civilized world is religion. However refined or disguised, the savage lurks beneath every religion in the world. If

¹ 3 vols. Macmillan. 37s. 6d.

we take the Christian practice of the Eucharist, the eating of the body and drinking the blood of Jesus carries us back to the primitive practice of god-eating. The Christian confirmation rests on the initiatory public ceremonies still existent amongst savages. The medicine man is the father of the priest, as the belief in an intelligent deity dominating nature has no better ground than the animistic assumption of the primitive savage. There is no need to dig, you need only scratch religion to find the savage. And the life work of Sir James Frazer has no greater significance than this. However much some of his speculations may be questioned the main principles stand proof against all criticism. Had civilization been primitive, religion would never have existed.

* * *

Some Biblical Legends—

Sir James Frazer takes his starting point from the first legend in the Bible, the Creation, and he brings to bear upon this a mass of stories from all parts of the world which are no better nor worse than the Biblical one. All peoples have speculated more or less upon the origin of things, and without scientific guidance their speculations have naturally followed the same main forms. Following the Creation comes the Fall of Man, the Mark of Cain, the Great Flood (treated with very great fulness), and the Tower of Babel. All of these Sir James traces to their savage originals, and, working both backward and forward, claims, with justice, that, observing the gaps in the Hebrew story, "it has been left for the comparative method, after thousands of years, to supply the blank in the ancient canvas, and to restore in all their primitive crudity the gay barbaric colours which the skilful hand of the Hebrew artist had softened or effaced." All these stories had already been collated with Chaldean, Assyrian, and similar legends current among semi-civilized peoples; the value of the present book is that it collates them with the much larger group of stories current among uncivilized races. And the significance of this is too obvious for comment.

* * *

And Savage Customs.

We have no space in which to deal with the chapters on Primogeniture and Ultimogeniture, with their review of marriage customs and the regulations governing inheritance. These throw a strong light on both social and religious customs, and may form the basis of articles on some future occasion. We have space only for a rapid review of some of the analogies presented by Sir James in the course of his work. We have the struggle of Jacob with the Angel, the drinking-cup of Joseph, the passage through the Red Sea, the Witch of Endor, the test of Drinking Bitter Waters, the boring of a slave's ear as a sign of perpetual servitude, the superstition underlying the command "Thou shalt not seethe a kid in its mother's milk," the sin of a census—for the taking of which the Lord slew thousands of the people, etc. All these and other Biblical stories are placed in their appropriate settings. And exhibited as Sir James sets

them forth their air of absurdity disappears. They are seen as part of a group of myths and folk tales that belong to the childhood of the world. And that expression reminds us that Professor Frazer would probably reply that a much smaller proportion of the world's inhabitants have reached maturity than many would imagine.

* * *

How to Read the Bible.

Finally, we may remark that Professor Frazer has shown the Christian how to read the Bible. It is always the Freethinker who has done this. In making a fetish of the Bible, the Christian succeeds only in making it ridiculous. He makes it, not a book or a collection of books, but a monstrosity. As the Christian presents it, the Bible is false as history, outrageous as a manual of ethics, and absurd as a text-book of science. He makes it ridiculous, and then seeks to protect an absurdity by penal enactments and social boycott. It occupies a privileged position only because it is the charter of an established religion, the warranty of a caste, the documents on which rest the pretensions of a hundred and one absurd sects and ridiculous doctrines. As the Freethinker would have it, the Bible may be read with pleasure and studied with profit. The childhood of the race, like the childhood of the individual, is interesting and instructive. There is nothing ridiculous in the savage, and there is nothing absurd in childhood. Absurdity commences only when the man attempts to regulate his life by the thoughts of the child, and when civilization insists upon maintaining the view-point of the savage. In the Bible we have savagery at different levels, but the primitive standpoint is maintained throughout. The Bible *should* be read as a reservation of beliefs and customs, the true analogues of which are to be found to-day among the uncivilized peoples of the earth. Read as it is read by large numbers of people, it is an outrage on common sense and scientific knowledge.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Sin and Death.

THE Rev. Professor David Smith, D.D., in his Correspondence Column in the *British Weekly* for Nov. 28, dealt with the following passage submitted by an inquirer: "I have often wondered why contact with a corpse should render a person ceremonially unclean (cf. Numb. vi. 6). In our day our dead are regarded with particular tenderness." Dr. Smith explains that the Jews regarded death as at once the consequence and the penalty of sin, and that such is indeed the doctrine of Scripture. Both in Genesis ii. 17 and Romans v. 12, as well as inferentially in numerous other texts, death is represented as wholly due to Adam's transgression. If the first man had obeyed God, the human race would have been naturally immortal. Because Pelagius rejected this doctrine, and maintained that Adam would have died even if he had not sinned, mortality being a natural law, he was accused of heresy by St. Augustine and St. Jerome, and certainly those two Fathers were fully justified in bringing such a charge against him. Paul believed that until Adam partook of the forbidden fruit there was no such thing as death in the world. The world was young; life had only just appeared; disease was unknown; it is more than likely that when the apple was eaten, neither plant nor apple had died. No doubt the apostle looked upon the creation story as literally true, and on that assumption his view of death might have been literally as well as doctrinally correct. Of course, Dr. Smith cannot ignore the fact that the

science of geology has utterly disproved the Pauline doctrine of death, but instead of frankly making that admission, he asserts that "the Jews misconstrued it." As held by St. Augustine and St. Jerome, he pronounces it "an untenable notion." Then he adds:—

Death is no curse entailed by sin, but, as the Stoic philosophers recognized, an ordinance of Nature. It is a natural law, and its operation is universal. The leaves and flowers, the birds and beasts, no less than sinful man, obey it. And it is a beneficent ordinance. "Death," says St. Bernard, "is the door of life." It is not destruction, but transition into a larger, richer, and nobler condition, as our Lord taught when he said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone" (St. John xii. 24). This is the Christian conception.

Now, Professor Smith is distinctly unfair both to the Jews generally and to the apostle Paul in particular. He himself declares the Scripture teaches that death is "the consequence and penalty of sin," but that the Jews misconstrued it because they understood death as "physical dissolution." Well, what else does death mean? Surely, that is what St. Bernard understood by it when he called it "the door of life"; and it is equally certain that Paul used the word in that sense when he said that it entered into the world through sin. But this is how the Professor interprets the Apostle:—

It may seem indeed as though St. Paul contradicted it (the Christian conception) when, in a much debated passage (Rom. v. 12), he affirms that "through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin," and again (1 Cor. xv. 22): "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive"; but what does death here signify? If it be merely the dissolution of the body, then his argument breaks down. For Christ does not exempt his people from death in this sense. All still die, believers and unbelievers alike. But in his magnificent argument on the Resurrection of the Body the Apostle affirms the necessity of the dissolution of the physical organism in order to attain to the fuller life which is the goal of redemption (1 Cor. xv. 36-44); and hence it is evident that it is not this necessary and beneficent process that he means when he says that "through sin death entered into the world." He means not the physical process but its distressing concomitants.

Dr. Smith's exegesis does grievous injustice to the Apostle. Even Dean Alford admits that in Rom. v. 12, death bears the primary meaning of physical dissolution. To Paul death was, in itself, a necessary evil, caused by sin, and nowhere does he speak of it as a beneficent process. In 1 Cor. xv. the theme is Immortality as secured by the resurrection of Christ. The teaching is that Christ, by dying and rising again, robbed death of its final victory, or extracted its sting. By reason of our federal relation with Adam, all must still die, but the Heavenly Man's victory over death makes us all immortal. Some divines believe in conditional immortality only, regarding "all" in the clause, "so in Christ shall all be made alive," as applicable to none but the redeemed. Be that as it may, the blessing which Christianity is said to have brought into the world is conquest over death, and the Apostle joyously exclaims, "Death is swallowed up in victory." Dr. Smith has no right to say of him, "He means not the physical process but its distressing concomitants," nor do the Pauline Epistles contain a single statement which either directly or indirectly supports the following inference:—

Thus the Apostle's meaning is not that if man had never sinned he would have continued for ever on the earth, but that his dissolution would have been, according to the Creator's design, a natural and easy transition, without grief or apprehension, from the lower condition to the higher, like the passage from childhood to manhood, or the bursting of the bud into flower.

That is a theory which cannot legitimately be fathered upon the Apostle Paul or upon the Gospel Jesus. It finds no endorsement in the New Testament. It is perfectly true that death is just as natural as sleep, and all its "distressing concomitants" are of religious origin. So far as we know, death is the end of individual life, just as sleep marks the end of the day's work. All beyond this is sheer speculation, and cannot possibly be demonstrated. It is only too true, alas, that in Christian phraseology, death never signifies the mere dissolution of the physical organism, but "the gloom and terror where-with sin has invested that natural, necessary, and truly beneficent process"; but both the gloom and the terror, as well as the sin, are the artificial creation of supernatural religion. Death is not a curse but a boon when it comes naturally, as sleep comes to the tired child. Dr. Smith claims that the Christian conception of death is attested by the teaching of Christ, but the only attestation he cites is the fact that the Gospel Jesus never speaks of his disciples' "death," but always of their "falling asleep"; but that proves nothing at all. Even Lucretius, the disciple of Epicurus, one of the most original, beautiful, and dignified Roman poets, employs similar phraseology. In his great work, *De Rerum Natura*, Book III., this is how he sings of the final dissolution:

For thou shalt sleep, and never wake again,
And, quitting life, shalt quit thy living pain.
But we, thy friends, shall all those sorrows find,
Which in forgetful death thou leav'st behind;
No time shall dry our tears, nor drive thee from our mind.
The worst than can befall thee, measured right,
Is a sound slumber, and a long good night.

To Lucretius, as to his master, supernaturalism was a horrible nightmare, of which he did his utmost to relieve his fellow-beings by presenting them with a sane and wholesome outlook upon life, and by urging them to observe the wise counsels of Epicureanism. He was confident that some good had already been accomplished, for he says:—

So the times change; and now religion lies
Trampled by us; and unto us 'tis given
Fearless, with level gaze to scan the heaven.

The Christian doctrine of sin and death has done more to darken and blight human life than all else put together, for under its dominion myriads of men and women have spent all their days in frightful bondage to fear, death being to them, because of their superstitious sense of sin, a veritable king of terrors. They were so instructed as to the nature and consequences of sin that the very thought of death caused them to tremble like a leaf in the wind. They would read: "It is appointed unto men once to die; but after this the judgment." When little children laughed somewhat hilariously they were instantly asked in a lugubrious tone of voice: "What if you were to die to-night? Don't you know that it is a fearful thing to fall (unsaved) into the hands of the living God?" Some of us will never forget the awful pictures of the torments of the damned in hell with which our innocent young days were overshadowed and utterly spoilt. It was the false Christian doctrine of original sin that was responsible for all the gloom and depression that characterized life in Puritan homes. That doctrine is being considerably modified by the preachers and Sunday-school teachers of the present day, and yet it must not be forgotten that in some form or another it still lies at the foundation of the Christian religion and gives a sombre colour to all its dogmas. It will die hard, for when it is gone the ministrations of the pulpit will no longer be needed. What we need above all else just now is to get close to Nature's heart and there commune both with her and ourselves, listening with reverence and docility to Reason's voice as it points out to us the true path of social life.

J. T. LLOYD.

Swinburne and Some Others.

Time writes many wrinkles on criticism's clouded brow.

—Augustine Birrell.

"THE true life of a man is in his letters," said John Henry Newman. "Biographers varnish, they assign motives, they conjecture feelings, they interpret nods, but contemporary letters are facts." Yet some letters are the most natural, and others the most artificial of compositions. They may be written with the fear that they may be published, as in the case of statesmen and politicians. But if Newman's remarks are true of any class, they are true of poets and literary persons.

Think of Byron, who is one of the few English poets who have a world-wide reputation. His correspondence is amongst the best in the language, and full of that reckless fun which is one of his surest passports to the attention of posterity. He confesses that his handwriting is as bad as his character. His letters are full of literary quotations always most happily applied. So full of Shakespeare was he that he cannot describe a crush at the opera at Venice without saying that in pushing his way into the building he almost beat a Venetian and traduced the State. Jokes about mothers-in-law are as plentiful as leaves in Vallombrosa, but Byron gets a laugh by saying that his mother-in-law "has been dangerously ill, but is now dangerously well again." The perennial charm of Byron is that he knew the book of the world no less than the world of books. In an age when everybody is bent on saving somebody else's soul, it is a delight to turn to the work of a writer swayed by no worse influence than an easy conscience and a sense of humour.

Matthew Arnold, no mean judge, pronounced Shelley's prose as being superior to his poetry. He was not so far wrong with regard to Shelley's letters, which are simply wonderful. They are not only written in exquisite language, but they reveal the man himself more perfectly than even the incomparable lyrics. Italy has been described by thousands of pens, but Shelley's pen-pictures are among the worthiest. Nor does Shelley confine himself to clouds and sunsets. Byron emerges more truly from his descriptions than from the bulky volumes of Thomas Moore. The letters on Keats form the truest criticism of his brother poet. One must go, of necessity, to Shelley's letters to understand the personality of the author of *Adonais*, for if he had never written them, or if they had been lost, we should never have known the full powers of his wonderful mind!

Swinburne's letters, which have been edited by Edmund Gosse and Thomas J. Wise, form another case in point. His letters are as natural as his conversations, and throb with his enthusiasms and his objurgations. One can hardly imagine Swinburne as a Member of Parliament, although his gift of language might have enlivened and extended political controversy, and added to the revenues of the lawyers. But he was invited to become a candidate by the old Reform League. "I appealed to the man I most loved and revered on earth," says the poet. Mazzini (for it was he) was against the idea, and so Swinburne dismissed the matter. It was not a question of modesty, for Swinburne had as good a conceit of himself as Bernard Shaw. Here, for example, is a pleasant piece of arrogance:—

I should very much like to see the play of Euripides
which contains five hundred consecutive lines that could
be set against as many of mine.

Humour is not Swinburne's strong point, but he is amusing in comparing Oliver Cromwell and Frederick the Great. "Trust in Providence," he says, somewhat spoils heroism; to me at least—

A God-intoxicated man, of course, can fight, but I
prefer a man who fights sober. Whether he gets drunk

on faith or on brandy it is still "Dutch courage," as the sailors call it. I must say Frederick's clear, cold purity of pluck, looking neither upward nor around for any help or comfort, seems to me a much more wholesome and more admirable state of mind than Cromwell's splendid pietism.

Like old Dr. Johnson, Swinburne was a good hater. He hurled the whole vocabulary of a poet's scorn at anyone he disliked, but his passion was frequently too frothy to last long. His moods alternated. At one time he hailed Walt Whitman as a great poet, and at another he vehemently denounced him with a veritable Niagara of vituperation. He saw very little good in Emile Zola, and regarded *L'Assommoir* as "the most horrible and loathsome book that ever got into print," which is a statement that makes a judicious critic grieve. Happily, Swinburne's adjectives were not always misplaced. On the whole, few writers have been more generous in their enthusiasm for the best in literature, and he never withheld his tribute to his contemporaries. Victor Hugo, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Browning, Charles Reade, Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and hosts of others, evoked his hearty praise no less than the great Elizabethans and the master-minds of literature.

These letters of a real and unmistakable poet entertain and rouse. To read him is like sitting at the poet's fireside, listening to his gossip on books and authors. To woo the world with a soft tongue was not Swinburne's way, and his letters are characteristically outspoken. Swinburne himself, with his nervous energy, his troubled passion, his restless sense of beauty, was, in real life, somewhat too much of a recluse and a book-worm, and this defect is written boldly in his letters. We must leave it at that. It does not in any way detract from his rare and exquisite gifts as a singer, which make him so striking and even unique a figure in the literature of his country.

MIMNERMUS.

Religion After the War.

III.

(Continued from p. 629.)

At once the most crushing and the most appalling aspect of Christianity is the aspect of an apparently Christian nation committing every possible crime, inventing every possible infamy, and applauding itself in every atrocious enterprise as the chosen weapon of God! The whole blasphemous business is so revolting that even the neutral-minded historian will never be able to gloss over its degradation.—"Rita" (Mrs. Desmond Humphreys), *The Wrong End of Religion*; 1917; p. 114.

The moans of the dying who have sacrificed their lives on the altar of Christianity are mingled with the prayers of the grief-stricken multitudes in the several fatherlands; and this monstrous human discord is called: The Christian Nations at War. Was there ever such a horrible cacophony in the history of our planet? Never in the annals of Churchanity has there been a carnival of blood and tears to equal it. Never before has the God of War celebrated so great a feast of human bodies—offered up spontaneously by His disciples, the rival Churchanteers. Glutted with blood, He, the mighty War-God, will quench His thirst with the tears of weeping humanity—the tears which are the first by-product of Churchanteering Militarism.—W. Bell, *The Exodus From Houndsditch*, pp. 165-166.

The most wonderful part of this infernal enterprise (War) is, that each chief of the murderers causes his colours to be blessed, and solemnly invokes God before he goes to exterminate his neighbours.—Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*. Article "War."

THE German Army was the only army thoroughly prepared for war. When the frontier fortresses and towns fell like ninepins before the giant guns of their advancing army, and the religious among the Allies turned to God for help, they discovered, with dismay, that the great

War Lord, the Kaiser, had made an alliance with the Lord of Hosts.

Nothing has so disconcerted and exasperated the pious among the Allies as the prominent and whole-hearted religious professions of the enemy. Every German soldier bears the inscription "Gott mit uns" (God with us) on his belt. The cry, "God strafe England," was in every German mouth. Strange sentiments, these, for a nation of Atheists, as the religious would have us believe. Every speech of the Kaiser reeked with piety, and he never lost an opportunity of declaring that God was on the German side. He has been compared with the praying Mantis, a beetle which assumes a praying attitude while seeking its prey. The frenzied rage of the pious vented itself by describing the Kaiser as "The blasphemous bully of Potsdam."

France did not call upon God for help. If any nation can be described as an Atheistic nation it is France. They have disestablished the Church and turned the priests out of the schools. We have not forgotten the torrent of abuse from the religious and Conservative Press in this country over these proceedings, coupled with the prediction of speedy vengeance from an angry God—a prediction which seems to have missed fire. Or perhaps God arranged for the defeat of France in this war; but, as on another occasion, recorded in the Bible, the enemy was too much for him. For we read (Judges i. 19) that the Lord was with Judah, and drove out the inhabitants of the mountains, "but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valleys, because they had chariots of iron," the "tanks" of those days.

Our clergy called on the Lord for help, and they claim that he responded with the "Mons angels," at a very early stage in the War. Since then nothing has been heard from him.

Since the War began, the clergy, while attributing the origin of the War to the Atheism of Germany, have been discreetly silent as to the Atheism of France, about which they used to be so eloquent. If France had been fighting against us, then we should have heard something about it—"not arf," as the vulgar say.

But ordinary people will not fail to note that infidel France was victorious over the loudly declared religiosity of Germany. We append a few extracts from the Kaiser's speeches: they are characteristic of them all:—

God's goodness will guide the German people through battle to victory—to the goal appointed for the German people by Providence.—December 19, 1914.

Germany knows her strength, and she relies on God's help.—July 31, 1916.

All Germany contemplates with pride her brave sons whose deeds, with God's help, will be a landmark on the road to final victory.—December 6, 1916.

If only we cast our burden on the Lord He will smite the foe, hip and thigh, as He did Amalek, the prototype of perfidious England.—March, 1917.

U-boats are not going to rest until the enemy is beaten with God's help.—November 16, 1917.

The year 1917, with its great battles, has proved that the German people has in the Lord of Creation above an unconditional and avowed Ally, on whom it can absolutely rely.—December 22, 1917.

The German people, convinced of its just cause, resting on its hard sword, and trusting in God's gracious help, has confronted a world of enemies.—August 1, 1918.

Remember that you are the chosen people! The Spirit of the Lord has descended upon me because I am the Emperor of the Germans! I am His sword, His Agent. Woe and death to all those who oppose my will! Woe and death to the cowards! Let them perish, all the enemies of the German people! God demands their

destruction; God, who by my mouth, bids ye do His will!

As Professor Gilbert has pointed out:—"Very frequently and explicitly the Kaiser avows his Christian faith. No other ruler in history has publicly declared his faith so often as he has done. He preaches, he brings religion into his addresses to military and naval recruits, he takes a prominent part in the dedication of churches, he is concerned for the religious education of the young, he assures his people that not a morning or evening passes without a prayer by him on their behalf, and he concluded his address to the residents of Berlin at the outbreak of war with a solemn command to go to their homes and pray."¹ The same writer also observes, the Kaiser "has given common currency to a warlike and nationalistic designation of God in the term 'the great Ally.' And again: "When speaking to the recruits in Berlin, in November, 1897, the Kaiser said, 'He who is not a good Christian is not a brave man, and is no Prussian soldier,' for the highest qualities of a Christian are 'self-control and self-abnegation,' the latter quality being identical with 'unconditional obedience and subordination' to those who are appointed over one."² The Kaiser being evidently of the opinion of Constantine, when he adopted Christianity as the State religion, to use the caustic comment of Gibbon: "The throne of the Emperors would be established on a fixed and permanent basis if all their subjects, embracing the Christian doctrine, should learn to suffer and obey."³ The Kaiser has been charged with hypocrisy; but there is not an atom of evidence to prove that he is acting a part, or that he does not really believe in what he preaches. On the contrary, all the evidence goes to prove that he does. For we are told by those acquainted with his private life, of his morning and nightly devotions. Even in his bed-chamber, where he is secluded from the eyes of the world, and pretences may be laid aside, the Bible lies on a table beside his bed so that he can console himself with it in his waking moments.

Moreover, we have the conclusive testimony of the Archbishop of York as to the Kaiser's spiritual fervour; for, as Mr. Temple complains:—"His Grace of York thought it seemly and fitting to dilate in public on the spirituality of the Kaiser as revealed in private conversation with himself."⁴ And if an Archbishop is not an expert upon such a matter, we should like to know who is.

Our clergy called on God for help, but the English people put more trust in the Navy than in all the God's ancient or modern, and the results have amply justified their faith. The attempt of the Church to exploit the War with the mission of repentance and hope, was an acknowledged and unmitigated failure. The people would have none of it.

Now that Germany is definitely beaten, people will reflect that, in spite of her loudly vaunted alliance with God, she has been defeated by infidel France and her Allies, and they will draw the obvious inference that it is better to rely on yourself than rely upon God.

Another loss sustained by religion during the War is the breaking down of the sacredness of the Sabbath. In response to the request of the Government, the Church grudgingly granted permission—many of the clergy vehemently protesting—to believers to work on Sundays for food production on the allotments. Many thousands who, before the War, would not have dared to risk public

¹ Professor G. H. Holley, "The Religion of the German Kaiser," *The Fortnightly Review*, November, 1918, p. 649.

² *Ibid.*, p. 654.

³ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. ii., p. 295.

⁴ M. H. Temple, "The Failure of the Church," *The National Review*, January, 1918.

odium by Sunday work, have taken advantage of the situation, and it is safe to say, they will never go back to the old rigid Sunday observance again. Still worse—from a religious point of view—in spite of the moans of the clergy, the Americans have been publicly entertained with baseball, and boxing matches have been promoted for their recreation on the same day. Moreover, some of the most strenuous fighting of the War has taken place on Sunday. That is another religious barrier broken down.

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

Father Bernard Vaughan once distinguished himself—as a Christian priest—by asserting that it was our duty to go on killing Germans. This may have been true enough, but it scarcely seemed the function of a man whose mouth was full of the Gospel of love and brotherhood to say it. From the brief report of an address before the Guild of Glaziers, we see that he is now in great fear lest the ex-Kaiser should not be executed—which shows stupidity as well as vindictiveness—and vindictiveness is always stupid. Really, the most cruel punishment would be not to kill William, but to restrain him from further mischief, and keep him alive. If punishment is aimed at, there could be no more severe form than this. The cry of "Hang the Kaiser" is the cry of the unthinking mob, and many who join in it are quite consciously playing to the mob. To suffer one must live, to atone one must live. To die is to end suffering, and Father Vaughan is too vindictive to desire an end to the ex-Kaiser's sufferings.

Father Vaughan says, "He boasted of being the All-Highest, and therefore he could at once have stopped, as well as started, the war." The crude sociology of the thing is appalling. But Father Vaughan believes in a God whom he affirms is the real "All-Highest." And he could certainly have stopped the War, or prevented the War ever starting. What does Father Vaughan propose in relation to him? If William of Hohenzollern deserves the scorn of all honest men and women—and we should be the last to question this, though we have too much contempt for our modern kings to be vindictive—what does Father Vaughan's "All-Highest," who might have controlled the Kaiser, deserve? Hang the Kaiser for causing the War, says Father Vaughan, but praise God for not having prevented it! Whose, now, is the greater guilt? Perhaps Father Vaughan will tell us.

Christians say that the streets of the New Jerusalem are paved with gold, and they manage to get hold of a lot of money in this vale of tears. The American Young Men's Christian Association asserts that it has received subscriptions to the amount of £30,000,000; and the more modest British branch has expended £2,500,000. The Church of England is trying to raise £5,000,000. Yet the founder of the Christian religion was sold for thirty pieces of silver.

The value of prayer is always emphasized by the dear clergy—when they are addressing their congregations. In actual life they take no risks themselves. The sandbags, which were placed in Westminster Abbey as a protection against air-raids, are now being removed.

The merry birthday of the Man of Sorrows will be shorn of some of its delights this year. The old-time Christmas pudding cannot be managed as there is a shortage of currants, raisins, and sultanas.

The War was God's War, shrieked the Bishop of London. We were out to end war, said other reverend gentlemen. So we read that as the War was to end war, a new ammunition combine is to be formed in this Christian country with a capital of over fifteen millions. Presumably, they will go in for firework-making as a means of paying dividends.

Cardinal Bourne is quite certain that the "Finger of God" is to be seen in the Allied victory. We hope the same finger will be equally busy in preventing trouble between those who have won the War, and if the "Divine Finger" is not heavy enough, then the whole divine anatomy might plump itself down on the armament rings in the Allied countries, and on the new race in armaments that appears to be developing between various countries. After so much cant about "moral force," it is surely only fitting that the civilized world should rid itself of the constant incitement to war arising from the existence of huge armies and navies.

The *Church Times*, in noting the Labour meeting at the Albert Hall on November 30—it ignores the *Sunday* meeting with true Christian hypocrisy—asks plaintively, "But where were the clergy?" It finds "something alarming in such a gathering without religion having a place," and we concede the ground for apprehension. It remarks that the workers have a religion of their own; but as it points out that the chairman, George Lansbury, confessed to being "one of the few men in the movement who has retained faith in religion," what is left does not appear of a very robust quality. The truth is that the last few years has led thousands in the Labour Movement to realize that the less they have to do with Christianity the better. Freethought is coming to its own there as elsewhere.

The *Church Times* says there seemed to be an absence of clear thinking on the part of some, else why so much enthusiasm for the present tyranny of force in Russia? We must remember that the Russians have disestablished the Church, and that is quite enough to antagonize the *Church Times*. One ought to remember the campaign carried on in the English Press when the Portuguese Republic was established a few years ago. Then, too, we had carefully prepared accounts of the tyranny of a few, etc. Freethinkers will certainly not forget the way the Press was "worked" against France in pre-War days on account of its secularizing policy. What is going on in Russia, no one knows. As we are living with a muzzled and Government-controlled Press, we are not likely to know for some time. We lost our freedom of the Press to win the War, and we are to do without it, apparently, to keep the peace.

"God" appears in quite unexpected and unnecessary places. The London Chamber of Commerce, in a circular to its members, dated November 23, 1918, records the passing of the following resolution:—

That the Council of the London Chamber of Commerce places on record its heartfelt thankfulness to Almighty God on the success of the Allies and the United States in bringing the war to a victorious end.

"Almighty God" must feel flattered on receiving the congratulations of the London Chamber of Commerce, but we think that the Chamber would have been much better occupied attending to its own affairs, and thus avoid offering a gratuitous impertinence to many of its members. We believe that a protest has been made, and although it was too late to prevent this particular stupidity, the protest may serve a purpose by preventing its recurrence.

"God" is also taking a hand in the Chiswick election. At least the Vicar of St. George's, Brentford, says he has a conviction that God had raised up the candidate, Colonel Grant Morden, to help rebuild this mighty empire. So the Kaiser's God upheld the German Empire. So others affirm that God upholds the British Empire. So, still others, on the "divine mission" of this or that nation. Is it any wonder that our political life is what it is when so many of our public men are so little removed from the level of savages in the substance of their thinking. And if the Vicar of St. George's is right, everyone who votes against Colonel Morden will be opposing God. The political fool is bad, so is the religious fool, but when we get a combination of the two, the outlook is poor indeed.

Religious instruction in public schools is one of the main topics on which the "hecklers" in Bellshill (Glasgow) bom-

barded their Parliamentary candidates. Unfortunately, neither candidate would satisfy the aspirations of Freethinkers in this respect. The Coalition candidate is quite satisfied with the present arrangement, and the Labour candidate says he does not wish to raise sectarian matters at this Election.

Is it an indication for good or for ill of the Secular Cause in South Shields that the two candidates, official and unofficial, both held forth to enthusiastic audiences on the Lord's Day? Last Sunday no less than three great mass meetings, two indoors and one out, took place, and the intelligent and worthy electors seemed quite oblivious of what is ordinarily meant by the Sabbath.

God, says Dr. Clifford, sends pastors and teachers for the Churches and statesmen for the nation. All we can say is, "Look at 'em!" Of course, if God does send them, it explains a lot and excuses a lot. Hitherto we have blamed the people for having selected them. But if God sends them, we can see it is not their fault. God sends them. God save them! And God help the rest of us.

Among the things which Dr. Clifford says the nation needs for the new Parliament is "The abolition of theological and ecclesiastical tests for State teachers, the removal of sectarian teaching from the rates." We don't think that Dr. Clifford quite says what he means. Read literally, it should mean complete secular education in the schools. But Dr. Clifford does not, we think, mean this. His removal of sectarian teaching would allow the retention of a form of Christian teaching that suited all Christians. As though Christianity is not in itself a sect in this country, and as though its retention in the schools is not an endowment of sectarian teaching.

A *Christian World* writer remarks that when the Jews get back to Palestine, there is no reason why the Jews "should not be able again to give the world a distinctive civilization." What we should like to know is, when did the Jews give the world a distinctive civilization? The Greeks did, the Romans did, the Egyptians did. But there never was a distinctive Jewish civilization, and we venture to say there never will be. The only distinctive thing about the Jew to-day is his religion; and once the pressure of Christian Bigotry is removed, his religion is hardly worth a century's purchase.

The attitude of the clergy towards advanced thinkers is often amusing. In a life of Canon Barnett, written by his wife, it is stated that Herbert Spencer was one of the party that went with the Canon to Egypt in 1879. The Canon's impressions of the great philosopher are characteristic. "Herbert Spencer," he wrote, "has a world-wide reputation, and is looked up to by some clever people as their great light. I have not read his books; I found them alien and dull." Is it not delightful? And the writer who confessed that he found Spencer's books "alien" and "dull" without reading them was not a common or garden curate, but a Canon of the Church of England.

The Bishop of Southwark is one of the vice-presidents of the National Society for Combating Venereal Diseases. An advertisement issued by that body is headed: "An Enemy which Knows No Pity," and refers to the ravages caused by such diseases. Does the Bishop endorse this delicate impeachment of Providence?

Providence cares as much, or as little, for churches as for other buildings. In March last the church of All Saints, St. Ives, Hunts, was damaged by an aeroplane, and the cost of restoration is estimated at £7,090. There are only 3,015 inhabitants in the little town, so the church is a somewhat expensive luxury.

Mr. Kennedy Jones suggests that much of the industrial trouble is caused by indigestion from bad cooking and feeding. As Ingersoll associated indigestion and religion, we may look forward to a revival on a large scale.

The "Freethinker."

A New Year "Push."

EVER since the signing of the Armistice I have been receiving congratulatory messages on the *Freethinker* having so successfully pulled through the War. I think we all have reason to congratulate each other on that. We have all fought together, and we have all triumphed together. Not that our troubles are yet over; we have only seen them at their worst. For some months there will be no decrease in the cost of production, although there will not be the same anxiety about supplies.

But, in addition to sending me congratulatory letters, many have written expressing a desire that *Freethinker* readers should have an opportunity of giving their appreciation of what I have done—"a substantial form"—in the shape of some personal testimonial. It has also come to my knowledge that letters have passed, and some steps have been taken to give this desire a concrete form. I discovered this quite by accident, and it leads me to say what I am saying.

In the first place, I have no desire that anything of the kind should be done; more, I desire that it should not be done. As some of my friends know, I have big designs ahead, and it will be time enough for any general expression of public appreciation when the *Freethinker* has been placed upon a thoroughly self-supporting basis. When that has been done, and when there has been created a really strong Secular Society in the country, something tangible will have been accomplished. Until these things are done we must all keep up the struggle with all the vigour we possess. And the only expression of appreciation for which I ask is co-operation in realizing these aims.

But the desire to which I have referred emboldens me to suggest a way in which a good lift may be given to help the *Freethinker*. In three weeks' time we shall be issuing our New Year's number, and commencing our thirty-ninth volume. For a Freethought journal that in itself is an achievement. No other journal in this country has had so long a life, and none have lived with greater distinction.

Now this New Year's number may be made the occasion of giving the *Freethinker* a good lift forward. Nearly everyone of my readers will know someone who does not read the *Freethinker*, but who ought to read it. For that one week I want each of our readers who will to see that this new man, or woman, gets it. I want several thousands of our readers—the more the better—to order one extra copy of the "*Freethinker*" for January 5, and post it to a likely subscriber. The cost to each will be twopence-halfpenny, and it will be a useful New Year's gift to Freethought; as for myself, I will gladly take that as a welcome expression of appreciation for anything I may have done during the War period.

This is a simple, an easy, and an inexpensive way of lending a hand. So far as the office is concerned, care will be taken to make the issue for January 5 an extra good one, and it may even be enlarged for that one week. But on that point we cannot yet be certain. Still, the issue will be a very readable one.

The effect of several thousand copies of the *Freethinker* finding its way into new hands in one week is certain to be good. But the copies must be ordered beforehand, otherwise they will not be obtainable. Our circulation is still mounting, but the bigger the circulation the better.

Remember, it is the issue for January 5, 1919, that must be ordered, and the Order should be placed with the Newsagent not later than December 21. A wrapper and a halfpenny stamp will do the rest.

Each copy of the *Freethinker* so sent will reach a new reader, and we shall be surprised if in a large number of cases he does not rise up and call the sender "Blessed."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

December 15, Nuneaton; December 22, Glasgow.

To Correspondents.

- R. CHAPMAN.—Mr. Cohen is pleased to learn that your Branch desired to express its continued confidence in his Presidency of the N. S. S. The confidence and support of the members of the Society is all Mr. Cohen desires in the pursuit of a common labour, and it is gratifying to him to know how very general that support is. Sorry to hear of Mr. Shiel's death.
- L. ERENBERG.—No one who knows anything of the superstition of the Russian peasantry would be surprised at what you say. The power of the Russian czars rested on the ignorance of the people, and ignorance and superstition are two sides of the same thing.
- W. P. ADAMSON.—Have sent your candidate some literature and information. The poor man probably is ignorant of the facts—hence his qualification for Parliament.
- W. E. C.—You may rely on our treating your letter with the utmost confidence. A long and strong pull on one's self, with occupation in some form of mental work, is the best antidote.
- T. OWER.—We don't blame God for anything. It is the Christian who saddles him with the responsibility. All we do is to point the moral of the religious hypothesis.
- G. B. TAYLOR.—We are hoping for great improvements as conditions approach the normal. At least, things should be easier. We haven't gone grey over it, but that might have happened.
- N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: H. Reeve, 3s.; Fred. Hall, 10s.
- STOKER W. PALMER.—Pleased you find the parcel of literature useful. We will send more if necessary.
- F. BETTS.—Certainly there should be a branch at Northampton. We hope you will succeed in forming one. Will use MS. if possible, but have little space, and piles of unpublished articles.
- F. INGHAM.—My *People* and *Capel Sion* are published by Melrose, price 5s. See "Views and Opinions" for other matter.
- WELL-WISHER.—We quite appreciate the motive underlying your suggestion, but names become assets in the course of time, and the thing is not so simple as many imagine. However, we always welcome suggestions from readers, whether it is possible to act on them or not.
- J. WILLIAMS.—It is help such as yours that carry the greatest encouragement. Shall we arrange for your having the paper regularly? Please let us know if it will help in any way.
- R. L. M.—We quite agree with your comment, as you will see from this week's issue.
- B. DUPREE.—It is simply untrue that Horatio Bottomley was ever invited to become President of the N. S. S., or that he made application for the post on the death of Mr. Foote.
- A SCOTTISH CORRESPONDENT writes:—"Are Freethinkers doing all they might do in airing their legitimate grievances during the present Election campaign, or are they more interested in their politics than in their Freethought principles? Some Freethinkers are refraining from asking questions relative to Freethought because they might jeopardize the chances of their candidates."
- H. LANCASTER.—We very much regret to hear of Mr. Wilson's death, and feel sure he deserves the good things you say of him. Please convey our sympathy to all concerned.
- 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."
- 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 (December 15) Mr. Cohen lectures twice in the Palace, Queen's Road, Nuneaton. We hope that all Freethinkers will do their best to induce a Christian friend to accompany them to the meetings. The meetings are at 2.45 and 6.30.

Next Sunday (December 22) Mr. Cohen visits Glasgow, and lectures there, 12 o'clock and 6.30, in the Burgh Hall, Hamilton Crescent, Partick. The usual meeting-place is not available on this occasion owing to the hall being taken by the Government. However, trams run to the Burgh Hall, the stopping-place being Peel. Journeying from London to Glasgow is no holiday task nowadays, and advertizing is very costly, so we are asked to request Glasgow Freethinkers to do their best to make the meetings well known among their heretical and religious friends. There will be music before the evening meeting.

We are not replying at length this week to Dr. Lyttelton's article in our last issue. This is not from any discourtesy to our able and courteous critic, but because we feel there is much in his contention that as it is almost impossible for us to agree on fundamentals, we are, therefore, arguing on different plans, and, under such conditions, discussion is apt to be wordy without being either enlightening or conclusive. Moreover, as Dr. Lyttelton promises to deal with the question of the way in which "we Christians reconcile our doctrine of God with the existence of misery, strife, bloodshed, etc., on the vastest scale throughout the world," we feel that we may let the discussion rest where it is, until this justification appears. We can then deal with the question at length.

Now that the War is over, the Glasgow branch, N.S.S., is entering upon a campaign to increase its membership. Lapsed members are earnestly requested to renew their connection. All Freethinkers are welcomed to the regular meetings of the Branch, which are held every Sunday at noon in the Good Templars' Halls, Ingram Street, Glasgow. Quite a number of young ladies have joined recently, but the Secretary is still open to receive many more applications for membership.

We are constantly receiving complaints from readers who are unable to get their copy of this paper delivered from their newsagent. We are doing what we can from this end to bring pressure to bear, and earnestly ask our friends to do what they can to set matters right. They should insist upon a regular delivery; and if failure to do this meant a transfer of custom for all papers, we have no doubt greater care would be shown in giving a regular delivery.

We venture, once more, to remind intending subscribers to our Sustentation Fund that the closing date is December 17. That is the day on which we go to press and remittances for the final list must reach us by the first post of that date.

"Freethinker" Sustentation Fund.

Previously acknowledged:—£444 10d.; T. H. Gunning, 10s.; A. J. Fincken, £5; Mr. and Mrs. Holland, £1; J. Weeks, 8s.; G. H., £1; Tradeston (Glasgow), 2s. 6d.; W. L. Paterson, 9s. 6d.; G. B. Taylor (second sub.), 9s. 6d.; L. A. Kingsworth, 2s.; G. G., 5s.; R. L. M., £2; J. Williams, 1s.; J. Kirkpatrick, £1 1s.; E. R., 1s.; H. Holls, 5s.; A. Cayford, 10s.; J. Henry, 2s.; T. Williams, 1s. 6d.; T. Banks, 5s.; T. Vine, 4s. 9d.; W. Beaumont, 5s.; C. Curtis, 1s.; "Arno," 2s.; Wm. Roberts, 10s.; Failsworth Secular Sunday School, 21s.; Old Soldier, 10s. Total, £460 17s. 7d.

Correction:—"T. Hart, 2s. 3d.," in our issue of December 1, should have read: Gunner T. G. Hart (France), 2s. 3d.

This Fund closes on December 17.

The Curse of the Church.

THE Church, as an institution which presumes to decide what is true by majority vote, and uses its power to reward obedience with wealth and honour and office, and to punish objectors with poverty and ostracism, is a curse to the world.

There is no tangible thing corresponding to the word Church any more than to the word State. When a number of men assemble and by majority vote decide that something pertaining to politics shall be done, this assembly is called the State. When a number of men assemble and by majority vote decide that something pertaining to religion shall be done, that assembly is called the Church. But there is no such identical thing as the Church or the State.

It would be well if everybody could understand this, for it would then be plain that such words as Church and State are merely convenient expressions for shifting responsibility from individuals to an alleged something that does not exist.

For example: a custom-house officer examines a traveller's baggage and either steals his goods or makes him pay something to be allowed to keep them. The custom-house officer is no better than a common thief, but he satisfies his conscience by the thought that he is an officer of the State.

But when you clearly understand that there is no such entity as a State, and, therefore, that the custom-house officer is simply a person employed by a number of other persons to rob travellers, you also understand that he is nothing but a common thief. In Italy there are bandits, and in England we also have bandits, only we call our bandits protectionists. We appeal to the superstition of the people by throwing over our bandits the sacred name of the State, the stealing is called collecting customs duty, and what is a crime in Italy becomes a virtue in England. To say that this stealing is done by the State deceives nobody but the ignorant and superstitious, for you can be robbed only by a man. Start out to hunt for the State, and see if you can find anything but a politician and his underlings—and a politician is generally and almost necessarily a man beside whose true biography the life of Dick Turpin would be a Sunday-school book.

And what is true of the State is true of the Church. Certain parsons and laymen meet together and decide by majority vote to do certain things, and then to escape responsibility declare that the Church has done everything.

In the first place, this imaginary thing called the Church is a curse to the world, because in its name both parsons and laymen will be guilty of crimes that none of them would commit on his own hook. Just as a hangman, who, on his own hook, would not kill a sparrow, will, in the name of the State, kill his neighbour—so a parson, who, as an individual, would not lie or treat anybody unkindly, will in the name of the Church, subscribe to statements he does not believe and cruelly cut his best friend. Where is there a creed that expresses the honest personal opinions of the men who either made it or subscribe to it? There is not one; and this means that a few hundreds of parsons and laymen will assemble, and in the sacred name of the Church, declare that they believe what no single one of them believes. For themselves they may be truthful enough, but for the Church they will lie. And, consequent on the steady advance of Freethought, there are very few parsons nowadays who would say to one who differs from them in opinion: "Depart, sir; you are a heretic, and therefore unfit to enter my house or sit at

my table." But they will assemble at some synod and excommunicate a man whose only offence is that he will not subscribe to a creed that he does not believe. In their private relations they are kindly, but in the sacred name of the Church they are as cruel as Calvin's God.

In the second place, the Church is a curse to the world because it tries to paralyse the brain. It forbids men to reach conclusions contrary to the statements of the Creed, notwithstanding that no thinking person in the Church really believes those statements. The moment a parson begins to openly question the creed and honestly state his doubts, that moment he begins to be treated like a criminal. Promotion becomes impossible for him. He is left off all committees, and receives the cold shoulder. He is regarded with suspicion, and treated as a disturber and a traitor. More than one honest parson has died from such unmerited contumely, coldness, and ostracism.

A parson may be intelligent, devout, and stainless in his character and life, but if he is driven by his reason to conclusions contrary to the Creed, he is doomed to suffering, to poverty, perhaps even to death—doomed by the Church which professes to wear the garments of an angel, but scratches with the claws of a cat.

On the other hand, a parson may be intellectually feeble, mechanically conventional in his piety, weak in character, and unsavoury in reputation; he may be a moral coward and harsh in nature; he may have an impure mind and gross instincts; but if he is orthodox, any position in the Church is open to him—he can become a father in Israel, living in luxury and dying in all the odour of sanctity.

In short, the Church is a curse to the world because it rewards mediocrity coupled with conformity, and punishes superiority coupled with independence and originality, thus paralysing all the advance it can. The direct and necessary result of this policy is to make parsons mentally dishonest, and I have no doubt that with the possible exception of politicians, no class of men are more dishonest in their public utterances than parsons. The constitution and necessities of the Church are such that every parson must be either a fool or a knave; for he must either have no doubts, in which case he is a fool, or he must conceal his doubts, in which case he is a knave. Many good parsons have, no doubt, convinced themselves that it is right for them to conceal their doubts, on the plea that truth is dangerous unless generously mixed with error. They believe that it is their duty to God and man to be hypocrites, and so they are conscientious knaves, but all the more dangerous for that very reason.

Moreover, the Church is a curse to the world because it energetically bolsters up a false system of morals, and by doing so harbours and clothes with respectability some of the vilest people, while it denounces and vilifies some of the best and purest people, as well as many who are not so very good, but who are certainly not so bad as some of its prominent members.

A Freethinker, though he conform his life to every precept of the Sermon on the Mount; though he be true to his friends and love his enemies; cannot belong to the Church. But a Calvinist, though he rule his children with a rod of iron; though he be false to his friends and vindictive to his enemies; though he violate every maxim of the Sermon on the Mount; can. A common prostitute cannot belong to the Church, but a young woman who in legal prostitution sells herself to a rich old man, can. A common murderer cannot belong to the Church, but a hangman can. The hand that adjusted the noose and pulled the lever on Saturday can take the Communion bread and wine on Sunday. The most ignoble criminals in this country are the men who

are deceiving the workers by misleading articles in the subsidized Press while they are robbing them wholesale by "profiteering," who are starving them by keeping them from the free use of the land, and by limiting the supply of banking facilities; and these men are all members of the Church, or may be.

The Church wants God in the constitution, but it cares nothing for justice in society. It wants the Bible in the national schools, but it cares nothing for the Golden Rule in business. It says we must not break the Sabbath, but it does not say to the greedy capitalist: "You must not break that poor woman's back over a sewing machine." It tells you to worship Christ, but if you try to follow his precepts it will persecute you. It tells the workers to be thrifty and contented instead of telling their exploiters to get off their backs. It tells the idle rich to be charitable instead of telling them to stop robbing the workers. It encourages the suppression and imprisonment of reformers instead of studying and trying to answer what they have to say. It points the eye of faith to a future world of everlasting bliss, but encourages the hand of the profiteer to lay up treasures in this poor vale of tears. It preaches the blessedness of poverty, while its high priests revel in the luxury of wealth. It loves respectability much more than righteousness, and hates social obscurity worse than sin. It is intrinsically and necessarily bad. It cannot be reformed. It must go!

G. O. WARREN.

Arnold Bennett.

MANY of us must have rubbed our eyes with astonishment when, a few weeks before the end of hostilities, it was announced that Mr. Arnold Bennett had been called to the Ministry of Information. To any one who knew what a Government department was like, the fact that our rulers had ever heard of the existence of Mr. Bennett, let alone that they should have decided to trust him with so important a branch of war-work as publicity and propaganda, must have appeared to signalize the end of an epoch.

Mr. Bennett is, with the solitary exception of Mr. Thomas Hardy, the greatest living writer of English fiction. He stands above Mr. Hewlett and Mr. Wells—his two closest competitors—by his freedom from the one's slight affectations in style, and from the other's recurrent tendency to caricature. It is a sign of the times that all these four first-rate novelists are Freethinkers. Each one of them is certain to be banned by any orthodox religious family as "unpleasant"—the best compliment that the orthodox religious public are able to pay to any writer. Yet, with all their community of thought, these writers are curiously contrasted, particularly Mr. Hardy and Mr. Bennett. Both are Rationalists and Monists to the core; but while Mr. Hardy's outlook on life is mainly pessimistic, Mr. Bennett is an aggressive and infectious optimist. He gives the impression of enjoying life, even at its worst; and he nearly, even if not quite, succeeds in making you enjoy it too.

Mr. Bennett stands at the head of the small group of novelists and playwrights, among whom the late Stanley Houghton was the principal of the lesser lights, whose function it has been to give literary expression to the life of the industrial north. To us southerners—I speak as one who is bound by iron chains to the metropolis, and whose visits north of the Trent have been few and fleeting—this literary movement has been a delight and a revelation. "Bursley" and "Knype," "Hanbridge" and "Bleakridge"—to quote the names under which Mr. Bennett thinly disguises his native haunts—

may be quite horrible places to those who dwell therein, but to his southern readers they are holy ground, like Mecca and Medina to good Moslems. Some day I shall make a pilgrimage thither. Probably the trams and shops and mud in the Five Towns are very like the trams and shops and mud in other towns; but to me they will not be so. They will be transfigured by the imaginary presence of Mr. Bennett's creations—Edwin Clayhanger, the romantic master printer; the goodly fellowship of the Orgreave family; and the tyrannical, incalculable, but irresistible Hilda Lessways.

The trilogy of which these characters are the centre is Mr. Bennett's masterpiece. The three novels, *Clayhanger*, *Hilda Lessways*, and *These Twain*, form a veritable prose epic of the Victorian era. Let no clerical hand open these profane volumes: let good church-goers eschew them, and let Pleasant Sunday Afternoons be kept pure from their polluting influence! The spirit of Freethought, humanitarianism, the love of *this* world, blows through them from cover to cover like a fresh breeze. Begin at the beginning; read the burning description of early Victorian industrialism in the fourth and fifth chapters of *Clayhanger*, with its child-slavery and Methodist religiosity. That is the City of Destruction from which Mr. Bennett's pilgrims start upon their journey. In its progress we come across, in due order, all the main incidents of the fight for freedom: the Colenso controversy and the Bradlaugh episode duly figure in the story. The last is, in fact, made the occasion for the first mutual encounter of the hero and heroine. No reader of Mr. Bennett will forget the scene at dinner, where Edwin is asked by his host: "Are you a Bradlaugh man?"

"And Edwin, uplifted, said: 'All I say is—you can't help what you believe. You can't make yourself believe anything. And I don't see why you should, either. There's no virtue in believing.'"

Nor will any reader forget the scene later that night, when Hilda pursues Edwin into his garden to ask: "Did you mean it when you said—you know, at supper—that there's no virtue in believing?"

"Did I say there was no virtue in believing?" he stammeringly demanded.

"Of course you did!" she remonstrated. "Do you mean to say you can say a thing like that and then forget about it? If it's true, it's one of the most wonderful things that were ever said!"

Or the description of the Sunday-school Centenary, with the crowds in the Square singing, "There is a fountain filled with blood," and Edwin's comment: "Look at it! It only wants the Ganges at the bottom of the Square—"

Thus do Mr. Bennett's characters slowly win their way from mid-Victorian superstition to the freer atmosphere of modern days. But it is not only to religious orthodoxy that he flings down the gauntlet. Thomas Hardy issued a terse challenge to conventional morality when he gave his novel, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the subtitle, *A Pure Woman*, in protest, as he says in the preface, against the current "inability to associate the idea of the title-adjective with any but the artificial and derivative meaning which has resulted to it from the ordinances of civilization." Mr. Bennett's challenge is less terse, but no less emphatic, when he makes his heroine, after falling victim to a bigamist, end up as the admired and respected mistress of a prosperous household. If the book had been written twenty years earlier, there would have been an outcry. In the second decade of the twentieth century it was a safe venture; the teeth of Grundyesque convention must by now be nearly all drawn. Mr. Bennett himself had helped to prepare the ground in one of the best of his earlier stories, *Sacred*

and Profane Love, in which the distinction between sanctity and profanity certainly does not turn upon the presence or absence of the wedding ring.

If Mr. Bennett's readers have any just cause of complaint against him, it is that his Hilda and Edwin, after going through fire and water in two whole novels to get each other, develop in the third volume a rather disconcerting predilection for quarrelling on small occasions. Two people of such superior metal, we cannot help feeling, ought to have taken a shorter time to discover the secret of success in marriage. It may be that Mr. Bennett, having allowed some years to elapse between the second and third novels of his trilogy, had a little lost touch with his characters. More likely it is only his way of showing us, incorrigible optimist as he is, that he enjoys life and everything in it—matrimonial quarrels and all!

In Mr. Bennett's interest and sympathy with life in all its phases, there is something reminiscent of French rather than English fiction—particularly recalling Anatole France. This native of the Five Towns, going forth into the world and becoming imbued with the free spirit of Gaul, has returned, as it were, to turn the rays of French common-sense and reason upon the uncouthness and angularity of English provincial Puritanism. It may safely be said that English fiction will never again be quite the same as if he had never touched it. A Democrat, a Freethinker, a Materialist in the best sense of that vilified word, Mr. Bennett has borne a gallant part in the war of human liberation, and contributed not a little to the downfall of the doleful cult of Stiggins and Chadband in this corner of the planet.

ROBERT ARCH.

Correspondence.

EDUCATION AND THE WORKING CLASS INTERNATIONAL.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Will you kindly allow me to draw attention in your columns to an education movement (based on the subjoined proposals), which but for the War would have been definitely established at the International Socialist Congress arranged to take place at Vienna in August, 1914? The movement is of necessity of an anti-clerical character, and is much needed in the British Labour movement, whose "leaders" have so shamefully capitulated to the forces of reaction in the matter of the clerical education legislation of 1902 and 1903, legislation, by the way, which the Labour Party were returned to Parliament in 1906 pledged up to the hilt to reverse. How far those pledges have been fulfilled is shown by the meek, indeed enthusiastic acceptance by the Labour Party of Mr. Fisher's Education Bill, which was frankly based on the legislation of 1902 and 1903.

It is worthy of note that an amendment moved by Mr. Joseph King that there should be no religious tests for teachers, received no support from the Labour Party.

I suggest that the many capable Freethought lecturers who visit industrial centres should invite their Trade Union sympathisers to discuss with Labour M.P.'s the following question: "How far has the advent of Organized Labour as a political force tended to further democratic principles in education politics?"

This question was one, which prior to the War, engaged the attention of capable research students in this and other countries, and it became ever more clear that there was need for an international working-class education movement, by means of which rank-and-file students of the British Labour movement could obtain the assistance, in matters educational, of educationists in those Labour movements in other countries, which are not, like the British Labour movement, so dominated by clerical influences.

Therefore, a movement was set on foot based on the following proposals:—

1. An International Federation of such Labour colleges in various countries as are provided and controlled by working-class organizations.

2. An International Working-class Students' Union; and in order to secure the rank and file character of this union, the *unit* to be, not Labour and Socialist "leaders," or great committees of such "leaders," but the *class* (controlled by the workers) for the study of the principles of International Socialism.

3. An International system of travelling scholarships to secure an interchange of lecturers between various countries, and also to enable working men and working women students to visit, and to study the educational systems of, other countries than their own, and to report to their organizations.

4. An International Socialist Library, to bring within reach of working-class students translations of the best works on Socialism and Education published in various countries.

5. That, under the auspices of this Education Movement, there should be held, side by side with the International Socialist *Political* Congress, an Education Congress, for the purpose of furthering the education of the workers in all countries.

This scheme will ere long be carried into realization. The difficulties will be great, in spite of the fact that it will receive warm support from many influential fighters for intellectual liberty in other countries. In the meantime, it is desirable that the proposals on which it is based should be known to, and discussed by, all Britishers who wish to help the younger and brighter spirits in the British Trade Union Movement in their uphill fight against the forces of reaction in British education. Amongst those forces of reaction, I myself, after over twenty years' work in the Labour Movement, unhesitatingly place the *British high Labour and Socialist bureaucracy*.

M. BRIDGES ADAMS.

LIFE AFTER DEATH.

SIR,—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle attempts to answer my question as to why the spirit communications are never of any general interest by stating that I do not realize the limitations of psychic phenomena. But surely it is as easy for the spirit of a drowned sailor to say how he came by his death as to say how happy he now is having the enjoyment of spiritual whisky and cigars, as revealed by Sir Oliver Lodge's son Raymond.

I have just finished Sir Arthur's *New Revelation*, and find there is nothing new in it beyond the title, the spiritual yarns therein recounted having been forestalled by that of the Witch of Endor in the quaint old Book, and not nearly so well told. And, so far from Mr. Maskelyne's tricks being plausible imitations of spirit phenomena, it is much more true to say that his clever tricks were exploited by smart "mediums" for the gulling of simple and honest Spiritualists. Like all the other spiritual revelations I have read, Sir Arthur's book only confirmed my previous view, that when the spooks fly in at the window common sense walks out at the door.

G. O. WARREN (Major).

Obituary.

On the 4th inst., at West Herrington Churchyard, near Fence Houses, were interred the remains of Mr. Andrew Shiell, who died in his sixty-first year at New Herrington. At the graveside the Secretary of the South Shields Branch through whom deceased had kept in touch with the Secular Movement in recent years, in a few words expressed the sympathy of the Party with the sorrowing relatives and friends. It was with deep regret they had received the last request for a Secular Burial Service. Mr. J. Fothergill gave an impressive reading of Mr. Austin Holyoake's appropriate words, and Mr. R. Nuttall, General Secretary, Northumberland and Durham Colliery Officials' Association, added a touching tribute of respect, acknowledging the loss of a useful and worthy member. Mr. Martin Weatherburn (Newcastle) and Mr. and Mrs. Wright (Penshaw) and others were present. Mr. Shiell was born at Tweedmouth, and many years ago was an active worker in the Cramlington (North-

umberland) Branch. Up to his last serious illness he was a steady supporter of the *Freethinker* and the Cause.—R. C. (South Shields).

On December 7 a small gathering of relations and friends attended the funeral of Mr. Jas. Wilson, of Falkirk, who died on December 5 from influenza-pneumonia. He was fifty-one years of age, and leaves a widow and four children. He was a staunch Freethinker, and had been a loyal and zealous Secretary of the local Branch of the N. S. S. since its inception. He was keenly interested, and took an active part in social economic questions. More for the sake of propaganda than for profit, he ran a bookstall, and at most meetings could be seen with a selection of progressive literature for sale. To know him was to like him, and he will be greatly missed by a large circle of friends. Mr. Wilson viewed his approaching end with characteristic courage, and gave instructions that his funeral was to be a purely secular one. Accordingly the ceremony at the graveside consisted merely of a short address by the writer of this notice, who feelingly referred to Mr. Wilson's many excellent qualities of head and heart.—HANDEL LANCASTER.

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.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, W., near Edgware Road): 8, Mr. Yates, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Miss Nina Boyle, "Our Dishonest Press." Open Debate.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, Joseph McCabe, "Is It a New England?"

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BARNSELY BRANCH N. S. S. (Irving's Studio, 48 Sheffield Road): Tuesday, December 17, 7.30, Mr. T. Lamb, "Voltaire."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Good Templar's Hall, 122 Ingram Street): 12 noon, "Did Jesus Ever Live?"

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

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Baker's Hall, 56 Swan Street): 6.30, Mr. F. E. Marks, "The Lesson of the Bowman Case."

NUNEATON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Palace, Queen's Road): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 2.45, "The New World and the Old Faith"; 6.30, "Christianity, Freethought, and the Labour Movement."

RHONDDA BRANCH N. S. S. (Morley's Restaurant, Perth): 2.30, Important Business Meeting.

SHEFFIELD ETHICAL SOCIETY (Builders' Exchange, Cross Burgess Street): 6.30, Mr. R. H. Minshall, "Oliver Wendell Holmes."

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