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Views and Opinions.

The Reign of Cant.

The Election is over, although the results are not yet known. For several weeks the air has been vocal with the virtues of one party and the vices of all the others. But which owned the one, and which the other quite depended upon the point of view. I daresay most of the speakers believed all they said, while they were saying it, the power of the human animal for self-deception is so great. Besides, they all do it, people look for it, and candidates must "play the game." It might be argued that as the thoughtful are not deceived, and the thoughtless soon get over the illusion, little harm is done. Party followers were waiting for a lead to find out what it was they were to shout for; and party leaders—who more to-day than ever lead because they follow—were quite as eager to find out what the people expected. The followers follow because they see their own prejudices offered them by someone with a louder voice or a greater gift of verbal presentation. That a leader should lead because he is a clearer thinker, of greater moral courage, or indicates new lines of progress, is not thought of.

* * *

Gregarious Coercion.

If this insincerity, self-deception, and lack of independence were characteristic only of election time, the harm done would be trifling. The serious thing is that it is symptomatic of a wide-spread evil. The number of people capable of really independent thinking always represent the minority in a nation. Those who have the courage to express their thoughts, represent a still smaller number. Society at large cares little for independent thought, still less for fearless speech. It reads and listens not so much for instruction or stimulation as to see its own prejudices placed before it in the most attractive manner. The man or woman who breaks in on the closed circle of ideas that forms the mental furniture of most people is not hailed as a deliverer—he is hated as a disturber. Against the assertive individuality of the few is arrayed the coercive gregariousness of the many. Society, as Emerson put it, is in a conspiracy against the manhood of its members. It promises protection at the price of individuality; and this conspiracy of society against its creative individualities is in final analysis the one great obstacle to reform. Expressed dogma-

tism may be fought and conquered. In the act of expression dogmatism reveals its weakness and challenges opposition. But the apathetic conformity of the crowd provides no individual strength to which an appeal may be made, no consciousness of mental independence that may be roused to activity. There is only apathy, delusion, and cultivated ignorance; and against these even the gods are powerless.

* * *

The Power of Religion.

Greatest of all the forces that make for the maintenance and prevalence of this frame of mind is religion. The note of insincerity, evasion, subterfuge, runs right through modern theology. Preachers, one feels, would not believe as they do if they had the courage to submit their beliefs to careful examination and the ability to appreciate the weight of evidence. And even with those that are of a bolder and more able type, what they discard makes us more than ever suspicious of what they retain. It is impossible not to feel that they who say so much must know a great deal more, which is not said because of the consequences that would follow. Preachers do not speak out because of their congregations; congregations maintain an outward conformity because of their preachers. One-half the world is busy inoculating the other half with the virus of hypocrisy in the interests of honesty. For the peculiar feature of all deterrents—legal or social—to heresy, whether the heresy be of a religious, a social, or a political nature, is that it punishes courage and honesty only. The man who will tell a lie or act one escapes scots free. It is like promising a boy a thrashing if he tells you a lie—with the inevitable result that you get it. The necessity for a religious qualification could not shut out a dishonest Atheist from any office in the State. But it could, and does, shut out the honest ones. Among all the people burnt by the Christian Church for heresy, there was not put to death a single sturdy liar. The Church could bag only the honest heretics, because only the honest ones would say what they were. It is surely a delightful and truly Christian arrangement which provides that heresy added to lying may prosper, but heresy added to honesty and courage shall be sternly repressed.

* * *

The Social Pressure.

Curiously enough, the most mischievous punishments for heresy are not those that are legally enforced—even when the law is sternly and persistently applied. In England a king is not supposed to have political opinions. He is permitted to have opinions in religious matters, but here no one bothers about them. For they go with his office, they are fixed by law, and it is quite recognized that his private opinions might be different from those selected for him. So with the rest of the people. Where people are openly compelled to profess a particular opinion, the profession may be made without one sinking either in one's own estimation or in that of one's neighbours. The compulsion is obvious, and it is generally recognized that conformity under such conditions is

no indication of conviction, any more than a Republican paying—through taxation—a part of the King's income would indicate a belief in monarchy. In such cases the conformity is wholly on the surface. The more morally mischievous conformity is that enforced by social custom and opinion. If for no other reason, because it is in operation at all times and under all forms. A legal enactment must be consciously and openly applied, and can only be set in operation in specified cases. A social enactment may be applied in all sorts of disguises, and in an almost indefinite number of directions. It commences with the child at school; it operates in the choice of a career, in the choosing of a wife; nor does it relax its hold on an individual until he sinks into the grave—and even then it will exert a supervision over his character. Legal restriction would be defied by hundreds who wilt before this many-headed tyrant of social conformity. People connected with advanced movements will be at no loss to recall cases of characters that have held out for long against this social pressure, only to go under in the end. It is not a case of frank and open surrender. People do not say, I am tired of the struggle; or, I am hopeless of good by struggling; or, I value a position in the world more than aught else; or, I have sons and daughters, and wish to place them in life. Were any or all of these reasons avowed, the one who offered them would be acting honestly towards himself and others. Instead of this, his action is covered with a hundred-and-one excuses which serve to blind others and to deceive himself. The moral effect of this social coercion is far greater and much more deplorable than that exercised by any legal coercion that has ever existed.

* * *

An Appeal to Heretics.

The strongest and greatest obstacle to-day to real Freethought, whether religious or political, is this social terrorism which people profess to despise even while they yield to it. It is the last refuge of a detected falsehood, and it can only be broken down by all who disbelieve in the customs and beliefs it defends saying as much with unmistakable voice and manner. There is only one time suitable for anyone to call a lie by its proper name, and that is the moment they recognize it as such, not to wait until there are singers enough to make a respectable chorus. In this case delay is a real danger. It is usually much more difficult to palter with one's sense of rectitude at the beginning than it is after a long course of dissimulation. Excuses will wait on inclination, and the truth is apt to look less alluring when we contemplate it through the distracting media of a socially easeful conformity. In strict truth every man who sees a belief to be false, and continues acting as though it were true, is doing what he can to give it a fresh lease of life. And if Freethinkers do not speak out, who shall? In these closing days of the old year we are appealing to all heretics. Theirs is more than a personal responsibility; it is a social one. Behind each opinion stretches a long heredity; the individual merely expresses the last stage in the process. Ultimately all opinion belongs to the race, and is one of the chief instruments by the aid of which progress is made. Unbelief thus brings its responsibilities no less than belief, nonconformity as much as conformity. There is no real reason why the heretic should go through life with his mouth closed or his voice attuned to a minor key lest he should hurt the feelings of the believer. There is nothing praiseworthy in paying homage to a lie because it is ancient. This policy has been followed too long, and its practical results are seen in the insincerity and moral cowardice that are among the most deplorable features of contemporary life.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

“Does God Speak to Man Now? If So, How?”

THE above is the sub-title of a remarkable discourse by Dr. Fort Newton, delivered at the City Temple, and published in the *Christian Commonwealth* for December 11. The real subject is the Bible and what its message involves for mankind. The sermon is remarkable chiefly for its vagueness or ambiguity, a characteristic which may hide a multitude of theological sins. Dr. Newton prides himself upon being free from all dogmatic shackles, forgetting, evidently, that the proclamation of a supernatural gospel in any shape or form is a species of metaphysical dogmatism. For example, he begins the address in question with the dogmatic assertion that “the Bible is a unity in faith, in spirit, and in purpose”; but every thoughtful student knows that the Bible possesses no such unity at all. It contains several different and contradictory conceptions of God. Jehovah is invariably a reflection of the people who believe in and worship him. Mr. R. J. Campbell used to describe him as a monster of injustice and iniquity. He is “a man of war” and the “God of Hosts” long before he is conceived of as light and love. Is there a unity of spirit between the Book of Joshua and the Gospel of John? Joshua was Jehovah's commander-in-chief, whose wars of extermination and enslavement were as cruel and savage as the worst on record; and even in the New Testament the avenging Deity occupies a very conspicuous position. Again, the Bible records a violent conflict between two different types of religion, the priestly and the prophetic, or the ceremonial and the ethical. The priests and the prophets were at never-ceasing strife even as to the very nature of the religious life. There is absolutely no indication that the Biblical writers had the least idea that they were assisting in creating a sacred literature or library through which an increasing purpose, like a golden thread, would infallibly run. It is perfectly true, as the reverend gentleman observes, that the Bible “nowhere speaks of itself as a whole,” for the simple reason that it never knew itself as such. It may also be a fact that “in the Bible the name ‘Word of God’ is never once applied to anything written”; but such a statement has only the effect of pulling the Holy Scriptures down from the high pedestal upon which the first sentence in the sermon places them. And yet the object of that statement is to justify the inference that the Word of God is “a power at once so august and intimate that no book, nor all the books in the world, can contain it.” Consequently:—

Every land, every people, every age hears it, each in its own tongue; and because there are always listening ears, however few,

One accent of the Holy Ghost
The heedless world has never lost.

If Dr. Newton is right, then Paul is wrong when he declares (Rom. iii. 2) that the Jews had much advantage, profit, or pre-eminence, “chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” In the Apostle's opinion, the Jews were the only people who had been entrusted with such precious treasures; and it was the general belief that, in consequence of this pre-eminence, it was only through them that other nations could be blessed. Curiously enough, Dr. Newton says that “God speaks in the Bible, but that he does not write”; but it surely follows that, if God speaks in the Bible, he of necessity, speaks in words, and that the words, whether he wrote them or not, are distinctly his, and it follows further that, the Bible being claimed as the divinest book in the world, God must have spoken with greater clearness and fulness to the Jews than to any

other nation under the sun. The reverend gentleman's piety puts the Bible in a category by itself, and, inferentially, gives the Jews the prominent place among the nations, though his logic represents the Almighty as treating all nations alike, as speaking to and being heard by all of them. Unfortunately, however, in his case, piety wins a complete victory over logic.

In a preacher, piety makes rhetoric its favourite vehicle and flings logic down the wind. Argument is eschewed because it tends to act as a damper on piety, and reason is held in check because it cools the zeal and restricts the flight of faith. Reason says: Assuming the existence of a Heavenly Father we are bound to think of him as the very opposite of a respecter of persons, as one who, if he speaks, speaks to all alike. Piety knows better and unhesitatingly affirms that the Supreme Being chose Israel "to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth," to make them high above all nations which he had made, and that, naturally, he spoke to them more freely and intimately than to all others. Dr. Newton's whole sermon is based on this pietistic but wholly irrational assumption, and, consequently, the Bible is to him God's supreme message to mankind. He says:—

Something reaches us from its pages and pulls us into the play of its realities. It is not a fiction of what life might have been; it is life itself speaking to us. Nor is this to disparage literature and its service to the human spirit. Far from it. How we love to wander in its Chamber of Imagery, amid forms lovely and haunting, where Homer sings, and Plato speaks, and Hamlet dies; and there are lines in the great poets—often even in lesser poets, which open, in the light of a flash, a vista half on earth and half in heaven. Literature is bountiful and benign, free, ideal, and richly rewarding. But the Bible is more compelling than persuasive. It does not entertain; it commands. No other book has such power to comfort and command.

That is sheer declamation, resounding rhetoric or artificial eloquence, and every word in it points to God's immoral behaviour towards the offspring of his heart. It is seldom Dr. Newton descends to concrete instances, but when he does so his selection is unfortunate. On this occasion he chooses the 51st Psalm, and maintains that when a man tries to read it "as he reads any other poem, he finds himself face to face with God and the soul, humbled, subdued, exalted"; but he is radically mistaken. Reading that Psalm, like any other poem, the natural man sits in judgment upon the character of the speaker therein who is generally supposed to represent King David. Now, David was a notorious sensualist, who committed the worst crimes for the gratification of his passions, of which he did not repent until the dread of dire punishment from above had seized him; and even his repentance was entirely one-sided and selfish. He thought only of himself in the hands of an angry judge, and, like a coward, cried out: "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight; hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities." He made no reference whatever to the women and men whom he had seduced, injured, and slain. We do seriously doubt the inspiration of this Psalm, and can see in it nothing but a wretched, frightened criminal basely cringing before a Being whom he believed capable of destroying both him and his house.

Dr. Fort Newton is an unrestrained idealizer. His exaggerations are boundless, his eulogy of the Bible ignores all the canons of criticism, and his practical deductions can be justified at the bar of no well-attested facts. He avers that if we let the Bible have its way with us "it will lead us infallibly in the way everlasting." "Yes, infallibly," he adds. Perhaps no persons were

ever more heroically obedient to Biblical maxims than the Puritans, and the inevitable fruit in their character was narrowness, bigotry, intolerance, which gave rise to the most hateful and odious system of persecution known to history.

Dr. Fort Newton utterly fails to produce any convincing evidence that God has ever spoken, much less that he speaks to-day, and his very attempt to establish such a thesis has but one effect, namely, the reduction of the Divine Being to the human level. Indeed, in one illuminating passage he gives his whole case away:—

Primarily, men are inspired, not writings. Wherever a man, by any means soever, learns what reality is, and what are the laws of the world, he is reading the Word of God. Often he can decipher only here a line and there a stanza, but God is speaking to him.

What a mean, contemptible apology for God. The God revealed by the action of events, the God who spoke in the terrible events of the last four years, certainly deserves neither worship nor belief, for he is robbed of sovereignty, and becomes only another name for man. For ourselves, we much prefer the old name, and to interpret all historical events without any reference whatever to supernaturalism. We learn only by experience, the art of life being acquired solely by actually living. Life is an evolutionary process, a process of outgrowing unworthy elements by reaching out towards nobler and ever nobler achievements. In the well-known words of a modern poet this point is beautifully put:—

I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.

J. T. LLOYD.

"God's" Birthday.

It is a lie—their priests, their pope,
Their saints, their — all they fear or hope
Are lies, and lies. —Robert Browning.

Why will the worldly minded man smile when his eyes rest upon the title of this article? It is severely simple. And why, if this were an orthodox publication, would the editor run his blue pencil through the offending headline? And why, if I were writing in a pious periodical, should I have to use grave words and check any desire towards criticism or light-heartedness? It speaks ill for a religious institution when it can only be discussed from one narrow point of view.

"God's" birthday is associated with humour and mirth, with feasting and merriment. At this particular season of the year the antics of the clown evoke the laughter of children, and the red-hot poker of tradition has not wholly lost its power to please. The shop windows are brilliantly decorated, and little people crowd the pavements and press their tiny faces against the glass. In countless homes folk are trying to get a little colour out of a drab existence, to impart a little warmth to life at this dullest season of the year.

The convivial features of Christmas have been noted frequently to the discomfiture of the dear clergy. For it is among life's little ironies that the alleged birthday of the "man of sorrows" should be a time of rejoicing; and that the festival of the "prince of peace" was fixed in December from the urgent necessity of fighting Pagan rituals. Like all human institutions, the Christian Churches and their feast days have had to contend in open warfare for survival. The festivals of Pagan Rome were as numerous as plums in a pudding. The public holidays were so frequent that they threatened to make life a siesta, and the hard-hearted Roman emperors curtailed them. It was to counteract the

attractions which these Pagan holidays exercised over the people that the leaders of the Christian Churches sanctioned and incorporated some of these feasts.

Thus it is that "God's birthday" is a godless saturnalia. Years ago, grim old Thomas Carlyle made an entry in his diary on Christmas Day. It reads: "On looking out of the window this morning I noticed my neighbours were more drunk than usual, and I remembered that it was the birthday of their Redeemer." The association of gluttony and godliness is by no means the only criticism that can be levelled at this Christian festival. Why God, who is described as eternal, should have a birthday at all is a matter that Christians ought to settle among themselves. Other folk regard life as being too short for wasting time in such pleasing and unprofitable speculations. Non-Christians regard Christ as a mythical person, like all the other sun-gods and saviours of antiquity, whose careers were embellished with marvels.

The merry birthday of the "Man of Sorrows" was not kept regularly until many generations after the supposed date of the birth of Christ. In the earlier stages of the custom it was held on varying dates. The precise time of Christ's birth, like that of James de la Pluche, was "wropt in mystery," but it was not in December, even according to the legends. For shepherds do not watch their flocks by night in that unromantic time of the year. Why, then, do Christians keep "God's birthday" on December 25? The answer plucks the heart out of the Christian superstition.

It was in competition with the feast of Saturnalia, one of the chief Roman festivals, that "God's birthday" was fixed in December. The anniversary of Saturn and his wife was held from December 17 to 20, and the Emperor Caligula added a fifth day of rejoicing. On these five festal days of old Rome the schools were closed; no punishment was inflicted; the toga was replaced by an undress garment; distinctions of rank were laid aside; servants sat at table with their employers; and all classes exchanged gifts.

The propensity of converts from Paganism to cling to custom proved invincible. If the apostates were to be retained in the new religion it became necessary to incorporate the old under the mask of the new. The struggle for survival also incorporated other features. In the far-off centuries white-robed Druids cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their hymns to the frosty air. These features were absorbed, and the mistletoe and carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, part in the celebration of "God's birthday."

This struggle for survival is still going on. In the past the Churches sought for adherents by increasing their festivals, and crushed opposition by bribing the weak and killing the strong. In the twentieth century they are cajoling apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries, and at home by instituting Pleasant Sunday Afternoons in the place of painful Sabbaths; and by hypocritically identifying themselves with social measures which appeal to the working classes.

"God's birthday," with its pharisaical profession of goodwill to men, is largely pretence and make-believe. There is no "god" nor "devil" there at all except the men who make millions out of this sham, and who hiss at the "intellectuals" who would free mankind from their influence. The clergy are not deceived; they are clever actors. When Edmund Kean as Iago, was wringing the heart of his huge audience he could still whisper in his son's ear, "We're knocking 'em, Charlie."

MIMNERMUS.

Religion After the War.

IV.

(Continued from p. 641.)

How can one speak of the fatherhood of God in any universal and all-embracing sense in the light of the terrible calamities which have fallen upon so many innocent sufferers all over the round world? How can one believe in the goodness of God when one contemplates this unexampled harvest of agony, of bitterness, and of death? How the whole dilemma that in every age has haunted the imagination of man, the dilemma: either God would not, and then He is not good, or He could not, and then he is not in control—how this dilemma has been sharpened until it seems as if it could not be evaded?—*Professor W. Adams Brown, "Hibbert Journal,"* January, 1916; p. 339.

The individual doubter can perhaps be brushed aside, but a gigantic evil compels millions to doubt, and clamours for an explanation. In the North, the millions are asking what is the good of prayer, of intercession; things go on just as before. The thousands are saying: "Here in this vast crime God could not help interfering if He had any heart, even as much goodness as any human being. He is, therefore, either not good, or else He is not powerful enough—not capable of interfering." The charge of criminality is preferred against the Deity in a way it has never, perhaps, been before.—*E. D. Priestley Evans, "Hibbert Journal,"* April, 1916; p. 643.

WHAT answer has the Church to the charge of not preventing the War—to the culpability of God in allowing the War, with its resulting 26,000,000 casualties, at a cost of £30,000,000,000, and its trail of desolation, famine, and disease? The apologies offered, in most cases, only aggravate and exasperate, instead of consoling the seeker after a solution of the desperate enigma. For instance, Dr. Ingram, the Bishop of London, preaching at St. Paul's on August 4 of the present year, said: "Men were asking in their hearts to-day, 'Why does God not stop the war.' Why did He not stop the Whitechapel murders of thirty years ago?"¹ Well, why didn't he? Such reasoning—if it is allowable to call it reasoning—would not satisfy a child, let alone an adult. Nor is this an exceptional example of the Bishop's reasoning powers, for not long ago he is reported to have said: "Some men said there was no God. But there must be somebody above the Devil." Fancy basing the existence of God upon the existence of the Devil, in which no educated person now believes! If this is all that one of the most influential dignitaries of the Church can offer, what must we expect from the rank and file? The Church appears to be perishing from senile decay. The vast majority of the people have lost all respect for it. The more clear-headed of the clergy know, and admit it. The Bishop of Woolwich, speaking at the Lower House of the Convocation of Canterbury on July 11, declared: "That the state of religion in England to-day gave cause for serious anxiety. The educated and refined were for the most part either antagonistic or apathetic. The mass of the workers did not trust the Established Church, which they regarded as the hereditary enemy of their ideals."²

The Nonconformist Churches are in the same position. The Rev. W. E. Orchard, after admitting the failure of the Churches, with all their unrivalled influence and opportunities for teaching, to bring home to the conscience of humanity the wickedness of war, observes: "It is useless to plead that this war is different: the attitude of the Church has been the same in all wars. It is no wonder that thousands are turning from the Churches in disgust."³

Another leading light of Nonconformity, the Rev. R. F. Horton, comparing two religious works dealing

¹ *The Daily News*, August 5, 1918.

² *The Daily News*, July 12, 1918.

³ *The Daily News*, June 21, 1918.

with the War, representing the Church and Nonconformity respectively, says of the first, entitled *The Church in the Furnace*, by Seventeen Church of England Chaplains: "Loyal Churchmen, startled by the discovery at the Front that the Church has lost the manhood of the country, cry out for drastic changes and reforms in the Church they love." Of the other work, *The Churches at the Cross Roads*, by Mr. Shakespeare, Mr. Horton observes: "In this volume a Free Church leader makes a similar almost agonising discovery of the failure of the Free Churches, and turns his whole strength of mind and heart—and it may be observed that Mr. Shakespeare is a very strong man—to find a remedy."¹

No remedy will be found. The great Mission of Repentance and Hope, which was to start a new revival and fill the empty Churches was a dead failure from the start. The fact is, the War has only accelerated a movement which was in progress long before the War began, namely, the secularization of life. All the Churches, for years before the War began, were reporting, with monotonous regularity, an annual loss of membership. With an increasing population there was a decreasing membership. A state of affairs which cannot continue indefinitely. The War with its staggering atrocity—which God allowed to start and did nothing to terminate, for it was fought out to the bitter end—only accentuated the fact, which many among the congregations were already beginning to suspect, that, as Carlyle lamented: "God does nothing now." To say nothing about raising irrepressible doubts as to the existence of any such Being.

The panic-stricken Churches are calling upon one another to join forces, to amalgamate and form a huge religious combine, or Trust, in order to stay the rout and recover the deserters. But it is too late. Nothing the Churches can do now will rehabilitate them. It is religion itself that is discredited. A fact that the Churches decline to face.

The Churches could afford to ignore the criticism of the poor and unpopular little band of Freethinkers of the past, but the seed they have sown is bearing fruit now, and the foes of the Churches to-day are of her own household. The pews are revolting against the pulpit. They are demanding more intelligence, more honesty from the clergy, and that their teaching shall be more in accordance with the scientific knowledge we now possess. As Mrs. Desmond Humphreys—better known under the pen name of "Rita" the popular novelist—observes:—

The Church seems to ignore the ability of the laity. It has not reckoned with the force of an advancing tide of criticism—criticism born of the Church's own supine stupidity; its long and tacit acceptance of unprovable facts; its aggressive attitude towards science; its blind adherence to proved errors; above all, its belief in its own appointed supremacy over the minds and souls of mankind.²

The child finds, when he grows up, that he must unlearn all he has been taught. "And therein," says Mrs. Humphreys, "lies the fundamental mischief at the root of all Religion. It has taught wrongly from the beginning, and it has gone on teaching wrongly because it does not possess the moral courage to say, 'I am wrong.'"

The Protestant priest fares no better than the priest of Rome:—"Even empty Churches and a growing tendency to criticism have not quite awakened him. He is still a slave to his own narrow-mindedness. He has accepted the Thirty-nine Articles, and all they involve, and he dares not go back upon one for fear of being com-

pelled to recant all."¹ The Church of to-day: "must recognize that the spiritual life of the nation has passed almost beyond its influence. That the world is up against ecclesiasticism and all the old futile explanations of life's mystery."²

(To be concluded.)

W. MANN.

Acid Drops.

Months ago we warned our readers to take with a grain of salt tales that would appear in the ordinary Press concerning Russia. Just as men like the Bishop of London and Mr. Stephen Graham romanced concerning the devotion of the Russian people to a pure religion, so we knew that the moment the Revolution disestablished the Church and Religion in Russia the stream of lies would be in the other direction. The *Church Times* has from time to time published accounts of the way in which the Russian Government is oppressing religion. Now we see the *Christian World* of December 18 publishes an account of the Baptists in Russia, from their leader, Pastor Fetler. This states that since the last revolution the Baptists have been very active in propaganda, they have opened new mission halls, holding open-air services, and establishing new schools. So much for the Bolshevik suppression of religious freedom. This quite agrees with our information from other sources, which also runs that greater efforts are now being made towards the education of the people of Russia than has ever been the case before. In a year or two, perhaps, the general public may learn the truth of the situation.

A story is told of the late Dr. John Percival, Bishop of Hereford. The Bishop once entertained a colonial divine at Hereford, and the latter said: "Well, bishop, you've got a fine cathedral, a beautiful palace, a salmon pool in the river, and a decent hope of heaven. You must give up one of them." Presumably, the Right Reverend Father-in God responded in the negative.

According to a daily paper, the profits from military canteens are very considerable, and these profits are to be used for the benefit of soldiers. As the Y.M.C.A. huts made similar charges to the troops, their profits ought to be considerable. Who is to benefit by the Y.M.C.A. profits?

The Churches regard marriage as indissoluble; but during the past five years the divorce rate has doubled, and bigamy has more than doubled.

Bishop Gore approves the Labour Party, and, after throwing flowers at it, concludes: "And may God give it wisdom and understanding." A similar prayer has been offered on behalf of Parliament for generations, and the results have been exceedingly unsatisfactory.

The Rev. Professor David Smith, the ultra-Evangelical divine, says that "every time we write a date we unwittingly confess the glory of the Name which is above every name," which is complimentary neither to the Lord he pretends to serve, nor to his own intelligence. The reverend gentleman mistakes Christendom for the world, and seems to convey the impression that the Christian Calendar is the only method of distributing time into periods in existence, whereas, as a matter of fact, the calendars, now in force in different parts of the world, are practically innumerable, such as the Mohammedan, Hebrew, Mexican, Mongolian, Nepalese, Peruvian, and so forth. A calendar is simply an orderly arrangement of the division of time, and in writing a date we merely conform to the calendar in use in the part of the world in which we dwell. The act has no religious significance at all.

¹ *The Daily News*, November 7, 1918.

² "Rita," *The Wrong End of Religion*, 1917, p. 5.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

Now that Glasgow has got a start in the breaking of the Sabbath, it is difficult to know where she will stop. The principal libraries are to be open for a few hours every Sunday from the beginning of the year. We are to have regular band performances in the parks during the summer months on Sundays, and now it is announced that the two captured German submarines which have been sent to the Clyde are to be open for inspection every day for the next three weeks—Sundays included.

Is the Socialist movement in Scotland being captured by the Church? It looks very like it at present. One Labour candidate said at a recent meeting that Socialism was only an exposition of Christian ethics, and immediately thereafter threw out an appeal to his Masonic brethren for their support.

Not content with being exempt from taxation on churches, an appeal is now being made for the exemption of all property held by the Church. It is high time that churches and all church property should pay their fair share of taxation. Do they not enjoy the same protection as other properties.

As evidence of revival of religion in Scotland, we may note that the U. F. Church of Scotland Central Fund shows a decrease of £2,226. Karl Marx said that the Church of England would sooner sacrifice thirty-eight of its Thirty-nine Articles than one thirty-ninth of its income. And we are quite certain this holds good of Churches the other side of the border.

A poor old grey-headed Leinster woman was sentenced to death the other day for murdering her daughter-in-law. The accused, it was said, was suffering from religious mania, and was never tired of reading her Bible. She deserves sympathy rather than a sentence.

We feel sure our readers will be deeply grieved to learn that the Vicar of St. James, Clerkenwell, announces that the *Parish Magazine* is bound to cease publication owing to the expenses of production. We don't know whether the vicar has tried prayer as a means of saving the paper.

We are told that humility is a grace specially created by the Christian religion; and yet in daily life Christians are the proudest and haughtiest people on earth, always looking down upon and despising all who differ from themselves. To Catholics all Protestants are schismatics, while to the latter the former are followers of the scarlet woman. To the Anglican Church the Free Churches are unauthorized "mushroom growths," and Free Church people find the Established Church people sorely lacking in true spiritual religion. The truth is that humility is not a *religious* product at all, but a purely human virtue, rare everywhere and at all times, but by no means confined to the disciples of Jesus.

"Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder," is a sentiment pleasing to clerical ears. It has no terror for lawyers, however, as may be seen in the fact that thirty-five undefended divorce cases were disposed of by Mr. Justice Coleridge recently in four hours.

The Young Men's Christian Association is advertising for handkerchiefs, pipes, woollen underclothing (presumably for men) and other spiritual additions to the Faith once delivered to the Saints.

The Battersea Free Church invited the six candidates for the two divisions of the Borough to their Pleasant Sunday Afternoon to state their views. The rules were no questions, no applause or dissent, and no voting. Surely, a limited-liability idea of liberty.

The Bishop of Oxford has been coquetting with the Democrats, and, in an article in a daily paper, he said: "No citizen has a right to exist unless he is a labourer with hand

or mind or both." Logically, the Bench of Bishops should be shepherded to the dust destructor.

Dean Inge says that the Englishman "looks like a fool and talks like a fool"—but he wakes up when his back is to the wall. Maybe that is one reason why the dear clergy like to keep people asleep.

The dear editors are doing their best (or their worst) to discredit everything unless it is home-grown. One says: "You may hear the whisper that Santa Claus came from Germany," but he dismisses the notion with scorn. If this sort of thing goes on we shall hear presently that Jesus Christ was a Welshman.

The leading article in the *British Weekly* for December 12 is entitled "The Calmness of Jesus Christ." Two sentences therein are noteworthy. One is as follows: "The footprints of God are hidden." No statement could be truer; of the Divine existence and activity there are no traces whatever. This is the other: "Jesus Christ was always calm." Change *was* into *is*, and this statement also is perfectly true. Christ never does or says anything; but was the Gospel Jesus calm when he cursed his enemies, calling them "hypocrites," "serpents," "offspring of vipers," as recorded in Matt. xxiii.?

A sum of £64,000 is to be raised for the new Bishopric of Bradford. £37,000 has been already received, and it is hoped to secure the rest this year. This creation of new bishoprics strikes us as a scandalous waste of money, and a trading upon the gullibility of a too gullible people. Perhaps a larger circulation of the *Freethinker* in the district and a more vigorous prosecution of Freethought work might have a salutary effect.

Wise Men, and Holy!

WHEN Holy Men
Are wise
They tell most lies,
Most terrible lies!
But then,
They are but wise
For their creed!
A deed
They rarely do,
And when they do,
They do belie
Their creed,
And so give the Lie
To all Their Breed!
When they rave—
As they sometimes do—
They save
Truth,
Forsooth!—
They save
As they never saved before.
And after,
In the calm,—
Increasing the Doubter's laughter
They do deplore
All such ravings,
And do their best—
Just like each other similar pest!—
So then to cancel
All such savings
By devious ways,
Such as are full known to them,—
And to all who enquiry condemn—
By prayer or praise,
By wise stealth,
Or wealth
Spurned from the Unwise!—
By such wordy embalm
That slings ever to Their Chancel!
How Wise!—Holy Men,—How Wise!

C. B. WARWICK.

Our Day.

OUR New Year's Push has, we are glad to say, caught on. We have had many letters from readers saying they intend to do their share, and some have sent postal orders with lists of addresses for copies of our New Year's issue to be sent direct. We shall be very pleased to attend to these instructions.

What we are asking is that each of our readers shall take an extra copy of the issue dated January 5, place it in a wrapper, and send it to a friend or acquaintance to whom it will be acceptable. *Freethinker* should be written across the back in order to secure the benefits of the halfpenny newspaper rate.

We are increasing the paper for that week to 16 pages. This is costly, but if we are not deceived as to the number of copies that will reach new readers it will pay ultimately.

At the cost of twopence halfpenny each one can give the *Freethinker* a good send off for the New Year, and perhaps secure a regular reader.

There are thousands of potential readers scattered about. We hope to pick up a fair number of them by this method.

Readers must order their copies early from their news-agents. They must also bear in mind that in an effort of this description everyone counts.

We see that some have been giving substantial sums to Churches as a thank-offering for the War having come to an end. Let each *Freethinker* reader take the suggested plan as a thank-offering for survival. Our War is still proceeding, and we are proposing a method of peppering the enemy with explosives of the highest order.

Don't forget, then, to secure an extra copy of the *Freethinker* for January 5. It is the opening of a new volume. The first shot in the campaign of 1919.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

To Correspondents.

F. AGATE.—It is a good plan to leave used copies of the *Freethinker* in train or tramcar, and it is adopted by many of our readers—with good results.

HUGH THOMSON.—We agree with you that we need to be on our guard against the after-War reactionary forces. They are very active just now, and Prussianism in Britain may be even more difficult than Prussianism in Berlin.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges:—"Ernest," 2s. 6d.

N. S. S. GENERAL FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges:—"Ernest," 2s. 6d.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—E. Lyons, 2s. 6d.; George Proctor, 2s. 6d.; S. Clowes, 5s.; W. F. Ambrose, 2s.; W. Darge, 2s.

A. J. PREECE.—You are quite mistaken. The Secularist is asking for no sectarian teaching in schools. The Education Code itself defines the meaning of "secular," and all the *Freethinker* asks is that the education in State schools shall be confined to subjects that come under that head.

VERA C. DICKINSON.—Pleased to hear from a new reader who is so interested in the paper. See "Acid Drops."

T. H. GUNNING.—Copies of January 5 issue will be sent to addresses given. Thanks.

J. HIBBOTT.—Pleased to hear from so old a *Freethinker* as yourself, and to learn that in your opinion the *Freethinker* stands to day higher than any of its predecessors. Sending what is required. Please accept with our compliments. Papers sent are interesting and useful.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

On January 5 Mr. Cohen opens his New Year's work with two lectures in the Co-operative Hall, Ardwick, Manchester. We hope that Manchester Freethinkers will do their best to make the meetings as widely known as possible. There is no advertising like personal effort. The Manchester Branch has made splendid headway, but it is only a mere skeleton of what it ought to be in a city with a population of well over half a million,

The Glasgow Branch adopted a new, but a very admirable, method in advertising Mr. Cohen's lectures. The notice of the meeting was accompanied by a reprint of "The Principles and Objects of the N.S.S." This should be effective in calling attention to the purpose for which the Society exists.

Strong efforts are being made by the Glasgow Saints to get the *Freethinker* placed in the reading rooms of the public libraries.

We mentioned some time ago that Ireland would be moving in a Freethought direction after the War. We are glad to note that a well-attended meeting was held recently in Belfast, and it was decided to form a Branch of the N.S.S. in that city. Mr. Cohen has been asked to pay Belfast a visit, and he will take the earliest opportunity of doing so. Meanwhile, will Belfast Freethinkers note that meetings are held in the City Studio, 3 High Street, Belfast, every Friday evening? Secretary, Mr. J. F. Lessels.

We have received Dr. Lyttelton's promised article, but owing to getting out two numbers of the paper in a week, we regret our inability to publish until January 5. As, however, that issue of the *Freethinker* will reach a much larger number of readers, the author will lose nothing by the slight but unavoidable delay.

THANK GOD!

Cassander was one of the greatest geniuses of his time, yet all his merit could not procure him a bare subsistence. Being by degrees driven into a hatred of all mankind from the little pity he found amongst them, he even ventured at last ungratefully to impute his calamities to providence. In his last agonies, when the priest entreated him to rely on the justice of heaven and ask mercy from him that made him; if God, replies he, has shown me no justice here, what reason have I to expect any from him hereafter? But being answered that a suspension of justice was no argument that should induce us to doubt of its reality; "let me entreat you," continued his confessor, "by all that is dear to be reconciled to God, your father, your maker, and your friend." No, replied the exasperated wretch, you know the manner in which he left me to live, and (pointing to the straw on which he was stretched) you see the manner in which he leaves me to die!—Oliver Goldsmith, "Citizen of the World."

Man's Feline Friend.

II.

(Continued from p. 658.)

ANNE MARKS, in her instructive and entertaining volume, *The Cat in History, Legend, and Art*, notes an instance in which the warmth-loving cat has been completely adapted to intensely cold conditions. "A special breed of cats," she states,—

is used in American (and possibly in other) cold-storage warehouses. The ordinary cat could not live in the temperature, but some robust individuals having at length become acclimatized in one such place, their offspring—strong, thick-furred animals—able to withstand the cold, are now domiciled in these warehouses, and the variety, sturdy and answering the purpose, continues to flourish.

An ardent lover of cats, our authoress enters her protest against the vulgar error that these animals rank far below dogs in the scale of intelligence. Doubtless some clever cats easily excel many dogs. Individual felines and canines vary widely in mental power. In certain cases the dog's sagacity proves superior, while in others the cat shows itself quite equal or even greater in intelligence than its canine competitor. One shrewd and experienced American trainer claims, as a result of long and patient study of the animal, that the cat is really more intelligent than the dog. In reply to the complaint that while man has made the dog an obedient and trustworthy companion and servant, and has trained the horse and other creatures to labour for his benefit, the cat has invariably refused all human attempts to induce it to toil in man's service, this observer answers that the cat's obstinacy is the outcome of its astuteness. In any event, it is indisputable that cats

thoroughly understand their own wishes and the way to realize them, and they invariably succeed in compassing the end they have in view, unless prevented by resolution and patience equal to their own, aided by the superior resources at the command of a human opponent.

The cat group ranges throughout the Eastern and Western Worlds. The lion may be regarded as the head of the family, even ranking above that terrible carnivore the Bengal tiger. The jaguar, leopard, ounce, ocelot, puma, serval, the civet cat, mongoose, and caracal are all members of this extensive order. Another famous feline is the Caffre Cat, the probable ancestor of the domesticated European cat. This animal occurs in Africa where it extends from Egypt and Algeria to the Cape, while it is native also to Syria and Arabia. Formerly common in Cape Colony, it has receded with the spread of civilization into the less-frequented regions where it is still abundant, and constitutes the representative wild cat of the once Dark Continent.

The Caffre cat was tamed at an early period in ancient Egypt, where it became the object of adoration and worship. But, although the modern house cat is mainly descended from this stock, there can be little doubt that a fair amount of intercrossing has occurred with the native wild cats of the various European countries. Moreover, the untamed Caffre cat once dwelt in Europe, and its fossilized remains have been discovered in the cavern deposits of Gibraltar. The presence of the animal in Spain presumably dates from the period when the Iberian Peninsular was still united with the African land-mass.

From remote times the cat has been familiar in China and India, but nowhere else has the animal occupied so exalted a position in the estimation of the people as in ancient Egypt. There it was venerated; it possessed its peculiar divinity; cities were dedicated to its ser-

vice; sculptors and painters made it the subject of their respective arts, while at its death its remains were solemnly embalmed in costly raiment, perhaps to await a glorious resurrection. The cat-cult of Old Nile varied locally, and the feline goddess Bast bore many names. Bast is portrayed in art with a human body surmounted with the head of a cat, while figures of cats and kittens were adored as emblems of the divinity. Medals stamped with the likeness of a cat were worn as charms, and from their sale the priests of Bast derived a handsome revenue. We gather from the Greek historians that pet cats resided in all the Egyptian temples.

The cat was associated with solar ceremonies, and the animal seems to have been worshipped in the great City of the Sun—Heliopolis—because, it is said, "the pupil of its eye was observed to vary with the height of the luminary above the horizon."

A world-wide superstition connects the cat with the lunar orb. The size of the cat's pupil was supposed to fluctuate with the phases presented by the waxing and waning moon. The pupil of the eye was believed to expand with the orb's increase, while it contracted with its dwindling. Further affinity between the silver moon and the cat was evidenced by their common nocturnal preferences. The queen of the nightly skies was regarded as the mistress of the feline race, and the lunar divinity was thought to be influenced through the reverence of the people towards her terrestrial servants.

When Hamlet meditated over the skull in the Elsinore graveyard his thoughts turned to the ignoble employment to which the dust of Cæsar and Alexander might one day descend. But little did the early Egyptians imagine the unromantic if practical purposes to which a less religious age would devote the embalmed bodies of their sacred cats. Yet, when quite recently thousands of mummied cats were unexpectedly unearthed in an Egyptian cave in which they had for centuries reposed, many were spread over the adjacent fields to enrich the soil, while the remainder were shipped abroad for the same purpose.

The cat became man's companion in prehistoric times, and conclusive proofs of this relationship are of great antiquity. The "cat" employed by the ancient Greeks was probably the marten. But there can be little doubt that the true cat was domesticated in Europe centuries prior to the Christian era. Professor Mivart, in his splendid monograph, states that:—

There are signs that it was domesticated amongst the people of the Bronze Period, and the supposition that it was first introduced into Western Europe by the Crusaders is of course an altogether erroneous one."

In the East, the monuments of Babylon and Nineveh, in addition to those of Egypt, preserve evidences from remote times of man's close acquaintance with the animal. The earliest known representation of the cat occurs in the Necropolis at Thebes, and dates back at least 4,000 years. Various extremely ancient models of the animal may be seen in several European museums.

Mainly from religious motives, the crime of cat-killing was in old Egypt visited with the punishment of death. In later Europe the penalty was mitigated, but the value of the cat as a vermin-destroyer was clearly recognised, and the heavy fines inflicted on a human cat-persecutor sufficed to protect the animal from fatal injury. During the Middle Ages the death of a cat incurred the forfeiture of a ewe, or of a quantity of wheat—a commodity both scarce and costly—sufficient to cover the animal's body "when it was held up by the tip of the tail with the nose touching the ground."

The traveller in Persia who expects to greet the

splendid long-furred beauties so familiar in England will be greatly disappointed. The native cats of Persia are miserable emaciated felines, and these animals are regarded by the people with cold indifference. As a matter of fact the magnificent Persian specimens so admired in Europe are the artificial creations of the selective breeders of pedigree cats.

With the Arabs, on the other hand, the cat is affectionately treated, and Arabian folk-lore contains several stories of the native fairies assuming the form of the cat. The Jinns, or fairies in feline form were believed to hallow the dwellings which they entered.

In the Far East generally the cat is both venerated and valued. It is stated that in China the cat's eye serves as a chronometer. The pupil of the animal's eye contracts with the advancing hours after dawn until it becomes a mere slit at noon. Then it begins to dilate until its full expansion approaches as the twilight deepens into night. By observing these fluctuations the people tell the time much as our own rustics note the hour by looking at the sun. The Celestials appreciate the cat as an article of food, and the animal's flesh is considered a dainty. Large cats are exposed for sale on the provision stalls in Eastern lands. The animals are chained up on the farms where they are fattened for the market. The cat was formerly a much commoner comestible than at present. We gather that after the removal of the head and tail, and presumably the intestines also, the cat's carcass is suspended in the open air to purge it of its powerful flavour, when, after the interval of a day or so, it is ready for cooking, and is by some "considered almost as sweet as rabbit."

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued.)

The City and the Coast.

It seems to the writer that an impression of "Glasgow Fair," 1918, will not be out of place in the pages of the *Freethinker*, but may even be a diversion as agreeable as the holiday itself. On this hint he speaks.

They are "Fair" folk, and folk who are very fair—beautiful, he means, especially the women-folk. Health and happiness and freedom have a way of making even the plain face beautiful. The city, when it comes to the coast, transforms the hamlet there; and when the weather is superb, as it has been, the natural beauty of the particular scene transforms, nay, transfigures, the citizen. The clouds and azure, the rocks and seas, the island alps and fairy isles, the wonder of the woods, the winding ways, the wistful splendour of the maturing summer; and always over all, transcending all, that great inverted bowl we call the sky, with tranquil fleecy clouds, or "barred" horizon, turned to incandescent gossamer and silvery filagree, still white vapours between the earth and the dazzlingly splendid sun, loftily poised in the intense inane, so wondrously, weirdly suffused and shaped and shaded in the perfect dome of azured light. The inland hills are solemn and sublime, steeped in the sunset haze, when the quiet West from silver turns to gold, anon to deeper red, expiring fires.

And the sons of God looked upon the daughters of men, and behold they were very fair. And it is so to this day, only more so. The pensive penman is quite positive the ladies dressed not so daintily of old; and evolution, with selection, in a word, refinement, has been beautifying the human form divine, and shaping and irradiating the female face, in colour and contour, eyes that mislead the morn, eyes that shine eternally

pure and bright and soft and sweet and holy even over the brutal paths of glory and the grave.

It is said fine feathers make fine birds. It is not true; not wholly so; but rather fine birds desire—and deserve—fine feathers. And surely never in the history of the world were our womenkind so attractively, so fittingly, attired—not even the mythical Mother Eve herself in all her unadornment—nor the goddesses of old Greece and Rome. In the forefront of his picture the writer sees a bevy of four—if four is a bevy—four girls, arm in arm, and dressed in white, or shading off into indescribably delicate hues—fine feathers and fine birds, young and sweet and wholesome, winged beauty, with fairy draperies waving in the wind—a poem, a picture in petticoats, or the very essence and inspiration of poetry and art. Were they morally good or otherwise? Oh, ye moralists, ye dream-dispellers, ye joy-killers, ye undertakers! know ye not that health and happiness and liberty, and the desire to be good and beautiful and beloved, are the true safeguards of, and incentives to, morality itself? These were truth and beauty, and tending towards the light as do all delicate and beautiful things.

The wagonette rides east and west are popular. The braké horses, and the broken horses, have not quite the fun of the Fair. One salutes the dumb animal, and hopes he will receive his well-earned corn and water, bedding for his weary bones and galled hide, and for the repose of his *mortal* soul!

There is the cry-baby, and the urchin's tears, and the sad-faced man and woman here and there. We cannot all be happy at once, or all the time, and yet it is so *easy*, and so *natural*, to be happy. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the Gospel of misery, is out of date. The gospel of hope, and gladness, and realization, is breaking at last in waves of light on the shores of chaos and old night. The writer noticed it particularly, even the plain face was pretty; and he felt quite handsome himself!—the past relegated, the future undreaded, the present moment the life and opportunity of man. Those darlings, in those dresses, are foam flakes on the crest of those rolling, glittering, glorious waves. The plain root virtues, the natural strength, fertility, and growing goodness and intelligence of the race, in murmurous music, in hoarse strivings, in deep calling unto deep, in soundings near and far, in the universal *sub mer*, make possible this adorable beauty, this flower and fruit of the ocean of existence, which, as the Holiday Spirit, is now rolling, and will more and more advance upon the world-weary shores of human kind.

Some reader may ask: whence this wholesale optimism in one who professes to be a free and serious thinker? Well, it is in the air, in the sun, and partly inspired by a wonderful companion from the city whom the wise will know as Ingersoll Redivivus, who imparted so much information, who made the world larger, brighter, better, by his very presence. This man, as a Free-thinker and a philosopher, as the fountain of a thousand generousities, mental, moral, and material to all he meets with everywhere—this man, and this woman, and this superb summer scene, are the proofs of what despised Nature can produce, and the prophesy of better still to come, when man at last exchanges the jangle and the shadow of the creeds for the harmony and the light of earth.

It was fitting, also, that the writer and his friends should stand on the little rocky eminence, known as

Androssan Hill, and observe the passing of the perfect day. The inevitable preacher was young, and glib, and earnest, with much more faith than knowledge, "most assured" indeed. The setting sun made a path of silver o'er the deep to where the Cumbræ dwelt in shade. The silver turned to gold and dusky dreamy red. The ancient ruin on the hill alternately frowned and grinned as the passing shadows fell. The party heard but heeded not the youthful exhorter; theirs were older heads and richer imaginations, and there was an infinitely grander, nobler, sermon in the silent stones of the grim old castle wall, and in the soundless eloquence of that sunset splendour amidst the hills and sea.

ANDREW MILLAR.

Writers and Readers.

IN commenting a little while ago on the preposterous Billing case, I called attention to one of Mr. Justice Darling's many foolish remarks. The counsel had been pointing out instances in *Salome* where Wilde had transcribed the actual words of Holy Writ. The "learned" judge, who is supposed, by his legal friends, to cut something of a figure in polite letters, was astounded. Poor Wilde was then a rank plagiarist. He was not only abnormally vicious, he was also a mean pilferer of other people's phrases and ideas. I suggested that, by condemning Wilde for using the actual phrases of his source our "learned" Judge was equally condemning Shakespeare. Now, it would seem that there are still some people who resent any censure of Shakespeare, our literary fetish. If we do not fall down and worship, we are blasphemous unbelievers. A correspondent who thinks that I am too hard on the God of his idolatry, has asked me to say where Shakespeare is guilty of "lifting" other men's ideas and phrases.

The difficulty is rather to say what Shakespeare did not borrow than what he did borrow from other people. In the first place, the Wilde count is paralleled by Shakespeare's treatment of North's *Plutarch* in the Roman plays. The prose of the translator is often turned almost literally into blank verse. It is not recast; the poet was in too much of a hurry to get his play on the boards. With the sole exception of *Love's Labour Lost*, the construction of which is singularly inept, the plots and the plays are all borrowed. Even the great plays are the revisions of the work of hard-working contemporaries and predecessors. Scenes and characters he "lifted" entire. In *The Winter's Tale* he appropriated the whole of the plot from a novel by Robert Greene, who at the time could not object, poor man! because he was dead. He had an irritatingly high-handed way of treating the work of his fellow-dramatists; and everyone, I presume, knows Greene's indignant reference to him as an "upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers." His way at first was to take plays which had gone out of fashion, touch them up a little, and allow them to pass as his own. Anyone who does not think with the late Mr. Foote and others that Shakespeare is understood better the less we know about the conditions of his workmanship, will agree with me that there is much in even the great plays that was not written by him, while *Titus* and the *Henry VI.* group were in all probability the work of his minor contemporaries. We have just to make up our minds to accept facts as they are. Shakespeare never invented a character, a scene, or a plot if he could come by it honestly or dishonestly. Justice Darling's gibe at Wilde was simply another instance of legal foolishness.

Talking of the fatuity of "learned" judges reminds me of a good story Coleridge tells of Lord Kenyon, who tried a bookseller, Thomas Williams, in 1798, for publishing Paine's *Age of Reason* :—

In his charge to the jury Kenyon enumerated many celebrated men who had been sincere Christians; and, after having enforced the example of Locke and Newton—both of whom were Unitarians and not Christians—proceeded: "Nor,

gentlemen, is this belief confined to men of comparative seclusion, since men, the greatest and most distinguished both as philosophers and as monarchs, have enforced this belief, and shown its influence by their conduct. Above all, gentlemen, need I name to you the Emperor Julian, who was so celebrated for every Christian virtue *that he was called Julian the Apostle?*"

Kenyon was consistently ignorant to the very end. He left instructions that *Mors janua vita* should be cut on his tombstone. His legal friends explained the bad Latin by saying that he was too parsimonious to pay the extra charge for the diphthong in *vita*, but it is more likely that his acquaintance with Latin was on a par with his knowledge of Christian origins.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

Christianity and Labour.

IT is with cordial concurrence that one reads a recent appreciation by "Mimnermus" of Mr. Cohen's *Christianity and Slavery*. The facts garnered by Mr. Cohen need to be continually presented and driven home. How true it is, as "Mimnermus" observes, that the clergy "in their hearts care as little for the welfare of the working classes as the Sultan of Zanzibar for his slaves"! Even in Nonconformist Churches, which like to think themselves democratic, and free from the vices of the Government religion, class distinctions are firmly established, although the pastors are for ever killing these distinctions "with their mouths," loudly proclaiming that in the House of God all meet together on an equal footing, and that the Lord is no respecter of persons.

Unfortunately for these statements, some of us have inside knowledge of the manner in which the business of Church and Chapel is transacted. In this connection let it be said that the observation and experience of the writer goes to show that the Conformists are more democratic than the Nonconformists. It is true that a working man may be found acting as a member of a managing board of a chapel—a point which "Mimnermus" must not forget—but how often are his views adopted and acted upon in preference to the views of his minister or his wealthy fellow-member? Not once in ten thousand times. Can we wonder that workmen with any brains or independence of character turn from this kind of snobbery and toadyism with disgust?

At the same time, we must not be deceived by an easy optimism. Certainly, I believe that a great many Labour men are opposed to priestcraft and the pretensions of clericalism; but many "Labour Leaders" are permeated by religiosity, and pay homage to the "Lord of Lords" with all the fervour of the cleric. Mr. W. Adamson, M.P., is a prominent Baptist, and officiates regularly at religious services. Mr. Arthur Henderson, M.P., is an outstanding Wesleyan, and one of the most popular lay preachers of his communion. Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, M.P., is a Godite also, and not so long before the War was, on a United Free Church Assembly Platform in Edinburgh, expatiating upon the happy co-operation between Christianity and Labour. Mr. R. J. Campbell on one occasion dubbed Mr. Snowden, M.P., the "Bishop of Blackburn." The same Mr. Campbell was responsible for the ill-mannered and insulting statement that Mr. Robert Blatchford was a Christian without knowing it. The writer was once present at a Sunday meeting of a large I.L.P. Branch when the addresses, given by two Unitarian ministers, were on the subject of "Religion and Socialism." These two gentlemen took up very much the Campbell position, which found favour with their hearers, and when a questioner of the N.S.S. type got up and described the religion expounded that evening just as much superstition as any other sort, a pained "ooh" went through the audience, being particularly audible amongst the women.

In view of all these facts and considerations, is it quite safe to conclude that there is marked and universal hostility on the part of the labour leaders to the clergy? Frankly, the writer has not heard any "hysterical appeals" by clergymen to labour leaders to remember that God and the Churches have always been on their side; and he thinks that the clergy are astute enough to prefer other methods. Is it quite safe

to conclude that "Christianity has let the mastery of the democratic movement pass to other forces"? We would be glad to think so; but is it the case?

Most labour men choose to call themselves Socialists. Now, logically, no man can be simultaneously both a Socialist and a Theist. Necessarily the Socialist must disapprove and seek to destroy many things "ordained of God." "Christian Socialism"—taking the term "Christian" to describe the Churches and Chapels as we see them—*must* be a contradiction in terms. If we, however, use the adjective "Christian" in the primitive impracticable sense, then, of course, the terms of the expression are congruous; but, in that case, the expression describes something that has no existence—which is absurd.

What Freethinkers ought to strive to make people (including the clergy themselves) understand is that they are out not to patch up but to completely renew. Thus, we do not make it our policy to change or modify the power of clerics. We seek their total abolition. Plainly our objective is, *first*, to eject the Spiritual Lords from Parliament; *second*, to disestablish all Established Churches; and *third*—well, the third—will be able to take care of itself, when we think of the new vigour which the Freethought movement throughout the whole world has lately shown.

IGNOTUS.

Correspondence.

SOUL-SALVING.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I have read with interest and appreciation the articles by "Keridon" criticizing the obscurantist views of Dr. McDougall. There are, however, some points in the articles open to criticism, and, in order to assist the writer's endeavours to introduce some clear thinking, to replace the question-begging methods of Dr. McDougall, I venture to ask for some of your valuable space to continue the discussion.

In the issue for December 1, "Keridon" defines energy as "that which can do work," thus laying himself open to the charge of viewing energy as an entity. This is also the interpretation which might be put upon his conception from his other references to energy in the article. Knowing full well the poorness of our language to express our ideas clearly, I recognize the necessity of personifying abstractions in ordinary conversations and discussions, and it may be thought that I am hypercritical in calling attention to a possible interpretation which I think "Keridon" himself would disavow. Justification, however, may be admitted when it is pointed out that energy is frequently asserted to be an entity even in the writings of authors of considerable scientific attainments.

Another point open to criticism is his strictures on Dr. McDougall for the reference to "potential energy" as a "convenient fiction." This is my own conception, and, in referring to it in this way, I should not like to be thought to "sneer" at a convention whose utility is recognized. "Keridon" may be right in his description of the original meaning of the term, but, if so, its meaning has completely changed, as a reference to a modern text-book on physics will show. Therein potential energy is usually referred to as a distinct form of energy, and, moreover, it is used as a proof of the theory of the conservation of energy, or alternately, as a deduction from the theory. It would take up too much of your space to enter into a discussion upon the correctness of this view, but if any of your readers desire further information, I would refer them to an article, entitled "Meta Mechanics," by An Old Millwright, in *Engineering*, for August 30, 1912.

I gather from his remarks that "Keridon" does not accept the common view, and, in that case, I fail to see how he can object to Dr. McDougall referring to "potential energy" as a "convenient fiction."

H. V. T.

METAPHYSICS.

R,—May I say, in regard to the article by Mr. J. T. D in your issue of December 8, that I used the word "taphysics" in the letter on which he comments in the

popular sense? This, in addition to the definition Mr. Lloyd gives, embraces those subjects that are now more correctly classified under "Psychology" and "Ethics."

When I referred to the large amount of attention paid to metaphysical research, I had in mind the spread and growth of Christian Science, Theosophy, and the New Thought teachings, together with the increasing number and circulation of books on "Mind Power." My reference to love, life, truth, goodness, should have made this obvious.

Mr. Lloyd's attitude towards metaphysics in the article on the subject is curiously ambiguous. He regrets that he should have been thought guilty of placing metaphysics on a level with "dogmatism"; he regards metaphysics as an *important* subject; he hates all dogmatism except that which inevitably accompanies actual knowledge; and agrees with Ingersoll that metaphysics is (in brief) "the Science of Fools"!

It is by a careless reading of my letter that he accuses me of forgetfulness. I wrote, not that it is impossible to conceive of space and time, but that it is impossible to conceive of these *as finite*.

Is it not true that the tendency even of scientific discovery is from the finite to the infinite? Has not the discovery of the disintegration of the atom and the subsequent electron theory of the composition of matter tended that way?

Mr. Lloyd's plea that people who desire answers to such questions as those I propounded (*viz.*, why absolute memory persists in the subconscious mind and the utility of the experience of a lifetime if the ego ceases to be at death) look at life through selfish eyes, is quaint. Does he not agree that all desire is selfish? In any case, the point is that the subsequent annihilation of a mind equipped with experience and knowledge acquired through a lifetime conflicts with the law of the conservation of energy.

J. DOWELL JONES.

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.

COUNTRY.

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TO the affectionate memory of Mrs. Alice Wilson Arbuckle Reid, formerly of Kirkliston, Linlithgowshire, N.B., and Wandsworth Common, London, S.W., wife of James Reid, of Kinraig, Cutcliffe Grove, Bedford, who died December 7, 1916, aged 64 years.—JOHN A. REID.

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