

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Missing the Point.

My last week's notes might be taken as an example of the way in which Christian writers and speakers, while professedly replying to freethinking criticism, raise and discuss altogether different issues. It has always been more or less amusing to note the time and energy spent on proving that Jesus Christ was a good man, when all the time the real issue was completely ignored. Jesus Christ, says the orthodox Christian, was an incarnation of Deity; he was "very God of very God." Asked for proof, he replies that Jesus was good, lovable, etc. But all this is quite beside the point. Men are, in the mass, more or less good, and lovable, and merciful, and sympathetic. And no matter how much we enlarge these qualities, the utmost we reach is a more perfect man. And surely a man does not lose his manhood as he increases in goodness. All that the Christian proves, then, is that Jesus was a good man. What he needs to prove is that he was more than man. It is like trying to prove that a horse cannot be a mammal because he isn't a cow. The Christian's "proofs" are not merely insufficient to prove his point; they are totally irrelevant. They are incapable of proving it, no matter how strengthened.

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### Creed and Character.

Christian argumentation is full of similar irrelevances. A Freethinker questions the existence of Jesus, the truth of Christian doctrine, or of Biblical miracles. The Christian immediately sets up a barrage fire of good works—hospitals, asylums, charitable homes, etc. Actually these things owe their existence to very mixed motives—some not very creditable; but what have they to do with the points raised? How can the building of a hospital prove the truth of the resurrection? How can one establish an equation between New Testament miracles and the endowment of a home for crippled children? How many gallons of soup must one distribute to prove that Jesus fed a multitude with a handful of loaves and fishes? It appears as though in the minds of believers there is some numerical relation existent, because one bowl of soup, or one hospital, or one act of charity would not prove anything. It is the number that does it, evidently. Of course, there might be some

relation between Christian doctrines and the building of lunatic asylums; but it would be cruel to press that point. Or, reversing the argument, certain types of Christians dwell upon the deplorable character of Freethinkers. They are drunkards, liars, profligates, etc. Suppose we grant it all—and there really is no reason why Christians should have a monopoly of human vices—it is all splendidly irrelevant. It is neither the character of the Freethinker nor of the Christian that is in question. We are arguing, not that Freethinkers are paragons of virtue, but that Christian doctrines are untrue. If the Christian can establish their truth, he will have disposed of the Freethinker at once and for ever.

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### Moral Miracles.

Take, again, the question of what is called "moral conversion." A man or a woman is here or there induced to turn over a new leaf and become a more respectable member of society than he or she has hitherto been. Because the immediate cause of this change appears to be a religious person or a religious organization, we are asked to see in it a demonstration of the power of God, and confess to our own confounding. Now, without dwelling upon the fact that sudden transformations of character do not occur, and that miracles are as imaginary in the moral as in the physical world, one may ask in what way can "moral conversion" prove the operation of a superhuman power? Plenty of people are converted from Conservative to Liberal in politics, or from allopathy to homœopathy in medicine, or from meat-eating to vegetarianism in dietetics. Others contract the habit of early or late rising, eating or drinking special foods, a liking or disliking for certain places or things; but no one ever assumes a supernatural cause for any of these changes. Why should a change in conduct imply the interference of Deity? Well, it does not; and the machinery of the change is obvious. People are not, it will be observed, transformed in solitude. Shut up a drunkard in a room with a good supply of whisky, and the prayers of all Christendom will not keep him sober. The condition of change is always social—it is always affected through the agency of others. The action of man is here obvious and adequate; Deity adds nothing of value and importance. And we know that human intercourse does modify character—not only for good, but also for bad. A thieves' supper may be quite as effective a means of conversion as a revival meeting, although the results of the two cases may be of widely different character. The *Newgate Calendar* may be as great a source of inspiration to the budding Jack Shephard as the Four Gospels to an immature St. Francis. There is no Deity in the one case; why should there be in the other? If human influence is adequate in the one case, why not in the other? It is a curious philosophy which says that human intercourse can only make for evil; it is quite impotent for good. And one may fairly ask why, if God's influence is so powerful to save, it is not equally powerful to prevent?

## Christian "Experience."

Nearly every week I receive a letter from some Christian telling me that what I lack is a Christian experience. If I once experienced what it was to be a Christian all my doubts and difficulties would go. Really, these "doubts and difficulties" are quite imaginary. I am in no doubt whatever about Christianity, and I have no mental difficulty concerning it. I doubt it as I doubt that twice two equals five, and my difficulty is not as regards myself but as regards others. But the peculiar thing about the Christian experience which is to remove my imaginary doubts is that I must be a Christian to get it. To put the position briefly. The truth of Christianity is proven by personal experience. The Freethinker is a stranger to this experience, because he is a disbeliever in Christianity. To gain this experience he must believe. But if one already believes the experience is quite unnecessary. So it becomes evident that the Christian does not believe as the result of experience, he experiences because he believes. "Proof" follows faith as trade is said to follow the flag. It is the faith that produces the proof, not *vice versa*. And that this can happen no Freethinker will deny. The whole business of the quack medicine vendor is built on this possibility, and "faith," which sees a life saved by bread pills or coloured water, or rheumatism cured by a "magnetized belt," or a life saved by wearing a three-and-sixpenny mascot, is not likely to break down when applied to religion. Faith may not move mountains, but it can do the next best thing—it can cause people to *believe* they move. And that is all the stock-in-trade needed to start a religion.

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## A Cuttle Fish Policy.

It is difficult to fix a limit to the number of instances that might be cited to the same end. Either a quite different question is stated to the one that is really at issue, or we have conclusions drawn that bear no thinkable relation to the premises laid down. The evidence, such as it is, for religion is really very simple, and it can be easily and effectively disposed of. The only difference between a clever and a foolish, or an astute and a simple theologian is that one manages to confuse the issue more successfully than does the other. And perhaps the greatest blunder that any Freethought advocate can make is to accept an opponent's statement of the issue without the most careful examination of the terms employed. In religious controversy the cloud of words thrown out answers much the same purpose as the emission of ink by the cuttle-fish. It prevents the enemy seeing where the antagonist is. By the time the murk has subsided the cuttle-fish has moved to safer quarters. By the time the words have been sifted the issue has been too often forgotten. Perhaps what has been said may serve to keep these issues clearer in the minds of some of my readers.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## TRUE GREATNESS.

A man's greatness lies not in wealth and station, as the vulgar believe, nor yet in his intellectual capacity, which is often associated with the meanest moral character, the most abject servility to those in high places and arrogance to the poor and lowly; but a man's true greatness lies in the consciousness of an honest purpose in life, founded on a just estimate of himself and everything else, on frequent self-examination, and a steady obedience to the rule which he knows to be right, without troubling himself about what others may think or say, or whether they do or do not do that which he thinks and says and does.—George Long, "Thoughts of the Emperor M. Aurelius Antoninus."

## Baseless Assumptions.

## II.

PROFESSOR LYNN HAROLD HOUGH, D.D., in his articles on "Fundamental Issues" which are appearing in the *Christian Commonwealth*, is guilty of grossly misrepresenting the views of those who reject the Christian Faith. Everybody is familiar with Omar Khayyam's allusion to the seed of Wisdom which he sowed, and with his own hand he "wrought to make it grow," and from which all the harvest that he reaped was this:—

I came like Water, and like Wind I go.

Then Omar says:—

Into this Universe, and *Why* not knowing  
Nor *Whence*, like Water willy-nilly flowing;  
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,  
I know not *Whither*, willy-nilly blowing.

Dr. Hough calls that the wail of Fitzgerald's Omar, and then indulges in the following comment:—

A good many men in our time have been inclined to take up the wail and make it their own. They have idealized their hesitations and have doubted their inspirations. They have believed in their scepticisms and they have refused to trust their faiths. They have been proud of their ignorance and ashamed of their knowledge. They have sought intellectual and æsthetic distinction in a temper of poised and self-contained bewilderment. They have boasted of their intellectual insolvency, and have found beautiful phrases in which to describe their mental bankruptcy.

Every sentence in this extract is inaccurate and misleading—a farrago of exaggeration and nonsense. In the first place, the unbeliever does not howl and wail, nor does he envy the believer. His ignorance of the whence, the whither, and the why does not distress him in the least. Instead of envying, he pities the believer, regarding him as the slave of superstition. To him, belief without evidence is an unmistakable sign of mental weakness. To say that he is proud of his ignorance and ashamed of his knowledge is to utter a deliberate lie, knowledge being the object of the supreme quest of his life. Evidently, Dr. Hough's unbeliever is a creation of his own fancy, and has never been seen on land or sea, while his believer is a person the major premise of whose syllogism lies hidden and unexpressed in the background of his thought. His Determinism, too, "is a part of a vast mechanism with the movement of whose wheels he has really nothing to do, and in the midst of whose processes he is absolutely helpless," who in argument with an advocate of Freewill naturally asks, "Now what has become of your freedom?" Quite as naturally his opponent answers, "And if freedom is gone, what becomes of your argument? In every stage of the process by which you have reasoned freedom out of life, you have assumed the thing you were endeavouring to deny." Then follows this deliverance on the nature of freedom:—

Every appeal to my mind, every putting of the argument, assumed that you have a free mind which can construct a process of reasoning, and that I have a free mind which can respond to the appeal of the argument. You have tried to use freedom in such a way that it would cut off its own head. And just because your conclusion attempts to deny what you had to assume in order to argue at all, your whole process of reasoning is discredited. Freedom is involved in rationality, and therefore you can never use the reason as a means to deny its existence. Your conclusion can never assert that your major premise is false, unless your logic itself has gone mad.

What an absolutely false conception of freedom finds expression in that short passage. Dr. Hough does not understand the meaning of the term Determinism. Ac-

ording to him, freedom excludes determining conditions from all human thought and action, which is equivalent to the elimination of the law of causation from our life.

In his fourth article, entitled "Denials which Contradict Themselves," published in the *Christian Commonwealth* for January 22, Professor Hough betrays afresh his inability to do justice to opponents. He refers to a young lad who, in a heated debate in a public school, exclaimed: "I deny the fact." "That is rather worse for you than for the fact," replied the teacher with an amused smile. "But," adds the Professor, "a good many of us do go on denying facts." That is, doubtless, true, even of doctors of divinity; "and a good many of us make denials full of such inner inconsistencies as to be the equivalent of affirmations." This also may be true enough, though its relevancy here is doubtful. Before the real point is reached we are introduced to another "young man of quick and agile mind" who was once a strenuous and stubborn denier, but who, of course, was soon brought to see how groundless his sceptical assumptions were. He went to see an old minister of great tact and judgment whom he respected and loved. To this kindly, shrewd, and wise clergyman he told the whole story of his mental struggles, and was answered thus: "My only difficulty with you, Tom, is that you have not carried your criticism far enough." Astounded at so strange a remark from a man of God, the young fellow simply asked: "And just how would you set about going farther?" "Why," replied the minister, "I should begin to try out the effect of denying some of my denials." Presumably, the young man was silenced and went away humbled and heartily denying all his denials. That is what happens to all Dr. Hough's clever young sceptics.

But let us see how the Professor himself deals with one or two specific denials. He says:—

Here is a man who denies that God ever takes account of individual prayers. The whole universe, he declares, is a vast network of laws which are never broken. In this vast system of uniformities there are no breaks. All is perfectly oiled. All moves with unhesitating precision and celerity. It is presumption to declare that the petition of a human being can break this perfect system.

Curiously enough Dr. Hough does not even attempt to refute this denial of the efficacy of prayer, but contents himself with emphasizing his radical misconception of Determinism. He seems to imagine that the mind which could conceive of Nature as a mechanism, governed alone by physical and chemical laws, was itself working outside and independently of the machine it so graphically described. As a matter of fact, the mind is as subject to the law of causation as the heavenly bodies are, which only means that for every mental effect there is adequate cause. Can Professor Hough adduce a single proof of the theological contention that Nature is not a machine or that its uniformities are ever violated in response to human prayer? If he cannot, on what ground can he believe in Providence, or justify the belief in supernatural interferences of any kind? And this brings us to his second illustration of what he regards as the futility of denials, namely, the denial of the supernatural. Here, again, he offers no evidence whatever of the reality of the supernatural, but merely asserts that the mental process involved in its denial is itself a species of supernatural activity. He admits that "by the supernatural some obscurantist thinker may mean his own favourite bit of theological mythology." Here, however, is the Professor's favourite bit of theological mythology:—

What we mean as we use the illustration is the existence in the world of something uncontrolled by that

relentless mechanical uniformity which we associate with the laws of physics and chemistry. Now the man who produces a learned process of reasoning to justify his denial of the supernatural in this sense is at the very moment illustrating the thing he is denying. Whether or not there is a supernatural God, there is surely a supernatural man. The very swift power with which he argues proves that our disputant is not held in the clutches of a rigid system with no free movement in it.

Such is Dr. Hough's "own bit of theological mythology"; but is he not aware that the greatest thinkers, from Bruno downwards, have regarded man as part and parcel of the wonderful mechanism of Nature, subject to its physical and chemical laws, being the goal of its evolutionary processes? Man is a machine within the larger machine, and all his movements are, of necessity, mechanical. And, according to the best science of the day, whether it be that of physiology or the younger one of psychology, he does perceive and is bound to treat himself as being within the vast system of the mechanism of Nature.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Call of Freedom.

Freedom is come among us. Winged from hell  
She rises with the serpents in her locks;  
Kings, priests, republics, with her fiery shocks  
She breaks and scatters daily. —John Barlas.

THE noise of revolution is echoing in all ears. Thrones have been falling in Europe like ninepins, and many poets have attempted to celebrate this tremendous moment of the world. The papers have been full of their good phrases, excellent sentiments, and some well-turned lines; but nothing so far that recalls the masterly songs of the older poets. Compared with the resounding lays of the poets of previous generations, present-day singers are poor of resource and barren of ideas, and their honeyed effusions sound like "the horns of Elfland faintly blowing." Think of Shelley's "Men of England," Ebenezer Elliot's "God Save the People"; recall the sonorous music of Swinburne, and then turn to the mouthing and coxcomby of the latter-day bards.

This absence of real present-day poetry has resulted in reaction. Editors and publishers have disinterred some of Rudyard Kipling's verses, particularly the *Recessional*, which has been printed as a hymn-sheet for the use of Christian congregations. This poem is, however, but Anglo-Indian orthodoxy in the most blatant form. The second verse, if it stood alone, might pass; though its best line, "An humble and a contrite heart," has not the merit of novelty. But how absurd is the association of the reference just quoted to that other arrogant sentiment:—

Such boasting as the Gentiles use,  
Or lesser breeds without the law.

It seems as if Kipling were utterly incapable of striking a deep note on his lyre. In his *White Horses* he attempts to be profound, and all he can suggest is that the very oceans of the world are bestowed by a benevolent Deity for the pleasing purpose of the British destroying their enemies. Even the poetasters who illuminate the chaste pages of *Punch* can do this sort of thing without too much loss of dignity. The older poets wore their singing robes with a far better grace. Assuredly the poets of to-day cannot leave the lower slopes of Parnassus. They cannot approach the altitude of the *Marsellaise*, a song of revolution that heartened a nation in the hour of supreme struggle.

The poetry of the maligned and misunderstood nineteenth century is full of the cry of Liberty. From the

days of Byron, who died like a soldier in the ranks of the Greek Insurgent Army, to the time when Swinburne rolled his richest thunders against the despots of Europe, the great English writers were veritable knight-errants. Liberty knows no frontiers, and the liberation of Italy roused the English poets to some of their noblest efforts. Byron declared that Italy's dream was "the very poetry of politics." Shelley's sympathy for Greece and Italy gave us *Hellas*, the immortal *Lines on the Euganean Hills*, and the *Ode to Naples*; whilst his *Ode to Liberty* expressed his world-wide abhorrence of tyranny in all places. Even the austere Wordsworth championed the cause of Touissaint L'Ouverture, the unhappy Haytian leader. A later writer, George Meredith, hailed Mazzini and his colleagues as soldiers of Freedom. Arthur Clough's *Amours de Voyage* depicts the adventures of an Englishman in Rome in "forty-nine," when the red-shirted Garibaldians were defending the infant Republic against Marshal Oudinot's French bayonets. From her Casa Guidi windows, Elizabeth Browning watched the struggle, and her muse was inspired by the same theme. Swinburne, however, surpassed them all in the ardour of his devotion and the rapture of his praise:—

The very thought in us how much we love thee  
Makes the throat sob with love and blinds the eyes.

Indeed, *Songs before Sunrise*, is unique in the whole range of English poetry. More enduring than marble are the noble lyrics of which Mazzini and the cause to which he dedicated his life were the inspiration:—

Of God nor man was ever this thing said,  
That he might give  
Life back to her who gave him, whence his dead  
Mother might live.  
But this man found his mother dead and slain,  
With fast-sealed eyes.  
And bade the dead rise up and live again,  
And she did rise.

This love of liberty was a common possession of the nineteenth century writers, and the nobility of the cause always inspired nobility of utterance. Even the æsthetic Rossetti was roused. In a poem on the refusal of military aid between nations, he said that by this he was certain:—

That the world falls asunder, being old.

John Ruskin, a poet at heart, was at his fiercest in his denunciation of the desertion of insulted Denmark. Nor was it simply a desire to hymn the praises of victory. James Thomson portrays a Pole ready to die for his country, although he realizes that it is a forlorn hope:—

Must a man have hope to fight?  
Can a man not fight in despair?  
Must the soul cower down for the body's weakness,  
And slaver the devil's hoof with meekness  
Nor care nor dare to share  
Certain defeat with the right?

Nor was it a mere atmosphere of spirit that this doctrine of military intervention in the cause of liberty all over the world was taught by the poets. William Watson, in his forceful *Purple East*, was quite explicit in his desire to have the Turk driven out, bag and baggage, and Swinburne's denunciation of the White Czar, *Night hath but one Red Star*, provoked by the persecution of the Jews, has re-echoed ever since.

During the nineteenth century the wheel of time had come round full circle, and the lighted torch of Liberty, which had been held by Byron, had passed through hands of inspired poets during succeeding generations. "Freedom is come among us," and we need an inspiration for our faith in human destiny. Such a message is sounded in Swinburne's lines in the speech of

England in the chorus of the nations crying out to their mother, Liberty:—

I am she that was and was not of thy chosen,  
Free and not free;  
I fed the streams till mine own streams were frozen,  
Yet I am she  
By the star that Milton's soul for Shelley lighted,  
Whose rays ensphere us,  
By the beacon—bright Republic far-off sighted,  
O, mother, hear us

MIMNERMUS.

## The Birth and Development of Gods.

### II.

(Continued from p. 45.)

DEAD friends and foes appear to the savage in his sleep, clothed with flesh and armed as they were in their living days. Yet he saw them die, and may have witnessed the destruction or natural decay of their bodily framework. Although aboriginal man is ignorant, all available evidence clearly proves that he is logical within his lights. He therefore questions himself concerning this curious contradiction. The plain deliverances of his senses and memory assure him that his visionary visitors have had their day and ceased to be. Yet they continue to manifest their living existence to him in his dreams. Thus, there is no escape from the conclusion that although their bodies are dead, or even devoured, there survives an apparition, ghost, or spirit, which evades destruction. Hence is begotten the belief in the double of the dead; for how can the shadowy substance of the departed appear to the living during their sleep unless it still remains alive? Again, uninvited dreamland visitors differ markedly in their demeanour. Some are friendly, others neutral; the remainder most fiercely hostile. What, then, more reasonable than to extend the activities of ghosts displayed in the visionary realm to the prosaic workaday world? Surely, it is said, the innumerable misfortunes of men, for which no other assignable cause can be imagined, must of necessity be traced to the mischievous activities of those spectral beings who appear in dreams.

To the uncivilized everywhere, as with the believers in ghosts in modern civilized States, the spirits of the dead are very generally regarded as truculent and spiteful. Among savage peoples the ghosts are usually dreaded, and it is essential that their goodwill should be secured. The favour of these sinister and powerful spirits is therefore sought by means of sacrifice and prayer. In the mind of the savage, surrounding Nature is crowded with ghostly beings. Those spirits deemed entirely baleful are carefully shunned or circumvented, while those appeased by sacrificial gifts, prayer, and praise are sedulously courted by their worshippers. Thus, a misinterpretation of dream phenomena appears to have led primitive races to a belief in the ghosts of the dead, and this subsequently conducted them to the worship and adoration of tribal and ancestral spirits.

The surprising resemblances which some children bear to defunct relatives or other members of the tribal group seem to have fostered the faith in spiritual survival. To the savage, this proves that the souls of the deceased have returned to reside within the bodies of the living. Here is observable the germ of the widespread religious cult of reincarnation and rebirth which prevails among savages as well as among communities of superior civilization. Examples of this are very numerous, but one instance of this fancy may be

quoted from Northern Nigeria, where the Kagoro assert that—

a spirit may transmigrate into the body of a descendant born afterwards, male or female; in fact, this is common, as it proved by the likeness of children to their parents and grandparents, and it is lucky, for the ghost has returned, and has no longer any power to frighten the relatives until the new body dies, and it is free again.

To a constantly increasing section of modern civilized peoples death appears as natural as birth. In truth, we clearly distinguish between deaths due to old age or disease, which we term natural death, and those forms of fatality which result from accident, warfare, or homicide. With the uncivilized, on the contrary, mortality is rarely regarded as a natural event, much less as a penalty which all must pay. The savage has regularly risen, and has constantly seen his companions rise from sleep; but now some calamity has overtaken his friend, and he cannot be awakened from his slumber. The normally warm body soon becomes cold and rigid, and unless the corpse is speedily buried, the repulsive odours of putrefaction poison the atmosphere. Obviously, reasons the savage, some baneful influence has operated in arresting the activities of his unconscious companion. Thus has arisen the common belief that the mortal thrust is administered by malignant sorcerers. Were it not, savage peoples say, for the death-dealing devices of sorcerers, men would never die. The Abipones of America traced all forms of death either to the wizards or the magical firearms of the Spaniards. Even when death resulted from the most serious wounds, and consequent loss of blood, these Indians persisted in their denial that death was due to natural causes. No; the death was caused by the evil enchantments of a sorcerer, and he must answer for his crime. The survivors firmly believe that if they tear out the heart and tongue of the corpse, and throw them to a ravenous dog, they thus despatch to his last resting-place the sorcerer who slew their comrade.

Other savage tribes to whom the plain evidence of their senses makes no appeal in this matter, and who employ the arts of their medicine men to discover the identity of those who have brought death to their fellows, are the Araucanians of Chili. This is also true of the native races of Brazil, the Indians of Guiana, the Tinneh tribes of North Western America, and the aboriginal stocks of the Australian Continent. Among these last the judicial murders of witches and wizards which darken the annals of European States in quite recent centuries, are paralleled by the penalties inflicted for the imaginary crime of sorcery against the alleged agents of this art. The story is much the same throughout savage Australia, while, with regard to the aborigines of Central Australia, those first-hand authorities, Spencer and Gillen, assure us that every natural death among the native population was succeeded by the deliberate murder of the person singled out by religious superstition as the author of the crime. These eminent writers justly remark that:—

It need hardly be pointed out what a potent element this custom has been in keeping down the numbers of the tribe; no such thing as natural death is realized by the native; a man who dies has of necessity been killed by some other man, or perhaps even by a woman, and sooner or later that man or woman will be attacked. In the normal condition of the tribe every death meant the killing of another individual.

Certainly such methods as these must prove extremely efficacious in restraining the increase of population. Moreover, even when death is caused by the attacks of carnivorous animals, the savage persistently ascribes

the calamity to the machinations of wizards or to those of spiteful ghosts.

A few savage peoples, however, are known to discriminate between deaths proceeding from the spells of sorcerers and those arising from violence, disease, or misadventure. These exceptional instances prove that even rude races learn in the hard school of experience, and their more rational philosophy indicates marked mental progress.

The Melanesians, although they attribute the majority of deaths to the direful ghosts, are yet quite willing to believe that some fatal diseases are natural. In this attitude there appears a compromise with an earlier opinion which credited all mortal maladies to the account of the goblins, sorcerers, and witches. According to Dudley Kidd, the Caffres of South Africa have advanced to the stage in which they concede the possibility of natural disease, although they remain convinced that the ancestral ghosts and wizards are responsible for various painful illnesses and for some forms of death. Yet, with average human inconsistency, they seek and apply any available remedy for ailment or accident. "In some cases," states Mr. Kidd, in his *Essential Kafir*,—

they do not even trouble to consult a diviner; they speedily recognize the sickness as due to natural causes. ....If they think that some friend of theirs knows of a remedy, they will try it on their own initiative, or may even go off to a white man and ask for some of his medicine.

This practical attitude is, doubtless, in some measure due to the influence of European residents who had dwelt in their own country in an atmosphere permeated by modern materialistic science.

(To be continued.) T. F. PALMER.

## Acid Drops.

Freethinkers are all familiar with the famous watch story, in which an Atheist pulled out his watch and gave the Deity three minutes in which to strike him dead. The *Daily Express* of January 20 publishes the following from "a well-authenticated Russian source":—

A small party of Bolsheviks broke into a church, and in the vestry murdered the priest. The people were in the pews while the tragedy was enacted. Another priest was praying at the altar. One of the murderers stalked down to the pulpit and climbed into it—a hitherto unheard of liberty. Then, waving his arms, the Bolshevik cried out: "You see how silly all this religion business is. There is no God! I tell you there never has been a God! I have just killed the priest. In the silly old days you would have told me that God would kill me because I killed the priest. Well, here you see I am in the pulpit, I have killed the priest, and God doesn't lift a finger to kill me!"

A pistol shot rang out. The Bolshevik fell dead in the pulpit. A man in the audience turned round with the pistol in his hand and said calmly, "He said God would not kill him. I did. Well, perhaps I am God's instrument!"

The *Daily Express* doubtless knows its readers; but we really think it might have concocted a more convincing tale than this—or at least it might have been more picturesque. It is the "watch story" up to date, but even less impressive than the original yarn.

The clergy like people to believe that religion is without money and without price, but they are themselves veritable cormorants so far as money is concerned. The advertising campaign of the Church of England for a modest five million pounds is scarcely concluded, when the Bishop of Wakefield asks for a capital sum of £100,000 and an annual income of £15,000 for the Church Training Colleges.

A recent pastoral of the Bishop of Coventry deals with the establishment of a House of Women in connection with

the Church of England. If his Lordship cares to pursue the subject, he will find that most Churches are "Houses of Women," for the bonnets far outnumber the men in places of worship.

"History is perhaps the most amusing branch of literature," says a sapient pen-pusher in a Nonconformist newspaper. Perhaps he had been reading the earlier books of the Old Testament.

Rev. J. A. Roxburgh, Director of Religious Work, Y.M.C.A., Camp, Halton, says that in the weekly debate in the Hut, among the subjects discussed was: "Has the War proved that Christianity has failed?" On this he says the voting was unanimous that the Churches had failed but not Christianity. We expect that the last was a qualification introduced by some more or less interested person. For if the Churches had failed to prevent war so had Christianity. How otherwise could the War have occurred? And if Christianity could not keep the Churches in the right path, what chance is there of its being more successful with those outside the Churches?

The English governing class is very acute—one of the shrewdest governing classes in the world. It sees that some tit-bits must be thrown to the lions of reform, and, apparently, the advice has gone forth that some concession must be made on the observance of Sunday. The *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and several other prominent papers, have, suddenly and almost simultaneously, burst forth in favour of a more enlightened, a more completely secularized Sunday. The *Daily Telegraph* asks not only that museums, etc., should all be opened on Sunday, but that games of cricket, bowls, tennis, and other sports should be made available for the masses. It points out that "Sunday is the one full day's holiday of millions of persons, women, as well as men," and calls on the London County Council and other bodies to do their duty in this matter. It even says that "the day has gone by for argument," public opinion is ready for the change. This is, indeed, a change of tone. Before the War the *Daily Telegraph* would have stoutly opposed the "Secularization of Sunday." It would have denounced it on all sorts of grounds, economic, moral, and religious. All that the *Telegraph* now says about the evil effects of our Puritan Sunday, has been said by Freethinkers for many years. We are quite pleased to welcome so notable a convert, and if things progress at this rate we shall have to consider asking for the use of St. Paul's for a course of lectures.

Nothing that one could say about the English Sunday of the last three centuries could be too hard. Nearly ten generations have been brought up with the only distractions possible during their one leisure day in the week being the church and the public-house. An immediate consequence of the establishment of the Puritan Sunday, and the banning of healthy sports, was an increase of drunkenness. This was noted in the seventeenth century; and insobriety and Sabbatarianism seem to have increased side by side. A drunken man is usually politically "safe," and religiously harmless. The English Sunday was admirably calculated to produce moral cowards and religious hypocrites, and in these directions it must be pronounced a complete success.

The strange thing is that papers like the *Daily Telegraph* should only just have discovered the evil effects of Sabbatarianism. For it has been the same thing all along. We suspect the prolongation of the War has had something to do with it. Had the war ended after the first eighteen months or two years, it might have been different. But it went on for four years—if it is yet finished. The war of force went on until it gave birth to an idea; and so far as social evolution is concerned, it is the contact of an idea with a settled institution that is important. The idea of Liberty, Freedom, Manhood, became vital in the minds of many; and those who have been busy fighting on Sunday, killing on Sunday, working on Sunday, are now asking why they may not visit a museum or a concert, or play a game of cricket or football on Sunday. The English Sunday seems doomed,

and Britain will be the cleaner and the healthier for its demise.

A motor-car belonging to the Bishop of Durham knocked down and fatally injured a child at Chester-le-Street. This could hardly have happened had the Bishop imitated the methods of locomotion used by the Founder of the Christian religion when he entered Jerusalem.

Residents of Sutton Bonington, Nottingham, protest against the erection of a memorial on the graves of German prisoners who have died. Surely, a quaint way of showing how they love their enemies.

The old proverb says that adversity makes strange bed-fellows. At a Thanksgiving Service at Bermondsey, the ministers who took part belonged to the Government Religion, and four different fancy religions. The Rev. F. H. Gillingham, the cricketing parson, presided.

"Exit Alcohol" is the terse comment of the chief London Liberal paper on the decision of thirty-six out of the forty-eight States of the American Union to suppress the liquor traffic. What we should like to know is what the Churches intend to use in their Communion services? Will it be orangeade, lemon-squash, or plain water?

The attempt to make the United States a "dry" country is receiving opposition from the Roman Catholic clergy. Cardinal Gibbons says that "absolute prohibition will prevent 20,000 Catholic clergymen in the United States offering the daily Sacrament of the Mass." Individual liberty of worship is thus restricted. We do not see that the difficulty is insuperable. If the power of the priest can miraculously convert ordinary port wine into the blood of Jesus, we don't see why it shouldn't be able to do the same thing with ginger ale. When one is in the miracle business one might as well go the whole hog.

The dear clergy are not all total abstainers. Bishop Mitchinson, who died recently, left his wine and beer in the cellars at Pembroke College, Oxford, to his successor in the Mastership of the College.

An evening paper has been searching for the oldest man in London, and so far has not captured a centenarian. Most of the men so far mentioned have been about ninety years old. At that tender age the Bible Methuselah was playing leapfrog with other "boys."

The Bishop of Birmingham says that "you cannot make saints in pig-styes." Unhappily, in Christendom, there are so many pig-styes and so few saints.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, the popular verse-writer, says that she has communicated with her husband since his death, and a Sunday paper has spent much money in advertising the alleged experience. The value of Ella's testimony may be estimated by her statement that the fourth incarnation of herself and husband was "on the island of Atlantis, the golden city," where they were both executed. "He and I," she says, "were clasped together so tightly that one blow of the sword severed our heads." Every schoolboy should know that "the island of Atlantis" is a fabulous place.

The Bishop of Chelmsford says that no clergyman should receive less than £300 per year. We shouldn't mind seeing the same principle extended to editors of Freethought papers; but we quite fail to see why a clergyman should be given preference in the allotment. He believes in the blessings of poverty; we don't.

The wicked can never be prepared for death, the good always are.—*Landor*.

**O. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.**

February 9, afternoon, Blaina; evening, Abertillery; February 10, Abertillery, Debate; February 23, South Shields; March 2, Swansea; March 16, Leicester; March 23, Manchester.

**To Correspondents.**

"FREETHINKER;" SUSTENTATION FUND.—M. R., 2s. 6d.; J. H. Mason, 9s. 6d.; A. Courlander (S. Africa), £1 1s.; L. Webster, 10s.

VERA DICKINSON.—Interesting, but rather too lengthy for an anecdote. Unfortunately, all that many people understand by education is prohibitive. It is a series of "don'ts," which are not only ineffective, but actually provocative of the thing forbidden. "To teach to do things properly" is the only sensible rule.

WORKING.—You evidently missed the sarcastic note in the article. We agree with you in thinking Buddhism superior to Christianity.

H. W. BARNES.—If you are subjected to such perpetual annoyance, your best plan would be to secure the names of some of the people and summon them. The matter is not of sufficient general interest for publication.

J. S. FREEMAN.—Thanks for letter, which, as you will see, we are using.

C. M.—Sorry, but the discussion of a six-hour day hardly comes within the scope of the *Freethinker*. So far as we are concerned, we should be very pleased to get off with a ten-hour day. But we expect we should then find we had leisure for more work.

A. M.—The matter is too common for even comment. We wonder that grown-up men don't resent being patronized in this way by a number of uneducated, or miseducated, preachers. When they do so, it will be an indication that they have begun to realize what real manliness is.

G. McNAUGHT.—The subject seems to turn on the question of the inequitable distribution of good and evil in the world, and to have as a background some theory of reincarnation.

M. C. NOWELL.—It is a necessary precaution rather than a blind observance of etiquette.

J. H. MASON.—*Free*. sub. duly credited at time of receipt. Sorry other acknowledgment overlooked.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: Horace Dawson, 2s.; W. Stewart, 2s.

SEVERAL readers are cordially thanked for sending on the wanted copy of *Freethinker* dated November 24.

J. L.—The parody is clever, and we are glad to have it, but, as you surmise, not in our line for publication.

COSMO.—We are always pleased to receive articles from new writers, but they must be brief and pointed.

G. RAWLINGS.—You say you are astonished that a paper like the *Freethinker* should continue to exist. So are we; but for a different reason. You are astonished because it is so bad, we, because it is so good. Perhaps a six months' course of the paper would effect a change. It has worked wonders in other cases, and we don't like to think of yours as incurable.

C. F. BUDGE.—We are always pleased to receive newspaper cuttings of interest. Those who send them do us a real service. Thanks for copy of paper.

F. FREEMAN.—We are obliged for copy of *Freethinker* for November 24.

J. KENNARD.—Your letter is very much to the point, but it is, perhaps, as well not to enlarge the discussion at this stage of the proceedings.

T. A. JACKSON.—Thanks for reference. "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good." We had already placed that one, on p. 472 of Conway's edition of works, vol. ii.; but we wanted the full quotation, beginning "The world is my country, mankind are my brethren," etc. Paine's exact words are as given above. The rest of the quotation, as usually given, appears to be made up of a sentence from William Lloyd Garrison.

TAB CAN.—Thanks for cutting. We are not surprised you have found it "the most expensive and dangerous duty" to be honest to yourself. Still, it is the only policy that is ultimately profitable. What one loses is nothing to what one gains.

JOHN RICHARDS.—The Vicar of Kilvey is evidently very careless about the truth, and if his only authority for the recantation of "Paine" is an unnamed book "on the death of sceptics," anything he says may be treated with contempt. As a matter of fact, this particular lie about Paine has been exposed time after time—

Two clergymen did enter Paine's bedroom shortly before his death, and was told: "Let me alone, good morning." You will find a full account of Paine's death in Moncreu Conway's *Life of Paine*, vol. ii., last chapter.

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

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**Sugar Plums.**

Next Sunday (February 9) Mr. Cohen pays another visit to South Wales. In the afternoon he lectures at Blaina, and in the evening at the Institute, Abertillery. On the Monday evening (February 10) a debate has been arranged with the Rev. J. Towns, a well-known local clergyman. The subject for discussion is: "Have the Religions of the World Hindered Progress?" The debate will take place in the Bethany Baptist Church at Six Bells, and will commence at 7 o'clock.

In view of the well-known fact that there are a large number of unattached *Freethinker* readers on Tyneside, the local Secretary of South Shields Branch asks to be allowed to draw attention to Mr. Cohen's lecture visit on Feb. 23, when there will be two lectures, afternoon and evening, in the Victoria Hall, Fowler Street. As usual, invitations will be sent by post to old friends whose addresses are recorded, and any thus sufficiently interested are earnestly invited to write to Mr. Chapman, 6 Wenlock Road, for further particulars. Arrangements are being made for a short programme of instrumental music before the evening address, and any suggestion likely to conduce to the success of the gatherings will meet with a hearty welcome.

Manchester friends will please note that Mr. W. H. Thresh is paying his first visit to Manchester to-day (Feb. 2). He will lecture twice in the Co-operative Hall, Downing Street, Ardwick. His afternoon subject, at 3 o'clock, is "Insect Life"; evening, "Rationalistic Education." Tea will be provided for those who desire it, and it is hoped that the afternoon lecture will attract many of the younger generation. Manchester "saints" will oblige by making the meetings as widely known as possible. The Secretary asks us to remind members that their Branch Subscriptions are now due.

At the Repertory Theatre this evening Mr. Clifford Williams will lecture on "The Death Knell of Superstition." The lecture commences at 7 o'clock, and Birmingham Freethinkers are asked to do what they can to advertise the meeting among the general public.

The following letter loses none of its interest from its forming part of a communication to the writer's brother:—

Dear Joe,—It would have done your eyes good to have seen the rush for my bed when I opened the parcel of literature you so kindly sent. I began to think my chance was a small one of having any for myself; but at last I got them a bit quiet by promising them they should read the lot—but

after me. So I am doing the "Pass them along" stunt. Goodness knows if I shall see them (the papers) all again; I have my doubts. I had a good many asking me if I had got *Christianity and Slavery*. They had heard it was good, but, like myself, had not seen it. Some of them have already got as far as Treport (about 35 kilos away = 20 miles). Chaps have even come from Janville and Martin Eglise (a good hour's walk) to beg a few of the old *Freethinkers*. I am sure the writers of the various articles would be pleased to see the way their writings are appreciated; and the way the various points were argued, or, rather, discussed, would have surprised a good many folk who fancy themselves at that game. The clear insight that some of them showed will be a nasty stumbling-block for both parsons and politicians, especially the old-fashioned soothsayer. Talk about the working man having no brains! By Gad, but they have; and the beauty of it is, they are beginning to use them. What with them and the women, I can see the poor parson shivering with alarm. Lord! he will feel a draught shortly.

I should like to thank Cohen and the other writers on the *Freethinker*, and more especially a few of the dead and gone heroes who strove so hard in the past that we could have the benefit of their labours. Theirs was a really good work and no doubt about it; they all deserve well of their fellows, instead of which they receive unmerited scorn, with more kicks than ha'-pence as their reward.

We have sent out another parcel of literature to the writer of the above, and we hope it will prove as useful as those already received.

Will Cardiff readers who are willing to assist in the organization of some public meetings in Cardiff please communicate with Mr. J. H. Edwards, of 9 Sycamore Terrace, Taffs Well, Cardiff.

## Ether and the Spirits.

UNDER the title "Ether, Matter, and the Soul," Sir Oliver Lodge offers, in the January number of the *Hibbert Journal*, what purports to be a scientific estimate of the present state of knowledge as to the relations between these three entities. This article has not raised my opinion of the value of Sir Oliver Lodge's judgment on questions of this kind. I am not one of your born sceptics; on the contrary, when a man is an acknowledged authority on any subject, my instinct is to take his word on matters falling within his jurisdiction, in the absence of first-hand evidence, to the contrary. Sir Oliver Lodge is an acknowledged authority on physics. In the article, however, to which I refer, he displays, even on questions of physics, an inability to express his undoubted knowledge in consistent and logical terms; and his failure to write clearly and philosophically on a subject of which he is a master does not inspire me with confidence in his judgment on subjects of which his claim to mastery is more open to question.

Let me give examples. Sir Oliver Lodge proposes, in the first part of his article, to give a summary of the present position of our knowledge as regards the nature of matter. That is a highly interesting subject, and I started reading the article with a desire to learn what Sir Oliver had to say upon it, and to profit by his teaching. Here are some of the things he tells us. Light is a vibration; it is not a vibration of matter, but of "something far more perfect and fundamental": "it is a kind of disembodied vibration; its home is vacuum." The thing which vibrates—the ether—is "a medium which does not appeal to our senses in any way," and of which "we may popularly be said to know nothing," though "essentially and really we know a great deal." Electricity "is a substance—a fluid if we like to call it so,—it consists of particles, not material indeed, but corpuscular." It is "no form of ordinary matter, but suggests itself as the raw material out of which ordinary matter is composed." Light is generated "by the changing movements of electric corpuscles." These corpuscles are "specks of modified ether," and "are

themselves material," though "not ordinary matter." Besides these electrons, of which all "ordinary matter" is composed, there is "the great bulk of indifferentiated ether," which fills all space. The characteristic of matter is "movement or locomotion"; the characteristics of ether, "strain and stress." "The probability is that every sensible object has both a material and an ethereal counterpart."

Now, I am far from wanting to set up my opinion against Sir Oliver Lodge's. All I wish to do is to point out that he contradicts himself, and is vague in his language where clearness is vital. First he says that electrons are not material; then he says that they are. First he says that ether is incapable of movement or locomotion, its characteristics being strain and stress; then he says that every sensible object has probably "both a material and an ethereal counterpart," which, if it means anything, means that every material object has an ethereal "double" resembling it and following its movements. The whole article is contradictory and vague; and the reason appears to be that Sir Oliver Lodge, who knows his subject and has clearly in his own mind what he wants to convey, sets out to convey it without defining his principal terms.

What, for example, does he mean exactly by "matter"? He has evidently not decided; otherwise he would not call the same thing first immaterial, and then material. He distinguishes "matter" from ether, which he says is not matter; but on what ground? Matter, says Nuttall's Dictionary, is "that which occupies space, and is perceptible to the senses." The ether occupies space. Sir Oliver Lodge, it is true, says that it does not "appeal to our senses"; but can this be maintained? Surely ether affects our senses just as much as ponderable matter does; we have no other evidence for the existence of either than their effect upon our senses. When I look at an object, the object causes vibrations in the intervening ether, and the vibrations of the ether affect my eye; that is how I see it. It is only because the ether affects my senses that the object is able to do so.

The denial of the name "matter" to ether, though customary among some men of science, is really an arbitrary abuse of terminology. It also does violence to the historical significance of the word "matter." "Matter," or its Greek equivalent, *hule*, was used by the Greek philosophers, and especially Aristotle, to denote the *stuff* of anything—the *material* (as we say) out of which it springs. Now the ether, as Sir Oliver Lodge and other physicists inform us, is the *stuff* of the universe *par excellence*. Electrons, they tell us, are only modified ether; and the whole sensible world, in turn, is made up of electrons. To deny to this ether, of which all things are made, the name of "matter," seems to me the height of absurdity.

While, therefore, I have the greatest respect for Sir Oliver Lodge as a physicist, and the greatest faith in his authority in that domain, the readers of the *Hibbert Journal* have a right to wish that he had observed a greater measure of clearness and consistency in conveying his meaning. When we leave the domain of physics, and enter that of what Sir Oliver is pleased to call "psychics," the matter becomes far more serious. We have already noted his assertion that every sensible object has probably "both a material and an ethereal counterpart." We have noted the vagueness of this statement, and its apparent inconsistency with the statement, also made by Sir Oliver Lodge, that ether is capable of strain and stress, but not of movement or locomotion. Sir Oliver claims for his theory of "ethereal counterparts" of material objects no more than probability; he does not give reasons for it: it is pure hypothesis, and to the lay mind, somewhat unnecessary.



Yet, when he comes to deal with the "soul," Sir Oliver Lodge makes this the basis of his argument. He puts forward the theory that we possess an ethereal body in addition to our material body, detachable from the latter and capable of separate existence, so that when the material organism dissolves, its ethereal counterpart may none the less continue to live.

It would be unwise to dub such an hypothesis flatly impossible. There may, for all we can tell, be such things as ethereal organisms—though hardly if, as Sir Oliver indicates, the ether is a perfect fluid, incapable of movement, but capable only of stresses and strains. A motionless and immovable body does not answer to our idea of a living organism. Still, in the last resort, it is a question of evidence. Can Sir Oliver Lodge produce for inspection by his fellow-scientists one of these "ethereal counterparts" of living organisms? Can he, at least, show reasons for belief in their existence as conclusive as those which lead us to believe in the existence of the ether itself? So far, the high-water mark reached by the evidence on the subject is the book *Raymond*, as to the cogency of whose proofs readers of the *Freethinker* may have formed their own opinion.

In a note appended to his article, Sir Oliver Lodge refers to a book called *The Unseen Universe*, by Professors Tait and Balfour Stewart, which appeared in 1875, and in which arguments were advanced for "a psychic significance" of the ether of space. That book was ably answered at the time by the late W. K. Clifford. I cannot do better than quote here a cardinal passage from that answer, as it bears with overwhelming force on all speculations such as Sir Oliver Lodge's:—

The laws connecting consciousness with changes in the brain are very definite and precise.....Consciousness is a complex thing made up of elements, a stream of feelings. The action of the brain is also a complex thing made up of elements, a stream of nerve-messages. For every feeling in consciousness there is at the same time a nerve-message in the brain. This correspondence of feeling to nerve-message does not depend on the feeling being part of a consciousness, and the nerve-message part of the action of a brain. How do we know this? Because the nervous system of animals grows more and more simple as we go down the scale, and yet there is no break that we can point to and say: "above this there is consciousness or something like it; below there is nothing like it." Even to those nerve-messages which do not form part of the continuous action of our brains, there must be simultaneous feelings which do not form part of our consciousness. Here, then, is a law which is true throughout the animal kingdom; nerve-message exists at the same time with feeling. Consciousness is not a simple thing, but a complex; it is the combination of feelings into a stream. It exists at the same time with the combination of nerve-message into a stream. If individual feeling always goes with individual nerve-message, if combination or stream of feeling always goes with stream of nerve-messages, does it not follow that when the stream of nerve-messages is broken up, the stream of feelings will be broken up also, will no longer form a consciousness? does it not follow that when the messages themselves are broken up, the individual feelings will be resolved into still simpler elements? The force of this evidence is not to be weakened by any number of spiritual bodies. Inexorable facts connect our consciousness with this body that we know; and that not merely as a whole, but the parts of it are connected severally with parts of our brain-action. If there is any similar connection with a spiritual body, it only follows that the spiritual body must die at the same time with the natural one.

ROBERT ARCH.

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;  
The proper study of mankind is man.—*Pope*.

## The Edinburgh Churches Civic Association.

EDINBURGH has just emerged with credit from a unique municipal contest. Three candidates were nominated for one seat in the Town Council, the vacancy being in Morningside Ward, a district famed as having within its bounds the Royal Asylum for the Insane, though, as Mr. Weller would probably say, that is no part of the present consideration. What has to be noted is that Edinburgh—the nerve-centre of Scottish Ecclesiasticism—has given clerical presumption a vigorous and resounding slap in the face.

It was from the beginning recognized that the real struggle in this election was between Mrs. Millar, a very capable and well-informed candidate, the daughter of a lately deceased and much-esteemed Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Sir Robert Inches, and Mr. Leith, who posed as "The Citizens' Candidate," a description loudly blazoned on every wall, but who was really the nominee of the members of a recently formed body calling itself "The Edinburgh Churches Civic Association." With Mr. Leith's election address there was enclosed to each elector the "coupon" of the E. C. C. A. (initials are fashionable just now) issued from the offices of the United Free Church of Scotland. This "coupon" was unsigned, and, needless to say, it does not stand good for even a twopenny pie; but the E.C.C.A. put forth all the energy it knew; it realized that the election was a test election, and the result announced on January 15 is this:—

Mrs. Millar ... ..	2,500
Mr. Leith ... ..	1,600

And there is wailing and gnashing of teeth at the firesides of the members of the E.C.C.A.

There is a variety of reasons for this blow to the divine activities of the E.C.C.A. To understand these reasons it is necessary to know how the Association came into being. It may not have sponsors, but of necessity it had a progenitor. The organization really came into being after the failure of a deputation of clerics to Edinburgh Town Council protesting against Sunday evening concerts for soldiers and sailors in the spacious Waverley Market. One of the deputation was that stormy petrel of Scottish Presbyterianism—Rev. Dr. Norman Maclean. His Celtic ire rose, and vehemently did it express itself. The men of God bearing their holy commissions were not to be insulted and defied by a section of the "lower middle-class of Edinburgh"! Thus and thus should it be done to the troublers of Israel. And then with much prayer was the E.C.C.A. launched upon the perilous seas of 1919. Alas, Morningside has proved to be the rock it was to perish on! To change the metaphor, this infant organization, at the instance of its parent, Dr. Maclean, has put its foot badly into it—"it," in this case, being scalding hot water. We do not hesitate to say that the injuries it has received will prove fatal, and that the E.C.C.A. will never attain maturity. And those who value freedom of thought will not mourn much.

A paragraph in the public prints stating that the E.C.C.A., as representing the Established and United Free Churches, were backing Mr. Leith, started the trouble. The unsigned "coupon" accompanying his election address put the tin hat on it. Somebody recently asked why St. Cuthbert's Parish Church need bother about having a Church Magazine, seeing that both the ministers of that church (Dr. Maclean and his colleague) are on the staff of the *Scotsman*? But the *Scotsman* has readers who are not tied to the chariot-wheels of clericalism. And they bombarded the orthodox

*Scotsman* with their protests. They wanted to know what was the matter with the two candidates who had not received the ecclesiastical "coupon," but who had been nominated by "eminently respectable people." They wrote of "intolerable pretensions" and "coercion"; of action that was "invidious" and "lacking in charity"; of "intrusion" and "encroachment on the right of private judgment." One newspaper correspondent described the E.C.C.A. as "this ill-inspired Association," and spoke of its "potentialities for mischief." Even that valiant snob, Dr. Maclean himself, was singled out and denounced for occupying the pulpit of Morningside Parish Church on Sunday, January 12, for "electioneering purposes"—pointedly called a "gross misuse."

The Churches campaign for "spiritual quickening" and "national rededication" is making headway—backwards. This is the first serious bout for Edinburgh in the great fight between Freethought and clerical autocracy since the War, and lovers of Freedom may justifiably congratulate each other on the result. So passes the E.C.C.A. "All's well that ends well!"

IGNOTUS.

### A Turbulent Priest.

WHAT manner of men are these, these priests, who, while professing a religion of love, are, and have been, ever ready to persecute all who dare to deviate from their trodden paths? The type is very old—probably as old as humanity. They learn nothing and they forget nothing. It pleases us to persuade ourselves that they are only of historic interest. We read that some of those old persecutors were model parents and citizens; so we conclude that they were victims of their times and circumstances as much as were the poor tortured beings who suffered under them. This question is of peculiar interest to Secularists. We are sharply reminded sometimes that we are not yet out of the wood. A little oil would cause the rusted rack to work again; the fires of persecution are not yet extinguished—they smoulder still.

All this is brought vividly home to us by an article in a recent issue of *The Life of Faith*. The Rev. W. S. Hooton, B.D., deals with "Christianity's Coming Conflicts." The Secularist and Rationalist propaganda in the Army and Navy has impelled this representative of the Prince of Peace to go on the warpath. His attitude might be reasonably summed up in the terrible declamation, "Kill and spare not." He is quite uncompromising. For the time being, at least, he has forgotten to "Come, let us reason together." He has neglected all the saving graces of his creed; his attitude is one of savage intolerance. He seems to be well up in all the refinements of modern warfare. He uses smoke-clouds to hide the names of the *Literary Guide*, the *Freethinker*, and other advanced publications. He threatens us with the most direful means of destruction—Christian Evidence papers and lecturers.

Oh, spare us! We can still hear the screams of Marchant, the grinning oddities of Celestine Edwards, and last, but not least, that doughty anti-infidel champion, Walter Powell, the only person in all our life that we ever refused to listen to.

He reminds us of the machinery of the law; not only crude blasphemy must be restrained, but also all the refined findings of Rationalism. The prospect is indeed drear if this "Turbulent Priest" has his way. He makes a truculent "Call to Holy Boldness." He is going to perforate us with "Roger's Reasons," or "Inspiration of the Bible." He will topple over all his timid *confreres* who tinker with the Bible; its infallibility must be reasserted. The lion must be unleashed; and

he quotes Hastings as saying: "Let the lion out, and he will defend himself." We might here make a curious comment. On the page preceding the one on which this priest performs his war-dance, the following words of Cardinal Wiseman, the first Archbishop of Westminster, are quoted: "The indiscriminate reading of the Bible has transformed a mild and promising race into a pack of lazy, immoral infidels." It seems as though Nemesis is at work. Our "Turbulent Priest" is no doubt included in the above pack; so perhaps they will "rend each other."

We can in some little way admire the "splendid isolation" of this "Turbulent Priest," he is no respecter of persons, he says in effect: "Come all or go all"; "Walk my path or perish." He will resort to almost any measure to maintain the one and only religion. He will even "sacrifice the innocents" by withdrawing from all the reading-rooms and public libraries all Church and Chapel periodicals and newspapers, if by so doing he can oust all reading matter that he may disapprove of. What sacrifices this priest is prepared to make, what pangs of regret we feel when we contemplate the withdrawal of all those dear little parish magazines with their "sweet nothings." Still, they perform a great function; many of the important affairs of the life of the people are recorded and disseminated there. And it is our debt to Secularism that we appreciate these things more and more keenly. The witchery of life ever appeals to us, everything is of undying interest. Thus it is that we view with grave concern the attitude of these "Turbulent Priests." They smash in upon the beautiful tracteries of life with their rude theories. They are obsessed with the idea of "other worldism." This world compares very unfavourably with their imaginings and frenzied states of mind based upon unproven assumptions. We would rather avoid all feelings of bitterness towards these "Turbulent Priests," their case seems to be one for pathological inquiry. He seems quite oblivious of the fact that the War has been won for "discussions and Parliaments." The Bismarckian dream of organization, as the only means of progress, based upon "Blood and Iron" is, we hope, in the main for ever discredited. We would sweetly admonish this "Turbulent Priest." "Come, let us reason together." We are surrounded by problems, the understanding of which requires the best that is in us all. We would gently remind him that this way "Madness lies." All through the ages vain attempts have been made to give humanity a certain shape, but these attempts have been on the whole out of harmony with the real needs of the people, thus they have failed. It is said that flowers grow best in the gardens of those who love them. We would suggest that the race will do best on lines of liberty and sweet reason. "Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all other liberties" the trumpet-call of Milton, it will ever resound in the hearts of mankind. It will be a bad day if it should be lealed in vain.

J. FOTHERGILL.

### FIXING THE RESPONSIBILITY.

"Now, Willard, be a good boy, dear, and say your prayers," said Mother, as his head dropped on her shoulder. "Thank God for all his goodness to you. Willard," and she shook him sternly, "you cannot go to bed until you have thanked God for his blessings; for giving you a nice, comfortable home and a father and mother to love you. Just think of the many little boys to-night who are hungry, and have no home and no nice clothes to wear, and no mother....."

"Mother," said Willard, sleepily, "I think them's th' fellers that ort to do th' prayin'."

Correspondence.

SOUL-SALVING,

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—But for the fact than an allusion was made in last week's issue to H.V.T.'s letter, criticizing my defining "energy" as the text-books do, I should not know anything of it, as, owing to being away over the holidays, I did not get my copy for December 29.

If H.V.T. is the well-informed gentleman bearing those initials, whose appreciated acquaintance I once made at Bristol, I know his letter was not inspired by captious cavil—nor yet prompted by the "conceit and egotism of the pedant"—a disease, by-the-by, as incurable as cancer, but was written with a desire to prevent a misunderstanding as to my attitude in respect to the question whether "energy" is an "entity" or not.

As the "entity" pundit is, nowadays, often in evidence, and as he usually displays a woeful confusion of thought in respect to the very "object" which he considers himself divinely "called," Don Quixote-like, to defend, I propose, with the kind permission of the Editor, to write a short article at an early date on the meaning of "entity," from which it will be seen that my remarks about "energy" lent no support whatever to the idea that it was an "entity."

KERIDON.

RELIGION IN THE ARMY.

SIR,—I am taking the liberty of writing you these few lines, depicting a recent incident which occurred in my company, thinking same might be of interest to you. It was last Saturday evening, when the orders for the church parades for the following day (9.30 a.m. R.C.'s and 10.45 C. of E.'s) were given out as *voluntary*, which is quite an unusual procedure. The company is about five hundred strong at present, and out of these less than thirty R.C.'s turned up, and only one C. of E. The church was a large barn, in which concerts are occasionally held, and is now being fitted up for a cinema. We have been in this village for

about nine weeks now, but this is the first church parade that has been announced.

The O.C., on seeing but a solitary C. of E. communicant present at the stated time, was much enraged, and said the whole thing was "disgusting"; whereupon he immediately ordered the parade to be made compulsory. About twenty minutes after, the total assembly of "conscripts" did not exceed twenty in number, who were then marched off to the service, being halted several times on the way at different billets, at which the officer in charge made a diligent search for stragglers, but was unsuccessful in his endeavours, as they were only conspicuous by their absence, having "got the wire," as one calls it in the Army.

You can well imagine the surprise of the parson on seeing an audience of twenty instead of about two hundred. After the Church Service, the preacher announced a Communion Service, and the candles were then lit; but as nobody was anxious to stay for this ceremony, they were blown out again, much to the surprise of both speaker and pianist, the latter being one of the company officers. I presume, after this glorious fiasco, this will be the last of the *voluntary* church parades, although I trust I am in error. I think this conveys a good general impression of Tommy's so-called craving for religion, as expounded by the Black Army in England and elsewhere, and is certainly a bright outlook for the future of the "best of causes," which you have so admirably upheld during the past critical times.

Wishing you and your Cause every success, which is the least you deserve.

B.E.F., Jan. 20, 1919.

F. LUGHAMAN.

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SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W., near Kennington Oval Tube Station): 7, Miss Nina Boyle, "New Duties in a New World."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "Karl Marx and Revolution."

#### OUTDOOR.

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

### COUNTRY.

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GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (The Good Templar's Hall, 122 Ingram Street): 12 noon, Old and New Members cordially invited.

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SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Hall Buildings, First Floor, Fowler Street): 6.30, "Scholasticism"; 7.15, Branch and Lecture Business.

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