

# THE FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Religion and Man.

By many man is defined as a religious animal. And so he is if by it is meant no more than a statement of the fact that he has managed to develop a religion wherever he is found. But with equal truth he might be defined as a thieving animal, since his stealing is as universal as his religion and, on the whole, it is more assiduously practised. Yet the universality of stealing, the difficulty of making honesty everywhere prevalent, does not prove the morality of stealing any more than the universality of religion proves either its truth or its utility. Ah! but people gradually see the evil of stealing, we are reminded, and turn to better ways. Why, yes; this is true of some of them; we all hope it were true of all of them; but one may say exactly the same of religious beliefs. People outgrow these likewise. We have all phases of this around us from the strenuous believer in worn-out doctrines to the man who believes in a nebulous sort-of-a-something that scarcely admits of discussion because it can never be clearly understood. On the whole, mankind does grow more moral; equally, on the whole, mankind does grow less religious. And the vital problem for the religionist to face is why this is so? Man is an animal with the capacity for acquiring a religion. The complementary truth to this is that sooner or later he is certain to lose it.

### The Burden of Man.

The student of history is bound to confess that religion is one of the most patent and one of the most general facts in human history. It is also the greatest burden that human nature has had to carry. On no other single purpose has man expended so much of his time and energy. He has sacrificed his dearest and given of his best. War has been an enormous drain on human society, but it has not been so persistent and, therefore, so great in its demands. For religion is always with us, profiting by our joys and still more by our sorrows. Look at the temples, churches, synagogues, mosques erected to the service of religion ever since the dawn of history. Consider the armies of men withdrawn from productive labour devoted to religion, and whose maintenance necessarily falls upon the remainder of the community! Think, too, of the time and labour spent in attacking religious beliefs, an expenditure absolutely necessary to clear religious obstruction out of the

road. Think, too, of where the world might have been had the energy spent in fighting religion been expended in discovery, in invention, in positive social effort! Of all the burdens heaped upon the shoulders of mankind none is so colossal as that of religion. It is the oldest and the heaviest. Easiest to assume—hardest to remove.

### Is It Worth While?

Has the burden been worth the carrying? The religious world itself supplies the answer. Adherents of each creed charge the adherents of every other creed with having obstructed the higher development of man. Each traverses the claims of all the others, without apparently realizing that this mutual process of cancellation leaves religion without any justification for its existence. And each one is right in his indictment. The worst customs connected with uncivilized life owe their origin to religious belief. And among the more civilized peoples brutal practices are perpetrated longest under the impulse of religious faith. The belief that religion makes people kind and brotherly is an interested superstition; it does nothing of the kind. Kindness does, on the whole, increase; our sympathies grow wider and deeper; but this is due to the secularizing of life, not to the growth of religion. Look at Catholics and Protestants in Ireland! Look at Greek and Roman Catholic Christians in the Near East! Why, it is counted as something to be recorded that Nonconformists and Churchmen can meet on the same platform. And all over the country, in friendly clubs and literary societies, religion is excluded from discussion on the avowed ground that it would be certain to lead to ill-feeling and disaster.

### Religion and Science.

Towards the magnificent structure of scientific knowledge religion has contributed nothing. It has cast light upon none of Nature's secrets; it has pointed to no road by which man might master them. Religion fears, wonders, worships; it never inquires—and inquiry is the very soul of science. Religion has damned the inquirer and cursed the critic. It gave investigators certain torments in this world and the promise of infinitely magnified tortures in the next. It is sometimes said that religion has helped art. But this is pure delusion. The Church bought the artist, as it may buy the thinker; but that is not helping art. Art will always express itself more or less in the forms of current life. But art is only really and permanently helped by those who can appreciate its output; and the artist has far more reason for complaint against the society that cannot recognize his genius than he has cause for gratitude to the millionaire who may purchase his products. The Church utilized art for the sake of its influence on the people. The artist came to the Church, not for inspiration, but for a customer, because the Church was wealthy, and because it had so demoralized life that the people had neither the means of purchase nor the power of appreciation. Far better would it have been had the higher life of the old Pagan world continued its course,

with the artist free to choose his subjects, in a society capable of taking him and his work at their proper value.

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#### The Evil of Religion.

In social matters we have the same lesson. There is no need to lay stress on the familiar lesson of the obstruction offered by religion to every phase of social reform. It is more important to observe that this opposition is not adventitious but essential. In civilized societies religion is not discovered or invented, it does not grow out of current life and needs, it is something inherited. In essence it belongs to the past, and only so far as it is possible to perpetuate frames of mind belonging to the past can it maintain. The consequence of this is, that religion as a whole is committed to the worst and most unreasoning forms of conservatism. It associates itself with the most reactionary of social forces, and in turn social reactionaries look to religion for that mental support without which no secular abuse can last for long. The illustrative fact here is the concern that all kinds of vested and governmental interests have shown in seeing that the people were well provided with religious ministrations. Schools may be wanting, but never churches. The people may not be taught to read, but they must be taught to pray. It may be a crime to stand erect; it is always a virtue to go on one's knees. Secular abuse and secular tyranny, have always gone hand-in-hand with religion. They have hung together for fear of hanging separately. It was Charles the Second who said "One stone out of the Church means two out of the Throne." And it is not without reason that the world fails to present the picture of a secular tyrant who has not done his best to keep the people religious. Camels and Christians, says Ambrose Bierce, take their burdens kneeling. The greatest burden borne by man is that of religion. It has kept him bowed in subjection. Its removal will enable him to stand erect in freedom.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### Natural Law.

ALL theologians assume the existence of two worlds, the natural and the supernatural, and most of them regard the supernatural world as their own special province, concerning which they confidently undertake to convey all requisite information. That they know absolutely nothing about it is demonstrated by the fact that scarcely any two of them are agreed as to what it really means. When the notorious work, *Essays and Reviews*, appeared in 1860, all the contributors to which, with one exception, were clergymen of the Church of England, it was well-nigh universally censured as heretical; and in 1864 it was formally condemned by Convocation. Two bishops and several well-known clergymen wrote replies to it. One orthodox Presbyterian divine, the late President M'Cosh, of Princeton University, published a volume, entitled *The Supernatural in Relation to the Natural*, in order to counteract its wicked teaching; and this is what he thought of its destructive effects:—

I believe that the issue, chronological and logical, of the views propounded, on those who fall thoroughly under their influence, must be a denial or at least a doubt, of any supernatural power having been in operation, at the creation of the world or since, either in the production of man or in order to his redemption. Whatever Mr. Temple or Mr. Jowett may have meant, we may see—unless it be counteracted—the proper result of the whole movement in once living faiths groaning, bleeding, and dying in that stony, arid, and horrid plain which Mr. Baden Powell has provided in his exclusive naturalism, in his mechanical law, and physical causation (p. ix.).

It is interesting to note that the Mr. Temple referred to in that extract became Archbishop of Canterbury, and that both he and Benjamin Jowett were firm believers in Christianity as a supernaturally revealed religion, the only charge against them being that they explained naturally certain things which men like Bishop Wilberforce and Dr. M'Cosh accounted for supernaturally. In the year 1883, Professor Henry Drummond published a remarkable book, bearing the strange title of *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, in which he contended that "what is required to draw science and religion together again—for they began the century hand in hand—is the disclosure of the naturalness of the supernatural." For a time that work was extremely popular, and thousands of so-called progressive Christians swore by it, although to scientists it possessed no value whatever; but the principle which underlay it was wholly false. The naturalness of the supernatural is a ludicrous contradiction in terms. Science and theology will never be reconciled by means of so glaring a subterfuge as that.

And yet the Rev. Professor David Smith, in his Correspondence Column in the *British Weekly* for March 27, commits precisely the same blunder. In answer to an inquirer, who asks, "Does God work by other than natural laws?" Dr. Smith declares that God always works according to law; but instead of repeating Drummond's view that all laws are natural, he shuffles and hedges and lurches, and then in the end comes to no definite conclusion. He maintains that the contrast between "natural" and "supernatural," "while expressing a superficial distinction, is in truth a false antithesis." He offers his own theory of the world as absolute fact thus:—

The Universe is a unity, and it is regulated throughout by the Creator's Will. Nature is his ordinance, and everything is truly natural; but there are ranks in Nature. The Universe is an ascending series of natural orders, and each order appears supernatural to the lower.

Here the reverend gentleman draws upon his imagination with a vengeance. Dean Swift's story of the spider in his *Battle of the Books* is tremendously amusing. "Upon the highest corner of a large window he dwelt, swollen up to the first magnitude by the destruction of infinite numbers of flies, whose spoils lay scattered before the gates of his palace." But one day "it was the pleasure of fortune to conduct thither through a broken pane a wandering bee, where expatiating awhile he at last happened to alight upon one of the outward walls of the spider's citadel.....Thrice he endeavoured to force his passage, and thrice the centre shook." The spider thought that the end of the world had come; but Dr. Smith's comment is amusingly puerile: "It was a natural occurrence; but to the spider it seemed supernatural, since it transcended his order of experience." That comment, it is needless to point out, is the Professor's, not the Dean's; and what we find in it is not disciplined wisdom, but unscrupulous trifling, or juggling with words. Supernatural is simply a relative term. A man is a supernatural being to his dog. "And to all the lower orders of intelligence man's doings are supernatural. They are not indeed 'above Nature,' but they are above Nature as Nature is understood by the lower orders." What right has this divine to speak in the name of the lower orders? How does he know that a dog has any idea at all of Nature and Supernature? It is a peculiarity of the theologian that he is most dogmatic when treating of matters which transcend knowledge, as the following passage abundantly shows:—

Now it appears what that term "supernatural" really means. Man is not the highest order of intelligence in the Universe. The world which we inhabit is

compassed by the Unseen and Eternal; and when the forces of the latter intrude into our order, their operation is unintelligible to us. It seems, as St. Augustine put it long ago, above Nature, but in truth it is above Nature only as we know Nature; and as our intelligence is enlarged we recognize as natural what we deemed supernatural.....A miracle is simply the operation of an unknown law; and if mere enlargement of our understanding of the present natural order has eliminated the idea of the supernatural from wireless telegraphy, would it be reasonable to pronounce it incredible that the will of our Lord at Cana of Galilee should have healed the nobleman's child at Capernaum (St. John iv. 46-54)? The thing may indeed be inexplicable on any principle belonging to the human order; but the human order is subordinate to the Divine and open to its intrusions.

The existence of a super-human order of intelligence is a gratuitous assumption totally unsusceptible of any sort of verification. It is quite true, as Huxley says, that "the doctrine of evolution is neither Theistic nor Anti-theistic," or that "it has no more to do with Theism than the first book of Euclid has." Evolution is a purely natural process; and we know of absolutely nothing else. Dr. Lyttelton prides himself upon possessing a direct and positive knowledge of God, but the reverend gentleman clearly confuses belief with knowledge and fancy with fact. Dr. Smith, likewise, assumes the existence of a Divine order of intelligence in contradistinction to the human, and to which the human is subordinate, and then treats the assumption as if it were an established fact upon which it is safe to build. It is easy to assume that the world which we inhabit is compassed by another, unseen and eternal, and that this alone is real; but to verify the assumption is beyond the theologian's power. Celsus was impolite enough to compare the Christians to frogs in a marsh disputing about Providence; but Dr. Smith surpasses the Pagan philosopher in impudence when he says that "the figure was much more applicable to Celsus himself and his fellows in all ages." Perhaps this is an illustration of the grace of humility in practice which, we are assured, is a virtue peculiar to Christians only. Dr. Smith adds: "When we maintain that all things must obey 'natural law,' we are like frogs who think their marsh the only world." Celsus was a man of great culture, fully Origen's equal, to say the very least; but neither of them knew of any realm that lay outside the limits of natural law; and we challenge Professor Smith to name the things which, in his opinion, are not subject to it. Science recognizes nothing but Nature and her laws, to which all living beings are bound to conform or perish. "You should read Bushnell's *Nature and the Supernatural*, the Professor advises his readers, and he characterizes that work as 'the noblest book ever written on the question of Miracles.'" Well, we have read the belauded volume more than once, and its excellence is unquestionable; but we rose from each perusal profoundly persuaded that Nature is all in all, while the supernatural is but the baseless fabric of a theological dream.

J. T. LLOYD.

#### UNIVERSAL INTERDEPENDENCE.

Those will come to whom it will be given to see the elementary machinery at work: who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow. To them will nothing be trivial, seeing that they will have in their eyes the invisible conflict going on around us, whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh, of ours perpetually changes, and they will perceive moreover, that in real life all hangs together: the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow, that bursts upon the field of thousands. They will see the links of things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people now do, that this great matter came out of that small one.—*George Meredith.*

## Rationalism and Religious Reaction.

*Rationalism and Religious Reaction.* The Conway Memorial Lecture. By Jane E. Harrison. With introduction by Professor Gilbert Murray. (Watts & Co.: 1919.)

SINCE its inception in 1908, the Conway Memorial Lecture has been delivered by distinguished public men; but this year the address was given by a lady, who is not only a Rationalist, but one who enjoys a wide and deserved reputation. Like good wine, Miss Jane Harrison needs no bush. Her books are known to all readers of the best in contemporary literature.

It is scarcely possible to set Miss Harrison on a higher pedestal than she deserves. She is in far more danger of being praised too little than too much. Critics are mainly men, and men do not always feel comfortable in the presence of a very clever woman unless they are allowed the polite malice of disparagement. Miss Harrison commands attention. No less a critic than Professor Gilbert Murray has hailed her publicly as "one of the greatest living champions of Freethought." And the churliest judge must admit her imaginative outlook, her liberal sympathies, her passion for principle. To read her lecture on *Rationalism and Religious Reaction* is not merely to learn about the present; it is to peer into the near future.

One cannot read this brilliant discourse on contemporary thought without seeing in it one long justification of the militant wing of the Army of Progress, Miss Harrison is very optimistic. She even declares "the idol is overthrown, the whole orthodoxy is dead." Indeed, her whole argument is that Freethought has done its work, and that Christianity has followed many another superstition into the limbo of half-forgotten things. She adds:—

Such dogmas as the verbal inspiration of the Bible and the eternal damnation of the wicked are not only *not* held to-day by the religious, but are felt and avowed to be a danger and a prejudice to modern religion. If chapter and verse are needed, I will quote the Bishop of Oxford.—We are bidden by a Bishop of our National Anglican Church to exclude from the religious teaching of our children whatever is "alien to the trend of the philosophy, science, and history of our time." Does any Rationalist ask more? What need to go on crying "*Ecrasez l'infame*" when a Bishop himself declares *l'infame* to be infamous?

This pleasing picture of the millennium is so often painted by superior Rationalists. If it were true, the poor militant Freethinker would have nothing more to do but to have his sword fashioned into a golf-stick, and go home a sadder and a wiser man. Is it permissible, however, to suggest that one swallow does not make a summer, and that Bishop Gore is merely speaking for himself? His views are obviously not shared by his episcopal brethren, to say nothing of the 25,000 ministers of the Established Church. And, surely, when M. de Voltaire spoke of *l'infame*, he was directing the shaft of his indignation at Priestcraft itself, and not the puerile fairy tales of the older books of the Jewish Bible.

If Christianity is dead, it is the liveliest of all mummies. It has fifty thousand professional apologists, who still exert very considerable influence in national affairs. Bishops of the Established Church sit in the House of Peers, and retard the passing of progressive legislation. In the schools the clergy still see that millions of children are taught the follies of faith. In the Army and Navy men are still forced to attend religious services. The path of reform of the divorce laws is still blocked by the clergy, and, thanks to their influence, the British

Sunday is such that most foreigners regard us as the most stupid and irrational of mankind.

Despite the undeniable fact that Rationalists have compelled the clergy to be circumspect in thrusting their more repulsive dogmas on the nation, the fight between Freethought and Superstition is by no means over. We have not yet succeeded in eliminating the clergy from our social life. As George Meredith said: "They are interwound with the whole of the middle-class like the poisonous ivy." Of late there are not wanting signs that Church and Chapel may yet combine their efforts against the common enemy, and a recrudescence of bigotry may yet cause us need for greater vigilance and activity in the near future.

In face of all this, Miss Harrison thinks that Freethinkers can lay down their arms. The Christian superstition is to be merged in that "New Immanence," and the soldiers of Freethought can demobilize, and leave the Black Army, 50,000 strong, in possession of the field. It is an easy and pleasant solution, and saves the trouble of a prolonged Peace Conference between the forces of Reason and Unreason. Unfortunately, it is a counsel of perfection which cannot be followed.

Freethought is not a religion, nor a substitute for superstition. It is actuated by the love of truth, and is justified in bending its whole energies on the destruction of delusions. Its mission is to free man from ancient error, and, in so doing, it is rendering a service to humanity. Civilized man needs to be freed from the shackles of clerical control, and he will then adjust himself naturally to the real conditions of life. Although no ideal perfection may ever be reached, man will be all the happier for having escaped the control of the clerical caste.

So far from the battle between priestcraft and the people being over, the sternest fighting is yet to come. Nothing is gained by saying that orthodoxy is dead, when all the time fifty thousand parsons in this country are occupying the position of a highly privileged caste, possessing immense wealth, and perpetuating the reign of ignorance and superstition.

MIMNERMUS.

## Charity.

ALMSHOUSES, poorhouses, free hospitals, and the Charity Organization Society, are more demoralizing than public-houses, gambling-houses, and brothels. Drunkenness, gambling and lasciviousness are vices which injure only the persons who indulge in them, and those who are immediately dependent on them. The vice of widespread charity demoralizes the whole community. Other vices are a disgrace to those who indulge in them, but charity is a disgrace to the human race. Personal vices are recognized as evils to be shunned; charity, though a deadly evil, passes for a virtue; it is a hypocrite in the guise of a saint; a confidence woman in the garb of a nun.

By giving alms to the poor the rich think that they add to their own righteousness and subtract from the miseries of the poor, while in reality they are guilty of the crime of perpetuating the present unjust order of society, and everything they give to the poor goes eventually into the pockets of the monopolists, in the form of reduced wages for the workers. If there were no charity, the sick poor would then die in their slums, with none to bury them. Honest people, willing to work, would starve to death by scores, and their corpses would lie rotting by the roadside. The vision of what would happen if charity were suddenly to cease is horrible beyond description, but in full view of it the people would learn the truth far

more speedily than they otherwise can or will. They would then see the unmitigated effects of usury, which enforces the exclusion of the great majority of the workers from the opportunity to live in comfort. The State authorizes and enforces the monopoly of banking, the necessity of trade, and of land, the necessity of life. Consequently, the landless and the moneyless are at the mercy of the Land Lords and the Money Lords. These Lords employ the helpless workers and take from them nearly all the wealth they produce. They do not allow them to keep enough of the products of their labour to feed, clothe, educate, heal, and shelter themselves and their families. Hence the need of charity. And the State has a faithful ally in the Church, which works hand in hand with it and covers up its sins with the cloak of charity.

Whenever the people see something they do not understand they think it must be produced by God. When they did not understand about lightning or earthquakes, or cholera, or yellow fever, they thought each was a way God had of punishing them for not going to church. And the Church fostered these false beliefs, because they kept the people dependent on the priests, who told them that they had influence with God and could persuade him to turn off his terrors, if the people were submissive to the Church.

The people have found out about lightning and earthquakes, cholera and yellow fever. They do not now pay the priests to pray such things away, because they know they cannot do it. But they have not yet found out the truth about poverty. The priests tell them that poverty is caused by God; that it is a great blessing; that the poorer they are in this world the richer they will be in heaven, if they are obedient to the Church and State. They tell them that, of course, it would not be right to have the poor coming to the Churches where the rich worship, because they would soil the pews and bring nasty smells and microbes into the house of God, but there is a nice little mission chapel which has been built for them by the kind-hearted rich, and they are always welcome in this spiritual poor-house, to prepare for heaven, without bothering the rich in their high-toned devotions.

They tell them that God does not make everybody alike. Some of his children he endows with the gift of being poor, and these he loves best. That is why he blesses them with poverty, ignorance, disease, and dirt. Others he endows with the gift of making money. He gave William the Conqueror, for example, the wit to see that if he divided up the land of England among his generals they could always have a nation of slaves to work for them, so that our royalty and aristocracy have been ever since riding comfortably on the backs of the workers of England. He gave the Rothschilds and other banking magnates certain legal privileges to control the currency in their own interests, so that they can accumulate enormous fortunes by financial jugglery. He gave to John D. Rockefeller and the good Baptist brethren, who run the Standard Oil Trust, the wonderful gift of swallowing everybody else in the same line of business, and very kindly taught them how to substitute piety for honesty.

But these rich people are not his favourites.

The poor are his favourites, to whom he deals out his love and his chastisements without measure. The rich are very unfortunate, for their souls are always in danger of being lost. Their riches plunge them into many temptations. They are prone to grow selfish and hard-hearted; and so the Heavenly Father confers on the poor the honour of being the means of the spiritual development of the rich, who are kept tender-hearted by dispensing charity—out of their employees just wages.

If all persons were able to buy or hire books, there would have been nothing to excite the kind feelings which induced Andrew Carnegie to build so many free libraries. If there were no slums, how would the rich ever know the pious joy of building hospitals and alms-houses, or of visiting the poor in their kennels? The clergy tell the poor that it is a virtue to be contented, and they tell the rich that it is a virtue to be charitable. Thus the Church plays into the hands of the State and its pets, the monopolists. This is the reason why the rich, whether they are religious or not, are so generous in supporting the Church, for without the aid of the clergy in deceiving the people, the State-supported monopolist could not rob them.

But all that the State does in this regard is unjust, and all that the Church teaches on this subject is untrue. Poverty is not produced by God; it is produced by law. Charity is not a virtue; it is a crime. It mitigates the suffering of a few individuals, but what it gives them in bread or medicine it takes from them in self-respect, thus degrading and demoralizing them. It helps a few poor people, but it retards the process by which the chains of usury that bind the human race are slowly rusting away.

Monopoly and charity stand and will fall together, for charity acts as a mask to hide the truth about legal privileges, and helps to stay the ravages of poverty, which the exclusive ownership of land and the exclusive control of banking produce. These ravages should not be stayed. The whole world would then see the disease in all its horror. If men and women and children were dying by scores from cold and hunger, as they would be but for the mistaken charity that interferes with the natural action of usury, people would inquire the reason of the plague and soon find a way to arrest it.

I believe in the natural law of the survival of the fittest, and, apart from his relations as a social animal, it is operative with mankind. But in the ordering of society, man has interfered with Nature's working, so that results appear which are quite incompatible with any such law. Look at the people who have great unearned riches and who occupy the great offices of State to-day. Does anybody think that they would be at the top unless through some interference with this natural law? Was the late Czar the fittest man in Russia? Is John D. Rockefeller, the multi-millionaire, an abler man than the late Mark Twain? Is Austen Chamberlain, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, superior in any way to scores of bank managers? Nature does some queer things, but she never heaved such duffers to the top all by herself. They are the "fittest" under the arbitrary system of society which man has invented, but if man had not ignorantly meddled with Nature such people would probably never have attained any eminence.

But the introduction of the banking monopoly and the land monopoly, and all the other monopolies that depend on them, has turned the stream of natural law into a new channel, with the result that hypocrites are in office and heroes in prison; parasites in palaces and wealth producers in slums. Monopoly is an ignorant and impudent interference with the orderly operations of Nature, which, however, could never have lasted long but for the cloak of charity to hide its horrid effects. There are some things you will find always going together, and the world will never be happy until we see the last of them. They are all pairs of hateful twins. They are these: God and a slave; religion and ignorance; usury and poverty.

The parson and the politician will tell you that these are all human necessities, and in so far as misery attends them it should be met and assuaged by charity. But in my opinion, if there were no belief in God there would

be no slave; if there were no supernatural religion there would be no ignorance; if there were no usury there would be no poverty; and if there were no charity, all would go.

G. O. WARREN.

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## Acid Drops.

The Vicar of Leeds has been lecturing on the subject of the Virgin Birth. He places no faith in the symbolical interpretation of the story, and insists that it must be either false or a statement of fact. So the Vicar accepts it as having happened, and the evidence for it "is as strong as it can reasonably be expected to be." We do not see it. Mary, the only one who could really know, says nothing about it. The Evangelists who tell us about it are not witnesses, and cannot be. All they can tell us is that they believe it. And anyone can tell us that. So far as we are concerned, the belief of a man who lived two thousand years ago is of no greater value than that of a man who lives to-day. The impossible does not become possible nor unreasonably reasonable by a mere change of dates.

Nevertheless, the Vicar does not hold that one who does not believe in the Virgin Birth should be unaccepted by the Church. They should be welcomed whether they believe or not. Evidently the Church is in a bad way. If you will only come to Church it doesn't matter whether you believe or not. What a change from the time when men and women were burned or imprisoned for casting doubt on Christian doctrines.

Many people are now acquainted with the Testament-that-saved-a-life-story. Last week, however, at Hull, a man fell from out of a window, a distance of thirty feet, and received fatal injuries. In his hand was a copy of the New Testament. It is supposed that he was walking in his sleep. Probably Providence was too busy at the Peace Conference to prevent this man from falling foul of the law of gravity. Of course there is no moral, but if it had been a copy of the *Freethinker* in the man's hand the religious press would not have missed it for worlds.

The Rev. W. Kingscote Greenland, who made such unpalatable statements about the colossal failure of the Churches at the recent meetings of the Free Church Council, has since resigned from the Wesleyan Methodist Ministry. To an honest man, no other course was open.

A memorial service for American soldiers and sailors is announced to take place in Westminster Abbey. The dear clergy do so love to have their fingers in every pie.

A new departure is a newspaper entirely for children. Let us hope that it will be more truthful than the newspapers published for grown men and women.

A new book bears the happy title, *A New Heaven*. After so many thousands of years, the inhabitants must be tired of the golden streets of the old Elysium.

Where is Christianity going to begin? In the *Star* "Man's Diary," in a recent issue of our lively contemporary, the following paragraph appeared, anent Mr. Smillie's gallant plea for the miners at the Sankey Commission:—

The Sankey Commission report takes a different view of the miner from that implied in our laws little more than a century ago.

In Mr. Smillie's native land coal-miners, in the eighteenth century, were bought and sold with the land, compelled to work every day of the year except Christmas and Easter, were whipped for the slightest offence, and tracked down by specially trained bloodhounds.

Not until 1799 did the law recognize the right of the Scottish pitman to change his master,

Evidently Christianity as a humanizing agent had made but a poor start in Scotland, though at the time referred to "religion" had a very strong grip on every person's mind, including those of the mine owners. Christianity a hundred and twenty years later exhibited another ghastly feature, by proving itself perfectly incapable of stopping the War, or of soothing hatreds in connection with it. On the contrary, some of the fiercest sentiments were expressed by occupants of Christian pulpits in the various Christian countries that were doing the fighting, all sue of God's encouragement and blessing for their share in the bloody work.

Bedford Congregational Church, Somers Town, is to be converted into a laundry. This is a "conversion" that will not please the orthodox.

A newspaper paragraph states that a youth in a New York hospital has been asleep for four weeks. This is not a record. The Christian Church has been asleep for many generations.

It is high time that someone published an appendix to Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, and included a chapter on the sufferings of the Bishops. The Bishop of London has assured people that his salary of £10,000 a year is a source of great trouble to him. And now the Bishop of Southwell (Dr. Hoskyns) declares that his own salary of £3,000 a year is so inadequate that, but for spending money from his private income, "he would have to walk out of his house." Is it not "too deep for tears"?

The Rev. A. T. S. James, B.A., M.Sc., of Gloucester, tacitly admits the collapse of the Church. In an article in the *Christian World* for March 27, he says that "antagonism to religion abounds," and that what is needed is the recovery of the Church, of which recovery, however, there is at present no sign whatever. Indeed, an eminent American divine has declared that Christianity has been practically discarded, that churches and chapels, both in the U.S.A. and in Great Britain, are empty, and that we are all on the high road to hell-fire.

We are told that the sin of Dives was one of omission; he shut his eyes to the misery and distress that lay all around him. Has not this also been the sin of the Christian Church in all ages? Has she not taken for granted a condition of society which gives Dives everything and Lazarus nothing? Even to-day, in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, we find the following pious lines:—

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them high and lowly,  
And ordered their estate.

Now that the actual fighting is over, Christianity or the Churches are falling apart, and it is the soldiers (not the clerics) who are complaining of the unfortunate effect of our blockade on German women and children. With the possible exception of the Bishop of Oxford, the occupants of the Episcopal Church—obviously the individuals to whom one must look for leading in the matter, are dumb, or worse. One, Bishop Frodsham was even questioned if a serious state of starvation among the German women and children really existed? We may well ask, therefore, where is Christianity going to begin, seeing how ill the attitude of its official exponents compares with that of our soldiers, most of whom make no profession of Christianity or any religion at all? Our opinion that people have no organized religion when they are free to express themselves is shown, by the fact that in most, if not all our churches, the first thing enfranchised citizens do is to break down the connection between Church and State. Evidently the nations—when left to themselves—can see that Christianity is never going to begin to do anything of real value.

On a recent Sunday no less than five bishops were preaching in Metropolitan churches. Orthodoxy has to

put on its "star-turns" nowadays to get people to listen to the "old, old story."

"Some Christian communities seem to have consumed a good deal of opium," says the Rev. F. G. French, at Lee Chapel. Was he thinking of the Shakers?

"I claim to be a Methodist," said the Bishop of Chelmsford. His lordship is accommodating enough to claim that he is a Chinese Presbyterian—if it answered his purpose.

The Rev. K. Greenland has resigned from the Wesleyan ministry to enter politics. A touch of Greenland should be a change in the heated arena of the political world.

The Rev. H. A. Mackenzie, of Durham, writing in the *Daily Mail*, advocates taxing bachelors heavily. Such a tax would hit the clergy hard, for so many priests are celibate.

Some people find the Sabbath in England too long. The leader of the Prudhoe Street Mission, Newcastle, is of a different opinion. He never finds "the Sabbath Day half long enough for worship and praise." Well, taste is a queer thing, and Mr. Bowran has every right to indulge in his fancy. The trouble is that he wants to prevent other people having opportunities for enjoying the Sabbath in their way. We have no objection to Mr. Bowran commencing his Sabbath on Saturday afternoon and continuing it till Tuesday. But give others the same liberty of choice.

Being unable to find a cottage in Blechingley, near Redhill, a working man bought a disused corrugated iron chapel and had it furnished as a residence. So far the man has not been struck with lightning by an enraged deity.

A vote of the people of Bognor on Sunday cinema opening showed a very substantial majority in favour of Sunday performances. Other towns might get rid of clerical control in the same way.

During the singing of a hymn at Stamford Hill Congregational Church a worshipper dropped dead. There is no moral.

In a recent issue of the *Scotsman*, "Norman Maclean" calls attention to the disastrous condition of the Churches in Scotland. He says that "it is with the sweep of an ebbing tide after a flood that the industrial population are ebbing out of the Churches." "Norman Maclean" seems to think this is due to the Churches having wasted their forces, and because the Churches have been badly distributed. The explanation is fantastic. Scotland is passing through the same experience as other countries. Religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is everywhere on the ebb, and the cause is not the distribution of Churches, but the growth of common sense and the spread of knowledge.

"Norman Maclean" calls attention to the fact that last year there were 5,000 civil marriages in Scotland. That one fact, he says, "is black as a thunderstorm." To whom? Certainly not to those who are married, and they are the chief persons concerned. Certainly not to the State, for the State has no reason for complaint. It is ill for the Churches, because it means that the family is escaping their clutches. And that does present a black outlook—for the Churches. But we are not satisfied with that number of 5,000. There ought to be at least 50,000, and we hope one day to see civil marriages compulsory with all.

A small boy wants to know why the clergy say that salvation is "free" when you are expected to put money in the plate.

Unless more councillors go with him the Mayor of Camberwell says he will refuse invitations to attend officially at church. The clergy will remember those councillors in their prayers.

**C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.**

April 6, Edinburgh; April 7, Falkirk; April 8, Paisley; April 10, Milngavie; April 13, Glasgow; April 27, South Place, London.

**To Correspondents.**

**NORTH GATE.**—Charles Dickens attended Little Portland Street Chapel, London, and the fact is recorded in a memorial pamphlet issued at the time the chapel was closed. Dickens remained a Unitarian to the end of his life, but his biographers, being orthodox Christians, are very chary of noting it. It is curious that both Dickens and Longfellow, two of the most popular of writers, should have been Unitarians, and thus outside all the orthodox Christian Churches.

**H. B. DODD.**—We do not at all endorse the idea that Spiritualism is merely a money-making game for a crowd of fraudulent mediums. That there are frauds is admitted. That there is a tremendous amount of self-deception and delusion is, to our mind, quite clear. And where self-deception is active there will always be found knaves ready to take advantage. For the rest, "Mimnermus," in common with other writers in this paper, is responsible for his own expressions. The editorial responsibility extends only to suitability for publication.

**J. BREESE.**—You looked at the matter as we thought you would. Other matter receiving attention.

**MAJOR WARREN.**—Very pleased to act as you suggest. Addresses noted for future use.

**E. LARE.**—We have in view the preparation of something of the kind you name so soon as we can find time. But with so much travelling on hand, we shall have to wait for the summer before it could be attempted.

**P. GAVEAN (Glasgow).**—Thanks for cuttings. Very useful indeed.

**L. J. ROE.**—It is, as you say, suggestive that the Y.M.C.A. post-card should bear as a "trade mark" a couple of mounted guns. Mr. Cohen is writing you on the other matter, which is important.

**J. BLACKHALL.**—Thanks. We had a successful and enjoyable time in Belfast. We were not surprised as we had been there before. The local friends are anxious for a return visit, but we are afraid that cannot be managed just yet.

**E. R.**—(1) Yes; the offer was made to us in September last. But its acceptance, however flattering, would have taken too much of our time away from specifically Freethought work. So we declined. (2) We cannot devote our weekly "Views" to current political events, save in such cases where they have a bearing on Freethought.

**N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.**—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—Bethnal Green Branch, 5s.; Goldthorpe Branch, 5s.; Maesteg Branch, 5s.; Manchester Branch, £1 7s. 4d.; H. E. Bampton, 5s.; West Ham Branch, 10s.

**N.S.S. GENERAL FUND.**—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—Bethnal Green Branch, 5s.; Goldthorpe Branch, 5s.; Maesteg Branch, 5s.; Manchester Branch, £1 7s. 3d.

**M. MURRAY.**—We can assure you we run no risk whatever in lecturing on Freethought in Ireland. On the contrary, the experience is a most pleasureable one.

**S. CONWAY.**—The *Viel of Isis* has been out of print for years, and could only be procured through second-hand dealers. The address of the *Truthsseeker* is 62, Vesey Street, New York.

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

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**Sugar Plums.**

In spite of rain, cold, and snow, Mr. Cohen's Belfast visit was a great success. On both evenings the hall was well filled, and the lectures were followed with keenness and appreciation. Brief reports appeared in the local press, which noted the large audience and its interest in the speeches. The Belfast Branch is only three months' old, but it is a promising and a lusty infant. It has a capable and energetic Secretary in Mr. J. Lessels, and he is backed by a number of enthusiasts. Taking the present membership of the Branch with other circumstances, about which more may be said later, we have great hopes of the future of the movement in Belfast.

From Belfast, Mr. Cohen travelled to Leeds, and his meetings there delighted the local folk. These have set out to make their presence felt in Leeds, and they look like doing it. The afternoon meeting was a good one, and the evening showed an improvement on Mr. Cohen's previous visit. The Town Hall is a huge building, and the local Secularists deserve the success achieved by the courage displayed in the undertaking. But the Leeds press has not yet discovered the existence of these meetings. Press tickets were sent to all the papers, but no reporters were present. Ignoring meetings in the Town Hall and reporting sermons in any sort of church or chapel is a policy grotesque in its stupidity. If the silence of the press cannot prevent the success of these meetings, the absence of a report can only raise a smile. The English press is a glorious institution—governed by Mrs. Grundy and the advertisers.

During March Mr. Cohen travelled about 2,000 miles, and lectured at Swansea, Liverpool, Leicester, Manchester, Belfast, and Leeds. This, in addition to literary and other work, represented a fair amount of labour, and it was not made easier by his carrying around an attack of lumbago. Now, after a few days at home, he is off for a week's lecturing in Scotland. He will visit Edinburgh to-day (April 6) where he lectures in the Free Gardener's Hall, Picardy Place, at 11.30 and 6.30. On Monday he visits Falkirk (at the time of going to press we do not know the name of the hall); Tuesday, Paisley; Thursday, Milngavie; and finishes up at Glasgow with two meetings on the 13th. By that time he will have earned a few days' rest—whether he gets them or not.

We bring to a close this week the discussion that has been going on between Dr. Lyttelton and the editor. As the latter had the first say in the discussion, it is only fair that Dr. Lyttelton should have the last. We have every reason for believing that these articles have attracted considerable attention outside the ranks of avowed Freethinkers, and all will be better for having had both sides of the case presented to them. And this was what the disputants desired. We have had a suggestion from Dr. Lyttelton that the discussion should be reprinted in pamphlet form, and it is quite probable that this will be done. We think we may safely say that few discussions of a similar kind have been carried on with so much courtesy and good temper.

We are pleased to hear that Mr. W. H. Thresh had a good meeting at Birmingham on Sunday last. Mr. Partridge, the Secretary of the Branch, writes that the lecture on "The Evolution of the Solar System" was greatly enjoyed, and "Appreciation was expressed on every hand." Before the conclusion of the meeting a presentation of a music cabinet was made to Mr. Clifford Williams, following his marriage, as a slight appreciation of his services to the Branch. The presentation was made by Mr. F. E. Willis. We heartily wish Mr. and Mrs. Williams a long and happy married life.

This age of personality, this age of literary and political gossiping, when the meanest insects are worshipped with a sort of Egyptian superstition, if only the brainless head be atoned for by the sting of personal malignity in the tail.

Coleridge.

## Man's Discovery of the World.

### II.

(Continued from p. 140).

WHEN Russel Wallace urged the acceptance of the doctrine that our puny planet is in reality the most centrally favoured spot in the entire universe he was merely reviving an ancient fancy. In this instance the astronomers marvelled at his doctrine, and they proved that it lacked even a vestige of evidence in its favour. Nevertheless, it was for ages an orthodox belief among many races that their capital city or most venerated spot was seated precisely at the centre of the earth.

In ancient Egypt, Assyria, Arabia, early India, Greece, and elsewhere, some town or temple or sacred stone stood at the centre of the world. Quite in the nature of things, the Jews looked upon Jerusalem as the central city of the earth. In that proud position Ezekiel places the holy city, and all the other important areas of the world, are ranged round it. This tradition descended to the Gentiles, and was long received as a direct revelation from heaven by the Christian Church. For centuries this fancy passed almost without challenge, and the author of the well-known narrative of travels attributed to Mandeville declared that as Jerusalem is seated at the earth's centre a spear standing upright at the Holy Sepulchre casts no shadow at the equinox. The early map makers arranged their maps in accordance with this belief. Professor White points out that—

The map of the world at Hereford Cathedral, the maps of Andrea Bianco, Marino Sanuto, and a multitude of others fixed this view in men's minds, and doubtless discouraged during many generations any scientific statements tending to unbalance this geographical centre revealed in Scripture.

And not only was the site of Calvary held to represent the world's centre, but it was confidently asserted that long before, on this identical spot, there flourished that sacred tree of Eden's garden, with its wonderful interdicted fruit. Men's concepts of the world were thus made to conform with theological fancies. These childish beliefs enjoyed an immense popularity, and hardly anyone dared to doubt their truth. Credulity knew no limits. In the *Pilgrimage of the Abbot Daniel*, a compilation long accepted as authentic, the following astounding story is gravely set forth:—

At the time of our Lord's crucifixion, when he gave up the ghost on the cross, the veil of the temple was rent, and the rock above Adam's skull opened, and the blood and water which flowed from Christ's side ran down through the fissure upon the skull thus washing away the sins of men.

Even at the time when Charles II. was reigning in England, as late as 1664, a famous French cleric, Eugene Roger in his *La Terre Sainte*, an account of his travels in Palestine, cited Ezekiel and Isaiah to prove "that the exact centre of the earth is a spot marked on the pavement of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre," and that this was the precise position where the forbidden fruit tree grew, and where in subsequent ages stood the cross upon which the Redeemer was crucified to atone for the transgression of Eve.

Even when the idea of the earth's sphericity had been accepted, our planetary home was pictured as a world turning on its axis through the agency of angels labouring at a crank at the north and south poles. This remarkable process is depicted on one old map published in a work dated 1537; while the hand of God the Father is displayed, as it extends through the clouds engaged in sustaining the world, which he held by a rope, as he spins it with his fingers, in Hondius's map of 1589. With

the advance of knowledge in succeeding generations, the concept of natural causation took a step forward, and the belief in supernatural interference receded more and more until it was entirely banished from the realms of physics and astronomy.

As in all other departments of natural inquiry, the early geography of Christendom displays a sad decline from the standpoint of ancient Pagan times. Under the Roman Empire men were extensively acquainted with wide areas of the Eastern hemisphere. Far back in the period of Pericles, 500 B.C., maps existed in Athens. Yet, despite the triumph of a truly divine faith over the old Pagan cults, we discover that more than 1,000 years later nothing survived save a few distorted fragments of classical earth-lore. As Raymond Beazley states in his important *Dawn of Modern Geography* (vol. i., pp. 244, 245):—

Till the Mediæval Renaissance begins, in the Crusading Age, we must be content with abridgments of Pliny, lists transcribed with many blunders from ancient itineraries, and maps drawn partly from the Jewish Scriptures, partly from late and second-hand repositories of general knowledge. Early Christian science seemed often to avoid, as if on principle, the better sources of information.....And besides this instinctive preference for the legendary as against the commonplace, the Christian science in question had two other prepossessions which were scarcely helpful in the progress of knowledge. It delighted in any suggestions of geographical symmetry, however fanciful; and it was anxious to square its ideas of the world with those which had been held by the Hebrew race at various periods, and which were enshrined in the Old and New Testament.

During the ages when the doctrine of our planet's sphericity was still battling for victory, the problem of the existence of human creatures on the opposite surface of the earth was forced into notice. Among the sages of antiquity, a difference of opinion prevailed concerning the possibility of life at the antipodes. The Fathers of the early Church manifested a marked aversion towards the supposition that men dwelt on the earth's underside. Lactantius tartly wondered whether anyone was idiotic enough to imagine that there were folk whose heels stood higher than their heads, or whether there were countries where the trees and herbs grew downwards. How could the rain and snow fall upward to the earth? Parting with all patience when he contemplated the apostles of folly so presumptuous, Lactantius declares that he finds himself at a loss what to say "to those who, when they have once erred, steadily persevere in their stupidity, and defend one vain thing by another."

Naturally, the theory of the antipodes was speedily shown to be quite contrary to Scripture, and the Church proceeded to denounce it as a dangerous heresy. Nearly all the Church authorities very gravely doubted the possibility of salvation to those who entertained a belief in the existence of people who lived on the opposite side of the earth. In truth, it was uneasily felt that to concede the possibility of antipodean people was to cast doubt on the literal accuracy of the divine record. With no wavering voice, the great Augustine delivered judgment on this exasperating question. The Scriptures, he said, make no mention of such offspring of Adam. Besides, God would not permit men to dwell on the other side of the earth, for that would prevent their witnessing the Saviour's arrival through the air at his second coming. Augustine also quoted several passages from Scripture which conclusively demonstrate that the antipodes are non-existent. According to Holy Writ, Christ's Gospel was preached "unto the ends of the world." No preachers journeyed to any alleged antipodes, therefore no antipodes can possibly exist.



This definite pronouncement of the all-powerful Augustine proved decisive, and held the Church in bondage quite ten centuries. Yet there must have lingered a few bright spirits who continued to cherish a belief in the antipodes. In the sixth century, Procopius of Gaza attacks the heresy with pitiless logic. Thus ran his unanswerable argument. If men lived on the other side of the world, he said, "Christ must have gone there and suffered a second time to save them; and, therefore, that there must have been there as a necessary preliminary to his coming, a duplicate Eden, Adam, serpent, and deluge." Cosmas likewise delivered a crushing blow to this pestilent heresy. Here we have the striking example of a man of naturally enterprising character, who sailed to Malabar and Ceylon from the Red Sea, and after returning to Egypt abandoned his old mercantile business, and retired to a monastery to elaborate his Topography. His experiences as a trader and traveller counted for nothing. His mind was so darkened by religious prejudice that he long stood as a serious barrier against all true knowledge of our globe. And even St. Isidore, one of the clearest thinkers of the age, was so daunted by the sullen obscurantism of the Church that he refused to reason on a subject so unlawful, and humbly bowed to the combined authority of Augustine and the Bible.

When someone ingenuously asked how the octogenarian bishops managed to retain their youthful appearance, it was answered that what they had said at twenty they repeated at the age of eighty. They had apparently left off thinking early in life. Yet Berkeley was a bishop, and so was Colenso. And strange to relate, despite the benighted times in which he lived, Bishop Virgil, of Salzburg, in the eighth century of our era, dared to vindicate the doctrine of the antipodes. St. Boniface promptly denounced this teaching as tantamount to the assertion that human beings were restricted to regions outside the divinely ordained channels of salvation. He therefore sought the assistance of the Pope in suppressing this godless theory. Bishop Virgil was sternly silenced by Pope Zachary, and for several centuries no one dared openly espouse this truth.

The impious heresy of the antipodes was regarded as both dead and damned for a space of 500 years after this Papal pronouncement. Even Vincent of Beauvais, while admitting that the earth is a sphere, firmly declined to consider so unscriptural a doctrine as the existence of the antipodes. And still the theory refused to succumb. Like modern scientific Materialism, it lived long after its death and burial had been repeatedly published to the world.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued.)

## The Modern Evangelists.

WOULD Matthew, Mark, Luke and John recognize their twentieth-century successors? It is to be feared they would not. In Scotland we have been treated to the attentions of a variety of outside "medicine men," who appear to think that Scotland's spiritual condition is becoming more and more parlous. More lamentable is the fact, if we are to accept the authority of several Scottish "meenisters," that these outsiders are not far out in their suppositions. The Scottish churches some considerable time since organized, firstly, a movement for "spiritual quickening," and, thereafter, a campaign for "national rededication." These schemes appear to have been attended with about as much success as the English "National Mission of Repentance and Hope." "General" Booth, two years ago, condescended to make

Scotland "a unit of the Salvation Army's life," though, for years before the real Great War, Scots people had become quite familiarized with the presence of the "Blood and Fire" uniforms, with the blare of the Salvation cornet, the bang of the Salvation tambourine, and the rattle of the Salvation collecting-box. More lately, Edinburgh has been favoured with a mission conducted by Dr. Dixon, of the Metropolitan Tabernacle, who, it will be remembered, sought to attempt to justify Torrey, the slanderer of Ingersoll, who received such a dressing down at the hands of the late Mr. W. T. Stead, that he discontinued his Evangelistic missions in Britain and was replaced by another Yankee called Chapman. The Edinburgh press has not given Dr. Dixon many notices. The watchword of his mission, however, was "A Revival of Religion: the Great Need of the Time." He was not well away from Edinburgh, it may be observed, when the Town Council passed a resolution to continue Sunday evening concerts in the Waverley Market, which, when they were started, were vehemently denounced by several prominent representatives of the Churches.

Some critics profess to believe that the Churches are losing their influence because the ministers are slipping their moorings from the old verities of the simple Gospel. According to these critics, there are too many secular attractions being introduced into church services, and these result in a lack of earnestness. This may in large measure be well-founded criticism. But the Churches are between the devil of accepting secular attractions, thereby maintaining attendance and the deep sea of rejecting them and seeing the pews gradually emptying. The modern evangelists on the platform, in the press, and in the pulpit insist vigorously on the necessity for a "restatement" of Christian "Truth," and of the object of the Churches' mission to the world. The "Way of Salvation" is not pointed out in the good old-fashioned manner, and the old-fashioned believer is pained because it is not. He flouts the "ethical redemptionists" who put the water of their "cauld morality" into the pure milk of the word. He wants to see faith put before works. He wants to hear more about the "Precious Blood—the Cleansing Flood." He wants the ministers to tell the people that

There is life for a look at the Crucified One,  
There is life at this moment for thee.

"Only Believe" and "Whosoever Will" are seldom heard on the lips of modern evangelists, except at long intervals in the slum mission hall.

Of course, it is for the critics and the criticized within the pale of the Church to explain their religious inconsistencies (if they can), and to compose their differences (again if they can). In childhood's days we had a rhyme:—

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John,  
Take a stick and lay on.

The older school believed in the efficacy of the rod for beating religion into you. The newer school resort to P.S.A. addresses and syrups. The older school could depict the leaping flames of hell; they could even smell the sulphur fumes. The newer school say we get hell on earth, and embrace a heretical belief in the desirability of obeying the laws of Nature.

An Edinburgh clergyman not long ago stated that the Y.M.C.A. was just the Church in action. The Y.M.C.A. is a business organization which finds the uses of advertisement to be sweet. But it has yet to prove that it can succeed in peace. The War—the terrible devastation of four years—furnished the Y.M.C.A. with an opportunity; but did it do more than any other social organization could have done that did not adopt the title "Christian"? If the Y.M.C.A. had not been able

to supply tea, coffee, cigarettes, and secular literature, and had had to depend solely on the Bible and hymn-book, how far would its success have extended? What about its "penitent form"?

The pillars of ecclesiasticism and clericalism are strong, but they are not impregnable. Freethought is gradually undermining, and will ultimately loosen and remove, them. Christianity as a system is big and far-reaching; richly endowed; professed and supported by most monarchs and rulers, and therefore ostensibly powerful. These are the chief reasons which secure the retention of belief in falsehood, tyranny, and wrong. Happily, the little *Revenge* of Freethought is manned by a spirited, intrepid, and resolute crew!

IGNOTUS.

### Gold Dust.

THE question of Sunday performances at the London theatres is the subject of a column in the *Daily Sketch*. The writer, in his best journalistic style plays at battle-dore and shuttlecock with views to suit the readers of a picture-paper, and we frankly admire his graceful walks round our old friend Religion. "There are difficulties in the way of course. Religious prejudice is one; sweating is another. The religious argument is one into which at the present moment I cannot enter," says he. Many thanks; in the sweet by-and-bye when this leader of public opinion has his official orders, we may be privileged to hear something of the religious argument. In a previous paragraph he writes: "If we must be vulgar on week-days, let us at least seek refinement on the Sabbath." This pronouncement should appeal to all with a nicely developed sense of compromise; to others it can be summed up in one word—trash. If this is the best in ethics that emerges from the crucible of war, then the perpetrator should retire to write advertisements for soap and pills; or, as an alternative, assist Mrs. Gossip with the description of the house that Grace Lady Newborough has let in Park Lane. The former lady writes: "It looks very spick and span in a new coat of paint." He of the religious argument difficulty could at least be trusted to tell the gaping world what kind of hat it wore for the occasion.

Those readers of a philosophic turn of mind (and what Freethinkers are not?) will find in the *Times Literary Supplement* an interesting article on the two volumes, entitled "The Philosophy of Plotinus," by Dean Inge. According to the writer, there is no evidence that Plotinus knew anything of any literature except that of Hellas. This fact alone should commend him to our consideration. Speaking of what may be in store for this badly battered world of ours we find:—

The great task of spiritual men in a society which threatens to resolve itself into a morally illiterate proletarian mass and a handful of millionaires, ethically on the same level of barbarism, will be to set the example of cultivating the spiritual life in philosophic poverty and to preserve the spiritual tradition of Hellenic civilization from utter destruction by the general deluge.

Further on we read:—

As Dr. Inge reminds us, the Neo-Platonist philosophers inevitably saw in the progress of the Christian Church one of the most alarming dangers to the products of the Hellenic spirit.

To begin with, we have enough faith in man to think and hope that the world will not be a howling wilderness of despair, yet, on whom must we fix the responsibility if such an event takes place? We will draw our bow at a venture and answer the question; the newspapers, and our black-coated, self-appointed moral

guardians. The former have set money values as the standard of all things, and the latter have misled and fooled man about his destiny. To suggest such an event is itself an indictment of Christianity. Nietzsche would term this suggestion as the result of a bad conscience. However, this digression was not our intention in taking the above two extracts. Granted the second flood, the task of spiritual men is, in brief, to preserve the tradition of Hellenic civilization. The Hellenic spirit, Dr. Inge intimates, saw the Christian Church as an alarming danger to itself. What dialectical anarchy is this? If we were a popular writer, and we are not, praise God, we should stigmatize it as literary Bolshevism. He that hath eyes to see, let him observe the few specks of gold dust discernible. We are inclined to think that the writer is doing his best to speak sincerely within his limitations. His candour is seen through a glass darkly.

And now for a few specks in an advertisement. *The Rival Philosophies of Jesus and Paul*, by Ignatius Singer, in the same paper, is commented upon as follows, as "Being an Explanation of the failure of Organized Christianity and a vindication of the Teachings of Jesus, which are shown to contain a religion for all times." We are glad to welcome the suggestion that organized Christianity has failed, and at the same time remark that the teachings of Jesus were of little or no value during the last few years. We cannot cut this period out of eternity.

In the same paper, Mr. Guy Thorne's latest book is dismissed in six lines. It seems a little unkind of the reviewer to use the phrase, "Guy Thorne makes up a tale"—it is almost like a recipe from Mrs. Beeton's *Wine the Mocker* is a book in which the hero is cured of alcoholism by the influence of religion. Why stop at alcoholism? Why not try it on bacon? Says the reviewer, "the whole story is artificial." Quite as artificial as the pretence that the country cannot manage without Christianity.

One more tiny speck. *The Challenge* comments on a book entitled *The Increase of God*, ".....it is refreshingly free from the language of the pulpit, which is resented by the plain man." We wonder if the coloured man, at this moment, resents the language of the pulpit. It is all very amusing—and gratifying—to find these specks of Freethought gold-dust, these remarks that read perilously near to common sense. My friends, patient readers, you have your "Sugar Plums" and your mental "Acid Drops"; do not be hard with me if I have failed to find you a few specks of Gold Dust. But I am left laughing. How would a picture-paper leader writer deal with the "religious argument"? With his nib, red-hot from four years at high pressure, what profound truths we might read if, "we must be vulgar on week-days."

WILLIAM REPTON.

### Correspondence.

#### OPINION IN PRISON.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—This Branch wishes through the columns of your journal to suggest to the public that the Government by their callous indifference towards political prisoners, military prisoners and CO's in particular, are doing much to create industrial unrest. Toleration has been shown to such prisoners in Italy and other countries. Further, seeing that all these men are in some way or other attached to organizations, labour or social, on these grounds we claim that the

release of these prisoners would be a great factor in the solution of the problem of labour unrest.

A. S. HULL, Hon. Sec.,

Tooting and Balham Labour Centre,  
126 Upper Tooting, S.W. SW 17.

**Obituary.**

On May 17, 1917, Robert John Kay, a soldier in His Majesty's Forces, and a constant reader of the *Freethinker*, hating war as thousands of his comrades did, succumbed to injuries received near Arras. Mr. Kay, who was twenty-eight years of age, was in hospital for a week, and in announcing his death to his sister, Mrs. H. Idle, the Army Chaplain wrote as follows:—

It is a deep sorrow to me that he passed away glorying in being, as he put himself down, an Atheist; he remained so to the end. He has been the first man in all my experience out here who has in his hour of need refused to recognize God. If his creed was one of real honest conviction, he has certainly been true to it; but it was a creed which absolutely cut him off from all hope in himself and in the power of others to help him.

Mrs. Idle, in informing the undersigned that a legacy of ten pounds (which has since been received) had been bequeathed by her brother to the Secular Society, Ltd., mentions that they (his family) are intensely proud of his steadfastness at such a time. She also informs us that her brother had been a Freethinker from about the age of nineteen, at which age he commenced an irregular diary, from which we are favoured with the following extract:—

No. I think my religion is fixed to this earth; whether there be Gods, I know not, but the Gods are not petty kings, who care whether man acknowledges or denies them—the personal element would not enter into their calculations; they must be above that. This is merely my ideal, which to my mind is higher than the ordinary Christian God. Let me not think of Gods who can and will not aid, but let me look around and know that I, when this body is useless, have done

a wee mite towards bringing about the Utopia of mankind. Still, let me be one who can have, when I finish, written on my tombstone (and it is my dearest wish), "R. J. Kay, Atheist."

Mrs. Idle adds: "And to that he was steadfast to the end." In offering our sincerest sympathy to the sister on the loss of her brother, we may assure her that we share to the full her admiration for the loyalty to conviction shown by him. That such existed is not, of course, surprising to us. We consider, however, that these bare facts regarding Robert James Kay redound to his honour, and form a very high personal tribute. Let us hope that those who doubt the adequacy of Atheism as a sustaining philosophy in the hour of death will accept this chronicle of events as a correction of such doubts.—EDITH M. VANCE, Secretary, National Secular Society and Secular Society, Ltd.

We have to record with great regret the death of H. J. E. Kain, of Poplar, at the early age of twenty-six. The deceased had been a Secularist from boyhood, and followed the profession of a school teacher. Although firm in holding and expressing his views, he won the cordial admiration of all his associates. Both in his private and public life he deserved and won respect. Mr. Kain was buried at East London Cemetery, and a Secular Service held.

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The Humanitarian works by Joachim Kaspary, out of print, can be studied in the Reading Room of the British Museum, London. They will, however, be Revised and Published as soon as possible.

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**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.**

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice" if not sent on postcard.

**LONDON.****INDOOR.**

**METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY** (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, W., near Edgware Road): 8, Mr. G. Ratchiffe, "Christian Evidence."

**NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.** (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Mr. P. Friedberg, "Democracy the Only Solution to the Troubles of the Time." Open Debate.

**SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.** (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W., near Kennington Oval Tube Station): 7, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., "Past, Present, and Future of Religion."

**SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY** (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "The League of Nations."

**OUTDOOR.**

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

**COUNTRY.****INDOOR.**

**EDINBURGH** (Free Gardener's Hall, Picardy Place): 11.30 and 6.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen.

**FALKIRK:** Monday, April 7, Mr. Chapman Cohen.

**GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S.** (The Good Templar's Hall, 122 Ingram Street): 12 noon, A. Y., "The War and the Death of God." (Collection.)

**LEEDS SECULAR SOCIETY** (29 Lowerhead Row, Leeds): 2.45, Business and Discussion.

**LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY** (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Operetta, "Bold Robin and the Babes." Performed by the Children of the Secular Sunday School. (Silver Collection)

**LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S.** (Clarion Cafe, 25 Cable Street): 7, Saturday, April 5, Members' Meeting.

**MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S.** (56 Swan Street): 6.30, Annual Meeting of Members—Important Business.

**MILNGAVIE:** Thursday, April 10 (I.L.P. Hall, Kersland Drive): 7.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Is Christianity Worth Preserving"?

**PAISLEY:** Tuesday, April 8 (George A. Clark Lesser Town Hall): 7.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Is Christianity Worth Preserving"?

**SHEFFIELD ETHICAL SOCIETY** (Builders' Exchange, Cross Burgess Street): 6.30, Mr. Ed. Carpenter, "Sun Worship."

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