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Views and Opinions.

Freethinkers and Christians.

We have often pointed out that the most difficult thing in the world is to convince Christians of the existence of other people. In theory their existence is admitted, in practice it is ignored. Christians recognize Freethinkers much as the average Briton recognizes the existence of earthquakes. They are a casual but undesirable feature of existence. And there is always a tendency for the undesirable to be ignored. So the Christian goes through life just as if none but Christians existed. He refers to "this Christian country" as though it were filled with none but Christians. He discourses on education as though only the Christian view matters; and when the question of a day of rest is under discussion it is only the Christian that is considered. Freethinkers ought not to exist, therefore they do not exist; that appears to be the attitude of the average Christian, and, it must be confessed, there is wisdom in his conduct. It prevents many considering the claims of those of their fellow-citizens who differ from them in religion. It stamps a mental attitude as an abnormality about which no one need bother. One can well understand Christians *pursuing this policy, but is there any reason why Freethinkers should help them carry it out?*

* * *

Are Freethinkers to Blame?

Now, this policy of ignoring Freethinkers would be impossible if they themselves did not lend a hand at the game. Consider the position. All over the country Freethinkers are at work in all sorts of movements. It is no exaggeration to say that without them these movements would, in a great many cases, be robbed of a great deal of their driving power. We are not speaking at random, we are speaking of what we know, and we are in as good a position to know as anyone in Britain. And yet wherever we turn we find movements that have been built up by Freethinkers coming more and more under Christian influence. Freethinkers are still there, but opportunist preachers, and Sunday-school superintendents with an itch for politics are allowed to take first place. What is more, they are encouraged, by the silence of Freethinkers, to talk as though the movement they are representing owed its inspiration and existence to Christianity. And, naturally, the general public accepts

this travesty of the truth on its face value. It knows nothing of the work of Paine, and Godwin, and Owen, and their followers in building up modern democracy. Nothing of the work of Carlyle, and Hetherington, and Holyoake, and Bradlaugh in winning for the people a free press and free speech. So it becomes quite easy for Christians to claim Old-Age Pensions, the League of Nations, etc., as products of Christian teaching. They who could speak are silent. The self-assertive Christian is given full scope. It is a cleverly conceived policy and cleverly carried out, but its success is finally dependent upon the unconscious co-operation of Freethinkers. Speech on their part would break the delusion. Silence gives it the authority of unquestioned dogma.

* * *

Mistaken Modesty.

We detest sectarianism in all its forms, and we have no desire to see a secular church established in place of a Christian one. It is the sectarian spirit that is objectionable, not the particular form in which it is cast. It is, therefore, in no sectarian spirit that we urge upon Freethinkers the need for a little assertion upon their part. In their anxiety to help the cause with which they are working they are unconsciously weakening it, and, in addition, doing an injustice to the Freethought party. There is a mistaken modesty, a positively injurious policy of self-effacement. It keeps people in ignorance, and ignorance is the mother of (religious) devotion. It encourages Christians in the belief that the Freethought propaganda is an irresponsible hobby of no particular account. Others are encouraged to take no part in our work because they are ignorant of its influence in the history of reform and of its importance in the present struggle. And is there any adequate reason why a Freethinker should keep his opinions on religion to himself while a Christian is permitted to mouth his inanities about the "spirit of Christ," "genuine Christianity," etc.? If the Christian will introduce his religion, let the Freethinker see that the corrective is not far behind in the shape of a good dose of Freethought. We shall each, then, know where we are. And it will do the Christian no harm to realize that there are others in the world beside himself. It may induce a little of the humility about which he talks so glibly.

* * *

Can We Leave Religion Alone?

Generally, this policy of silence is described as "letting religion alone." And if by that were meant having nothing to do with religion much of what we have said would be without point. But that is precisely what it does not mean. In practice it means the Freethinker keeping quiet while the Christian does the talking. It is a one-sided game. And, after all, can we really leave religion alone? Religion may deal with heavenly matters, but its immediate concerns are of a very earthly and practical nature. Can we, for instance, settle the Education Question and leave religion alone? The Church of England is one of the largest landowners in the country. Can we settle *that* and leave religion alone? Can we

settle questions that cluster around the family, marriage, and divorce, and leave religion alone? Every time we seriously grapple with a vital question of sociology, we find ourselves brought up against religious interests and religious prejudices. Even to keep quiet about religion is, for the Freethinker, to help the religious side. But to remain quiet while the movements with which he is associated are given a religious colour, is to help positively as well as negatively. It is at least helping the Christian to retain control of the social machine; and so long as that is the case, much of our work as Freethinkers is bound to be fruitless. We must become as assertive as Christians. We must demand that amount of respect and consideration to which we are entitled. *And we shall never get it till we prove ourselves strong enough to demand it.*

A Call to Arms.

Are we strong enough to demand it? We think we are. It is a significant thing that Britain is about the only country in Europe in which there is not a definitely anti-clerical party in Parliament. And it is the only country in Europe in which Freethinkers in politics are so desperately fearful lest the rest of the world discover that they are Freethinkers. Moreover, while we have not a very intimate acquaintance with the Continent, we do know that, amongst prominent men in science, art, and letters, there is nothing like the same timidity as here in letting the world know they are Freethinkers. The two things are not unconnected. Indeed, they are illustrations of the same lack of intellectual straightforwardness in our public life. On politics we speak out readily enough; in religion a secretiveness is maintained which allows religious organizations to exert a power they ought not to possess. Now, we are suggesting to Freethinkers that the remedy for all this lies in their own hands. There are not fewer Freethinkers in this country than on the Continent; it is simply that fewer speak out. But suppose that Freethinkers—if only amongst the rank and file—were to make public their opinions on religion, does anyone imagine that anything like the present boycott could be kept up? For how long, then, could the pretence be kept up that the various social movements around us owe their inspiration to Christianity? A little plain speech from heretics, a determination to stand on their rights, would save a deal of that humiliating secrecy and compromise which are now so widely practised. It was not by waiting on Christians that Freethinkers won even the right to exist; it is not by waiting on Christians that they will win proper recognition in public life. They must show themselves strong enough to demand. Bigotry knows but one argument why it should not persecute—and that is the inability to do so.

A Plea for Straightforwardness.

So we come back to the point at which we started. We must force home on the Christian the lesson that others exist beside himself. We shall never do that by practising the humility that he preaches, but by making him realize his proper position in the modern State. Here Christianity is only one sect—one of many sects—and the Christian has no legitimate claim whatever to preferential treatment. And in order to drive this lesson home on the Christian, there is no need whatever for a Freethinker to make himself a general nuisance. He has only to resolve that in whatever society he moves, or to whatever society he belongs, there shall be no concealment of his views and no infringement of his rights without a protest. He will soon be surprised at the result. Personally, we have acted on that plan all our life, and we have never suffered any particular inconvenience. Nearly fifty years ago John Stuart Mill said

that the time had arrived for every man and woman to speak out their minds on religion. Surely to-day the need for speech is more urgent than ever. The world never stood in more vital need of clear thinking and plain speaking than it does to-day. Freedom, even in our own thinking, is only won to be used, and surely the chief social use of our freedom is to see that it leads to the enlightenment of others.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Meredith and Prayer.

It affords me great pleasure to devote another article to this subject, in order to discuss some of the points raised by Mr. A. Yates in his letter which appeared in the issue for May 11. Of the supreme importance and value of prayer to a genuine believer there can be no doubt whatever. So profoundly convinced of its absolute indispensableness is the Rev. James Hastings, D.D., the famous editor of so many biblical and theological Dictionaries, that in the middle of the War he published a volume of upwards of four hundred pages in defence and illustration of it; and the following statement in the Introduction clearly shows what the Christian conception of prayer is:—

The instinct of prayer is to us like the wing of a bird to a bird, and the fin of a fish to a fish. The wing of the bird demands the air, the fin of the fish demands the water, the instinct of prayer demands God. Therefore the only monstrosity of Nature, just as much a monstrosity as a wingless bird or a finless fish, is the prayerless man or woman, because the deepest and most real instinct they have is not satisfied (*The Christian Doctrine of Prayer*, p. 3).

In every supernatural religion to pray signifies to thank, supplicate, and commune with, a Supreme Being believed to exist and to be capable of hearing and answering the petitions addressed to him. Christians generally confess that they approach the Throne of Grace as humble suppliants. Paul says (Eph. iii. 20) that God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask," and he also exhorts (1 Tim. ii. 1), "first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men." The Gospel Jesus makes the following audacious promise:—

Verily, verily, I say unto you, if ye shall ask anything of the Father, he will give it you in my name. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled (John xvi. 24).

Some divines endeavour to minimize the significance of petition as an essential part of prayer; but the whole teaching of the Bible and of orthodox theology is entirely against them. Highly illuminating are these words in the Epistle to the Hebrews (iv. 16): "Let us draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need." It is a throne set up on purpose, that undeserved gifts may be bestowed upon all those who ask for them in faith. Asking for things is, therefore, of the very essence of Christian prayer. It consequently follows that Mr. Yates is fully justified in putting the question, "Why should we kneel if not to pray; how can we pray without asking for something?" but he is entirely mistaken in thinking that Meredith advocates prayer in any sense. If he reads carefully the lines quoted from *The Empty Purse*, I am confident he will see that the context determines their meaning beyond the possibility of a doubt. The poem is addressed to a young man who in early life has been a waster, and who is now at the parting of the ways, and may, if he chooses, become a true man

by listening to and heeding Nature's voice as it utters, in clear accents,—

The cry of the conscience of Life :
Keep the young generations in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house.

That is "the sacred theme," the practical understanding of which results in high-toned, useful life. The secret of manhood lies in close touch with "the Innermost," which is Earth, or Mother Nature :—

Not thee
She cares for, but us. Follow her.
Follow her, and thou wilt not sink.

This is the good fight which the young man is urged to fight with all his might of body and mind :—

Yield into harness thy best and thy worst ;
Away on the trot of thy servitude start,
Through the rigours and joys and sustainments of air.

Such is the law of life, in the fulfilment of which triumph over all difficulties is assured. But—this is the connection in which the well-known lines on prayer are introduced—but if strength, determination, breaks down, if from any cause the young fellow is not equal to the indispensable struggle, then, but only then, he may fall back upon prayer ; for there are those who, in such circumstances, find help in kneeling, if their kneeling implies their getting nearer to Nature's heart. Thus we see, with the utmost clearness, that prayer is recommended, not as the highest and noblest mental exercise, not as the very breath of life, but *in lieu* of something infinitely better and more efficacious, or in the absence of that courage without which the most splendid results in character can never be achieved. In Meredith's philosophy, embodied in his poetry, it is only as fellowship with the Ideal, or communion with Nature's laws, that prayer is recommended, but in any other sense it is merely tolerated as a concession to human weakness or cowardice. Kneeling is represented as wholesome only when courage falters. In one of the greatest and most remarkable poems, *Earth and Man*, all appeals for aid to the supernatural are laughed to scorn. Here man, when he "inclines afresh to the Invisible," is called a "wretch," being sadly led astray by "his fables of the Above," for all the time he is held fast in Nature's grip, her essence being the spur, and—

His cry to heaven is a cry to her
He would evade.

No prayer ever offered has resulted in the slightest alteration of the course of things. Nature remains steadfast, despite all the vigorous activities of—

The legends that sweep her aside,
Crying loud for an opiate boon,
To comfort the human want,
From the bosom of magical skies ;
She smiles on, marking their source.

And yet she possesses light, and "her light is our own if we list."

Put in a nutshell, then, Meredith's Gospel completely repudiates supernaturalism and concentrates upon the duty of conforming to and utilizing Nature's laws. The individual is to regard himself as an instrument of service to the race, and his whole duty consists in qualifying himself for and fulfilling that glorious vocation. We are to live with our eyes upon the future—the young generation. Wholly dissatisfied with existing social conditions, we are to look forward to the happy time when, as the result of our philanthropic enterprises, they will be vastly improved ; when men and women will enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and obligations ; and when all the evils against which we now lift up our voices—all artificial distinctions and classifications, all tyrannies, all injustice, and all economic disabilities, shall have been swept away. To those who sincerely cherish it and live in its spirit, this hope gives hearts overflowing with gladness.

They sing the song of the thrush in February, which is in the major key throughout, saying :—

So mine are these new fruitings rich
The simple to the common brings ;
I keep the youth of souls who pitch
Their joy in this old heart of things :
Who feel the Coming young as aye,
Thrice hopeful on the ground we plough,
Alive for life, awake to die ;
One voice to cheer the seedling Now.
Full lasting is the song, though he,
The singer, passes : lasting, too,
For souls not lent in usury,
The rapture of the forward view.
With that I bear my senses fraught
Till what I am fast shoreward drives.
They are the vessel of the Thought
The vessel splits, the Thought survives.

Meredith was thus an incorrigible optimist. To him the thing we are is the parent of the thing we would become. He whose mind is Nature's temple, "dedicate to truth," moves forth in faith, with the result that—

Earth's nourishing delights, no more gainsaid,
He tastes, as does the bridegroom rich in youth.
Then knows he Love, that beckons and controls.

Such a man—

Accepts the spur of explicable pains ;
Obedient to Nature, not her slave ;
Her lord, if to her rigid laws he bows.

In *The Thrush in February* Nature's double visage, double voice, of Pain and Pleasure are but the guides that—

Led our wild steps from slimy rock
To yonder sweeps of gardenland.

Supernaturalism is utterly shut out, Nature being our all in all ; and with God and his angels, disappears the need for prayer in any supernatural sense whatsoever. All we require is the light in whose womb love is conceived, the love that blossoms into vicarious service ; and then—

Love, born of knowledge, love that gains
Vitality as Earth it mates,
The meaning of the Pleasures, Pains,
The Life, the Death, illuminates.
For love we Earth, then serve we all ;
Her mystic secret then is ours.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Sweet Singer of Secularism.

Verse is the form most apt to preserve whatever the writer confides to it, and we can, I believe, confide to it, besides all sentiments, almost all ideas.—*Sully Prudhomme*.

The kind wise words that fall from years that fall—
Hope thou not much, and fear thou not at all.

—*Swinburne*.

A SHORT time since Mr. W. L. Courtenay, the distinguished literary critic of the *Daily Telegraph*, devoted several columns to a notice of Matthew Arnold's half-forgotten volume, *Friendship's Garland*, and revived interest in "the most efficient, the surest-footed poet of our time," as Swinburne calls him. For Matthew Arnold has an enviable reputation. When the English poet returned from a visit to the United States, full of delight at the hospitality extended to him, he told with glee a story of Barnum. The great showman, he said, had invited him to his house in the following terms : "You, sir, are a celebrity ; I am a notoriety. We ought to be acquainted." Matthew Arnold was a celebrity, and the astute American labelled his luggage, "The Matthew Arnold Troupe."

Long before the trip to America, Arnold had managed to get talked of. Whilst an undergraduate at Oxford,

report spoke highly of his Newdigate prize-poem on Oliver Cromwell, whose memory was then execrated. The lines formed a striking contrast to the prize-poems of his time, which were feeble imitations of Pope and Heber, beginning with a sunset or invocation and ending with the Millennium and the Conversion of the Jews.

Although Arnold's work always attracted the attention of cultured people, he never was a popular poet. With the exception of *The Forsaken Merman* and *Desire*, which are met with frequently in anthologies, he cannot be said to have gained the general ear. Outside intellectual circles, his verse is little known; but his work stands, in a remarkable way, the wear and tear of the years, gaining rather than losing as time passes. So sure a critic as Augustine Birrell considers that the times are ripening for Arnold's poetry, "which is full of foretastes for the morrow."

Arnold had an exquisite tact and restraint, which is only paralleled by the great writers, and his use of epithets is masterly:—

His eyes be like the starry lights—
His voice like sounds of summer nights—
In all his lovely mien let pierce
The magic of the universe.

Once more:—

So have I heard the cuckoo's parting cry,
From the wet field, through the vext garden trees,
Come with the volleying rain and tossing breeze;
The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I.

In his verse there is an ever-present sense of the largeness and austerity of Nature:—

The solemn peaks but to the stars are known,
But to the stars and the cold lunar beams,
Alone the sun arises, and alone
Spring the great streams.

Matthew Arnold was a Secularist. Brought up in a strictly evangelical family, he broke completely and finally with his parents' orthodoxy. He had too much love for the great classical writers to have been long enamoured of the Christian religion. The world in which his mind adventured was largely Pagan, and his modern favourites were Freethinkers, such as Goethe and Sainte-Beuve. It must always be borne in mind that he belonged to a very orthodox family, and in religious matters his foes were those of his own household. Yet he held his way manfully. Writing to his mother, he said:—

One cannot change English ideas so much as, if I live, I hope to change them, without saying imperturbably what one thinks and making a good many people uncomfortable.

In a letter to his sister, he says:—

The common anthropomorphic ideas of God and the reliance on miracles must, and will, inevitably pass away. This I say not to pain you, but to make my position clear to you.

Arnold meant every word that he wrote, and in all his theological works—if, indeed, such playful works can be called by so dreary a name—he worked to that end. His own Secularism is seen in his language about death. Thus, in his monody on his friend, Arthur Clough, he sings:—

Bear it from thy loved, sweet Arno Vale
For there thine earth-forgetting eyelids keep
Their morningless and unawakening sleep
Under the flowery oleanders pale.

In *Geist's Grave*, his fine poem on the death of a favourite dog, he strikes the same secularistic note:—

Stern law of every mortal lot,
Which man, proud man, finds hard to bear,
And builds himself I know not what
Of second life I know not where.

In his magnificent lines on *Dover Beach* he is quite explicit in his renunciation of orthodoxy:—

The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd;
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear,
And naked shingles of the world.

His language concerning man's relations to Nature is always striking:—

Nature, with equal mind,
Sees all her sons at play;
Sees man control the wind
The wind sweeps man away;
Allows the proudly riding and the foundering bark.

His poetry is not lacking in morality:—

The sophist sneers: Fool, take
Thy pleasure, right or wrong.
The pious wail: Forsake
A world these sophists throng.
Be neither saint nor sophist led, but be a man!

Although no one understood better the value of reticence in literature, Matthew Arnold knew the worth of ridicule as a weapon. He realized, as well as Voltaire, that there are delusions for which laughter is the proper cure. Arnold poked fun at the Trinity, and he never showed weariness of bishop-baiting. Even the divinity which hedges the middle-class had no terror for him. He was all his life girding at the Nonconformists, and used to quote his own front-name as an instance of what one had to put up with. In criticism, he expressed himself with a haughty, careless, grace. He tells us that Addison's Attic elegance "gilds commonplace"; Jeremy Taylor is "a provincial Bossuet"; Burke is "Asiatic"; and Macaulay "a rhetorician." John Stuart Mill is logical, but knows nothing of style; and the Christian Trinity resembles three Lord Shaftesburys.

Arnold was inimitable. He combined with great poetic gifts, the mental and imaginative resources of a scholar, a philosopher, and a man of the world. His literary work was done in the scant leisure of a busy life, for he was an inspector under the Education Department. Yet he found time to write prose and verse of enduring value. The muddy streets of men's traffickings chafed him. "O, back to the fields with the dew on them, back to the birds with their singing," his heart cried, and he voiced his regrets in verse of calm pathos and wave-like melody. There are pages redolent of the breath of sweet English meadows or the scent from the pines of Switzerland. And rarely has Secularism found a tenderer interpreter or a sweeter singer.

MIMNERMUS.

The Origin of Life.

VI.

(Concluded from p. 249.)

SOME of the plant-growths illustrated are only one-third natural size, which, by measurement, would give them a height of nearly eighteen inches. There are also illustrations of shells, coral, and artificial cells, which, as is well known, are the basis of all organic life. We know that the cells of which our bodies are built, and of which all living things, including animals and plants, are composed, grow or increase by division. That is, when a cell reaches a certain size, it divides into two, each containing a nucleus; this is known as karyokinesis, and Leduc gives illustrations of this karyokinesis, or cell division, just as it takes place in the living cell. He has even produced foliage, or osmotic

leaves, which, he says: "also present great varieties both of appearance and of structure. The veins may be longitudinal, fan-shaped, or penniform. We have occasionally met with leaves having a lined or ruled surface, giving most beautiful diffraction colours. The usual structure, however, is vesicular or cellular" (p. 143). The accompanying illustration gives the corrugated appearance shown on the ordinary cabbage. And these structures are all produced by lifeless chemicals. For instance, small pellets composed of two parts copper sulphate and one part sugar, sown in a solution of gelatine, potassium ferrocyanide, and sodium chloride, will produce worm-like shapes. To cite Leduc again:—

Ferrous sulphate sown in a silicate solution gives rise to growths which are green in colour; climbing, or herbaceous, twining in spirals round the larger and more solid calcareous growths. With salts of manganese, the chloride, citrate or sulphate, the stages of evolution of the growth are distinguished not only by diversities of form, but also by modifications of colour. We may thus obtain terminal organs black or golden yellow in colour on a white stalk. In a similar way we may obtain fungi with a white stalk and a yellow cap, of which the lower surface is black.

Very beautiful growths may be obtained by sowing calcium chloride in a solution of potassium carbonate, with the addition of 2 per cent. of a saturated solution of tribasic potassium phosphate. This will give capsules with figured belts, vertical lines at regular intervals, or transverse stripes composed of projecting dots such as may be seen in many sea-urchins. These capsules are closed at the summit by a cap, forming an operculum, so that they sometimes appear as if formed of two valves. Now and again we may see the upper valve raised by the internal osmotic pressure, showing the gelatinous contents through the opening.¹

These growths, like those of plants, have their period of birth, growth, and decay. They grow old and die when the osmotic force in the interior has been expended. "It is even possible to rejuvenate an osmotic growth that has become degenerate through age," says Leduc, "A calcium osmotic growth which has thus become exhausted may be rejuvenated by transferring it to a concentrated solution of calcium chloride. It will absorb this, and thus be enabled to renew its evolution and growth when put back into the original mother liquor." (p. 141). Again, says the same scientist: "An osmotic growth may be wounded, and a wound delays its growth and development like a disease or an accident in a living being. A wound in an osmotic production may also become cicatrized and covered with a membrane, when the growth will recommence exactly as in a living being" (152). Nutrition is essential to life, for without nutrition life cannot exist. As Leduc points out, these growths exhibit all the phenomena of nutrition, he says: "Osmotic growths absorb material from the medium in which they grow, submit it to chemical metamorphosis, and eject the waste products of the reaction into the surrounding medium. An osmotic growth moreover exercises choice in the selection of the substances which are offered for its consumption, absorbing some greedily and entirely rejecting others. Thus, osmotic growths present all the phenomena of nutrition, the fundamental characteristic of life" (p. 150). Thus, all the most fundamental characteristics of life may be produced by non-living matter. As Leduc remarks in his concluding chapter: "There is in fact no sharp division, no precise limit where inanimate nature ends and life begins; the transition is gradual and insensible, for just as a living organism is made of the same substance as the mineral world, so life is a composite of the same physical and chemical phenomena that we find in the

rest of nature. All the supposed attributes of life are found also outside living organisms. Life is constituted by the association of physico-chemical phenomena, their harmonious grouping and succession. Harmony is a condition of life."¹

Thus, the amazing variety of form and colour in the animal and plant world are not caused by the fiat of an almighty being, but are due to the most stringent laws of necessity. The same force, declared Tyndall, that rounds a tear moulds a planet. The same laws hold good in the organic as in the inorganic world.

W. MANN.

Acid Drops.

The Bible is a Jew-book, and one would imagine that a Jew would be the best one to teach it—for religious purposes. At Koffiefontien (S.A.) a lot of Christians are of a different opinion, and they have just asked for the dismissal of a Jewish teacher because, being a Jewess, she cannot take the Bible lessons. What a lovely place the world would be if only Christians could do as they pleased!

A contemporary states that the Hyde Park War-shrine is "getting shabby." The same remark applies to these jerry-built erections all over the country. It is ironic to reflect that these sacred grottoes were once considered evidence of a marked revival of Christianity.

The poor, unhappy Bishop of London is sinking deeper and deeper into poverty. His £10,000 a year is not sufficient to make the two ends meet, and he is compelled to part with one of his two palatial residences. At the London Diocesan Conference, the Bishop spoke of his fearful indebtedness, after he had provided for his two houses, motors, ten servants, and the usual appurtenances of wealth. His position is, undoubtedly, serious. We suggest that his lordship imitates the Salvationists, and refuses to preach until the hat is full of money.

Sir Arthur Yapp, the Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association, wants a modest £8,000,000 to make a chain of clubs and huts to cover the country. To attract the yokels, the huts will be run on the usual lines, with refreshments, billiard-tables, games, and all the fun of the religious fair. A citizen may ask if Christ was crucified to provide provincial youths with cheap billiard-tables.

The Germans cannot be described as hard-shell "Atheists," for no sooner were they conquered by the Allies than they all straightway embraced Christianity. How complete the conversion is may be estimated by the paragraph in a London paper, headed "German Call to Prayer," and stating that Cardinal Hartmann has ordered prayers for a milder peace.

Providence is very careless of sacred buildings. St. Alban's Church, Golder's Green, has been entered by thieves twice in a month, and ecclesiastical ornaments stolen.

Sir Albert Spicer suggests raising a fund of £25,000 for the home missionary work of the Congregational Union. As one of a large firm of paper-makers, we imagine that Sir Albert might furnish the whole out of the profits made during the War.

Sir A. Conan Doyle's conversion to Spiritualism has had a very unforeseen result. At Southend-on-Sea five palmists and fortune-tellers were summoned, and their solicitor pleaded that much was to be said for the occult practitioners, citing Doyle and other well-known names. All the defendants were discharged, the Chief Constable withdrawing the summonses. On previous occasions, in similar cases, fines have been imposed.

¹ Leduc, *The Mechanism of Life*, p. 137-138.

¹ Leduc, *The Mechanism of Life*, p. 147.

According to a poster, the Central Hall, Westminster, had a most distinguished visitor recently, for General and Mrs. Booth advertised boldly: "Two Days with God." Reserved seats were only two shillings, which is cheap, considering that men have been searching for God for so many centuries.

According to the *Star*, Count Brockdorff Rantzau objected to Article 438 of the Peace Treaty on the grounds that it deprived Germany of its fields for missionary labours, and that means four-and-a-half millions of natives would lose their spiritual leaders. We have no doubt the natives would survive the absence of these missionaries. Indeed, the natives all over the world would be none the worse if all the whites left them alone. For the sober truth is that there is no white people in the world who are fit to be trusted with the control of a coloured race. It is a case of varying degrees of exploitation—generally under the cloak of religious conversion.

According to Prebendary Carlile, of the Church Army, "Jesus chummed with people, and even gave Judas a little sop." It is novel to hear Jesus described as "chumming" with anybody; but it must be remembered that he gave a large number of people "hell."

There is a Government department in heaven which records the fall of the sparrows and counts the hairs of our heads. It is a pity that all this care was not devoted to a worthier object. During last year, in England and Wales, there were 49,044 street accidents, of which 2,460 were fatal.

The *Daily Mail* says the failure of the Church is due to the fact that the clergy are out of touch with life, and adds, "the monastic seclusion of a theological college" has its share in this result. What beautiful nonsense is this? There is no "monastic seclusion" at Oxford, Cambridge, and other Protestant universities. And married persons should be as much in touch with life as other folk. The journalist was thinking of the petticoated priests of Rome. He had better try again.

Rev. F. C. Spurr says that the monarchy in this country will have a hard struggle to exist after the wars are over, but thinks that, if it does, the King should be given more freedom. He should be allowed to choose both his religion and his wife. By all means. But we fancy Mr. Spurr's liberality is largely on the surface. The king must be a member of the State Church—the religion goes with the post, and most monarchs agree with Henry of Navarre in thinking "Paris worth a mass." But Mr. Spurr is a Nonconformist, and would naturally like to see the king a member of his local tabernacle. Hence this liberality. Logically, Mr. Spurr should support the abolition of religious tests and qualifications everywhere. A sense of freedom is as good for a dust-man as for a king—more so, in fact, the former needs it more. But we have not observed Mr. Spurr protesting against the State patronage of religion when his own brand is getting a share.

Gipsy Smith, the Evangelist, says the soldiers in France never asked him what Church he belonged to, "they were all one in Christ." We don't suppose the soldiers told him *that*. He assumed it because they never talked about religion. Others might assume they never talked about it because they didn't bother about it. But, then, they would not be professional evangelists. That makes a world of difference.

"After thirty years' medical practice," says the Rushden medical officer, "I find that the nation has more C3 heads than C3 bodies." Perhaps this is one of the reasons why folk believe such yarns as those of Jonah and the whale, and the story of Noah's Ark.

In the Dowlais Revival, conducted by Pastor Jeffreys, it is said that there were 600 converts. Presumably, converted from one chapel to another.

To the awful list of "starving clergy" must be added the names of the late Rev. J. F. Sargent, formerly vicar of Salcombe, and the late Rev. E. H. Hopkins, of Addlestone, Surrey, who left estates to the value of £17,831 and £14,128 respectively.

The Church Army authorities are under no illusions as to the soporific value of the Christian superstition. In a large display advertisement in a daily paper, they urge that "in the present state of unrest, the preaching of the Kingdom of God is one of the most urgent needs." Wealthy employers of labour will note with satisfaction that if people can be assured that they will be angels in heaven, they will work for low wages on earth; and that if they will some day walk the golden streets of the new Jerusalem, they will submit to living in hovels for a short time here.

According to the *Telegraph*, at the time the Armistice was signed there was being made in America a new poison for use in the War, a single drop of which would penetrate to the blood and kill instantly. Ten aeroplanes would have carried enough to have destroyed all life in Berlin. Ten thousand tons was being made for the American Front. The Armistice prevented its being used against the Germans. Still, the inventor, Professor Lewis, need not despair. There will be a chance in the next war. For by that time everything used in this War will have become quite regular.

A boy was knocked down the other day by a motor-car in which was the Prince of Wales. All the papers flamed out into large headlines about the Prince's motor accident—the Prince in a motor smash, etc. The incorrigible snobbery of the thing is astounding. One can understand how people delighting in this kind of thing feel that they cannot get along without a God of some kind. We understand that nothing is to be done to the boy for getting in front of the car.

From the *Daily Telegraph* of May 23, we see the Manchester Police Superintendent is convinced that there must be an increase in the quantity of beer brewed. The present shortage has convinced people "that their liberties are being undermined." Glorious beer! Anything else may be suppressed, but leave us our beer. We can stand the loss of freedom of the press, of the liberty of the subject, of trial by jury; we can stand Government by administrative order, but *not* the loss of our beer. So the Government has increased the beer supply from twenty to 26,000,000 barrels.

How You Can Help.

ORDER your copy of the *Freethinker* regularly. Don't depend on a copy being left unsold.

Help us to break down the boycott by insisting on your copy being obtained for you. Reporting it out of print or other excuses for non-delivery are mainly attempts to prevent sales. Tell your newsagent to write us if he really has a difficulty in meeting your order.

Get your newsagent to take an extra copy for display. If you guarantee its sale you will seldom have to buy yourself. Display nearly always leads to sales.

Order an extra copy yourself and hand it to a friend. We owe more new readers to this method than to any other adopted.

Remember we are determined on making the *Freethinker* a great success, and we *must* have your help to do it.

If you have any suggestions as to getting this paper into more hands let us hear from you. We are always open to new ideas.

Remember, finally, that the *Freethinker* ought to have twenty times the circulation it has. *And it must get what is its due.*

The N. S. S. Conference.

ON Sunday next (June 8) the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society meets at Manchester. As President—and President-elect—I may be allowed to express the hope that there will be a good attendance of members and delegates. Manchester is central to the whole of the country, and all who can should make an effort to be present. Now is a critical time for all advanced movements, and I feel very strongly that the next three or four years may play a decisive part in determining the future of our cause. For this I am desirous of seeing every member taking an active part in the work. The Churches are making a desperate effort to regain lost ground, and we must be prepared to offer a vigorous resistance.

Personally, I am content—but not satisfied—with the progress made during the three years I have held the post of President. During that time the number of Branches of the N. S. S. has been trebled, and there has been a large increase in the membership of the Society. This progress should be more than maintained in the future. Naturally, I feel proud that this revival and growth of Freethought should have taken place during my occupancy of the Presidential Chair, and I thank most heartily all who have contributed to the result. It is not for me to say how much my own personal efforts have contributed to the revival, I am content to feel that I have done my share, and I can at least claim that my Presidency has not been fatal to the Society's welfare. Other Presidents might have done better—one never can tell—but I am certain none could have worked harder.

I may also be permitted to refer here to another matter which, while not technically connected with the office of President, is, I think, of some interest to the movement. In spite of the unprecedented difficulties in the way of printing and publishing, a number of new and useful propagandist books and pamphlets have been issued, and are playing their part in the country. The *Freethinker*, on the maintenance of which so much depends, has been kept going, where so many papers have gone under, and has now a larger circulation than it has had during my twenty-one years connection with it. Here, again, I must add that the loyalty and devotion of its readers has been beyond praise. They have helped to make what might have easily been a fatal struggle into an interesting contest of endurance. When I am able to write the story of these four years there will be some interesting and amusing passages to record. At present it is good to reflect that one is still alive. And now that the future is wearing a more assured look, one can go ahead with other things. I have been working on a plan for four years, and if I am able to work out my designs to the end, I think I can promise that the *Freethinker* will be in a far better and stronger position than it has ever occupied.

So all's well that ends well. The War is over, we are alive and vigorous, the Freethought movement is in a healthier condition than it has been for years, and everything points favourably for us. And I hope that members of the N. S. S. from all over the country will be present at Manchester on Whit-Sunday. It will be pleasant to see them, and prove their interest in one of the greatest causes to which one can give his, or her, services.

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

Words are like leaves; and where they most abound,
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.—Pope.

To Correspondents.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—H. Dawson, 5s. R. Wood, 5s.

M. G. LE QUESNE (Auckland) sends us a Postal Order for £1, "subscribed by a few friends, spontaneously, after coming to the conclusion that the *Freethinker* is doing the best propagandist work in the world." We appreciate the compliment, and as no instructions accompanied the letter, have placed the P.O. to the credit of the Sustentation Fund.

E. SHEPPAN.—We know nothing of the matter. Nothing has been sent from this office.

W. H. P.—Sorry we are unable to use the MSS. you send.

"THISTLE."—Certainly, if the Jews were compelled to be governed by the Bible they would soon see the absurdity of its teachings. But that seems true of all religions in a civilized country. People are prevented seeing the absurdity of their creeds by the law and commonsense protecting them from their effects.

A. L. MOREHEN.—Sorry we cannot enlighten you on the subject about which you write. Of course, statements concerning the very early history of the Sumerians must be largely conjectural. They differ in type and language from the Babylonians, and their origin is unknown. There are a number of texts extant in honour of Tammuz, who is affiliated to the Gospel Jesus.

W. H. J. HEPPWORTH (S.A.).—Pleased to hear from you. Religion is much the same wherever one meets it. Its capacity for mischief is only limited by its opportunities.

A. E. MADDOCK.—Received, with thanks. "The Science of the Ultra-Material" shall appear so soon as we have room. A scientific article with thought at the back of it is always acceptable to *Freethinker* readers.

W. BLACK.—Glad to have your appreciation. If Freethought is not worth fighting for, it is not worth having. We shall have something to say on the other matter in a week or so.

E. MORRIS.—Capital! It is quite evident that the British Museum authorities ought to exercise more care in the choice of their guides. If many challenged their statements on the spot as you did, it might have a salutary effect. We share your appreciation. We expect Mr. Mann will be writing more in the future.

ANTI-CHRISTIAN.—Pleased to know that the reading of the *Freethinker* brought you over to Freethought. That is its purpose, and we like your way of showing appreciation.

H. POOLE.—Certainly; if women only realized the enemy to her sex the Church has been, few of them would remain in the Church. We agree; the cant of the cutting enclosed is sickening.

R. MORRIS.—Have sent you on a copy, with full particulars.

A. J. MARRIOTT.—We were not aware that you had written on the matter, but we are glad to have your appreciation of what has been done. We have had the other question under consideration for some time.

L. J. ROE.—Thanks for suggestion. We are making use of it. If all our readers could induce their newspapers to display the *Freethinker*, a big jump in circulation would be the result.

M. L.—We do not always return manuscripts because they are not up to our standard of publication, and we did not return yours for that reason. Sometimes we do not care for the subject; sometimes it has already been recently dealt with; often because it would mean months before we could find room. At the moment we are loaded with unpublished MSS. We should say that the *Freethinker* never had so many able and practised pens at its service as it has at present. We could issue three numbers a week without extra trouble—save that of editing.

G. MAY.—We hope to issue a new edition of Mr. Cohen's *Determinism or Free-will*, revised and enlarged, by the autumn. There is a steady demand for the work.

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

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

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

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

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

The *Freethinker* for next week and the week following (June 8 and 15) will be special issues of 16 pp. We shall then revert to our present size for a little while longer. May we suggest to our friends that this will be a capital opportunity for introducing the paper to friends? They may rely upon us making these numbers as interesting as we can.

We hope all those who intend visiting the Manchester Conference have acquainted the local Secretary with what they require in the way of accommodation. As previously announced, there will be a luncheon provided at the Clarion Cafe between the morning and afternoon sittings, and probably a tea later. The Conference will sit at 10.30 and 2.30, at the Clarion Cafe, Market Street, and is open to members and delegates. In the evening there will be a public meeting in the Palladium, Peter Street, at 7. There will be a good array of speakers, and we hope that the Manchester friends will do their best to see that the hall is well filled. It will be an excellent opportunity for members to introduce new-comers to our Movement.

We publish this week a new booklet by Mr. Walter Mann, entitled *Science and the Soul*, with a chapter on "Infidel Death-Beds." There is no need, so far as readers of the *Freethinker* are concerned, to dwell on the quality of Mr. Mann's work. *Science and the Soul* is, as is usual with Mr. Mann, a piece of thorough and straightforward writing. The reader is left in no doubt as to Mr. Mann's meaning, full references are given for all statements, and the sections dealing with the death-beds of Paine, and Voltaire, and others, will be of great interest to our readers. The price of the booklet is 7d. net. Postage, 1½d.

As a result of Mr. Cohen's recent visit to Edinburgh, a Branch of the N. S. S. has been formed there. We wish the new Branch every success, and hope to see it well at work next autumn. Edinburgh, Glasgow, Falkirk, and Paisley are within easy railway distance of each other, and should be able to work well together. Scotland is ready for a strong forward movement.

We have lately received complaints from readers in North and North-West London that they have difficulty in getting their paper, and sometimes cannot get it at all. We shall be much obliged if all those who have been bothered in this way will be good enough to let us have particulars, including the name of the newsagent. We will then see what can be done. It is very annoying, and it is evident that there is on foot a deliberate attempt to obstruct the circulation of this paper. It is a compliment to the growing influence of the *Freethinker*; but all the same, we do not intend to quietly sit down under the boycott. We mean to defeat it, and we look with confidence to the help of our readers in doing so.

There is another kind of boycott, an endeavour to break down which should be made. For example, the *Daily Telegraph*, mentioning the other day the fight against the taxes "on news and knowledge," referred to the work of Gladstone, Cobden, Lytton, etc., but, of course, refrained from naming Collett, Holyoake, Bradlaugh, and other Freethinkers. If the writer knew no better than he wrote, so much the worse, but it is probable that he was merely acting on the rule of never mentioning militant Freethinkers if it can be avoided. If it is impossible to avoid mentioning an Atheist, he must be spoken of as an "Agnostic," or as being "rationalistic in view" (as though any human being could ever be anything else than rationalistic), or by some other term that will avoid definiteness, and save the writer being called a liar. We have even seen Bradlaugh (one of the most militant and uncompromising of Atheists) set down as a "Rationalist," as though he were in any doubt as to the nature or value of religion. Now, newspaper men write, in the main, as they are ordered, or as they may. And they will continue writing as they do until the Freethinking

public demand something better, and show that they mean to have it.

It has been decided to publish in book form the discussion between the Editor and Dr. Lyttelton which recently appeared in these columns. This is, of course, being done with the consent of both disputants. The discussion created considerable interest all over the country, and requests for its issue in book form were numerous. There will be a special Preface by each disputant. The book will be put in hand directly after the Whitsun holidays, and will be issued as soon as the uncertain conditions of the printing trade permit.

Will those of our readers who are interested, either in the circulation of this paper or in Freethought propaganda generally, and who live in the neighbourhood of Milnsbridge, Yorks, please put themselves in communication with Mrs. E. Taylor, of 164 Scar Lane, Milnsbridge, Yorks?

The *Edinburgh Evening News* notes the appearance of Mr. Cohen's *Woman and Christianity*, and pays a compliment to its style as well as to "the remarkable knowledge of historical facts displayed." We only wish that a knowledge of the facts was universal.

The Centenary of Walt Whitman (1819-1892).

It is too often the misfortune of your man of genius to be born a generation, or a couple of generations, too soon. Some of my readers will have noticed that the French poet, Baudelaire, whose *Fleurs du Mal* was published in 1857, two years before *Leaves of Grass*, has only just weathered the storms of academic misunderstanding and philistine abuse. It needed the intellectual and moral upheaval of a world-wide conflict to make us appreciate the spiritual force of his message. Whitman also had to wait a long time for the critical public to come even within sight of him; and now, after more than sixty years, I am not quite certain that we have an æsthetic standard of sufficient delicacy by which to measure accurately the originality and subtlety of his genius. The element of strangeness perplexes and irritates the average critical reader who, if he happens to be American and a democrat, ought, I suppose, to be sympathetic. Yet there is no doubt that he really feels more comfortable with Longfellow, Whittier, Bryant, and Lowell; while the average man and woman (not Whitman's "divine average," the "powerful, uneducated" person) prefer the banal rhythms and superfatted sentiment of the great Ella, "the Poetess of Passion, Pleasure, Progress, Peace, and Power."

Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, in the village of West Mills, on Long Island, some thirty miles from New York. His father was English, his mother half Dutch, half English. They came of good stock, and were comfortably placed in life. In the poet's early childhood they removed to Brooklyn, where the boy was sent to a national school. At the age of thirteen he went into a printing office, and learned to set up type. At seventeen he is roaming about the countryside and sea-coast teaching, and "boarding round" with the families of his pupils, after the manner of the Irish "hedge schoolmaster." He now begins to write sketches and short stories, which he sends to the New York papers, and is soon rubbing down the sharp angularities of ignorance and innocence. An apprenticeship to Bohemian journalism is by no means the worst sort of schooling in the humanities, if only the health be good and the heart in the right place. No doubt he had his wild hours of riot and excess. There is equally

no doubt that it was here that he strengthened the innate love of democratic *camaraderie*, which for him was the primal element in the ecstasy of living. This passionate affection for the individual man—for Tom, Dick, and Harry—was a stumbling to the lover of man in the abstract, whose affection for man in particular is like that of the friend of humanity for the needy knife-grinder. *Leaves of Grass* first saw light in 1855. Whitman set up the type himself, and the general appearance of the thin quarto was as unassuming as the poetry was flamboyant and assertive. In this form, and in later editions with added and even more provocative poems, the American democrats had something to cut their teeth on. Most of those who had the courage to try it found that they got more pain than profit. Their poetical gums were as yet too tender. In aristocratic and feudal England it found enthusiastic admirers, especially among those who approached it by way of Blake. W. M. Rossetti, Symonds, Dowden, James Thomson, and Swinburne (except when he recanted in deference to the opinions of his dry nurse, Watts-Dunton) were refreshingly sympathetic. It says much for the strength of Whitman's optimism that he still continued to believe in the wonderful future for the "powerful, uneducated man" who despised the songs written for him. In many ways the future of democracy may be wonderful, but I am not sanguine enough to believe that it will include a genuine love of poetry, which is peculiarly the art-form of aristocratic individualism.

The Civil War tested the moral fibre of Whitman as it tested that of Lincoln, and many another fine spirit. At the outbreak he volunteered as a nurse for the wounded. The awful sights continually before him burnt into his brain, and the continuous nervous exhaustion of one who was both by temperament and imagination intensely sympathetic was, no doubt, the cause of the paralysis which came upon him later. He worked night and day bringing comfort to many a poor soul on its way to dusty death, and winning back to life those on whom death was about to set his seal. War he hated as a beastly and foolish business at the best. The sight of wholesale butchery made impossible for him that ecstatic contemplation which comes easily enough to those who, like Tennyson and Mr. Kipling have only a vicarious acquaintance with battle, murder, and sudden death. If you want to see how this the humanest of democrats looked at war, if you want poetry, that embodies the deepest and tenderest emotion in words that have the tense vibration of a spirit in anguish, you must read *Drum Taps*. If you do not then see Whitman as I see him, the supreme democratic figure in English literature, the great emancipator, the proclaimer of a new life and a new art, I must advise you to let literature alone and give your time to mathematics.

So robust a thinker as Whitman could not well be anything but a Freethinker. His world-philosophy was a loosely held, optimistic pantheism, which was not far removed from the materialism of his time, save in its immovable faith in the absolute value of life. It is this emotional philosophy that led him to sing the "body electric" and its functions. The poems grouped under the title of "Children of Adam" gave, and still give, pain to those who had or have not "cleared their minds of cant." I can recall the virtuous disgust of a distinguished literary man of my acquaintance who, I had reason to know, found emotional refreshment in the pornographic futilities of Catulle Mendes. For Whitman, the procreative function was natural and clean,

and its association with the deepest emotions helped to keep his poetic treatment of it on the high plane of sustained ecstasy. Other bodily functions, I imagine, would be less tractable material. His theory of art was the outcome of his pantheism. It was the conscious return to nature of the highly civilized man. Whitman was in some respects a nineteenth century Rousseau, but his was not, as some critics would have us believe, a return to the primitive mental outlook of the child or the savage. Children and savages are the most conventional of creatures. They find pleasure only in simple and strong rhythm. What child could possibly get any æsthetic impressions from poetry in which the rhythm is made up of thought-units? In Whitman we have not the artless song of a child, but the fine flower of modern culture. A careful study of his workmanship will show that his poems and prose are built up, not thrown together. I do not know a finer piece of prose criticism than the preface to the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. It is worth reprinting in pamphlet form, as it did not appear, so far as I know, in the later editions, with the exception of W. M. Rossetti's volume of selections. It should be conned diligently by every amateur in the art of writing. If Whitman is a master of prose he is, at best, a supreme artist in poetry. To appreciate the wonderful scope of his genius, there is needed a mind emancipated from all cramping traditions. Such freedom in itself is a rare possession; it is infinitely rarer when it brings us a poem like *Tears*. I give myself the pleasure of quoting it:—

Tears! tears! tears!
In the night, in solitude, tears,
On the white shore dripping, dripping, sucked in by the sand,
Tears, not a star shining, all dark and desolate,
Moist tears from the eyes of a muffled head;
O who is that ghost? that form in the dark, with tears?
What shapeless lump is that, bent, crouched there on the sand?
Streaming eyes, sobbing tears, throes, choked in wild cries;
O storm, embodied, rising, careering with swift steps along the beach!
O wild and dismal night storm, with wind—O belching and desperate;
O shade so sedate and decorous by day, with calm countenance and regulated pace,
But away at night as you fly, none looking—O then the unloosened ocean
Of tears! tears! tears!

I leave the reader to compare the æsthetic impressions he gets from this poem and from Tennyson's "Tears, idle tears."

In another vein is this short poem, called "Reconciliation":—

Word over all beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

But the reader who has the root of the matter in him will find a hundred passages even lovelier than those I have chosen. And this, forsooth, is the poet of whom your average bloodless critic could say, "I cannot rank him with the truly great; his work is far too formless, inchoate." It reminds me of Clement Scott putting Ibsen in his place.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

The Philosophy of Secularism.

By G. W. FOOTE.

PRICE TWOPENCE. POSTAGE ½D.

Atheistic Morality.

The time to be happy is now; the place to be happy is here; the way to be happy is to make other people happy.

—Robert Ingersoll.

IN Christian circles it is commonly supposed that if we lose faith in a purely hypothetical person called God, and in an equally hypothetical immortality, we shall have no moral motive power left. I know just how these Christians feel, because I once felt that way myself. And now that I have become a Freethinker, many of my old friends think that I have "fallen from grace" and suffered moral degradation. So far is this from being true, I can say, without any boasting, that I am now a better man than I was when a Christian. I have a more honest, logical, and serious mind, a greater desire to do right, and a greater hatred of all injustice, than I had then.

Now, how is it that Freethought has made at least one man better than Christianity? The answer is that I ceased to be a Christian through hunting for the truth; and when I found the truth, it acted as a great inspirer and purifier. So long as I was a Christian, I was debarred from this beneficent influence; instead, I searched the Scriptures, and accepted what they taught, without any doubt or investigation; it was not necessary for me to develop my sense of right and wrong, because the Bible was above my conscience. It is not logically necessary that a Christian should be scrupulous in his conduct, because pardon for sins is a large plank in his creed. Character is nothing like so important in the Church as salvation. It is better there to be "saved" with the blood of a neighbour on your hands than to be "lost" with a spotless character.

I know, of course, that there are many Christians of good moral character; but they are not logical. They are good, not because of their creed, but *in spite* of it.

On the other hand, a Freethinker has to work out his own salvation with more or less diffidence and fear—not because of future torments, but because of the possible loss of his own self-respect. There is no one to help him but himself, and there is no one to suffer in his stead. He has no God and no Saviour and no Devil; no heaven and no hell; no infallible book and no authoritative dogma.

This seems to a Christian a very "blasphemous" and sacrilegious life to lead; but that is just where he is mistaken. It is a very true and logical kind of life, and may be a very lofty one. Christians think there must be some sort of faith in God and a future life to make this life sacred. And yet nearly all the drunkards, libertines, thieves, and murderers are believers in God, and many of them are in the Church. That proves religion does not *necessarily* make a man clean and true. Countless instances might be cited to show that a religious belief does not tend to make people good—that is, noble, generous, honest, and clean. I do not say that a mere *absence* of religious belief is any more calculated to make people good. But I do say that an earnest determination to ascertain and follow the truth will tend to make people good, whether they are religious or not.

I do not believe in God simply because it is impossible for me to have any beliefs upon a subject about which I know nothing, and about which nobody else knows anything in a way that enables him to explain it to others. There is nothing blasphemous or wicked about such non-belief in God. It arises from the fact that I wish to be truthful. I cannot honestly say that I believe in a God about whom I know absolutely nothing. But what of that? Is that any reason why I should defraud or injure my neighbours, or live a licentious life?

Christians say that I should not do these things because God will punish me if I do. But that is no worthy reason, and is not substantiated by facts. For fear of punishment will never inspire any man to be good; and moreover, to punish anybody is just what "God" never does. There are plenty of frauds about—political frauds, commercial frauds, and religious frauds—men who lie and steal by every known legal method. But God does not punish them. On the contrary, they are the very people who run God's Church and God's State, and who teach people to believe that Freethinkers are wicked. If it be argued that God punishes only in the next world, then I say that is something about which we know nothing, and I, at least, care nothing. It is enough for me to know that if I do anything to injure myself or my neighbour, I make myself unhappy by incurring perfectly natural unpleasant consequences.

My own experience is that when two courses of conduct are before me, I know that if I choose one I shall suffer loss of self-respect, or what is called remorse, but that if I choose the other I shall be at peace with myself, even though I lose money and friends. Money is desirable and friends are pleasant. But it is better to sacrifice both than to suffer remorse. Now, what has God, or heaven or hell, to do with this? Absolutely nothing. Why I am dissatisfied if I injure my neighbour I do not know. But I know that it is so, and my religious beliefs or non-beliefs have nothing to do with the case. I am simply seeking my own highest happiness, and this I will naturally do without reference to God or immortality. And the Atheist looks at death just as it is, so far as we know anything about it—the end of life. He does not expect to live after death, for all the facts known to science prove that he will not. He, therefore, maps out his life without any regard to alleged heavens or hells or any kind of spirit world. He goes through life seeking his own welfare, and knowing from history and his own experience that he can best promote his own welfare by promoting that of every other man, knowing that he cannot be as happy as he might be while anybody else is miserable. He knows that death is as natural as birth, and that if it puts an end to him as a person it cannot be an evil. He suffered nothing before he was. He will suffer nothing if he ceases to be.

Why should not such a man meet death with composure? Do not Christian millionaires, who have mixed the blood of their *employees* and the heart-fibre of the poor with their stolen luxuries, die like saints? And is death, so easy to such as these, a thing which a rational man, living worthily from day to day, need fear because he does not believe in fables, and will not hope for immortality against the evidence of his own senses and the conclusions of his own reason?

If anybody wants to know how to prepare for death I will tell him, and if any parson or priest knows a better way I have yet to hear it. Honestly and earnestly think out your own beliefs, then they will stay with you in storm or sunshine. Do nothing that you need be ashamed of *after* it is done. Live exactly as if this were the only life you will ever live. Live so that the last years of your life, be it this year or next, or any other, will be the best. Never do anything that injures your body, for good health is essential to happiness and good work. Do not wrong another, for your own welfare is inseparably bound up with the welfare of everybody else. Accustom yourself to bear your own burdens and sorrows, and to face the conclusions of your own reason. Keep yourself clean in body and mind. Honestly earn every penny you get. Make people respect and love you by being worthy of respect and love. Get over all fear of

gods, and ghosts, and Mrs. Grundy, that you may have inherited from your ignorant and superstitious ancestors. Be merciful in your judgment of the actions and opinions of others, well knowing that under similar conditions you would have done and thought as they do. Earnestly seek out the causes of the world's great poverty and misery, and do your best to remove them. If you live in this way you may not, indeed, die with hallelujahs on your tongue, but you may be sure that your life will be as pleasant as is possible under present conditions, and that the memory of you and your habits of life will be sweet and helpful to your own generation and those which will come after you are gone.

G. O. WARREN.

Correspondence.

FEUDALISM AND WOMAN.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In the *Freethinker* for last week, under the heading "Sugar Plums," it is mentioned that Mr. Underwood is of the opinion that the practice of "*Jus Prima Noctis*," mentioned in your *Woman and Christianity*, is mythical. On the contrary, it is even practised to-day in some parts of the world, and is a relic of past customs, when maternal law and group marriage was in vogue. Among some nations, the friends and relatives of the bridegroom or the wedding guests claim the right. In other cases, an official person represents the community and exercises the right.

W. T. WILLIAMS.

Obituary.

At Alness Churchyard, on the 17th inst., the remains of Mr. George Ogilvie, of Invergordon, Ross-shire, N.B., were laid to rest. Circumstances, over which those who desired a non-religious burial had no control, involved a Christian Service. Mr. Ogilvie was a man of unimpeachable integrity, of lofty moral courage, of a winsome disposition; generous with, and tolerant to, all human frailties, except when one pictured and peopled the unknown—then he was unsparing, combative, scathing. Though buried with Christian rites, it is one's life that counts, that tells, that impresses. Thus the influence of the deceased will be potent for many a day to come. As evidencing Mr. Ogilvie's views on life and death, one cannot do better than quote the subjoined, the final paragraph of his will:—

From sense and grief and pain I shall be free;
I shall not *feel*, because I shall not *be*.
The worst that can befall me, measured right,
Is a sound slumber and a long good night.

C. R. N.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF LAST EXECUTIVE MEETING PRIOR TO THE CONFERENCE.

The President, Mr. C. Cohen, in the chair. Also present: Messrs. Brandes, Eager, Gorniot, Kelf, Lazarnick, Leat, Moss, Neate, Quinton, Roger, Rosetti, Samuels, Shore, Wood, Miss Kough, Miss Pankhurst, Miss Pitcher, Mrs. Rolf, and the Secretary.

Minutes of previous meeting read and confirmed.

Annual Balance Sheet read and adopted.

New members admitted for Edinburgh, Liverpool, Manchester, North London, Swansea, and the Parent Society. Nineteen in all.

Permission was granted for the formation of a Branch in Edinburgh.

The Secretary reported the conclusion of three successful lectures at South Place Institute.

The draft of the Executive's Report was read and adopted.

Amendments to the resolutions on the Conference Agenda from various Branches were submitted, and instructions given as to correspondence.

E. M. VANCE, General Secretary.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice" if sent on postcard.

LONDON.

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "Rousseau and the New Social Order."

OUTDOOR.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 3.15, Mr. C. H. Kelf, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., A Lecture; 6, A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., A Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. Shaller, A Lecture.

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Mr. Shaller; 3.30, Messrs. Ratcliffe, Saphin, Kells, and Dales.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

LEEDS SECULAR SOCIETY (19 Lowerhead Row, Youngman's Rooms): Members meet every Sunday at 5.45 (afternoon). Lectures in Victoria Square at 7.15.

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