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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page.
<i>A Plea for Honesty.—The Editor</i>	337
<i>The God-Eating Sacrament.—J. T. Lloyd</i>	338
<i>A Century of Christian Charity.—Mimnermus</i>	340
<i>Book Chat.—G. U.</i>	340
<i>The Science of the Ultra-Material.—A. E. Maddock</i>	344
<i>John Lee and Providence.—W. Mann</i>	345
<i>Reverie and Dream.—Andrew Millar</i>	346
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letter to the Editor, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions.

A Plea for Honesty.

We were dealing recently with the case of those clergymen who, we said, had the wit to see but lacked the courage to do. Illustrations of the truth of what was then said are not hard to find. We have, for instance, just received from Mr. Fisher Unwin a copy of *Faith in Fetters*, by the Rev. T. R. R. Stebbing (price 6s.). Mr. Stebbing is a clergyman of the Church of England, although not, we should think, a practising one. His book is a very strong and justifiable impeachment of the Church as a stronghold of ignorance and prejudice, of mental evasion and insincerity. So far as Mr. Stebbing himself is concerned, one fails to see where he retains anything that can entitle him to any real claim to the name of Christian. He does not believe in the inspiration of the Bible, or in miracles, or in the virgin birth, or in the resurrection; indeed, he disbelieves in so much that one wonders why he should still believe in calling himself a Christian, or retain the title of clergyman. We agree with the author that it is time "for men of science and theologians to join hands in revolt against superstition masquerading as piety," only we are convinced that one half the alliance will not be of a very effective character. So long as one is attacking Christianity in the name of "true religion," the Church can afford to take these attacks quite calmly. One person here and there may be affected, but in the main they serve to encourage the conviction that "true Christianity" is something the world cannot afford to lose, and that provides precisely the rationalistic and utilitarian gloss which keeps Christianity alive among the unthinking. What Christianity has really to dread is the attack which pictures it as what it is, not as a valuable system of ethics which has in the course of time been overlaid with a number of superstitions, but as essentially a collection of primitive superstitions that have, under pressure of social life, become associated with rationalistic and utilitarian factors from which a separation is urgently needed in the interest of human progress. Here, as elsewhere, the vital need is for clear thinking and plain speaking, but human nature still fights against having forced on it that which it most needs.

* * *

What is True Christianity?

What do people mean when they talk about "true Christianity"? And is not "true Christianity" as great

a superstition as any they attack? It is not, evidently, historic Christianity. Mr. Stebbing is quite clear in his rejection of that. The doctrines of historic Christianity are "statements founded on fables and supported by false logic." And, indeed, the difficulty nowadays is to find educated men and women who will give their support to Christianity as the world has known it. But if we reject historic Christianity what have we left? And on behalf of what Christianity is anything claimed? Those who denounce historic Christianity are really saying that for hundreds of years the world has in the name of religion been taught a lie. It has been fed on delusion, cajoled by fraud. And not only has historic Christianity taught lies and practised fraud, but it has by every circumstance of cruelty, and slander, and persecution, striven to prevent the people from discovering the truth. Just now there is a terrific clamour over German duplicity, and German deception in having deceived the simple and trustful Britisher for nearly forty years. But assuming this to be case, and that the Britisher is the simple, trusting fool at the mercy of the German, or the Russian, or any foreign agitator that lands here, what some would have us believe, what is the record of Germany compared to that of the Christian Church? Germany has lied for forty years, and it cannot be trusted in the future. But the Church has lied, and tricked, and forged, and swindled, for more than forty-five generations, and what is Germany's record compared to that? Mind, it is not alone we Freethinkers who draw this picture of the Christian Church as the greatest lie of the ages. It is implied in the criticism passed upon the Church by men like Mr. Stebbing in the name of "true religion." If their criticism does not mean that then it is meaningless. The only Christianity the world has known is a mass of "fables supported by false logic." A more sweeping condemnation of Christianity was never made.

* * *

The First Salvation Army.

But we are forgetting "true Christianity." What does that mean? Does it mean the Christianity of the New Testament and of the primitive Christians? And if so, what kind of a picture do we get here? Is the demonism of the New Testament less of a lie than the demonism of the Mediæval Church? Are the miracles of the Gospels less incredible than those which Mr. Stebbing rejects? Is the resurrection of dead men less impossible now than it was two thousand years ago? And if we eliminate these from the New Testament, and from the beliefs of the primitive Christians, what have we left to bother about? The picture of Jesus as a Jerusalem prototype of Karl Marx, and of the early Christians as a community burning with the verbal exaltation of a modern ethical society, will not do. They were ignorant, they were superstitious, credulous to an almost unbelievable degree, and the last thing in the world they thought about or cared about was social salvation. Their trust was in the supernatural, their concern was for their souls, their hope in the next world.

The historic truth is the exact reverse of the picture drawn for us by the liberalizing Christian. We have not a society of high thinking, liberal minded, socially inclined men and women; what we have is a body of narrow-minded fanatics, obsessed with the belief in the approaching end of the world, an invincible belief in magic and the supernatural, quarrelling with each other with a savagery that astonished the tolerant Roman world, and, then, after long centuries, this welter of primitive superstition and ferocity being toned down as a consequence of the growth of knowledge and of the secularizing of life. Ethically and socially we have a "purer Christianity" in the Churches to-day than we have ever had. And that is only another way of saying that we have less genuine Christianity than we have ever had.

* * *

An Intolerable Position.

These things are writ plain to all who care to read them. And it is straining credulity too far to expect us to believe that there are not many clergymen who both read and understand. It would be foolish of us to say of the thousands of clergymen in this country that they are all fools, and it would be equally foolish to assert that they are all philosophers. They are not all knaves, but neither are they all honest men. The Freethinker has no need to claim that the clergy are, as a body, worse than any other class; his protest is against the claim that they are better. Any bunch of them that one selected would probably present the same variations of sense and folly, of honesty and dishonesty, that one finds among other men. They select their calling from the same mixed motives that others select theirs, and, having selected it, they are governed by the same class ethic and fight for the welfare of their order as do other classes. It is the operation of these motives which are responsible for the clergy acting as they do. They must know, many of them, that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity have been riddled through and through by modern knowledge. Yet they continue to preach the old things, they use the old language, they retain their old positions. And in doing so they cannot avoid misleading those who look to them for guidance. The position, we have good reasons for saying, is almost intolerable to many. Evasions and excuses and reservations make the position bearable to some; but these apologies ring hollow. There is only one way in which a clergyman who sees the truth can act with credit to himself and with honesty to those who look to him for leadership, and that is by casting all reserve on one side, and by throwing off even the name of a creed that has ceased to carry conviction.

What is Wanted.

* * *

In this respect the clergy may not, perhaps, be much worse than other people, but they are certainly not any better. Perhaps, also, the plain and brutal truth is that the average man, whether cleric or lay, exists habitually in a state of mental haziness and moral "funk." Normally without any very strong desire to discover whether his beliefs are well based or not, he quite usually lacks the courage to express a belief that is pronounced "taboo" by general opinion. If he has ceased to believe in a God of an intelligible character, instead of saying so, he expresses a belief in a kind-of-a-sort-of-a-something somewhere or other. If he does not believe in even this apotheosis of vacuity, instead of calling himself an Atheist, he confesses to being of an "Agnostic" turn of mind, leaving it to the religious world to read some sort of a religious tinge into it. So, again, when he is driven to realize that Christianity is a bundle of absurdities that can no longer be held, the fact must be camouflaged by a confession of faith in some equally

mythical New Testament teacher of profound moral importance. And the plain, unadulterated name for this frame of mind is just fear. Mr. Stebbing says that "primitive beliefs, having by whatever means acquired a reputation as being sacred, retain a popular hold long after their futility has been recognized by the educated." This may be so; but we are certain that a large share of the responsibility for this rests with the educated classes. Suppose all the educated people in Britain who do not believe in Christianity were to say so. For how long would Christianity retain a hold on the people of less education? Not for long. What is needed is an example of plain, honest speech set by these same "educated" people who have given up belief in the orthodox faith. Then we should soon see things. It is not altogether a question of education. It is partly a question of moral courage. And a good example set by those who regard themselves as the leaders of the people could not but obtain a wide and beneficial response.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The God-Eating Sacrament.

III.

TRANSUBSTANTIATION.

A CRITICAL examination of the Pauline doctrine of the Lord's Supper proves its irrationality beyond the possibility of a doubt. In 1 Cor. x. 16 we find the following eye-opening definition: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?" The Greek word for "communion" is *koinonia*, which comes from a verb meaning *to have in common, to divide, to share*; and Professor Preserved Smith, in an excellent article in the *Monist* for May, 1918, renders the verse thus: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing of the body of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a sharing of the body of Christ?" Taking this definition in conjunction with the words ascribed to Jesus in 1 Cor. xi. 23-25, we are in possession, germinally, of the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist. Of the bread, Jesus is made to say, "This is my body, which is (broken) for you," and of the wine, "This is the new covenant in my blood." Protestants maintain that the bread and wine are but *symbols* of the body and blood of Christ; but Paul states definitely that they *are* the body and blood of Christ. He represents Jesus as saying, not "This represents, symbolizes, or stands for," but unequivocally, "This *is* my body," and "This *is* the new covenant in my blood." The Protestants are fully justified in basing their objection to such teaching upon its unreasonableness and utter impossibility; but they overlook the undeniable fact that the author of First Corinthians believed it to be literally true. Paul would have been the first to admit that in the natural order bread and wine could not become the body and blood of Christ; but then he was the champion of a supernatural order, and what he saw on the Lord's Table was a mighty miracle. Even in *Hymns Ancient and Modern* the same miracle is sung:—

Draw nigh and take the Body of the Lord
And drink the holy Blood for you outpoured.
Saved by that Body and that holy Blood,
With souls refreshed we render thanks to God.

To Dryden, as to Paul, Nature was set at defiance, or transcended, on the Lord's Table, and reason appeared in bondage to belief.

Can I my reason to my faith compel,
And shall my sight and touch and taste rebel?
Superior faculties are set aside:
Shall their subservient organs be my guide?

John Earl Russell, in number viii. of his *Essays on the History of the Christian Religion*, erroneously fathers the doctrine of Transubstantiation on Paschasius Radbert, one of the most prominent theologians of the ninth century; but his lordship's summary of Radbert's views on the Lord's Supper is accurate:—

According to this monk, the elements ceased entirely to be what they still seemed to be to the outward senses. The bread and wine, it was affirmed, were annihilated, being changed into the body and blood of the Redeemer. The bread and wine used in the Sacrament, it is true, were to the researches of chemical science not different from any other bread and wine placed on a table for food or refreshment, but in the minds of Christians, the real body and blood of Christ (p. 110).

Earl Russell is entirely mistaken, however, when he says that "the Church of England has justly declared that Transubstantiation in the Supper of the Lord cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions." As a matter of fact, though the first to employ the term "Transubstantiation" was Hildebert, Archbishop of Tours, at the beginning of the twelfth century, the idea can be traced back to the Apostle Paul, and Paul claimed to have received it by revelation of Jesus Christ. "At bottom," from the first, as Harnack admits, "the faith required was blind faith"; and, of course, "miracle is the favourite child of faith," and after the miracles of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, the miracle of Transubstantiation is not so unbelievable. At the end of the third century Transubstantiation was firmly held by the Church, for Porphyry, who was opposed to the eating of flesh and the drinking of blood in general, denounced it in the following violent terms:—

Is it not, then, bestial and absurd, surpassing all absurdity and bestial coarseness, for a man to eat human flesh and drink the blood of his fellow tribesman or relative, and thereby win life eternal? Why, tell me what greater coarseness could you introduce into life, if you practise that habit? What further crime will you start, more accursed than this loathsome profligacy? The ear cannot bear to hear it mentioned—and by "it," I am far from meaning the action itself, I mean the very name of this strange, utterly unheard-of offence.

It is true that there always were a very few who vigorously opposed and rejected this doctrine, holding the view that the Lord's Supper was a memorial or commemorative rite merely; and it is also true that up to the eighth century no definite theory or dogma had been framed by any Council of the Church. But the majority of the divines loyally adhered to the Pauline position. Even Augustine, who is often claimed by the Protestants as a supporter of the symbolical theory, was in reality a transubstantiator, for he declares that genuine members of the Catholic Church "are truly said to eat the body and drink the blood of Christ." "He that dwelleth not in Christ, and in whom Christ dwelleth not, neither eateth his flesh nor drinketh his blood." At the second Council of Nicæa, 787, it was decreed that "the elements in the Lord's Supper are the very body and blood of Christ, not figures." This was reaffirmed at the fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and at the Council of Trent in 1551.

During the Protestant Reformation, Transubstantiation was hotly repudiated. The Reformers could not agree as to the exact sense in which Christ is present in Eucharist, but they were all of one mind in their opposition to the Catholic view. Luther taught that the bread and wine are not changed in their substance when the words of consecration are spoken by the priest. In England, under Henry VIII., the Protestants attacked the Sacrament of the Mass with the utmost scurrility and bitterness. In ballads and mystery plays

the doctrine of Transubstantiation was held up to ridicule, and we read of a certain lawyer who had the audacity to raise a dog in his hands when the priest elevated the Host. This greatly irritated the king, who, in belief, remained a Catholic almost to the end, and the Act of the Six Articles was passed, the object of which was to "abolish diversity of opinions in religion." The first article was as follows:—

That in the blessed Sacrament of the altar, by the strength and efficacy of Christ's mighty word, it being spoken by the priest, was present really under the form of bread and wine, the natural body and blood of Jesus Christ, and that after consecration there remained no substance of bread and wine, nor any other, but the substance of Christ.

Whoever denied this Article was to be burnt at the stake, and for a time the cruellest persecution was practised.

It may be objected that the Protestant doctrine of the Eucharist was more reasonable than the Catholic, which is doubtless true; but, after all, of what advantage is it to attempt to make an essentially supernatural doctrine reasonable? In point of fact, there was no real gain in endeavouring to present a fundamentally absurd dogma in a somewhat less ludicrous light. Besides, whilst the Reformers were agreed in combating Transubstantiation, wide differences existed among them in their estimate of the significance of what was called the Real Presence, Luther, for example, introducing the tenet of Consubstantiation.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the stupidity of the Catholic dogma of Transubstantiation. In the twelfth century the custom of admitting children to the Lord's Table was abolished, for fear the bread and wine, being converted into the body and blood of Christ, might be dropped in the distribution of them. Another custom which had been gradually growing up in the Church now became confirmed, namely, that of withholding the wine from the laity. Alexander of Hales, an Englishman and a noted Schoolman, defended this custom, and the ground on which the defence was based was the preposterous doctrine of concomitance, which was invented by that incomparable intellectual acrobat, Thomas Aquinas. By concomitance was meant the presence of the complete Christ—body and blood—in each element on the Table, so that to communicate in one kind only was regarded as sufficient. When laymen complained of the refusal of the cup to them, they were assured that they lost nothing inasmuch as after consecration the bread was the blood as well as the body of Christ. The reader is doubtless familiar with Swift's scathing satire on this silly theory in his *Tale of a Tub*. Peter is represented as singing the praises of a brown loaf in the following fashion:—

"Bread," says he, "dear brothers, is the staff of life; in which bread is contained, *inclusive*, the quintessence of beef, mutton, veal, venison, partridge, plum-pudding, and custard; and, to render all complete, there is intermingled a due quantity of water, whose crudities are also corrected by yeast or barm, through which means it becomes a wholesome fermented liquor, diffused through the mass of the bread." Upon the strength of these conclusions, next day at dinner, was the brown loaf served up in all the formality of a city feast. "Come, brothers," said Peter, "fall to, and spare not, here is excellent mutton; or hold, now my hand is in, I will help you." At which word, in much ceremony, with fork and knife he carves out two good slices of a loaf, and presents each on a plate to his brothers.

Of course, the brothers were puzzled and disappointed at getting bread instead of the promised mutton, but the only explanation afforded them was this:—

"Look ye, gentlemen," cries Peter in a rage, "to convince you what a couple of blind, positive, ignorant,

wilful puppies you are, I will use but this plain argument: by G——, it is true, good, natural mutton as any in Leadenhall Market, and G—— confound you both eternally if you offer to believe otherwise."

J. T. LLOYD.

A Century of Christian Charity.

In the name of universal benevolence Christians have hated their fellow men.—*Ingersoll*.

If Christians would teach infidels to be just to Christianity, they should themselves be just to infidelity.—*John Stuart Mill*.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY died so long ago that one would have thought the facts concerning his life were well known to every lover of literature. Yet Christians are still very reluctant to admit Shelley's Freethought. Being pious themselves, they pretend that a man of genius cannot be a Freethinker; and so they distort facts, and strain their faculties to disprove what Shelley himself asserted all through his life.

Some time ago a leading London newspaper thus referred to Shelley:—

Courageously and Christianly he held to his faith in the perfectibility of man. He did not believe in it, it is true, according to the Christian method. But to believe in it at all is a sort of Christianity.

It is enough to break a critic's heart. The idea of the perfectibility of human nature was the very mainspring of the great French Revolution, and every school-boy should know that the leaders of that movement were, almost without exception, militant Freethinkers. Of the new world foreshadowed by these pioneers, Shelley is the poet. If this were an isolated example of gross misrepresentation, it would be unworthy of note; but in the case of Shelley, orthodox writers have always found opportunities of imposing upon the innocence of ordinary folk.

Professor Henry Morley, whose pen was at work in the interests of the Church for so many years, was a typical sinner in this respect. In his introduction to a popular edition of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, he was unpardonable. This is the way the Christian professor defamed the dead Freethinker: "the refuge he (Shelley) seeks from the wrongs of life is—though he did not know it—at the feet of Christ."

Professor Morley was not alone in this crusade of defamation. Mr. Edmund Gosse, in his address delivered at the Shelley Centenary celebration, since reprinted, said that the poet "rashly styled himself an Atheist, forgetful of the fact that, whatever name he might call himself, he, more than any other poet of the age, saw God in everything." A more recent writer, Mr. Hector Macpherson, in his book, *A Century of Intellectual Development*, debases equally the moral currency. He declares that "Shelley was bent upon Christianizing politics, and pleading for a sociology which would bring the world nearer the ideal of the Sermon on the Mount."

Even so great a poet as Robert Browning, who had hailed Shelley as "Sun-treader," was so biased by his own religion, he asserted that Shelley, had he lived, "would have finally ranged himself with the Christians." Richard Hutton, the famous critic of the *Spectator*, said that Shelley "learned even to believe in God as he drew near the end." The crusade of misrepresentation is still carried on. In a present-day publication, Dent's *Dictionary of English Literature*, which is supposed to be a work of reference, it is remarked: "The charge of Atheism rests chiefly on *Mab*, the work of a boy, printed by him for private circulation, and to some extent repudiated as personal opinion." Generations of Christian writers, from the days of Gilfillan to those of our own time, have wilfully refused to tell the truth about

Shelley, though the poet's Freethought is "four square to all the winds that blow."

Shelley, be it remembered, was expelled from Oxford University for his Atheism, and, years afterwards, was declared by Lord Chancellor Eldon to be unfit to be the custodian of his own children on account of his heterodoxy. The poet's Atheism was never disputed during his unpopular days, when men and women were fined and imprisoned for selling *Queen Mab*, which figured in many a trial for blasphemy. But when it was discovered that the star of a great poet had arisen, Shelley was falsely and impudently dubbed a Christian.

Other Christians adopt the easier method of simply throwing mud at Shelley. When the news of his death reached England, the *Gentleman's Magazine* said that the dead poet was "a fitter subject for a penitentiary dying speech than a lauding elegy; for the muse of the rope rather than of the cypress." Not long before, another Christian met Shelley in the post-office at Pisa, called him a "damned Atheist," and knocked him down. Only a few days ago, one of the most widely read literary periodicals dubbed Shelley a libertine and a brute. So the game has gone on for a century. Thus Orthodox writers cast libellous dust in the eyes of the unthinking public, and incapacitate them from seeing the facts of the case. It is done to discredit the Cause to which Shelley dedicated his life.

Shelley's crime was that he proclaimed himself an Atheist. He rejoiced in the name. "I took up the word," he said, "as a knight takes up a gauntlet in defiance of injustice." All his life he was fighting the "Galilean serpent." A hundred years ago it was a very brave action. One of the results that flowed from his action was, for a century, his name was a hiss and a bye-word in the mouths of the orthodox. Christian charity is a fearful and wonderful thing. In the ages of faith the disciples of the religion of love used scaffolds, stakes, and torture-chambers, now they rely on lies, libels, and misrepresentations.

MIMNERMUS.

Book Chat.

I WONDER how many of my readers know anything of a curious eighteenth century novel, *The Life of John Bunclie, Esq.*, in two volumes (vol. i., 1756; vol. ii., 1766). There was also an edition in four duodecimo volumes, 1770. These seem to have satisfied the amateurs of the outlandish and bizarre at the time; but some fifty years later there was a revival of interest in the waifs and strays of literature. *The Spirit of Bunclie* (1823) was enough for those who wanted the surprising adventures of the gentleman without his amazingly learned and unorthodox disquisitions; and for those who had a liking for eccentricity and unconscious humour, there was a reprint in two volumes (1825). These appear to have satiated the literary appetite, and it was not until 1904 that we had a chance of buying a copy without searching the second-hand booksellers' for it. An edition in one volume was published by Routledge in that year. It was edited by a specialist in out-of-the-way fiction, Mr. E. A. Baker.

I am reminded of *John Bunclie* by a reprint of a paper read by Mr. J. Cumings Walters before the members of the Manchester Literary Club, October, 1918. Mr. Walters has amused his leisure by analysing and annotating the two volumes. His pamphlet is therefore a real contribution to the study of a curious example of eighteenth century fiction. The writer was a Thomas Amory (1691-1788), "a man with a mania, an insatiable itch for scribbling, and without a grain of humour in his composition. He was a bookworm and a recluse, a fanatic and something of a fool;.....a self-absorbed creature, with quaint out-of-the-world manners, pursuing his chosen path obstinately, and doubtless convinced that his irresistible arguments would convert mankind to Unitarianism and multi-marriages simultaneously." The surprising

adventures of our hero are connected with his search for a wife, who must be young, beautiful, wealthy, and learned, and a sound Monotheist. His courtship of the ladies who unite their lives with his are often screamingly funny. Its self-contained business-like air may have been designed as a contrast to the sentimental romances of the period. In that case we should be obliged to revise our notion of Amory's lack of humour. He marries, and is providentially relieved at short intervals of the learned sharers of his domestic hearth. But the adventures are not the soul of the book. *The Spirit of Bunce*, the selection I mentioned above, was, however, really the more ponderous part of that collection. It is the other side of his talent that attracted men like Hazlitt, Lamb, and Leigh Hunt. He was obviously a man of ideas; he had a thousand things he wanted to say on every subject under the sun, from trigonometry to Phallicism, from ornithology to circumcision, and he says them with the energy of a man endowed with a naturally good brain. A passage in his preface (printed only in the first edition) shows the company he had kept. "The dull, the visionary, the hard-honest man, and the poor liver are people I have had no connection with, but have always kept company with the polite, the generous, the lively, the rational, and the brightest of free thinkers of this age."

Mr. Walters, I think, exaggerates the realism of Amory's description of certain phases of life. There is nothing in the portrait of his Irish friend Gollapsey to recall the filth of Rabelais. Indeed, the passage is reprinted by Mr. Baker without a single omission. It is simply the plain language of the English Bible, of Shakespeare, and of Fielding. It is the expression of his "gusto," his aptitude for strong sensations and emotions. Let me remind Mr. Walters of what another good reader, Mr. Saintsbury, has said of his favourite:—

It is his business to enjoy; and he appears to enjoy everything, the pears and the antiquarian inquiries, the theological discussions and the beautiful young ladies who engage in them, the hairbreadth escapes [and the lovely prospects, nay, even the company of a scoundrel with some character like Curll. Hazlitt was perfectly right in selecting the passage describing Bunce's visit with his friends, the Dublin "bloods" (some of them, apparently, greater scoundrels than Curll himself) to an alehouse on the seashore. This display of mood is one of the most remarkable things of the kind, and the wonder of it is not lessened when we remember that it was published, if not written, by a man of nearly seventy. That there is practically nothing—either real or factitious—of the sense of regret for the past is less surprising than that the gusto is itself not factitious in the least—that it is perfectly fresh, spontaneous, and, as it were, the utterance of a full-blooded undergraduate. In none of the four great contemporary novelists is there this absolute spontaneity—not even in Fielding; and Amory ought to have credit for it.

A friend of mine, whose happy genius has brought him admirers in the most out-of-the-way places, has sent me a curious booklet. It is written by a Scotsman who has forsaken his native town of Ayr for Govesville, West Virginia. Mr. C. S. Musgrave has entitled this "first heir of his invention" *Pebbles and Fancies*. I take it that "pansies" is just a fanciful name for the delicately coloured and sweet-scented thoughts, the emotions and sensations of a nature tremblingly responsive to the appeal of all things that are lovely and of good report. But while Mr. Musgrave has the poet's love of natural beauty, it would seem that this side of his talent is subordinated to a passion for moral beauty and strength expressed in sincere hero-worship. His heroes are all worthy of his reverence. But a critical discord here and there would have relieved and strengthened the eulogistic harmony. George Elliot is not, as her more stupid admirers would have us believe, a Shakespeare in petticoats. She is a little below Jane Austin and Charlotte Bronte, and far below Thackeray, Dickens, and Meredith. Her verse is the sort of stuff our ethical friends would sing to mid-Victorian hymn tunes. She belongs to the choir invisible—I trust inaudible too—that includes Eliza Cook, Adelaide Proctor, and others of that kind. Again, Mr. Musgrave finds no malice in her. I advise him to read the malevolent attack on Lecky, and to notice the unpleasantly acrid quality of her other critical essays.

Shelley, Burns, Byron, Keats, Paine, Jefferson, Renan, Voltaire, are heroes for our West Virginian Scot, as indeed, they are for most of us—with certain reservations. For the poets he does but record his admiration. That is all very well, but what is more important is to see them from a new angle of vision. Mr. Musgrave could do much better if he tried hard, especially if he accustomed himself to reading only the greatest poetry. You cannot keep your sense of values if you debauch your ears with the barrel-organ rhythms of George Eliot and the insufferable Mrs. Wheeler Willcox. Unfortunately, it is not Keats, and Shelley, and Burns, that Mr. Musgrave imitates in his original verse, but the English and Yankee poetasters.

Mr. Musgrave is more interesting on Voltaire. He was the great dominating figure in French literature in the eighteenth century, and is almost as much alive to-day as then. Yet I am surprised to find our Scottish friend endorsing Voltaire's unintelligent criticism of Atheism, a philosophical position he did not even to try to understand. It frightened him because he held, like many other people of his time, that a belief in some sort of a God was a necessary factor in the moral drilling of society. Voltaire was an energetic and energizing moral force rather than an original thinker. Mr. Musgrave seems to think that it was Voltaire who conceived the idea of the *Encyclopedie*. It owed both its conception and final success to Diderot.

So much for the "pansies"; the "pebbles" are hard lumps of controversial matter which our Yankee David hurls at the Goliaths of conventionality and unreason. They are amusingly violent and voluble, but the style is a little too artfully alliterative to fit in with our sober English taste. Mr. Musgrave must give the cold shoulder to Yankee journalism, and go back to Paine and Cobbett. G. U.

Acid Drops.

The Kaiser is to be tried in London for his responsibility in bringing about the War. That is quite good in principle, and we should like to see it put into operation with regard to all wars, whether in relation to wars with a small or a large people. But we are rather afraid that the principle will not be applied to the small nations, or to less "civilized" peoples. We do not see why all responsible for the War should not be tried—or, at least, judged. For instance, the Proclamation for thanksgiving in the Churches says that "it has pleased Almighty God to bring to a close" the War. Now, if words mean anything, this means that he *could* have brought it to an end earlier. But he did not. And for anyone to continue a war of this kind a day longer than was necessary, was a crime. Mr. Asquith said so; Mr. Lloyd George said so; plenty of others said so. And now we have it officially said God brought it to an end. Its ending or continuance rested with him. And we feel that plenty were asking on Sunday in their prayers, "Father, what did you do in the Great War?"

The French Government has officially declared that there will be no resumption of official relations with the Vatican. That is as it should be. The Government has no relation with the followers of the Pope, its relations are only with its own citizens. Whether these citizens are Catholic, or Protestant, or Atheist, is a matter that concerns them alone. That is a plain and straightforward policy, and in these matters it is always the straight policy that pays best.

In the House of Commons, on July 3, Mr. Lloyd George said that one way for the Allies to deal with Germany would be to say, "Go, sin no more"; but, he added, "to have done that would have been to put a premium on militarism. I do not think it is worth arguing about." We are not disagreeing with the Premier on this; only we beg to point out that the authority for the practice which would set a premium on villainy is Jesus Christ. And we wonder what Mr. George's Nonconformist friends will think of the official assurance that the method of Jesus Christ sets a premium on rascality,

and is not worth arguing about? Sooner or later, Free-thought criticism is justified.

One of the lessons read at the thanksgiving service on Sunday included "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth," etc. And the people who spake thus were in nowise alarmed, for they bethought themselves that the Government had likewise exhorted them to invest their money in War stock at 5 per cent., and these preachers had also exhorted them in the same manner. So they took heart as they thought of their annual dividend, and wondered within themselves if they would win one of the yearly drawings. But these people were not hypocrites. They were good Christians, and acting after the manner thereof.

According to a Government White Paper just issued at Breslau, British officers found infants "from three weeks to three years sucking spinach soup from a bottle instead of milk." We hope that, after this, Father Vaughan and the Bishop of London are quite satisfied as to the moral uplift of the War, and also that Mr. Lloyd George is still convinced that the Allies are carrying out the decrees of Providence. The White Paper points out that rich people can still get food. As usual, it is the poor devils at the bottom who suffer most. But babies forced to feed on vegetable soup! We hope the clergy will think of this while returning thanks to God.

There is a new Spiritualist Society formed, and it has for its President no less a person than the late W. T. Stead. In the ordinary way, the fact of a man being dead would be a drawback, but it is not so here. Moreover, Mr. Stead has been given power to appoint a "Spiritual Committee." A committee of spooks presided over by a spook! That is certainly something unique. We have heard it said that the ideal committee is one of three persons, where two go to sleep; but a committee where they are all dead is an advance on that. The committee announces its intention of raising a fund of £50,000. We suggest that donations should be given in the form of the ghosts of Treasury notes.

"I am sending you," writes a correspondent of the *Amateur Gardener*, "a small buttercup that came up in my garden.....the seedling pod is very curious.....one more wonderful work of our good God." Whereupon the editor replied that the plant is common, very poisonous, and often kills sheep and cattle. So much for the work of "our good God"!

Rev. G. H. S. Matthews, Vicar of St. Peter's, Thanet, refused to offer up prayers for rain. His refusal has brought him much criticism, and to this the Rev. gentleman replies as follows. We quote from the *Weekly Dispatch* of July 6:—

"I doubt," he says, "whether anyone really consistently believes that we are meant to regulate the whole course of the weather by prayer. If they do, we ought, of course, to form a standing committee of farmers and agricultural experts to decide upon the weather we need day by day and week by week, so that the clergy may know exactly what to ask for.

"I remember a drought in Australia. We all prayed constantly for rain. The bishop appointed special days of prayer. Men who never went to church at other times came then on the off-chance that God might answer their prayers. But for all that the drought lasted five years

"Surely no educated person really believes that the clergy of the Church of England can induce God to send rain, or that He withholds it until they use a form of prayer for that object?"

That is good "horse sense," and we congratulate Mr. Matthews on his reply. But if prayers do not induce God to do something, perhaps Mr. Matthews will inform us what is the use of praying at all? And if God does not send the rain, will he be good enough to tell us what on earth, or in heaven, he really does?

The Rev. Frederick Charles Oliver, a Presbyterian minister, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment at the Old Bailey for gross impropriety. The boasted restraints of religion are not very marked in this instance.

At the 250th anniversary at St. Mary's Baptist Church, Norwich, the Bishop of the diocese occupied the pulpit. Such a thing had never happened before. It had taken all the 250 years for these two brands of Christians to get acquainted with each other.

Religious folk often lack a sense of humour. At Southend-on-Sea an itinerant evangelist, bearing a huge placard with the words: "Prepare to meet thy God," posted himself outside a sausage-shop, much to the amusement of passers-by.

Bishop Stevens has been cleansing his bosom of much perilous stuff concerning the Church's part in the Great War. Papa does not suggest that he did much himself, but he blushes with pride when he remembers that "at the great call of God, at once, 4,000 clergy came forward," whilst the rest of their ministerial brethren screwed up their courage and comforted "the self-denying, tender-hearted sisters," who were left behind. Yet papa paints only a partial portrait of these heroes. Notwithstanding the "great call of God," the brave clergy were exempted from military service, and they only consented to guard the communion port at the price of officers' salaries. Yet at the Universities these same clergymen were not innocent of athletics and physical training. "Oh, the sorry trade!"

Miss Marie Corelli, who continues to take herself quite seriously as a thinker on social and ethical questions, has favoured the readers of the *Sunday Chronicle* with her views as to the causes of the social demoralization, with pictures, of course, exaggerated. One cause is "the criminal sufferance accorded to atheists" and "the tolerance shown by the public press to atheism and blasphemy." We wonder how on earth Miss Marie Corelli connects the newspaper tolerance of Atheism with the picture of demoralization she draws? And what is it the lady desires? Would she like a profession of Atheism made a capital offence? or would she descend to torture and compel every Atheist to spend so many hours daily reading the *Master Christian*? Anyway, Miss Corelli is in deadly earnest—that is the only amusing feature of her outburst.

The destruction of militarism is still proceeding. For example, the Government has now put on the hoardings a series of posters depicting the advantages Army life has over a civilian career. If that is true, all we can say is a civilized country ought to be ashamed to advertise it. The Chinese properly call the soldier a necessary evil, and soldiers will generally agree with the description. But to advertise that our society is so organized as to give to the soldier greater ease, better pay, more opportunities for enjoyment, etc., than it gives to the man engaged in peaceful productive pursuits, is surely to advertise the failure of our civilization.

One of our readers who had been wasting some of his time listening to a Christian Evidence Society lecturer was surprised at the statement that an Atheist said there was no God. It is not true, but it would be no more than a piece of foolishness if it were. We have no sympathy with the type of mind which treats it as though it were anything more than a lapse in logic. An Atheist does not deny "God," for the simple reason that by itself "God" means nothing. And one cannot negate nothing. God undefined is nothing. "God" defined negates itself—at least, every God that we have ever heard of does.

The Bishop of Peterborough was the hero of a series of accidents which deserve filming. Travelling to Wellingborough, the Bishop's motor broke down. He obtained another, which ran into a hedge, and threw the occupants into a ditch. The Bishop completed his journey mounted on a brewer's motor-lorry, and drove up to the church in a blaze of glory which almost rivalled the entry of the founder of the Christian religion when he entered Jerusalem mounted on a donkey.

The *Evening News* printed recently a prayer for rain. It occupied the central position on the front page. The Savage Club ought to make the editor an honorary member.

Special.

WE have reason to believe that a systematic attempt is being made in certain quarters to obstruct the circulation of the *Freethinker*. All sorts of obstacles are being placed in the way of the public getting it, and we are of opinion that some of the methods employed are such that they might become the subject of legal action.

We, therefore, earnestly ask our readers to do all they can to check this exhibition of bigotry. The *Freethinker* is issued through all the usual wholesale agents in England, and through Messrs. Menzies & Co. in Scotland. So there need be no trouble in anyone getting copies.

This outburst of bigotry is, no doubt, a compliment to our growing influence, but we hope our friends will not allow us to suffer from this particular piece of flattery. Those who wish to have the *Freethinker* should insist upon getting it, and accept no excuse. If they cannot get it write to us at once.

To Correspondents.

J. H. O. writes us from South Africa, suggesting the formation of a league for the suppression of human vermin. He thinks certain people ought to be destroyed for the same reasons and on the same grounds that we destroy noxious kinds of insects and animals. We are afraid there would be too great a disagreement as to where the line of survival should be drawn.

MR. F. MARGETSON writes to point out that in his letter which appeared in our issue of June 29, "age," in the first line of the fourth paragraph, should have been "eye." We apologize for the misprint.

J. BREESE.—Much obliged. It does not do to take Miss Corelli too seriously.

C. F. J.—When we get back to sixteen pages, which we hope will be soon, we might adopt your suggestion of a Sale and Exchange column for the use of readers—that is, if they show any desire for it.

J. CLOSE.—Idea is a good one. Will see what can be done. We must be getting some [more small slips advertising the paper very soon.

ONE of our correspondents is anxious to get a good work on the Russian Greek Church. Perhaps one of our readers can advise on the matter.

A. MILLAR.—We are sorry to hear of the death of Davie Watt. We have known him for many years as a single-minded loyal servant of Freethought, and are not at all surprised at the high esteem in which he was held by those who knew him. Scottish Freethought has lost a firm friend.

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. Vanoe, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

The Swansea Branch of the N.S.S. has arranged an excursion to-day (July 13) to Port Eynon. The party will leave the Reformers' Bookshop, 60 Alexandra Road, at 10.30 sharp. We hope that the weather will be favourable, and that there will be a good assemblage of friends.

The Giordano Bruno Association is a group of Italian Freethinkers who are intensely earnest in their attack on clerical obscurantism. It would be hard to find a more appropriate name for such a Society than that of the sixteenth century knight errant and martyr of Freethought, who was undaunted by years of torture in the dungeons of the Holy Inquisition, and in the end was burnt alive by his infamous enemies in the February of 1600. An illustrated supplement to the journal of the Society was issued last month. Its occasion was the thirtieth anniversary of the erection of a statue to Bruno's memory in the Campo dei Fiori, at Rome, where he was burnt alive. This monument, the work of a brilliant sculptor, Ettore Ferrari, himself a man of culture and a good Freethinker, was set up on June 9, 1889. Its erection was vigorously and unscrupulously opposed by the Clerical party, who even denied that Bruno suffered at their hands, although the documents proving his death at the stake were in the Papal archives all the time. The four-paged supplement, which is enthusiastic and eloquent in the ardent Italian manner, declaims pleasantly, if rather vaguely, on a number of aspects of Bruno's genius. His claims are by no means understated on the first page. We are told that all modern systems of philosophy proceed from him; that he had an intuition of the law of evolution two hundred years before Lessing, Condorcet, and Herder; that before Darwin he divined the transformation of species and forms; that before Laplace, Lyell, and Kant he had a theory that the centre of the earth was a mass of fire; that Lamarck, in 1800, merely developed Bruno's conception of the evolution of mind; that Helmholtz demonstrated that the formulæ of thought were mathematical formulæ two hundred and fifty years after Bruno had maintained the identity of thought and matter; that he was a utilitarian before Bentham, a scientific student of the history of religions before Volney, and, finally, that he had anticipated the conclusions of Vico on the evolution of history. We are not prepared in cold blood to accept this large rhapsodical estimate of the Italian thinker and martyr. Our English admiration is well on this side of idolatry. We admit that he was an ardent revolutionary leader who caught glimpses of the truth long before it was revealed to the colder and more cautious minds.

The West Ham Branch reports a successful excursion on Sunday last to Laindon Hills. The dull and threatening early morning kept many away who might otherwise have attended, but the weather put on a more cheerful aspect before the morning was very far advanced, and retained its good humour throughout the day. There was a very fair muster of members and friends, and these enjoyed themselves thoroughly. Two of the quaint old Essex Churches were visited during the day, and the Laindon Hotel provided tea for the party.

Mr. W. H. Hearson writes:—

I am glad to be able to tell you that as a result of advertising with you I have had a number of enquiries, most of which have resulted in tentative orders, and in quite the majority of cases appreciative recognition of the work done.

We are not surprised. The *Freethinker* is a paper that is bought to be read, not merely glanced at and thrown on one side.

In Charles W. Dahlinger's *Pittsburgh: a Sketch of its Early Social Life* (1916), the following anecdote refers to "scenes from clerical life" in the United States in the early nineteenth century:—

A practical joke perpetuated by the Rev. Dr. John McMillan on the Rev. Joseph Patterson, illustrates the custom of drinking among the clergy. On their way to attend a meeting of the Synod, the two men stopped at a wayside inn and called for whisky, which was set before them. Mr. Patterson asked a blessing which was rather lengthy. Dr. McMillan meanwhile drank the whisky, and to Mr. Patterson's blank look remarked blandly, "You must watch as well as pray"!

The story is quoted from a Presbyterian minister.

Systems save trouble—the trouble of thinking.—*Helps.*

The Science of the Ultra-Material.

II.

(Continued from p. 321.)

THE Monistic view of the nature of consciousness seems to furnish an answer to this question, for on this view there must exist a definite limit to the energy function constituting our intelligence. If our intelligence be itself but a definitely limited function of some underlying energy, then the definitely limited degree or condition of substance and movement constituting that function must impose a limit beyond which no cognition of a material energy function can be formed. As we shall try to show further on, there are scientific grounds for regarding the energy function of which mind consists as a breakdown of material equilibria in those very unstable forms of protoplasm which make up brain and nerve substance. Our cognitive faculty would be dependent on and relative to this energy function, and to such a relative faculty a degree of material dissociation or diffusion transcending that which constitutes the function might be cognized as "infinite" diffusion, while similarly a degree of velocity transcending that which constitutes the function might be cognized as "infinite" velocity.

We may, again, borrow an illustration from a familiar case in physics. The visible part of the solar spectrum forms but a small proportion of the whole spectrum, the range of vibrations which affect us as light comprising less than a hundredth part of the entire range of vibrations. Now, supposing this were a condition of things involving not merely a particular perception but the cognitive faculty itself. To such a faculty the ultra-violet vibrations, of shorter wave-length than the shortest of those functioning as cognition, might be cognized as "infinitely" small, while the infra-red vibrations, transcending in wave-length the utmost limits of those constituting the intellectual faculty, might be cognized as being of "infinitely" great wave-length.

Thus, to our intelligence, limited as it is by its own nature, expressions which connote the idea of an absolute limit carry a relative meaning when we try to realize them in terms of that limit. This is well shown in the meaning which mathematicians have to assign to the term "infinity." Thus, the sum of a convergent series "carried to infinity" does not really mean the sum of an absolutely endless series of terms, for this is inconceivable. It means the value to which, by increasing the number of the terms to any extent however great, their sum can be made to approach within any quantity however small. That is to say, an expression connoting the idea of an infinite value has to be given a meaning involving the conception of finite values; and this relative meaning is the only real and valid one we can ascribe to such expressions.

These considerations may go some way towards affording a rational basis for that purely kinetic theory of matter which recent researches seem to be leading the modern physicist and chemist to adopt. This theory necessitates a conception of immaterial energy underlying and producing all material energies—a primordial fountain of energy whence all material existence arises, and consisting of substance in a state of infinite diffusion and infinite mobility, the term "infinite" in both cases bearing the relative meaning just referred to. And if we choose to call this "the ether" we can say with Professor J. J. Thomson: "All mass is mass of the ether, all momentum momentum of the ether, and all kinetic energy kinetic energy of the ether."

THE UNIVERSE AS EQUILIBRIUM.

This conception of the immaterial world seems to imply a condition of absolute instability—a total negation of equilibrium. Equilibrium, however feeble, however unstable or fleeting, is a condition of arrest or retardation of motion; a condition of limited mobility in which kinetic energy assumes, in however slight a degree, the form of potential energy. Infinitely diffused substance in a state of infinite mobility can thus possess no equilibrium, but its very condition of instability compels it towards equilibrium. Material evolution would thus seem to be necessitated by the very nature of immaterial energy—a consideration which would seem, by the way, to afford a satisfactory reply to those who inquire as to the "why" of evolution and the "purpose" of existence. And this evolution might be described as an inevitable fall from a state of complete instability in the immaterial world, through varying stages of unstable equilibrium, to the state of relatively stable equilibrium manifested in matter. This description would be quite in accord with the results of recent researches into the constitution of matter, notably those of Gustave le Bon, who has given good grounds for his theory that all the sub-material energies—electricity, magnetism, heat, light, radioactivity, etc.—are forms of equilibrium intermediate between the "ether" and the "intra-atomic energy" of matter. Proto-material evolution, then, is a fall from instability to stable equilibrium, and might be graphically represented by the downward branch of a curve descending from an infinite "ordinate" in the immaterial world and reaching a "turning value" at the stable equilibrium of matter, whence an upward branch representing post-material evolution would take its rise. But while the characteristic feature of the downward branch is, as just stated, a fall from instability through various grades of unstable equilibrium to the stable equilibrium of matter, the characteristic feature of the upward branch is a progressive rise from stable to unstable equilibrium. Let us briefly examine it.

There is good ground for believing that atomic "valency," that is the number of combinations which an atom is capable of entering into with other atoms in the formation of molecules, is, to some extent, a measure of its instability. An atom which can combine with, say, three or four other atoms—what chemists call a tri-valent or tetra-valent atom—is, presumably, less stable than an atom which can combine with only one other atom—mono-valent. For chemical combination, probably, involves a certain disturbance of the intra-atomic equilibrium, and a greater facility for chemical combination, as manifested in a higher valency, would imply a greater readiness in the atomic equilibrium to yield to the disturbing influences of other atomic energies—that is, it would imply a less stable equilibrium. In the light of this connection between valency and instability, we shall find some clear indications that the progress of material evolution is a progress towards unstable equilibrium.

Stellar spectroscopy shows that the newest and hottest stars are distinguished by the presence of hydrogen and helium, the former being a monovalent element and the latter being devoid of any valency or chemical affinity whatever. It would hence follow that as the presence of these elements is characteristic of the hottest and most newly formed stars, the stabler forms of material equilibrium are the first to manifest themselves. And this is just what we should expect. As the various forms of proto-material energy are passing into material energy, those forms which are less stable would be unfitted to maintain a permanent material equilibrium under those conditions of intense heat which are known to prevail in the newer stars. These forms would,

therefore, either fail to materialize at all under such conditions, or their feebler equilibria would be soon destroyed, while those of greater stability would resist disruption and survive, by a sort of natural selection, as the first outstanding forms of matter properly so called. As the heat of the condensing star-nebula diminished the less stable of the elements would be able to come into being. And this progressive evolution of matter would continue throughout the stellar history, the older stars showing the presence of elements of higher valency, such as carbon, which is a tetravalent element, and which only appears in red stars which are supposed to be approaching extinction.

A. E. MADDOCK.

(To be continued.)

John Lee and Providence.

II.

(Concluded from p. 329.)

WE now come to the attempted execution of John Lee. Mr. Pitkin, the chaplain, says that the scaffold was newly erected, but an old platform, or drop, was transferred from a dilapidated building, where it had been used for the execution of a poor woman named Annie Took, who was convicted for child-murder. He goes on to say:—

It was quite unsuitable for a public execution, being made of thin wood and slight bolts. No dummy had been tried upon it, the dummy system having originated through the failure in John Lee's case. The fairy-tales of the rope breaking three times, and the success of the dummy trial, have been invented since that time, and are entirely fabulous.¹

The present writer remembers reading, many years ago, the explanation given by Berry—the executioner in attendance—as to why the trap, upon which Lee stood, failed to drop when the lever was pulled. Berry declared that the scaffold was erected by convict-labour, and the convicts contrived it so that it would not act with a weight on it, and since then convicts have not been allowed to construct the scaffold. However that may be, it is certain that the structure was defective. It has been said that the boards were swollen by rain, this was evidently the idea of the officials in attendance, for Lee says he could hear them chipping and hacking away at the wood-work after he was removed from the scaffold.² But one of the warders told Lee afterwards that there was plenty of space between the two doors of the trap, and that if the bolt could have been drawn another sixteenth of an inch the trap would have fallen. The fault was evidently in the mechanism of the bolt and the lever. The officials, however, had evidently lost their heads and were too panic-stricken to find out the real cause. Berry himself, so Lee says, came to him after the first failure, and clasping his hands, he said, "My poor fellow, I don't know what I am doing!" And all the others were in like condition. So after the third attempt to hang Lee had failed, Mr. Pitkin (the chaplain) himself on verge of collapse, intervened and Lee was removed to the cells and afterwards relieved.

We need not go outside Lee's own story to show its falseness. He says that on the Sunday before the day fixed for the execution, a stranger appeared in the yard where he took exercise, and upon Lee asking the warders who he was, they looked at him rather curiously and replied: "Oh, that's a visitor." Lee says: "I guessed who the 'visitor' was. 'That's the executioner,' said I to myself, 'looking at me to see how much drop I shall

want.'" As a matter of fact, Lee knew nothing of the "drop" as used by the modern hangman. For when he was brought to the scaffold he was puzzled to know how the operation was to be performed. He says: "I had in my imagination a picture of the old gibbet—the post with the beam across it and the rope hanging down. I thought there would be a cart and that I would be in the cart, and that when the noose was fixed the cart would be drawn away."¹ Of course, this was the old practice, which was practically death by strangulation, the "drop" being adopted later to cause instant death by dislocating the neck.

Then, again, there is Lee's tale of his dream the night before in which he says he went through all the incidents of the attempted execution. If he had, indeed, dreamed all the incidents, he would have known all about the trap and the drop, and the arrangements would have been no puzzle to him. Mr. Pitkin, the chaplain, says Lee told him he saw in his dream that they tried three times to hang him but it would not work, and they had to take him back to his cell. But Mr. Pitkin gives a letter which Lee wrote to his sister on the following day in which he mentions this dream. He says: ".....I had a dream on Sunday night that the scaffold was not ready, and that they had to make another. And I told the officers that were on the watch over me the dream at 6 a.m. I did not think it was coming true—but it did."

This is a very different version from that which Lee elaborated later on. As a matter of fact the scaffold was ready, and another scaffold was not made. But at the time Lee wrote this letter he had not realized the advantages of working in this dream as part of the providential interference on his behalf. When he did realize it he altered it to coincide with everything that happened down to the minutest detail.

We now come to the third period of Lee's life. After serving twenty-two years in different convict establishments Lee was released. Mr. Pitkin says that he seems to have had a good time in Devon and been well supplied with money. He travelled about always putting up at all the best hotels and indulging in the best fare. A year after his release he married Jessie Augusta Bullied, chief nurse of the female mental ward at Newton Abbott Workhouse, by whom he had several children. He then removed to London where he became a barman in a public-house in one of the London markets, the proprietor of which did a good business while Lee was with him, for people came from all parts of the country to see the "man they could not hang." But after a time he was missing, and so was a barmaid who served in the bar with him. They afterwards turned up in Australia.

As Mr. Pitkin truly remarks:—

The absence of moral sense is seen in the sequel to his life. He left the poor wife, who was very courageous to marry a man with so black a record, without any sort of provision for the family maintenance, and she was obliged to apply to the Lambeth Guardians for assistance. The newspapers have recently stated that this extraordinary criminal adventurer died a natural death in Australia, quite contrary to my expectations. I quite believed that he would have been executed for some other horrible crime.²

Lee was a congenital criminal; he was born with a criminal disposition. He was lacking in sympathy and imagination. Sympathy for the suffering of others, and lack of that imagination which enables more sensitive people to realize the horror of the actions they contemplate, and therefore makes them realize the consequences

¹ Rev. John Pitkin, *The Prison Cell in its Lights and Shadows*, p. 206.

² John Lee, *The Man They Could Not Hang*, p. 52.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

² Pitkin, *The Prison Cell*, p. 214.

of those actions, and acts as a deterrent to these criminal impulses. Mr. Pitkin describes him as a "criminal hero." He says:—

A hero is a person who exhibits extraordinary courage, firmness, and intrepidity throughout his life. He has no fear and no moral sense. The character and conduct of John Lee accords with this description. He stood, calmly, close to the pool of blood in the hall near his own sleeping-place, and where the jury believed he must have murdered his kind and considerate mistress. He, without the least excitement, led Jane Neck through the smoke of the fire he had himself kindled, and stained her nightdress with the blood upon his hands. With intrepidity, he went into the dining-room, where, doubtless, he had carried the body, and tried to make it appear that he had looked round by chance, and saw the body lying on the floor. With the calmness of apparent innocence, he ran to Torquay to tell the McCleans, the murdered lady's relatives, that his mistress's house had been set on fire and she was much burnt, when he knew she had been cruelly murdered. With cool deliberation he went with the sergeant to the police-station, where he was apprehended on suspicion. He exhibited no sort of anxiety whilst awaiting trial, but conducted himself like a criminal who is charged with a trifling offence. During the three days' trial he seemed to have no care as to the result. When the verdict was given, he received it with complaisancy and indifference. During the three attempts to execute him he never spoke, and no word of dread or remorse escaped his lips. He said he wanted to die, and hoped to do so the next time he went to the scaffold. This criminal hero told the warders he had another chance of being hanged, as he could dash out the Chaplain's brains with the leg of the table, when he was alone in the cell. The officers advised me to be careful. When the Governor told him the day appointed for his execution, he turned round and smiled. Upon the scaffold, in answer to the executioner, he said that he had nothing to say. All through this notorious case you can see the criminal's nerveless demeanour, extraordinary courage, and fortitude. He had an indomitable will-power. He made up his mind to brave out the whole thing, and succeeded. The absence of moral sense accounts for this strange characteristic.¹

It should be borne in mind that is not the testimony of a sceptic or unbeliever, but of an orthodox English clergyman; not one of those "half-believers in our casual creeds," so common among the clergy to day, but one of the old-fashioned, ultra-orthodox believers. Mr. Pitkin even believes in demoniacal possession; for he states that he has had to minister to men and women who have purposely injured themselves, smashed everything in their cells, destroyed their clothes, leaving themselves naked, assaulted the officers, and amused themselves in this condition by singing alternately songs and hymns. When the visiting justices came to try and certify them insane, and asked the Rev. Pitkin for his opinion, he says: "The only explanation I could give was that they were possessed with an evil spirit, as I saw no signs of insanity about them"; and he cites the case of Jesus casting out evil spirits, and his declaration that "This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting," which he considers even to-day to be the only successful cure.

If there had been the least doubt as to his innocence, we may be sure that this true believer would have seized upon the failure to execute Lee as a divine intervention of Providence in favour of an innocent man. But the facts were too strong to admit of any such interpretation. Innocent men have been tried, condemned, and executed, for murders they have not committed, but

Lee was guilty, and escaped the penalty. Why, then, did not Providence intervene to save the innocent from execution? If the Devil governed the world, could he manage things worse?

W. MANN.

Reverie and Dream.

THEY are easily overdone, and like all æsthetic pleasures, must be indulged in in moderation; but what were life without those abstract exquisite delights? All round those enchanting atmospheres and oases of existence stand those crude, clamant, actual things called duties, whose menace and insistence almost breaks the spell, but like cloud-wrapped hills seen dimly for the moment through the transforming mists and shades, partake of the beauties of the ideal scene, which forms, as it were, the vestibule and starting-place and inspiration for the heaven of achievement. It may be the mind deceives itself, and soaks for the time in an inebriate and unsound consolation; but I, at least, have often used this mental state—or it has used me—as an "inclined plane" to something attempted, something done, and without which the duty might have been neglected. It might almost be said that the higher type of mind *unconsciously* reasons (*vide* Shelley). It has read and remembered, observed and reflected, and goes its "destined" way. The mind, good or bad, weak or strong, finds its own place and its own mode of operation, and makes its heaven and hell (*vide* Milton). The present writer has a mind—of sorts; it may interest the reader, and will certainly please the writer, to give as near as possible a physical description of that psychological instrument.

It pleases me, then, and it seems to me most apt and pretty (you know how the best of us are pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw)—*vide* Pope—to compare my mind to a well that slowly fills—comes whispering to the pebbles (*vide* Ingersoll) in quiet shady places. It is easily disturbed, but ever and anon it clears and calms again and yet again, and reflects the wonder-world of animate and inanimate nature in its glassy normal deeps. There is the brute stampede of savagery round the spring, and the margin is all but obliterated; or the spring itself boils, and effervesces, and muddies, but so far it has always cleared again and smiled once more, as, at the moment, it jewels its cool and verdant shore, and contemplates the glint of shrines and sculptured gods, and the natural wisdom of trailing woodlands sweet and dim (*vide* Keat's exquisite *Ode to a Grecian Urn*).

Or, to change the metaphor—all the notes of the harmony are there; touched in a certain way at the psychological moment, and music is the result; as lightly touched another way another time, and direst discord reigns. As an instance, the mind in question awoke to consciousness the other morning, and some sounds from the street suggested the distant notes of a clarion, whereupon the said mind immediately thought of a forgotten verse of Gray's *Elegy*, or a line of it rather, and slowly pieced the rest together, as thus:—

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed.
The cock's shrill clarion or the echoing horn
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For the moment I was the author of the lines. They were at least *mine*. It is thus the grand, simple things come *home*, and ennoble and enthuse the mind, aye, even in reverie and dream!

ANDREW MILLAR.

The nature of God, immortality, the being of the soul and its connection with the body, are eternal problems, wherein the philosophers are unable to give us any further knowledge.
—Goethe.

¹ Rev. John Pitkin, *The Prison Cell in its Lights and Shadows*, pp. 214-215.

Correspondence.

COURAGE IN THE PULPIT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—An unknown benefactor has forwarded to me your paper of June 29, and increased the natural interest with which I should have perused your lively pages by super-scribing, "Sir, you should be contributing to this paper rather than preaching in a Christian Church. Why not?" After having read your first article animadverting on my "having the wit to see, but without the courage to do," an article founded on a scrappy report by another unknown benefactor who heard me preach, and forthwith sent his idea of my ideas to the *Christian World* as "remarkable." I feel inclined to ask you kindly to permit me to become a contributor to your paper, in order to say that for forty years I have been an Independent minister and have never based my religion upon miracle or magic. It has not been easy going, for there are many who, like yourself, persist in the notion that religion rests on a foundation of magic and miracle. Such have generally upbraided me, and given me no further opportunity of addressing them. The sermon to which you refer was in no sense abnormal, for I have always held that as science proceeds on the assumption that the universe is rational throughout, so religion assumes and proclaims that the universe is a moral order with a purpose of good within it. Scepticism of the former faith would reduce thought to chaos; scepticism of the latter faith would deprive us of life's working power and land us in hopeless bankruptcy. That dual faith, in the reasonableness and purposefulness of the universe, saves life from being worthless and void, and that faith verifies itself every day. On this I found my preaching. How far this indicates lack of courage it is not my province to assess. Suffice it to say that any gratification that you find in my unconscious following of your lead, "even so late in the day," is not in the least grudged by me, though I had thought that in deprecating thaumaturgy and discounting magic I was following Jesus.

BERNARD J. SNELL.

[We very gladly afford Mr. Snell the use of our columns in order to place his position before those who read the article to which he refers. We do not, of course, agree that "the universe is a moral order," nor that scepticism of this would land us in "hopeless bankruptcy." Morality, to us, is part of the human order, and its existence therein no more warrants us in declaring the *universe* to be a moral order than existence of, say, a perfume warrants us in speaking of the universe as being a perfumed order. We do not follow Mr. Snell in the statement that in deprecating thaumaturgy and magic he is following Jesus. Surely, in the feeding of the five thousand, in raising the dead, in walking on the water, etc., Jesus was lending the very strongest encouragement to the practice of magic. We will only add that if Mr. Snell desires to place his position more definitely before the readers of the *Freethinker*, we shall be happy to place the necessary space at his disposal.—ED.]

Obituary.

It was with deep regret that we record the death of Mr. David Watt, 3 Albion Street, Paisley, for over thirty years a respected member of the Glasgow Branch of the N. S. S. The large number of friends at his funeral testified to the respect in which he was held. His presence at the Branch meetings will be sadly missed, as his wise counsel and helpful suggestions were based upon a long experience of work for the Cause of Freethought. His life was an inspiration to all who knew him; his enthusiasm never flagged. He travelled fourteen miles on a Sunday to attend the Branch meetings. The sympathy of the Glasgow Branch is extended to Mrs. Watt in her great loss. He was buried at Woodside Cemetery on Friday, 4th inst., the Secular Service being read by the Secretary of the Branch.—F. LONSDALE.

Population Question and Birth-Control.

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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.**

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "Money and Morals."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Band Stand): 6.15, Mr. James Marshall, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 6, J. J. Darby, "Religious Persecution."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, Mr. C. H. Kelf, "If Bradlaugh Were With Us Now"; 6, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, A Lecture.

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

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Messrs. Saphin and Shaller; 3.15, Messrs. Baker, Ratcliffe, Saphin, 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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