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Views and Opinions.

God and the War.

It may safely be said that more people have had their illusions on the subject of religion dispelled during the past five years than has ever been the case in any like period. This is not because the War brought any new facts to light; it did not. But it opened peoples eyes with regard to old ones. Death and disaster, pain and suffering, are every-day occurrences, and the pain of losing one that is dear is as old as humanity. But the scale on which the War was waged, the fact of the combatants being people who have ostentatiously paraded their religion before the world, the praise of the moralizing effect of war by the clergy, the energy with which these men fanned the War spirit, all combined to bring thoughtful men and women back to the consideration of something like fundamental issues. In political and social revolutions it is usually some particular hardship—a famine, a spell of bad trade, etc.—that calls attention to grave constitutional abuses. So in this instance, the War brought home to many the utter impossibility of harmonizing the world as it is with the existence of a God wise enough or good enough to command the homage of intelligent men and women. A God there might still be, but in that case it would be more manly to "curse God and die" than to pay even lip homage to a being who could permit such a catastrophe in his world. The world blamed the German Government for commencing the War, it was ready to blame anyone for continuing the War a day longer than was necessary, how, then, could it relieve of responsibility a God who permitted the War to begin, who did nothing to bring it to a close, and who could calmly watch his children butchering each other in his name? Even religious docility and stupidity have their limits.

* * *

Man and God.

How does the Theist harmonize his belief in God with a world disaster such as the War? If, he says, people will act in a particular way they must expect certain consequences to follow. Granted that certain consequences will follow, whether we expect them or not, how does that meet the issue? Well, it does not meet it in the least. People, as Aristotle long ago said, act in what they believe to be their own interest, and if they are really acting so as to do themselves harm, surely it is

here a case of "forgive them for they know not what they do." If these people had seen more clearly, surely they would have acted differently. A difference in the quality of the brains God designed would have made so much difference. As it is the "plan of creation" bears very much the look of a trap. God places man amid conditions that the brain with which he has been equipped does not enable him to properly appreciate. Blunder and wrong are thus made inevitable, and when the blunder is made he is told that he is only reaping the consequences of his actions. In what way, then, does the supposed fact of God help? How much worse off would man be without God? And then to add to the stupidity of the whole business, when the War is over God is given thanks. For what? For the fact that some have escaped? Then what of the millions who have perished? Is it not plain common sense to say that if we are to thank God for those who are saved we should curse him for the millions destroyed? And is it egotism or stupidity that leads the survivors to kneel and thank God for their own safety within sight of the dead bodies of their fellow-creatures?

* * *

The Providential Plan.

It is said that God did not desire men to act as they have acted. Maybe not, but being what he is, he must have *expected* them to act as they did. After all, if one is not a politician or a fool, he will not be content with attributing the War to one man or to one nation. Pressure of population, the desire for aggrandisement, love of military adventure, the desire for supremacy, are all causes that make for war, and are by no means confined to Germany or to any other nation. So that here once more man is only working out a career traced for him by "Providence." God first of all implants in man qualities that can have but one result, and then punishes him with every circumstance of cruelty for being what he has made him. A little difference in the human make-up would have made all the difference to the world's welfare. Almighty wisdom animated by Almighty love, and supported by Almighty power, might easily have so constructed human life that disasters consequent on human misjudgment should never occur. Divine wisdom preferred things as they are, and it is idle to attempt to evade the responsibility. It is futile to blame conditions. God made the conditions, and man himself is no more than one of the conditions in the divine scheme. For good or ill the responsibility rests with God—if there be a God. To blame man is only another way of blaming God. The world is his world, and a better plan would have turned out a better world.

* * *

An Apology for Evil.

The apology is made that we cannot see enough of the "Divine plan" to offer reasonable criticism, and that, after all, things work together to a good end. And even the War, along with all the trials and disasters of life, strengthens and develops human nature. Well, we may grant even this; but we do not see that it materially helps the believer. Granted that danger calls

forth courage, that suffering calls forth sympathy, is this an adequate apology for the existence of needless danger and unmerited suffering? Surely not. If there is any strength in this argument, it involves the assertion that all who cause suffering are our benefactors, since they develop our sympathies. The sweater, the tyrant, the land-grabber, the man who creates a war, are all friends of humanity—they are developing our sympathetic feelings, and we owe them our gratitude. And if we ought not to thank the man who sets fire to a houseful of people, and so excites our courage and our compassion, why should we praise God for sending plague and pestilence and famine to the same end? What real distinction is there between the two cases? Will some Theist please explain?

* * *

How Man Helps God.

We have written the above on the assumption that God exists, and that the world is the expression of his character. But the assumption is groundless; neither facts nor logical reasoning support it. Nature is not conscious, neither is it intelligent; and therefore praise and blame, save as figures of speech, are quite out of place in dealing with it. For aught that we can see, Nature cares no more for the life of a man than for that of a worm. Both are born and both die with, so far as Nature is concerned, absolute indifference. It is the Theist who asserts the contrary, and he is bound to abide by the logical implications of his assertion. We have only tried to indicate what these implications are, and to insist that if the wanton infliction of suffering by man indicates an unadmirable character, the wanton infliction of pain by God must point to a like conclusion. If the indifference of man to suffering argues want of sympathy, the fact that God sits silent while men and women are blasted by disease, starved by famine, or overwhelmed by disaster, forces us to a similar conclusion. It is useless to reply that God's ways are not our ways. If we judge at all, we are bound to judge by the only measure of right and wrong with which we are acquainted. And if the statement is true, it can only be received with regret. If God exists, we may grant that he is greater than man—in power. But in kindness, in sympathy, in all that makes up really admirable moral qualities, man is greater than his God. For it is man who corrects the blunders of his Deity. Man makes habitable the places of the earth left uninhabitable by God. He discovers antidotes to the diseases God sends; remedies for the famine and distress created by him. The enduring fact is, not God's goodness to man, but man's love and helpfulness to his fellow-man. Man owes nothing to the Gods, first created and then feared by him. These have always existed like a spasm in the heart and a cramp in the intellect, checking his noblest aspirations and damning his best efforts. It has been part of the work of civilization to free man from the rule of the gods, and only as this has been done has civilization been secure or human well-being guaranteed.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Q. Are the good always rewarded in this life?

A. No, surely; for many virtuous men are miserable here and greatly afflicted.

Q. Are the wicked always punished in this life?

A. No, certainly; for many of them live without sorrow, and some of the vilest of men are often raised to great riches and honour.

Q. Wherein then doth God make it appear that he is good and righteous?

A. I own there is little appearance of it on earth.—Dr. Isaac Watts, "The Improvement of the Mind."

The God-Eating Sacrament.

VII.

CANNIBALISM.

AT this stage we are prepared for the formal declaration, however startling it may sound, that the governing idea of the Lord's Supper has been evolved by a perfectly simple process from the primitive ritual of anthropophagy. Men were in the habit of eating one another long before they even dreamed of the possibility of consuming their God or Gods; and it may be worth our while to make an attempt to trace the somewhat obscure process by which the man-eating evolved into the God-eating Sacrament. Everybody is aware that the consumption of food is an essential condition to the preservation of life. That is an elementary truism. But it is not so commonly realized that food is also a part of the stuff out of which character is made. A man's conduct is largely determined by his diet. This is a subject on which primitive man entertained wonderfully enlightened views. He could perceive no wide gulf separating human beings from the animals below them, the only difference between them recognized by him being one of degrees merely, not at all of kind; and as he was himself a flesh-eater, it naturally followed that to him eating a brother man was no less agreeable a performance than eating an ox, a sheep, or a rabbit. In either case, it was a fellow-being that he consumed. It is impossible to be just and fair to cannibals without bearing that fact in mind. It is only to civilized and semi-civilized people that the habit of devouring human flesh is more disgusting and loathsome than that of eating animal flesh. We pronounce it a horrible, monstrous custom, and rightly so; but to our ancestors long ago, as Pliny says, "to murder a man was to do an act of greatest devoutness, and to eat his flesh was to secure the highest blessings of health." Herodotus tells us that among the Scythians there were Androphagi (Man-eaters), and that in consequence they were "unlike any other nation in these parts" (iv. 106). He also mentions several tribes who were cannibals, such as the Padæans and Issedonians. Among the latter he found the following custom:—

When a man's father dies, all the near relatives bring sheep to the house; which are sacrificed, and their flesh cut in pieces, while at the same time, the dead body undergoes the like treatment. The two sorts of flesh are afterwards mixed together, and the whole is served up at a banquet (iv. 26).

Again, he relates the following custom of the Masagetæ:—

Human life does not come to its natural close with this people; but when a man grows very old, all his kinsfolk collect together and offer him up in sacrifice; offering at the same time some cattle also. After the sacrifice they boil the flesh and feast on it; and those who thus end their days are reckoned the happiest. If a man dies of disease they do not eat him, but bury him in the ground, bewailing the ill-fortune that he did not come to be sacrificed (i. 216).

Of cannibalism as a habit, with all its sickening horrors, which "assumes its most repulsive form where human flesh is made an ordinary article of food like other meat," I do not here speak. That it has been a habit among certain tribes, civilized and uncivilized, is undeniable; but it is equally a fact, as Tylor points out, that Anthropophagy is "deeply ingrained in savage and barbaric religions." This was doubtless true long before superhuman Gods had been created. There was no God-eating because there was no God, but, as Professor Gilbert Murray remarks, "only the raw material out of which Gods are made." And yet even then cannibalism was practised sacramentally because of the

belief that the qualities of the things eaten would be assimilated by the eater. Prisoners of war were killed, cooked, and eaten that the courage they had displayed on the field of battle might pass into the victors. A lion's heart was eaten from the same motive. In those ignorant, superstitious days the sacramental element entered into almost every action. In time personal Gods appeared, and they were all made in the image and after the likeness of their creators. Ere long the day dawned when men and women resorted to cannibalism with greater devoutness than ever because they believed that the Gods delighted in human flesh. It was on this account that Anthropophagy was a vital part of the Fijian religion. It was the same conviction that gave rise to human sacrifices. Most of these sacrifices were peculiar, whose object was to purchase the favour of angry Deities. At one time such offerings were well-nigh universal. All untoward circumstances, such as blighted harvests, destructive storms, ravaging earthquakes, and devastating diseases, were regarded as expressions of the wrath of the Gods, and the sacrifices were offered in the hope of placating them. But there were other sacrifices which were sacramental and magical, of which the late Professor Robertson Smith says:—

It is perfectly clear in many cases that such sacrifices are associated with cannibalism, a practice which always means eating the flesh of men of alien and hostile kin. The human wolves would no more eat a brother than they would eat a wolf; but to eat an enemy is another matter. Naturally enough traces of cannibalism persist in religion after they have disappeared from ordinary life, and especially in the religion of carnivorous Gods. Thus it may be conjectured that the human sacrifices offered to the wolf Zeus (*Lycæus*) in Arcadia were originally cannibal feasts of a wolf tribe (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, Ninth Edition, vol. xxi., p. 136).

Dr. Robertson Smith, though an orthodox divine, was an honest, painstaking, and courageous critic, and the admission made in that extract is highly significant, as well as fully justified by numerous well-attested facts. Our point, however, is that it was anthropophagy that led to theophagy; or in plain English, that the God-eating Sacrament gradually grew out of sacramental man-eating. In the evolution of humanitarianism, animal sacrifices were substituted for human; but the principle involved remained the same. It mattered not of what the sacrifices consisted, slain men or slain animals, banquets were given to which the God and dead relatives were invited; but the amazing miracle was that when the God came down to share the delicacies with his worshippers, it was himself in the form of a bull, a lamb, or a goat that he ate, and it was his own blood that he drank as wine, because the moment the words of consecration were spoken by the officiating priest, all the elements provided for the feast were converted into the God's body and blood. It is a most remarkable fact that among the Aryans of ancient India, centuries prior to our era, the doctrine of Transubstantiation was both taught and practised. When rice-cakes were offered in sacrifice as surrogates for human beings, the priest uttered certain magical words, and there remained no substance of rice-cakes, nor any other, but the substance of human bodies. The Aztecs, who founded a powerful empire in the valley of Mexico four or five hundred years before the discovery of America, had the sacramental custom of making twice a year, in May and December, a dough image of the great God, Huitziloputzli, which they broke in pieces and consumed. It appears that the paste was made of beets and maize by Aztec virgins. Then, after a dreadful holocaust of victims, the mighty miracle was performed, and the priests distributed the dough, no longer dough, but the

body and blood of Huitziloputzli. After supplying full details concerning these instances of Transubstantiation in the *Golden Bough*, Frazer comes to the following conclusion:—

On the whole it would seem that neither the ancient Hindoos nor the ancient Mexicans had much to learn from the most refined mysteries of Catholic theology.

J. T. LLOYD.

Body-Snatching as a Fine Art.

To what damned deeds religion urges men.—*Lucretius*.

What a man was while he could stand, speak, and write, is matter of interest and importance to those who care to know anything about him: when he cannot, it may be assumed that he can no longer think for himself.—*A. C. Swinburne*.

PRIESTS seldom appear more odious than at the deathbeds of those who fought against them in the full strength of their manhood. Even Wyclif was worried in this way, but drove them out with the cry, "I shall not die, but live, and will declare the evil deeds of the friars." To their dismay, he did recover, and he kept his word. Prince Jerome Napoleon was not so fortunate. On his death-bed he resisted the blandishments of the priests, but in some sort they prevailed at last. Prince Napoleon, who numbered Charles Bradlaugh among his friends, was an anti-clerical in politics, and a Freethinker in religion. He was smuggled into the Catholic Church at the last, at a time when he was unconscious. It may be that his wife was anxious for his conversion, but the spectacle of a priest administering the last sacrament to the unconscious man who had steadily resisted all entreaties to be reconciled to the Church is none the less offensive.

The priests of the Great Lying Church did the same thing with Sir Richard Burton, the world-renowned traveller. It was nothing to them that their grim farce would, if taken seriously, give the lie to the dead man's whole life. All they cared for was that the world should understand that this terrible Freethinker had submitted to Holy Mother Church at the last. While Richard Burton was sound and strong, his contemptuous disgust of their creed was wont to exhaust the whole vocabulary of his scorn. When, however, the living man was replaced by the helpless corpse, nothing hindered these body-snatchers at their ghastly revels.

Richard Burton was a complete Freethinker. His views were not merely anti-Christian, but were opposed to the invertebrate religionism of the day. Looking with cynical eyes on all religions, towards the lying Catholic Church he was especially critical, and, as events proved, not without reason. His wife, Isabel Burton, was a bigoted Catholic. When he was dying, she sent for a priest, and the great lying Church of Rome took formal possession of Burton's corpse, and pretended, moreover, to take under her august protection his "soul." Burton's funeral took place in the largest church in Trieste, and was made the excuse for an ecclesiastical triumph of a faith the great man had always loathed. Even this disgraceful demonstration at Trieste was not sufficient. The body was conveyed to England, and the funeral services were repeated at Mortlake. Again the priests intoned the Mass, again the acolyte bore the crucifix before the helpless body to the grave. Again was truth trampled under foot in a vain endeavour to exalt a church over a formidable enemy.

Indeed, the priests have made body-snatching one of the fine arts. Freethought has wrested so many positions from religion that, in order to present an appearance of having some weight of authority to support the

tottering edifice of superstition, priests will hesitate at nothing to drag in some really great men with whose names and influence they hope to buttress the wavering allegiance of their lukewarm supporters.

Christian priests buried the heretical Charles Darwin "in the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection," and, with equal effrontery and impudence, mumbled their mythological nonsense over the coffins of doubting Thomas Huxley, and Robert Buchanan, two of the most stalwart soldiers who ever drew sword in the service of liberty.

The weapon used by the clergy is a double-edged one. When the Freethinker is alive, they pour out upon him all the vituperation which their practised and venomous tongues know so well how to use. If, in spite of their abuse, he gains fame, then they claim him as one of their own. Shelley and Swinburne went through both processes. Like the vultures which feed only on corpses, so does the great Lying Church fatten her waning reputation on the dead soldiers of the Army of Progress.

MIMNERMUS.

The Old Testament.

II.

BEFORE THE EXILE.

OUR earliest first-hand evidence on the nature of the prophetic movement is afforded by the book of Amos, who flourished about 750 B.C. Amos, according to his own account, was "not a prophet"—*i.e.*, not one of the bands of ranters above mentioned—but a herdsman and cultivator, one of the class on whom the abuses of the time pressed hard. He inveighs against various Syrian kingdoms for acts of cruelty and violence, but chiefly against Israel for economic oppression, and announces, in the name of Yahweh, the downfall of the kingdom and the priesthood. Here we have the beginning of the new religious conception. The Yahweh of Amos, who is to avenge all this cruelty and injustice, is a totally different kind of being from the Yahweh of the old legends, who gloated over massacres and accepted human sacrifice. Amos attacks the whole religious ritual of his time. In chapter v. 21-25 we read:—

I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?

The final question incidentally proves that the Pentateuch as we have it, with its elaborate directions for sacrificial ritual, all professing to have been received from Yahweh by Moses, did not exist in the time of Amos.

If we seek the inwardness of this reforming movement, we shall find it rooted, like so many movements, in economic facts. So long as a rude social equality, with sufficiency for all, obtained in the community, the system of sacrifice was felt as an equal burden. But after the establishment of the kingdom, when (as under Solomon) thousands were compelled to labour to minister to royal and priestly pomp, and when the lands of many were seized for the enrichment of greedy courtiers, the exactions of the priesthood bore more hardly on the poorer cultivators. At the same time, alliances with neighbouring kingdoms and intermarriages with their royal houses, by leading to the introduction of alien cults and the

multiplication of religious establishments, added to the burden. Hence, probably, the outcry of prophets like Elijah against the worship of the Phœnician Baal (Melkarth)—the idea of Yahweh as a "jealous god" covering the unexpressed motive of anger at accumulated burdens.¹ Later, as is the way, the material grievance took an idealistic form, and gave rise to the doctrine of one God, Yahweh, the creator of the universe, who was affronted by idolatrous worship and immoral rites.

About the same time as Amos was agitating, the second surviving stratum of Old Testament history took form—the narrative known as "E," because its author, like "P," calls his deity "God" (Elohim) in the early part of his work. Specimens of "E" are afforded by Gen. xxii. 1-13 (the sacrifice of Isaac), most of Gen. xl.-xlii. (Joseph in Egypt), Ex. ii. 1-22 (early days of Moses), and Ex. xxxii.-xxxiv. 28 (the golden calf affair). "E," like "J," is concerned chiefly to tell the story of his people, and does so in an attractive style not unlike "J's." But unlike "J," he is a propagandist as well. He writes under the influence of the prophetic movement, is strong against idolatry, and pronouncedly anti-clerical. His conception of Yahweh is still very anthropomorphic; he thinks man may be allowed, as a special favour, to view the Deity's back, but not his face (Ex. xxxiii. 21-23); and he represents Yahweh as holding conferences with Moses in the tabernacle, screened by a cloud from the gaze of the vulgar (xxxiii. 9-10). This is sufficiently *naïve*, but is certainly less gross than the Yahweh of "J" and his dinner-party with Abraham! The priestly profession, in "E," is made to cut a poor figure. Aaron is held responsible for the manufacture of the golden calf (Ex. xxxii.), and is put severely in his place on another occasion also (Num. xii.). Altogether, "E's" work is a typical product of the movement against priestcraft in the time of Amos and Hosea.

The kingdom of Israel was extinguished by Assyria not many years after this (722 B.C.). The prophetic party were able to represent this as a judgment on the abuses they attacked, and to gain a temporary triumph under Hezekiah of Judah, who was the first Hebrew ruler to attempt the extirpation of idolatry and the suppression of local sanctuaries. The devastating Assyrian invasions, however, which marked his reign, enabled the old stagers to discredit the iconoclasts, and under his son Manasseh (seventh century) the former practices were completely restored, and the prophetic party came in for a hard time—just as, in our own history, the Marian persecution followed the excesses of the Protestants under Edward VI. In this long period of adversity, many prophets seem to have despaired of their cause, and taken service with the court and the established order—the state of things which causes Jeremiah to write: "A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jer. v. 30-31).

The Monotheists now had recourse to one of the favourite weapons of religious propagandists—literary forgery. In 622, when certain repairs were being executed in the temple of Jerusalem, the priest, Hilkiab, informed one of the royal secretaries that "the book of the law" had been found in the precincts. The book was read to the young king, Josiah, to whom its contents were evidently news, for he "rent his clothes," and ordered inquiry to be made as to the means of averting the curses denounced in it. As a result, idolatrous worship was put down, the local sanctuaries desecrated, and worship restricted to Jerusalem. In Samaria, the local

¹ "Baal" is merely an epithet, "lord" or "master." It was applied to various gods, including Yahweh himself (Hosea ii. 16).

priests were sacrificed upon their own altars—the Puritan party displaying, in their moment of triumph, their full share of barbarity and ferocity (2 Kings xxii. 3-xxiii. 20).

The forgery which worked this revolution was our book of Deuteronomy, or the first thirty chapters of it—the present end of the book being an editorial addition. This work purports to be the final address delivered by Moses to the Israelites before his death. As Moses is represented by other writers of the Pentateuch as no orator, and needing Aaron to do his speaking for him, the eloquent harangue put into his mouth in Deuteronomy is at plain variance with the story. This, however, did not trouble the Monotheistic forger, as there was no Pentateuch then in existence. The reform party evidently did a “deal” with Hilkiah, inducing him to plant their imposture on the unsuspecting king, in return for the monopoly of sacrifices which they proposed to confer on the temple of Jerusalem. Unable to sweep away the system of priestcraft altogether, they compromised with it.

The distinguishing notes of Deuteronomy are its severe Monotheism (Yahweh now has no longer any bodily form, but only a voice—Deut. iv. 12-8), and its ruthless denunciation of capital penalties on those who depart from it. The apostate prophet is to be put to death; a town practising idolatry is to be burnt, and its population massacred (chapter xiii.); and while certain relatively humane provisions are made for the conduct of war generally, Canaanite cities in Palestine are to be excepted from them (chapter xx.). No sacrifices are to be allowed except at Jerusalem (chapter xii.). At the same time certain political and economic reforms are sketched out. All debt is to be cancelled once in seven years (chapter xv.), and the king is to be strictly limited in the number of his wives, the strength of his army, and the amount of his treasures (chapter xvii. 14-20). It is doubtful if these beneficial measures were ever executed: the periodical cancellation of debt, at any rate, is impossible in any society which recognizes private property.

The triumph of the Monotheists was short-lived. Josiah was slain in battle against Necho of Egypt, and his son Jehoiakim, whom Necho put on the throne, restored the old religious practices—perhaps estimating at their correct value the claims of the recently found law-book to a Mosaic origin. Jehoiakim showed scanty respect for any prophetic admonitions; when the first edition of Jeremiah was read to him, he unceremoniously lit the fire with it (Jer. xxxvi.)—a proceeding which the prophet resented with the natural fury of outraged authorship.

The downfall of Assyria, occurring at this time, left Babylon the mistress of south-western Asia. Judah, like the other petty kingdoms, had to accept the new yoke; and a series of futile rebellions, under Jehoiakim and his two successors, led finally to the capture of Jerusalem, the destruction of Solomon's temple, and the removal to Babylonia of most of the population who escaped slaughter (586 B.C.). The attitude of the Monotheist party, to judge by Jeremiah's utterances, was unashamedly anti-national in the final crisis; and the account of Jeremiah's arrest under the “Dora” of those days has a very modern ring about it (Jer. xxxvii. 11-21). By the fall of Jerusalem, in fact, this party were absolute gainers. Their principal enemies, the chief priests, were executed by the Babylonians; the temple, with its idolatrous associations, was burnt; the kingdom was destroyed; and all this they were able to represent as Yahweh's vengeance upon idolatry. The way was open for a strenuous propaganda among the exiles in Babylonia, which should convert the remnant of the Jewish people into a Monotheistic religious sect.

The prophetic party also undertook, shortly before or after this time, that re-writing of the history of Israel in the light of their own prejudices, which has given us the present books of Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The method followed was very simple. Extracts were freely made from the old, naive histories of “J” and his school; and these extracts were padded out with comment, on the lines of Deuteronomy, claiming disasters as the inevitable penalty of idolatry, and prosperity as the inevitable reward of Deuteronomic orthodoxy. The merits of monarchs are assessed according to their religious policy alone. The rulers of the Northern kingdom, simply because they maintain sanctuaries other than that of Jerusalem, are invariably declared to have “done that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.” Ahab, who was at all events a valiant fighter, not without a certain chivalry, is singled out for exceptional reprobation, because he introduced Phœnician worship; his magnanimity to his enemy, Benhadad of Damascus, is treated as a crime (1 Kings xx. 30-43). The only monarchs commended are those kings of Judah who listened respectfully to prophets, and took, at any rate, some measures against idolatry. Hezekiah, who was the first to attempt the total suppression of local worships, is highly extolled; and to minimize the impression made by Sennacherib's invasion and the thumping indemnity Hezekiah had to pay, an outbreak of sickness in the Assyrian army is exaggerated into an angelic massacre of 185,000 troops (2 Kings xix.). Deuteronomy, and the Deuteronomic history written at this time, became the nucleus of the Jewish Bible as it subsequently grew up.

ROBERT ARCH.

Acid Drops.

Bishop Hensley Henson writes to the *Times* protesting against the identification of Christianity with an attempt to make England a “dry” country. He says that if the English artizan is forced to link together in his mind Christianity and total abstinence, he will reject both. He also says:—

There is yet another consideration. The nation may vote itself “bone-dry,” but the Church cannot, so long as it continues to celebrate the Holy Communion according to the Lord's institution. And Anglicans, before they can become prohibitionists, must revise the Catechism.

That is a decided hit. The alliance of religion and drink is an ancient one, and not to be so easily broken as some people appear to think.

The clergy were exempted from Military Service during the War, but they are determined to exploit the peace time. Three bishops took part in the service at Captain Fryatt's funeral, and another Father-in-God officiated at the service at St. Paul's Cathedral.

At a Churchmen's Union meeting at Kensington it was stated that there was a tendency to describe the Kingdom of God as the “Democracy of God.” We do not despair of parsons describing the “King of Kings” as the “President of Presidents.” The clergy are adepts in the art of camouflage.

Professor David Smith is a notorious trimmer and evader of difficulties. In the *British Weekly* for July 31 he is asked “Why did God allow ages to pass before he sent his Son, during which time men groped in the dark?” This is an old question, and innumerable are the attempts that have been made to answer it; but the fact is that, on the assumption of the existence of a Heavenly Father, it is eternally unanswerable. Dr. Smith juggles with it, and ignores his own doctrine of the Fall, or, as he calls it, the “Initial Catastrophe.”

The curious thing is that, completely ignoring original sin, which forms such an important article in his creed, Dr. Smith says, adopting Lessing's words: "That which education is to the Individual, Revelation is to the Race." Of course, the race does not exist at all apart from the individuals who constitute it; and according to the Bible, God revealed himself, not to the race, but to favoured individuals in a specially favoured nation. We know quite well that education is necessarily gradual, and that in the Professor's article is identical with evolution; but the Son was sent that he might become mankind's Saviour. Dr. Smith, however, teaches that mankind was incapable of being saved until it reached a certain stage in the course of its education; but he forgets that when the Saviour *did* come, he was rejected, and is still rejected by two-thirds of the human race.

The truth is that Dr. Smith is what Robert Hall more than once called the great Puritan divine, Dr. John Owen—"a double Dutchman floundering in a continent of mud." It is of evolution, proceeding by means of inexorable physical and chemical forces, that he really treats, and his frequent allusions to God's and the Holy Spirit's share in the work damns it as the most gigantic and ghastly failure conceivable. It is utterly impossible for anybody to be at once a consistent evolutionist and an orthodox Christian divine, and Dr. Smith's naive attempt to combine the two is screamingly ludicrous.

At the George Eliot Centenary Celebrations at Nuneaton, the Bishop of Birmingham took a prominent part. The clergy love to patronize Freethinkers—when they are dead.

Providence doeth all things well. At Rio de Janeiro a plague of locusts has cheered the inhabitants.

The *Christian Commonwealth*, in its leading article for July 30, expresses its conviction that "the remedy for superstition in religion" is not Rationalism, for the simple reason that "Rationalism tends to leave out what it cannot rationalize"; but our contemporary culpably quibbles. The Rationalism that includes what it cannot rationalize is clearly a misnomer. The editor naively admits that there has been an irrational element in the great religious movements, and, of course, "irrational" and "superstitious," as applied to religion, are synonymous terms. The question that confronts us, therefore, resolves itself to this: What is the remedy for irrationalism, if not Rationalism?

The irrational element in religion is theology, or supernaturalism. To speak of "a reasonable theology" is essentially illogical, and all the great theologians glory in the fact that their doctrines transcend reason. The *Christian Commonwealth* disapproves of the service of Benediction, so warmly advocated just now by the Catholic party in the English Church; but, surely, the belief in it is no whit more unreasonable than any other supernatural belief. The simple truth is that there is no such thing as a "reasonable theology," and this is the very ground on which Rationalists reject all forms of theology, and confine their researches within the limits of Nature.

Dr. Barber, President of the Wesleyan Conference, confesses that "we are faced with a world of criticism, petulant, often unjust, but with some truth in the criticism," and yet, in the same breath, proudly claims that "never was the name of Jesus Christ so honoured." Consistency is a jewel not possessed by the ordinary parson.

At one of the Wesleyan Conference meetings, the Rev. Mr. Gautrey sorrowfully admitted that "as a profession the Ministry was a failure," but asserted that "as a vocation it was the greatest on earth." He spoke the truth. The ministry is indeed a total failure; but it yields a comfortable living to fifth and sixth-rate men who would starve in any other calling.

The *Evening News* states that at the Woking Peace Pageant the Salvation Army took part. Two banners were carried

in the procession, inscribed: "Are you prepared for death?" and "Death followeth on closely." What actually followed was a tableau of "the Allies." It might have been worse. The S.A. band might have played "The bells of hell go ting-a-ling, a ling."

Cardinal Bourne reviewed two cadet companies of the Sussex Yeomanry. Afterwards, the lads kneeling, the Cardinal pronounced the benediction. This took place in London, the capital of the British Empire, in the twentieth century.

"There is a marked increase in crimes of violence," writes a London editor. Just so! Only the dear clergy would have it that the World-War was a punishment for somebody's sins.

Place: North London Police Court. Occasion: Alfred Benning, Salvationist, summoned for maintenance of an illegitimate child. Incident: Defendant questioned as to whether he was speaking the truth. Reply: "I am a Salvationist, and don't tell lies unnecessarily." The qualification is delicious. But evidently the Court decided that this was not one of the necessary occasions, and made an order for 6s. per week.

The Vicar of Goldhangar, Essex, is seriously annoyed. It appears that "a host of ungodly persons" come to the village during the summer months for a holiday. The vicar would not object to that; but they don't go to church, and that does annoy him. For while those who let rooms and those who supply food, etc., reap the benefit of the holiday influx, the vicar gets nothing at all. The visitors require attention on Sunday, and that keeps the natives away from church. And "not only do they neglect to go to church themselves; they make it impossible for others to go." Hence the tears. And it is hard on the vicar. He is the only tradesman in the village who receives nothing from the holiday influx.

A decision has been taken by the Upper House of Convocation of Canterbury to introduce in the Prayer Book, a Collect, Epistle, and Gospel for the Festival of the Blessed Virgin. This decision, if persisted in, should go far to transform the Christian Trinity into a Quartette.

The British Undertakers' Union reports that the cost of coffins has increased sevenfold, and, in many places, burial fees have been materially increased. Perhaps the clergy will inform us if the cost of living in heaven is affected by the War.

The Mansion House is evidently undergoing a fit of active piety, for it holds a weekly prayer meeting. We confidently predict that, like most fits, this will not be of long duration.

Dr. Fort Newton, of the City Temple, makes a startling confession, namely, that, after nineteen centuries of Christian history, "very few have ever seen, even in a dream, what Jesus came to do, and what his Gospel meant, much less have they believed it." And yet, with this damning fact staring him in the face, the reverend gentleman has the temerity to assert that Jesus is the only hope of the world, in and by whom "all mankind can be saved here, now, upon earth." What an illusive hope to cling to!

The Young Men's Christian Association is to cater for women at some of their holiday camps. Perhaps they cannot get hold of the men without the girls.

The Bishop of Woolwich, like so many ecclesiastics now, is very democratic. Speaking at Brockley, he said that "he sympathized with the labour programme from beginning to end." Presumably, in the high and palmy days of Imperialism, he took comfort in the text: "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."

The Rev. Tyssul Davis declares that Christianity is "the religion of service." Did he mean domestic service?

To Correspondents.

- A. G. BARKER.—Thanks. Will prove very useful.
- L. MUSKETT.—Congratulations on the six new readers received. We can send you back numbers for distribution if you can use them. Much obliged.
- T. SHARPE.—Papers to hand. We shall be pleased to see to their distribution.
- MR. G. TREBELLS, replying to a correspondent in our issue of June 22, reminds us of an article which appeared from his pen on "Women and Freemasonry," which appeared in our issue for August 15, 1916. He also says that he sent us a subsequent article from New York. We regret that this never came to hand. It was probably submarined *en route*.
- MRS. E. ADAMS.—No, things are not much easier yet. But we are hoping for better times. And having lived through the past five years, we feel equal to anything. Thanks for appreciation.
- W. BINDEN.—It was personal identity as the expression of an entity separate from and independent of the material organization that was intended. It is the memory of past states, with their registration in a modified nerve structure, that provides the foundation of all that we can legitimately mean by the expression.
- J. W. SILKSTONE (Toronto).—Pleased to hear from you. It is not all "beer and skittles" being a Freethinker anywhere. But, after all, the man who has the courage to avow himself one finds something that nothing else can give him. And on any proper valuation he gains more than he loses—even though the gain cannot be counted in terms of cash or social position. Those who have tried it know it.
- T. B. H.—We have not forgotten your promise, and shall certainly call on you when the time arrives.
- W. J.—We did all that was necessary by letter. We have not lost sight of the other matter.
- A. E. HAMBOOK.—We agree with you that some very interesting accounts could be written of the progress of many of our readers from superstition to Freethought. One day we might start a series of such autobiographies, of about half column each—if they could be so compressed. We are gratified that you have found our writings so helpful; also that your brother-in-law in Burma finds the *Freethinker* in such ready demand.
- P. ADAMSON.—We haven't seen Professor Adamson's book, but, as you say, it is monstrous that such men should sneer at such great figures as Thomas Paine. The truth is that religious bigotry and vested interest found so deadly an enemy in Paine that his part in moulding the better thought of the nineteenth century has been systematically hidden. And to-day there is not one writer in a thousand who has the moral courage to do Paine justice.
- F. SWINFORD.—We note what you say, but, of course, our comments referred to the intellectual rather than the moral quality of the man. We cannot say whether Dean Inge holds shares in an armament firm or not.
- E. A. MACDONALD.—Safely to hand, with thanks. Rest will appear in due course. Sorry to hear you have been unwell. We are keeping fit, and in truth have no time to spend on being ill.
- D. WILSON.—There is no work of the kind at present in print. Something may appear one day.
- MR. G. WALLACE informs us that a popular edition of Metchnikoff's *Nature of Man* was published by Messrs. Heinemann at 1s.
- O. L. DAVIS.—We wrote on the subject some long time ago. Will deal with it again when opportunity offers.
- The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*
- The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*
- When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible.*
- Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.*
- Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.*
- All Cheques and Postal Orders should be crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."*
- Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.*

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention. The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

We hope that the Branches of the N.S.S. are not losing sight of the necessity of early preparations for the autumn and winter propaganda. It should be easier now to obtain halls for public meetings, and the public is there, if only an attempt is made to get at it. Nothing succeeds like a policy with a little courage behind it, and a Branch that ventures little cannot hope to achieve much. Ours is really "a glorious adventure," and the end is worthy the adventuring. Any help that can be given from headquarters will be cheerfully rendered.

We have nothing further to report this week concerning the action of the L.C.C. in prohibiting the sale of the *Freethinker* in the public parks. An attempt will be made to get the matter fully discussed within the Council itself, and, in view of that, we hope our London readers will let their representatives have their views on the matter. If the Council persists in its attempt to prevent anything being sold with which it disagrees, then will be the time to try other methods. But we can afford to wait. There are still some people left who care for freedom of the press and of propaganda; and the L.C.C. may find, once more, that it has tackled a bigger problem than it thinks.

We feel impelled to print the following from Mr. H. Irving, so do so:—

Your *Creed and Character* is a fascinating little book. In the course of my reading it, I had to lay it aside once or twice on account of my work, and I begrudged doing so. You throw your "Coh-e-noors" about like a millionaire trying to beggar himself, although I suspect that, radium-like, you emit these radiations without loss to your store. But there is a financial side to the matter. Sevenpence is a low price for such a closely packed mass of information and original thinking. One would think it was a case of "easy come, easy go," and even we who have been in touch with your public career for a straight run of about thirty years are apt to forget that it is the result of sustained digging in hard rock for as long a period. Your expressed view is that giving yourself *wholly* to the Cause you love is not sacrificing yourself, but realizing yourself. It would be encouraging if Freethinkers generally would *partly* realize themselves. They could do this by extending the circulation of *Creed and Character*. I have ordered a dozen copies, which shall either be sold, lent, or given away.

Eskimo Questions.

IN Curran and Calkin's interesting story of their eight months of travel by canoe, motor-boat, and dog-team, along the east side of Hudson's Bay (*In Canada's Wonderful Northland, 1917*), they describe a visit to a mission church, where they heard an Eskimo preacher addressing a congregation of Eskimo men, women, and children, and they say:—

Although not a word from the beginning to the close of the service could be understood [by the visitors], it was our duty to be present and show these people that we were heartily in sympathy with them. The missionaries say that they are placed in a most embarrassing position when white men visit the Posts, and entirely ignore the Church. The natives suppose the Church to be a universal institution of the white man, and the missionaries have been plied with many questions regarding the fact that some of the visitors had failed to attend the services. These questions they have found very difficult to answer. In fact, the Eskimo is, generally speaking, a thinking man, and it is not an infrequent occurrence for the missionary to be hard pressed for an answer to his critical questions regarding the creation and other Biblical stories with which he is familiar.

We can guess what will happen when larger and non-missionary knowledge penetrates to Wonderful Northland, "Coming events cast their shadows before."

In the "Upper Circles."

ACCORDING to the brief reports of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's lectures on "Life after Death" in the *Daily News* and other papers, the spirits of the dead have a jolly good time up above.

"People asked," said Sir Conan Doyle, "what about the child who dies? The answer is always the same," says Dr. Conan Doyle. "The child grows up under delightful conditions, and when the parents come across, it is there, grown up to welcome them."

"Yes."

"And what about old persons?"

"The old person goes back to the normal, the man to about thirty-five, the woman to thirty, so that no man need mourn his lost strength, or any woman her lost beauty."

"And what do they do?"

"A part of their work is missionary, and they talk of artistic, literary, dramatic, and musical matters. The 'etheric body' in which they work and which passes out of the physical body at death is an exact duplicate of the present body."

When I read this, I was, I must confess, a little bit astonished, for though I had become used to extraordinary stories from "spiritists"—friends of mine—of the doings of spirits in the other world, wherever that may be, I was not prepared for such a startler as this from Dr. Conan Doyle.

I pondered the matter over carefully for some days, and one night when I had got my mind finely attuned for the reception of any stray "spirit" that *might* be wandering about in the neighbourhood of Peckham, I called up one of my favourite little "sprites," Psycho by name, because of his sprightly movement and nimble wit, from the vasty deep, and post haste dispatched him off to the "upper circles" to ascertain for me whether what Dr. Conan Doyle had said before a large and credulous audience at Queen's Hall was strictly accurate, or whether it was, after all, only one of those fascinating stories that he used to spin when he set "Sherlock Holmes" on the track of some diabolical scoundrel of his own powerful imagination.

My little "sprite" was a long time on his errand, and in the meantime I had fallen into a sleep which, however, was more or less disturbed by strange dreams. In one of these dreams my "young sprite"—I say young, because the sprightly appearance of these creatures would lead one to suppose that they were always in their early youth—returned and narrated to me in language which I perfectly understood what he had seen "up above." Then he beckoned me to accompany him on a journey to "The Upper Circles," assuring me that it would only take a few years to reach our destination, and that he had "an invisible chariot" in waiting in which we could be comfortably wafted into the heavenly regions without running any risk of collision on the journey. When we had gone far away into the "Upper Circles" we came upon a group of beings whom my guide assured me were "spirits" who were clothed, or perhaps it would be more correct to say "wrapped in their 'etheric bodies.'" Presently when we had got, so to speak, to close quarters with numerous groups of "spirit forms," I ventured the remark that I thought I could see "the astral" or "etheric form" of some of them.

"Yes, I think you can," said my lively companion Psycho. "But they are very thin. I fancy I can see through them, I continued."

"Well, if you can't, I can," said my guide, who was a veritable Sherlock Holmes in his method of investiga-

tion and deduction. Presently I heard them mumbling something, chattering together like so many apes.

"Is that 'jabbering' their method of talking?" I asked.

"Yes," said Psycho. "You will observe that they are all toothless."

"So I perceive. There are no dentists in the heavenly regions, I suppose?"

"None," said my guide. "And consequently no artificial teeth for the spirits."

"What long 'astral beards' those old fellows over there wear, to be sure! No barbers up here, I presume?"

"None," said Psycho. "And they can never get their hair cut."

"Do you think it possible that the 'spirit forms' grow younger as the ages roll?—that time passes them by, like the Levite, on the other side?"

"Certainly not. Look for yourself. That old joker over there looks quite a thousand years old; look how shrivelled up he is. Why, you can't see his face for wrinkles."

"Yes; but I suppose he could put us up to a wrinkle or two"—I couldn't resist the pun—"about his 'etheric form.'"

"But what about the children? Do their spirits grow old?"

"Certainly."

"When they are very young, and take on the 'etheric form,' how do they grow or develop to the full spirit form? What kind of nourishment do they get? Are they brought up on the bottle, or do they get 'spiritual milk' from the breast? I can't see any breasts in the 'astral bodies' here; in fact, I can't tell what sex, if any, they belong to—they are all so much alike."

"Quite right," said Psycho; "that is why there are no marriages in the Upper Circles—and no divorces."

"But tell me, do you think Dr. Conan Doyle is right when he says that these creatures here who have taken on the 'etheric bodies' occupy their time in discussing music, literature, and the drama?"

"No; certainly not," said my guide; "because when they are on earth, although they get 'etheric bodies,' they leave their brains behind them. In fact, it's hard to say what they discuss, for they don't appear to have either teeth or tongue—and yet they have plenty of jaw."

"But have they any bands up here—string, or brass, or jazz?"

"No, not even a penny trumpet or a jews-harp. There are no instruments with an 'etheric form' and no instrument-makers up here."

"With regard to 'literature,' what books have they up here?"

"No books, no printers, no bookbinders, no machine-rulers, no publishers—no nothing; nothing but damp clouds and 'etheric' forms—too numerous to be counted."

"Then I think I can confidently tell Dr. Conan Doyle that he is wrong in this matter; that the spirits leave fools and knaves to do all the discussion down below?"

"Exactly."

"But I always understood that somewhere in the heavenly regions there was a land overflowing with milk and honey?"

"Not that I know of," said Psycho. "In any case, there are no cows and no bees up here; when they die, they are unable to put on an 'etheric form.'"

"What is that group doing over there?"

"That group," said Psycho, "is doing what all the spirits do in turn—the old trick—trying how many of them can stand on the point of a problematical needle that has neither length, breadth, nor thickness."

"In that case I do not think we need pursue our investigations any further. Let us descend."

With that remark we made our way through the clouds until we came to our "invisible chariot," and began to make a rapid descent towards the earth; but all of a sudden we seemed to knock up against a very stiff cloud, and the machine turned suddenly over, and down we came at a tremendous speed—crash! crash! crash!—both of us being precipitated out of the machine. Over and over we turned thousands of times; indeed, perhaps we turned somersaults millions of times, before we came within sight of the earth. When I realized that we were very near the earth, I groaned with fear, thinking of the awful bump I should get when I touched *terra firma*.

At that moment I groaned and turned over in bed, and rolled on to the floor, striking my head against a chair which stood near the bedside. I saw millions of stars; but when I had sufficiently recovered from my fall, I realized that the whole series of incidents was nothing but the "baseless fabric of a vision."

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Is God Necessary?

Si Dieu n'existait pas, il faudrait l'inventer.—VOLTAIRE.

LET me, with too weak words, paint for you the picture of what the alleged condition of the world under Atheism would be.

There would be wars and rumours of war. Truth would not be. Men could not trust the words of their fellow-men, nor nations the words of nations. Earth would be an armed camp and Desolation would cast its withered blooms across the face of things.

A hiatus would exist in the course of affairs. Stagnancy and putrefaction would be everywhere.

Immortality would be rampant. Robbery and murder, hand in hand, would devastate all.

No longer would man have a guiding star to look to in the darkness of his days, no longer a hope to cling to in his latest hours. Gone would be the higher things, gone the wonder of the inscrutable. He would be of the earth, earthly.

A pretty picture. Yet there is a familiar ring about it. Methinks the "God-fearing" world of to-day is not so different.

But the picture is false. It is as detestable as a *faux Rodin*. It is a fierce denunciation: a weapon of which ecclesiastics make much. But it is a two-edged dagger, cutting both ways.

For almost two thousand years Christianity and other equally inspired religions have shaped men's morals. They have insinuated their doctrines into the receptive and indiscriminating minds of children; they have bred those children to fear an invisible and omnipotent power. Yet, they argue, take away the object of their fear, which is to say, God, and they will become moral (and probably physical) reprobates. How comes it, then, that Churchmen would have us believe that fear and "bargaining with God" is a mistaken view of religion? To me, the crux of the matter lies in the fact that they themselves have no clear idea of what religion is.

This is no new situation. Andrew Lang, in his *Myth, Ritual, and Religion*, is forever endeavouring to find where the one begins and the other ends. And fails. Where experts fail, can an amateur hope to succeed?

The question we must ask ourselves is, "Has Christianity (exemplifying the highest sphere of worship) accelerated progress?" Has it led us to a position which the natural development of man could not have reached?

This is a subject in which fact must to a certain extent give place to surmise. Christianity is an active force beyond the radius of whose ruthless activity is nothing. The comparative method is the only one which can be adopted. From a knowledge of what was, one can construct what might have been—and what shall be.

The origin of the idea of God was due to an ignorance of natural laws. As these became better understood, the conception of Deity changed. The power behind the veil ceased to be the maker and mover of all things. As Man ascended, God descended. Early progressive scientists became sceptics, became Atheists in many cases. With ignorance, God is great; with knowledge, God is not.

Of ancient civilizations, the most advanced was the Greek. Amongst the Greeks were numbered many Atheists, and others had but vague, indefinite ideas of Deity. Plato's God was but "the idea of good"; yet that most eminent Christian lay-preacher, Dr. Glover, once asserted to me that Plato was a pre-Christ Christian.

Democritus of Abdera, the greatest thinker of his time, the formulator of the *atomic system*, was amongst the sceptics. He did not acknowledge the presence of design in Nature, and asserted that the gods were merely aggregates of atoms.

The gods of Epicurus were otiose, decadent "beings," who slept in the background, forgetful of all they had done, and existing merely because the philosopher had more important and more difficult problems to deal with than demolishing chimeras. If Epicurus did not deny that there were gods, he did deny that there was immortality. "*When we are, death is not; and when death is, we are not.*"

Lucretius, in his *De Rerum Natura*, transmutes the twin-philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus into the stately grandeur of Latin poetry. Euhemerus, whose mythical discovery of an island whose inscribed tombs demonstrated the fact that the gods of Greece were merely shadows of defunct kings, ironically jested at the idea of divinity, while Lucian, greatest of classic essayists, openly laughed the gods to scorn.

Yet, *mirabile dictu*, early Christian philosophers adopted Euhemerism as a mode of discrediting opposition candidates for the God-head. Would that they had been consistent and had applied the system to their own gods. But one cannot look for consistency in Christians.

With the rise of Christianity, with its intolerance playing upon the fears of the people, came the dark days of ignorance. Learning slept. When hundreds of years had passed and knowledge blossomed fresh in the Renaissance, Atheism became current. The forward minds left God behind them. They led the van of the assault on the fortress of deity, they were the earliest propagandists of a "world set free."

But intolerance, excommunication, and the Inquisition, did their deadly work. Yet this time knowledge had awakened not to sleep again. Slowly, but with sure foot, progress was made. Breach after breach was made in the stronghold of the gods. Now only a few tumbled bricks remain, behind which the remaining "last ditchers" have fortified themselves about with inspiration and "belief before knowledge is possible."

It is significant that the *Dark Ages* were those in which Christianity was omnipotent. They were dark with crime, and hate, and Prelacy; Progress lay chained with the thousand chains of prejudice and enforced ignorance.

From the foregoing necessarily brief *resume*, it is obvious that progress was made not because of but in spite of Christianity. A belief in deity creates a "forbidden ground," on which it is impossible, with impunity, to tread. Take away this bogey and the world is ours.

Why should we go through life fettered with ancient taboos and prejudices? Why should we sit, gray-haired and leaden-eyed, waiting the fulfilment of a promise made by the Lord — knows who? Why should we wait, and watch, and weary when we might be up and doing? We are here for but a little time; make the most of it that a better world may be possible for those who come after.

Wherein, then, is God necessary? If to keep men from crime, there is a sufficiency of human laws, and judges, and policemen without introducing a series of supernatural ones. If to have something to revere, man exists, as yet the noblest evolution of the common clay.

If to have something to strive for, there exists the vista of a nobler and a better world, which would at least be a reality, not a problematic Paradise. But if it is as a salaried inactivity for mediocre talent, there will, indeed, be a void and a glut in the market for unskilled labour.

This would be the only loss, and this loss would be, for the world at large, a gain.

H. C. MELLOR.

A Dirge.

Play me a march, low toned, and slow.

SECULARISM is a philosophy perfectly fitted to respond to all phases of life. It brings more happiness into the world than any other known deductions from the facts of Nature. But life is not all sunshine. We are all subject to the troubles inevitably linked to our existence. Even in the dark hour of final separation, Secularism is the greatest solace known to man. Reason and knowledge provide the most powerful sustenance by their harmony with the facts that everywhere surround us.

It has been our sad duty, recently, to attend and pay our last tribute and to render our last services to an aged relative. He was full of years, but—

Why mourn ye that our aged friend is dead?
Ye are not sad to see the gathered grain,
Nor when their mellow fruit the orchards cast,
Nor when the yellow woods let fall the ripened mast.

Ye sigh not when the sun, his course fulfilled,
His glorious course, rejoicing earth and sky,
In the soft evening, when the winds are stilled,
Sinks where his islands of refreshment lie,
And leaves the smile of his departure spread
O'er the warm coloured heaven and ruddy mountain head.

Why weep ye then for him, who, having won
The bound of man's appointed years, at last
Life's blessings all enjoyed, life's labours done,
Serenely to his final rest has passed;
While the soft memory of his virtues, yet,
Lingers like twilight hues, when the bright sun is set?

On arrival at the place of burial, we had some opportunity to reflect upon our change of attitude from the time when the thralldom of superstition was still upon us. How the surroundings used to weigh us down! We do not, of course, claim that we feel light and joyous now under these circumstances; but there is a great change. All around us are the innumerable dead, among whom are many that we loved, and by whom we were loved in return, and whose memory we still earnestly revere. They seem, in our present fancy, to reprove us; we come to them so seldom. What memories come to us! But we no longer fear about their fate; they are all sleeping peacefully.

How the voice of the presiding clergyman jars upon our feelings: "Man hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery," uttered in a loud, hurried manner, but soon to be lowered and slowed down as though he had become conscious of his want of harmony. Here lies our great charge against Christianity, this,

our present life is belittled in the interests of a supposed future life. As the service proceeded we were greatly impressed by: "The pains of eternal death" solemnly spoken and repeated. How futile all this seemed in the presence of all these surrounding tombstones. They seemed to mutely and decidedly dispute all that was being said over the open grave: "As we are, so will you be, behold our quiet." Let us listen to Jeffries:—

Nothing has the least fear. Man more senseless than a pigeon, put a god in vapour; and to this day, though the printing press has set a foot on every threshold, numbers bow the knee when they hear the roar the timid dove does not heed. So trustful are the doves, the squirrels, the birds of the branches, and the creatures of the field. Under their tuition let us rid ourselves of mental terrors, and face death itself as calmly as they do the vivid lightning; so trustful and so content with their fate, resting in themselves and unappalled. If but by reason and will I could reach the godlike calm and courage of what we so thoughtlessly call the timid turtle-dove, I should lead a nearly perfect life.

Thus, we here repeat that the great work of Secularism is the removal of the fear of death from the world, and by so doing we will stay all "tales of dying horror." The severing of the ties of love by death will ever bring pain and sorrow in its train. But as man becomes freed from these terrors he will learn more and more to look upon death, still with dirge-like feelings, but—

Like one who wraps the drapery of his couch
About him, and lies down to pleasant dreams.

J. FOTHERGILL.

Correspondence.

"THE SCIENCE OF THE ULTRA-MATERIAL." TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your contributor seems to me to land one into a morass of metaphysics, simply because he accepts too readily the opinions of Professor Oliver Lodge and other great physicists on the ether.

They start with an atom, and agree that it consists of matter and energy. A process of pulverization then follows, in which an atom is divided into much minuter parts. In this process matter has vanished, and we have only energy of some kind left. Professor Lodge reduces the atom to corpuscles of electricity, whatever they may be. No wonder Spiritualism flourishes after a process of metaphysics like this.

Might I recommend to your readers another view set forth on p. 250 of R. K. Duncan's *The New Knowledge*?

The ether is what it was—the hypothetical, but none the less believed in, medium of extreme tenuity and elasticity diffused throughout all space, the medium for the transmission of radiant energy.

Recently, however, Mendeleeff, the doyen of chemical science, has originated the conception that the ether, instead of being some mysterious form of non-matter, as generally believed, is actually the lightest and the simplest of the elements, and a definite form of matter.

He believes it to be one of the inactive gases of the Argon family of elements, and he assigns to it the position x in the Zero Group of his revised periodic arrangement of the elements.

The atomic weight of the ether he concludes to be nearly one-millionth of that of hydrogen, and its atoms consequently travel with enormous velocities.

This extreme velocity explains the all-pervading character of the substance.

It may be said that, on this hypothesis, Mendeleeff accounts fairly well for the properties of the ether, and his speculations are deserving of more credit and attention than they at present receive.

To the solid ground of nature
Trusts the mind which builds for aye.

HENRY SPENCE.

THOMAS PAINE.

SIR,—Re "Sugar Plum" on Thomas Paine. Am very much interested as to the house in New York. Some thirty years ago I found myself in the States, and from Castle Gardens some old farmer took me away out to New Rochelle, thirty miles from New York. On leaving the train we had to walk two or three miles to his and my future home for five months. Nearing there, I espied a four-walled enclosure, an iron gate entrance, weeping willows at each corner, and an obelisk in the centre. My curiosity was aroused at such a sight in the midst of open country. I questioned Livingstone Disbrow, who was to be my employer, what it meant, and I remember he sneered a reply with some contemptuous remark. This made me very determined to see it at the first opportunity. I did the next evening; the gate was locked, so had to climb the wall, and found it was Thomas Paine's memorial, his profile on one side, and quotations from his books on the other three sides, the significance of it being there I could not glean at the time. Eventually, I was employed painting on a farm adjoining the estate given by the U.S. Senate to Thomas Paine. My bedroom was in a barn, the only furniture a bed and a sleigh, and rats were were my companions; my working hours sunrise to sunset, Sundays free. From my one solitary window I often gazed on one other solitary house away in the meadows (they called them 'lots,' for they had stone walls like as in Ireland), and it was the house where Paine ended his days. I read afterwards that Mrs. Annie Besant, then a neophyte in the Theosophic rubbish, made a pilgrimage to the spot by the wayside. Have I not also read that the shrine has been removed? On the voyage over, I went by a Red Star boat from Antwerp, and there were only about twenty English folk amongst a cargo of all nationalities. I had equipped myself with Paine's *Age of Reason*, and several of G. W. Foote's pamphlets. Through being seen with these, I earned the sobriquet of Bradlaugh, and a so-called "Debate" was fixed up with a broken-down Professor. He read a treatise a long way above their ken, and I replied and scored with reading *Mother Eve*, rather it was G. W. Foote that scored, only I got the credit.

W. S. CLOGG.

HEROES.

There is the Open Secret Society of the heroes. Their mystery has been published in books, in songs, in world-famous deeds of life and death, to all men of all nations and languages; yet only the heroic brotherhood really comprehend it, and are fully possessed by its inspiration. Other men may have transient glimpses of its meaning, and may thrill with its divine enthusiasm in rare moments; but soon the great door shuts, and they are cowering again in the darkness and the cold; nor can they even truly remember these rare moments in other hours and days, though they remember well enough the words of the chant, or the details of the action with which the inspiration happened to be connected. But one of the brotherhood understands and feels always. The mystery which he understands so thoroughly and feels so triumphantly is simply this: That in the whole range of the universe from highest heaven to deepest hell, there is no thing or circumstance, creature or being, dreadful to a man; that out of himself there is nothing which a man need fear; that no nature can be born into a realm unquerable by that nature; and moreover, that the most dazzling lightning of ecstasy leaps from the blackest storm of danger. But neither he who writes nor he who reads is any nearer to the heart of the mystery through this interpretation; if he is of the brotherhood his pulse beat in unison with the throbs of this heart before; if he is not of the brotherhood his pulse will never beat in unison with these throbs—save at intervals and for moments similar to those in which the hands of a clock that does not go agree with the hands of another which is keeping true time.

—James Thomson ("B. V.")

Whoso comforteth a woman who has lost her child will be covered with a garment in Paradise.—Mohammed.

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.

OUTDOOR.

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

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 6, A Lecture.

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S.: 3.15, Mr. H. Brougham Doughty, "Are Secularists Sincere?"

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): Mr. E. C. Saphin, 3.15, "The Creation Story;" 6, "Mithra and Christ."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY.—Ramble to Epsom, Headley, and Walton Heath. Conducted by Mr. F. M. Overy. Train from Waterloo (L. & S. W. Railway) 10.38 a.m. Take single ticket to Epsom, 1s. 6d. Tea at Headley.

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

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Messrs. Samuels and Shaller; 3.30, Messrs. Baker, Saphin, Ratcliffe, and Dales.

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