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Views and Opinions.

The Death of Religions.

One of the largest facts in human history is religion. It is a phenomenon upon which religious advocates dwell at inordinate length, but without anything like an adequate appreciation of its cause or its significance. They point out with great glee that humanity at all times, and under all conditions, has possessed a religion; but they ignore the fact that, except under the most primitive conditions, human advancement has meant a weakening of religious conviction. With very primitive societies, gods are created with a lavish profusion, and flourish with the grotesque exuberance of an untouched tropical forest. In less primitive times the gods are more sharply defined, their "spheres of influence" marked out, the extent of their powers indicated. Advancing civilization sees them diminished in number and still further weakened in power, until their very weakness and impotency are apt to breed the kind of sentimental pity one feels for a millionaire become a pauper or an aristocratic monarch reduced to the level of a simple citizen. Like their human creator, the gods bring with their birth the promise of death. They are all born, flourish, and decay under fundamentally identical conditions. Sooner or later mankind turns its back on its gods, and the causes are patent to all who attentively study the subject. Every religion carries within itself the seeds of its own dissolution. In the causes that give the gods their being is contained the sure promise of their decay.

* * *

An Old Process.

The rejection of religion is no new phenomenon. It occurs in all civilized history. In one of his wonderfully modern Dialogues, Lucian introduces the Olympian deities discussing—like a modern Church Council—the prevalence of unbelief among men. They are disturbed that man seems to be reaching the stage of either not believing in the gods at all or not troubling about them. There is a great deal of talk, until one of the minor deities asks:—

What other conclusion could they arrive at when they saw the confusion around them? Good men neglected, perishing in penury and slavery; and profligate wretches, wealthy, honoured, and powerful. Sacreligious temple robbers undiscovered and unpunished; devotees and saints beaten and crucified. With such phenomena

before them, of course men have doubted our existence.We affect surprise that men who are not fools decline to put their faith in us. We ought rather to be pleased that there is a man left to say his prayers. We are among ourselves, with no strangers present. Tell us, then, Zeus, have you really ever taken pains to distinguish between good men and bad? Theseus, not you, destroyed the robbers in Attica. As far as Providence was concerned, Sciron and Pity-o-campus might have murdered and plundered to the end of time. If Eurystheus had not looked into matters, and sent Hercules upon his labours, little would you have troubled yourself with the Hydras and Centaurs. Let us be candid. All that we have really cared for has been a steady altar service. Everything else has been left to chance. And now men are opening their eyes. They perceive that whether they pray or don't pray, go to church or don't go to church, makes no difference to them. And we are receiving our deserts.

The case could hardly be put more effectively. It is the appeal to experience with a vengeance, and experience sows the seeds of the one disease that is fatal to all shams. We can say with Lucian, Men are opening their eyes—and the gods are receiving their deserts.

Religion and Science. * * *

How long is it since man began to find out his gods in the matter of physical science? For thousands of years the gods dominated the world. From the fall of a shower of rain to the revolution of a planet, the gods did everything. To merely question their power was the greatest of crimes. Bit by bit this vast field was reclaimed—a task at the side of which the conquest of the frozen North or of the fever-stricken tropics was child's play. The process is now practically complete. Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Laplace, Lyell, with numerous other workers, have given us a finished universe in which there is simply no room for the supernatural. All that was once done by the agency of the gods is now done through the motions of a cosmic mechanism with which outside interference in simply inconceivable. Physics and chemistry know nothing of the supernatural; if it exists, it is outside their departments. A chemist or a physicist would to-day no more think of bringing in "God" as the cause of the phenomena with which he deals than he would attempt to revive the cosmical theory which rested the earth on the back of an elephant.

Morals and Religion. * * *

As in one direction we can see a physical world developed that is self-contained and self-sufficient, so in another we can see a moral world developing along the same lines. Deep down in the animal world we can see the beginning of our moral nature. We can trace, more or less completely, its growth from the purely animal to the semi-human, and from the lowest human stage to the highest. The history of the moral sense may be difficult enough to trace in full detail, but it is plain enough in its general outline, and the knowledge of detail is bound to come some day. At any rate,

there is no room for doubt that normal human associations alone are adequate to explain the origin and development of the moral qualities, nor that the gods, as in Lucian's sketch, have been receiving credit that is not due to them. Very largely, indeed, they have hindered moral development rather than aided it. In the name of God vices have been branded as virtues and virtues branded as vices. In the name of God the moral sense has been stunted and deformed so that men have been led to praise in God conduct they would at once have denounced in their fellow-men.

* * *

Religion and the State.

In social life there is the same lesson. Once upon a time the existence of a State without a religion would have seemed an impossibility. Much as Christians have quarrelled on other matters they have agreed on this. The contest between Nonconformist and Churchman has been far more a question of *what* religion should be taught than of *ought* else. To-day the fact that there is a growing number who hold that the State has no right to interfere at all in matters of religion, is proof that here also the gods have been found out. It is a recognition that the gods contribute nothing of value to society at large. And this marks an enormous advance. It marks the beginning of the end, and registers the truth that man has been his own saviour in the past, and must be his own saviour in the future. People are recognizing with us, as with Lucian, that going to church, offering prayers, belief in the gods, have no real bearing on human welfare. Now, as then, people see good men punished and bad ones rewarded, and they who are not fools, and who have the courage to look facts in the face, decline to put their faith in deities who are either incapable of doing anything, or are too careless to exert their power.

* * *

The Penalty of Detection.

In all directions the gods are being found out, and no deity the world has ever seen has been proof against such a discovery. They owe their power to human weakness, their wisdom to our folly, their supposed care for man to man's lack of care for his fellows. Yet, because old beliefs die hard, and because people shrink from treading unaccustomed paths, the gods die but slowly. Fear is only quite killed by knowledge, and knowledge is of slow growth. There is an old German story of a ghost that had for long terrified a whole district. People did not wait to see it, it was enough that news came that it was abroad. At last some villagers met the ghost in a place where escape was impossible. Terrified they watched its approach, until when it came close the spectre obligingly removed its skull and showed them that it was empty and harmless. So the world has for unnumbered generations been terrified by the spectre of deity not a bit more dangerous than the Germanic ghost. It terrifies only those who are too timid to come to close quarters with it. Others are under no delusion as to its nature or value.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Why, why was I born a man, and yet see the sufferings of wretches I cannot relieve! Poor houseless creatures, the world will give you reproaches but will not give you relief. The slightest misfortunes of the great, the most imaginary uneasiness of the rich, are aggravated with all the power of eloquence, and held up to engage our attention and sympathetic sorrow. The poor weep unheeded, persecuted by every subordinate species of tyranny; and every law which gives others security becomes an enemy to them.—*Goldsmith*.

The Obsolete Faith.

ONE of the chief features of supernatural religion is its out-of-dateness. In its very essence it is an anachronism, a surviving but happily declining relic of what has aptly been called the Primal Stupidity of mankind. All its doctrines, as well as all its rites and ceremonies, are antiquated. Prayer, for example, is amusingly archaic both in style and substance. Its very language is reminiscent of times that are dead. The leading article in the *British Weekly* for August 21 is entitled "Three Steps to God." A quotation is given from the third volume of Woodrow's *Analecta*, in which the writer describes what a servant girl once told him about the Rev. Samuel Rutherford. As is well known, Rutherford was a Scottish divine who lived during the first half of the seventeenth century. He was an ultra-Calvinist, and had to undergo severe persecution for the faith that was in him. Even for his own day, his piety was of such a character that "profane wits" jested upon it, and Woodrow himself admits that he made use of "some familiar expressions." To return to the servant girl's report as supplied by the *British Weekly*, we find that—

She overheard the great preacher in his room, and noticed that he offered three petitions to God, one after another. "When he walked sometime she heard him say, 'Lord, make me believe in Thee'—and then he sat down and mused sometime. He rose again and walked; she heard him say, 'Lord, make me love Thee!' and then sat down again. And again he rose and uttered these words, 'Lord, make me keep all thy commandments!'"

According to the *British Weekly*, there are "three steps to God," and certainly most peculiar and unnatural steps they are. Assuming the accuracy of the servant girl's tale, we have no hesitation whatever in characterizing Rutherford's threefold prayer as a telling argument against the truth of supernaturalism.

Curiously enough, however, the *British Weekly* not only makes allowances for, but positively defends and urgently recommends, the continual use of those strange petitions. It is admitted that "there is much in life, even in church life, to abate our belief in God, to dull our sense of his reality, and to damp our conviction of his living presence." We venture further, and confidently affirm that there is nothing in life, particularly in church life, even to remotely suggest the active existence of a just and loving God such as Christianity preaches; and so unnatural is the belief in him that it is in perpetual danger of dying out. As the leading article states, "unbelief is not far from any one of us, however advanced we may be." The truth is "that faith remains to the end an object for prayer." In other words, it is not in us at all; "it is a gift of God, not only at the threshold, but later." It is not a thing that can be manufactured out of our natural resources.

Now, equally foreign to our nature is the so-called duty of loving God. Of course, "there can be no love without faith, but there can be faith without love, even in Christianity." Your faith in God may be as firm as a rock, but you can have no love for him until it is shed abroad in your hearts through the Holy Ghost in answer to your own prayer.

There are plenty of men and women in Christendom who are satisfied with their faith in a just God, but never thrilled by it. They need to pray, as they take the step of faith, "Lord, make me to love Thee!"

Thus, pietism is nothing if not irrational. Has a human child ever pestered his father with such silly petitions as "Father, make me believe in thee" and "Father, make me love thee"? Belief in and love for his father are

perfectly natural to a healthy child, and to pray for either would be ludicrous in the extreme. And yet the Heavenly Father can neither be believed in nor loved except in answer to fervent and never-ceasing prayer.

If the Christian God really existed, the third petition would be less grotesque than the other two; for any father worthy of the name would be delighted beyond measure to be of every possible help to his children. As a matter of fact, however, there is absolutely no evidence of the existence of a Super-nature in any shape or form. We maintain that all the facts of history, honestly faced, bear witness to the non-existence of a just and loving Ruler of the world, and most assuredly there are no ethical commandments, no moral obligations whatsoever, which bear the least trace of a supernatural or super-human origin. It is easy enough for the editor of the *British Weekly* to expatiate on the undefined "laws of God" and the duty of "an all-round obedience to God's will"; but we challenge him to point to any law or will which is not wholly natural. He talks confidently of revelation to which faith is the response, and assures us that "the revelation is of a God whose character is Love," ignoring the melancholy fact that we are living in a world dominated by Hate, whose actual God is Greed. He alludes to "human conditions which are sometimes full of misunderstanding and friction," and adds, "It is there that the commands of God are visible." We aver, on the contrary, that human conditions have always been, and are now in a pre-eminent degree, so full of injustice, cruelty, oppression, and exploitation of the weak by the strong as to make the belief in a Supreme Being whose character is love the stupidest and most canting of hypocrisies. There are some twenty or thirty brutal wars in progress in Europe at this moment, economic disabilities, and wicked profiteering prevail everywhere, Capital and Labour being at daggers drawn; and in all these conflicts the Christian Church, despite its tall talk, exerts no influence, and does not even take the slightest part. Face to face with such a terribly miserable situation, the following is the wisest sentiment to which the editor of the *British Weekly* can give expression:—

"Lord, make me believe in Thee," is a prayer that accompanies us, as we live on and attempt to see God as the reason and meaning of our world, as the hope and strength of our existence.

Highly significant are the Pastoral Addresses which the various Methodist Conferences have just sent down to the Churches. They all virtually admit the practical impotence of Christianity. That of the Wesleyan Conference dwells on "the relaxation of standards of sex morality, the disregard of Sabbath observance, and of truth, the feverish gambling, love of pleasure, and the strength of the liquor traffic" as menacing signs of the times. The United Methodist Pastoral is a somewhat self-righteous document. Here is a specimen:—

As a Church we have reason to be proud. In pulpit and pew we possess a large share of gifts, culture, and scholarship. Our financial resources were never greater. We have a finely-balanced constitution. But it is a fuller baptism of the Spirit that will alone equip us for the problems and tasks of our age.

When will that fuller baptism be realized and supply the essential equipment? The Primitive Methodist Address is a more modest and also more truthful address. It declares that "Christ must have his chance in the world's affairs," a profoundly humiliating claim after nineteen centuries of Christian history; and the League of Nations is said to be that great chance. But the Primitive Methodist Church is sensible of the fact that Christ has not yet won even Christendom. "Around

us," the Note confesses in sadness of spirit, "are crowded populations in town and city drifting—steadily drifting—away from our churches." The writer is convinced that those teeming millions are not actively opposed to Christianity, though thousands of them undoubtedly are; but, in any case, the Church no longer attracts them, the true explanation of which is to be found in their total loss of positive supernatural belief.

We, therefore, contend that theological religion, or supernaturalism, has outlived its time. The bulk of the people have left it behind and take no account of it. There are Rationalists among us who simply ignore it, not thinking it worth their while to even formally attack it. Being themselves independent of it, finding their own resources adequate in all emergencies, they turn their backs upon it, and treat it as if it were not. There are others, however, who, having thrown off the yoke of superstition, are solemnly resolved to do all within their power to help those who are still in bondage to emancipate themselves as speedily as possible. It must not be forgotten that there are many thousands in Great Britain and Ireland whose livelihood is contingent upon their success in keeping the superstition afloat; and some of us regard it as our bounden duty to counteract their baleful influence over their steadily dwindling followers.

J. T. LLOYD.

Parliament and the Priesthood.

If I had been a bishop, with an income of five to fifteen thousand a year, I should have had an inexhaustible source of rejoicing and merriment in the generosity, if not in the credulity, of my countrymen.—*John Bright*.

A CYNIC once described the Church of England as "a distinguished branch of the Civil Service." It was happily done, for that form of the Christian Church which is known as the Church of England has been manufactured by Parliament, and from time to time has been in the hand of its creator for repairs. This creator is a secular association known as the House of Commons, having no religion in particular, and looking upon the theology which it patronises as a special constable, whose duty it is to prevent people from attending too much to the affairs of life by promising them rewards when they are no longer alive.

Among the clergy are a number who pretend that the Church of England represents a religion independent of Parliament. Most clergymen are notoriously ignorant of the culture of their own profession, but the ignorance is unpardonable when they see from time to time the ritual, government, and doctrines of their Church being declared by Acts of Parliament, framed by Freethinkers, Roman Catholics, Free Churchmen, Jews, Unitarians, and the other religions or non-religions professed by the six hundred Members of Parliament.

It appears also that these clergy, who are so ignorant, are many of them perjurers. They subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion sanctioned by the King "by God's ordinance, according to our just title, Defender of the Faith and Governor of the Church within these our dominions." But in practice they openly defy these ordinances, which are declared to be "the true doctrine of the Church of England, agreeable to God's Word." These Articles make most curious reading. They include the belief that Christ went bodily to hell; that a spirit can be at the same time a father and a son, and also proceed from itself as a ghost; that Adam was the father of the human race, and that he ate forbidden fruit, in consequence of which countless generations are damned to everlasting torture; that the Romish doctrine

concerning pardons, worshipping, and adoration, as well as of images and invocation of saints, is a vain invention; that the Bible is the Word of God; and that the monarch is the head of the Church.

To these Articles of Faith, among others, every Church of England parson subscribes. We know that great numbers of them do not believe in them, or observe them; that they are taking money by false pretences. Their main reasons for remaining in the Parliamentary Church of England are "purple, palaces, patronage, profit, and power," as a former Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral happily expresses it. And the right to appoint clergymen to benefices is sold for money in the open market, as if it was so much coal or a quack medicine. Parliament makes the religion and the landlords appoint its professors, or barter the appointment to the highest bidder. "O the sorry trade!"

The Parliamentary nature of the Church of England is emphasized further by the fact that the ecclesiastical canons of 1603 are still in force, except they conflict with the laws of the land, and the courts have decided that they are still binding on the clergy. They have been amended from time to time, as, for instance, in 1887, when Parliament extended the legal hours for the performance of the marriage ceremony, and one of the canons was altered accordingly. When James the First ratified these canons, they were ordered to be read once a year in every Church. It is a pity that this ordinance is no longer observed, for they are a reminder of the intolerant and bitter spirit underlying priestcraft.

The first dozen canons are aimed at Nonconformists, and all but one ends with a curse, a distinguishing mark of vertebrate Christianity. Whosoever denies what the canons affirm "let him be excommunicated by the fact itself, and not restored but by the Archbishops after his repentance and public recantation of these his wicked errors." This excommunication means that any loyal Churchman may not sit at meal with the person cast out, although he may be his own father or brother. Clergymen who look sideways at Nonconformist tradesmen, or who exclude little Free Church folk from Sunday-school treats, are only obeying the canons as best they can in a milder age.

Who are the unhappy persons who are cursed? If you deny the royal supremacy in Church affairs you are cursed. If you deny that the Anglican Church teaches and maintains the doctrines of the Apostles you are cursed. If you say that the Prayer Book is out of harmony with the Bible you are cursed. If you declare that the Thirty-nine Articles are erroneous you are cursed. And so on, and so forth, in the true spirit of Christian charity. But that the law of the land overrides these canons, everybody who refused to attend Church should be solemnly cursed, and the names read out in the parish churches.

It is a grievous and bitter thing that boys and girls, silly women, and ignorant people generally, should be taught such distinctive Church principles in language which leads them to believe, and is intended to that end, that millions of their fellow-countrymen are outside the pale of salvation. We are told from every pulpit that, now the World-War is over, our national religion is to be something quite different from what we have known before. There is much room for drastic alteration. It concerns us all, for the legal theory of this country makes us all parties to the constitution of the Church. And this branch of the Civil Service is the enemy of democracy. For no one can be a loyal Churchman without renouncing his mental and moral freedom, and placing his civil loyalty and duty at the mercy of a priest.

MIMNERMUS.

The Kirk Alarmed.

THERE has been for some time past a doleful outcry from the various governing bodies connected with the Protestant Churches in Scotland, and their plaint has latterly been increasing in poignancy. Their grievances are the serious falling-off in church membership, the lax attendance at church services, and—most ominous of all, for here the future of the Church is at stake—the dwindling number on the Sabbath-school roll.

The lamentable condition of the Scottish Churches is not a new one. Outside observers have long noted the decay in churchgoing, and its steadily progressive character; but save for an occasional utterance by some candid cleric the prevailing tendency on the part of the Churches has been to minimize so far as possible the significance of the growing defection of the masses from old-time orthodoxy.

But of late there has been in several ecclesiastical quarters very frank admission that the Churches are fast losing their hold on the people, and that it is not going to be easy for them to regain control. Obviously the Churches are hugely disappointed that the War has not been instrumental in sending the people back in droves to religious worship. Though how a War such as we have come through could be expected to lend a strengthening aid to the Christian religion must remain a puzzle to anyone whose mentality has not been completely doped by Christian teaching. The fact remains, however, that the Churches confidently expected that the War (in the providence of God) would work out to their advantage, and their chagrin at the egregious failure of their anticipation is proportionately keen.

There was some plain speaking at a recent meeting of the Glasgow United Free Church Presbytery. What was referred to as "the new situation arising from the War" formed the subject of considerable discussion. If the world was to be saved from injustice and class-hatred, there was only one thing that could do it. Needless to say this "one thing" implies the influence of Christianity. No explanation was given as to why Christianity, which has been at work for a good few centuries, had not already exorcised injustice and class-hatred. Nor do any of the speakers seem to have realized that the record of Christianity's non-success in this field hitherto is scarcely likely to encourage confidence in her future ability to achieve the much-desired object, namely, justice and universal goodwill.

It being frankly conceded by the committee previously appointed to consider the matter that the "world" at large now declines to come to the Church to be "saved," the suggestion was made that the Churches should go out to the people, presumably in emulation of the Salvation Army, though with a certain measure of refinement. It was urged that "men of special gifts" should set forth the views of the Church at open-air meetings at such places as Glasgow Green, "where all sorts of orators, atheists and agnostics among them, addressed people on all sorts of subjects." If this proposal, which is to be submitted for the approval of the congregations attached to the Presbytery, ever comes to anything we may wish the Churches joy of their attempt to compete for popular favour with the Atheistic and Agnostic orators aforesaid.

One lay member of the Presbytery made the sorrowful admission that it was the thinking working man who, to a large extent, was going from the Church. No more strikingly adverse reflection on the Churches can be conceived than the obvious deduction from this statement. Secularists have long contended that if the people would only think there would be a speedy emptying

of the Churches. It is gratifying to find this contention confirmed from within the religious fold itself. Unfortunately for our cause but fortunately for the Churches, the percentage of those in the pews who cultivate independence of thought is not remarkably high. Religion is a sedative drug for the intellect, not a stimulant.

We are not impugning the sincerity and conscientiousness of many in the ministry when we insinuate that the clerical repining over the serious falling off in church attendance has mainly an economic basis. Observers of human nature are well aware that the motives which actuate the conduct of men and women are curiously mixed, and that singleness of purpose is an exceedingly rare characteristic. It not unfrequently happens that the ostensible reasons given by an individual for pursuing a particular course of action fail to include the one factor which really dominates the issue in his mind. We are all apt to ascribe to ourselves purer motives than those with which we are really entitled to be credited, and clergymen are no exception to this generalization. We may, therefore, reasonably infer that something besides zeal for the glory of God and for the moral uplifting of humanity lies at the root of the grave concern expressed by the clergy at the visibly growing indifference to their proffered ministrations.

There is all the more likelihood of the jeremiads of the clergy being inspired by economic considerations where a church is solely, or almost solely, dependent on pew rents, voluntary contributions from members, and donations from wealthy sympathisers. In the case of an Established church, where a comfortable "living" is provided whether the pews are filled or not, the incumbents can afford to regard empty benches with a philosophic equanimity not to be attained by the cleric to whom empty benches may spell semi-starvation. It can thus be perceived that in one most important particular the so-called Free Churches are not quite so free as they profess to be. They are tethered by the economic rope, the length of which depends upon how far they can succeed in pleasing their congregations.

Economic pressure is also—consciously or unconsciously—to a great extent the moving power of the current agitation amongst the Protestant bodies for church union; and this despite the plausible show of indignation at the scandal of a divided Christendom with which the demand for reunion is put forward. But it is not merely an amalgamation of the governing authorities of the various Presbyterian bodies that is seen to be desirable. Much more essential to the financial well-being of Protestantism in Scotland is the amalgamation of the many skeleton congregations to be found struggling to maintain their existence within comparatively small areas where church attenders are a vanishing quantity. The serious dissipation of monetary resources involved in the indiscriminate planting of churches is being vividly brought home to clerical leaders in this country. Union and combination would reduce the competition, and incidentally, by eliminating a percentage of the clergy, furnish a little more money to go round. In this way the stipends of the remaining clergy could be substantially increased.

Unquestionably, to judge from the discussions that take place at clerical gatherings and from letters to the press, the principal concern of a large number of clergymen is how they can manage to secure a better income. They are not disposed to rely upon God's overshadowing beneficence and the spontaneous or whipped-up generosity of the faithful. What they want is a guaranteed minimum salary fixed on a basis having some relation to the current high cost of living. It may be

noted as a healthy sign that some lay members are of opinion that the present general income of the Presbyterian Church should be more evenly distributed, and that if this were done the income level of the lower paid clergy could be raised appreciably without any clamant appeals being made to the public for the augmentation of small livings. One correspondent—greatly daring—has suggested in the columns of the leading Scottish daily newspaper that a reasonable average stipend should be settled by the Church, and that the many clergymen who now enjoy handsome incomes should voluntarily surrender any surplus in excess of this fixed sum for the benefit of their poorer brethren, by allowing all salaries to be pooled. The above-mentioned correspondent must be remarkably sanguine if he expects the wealthier clergy to do any such thing. We think we see the ministers with the big stipends tumbling over one another in their eagerness to display their Christian charity in such tangible fashion.

The same writer has a short and easy way of dealing with an appeal which the Church of Scotland has recently made for an additional £10,000 per annum for foreign missions. He says: "Take twenty of the livings whose stipends are £1,000 each, divide each by two, and without real hardship to anybody concerned the £10,000 asked for would be obtained at once." He very aptly indicates that this is one of those causes which ministers have presumably near their own hearts and towards the support of which they should give the self-sacrificing lead, and he bluntly declares that the laity should say, "Not a penny till the Church's own house is set in order." Were this attitude of the laity to become widespread, the alarm of the Church would speedily develop into panic.

GEO. SCOTT.

Acid Drops.

A particularly brutal case in connection with the Prior Park Roman Catholic Industrial School came before the magistrates at Bath on August 25. The Superintendent and three other officials were charged with ill-treating a lad of thirteen who had been committed to their care from Ilford. The lad was found by the police wandering about the streets of Bath with a chain attached to his legs. He had escaped from the school, and inquiry showed that he had been severely ill-treated. He had also been chained by the ankles, and by the hands and feet in such a way as to make movement impossible, and, it was stated, had been beaten about the head with a rolling-pin. Medical evidence showed that the boy's body was covered with bruises, and that he had been subjected to gross ill-treatment. After a lengthy hearing, the Superintendent was fined £10, another official £2, one sent to prison for one month, and the remaining one discharged. The Chairman of the Bench then admonished the boy for being badly behaved, and told him that he was responsible for men of hitherto unblemished reputation being brought before the Court. We take it that the unblemished reputation only means never having been found out. For brutality of the kind described cannot be the product of an accident. But the magistrate lecturing the boy for being the cause of these pious gentlemen getting into trouble strikes us as distinctly humorous. If the men had been Free-thinkers, the lad would have been praised for performing a public service.

Men no longer attend churches in any number. The Bishop of Chelmsford says that men comprise only fifteen per cent. of congregations at church services. At Bethnal Green less than one per cent. of the men attended church. Nor is this all the story, for a census taken in London some years ago showed that only five per cent. of the population attended places of worship, and of these the overwhelming proportion were women.

The dear Bishop of London advised a Hyde Park congregation to have nothing to do with Spiritualism and ghosts. Except, of course, the Holy Ghost, which is a perfectly respectable bogey.

At Bristol, a dock labourer appealed against a sentence of one month's hard labour for stealing two apples. The sentence was reduced to two days' imprisonment. According to the Bible, for a similar offence in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve received a perfectly monstrous punishment, which was continued during succeeding generations, and is still in force.

"Poor clergy are a disgrace," says the Bishop of Chelmsford. It is a worse disgrace that thirty-nine members of the Bench of Bishops should share £180,700 annually, and prate of the blessings of poverty.

The *Daily Chronicle*, which is old enough to know better, is voicing the dreadful sufferings of the "starving" clergy. In bold headlines, the editor harrows his readers' feelings in this fashion: "How a Vicar Lives on £200 a Year," and then adds in the letterpress that the poverty-stricken parson has to wear his overcoat in Sunday-school to hide his rags. The editor of the *Chronicle* is losing his sense of humour. Millions of families live on £200 a year, and less, and even then father doesn't have to pin his shirt-front to his braces.

Dean Inge is very gloomy about the future of this country. He thinks there will most likely be bankruptcy, followed by a period of anarchy which will end up in a military autocracy. We do not think the outlook is quite so black as this, although we agree that it is none too bright. But it is curious to observe what little real help religion is in the great crises of life. Religion could not prevent the War, it could do nothing to shorten it, and now that the War is over it can give no assistance to straighten out the tangle. And yet people ask, What should we do without religion? Perhaps the best way to answer the question is to ask, What is it that religion does that could not as easily be done without it?

Speaking at an English Church Union meeting at Weston Favell, Northampton, the Rev. T. J. Watts said: "Women were said to be emancipated, but he did not know from what. In half a century he had not discovered that they were slaves." Perhaps the reverend gentleman's reading has been confined to religious works where they do not mention such dreadful subjects.

Churchmen combine the gentleness of doves and the wisdom of serpents. The Welsh Church Bill is a case in point. By the secularization of tithe, the Church would have lost £100,000 annually, but the War caused the suspension of the Act. Since that date the value of the tithe has appreciated, and the astute Church officials have squeezed another million of money out of the taxpayers.

What did the Church do in the Great War? Apart from acting as recruiting agents, the clergy did not cut a heroic figure. The Church sent over 1,000 chaplains—at officer's pay—to the back of the fighting lines.

The Bishop of Chelmsford declares that "the Church can never identify herself with any one political party against another." It is a counsel of perfection. His lordship had better look up the record of the votes of the Bishops in the House of Lords.

The trombones of the Church Army have ceased playing military marches, and are now raising the wind by hymning the Prince of Peace. Bold advertisements, asking for thank-offerings, are now appearing in the press, and are headed with the word "Peace." We wonder if the Church Army's officials ever laugh at the results of their excessive brain-work?

"The average Englishman is shy and reticent in talking about his religious opinions," sagely remarks the *Daily Mail*.

But bashfulness is excusable when the unfortunate individual is hazy as to whether he believes in one God or three, and as to whether hell is like Mesopotamia or an ice-cream factory.

The journalists are hard pressed for copy during the holidays. One London paper informed its readers that a snake eighteen inches long had been found in an allotment on the outskirts of the Metropolis. What would those journalists do if the talking snake from the Garden of Eden turned up—and bit some of them?

Mr. Bankes, a London police magistrate, writing to the *Times* on the drink question, says that he does not believe "that the miracle of the wedding of Cana of Galilee is untruly narrated." Perhaps his honor is misled by present-day conditions, when wine is indistinguishable from water.

Laundry charges are to be increased still further. At this rate, it will be cheaper to buy a new shirt than to send the old one to the wash, and presently we shall all be driven to the idea of adopting the simple-life blankets of the Twelve Disciples.

What hair-raising things are reported from Russia! It is even said that the monasteries have been closed and the monks sent to work.

In a laudatory notice of Billy Sunday, the American evangelist, who has been asked to visit England, a London paper says: "he owes his success to his unsurpassed fervour and his torrent of racy baseball slang." The latter is a strange qualification for a "doctor of divinity."

According to the *Observer* of last Sunday's date, the American Red Cross experiences great difficulty in carrying out its work in Montenegro owing to the prevalent belief in evil spirits. There is a general belief that all illnesses are borne on the night wind, and are distributed by evil spirits. As a consequence, the people keep their windows closed, and so help to spread tuberculosis. Dentists state that, when they extract a tooth, the patient keeps a handkerchief over his mouth for several days, in order to prevent evil spirits getting into the cavity. We may take this as one of the ways in which religion shows its beneficial influence—it spreads disease in the very act of guarding people against it. And an inquiry would show that even in this country many thousands of similar cases could be easily found. European civilization is still only skin deep, and this semi-submerged mass of superstition forms the great reservoir on which Spiritualism and all forms of religion so easily draw.

The "Starving Clergy" stunt in the press makes interesting reading. One of the "starving" parsons writes to the *Daily News* complaining that he has discarded his horse and trap, discharged his gardener, and two indoor servants. In their place he has a lad to help the remaining maid.

Writing of the Whitehall cenotaph, the Rev. A. Fleming, of St. Columba's Church, Pont Street, calls the memorial "a sermon in stone," and adds, "There are no dead." Presumably, the reverend gentleman means that the so-called "dead" are walking the golden streets, or else grilling in another and warmer place.

Many efforts have been made to get a *Christian* inscription placed on the cenotaph, the obvious idea being to get all the advertisement for Christianity that is possible. We protested in these columns against Christian symbols being placed over the cemeteries in France where our soldiers lie buried. We have no objection whatever to Christians putting over their graves anything they like, but it is monstrous to use the deaths of all sorts of people as an occasion for advertising the great imposture of Christianity. We are glad to see that our protest has borne some fruit in the exclusion of Christian symbols from the cenotaph, which is, we believe, to be a permanent erection somewhere or other.

To Correspondents.

J. ADLE.—We are not aware of any English translation of Laplace's *Mecanique Celeste*, but you should find an adequate account of the work in any good history of astronomy.

T. WELLS.—We have no doubt that if we made the *Freethinker* other than it is, our sales might be increased. But that would not be the *Freethinker*; and, so far as we are concerned, there would be no reason for issuing the paper at all. We are not anxious to sell a paper—it is *the* paper we want to sell. We must sell it because we can't afford to give it away; but in either case it is only of interest to us so long as it is doing the work it has always done.

T. ELMES.—Thanks. We feel much better for the rest. It was not until we knocked off for a bit that we realized how much the rest was needed. And we made the most of it. Some days we reduced the work of doing nothing to a fine art. We don't think anyone could have done less.

MRS. C. M. RENTON.—We have handed on your suggestion to the proper quarter. Whether expressing or repressing oneself is a pleasant or an unpleasant task is, we think, a matter of character. You evidently find repression the harder task, and we congratulate you on the hardship. When you come to England we shall hope to have the pleasure of meeting you.

MRS. HARDINGE.—If God gave half the attention to murderers before they became such that he is believed to give to them after they have committed the crime for which they are executed, both they and the world might be the better for it. We agree with you as to the stupidity of most of the "spirit controls." The orthodox creed makes heaven frightfully dull, Spiritualism makes it very stupid in addition.

G. GROVE.—We note your appreciation of Mr. Lloyd's articles. This appreciation is, we are pleased to say, very general among our readers.

MR. J. NEATE writes expressing the great appreciation of a large audience of Mr. Thresh's first visit to Victoria Park. Members are looking forward to another visit from the same speaker.

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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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.

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

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.

When some three years ago a Freethought lecturer was arrested in Connecticut, U.S.A., on a charge of "Blasphemy," Mr. Theodore Schroeder undertook the defence. And it could scarcely have been in better hands. Mr. Schroeder has made the case an occasion for a review of the whole question of blasphemy, and as it stands we have no hesitation in saying that it is one of the most—if not the most—complete discussions of the subject yet offered. The argument fills an octavo volume of 456 pages, and is published by the Free Speech League, East 59th Street, New York. We cannot say what the published price is, as there is no indication of cost on the copy that has reached us.

The special value of Mr. Schroeder's work is that, in addition to the usual legal arguments, the reader is given a history of the "crime" of blasphemy, with a record of all the cases in England and America until the early years of

the nineteenth century. But along with a record of cases, there is given, to use the author's words, "much of the psychology and philosophy of the law, and more or less of discussion as to the intellectual methods involved in the formation of legal opinion." It is these latter features which makes Mr. Schroeder's work stand out so clearly from the customary run of essays on the question of Blasphemy. The preparation of the work must have involved an enormous amount of research, and we heartily congratulate Mr. Schroeder on the result. Freethinkers everywhere are under obligation to him for his work. Bulky as the volume is, Mr. Schroeder calls his work "an unfinished argument," and hopes to one day complete it. We sincerely hope he will.

Plain, straight, clean, and courageous talking on the sex question is always welcome, and readers will find all these qualities in *Married Love: a Book for Married Couples*, by Dr. Marie Stopes (Putnam's Sons, 6s. net). Much of what Dr. Stopes has to say is, of necessity, of a speculative character, but it is all said with insight and imagination. Unfortunately, thanks to the doubtful moral tone induced in this country by the prevalence of Puritanism, the handling of questions relating to sex relationships has, for the most part, fallen into wrong hands, and an unpleasant atmosphere has gathered round a subject, the right understanding of which is of vital importance to the race. All the more reason for welcoming a work of the character of *Married Love*, which has now reached a seventh edition in the short space of twelve months. Dr. Stopes handles her subject in the only way in which it should be handled, that is with perfect frankness, which is the proper corrective to a deal of the prevailing suggestiveness. For just as it is the partly clothed, and not the nude that suggests indecency, so it is the writing that proceeds by hints and innuendo that is really unclean. The sooner sex questions are dealt with openly and plainly by people of authority and standing the sooner will it be lifted out of the hands of those who live by trading on the baser feelings of men and women.

We see that the Malthusian League is issuing a "Most Urgent Appeal" for funds. As there appears to be no money in hand, the need is evidently urgent enough, and it would be a pity to see the propaganda of the League languish for need of a little timely assistance from those who believe in its work. The address of the League is 48 Broadway, Westminster, S.W.

Mr. John Richards, a member of the Swansea Branch, has undertaken the selling of twelve copies of the *Freethinker* weekly to new subscribers, the local Branch undertaking the purchase of any unsold copies. The Secretary of the Branch writes that knowing Mr. Richards, he does not expect any of the twelve copies will remain unsold. This is a capital way of helping. Enough of this kind of assistance would enable us to get back to sixteen pages in a very short time. And we shall not be content until we get the paper back to its old size. The *Freethinker* was the last paper to change, in consequence of the War, and we think it will be one of the first to get back to its old form.

A Rondeau.

THE Human Mind, by education,
Can overcome its degradation,
And, through the Flame—Experience—
Shall know the Truthful from Pretence,
And aid each salving emanation.
To weakness, born of superstition,
Is proved each Fear-housed institution
Its strength!.....Reason shall make clearance
Of remaining Lies!
Fear of the Unknown, on emotion;
On human feelings and devotion,
Exploited by Dark Appearance,
To Human Love gives severance
From Truth—to Reason, destitution;
There remain but Lies!
C. B. WARWICK.

Subjection.

"You shall be subject to your husband" must be a quotation, which, to-day, to all decent and refined women, requires a great deal of thought—particularly to the younger generation—who have their lives before them and the marriage vow or contract in their minds. Undoubtedly the word "subjection" covers absolutely the future happiness of all married women, for does it not give that opportunity to an abnormal mate or husband to really and finally spoil her future life.

To an observer with a knowledge of elementary philosophy and physiology, any street, in any town, and the various families residing there, are object-lessons. The word "subjection" hits him at once on all sides, and he has not to go far to study its effect on women, and the governing principle of the marriage vow. He sees with little effort, many, many cases of woman's whole existence as a refined being spoilt, especially in the case where the married couple happen to have been brought up in an intensely religious atmosphere, or possibly in a mixture of religions.

As an example, take a male Catholic married to a rather simple and impressionable woman, who may or may not have been lured over to the same faith—the husband, probably, is of an abnormal nature—most Catholics are, either through a mixture of foreign blood, or the fact that their antecedents have been encouraged to propagate freely on behalf of their Church; and in addition no Catholic understands science (this, of course, is "taboo"). What is the effect on the woman whom he marries? She, on her part, has vowed to the Church to be true to him. At first she is frightened, then she is disgusted, and finally she settles down to a life a little better only than that led by a woman of the unfortunate class.

Possibly, if she be a woman with a good constitution, she is burdened with a large family, and her home continually is in the hands of priests, doctors, and undertakers. Sometimes, after a few years, the husband takes to drink, and she has to keep him, and perhaps at an early age buries him, if she does not go under herself first—a tragedy caused through ignorance of the ordinary ethics of life, the Church's insistence on the woman's vows and that objectionable word "Subjection."

It may be said that very few women to-day carry out to the letter their marriage vows—possibly the more enlightened evade them; but what chance has a dependent woman who happens to marry a man distinctly more polygamic than monogamic?

Women who wish for healthy and happy unions should insist at least on an alteration in the marriage contract, or, better still, agitate for the principles of ordinary eugenics.

We hear of a lot of advice given as to the rebuilding of the human race, but is it possible while the word "Subjection" remains in the marriage contract?

W. H. W.

Mr. Speaker, Sir,—I am now the instrument to present unto you a very short, but a very sharp bill, such as these times and their sad necessities have brought forth. It speaks a free language and makes a bold request. It is a purging bill. I give it you as I take physic, not for delight but for a cure: a cure now, the last and only cure, if, as I hope, all other remedies have first been tried. I never was for ruin, so long as I could hold any hope of reforming; my hopes that way are even almost withered. The bill is intitled, "An Act for the utter abolishing and taking away of all archbishops, bishops, their chancellors, commissaries and deans, deans and chapters, archdeacons, prebendaries, chanters and canons, and all their under officers."—*Sir Edward Dering, "A Collection of Speeches, &c., 1610."*

Writers and Readers.

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE.

It is a rule of journalism that writing, while it may be good enough in itself, is indifferent or bad from the standpoint of periodical literature if it is not connected however loosely with something of actual interest. It must not float aimlessly in the air. The journalism of Freethought, however, is not so completely a slave to topical interest. All that is needed is that the subject should be more or less intimately connected with the Atheistic view of things, and given a little ingenuity, it is easy to find correspondencies and analogies. A little while ago some of us were wondering what that inspiring beverage tea had to do with Freethought. A friend of mine, who knows the whole movement as well as I do the palm of my hand, tells me that the connecting link was the well-known tea-drinking habit of the great Atheist debaters. The whole thing was clear; but I still think that Mr. Palmer, who amused us some while ago with a series of articles on this mind-sapping beverage, might have worked out more fully his theory of the relation of tea to Freethought, contrasting perhaps the flatulence and dullness of the old-time debates with the sparkle of *Satires and Profanities*, the work of a poet who had "taken the Daughter of the Vine to spouse."

I do not think I need an excuse for talking about Marlowe in the *Freethinker*, and the topical interest, if one is required, is provided by a paragraph in the daily papers with regard to a memorial tablet to the Atheist Marlowe:—

A memorial tablet, "To the immortal memory of Christopher Marlowe, M.A., the founder of grandiloquent blank verse, who met a tragic death near this spot 1st June, 1593, aged 29 years," and bearing the quotation, "Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight," was yesterday unveiled by Sir Frank Benson at the parish church of St. Nicholas, Deptford.

After paying a warm tribute to Mr. Stanley Cooper's part in securing this tribute to the poet's memory, Sir Frank Benson said they honoured Marlowe because he so fully represented that wonderful Elizabethan age—unrivalled for the various products of human activity, the various forces set going in every direction of human life—which was so full of achievement, so greatly daring, so strong, and which laid the foundations of our Empire. The peer of Shakespeare, he had enriched our language for all time with lines such as "She gilds the flowing waters as they glide," and the picture of a king: "The perfect shadow of a sunshine day." They honoured him not only in his own achievements, but in his inspiration, as the man who helped to make Shakespeare's task possible.

How anxious are the parsons and their respectable friends to connect themselves with any writer who has added to the credit of English letters! Probably Marlowe was buried in the churchyard of St. Nicholas, but that was not because the Church honoured him, but because he happened to die at a disreputable tavern close by. Deptford had a roisterous and bawdy reputation in those days, and seems to have done its best to live up to it. Marlowe was filled with the heady spiritual wine of the Italian Renaissance, and his view of personal morality was no doubt hazy. At the end of May, 1593, he was boozing with some choice companions, and coming to blows over the favours of a punk or the turn of a dice, his own dagger was wrested from him and driven through the eye to the brain. Now, there is no reason why a man should not be a good Christian and a bad member of the social group. George Peele, on his own confession, was a moral cesspool, and yet he was unctuously pious, and had, we may be pretty certain, a genuine horror of Freethought. Marlowe, we feel sure, had not sunk so low as some of his fellow-playwrights, but from the standpoint of religion he was worse because he saw through it. He had found its origin in a social fiction rather than in a revelation from on high.

Christopher Marlowe was born the same year as Shakespeare, in 1564, at Canterbury, where his father was one of the gentle craft of shoe-makers. He was educated for one of the learned professions, possibly the Church, first at a good Canterbury school, and then at Cambridge, where he graduated B.A. in 1583, and M.A. in 1587. The freedom of

London life attracted him, and the atmosphere of the stage which was just about to free itself from the combined fetters of Senecan tragedy and the old mystery play, was one in which he could breathe freely. It is likely that he had had a hand in many plays which have not come down to us, and his voice is to be heard in some of the anonymous plays that are now credited, in part or in whole, to Shakespeare, or to other playwrights. *Tamburlane*, an imposing pageant rather than a play, was, probably, produced in 1587. It replaced the "jigging rhymes" of the old drama by a new kind of blank verse, a fitting vehicle for vehement and heaven-aspiring thoughts. The amazing career of this scourge of heaven, the Atheist *Tamburlane*, must have thrilled the simple theatre-goer of the time. But not for long; in a few years the wits were raising a laugh by ridiculing the more highfalutin passages. You know the great scene where *Tamburlane* enters in a chariot drawn by the captive kings of Trebizond and Soria with bits in their mouths and thus addresses his steeds in great style:—

Holla, ye pampered jades of Asia!
 What, can ye draw but twenty miles a day
 And have so proud a chariot at your heels
 And such a coachman as great *Tamburlane*.....
 To make you fierce and fit my appetite,
 You shall be fed with flesh as raw as blood,
 And drink in pails the strongest muscadel.
 If you can live with it, then live, and draw
 My chariot swifter than the racking clouds;
 If not, then die like beasts, and fit for naught
 But perches for the black and fateful ravens.

There is plenty more in the same Hercules vein, if you can manage to stomach it, and here and there snatches of pure lyric beauty that will quieten your irritated nerves.

The theme of *Tamburlane* is the lust of kingly power and possession, stifled only in the dust of death. In the next play, *Dr. Faustus*, we are shown an aspiring student of Nature reaching for knowledge beyond human limits, and finding it worthless in comparison with what is lost, when at last the knowledge is compassed. In the *Jew of Malta*, a crude and sanguinary melodrama, the theme is the lust of worldly riches. With his last and greatest play, *Edward II.*, Marlowe came to grips with the more complicated facts of human nature. In this powerful and painful drama he portrays for us a man, under the dominion of personal caprice, sacrificing the welfare of a loyal people to an ignoble passion, and yet not wholly bad, but rather too refined, too soft, and too subtle for the harsh times in which his lot is cast. The last scenes are concentrated horror and pathos. If this is what Marlowe could do at the age of twenty-nine, when Shakespeare was publishing the "first heir of his invention," the facile and lascivious *Venus and Adonis*, where would his genius have taken him if he had lived another twenty years?

These are the subjects of his four great plays. It is not possible to identify him with any one of his characters. All we are entitled to say is that he was attracted by abnormal physical and moral courage, and by equally abnormal weakness, and that he was temperamentally disinclined to run quietly in theological harness. What is more, we know, from the number of contemporary attacks on Atheism, that there was a good deal of Freethought abroad of the sporadic kind. It was not published, because your sceptic is not usually a fanatic; it was spread by private or semi-private discussion. The bold spirits at the Universities and in London would meet together to challenge the conclusions of Theism. Lyly, the author of a fashionable and tedious novel, addresses a chapter to the gentlemen scholars, in which he puts down rather too easily a sceptic whom he calls Atheos. Reading between the lines, we can see that Lyly had had the worst of the argument with some real Atheist, and revenged himself by knocking down one of his own making. Ascham found Freethought prevalent among the travelled classes, while another writer tells us that it is hard to find an older man who is not an unbeliever. The insidious spread of antitheistic theories was checked, not by argument, but by the common informer, an open confession of weakness. The latter days of Thomas Kyd, the author

of the popular *Spanish Tragedy*, were embittered by the lying reports of one of these needy scoundrels, and he was even put to the torture. Kyd was most likely an innocent victim, but not too careful of the company he kept. Marlowe, we can be certain, was less innocent. There exists an indictment, prepared by one Richard Bame, which would have brought Marlowe to the stake if he had not been killed in a tavern brawl. Here are a few of the counts in the informer's indictment, and it is impossible to say that they are not in keeping with what we know of Marlowe's temperament:—

That the Indians and many authors of antiquity have assuredly written at above sixteen thousand years ago, whereas Adam is proved to have lived within six thousand years.

That Moses was but a juggler, and that one Heriots (Harriot) was a mathematician and dependent of Raleigh) can do more than he.

That the first beginning of religion was only to keep men in awe.

His alleged remarks on the New Testament and Jesus are even more profane. He said that Christ was the son of a carpenter, and that, if the Jews crucified him, they knew best what they were doing; that the sacraments would have been administered better in a "pipe of tobacco"; that all Protestants were hypocritical asses; that "if he were put to write a new religion he would undertake both a more excellent and more admirable method, and that all the New Testament was filthily written." The curious reader can study for himself the whole of the charges in Mr. Havelock Ellis' unexpurgated edition of the plays (*Mermaid Series*). Now, it would seem that the Church and her misguided friends have forgotten the Atheistic opinions of the poet, and, in their anxiety to identify themselves with a man of genius, have taken a viper to their bosom. It was not kind of Sir Frederick Benson to let down his clerical friends so badly.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

Haeckel's Shrine.

THE beauty of being an anonymous press hack is that you can snipe the big men. A writer in the *Nation* has been letting himself go on the subject of Professor Haeckel. And very entertaining his criticisms are. This sapient journalist has invented another and false antithesis to "Materialism." This time it is "Vitalism." After cursing the great German Monist for his Materialistic writings, chiefly for his arguments against the existence of a human soul, he administers the knock-out blow thus: Haeckel points out that man ought to pursue truth, goodness, and beauty; but what if the molecules of the human brain make him seek what is false, bad, and ugly? After all, Haeckel "has his shrine like the rest of us," for does he not conclude "The Riddle of the Universe" by remarking that we must "bow before" truth, goodness, and beauty?

This is subjectivity run mad. If you have a shrine of some kind, apparently you are all right, though the object of your worship and devotion may be quite unsusceptible of definition. All the truth, beauty, and goodness man has ever known or acquired, or will ever know or acquire, have their source in Nature. We have no evidence or experience of a "super nature." We have known *men and women* to whom it was a delight to offer whole-hearted and reverent homage; but it is a very different proposition to expect any reasonable being to pay the same tribute to some person he has never known, never seen, and never heard. It is not the Materialist who decries and obliterates truth, goodness, and beauty. These are abstract terms, and what they represent are the qualities of human thoughts, human words, human acts. The orthodox offer you a pig in a poke. There is no room for the rule of "Caveat Emptor" in the theologians' law. You are asked to believe in, to worship and to serve, somebody you do not know and have never seen or heard. Is that anything like Haeckel's "shrine"? Does it not, on the contrary, involve a repudiation of truth? How can anybody love, or hate, or admire, or express any opinion of value upon somebody else he knows absolutely nothing about? No person who is loyal to his own manhood would so degrade his reason.

The proceeding is essentially immoral. It is sheer pretence and, therefore, false.

There are, no doubt, some of our own scientists who would never feel a spasm of anger though you referred every day to their "shrines." It is largely by the tyranny of terms—words—that orthodoxy manages to survive so long—terms that are polarized. "Shrine" is one of them. But the fact of a man having a "shrine" is not necessarily proof that he is pursuing truth, beauty, and goodness. On the contrary, some very great figures in history have been convicted of falsehood and deceit, oppression and villainy, who were ardent and abject devotees at some "shrine."

Haeckel is to-day the target for many popguns. We think his teaching will survive them. But, as the Editor pointed out, the sapper and miner are also at work. As he truly observed, the *Daily Telegraph* added slander to absurdity by declaring that Haeckel's Materialistic teachings had much to do in implanting the ideas that led Germany to war. This idiotic lie was copied into many other newspapers. The clerical dodge is to keep a good grip of the press, though it must be confessed that clerical influence, while very evident in the more provincial newspapers, is not quite so strong as it was in the bigger dailies, who are reducing the space that used to be given to "Ecclesiastical Intelligence." Maybe they are beginning to realize that the "Intelligence" is not so "great," and that it does not go down so readily as in former days.

It is suggestive to reflect that Haeckel's country is the land where many of our British Churches sent their divinity students to complete their education.

IGNOTUS.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIAN VERACITY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your interesting series of articles on the Christian cannibal rite, more or less following the lines of Mr. J. M. Robertson's admirable *Pagan Christs*, a popular edition of which, with the polemical matter left out, I have in vain urged him to publish, there appears to me an occasional lack of one of the most essential virtues of Freethought, viz, critical scepticism. To come to the point, I allude to the following passage: "Tacitus, who wrote somewhere between the years 115 and 117, describing the horrible punishment which Nero inflicted upon the Christians for their suspected share in the burning of Rome, speaks of them as 'Men.....,' " etc.—the well-known passage. Not being a bookworm, I have to rely on memory; but I think I am right in stating that, like similar passages about the early Christians in Pliny and Josephus, this one in Tacitus is admittedly a forgery. It does not occur in any of the MS. copies of Tacitus before the thirteenth or sixteenth century. The name of the forger of the passage was given, along with other details of the forgery, but it has escaped my memory.

We all know the picture of the "infamous Emperor" conjured up by the diseased imagination of the moralists, Christian and other, dancing up and down a broad terrace, mad, and playing a fiddle—though, so far as I know, fiddles hadn't yet been invented—all Rome burning luridly below, and at intervals along the breastwork of the terrace impaled Christians, steeped in bitumen, flaring merrily, to represent street gas-lamps. If I mistake not, a second-rate Christian artist has depicted the scene, his work being about on a par with another stagey pictorial libel of the same class, entitled "A Circe of the Arena." I ran through the *Annals* many years ago, but have not retained the details in conscious memory; but much later I have twice gone through Suetonius with a certain amount of critical attention. Suetonius gives me the impression of being a more cautious and phlegmatic writer than Tacitus, and his three brief allusions to the Christian camorra in Rome have not, so far as I know, been impugned.

The first occurs in the *Life of Claudius*. After alluding to the establishment of fire brigades at Pazuoli and Ostia, the suppression of the liberties of the Lycians on account of their ruinous quarrels, the restitution of those of the Rhodians on account of their good behaviour, etc., Suetonius writes;

"Judæos impulsore Cristo (apparently the head camorrister) adsidue tumultuantes Romæ expubit"—not a word more. The second allusion to the Christians in Suetonius occurs in his *Life of Nero*, cap. xvi. Mention is first made of Nero's invention of a new type of architecture. Colonnades, built at his own expense, were to run in front of the blocks of houses, from the upper part of which the fire brigade was to dominate the flames when any of the blocks took fire. He proposed including the port of Ostia within the walls of the city of Rome, and uniting the two towns with a ship's canal. Public extravagance was severely checked, and public banquets reduced to the presentation at Christmas of hampers of chicken and veal pie. Cookshops were only permitted to sell haricot beans and vegetables. And finally: "Afflicti supplicii Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novo et malefico." That is all.

We come now to the burning of Rome cap. xxxviii. Some one observed: "On your death there'll be a grand flare up." "No," replied Nero, "in my lifetime." Suetonius goes on: "Nam quasi offensus deformitate veterum ædificiorum et anquutus flexurisq; vicorum incendit ushem." It was done quite openly; he sent his domestics round with flaming tow and torches. The famous golden house being surrounded by sundry granaries, he had them bombarded being of stone, from which it may be inferred that the nasty slums he was determined to get rid of were mainly built of wood, and, therefore, double-distilled hotbeds of bugs and pestilence germs of all sorts and sizes. The salutary bonfire lasted a week. He watched it from the Mecænutic or Mecænatian tower, dressed in his stage costume (he had made his *début* sometime previously as light tenor at the Naples San Carlo of those days) and chanted the capture of Troy presumably from some opera in which he had taken part. Such is the inflated cock-and-bull story of the Imperial monster reduced to its true dimensions.

The learned though youthful founder of modern scientific physiology had ventured to diagnose the early Christians as the enemies of the human race. A truly scientific diagnosis, and, naturally, they had to pay him out with the weapons generally employed by them, viz., lying and calumny.

The third allusion to the early Christians occurs in the account of the dastardly murder of Domitian; turn it up and you will be truly edified.

See how a plain tale shall put you down.

Genoa, August 5, 1919. W. W. STRICKLAND, B.A.

Obituary.

North London Freethinkers will learn with regret of the death of Walter Lloyd, aged seventy-three, who passed away at his residence in Kentish Town on Monday, August 17, after a long and painful illness borne with much fortitude. Mr. Lloyd had been associated with Freethought for more than forty years, and was a familiar figure at all North London meetings. To his daughter, who nursed him with devoted care, he constantly repeated the wish that a Secular Burial Service should be read at his graveside by Mr. J. T. Lloyd. This wish was carried out at Highgate Cemetery on Friday, August 22, in the presence of his sorrowing sons and daughters, to whom we extend our deepest sympathy.

E. M. VANCE.

Some for the Glories of This World and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

—Omar Khayyam (*Fitzgerald's*).

I that saw where ye trod
The dim paths of the night,
Set the shadow called God
In your skies to give light;
But the morning of manhood is risen, and the
shadowless soul is in sight.

—Swinburne "*Hertha*."

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. James Marshall, A Lecture.
- NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Parliament Hill Fields): 6, Mr. H. Brougham Doughty and Mr. R. Norman, A Lecture.
- REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S.: 3, Mr. H. Brougham Doughty, "Secularism — The People's Salvation"; Mr. R. Norman, "The Money God."
- SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, Mr. Percy S. Wilde, A Lecture; 6, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Primitive Brains in Modern Skulls."
- WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. W. Thresh, A Lecture.

HYDE PARK: 11.30, Mr. Samuels; 3.15, Messrs. Baker, Saphin, Dales, and Ratcliffe.

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.
- NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE BRANCH N. S. S. (12A Clayton Street East): 6.30, Members' Meeting.
- SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY.—Ramble to Caterham, Oxted, and Godstone. Conducted by Mr. F. M. Overy. Train from Charing Cross 10.25 a.m., or London Bridge (S. E. & C. R.) 10.34. Take single ticket to Caterham, 1s. 10½d. Tea at Godstone.
- SWANSEA AND DISTRICT BRANCH N. S. S.—Outing to Port Eynon. Leave Reformer's Book Shop 10.30 a.m.

SHORTHAND.—Special Correspondence Course by Gold Medallist and L. C. C. Instructor. Personal attention. Moderate fee. Inquiries for particulars cordially invited.—SCRIPT, 5 Hailsham Avenue, London, S.W. 2.

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