

FREETHINKER

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Views and Opinions.

As Good as Christians!

The other day the Rev. A. Dale, Vicar of All Saints, Chorlton-on-Medlock, Manchester, declared that "We have to face the fact that a large number of people outside the Churches are quite as good Christians as those within." The vicar probably thought this a very commendable exercise in liberalism, and perhaps it is—for a clergyman. But it is all part of the colossal conceit that has grown up with Christianity, which leads Christians to assume that everything decently and properly human belongs to a particular Church, or if not to a Church, at least to Christianity. How often does one hear the remark, from a "liberal" Christian, "I think that some Freethinkers are quite as good as Christians"? The compliment is meant to be overpowering—and it is. But it is the cool impudence of it that overcomes. The assumption that one ought to feel flattered on being placed in the same category with Christians is delightful. Because, after all, one knows these Christians. We live with them, walk with them, talk with them; we see them when they are not posing, as well as when they are, and is their behaviour or their temper so overpoweringly excellent that one ought to feel flattered on being told that one is as good as they? Personally, we decline to feel flattered. We feel that the sentence should run, "Freethinkers are often no better than Christians." Then we might feel a becoming sense of humility, for we should realize that all our efforts after improvement, both of self and others, had ended in a ghastly failure. * * *

Are Christians Superior?

Looking at the matter impartially, does the Christian really strike one as presenting a quality of conduct of such a kind that to be placed in the same category ought to be considered a compliment? Facts hardly support such an inference. Could one honestly say "as sober as a Christian," or "as truthful as a Christian," or "as tolerant as a Christian," or "as clean as a Christian," or "as honest as a Christian," and by any or all of these expressions mean that the Christian showed a superiority over the rest of the world in the exercise of the qualities indicated? Christians are less kindly and tolerant than Buddhists, less sober than Mohammedans, less peaceful than the followers of Confucius, and less

truthful than anyone who places a moderate value upon truthful speaking. In actual life the Christian will lie in the name of Christ, slander in the name of Christ, rob in the name of Christ, kill in the name of Christ. And all the time proclaim—also in the name of Christ—his superiority to all others. That, perhaps, is due to the name of Christ. For underlying the professed humility and meekness of the Christian, lies the most profound arrogance and assertiveness. His arrogance is born of the belief in exclusive salvation and imagined selection. His assertiveness is a consequence of his religion having been for so long in a position of power—a place to which neither its moral strength nor its social utility has ever entitled it. * * *

How to Get a Safe Testimonial.

We were once engaged in a debate with a Christian who read a number of passages from some book, pointing out the great strength of the arguments he had been using. After some time, we asked him who was the author of the book from which he was quoting. "I am," he replied. Excellent! He had written his own testimonials, and was taking no risks. Now, that is exactly what Christianity has done. It has written its own testimonials, and has taken all possible care that testimonials of an unflattering character should have as small publicity as possible. Practically, all the testimonials as to the overpoweringly moral excellence of Christianity come from Christians. Naturally, they are all flattering. It is the only way by which one can be quite certain that a testimonial shall be flattering. So Christians have seen to it that the histories on which the people are fed shall be written by Christians. They see to it that the press shall be provided with plenty of testimonials to Christianity—from Christians. And this game has been going on so long and so steadily that the Christian can seldom see anything wrong about it. Indeed, he propounds the canon that if you do not already believe in Christianity, you are quite disqualified from expressing an opinion concerning it. You must first of all believe in the excellence of Christianity, then you will be heard as to its goodness. A very sound rule. Indeed, it is the only rule that can secure Christianity a favourable verdict. * * *

Christianity in Practice.

Recently, in glancing through an account of a particularly brutal murder, we found it described as "un-Christian." Of course, this may have meant no more than a desire to separate this murder from other murders of the Christian variety. But we hardly think this was the case. We fancy it was part of the Christian egotism which labels all the good Christian, and all the bad "heathen" or "un-Christian," with any other name that will disguise the fact that vices flourish with the same ease among Christians as among others. The curious thing to observe is, that this plan not only narcotizes the sheep-like mind of the average Christian, it also imposes on many who are not Christians. Often when we have had a meeting disturbed by the rowdyism of

Christian attendants, we have heard people ask, "Where's your Christianity?" when it was fronting them all the time. During the course of the war, when some specially brutal, bloodthirsty incident was reported, we were sometimes asked, "Where is Christianity in all this?" Why, there it was, all the time. It was in operation to the same extent and in the same manner that it has always been in operation. Can anyone tell us when or where Christianity has been found unaccompanied by, or incompatible with rowdiness, intolerance, or brutality? And why should anyone be surprised on finding these accompaniments with it to-day? The world shows us Christianity in action, naturally Christians seek to disguise the fact, but this only makes it more incumbent upon non-Christians to present Christianity as it really is.

* * *

The End of a Chapter.

There are people outside the Churches, says Mr. Dale, who are as good Christians as those within. Well, the achievement does not strike us as at all bordering on the miraculous. A thousand people, taken haphazard, who could not reach the level of all-round goodness achieved by Church attendants, deserve to be handed over to the custody of a body of mental pathologists. They would be something socially abnormal. The next stage in this manifestation of Christian arrogance is the information that "many Freethinkers are as good as Christians." Again, a statement that does not involve a discussion as to whether miracles really happen. As the Christian develops, he may discover that the self-respecting non-Christian is not at all overpowered by the concession. It is not at all flattering to be told that Bradlaugh or Foote was as good as a Christian. One really had hopes that they were better, and it is a little disappointing to learn that their development had not proceeded so far as one had thought. The Freethinker who does not *know* that he is better than the average Christian is only, as yet, half developed. The Christian who fancies that he is complimenting the Freethinker in telling him that he is as good as a Christian is only exhibiting the fact that he neither understands the position of the Freethinker, nor appreciates the impertinent arrogance of his own attitude. But having brought Christians to the point of admitting that Freethinkers *may* be as good as believers, we may hope for a time when they will recognize that there is no necessary connection at all between a confession of faith in Christian doctrines and a usefully upright social life. And when we have reached that point the fight will be over. Intellectually, Christianity was long ago discredited. As a substitute for intellectual conviction, it took the ground that it was socially useful and morally elevating. Hard facts are driving them from that position; and when we have finally demonstrated to the world the hollowness of this ethical pose, we shall soon see Christianity reduced to its proper place as one of the world's many creeds with no better foundation than those other superstitions that are now so generally discredited among genuinely cultured men and women.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

We owe to the Greeks every noble discipline in literature; every radical principle of art; and every form of convenient beauty in our household furniture and daily occupations of life. We are unable, however, to make rational use of half that we have received from them: and, of our own, we have nothing but discoveries in science, and fine mechanical adaptations of the discovered physical powers. On the other hand, the vices existing among certain classes, both of the rich and poor, in London, Paris, and Vienna, could have been conceived by a Spartan or Roman of the heroic ages only as possible in a Tartarus, where fiends were employed to teach, but not to punish, crime.—*Ruskin*.

The Menace of Secularism.

I.

SUCH is the title of an important, though small, volume by the Hon. Mrs. Gell, consisting of a series of *Addresses on the Nation's Need of the National Church*. We have no desire to cast the least suspicion upon either the sincerity of the convictions expressed or the purity of the controlling motive in these published lectures. We even frankly admit that the onslaught of Materialism and Secularism upon Christianity constitutes a serious menace to all the Churches, and has already done much to undermine their power and influence. The aim of this little book, however, is to show that if the National Church were disestablished and disendowed the floodgates would fly open and the poison of Freethought would immediately flow in, and, like a devastating deluge, overwhelm the land. Hence—

The day of decision has come. We are face to face with the greatest crisis which has menaced the Church since Cromwellian troopers preached from the pulpits of our fanes, and, as at the sack of Lichfield, chased a cat through the noble aisles and christened a calf in the font in ribald mockery of the sacred baptismal rite. And now once more the battle is set. The Church of our Fathers is the object of an attack in which certain leaders of other Christian bodies are joining forces with those who are avowedly antagonistic, not merely to the Church, but to all which the mass of Christians hold sacred—who, in a word, desire to materialize and secularize the whole gamut of human life (p. 2).

It is perfectly true that Secularists advocate the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church, but it is false to represent them as desiring and working for the materialization of life. To secularize life is a radically different process from that of materializing it. Freethinkers zealously believe in the former process but are sworn enemies of the latter.

The Hon. Mrs. Gell is, doubtless, sincerely pious and heroically loyal to the Established Church, but her arguments are vitiated by prejudice and riddled with fallacies. Pretending "to sweep aside specious arguments," she deliberately employs them. It was the dread of disendowment much more than of disestablishment that animated her lectures in opposition to the liberation of the Church in Wales, one of her chief points being that the spirituality of the Church is vitally affected by its material prosperity. She ridicules the specious arguments of those who doubt or deny that great truth—

As though it had not been a cardinal principle of the primitive Church that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel; or as though our Blessed Lord himself had not vouchsafed to be dependent upon the common sustenance of his fellow-men for the maintenance of his sacred body (p. 2).

The Gospel Jesus was not supported by those who did not believe in him. He was dependent upon purely voluntary contributions. If certain people want to have the Christian Gospel preached to them, no sensible person would dream of denying them the luxury, if they are prepared to pay for it. What Anglicans evidently insist upon as a right is that the religion, or form of religion, which they accept and enjoy should be a charge upon the public funds, which is, on the face of it, a rank injustice. Mrs. Gell exclaims: "Dare we sit calmly by while the means by which her spiritual influence is maintained are wrested from the Church in Wales?" In that question we find, unconsciously embodied, the quintessence of religious selfishness. Church people in Wales are too few, too poor, or too indifferent to maintain the ordinances of their own organization, and the

very suggestion of putting them, on the same footing as other religionists, they resent as a threatened attack upon religion itself. In the Principality, Calvinistic Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Wesleyans, are self-supporting sects, but Anglicans haughtily persist in calling themselves the Church to the maintenance of which all the citizens should be compelled to contribute, whether they believe in and like it or not. Mrs. Gell argues as if religion in Wales would cease to be if the English Church there were disestablished and disendowed. She says:—

This is no matter of party politics, nor is it a question between Church and Chapel. It is a question between the forces of good and the forces of evil, between religion and irreligion, between the things of the soul and the things of the body. Yes, it is not too much to say the very soul of the nation is at stake (p. 3).

Like most uncritical religious writers, Mrs. Gell is a blind traditionist. She waxes pathetically eloquent over our imaginary indebtedness to the Church. "All through our lives she has stood by us at the great moments of existence" baptizing us, confirming us, marrying us, and burying us, thus proving herself to be "a priceless blessing," and naturally everybody should consider it an inestimable privilege to share in supporting her. Such is the atmosphere of the whole book, in which the treatment of every question touched upon is bound to be rhetorical rather than critical. Take the origin of the Church. Relying alone upon tradition, our author affirms that "about the year 200 a Church existed in Wales, and that in all probability it was organized by Christians from France." That is a legend unsupported by a single historical fact. Surely Bede, Gildas, and Geoffrey of Monmouth cannot seriously be treated as reliable historians. The legends they record, the persecutions and martyrdoms they relate, are highly interesting, but historically of no value whatever. Gildas observes, in his *Ruin of Britain*, a work of the sixth century, that the Christian religion "had a lukewarm reception" from the British people, and in a valuable comment on that statement in his edition of Gildas, the late Professor Hugh Williams, of Bala, says:—

That is all Gildas says respecting the evangelization of Britain. Whether he knew more as to the first preachers of Christianity it is impossible to tell, but his words imply that its spread among the native population (*incolæ*) of the island was exceedingly slow: they received it "coldly." Among Roman officials and foreign immigrants it may have spread early, so that the few remains which now attest an early Christian Church in Britain belong to them, and are found in the parts most thoroughly Romanized. According to the evidence furnished by Hubner's seventh volume of Latin inscriptions, we gather that Heathenism of various types continued long, even among these provincials. Mythra and Cybele, Tyrian Hercules and Phœnician Astarte, had their worshippers: at York there was a temple to Serapis, and at Cærlleon, in South Wales, the Roman Legate, Postumius Varus, restores a temple of Diana late in the third century, that is, not *very* long before that Council of Arles (314) which we know so well. Christian inscriptions are more numerous in Wales than in any other part of Britain, yet neither there nor in the other parts do they indicate a date earlier than the middle of the fifth century. Of Britain, as well as of Gaul, the words of M. le Blanc are true, that the legendary stories of a conversion "by explosion" have no evidence whatever in their favour (Part I., pp. 22-3).

On this point Harnack agrees with Williams, saying that England was a province in which "Christianity could not gain any firm footing." He states that, apart from the legends, "the British Church emerges into daylight, first of all through the fact of three bishops from London, York, and Lincoln having attended the

synod of Arles in A.D. 314." A natural enough inference from the fact is that Britain had more than three bishops at that time, "only," Harnack adds, "only we know nothing whatever on this point."

Now, on the assumption that the legends found in Bede, Gildas, and other early ecclesiastical historians are true, their truth would weigh heavily against the argument advanced by our author. According to her, the Church which existed in Wales in the year 200 was identical with the Church of England; but that is not true. The Church which sent three bishops to the synod of Arles in 314 was not a Latin but a Celtic organization. When the Church of England was founded early in the seventh century by Roman monks, it differed on several points from the Celtic Church already in existence, and ere long there arose a violent conflict between the two. The Welsh bishops gloried in their independence, and for a long time offered vigorous opposition to their Saxon brethren. In the end, of course, the four Welsh dioceses joined the southern English province. Mrs. Gell ignores the fact that, as Gardiner puts it, "the Church of England which was founded by Augustine has nothing whatever to do with the early British Church: in after times certain British dioceses submitted to English ecclesiastical rule, and that is all." However, on the assumption that Mrs. Gell's contention as to the identity of the Church in Wales and that in England is true, I put her own question, what has been its influence in Wales? "Is it worth preserving? Has it been for good? Would anyone be the worse for its loss?" Our author *knows* that it was in existence about the year 200. Giraldus Cambrensis was a Welsh ecclesiastic and brilliant writer who flourished in the latter half of the twelfth century and the first twenty years of the thirteenth. One of his works is entitled *The Itinerary of Archbishop Baldwin Through Wales*, in which he gives a description of the manner of life and characteristics of the inhabitants. They love their country, and are ever ready to fight for it; their life is largely pastoral, and their food is the product of their herds rather than of the land: they keep open house for all comers; they consider playing on the harp the finest of all arts, and excel in it. Finally, "they show a greater respect than other nations to churches and ecclesiastics, to the relics of saints, bells, holy books, and the cross; and hence their churches enjoy more than common tranquillity." How worthy and noble and true they must be, and how much they owe to their Church! Unfortunately, however, there is another side to the picture, and Gerald the Welshman does not hesitate to present it:—

These people are no less light in mind than in body, and by no means to be relied on. They are easily urged to undertake any action, and as easily checked from prosecuting it. They never scruple at taking a false oath for the sake of any temporary advantage. Above all other peoples, they are given to removing their neighbours' landmarks. Hence arise quarrels, murders, conflagrations, and frequent fratricides. It is remarkable that brothers show more affection to each other when dead than when living; for they prosecute the living even unto death, but avenge the dead with all their power (*Description of Wales*, pp. 492-3).

And this was the outcome of centuries of that "priceless blessing," the Church of God.

J. T. LLOYD.

For my part, with the manifold directions in which my nature moves, I cannot be satisfied with a single mode of thought. As poet and artist I am a polytheist; on the other hand, as a student of Nature I am a pantheist—and both with equal positiveness. When I need a God for my personal nature, as a moral and spiritual man, he also exists for me.—*Goethe*.

The Passing of the Pious Editor.

Mythology and the newspapers cannot co exist.

—Mr. A. G. Gardiner.

Of all the dull, stagnant, unedifying *entourages*, that of middle-class Dissent seems to me the stupidest.

—Matthew Arnold.

MR. A. G. GARDINER has retired from the editorship of the *Daily News* after nearly twenty years occupancy of the chair. We do not add that the announcement will cause pangs of regret to millions of readers. That has been said by quite a number of his colleagues, who, probably, meant what they said whilst they wrote it. Our reason for writing is that Mr. Gardiner has been acclaimed as a "great editor," and, further, that he voiced the aspirations of the Nonconformists. For the *Daily News* has always represented the Free Churches, just as Mr. Blumenfeld and the *Daily Express*, and the curled perfumed darlings of the *Daily Telegraph*, have sought to exalt the Union Jack among the holy symbols of the National religion.

Indeed, Mr. Gardiner is already in a fair way to being added to the Saints' Calendar. One enthusiastic journalist went so far as to say that the retiring editor possessed "a fine intelligence, and a noble outlook on public affairs." Perhaps it is our fault, but we are not impressed. We fear that Mr. Gardiner kept his "fine intelligence" and "noble outlook" for private use only, for it is not very apparent in his printed utterances. He has unloaded his bosom of too much perilous stuff for our liking. And whilst Mr. Gardiner may be regarded as a facile writer, he is by no means a lamp to guide lowly men and women in the darkest hours of his country's history.

Mr. Gardiner has frequently expressed his severe displeasure of frivolity and sensationalism in the press, yet he is himself not unconscious of a desire to "tickle the ears of the groundlings." In a personal sketch of the King he let his "fine intelligence" have full play:—

He is the first English King to belong to the working classes by the bond of a common experience. He moves among them not as a stranger from some starry social sphere, but as one to the manner born. He has reefed the sail and swabbed the deck and fed the fire. He has stood at the helm through the tempest and the night. He knows what it is to be grimy and perspiring, to have blistered hands and tired feet. In short he knows what it is to be a working man. He has the mechanic's interest in things, and one learns without surprise that his presents to his children are largely mechanical toys.

When we first read these lines we rubbed our eyes, as well we might. Afterwards we read Mr. Gardiner's remarks on Queen Mary:—

The Queen, like her husband, has the middle-class seriousness and sense of duty. She is almost the only woman in society who cannot be called a society woman. When she pats an orphan on the head or gives sixpence to a beggar, I do not think she would want half a column of laudation in the newspapers to commemorate the fact that she shares the common sympathies of humanity.

What can one say of writing such as this? If Mr. Gardiner had wanted a peerage he could not have done the thing better. But the editor of the *Daily News* is a sturdy Democrat, and has a Puritan dislike to titles. Yet such prose-poetry with regard to royalty is almost a habit with him. Years ago he wrote some lines on the Kaiser which read like the deadliest irony in the light of subsequent events. This is the way he ladled out the

soothing syrup for Nonconformist intellectual infants. We almost blush to transcribe the words:—

The Kaiser is easily the foremost man in Europe. He is a king after Charles the First's own heart, "a king indeed," the last that is left, the residuary legatee of the divine right. The cause for which he fights could have no more worthy protagonist. He is every inch a king. Divest him of his office, and he would still be one of the half-dozen most considerable men in his empire. When the British editors visited Germany they were brought into intimate contact with all the leaders of action and thought in the country, and I believe it is true to say that the Kaiser left the sharpest and most vivid personal impression on the mind. No man in history ever had a more God-like vision of himself than he has. His cloud of dignity is held from falling by the visible hand of the Almighty. He keeps his powder dry and his armour bright. But he stands for peace—peace armed to the teeth, it is true, peace with the mailed fist; but peace nevertheless.

If Mr. Gardiner wrote his character sketches with his tongue in his cheek, then your hat flies off to him as an astute man of business. But it is far more probable that he regards himself seriously, and is capable of admiring these lines had they been written by another. Apart from this excessive loyalty, his atmosphere is heavy with the sentimentalism of the Free Churches. Witness his account of Dr. Clifford's theological views, with its exquisite perception of the highest and best in English literature:—

His own faith is still as clear and as primitive as when, sixty years ago, he sat a boy in Beeston Chapel, in much mental anguish, and in his own words, experienced conversion in the midst of the singing of the verse:—

The soul that longs to see My face
Is sure My love to gain;
And those that early seek My grace
Shall never seek in vain,

Critically, what can be said of folk who admire this gush of sentimentality and beautiful nonsense? It reminds us of the story of a counsel who, in addressing a jury, called the defendant "a naufragious ruffian." His junior asked him afterwards what the words meant. "I haven't the least idea," said the counsel; "but it sounded well, didn't it?" Mr. Gardiner's articles read well, but they are scarcely the outcome of "a fine intelligence and a noble outlook on public affairs." Is it not playing it a little low down on the British Nonconformist thus to take advantage of his innocence and inexperience? When the Education Act has run a little longer, the readers of newspapers, perhaps, will cease to hunger for such sawdust, and will prefer the bread of knowledge, even if it is stale. And yet, we will not be unjust to Mr. Gardiner. If he would but forget his Nonconformist audience, and write only for men and women, his articles would be so much better. He can write well, and we would not unduly dispraise him. Writing on the legend of the Russian Army in England, he had some excellent remarks:—

The true interest of the legend is psychological rather than historical. It offers the most striking instance in our time of the growth of a myth, and it throws a curious light on the origin of the myths that have developed in the past out of the terrors, anxieties, and hopes of people fumbling darkly for an explanation of an inexplicable world. It could only have survived in circumstances in which the Press had become artificially silent and had ceased to bring rumour to the challenge of definite proof. For the true twilight of the gods came with the printing press. Mythology and the newspapers cannot co-exist.

In sober truth, and not in the cant of Orthodoxy, let us wish for the conversion of Mr. Gardiner. There are

many editors for whom the inscription, "Died of the Christian fallacy," is good, and good enough. But the man who occupied the same seat as Charles Dickens, the man who writes for the same newspaper as Harriet Martineau, should not be one of these. Let us forget that British Nonconformity ever declined upon such a period of hypocrisy and vulgarity.

MIMNERMUS.

Writers and Readers.

A NOTE ON HERMAN MELVILLE.

(Born, August 1, 1819; Died, September 28, 1891.)

THOSE of my readers who are happy in sharing my absorbing interest in fine letters will thank me for calling their attention to one of the most original and attractive of American writers. If they have not yet made his acquaintance through the brilliant, romantic narrative *Typee* they have a delightful experience before them, while those who have pleasant memories of Melville's impressionistic genius will be glad to be reminded of their debt of gratitude. Like Bret Harte and Whitman, Melville came of good British-Dutch stock which would appear to be an excellent artistic strain. His father died in straightened circumstances when Melville was a boy, and he was left in the charge of an uncle. His writing shows that his education was thorough if somewhat elementary. He had a natural ear for the cadences of fine prose, and assiduously cultivated his taste. About the age of seventeen he shipped as cabin-boy on a vessel sailing from New York to Liverpool, visited London, and returned in the same boat. For the next three years he did some school-mastering, "boarding round," as did Whitman, with the families of his pupils.

The mild excitement of schoolmastering did not appeal to his romantic temperament, and after reading Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), one of the best of sea-yarns, he once more tried his luck as an able-bodied sailor. In January, 1841, he signed on with the *Acushnet*, an old sailing ship engaged in sperm-fishing. In the July of the same year, the boat put into Nukuheva in the Marquesas group, and Melville, with a companion, both of them "fed up" with a bad ship and a worse skipper, made up their mind to escape together into the interior. This they managed to do with great difficulty; and their adventures in the valley of the *Typee*, with their escape after four months, from a possibly cannibalistic issue out of their afflictions, forms the subject-matter of his first book. His sojourn in the enchantingly beautiful islands of the Pacific ended for ever when he returned to Boston in the winter of 1844.

The manuscript of his first book, *Typee*, was brought to England by a kinsman and offered to Mr. Murray, who was willing to accept it on the assurance that it was not a fictitious narrative. It appeared in 1847 in Murray's *Home and Colonial Library*. The unusually severe reflections on the manners and methods of missionaries stirred the bile of the clergy and of their supporters, and in the first American and subsequent editions here, in England, passages were omitted, but they were retained in the main by Mr. Stedman, the editor, of Putnam's 1892 edition. *Omoo* (1847) is a sequel to *Typee*. It is excellent in parts, but it has not the shapeliness of Melville's first essay in the art of prose narrative. Some good work is to be found in *Moby Dick* (1851), and *Redburn* (1848), which records his experiences on his first voyage, has fine descriptions of sea-life. Later his style and matter dropped off amazingly, but he managed to pull himself together when some severe criticism set his back up. His *Confidence Man* (1857) is a clever, ironical, and amusing satire of the natural gullibility of the so-called 'cute Yankee. His vase, on which he set much store, is, in my opinion, poor stuff indeed in comparison with the emotional and vibrating prose of his masterpiece.

I am inclined to assert emphatically that Melville is a man of one book. In *Typee* the vivid impressions of early manhood upon a mind exquisitely sensitive to the beauty of

atmosphere, colour, and emotion were caught precisely at the right moment. It has the freshness, the rich brilliance, of a fine proof mezzotint. His idyllic picture of life in the happy valley of the unsophisticated *Typees*, fine examples of the Polynesian savage before he had been ruined by the civilization—or, shall I say, syphilization?—of God-fearing Europeans, would have delighted that lover of the natural man, Rousseau. We can see what the natives of the Marquesas Islands must have been before their country was discovered by the Spaniards, and rediscovered later by Captain Cook. With his customary good luck, Melville was made *tabu* by his savage friends, and treated as a sort of divine being. But divinity has its inconveniences; the Polynesians, like the Christians, had a fancy for eating their gods, and that is most likely what would have happened to Melville if the whaler that rescued him had not been short of hands. He escaped just in time, or he might have figured in Polynesian mythology as an eaten god, and a Lord's Supper might have been instituted in his memory. Joking apart, I can assure my readers that *Typee* is an amazingly fine piece of literary impressionism; it is so good that the critics could not make up their minds that it was true.

We know from Melville's own repeated assurances and from independent testimony that *Typee* was the record of actual experience; however, if we look at all closely at his work, we are driven to the conclusion that Melville was not a creative novelist, for his characters have no inner life. We know them, not for what they really are, but for what they seem to be. For us, they are mere acquaintances, known to us by sight only, the hidden heart of them having no meaning for us. It may be objected that the characters in *Typee* and *Omoo* are picturesque, grotesque, amusing, or pathetic. That is true, certainly; but what is also true, at least in my opinion, is that they stop short of that intimate self-revelation which is the supreme effort of fictional art. The reader who knows his Conrad will appreciate the force of my criticism. And yet, perhaps, it is both ill-mannered and ungrateful to grumble when the table is spread so profusely with what most readers will consider the right stuff.

I had almost forgotten to say that Melville was a Free-thinker. It is excusable, perhaps, for we are all Freethinkers more or less nowadays. From his Scottish and Dutch ancestors he no doubt had his taste for metaphysics and philosophy, which in later life became an obsession, his lack of orthodoxy estranging a number of his friends. As I have noted above, he had a wholesome contempt for missionaries and their dubious and devious ways. In both *Typee* and *Omoo* he underlines the contrast between the innocence and moral uprightness of the heathen savage and the physical and moral unwholesomeness of the savage perverted to the religion of the so-called civilized world. Christian journalists, too much in a hurry, and too angry to show that he was wrong, politely called him a deliberate and elaborate liar. The Protestant missionaries at Tahiti had their revenge by burning his books, and burning the author of them in effigy.

Although Melville omitted passages from later editions of *Typee*, he held to the strict truth of his censure of the self-exiled heralds of the Cross. The picture of the missionary's wife who took her daily airings in a go-cart drawn by two islanders, one a youth and the other an old grey-headed man, is a damning indictment of Christian humility. However that may be, *Typee* and *Omoo* are stories to be enjoyed by all those who know a good thing when they read it. He knew the Polynesian Islanders more intimately than Stevenson or Louis Becke, his sympathy with wild life having not a little of the quality we find in the work of Mr. Safroni-Middleton, who is the modern poet of the wine-dark seas and tropic skies.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainties in this our life!—
In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse
To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!

—George Meredith.

Acid Drops.

Mr. Lloyd George, at the City Temple the other day, professed great anxiety that everybody should set about the task of building a new world, in which peace and brotherhood should reign, and wars should be no more. That is an old song, and none have sung it more lustily than those who have done their utmost to prevent its arrival. In the very act of appealing for this new world, Mr. George gives the following:—

Why should war always get the best out of mankind? And peace always get the poorest? War brought forth unselfishness in millions, comradeship, brotherhood.....Is peace going to call forth nothing but grasping, greed, avarice, faction, timidity, indulgence?

Now, if Mr. Lloyd George were to develop the capacity for sustained and solid thinking, he would realize the utter nonsense of such language, and that in attributing the good qualities as having been called forth by war and the bad ones by peace, he is giving encouragement to just those views of life that have helped to land the world where it is.

Mr. George presents the country as made strong by or during war, and falling the prey to sloth and vice during peace. And that is the natural view of the shallow-minded man who can see no farther than the moment, and no deeper than the passions or necessities of the hour. And if that view be true, then Prussian militarism, which taught that war made and kept a nation clean and strong and healthy, is indeed justified. But it is not true; on the contrary, quite false. It was not the War that brought forth unselfishness and brotherhood. However poorly they were developed, war found them here, and used them to their own destruction. Peace provided qualities, and war wasted them. There is at present plenty of greed and avarice, etc., in the country, but these have not been called forth by peace; they are the legacies left by the War.

We can all see what war does for the nations economically. The facts here are so plain as to be discernable by even politicians. And the facts are almost as evident in other directions. War wastes, mentally and morally, as well as economically. War used the qualities named by Mr. George, and then left the people socially and morally the worse for its presence. The deplorable features around us are partly the consequence of war. That our principal politician cannot see this says little for his ability to grapple with the facts. Probably the truth is that only the minimum of ability is needed to make war. It requires a maximum to conduct a desirable peace. That is, we think, a truth that will cast light in many directions.

Mr. Athelstan Riley was to have spoken at the Church Congress at Leicester. But Mr. George Lansbury was also to be among the speakers, and, as Mr. Riley does not agree with Mr. Lansbury's opinions on the question of Russia, he has declined to appear on the same platform with him. He asks Mr. Lansbury to publicly denounce "those bloody scoundrels, Lenin and Trotsky, and their hellish work," then he will meet him as "a Christian man and a brother." So either Mr. Lansbury or Mr. Riley will not be at the Church Congress. Again we remark on the peculiar quality of the Christian conscience.

Paul advised that the members of a certain Church should be saluted with a holy kiss. The vicar of Holy Trinity, Chatham, extended the advice to an attractive servant girl employed at the vicarage, with the result of a police court case, and a fine of £2 and £2 2s. costs. We consider the vicar is suffering from a misinterpretation of "Holy Writ."

Under the new regime in Hungary no newspapers are appearing, but paper will soon be supplied to the *Christian Press*. The *Christian Press* covers all papers that are given over to clericalism and reaction. We imagine our London County Council must be looking with envious eyes at Hungary. It doesn't like any but the *Christian Press* in the

public parks, and its regret must be that the non-Christian press is tolerated outside. Now, a people which reads the *War Cry* and the *Christian Herald* would be quite safe.

There is a strain of innocence in English people which must help the clergy to bamboozle the nation. In a case at Bow Street Police Court, in which a prisoner was charged with obtaining money by false pretences, the magistrate asked a witness how he came to accept a cheque from a stranger. The witness explained that prisoner took him off his guard by selecting two gramophone records called "O Rest in the Lord" and "Abide with Me." Is it not delightful?

In the Leytonstone baby-farming case, the woman charged received five years, while the man was discharged. Although the house was used as a baby farm, he said that he knew nothing about it. He was so busy that he had no time to take notice either of the number of children in the house or of their treatment. Even on Sunday he attended Salvation Army meetings three times. It would have been a pity to have interfered with the pious activities of such a man, even though some may think his story rather thin, and that less religious meetings and more attention to household affairs would have been all to the good.

The Wimborne Board of Guardians are having some trouble with their medical officer. The doctor wants an increase of salary, and complains that he is actually getting only about half as much as the chaplain. He also says that he considers he is doing quite as much work as the parson, and should be better paid. We think so too. If the doctor is not as much use to the guardians as the parson, he ought to be thrown out. But we should be surprised to find that to be the case. We suggest they should test the matter in the medical ward—make it a case of physic versus prayer, and see which is the more effective.

Brother Barnes and other pietists who are quite hysterical concerning the "soulless" outlook in the Labour Movement, might have the decency to remember that the Labour Movement was the outcome of the work of idealists who were Freethinkers. It is all very well to try and induce workers to believe that Christ was a trade-unionist; but to-morrow the cue might be given to instruct workers to "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's." As old Martin Luther said, the Bible is a nose of wax, and can be twisted to any shape.

The *Observer* calls attention to one aspect of Irish affairs that is of interest to Freethinkers. The Government is putting one area after another under military law, which, it has been well said, is no law at all. But in doing this, the *Observer* discerns something like a set policy at work. It knows that suppression means the growth of secret societies, and a probable increase of outrages. And by this means it seeks to drive the Church into taking a hostile attitude towards the Nationalist Movement. It says:—

In the last resort, the traditional policy of Dublin Castle looks to eliciting support from the ecclesiastical power. Its officials know perfectly well that they cannot put an end to the mentality in the Irish people which resists them. They think that they can break up that mentality, destroy its regimented resistance, by pushing matters to a point at which the moral law must be invoked by the most disciplined of religion, and enforced by a refusal of the sacraments.

The point is of interest as illustrating what we have often said, that in the last resort the ruling classes of every country regard religion as one of the most powerful adjuncts to the police force, if not superior to it, as a coercive force. All Governments know, that to control a people effectively, the control of their mentality is essential. The *Observer* may be wrong in the present instance. With that we are not concerned. But there is a lesson in what has been said that all may read who will.

"The Church divided on Sunday Games" was the headline in a daily paper. The sport-loving public, however, is not divided in its opinion as to the game of Mother Church.

O. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

October 5, Swansea; October 12, South Place, London; October 19, Weston-Super-Mare; October 26, Manchester; November 2, Glasgow; November 3, Paisley; November 6, Milngavie; November 9, Edinburgh; November 16, South Shields; November 23, Leicester; November 30, Birmingham; December 7, Sheffield; December 21, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—October 5, Glasgow; October 19, South Place Institute; October 26, Birmingham; November 16, Leicester; November 23, Manchester; December 7, Swansea.

J. McMURRAY (Bargoed).—You are entitled at law to withdraw your child from religious instruction. The teacher is acting quite wrongly in keeping her in the same class while the religious lesson is proceeding, and in a distinctly illegal manner in giving the religious lessons against your instructions. We advise you to send a written application for your child to be withdrawn from religious instruction, and if the thing of which you write goes on, complain to the local education authority. If the matter is not then remedied write the full particulars to the General Secretary of the N. S. S. and we will see what can be done.

JESSIE C. JOHNSON.—We have read your letter attentively, but we find it very unconvincing. You appear to have been taking all the statements of religious apologists for granted without seeking for proof. Do you find in your own experience that Christians are invariably better men and women than non-Christians? And if not, why should you believe the results of belief to be different elsewhere?

HILDA LANGELAAN.—Thanks. We are obliged for information which we will keep for future use if required.

V. H. SMITH.—We are never likely to measure one's interest in this paper by the amount of their contribution. Thanks for your help.

R. TERRONI.—Pleased to hear again from our Italian heretic. Give us a call when you are again in London.

J. H. ENGLISH.—We hope we have your name correctly. We hope to be meeting our many friends on the Tyneside very soon.

R. ALLEN.—*The Traveller's Guide* is one of the most monotonous pieces of stupidity that we have seen for some time. We wonder the more intelligent Christians don't stop the circulation of such things. It is an advertisement to the enemy of the kind of intelligence that keeps religion alive.

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.

Pressure on our space prevents us giving this week excerpts from the many interesting letters received from subscribers to the Sustentation Fund, an account of the subscriptions to which appears on the next page. Mr. George Scott says that we "need never apologize for asking the help of your readers. Who should help, if they do not?" Well, we do not exactly apologize, but it is the fact of the help being given so cheer-

fully that makes us regret having to ask for it. It is pleasant to notice from the letters received the large proportion of subscriptions from ladies. That is the healthiest of all signs—not because we think less of the men than of the women, but because the Churches have found their chief strength in their hold on the women. And with the loss of the women naturally goes that of the children. Then we shan't be long.

One subscriber hopes that the present Fund will enable us to get back to the sixteen pages. He fears that a small paper means a lessened effectiveness. That may be so; but at the present time an increase in size would mean a serious increase in expense. We calculate that it would mean another £250 a year. Of course, paper is cheaper than it was, but it is still about three times the pre-War price, and there are other things. Compositors' and other people's wages are double what they were, with the result that the permanent increase in the charge for setting up and machining this paper has increased to over £400 per year. This is permanent, as wages are not likely to come down. But we hope to overcome this in the course of the next year or so, which is one reason why we are so anxious for new readers. It is the only sure way, and every one helps.

On Sunday next Mr. Cohen lectures in the Dockers' Hall, Swansea—afternoon and evening. His afternoon subject is "God and Evolution," and he will deal with some of the nonsense that has recently been written in connection with Haeckel's death. The evening lecture will be on "Free-thought Before and After the War." These will be the first lectures of Mr. Cohen's this season, and he will then go on without a break until Christmas. As only one Sunday will be spent in London, lecturing, with literary and other work, will keep him busy for the rest of 1919.

It was intended that Mr. Cohen should pay a visit to Neath either on the road to or from Swansea. But as it was found impossible to get a hall, that project has had to be abandoned. Local friends report that the hall proprietors "cried off so soon as they knew who was coming." We are sorry we inspired so much alarm. It is a compliment in its way, but an awkward one. We suggest to local friends that they can still carry on a propaganda with literature, and this may be the means of inducing a more tolerant state of mind. Neath evidently needs waking up.

The Rhondda Branch of the N.S.S. is commencing to organize its winter work, and a meeting of the Society will be held at Morley's Restaurant, Porth, on Sunday, October 5, at 2.20. We hope there will be a good gathering of members and friends. Splendid progress was made in South Wales last year, and it would be a pity for any of this ground to be lost by lack of energy of the local Free-thinkers. The local Secretary is Mr. S. Holman, 34 Lincoln Street, Cymmner, Porth, who will be pleased to answer any enquiries.

The Bethnal Green Branch brings its season to a close to-day with a lecture by Mr. Marshall, at 6 o'clock. The meeting is held in Victoria Park, near the Bandstand. We hope there will be a record attendance for the farewell meeting of the season.

We are pleased to hear that the Belfast Branch of the N. S. S. is now making plans for a vigorous campaign during the winter season. Arrangements are being made for Mr. Cohen to visit Belfast shortly, so as to give a send-off to the season's lectures. Further particulars later, when dates are definitely fixed.

To-day (September 28) is "Bradlaugh Sunday," and many of the N.S.S. Branches will be holding meetings in honour of their great and first President. The N.S.S. has never departed from the tradition of thoroughness that Bradlaugh bequeathed it, and to-day's meetings will, we have no doubt, duly emphasize that fact.

"Freethinker" "Victory" Sustentation Fund.

Third List of Subscriptions.

Previously acknowledged, £189 8s. 6d. C. G., 10s. C. G., jun., 10s. J. Kelsey, 3s. G. Scott, 5s. 6d. J. Carmichael, 2s. 6d. G. Smith, £1. A. W. W., 10s. T. De Vail, £1 1s. Miss M. Needham, 3s. S. Hartley, 10s. H. Green, 9s. F. E. Willis, 10s. Ex-Churchman, 2s. 6d. Ex-Churchwoman, 2s. 6d. E. Leaf, 3s. A. Goodman, £1. Jersey, £1. J. H. English (North Seaton), 5s. V. H. Smith, 5s. R. Terroni, 10s. W. H. Knight, 10s. Mr. and Mrs. Finney, £1. Sydney G. Leech, £1. W. H. Blackmore, 5s. J. Ferguson, 5s. James Dow, 2s. 6d. R. Reid, 2s. 6d. Three Boys from Cologne, 7s. 6d. Mr. and Mrs. Bullock, 5s. G. Brady, £5. B. Lee, 5s. Dr. A. W. Laing, £6 6s. W. F. Ambrose (3rd sub.), 2s. W. H. Hicks, £2 2s. G. Davies, 5s. H. J. Earthy, 5s. E. Truelove, 5s. M. R. V., 7s. 6d. Miss H. Baker, 10s. R. Daniell, 5s. Dr. J. Laing, £3 3s. R. B. Fowler, 5s. S. Holman, 2s. 6d. F. Hayes-James, 7s. 6d. W. M., £2 2s.

Per F. Lonsdale (Glasgow Branch):—Mr. Little 10s. Mr. Organ, 2s. 6d. Mr. Harrison, 5s. Mr. Faulkner, 2s. 6d. Mr. Neille, 1s. Mr. W. T. M., 5s. Mr. G. Gibson, 2s. 6d. Mr. W. Ewing, 2s. 6d. Mr. and Mrs. Lonsdale, 5s. Total, £225 16s. 6d.

Corrections.—"W. R. Minton, £5," in our issue of September 14, should be W. R. Munton. "W. J. Wilmot, 2s.," in last week's issue, should have been £1 1s. "T. Good" should be H. Good. The total has been corrected accordingly.

The Advance of Materialism.

II.

(Continued from p. 471.)

If the reports of the recent conference on *Religion and Labour* are a correct index of the discussion, they are the record of a lost opportunity. Neither the speech of Mr. G. N. Barnes, M.P., nor that of Mr. H. F. Stead, shows an intelligent appreciation of the existing stage of the problem, and both of them appear to evince the desire to base the *Religion and Labour* on the platonic metaphysical idealism now challenged in every department of modern science.

The immense debt that Labour and human progress generally owe to the "Materialists" is worthy of a more generous recognition than it has yet received. It is the futility of a religion of mere subjective metaphysical idealism that needs emphasis to-day. It has been the so-called materialists who, by the methods of scientific economic reorganization, have shown to be a fumbling idealism the method by which justice and fellowship could be woven into the physical texture of man's earthly life. And it is the accredited champions of Idealism who are the foremost defenders of the pitiless and illogical competitive system which Labour knows it must destroy, that it may rescue the soul of the world.

The *Religion of Labour* is going to accept the economic interpretation of history. It will be based on the belief that both man's personal development and his social progress have been shaped and moulded by his material conditions, and that all his social institutions, customs, beliefs, politics, laws, religions are the expression and the results of this process.—R. W. Cummings, "The Religion of Labour," the "Daily News," September 5, 1919.

TO-DAY it is the fashion to pretend that Materialism is out of date. From the cathedral down to the tin tabernacle you can hear the preacher declare that science has discarded Materialism as a system of thought, as if by much shouting they could make it come true. This is the parrot talk that was stuffed into them at the theological seminaries at which they were trained, and they know no better. They do not follow the latest investi-

gations of science. You do not find upon their bookshelves the great works upon biology, psychology, and anthropology which have given the death-blow to their puerile superstitions.

They do not read them, they do not want to read them, science is the enemy in their regard. Here is the testimony of a clergyman himself to this fact: the Rev. E. W. Winstanley says that whatever a few open-minded "thinkers may do in the matter of studying condemned or heretical works, the majority of the parochial clergy are little inclined to exercise their spiritual and intellectual digestion in this way. One will refuse to peruse a book because its author is 'suspect,' another will not consult any writing whose 'soundness' or 'orthodoxy' is not assured and testified beforehand, and that commonly in accordance with party standards, the straightest sect in this respect being those who claim for themselves the most comprehensive title. And if investigation tends to lead some parson who retains his studiousness to conclusions upon some point or other differing from those of an ancient council or a 'safe' modern compendium of theology, he is sorely tempted to discontinue his research, or timidly to compromise with truth, for fear of the horror and suspicion with which his ultra-traditionalist brethren will regard him as being not 'a good Churchman.'"¹ The same writer also speaks of "the fearfulness of novelty characteristic of Churchmen, and notably so of the clergy. It would probably be conceded that a majority of the latter seem to the plain man to be reactionary, conservative, traditionalist, obscurantist, and the judgment would not be limited to one type alone."²

It is true there are a few, a very few, who understand the truth of the matter, that the game is up, that supernaturalism is doomed; one of them, the Rev. H. D. A. Major, writing in the same magazine—of which he is editor—is willing to give up everything if only people will continue to call themselves Christians. He says: "You may alter your views about miracles in accordance with the demands of modern history, science and philosophy; you may change your opinion of the apologetic value of the argument from prophecy; you may part with an infallible Bible and an infallible Church in exchange for an inspired Bible and a Spirit-bearing Church; you may jettison whole theological systems; but your Christian faith will not necessarily be weakened thereby, still less destroyed."³ That is to say, you may disbelieve in miracles like the raising of the dead, the Virgin birth, etc. You may disbelieve in prophecy. You may regard the Bible as inspired in the same manner that Shakespeare is inspired, and you may jettison all theology *en bloc* if you will declare that Jesus was a great moralist and call yourself a Christian. Another clergyman writes: "I am quite prepared to see such large developments in the coming form of Christianity that the religion of our sons and grandsons would seem to be almost another faith, if it were witnessed by our grandfathers."⁴ It is another faith now, in everything but name.

In a recently published book, entitled *The Problem of Creation*, by a Bishop of the Church of England, we read: "At the outset, I would declare my conviction that the evolution hypothesis.....furnishes a master-key for understanding the How of the cosmic process." "A process in which there is no break, fresh start, or

¹ Rev. E. W. Winstanley, *The Modern Churchman*, Nov. 1917, p. 407.

² *Ibid.*, p. 405. The italics are in the original.

³ Rev. H. D. A. Major.

⁴ Rev. Barry, *The Church in the Furnace*. Cited in the *Modern Churchman*, May, 1918, p. 85.

stoppage." No outside interference "The curve of life is ever upward—the electron, the atom, the crystal, the cell, the amoeba, the dog, the savage, Aristotle, St. Paul." Not only does the Bishop grant the natural evolution of plants, animals, and man, but the evolution of the organic from the inorganic, the living from the non-living. There are no gaps in the process, the atoms themselves have been evolved, and exist: "by virtue of their being, out of a host of possible atoms, the fittest to survive." The Bishop also accepts, and adopts, the Atheistic *ex nihilo nihil fit* (out of nothing there can come nothing), and denies the possibility of "creation out of nothing." Why the Bishop retains the word God at all is not clear; we are confident that ninety-nine out of a hundred who accept his ideas will not see the necessity. And yet the *Modern Churchman* (June, 1918) in a review of the work, from which the above extracts are taken, recommends the work to those responsible "for the intellectual equipment of Ordination candidates." And styles the Bishop "a prophet and teacher." We sincerely hope his advise will be acted upon, but fear there is not much prospect of it.

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

Religion or Reality?

The other night, at a meeting, I was accused of believing in "nothing." The gentleman who made the charge was very red and very indignant, and his manner was somewhat stormy. A very few words of mine had stirred wonderfully his otherwise sluggish imagination. The result was a certain amount of turgid abuse, centering around the complaint that I "believed absolutely in nothing—neither man nor God, neither king nor Devil."

The charge was exaggerated just a little. Only three-fifths of it was true. I do believe in something. I believe in man. The remaining counts of the indictment may stand. I acknowledge my guilt. But my guilt can be sustained only if the prosecution recognize the inaccuracy and wildness of their other statements. It is precisely because I do believe in something that I am an infidel, and not a fidel. It takes a fidel to believe in nothing, which is only God's *alias* after all. It is because I do believe in man that I reject all faith in God, king, and Devil. And now, if my good Christian friend will exhibit only a thousandth part of that patience attributed to Job, I will proceed to demonstrate the truth of my contention.

"Man," truly wrote Richard Carlile a century ago from the prison cell, "has no immortal soul. The mortal soul of man is the only intelligent lord of matter." Upon this declaration of faith we Freethinkers take our stand. And we are told that, to believe in this principle of man's mortality and supremacy, is to believe in "nothing." According to the Christian outlook, then, man is nothing, and the world in which he lives, moves, and has his being is nothing. By what process of reasoning does our opponent manage to arrive at this conviction?

It is quite easy to understand. The metaphysician denies the reality of all relative existence, and pins his faith only to the absolute. But the absolute cannot and does not exist. It represents the eternally dead, the everlastingly unknowable. The absolute, since it never decays, can never ferment, create, or give birth to change. It is static, and not dynamic. Belief, therefore, in the absolute is tantamount to faith in death, and not in life. It denies all living reality, and presupposes a non-living, abstract negation of reality to be the ultimate reality. To this eternal principle of death, this

useless load of faith, the pious folk address their prayers and hymns, under the invocation of "God." In the name of this God they have warred against sanitation and thought, against science and human liberty, and fettered mankind to the oppressive traditions of a mythical past.

The schoolmen of mediæval thought were conscious of God's nothingness, and actually worshipped him as being Nothing—THE NOTHING. He was NO THING. He was the denial of all reality. The real was an eternal succession of phenomena, ever becoming, ever ceasing, a stream of life. There seemed nothing final in all this; and so they abstracted from this stream of reality its apparent vital principle, and posited it as the unchanging and unchangeable essence of all being. This they called "God."

But how could this God be sensed? Obviously, not at all. And what were his attributes? Obviously, he could boast of none. Attributes were passing somethings, symbols of that world which did not exist ultimately in itself. And so these pious schoolmen hailed God as the supreme nothingness, the unchangeable reality.

Modern religionists may not like to think of God in this way. But he represents, none the less certainly, the principle of negation. Bakunin often complained, quite properly, that the idealist invented God at the expense of man, as he invented spirit at the expense of matter. History is reversed; and the spiritual attributes which belong to vital matter are made to exist before all matter, and even to create the matter of which they are, in the real world, but properties. Similarly, God is but a concentrated abstraction of the qualities of man, symbolized as eternal facts, whereas, in the real world, these qualities are but passing and ever-changing attributes of man's character. This totally unreal, disembodied spirit world, presided over by a totally unreal disembodied king or god, is acclaimed as the unchanging reality simply because it is the lasting negation of reality. Precisely because it never changes, includes no contrast, and has no light or shade, it is not reality. It is, for these reasons, the eternal unreality, the everlasting nothingness.

Throughout the centuries, man has lifted his hands to it in prayer in vain. For it does not change. It cannot change. It is the unchangeable. Tears cannot move it. Joys cannot move it. It has no humour. It boasts no mood. It is deaf, dumb, and blind. It is unalterable, immovable, unchangeable. *It is not*. In other words, *it is God*.

This quest of the incomprehensible, because non-existing, absolutely colours the entire religious outlook. Want of contrast explains want of humour. The religious mind is vacuous because its faith is fixed on a vacuum.

Take its attitude towards sacred Scriptures. One, to be pious, must believe in the entire holy Word from cover to cover. There are no gems because there is no dross. There are no degrees of brilliance. The infidel goes to a "holy book" and discovers brilliants, as he might in any other book. The fidel shuts his eyes to brilliants, denies that they exist, since he fears that to exercise his wit on holy thought might be presumptuous. Hence, to him, the Bible is not sacred, not deep, not true, not pathetic. It is holy and inhuman and dead and indecipherable. It is a load, a mythical imposition. It is the wit of nothingness, incapable of creative power, devoid of purpose because inaccessible of change.

There can be no purpose without change. There can be no creation without decay. There can be no reality which is not relative. There can exist no God who was not once created and will not die, or, be, at least, "translated."

These are platitudes begotten of experience. And in the light of these platitudes it can be seen that the religious man, the fidel, with his myths about heaven and hell, believes in nothing. The infidel believes in life, in reality, in man, in beauty, in all the ever changing facts of shade and colour, of comparison and contrast. The infidel believes in the real world of ever unfolding nature and wealth-creating man. He believes in nothing final, nothing stagnant, nothing perfect. His world is the real world without end—the ever progressive reality. Hence the Freethinker is the real radical, the eternal progressive, the regenerator, and the revolutionist.

"Nothing" is reality, not to the wise, but to the unwise. The philosopher knows that the negation of all that he knows to be is not reality but supra-reality. We discover the unity of nature in the realm of reality, of actual experience; not in an unknowable land of non-existence. When we predicate an altogether unknown and unknowable unity behind all experience, we are transcending reality and entering the world of supra-reality. But supra-reality, the beyond-reality, is but a shadow land of unreality—the realm of the stagnant, the absolute, and the altogether impossible. It is the land of God, of faith, and moonshine.

Whoever believes in this spirit-land as real, believes likewise in unreality on earth. See him mistake respectability, the unreality, for virtue, the reality. See him respect reputation where he should pay homage to character. See him worship monarchy, the stolen suit of clothes draped on an indifferent prop, for manhood, the integral principle of real majesty. See him mistake ceremony for faith, the cant of words and of gesture for the worth of sincerity and attitude. See him hail as infidels men and women of too large a faith to kneel in fear before unknown omnipotence when duty and nature calls for erectness of mind and bearing in defence of truth and the pursuit of liberty. See the self-same fidel mistake, a weird incantation of phrases for prayer, and despise the work to which nature alone vouchsafes an answer. Measure his works by his faith, and judge his faith by his works. And then inquire into the reality of his creed, the reality of his God, and the reality of his life. It will be found that the programme of the religious life which he stands pledged to defend is a practical nothingness, empty of all worth and all integrity. It will be discovered that the wisdom of the religious life is also an eternal nothingness—empty phrases of stagnant, meaningless import. His whole life, instead of being devoted to the pursuit of the ideal in the realm of the real, represents a mean attempt to attain the real-beyond-reality in the realm of the ideal. And so he continues to prate of his God, a sham in a world of shams: a nothingness masquerading as the only something, supra-reality seeming to be reality, the impossible trying to prove itself the probable.

Life, with its call to truth and reality, its eternal protest against all sham, repudiates religion and its God for this very reason, that religion is the nothing altogether above and beyond reality. Life rejects God and all that appertains to Godliness, because life is not Nihilism. And religion is nihilism—not the Nihilism of the Nihilists, which is but a protest against shams, but the nihilism of theology, the conspiracy of hobgoblin and of ghost against the natural well being of man.

Life, the eternal infidel, with its living faith in progress and the coming commonwealth on earth, spurns the fidel with his deadly faith in the supernatural, and the paradise that can never be in the land of nothing beyond the stars, where nothing dwells in isolated com-

munion with itself. Life leaves the fidel to decay amidst his stagnant fidelity, and marches onward with the infidel to establish the republic on earth which the Devil pioneered in Eden.

GUY A. ALDRED.

On Dying Like a Dog.

Alas for love! if *thou* wert all,
And naught beyond, O Earth!

So, at the end of her beautiful "The Graves of a Household," wrote the pious Mrs. Hemans, an early and still a favourite poetess of mine, but one whom I often think might have been a greater writer had her facile genius not been vitiated by orthodox conventionalism and religious emotionalism. Thus far but no further could her sweet genius, in those songs of the affections, soar; the sanctions all of earth, but the sentiment only complete in some all-compensating heaven beyond; and yet not complete—dissipated, rather, for it was a theme for rejoicing, not for sorrow, the passing of the immortal soul to those abodes of eternal and unimaginable felicity. But, ah, was it? Was not the good lady consciously but conveniently deceived, and passing on to others, quite conscientiously, and certainly religiously, the conventional deception? The point is quite fine—subtle, indeed; the vague, unlocalizable line between doubt and belief, the sublime haze of holy and happy minds. But the vulgar Atheist has no such polite illusions. He grovels in the abyss of the actual. He dies like a dog. Gentle Christians, hypersensitive to sceptical criticisms, will not scruple to tell the unbeliever he will "die like a dog," which, in the average Christian's poverty of vocabulary and imagination, expresses the antithesis of dying like a Christian. And yet we have seen dogs make a most edifying end, suffering heroically, gazing on their human friends with dumb affection's eloquent appeal. After all, there is no reproach in dying like a dog; the reproach rather lies on the human side, with the man who "claims himself a sole exclusive heaven." The dog has no such hope or desire, no such illusion. Its home and happy hunting-ground was, and would be, here; and were it caught up to the seventh heaven with its lord and master, man, it would only be heaven because he was there! and were there no man, no mess of pottage, no rabbits, sheep, and cows to chase, no door to guard, it would, if possible, instantly escape, rejoin its human companions below, and, fawning and crawling on its belly, beg to stay! Which reminds me of little Scotch Jimmy, who asked: "When I dee, mither, will a gang to heaven?"

"O, aye, Jimmy, if you're a good boy."

"An' will I get back to see you, mither?"

"No, no, Jimmy; ye'll no get back."

"Ah, weel," quoth Jimmy, frowning abruptly and defiantly, "A'm no gaun!"

James was human, all too human, and in danger of dying like a dog; but, just like dogs and Christians, where his treasure was, there was his heart also.

A. MILLAR.

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
Of the Two Worlds so wisely—they are thrust

Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument

About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same door when in I went.

—Omar Khayyam (*Fitzgerald's*).

Correspondence.

"TRUE" CHRISTIANITY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your issue of July 13 you very wisely ask the question, What is "True Christianity"? and presumably you expect a solution of the problem to be volunteered by one of your readers; and on this assumption I venture to submit it, for the benefit of all who find the question perplexing. True Christianity, then, must obviously be the reality as opposed to the sham or false variety, this latter being what passes muster for Christianity to-day throughout the world.

Christianity has no more mysterious significance than the utterance and practice of "common sense," which, although a rare trait, cannot be regarded as novel, mysterious, or objectionable, except by those who do not possess the boon.

Did anyone, I ask, ever hear common sense uttered from any pulpit or by any statesman, by any politician, lawyer, or partizan press-proprietor? If any of your readers think they have done so, they would confer an immense boon upon suffering humanity by recording the instance and by furnishing the name of the happy orator or scribe.

True Christianity implies consistency between thought and action, or between speech and action, and therefore means the performance by the occupant of the pulpit, or by the orator or scribe concerned, of all the virtues recommended for the salvation of flocks and the numerous suggestions put forward for the public weal, and the rigid avoidance by those same would-be public guiders of all those sins and errors which sham Christians make a hobby of.

When, may I ask, has any clergyman, politician, lawyer, judge, or partizan scribe ever given an example in this direction, whether called Primate, Pope, Bishop, President, Premier, or Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Again, "true" Christianity is opposed to dishonesty, whether by the unlicensed pickpocket, burglar, or highway robber, or by the licensed commercialist, financier, lawyer, judge, police, municipalities, M.P.'s, or statesmen; nor does the innocent titles of "Necessary taxation," "Poor and general rates," "Guildhall collections," "Fines," and "Charitable contributions" serve to diminish the gravity of the act, nor does the killing and torture of dumb animals represent a correct interpretation of Christianity. "Thou shalt not steal" and "Thou shalt not kill" are two of the cardinal principles of Christianity; and are not both of these common-sense injunctions ruthlessly and shamefully violated by the War in progress?

Let me ask: Where is the prelate, politician, statesman, lawyer, judge, financier, or alderman who, styling himself a "Christian," has had the courage and honesty to denounce this monstrous antichristian, because senseless, expose of savagery and barbarism, and who, at the same time, has taken consistent steps to put a stop to the insensate pastime?

Again, can anyone in his sane senses imagine that a state of open or occult warfare is consistent with those well-known utterances ascribed to Christ, and which represent the essence of common sense, to wit: "Love thy neighbour as thyself" and "Do as you would be done by"? In other words, "Respect others as you respect yourself," and "Respect the life and property of others if you wish to be treated in a reciprocal sense."

How, in the name of Goodness or soundness, can those who patronize war and pillage, and who violate every tenet of what is known as "Christianity," have the temerity and impudence to call themselves "Christians"? The presumption is too ridiculous for words to express.

Hence the obvious necessity for discriminating between the reality and the sham; between a sensible actor and a silly pretender.

The truth is, my dear Sir, that Christianity died with Christ 2,000 years ago, and cannot be revived until after the War, when all antichristians or insensate savage barbarians will have gone to join the great majority.

Thus "out of evil cometh good," because peace could never be established without the present War; nor will peace treaties avail.

Savoy Hotel, Madeira.

A. WATTERS.

Obituary.

We regret to record the death, from drowning, of George Dean Billing, at Witley Park, on September 10. The deceased was attached to the Liverpool Scottish Regiment, and was bathing with some companions, when he suddenly sank and was drowned. He was the son of George and Lavinia Billing, of Birkenhead, both of whom have been for many years associated with the Liverpool Secularists. The loss of their son, at the age of twenty-one, is a heavy blow, and they will have the sympathy of all Freethinkers. The funeral took place at Haybrick Hill Cemetery, the Secular Burial Service being read by Mr. McKelvie, Secretary of the Liverpool Branch of the N.S.S.

In Memoriam.

IN affectionate remembrance of Charles Stuart Hayes-James (2nd Batt. Inniskilling Fusiliers), the beloved eldest son of F. and G. Hayes-James, of Southern Cottage, Mutley, Plymouth, who fell in action September 29, 1918, aged 19 years 7 months.

Heaven's but the vision of fulfilled desire
And Hell the shadow of a soul on fire
Cast on the darkness out of which ourselves
So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, Mordaunt Shairp, B.A., "Hugh Walpole, Novelist."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 6, Mr. Marshall, A Lecture.

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

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S. (near Band Stand): 3, Mr. H. Brougham Doughty, "Charles Bradlaugh"; Mr. R. Norman, "Wake up, Secularists!"

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, Mr. E. Burke, "The Task of Secularism."

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

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Free Gardeners' Hall, Picardy Place): 6.30, A Lecture.

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. (Collingwood Hall, 12A Clayton Street East): 6.30, Members' Meeting, Election of Officers, etc.

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