

# The FREETHINKER

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## Views and Opinions.

### Are We Getting Superstitious?

"Has superstition increased since the War?" asks the *Daily News*, and points to the large number of people who are now wearing charms of various kinds. Personally we do not think the number of charms worn indicates in a large number of cases anything more than a following of fashion, even though the fashion may have been set by some few who were themselves superstitious. People are imitative to an enormous degree, and the reverse of this capacity for imitation is, with most, a disinclination to do anything that others are not doing, or to refrain from anything that others are doing. The older one gets the more one is impressed with this sheep-like quality of men and women, their fear to separate themselves, either in thought or in act, from the crowd. Mr. Augustine Birrel once said that children would rather be wicked than singular. It was a perfectly truthful remark, and it applies with hardly less force to adults. Everyday experience shows that large numbers of people have no invincible dislike to taking part in a piece of rascality. Devise such and you shall hardly have walked the length of your own street before you will have found an accomplice. But formulate an unfashionable or an heretical opinion, and you may search a good-sized town to find a dozen backers, and even then may discover, like the New Testament Jesus, that the larger portion of them will desert you should a really critical moment arise. Singularity in opinion is the bugbear of the commonplace-mind.

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### What the War Has Done.

That the War has resulted in a genuine increase of superstition we do not believe. But it has strengthened those conditions which encourage a more open and unashamed manifestation of whatever superstition exists. The strain and stress of the War, the rule of brute force, the general reversion to more primitive levels of thought, naturally lend encouragement to whatever superstition exists. But it would certainly be a great mistake to conclude that because the superstitious type has become temporarily more assertive therefore superstition has become more common. There are always large numbers of people who will have a superstition of some sort, and, like the drinker who, when deprived of whisky, flies

to brandy, having got rid of one form of superstition immediately adopt another. With this class the War may well have given an added impetus to their superstitious inclinations, but to another, and one fancies, a growing class, the War has resulted in a definite abandonment of all forms of religious belief. And the War has had this effect, because it brought the claims of all organized religions to the sharp test of reality. We have thus had a dual effect flowing from the War. On the one hand it has driven the naturally superstitious type more directly to its folly. And, on the other hand, it has produced a firmer and more decided temper with those who are really emancipated. The line of demarcation is clearer, and the sharpness of the division has made more sustained progress possible.

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### "Tailed" Minds.

But there is more in the *Daily News* question than whether superstition has increased since the War. It opens up the subject with which we have dealt more than once, namely, the amount of superstition current in all ranks of society, and the degree to which it serves as a centre and a source of reaction. Very few, except those engaged in the traffic, have any conception of the trade done in charms, dream-books, fortune-telling, and the like. And very probably very few reflect on the significance of the prevalence of the many superstitions one may come across in an ordinary day's experience. We have heard so much of the progress of science, and of the conquests of science, and the evidences of our scientific knowledge are so numerous, we are inclined to overlook the fact that, so far as the general mind is concerned, our scientific culture is of the shallowest description. Animistic modes of thinking are not without their representatives within even the ranks of science itself. The truth is that our minds are "tailed" as well as our bodies, and we carry into our social practices modes of thinking which belong to the primitive ages of the world. It is the fact of this that gives to Freethought its great social importance. For it means lifting the whole of our social thinking on to higher levels. And it is perhaps the perception of that which makes Freethought more dreaded by the forces of reaction than anything else. It is the one thing which works for the sure destruction of the religious type of mind, and so makes genuine progress possible. It is not for nothing that the quack, in religion, in medicine, and in politics is so frequently found in close association with religious organizations. His appeals touch the religious mind; they are apt to leave unaffected the critical and informed intelligence.

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### The Power of the Crowd.

Most men love to move in a crowd, and their thinking—such as it is—follows the line of the herd. A large part of their courage is really little more than a disguised fear of being very different from the rest of the people. At all events, they demand the presence of a sufficient number to keep them intellectually warm.

There are in this country millions of people who, if they proclaimed their real opinions without any sort of disguise, would acknowledge themselves Atheists. Instead of that, we find them adopting all sorts of half-way descriptive titles for themselves, as a religious friend of ours observed, paying an unwilling homage to the creed they have forsaken. At any rate, if it is not that, this habit of clinging to the name of religion, or of adopting some name that will hide the fact that genuine religion has been rejected, can but strengthen the superstitious mind in its superstition. It implies that there is something, after all, in the superstition that is being attacked; and if there is, the real religionist feels that he may as well be on the safe side. Thus the superstitious practices affirm, on the one hand, the currency of a mass of crude superstitions; and, on the other hand, it is proof that there exists no genuinely organized social opinion against it. It is proof that mental courage is as rare today as ever. And the moral, to us, is that until the Freethinkers of this country have the courage to cease paying "unwilling homage" to religion, to throw off all forms of "respectable" disguise, and proclaim themselves for what they really are, Freethought will never occupy the position it should have in the land. Carlyle, Hetherington, Bradlaugh, Foote, the men who broke the bitterest opposition of the Churches, did it, not by concealing their antagonism to the fundamentals of religion, but by proclaiming it. If we would have moral courage in the mass, we must set the example in the individual.

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#### The Savage in Our Midst.

The mass of superstition to which the *Daily News* draws attention embodies one of the real dangers which front modern civilization. Professor Frazer informs us that in society "the higher human intelligence sways the lower, just as the intelligence of man gives him the mastery of the brute." In a general way that may be true, but in reality the intelligence that sways society need be neither high nor enlightened in a cultural sense. All it needs is to be strong, and directed towards a clearly perceived end. The intelligence of the leaders of the old Roman society was certainly superior to that of the Christians who gained control. And their success—a success which brought civilization to ruin—was achieved through an energetic and unenlightened minority appealing for support to a mass of superstition that was current in Roman society. And what has occurred once may occur again. Culture is more diffused now than it was in the days of old Rome, but its greatest danger still comes from the presence of widespread superstition, to which the reactionist may at any time appeal. Scientific formulæ are accepted by all, but they are only assimilated by a few. In action and in fundamental thinking, animistic and primitive modes of thinking are strongly in evidence, and represent fires that are damped down rather than extinguished. Weakened from within by Christianity, old Rome went down finally before the invasion of the barbarians. Today we are secure from such an attack. Our barbarians are not without, but within. It is the savage in our midst that is our ever-present danger. Our real task is to civilize *him*. And until we see clearly and proclaim boldly that all forms of religion are no more than survivals of primitive animism, we are ill equipped for this educational work.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The dark night has ended and dawn has begun;  
Rise, hope of the ages, arise like the sun,  
All speech flow to music, all hearts beat as one!

Whittier.

## The Menace of Secularism.

## II.

THE Hon. Mrs. Gell's book, bearing the above title, was published in 1912, prior to the passing of the Welsh Church Disestablishment Act, as a vigorous protest against the wicked, criminal principle alleged to be involved in the Bill, which was then so heatedly discussed by the parties immediately concerned. It was dedicated to the "Churchwomen of Wales," and to "Our Fellow-Workers, Pledged to Resist the Menace of Secularism." It is well known that the agitation against the measure proved a total failure, and soon now the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church in Wales will become an accomplished fact. In reality, this Act is a further step in the secularization of the State and in the disintegration of supernatural religion in the land. So far as Wales is concerned, however, Secularism, as such, has had but little to do directly with disestablishment, nor is it likely to reap much benefit therefrom. It is only indirectly that the Act is a gain to Secularism, though the benefit it confers upon the Welsh nation is very substantial. But Mrs. Gell's apotheosis of the Church is ludicrous in the extreme. For example, she glorifies the Church as "the great *Almsgiver*," which, in actual fact, should be set down to its discredit. Almsgiving has always been one of the greatest social evils, conducive only to the perpetuation of poverty. What the poor need is not charity, but justice, the granting of which would ultimately result in the complete obliteration of poverty. One of the Church's proverbs is: "The poor ye have always with you," and they exist in order that the rich may enjoy the privilege of "caring" for them, and thereby contribute to their own already high favour with heaven. For the removal of the conditions which render poverty an unavoidable necessity the Church has never taken or encouraged a single action. In Wales, particularly, it has always been pre-eminently the Church of the rich. From the Report of the Royal Commission on Land in Wales and Monmouthshire, which was appointed on March 27 1893, we learn:—

That on the most typical estates in Wales the landlord and his family belong to the Established Church, while the bulk of the tenants belong to one or other of the Nonconformist organizations. We are not aware that a similar state of things exists in any English county, and there can be little doubt that this remarkable fact has had a powerful influence in creating a marked divergence between the opinions of the land-owning class and the mass of the people, and in emphasizing the opposing interests of landlord and tenant (*The Welsh People*, p. 455).

In the parish with which I was most familiar fifty years ago, which was an entirely agricultural one, there were no landowners nor rich people, and all the farmers, with one exception, were Nonconformists, with the result that the Church was attended only by the vicar's family, the sexton's, one farmer's, and a few poor folk who were in receipt of parish relief.

Mrs. Gell tells us that the Church was "the great Teacher" of the Welsh people. She naively admits that there were no provided and secondary schools, no colleges nor evening classes, except such as were carried on by the clergy, but claims that "the education they gave was true education, for while it prepared young people to be useful citizens, it was based on the only sure foundation: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding.'" Be it borne in mind that, according to her

testimony, the Celtic Church was in existence as early as the year 200, and yet that at the beginning of the eighteenth century there were scarcely any schools in Wales. Ignorance and superstition prevailed everywhere, not only in Wales, but in England and Scotland as well. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge founded two thousand schools for the benefit of the poor; but the education given in them was of a most remarkable character. In 1714 the Bishop of London preached a charity sermon, in which he stated that these schools had been established to fit the child for its "inferior station," or "to order itself lowly and reverently to all its betters." In Wales, at this time, a clergyman here and there, such as Griffith Jones, of Llandouror, and Thomas Charles, of Bala, worked hard in the cause of popular education; but the Church, as a whole, did practically nothing, and the people lay in a state of the grossest intellectual darkness and moral apathy. In Denbighshire there was an old man who suffered severely from asthma and insomnia. Someone told him that if he placed a Bible under his head in bed for three nights he would get relief. His wife wandered about from house to house in search of the Holy Book, but none was found until she got to Henllan Palace, where she obtained an old English Bible, which the sufferer put under his head and slept soundly. On one occasion a young girl went to church and heard a sermon. On her return she asked her mother, "Who was that Jesus Christ the preacher talked so much about?" "I really don't know," answered the mother; "I never knew anyone of that name. Very likely he was some kind-hearted Englishman." A clergyman, accompanied by his sexton, went to administer the Communion to a bed-ridden farmer. The sexton arrived first, and the old woman asked him, "What have you got in that green bag, Tomas?" "A Bible and a Common Prayer," Tomas answered. "Let me see the Bible," said she. "Here it is, aunty," said Tomas. Whereupon she remarked: "Well, praise the Best Person; there never was one in our house before, nor any need for it either; thanks be to God for that." There was another farmer, one of whose cows was ill on a Sunday; and after giving her some medicine, he thought she was dying. He ran into the house for a Bible, and then read a chapter to her. These are illuminating evidences of the marvellous success of the Church as "the great Teacher" of the Welsh nation, after a trial of sixteen hundred years!

Another fallacious claim put forth on behalf of the Church in Wales is that it has been the custodian and inspirer of morality, "religion and morality being so closely intertwined that the two cannot be dissociated." It is oracularly asserted that "it is through vital, active religion that the moral sense is developed, by the personal action of God the Holy Ghost." We give Mrs. Gell full credit as an orthodox theologian and sincere believer in the Church; but the fact cannot be disguised that she is not well versed in either history or logic. It is the tritest of truisms that religion and morality in many instances have been and still are as far apart as the poles. Saintliness is not necessarily accompanied by elevation and nobility of character. Mrs. Gell proudly asserts that "in the mighty Empires of Greece and Rome philosophy was found incapable of safeguarding the sanctity of homes and the virtue of women." Without fear of intelligent contradiction, we give that assertion the direct lie. To Pagan Greece and Rome the sanctity of homes and the virtue of women were fully as precious and as carefully protected, to say the least, as they are in Christian Britain to day. Even Lecky admits that in Rome "the ideal of female morality was placed as high as among Christian nations" (*Euro-*

*pean Morals*, vol i., p. 104). If Mrs. Gell would study such scholarly works as Dill's *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, she would realize how incompetent she is to sit in judgment on ancient Greece and Rome, and how steeped in ignorance or perverse Christian prejudice much of her tiny book is. She says that "morality severed from religion is a machine without a soul," forgetting that the most religious people are often the most immoral; and we have the authority of so orthodox a divine as Professor Peake for the statement that "morality and religion are radically distinct and often mutually antagonistic." He frankly admits that there are "people who have genuine religious feelings and desires, but combine with them a low moral standard" (*Christianity: Its Nature and its Truth*, p. 17). Professor Peake says further:—

I have heard of a director who was so religious that he would not read a newspaper on Monday because it had been printed on Sunday, who yet was responsible, with his colleagues, for a colossal financial disaster which plunged thousands into ruin (*Ibid.*, p. 18).

Then he accounts for so unpleasant a fact by falling back upon the principle of "the radical distinction of religion and morality, and the frequent antagonism between them."

Following the example of the late Bishop Wilkinson, Mrs. Gell grossly misrepresents the results of the adoption of secular education in France. She gives neither "facts nor figures" in support of the assertion that "juvenile crime of the worst and most degraded type" has increased to an alarming extent in France under the secular system, whereas the latest statistics show that juvenile crime in that country has been steadily diminishing since the year 1889. At the end of 1896 there were 5,023 boys in French reformatories, but by 1901 the number had fallen to 3,037. In 1889 there were 4,080 boy offenders and 728 girl offenders, but by 1894 the numbers had gone down to 3,582 and 620. Has our author not read Dr. Lacassagne's and Fouillet's works on this subject? But while so wickedly falsifying the state of things in France, Mrs. Gell discreetly says nothing about the moral condition of Great Britain and Ireland, and other countries in which religious education is still in full operation. She is silent because she dares not face the facts, which are most discreditable to the Church, Catholic or Protestant, established or free.

But what about the menace of Secularism?

J. T. LLOYD.

## A Voice Valedictory.

Spirits are not finely touched  
But to fine issues. —Shakespeare.

To bear all naked truths  
And to envisage circumstance, all calm;  
That is the top of sovereignty. —Keats.

In the September issue of the *Humanitarian* it is stated that the Humanitarian League will be "wound up," and that its useful career of over half-a-century is over. The periodical finishes with the Society, and the editor fittingly makes the number a memorial issue. In a dignified farewell to his readers, he says, "the *Humanitarian* will be able to take its departure without any of those idle compliments that on such occasions are apt to be bandied to and fro," and he remarks that he rejoices that the paper has never been popular, for, as Thoreau said, to be popular "is to go down perpendicularly."

Yet, the *Humanitarian*, unpopular as it was, will not disappear "unwept, unhonoured, and unsung." Unlike

so many advanced papers, it was edited without the least fanaticism, although it challenged convention at so many points. The editor, Mr. Henry S. Salt, ploughed a lonely furrow, but he was never morbid nor intolerant. Taking things at their true worth, he was never surprised by views he could not accept. He merely acknowledged urbanely that they were so entirely different from his own. From the first number to the last of the *Humanitarian*, the leading ideal which has guided Mr. Salt has been that all cruelty is abhorrent, and, to this end, he advocated a wide and comprehensive system of humaneness. For a quarter of a century this brave reformer carried on a crusade against the numerous barbarisms of our civilization, ranging from the cruelties inflicted by men on men to the no less atrocious ill-treatment of animals. Brutal Sports, Criminal Laws, Prison Treatment, Errors in Diet and Dress, Bad Education of Children, and many another subject of reform, came within the scope of this fearless writer. Those who think that he was in advance of his time will note that positive results were achieved, chief among which were the discontinuance of birching in the Royal Navy, the abandonment of the tread-wheel, and the passing of the Criminal Appeal Act. The League had the support of such well-known leaders of opinion as Herbert Spencer, Bernard Shaw, George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, and G. W. Foote, who wrote and spoke on behalf of many of its objects. Indeed, this advocacy of a humanitarian ethic was very dear to our dead leader, and he was never happier than when helping the Humanitarian League, which he described as "one of the noblest and most useful organizations in England."

We have a very real admiration for Mr. Salt's striking talents and widespread philanthropy. Throughout a lengthy career of public usefulness, he has taken as much pains to avoid publicity as most other men do to ensure it. And we cannot allow him to vacate his editorial chair without a tribute of praise, which gives us unalloyed pleasure to pen. At the moment there is a wave of reaction throughout the world, but the time will come when a real civilization, a true humanistic morality, will arise; and on what principles can it be founded but on those which Mr. Salt has proclaimed, with so much earnestness, for so many years.

Unlike those noisy preachers who, in inviting men to be saved, imply that mankind is damned, Mr. Salt conceives human society as a great brotherhood. He sees that the underlying unity is not merely economic, not merely the apotheosis of an enlightened selfishness, but an ethical fraternity, where love and mutual service are to be confidently expected. This faith is not to be limited to one race or species, but extended to the whole world of innocent beings.

"You make steps in our civilization," wrote George Meredith, appreciatively, to Mr. Salt. These steps in civilization have not been easily made. It is, therefore, fitting that the part played by the editor of the *Humanitarian*, and the prime mover in the Humanitarian League, should be recognized.

MIMNERMUS.

"What is my faith?" I do believe  
That ladies never would deceive  
And that the little fault of Eve  
Is very easy to retrieve.

"She lost us immortality!"  
Well, so she might; and what care I?  
Eden and paradise are nigh  
As ever: should we pass them by?

—Landor.

## The New Testament.

### III.

#### THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY.

THE Gospel narrative, as we have it, must be regarded as the growth of many decades—perhaps as much as three-quarters of a century. The nucleus must have been put together before the end of the lifetime of at least some of the earliest followers of Jesus: on no other assumption can we explain the presence in all three Synoptics of such a prediction as: "There are some of those who stand here, who shall not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come with power" (Mark ix. 1; Matt. xvi. 28; Luke ix. 27). On the other hand, the Gospels, as we have them, cannot have existed until well into the second century. The ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius, quotes from Papias (A.D. 140), the bulk of whose writings are lost, only two fragments in support of the authenticity of the Gospels: one fragment says that Matthew compiled the sayings of Jesus in Hebrew (Aramaic), and that various Greek translations of these existed in Papias' time; the other records a statement made to Papias by a person known as "John the Presbyter," that Mark, a follower of Peter, wrote a disordered account of the doings of Jesus based on Peter's teaching. This is practically all the external evidence that matters. It shows that both Luke and John were either unknown to Papias, or regarded by him as so recently written as to be not worth mention; if Papias had mentioned them at all favourably, Eusebius would surely have quoted his testimony. It shows, further, that the only Gospel narratives generally known early in the second century were Mark (presumably our second Gospel) and some matter attributed to Matthew, which was certainly *not* our present Gospel of that name. Now, as a matter of fact, all the obviously early matter in our Gospels—the passage quoted above is an example—occurs either in Mark, or in a stratum of material common to our Matthew and Luke, called "Q" by the critics. The obvious conclusion is that "Q" represents *one* of the Greek translations of the collected sayings of Jesus which Papias mentions; that the compilers of our Matthew and Luke used it; and that whatever is not in Mark or "Q" must be assigned to the second century.

"Q" and Mark, therefore, are valuable, not as giving the real history of Jesus, but as showing what was put down as authentic about him towards the end of the first century. The discourses in "Q" include the Sermon on the Mount and other material, and give a picture of his teaching very similar to the Epistle of James. In "Q" and Mark together we get the impression of a prophet, exorcist, and faith-healer, denouncing riches and exalting poverty, who preaches the immediate coming of a millennial kingdom, gets into difficulties with the Pharisees on the question of the Sabbath and ceremonial washing, is spurred on by fanatical adherents to proclaim himself the Messiah, attempts a *coup de theatre* at Jerusalem, and is crucified by Pilate as a seditionist. This is about all we can say of Jesus with any degree of certainty. The narrative of Mark, apart from this skeleton of fact, is packed with the impossible. It ends abruptly with the discovery of the empty tomb: the summary account of the appearances of the risen Jesus (xvi. 9—end) is a second-century addition, the real ending having been destroyed.

These Gospel strata are conspicuous by the almost total absence of the distinctive doctrines of Paul. "Q" was most probably first put together in Palestine, and Mark at Rome. Both were, therefore, composed in non-Pauline surroundings, for the Roman Church was not of Paul's foundation. The only Pauline traits in Mark

are the small gloss in vii. 19 (regarding the permissibility of meats forbidden by the Jews), and the account of the institution of the Eucharist. Of the incarnation and similar doctrines there are no trace.

Mark must have written in the years immediately after the fall of Jerusalem. With the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96) a new period of persecution began. This Emperor, a gloomy reactionary, was remarkable for his efforts to restore the old Roman religion in all its austerity. He revived, it is said, the punishment of burying alive a Vestal Virgin convicted of unchastity. Both Jews and Christians, therefore, came in for persecution. To this reign belong the anonymous "Epistle to the Hebrews," the so-called First Epistle of Peter, and the uncanonical Epistle of Clement.

The "Epistle to the Hebrews" is addressed to the Roman Church by a person unknown, temporarily absent from Italy ("Those from Italy salute you," xiii. 24), with the object of strengthening the faith of his readers in view of an impending prosecution. The writer is a Paulinist, and a friend of Paul's disciple Timothy (xiii. 23); but the ascription of the letter to Paul himself is now universally admitted to be unfounded. The epistle itself makes no such claim. Whoever the author is, he is a more unpleasant person than Paul—an arid rhetorician and sophist, without a touch of human sympathy—the Calvinist of the New Testament. Paul is occasionally very human; the writer of Hebrews never. His letter is notable for its assertion that wilful sin after conversion to Christianity entails damnation without hope of pardon (Heb. x. 26-31). What a self-righteous Chadband he must have been!

I Peter is very little later than Hebrews; the persecution then threatened is now raging. The epistle cannot be Peter's, as it is a mere rehash of some of Paul's teaching, with a little topical exhortation thrown in. Moreover, it is not a real letter at all. It purports to be addressed by Peter to the Dispersion (*i.e.*, to Jewish believers) in Asia Minor; yet, in the body of the document, he refers to them as converts from idolatry (I Pet. iv. 1-5); so that the whole does not hang together. The document must rank as the first of the notorious forgeries which mark the history of Christianity from this time on. Peter, of course, was a favourite name for such forgers to employ to lend credit to their productions, while Paul, Barnabas, James, John, and other apostles were greatly in request.

We have now reached the close of the first century. The Christian Church is ceasing to be a scattered collection of small circles of visionaries, living in ecstatic anticipation of the Second Advent. It has become a "going concern," with a distinct hierarchy of presbyters exercising discipline over the many, and a tendency even, in some districts where converts are numerous, to erect an arch-presbyter or "bishop" as chief wielder of authority. The Judæo-Pauline feud has died down through the superior attraction of Paulinism as a new "mystery," and the complete failure of the Nazarene sect to establish itself outside Palestine, except temporarily and partially at Rome.

The persecution of Domitian ceased with his death in A.D. 96. Christianity, now recognized as distinct from Judaism, was an "unlawful religion" in the eyes of the authorities. There was, however, no great determination on their part to enforce the law; the Roman temper was tolerant; and an edict of Trajan, preserved among the correspondence of the younger Pliny, strictly forbids inquisitorial measures against the Christians. Such persecution as occurred at this time seems to have been due to the fanatical zeal for martyrdom of some Christians, who regarded it as a short cut to glory, and went out of their way to insult publicly the pagan worship in

order to win it. The strange case of Ignatius (A.D. 115), who was sent from Antioch to Rome under Trajan to be thrown to the wild beasts, must have been of this nature.

We have a picture of the internal state of the Church at the opening of the second century in the so-called "epistles of Paul" to Timothy and Titus. These writings are totally unlike Paul's in style and vocabulary, and cannot be his. They are, in fact, forged in the interests of ecclesiastical discipline. The fabricator has a low opinion of most of his fellow-believers; he quotes the verse of a Greek poet, "The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy pot-bellies," as applicable to Cretan Christians—and I daresay he was right! He is concerned about the spread of heresy, and strongly supports Paul's doctrine of the inferiority of women to men. There was no persecution raging or impending in his time; on the contrary, he wishes prayers offered for the Emperor and the Roman governors, "that we may live a quiet and peaceful life in all piety and sobriety." A long way, truly, from primitive Christianity as revealed in the Apocalypse, with its fury against Nero as Antichrist and its denunciations of fire and brimstone!

ROBERT ARCH.

## Acid Drops.

The *Manchester Daily Dispatch* reports the principal Wesleyan chaplain to the forces as saying that Sir Julian Byng had told him that "God had blinded the eyes of the enemy," and that "several generals" had told him that it was a "God won war," though they had not prayed before they would pray now. We gather from this, assuming that the chaplain is telling the truth, that some of our generals like a joke, even when practised on one with so poor a sense of humour as the chaplain-general appears to have.

Evidently they take an interest in sport in heaven. At least we assume as much from the action of the Rev. F. M. Millan, Pastor of the Walnut Hills Presbyterian Church, Cincinnati. This gentleman has given out a form of prayer in which God is asked to permit the Cincinnati team to win the baseball championship of the National League. God is also given a few tips how to help. He is to grant "speed and deceptive curves" to the Cincinnati players, with "frequent and timely hits." That is very thoughtful, as we suppose there is some danger of the angels being out of practice. Hitherto we have been under the impression that the only amusements in heaven were singing and music. Perhaps it is not so dull a place as we have thought.

The *Daily News* has published a number of letters on the "Religion of the Soldier." A large number of the letters appear to be written by clergymen and ultra-pious laymen, and they are remarkable for their unanimity in attributing a lot of religion in the soldier. The writers seem to know more of the Army of the Lord than the British Army.

Mr. Israel Zangwill, the famous novelist, says that "the whole anti-Zionist agitation is a Franco-Catholic intrigue." Perhaps Papa, at Rome, and the Cardinals, are thinking of the value of the Holy places as side-shows of the Roman Catholic Church. It would never do to let theatrical speculators get control of Adam's tomb and other sacred relics.

Speaking at the Brotherhood Congress at the London City Temple, the Rev. F. B. Meyer said "the War has killed Atheism." As Mark Twain said on a similar occasion: "the report is greatly exaggerated."

The Religious Tract Society has sanctioned the filming of some popular religious stories published by them a generation ago. When will pious folk be brave enough to film the

story of Jonah and the Whale, and Noah's Ark? A procession of the animals marching two-by-two ought to provoke smiles from a Brotherhood meeting.

The clergy are a caste apart. But sacrosanct as they are, they are still men, and subject to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Recently, Father Edward Smith was drowned while bathing at Mount Nugent, Co. Cavan. At Linsdell Parish Church, the Rev. W. Roulston fell dead at the altar when administering communion.

"I know a young man who has been offered £4 10s. a week, but he won't work," plaintively says the Rev. F. W. Roberts, of Uxbridge. We know plenty of parsons, with far better salaries, who work only one day a week.

Cuthbert Shepherd, a well-known Southend pastor, has been committed for trial on a charge of perjury. There is no moral—at present.

There is an unconscious note of humour in an article in the *Daily News* by the Rev. R. W. Cummings, a Lancashire parson. Criticizing the average clerical attitude towards Materialism, he says that "the immense debt that Labour and human progress owes to the Materialists is worthy of a more generous recognition." And, then, he adds, "we had better accept the modern Materialist movement as of God." This is pure, unadulterated fun. Only, as old Euclid puts it: it is absurd.

In a leading article the *Daily Mirror* (London) complains that there are too many money-makers at church doors. The writer mentions that in one church a charge of a shilling was made for taking photographs, and in several places of worship charges are made for admission. In one instance there was a ticket office and a postcard and guide-book stall. Then follows the pertinent question: "In other words, after a thousand years of established Christianity in this country, the Church has so little influence over her people that they are prepared to sacrifice their places of worship rather than part with the money necessary to keep them going."

Providence may watch the fall of sparrows, but appears indifferent to the fall of parsons. The Rev. O. Legge-Wilkinson was fatally injured by being run over by a motor at Allington, near Maidstone.

A newspaper paragraph announces that Mrs. "General" Booth will head a Salvation Army procession from the Embankment riding on a white horse. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, he was riding on an ass. It would have been more fitting had Mrs. Booth kept to the same animal, and infinitely more suggestive to the intelligent onlooker.

A newspaper cutting reaches us advertising "Anti-Atheism Leaflets" at 3½d. per doz., Christmas cards at 4d. Evidently the seller has a shrewd idea of the comparative value of his wares.

There is still a good deal of religion left in South Wales. Thus the *Cambria Daily News* reports the following prayer in a Porthcawl chapel: "O Lord, we hear there are some men playing golf here to-day. Lord, open the earth, and swallow them out of the way, as the earth did with those other men centuries ago." And yet there are some who doubt the power of Christianity to appeal to the higher qualities of man!

There is dissatisfaction among the Nonconformists of Fulham. It seems that of late a number of them have been buried among Church of England people, and the Nonconformists do not like it. These Christians will not even be buried together if they can help it. There really is nothing like Christian love and brotherhood, if one only understands it properly.

The Pope has nearly been frightened to death. Six hundred Bohemian priests have asked for permission to marry,

and a large number have left the Roman Catholic Church in order to enter the holy estate of matrimony. Other husbands will welcome the news, in spite of Papa's grief.

The Rev. A. T. Guttery, President of the Free Church Council, complains that pugilists earn greater incomes than Prime Ministers. Brother Guttery made no reference to ecclesiastics. Two score archbishops and bishops share annually the modest sum of £181,000. Besides, pugilists fight real men, and not an imaginary devil.

The journalists are seeking to impress their readers with the very democratic character of the clergy. A paragraph states that the pastor of Wesley's Chapel, City Road, was once a boy who sold articles in the streets. Tradition has it that the Christian Trinity was once a carpenter, but that doesn't alter the fact of the Bench of Bishops.

In an article in a literary contemporary we are informed that "the present-day prophet always shouts." The old Hebrew prophets screamed like parakeets—and with the same brain-power.

The Wesleyan Methodists, Primitive Methodists, and United Methodists are organizing central schemes for raising the salaries of their ministers. It is to be noted that these Christians do not rely solely upon prayer, but pin their faith to the worldly subscription list.

In an article on the "Penurious Clergy," by "One of Them," the writer says "the vast majority of livings to-day are worth only £200 to £250," with a vicarage. That's something like penury! Four or five pounds a week and a house, invitations galore, and presents from the congregation, may not spell wealth, but neither is it the life of a beachcomber.

The remains of the late Bishop of Lincoln were cremated. When the Judgment Day arrives it should be anything but easy for his lordship's grave to give up its dead.

The Rev. T. Pym, of Camberwell, complains of "that Monday yawn." Surely, the unhappy folk in the pews during sermon-time must yawn worse on Sundays than Mondays.

The Rev. S. C. Tickell, of Stainton-cum-Hellaby, is quite in favour of Sunday games in the villages. It would enable village boys, he declares, "to kill time without killing anything else." In the good old days of Faith, the clergy nearly killed folk who tried to kill time on the Sabbath.

A London clergyman writes indignantly in the columns of a contemporary that he was charged ninepence for a glass of home-made lemonade. We can imagine his excitement, for that was about the price that used to be paid for "communion port" in the pre-War days.

Criticizing the Church of to-day, a Nonconformist writing in the *Daily News* says: "the clerical collar does form a barrier." Bless his innocent heart! what would he say if he lived in a Continental country where the priests wore petticoats?

In a *Daily News* book review, the writer says: "Chief crime of all, man has laid his children, generation after generation, as sacrifices before religious stupidity." Free-thinkers have said this for very many years.

The dear clergy appear to have quaint ideas concerning destitution. One doctor of divinity publishes a piteous letter in a daily paper, in which he says, "with a net income of about £500 and rising rates, how can one live in these days?" If he took the trouble, he would find the majority of his parishioners existed on a smaller sum.

## C. 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.

H. J. EARTHY.—We should like to do as you would like—to advertise in a really large way; but we must wait awhile before we can launch out in that direction. Perhaps that will come one day, and then the *Freethinker* will come into its own. It has had nearly forty years of struggle, and deserves some relaxation.

G. DAVIES.—Mr. Lloyd thanks you for your good wishes, which he reciprocates. We hope to be down your way before the winter is over.

H. SPENCE.—Thanks; we are keeping quite well. We suppose we get through what you call "an enormous amount of work" simply because it has to be done. We can be lazy with ease, but we haven't time at present.

GAMALIEL SENIOR.—We will gladly visit Huddersfield if a hall can be secured. The Bishop of Wakefield is a funny man, although not perhaps funnier than other bishops. Still, it might have occurred to him that the "mystery" of pain is of his own making. His difficulty is how to harmonize it with a good God. And as that cannot be done, he calls it a mystery. The proper conclusion is that the theory of God does not fit the facts.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges:—H. Reeve, 2s. 6d.

S. HICKS.—Thanks for good wishes. We are pleased to have your appreciation.

A. J. MARRIOTT.—We read the "Profits of Religion" when it appeared in one of the American papers. Sorry you were unable to get a hall in Reading.

"JOHN'S PARENTS."—We are very pleased to receive the support of "John's Parents" as well as that of his "Grandpa." We consider John a fortunate young gentleman, and we hope he will grow to reward them both in the way they would desire. Shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing you both at our next meeting at South Place.

V. C. JAMES.—Thanks for subscription, and the news that you have gained us a new subscriber. We hope all our readers will follow your example. Then we can snap our fingers at Fate.

J. PALPHREYMAN.—Sorry we were not at the office when you called. Hope to see you next time.

E. E. STAFFORD.—MSS. to hand. Thanks. We hope that your expectations will soon be realized.

R. NORMAN.—You say that the existence of your own intelligence is proof of a God. The argument is unconvincing to us, and not complimentary to the Deity.

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.

## Special.

WE must ask our readers all over the country to exercise their patience with regard to the receipt of this week's issue of the *Freethinker*, and of subsequent issues, until such time as the Railway Strike is at an end. At the time of writing, we are unable to send the weekly parcel to our Scotch agents, Messrs. Menzies, and those newsagents who are supplied through them will understand the cause of the delay. Messrs. W. H. Smith are taking only half their usual supply, owing to inability to handle their weekly consignment of this and other journals. We presume that all are suffering in a similar degree.

We are printing the usual quantity, and we hope that our readers will see that they get all their back numbers when train services are running. It is certain to mean a serious loss to us in any case, and we must rely upon the goodwill of all *Freethinker* readers to make that loss as light as possible.

## Sugar Plums.

Provided there is the ghost of a possibility of getting there—even by aeroplane—Mr. Cohen lectures to-day (October 5) in the Dockers' Hall, Swansea, afternoon at 3, evening at 7. "Saints" in Swansea and district will please note.

To-day (Oct. 5) the Glasgow Branch commences its lecture season with two addresses from Mr. Lloyd, also assuming the possibility of his getting there. We hope that all our Glasgow readers will see that the meetings are well advertised among their friends and acquaintances. There is nothing like commencing the season in good style.

On Sunday next (October 12) Mr. Cohen opens the course of Sunday afternoon lectures at South Place Institute. We are relying upon our London friends to see that the meetings are widely advertised, and we hope they will do their best to secure the attendance of as many enquiring Christians as possible. The following Sunday Mr. Cohen will visit Weston-super-Mare. These will be the first Free-thought lectures ever delivered there, and we are looking forward to the experiment with some interest. Thanks to the activity of a local friend, the large Grand Pier Pavilion has been taken for the day and the "Cove (Ladies) Orchestra" engaged. The meetings are pretty certain to arouse considerable interest, and should bring together all Free-thinkers in the district. Bristol friends will, probably, make it a point of being present. As the Pavilion seats 2,500 there will be room for all.

We are again able to give only the briefest notices to the letters we are receiving in connection with our "Victory Fund." Mr. G. Brady sends his congratulations on "the splendid fight" that has been put up this last five years. Mr. W. Hicks wishes he could make his subscription twenty times as large, and regrets that we have to give so much and receive so little. Mr. E. Truelove hopes for a shower of that rare but useful friend "John Bradbury." Mr. S. Dorman thinks we are over sanguine in thinking that we are nearly at the end of our troubles, and fears there are hard times ahead. He backs his opinion by doubling his subscription of last year, and hopes that others will follow his example. Mr. A. V. Templeman also thinks we are over sanguine as to the future. Both these friends may be right, but we shall try to show that they are wrong. We recognize that the future is a bit of a gamble, but if we can get that other 1,000 subscribers we are after we have no fear.

The Profiteering Act, it is announced, is to be extended so as to include books. We are glad to see this. Everyone knows how greatly the cost of printing has increased, and one can understand the increased price of new books. But when we find publishers working off their stocks of books

published *before* the War at twice the pre-War prices, it is evident that they are simply taking advantage of the occasion to line their pockets. We speak feelingly as a buyer of books, and we should be glad to see some committee go into the profits of those publishers who are selling their pre-War stocks at two, and even three times, the pre-War prices. Such a policy bleeds those who *will* have books, and makes those who ought to have them less likely to get what they need.

The Manchester Branch has arranged a good course of special lectures for the forthcoming autumn and winter, and is looking forward to a good season's work. Special lectures are arranged for two Sundays each month from October 26 to March 1. The intervening Sundays will, we presume, be filled with local speakers. We wish the Branch success in its endeavours to break its previous records.

The Birmingham Branch has again taken the Repertory Theatre for the season 1919-20, and held its first meeting on Sunday last. Mr. Clifford Williams gave a specially interesting address to a good audience, and the meeting augured well for the autumn and winter. The Committee of the Branch makes a special appeal for the help of all members and friends in the district, and the Secretary, Mr. J. Partidge, 245 Shenstone Road, Rotton Park, Birmingham, will be pleased to hear from all who can give help in any form.

Now that the lecture season is commencing, we wish to impress upon Branch secretaries the need for getting lecture notices, etc., at this office as early as possible. We cannot promise insertion unless they reach us by the first post on Tuesday morning. Some time ago we tried the experiment of having a column devoted to Branch news. That only met with indifferent success owing to only a few of the Branches sending in reports. We are quite willing, however, to give the column another trial if Branches care to co-operate in the matter.

## "Freethinker" "Victory" Sustentation Fund.

### Fourth List of Subscriptions.

Previously acknowledged, £225 16s. 6d. A. J. Marriott, 10s. W. Bailey, £1. H. Spence, 5s. T. Teasdale, 2s. S. Hicks, £1 10s. Gamaliel Senior, 2s. 6d. A. V. Templeman, £1. V. C. James, £1. Miss M. Pitcher, 10s. J. O'Connor, £1. Allan Jones, 5s. John's Parents, £1. Duncan Stewart, 10s. S. Dorman, £1. K. Palmer, 2s. W. P. Kensit, 5s. Mr. and Mrs. W. Waymark, 5s. Alfred and Andrew Harvey, £2. W. F. Ambrose (4th sub.) 2s. J. Burrell, 2s. 6d. T. C. Riglin, 4s. S. Crowther, 6s. 6d. Postman, 2s. 6d. Blue Black, 2s. 6d. Mr. and Mrs. Dobson, 10s. C. McLachlan, £1. C. C. Schmitz, 2s. 6d. Total, £240 15s. 6d.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.—To-day, October 5, North London reopens its winter session at St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, Kentish Town. Miss Evans, of the Land Nationalization Society will speak on "The Land Blockade," and, as Miss Evans is at home with any subject she tackles, we are looking forward to an enjoyable evening. Mr. Harry Jones will take the chair at 7.30. At the time of writing, aerial locomotion is scarcely adequate for our needs; and although we hope that the mists will have rolled away before Sunday next, one never can tell. Will all members and friends make a determined effort to be present at our first meeting on Sunday? and if those within walking distance of the Club will make two efforts, we shall be grateful. Our gratitude will be very much increased if members and friends will try to be in time for the meeting, to commence at 7.30 sharp. Please note—Sunday, October 5.

F. AKROYD, Hon. Sec.

## The Advance of Materialism.

III.

(Continued from p. 481.)

In the *Contemporary Review* for June, 1919, there is still more important testimony, from an opponent, as to the growth and strength of Materialism in an article, entitled "Hindrances to Belief in Immortality," by the Rev. Dr. Samuel McComb. In the second part of that article dealing with "The Rise and Influence of Materialism," Dr. McComb deals with this question of the supposed collapse of Materialism, and reaches identically similar conclusions to our own.

Tracing modern Materialism from the time in 1874, when Tyndall startled his contemporaries by declaring that in matter he discerned the promise and potency of all life, which, along with Darwin's revolutionary doctrine of man's development from pre-human ancestors, which, says Dr. McComb, seemed to complete the materialistic argument, and "threatened to sweep the last generation off its feet; and to make materialism triumphant among all educated people." It is now claimed, he goes on to say, that idealism has turned the tide, "and on all sides we are assured that materialism is dead or dying. He cites the testimony of an ethical culture lecturer that "Science herself has sounded its death knell." Of an Anglican theologian (V. Storr, *Christianity and Immortality*, p. 23), who asserts of Materialism: "To-day it has ceased to be fashionable and is thoroughly discredited." Also the article on Materialism in Hasting's *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, by Dr. Tennant, who declares that "materialism is to be found to-day, perhaps, only in the literature of secularist 'free' thought." And, lastly, the article on Materialism in Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, the writer of which avers that "materialism as a dogmatic system hardly survives in philosophical circles, although in alliance with Secularism and Socialism it is, no doubt, influential among certain sections of the working classes, and often forms the creed of the half-educated specialist." Dr. McComb observes of these deliverances:—

There can be no doubt that these writers are serious thinkers who not only believe what they say, but have grounds for their belief. Yet it is no less certain that materialism was never more rampant in scientific circles than it is to-day. It was an ancient saying that when three physicians met two were found to be atheists; substitute the word "materialists" for "atheists" and you will not be far from the truth. Owing to the ill odour now attaching to materialism, as though it involved a certain opprobrium, scientific men do not care to label themselves with the name, but that they are firmly persuaded of the doctrine and teach it to the youth who attend our medical schools may be reckoned as certain. Almost any of our young psychologists will tell you, says James, "that only a few belated scholastics, or possibly some crack-brained theosophist or psychical researcher can be found holding back, and still talking as if mental phenomena might exist as independent variables in the world."—*Human Immortality*, pp. 9, 10.

Which quotation from Professor James, being translated, means that only a few crack-brained theosophists or psychical researchers still believe that mind can exist apart or independent of matter. "But," goes on Dr. McComb, "the matter has been recently put to the test in a genuinely scientific style. Professor J. H. Leuba, the well-known American psychologist, sent out a questionnaire to groups selected from published lists of American scientists and psychologists and philosophers, with a



view to discover how far the belief in God and Immortality still prevailed among the educated classes, more particularly in college and university circles. Of those who answered the questions it was found that 49.4 per cent., among the physical and biological students taken together, declared themselves either disbelievers or doubters in regard to belief in immortality. Of the more eminent as distinguished from men of lesser reputation, only 36.9 proclaimed themselves believers. The biologists produced a much smaller number of believers than the physicists, 50 per cent. being credited to the latter, 37 per cent. to the former. Of the men of greater standing among the biologists, only 25 per cent. avowed their belief in a future life. Another interesting and significant fact emerged. Whereas among the physicists and biologists the number of believers in immortality was substantially larger than that of the believers in God, among the psychologists the number of believers in immortality was clearly less than that of the believers in God, 24 per cent. asserting their belief in God, and 19.8 per cent. their belief in immortality. Among the greater psychologists, the number of believers in immortality sank to 8.8 per cent. Professor Leuba concludes that 'in the present phase of psychological science, the greater one's knowledge of psychic life, the more difficult it is to retain the traditional belief in the continuation of personality after death.' To put the matter briefly, more than half of all those who replied to the questions addressed to them, and over two-thirds of the more eminent of these rejected belief in immortality. These ascertained facts prove that the reassuring of men of philosophical distinction as to the passing of Materialism requires critical discrimination. Inquiry and statistical study prove the prevalence of denial of survival in scientific circles as the result of psycho-physiological knowledge implying Materialism, and yet sincere and thoughtful men assure us that this doctrine is thoroughly discredited among the half-educated and scientific circles.<sup>1</sup> And he adds: "Materialism as a psycho-logical-physiological solution of the problem of mind and brain was never more alive in scientific circles than it is to-day." Of course, the Rev. Dr. McComb, who is an idealist and a Doctor of Divinity, cannot admit that Materialism has really vanquished Idealism and Spiritism, and declares that "The old doctrine that nothing is in the mind except what enters through the senses was shown to be false by proving that mind had powers which the senses were not adequate to explain." Even if this were true—and Dr. McComb advances no proof whatever for this contention—he admits that it does not meet the case.

The scientific materialist does not wince at this philosophic victory. For he is not concerned about the nature of knowledge; such a problem he hands over to the metaphysician. What concerns him is to frame an hypothesis, in harmony with scientific method, which will render intelligible the relation of mind to the bodily organism. And this hypothesis can be expressed in a sentence: *Consciousness is a function of the brain.* It cannot be denied that the facts are on the materialistic side. Universal experience testifies that consciousness is always associated with a physical organism, weakens when the organism weakens, is impaired, and finally disappears when the organism perishes under the stroke of death. It is true that the materialist cannot prove that consciousness is destroyed by death, but why, he asks, should consciousness persist when the other functions, the various chemistries of the body, are stilled for ever?<sup>2</sup>

And he cites Professor Clifford as saying: "If an indi-

vidual feeling always goes with an individual nerve-message, if a combination or stream of feelings always goes with a stream of nerve-messages, does it not follow that when the stream of nerve-messages is broken up, this stream of feelings will be broken up also, and will no longer form consciousness."<sup>1</sup> And of Haeckel: "That the organization of mind advances with even pace along with the organization of brain, is the merest commonplace. The fortunes of mind and brain are so interwoven at every moment that to the scientific observer it is incredible to suppose the escape of consciousness from the shattered elements of the physical organ. The general thesis of the mind's dependence on the body is buttressed in detail by the researches of the physiologist and the psychologist."<sup>2</sup> And of Duhring that: "The phenomena of consciousness correspond, element for element, to the operations of special parts of the brain. ....The destruction of any piece of the apparatus involves the loss of some one or other of the vital operations; and the consequence is that, so far as life extends, we have before us only an organic function, with a *Ding-an-sich*, or an expression of that imaginary entity, the soul. The fundamental proposition carries with it the denial of the immortality of the soul."<sup>3</sup>

(To be concluded.) W. MANN.

## Freethought in Unusual Places.

### II.

#### THE SONGS OF THE SOUTHERN SYNCOPATED ORCHESTRA.

THE unique character of the musical performance of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra is not spoiled by the conventionality of the words of the performer's songs. The *ensemble* of the performance has been transferred from the place of its birth to a London hall, and it has been transferred without the curse of modification, in order to avoid offence to a people of a different character.

Such a transference of an indigenous artistic output to another soil rarely meets with unprecedented success, but the moment was ripe for a definition by respectable musicians of the future of syncopation as a musical vehicle. Apart from merely harmonic considerations, however, the performance has virtues which do not lie altogether upon the surface, but are inherent in its origin.

The influence of the classical nature of the English of the Jacobean version of the Hebrew Scriptures, and its slightly archaic mode of expression, have done as much as anything to create the modern indifference to that work. Similarly, the less classical but better known phraseology of the Christian hymns have nullified any influence in the direction of which they were written. The words are sung by the congregations of the various chapels and churches, where such congregations still exist; but what little meaning these words may once have had is lost now to the people who repeat them. Such is always the result of repetition. The sentences tend to develop into an holy incantation, with a forgotten meaning, but an accepted efficacy.

It is hardly credible, however, that even the sparse congregations of the chapels and churches regard the hymns they sing in the light of an entertainment, and it is consequently somewhat surprising that the Southern Syncopated Orchestra should be able, without offence, to present the songs of the simple race of American Negroes to a cosmopolitan London audience. But it is not quite correct to call the songs hymns. They are not

<sup>1</sup> Rev. Dr. McComb, *The Contemporary Review*, June, 1919; pp. 686-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1</sup> Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, vol. i., pp. 247-249.

<sup>2</sup> Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> E. Duhring. Cited by W. James, *Human Immortality*.

precisely sung in praise of God, though the whole life of the negroes in the Southern States is so bound up with religion that the songs are nearly all of a religious tenor.

The less civilized races accept less questioningly the religious truths which the medicine-men of the human race inculcate, and the race whose songs are now being sung in London were no exception to the rule. They accepted the religious truths, and these truths have become just as important in their lives as the Ju-Ju of the African forests undoubtedly was to their ancestors. But combined with the simplicity of this people is a strong flavour of cynicism, which savours almost of disbelief. Life was not so soft for them that they were unable to accept it with equanimity, but even its severity becomes a matter for jest when the limit of human endurance is reached without the possibility of improvement. An identical spirit was that of the Armies in the Field in the late War. They, with no thought for the morrow, or as little as could be managed in that direction, ate, drank, and were merry to-day.

Such a spirit is bound to engender cynicism, and cynicism freshly expressed is an influence which destroys the worship of accepted forms. Thus was some of the quaintest blasphemy of these songs greeted by the audience with bursts of laughter and applause, which was so insistent that encores had to be performed again and again. Like a flash of inspiration, the audience were made to realize that once perhaps there had been a meaning in their own forms of worship, but that the meaning had vanished, leaving behind only a deposit of verbiage.

The complete absence of crystallized phrasing, as we know it, is perhaps the essence of the appeal of these songs to the London audience. Possibly to the performers and to their own people the songs are familiar to boredom, but if so that boredom does not appear. The performers are as interested as the audience, or if they are not really interested, they very successfully create the illusion of that emotion. They come of a people who have not yet arrived at the stage of civilization which demands the stultification, or, at least, the concealment of feeling, and they consequently dramatize their songs by a perfection of physical motion which illustrates the subject of the song. This is quite unconventional from the point of view of European singers, who may feel the passion or pathos of the song, but who merely use hackneyed and stiff gesture so that the onlooker is forced to the impression that they do not know nor can they express emotion. And the success and unconvention of this dramatization by the Southern Syncopated Orchestra, which is seen at its best in conjunction with the song, "Joshua fit the battle of Jericho," is another factor of assistance in pushing aside the garish curtains which we have set up to shield our feeble eyes from the blinding light of truth.

The wording of the title of this song, which was so excellently received that it was not only sung twice during the performance, but was even then encoed again and again, is a sufficient indication of the character of the regard for the Biblical topic of the people whose songs these are. To us, accustomed as we are to the Scriptural account of the incident, it had hardly occurred as an ordinary battle in which ordinary human beings were engaged. It was just a story of one of the incredible miracles in the Bible, but these words put the affair in quite a new light as do the dramatic actions which accompany the song. Indeed, if the battle really took place, it was a struggle between two peoples for the possession of a city, and was doubtless conducted with all the pain, and blood, and dust, and sweat, which even modern battles correlate. But from the beginning of time the occupants of the city were doomed to give way

before the God-assisted children of Israel, who marched round the city and shouted, when "the walls came tumbling down."

The effect of de-standardization is the beginning of all reform. The apathy and indifference, which are shrouded in the use of conventional actions, habits, phrases, gestures, methods of presentation of artistic work, and all other activities of a civilized people, must be stirred into a bright and consuming interest in their life and all its connotations. It is not sufficient for the people to be merely indifferent to the progress of their race. It is not sufficient for them to allow outworn customs to decay by lack of use. They must awaken to the fact that life is most intensely real and quite thrillingly earnest if an endeavour to live it completely is made. And such novel and surprising entertainments as that of the Southern Syncopated Orchestra are one of the means of jolting the apathetic intelligence. Moreover, the jolt is received with vivid acclaim, and there is an intense Twistian demand for more, but, unfortunately, on the morrow there is the "common round, the daily tasks," with its dullness and routine, its lack of interest, and its mind-maiming method, so that the effect of the extraordinary is almost blotted out in the quantity of the ordinary. But, thankfully, it cannot be quite obliterated, for we are ever more prone to remember our trivial happiness than our vast and everlasting dullness.

G. E. FUSSELL.

#### Notes From Ireland.

I know a certain cod of a fellow of no less than sixty years of age. Very pious and cadaverous he is in the face, of which the expression is rarely anything but one of conscious benevolence and inch-thick holiness. He looks as though he subsisted entirely upon blue-bottles of his own catching. I saw him in a small confectioners the other day, his devout jaws making fine inroads upon a penny-worth of black Chester cake. And the noise of his eating was awful—like a calf crunching turnips. Dangling from his watchchain I noticed a small cross upon which a man was stretched—a man with a beard—a brown beard.

Why doesn't suffering breed scepticism? A middle-aged man of my acquaintance lives in spite of a lot of things. These are: As a result of diving, a bone, hard as concrete, grew in his left ear. His doctor recommended a hazardous operation. He underwent the operation which burst the drum of the ear and left him, after four days of dreadful agony, utterly deaf in that ear. Subsequently, he learnt that the operation should not have been performed, and that a certain cure could have been effected in another way without the slightest risk. The same operation paralyzed the whole left side of his face. He is without sense of taste. He suffers from polypus. Three years ago when wrenching out some of the growth, the doctor tore out pieces of the membrane, or something as well, depriving him of all sense of smell. Now, Jesus Christ was crucified. But he didn't undergo half the sufferings of this poor man. Yet he is one whose soul is stunned by the magnitude of our Saviour's pain, and who rears his children in reverence of the scarlet tears of Christ's artificial heart. Truly, as a French poet has remarked, in religion one must not know by the forehead.

The other day I saw a man get into five feet of water. His naked neck was adorned with a beautiful brown scapular. It was a public bath. He dipped his thin white fingers into the salt water and blessed himself several times. He was a good swimmer too.

I know an old man, the father of a family, who is a Freethinker, and who, moreover, has never been to Mass for the last twenty years. He took ill a short time ago, and I

called to see him. The first thing inside his house that confronted my vision was a small card, affixed to the centre of the inside of the hall door, depicting Christ with breast exposed, and an ugly dagger sheathed in his marvellous red heart.

In this little island we haven't much of the Salvation Army business. Some years ago a few of their assistants and harmonium players did embark upon a crusade to a few towns in the south-west. But they were speedily run into the Shannon. Thank God! for no matter how we may pitch into Romanism, we cannot but admire the spirituality and the longing for starlike beauty it often instils. But this Salvation Armyism! it is nothing more than a great, big lump of Puritanism that sees in eternity a banquet "seasoned and perfumed only with blood." It never points to the mists of eternal beauty; it never points, with fingers white and trembling, to shining pictures that artists have painted. No, no, no! It hates the stars because they are beautiful; it hates churches because of the music of their organs. All it does is to stand blackly and bid people shelter under the strength of the dark clouds of the blood of the lamb. Poor fools, why cannot they see that their precious blood is as weak as barley water?

At the same time, the Roman Catholicity of Ireland is not the same as that of the Continent. There it is fundamentally an æsthetic influence. Here it is rather superficial. Indeed, it is hardly more than a complete acceptance, in the most literal manner, of all the Scriptural cycle of legends. Were the wonder tales of the Bible ten times more wonderful, I am convinced that the Irish Roman Catholic's capacity for belief would not even then be strained to incredulity. One of the results of this is that we have no really great Catholic artists. Katherin Tynan is, perhaps, the finest of them; but her stuff is a simple fabric devoid of the profound emotion, and intellectual depth, and exaltation of the whole being one meets with among the French and Belgian believing-sceptics.

DESMOND FITZROY.

#### THIS WORLD-ISM.

Seeing that the Power, whatever it be, that created the world (which, I think, certainly cannot have created itself, has, for the present, while using us as its instruments) reserved to itself the privilege of knowing why it has made us and whither it is leading us—seeing that this Power (in spite of all intentions attributed to it, in spite of all the demands made upon it) appears even more and more determined to guard its own secret—I believe, if I may say all I think, that mankind is beginning to cease to try to penetrate that eternal mystery. Mankind went to religions, which proved nothing, for they differed among themselves; it went to philosophies, which revealed no more, for they contradicted one another; and it will now try to find its way out of the difficulty by itself, trusting to its own instinct and its own simple good sense; and since mankind finds itself here on earth without knowing why or how, it is going to try to be as happy as it can with just those means the earth supplies.

—Alexander Dumas (Fils).

#### Obituary.

By the death of Mrs. A. Berkeley, which took place on September 13, the Birmingham Branch has lost a very old and earnest worker in the cause. She had suffered long and painful illnesses which had been borne with fortitude. Fearless to a degree, she had never failed on all opportune occasions to express her opinion of and contempt for the Church and all it stood for. With her mental faculties good, she adhered to her Freethought principles to the last, and death was welcomed rather than feared. It was at her express wish she had a Secular funeral, and a Secular Service was read at the grave side. The funeral took place at Witton Cemetery on September 18.—J. PARTRIDGE.

#### 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.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Miss Dorothy Evans, "The Land Blockade."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, S. K. Ratcliffe, "The Redemption of England."

###### OUTDOOR.

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

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S. (near Band Stand): 3, Mr. H. Brougham Doughty, "Are German Socialists Sincere?"; Mr. R. Norman, "Our Christian Isles."

##### COUNTRY.

###### INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Repertory Theatre, Station Street): 7, Mr. W. H. Thresh, "Real Education the Hope of the Future."

FAILSWORTH SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Sunday-school, Pole Lane, Failsworth): Mr. F. J. Gould, 2.45, "The March of a Million Years"; 6.30, "England's Need."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (The Good Templar's Hall, 122 Ingram Street): Mr. J. T. Lloyd, 12 noon, "Religion and Morals in the Light of Science"; 6.30, "Dream Life and Real Life." (Silver Collection.)

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

SWANSEA AND DISTRICT BRANCH N. S. S. (The Docker's Hall, Swansea): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "God and Evolution"; 7, "Freethought Before and After the War."

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