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Views and Opinions.

Is Religion of Importance?

There are no questions of so vital importance to man as those that cluster around religion. So said a daily paper the other day. And we meet the assertion with a flat denial. Really, there is no subject of so little intrinsic importance as that of religion. Everyone finds they can quite safely treat other people's religion as of no consequence. The Christian treats his own religion with the utmost gravity, and laughs at that of others. The only reason he has for thinking a particular religion is of importance is that it happens to be his own. And the other man never fails to return the compliment. Each one laughs at the other's absurdity—and cherishes his own with the utmost affection. The awe-inspiring narrative of one religion becomes the laughter-making material of another. What is revered and what is laughed at are largely a matter of geography. If Old Mother Hubbard had been in the Bible, it would have been treated with the same gravity as Jonah and the Whale. It is a mere accident that we have not as many solemn commentaries dealing with the esoteric significance of Jack and the Beanstalk as we have dealing with the Song of Solomon. So long as we only know one religion, we may talk of their transcendent importance. It is when we contemplate religions as a whole, and note how one cancels the other, that we begin to realize how easily the lot might be dispensed with.

* * *

Does Religion Help?

What justification is there for the often expressed opinion that it is of profound importance to have sound views concerning God and a future life? Does it really matter? How can a belief in God—for the presence of which no one is the better, and for the absence of which no one is the worse—how can a belief of this kind be said to be of importance? Other things equal, the student, the scientist, the "man of the world," gets no help from the belief. The belief in God never made a wise man of a fool; it has often helped to make a fool of a wise man. It has never made an honest man of a rogue; but it has often made the road from honesty to roguery easier than it would have been otherwise. No one, where there is anything at stake, say, a house to let, business credit to be given, or an assistant to be

employed—ever takes religious belief as an adequate guarantee of character. Long experience has removed all delusions on this head. In all the practical affairs of everyday life we look to a man's recorded character, not to his professions of faith. And it is manifestly absurd to call of importance beliefs that may be, and are, so easily and safely set on one side by all.

* * *

Practical Atheism.

To-day there is not even the theoretical importance that once attached to religious beliefs. While natural forces were believed to be either supernatural in character or under the direct control of supernatural beings, there was at least a theoretical importance in forming right beliefs concerning these assumed powers. The gods then punished or rewarded men as their beliefs concerning them were sound or unsound. But this view is no longer held by the great mass of educated believers. God, they say, no longer interferes with the action of natural forces. He works through them, and their effects on believer and unbeliever alike are identical. And what is this but saying in a roundabout manner that the belief in God does not matter? If natural forces operate on all alike, if prayer is powerless to alter them, if God does not modify their incidence to meet the needs of believers, if these things are true, in what essential does the position of the believer in his dealings with Nature differ from that of the unbeliever? I do not believe in God, says the Atheist. I believe in God, but he does nothing, says the Theist. What substantial difference is there between the two positions? Practically none. Our whole welfare depends upon our knowledge of Nature and its processes. The theory of God *minus* this knowledge is of no value. The knowledge *minus* the theory of God is none the worse. And all history enforces this lesson. Individuals and nations flourish or decay in proportion to their understanding and use of natural forces. Nothing else matters. The God who sent harvests and plagues, health and disease, victory and defeat, was someone to reckon with. But a God who does nothing may safely be set one side in a world where the need for intelligent action is great.

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An Inculcated Desire.

The sober truth is that religious doctrines never trouble those whose minds have not been specially prepared for their reception. Left alone, no one born in a modern society would experience any difficulty concerning them. If such questions occurred at all, it would only be as men discuss the habitability of Mars, or the question of an atmosphere in the moon. The professed interest in religion is an artificial, a manufactured one. It is the result of thousands of preachers impressing it upon the public; of parents, acting as the unconscious tools of the pulpit, impressing it on their children. The prominence given to religion in State functions helps to perpetuate the illusion, and the result is, not the creation of a living conviction of the value of religion, but a divorce between theory and practice that

makes our public and political life a mass of insincerity and mental crookedness. Long ago Emerson said:—

Our young people are diseased with the theological problems of original sin, origin of evil, and the like. These never presented a practical difficulty to any man—never darkened any man's road who did not go out of his way to seek them. These are the soul's mumps, and measles, and whooping cough—a simple mind will not know these enemies.

But a simple—that is a free mind—is precisely what we are not allowed to have. Our education, our social environment, is so arranged that the dice are loaded against us from the start. Our enemies wear the garb of friends, and our friends are unconsciously made our enemies. The "Black Army" is in occupation, and our chances of a free life in a free city are small while we give the leaders of that Army an honoured place in our homes and in the schools.

* * *

Why We Forget God.

It is an old complaint with the clergy that people "forget God." The wonder is that it is never asked *why* God is forgotten? A God who did something would not be ignored in this way. People could not, even if they were inclined to do so. But the suggestive thing is, not that God is ignored, but that no one is the worse for ignoring him. In every other direction the pressure of insistent facts is such that they command attention. Society cannot retain bad drains and keep free from disease. We cannot eat bad food and drink impure water without paying the price. Natural facts, real facts, cannot be ignored with impunity. Sooner or later we are brought up against the actualities of existence. Why is it, then, that people can go on year after year, not merely blind to God's existence, but convinced that their disbelief in his existence is justified by the facts, and feeling no need for the assumption of his being? That is the real question the believer has to face, and never does. The truth is that God is not forgotten, he is found out. People have become aware of the fact that "God" is no more than one of those primitive ideas that were framed in the childhood of the race, which have become utterly discredited by more mature thought. It is the hypothesis of God that is ignored, and the cause is precisely the one that justifies the rejection of witchcraft or demoniacal possession, and for exactly the same reason.

* * *

Our Suicidal Policy.

It is not true then, that the question of religion is of vital importance. It is only needful that people should understand it, and that chiefly because to understand it is the surest way of leading to an appreciation of its proper value. For the rest there are a hundred and one things in life that are of greater importance than religion. The land question, the housing question, sanitation, education, are all of infinitely greater importance than any of the questions about which theology concerns itself. Yet we put on one side matters of "great pith and moment" while we discuss questions of vestments, and lights, and baptism, and the other grotesques that go to make up the phantasmagoria of theology. We starve our scientific workers while we squander millions on a priesthood that has left its evil impress on every page of European history. We allow that priesthood to retain a footing in our schools, and thus deliver up the new generation mentally shackled and ready for exploitation. We cry out for reform, and refuse to recognize that the most pressing reform of all is to learn to take things in the order of their importance; to deal with this life while we have it, and with any other in the order of its emergence.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Facing the Facts.

THE Rev. Sidney M. Berry, minister of Carrs-lane Congregational Church, Birmingham, is a man who has the courage to face at least some of the religious facts of the day. In a sermon entitled "The Spiritual Ground-work of a New World," published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for October 8, Mr. Berry is impelled by his sense of honesty to make a few highly significant admissions. One of his wholly sensible utterances is as follows: "To imagine that the new world will appear as a result of the greatest war in history is to misread the situation and to write the preface of another book of disappointed hopes." Time was when certain evangelical divines, such as the Bishop of London, Dr. Horton, and for a while Dr. Orchard, almost deified the War, calling it "a day of the Lord," "an operation of God," and generally one of the most signal blessings conceivable. One man of God declared, at an early stage, that it had sounded the death-knell of Rationalism, and would without a doubt bring about the return of the nations to God. Another confidently assured us that the trenches were so full of God and his glory that Atheism could not live in them. "If you know of an Atheist at home whom you wish to see converted, send him to the front, and his Atheism will fall away from him like an outworn, useless garment." But Mr. Berry harboured no illusion of that kind. Though he laboured for months among the soldiers in France, he did not speak of any mighty work of God accomplished upon them, dramatically putting an end to their indifference and even antagonism to religion, and converting them into thoroughgoing, exemplary saints. The truth is that the oft-repeated story of a religious revival at the Front so remarkable as to be well-nigh incredible, was purely legendary, as is now proved beyond dispute by the book edited by Dr. Cairns, of Aberdeen, called *The Army and Religion*. In this exhaustive work we learn that to the majority of men in the Army "the Living Christ was a mere phrase," the term "the kingdom of God had little meaning," and that they "missed Christ through lack of reliable information about him." Mr. Berry says that this is a factor to which he drew his people's attention again and again on his return from France. Dr. Cairns' book, he tells us, "amounts to nothing less than an inquiry as to how the manhood of the nation stands with regard to religion," and "one of the outstanding facts which emerge will probably startle many people at home." Then he states the startling fact thus:—

It is that the majority of men do not know with any clearness the things for which Christ stood, what he taught, and what is the meaning for them and for the world of his Person and work. In other words, the most essential thing in the Christian Gospel is not widely known to day.

Mr. Berry's statement is entirely true, and the only rational comment on it is that its truth is the severest and completest condemnation of the Christian religion that its worst enemy could conceive. There is no agreement among the divines at this late day as to what Christianity really is. The theories of Christ's Person are amazingly numerous, while those concerning his work are beyond count. But is not this the saddest, most humiliating confession a minister of the Gospel can make? The people are ignorant because their teachers have no knowledge to impart; and because of this utter lack of knowledge the teachers themselves are split up into multitudes of hostile and mutually destructive schools, devoting much of their time to the degrading task of anathematizing one another. All they have to

offer to their respective followers is a cluster of opinions, and the consequence is thus described by Mr. Berry:—

The manhood of the country is widely ignorant of the essential thing in the Christian message. The Christ to whom men are invited is not known. As an experienced chaplain puts it, it is of no use to tell men like these to have faith, to be saved and born again, to come to Christ, because "they have not the foggiest notion as to what that sort of thing means.".....The life which is the light of men is veiled.

Mr. Berry holds the Churches responsible for this gross ignorance to which the manhood of the country is so unfortunate an heir. It is the mission of these organizations to make Christ known to men, but they "are today in a state of weakness." Speaking in their name, the reverend gentleman sorrowfully admits that "in our present form we are not equal to the situation." While making this dismal confession, however, he forgets that he has already referred to Christ as omnipotent, as "having command of the human situation," and as "equally having the power to give to his followers which will make them capable of victorious realization." The question naturally arises, What is the use of Christ being all-powerful if the Churches are weak? But after all, this is not the point. The fact is that if Christ is omnipotent and can make the Churches capable of victorious realization, their notorious impotence is not their fault, but his. It is he who has failed, not they. As merely human institutions they have done wonders, but as his appointed and inspired instruments they have been and are stupendous failures. In a surprisingly naive fashion Mr. Berry virtually makes that admission. He says:—

We are the instruments of that life which is the light of men, the life once manifested in Christ which in us gives the power to become children of God and to open the gates of the kingdom to others. The Kingdom is the authentic picture of the new world. We shall never realize it by ourselves. There is only One who can bring it in, One who uses us for his tasks and empowers us to face all the difficulties of the way.

The wonder is that the reverend gentleman does not see the glaring inconsistency of his position. Either his portrait of Christ is false, or if Christ himself is real, he is culpably neglectful of his duty. It is said of the men in the Army that they "reverence Christ, but do not look on him as living." Why do they regard him as not living? Simply because he does not do the work which he is spoken of as living on purpose to do, and naturally the living Christ is a mere phrase to most of them, and to some only a myth. It is perfectly true that "character is the foundation of everything"; but character is not a Christian product. Some of the most shining saints have displayed exceedingly defective characters. Character is an exclusively human growth, and is to be found in Heathendom as well as Christendom.

What is the essential Gospel of which the manhood of Britain is declared to be so deplorably ignorant? According to Paul the essential thing in the Gospel message is "the faithful saying that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and, in order to do that, he had to be made to be sin for us, to die a sacrificial death, and rise again; but Mr. Berry finds the heart of the Gospel in the two fundamental notes of righteousness and love. These two fundamental notes, however, are by no means peculiar to Christianity, nor have they ever formed the burden of the Gospel message. Righteousness and love are fundamental notes in Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, and Mohammedanism. A finer eulogism on love was never seen than the one pronounced by the Buddha five hundred years before Jesus was heard of, and he was

equally insistent on justice and fair play as between man and man. According to Mr. Berry, Jesus excels all other teachers in that in him alone light and power are joined together, "for at the very heart of his Gospel is the assurance that out of moral weakness and failure he has the power to bring men to moral strength and victory." That is true enough, but it is also true that the very heart of his Gospel is historically a lie. As Carl Snyder, in his *New Conceptions in Science* well says:—

Neither mentally, morally, nor physically has the race varied greatly in six thousand and perhaps ten or fifteen thousand years. The intervening period has meant less change than is represented, say, in the advance from a bushman or a cave-dweller to a Zulu chieftain (p. 20).

As John Sparrier, in Temple Thurston's *Evolution of Katherine*, observes: "Christianity is only a word—so is Christ—so is Jones; believing in a name won't save you" (p. 17), an observation of the truth of which the history of the Church furnishes ample evidence. Christ has not drawn mankind to himself, and the majority of those who call themselves by his name are not one whit superior to the majority of those who do not. The transforming power of his indwelling Spirit in the soul is the creation of an empty dream. Writing some time before the War, in that same *Evolution of Katherine*, Temple Thurston maintained that "Christianity has done away with duelling, and (that) it is gradually doing away with War," your martial type of man being well nigh effete, worn out, dissipated. We know to-day how absolutely false that statement is, militarism being still held in high esteem by all, except by comparatively small bands of despised Socialists. Indeed, Mr. Berry himself affirms that even now "all the hard barriers between classes and nations remain on the ground which we have to cultivate," the War having, not only failed to destroy them, but actually intensified many of them. As Tennyson tells us: "progress halts on palsied feet," and one's hope often grows dim and misty. A local preacher once exclaimed: "The world is upside down; the world needs to be turned downside up, and, by Heaven, we are the chaps to do it." That was a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, and the world is lost until we begin to act upon it. The bottom dog's only chance lies in self-assertion, not in resignation and self-denial. The weak will always be more or less cruelly exploited by the strong until as the outcome of education and persistent struggle they succeed in shedding their weakness and gaining strength. Waiting upon the Lord has never resulted in any good, and nothing is nor can be more futile than trust in Christ.

Mr. Berry recognizes many facts ignored and even denied by the majority of his brethren, but the most momentous of all facts he, too, ignores, or fails to face. It is that the Christ preached in all the Churches is the most gigantic and tragic of failures. J. T. LLOYD.

DOGS AND MEN.

Of all the beasts that graze the lawn or hunt the forest a dog is the only animal that, leaving his fellows, attempts to cultivate the friendship of man; to man he looks in all his necessities with a speaking eye for assistance; exerts for him all the little service in his power with cheerfulness and pleasure; for him bears famine and fatigue with patience and resignation; no injuries can abate his fidelity, no distress induce him to forsake his benefactor; studious to please, and fearing to offend, he is still an humble steadfast dependant, and in him alone fawning is not flattery. How unkind then to torture this faithful creature who has left the forest to claim the protection of man; how ungrateful a return to the trusty animal for all his services.—*Goldsmith*.

Concerning Thomas Paine.

I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.—*Blake.*

CARDINAL NEWMAN should have been well acquainted with Freethought, for one of his brothers was a Theist, and another was an Atheist, whilst in many pages of his own inimitable writing he shows a delicate appreciation of the sceptical objections to orthodoxy. The Cardinal's biographers, however, do not appear to possess much knowledge on the subject. In a sketch of Cardinal Newman, published under the auspices of the Catholic Truth Society, and written by Dr. James Barry, it is stated that Newman, at the age of fourteen, "read Paine's tracts against the Old Testament, and found pleasure in thinking of the objections they raised."

It would be difficult to find a better specimen of "Catholic Truth." Thomas Paine wrote no "tracts" against the Old Testament, and his famous *Age of Reason*, which attacks the whole Bible, is a substantial volume. It has been on sale for over a century, and has been sold by the million. Many replies have been published, but Paine's book has outlived them all, and may be regarded as a Freethought classic. It took the religious world by storm. Whether men applauded or anathematized, none could deny its vitality. Professors might gibe, clerics might rail, judges might imprison. It survived all attacks, and the world of Orthodoxy has had to reckon with it. Not even the hindmost of the reactionaries, not even the most orthodox of subsequent commentators on the Bible, have written as they would have written had it never been published. Freethinkers have found it a rich mine of ideas, a full fountain of inspiration. For Paine's practical common sense was as fatal to religion as the smile of Voltaire.

There were critics of the Bible, it is true, long before Paine's time, but they were mainly dry-as-dust scholars, whose erudite works were not easily understood by plain men and women of ordinary education. Paine himself, a man of genius, had sprung from the people, and he spoke their tongue and made their thoughts clear and articulate. But, boldly as Paine might write, his book would never have been read at all but for the superb courage of the Freethinkers. In that battle for free speech and Freethought, Richard Carlile, his wife, and friends, divided between them about fifty years' imprisonment. Think of it! One small circle of Freethinkers serving between them over fifty years in prison for the right of free speech. Daniel Eaton, besides being prosecuted seven times, had the pillory inflicted, and thousands of pounds worth of literature destroyed. Christian apologists, who never tire of boasting of the tolerance and democratic nature of their fanatical and intolerant superstition, need to be reminded of these things. Although trials for blasphemy have been numerous, the comparatively enlightened nineteenth century holds the record for the number of blasphemy and free speech prosecutions, and it is extraordinary in how many instances Paine's book has figured. The reason is not far to seek. Paine woke the working classes to intellectual issues, and since Church and State have united in an unholy alliance to strangle Liberty.

Paine has written his name for all time to see. In a generation of brave men and women, he was one of the boldest and noblest. No wrong found him indifferent; and he used his swift, live pen not only for the democracy which might reward him, but for animals and slaves. Poverty never left him, yet he made fortunes, and gave them to the cause he loved. The *Age of Reason* was the bravest thing he did, for it threatened his name

with an immortality of insult. "Where Liberty is, there is my country," said Benjamin Franklin; and Paine's magnificent answer was, "Where is not Liberty, there is mine." He was always thinking of the poor and the oppressed. In his superb reply to Burke's tirade against the French Revolution, in which he reserved his compassion too exclusively for the sufferings of the nobility, Paine said: "Mr. Burke pities the plumage, but he forgets the dying bird." Even Edmund Burke himself might have envied the felicity of the illustration. Shelley, no mean judge, thought this so excellent that he used it as part of the title of one of his own pamphlets. Fine writing as it is, the idea is far finer. It embodies the watchwords of Democracy, the marching music that sent Paine himself forth as a knight-errant, that sent Lafayette to America, and Byron to Greece, and inspired generations of poets from Shelley to Swinburne.

Out of the charnel-vault of Kingcraft and Priestcraft, Rousseau and the other great Freethinkers saw in vision the ideal society of the future. Of this new evangel Paine was one of the prophets of the rights of man. It is precisely because his heart was aflame with human sympathy that his works have vital and permanent effects towards hastening the coming of the day when the world will be one country and to do good the only religion.

MIMNERMUS.

The New Testament.

IV.

THE SECOND CENTURY.

THE dogmas of Christianity grew by the progressive absorption of various elements of Paganism. We have already seen how Pauline Christianity was modelled on the "mysteries" of Asia Minor and Greece, in which a dying and rising God was conceived as redeeming his worshippers and enduing them with eternal life. The myths of Attis, Adonis, and Osiris, however, were not the only type of Pagan mysticism. They represented originally the annual revival of corn and vegetation. Another type of "mystery" was based on the alternation of light and darkness, and the life-giving power of the sun. The old Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, recognized two antithetic powers in the world—light, or Ahura-Mazda, the source of all goodness and truth; and Ahriman, or darkness, the source of all lying, evil, and sin. Ahura-Mazda was worshipped in various forms; but his principal embodiment was Mithra—the unconquered sun, the source of all life and strength. In the course of centuries Mithraism spread from Persia over the Greek and Roman world, and underwent a transformation similar to the other "mysteries"—becoming, instead of a symbol of wonderful natural processes, an esoteric doctrine of individual salvation and future life. Along with the spread of Mithraism proceeded a parallel intellectual movement, derived from the philosophy of Plato. Plato, in the fourth century, B.C., had arrived by an abstract logical process at the doctrine that only the general qualities of things could be said really to exist, the particular or material element being an illusion. General qualities, or (as Plato termed them) "forms," or "ideas," could be apprehended by reason—the source of truth; matter was only apprehended by the senses—the source of error. As intellectual truth was attained by following reason rather than the senses, so moral goodness was attained by subjecting the irrational parts of our nature, desire and anger, to the sway of pure reason. The highest thing that could be apprehended by reason was the general quality, or idea, of

good. As the sun was the source of all life in the unreal, material world, so this abstract *good* was the source of all that was real in the intelligible world; and as the eye, the organ of sight, resembled (as Plato thought) the sun, so reason, the organ of truth, resembled, and, in fact, emanated from, the supreme and universal *good*, or God. Reason, goodness, and God are in the Platonic philosophy really convertible terms.

This doctrine—sufficiently “sloppy” at its best, by the standards of modern rationalism—became in the hands of dreamy Alexandrian Jews, like Philo, a portentous source of theosophical fantasies. The Greek word for reason (*logos*) meaning at the same time a “word” or “saying,” the Pentateuchal story of God creating the world by *words* (“Let there be light,” etc.), seemed to them to anticipate the whole Platonic philosophy. God himself, it was said, was an unknowable and incomprehensible being; only his *word*, the divine *reason* (*logos*), could be apprehended by man, since human reason was its offshoot.

This incipient Neo-Platonism, as well as the light-and-darkness symbolism of Mithra-worship, crossed the path of Pauline Christianity at an early date, and a remarkable fusion resulted. The Fourth Gospel is an attempt to restate Christianity as the latest thing in Alexandrian Platonism. Only in the light of Platonism and Mithraism can it be rendered, I do not say sensible, but susceptible of any meaning at all. Read in this light, it remains indeed hopelessly remote from any historical event that ever happened, but becomes, at the same time, something of a work of art. Read the opening:—

In the beginning was Reason (*logos*), and Reason was with God, and Reason was God. It was in the beginning with God. All things were made by it, and apart from it not one thing, that has been made, was made. In it was life, and the life was the Light of men. And the Light is shining in the Darkness, and the Darkness has not comprehended it.

In this Gospel the divine reason or light, the principle of goodness and truth, descends and inhabits the body of the man Jesus, and through him appeals to the world for recognition and obedience. The world, being the offspring of darkness and falsehood, rejects the message, and crucifies the incarnate deity. The latter rises from the grave and returns to his divine home, leaving behind him his faithful followers to continue his work against the forces of darkness under the guidance of his spirit. Out of this plot the author weaves a not unreadable romance—spoilt, like many good stories, by too much talk. The New Testament contains three epistles by the same writer, all bearing on the topic. Throughout all these writings runs, like a musical *motif*, the Mithraic light-and-darkness formula. “Light has come into the world, and men loved Darkness rather than Light; for their deeds were evil.”

The Fourth Gospel (apart from its appendix, chapter xxi., an editorial edition) does not explicitly lay claim to any particular authorship. The introduction, however, of a mysterious and unnamed “disciple whom Jesus loved,” whom the author cites as witness to the truth of his story, led the interpolator of the appendix to attribute the whole work to this person, traditionally identified with John the apostle. John, as a matter of fact, must have been dead long before the Fourth Gospel appeared. Even the Apocalypse (A.D. 69), which professes to be his, is probably a forgery; much more certainly, therefore, is the Fourth Gospel by another hand than his. If, on the other hand, the Apocalypse is a genuine work of John, the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel is flatly inconceivable; for two more dissimilar writings do not exist. Our only clue to the real authorship is the

writer's description of himself in his two shorter letters (2 and 3 John) as “the presbyter.” Whether this presbyter is identical with John the Presbyter, the informant of Papias respecting the authorship of Mark and other matters, we can only conjecture. The Fourth Gospel seems to have been put into circulation in Asia Minor near the beginning of the second century. It was not generally accepted, however, till the latter half of the century; and some members of the non-Pauline church of Rome rejected its authority as late as the time of Irenæus (A.D. 190).

Taken as an allegory, the story of the rejection and persecution of reason by a perverse world has a significance which Freethinkers should be the last to overlook. Reason, the highest faculty of man, is indeed despised, rejected, and crucified from generation to generation. But to take the personification of reason, by this writer, as a walking and talking human being as anything but a literary artifice, and a crude one at that, is to show oneself as dense as the densest of the unbelieving Jews whom he sets up as foils to his incarnate Deity. The Fourth Gospel is a work of conscious fiction, nothing more nor less.

There is no evidence that any Christian writer, up to the date of the Fourth Gospel, regarded Jesus as having been born otherwise than by the ordinary process of human generation. Everything shows that the earlier Christians, including the Fourth Evangelist, held the incarnation, so far as they believed in it at all, to have occurred, not at the conception of Jesus, but at his baptism by John, when the Divine spirit was seen descending on him according to the legend. Inevitably, however, a “Virgin Birth” was invented for Jesus, as for other extraordinary personages of antiquity. Ignatius (A.D. 115) refers to it. When the compilers of our Matthew and Luke undertook their work, perhaps a few years later, they included in their Gospels four contradictory elements—a genealogy of Jesus through Joseph (different in each case) and a narrative of the “Virgin Birth” (also different in each case). With these Gospels we have entered decidedly on a new style of composition, consisting mainly of the maximum accumulation of the marvellous. Nothing can now happen without a miracle. Jesus must not even pay his taxes by merely resorting to Judas and his bag, but must send Peter to catch a fish and find a coin in its mouth! Luke is a better writer than Matthew from a literary point of view, but the constant distortion of his material goes to even greater lengths. His Gospel is compiled from Mark, “Q,” and various apocryphal sources—Mark and “Q” being very freely treated and improved. The Acts are another instance of Luke's method. He seems to have written them with the Pauline Epistles before him, but he embellishes or alters their statements without scruple. Particularly determined is he that Paul shall never appear to disagree with the twelve apostles, or to claim an apostleship independent of them. A comparison of Acts xv. with Galatians ii., of which it is a “written-up” version, will exemplify this, and show the measure of credibility in Acts generally. Acts is an unfinished work: it ends abruptly *in mediis rebus*; and the “we-narratives,” derived from some older account of the journeys of Paul and his friends, are left high and dry in the text without introduction or explanation. The view that the whole work is by a companion of Paul, is rendered highly unlikely by its manifold inconsistencies with Paul's own version of affairs, and by other considerations of date. Acts is posterior to the Third Gospel; the Third Gospel cannot have been compiled long before or long after the First; and we know that the First Gospel, in its present form, was unknown to Papias (A.D. 140).

The remaining two books of the New Testament, Jude and 2 Peter, are of little interest. Jude is a ferocious invective against second-century heretics, and bears clear evidence of post-apostolic date (verse 17). 2 Peter is an amplification of Jude, and little more; it is the latest-written portion of the New Testament, and its canonicity was disputed down to the fourth century.

The New Testament is vastly inferior to the Old as literature. Its language, "Hellenistic" Greek—the dialect of Levantine Jews—bears the same relation to the Greek of Plato as Babu English does to the English of Shakespeare. Its writers, with the partial exception of the Fourth Evangelist, display neither knowledge of nor interest in the best Pagan thought of antiquity. Not one rises to any great height of literary art. Above all, not one, from beginning to end, evinces one gleam of the saving grace of humour.

ROBERT ARCH.

Acid Drops.

Dr. Fort Newton is giving up the City Temple, and returning to America. He says there is a certain prejudice in England against American preachers, which we take as Dr. Newton's way of saying that his ministry has not been a success. The question now is who is to succeed Dr. Newton, and several male names are suggested. It may be noted that Dr. Newton's assistant preacher at the City Temple has been Miss Maud Royden, and we understand that the lady has been more successful than the gentleman—which, when we are dealing with the clergy, is not paying Miss Royden a very great compliment. At any rate, it would seem that the proper course is to appoint her as minister in charge. But that would be to give a woman a first position in a Christian Church, and there are limits to Christian endurance. Women have been kept in a subordinate position in the Church, and they will be kept there just as long as it is possible.

Trust the Churches to attempt to turn everything to their advantage. St. George's (English) Church, Paris, is troubled as to what kind of a War memorial it can raise to those who "laid down their lives in the great war." And the Rev. F. A. Cardew decides that the best way would be to provide the church with a new organ. He has, therefore, issued an appeal for funds to this end. Whatever happens the Church always sees in it a reason for an appeal for funds. War or peace it is all the same.

The Bishop of Exeter, who, in private life, is Lord William Gascoigne-Cecil, considers prayer a suitable method of solving economic problems. In some parishes they are calling on the Boy Scouts to assist the Almighty.

The dear clergy was far too proud to fight the Germans, Austrians, Bulgarians, or Turks. They do not object, however, to fighting their own countrymen. The Rev. W. Pollock-Hill, formerly President of the Oxford University Athletic Club, has been acting the part of a railway porter, and the Rev. T. G. Pearson, a Cambridge vicar, has been wielding a stoker's shovel. Indeed, there never has been such work done by parsons since some of the twelve disciples mended their own fishing nets.

A newspaper paragraph states at the Great Western terminus the Bishop of London's chaplain, in cap and apron, loaded up trolleys. A truly touching instance of the modern democratic trend in religion.

Mr. G. K. Chesterton declares that "when there was a common creed individualism was called avarice and imperialism was called pride." "A common creed," indeed! The only place where there was a "common creed" was when Robinson Crusoe said his prayers on his island.

There are 50,000 parsons in this country. Out of this number about a dozen have expressed a carefully guarded sympathy with the Trade Unionists during the industrial crisis. At a railmen's meeting, the Archdeacon of Plymouth put the case against the strike, and was answered by the strikers. At another meeting, the Bishop of Peterborough and Canon Donaldson attended, and the latter said "his heart was with the men and their cause." What the Bishop said is not reported. A very different attitude was taken by Canon Pearson, of Ely, who acted as fireman on a Peterborough-Cambridge Great Eastern train.

There is a discussion going on among the clergy as to whether they should go on strike or not in order to secure a living wage. A Dorsetshire parson is the leader, and he suggests a minimum of £500 for all beneficed members of the union. We wonder what would happen if the clergy did go on strike. Would the Government call for volunteers, and declare the community to be in danger? We doubt it. At any rate, if the clergy are called out, we will volunteer to occupy the pulpit at St. Paul's, so that the people will have something to which to listen. And it shall be quite free, too. But it is interesting to notice that no great prayer-meeting has been called in order to get the living wage for the clergy. That is only recommended for laymen when they are in trouble. When it is the clergy who wish for something tangible, they know better than to trust to their own remedy. It would be like expecting a quack to seek health by swallowing his own medicines.

This is how the Salvation Army announces it: "139 men and women saved from sin. Among these were two Atheists, one Bolshevik, two daughters of shame." We are a trifle curious about the two Atheists, but it is noticeable that out of the 139 sinners there are only two Atheists. This is a very small proportion, and it looks as though the overwhelming majority of the "sinners" are still Christian.

During the railway strike, a newspaper announced that a duke drove a motor-lorry, a countess worked with her sleeves turned up, and other titled folk actually took their coats off. This ought not to be staggering information to people who believe that a real live God wielded a plane in a carpenter's shop.

The British Government is getting less intolerant. During the pilgrimage of the Mohammedan Holy Carpet, the relic is received with British military and naval honours. The Pope has received Count de Salis, the British envoy to the Vatican. In the process of time, doubtless, the existence of Freethinkers will be duly noted and recognized.

The Rev. J. D. Roberts, of Wimbledon, points out in the *Daily News* that "when trade unions were struggling for recognition, the Church opposed them. Now that they are established, it would follow. That is neither logical nor Christian." On the contrary, from the Church point of view, such conduct is both logical and Christian, for it has been pursued on so many occasions.

The Magistrate at the South-Western Police Court decided, in the case of a woman charged with fortune-telling, a Spiritualist, that, provided the accused person believed she could foretell the future, the charge must be dismissed. For ourselves, we do not see that good is done in any case by these prosecutions for fortune-telling. So long as there are people who believe in that kind of thing, there will always be those who will take advantage of their folly. And to prosecute the few who make a business of telling the future in a Spiritualist meeting, and permit millions of money to be extracted by the charlatans of the Churches, is an exhibition of both humbug and folly. The cure for fortune-telling is not the policeman, but the cultivation of common sense. And after all, the seed plot of Spiritualism is Christianity. It is that which keeps alive the type of mind on which these subsidiary superstitions exist.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

October 19, Weston-super-Mare; October 26, Manchester; November 2, Glasgow; November 3, Paisley; November 6, Milngavie; November 7, Falkirk; 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 19, South Place Institute; October 26, Birmingham; November 16, Leicester; November 23, Manchester; December 7, Swansea.

W. W. BARTON.—Very pleased to hear of the success of your son. Thanks also for your successful efforts on getting new readers.

C. LEWIS.—More articles from the same pen will probably appear. We do not know what chance there is of a Branch of the N. S. S. being started at Finchley. We would certainly do all we could to assist it. Are there any likely halls there?

E. H.—Not specifically; but both have written on such subjects many times in connection with their ordinary work.

F. S. KEEBLE.—We shall look forward to meeting you when we visit Edinburgh. Please make yourself known to us.

T. R.—We do *not* know mind as a thing, nor do you. What we know is mind as a function. That it is more than that is an assumption. Materialism is not in the least concerned with the existence of the atom, nor even with that of "matter" as the term is popularly understood. We advise you to pay some attention to the beginnings of Materialism, as well as to its developments, if you wish to properly understand it.

ONE of our readers, Mr. W. Easterbrook, would like to hear from Corporal Wycherley, one time of the 9th Devons. If this meets his eye, perhaps he will be good enough to send on his address to this office.

C. WHITE.—There is no evidence that we know of that would lead one to believe that had Mohammedanism conquered Europe the result would have been very different from what followed the conquest of Christianity. It could not well have been worse, and it would not have required a miracle for it to have been better.

J. ANDERSON.—Thanks for what you have done. We hope to see your Branch make good progress this winter.

MR. J. EDWARDS writes: "Congratulations to the Editor on the success of his lectures at Swansea, which have provoked widespread interest." We are glad to hear it.

A. C. ROSETTI.—Thanks for good wishes, but we can hardly hope to be free from financial worries—which are the only worries we have in this work—yet awhile.

J. THORNTON.—Will appear next week. Crowded out of this issue.

J. CAIN (Liverpool).—We have no agent in Liverpool. The shopkeepers are supplied through a wholesale agent; and as your newsagent gets his other papers, there should be no difficulty in getting the *Freethinker*. Messrs. W. H. Smith supply at Liverpool as elsewhere. We are sending you the copies required.

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.

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.

To-day (Oct. 19) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Grand Pier Pavilion, Weston-super-Mare. The afternoon lecture is at 3 and the evening lecture at 8 o'clock. The Cove (Ladies) Orchestra will play before and after each lecture, and we are hoping to hear of a good muster of all Freethinkers in the district. Bristol is only about thirty minutes' train journey,

and there should be many from that city. The Pavilion seats about 2,000 people, so there will be room for all. On Sunday next (Oct. 26) Mr. Cohen visits Manchester. Then he will spend eight days lecturing in Scotland.

The Manchester Branch will inaugurate its lecturing season with a "Social" on Saturday evening at the Co-operative (Small) Hall, Downing Street, Ardwick. There is to be a full and varied programme, including part-songs by the Failsworth Secular School Choir, a farce in one act, whist drive, and dancing. We should say that more could not well be got into one evening. No doubt members will be present in force, and will bring their friends.

A good beginning was made last Sunday with the course of lectures at South Place. The afternoon turned out very wet, and that had its effect on the attendance, but for a wet afternoon the gathering promised well for the remaining meetings. To-day Mr. Lloyd lectures, and his subject is one that should prove both attractive and interesting. We hope that all London friends will do their best to make the meetings widely known.

We have received five new publications from Messrs. Watts & Co., all of which are of interest to Freethinkers. Mr. C. T. Gorham is responsible for *A Plain Man's Plea for Rationalism*, which, in spite of a definition of Rationalism that even a Roman Catholic cardinal might subscribe to, puts what ordinary folk understand by the case for Free-thought in a way that is well calculated to arrest the attention of thoughtful men and women. The price of Mr. Gorham's essay is 1s. 3d. Mr. T. F. Palmer, in *Does Man Survive Death?* (6d.) goes over, in a general way, most of the reasons for giving a negative answer to the question. Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, in *Christianity and Conduct* (1s. 6d.), gives a kind of supplement to Mr. Gorham by providing an indictment of the influence of Christianity on morals and social life. Mr. F. J. Gould, in *Health and Honour; Sex Light for Younger Readers* (1s. 6d.), provides an interesting attempt to lift the subject of sex out of the atmosphere in which Christian impurity has plunged it; as Mr. Gould's facts of sex are not, and there is no need that they should be, topics of regular conversation, but information concerning them should be ready when required, this information is supplied by him in a clear, clean, and healthy manner.

The last on our list is a more bulky volume—*The Faith of an Agnostic*, by Sir G. G. Greenwood (pp. 366, price 12s. 6d. net). This is a reissue of a work published some seventeen years ago, but is now rewritten and enlarged. Sir George discusses at some length such topics as Determinism, Agnosticism, Materialism, and Spiritualism, etc., and devotes a special chapter to that pseudo-scientific writer, Mr. Benjamin Kidd. Without being precise enough to be considered a handbook of Free-thought, or elaborate enough to be ranked as a complete philosophy of the subject, *The Faith of an Agnostic* provides plenty of thoughtful reading for all who are interested in such subjects. The character of the work quite bears out the author's description of it as the effort of one who "has for many years honestly and with the sole desire to arrive at a truthful conclusion and to avoid all pretence and self-deception, directed such reasoning as he is endowed withal to the consideration of the great problems of life."

The R. P. A. is responsible for a photogravure reproduction of the portrait of Bradlaugh that was recently painted by the Hon. John Collier. The cost of the painting was defrayed by subscription, and it is intended that it should finally repose in some public institution. The copies now prepared are in two sizes. One measuring 18 by 15 on paper 32 and 34 is being sold at 12s. 6d., postage, 1s., and a smaller copy 8 by 6 on paper 14 by 10 at 1s., by post, 1s. 4d. Orders should be sent to 5 and 6 Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, E.C.

It will not come as a surprise to those of our readers who have noted the peculiar brilliance of Mr. H. C. Mellor's occasional contributions to our columns to know that he is a

poet. We have received from his publisher a lyrical drama called *Aboudahur* (Stockwell, 29 Ludgate Hill, E.C. 4, 1s. net.). It is quite an interesting example of a very difficult form of the poetic drama. We recommend the literary Freethinker to sacrifice a shilling at the altar of the dramatic-lyric muse.

Our critical objection to Mr. Mellor's little work is that he does not seem to have thought out his subject or the treatment of it. The fusion between drama and lyric is not complete. The characters do not live in our imagination as creatures of flesh and blood, and Mr. Mellor's power as a lyrical poet is not sufficient to project them into the golden and remote atmosphere of pure imagination. His blank verse has certain irritating metrical faults which we are sure that he will correct when they are pointed out. We have noted a number of instances where the breaks are so arranged that the verse runs into the ballad fourteen. But example is better than precept. How is this for a section of an iambic pentameter?—

But kings are born immortal, and their deeds are not their own.
Or this:—

For ever lose the music that the listening worlds await.

This is a defect which turns up all too frequently, and indicates that the poet's ear is not tuned to the more complicated harmonies of blank verse. We commend to Mr. Mellor's serious attention the poetic plays of the two ladies who wrote under the pseudonym of "Michael Field." We note, however, in our poet a distinct gift for shorter flights of song which, we suggest, he should cultivate assiduously.

"Freethinker" "Victory" Sustentation Fund.

Sixth List of Subscriptions.

Previously acknowledged £259 6s.:—J. Lazarnick, £1 1s. W. W. Barton, 2s. 6d. A. Waymark, £1. W. Milroy, 5s. J. Milroy, 5s. Mr. and Mrs. R. Ralston, 10s. E. A. H., 2s. 6d. M. Pankhurst, 5s. F. S. Keeble, 1s. S. A. Pinnock, £5. S. Gimson, £2 2s. Mathematicus, 10s. 6d. J. F. Aust, 10s. 6d. Mr. and Mrs. Bowman, 5s. R. Wood, 10s. J. H., 2s. T. Mercier, 2s. 6d. H. Irving, 10s. J. Brodie, 3s. J. Hardie, 5s. J. Chappell, 2s. 6d. W. F. Ambrose (5th sub.), 2s. A. C. Rosetti, 10s. Capt. G. B. Taylor, 4s. F. M. Grieg, 4s. H. Lessnoff, 5s. E. J. Rose, 5s. Miss Janet Parkin, 5s. Ivor Rowlands, £1. Ernest, 2s. An Atheist, 5s. A. H. Smith, £3.

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Total, £283 18s. 6d.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—On Sunday last Mr. Joseph H. Van Biene lectured on "Lessons to be Unlearned" to the North London Branch in his usual entertaining and thought-provoking style. From many different angles, Mr. Van Biene showed that there is no darkness but ignorance. On Sunday next, October 19, Miss Rosamond Smith, of the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child, will speak on "Illegitimacy." As this is Miss Smith's first visit to North London, we should like to give her a good audience in her attempt to throw some light on this pressing question.

World-Poverty.

Has it ever occurred to you that the world is very poor as compared with what it might be? This poverty is what strikes me more than anything else. True, the progress made since primeval man roamed the forests has been very great; but when we think of what might be, and what, I think, will be, we are sickened by the vulgar poverty we meet on every hand. I am not now thinking particularly of the poor *persons* who crowd the human pigsties of our large cities. The sight of them is certainly horrid, and the smell of them is even worse. I have sat down and talked with them in their wretched pens (more cheerless than the cells of criminals, more comfortless than the quarters of the old chattel slaves) until I grew sick and faint from the foulness of the place, and was forced to seek relief in the open air.

These poor persons are the scandal of the world. Every minister of the pretended Gospel of Jesus ought to wear sackcloth, every church should be draped in mourning, and if there is a personal God he should deluge the earth with his tears until this disgrace of personal poverty is purged away. Nay, the Devil himself, if there were a Devil, would have protested long ere this that into whatever wickedness he may wish to draw men, he is not mean and low enough to have conceived of the vileness of our East-end slums.

So long as such places and their helpless inmates exist, the idea of a supervising God is an offence to the sound mind, the Church is an imposture, religion is a failure, and justice and mercy are unrealized dreams.

But I am not now thinking particularly of the phenomenon of poor *persons*, although they are so many microcosms of the world-poverty I am considering. One reason why there are so many poor persons is because there is not enough wealth to enrich each one, even if it were equitably distributed. The curse of world-poverty is twofold. That which is most apparent is, that what wealth there is, is very very unequally, and inequitably, distributed; but the most important is that there is too little wealth, and it is the cause of this last fact that I wish to make plain.

And it is not only material wealth, such as good houses, food, clothing, and furniture, which is so sadly lacking, but also the mental wealth we might have but for the causes which rob us also of mental riches. How poor the world is in thought! True, there are books innumerable, all full of thoughts indeed, but the same thoughts are in all of them for the most part. There are only a few real books—books full of *original* thought—and these are the thought mines from which all the rest have been quarried. What thought there is has been the product of a few intellectual giants—Plato, Shakespeare, Goethe, Haeckel, Darwin, and a few more. The average run of men to-day are mental paupers. Talk with them, and you will soon get tired. Their minds go round and round in a little circus ring, and you soon get all the way round. You soon find that every time you meet them it is the same performance—now a somersault, now a jump through a hoop, but most of the time just jogging along. The vast majority think of nothing but how much money they made or lost, or expect to make or lose, or have or haven't; or else where they went or what they did or who they were with. Dollars and sayings and doings not worth talking about make up the sum of most men's speaking and thinking to-day.

Poverty of thought! I listen to most of the people I meet, and wonder how they can live in their confined range of thought, just as I wonder how the poor can live in their single room with a bed, a chair, and a table.

Now, why is the world thus poor in thought? Why is it that a mere handful of intellectual giants rear so high above the crowd? The answer seems to me plain enough. We do all we can to repress thought and discourage thinking. Your intellectual circus rider is considered the great man. He who merely repeats what others have said, who goes round and round in the beaten track, who smiles upon the crowd as much as to say: "You need not be afraid. You can come right up to the ring without danger. I and my horse go round and round always inside the ring." This is the sort of thinker that is considered a safe man. He becomes your prime minister, your college president, your Pope, your bishop, your judge, your editor, your leading politician, your great and much-prized after-dinner orator. But if a man announces a new thought, if he goes outside the circus ring, he is ridiculed as a crank, or denounced as a dangerous innovator and corrupter of youth. If his new thought threatens vested interests he runs the risk of being fined or imprisoned. In short, if any man has a new thought, we announce to the world that he shall express it only at the risk of his reputation, his liberty, or even his life.

If a parson expresses a new idea, the Church brings all her accursed machinery to bear against him, and he must either shut up or get out. If a public man—an economist, an editor, or a statesman—sees a new truth and speaks it, he is relegated to private life. Is it any wonder that the world is a mental poor-house when all the so-called leaders of the human race are urgent to kill every new idea before it is fairly born? Luckily truth cannot be suppressed, as otherwise our present rulers would run the world back to barbarism by mental breeding in and in. So also the world is poor in love, because every effort is made to cherish hatred of every nation but our own. We are taught from childhood that patriotism is one of the noblest instincts; that we should love and exalt England and everything English at the expense and to the detriment of foreign lands and their peoples. Ah, yes. If it were not for that silly cry: "For God and Country!" how would despots and plutocrats maintain their sway? It is to the interest of the rulers only that the various peoples should hate each other. It is to the interest only of the trade magnates that the workers of different lands should regard each other as competing rivals. This bastard patriotism is but the repression of that love of all men which would make of the world one people. And just as the clergy repress thought and the rulers repress love, so the profiteers repress the production of material wealth. The millionaire thinks that he increases his own happiness by being over-wealthy in the midst of poverty. He does not understand how much better off he would be with a fairly-earned competence in the midst of general wealth. But the great wealth reducer is he who holds vacant land out of use, and he who limits the supply of money. There are thousands of acres of land lying vacant in this and every other country, and thousands of unemployed and starving men. Put those men on that land and supply them with capital at a fair rate of interest, and they will begin to enrich the world at once. This world will always be poor until men are free to use the vacant land, and to trade together without any restrictions on the medium of exchange. There is no mistake about who keeps it poor. It is the vacant land-owner, and he who puts restrictions of any kind upon trade. These are the real causers of world-poverty, who should be held up to public shame and contempt. And these are they who indirectly also repress thought and love, because when men are freed from the fear of poverty they will think and say what they please, and love each other regardless

of the interests of rulers and monopolists. I like to think of that rich world wherein thought will be free and full; wherein love will overleap its present artificial boundaries; wherein it will be so easy to get food, and clothes, and houses, that they will no longer seem worth the sacrifice of everything else to attain.

G. O. WARREN.

Superstition and Religion.

M. BRIEUX, in that fine drama of his, *La Foi*, shows us the success of Egyptian priests in deceiving the faithful, in working up popular fanaticism by means of trickery; he also shows us a young priest whom reason and experience have made sceptical, and at the end done to death by the poor fools whose eyes he had tried to open. The fraud of the automatic statue has been worked over and over again. We know that General Championnet had the blood of Saint Januarius liquefied very quickly after the priest had told him what would happen if he didn't. It was to this blood that the Neapolitan populace attributed a mysterious influence. De Nava has proved that the so-called blood is a chemical mixture which is liquefied by the warmth of the hand, a certain movement of the phial, and the temperature of the place of the miracle, a temperature raised by the breathing of a crowd of people. But is it possible that at the present moment the crowd can believe in a weeping statue? Yet this is what happened a month or so ago at Nantes and Bordeaux.

There was a statue of the Virgin at Nantes, and a rumour went about that this statue wept for the awful depravity of the world. The ecclesiastical authorities, to prevent a scandal, had it removed from its environment of hysterical women, and presented it to a monastery, where it no longer wept. But a sort of religion had grown up around this weeping statue, and a certain lady became its woman pope. This lady, whom we will call X., mingled spiritualistic practices with religious dogma. As a co-worker, she had, at the beginning, an Abbe Z., a Syriac priest, an Ex-Grand-Vicar of the Archbishop of Lebanon, but later she broke with him, it would seem, through religious rivalry. The religious authorities sent him to Nantes, the lady remaining at Bordeaux. Here the story takes a curious turn. After the priest had gone the lady began to waste away, and to be tormented with sensations of grievous bodily pain. At one time she felt her flesh pierced with needles. At another she was bitten by an invisible mouth, and once the invisible mouth actually left one of its teeth in the flesh. The good lady had not a shadow of doubt that these things happened to her through the sorcery practised by the wicked priest. As we are aware from similar stories of magic charms, the priest must have made a wax figure of the lady, with magical incantations and rites he must have maltreated the figure at Nantes, the prickings and bitings being felt at Bordeaux by the lady who had been his friend.

Four devout members of the little community of the weeping Virgin, among whom was a stockbroker and an inspector of police, decided to put an end to the poor lady's martyrdom. One night they arrived at Nantes, and the next morning, when they had confessed and communicated, the four of them, armed with bludgeons, went to the abbe's lodgings. The priest was ill, and in bed. Binding him with cords, they threatened him, with the object of getting him to give them the magic figure. He was wholly ignorant of what they meant. He was bruised and broken with blows, and when they had secured his keys, they found nothing save a ball of

red wool and one of white thread. They asserted that the wax figure had been melted down, and that the wool and the thread were its clothes. They took away the ball of thread, which the priest claimed was his mascot, and now he sues them for trespass and personal violence. The trial is to take place at Bordeaux.

The above account is taken from the well-known Milanese paper, the *Corriere della Sera*.

We see here how far human imbecility can go when it is nourished by religion. You will notice that the four blackguards were not ignorant and uneducated men, since one of them was a public servant and the other a financier. It is therefore not education alone that will destroy superstition. We must strike at the root, that is, at religion—religion of all kinds. It is only by science that we can protect humanity against the vampire of superstition.

G. BROCHER.

—From *La Pensee Internationale* (Englished by G. U.).

Correspondence.

THE CHURCH AND SCIENCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The object of this letter is to examine critically the attitude apparently taken up by Freethinkers in regard to science. According to their view the greatest triumphs in the sphere of science or pure philosophical thought are exclusively the legitimate monopoly of atheists or unbelievers. May I point out that as a matter of fact the reverse of this contention is the truth. Strictly speaking, of course, we ought not to expect to find that the great masters of science, or, indeed, of philosophical speculation, would turn out to be Churchmen or theologians, for the same reason that it is foolish and out of place to read the Old Testament as a document of genuine historical authenticity or to regard the story of Genesis—which is only true allegorically and in the spiritual sense—as a thoroughly up-to-date scientific treatise. The Christian Church is not primarily concerned with the advancement of human or purely secular knowledge. It is merely the divinely appointed custodian of the deposit of revealed truth alleged to have been given to the world by Christ and his apostles as the "New Commandment." By its very nature and constitution the Church is essentially a spiritual institution. It is, therefore, non-scientific, and in this sense it must be understood and interpreted. Christ taught us a rule of faith for our spiritual salvation. He was not a purveyor of philosophic systems, though the theologians subsequently constructed a definitely Christian philosophy. Christ taught us about "Our Heavenly Father"; but he told us nothing about the "eternal fitness of things." Thus, we might expect Churchmen, whether ecclesiastics or laymen, to teach us none of these new things, but to rest content merely with the work of representing and interpreting the Gospel of spiritual salvation. Such, however, we find is far from being the case. Valentine, Linacre, Kircher, Stensen, Haüy, Roger Bacon, Nicholas of Cusa, Spallanzani, and of more recent times, Breuil, Obermaier, Secchi, and Mendel, the famous Augustinian abbot whose researches in the study of heredity have so greatly influenced the whole of modern biology, these are all great names borne by eminent Catholic ecclesiastics who are chiefly known to posterity for their important scientific works. In addition to these distinguished priests, Vesalius, Galvani, Volta, Bacon, Newton, Lænic, Muller, Corrigan, Pasteur, De Lapparent, and Kelvin as laymen are names to conjure with, and all these great scientists, together with many others whose names I have omitted to mention here, were sincere believers in the truth of Christianity. These facts speak for themselves. The services rendered to the cause of science and civilization by these men are inestimable. The verdict of history in this matter is indisputable, and, to my mind, overwhelming as a confirmation also of the argument that there can never really be any contradiction between religion and science, because Truth cannot contradict Truth. This is the view

commonly maintained by the most learned theologians. It is, moreover, the view endorsed by the Vatican Council. Thus, the theologian acting as custodian of the Faith, cautiously refuses to notice the numerous scientific hypotheses ostensibly at variance with some point of dogma which are from time to time proclaimed as scientific facts. If such hypotheses should ultimately assume the importance of facts, as often happens, the theologian must either reconcile these with the pre-existing dogmas of religion or else he must accept these facts as true, even though by so doing he is bound to submit to an inevitable curtailment of dogmatic belief. The Church is justified in attacking what is doubtful, provided always that it does not tilt against scientifically established facts. Such facts will not be found to contradict any dogma of religion. Frequently, of course, hypotheses, which have been labelled dangerous by the ecclesiastical authorities, have subsequently to be abandoned as inadequate or untenable; hence a cautious non-committal reticence on the part of the theologian is usually the best policy. An admirably straightforward rule is laid down by St. Augustine, who says:—

Whatever they can really demonstrate to be true of physical nature, we must show to be capable of reconciliation with our Scriptures: and whatever they assert in their treatises which is contrary to those Scriptures of ours, that is Catholic Faith, we must either prove it as well as we can to be entirely false, or at all events we must, without the slightest hesitation, believe it to be so.....

This, it must be admitted, is sound enough advice, and it would greatly simplify matters if theologians would always act upon it in the event of any dispute of this kind. Enough has been said, I think, to show that the supposed opposition of the Church to science is really more of a fiction than a fact. In reality, most of the greatest thinkers have declared themselves to be pronounced Theists, and have unreservedly accepted the doctrine of Design. Let us glance briefly at the testimony of a few, whose claim to scientific eminence will not, I think, be disputed. Bacon's opinion was: "Philosophy, where superficially studied, excites doubt; when thoroughly explored, it dispels it." Similarly, Newton said: "This I dare affirm in knowledge of Nature, that a little natural philosophy, and looking lightly into it, doth dispose the opinion to Atheism; but that much natural philosophy, and wading deeply into it, doth turn about man's mind unto religion....."

These quotations are sufficiently striking and significant to warrant notice here. The late distinguished physicist, Lord Kelvin, was definitely on the side of the angels. He considered that science endorsed the view that matter was created and endowed with its special powers by God. He definitely rejected Monism as an inadequate solution, and believed in the idea of Creation. In a famous article to the *Nineteenth Century* he declared: "Science positively affirms creative power.....which she compels us to accept as an article of belief." In conclusion, I would like to draw attention to the most significant fact that Maxwell, P. G. Tait, Balfour Stuart, Sir W. Crookes, Sir O. Lodge, Sir J. J. Thomson, Sir T. Larmoor, and Professor Poynting held, or hold, the opinion that the purely mechanical interpretation of the Universe is quite incapable of explaining satisfactorily the life-processes of organisms. The Creation idea, so carefully developed by Christian philosophers in past ages, is ratified by the conclusions of science. The Church has nothing to fear from the genuine progress of science. But the dabbler is ever her most vigorous assailant.

TREVOR T. BERRY.

SOCIALISM AND RELIGION.

SIR,—There can be no doubt (and I speak as a member of the I.L.P. and B.S.P.) that the attitude of the average British Socialist to religion is not as clearly defined as it ought to be amongst British Socialists. They forget that postponing difficulties is not to overcome them. The determination not to make a pronouncement on religion is done to placate Christians whose Christianity must later on bring them, if they are in favour of established State religions, into opposition to any Socialist Government. It is the most laughable thing in this world and the most imbecile to argue that Christ was a Socialist. The foundations of Christianity

are faith and charity. Both these are anathema to the Socialist, unless by faith is meant what can be proved by evidence before it is believed. As to charity as generally understood, the Socialist hates it. In one tale in the New Testament, Jesus accepts a young man who gave up half his possessions. This won't do for Socialism.

The fact is Jesus hadn't the remotest notion of Socialism, which in essence is Secularistic. Christianity is a very mischievous other worldism. Socialism is this worldism. As far as my opportunities go, which are now rather limited, I make these doctrines clear.

A. J. MARRIOTT.

REJUVENATION AND IMMORTALITY.

SIR,—I notice that Dr. Serge Voronoff, Director of the Laboratory of Physiology at the College de France, has been experimenting with a view to prolonging human life. He has grafted a vital part of a young kid on to an old goat, who became quite frisky, and resumed his "nights out" as in the days of his youth.

The suggestion is to graft the interstitial gland of a young MONKEY on an old man, and thus restore his youthful powers and vigour. Now, Sir, I take it that in time even the rejuvenated old man will die and go before his Maker, and, as a sincere believer, I object in the strongest possible terms to go to heaven 95 per cent. man and 5 per cent. monkey; for are we not all taught that in our flesh we shall see God? Ordinary Christian papers will, alas, not insert this protest; but you, Sir, I feel sure will.

J. W. WOOD.

The Broken "Amen."

In the early days of the settlement of the city of Pasadena, California, U.S.A., there was a Methodist minister named "Father" Solomon Dunton, who happened to be fond of chewing tobacco. Mr. J. W. Wood, historian of the colony, tells the following touching story about Solomon:—

Upon a certain occasion in the later history of the Colony he attended a revival service at the Methodist church and was one of the most fervid worshippers present. Rev. P. F. Bresee was the dominie in charge of the services, and anyone who knew him will recall his uncompromising attitude to sinners. On this occasion, he was preaching against the sinfulness of bad habits in general. At each characterization, made in a stentorian voice, the Reverend Dunton emitted an approving and emphatic "Amen"! The reverend preacher stormed against backsliding. "Amen!" shouted Dunton. Against the frivolities of social life. "Amen"! again exclaimed Dunton. "God punish the wicked who imbibe intoxicating drink." "Amen, amen!" came once again in resounding approval from Father Dunton, and with it an approving thwack of his hands.

"And, Lord, chasten those who defile themselves and defy thy law by using tobacco!"

The Reverend Solomon's hand had been upraised in order to give additional emphasis to his approving "Amen." But it remained suspended in the air; his exclamation died in a struggling gurgle, languished amidst the "cud" stowed away for safety in his cheek. A convulsive, strangling noise expired in his throat as his hand slowly descended, while his head was bowed in humble embarrassment. There was no further demonstrations from his corner that night. It is not reported that the old gentleman ceased using the "weed," but doubtless he refrained when under the Rev. Bresee's eye (*Pasadena, Historical and Personal*, pp. 94-95).

The melody was broken.

Obituary.

We record with regret the death of Mr. Alexander Orr, one of the oldest of Edinburgh Freethinkers. He was known to Holyoake, Bradlaugh, and later lecturers, and his death removes a link with the heroic ages of Freethought activity. Of recent years he has not been able to take an active part in the work, advancing age being the cause. But when a man reaches the eighties he may well be excused if he leaves the work of propaganda to younger and stronger hands. Our tribute of respect is to the work done, and by one of those whose strenuous labours have made our own task the easier.

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 Rosamond Smith, "Illegitimacy."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W., three minutes from Kennington Oval Tube Station and Kennington Gate): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Christianity's Harmony with Science—Anthropology."

SOUTH PLACE CHAPEL (Finsbury Pavement, E.C.): 3.30, Mr. J. T. Lloyd, "Dream Life and Real Life."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "The Moral Responsibility of Citizens."

OUTDOOR.

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

REGENT'S PARK BRANCH N. S. S. (near Band Stand): 3, Mr. H. Brougham Doughty, "Socialism and Secularism in Germany"; Mr. R. Norman, "Peace, Perfect Peace!"

COUNTRY.
INDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (The Good Templar's Hall, 122 Ingram Street): 12 noon, Mr. P. Kane, "Roman Catholicism from the Workers' Standpoint." (Silver Collection.)

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