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Views and Opinions.

Is Atheism Dying?

Many of the newspapers have been letting themselves go over the supposed decline of "Materialism" and "Atheism." And the nature of these deliverances rouses the suspicion that the majority of them come from a single source. There is a strong family likeness between them. They all declare that Atheism is dead and that Materialism is no more. This, of course, is very disheartening to one who spends his time in helping forward both doctrines, especially when one had hoped that some headway was being made. The only gleam of comfort lies in the reflection that one has heard of this kind of thing before. Every now and again one gets the authoritative declaration that Atheism is killed, that religion is indestructible, and that men and women are coming back to the faith which they had forsaken in a moment of aberration. And yet the number of men and women who forsake the Churches seems on the increase. The lamentations of the clergy rise to heaven concerning the small influence that religion exerts over the mass of the people, and no one appears seriously to look to religion for help in any of the troubles that are at the moment harassing the world. It was even made a ground of complaint by some of the religious papers that no mention was made of God in the peace treaty with Germany. Perhaps that may be rectified when the treaty with Turkey is settled. For the Turks have another God, and occasion may be taken to point out that their God had failed them. It would have been awkward pointing this out to Germany. They had the same God as ourselves, and mention of him might have aroused reflection.

* * *

Is Religion Indestructible?

To the Freethinker there is just one gleam of light in an otherwise darkened sky. Religion, we are told, is indestructible. The conduct of the clergy hardly bears out the statement. For an indestructible thing needs no protection. If a society were formed to-morrow to prevent the annihilation of the atmosphere, we do not think that many people would interest themselves in the matter. Yet we have religious people banding themselves together, raising subscriptions, issuing literature, and preaching sermons—to prevent our destroying an

indestructible thing. They tell us that religion is always with us. It is to be found among the lowest as well as among the highest. We must confess that the statement is true. But it is strongest with the lowest, and weakest with the highest. It is an unquestioned fact in the first instance, and a widely questioned theory in the second. And we fancy that the more educated people do not believe that religion is indestructible. "In their bones" they feel otherwise. What they mean is that the destruction of religion is undesirable. And that is a vastly different thing. It is no more than the assertion of an opinion. Life, they say, is undesirable without religion. Maybe; but the same thing is said of whisky and horse-racing, and a thousand and one other things that vast numbers of decent folk manage to get on very well without. After all, religion is only a habit. And the usual excuse for giving up a habit—good or bad—is that one cannot do without it.

* * *

The Problem of the Atheist.

And, after all, those who are without religion are not lamenting. They are happy enough; it is the religionist who is lamenting because the Freethinker is not miserable. And the Freethinker is really a problem to the religious man. He doesn't fit in with the world as the Godite conceives it. Religious people are fond of telling the Freethinker that his problem is to explain the presence of religion in the world. This is really not the case. The problem for the religious man is to explain the Atheist. Why are there so many people in the world who are not merely without the belief in a God, but who are none the worse, so far as one can see, for being without it? Sometimes the Godite thinks he has overcome the difficulty by assuming that the Atheist has allowed certain "faculties" to atrophy by his neglect of religion. But that is simply not true. The course of development is not first Atheism and then religion; it is the other way about. The Atheist is not deficient in any quality of mind or body that is possessed by the Theist. Nor can the Theist tell him anything about the feelings which are called religious. The Atheist knows what is the matter with the Theist; the Theist does not in the least understand the Atheist. A Theist sympathizing with an Atheist is not the case of a physician diagnosing a disease; it is rather that of a sick person offering to treat the doctor. Or perhaps a better picture would be that of a number of the inmates of a lunatic asylum commiserating with the folk outside for being insane.

* * *

Does Atheism Satisfy?

We are not, therefore, greatly impressed by the talk that Atheism is doomed because it is a "world outlook" that cannot satisfy human nature. It seems to satisfy Atheists all right, that is, unless we assume that they are all in a conspiracy to pretend to be cheerful when in reality they are miserable. Of course, if a man who already believes in a God and a Devil, a heaven and a hell, a soul and a future life, looks to Atheism to satisfy these demands he will be disappointed. But that is his

fault. He must, if he can, take the world from the Atheist's point of view, and then see how it looks. Lemonade, from the point of view of the whisky drinker, is a very unsatisfactory beverage, but the test is to go without one or the other and then see what happens. To the Atheist these religious demands are as much pathological symptoms as is the craving for continuous doses of alcohol by a disordered organism. However religious beliefs originate, there is no question that in a civilized society they are kept alive by artificial stimulation. Besides, Atheism does not undertake to satisfy every demand that a disordered human nature may care to make. All it claims is that Atheism shuts out nothing that is truthful, beautiful, or useful, and that it leaves room for the play of every human quality that is worth bothering about. Atheism does not deny the value of any of the standard virtues, although it might conceivably range them in a different scale of importance than the one usually adopted. The Atheist at least stands for the possibility of human improvement apart from supernaturalism, and whether that is a sound or an unsound position, it is certainly giving man credit for more real dignity than religion has ever done. It is, indeed, one of the curiosities of theological controversy that they whose whole theory involves a belittling of human nature should oppose other theories because they detract from the dignity of man.

* * *

Atheism Inevitable.

So all things considered, we find ourselves taking with a tolerable equanimity these announcements that Materialism is dead and Atheism a forsaken position. What is chiefly the matter with these people is that they do not know, and have never taken the trouble to find out what either doctrine is, and whether it is true or false. Atheism is not a fashion, but the concluding term of a lengthy historical process. It began, in germ, when the power, or the existence of some tribal deity was first questioned. It is as inevitable as death. Compromises may delay its recognition, but to that complexion thought must at last come. And Materialism is no passing phase of mind; it is the essential of a true scientific method. Science is only possible on the assumption that the universe is the theatre of knowable forces, calculable in their consequences, and inevitable in their operation. Vulgar minds may be impressed by the cry that Atheism is dead; those who know, and who think, will simply smile. They know it is one of the many tricks of the Churches to divert attention from the fact of their impending collapse. It is an appeal to the sheep-like tendency of the average human mind—the fear that so many have of being thought queer, or unusual, or of standing alone. For a time, and with some, the plan works. But the pretence of belief is growing dangerously thin. The religious appeal touches a steadily declining proportion of the population. Life is more potent than theory, and the theory of religion is breaking down before the growing pressure of the logic of fact.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Over every hill
All is still;
In no leaf of any tree
Can you see
The motion of a breath,
Every bird has ceased its song.
Wait; and thou too, ere long,
Shall be quiet in death.

—Goethe.

Seeing is Believing.

THE Rev. John A. Hutton, D.D., is regarded as one of the great lights of the Christian pulpit, whose services are in growing demand in all parts of the country, and whose influence as a leader is steadily on the increase. In the religious press articles from his pen are in great request and always heartily welcomed. To the *Christian World* he is a frequent contributor, and it is in the character of an apologist that he generally writes. He never forgets that the Gospel he preaches stands in perpetual need of being defended. His article in the *Christian World* for November 6, entitled "Seeing and Believing," is throughout in the apologetic vein, and deserves to be seriously pondered by both believers and unbelievers. It starts with the tremendous assertion that "to believe in God is surely the greatest possession that a man can have." Such a claim is, on the face of it, challengeable, and the article makes no attempt to meet the obvious challenge. Instead of that the specious suggestion is thrown out that life can have no meaning apart from belief in God. What proof is there that God exists? Dr. Hutton very properly says:—

We who are Christian people believe in God through Jesus Christ; we believe in God for the sake of Him. We welcome the corroborations of this belief which, once we have opened our hearts to it, crowd in upon us on all sides—from nature, from history, from certain obscure but invincible testimonies within our own minds. But we know that these corroborations are only corroborations; in themselves they are not proofs.

All intense believers in God declare that he is the Power that lies behind the genial and comforting things in the world of Nature and that, of course, he is friendly to our human race. Dr. Hutton puts it thus:—

A sunrise, or a sunset, the cool majesty of a mountain peak cleaving the naked sky, or the play of clouds upon a landscape—what garments of the Eternal God these are to those who for some still deeper and dearer reason believe in Him. But to those who have no such deeper and dearer reason which has tipped the balance to the side of faith, all the glory of the world, especially in the hours when that glory seems to be eclipsed, might easily appear to be nothing but accident, fate, the senseless and irrelevant passing of moments and hours, and days, the working out of some great business which has no bearing on this life of ours and no knowledge of us.

The glory of the world is a pretty figure of speech merely invented by man, and it exists only for the inventor; and for him the world is quite as ugly as it is beautiful, whilst to the unimaginative dog it is neither. And if there be any Power behind Nature its malignity is at least in as full evidence as its beneficence. This is a fact which none can deny.

From this point onwards Dr. Hutton plays more or less skilfully with the well-known proverb, "Seeing is believing." He first of all reverses it: "Believing is seeing." Someone has said that "quibbles have no place in the search after truth;" but surely it is a quibble to say "that we do not begin even to see a thing until we believe." Dr. Hutton affirms: "My confidence that I see you and that you see me rests upon an implicit and accepted faith in the reliability of the power of sight." That is an extremely unfortunate illustration, because there are few things less reliable than the power of sight. No scientist would dream of holding the view that "the optic nerve is to be absolutely trusted in the report it gives me about this thing that I call the external world." As a matter of fact the optic nerve is a notorious illusionist, and science has been kept busy for ages correcting its misleading reports. What is true of external and material things is equally true with regard

to mental and moral relationships. You trust a man's word because you have had experience of his truthfulness, or because he has the reputation of being a man of his word.

Dr. Hutton admits, however, that there is another interpretation of the proverb which is probably nearer to the original intention of it:—

When we quote these words to ourselves we are in the mood of one who should say, "I don't want to be taken off my feet. I don't want to be deceived. If you wish me to believe in a thing you must give me some evidence, such as I cannot fairly or decently reject, that the whole matter is as you declare." And this requirement is really quite fair.

So it is. We ought not to believe except on adequate evidence. The reverend gentleman assures us that if a stranger appealed to him for help he could not give his case a favourable consideration unless he produced some evidence of his worthiness. If the evidence satisfied him as to the man's *bona-fides*, then, assuming, on such ground, his worthiness as well as need of help,—

Something mounts up from within myself, something which our religion holds to be the deepest thing in us, which invites me there and then to clothe this bare evidence of his with all the richness of my nature—to let this precise occasion become the opportunity for the outlet in me of certain generousities and activities which in that moment I perceive to be my very business in this world.

Instead of proceeding, at this stage, to furnish adequate reasons for believing in God and Christ, Dr. Hutton goes off on a tangent to point out that some temperaments require more evidence than others. Thomas was of a cautious temperament, and what was sufficient proof of the Resurrection for the others left him doubting, whilst Simon Peter had an enthusiastic temperament, which made him only too ready to believe, almost without any reference to evidence at all. This may be more or less true of those two men, but the reverend gentleman skilfully evades the real point at issue. He omits, or is not able, to tell us on what evidence reasonable human beings can believe that a God of justice and love sits on the throne and rules the world. The real question for every man, according to him, is, "Would you like to believe?" Naturally, every sane person wants to believe what is in itself credible; but what we maintain is that the facts militate fatally against the belief that the world is governed in righteousness and love by an almighty Being. It may be easy enough for some folk to repeat, "we believe in God through Jesus Christ our Lord"; but that formula, so far from removing the difficulty, only emphasizes and enhances it. Strangely enough, the reverend gentleman *naively* admits that "if we kept our eyes upon the evil of the world, or the evil in our own hearts, we might deny God—deny him certainly as a robust and inevitable power"; but incontrovertibly such an admission cuts the ground from under his own feet. Why, it is the evil of the world, uneradicated through all the ages, that makes the active regnancy of an infinitely good and powerful God so unbelievable and so ridiculous a proposition. Ostensibly, Christ appeared that he might redeem the world from its sins of every kind, and yet the Church, whose Head and King he is said to be, has always winked at all social and economic evils, and has often stood up in opposition to genuine reforms. And yet, with all the horrible evils staring us continually in the face, Dr. Hutton says that "the real question for every man in our day, and in any day, is, Would he like to believe?" The truth is that the number of those who neither can nor wish to believe in an effete, impotent religion is steadily swelling year in and year out. Surely, Christ *has had his chance*,

for his career began nineteen centuries ago, and yet one of his ordained ambassadors confesses to-day that keeping our eyes on the evils of the world would probably have the effect of converting us all to Atheism. More strangely still, Dr. Hutton has the temerity to exclaim:—

When a man stands before Christ and gives Christ a chance, such a man becomes aware of something more than Christ. He becomes aware of a great Presence surrounding Jesus—a Presence which Jesus makes articulate.

Dr. Hutton is an exceptionally able man; but every now and then, by a mere slip of the tongue, so to say, he gives his own case wholly away. He does so in his article when he observes, "Now, faith is a kind of poetry." It deals not with facts but with fancies, and in a world of grim facts those fancies, however delightful to those who cherish them, are wholly out of place. The faith so eloquently and so illogically eulogized by this popular divine no doubt often lifts those in whom it burns violently into a state of the most exquisite emotional ecstasy; but the fault we have to find with it is that it has never succeeded in solving humanity's puzzling problems, in righting society's crying wrongs, in abolishing the evil conditions which breed poverty and want, or in bringing all mankind into the beautiful ring of true brotherhood and happy comradeship. Yes, Christ has had his chance, and has proved a complete failure. Shall we not now at last give Man his chance?

J. T. LLOYD.

The Christian Way.

The dogs bark—the caravan passes.—*Eastern Proverb.*

People swallow falsehood as a cat milk.—*G. W. Foote.*

He who fights with priests may make up his mind to have his poor, good name torn and befouled by lies and slanders.

—*Heine.*

THE younger recruits of the Army of Human Liberation can have little conception of the intense hatred and antagonism which the Old Guard of Freethought roused in the Christian camp. To-day, if there be not a greater tolerance, there is at least far less bitterness, due as much to increasing religious indifference as to more polished manners. Christian apologists, who never tire of boasting of the tolerance of their intolerant religion, need to be reminded of these things. In the battle for free speech, Richard Carlile, his wife and friends, endured fifty years' imprisonment. Daniel Eaton was prosecuted seven times, and had £2,500 worth of literature destroyed. The poet Shelley was ordered by a Christian court to be deprived of the custody of his children, and a similar indignity was inflicted on Mrs. Annie Besant many years later. Charles Bradlaugh had to wait for years before he could take his seat in the House of Commons as member for Northampton, and only his alertness prevented his imprisonment for blasphemy. The late Marquis of Queensbury was denied a seat in the House of Lords on account of his Freethought opinions. Last, but not least, thousands of pounds bequeathed for Freethought purposes were diverted to other channels. It was not until Freethinkers became too numerous to be any longer subjected to this form of highway robbery that it was stopped.

Few men even among these heroic personalities fought a more arduous battle against the buffetings of bigotry than Charles Bradlaugh. The abuse levelled against politicians is politeness itself compared with the assault and battery made upon Bradlaugh's reputation, echoes of which still sound in our ears to-day. A generation after his death, tales are recounted to his discredit, and

it is with some surprise that one finds a touch of the old malice in a book red-hot from the press.

It is true the work is from the pen of a clergyman, but nowadays people expect ministers of religion to be civilized. The Rev. John Pitkin is not an ordinary parson, and was for many years a prison chaplain. His allusions to Bradlaugh occur in his book, *The Prison Cell*, a volume of reminiscences of criminals he met in the course of his ministrations. One chapter, entitled "An Atheist's Testimony to Christianity," deals with the story of a convict who is alleged to have attributed his downfall to Bradlaugh's "ungodly creed."

Nine pages are devoted to this remarkable human document, and its value may be estimated by the fact that no names are mentioned save those of Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant. The nameless man who was converted is said to have been a charming individual who had been twice convicted and sentenced for attempted murder, one sentence being for twenty years. He had also served a further sentence for attempted suicide. He may be described as a brand plucked from the burning, especially as he had "once been foremost in spreading the poison of that pernicious system which is called Atheism."

Although described as "a devoted disciple" of Charles Bradlaugh, this convict had as hazy and remarkable ideas on the subject of Bradlaugh's opinions as ever illuminated a Christian Evidence pamphlet. How intimate his knowledge of Freethought was is seen in his confusion of mind between Atheism and Secularism. He even goes so far as to define Atheism, which, he declares, "exists to furnish designing clever lecturers with good incomes, which enables them to climb into power, where their moderate abilities in their own profession would never have placed them. They travel first-class, stay at the best hotels, and have a cab to take them to the lecture hall, if only five hundred yards distant." In short, they behave almost as badly as bishops. Lest, however, any reader should imagine that a Freethinker's life is all beer and skittles, the chaplain soon undeceives him.

Dipping his pen in crimson lake, he describes how that convict's daughter dies of consumption, and the convict drags a lecturer into the death-chamber, and asks him his candid opinion as to the existence of a Deity, and the chances of a future life. Of course, the unfortunate lecturer was dumbfounded. Another lecturer was kidnapped, and put through the same process, with the same awful negative results. Even Bradlaugh was approached on the same subject, but, apparently on account of his fine physique, not put through the torture-chamber, and it is recorded that he advised the convict not to permit his children to attend lectures and not to sell literature. We imagine that Bradlaugh would have advised the convict to see a doctor; but our ways are not the chaplain's. It was very fortunate, too, that this homicidal convict did not try to murder these lecturers, because, although "an ardent disciple of Bradlaugh," he writes bitterly enough: "I do not think that one of their lecturers truly believes in the Atheism he professes."

Like the criminal in Gilbert's verses, our convict was not always "jumping on his mother," and other people. Certainly, he tried to murder a constable, and to take his own life, but he only threw flowers at the chaplain. In one letter he writes: "In every one of your sermons you dispose of some bulwark of Atheism. One by one the distorted difficulties conjured up by our lecturers have been disposed of with ease." This is indeed interesting. Fifty-two sermons a year, and fifty-two religious doubts removed. We cannot wonder at the convict's conversion. And then comes the crowning

mercy: "The style of your preaching has caused me for ever to renounce Atheism."

The secret of the conversion of this "militant Atheist" is buried in the bosom of the chaplain, who, like Brer Rabbit, lays low and says nothing. The converted convict "left the country and sailed for Australia" nearly forty years ago. In delaying the publication of the terrible "infidel's" testimony to Christ for so lengthy a period, the Rev. John Pitkin has displayed a Christian patience. He cannot be accused of allowing his courage to outrun his discretion.

MIMNERMUS.

The Dead Bee.

THERE is enough material in the world to prove any case—in a superficial manner. Words may be used in such a manner that their *tesserae* forms a pattern for easy conviction. By speech, sound may take the place of sense, personality may cloak an evil design, and fanaticism may even induce a few to believe that the world is square—because there are four seasons. The gulf between belief and truth cannot be bridged by these means for those who do not reject human experience for revelation. Swedenborg is worthy of our attention in this respect. His *Divine Love and Wisdom*, in our opinion, written with sincerity, is the work of one who sounded his note. It is a sweet, tuneful note; and if our ears could be stopped to all other notes, halcyon days and nights would woo us to the end of our mortal journey. It would be soothing to think that divine love and wisdom animated all phenomena—particularly soothing to the Freethinker, who has occupied every position in the scale of abuse from such men as Tertullian, St. Paul, G. K. Chesterton, the Bishop of London, and the Rev. William Sunday. Putting aside the fact that two can play at this game—a rather disreputable game, by the way—consider the weight thrown off the shoulders of all critics of Christianity if Swedenborg's theory be universally established. If we grant his influx of the spiritual into the natural, our books on science, sociology, and cottage gardening may be piled up for a bonfire of thanksgiving. No longer need we rack our brains to understand the philosophic systems that have been thrown into the world for man's guidance, no longer need we essay to grasp this sorry scheme of things entire, if we admit that Swedenborg has found the philosopher's stone.

Among revelations of the twentieth century, such as the discovery of the rascality of our press, the transition of a human being by aeroplane from London to Paris in a little over an hour, and the existence of a person belonging to a victorious nation on one-and-a-half ounces of butter weekly, there may be found one striking phenomenon. It may even have been overlooked by all but the most observant. We refer to the practice of boot manufacturers. There is a depth of meaning in the Irishman's remark about his new pair of boots. He said he would have to wear them some time before he could put them on. In other words, boots are made, but the feet have to fit them. And we think that it is the same with most systems of religion. They are made; but the mind has to fit them. Witness the lives of such men as Cardinal Newman and Tennyson; their frankness tells us that religion could not supply answers to all their doubts; and we see the quaint position of Gladstone *defending* the impregnable rock of Holy Scripture. Their religious systems were made, and their minds could never properly fit them.

If, my readers, you can be won over by the fervour of Swedenborg, for his writings are not unlike those of

Jeremy Taylor, you will have to shut one eye and stop one ear. After a beautiful description of bees' activities—giving the natural side of their lives—he will lead you to this:—

It may be seen from this history that the bees, for the use they perform to the human race, possess, out of an influx from the spiritual world, a form of government like that which obtains with men on earth, yea, with the angels in heaven.

This statement will sound strangely to English ears—it contains not a few fallacies; but, with sympathetic insight towards Swedenborg and his period suppose we admit its truth.

In our garden from the tops of Japanese sunflowers down to rose bushes are long silken ropes. Perilous is the journey to the spider along one of these to the unknown leaf caught by the line thrown out. His rough scaffolding accomplished, a web is woven. You may meditate on the existence of spiders, or their motives. Swedenborg says that spiders are symbols of Hell, and come from that place. But our mind will not even fit that explanation. Into one of these webs a bee had flown. Poor little winged wanderer in search of sweetness. Evil hath made thee a winding sheet before thou wast dead. No more will thy drowsy hum fall on the summer air. No more wilt thou draw nectar from flowers—the gift of Gods who love us. With wings crushed, wax laden legs wrapped tightly with silken bonds, thou art now what thou wast not.

Our mind will not fit this scheme of good from Heaven and evil from Hell—an indictment of God; you allowed a pretty little honey gatherer to be caught in a spider's web, and you endowed us with feelings that were pained when we saw it. The European Affair!—on a larger scale. *Ex pede*, you do nothing very well. At midnight, when the hour of twelve strikes, Oberon and Titania will come with their fairy train, and the dead body of the bee shall have a royal funeral. Did you really divide the Red Sea? WILLIAM REPTON.

An Eagle's Feather.

Vide BROWNING ON SHELLEY.

MENTAL processes vary in their movement and intensity just as much as one mind differs from another. What is certain is the process, dull or bright, fast or slow, backward or forward, somewhere or somehow, every man "changes his mind." Most minds, it may be, move round in a narrow, and very often a vicious, circle; some are stodgy and almost stationary, like those of the beasts of the field; others, again, like Gibbon's, "deep and slow," exhausting thought, and hiving wisdom with much toil and care—the latter culminating in an electric flash illuminating the world. Even the ordinary mind of the average intelligent man or woman, be the earlier process quick or slow, in the contact, or conflict, of clearly seen ideas, may, in this ultimate event, gain by a hop, step, and jump, or by a single natural leap, the veritable mountain-top of a vision, where for a moment it feels itself a transfigured thing, and from whence it surveys in scornful and serene sovereignty the pigmies in the vale below! The road was rough, the training was severe, the schooling costly, but the consequent unpremeditated levitation seeming, and indeed being, as easy and natural as the winking of an eye.

And what a heterogenous collection seem the ingredients producing this mental result; what connection, in this concoction, of unconnected things! As a personal instance: I had been reading Ingersoll's superb Reply to Gladstone, with its reference to the weird and wonderful beliefs that men have entertained about gods and

devils, and the awful consequences to man himself of those ages of faith. Now I listened to a lecture on Home Rule for Scotland, and anon, with a few choice spirits, discussed "spiritual" things, in the dusk, at the close of the meeting.

The story was told, almost at first hand, of a man whose favourite dog died, which had been in the habit, while living, of rocking itself in a rocking chair. One morning, following the loss of his canine companion, the man awakened to see the chair *with nothing on it*—nothing, at least, but the invisible "astral body" of the dead dog rocking to and fro! The story was received with quite reverent credence by a Spiritualist member of the group, who did not see the joke even when the story was capped by that of the man, who dreamed he had been a day at the coast and awoke in the morning all sunburnt! "Ah," said he, quoting from Hamlet:—

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Whereupon I had my revelation: Yes, I said, and it is also true that there are a thousand things *dreamt* of in our philosophy which have no existence anywhere else. At this moment the friends separated, and I had no opportunity of noting the effect of my thunderbolt; but struck with my own lightning—or what I fondly believed my own—I came away not a little satisfied—perhaps even a little conceited.

A. M.

Acid Drops.

At the request of the King, November 11 (Armistice Day) was observed by a two-minutes' cessation of work throughout the country—more or less. The people were advised to spend the two minutes in "thoughtful remembrance." That strikes us as rather dangerous. To advise the people a year after a war to *think* about it is rather risky. Perhaps the hope is that they will not think, but will merely remain motionless, and *look* wise.

One paper, greatly daring, headed its announcement of the King's message, "A Year of Peace." That was superb. We have only now about a score of wars, at the end of a "year of peace," and the Allies are in full use of one of the vilest forms of warfare known to man—that of the hunger blockade. All other forms of war are humane at the side of that. And it is being enforced by Christians, as it has been elaborated by them. "Suffer little children to come unto me," says the New Testament, and "I will see that they get nothing to eat," say the Christian Powers. And this is what the world has come to after two thousand years of Christianity. A state of peace where only about a score of wars are being waged! What would the world have been like without Christianity? It certainly could not have been worse.

Archdeacon Gresford Jones is quite angry with the Spiritualists for enticing Churchmen with their psychic affirmations. The Archdeacon thinks that the Christian Church has sufficient bogeys of its own.

An Anglo-Catholic Congress will be held next spring, prior to the Lambeth Conference. At that pleasant season of the year, the priests will be able to wear their newest spring petticoats.

The latest news of the "starving" clergy is that the salaries of the assistant clergy at Trimley, Surrey, have been increased from £200 to £250 yearly.

His lordship the Bishop of Manchester says that "the public knew very little of the patience and dignity of the clergy during the difficult times which they were passing." Dear, dear! The public knows quite well that the

clergy were exempted from military service during the War, and it also knows with what "patience and dignity" the clergy are now posing as the "new poor," who are "starving" on the salaries mentioned in the Clergy List.

The Rev. S. F. Collier, of the Manchester Wesleyan Mission, lives in the clouds and laughs earthly facts to scorn. Many clergymen, who are on speaking terms with facts, sorrowfully admit the supreme failure of the Church; but Mr. Collier, pooh-poohing the facts, says: "The Church is a living, pulsating thing. Her life-blood comes from Calvary." Then treating the last nineteen hundred years as if they had never been, he continues: "And the Gospel she is commissioned to preach is the only true remedy for the sins and sorrows and miseries of mankind. Therefore, let us lift up our hearts. The future is ours; for the future is the Lords." Pious twaddle in which so many men of God indulge just now.

"The New Poor!" The Bishop of Southwark dined with his Majesty King Alfonso at the Grocers' Hall. At the banquet to the Shah of Persia at Buckingham Palace the Archbishop of Canterbury and his wife were among the distinguished guests. "Praise God, from whom all blessings flow."

Outside an East-end church is a notice, "The minister here was once a boy who sold papers in the streets. Come in and see him." It looks as if that minister was anxious to let folk know that he once earned an honest living.

The Rev. Robert Perdue, rector of Lorrha, North Tipperary, drowned himself in a tank. Yet emotional evangelists will have it that it is only Atheists who commit suicide.

Providence counts the hairs of our heads, but is careless about churches. In daylight, thieves broke a stained-glass window of Petersham Parish Church, and stole several brass candlesticks, and emptied the collection-boxes.

An extraordinary present has been given to the Prince of Wales by some of the Jews of Montreal, Canada. It consisted of gold tablets, inscribed with the Ten Commandments. What a pity they could not have included the eleventh, "Thou shalt not be found out." Perhaps the gold gave out first.

An American seaman, Harry Thomas, was found guilty of shooting a man at Liverpool. In the hearing of the evidence it was stated that Thomas thought he had had an interview with God and his dead mother and grandmother, and they told him to go and kill a burglar. He took the murdered man for a burglar. The jury found Thomas guilty of murder, but insane. We quite agree with the verdict; but we believe that the evidence for Thomas's communion with God is as good as any other evidence we have ever come across. What would have happened had Moses come along in 1919 with his story of an interview with God? His subsequent display of temper would only have confirmed the belief in his mental derangement. Or how would the prophets have fared? Or Jesus, with his interview with the Devil? These people were lucky in being born early. Thomas was unlucky in being born late.

At a meeting of the Manchester Diocesan Conference, it was suggested that the Churches should run combined cinema shows and restaurants "on business lines." Does this mean a film of the life of Christ and a sausage-and-mashed banquet for a shilling?

A picture appeared in a London newspaper of a crowd of racing stable-boys who had attended divine service in a local parish church. It seems appropriate that the Christian religion should appeal so strongly to stable-boys.

Lambeth was described by a labour candidate in the recent municipal election as "the most neglected and re-

actionary borough in London." Presumably, it is a mere coincidence that the Archbishop of Canterbury has a palace in the district.

The hard-hit clergy manage to keep the wolf from the door. One who was successful was the Rev. W. Poland, of Woodham Mortimer, who left estate to the value of £7,564. Another was Canon S. E. Davies, of Wyke Regis, Dorset, who left £2,276; whilst a third was the Rev. J. R. Phillips, of Abergavenny, who left £1,744.

If we had not been aware that there was a boom in Spiritualism at the moment—these things sweep over an ill-educated public in the way that the witch mania and similar delusions once swept over Europe—we should have guessed it after reading Mr. Bottomley's article in the *Sunday Pictorial* for November 9. In that article Mr. Bottomley promised all that if they would listen to the King's message and would "attune" their hearts and souls to the occasion "you shall hear the dead speak." And like a professional tipster selling a "dead cert," he adds: "There is no Death—and ere another generation has born and run its course on earth, we shall know as Fact what is to-day.....but a belief." That, we take it, is a straight tip from one who knows. And Mr. Bottomley knows because, we presume, a large number of impressionable and superstitious people are dabbling with the subject. When the boom dies out, Mr. Bottomley will, doubtless, declare it to be "damnable superstition." But, by that time, it will have served its purpose.

Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. The worries of the men of God are increasing, and the advent of the woman-preacher is the latest and not the least of their troubles. At the City Temple, London, Miss Maude Royden is the star-actress, and now Miss E. Picton-Turbervill is to be an extra-actress at St. Botolph's Church, Bishopsgate, and will preach on Thursdays. It is enough to make poor old St. Botolph "revisit the glimpses of the moon."

The Rev. Dr. Orchard, preaching on immortality recently, made the following frank confession: "I do not ask where I am going, and, speaking reverently, I do not care." The only difference between him and us seems to be that we do not believe we are going anywhere after death—except to the grave.

A devotional writer says that "Jesus is beyond our conceptions and our human categories." That is why the men of God have so much to say about him, and it also fully explains the utter silence and inactivity of the Saviour of the world. He *does* nothing simply because he is nothing but a theological idea.

In one place or another, and in some way or another, the question of religious instruction in public schools is always cropping up. In the Kilpatrick School Management Committee, one of the members, Mr. MacLeod, moved that the Shorter Catechism be omitted from the religious syllabus. Mr. MacLeod announced that he was not a Christian, but he had been taught the Shorter Catechism himself as a child, and was quite certain it was hurtful to him. The motion was lost, and the children will be dosed with the horrible concoction of mediæval barbarity and stupidity against which Mr. MacLeod protested. Still, it is good to keep the question alive. Common sense will tell in the long run.

It is a sign of the times to find the following in the *Glasgow Herald* :—

Isn't it time that religion, as taught in the schools, was removed from the curriculum? The children don't want it, and the teachers dislike it. The majority of parents don't wish it, but, having "been through" it themselves indifferently, consider that "it won't do any harm." Educational difficulties and bigotry would have a chance of disappearing were the little minds undisturbed by militant religion.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

November 16, South Shields; November 23, Leicester; November 30, Birmingham; December 7, Sheffield; December 17 and 18, Belfast; December 21, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—November 16, Leicester; November 23, Manchester; December 7, Swansea; December 21, Glasgow; December 22, Paisley.

M. J. MARSH (Cardiff) writes endorsing the opinions of Mr. Alec Cunningham as to the fear displayed by many local Socialist bodies lest religious people should be offended, and the need for a better display of "backbone" if progress is to be made and maintained. We are only concerned in this journal with the fact that progress everywhere depends upon the creation of mental charity and independence whether in Socialist or other organizations, and coquetting with religion is fatal to both qualities.

E. T. RAUTELA (Finland).—We scarcely understand your letter. As a regular reader of this paper, the answer to your questions are contained in its columns. We share your appreciation of the articles that have appeared in the *Freethinker*. Business preoccupations have prevented their writing as frequently as we should have liked, but we hope to see their pens more active in the future.

A. RUSSELL.—We have been trying for weeks to find space, but will publish soon. Regret delay.

H. BLACK.—We are pleased to learn that Mr. Thresh's lectures at Manchester last week were so much appreciated by those present, and that several new members were made. The example of your Branch should inspire some others to do likewise.

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

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible.

Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

After a week in the North, and a few days in the South, Mr. Cohen again travels northward, and will lecture to-day (November 16) in Marsden Miner's Hall, Imceary Street, South Shields. The hall is much larger, we understand, than the one usually engaged, and we hope that Tyneside Freethinkers will do their best to see that it is well filled. The meetings will be at 3 and 6.30 There will be music—6 to 6.30—before the evening address.

To-day (November 16) Mr. J. T. Lloyd will lecture in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, at 6.30. We hear that the audiences in Leicester have very much improved this year, and we, therefore, have little doubt that a speaker of Mr. Lloyd's calibre will find a good muster awaiting him when he mounts the platform.

The West Ham Branch of the N.S.S. is arranging a "Social," to be held at Earlham Hall, Forest Gate, E., on Saturday, December 6. There will be dances, games,

musical selections, etc., and admission will be free. Forest Gate (G.E.R.) and Wanstead Park (M.R.) are the nearest stations; trams, etc., to the "Princess Alice" or Forest Gate Stations. All Freethinkers and their friends will be welcomed.

We are pleased to learn that Mr. Moss's meeting at Birmingham on Sunday last was a very successful one. Mr. Willis presided, and the lecture was received with the greatest appreciation. We are very glad to hear of so favourable a beginning being made to Mr. Moss's renewal of platform work. We hope he will be kept busy.

**"Freethinker"
"Victory" Sustentation Fund.**

Ninth List of Subscriptions.

Previously acknowledged, £319 18s. Mr. and Mrs. Dawson, 10s. A. Cayford, 10s. S. E. Beardell, 3s. Per J. Stirling (Paisley), £1 5s. P. Siger, 2s. 6d. Mrs. B. Siger, 2s. 6d. E. Blakeman, 2s. 6d. D. C. Drummond, £1. J. Ralston, 10s. H. W. Barnes, 3s. W. F. Ambrose (9th and 10th subs.), 4s. Mrs. S. M. Peacock, £2. H. Bolt, 10s. Three Dundee Friends, 12s. 6d. Artisticus, 5s. A. D. Guest, 5s. Jas. R. White, 2s. 6d. H. J. Waters, £1.

Per James Thompson:—Mr. D. Smith, 2s. 6d. Alex. Thompson, 2s. 6d. Wm. Thompson, 2s. 6d. Mrs. J. Thompson, 2s. 6d. J. Thompson, 5s.

Total, £330 os. 6d.

The Better 'Ole ?

(IMPRESSIONS FROM YPRES.)

House of God or Estaminet, they shared the same fell fate.
—Daily Paper.

ESTAMINET or House of God
It mattered not one whit.
They went to hell, as you can tell
Whenever they got hit.
Nor Priest nor Pope, nor Faith nor Hope
Were of the least avail.
Both Sentry Post and Holy Ghost
Each told the same sad tale.
Oh, House of Wine and House Divine!
Pray tell me what ye thought
Of your two respective Landlords,
Were they, too, brought to nought?
The House of Wine replied, and said:
"I don't know, but I'm told
My master rushed away to pray
Within the Churches' Fold."

The House Divine said, "I opine
My master slipped away
For solace and security
To an Estaminet."

The reason of their common fate
In Ypres is common talk;
Almighty God was on the nod,
Or else gone for a walk.

Now the moral of this story
Is plain, though it seems odd:
Estaminets are just as safe
As any House of God.

Conversely, too, it seems quite true
It rarely ever pays
To leave the Holy House of God
To seek Estaminets.

So have a care, and be aware,
And swear by solemn oath,
To take no chance, but whilst in France,
Keep damn well out of both.

Atheism and Agnosticism.

II.

(Continued from p. 549.)

The mystic, like the ascetic, is always thought of as being such and such a man, rather than as holding such and such beliefs. Mysticism involves a certain attitude towards things which are not capable of being either explained or understood. The matters with which mysticism is concerned cannot be either explained or understood simply because mysticism, if it could give an account of itself, would cease to be mysticism. But whereas the tender-minded will regard such matters as being above understanding, and therefore sacred, the tough-minded will regard them as being unfit for understanding, and therefore valueless. The tender minded reveres what is beyond him, the tough denies it.

The tough-minded man calls everything to the bar of intelligence, and if it can give no account of itself, condemns it. He regards mysticism, Theosophy, and all doctrines which make more demands upon a man's faith than upon his intelligence as the resource of second-rate minds which have been driven to shelter themselves behind bulwarks of dogma, as a protection from the assaults of their intellectual superiors in the open field. Finding that intellect is not their forte they cry "These grapes are sour," disclaim its sovereignty, and affirm that the most essential truths about life, God, immortality, and the nature of the Universe cannot be grasped by intellect at all. If this is the attitude of the tough-minded with regard to the shibboleths of the tender-minded, the latter takes his revenge by pointing to the chaos of belief achieved by philosophy and is almost inclined to say that the more you trust to intellect the further you drift from truth. For such a mind mysticism is the only salvation from the barren quibbles of logic, which by enabling you to prove everything, turns round in your hands, and ends in proving nothing; for the tough-minded it is God's last ditch, the barrier erected by the intellectually unfit to save their self-respect from the defeats administered to orthodox religion by Evolution and the Higher Criticism.—C. E. M. Joad, "Essays in Common Sense Philosophy," 1919, pp. 228-230.

If you ask an Agnostic does he believe in the Devil? he will say: "certainly not." But why this definite denial in the case of the Devil, and this tentative, leave-it-an-open-question affair in the case of God? In this connection it should be noted that Spencer himself declared that if he were to be convinced of "a supernatural interference with the order of things, then my personal experience would force me to the conclusion that the power underlying things is diabolical."¹ So the fact emerges that if Spencer had come down off the Agnostic fence, it would not have been to join the worshippers of a wise and benevolent Supreme Being; but, if he worshipped at all, it would be at a sort of Witches Sabbath presided over by the Spirit of Evil.

The fact is that although Spencer professed to find in the "Unknowable" a ground for the reconciliation of religion and science, this was merely a device to camouflage the godlessness of his synthetic philosophy. Nothing was further from his thought, or wish, than such a reconciliation. How could it be, if he held that if there was any supernatural power at work in the world it was diabolical?

A further proof of Spencer's privately entertained aversion to the God idea once he had discarded it, and his fear of letting it be publicly known, is given in Mr. Wilfred Scawen Blunt's lately published memoirs in which we are told that Spencer, seeing some of Mr. Blunt's poetry, wrote to him—he being quite a stranger—asking him to compose a dialogue between God and Satan after the style of Goethe's *Faust*. Mr. Blunt agreed to the suggestion, and the piece was produced under the title *Satan Absolved*, meeting with Spencer's approval. Later, Mr. Blunt remarks in his *Diary* that Spencer "is in a terrible fright lest it should be found out that he gave the idea of the poem 'on account,' he

says, 'of the *odium theologicum* and the injury it might do to the spread of his philosophy,' so I have written a preface without exactly saying this, though it is not very courageous of him to leave me alone in the coming battle."¹

We yield to none in admiration of Spencer as the author of the synthetic philosophy, all the more, therefore, do we regret his fear of public opinion which resulted in the "Unknowable" by which he influenced Huxley to substitute Agnosticism for Atheism.

As Moncure Conway pointed out, Agnosticism is "a religio-philosophical Cave of Adullam wherein are gathered the discontented from various regions of thought. Agnosticism is especially the euphemistic retreat of scientific thinkers unwilling to be thought Nature-worshippers, and cultured Freethinkers escaping the vulgar commutations of Atheism, while maintaining their criticisms on all Theistic theories."²

Agnosticism never obtained any vogue on the Continent. Buchner denounced it upon its appearance in the following words:—

But, in reality, if we look at things in open daylight, we find that the "Unknowable" of modern Agnostics is nothing more than the good old God of the theologian, who has already made his appearance in so many deceptive disguises in the history of philosophy. It makes no essential difference whether he answers to the name of "Will," or "Unknown," or "Thing *per se*," or "Universal Soul," or "Unknowable." At the bottom of it we always find the same anthropomorphic disfigurement, the same *asylum ignorantie*, and the same vague being which, being begotten of the fear of the unknown, ruled of yore over the crude primeval man, and will continue to rule over the civilized man, until the sun of knowledge and the recognition of a natural and self-contained order of the world shall have made a reality *Fiat lux!*³

Perhaps this passage is responsible for Huxley's attack on Buchner.

The French Freethinkers, with their clear common sense, would have none of it. When a Frenchman leaves Catholicism he becomes an Atheist. He has no use for the half-way houses and camouflaged shelters invented by the English philosophers, who, with a few exceptions, like Professor Clifford, are more afraid of Mrs. Grundy and society opinion than they are of machine guns and poison gas.

W. MANN.

(To be concluded.)

Candour at Last.

THE report on *The Army and Religion*, which has just been issued, is the most cheerful piece of reading for we Freethinkers which has yet come forth from the headquarters of the Black Army. It was decided by the committee, of which the Bishop of Winchester and Dr. Cairns, of Aberdeen, were the joint conveners, that evidence should be taken from chaplains, officers, R.A.M.C. men, and others, who have been in close touch with our armies, as to the real religious position among the young men of to-day. This evidence has been carefully collected, and is now presented to the public in a handsome volume (Macmillan, 6s.). Nothing but the realization of their desperate position has drawn this candid admission of the decay of Christianity from its leaders and workers. As the editor, Dr. Cairns says:—

We believe that the evidence in our hands is full of deep and startling meaning.....and therefore we have

¹ Wilfred Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries* (1919), p. 402.

² Moncure Conway, *Free Review*, No. 1, vol. i.

³ Buchner, *Force and Matter*, 1884 ed., p. 499.

¹ Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, p. 373.

felt bound to lay it before the Christian mind of the nation, believing that a new contact with reality is absolutely necessary to any further progress.

Dr. Cairns thus sums up his conclusions from the evidence he received:—

That probably four-fifths of the young manhood of our country should have no vital connection with any of the Churches, and that behind this detachment there should be so deep a misunderstanding of the faiths by which Christian men and women live, and the ideals of life which they hold, is perhaps the most salient factor of our evidence. Here is an alarming fact, which is surely clear proof that something somewhere has gone gravely wrong. It is more than questionable if the situation has anywhere been adequately realizedWhen one thinks of all the spiritual, financial, and political resources of the Churches, and their control of schools and pulpits for educational purposes for so many centuries, why should there be this "impene-trable fog"?

In spite of this melancholy candour, Dr. Cairns still begs the question in true Christian fashion on two vital aspects of the matter. He declares that the men are "unconsciously" following Christ, that they are "following him in the dark and denying him in the light," and in spite of their lack of religion "are practising great Christian virtues which put many of us to shame." He is here inferring that all morality is Christian, and that the existence of morality in a man proves that he is a Christian though the man himself be unaware of it. His other assumption is that society will be ruined unless this decay of religion is arrested. He considers it a "tragedy." Freethinkers will be inclined to reverse his opinion, and consider that it is the "happy ending," the "tragedy" lying rather behind us than before us.

There are some very good things in the evidence quoted. Surely this description of the men's conception of modern Christianity, though written by an assistant chaplain-general, is worthy of Mr. Foote himself: "It is a Mosaic of kill-joyism and Balaam's ass's ears, and Noah and mothers' meetings, and Athanasian damns and the Archbishop of Canterbury at £15,000 a year." A second lieutenant is "convinced that the attitudes of these men before the War was pagan. They took life as it came. These men never interpreted life into spiritual terms." Again, it is lamented that "these men as a whole believe that the Churches are out of touch with reality and out of touch with ordinary humanity." "These men find the Churches lacking in the spirit of Reality. The doctrinal message is unintelligible. They do not know what it is about." "They have a haunting suspicion that the Church itself is not sure about its own creeds and about the Bible, and that there is something insincere about its testimony." A Lancashire chaplain has nothing more comforting than this to offer: "I should say that 10 per cent. are vitally related to the Church and 10 per cent. semi-attached." Though he cannot find it in his heart to say so, it is obvious that the remaining 80 per cent. are vitally un-related to the Church for various reasons, chiefly the following:—

To sum up a good deal of evidence, we seem to have left the impression upon them that there is little or no life in the Church at all; that it is an antiquated and decaying institution, standing by dogmas expressed in archaic language, and utterly out of touch with modern thought and living experience.

So the cat is out of the bag—at last! Nor can they even see their way to state that these men are ruined, socially or morally, by this new insight; for the Editor of the volume says "it is impossible not to feel the

sharpness of the contrast when we turn from the comparative poverty of the religious thoughts and ideals of the men to the wealth of noble virtues which they reveal in their relationship to one another."

The sins chiefly lamented in this volume are swearing and sexual indulgence. "The men who do not swear are a small minority. The majority indulge in foul, immoral, blasphemous language. The Holy Name is mixed with every foul expression." "They argue that sexual indulgence is natural, and therefore legitimate." Neither of these vices is, however, more prevalent to-day than during previous war-periods, and neither is in any way due to the decay of religious belief, except, perhaps, in an added boldness of blasphemy. As an Atheist who discards swearing as vulgar and irrelevant, I can testify to the lack of connection between Free-thought and foul language; and every one of us knows Atheists of the most rigorously moral sexual character.

Out of their own mouths they are convicted. Perhaps, after this, we will hear less about the great Revival of Religion which took place at the Front.

But now, having admitted the failure of Christianity at the present moment, what remedies have these reverend gentlemen to offer, what suggestions as to the best means of stopping the landslide so obviously in motion? None. Dr. Cairns gives it as his considered opinion that a great evangelical effort would only further alienate this mass of indifferent men. The only thing in which he can see any hope is "a widening and deepening of the whole outlook and aim of the Churches." A pretty generality; but what does it mean, unless it means a further breaking-down of dogmas and a further advance towards humanism and social service? But, as the rev. doctor says, there was no religious uprising during the latter part of the century strong enough to contain and use the great advances of scientific knowledge, and so to counteract "the advance of naturalism." On what, then, is the great revival to found its claims, now that the mass of men has passed out of relation to religion, and now that scientific "naturalism" has made such strides among the more educated? Truly, the reverend gentlemen who wish to set that revival afoot have something to think about for the rest of their days. This religion is dying in the way normal to all religions. Atheists, the report tells us, were few; the reason being simply that few men have a logical craving, a desire to "see life steadily and see it whole." The mass simply says, "This stuff won't wash," and drops the subject, without attempting to put anything solid in the place of the discredited creed. But as education, which is still very feeble, gradually improves and spreads its influence, the number who reject with reason and substitute with knowledge will rapidly increase. Even in their ignorance these men have suspected the truth; in their knowledge the men of the future will know it to the full.

H. TRUCKELL.

NATURE AND MAN.

We bow down to the universal laws,
Which never had for man a special clause

Of cruelty or kindness, love or hate:
If toads and vultures are obscene to sight,
If tigers burn with beauty and with might,
Is it by favour or by wrath of Fate?

All substance lives and struggles evermore
Through countless shapes continually at war,
By countless interactions interknit:

If one is born a certain day on earth,
All times and forces tended to that birth,
Not all the world could change or hinder it.

James Thomson, "City of Dreadful Night."

Pages from Voltaire.

III.

Instructions of the Superior of the Capuchins at Ragusa to Friar Pediculuso on his setting out for the Holy Land.

(1768.)

(Concluded from p. 554.)

XVII. WE shall not say much to you about the New Testament; you will, of course, harmonize the two genealogies; it is the easiest thing possible, for the one has no resemblance at all to the other; it is obvious that there you have what is called a mystery. The good Calmet remarks ingenuously with regard to the two genealogies of Melchisedek: "It is noticeable that lies always betray themselves, some give this genealogy in one way, some in a quite different way." He admits, it will be said, that this striking divergence of the two genealogies is obvious proof of a putrid lie. Quite so, for Melchisedek, but not for Jesus Christ; for Melchisedek was a mere man. But Jesus was both man and God; therefore, it is obvious to the least intelligent that he had to have two genealogies.

XVIII. You will let us know how Mary and Joseph went with the young child into Egypt according to Matthew, and how, according to Luke, the family remained in Bethlehem. You will explain all the other contradictions that are necessary to salvation. It is possible to make some very excellent remarks on the changing of the water into wine at the marriage-feast at Cana; for the folk were already pretty far gone in liquor; indeed, John, the only one who mentions it, says that they were drunk, *et cum inebriate fuerint* reads the Vulgate version.

Be sure you read the *Questions of Zapata*,¹ a doctor of the University of Salamanca, on the massacre of the innocents by Herod; on the star of the three kings; on the fig-tree withered for not bearing figs although the time of figs was not yet,² as we see from the text. Those who cure excellent hams in Bayonne or Westphalia are astonished to find that the Devil was sent into the bodies of two thousand swine, and that they should have been drowned at sea. They say that if the swine had been given to them they could have made twenty thousand francs, that is, if they were in good condition. Do you agree with Father Lemoine who tells us that Jesus had his knife into the Devil, and that he did well to drown him since he had got the better of our Lord on the mountain?

XIX. When you have put these matters with all the clearness they merit, we recommend you emphatically, to vindicate St. Luke, who was the latest of the evangelists in point of time,³ being better informed than his fellow-writers; and as he had examined all the facts with care from the beginning, as he says,⁴ he must be regarded as a thoroughly respect-worthy writer. This respectable author tells us that when Mary was about to be confined, Cæsar Augustus, who apparently had his doubts, commanded so that prophecy might be fulfilled, that the people of all the world should be numbered, and Quirinus, governor of Syria, published this edict in Judea. Certain infidels, who have the misfortune to be learned, will tell you that there is not a word of truth in this; that Augustus never published so stupid an edict; that Quirinus was not governor of Syria until ten years after Mary's confinement, and that this Luke was in all

¹ *The Questions of Zapata* is one of Voltaire's best anti-theological pamphlets. Its date is 1767.

² Mark xi. 19.

³ Except John, who wrote his Gospel about A.D. 96, many years after the death of Luke.

⁴ Luke.

probability an idiot who, having heard it said that a census was taken under Augustus, and that Quirinus had been governor of Syria after Varus, confounded all the periods and all the events; that he talked like an ignorant provincial of what took place at the court, and that he is impudent enough to claim that he has more education than the others.

This is the way your infidel talks, but you will believe only those writers who are pious; and speak yourself always as a pious man. Read especially on this point the *Questions of Brother Zapata*; they will clear up this difficulty as they do all the others. There may be a passage here and there which will puzzle a Capuchin, but, with the grace of God, everything can be explained.

XX. Do not omit to advise us, if you come across in your travels any scoundrels who make light of transubstantiation, the ascension, the assumption, the annunciation, the inquisition, who are content to believe in one God, to serve him in spirit and in truth, and to be virtuous. You will easily recognize these monstrous creatures; they confine themselves to being good subjects, good sons, good husbands and good fathers; they give alms to those who are really poor, and never to the Capuchins. The Rev. Father Hayer, the Franciscan, ought to help us to exterminate them. There is no true religion except that which puts millions into the coffers of the Pope, and brings generous gifts to the Capuchins. I recommend myself to your prayers, and to those of the small creatures that inhabit your beard.

Englished by GEO. UNDERWOOD.

Correspondence.

HERBERT SPENCER AND THE UNKNOWABLE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—May I supplement my few remarks under the above heading in your issue of November 10, 1918?

Reference was made to Spencer's illustrations in *First Principles* of the meaning of the terms "explanation," "comprehension," "understanding," etc., as showing that they all involve merely the successive inclusion of special truths in more general truths, and to his conclusion that the deepest facts cannot be understood, either because the process, if unlimited, would require infinite time; or because, if limited, we finally reach the most general truth, which does not admit of inclusion in any other, and therefore does not admit of explanation.

Against this, it was contended by the writer that instead of regarding the most general truth as inexplicable, it should be regarded rather as the *end* of explanation; and that, beyond this point, explanation becomes not impossible, but simply meaningless.

Some such view as this seems to have been held by Spencer himself in later years, for in a letter to the late Alfred W. Benn, written in 1899, and published in *Dr. Duncan's Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer*, he wrote:—

The idea of Cause is itself an entirely relative idea; and, being so, is in the last resort inapplicable to the relation between phenomena and that which transcends phenomena, however needful it may seem to us to use the word in that relation.....But there is even a still deeper reply, namely, that the very idea of explanation is out of place. I have repeatedly, when dwelling on the matter and feeling at once the need for explanation and yet the conviction that no explanation is possible, ended in the thought that the very idea of explanation is irrelevant. For what is explanation?.....it implies in every case the interpretation of a more special truth in terms of a more general truth; and the making of explanation behind explanation ends in reducing all special truths to cases of the most general truth. But now, what happens if we carry out this definition of explanation into the relation between the Knowable and the Unknowable? The explanation of that relation would be to include it along with other relations in a more general relation; but where is there a more general relation than that between the Knowable and

the Unknowable? There is none. That is to say, the idea of explanation is excluded.

In conclusion, I should like to again point out, as I have previously explained, that the statement about Paine's "tracts against the Old Testament," to which "Mimnermus" refers as a specimen of "Catholic Truth" and imputes to the Cardinal's biographers, is not Dr. Barry's, but was made by Newman himself, in Part III. of the *Apologia*.

J. A. TOMKINS.

THE BIBLE.

SIR,—May I be allowed to enter a word of protest against Mr. G. O. Warren's extraordinary article on "The Bible." The views expressed by him are amazingly one-sided and unfair. To quote one sentence from his article, he says the Bible "is the book of rulers, monopolists, pompous prelates, and designing priests." Surely he must be aware that a very considerable portion of the Bible expresses the ideas of the "prophets," who stormed against the tyranny and wickedness of rulers and priests in their day; of early Christians who were accused by the authorities of "turning the world upside down"; of Jesus, the central character of the New Testament, and he was put to death by the priests for expressing views which they thought were dangerous and a menace to their own position and power. Surely the writer of the article on the Bible knows all this, and surely he ought also to know that such a foolish article as his can never serve the cause of freedom and Freethought.

HUGH M. BROOK.

Obituary.

Swansea Secularists have lost a steady supporter by the death of Mr. Francis Prior, of Westbury Street, Swansea. Mr. Prior's funeral was the first in Swansea that had been accompanied by a Secular Service, and Mr. J. T. Lloyd travelled from London for the purpose of officiating. Considerable interest was displayed locally by so unusual a proceeding, and Mr. Lloyd's address produced an impressive effect on those present. To strangers present it probably came as a revelation that the attitude of Freethinkers in the presence of death is what it is. Some good is always done by lifting the great functions of life from the control of the agents of superstition. Reports of the ceremony appeared in the local press.

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METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 8, C. E. Ratcliffe, "The Mission of Secularism."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, C. H. Kelf, "A Socialist Commonwealth—or Despotism."

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. J. H. Van Biene, "Lessons to be Unlearned."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, Joseph McCabe, "The Religion of Great Artists."

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

LEEDS SECULAR SOCIETY (19 Lowerhead Row, Youngman's Rooms): Members meet every Sunday at 6.30.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. J. T. Lloyd, "Dream Life and Real Life."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Marsden Miner's Hall, Imeary Street): Mr. C. Cohen, 3, "The Meaning and Morals of Materialism"; 6, Music; 6.30, "Christianity, the Army, and the Nation."

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