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Views and Opinions.

The War and the Churches.

Peace and war, we said last week, is everybody's business, and for that reason we return to the subject. And if it is everybody's business it is most obviously the business of all the Churches. They are out to exploit the Peace as they were out to exploit the War. They could not prevent the War coming, but they could and did make the most of it when it arrived. They could do nothing to mitigate the ferocity of the War while it was on, but they could fan the War fever in the spirit of the most unscrupulous War profiteer in the hopes of gaining something from it. They could do nothing in the direction of making a durable Peace, but they are alive to making profit out of the Peace as they tried to gain from the War. In this country they are inaugurating a campaign for money on the strength of the absurd plea that the only hope for the world lies in more Christianity. Drunkards talk of taking a hair of the dog that bit them as a means of overcoming the consequences of a debauch. Perhaps it is on that principle that the Churches are appealing for six millions in America, more millions in this country, the Salvation Army asking for half a million, and the Missionary societies asking for another half a million "to safeguard their widespread service of Christ and Humanity." Well, they may get what they are asking for. It is very hard to gauge the extent of human stupidity on a given occasion. And one must confess that there is a certain redeeming quality of humour about such an appeal from such a source.

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The Cult of the Prussian.

We are not denying that the Churches might have done a deal towards keeping the world on the right road. Any organization of human beings in the position of the Christian Churches could have done that had they been so inclined. Our complaint is that they have thrown their influence on the wrong side, and that even now when we are threatened with the possibility of more military adventures they are silent when they should be vocal on the side of justice and reason. Soon after the War broke out we said that the British public would have to make up its mind as to whether it wished to crush Prussianism or merely to annex it. Events since the Armistice have only served to emphasize the justice

of the comment. It is quite evident that we have our militarists in this country whose "spiritual home" is really Prussia, and who will be content only when there is a war in being or in prospect. Of course the war, when it comes, will not be of their making. It never is in any country. And if we find ourselves landed in a new and official war with Russia it will be no fault of ours, it will not be because we have interfered where we have no right to interfere, it will be because we have been forced into it. And if and when that occurs we shall find the Churches once more fanning the flame of national hatred in the name of Christian brotherhood, and invoking the God of war in the name of Christian love—to say nothing of the appeal for more money on account of the good work they are doing.

* * *

The Prevention of War.

We have already said that the only sure way of preventing war is by each nation agreeing to put it out of its power to start one. The present situation is proof of this. So long as a nation maintains a large fighting force, that nation is contributing its quota towards breaking the peace of the world. Such fighting forces can no more be maintained without encouraging the desire to use them than one can supply a boy with a knife without encouraging the desire to cut something. Given a state of the world where war was neither imminent nor probable, the military class would sink into insignificance and disrepute, and no class can be expected to favour a state of things that leads to its own extinction. This does not mean that the military class is worse than any other class, it is the normal consequences of the creation of a class interest. And the cure, to repeat what we have said, but which we cannot say too often, is not the limitation of armaments but their abolition. In this matter no country is in such a position to give a lead as is Great Britain. America would almost certainly follow suit, and France would be unlikely to hold back in spite of the military class being stronger there than here. Disarmament is secured in Germany under the Peace Treaty, and with the general settlement of the country one may expect the peaceful elements to gain the upper hand. Over a hundred years ago Paine said that if England, America, and France would agree to form a union, and disband their armies, they could guarantee the peace of the world. The proposition is as sound now as it was then. It remains to be seen whether the three leading nations of the world can develop the courage and the sense of justice sufficient to take a step in the right direction. Unfortunately, these seem to be just the two qualities that appear to have undergone a considerable weakening during the past five years.

* * *

The Aftermath of War.

Look at the wave of crime that is sweeping over the country! Robberies with violence, "hold-ups," murders, assaults on women, are reported on all hands, and as a result we have a shriek for the general use of the cat,

which was only abolished because it was found to brutalize rather than improve. What else could one expect? For five years it has been almost a crime to be a humanitarian. Almost alone among the papers of this country, the *Freethinker* never ceased to point out that the normal consequences of war was the brutalization of those engaged in it, and that we might expect when the War was over—just what we are getting. Timid friends warned us that we should offend people if we wrote in that way while the War was on—as though the *Freethinker* ever wrote fearing what people might think! And we knew our readers much better than those who gave us what they considered a friendly warning. The Churches were busy preaching to the people of the kindness and brotherhood that was being engendered by the War, while the Government suppressed plays (as in the case of two by Mr. Miles Malleson) for merely depicting soldiers that were overcome by the horror and the inhumanity of it all. And now what is the position? Magistrates and judges are commenting on the evil passions that have been excited by the War. They are telling us that the low estimate that men have been taught to place upon life, the habits of violence encouraged, have all cultivated a spirit of lawlessness and brutality. The Chief Commissioner of Police also says that all wars have had the same effect; that “men have been accustomed to take life lightly, and during war are encouraged to do it. It cannot be expected that every individual will come back to the normal state at once.” That is precisely our own message; but if those responsible had kept that lesson in front of the people, it would have been better for the country. And above all others, it was the duty of the Churches to have taught the lesson. Had that lesson been taught, we should be better able than we are to withstand the present encroachments of militarism.

* * *

The Moral of Five Years.

One other point must be noted. Under cover of the war feeling—of which it is at the same time a product—there is an attempt to keep in operation a war against ideas. Both here and in other countries that were in the War, the mere holding of certain ideas is being denounced as a crime. The censorship is at work in all directions; newspapers are being held up, letters are opened; and the ease with which this is being done, the slight protest that is raised, is evidence of the demoralization caused in the public sense of justice by the War. During the War it was easy to do these things on the ground of public necessity, and as a consequence of the curious teaching that, once a war was on, it was the duty of all to promote and justify it by every means in their power. And now that the War is over, the spirit remains in virtue of which these things were done. As the War has tended to demoralize individuals with regard to offences against the person, so has it demoralized the sense of right and wrong in relation to citizenship. And the Labour Parties of this country seem so intent upon gaining political advantages that they remain more or less blind to the fact that no mere political advantage is worth much unless accompanied by a sense of freedom, of justice, and of social equality. It is for that reason that we are so insistent upon this aspect of the matter. We have had enough of the cost of war and of the deaths due to war. In truth, these are the lesser evils of war. The greater ones have to do with the mental and moral deterioration that are the inevitable accompaniments of all wars. And until people realize these things, until war becomes, not merely a criminal act on the part of the loser, but *prima facie* a criminal act in itself, the peace of the world will never rest upon a secure foundation.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Materialism and Christian Principles.

LORD HENRY BENTINCK, M.P., contributed an article to the *Star* of January 20 in which he vehemently condemns Materialism as a shallow and ruinous philosophy, and belauds what he calls Christian principles as the only hope of the world. He denounces without mercy “all our parrot cries,” all our “isms,” and all our Secular “panaceas” as productive of no good, and fertile sources of evil. Curiously enough, his lordship has a parrot cry, or ism, of his own, which he repeats again and again, but of which he supplies no definition; namely, the assertion that the only hope of solving life’s puzzling problems is “to throw ourselves upon Christian principles,” or to become “embued with the Christian spirit.” We gladly acknowledge, at the outset, that with the general ethical tone of the article we are in complete accord. It is highly pleasing to learn that Lord Bentinck is an enthusiastic social reformer, and a fervent advocate of the rights of native races. Though a member of the Unionist Party, he has never been a blind partizan. In the article under consideration, however, he falls into the common error of indulging in extremely loose and vague phraseology. He states that at the beginning of the nineteenth century we relied entirely, in the industrial movement, “on material considerations.” To us it is utterly immaterial whether that charge is true or not; but if it is, it must be borne in mind that a tremendous wave of evangelical revival had just swept over the land. John Wesley and George Whitefield had passed away; but the work initiated by them was bearing abundant fruit during the first half of the nineteenth century. England had never been so fully dominated by the Christian religion as it was during that period. Its philosophers, landlords, and millowners, who are said to have “all combined in telling people that the more they concentrated their minds on the acquisition and production of wealth, the more surely the millennium would come,” were professing Christians. Among them there was probably not one Materialist. The English commercial system was of a distinctively Christian origin. Coleridge’s lines, quoted by Lord Bentinck, are, doubtless, very accurate:—

Down the river there plied,
With wind and tide,
A pig with celerity;
And the Devil looked wise as he saw how the while
It cut its own throat. “There,” quoth he with a smile,
“Goes England’s commercial prosperity”;

but it must not be forgotten that England’s commercial prosperity or adversity is a Christian product; or, at least, a product wrought by Christian people.

The title of Lord Bentinck’s article is “Materialism and Labour”; but while we heartily admire his friendly attitude to Labour, we are bound to expose his total misconception of Materialism, which has no direct association whatever with any social question. Materialism is a theory of the Universe, the main principles of which, according to Hugh Elliot, are the uniformity of law, the denial of teleology, and of “any form of existence other than those envisaged by physics and chemistry.” It is perfectly true that the philosophers of the early part of last century taught that self-interest was the prime motive in human conduct, and that most of the economists of that age adopted that fallacy as the foundation of their systems; but neither those philosophers nor economists were scientific Materialists. Lord Bentinck is doubtless right when he says that “the social evils of our day—the slums, the rickety children, the unemployment, the social unhappiness, industrial unrest

—are traceable to the philosophy of that time"; but he is fundamentally mistaken in characterizing that philosophy as Materialism. As a matter of fact, Materialism cannot serve as the basis of any false economic teaching. In the words of Hugh Eliot, as Materialists—

We shall study problems of conduct and of thought from the point of view of physico-chemical mechanism, and shall not improbably reach conclusions of great importance, that we never could have reached without such general outlook. In morals and politics we shall understand the motives of mankind, which to others must remain for ever sealed. Infinite capacity of doing good necessarily follows, if we happen to be philanthropically minded. Materialism, in short, acts as a general guide and starting-point for investigation, which must furnish the possessor with unusual powers, whether in research or in action (*Modern Science and Materialism*, pp. 171-2).

Unfortunately, Lord Bentinck seems to revel in what Mr. Winston Churchill calls "terminological inexactitudes." Take the following sample:—

The more strictly we adhere to Christian principles in our social and national spheres, the more surely shall we live at peace, and secure the welfare and content of peoples; the more we rely upon Materialism and force the more sure are we to have war and rumours of war at home and abroad.

His lordship ignores definitions. He does not take the trouble to inform us what he means by Christian principles. It may be that his conception of Christianity is as erroneous as his conception of Materialism; but of the former he does not furnish us with the remotest hint. We have no hesitation whatever in affirming that there are no Christian principles. Christian dogmas there are in great abundance, though even these are original only in form; but of Christian principles there are none at all. Lord Bentinck fails to name them because they do not exist. There are numerous moral precepts in the New Testament, it is true; but they were all borrowed from older religions. Some of them are of such a nature that even Lord Bentinck cannot honestly adhere to them either in theory or in practice. In the article under review he writes sympathetically of Labour. He says:—

The more we realize that humanity has got to be put before the mere consideration of wealth, and that the worker has got to be treated, not as a subordinate but as a partner, the more we enlist by sympathetic means his co-operation and goodwill, the more sure are we that our national prosperity will be maintained.

Compare that extract with Paul's words in Ephesians vi. 5: "Slaves, be obedient unto them that according to the flesh are your masters, with fear and trembling." The Gospel Jesus says: "Blessed are ye poor"; "Ye have the poor always with you"; "Woe unto you that are rich." In all ages poverty has been treated by the Church as a blessed necessity, and the relief of it as one of the chief means of grace to the rich. The Church has never made a single attempt to abolish the conditions which inevitably produce poverty. All applicants for confirmation in the Anglican Church solemnly promise to submit themselves to all existing authorities, to order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters, and to do their duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call them. Poverty is thus of Divine appointment, and alms-giving is clothed with dignity and distinction. Consequently the present social and industrial unrest, of which his lordship approves, is one of the symptoms of original sin, and if the Churches were but loyal to their Lord and accepted creed, they would condemn it in the most scathing terms. It is a deliberate violation of one of the chief Commandments in the Sermon on the Mount—"Resist not evil." The workers in all parts of Chris-

tendom are setting at least one Christian rule at defiance by positively refusing to be contented with the state of life to which God has called them. "Love thy neighbour as thyself" is a most ancient religious principle, and the Gospel Jesus gives it a prominent place in his teaching. Conformity to this saying would certainly wipe out completely, and for ever, the very possibility of poverty and class distinctions, as well as every form and degree of injustice and oppression; but why call it a Christian principle? Was it not embodied in both Buddhism and Confucianism some five hundred years before our era began? The important point is that in those admirable old philosophies the supernatural was practically ignored. Confucianism has retained its primitive simplicity and beauty to this day, and, on the whole, the Chinese character is highly creditable to the philosophy on which it has been nourished.

We conclude, therefore, that Materialism is an interpretation of the universe generally, and of human nature and its life in particular, which is calculated to be of great service in the solution of all the problems by which we are confronted to-day. All our social evils have had purely natural causes, and can be eradicated by equally natural means. Of course, Lord Bentinck forcibly denies this statement; but, surely, he must admit that Christianity, after a trial of two thousand years, has not succeeded in putting an end to those evils. Do they not still stare us in the face at every turn? What we say is that Secularism, which is a philosophy of life based on Materialism, should be given a fair chance to justify itself. We are convinced that it is capable of doing for the whole world what Buddhism did for India during the short period of its supremacy there, and much more than Confucianism has done for China; or, in other words, that humanity, uninterfered with and untyrannized over by any system of supernaturalism, has within itself the capacity to work out its own salvation.

J. T. LLOYD.

Biblical Humour.

Le rire, c'est le propre de l'homme.—*Francois Rabelais.*

THE Rev. H. Harwood, speaking at Stationers' Hall, London, declared that "humour was an attribute of God," and added that "humour is found in the Bible." This may well appear a startling statement, and few will be surprised that the astute journalists made use of it.

It is, however, a matter of wonder how the Rev. H. Harwood is able to maintain, after a perusal of the Bible, that his Deity is entitled to the credit of humour. The pious opinion really seems in the nature of an unmerited compliment, unsupported by any evidence. The grim exponents of the religion of the "Man of Sorrows" so seldom smile, the study of "God's Word" having, apparently, a depressing effect upon them. So much is this the case that one can tell some Christians by their facial expression. Nay, more; the tell-tale features advertise frequently how far the victim is suffering from the disease of religiosity. From the dainty droop of the mouth which distinguishes the Roman Catholic and the High Churchman to the resemblance of a tired funeral horse exhibited by the flat-chested warriors of the Church and Salvation Armies, one might classify them with some accuracy.

So many Christians are cankered through with austerity. Generation after generation has been stifled under a religious system which is sunless, joyless, and graceless. Some of the results are to be seen in the dull, dismal, dreary, rectangular churches, chapels, and

tin-tabernacles. The clergy themselves are, usually, so devoid of joviality that any undertaker is a Merry Andrew in comparison. The plain, blunt truth is that clergy and congregations alike have very little to be jolly about. Their Gospel that life for the majority of the human race is but the ante-chamber to a place of distinct unpleasantness is an arraignment, not merely of the Christian Deity, but of human nature itself. And laymen sometimes "out-Herod Herod," and go further than the clergy in their fanaticism. Like the story of the old lady who was having a heated argument with her minister. Driven to desperation, the parson said: "My good woman, if what you say is true, only you and your husband will be saved from eternal damnation." "Very like," was the unexpected reply; "only I'm none so sure about my John."

Much unmerited suffering might have been avoided if the theologians had possessed the saving grace of humour, and had been able to see a joke without a surgical operation. It is entirely owing to the mental shortcomings and density of these stolid Oriental gentlemen that the Christian religion is a tiresome nightmare rather than a pleasant dream. What is worse is that the European theologians followed the lead of these unhappy Orientals, and shut the sunlight out of the Christian religion. We all know the fearful results. Are they not written in the joyless hymnologies of the Churches, and in the sad countenances of the folk who sing these melancholy refrains.

The Rev. H. Harwood contends that there is humour in the Bible. Learned men, who find out everything in time, have discovered two alleged jokes in all its hundreds of dreary pages. Mark Twain has pointed out that the phrase "the street which is called straight" is ironic; for, he added, the thoroughfare in question is "straighter than a corkscrew, but not so straight as a rainbow." Lord Byron, a gallant admirer of female beauty, found a sarcastic reference to a lady's nose as resembling "the tower which looketh unto Damascus." According to a distinguished French writer, there is a joke in Genesis, where the Almighty said, upon expelling Adam and Eve from Eden: "Behold, the man is become as one of us." But such delicate irony is beyond the reach of the average Britisher, who prefers something simple, such as shouting: "Hullo Trilby!" after a lady cyclist with large feet.

It will be seen that no man could set up as a humourist if he had no other source of fun than the Bible. To class the Holy Scriptures as a work of humour is to draw the long bow. It is a wonder-book of riotous, exuberant, Oriental imagination. If people would only read the volume instead of chattering about it, much misconception and trouble would be removed. The Bible is no more sober history than the *Arabian Nights* or the *Adventures of Mother Shipton*. When Christians find this out, they will cease to be Christians. That they have been so long doing so is sufficient to make their deity laugh until he holds his two sides, which are six; and his three heads, which are one, ache from the explosion of mirth.

MIMNERMUS.

THE ATHEIST'S TOMB.

David Hare was an old Scotsman and Atheist to whom the clergy of Calcutta refused Christian burial. He had died of nursing an old pupil through cholera. So his own boys (Hindus) carried his dead body, and buried it in a swamp, and made the grave a place of pilgrimage. That place has now become College Square, the educational centre, and his school is now within the University. And to this day, Calcutta students make pilgrimage to the tomb.—*Margaret E. Noble's "Notes of Some Wanderings with the Swami Vivekananda"* (Calcutta, 1913); pp. 45, 46.

Old Fogies.

Not only can conservatism not prevent the advent of the ultimate truth, but it actually helps it on. To fight against progress is but to burnish its armour and sharpen its sword. To attempt to answer a man who thinks he is telling the truth is but to force him to re-examine his premises and purge him of his errors. Old fogies are as necessary to the triumph of truth as Freethinkers.

We are apt to be impatient with hard-shell Tories, but we should recognize that nothing is better for the establishment of truth than that someone should stoutly defend error. One such General Election as our last, wherein political trickery was rampant and lying was epidemic, was as effective for the downfall of a wicked Government as many preaching from the housetops a gospel of purity.

Truth cannot prevail until it is demonstrated, and so your pompous priest, your puritanical Presbyterian, your boodle politician, and your greedy monopolist are all useful, because they stand in the highway of inquiry and compel us to show wherein they are wrong. When we have shown this, they will disappear; but should they be driven away by force, before the world knows them as they are, they would come back when the smoke of battle had cleared away, as was the case after the French Revolution; as was the case when the Americans rebelled against us, turning out one set of rulers only to let in another set, quite as bad; as was the case when they also put an end to one form of slavery in one part of America and introduced another form all over the country.

Nothing is ever settled by being fought out; it must be thought out. To believe an error and try to live by it is a sure way to discover that it is an error, and so to find a truth. Priests, politicians, and monopolists are necessarily bad, but in so far as they try to live out their lives on a basis of falsehood, we come at the truth.

The Pope claims to be the Vicar of God. If he would only go on acting out this preposterous claim, as he used to do when he issued bulls against comets, we should soon see the last of him. The Presbyterian pretends to believe in a fiery hell and the damnation of infants. If he would only preach these lies, Presbyterianism would soon vanish. The pious working man believes that God will answer his prayers. If he would only give up combining with his mates in a Trade Union and depend entirely on God to raise his wages, we should soon see the end of that kind of faith. The politician claims that he has a right to tax us by force. If he would only tax us to the bare living line, we should soon have him working for his own living. The Protectionist believes that a tax on imports benefits the country. If he would only be consistent, and benefit the country more by a complete blockade against *all* foreign goods, we should all be free-traders before long.

The gravest fault of religious and political conservatives is that they do not, and will not, live up to what they profess to believe; for if they only did, truth would come sailing in on the wings of the wind.

The trimmers, too, have their place and do their work as well as the old fogies, because their trimming is a concession to truth. Nicodemus is, as things go, a necessary part of the play. I do not like old fogies, or trimmers, but in watching the ways of the world and the manner in which error is ever overcome by truth, I perceive that there always will be old fogies and discreet cowards, as well as downright and uncompromising Freethinkers. The Freethinker is the only one who gets poverty, prison, or death, for his pains, but he is

also the only one who thoroughly enjoys himself. All, however, seem to be necessary.

And so, too, regarding the apparent misfortune of faction fights and quarrelling on the battlefield. Here we have, among those who are trying to better social conditions, co-operators, trade unionists, single-taxers, collectivists, State Socialists, Anarchist Communists, etc., and each is, to a greater or less degree, quarrelling with all the others. It seems to be a great misfortune, but it really is not. At any rate, it is absolutely unavoidable during a formative period like the present. When an engineer wishes to burnish certain small parts of a machine, he places them in a revolving cylinder where they rub against each other with a grinding noise, not unlike the din often raised in a meeting of reformers, and in a few hours they will be smooth, shining, and worth something. The moral is obvious.

The conclusion of all this is that we, who are in the front rank of progress, should not be disheartened. There will come dark hours and blue days, no doubt, when Hope droops her head and Fear and Care invade us. But our courage must not fail and good cheer must not be dismissed. When we look at the gross ignorance and gaunt poverty of the masses, and, worse still, at their contentment; when we see them hanging upon the lips of the priests and being carried like lambs in the arms of the politicians; when we see them making common cause with the monopolists against their prophets and against themselves, it almost overcomes us, as with a sickness. But all things *do* work together for good, and sooner or later the priest will find his pews empty, the politician will become an honest worker, and the monopolist will find himself in possession of nothing but some worthless bits of paper as useless and curious as the racks and thumb screws that now remind us of a race of men happily extinct.

G. O. WARREN.

Spiritualism.

I.

PROFESSOR ZOLLNER AND SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE.

Now that Spiritualism is again being discussed seriously in this country, and well-known writers and lecturers are telling us about a new revelation which has been granted to a distracted world, it is well for every man and woman to consider calmly what sort of attitude he or she ought to adopt with regard to it. It is, of course, quite useless to attempt to get any reliable information from at least two classes of people: firstly, the old ladies of Bayswater, whose faith in the "dear spirits" is as sublime as it is ridiculous; and, secondly, from that group of elderly writers on popular science who, whilst confessing that their knowledge of the subject is of the flimsiest, nevertheless lead us to believe that supernormal phenomena of this character rarely, if ever, take place at all. Another mistake that people are too apt to make is to follow the current custom amongst us of thinking that, because a man is a King's Counsel and knows a great deal of law, or because an author may be a brilliant writer of detective stories, therefore his opinion about Spiritualism is worth consideration. I remember one popular novelist, whose utterances about the life beyond are now received with reverence by all seasoned Spiritualists, who makes statements of such a remarkable character that I propose to examine just one for the sake of illustration, so that my readers can see on what sort of evidence he himself relies. I refer to that eminent writer of fiction, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who, in a letter to the *Times* of

August 2, 1919, spoke of the work of the *Magic Circle*, and hinted at the belief that their investigations could have little weight besides such scientific tests as those described by a Dr. Zollner, of Leipzig. I cannot believe that Sir Arthur knows very much about Professor Zollner and his experiments, or he would not have brought him forward as an authority, as the case in point is a very unfortunate one to produce—how unfortunate, my readers will judge if they have the patience to bear with me a little further.

Now, Professor Zollner was formerly a Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Leipzig, and his "scientific" experiments took place in that city with a person calling himself Dr. Henry Slade, reported to be a powerful medium, and very successful in procuring messages from the spirits. Some of Zollner's experiments were conducted in the presence of Professors Weber, Scheibner, Wundt, and G. T. Fechner, also a Professor of Physics at Leipzig. The *seances* began in 1877, and Zollner was soon quite convinced of the genuine character of Slade's claims, later publishing his results in a volume which has been translated into English under the title of *Transcendental Physics* (2nd ed., 1882). For those who wish to read a brief sketch of Slade's previous record, I would recommend Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism*, ii., 87 ff, where they will find a short account of his activities prior to 1877, when the Zollner sittings commenced. Here it must suffice to state that in 1876 he was prosecuted for fraud during a slate-writing *seance*, a slate having been discovered with the "spirit message" all ready prepared. Slade, however, left England, and arrived at Leipzig on November 15, 1877. The *seances* soon began, and included such wonders as messages on previously cleaned slates, knots on endless cords, the passage of matter through matter, etc. It was all very successful. The worthy Professor, childlike and trustful in character, expected everybody to be as honest and frank as he was himself. He therefore watched Slade closely only during the first three or four sittings, afterwards allowing him to do as he liked, and meekly submitting to all the conditions imposed by the spirit operators. Bent on proving a four-dimensional space, all his energies were directed to that one object; and it is a noteworthy fact that he was at that time suffering from an incipient mental disturbance, his friends noticing at the period that the sittings took place that he was somewhat abnormal. His supporters during the *seances* were even more untrustworthy witnesses. Professor Fechner's eyesight was extremely bad, suffering as he was from cataract, whilst Scheibner knew nothing of trickery, and never went to see conjuring performances because he was so shortsighted that even if he went he would not have been able to see anything at all! Weber also knew nothing of trickery, and held the curious opinion that, although Fechner was suffering from cataract, he was one of the best observers in the world. So much for the scientific experiments whose results are now paraded by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for our approval.

Fortunately, Slade's mediumship did not cease with the Zollner *seances*. In 1885 he had sittings with members of the Seybert Commission in Philadelphia, which body had been then appointed to investigate spiritualistic phenomena. Their results and decisions were of a different character from Zollner's, although it is difficult to say whether it was due in their case to the fact that they had some small acquaintance with trick methods, and were not half blind, or suffering from cataract and incipient mental disease. The fact remains that they had a series of sittings with Henry Slade, Medium, and were rewarded by being permitted to see the "spirits" at work on many occasions. The principal

test consisted in requesting the departed to write messages upon the surfaces of freshly-cleaned slates. "Every step in the process we have distinctly seen," they say, and at the last *seance* noticed a couple of slates on the floor resting against the leg of a small table behind the medium. No messages were received during the sitting upon these slates, as Slade had noticed that they had been observed by one of the sitters, but when the *seance* was over, a member of the Commission managed to displace one of the slates, whereupon the previously-prepared message was revealed!

But that is not all; Slade made at least two confessions as to the *modus operandi* of his performances. One was to John W. Truesdell, to whom he explained how he produced his effects, and the other to a Mr. Furness, who, on a certain occasion, whilst passing along Shawmut Avenue, Boston, saw Slade at a window and went in to talk to him. Settling himself in a chair, Mr. Furness remarked: "Well, and how are the old Spirits coming on?" To which Slade laughingly replied: "Oh, pshaw! you never believed in them, did you?" This was the medium, whose wonderful tests to half-blind old men with no knowledge of trickery are now being held up to us¹ by Sir A. C. Doyle as scientific experiments, after which any further investigations by experts skilled in deceptive contrivances would be superfluous.

E. J. D.

Cyrano the Freethinker.

A FEW weeks ago it was our pleasure, shared by our readers we hope, to write on Cyrano de Bergerac. We know that this figure in history actually lived. There was not a little of Don Quixote in his nature, and if Rostand has somewhat exaggerated his hero, we can still say: "This was a man." It is a very necessary function that the *Freethinker* performs in refuting current idiocy emanating from black-coated shepherds. These skirmishes on the way to our goal cannot be avoided, but it is the intention of this article to indicate our aim. Freethinkers were born or made for something better than proving that the Rev. Henry Fatpurse has the best house in the village—yet professing to follow his master who was homeless. We may laugh at celibate priests relieving their chaste minds on the subject of marriage and the population question—or the bewildered divine who wants to know if tithes will increase if there is a rise in the price of corn. These and similar matters can be disposed of with Triboulet's wooden sword or bladder. But it does not seem to us that the disposal of these constitutes the true Freethinker's function. We think nobly of the Freethinker, and Cyrano was a dangerous Freethinker. For clarity and downright definition of our attitude we think nobly of a dangerous Freethinker.

Christian and capitalistic values would seek to enslave the world. The calf of gold is God for both; we despise the two. Here is materialism crystallized—and the charge of *physical* materialism brought against us does not rise to the level of an answer. In an ethical sense the doom of Christianity has sounded. Some millions of dead are now a protest and a monument that Christianity is worthless, and that it cannot even keep the peace with its own brethren-in-Christ. We think that this condemnation can be safely placed with such universal knowledge that rain falls from the clouds,

¹ And also apparently by *Light*. See issue for October 11, 1919, and of J. C. F. Grumbine, *Beckoning Hands from the Near Beyond* (Lond., 1917), p. 47. Sir Arthur himself, in his latest book, *The Vital Message*, still relies on Zollner as "one of the greatest intellects who have examined and endorsed the facts!"

that the sea is salt, and that fish cannot swim on dry land.

Without prejudice, Christian or anti-Christian, let us look at man. He has been on the earth a long time, and has had to scratch, dig, delve, and fight before his brief candle went out. Of all animals he is least fitted to live on the earth. A dog will cross the road, just miss being run over, wag its tail, steal a piece of beef, eat it, and lie down to sleep, not caring where the next meal comes from. In other forms of life we also observe this terrific indifference—this sense of detachment from the fear of consequences. In most cases the things we possess possess us. The most clever move of Christianity was made when it seized on the idea of immortality. It made man's view prospective, but, carried to its logical end, it would be better to be asleep than awake, and better to be dead than asleep. That it was a "sick" value of life no one will deny who does not draw revenue from ignorance. Christianity has not fed the poor. It has fostered slavery of body and mind, and in the fifth act of humanity, in company with its arch enemy of life, it has swamped the stage with blood, and with cries of agony more piercing than any heard on a Greek stage. In other words, our negative attitude towards it was superfluous. We had no need to pull the bolt—it has hanged itself, and we should not even condescend to say that "we told you so."

There are many signs abroad that we are on the threshold of a renaissance. Slaves everywhere are kicking; Christianity is impotent; young men everywhere are surfeited with the colossal stupidity of the aged and decrepit, whose action in the War was one of well-concealed self-preservation. As one swallow does not make a summer, so one newspaper article does not make a new world. But one swallow in spring tells us that summer is not far off. We would ask our readers to turn to the *Times Literary Supplement* (Jan. 1) and read "An Aristocracy of Service." There are even traces of common sense in it. As there is a well-known conspiracy in the press to prevent people from thinking, this phenomenon is all the more wonderful. With this and many more indications that a new order of things is imminent, we turn to our own house. And it is here that we encounter the figure of Cyrano.

He fears nothing; he desires little more than nothing. He throws his month's pay on the stage; he makes his dinner off a glass of water, a grape, and half a macaroon. He refuses to be a "kept" poet. He discourses on his ugliness, and suggests some twenty similes to a young blood that he might have used instead of saying that Cyrano's nose is a trifle large. He fights a hundred ruffians hired by De Guiche to kill a rhymster friend of his. He makes a compact with a rather dull-witted Baron for the two to win Roxane for his less gifted friend. He prevents De Guiche from interfering with the marriage of Roxane and the Baron. He reads Descartes on the battlefield. When he dies, struck down by a felon's hand, he says he will see his friends, Galileo and Socrates.

With Spinoza, he has divested himself of Riches, Fame, and Pleasures of Sense. He has become an ideal Freethinker. If you say, my readers, that this ideal is too high, its practice is too hard, you are only fit to be a Roman Catholic. As you know, latitude is extensive in this faith; ignorance will give you a *carte blanche*; and when you die, you will go to see your friends the Popes—who live in the Chamber of Horror of History.

There is enough scope to write volumes on Fear and Desire; for the present, our ideal Freethinker is Cyrano. His life is one of fearing nothing, and desiring very little. We are glad you reminded us—Yes, he was a Dangerous Freethinker.

WILLIAM REPTON.

Acid Drops.

The Salvation Army is asking this year for half a million of money, and the *Daily News* and the *Star* devote special articles pointing out the claims of the Army on the public. In addition, the *News* publishes an article by Mr. John Oxenham, praising the Army and its understanding of the poor. We should much like to know whether Mr. Oxenham is writing from his own experience, or from information supplied by the Army itself? The Army, we know, is an adept at this sort of thing. First of all, it supplies a journalist with some very fancy stories of what it does and how it does it, then it copies its own stories, as printed in some newspaper, as independent testimony to its work. There are few organizations can beat the Army at manufacturing this kind of evidence. Mr. Oxenham says that the people pass the doors of the Churches, but go into the Salvation Army meeting-place. We would advise Mr. Oxenham to go himself to some of these religious meeting-places and see if they are any better off than the Churches.

But the *News* and the *Star* ought to know better. They cannot have forgotten the exposure of the Army a few years back. Nor can they be altogether ignorant of the truth about the Army. They should inform their readers that the Army is a huge trading and commercial concern, that its help is sold to the poor, and that the food and shelter sold by such institutions as the Rowton Houses, and at such prices as yield a profit, gives much better value for money than do the Salvation Army shelters. They should tell their readers that the Army gets a commission on its emigration business, that it pays the poor social refuse that is driven to its workshops a wage such as no firm would dare offer them. It is surprising to find the *Daily News* railing at the corruption of the trusts and the Government trading, and yet remaining silent concerning the commercial transactions of the Salvation Army. At least, it would be surprising if one did not understand the British press so well.

The Bishop of Chelmsford says that "after sixteen centuries only five per cent. of the population of London were communicants of the Church of England. Leaving out women and children, it was questionable if one per cent. were communicants." This is how the State Religion affects the seven million population of London.

Presumably, the Vicar of Beddington believes that there are many mansions in heaven, but he is appealing to his parishioners for help in finding an earthly house for his curate. Apartments will not be objected to.

Carshalton Christians are incensed at the use of incense in a local church, and are petitioning the Bishop of Southwark, who is petitioning the Throne of Grace in the matter.

In the new Congregational Hymn Book the famous jingle, "There's a friend for little children, Up above the bright blue sky," is conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps a lively recollection of the air-raids has something to do with the omission of the hymn.

The Glasgow *Sunday Mail* offers an explanation of the Aberdeen ghost that was so shy when people went to interview it. The shocks experienced occurred in connection with a subsidence of one side of the house which resulted in several of the floor boards being bent out of position, that afterwards sprang back into their places. This gave the jolt to which reference was made by some of the people living in the house, which credulity and ignorance transformed into a supernatural occurrence. The rest appears to have been due to the exaggerations that always gather round these stories. The whole is a sad lesson as to the mass of crude superstition that is afloat, which certain people are always ready to exploit.

The British and Foreign Bible Society is spending £64,000 a year on bookbinding. This is excellent—for the bookbinders. Do they build houses with the books when they are bound?

Out of thirty-two students at St. John's Diocesan Roman Catholic Seminary, Womersley, conscripted during the War, eleven decided to throw up the priesthood. They were ready to renounce the world before they knew it, and they owed their salvation to the State and not to priestcraft.

According to a newspaper paragraph, Archdeacon Holmes "is not at all pessimistic about the youth of the country." Evidently the choir-boys at his church are not on strike.

Bishop Welldon says that the same need that has driven the political parties to coalition will drive the Churches into a federation. We do not doubt it; and it will be for the same reason—the desire to perpetuate themselves under any condition so long as they are perpetuated. The Bishop might have followed up the analogy by pointing out that coalitions are never long-lived. The majority of folk have a sneaking regard for principles, and a coalition is generally destitute of these. Nothing, says Bishop Welldon, will so impress the nation as an example of Christian unity. We agree. The world would certainly be surprised to see the various sects of Christians cease fighting between themselves, and it is a commentary upon the value of Christianity that this should be so. Christians unite to fight, but never for much else. The bond between Christians is far more often hatred of someone else than it is love for each other.

The Rev. A. M. Rowland, M.A., in his Presidential Address to the Manchester Board of Ministers, published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of January 21, admits with sorrow that the British people have lost their belief in the uniqueness of Christianity, and that the pulpit no longer possesses any authority whatever. He complains that the sense of the enormity of sin and of the need of salvation is a thing of the past. In other words, the people of Great Britain are slowly but surely becoming, in practice if not in theory, thoroughgoing Secularists.

Mr. Rowland, like Dr. Horton, is a Congregationalist, and both testify that the atmosphere, not of the world only, but even of their own sect, is full of elements antithetical to the Christian faith. Mr. Rowland, however, is honest enough to confess that "the lack of magnetic contact of elbow with elbow, of the unbroken line of listening faces in the pews, means a lack of oxygen in the pulpit."

The *Morning Post* of January 24 is very indiscreet. Speaking of Russia, it says that there is only one salvation for Russia, and that is the restoration of the Monarchy and the Church. Well, kingcraft and priestcraft have always gone together, and it is likely that they will go together. One will not linger long behind the other. The primitive king was the primitive priest, the semi-religious character has always hung around the throne, and will do so to the end. Still, it was very indiscreet of the *Morning Post* to let the cat out of the bag in that way.

What a chance some of the ghost-hunters have missed! In an old manor-house the owner recently found an old manuscript which put him on the track of a buried treasure. He pulled up the floor of a cupboard, and discovered about ten thousand old spade guineas, with some rare old books. They had been lying hidden since 1745. Now, why didn't some of the spirits find these long ago? But that is quite in order. These spirits never seem to tell us anything that is useful, or anything that one cannot find out just as well without their assistance. For all the use that they make of immortality, it hardly seems worth the trouble of achieving.

The startling salaries paid to school teachers in Church schools has been receiving attention. The pay of headmasters are as low as £90, and assistants as low as £40.

A large proportion of assistants receive under £135. Yet the Church, which considers the above salaries as suitable for brain work, pays the Bench of Bishops (forty) over £180,000 annually.

Bardon Park Congregational Church, Leicestershire, has only had four pastors in 152 years, the last one dying recently at the age of ninety-two. This is a sidelight on the question of the "starving" clergy.

In a sermon on "The Type of Womanhood," published in the *Daily Mail*, it is stated that Eve is the universal type, but the Virgin Mary ought to be so regarded. It is rather unfortunate that both these Christian types of womanhood had such quaint ideas of marriage.

"Murder in Heaven" is the *Herald's* heading to the report of a case in which a woman threatened to murder her husband if she caught him there. We should not be surprised if murder did occur in heaven. Judging from tradition, it must be a deadly dull kind of a place; and there is nothing more demoralizing, or more likely to get on the nerves of the angels, than that. Besides, again judging from reports, there must be a pretty fair stock of murderers in heaven. Most of them are religious while on earth, and as, before they are hung, there is a chaplain told off for their benefit, they usually depart this life in the full confidence of being all right in the next world. And if the story of the thieves on the cross means anything, they are quite justified in their belief.

There are nine churches in the City of Glasgow for which the City itself is responsible. The ministers of these churches have applied for an increase of salary, and the Town Council rejected the application. It appears that last year there was a deficit of £3,481 on the nine churches, and one of the Councillors gave notice that he would move that Parliament be asked to sanction "the suppression of certain of the Parish City Churches belonging to the Corporation." The matter will come up for discussion at a subsequent meeting of the Council. We suggest that one of them might be let to the local Secular Society as a meeting-place. That would relieve the City of an expense, and would add to its revenues.

The Mayor of Woolwich addressed the children at the William Street Sunday-school on Sunday, January 11. We have no doubt that he felt it incumbent upon him to be pleasant and agreeable, but there was no need for him to be both stupid and misleading. For he took occasion to talk to the children on the Foreign Missionary Movement, and to congratulate them on the money they had contributed to it. He said the "money the children collected was to be used in sending missionaries to all parts of the world to teach nations to be kind, and not be selfish; to think of others, not to try to devote their lives only to earning money and getting rich and powerful." Now, if the Mayor had explained the interests in many business concerns that missionaries have in various parts of the world, that one consequence of our truly British desire to teach the natives not to be selfish was the native was forced to labour for the white Christian under conditions that were very little removed from slavery, that his land was taken from him, that he was infected with European vices and new diseases, and dosed with European drink, he would have given the children some information worth hearing. Taking the coppers from children for such a purpose is a miserable sort of a game.

The Secularists in Maesteg, South Wales, have been experiencing trouble over an attempt to hire the town hall for meetings. The hall is let for both religious and labour meetings, but the Council recently refused to permit the Secularists to use it. And there is a labour majority on the Council. One would have hoped for better things from them. The town hall belongs as much to the Freethinkers as the Christians in the town, the labour members have been elected to do their duty to the community and not to hold up the churches; one would have wished for a better sense

of justice than their conduct implies. The lesson of the situation is that in the last resort Freethinkers must depend upon themselves. They will never get justice from Christians, no matter to what political camp they belong, so long as they are not strong enough to demand it. And we suggest to the Freethinkers in the Labour movement in Maesteg and neighbourhood that if they make their presence felt more decidedly, and stand up for their opinions, they will get better treatment. Christianity is a cowardly creed, and every coward loves to play the bully.

Some correspondence on the matter has been going on in the *Glamorgan Advertiser*, and in the issue dated January 23 there is a letter from someone who very appropriately signs himself "Christian." The letter is worthy of the pen-name. "Christian" would "feel ashamed of our Council" if they let the town hall to the Secularists, and he desires to warn the people that if the town hall is let for Freethought meetings "our religious traditions.....will be swept away," and, therefore, "home life, liberty, morality, justice, and liberty will decline." Well, now, that is a lively kind of creed for the Christians of Maesteg, if the picture does them justice. A creed that will be swept away before a few Freethought lectures hardly seem worth the holding. And a people who will lose their morality and their justice, etc., if they listen to a Freethought lecture, seems scarcely worth keeping alive. Perhaps we had better regard "Christian" as a belated survival of the Stone Age, and wish the Maesteg Council a better sense of justice than they appear to possess at present.

More news of the "starving" clergy. Handsome presentations have been made to the Vicar of St. Barnabas, Golder's Green, upon his return from his honeymoon. Under the will of Lady Tate, the Rev. Bernard Snell, of Brixton, benefits to the extent of £12,000 and a cellar of wines and spirits.

Referring to an English clergyman in Moscow, a London newspaper says "his cloth has so far secured him immunity from arrest at the hands of the Bolsheviks."

Cathcart, Glasgow, has a prophet all to itself. This gentleman, Mr. David Christine, has issued some prophecies for 1950, but these are not to be opened till that date. That is quite safe, and shows a proper amount of native caution. But Mr. Christine has also issued some prophecies for the present year, and these are very striking. For instance, a General Election is to be "expected." There will be great railway unrest; the price of coal is going to be raised; seven great fires will break out in various parts of the country; people will do well to pay attention to their livers and kidneys. We commend all these to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, whose appetite for the "occult" seems insatiable. They are as convincing as anything he has yet produced.

We feel almost inclined to set up in the prophecy business ourselves. And for the coming year we venture to predict:—One of our Cabinet Ministers will be taking a journey abroad. There will be considerable discussion in Trades Union circles concerning a rise in wages. Some talk of marriage will be current concerning a member of the Royal Family. Everyone will be well advised not to take severe colds during the months of May, August, and November. There will be several fires in London during April and May. There will be some discussion of the housing problem in the early part of the year. Some striking messages from the spirit world will be obtained, and their genuineness warranted by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Merchants will try to advance the price of their goods, and there will be selling on the Stock Exchange in anticipation of a fall in shares, and also a buying in the hopes of a rise. Much disappointment will be caused. The circulation of the *Freethinker* will improve.

The late Rev. J. H. Phillpotts, formerly rector of Walkerm, Herts, left £15,530. We must grant the reverend gentleman some little courage, for his Master said, "Woe unto ye rich."

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

February 1, Stratford Town Hall; February 15, Plymouth; February 22, South Shields; February 26, Glasgow (Debate on Spiritualism); February 29, Glasgow; March 7, Leicester; March 14, Birmingham; March 21, Manchester; April 18, Swansea.

To Correspondents.

S. MYERS.—Thanks for cutting. We intend looking into the matter, and will probably write on it.

H. T. E.—Our Shop Manager is writing you. We note what you say, but it is difficult to please all tastes. We are, if that is any justification, quite in the line of the best Freethought traditions.—We saw the case of the Rev. Dr. Beckh's objection to an increase of salary. It is sufficiently unusual to cause comment. And we quite agree with his view as to the folly of taking the possession of money as the equivalent of happiness. We cannot say that we have tried both plans, but we have never seen that money gave sufficient compensation for one to spend one's life in getting it. The curse of all Christian countries is that they have hardly any other standard of value than money.

A. JOKELL.—Thanks for cutting. Sorry we do not know the song called "Bible Stories." Never heard of it.

B. STRECHHELLS.—There are a good many points in your letter with which we agree, and we hope to comment on them later. But to carry out some of them we should have to get regular help, and that means an expense which, in the present state of affairs, we cannot venture on. And we cannot undertake more ourselves. We already have our hands full—too full.

P. G. TACCHI.—We shall look forward to seeing you at Glasgow. There is an article in the current number of the *English Review*.

T. HOWARD.—Thanks for pamphlet. We may notice it when the opportunity presents itself.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—Dr. C. Beadwell, 5s. Per F. Rose (Bloemfontein): F. G., 10s.; A. Schwartz, 10s. 6d.; A. S., 10s. 6d.; I. Cohen, 10s. 6d.; A. Cohen, 10s. 6d.; M. Cohen, 10s. 6d.; H. Myers, 10s. 6d.; B. Epstein, 10s. 6d.; N. Golding, 10s. 6d.; D. Nicolaysen, 10s. 6d.; F. Rose, £1 1s.; G. Gluck, 5s.

F. ROSE.—Thanks for new subscribers. We are greatly obliged for your interest in the paper and for your appreciation of what has been done. Hope you are keeping well.

"CHEMIST" (Glasgow).—Paper sent on. Yes, it is quite a good plan to circulate literature. Some of it is certain to fall on good ground. We are always prepared to supply quantities at special prices for that purpose.

W. G. GROVE.—We are well aware of the keen interest you take in the *Freethinker*. If all were as eager as yourself our circulation would soon be doubled. Pleased to learn of your appreciation of Mr. Thresh's lecture.

C. T. SHAW.—We haven't thought of publishing a pamphlet of the kind you name. A complete list of the cases would probably prove of interest, but we haven't the time to attend to it.

C. E. TURNER.—We are always pleased to receive copies of paper containing information that is likely to be useful to us in our work. We cannot see all that we ought to see without the assistance of our friends.

R. PENMAN.—We do not know that the rise in the price has prevented anyone getting the paper. And we have always made it a rule never to allow anyone to go short of his or her copy of the *Freethinker* because they were unable to purchase it. When we know of such cases they are at once placed on the free list.

"M. D." writes:—"A line to thank you for your new work on *Religion and Sex*. The research embodied in the book is great, and the conclusions important. It casts a flood of light on the history of religion, and about that most people know very little... It strikes me that at 6s. the book can leave the publishers but little profit. That, however, is his business. It is ours merely to appreciate the boon."

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

The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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

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

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."

Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

Sugar Plums.

The South Place course of afternoon lectures came to a pleasing end on Sunday last with a large and enthusiastic meeting. Mr. Cohen's address on "The League of Nations" was listened to with appreciation and applause. To-day (February 1) Mr. Cohen lectures at the Town Hall, Stratford, on "Why Men Believe in God." The Town Hall is in the main road, and 'buses and trams reach there from all parts of London. We hope there will be a good gathering of local Freethinkers.

We are pleased to hear that Mr. R. H. Rosetti had good meetings on the occasion of his first visit to Manchester on Sunday last, and that his lectures were highly appreciated by all present. The Manchester Branch is arranging for a Social on Saturday evening, January 31, in the Co-operative Hall, Ardwick, at 6. There will be music, dancing, and whist drive. We hope there will be a good rally of local friends.

It is many years since there have been any Freethought lectures in Plymouth, but Mr. Cohen has now arranged to visit the town on February 15. He will lecture in the Corn Exchange on the afternoon and evening of that date, and it is hoped that his visit will have the effect of reviving the work there. There must be a large number of Freethinkers in and around Plymouth, and it is possible that a meeting may be arranged between them and Mr. Cohen in order to consider in what way the Movement may be placed upon a workable basis. Meanwhile, we shall be pleased if those who can do so will help in making the meetings as well known as possible.

The *Two Worlds* says that "*The Parson and the Atheist* is a dignified and passionless presentation of two views, and to those of reflective mind will make admirable reading." This seems to voice a general opinion, and is reflected in a solid manner by the sale of the work. The discussion gains in force and interest by being read as a whole, and our friends find it useful, both as a storehouse of arguments and as a means of introducing our views to religious friends. And these were the ends we had in view when reprinting.

On one point we differ from our contemporary. It says that the book is an illustration of the fact that "debates generally prove nothing and convince nobody." If the statement refers to the debaters the comment is true enough, but no one expected otherwise. The two disputants are already convinced, and they would be unfit for their parts unless they knew each others' case before the discussion commenced. But debates are conducted for the benefit of listeners or readers, and, in that case, many have their points of view altered through the debate. And, after all, are not papers such as the *Two Worlds* always conducting a debate? Every controversy is a debate either with one person or with many.

We hope to have ready in the course of a few days the new edition, revised and enlarged, of Mr. Cohen's *Determinism or Free Will?* The delay has been due solely to the time it takes to get work done by machinists and binders. The book will be published in two forms—in wrappers at 1s. 9d., and in a serviceable half-cloth at 2s. 6d. We shall thus be keeping up our reputation for issuing books at a

cheap rate despite the excessively high cost of production. Judging from the enquiries we receive for the work, both in this country and abroad, we shall be surprised if the new edition does not go off more rapidly than the previous one.

The Pioneer Press has also a number of other things that it hopes to issue at an early date. In addition to various reprints, there will be a careful and exhaustive work by Mr. Cohen on *Atheism and Theism*, a pamphlet by Mr. Robert Arch on *Society and Superstition*, a critical and appreciative essay by Mr. A. F. Thorne on Richard Jeffries, Nature-lover and Freethinker, and, thanks to the help of a friend, we shall be issuing a work that older Freethinkers will be well acquainted with. This is the epoch-making *Ruins of Empires*, by Volney. This work is of considerable importance in the history of Freethought, and one that the newer generation of Freethinkers should become acquainted with. A new translation is being prepared, and it will be pushed forward as rapidly as possible. The work will cover between 250 and 300 pages, and will be published at as low a price as possible—probably at 3s. We intend pushing forward the publishing side of our propaganda as rapidly as the state of the printing trade will permit. We have other developments in view, the nature of which will appear later.

We are sorry, but not surprised, to learn that our able American contemporary, the *Truthseeker*, is experiencing a full share of the trouble that attends the maintenance of a Freethought paper in these days. In a statement in its issue for January 10 it informs its readers that it is losing at the rate of over £20 per week, and it is wondering whether its readers will be able to supply it with something like 600 dollars to cover its estimated losses for 1920. We hope that its supporters will not fail it for that sum. There should, indeed, be more than one Freethinker in America who is both able and willing to supply all that is needed. At any rate, we trust that in some way or another the required amount will be found. We know well what it is to be continuously fighting to make ends meet, in addition to the inevitable cares of running an unpopular paper, and only those who are in the fight know how severe the strain is.

We are asked to announce that Mr. Joseph McCabe will lecture in the People's Hall, Albion Street, Leeds, on Monday and Tuesday, February 2 and 3, at 7.30, on "The Evolution of Life," and "The Evolution of Man." Local friends will please note.

Early Christian Frauds.

It is a fact worthy of notice, that Christian advocates who are loudest in denouncing the wickedness of "infidels," who impugn the credibility of the Gospel narratives, are most careful to ignore the large number of Christian falsehoods and forgeries which preceded and followed those narratives. The position usually assumed by these irrational apologists is that adopted by Dean Farrar, who, in his *Witness of History to Christ*, says:—

Now, into the genuineness and authenticity of the Gospels we need not enter, because for our present purpose it has been sufficiently admitted by the most strenuous opponents of the truths which they reveal.

The "most strenuous opponents" in this case are Strauss and Renan, neither of whom admits either the genuineness or authenticity of the Gospels, though the last-named critic, as is well known, makes many admissions for which he had no sort of authority whatever.

As a matter of fact, we know that in very early times—before we hear of the existence of the four canonical Gospels—a considerable number of spurious histories of Christ, fraudulently concocted by pious Christians, came into circulation, and were received by the early Church as authentic and historical documents. Many of these

are still extant, though not, of course, in their most primitive form. In some instances we have two or three versions of the same narratives, which, when compared, show clearly how the same alleged facts and events had been altered and recast at different times. In such cases the shortest and simplest form most nearly represents the original narrative. Altogether, as many as twenty-two of these "apocryphal" histories have come down to us, ten being written in Greek and twelve in Latin. These writings may be classed under the following three heads:—(1) Those relating to the history of Joseph and Mary before the birth of Christ; (2) those narrating events during the childhood of Jesus; (3) those having reference to the trial and crucifixion under Pilate. The *origines* of these three classes of writings are: the Protevangelium of James, the Gospel of Thomas, and the Gospel of Nicodemus or Acts of Pilate. Nearly all the other histories contain matter in common with these three, and appear to be modifications or amplifications of one or other of them, just as the three Synoptical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) are recastings of an earlier Gospel which, later on, being considered out of date, ceased to be copied, and so passed away to be seen no more.

Besides the three above-named forgeries, the following are the most notable of the other "histories" fabricated by the early Christians:—The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, the History of Joseph the Carpenter, the Narrative of Joseph of Arimathea, the Acts of Paul and Thecla, the Acts of Barnabas, the Acts of Philip, the Acts of Peter and Andrew, the Acts of the Holy Apostle Thomas, the Acts of the Holy Apostle Thaddæus, the Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John, the Acts and Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Andrew, the Acts and Martyrdom of Matthew the Apostle, the Martyrdom of the Holy and Glorious Apostle Bartholomew.

These fictitious "histories" were forged in the names of apostles in order that the wonders and absurdities therein narrated might receive more ready credence. At the end of the Protevangelium the mendacious author of that work says: "And I, James, that wrote this history in Jerusalem.....withdrew myself into the wilderness.....glorifying the Lord God who had given me the gift and the wisdom to write this history." The James here named is implied to be the great apostle of that name.

Again, the unprincipled forger of the Gospel of Thomas, in commencing his fabulous history, says:—

I, Thomas, an Israelite, write you this account that all brethren from among the heathen may know the miracles of our Lord Jesus Christ in his infancy, which he did in our country.

Similarly, the concoction of falsehoods called the "Acts of Pilate" is stated to have been written by a disciple named Nicodemus, who claims to have been witness of the events recorded.

The most ridiculous forgery of all is, perhaps, the "Revelation of Paul," which commences:—

The Revelation of the Holy Apostle Paul: the things which were revealed to him when he went up even to the third heaven, and was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words.

The fabrication of this narrative was, of course, suggested by the statement in 2 Cor. xii. 2-4. It must be borne in mind that no written Gospel of any kind came into existence until after the time of Paul.

All these spurious histories were the work of Christians, and not only so, but of the most learned and pious members of the sect. The forgers were not of the grossly ignorant and illiterate class that formed the vast majority of the early Church; they belonged to the exceedingly small minority who had acquired a knowledge of Greek

letters and composition. The great mass of the Christian believers, being unable to read anything for themselves, naturally relied on the few scholars among them for information respecting Jesus; and these scholars—who, there can be little doubt, held the position of elders and teachers in the Church—occupied some of their spare time in writing accounts of all the fresh marvels they had heard related of Christ or his apostles. Evidence of the actual occurrence of the wonders narrated was a matter never thought of. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John xx. 29).

The fictitious character of these writings is admitted by all present-day scholars without exception. Modern Christian defenders of the faith, however, appear to think they disarm hostile criticism by calling the narratives "apocryphal"—that is to say, hidden, of doubtful authorship, or uncanonical. It is, moreover, stated in extenuation of such frauds that fictions of this class were not by any means peculiar to Christianity, but were common at this period among both Jews and Gentiles. The concoction of lying histories was, we are told, simply a feature in the literary habits of the time. Whether this be so or not, one thing is certain: it is to this period that we are indebted for the composition and publication of the canonical Gospels, which can be proved to be full of contradictions, absurdities, and impossibilities, and therefore quite as much works of fiction as those termed "apocryphal."

Astute Christian apologists, confronted with this damning fact, endeavour to save the canonical books by contending that the present Four Gospels were written in the first century, and by apostles or companions of apostles, who were morally incapable of having imagined or invented the facts recorded; while the apocryphal narratives were composed towards the end of the second century, and were the work of heretics and Gnostics. The Rev. W. Sanday, who was, perhaps, the greatest living authority on the early Christian Gospels, says of the fraudulent histories: "The great majority of them are Gnostic, Ebionite, or Manichæan compositions, for which we, as Christians, need not feel ourselves responsible." He then goes on to say:—

So soon as there is any considerable Christian literature at all, we find the process of sifting going on. An individual writer here and there makes use of an apocryphal book, but they never effected a real lodgment in the Church..... The canon, as we have it, is simply the usage of the leading Churches carried on for more than three centuries before it was reduced to set rule (*Oxford House Papers*, No. ix.).

The last statement is perfectly correct. The Canonical Gospels came into general use in the Churches not because they were known to be historical, authentic, or the inspired word of God, but because several churches in various parts of the Roman Empire had already received them as such. But another circumstance which greatly assisted in securing them admission was the presence amongst their contents of a number of maxims, precepts, and moral sayings which were not found in the so-called apocryphal books. Moral precepts were not so easily manufactured as stories of the supernatural. As to the process of shifting and selecting, described by Dr. Sanday, it would have been more correct to have stated that this process did not begin until near the end of the second century. Up to the middle of that century there was no canon at all.

As regards the authorship and the alleged priority of the four Canonical Gospels, if it could be shown that these books were composed by the men to whom they are ascribed, and were in use long before any of the apocryphal histories came into existence, and that the latter were all concocted by heretics and Gnostics, it might

then be conceded that the fabrication of the last-named class of fictions would not seriously affect the authenticity of the canonical books. But can these alleged facts be established? Certainly not. There is no evidence that the Canonical Gospels were written by apostles or their colleagues: there is no evidence that they were in circulation in the first century, or prior to those called apocryphal; nor is there a scrap of evidence to prove that the last-mentioned fictions were composed by Ebionites or Gnostics. The Ebionites and Nazarenes had, it is true, a Gospel of their own; but this was a primitive version of the canonical Matthew.

With regard to the authorship of the apocryphal Gospels, we have no information whatever, save in the one case mentioned by Tertullian. This worthy "Father" tells us that the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* was written by a presbyter of one of the churches in Asia, and that this pious presbyter concocted the story "from love of Paul" (On Baptism, xvii.). The Christian forger, in this the only known case, was neither an Ebionite nor a Gnostic. Moreover, we know from the contents of many of the apocryphal writings that the authors belonged to neither of these sects, and must, therefore, have been orthodox Christians.

(To be continued.) ABRACADABRA.

Critical Chat.

THE PATHOLOGICAL ASPECT OF RELIGION.

ROUGHLY speaking, there are three methods of discrediting religion, which may be defined as a belief in supernatural beings, or in a supersensuous reality. There is the method of the seventeenth century, which was one of frank, even brutal scepticism; the method, let me say, of Hobbes; then there is the method peculiar to the eighteenth century, the bringing into prominence of the naively ridiculous element in religion; a method which, in spite of its disregard for historical veracity, was a deadly weapon in the hands of a master of sarcasm and irony; lastly, there is the modern critical and historical method. We no longer doubt the existence of religious ideas and ideals, or hold them up to a somewhat inexpensive ridicule; we do something far more effective, we explain them in terms of their origins and history. Of this newer and more fruitful method it would be difficult to find a better example than Mr. Chapman Cohen's *Religion and Sex* (Foulis), an admirably close and reasoned study of religion in its pathological aspect. The originality of this valuable book lies not so much in the facts used as in the grouping of them, and in the new and startling reading of their significance. Mr. Cohen's strong points are, I imagine, a peculiarly vigorous train of thought, an amazing dialectical aptitude, and a careful avoidance of a mere parade of learning. The reader is never wearied with a mass of citations and references, which he has neither the will nor the ability to control.

As I have indicated above, the association of sexual with religious emotions is not by any means a new discovery. Although the importance of this association has not always been insisted upon by the students of religion, it has been taken more or less into account. It is admitted that spiritual fervour is often infinitely increased when the physical sexual nature is suppressed; and sometimes we find that a great thinker, or a saint, is congenitally deficient on the sexual side. It has often been noted, too, that the monastic way of life tended to give an unhealthy prominence to sexual matters. We see this in the perverted interest shown by our Anglo-Saxon Penitentials, and by casuists like Liguori in abnormal offences against sexual morals. The curious, in these matters, read them in connection with Martial and the *Priapica*, and conclude that Christianity had all the vices of later Paganism, and few of the virtues of the Greeks and Romans in their great periods.

Another remarkable fact is that the period of puberty and adolescence, of the awakening of the sexual emotions, is also

the period of religious conversion. Mr. Cohen, following Starbuck and other inquirers, brings out this point with startling clearness. The psychic change which accompanies the bodily change at this time of life is often directed towards religion when the predisposition is there, and when the environment is favourable. And there is frequently a strange mingling of eroticism and religion in mysticism and in the more emotional and irrational forms of Christianity.

Dean Swift, in the eighteenth century, tells us that an eminent physician of his acquaintance had assured him that when the Quakers first appeared he had often to prescribe for attacks of nymphomania among Quaker women-folk. He goes on to say, in a remarkably clear-sighted passage, that—

persons of a visionary devotion, either men or women, are, in their completion, of all others, the most amorous; for zeal is frequently kindled from the same spark with other fires, and, from enflaming brotherly love, will proceed to raise that of a gallant. If we inspect into the usual process of modern worship, we shall find it to consist in a devout turn of the eyes, called ogling; an artificial form of canting and whining by note, every interval, for want of other matter, made up with a shrug or a hum, a sigh or a groan; the style compact of insignificant words, incoherences, and repetitions. These I take to be the most accomplished rules of address to a mistress; and where are these performed with more dexterity than by the saints? Nay, to bring this argument yet clearer, I have been informed by certain sanguine brethren of the first class, that in the height and orgasmus of their spiritual exercise it has been frequent with them to experience a physical orgasm; immediately after which, they found the spirit to relax and flag of a sudden with the nerves, and they were forced to hasten a conclusion. This may be further strengthened by observing, with wonder, how unaccountably all females are attracted by visionary or enthusiastic preachers, though ever so contemptible in their outward mien; which is usually supposed to be done upon considerations purely spiritual, without any carnal regards at all. But I have reason to think the sex has certain characteristics, by which they form a truer judgment of human abilities and performances than we ourselves can possibly do of each other. Let that be as it will, this much is certain, that, however spiritual intrigues begin, they generally conclude like all others; they may branch upward toward heaven, but the root is in the earth. Too intense a contemplation is not the business of flesh and blood; it must, by the necessary course of things, in a little time let go its hold, and fall into matter. Lovers for the sake of celestial converse are but another sort of Platonics, who pretend to see stars and heaven in ladies' eyes, and to look or think no lower; but the same joy is provided for both; and they seem a perfect moral to the story of that philosopher, who, while his thoughts and eyes were fixed upon the unstellations, found himself seduced by his lower parts into a ditch.

As Mr. Havelock Ellis remarks, this statement of the question from the ecclesiastical point of view is a very instructive one. I wish Swift had worked out the subject at length; but the eighteenth century, which was not mealy-mouthed on the generality of subjects, would, I am afraid, have had no stomach for a discussion so clairvoyantly cynical. Mr. Cohen has succeeded in doing what Swift, with his conventional environment, was not able to do, and I am pretty certain his book would have won the Dean's approbation.

The few pages devoted to Phallic worship bring out the importance of this widespread form of primitive animism. It is rather a difficult subject to handle, because its so-called obscene nature has attracted people whose taste lie in the direction of pornographic fiction rather than in that of scientific hierology. I am glad to think that this kind of specialist will be disappointed with Mr. Cohen's treatment of the subject.

Dancing, Mr. Cohen notes, was one of the methods employed to induce a feeling of religious ecstasy. "In connection with religious ceremonies it is generally outgrown in the civilized world." That is so; but it will interest Mr. Cohen to know that Mr. Arthur Symons describes in one of his books a minuet performed before the altar in the Cathedral at Seville by sixteen boys, who, while they danced, singing *coplas* in honour of the Virgin, were partly surrounded by kneeling priests. There was no light in the church, except about the altar; which blazed with candles. The whole performance was apparently an incentive to devotion, and

Mr. Symons found it a "quite logical development of that very elaborate pantomime which the ceremonies of the Church really are."

On the whole, the book is a model of careful statement, and orderly arrangement of material; in fact, it is scientific in the best sense of that often misused word. I note, however, one *lapsus calami*. On page 123 Mr. Cohen rather unkindly describes the veteran French Freethinker, M. Auguste Forel, as "the eminent German scientist." I also venture to assert that Mr. Cohen exaggerates what he calls the "grossly obscene character" of the erotico-religious verses quoted by Clonston. In my opinion, they differ *in toto* from the mediæval lyric poetry in which the mystics carried over into religion the ecstatic emotion of human love. Clonston may have been an intelligent alienist, but he knew nothing about poetry. I fancy his insane patient, in a lucid interval, had amused himself by pulling the specialist's leg. For my part, I do not find anything nauseous in an "erotic" conception of the commerce between God and the soul. From St. John of the Cross to Coventry Patmore it has produced fine poetry, for which I have the grace to be thankful. It is, no doubt, partly a matter of temperament, and partly the point of view.

Finally, the more cautious of my readers may be inclined to object that we cannot explain religion, any more than we can explain genius, in terms of disease. But that, I hasten to say, is by no means the thesis of Mr. Cohen's monograph. He assures the reader in the most emphatic manner that it is not his intention to show that religion springs from a perverted sexuality. The origin of the religious idea is something quite separate and independent. But he does claim, and he has the support of the materialistic psychologist, that a pathological inquiry is calculated to throw light on aspects of the subject which are now very obscure. He goes on to say:—

If so-called religious feelings do not admit of explanation in terms of psychology, nothing remains but to recognize religion as something outside normal life, to hand it over to the custody of word-spinning *mystics*, and to surrender all possibility of a rational understanding of either its nature or its history.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Correspondence.

ATHEISTS IN THE ARMY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The letter from Mr. Skilling referred to on p. 25 (Jan. 11) interests me, for I had many queer experiences with identification discs.

When I first joined up and particulars were called for, I wrote down "Atheist," and received a disc marked "C. of E." This inscription I defaced, and sent it back with a note pointing out the error. However, the Armourer-Sergt. was an old soldier, and was not going to permit innovations by an amateur, even were he an officer; so twice again were discs stamped out and sent to me marked "C. of E."

After this I took the latest round to his workshop, and, after he had spoiled two or three by his inability to spell the outlandish word, I got what I wanted.

On the back of my disc I wrote "*Ni Dieu, ni Peur*"—No Fiend, no fear, as you might say—which I thought was a good fighting motto for an Atheist, and would look well on my bleeding corpse when found in the forefront of the battle.

However, again I found myself stuck on a snag, for the disc and its inscription tickled the fancy of my brother officers, their servants, and all and sundry in the battalion; and the result was that, if ever I took it off and looked round, the disc was gone, and I had to get a new one—a matter, perhaps, of months in France—and there was always the old difficulty of getting the word "Atheist" on it—spelt in the usual way, that is.

The average life of a disc I found to be something like a fortnight. Between whiles I used a bit of cardboard from the end of a shaving soap box till it disintegrated, and then I made others. I, too, have my latest cardboard disc hanging up in my room.

The way my discs must have been "pinched" and handed round was brought home to me the other day. We had a new acting Brigade Major recently, who, on my entering and clicking my heels in the orthodox way, hailed me as "Latham, Old Bean," and whom I then recognized as an old staff captain of my brigade in France. Shortly afterwards I found him in the mess of the local battalion entertaining them with my biography and antecedents, and informing them that on one side of my disc I had "Atheist" and on the other "No God and no Devil."

When we were being heavily shelled in the trenches, I used to pull out the *Freethinker* and read it, or pretend to. It looked as well as the Bible, which was advocated by the pious officer (a major). My servant, however, used to lie on the fire-step and go right off to sleep! I never came across his equal for unfeigned indifference to danger.

J. LATHAM.

FREETHOUGHT ON TYNESIDE.

SIR,—Might I, with your kind permission, address a few words to Freethinkers on Tyneside. What can we make of the year 1920? Can we establish a record in our organization? We, in South Shields, have tried to arrange a run of lectures, but halls have become unprocurable? "Who said boycott?" However, there is much that we can do, our ranks need strengthening. Conferences at a variety of places might be arranged. There is much latent power in our district, let us all do what we can to make it active. I have considered the possibility of a martyrdom on Pensher Hill; what a rousing effect it would have! Rather extreme, you say, but who knows? Any suggestions as to the furthering of our Cause will be gladly received by

J. FOTHERGILL.

3 Thompson Street, Tyne Dock, South Shields.

AGNOSTIC OR ATHEIST?

SIR,—The question as to whether it is more consistent with Freethought principles to call oneself an Agnostic or an Atheist seems to have become quite a topic of late. Personally, I feel compelled to agree with Colonel Ingersoll when he says, "An Agnostic is an Atheist in a stove-pipe hat." Whatever labels they may wear, to my mind, for all practical purposes, both are out to gain the same ends. Voltaire, "the deadly satirist," defined "Atheist" as "a name given by theologians to whoever differs from them in their ideas concerning the Divinity; or, who refuses to believe in it in the form in which, in the emptiness of their infallible pates, they have resolved to present it to him."

Many people have held that the Atheist is a denier of God; but I affirm (and I believe I am justified from an etymological point of view) that an Atheist is simply a person without God. And the Agnostic does not recognize a God as the *primum mobile* of phenomena. The Atheist does not say "there is no God," but rather does he say, with Charles Bradlaugh: "I know not what you mean by God; I am without the idea of God; the word 'God' to me is a sound, conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me." Does not the Agnostic agree with this definition?

Charles Bradlaugh was an Atheist, and I think we can take it that he knew what he believed and understood what he taught; and the above definition can at least be taken as the meaning the word conveyed to him.

Mr. Kennard, in his letter, says he has recently come across an educated man who claims he *knows* there is no God; but I have no doubt this gentleman, whoever he may be, defines his God. I can hardly believe anyone, educated or otherwise, would be prepared to say he *knows* there is no power behind phenomena. I maintain there is no scientific evidence to show that there is; and both Agnostic and Atheist are compelled to leave it at that until more evidence is produced to justify them in making a more definite statement.

On the other hand, we can all reasonably deny the existence of God, if by that term we mean the God of the Christian Religion; that is, the one portrayed in the Old

and New Testaments, from which books all sects claim to take the tenets of their belief.

That God is already condemned—hoisted with his own petard—and it requires little temerity on the part of a Freethinker, whether he call himself Agnostic or Atheist, to deny that God or say he *knows* he does not exist.

I agree with Mr. Kennard, however, that it is regrettable for anyone who claims to be a Freethinker to speak or write in a "tone of asperity" against that section who call themselves Agnostics.

The fact still remains, however (whether Agnostic and Atheist are synonymous terms or not), that it does require more moral courage even to-day to designate oneself as the latter. At the same time, I disagree with placing the blame for the general dislike of the word on those early propagandists who, as Ingersoll said, "Cast pearls among swine—and some of the swine became men."

Although these pioneers were spoken of as "vulgar" they preached TRUTH, and truth is never vulgar. It was the Church, and those who for profit or power desired superstition and ignorance to continue, who called these men vulgar. The theologians defiled the word Atheist to warn off the timid. They defiled the name of Voltaire and called him vulgar for the same reason, and thousands of people to day are afraid of the very name. Voltaire! one of Nature's noblemen—a name revered by all Freethinkers, yet which name "pronounced in the presence of a clergyman will act as a declaration of war."

Finally, let me say, I am not prepared to agree that Agnostic is more consistent with the principles of Freethought than is Atheist, because, frankly, I have yet to learn that there is any real difference. It certainly does seem to me very much like another symptom of the "Blight of Respectability," and not being very badly affected with this malady I am content to be written down "Atheist."

FRED. COLLINS.

VITAL POINTS.

SIR,—I notice in the issue of January 18 that Dr. Lyttelton still reads the *Freethinker*. Allow me, therefore, to acknowledge therein his comment on one of my four questions, which you published at the time of the discussion, and to which he has referred in his Appendix to *The Parson and The Atheist*; and to say that I should be obliged if he will comment equally briefly and to the point on my other questions, all of which I consider more important than the one selected.

There were summarized thus:—

1. Religion is, in origin, a *mistaken interpretation* of the universe by primitive ignorance.
2. Christian apologetics are irrelevant to the point that Christianity is *untrue*.
3. Mr. Cohen's article on the *reliability* of convictions and the correct diagnosis of mental states (p. 69 of *Parson and Atheist*) is vital to the issue.

W. J.

THE LORD AND THE COMMONER; GOD AND COMMONSENSE.

SIR,—You will agree with me, perhaps, that the labour *Daily Herald* is an ably and brightly edited journal; and while, as it may be, it is quite sound on its concrete and economic grounds, it is somewhat "shoogly" in matters more abstract and philosophical. For instance, Lord Haldane, one of our more progressive and intelligent lords of England, in reviewing a book by Mr. George Lansbury, the editor of the *Herald*, quotes with approval from said book (*These Things Shall Be*—a title with quite a smack of Biblical prophesy) as follows:—

We must reconcile and redeem the world by the power of a great overwhelming love, and this comes, and can only come, from God.

To which one can only reply, "Good God!" The blue or clouded vaulted dome above (and below also, I daresay) is roomy, and round, and open, and empty; there is nothing to prevent God's arrival with his millennium; nothing at all. He is Almighty also. Besides, human beings, in various forms and stages of faith and worship, have been asking for his help for thousands of years; surely, it is obvious that they have asked in vain. It is conceivable that they may go

on asking for another two thousand years, while the same silence will answer them—or the echo of their own voices, the apparitions of their own mortal shapes. Two thousand years hence, it is all but certain, the same sun will be shining in the sky, the same soft, vapoury clouds drifting athwart its shining disk, the same silver arrows of the morning and purple, downy mists of eve; the same human race still devoted to destruction and superstition, to shadows and death instead of substance and life. Or it may be emancipated man, armed with the sword of the spirit, in individual, independent, clarified realization; recognizing at last his real needs, rights, and duties may know all "mysterious powers," celestial and terrestrial, for the phantoms and frauds they are.

To return to the present. There is in high places, and in low, the grossest Materialism; and even the progressive and refined spirits are much befogged and bemused with a futile transcendent claim. It may be the words written by the able editor, and quoted with so much gusto by the eminent statesman, are merely formal and imposing, but meaningless metaphor; none the less they are but part of what grand old G. W. Foote so happily described as "endless babble about God"; which meaningless, impossible, and absurd, revolts the man of taste and sense—whose taste and sense is the result of seeing poor humanity supplicating gods and kings so many thousand years in vain.

A. M.

Branch News.

BARNESLEY BRANCH N. S. S.—The annual meeting of the Branch was held on Tuesday, January 13, and a new office—that of Librarian—was created. Mr. T. Lamb, who has excellent literary attainments, was elected to the new office. The members themselves are contributing to the stocking of the library, but the Hon. Secretary, Mr. H. Irving, 43 Sheffield Road, Barnsley, would be pleased to receive useful books from readers of the *Freethinker* who feel inclined to help the new venture by gifts from their own bookshelves. Many could so help, and thus encourage the reading tastes of the members. The Branch meets fortnightly for discussion of suitable topics, and these are usually followed with interest and intelligence by the members. While writing, may I be permitted to make an appeal to all those readers of the *Freethinker* in this district who are not attached to a Society, and remind them that our subscription is 2s. 6d. per annum. There must be many Freethinkers who have not yet joined, but there seems no adequate reason why they should not do so.—H. IRVING, Hon. Sec.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S.—Mr. Thresh lectured here on Sunday last to a large audience, and was listened to with intense interest as he unfolded the period of life "From Savage to Shakespeare."—J. PARTRIDGE, Sec.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.—On Sunday Miss K. Browning gave a very interesting address on "A Wisdom Religion," *i.e.*, theosophy. Miss Browning spoke fluently and well, and is thoroughly versed in her subject; but as hard-headed Materialists it was almost impossible to help feeling that so long as the religion retained its wisdom it was peculiarly Secular. Next Sunday, February 1, Dr. Charles Porter, Medical Officer of Health for Marylebone, will speak on "State Control in the Prevention of Venereal Disease." Dr. Porter's address on this subject last session should ensure a record attendance on Sunday next at 7.30.—F. AKROYD, Hon. Secretary.

I believe that the supreme absolute power, uncoloured and unmodified by the conditions of knowing, is unknowable. I believe the word "God" is the letter x in an indeterminate equation, and that we have no means of ascertaining what the symbol stands for. I believe Science is the Providence of man. I believe that Agnostics know as much as theologians, and have as much right to have a creed and to express it. I believe that the mistake regarding creeds is in requiring men to conform to them on penalty of punishment here or hereafter.—*Ingersoll.*

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.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 8, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Dr. Charles Porter, "State Control in the Prevention of Venereal Diseases."

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, Debate: "Is Jesus a Perfect Moral Teacher or Example?" Music from 6.30 to 7.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11. C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "Education and Religion."

STRATFORD (The Town Hall): 7, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Why Men Believe in God."

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

LEEDS SECULAR SOCIETY (Youngman's Rooms, 19 Lowerhead Row, Leeds): Every Sunday at 6.30. Monday and Tuesday, February 2 and 3 (People's Hall, Albion Street, Leeds): 7.30, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "The Evolution of Life;" "The Evolution of Man."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, A Lecture.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE BRANCH N. S. S. (Collingwood Hall, 12A Clayton Street East): 3, Members' Meeting.

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