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Views and Opinions.

An Old Story.

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this wise. When his mother, Mary, was espoused to Joseph, before they came together she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.” Now the birth of the Greek demi-god, Perseus, was in this wise. When Acristus, King of Argon, was warned that he would be killed by the son of his daughter Danaë, he built a tower of brass, in which she was imprisoned, and so hoped to frustrate the oracle. But the God Jupiter visited the maiden in a shower of gold, and thus was Perseus born. And the birth of the Aztec God, Huizilopochtli, was in this wise. When Catlicus, the serpent-skirted, was in the open a little ball of feathers floated down from the heavens. She caught it and hid it in her bosom. And of this was the god born. The birth of the God Attis was in this wise. From the blood of the murdered Agdestris sprang a pomegranate tree, and some of the fruit thereof the virgin Nana gathered and laid it in her bosom, and thus was the god born. Also the founder of the Manchu dynasty of China was born in this wise. A heavenly maiden was bathing one day when she found on the skirt of her raiment a certain red fruit. She ate, and was delivered of a son. Likewise was Fo-Hi born of a virgin. And the virgin daughter of a king of the Mongols awakened one night and found herself embraced by a great light, and gave birth to three boys, one of whom was the famous Genghis Khan. In Korea, the daughter of the river Ho was fertilized by the rays of the sun, and gave birth to a wonderful boy. Likewise was Chrisna born of the virgin Devaka; Horus was born of the virgin Isis; Mercury was born of the virgin Maia; and Romulus was born of the virgin Rheasylvia. Many other stories might be related, but of all these there is none true but the first. Millions of Christians say so. For it is in the New Testament, and none of the others are. And to the eye of faith the distinction is of profound importance.

* * *

Birth and Death.

What is the meaning of it all? Why were all these gods and demi-gods born in this manner? Well, thereby hangs a tale, and its complete unravelment would carry us back a very long way in the history of human nature.

The first point to be grasped is, most of the things that to us are commonplaces, are really discoveries that are made only after the passing of many generations. Nothing seems to us, for example, more certain and more natural than death. Yet there exists ample proof that death, as a natural fact, is as much a discovery as is the nature of the moon's phases. Primitive mankind treats death as the result of being bewitched by an enemy, or killed by one of the tribal spirits. Only slowly is the true nature of death recognized. And the same principle holds good of birth. Nothing to us seems more certain than that birth is the result of the union of two people—a man and a woman. But this, too, is a discovery that mankind has to make, and although the discovery has now been made practically all over the world, there are some exceptions, and the prevalence of certain customs and superstitions are enough to prove that they resemble, in the intellectual world, those rudimentary organs which man carries about with him in his physical structure. They are the surviving indications of a lower state of culture from which the higher and truer have been derived. And a comprehension of the process enables us to understand why “the birth of Jesus Christ was in this wise.” Nothing else can.

* * *

Birth Legends.

In his *Legend of Perseus* and in his *Primitive Paternity*, Mr. E. S. Hartland has brought forward a mass of illustrations to prove two things. First, the widespread belief in the supernatural birth of gods and national heroes; and, second, the equally widespread vogue of superstitious and magical practices to obtain children, which are a practical ignoring of the biological laws governing their production. Thus, a tribe of natives in North-Western Australia believe that birth is quite independent of sexual intercourse. The North Queenslanders believe that babies are brought to women by Nature spirits, the function of the husband being apparently to invoke the spirits to do their work. On the Proserpine River, a supernatural being named Kunya inserts the baby in a woman while she is bathing. Some places are held to be the favourite ground for these unincarnated spirits, and women who have no desire for children will, when passing these spots, ape the walk and appearance of extreme age, in order to deceive the waiting spirit. On the Slave Coast of West Africa, it is believed that the child is derived from the ancestral spirits. Other parts of the world furnish similar examples. And as a product of beliefs such as these we have world-wide magical practices in order to obtain children. For these there is no need to travel far. They exist all over Europe, and almost any comprehensive work on comparative folk-lore will give illustrations of the practices current among Christian peoples who believe that by them fecundity is secured. And they all point to the once almost universal belief that the child is not the physiological consequence of the union of the sexes, but is in sober truth a supernatural product.

Oh, the Pity of It!

Now, what has been said is well known to all writers on comparative mythology and anthropology. But these works have an aggravating knack of stopping short at just the point where they begin to be of real importance. For the value, perhaps the whole value, of a comprehension of the religious beliefs of the lower races lies in their relation to the religious beliefs of the races that are more advanced. But, owing to the widespread fear of vested interests, this is seldom pointed out. The origin of the savage gods is clearly indicated in scores of authoritative works; but there are few, if any, of our first-class men that have the courage to point to the further truth that our modern ideas of God are descended from these primitive and clearly mistaken beliefs, and rest on no other and no better foundations. The consequence is that, when one tries to trace the development of the Christian belief in the Virgin Birth from such savage and primitive beliefs as have been above indicated, one finds oneself on almost virgin soil. But, starting from the fact that the nature of procreation and birth are a genuine discovery made by man in the course of his intellectual development, one may dimly see how belief in the supernatural birth of the scores of gods that have ruled over the minds of men came to be established. At anyrate, its persistence only serves to drive home the lesson that all religion, no matter how refined, has its roots in the delusions that have their sway over the mind of mankind in its most primitive stages.

* * *

"The Birth of Jesus was in this wise."

To our mind it is quite clear that in the Christian story of the Virgin Birth, as in the other classical versions of the same legend that have been quoted, we have a survival of the primitive belief that all birth is supernatural. And it is not difficult to conceive that as a better knowledge of procreation—at least of the fact, if not of the process—gained ground, the interference of the spiritual world in the matter of birth would be restricted to the appearance of striking personalities. In this we are only following the ordinary course of the history of the supernatural, where from everything being thought of as being due to the gods, we get their interference only on special occasions—occasions that become more and more rare as human knowledge becomes more and more precise. Thus, in course of time, it is not every man who is born of the tribal spirits or gods, but only the specially favoured individual. Sexual intercourse between human beings and the gods, such as appears in plain form in some of the legends, and in a veiled form in others, thus carries us back far beyond the period of the classical mythologies to the most primitive form of human thought. The mythologies are themselves late survivals, and their ready acceptance may be partly accounted for by the fact that, as popular folk-lore shows, there is still active in all parts of the world beliefs and practices which associate birth with supernatural intervention. Into the course of the development that derived the Gospel story from the belief of the primitive savage we have now neither the time nor the space to enter, but that the one is derived from the other there cannot be reasonable doubt. Later there gathers round the sexual act all sorts of mystical interpretation, but here, as in other cases, it is the savage who provides the true starting-point. And to the informed, the truth of religion is no longer a question of historical or philosophical enquiry, it is the psychology of religion that is of consequence. Not whether men are justified in their belief, but how they came to believe these things to be true is the pertinent enquiry. Anthro-

pology holds within it the secret of divinity. When the missionary sets forth to convert the savage, he is attacking the parent of his religion. For the savage alone can tell him why "the birth of Jesus was in this wise."

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Saintly Lament.

ONE of the most curious and illuminating passages in the whole Bible occurs in Ps. lxxviii. 61: "He (God) delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand." Here the Almighty is described as permitting himself to be defeated and led into captivity, shorn of his glory. The compilers of the Anglican Prayer Book were horror-struck at such a blasphemous statement, and so, without a moment's hesitation, they took upon themselves the responsibility for correcting the text as follows: "He delivered their power (that is, the power of Israel) into captivity, and their beauty into the enemy's hand." This emendation lowers rather than raises the moral tone of the verse. In both the Authorized and Revised Versions, God is represented as delivering himself into bondage and his renown into the enemy's hand, whereas in the Prayer Book he is pictured as inflicting that humiliating indignity upon his people, an impossible conduct, one would have thought, to a God of justice and truth. Now, Bishop Gore, who is a brave man, pronounces against the Prayer Book version, and decidedly in favour of that in the Bible. And he does very much more than that. He deliberately undertakes the hazardous task of setting the verse in what he considers its historic context. In a sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, and published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for March 3, he relates the story of a disastrous war between Israel and the Philistines as given in 1 Sam. iv.—vii. 1. The battle went against Israel because, it was believed, of the absence of the ark, an oblong box, in which Jehovah had his abode, and there was a cry: "Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that it may come among us, and save us out of the hand of our enemies." As speedily as possible the ark made its appearance in the camp; "and the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp; and they said, Woe unto us." But ere long the God brought into the camp with such serene confidence became a prisoner of war, and was carried in triumph to Ashdod. According to the Psalmist's account of the incident God suffered defeat at the hands of his enemies, and his glory departed. Curiously enough, the subject treated by the Bishop is "The Seeming Weakness of God," of which he supplies one or two other historical illustrations, such as the fall of Jerusalem and the temple, the Babylonian captivity, and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

It will be noticed that Dr. Gore is as cautious as he is bold in his choice of language. He depicts God's weakness as "seeming," not once as "real." And yet this is how he characterizes the state of things at this moment:—

Unless I am very much mistaken, there has not been in our generation a time when the minds of men who believe or who want to believe have been more oppressed with the signs of the weakness of the cause of God. In the great world of politics we were buoyed up during the War with great ideals. We talked of the better England, of the better world that was to be. We talked of the brotherhood of classes and the fellowship of nations. We had great leaders; they spoke great words, stirred us to our depth. But through the dreary months which have followed the Armistice the words have seemed to come to nothing. We find the same

factions of class against class, the same old jealousies of nation against nation, the same indifference to high moral ideals, the same dominance of financial interests, the same selfishness, the same bitterness as in the old bad times. And we say in the bitterness of our hearts, "Why does not God do something? Where is the God of righteousness and justice and truth"?

Then his lordship dons the mantle of pessimism and paints a most depressing picture of "the moral laxity of the times." He speaks of the Catholic Church as involving the maintenance of certain principles of faith and order; "and now," he sorrowfully confesses, "in our society, in almost every newspaper we open, in the talk of clever men, and in the talk of men who are not clever, but who have some sort of interest in religion, these principles are being derided, weakened, and treated as contemptible survivals or superstitions." Naturally, those who believe in and love the Catholic Church go about with sad hearts, "distressed and perplexed." Quite as naturally, in such circumstances, "Scepticism, whether as regards the Church, or about God, is so easy, so plausibly easy, and insinuates itself through everyday talk into the atmosphere that is all round about us, and they cry out, 'Where is the God of truth'?" After addressing his hearers in that doleful style, he observes: "Surely this is a time when God does deliver his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand."

But cannot a right reverend Father-in-God find a way out of this blinding, heart-breaking gloom? Dr. Gore is an honest man, and, puzzled and dismayed, he scarcely knows which way to turn. From the religious point of view, the situation must seem almost hopeless. Hopeless? Yes, verily, the apologist admits, but not so hopeless as it seemed when Jesus Christ hung upon his cross of shame; truth and right are, indeed, weak to-day, but not so weak as they were when the Saviour of the world was wrapped in impenetrable darkness and cried out in despair, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" That is the first comfort the Bishop can offer to his despairing fellow-Christians; but, unfortunately for him, it is a great comfort that involves the complete negation of Christianity, which proves that Christ died utterly in vain. The Bishop's second consolation is no better than the first. It is this: "Through weakness God is made strong." What does he do in his strength? Listen: "The Lord awaked as one out of sleep, and like a giant refreshed with wine. He smote his adversaries backward; he put them to a perpetual reproach" (Ps. lxxviii. 65-6). Dr. Gore actually quotes those words, and says, "That is the other side." Well, but can the return from Babylon be legitimately regarded as a triumph for Jehovah? It was only after the dissolution of the empire of Babylon by Cyrus in the year 538 B.C. that the exiles received permission to seek their fatherland once more; but the majority preferred to stay on where they were, only some forty-two thousand availing themselves of the privilege of returning to Palestine, which they found to be anything but a land flowing with milk and honey for them. The Bishop discreetly omits to illustrate the alleged exemplification of God's strength in the post-exilic history of Palestine, and takes a leap to the time of Christ. He knows full well what sore trials attended and followed the reinstatement of captive Israel in Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the temple. The re-establishment of the ancient Church did not bring peace and happiness in its train, and Israel passed from one foreign dominion to another until the great Dispersion took place which continues to this day.

The long extract cited from the Bishop's discourse shows conclusively that at the close of the second decade in the twentieth century the conquests of the risen Christ

are conspicuous only by their absence. What impresses us most at this stage is not the weakness of God, seeming or real, but the amazing inconclusiveness of his lordship's reasoning. Take the following sample:—

So Christ rose from the dead. In the events of those three days there was as it were compressed into one great act the disclosure of weakness turning into strength, and death turning into life, of the triumph of God in Jesus Christ, in his resurrection, body and spirit, in the world of matter as in the spiritual world, from the weakness of the failure of death. So he was crucified in weakness, yet he lived by the power of God.

Here certainly we have a house built upon the sand, which is bound to fall the moment the rain of facts descends, and the floods of criticism come, and the winds of reason blow upon it, and great shall be the fall thereof. As a matter of simple fact, is it not already a heap of black ruins? For example, what earthly or heavenly proof is there that Christ rose from the dead? He himself is reported to have predicted that if he were lifted up on the cross it would result in his coronation as the King of men and regenerator of the world. Nearly two thousand years afterwards there is visible, on the Bishop's own showing, scarcely any improvement at all in the conditions of life on earth. The kingdom of God so confidently promised has not come; God has failed to subdue the wild lawlessness of human passion; he has rather "suffered the forces of this sea of lawlessness to overwhelm, as it seems, the traces of his providence, of his government, of his justice, and of his truth." What is there left for Christians to cling to? What ground for hope still remains to them? Dr. Gore is delightfully frank, and his candour must have aroused considerable uneasiness and alarm among the faithful few who are ever becoming fewer. He says:—

So we come back to that great principle, which in inseparable, indeed, from any real belief in God, the principle which runs throughout the whole Bible—that is, the expectation of the Day of the Lord, the day when God at the last vindicates himself. He comes into his own. That is the Day of the Lord.

That is what Christians subsist upon—expectation, hope. The Gospel Jesus admitted that it was expedient for him to leave the world for a little while, but promised to return almost immediately. Paul expected him in his own lifetime, and in every age since his disciples have been eagerly waiting for his second advent; but up to the present he has not arrived. The same thing is true of the hope of the redemption of the world through his name. For nineteen hundred years that hope has been passionately cherished and proclaimed by believers, but to-day it seems farther away from realization than at any previous time. The Bishop says: "We must be ready for the worst. We must be ready to be utterly alone. This is the meaning of Christian endurance, and it is the supreme trial of faith."

The Bishop has presented us with the best explanation possible of the rapid and general decay of faith at the present time. He has furnished the most cogent reason why we should renounce our belief in God and begin earnestly to repose confidence in man, who should be trained to conduct his own affairs and to solve his own problems without appealing for aid to any beings or forces outside that Nature of which he is part and parcel.

J. T. LLOYD.

DIVINES AND THE LAITY.

The Divine stands wrapt up in his clouds of mysteries, and the amused Laity must pay Tithes and Veneration to be kept in obscurity, grounding their hope of future knowledge on a competent stock of present ignorance.

—George Farquhar, "Discourse upon Comedy," 1718.

The Muse of Meredith.

I would rather have written "Salamambo" than have built Brooklyn Bridge. It was more difficult, and it will last longer.—*Edgar Saltus.*

By virtue of his splendid gifts, George Meredith's best works remain among the brightest gems of English literature, so rich in glorious genius and transcendent talent. Tennyson has told us that, when Byron died, it was as though the firmament had lost a mighty star, in whose vanishing the world was left to chaos and night. Meredith was more to us than Byron, for he had been a living glory of our State for over half a century, and the star of his genius had wheeled so long and with such majesty that we had grown inured to his presence, and looked upon him as essential to the aspect of our heaven. So continuous was his influence, that the intellectual life of our time runs in a channel largely of his making; and to ends that but for him had been shaped far other than they were.

A striking instance of the provincialism of the average English reader was the comparative unpopularity of George Meredith. Popularity, of course, may mean nothing or everything. It may be that of "The Bells of Hell go Ting-a-ling," or of "The Messiah"; of "The Rosary," or of "Don Quixote." It may be absolutely damning, or the one incontestable proof of supreme merit. The tests are universality and endurance, for only noble work shall win and keep a lasting position. The best appeals in the long run to all, like *Hamlet*, though not in equal degree. With no advertisement, no clique, no furious opposition, but by sheer merit, George Meredith won his place in art.

Like Shakespeare, Meredith "unlocks his heart" in his verse. His magnificent novels remain among the finest works in our language; but in the poems we have Meredith's own passion; his great heart beating at the sight of love and heroism. The poems are so personal that one is tempted to imagine that, instead of having worked on the book, the author had worked straight on us. He defies, like Walt Whitman, our æsthetics, and proves that the greatest thoughts are those which are quickest dismembered and absorbed by the reader, and turned into part of himself.

Genius refuses to be labelled. Study Meredith's poems separately, and you think you can classify the author. In one poem he seems to be optimistic, in another he appears pessimistic; and then, perhaps, "Juggling Jerry" or "The Old Chartist" comes to upset the pleasant little theory. At the bedrock of Meredith's work lies the Horatian liking for the golden mean.

To re-read the old favourite poems is an unalloyed pleasure. How Meredith brings home "the voice of great Nature." Her praise is hymned in "The Woods of Westernmain," and in many other glorious lines, such as "The Thrush in February" and "Love in the Valley," where the liquid cadences linger in the ear like the notes of an ascending skylark.

Those who think that poets are always extremists will do well to ponder Meredith's lines, "Lucifer in Starlight," one of the sanest and noblest utterances in English:—

On a starred night, Prince Lucifer arose,
Tired of his dark dominions swung the fiend,
Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened,
Where sinners hugged their spectre of repose,
Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
And now upon his western wing he leaned,
Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careened,
Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows.
Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars
With memory of the old revolt from awe,

He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
Around the ancient track marched rank on rank,
The army of unalterable law.

The same perfect sanity appears in the lines from *Modern Love*:—

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

A more ironic note is sounded in the dramatic "Juggling Jerry," where the poor dying showman says, with fine stoicism:—

It's past parsons to console us;
No, nor no doctor fetch for me,
I can die without my bolus;
Two of a trade, lass, never agree!
Parson and doctor! don't they love rarely,
Fighting the devil in other men's fields!
Stand up yourself and match him fairly:
Then see how the rascal yields.

Great writers never pass each other without a royal salute. Read Meredith's magnificent tribute to Shakespeare:—

O lived the Master now to paint us Man,
That little twist of brain would ring a chime
Of whence it came and what it caused, to start
Thunders of laughter, clearing air and heart.

In another poem he describes Shakespeare's laughter:
broad as ten thousand beeves
At pasture.

It is a resplendent distinction that, apart from the play-going public, who agree to crown Shakespeare as the Master, his most resolute partizans are those of his own household, poets and novelists, men with the blood of genius flowing in their veins. And in Valhalla assuredly the artist of "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel" shall not sit far below the artist who gave us *Hamlet*.

MIMNERMUS.

The Devil.

I HAVE a great respect for His Satanic Majesty, whom I regard as a much maligned and little understood person, whose services to the world have never been adequately appreciated. I am not personally acquainted with him—know him only by hearsay; but from what is written about him, I take him to be a man of great ability and good quality.

First of all, he is a thinker. You cannot make him believe that things are so by merely telling him that they are so. And as a critic of Jehovah and Jehovah's ways of doing things, as a sceptic and an investigator, the Devil has always been a benefactor of the human race. When Jehovah placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and provided that they should always remain mental imbeciles by forbidding them to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that they might remain his abject slaves forever through ignorance, it was the Devil who came to their rescue and persuaded them to throw off the yoke of blind belief and obedience, and think for themselves. He told them that it was much better to look good and evil squarely in the face, and choose which they would follow, than to be shut up for ever in a nursery, rocked in a cradle of ignorance and swathed in the constricting bandages of respectability.

It has always been Jehovah's way to frighten people into blind submission; so he told Adam and Eve that, if they ate the forbidden fruit, on that very day they would surely die. But the Devil said that Jehovah only

wanted to keep them in ignorance, and that they would not die on that day; and sure enough he was right. How thankful we should be to the Devil for persuading them to eat of the tree of knowledge, for if they had remained as ignorant as Jehovah wished, the human brain would never have developed, and life would have been as dull as a Methodist prayer-meeting.

To the Devil, too, has been ascribed by the clergy all the grand work done by Bruno, Voltaire, Hume, Gibbon, Paine, Huxley, Darwin, Ingersoll, Bradlaugh, and thousands of other great infidels. According to the priests, he has been the instigator and leader of every effort for human freedom; so that if Jehovah had had it all his own way, things would have been far worse than they are. From this point of view, the courteous and clever Satan of the Old Testament is the father of invention and discovery, an inspirer of freedom of thought, and the moving spirit of reform. But now look at the Devil as the wicked being he is painted by the Church, roaming about like "a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour." If this be so, did not God create him? Could not God destroy him if he wished to do so? And if God declines to do so, is not God responsible for all the evil done by him? Manifestly, the Devil must be much more industrious, intelligent, and powerful than God, for he always gets the better of him. He has a hundred followers to God's one. God builds the churches, but the Devil sits in most of the pews, and in some of the pulpits too. God loves the people, and wants them to go to heaven, but the Devil gets nearly all of them. God wants to make them good and happy, but the Devil prevents him from doing so.

If you could find God, and were to say to him: "See here; why don't you put an end to all this revolting poverty and crime and disease?" If you could drag him through the slums in every large city and town, and make him look at them, and listen to them, and smell them; if you could say to him: "Come, now, explain yourself; you are God—omnipotent, omniscient, all-loving—and it is your business to see that nothing of this horrible sort occurs; why don't you put a stop to it?" He would have to answer: "Well, to tell you the honest truth, I can't, because the Devil won't let me. He's too smart, too cunning, and too strong for me. Some day I hope to get the better of him, but just now he runs things pretty well to please himself."

Taking the Devil, then, in his Christian character as a fallen angel, the opposite of goodness and kindness, vindictive, malicious, never so happy as when contemplating the miseries of an ignorant and unhappy people, and it is just such a being that seems to me to govern the world to-day.

What I mean is that if there were a nearly all-powerful supernatural being who had wished to contrive forms of government, an industrial system and an ecclesiastical institution well calculated to breed poverty and crime, to foster ignorance and to engender disease, he could not have succeeded better than our politicians and priests have done under the pretended guidance of their imaginary God.

Think of the atrocities committed by the men of all the nations engaged during the recent War, and, indeed, still going on, pre-eminent among which for cowardice and cruelty stands out our blockade of Russia, involving the slow torture to death by starvation for millions of innocent and helpless women and children. Now, where is the root of all this evil? for we must assume that such infamies could not occur except in a world ruled by the Devil, or by men as wicked as the Devil. This is the root of it all. You have an army and a police force for the purpose of doing, primarily, two

things, viz., preventing poor people from using idle land and from using any kind of money they choose in trading with each other. Our politicians make laws giving certain privileged persons the power to hold idle land out of use, and forbidding all persons from using any money except that which is under the control of the bankers and politicians, and the soldiers and policemen enforce these laws with bayonets, clubs, and guns. And adding insult to injury, they tax us to support them in unproductive work, and arm them so as to be ready to kill us if we disobey the rulers. We are forced to feed, and clothe, and arm, a large number of men whose primary business is to prevent us from doing two things that are essential to our welfare, and that it is right we should do. This could not be except in a world ruled by the Devil, or in a nation of ignorant or imbecile slaves. And this is an exact description of the great majority in this country to-day. They have not brains enough to say: "There is an unemployed man and there is unemployed land. Put them together and your industrial problem is solved, provided that you also allow this man to exchange what he produces in any way and any place he likes." They think that the professional clubbers and shooters ought to prevent the idle man and the idle land from getting together, and that nobody should use any kind of money except that which is completely controlled by the most dangerous gang of profiteers with whom a country was ever cursed. Moreover, a disabled man, or a starving woman, or a hungry child is not allowed to ask a passer-by for a penny or a crust of bread, nor is anybody allowed to peddle a few wares without first buying a hawk's licence. They cannot use land that no one else is using; they cannot beg; they cannot even sell a few trifles without being fined. What can they do? They can ask God to help them and go to work for a sweater.

And since I am writing about the Devil, what do you think of a civilization that makes it so hard for a girl to earn a decent living that she will stand up before a priest and swear that she loves an elderly man well enough to enter with him into the intimate relations of marriage when she is really marrying him for his money? In which the dangers of poverty are so great that many editors and parsons will write and preach what they do not believe from fear of coming to want; in which it is a virtue to tell people that they will go to hell for honest thought, and a crime to ask for a cup of coffee; in which legal causes are kept at work that inevitably produce wide-spread poverty, ignorance, crime, and disease, and in which the whole machinery of Church and State is hotly opposed to removing those causes? All this seems to me like the work of a most malignant Devil, and by-and-by all the people will see it as I do, and when they do—oh, when they do!

G. O. WARREN.

POETICAL, LIFE.

This is what you shall do: love the earth and the sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and the crazy, devote your income and labour to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence towards the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown, or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and mothers of families, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul; and your very flesh shall be a great poem, and have the richest fluency, not only in its words, but in the silent lines of its lips and face, and between the lashes of your eyes, and in every motion and joint of your body.—Walt Whitman.

Spiritualism.

VII.

SPIRITUALISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND THE POWER OF FAITH.

NOW that Spiritualism is becoming a religious power in the land, the majority of the priests and their dupes, seeing a rival faith claiming its believers, are very busy ascribing the whole movement to the power of the Devil. To all Freethinkers this can hardly fail to appear an entertaining spectacle. Sunday after Sunday churchgoers are regaled with stories of heaven and its beauties, whilst their unfortunate children are forced to sing of pearly gates and streets of gold. The life everlasting is proclaimed by both priests and people alike, but what a terrible thing it is to attempt to prove it! The fact that Spiritualism claims actually to *prove* a life beyond the grave damns it at once in the eyes of all good orthodox Christians, since such a revelation ought naturally to be the sole property of Holy Mother Church. Spiritualism springs, therefore, direct from Satan, and on that account must be strenuously resisted. The results are sometimes amusing, and recent letters in the press reveal the extraordinary expedients adopted by the Christians to save the situation. One great difficulty is that connected with the furnishing of heaven, or summerland, as the Spiritualists prefer to call it. Christians have long been accustomed to talk of streets and gates, harps and crowns, white garments and similar accessories. But the wicked Spiritualist actually speaks of highways and portals, pianos, hats and coats, which, when everything is said and done, are really rather like the Christian articles. The whole secret of the flutter in the religious dove-cotes is that for the first time they are being taken seriously. By dint of repeating their religious formulæ over and over again, the original meaning attached to the words gradually disappeared, and it was a rude shock to find anybody who really believed that when one went to heaven one would find harps and pianos, top hats and billycocks. Indeed, such a logical interpretation of their own theories proved too much for many of the clerics, so all they could do was to relapse into vague snortings and breathings of Satan. Theosophy was not such a danger. It was true many old ladies, and some neurotic young ones attended readings, in an attempt to become Mahatmas, but then those who wished could forsake the occult side, and pass over to the philosophical section, finally finding themselves at the feet of Rudolf Steiner. But Spiritualism is quite different. Here are famous men talking about their interviews with their dead sons, and the daughters of legal gentlemen becoming mediumistic, and telling us all about the other world through the obliging condescension of high French and Italian spirits. If any of the Christians at the Church Congresses had any knowledge of abnormal psychology, they would find it fairly easy to deal with their opponents. But, unfortunately, being as ignorant of that as they are of everything else of importance, all they can do is to froth at the mouth, and shout out that Spiritualism drives men mad, and that it is the Devil which makes the tables run round. As to the former charge, its audacity is really a little disconcerting. The number of persons driven mad through Spiritualism must be a very small minority

compared with those driven insane through religious mania, even if we took into consideration the actual number of believers of both faiths. It is hardly seemly for a Church, supported as it is by neuropaths of the first order, to accuse the believers in another creed of tending towards madness. Not that spiritualism is not dangerous. The constant attendance at *seances* with the inevitable tendency towards automatism, naturally does not make for the balanced mind, nor does the continual discussion of dubious marvels assist in forming a sound judgment. But for believers of other faiths to denounce Spiritualists is simply the old story of the pot calling the kettle black.

In the *Daily Telegraph* of February 10, 1920, Miss Marie Corelli gave some curious opinions upon this subject. She started off by assuring us that Jesus was referring to Spiritualism when he said: "There shall arise false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders, insomuch that if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect." Then she goes on to speak of the "Spiritualism which is not Spiritualism," telling us that she knows positively that the dead never communicate with us at all. This gifted authoress evidently knows all about it. The spirits, she says, "have no desire to communicate, having reached a plane of comprehensive intelligence" where this earth is but a trifle. Again, according to Miss Marie Corelli, who seems to possess inside information, "both natural and spiritual law" forbid such communications, and the same opinion is put forward by another writer in the same paper on February 18, who deplors the fact that so many of his fellow citizens are laying aside "their modesty and sobriety of judgment" and "their reverent way of treating as mysteries the things which Christ has left as mysteries."

Just as the power of faith operates disastrously in a Christian, so does credulity in a Spiritualist affect him in a similar manner. Thus there are certain people who know nothing or next to nothing of trickery, and so cannot distinguish what is genuine from what is fraudulent at *seances* and conjuring performances. If their religion is Spiritualism, then the only thing to be done is to say that those conjurers whose feats appear especially miraculous are really marvellous mediums, who, through reasons best known to themselves, pretend to be common performers. In the old days Spiritualists used to think that Mr. Maskelyne and Mr. Cooke were powerful mediums, because they could not see through their illusions! This provoked the indignation of D. D. Home, who wrote: "Surely Spiritualism must have fallen very low, when a couple of professed conjurers are hailed by Spiritualists as its best exponents."

It may sound incredible to my readers, but this sort of thing is still going on! Mr. J. Hewa McKenzie, the supervisor of an institution calling itself the British College of Psychic Science, is a lucid exponent of this remarkable theory. In his book, *Spirit Intercourse: its Theory and Practice*, he mentions Mrs. Thompson, of the "Thompson Mystery," Miss Fay, who was formerly a member of the Magic Circle, and Harry Houdini, as if they were powerful mediums! On February 8, 1919, *Light* contradicted this absurd story, but Mr. McKenzie repeated his statement in the issue for March 1, 1919, as, he says, "it directly controverts statements made in my book . . . In which I con-

fidently attribute to Houdini mediumistic powers of a transcendent character." The reason why this performer does not wish the public to know that some of his work is due to spirit agency is, according to Mr. McKenzie, that such an announcement would be badly received by a music-hall audience.

It is a little difficult to understand whether Mr. McKenzie is having a joke at the expense of his readers, or whether he really believes his extraordinary theories, but at any rate, I fear we can hardly hope that the British College of Psychic Science will do very much to forward the true interests of psychical research.

E. J. D.

Acid Drops.

The Rev. F. B. Meyer, D.D., the President of the National Free Church Council, pitched his Address distinctly in the minor key. Neither without nor within the Churches could he see any encouraging, inspiring, signs. At present the logic of facts is too formidable to allow the usual irresponsible indulgence in the illogicalness of faith. At Newcastle-on-Tyne, less than ten years ago, Dr. Meyer confidently predicted the advent, in a few months, of the mightiest revival of religion the world had ever seen; but that prophecy remains unfulfilled to this day. Instead of a revival a serious decay has been going on for many years, the reality of which the reverend gentleman now frankly acknowledges and bitterly deploras.

He also drew a very dreadful picture of the state of the country, but naturally, being himself, succeeded in making a deal of what he said ridiculous. Limitation of the family, he said, indicated race degeneration—as though there were any possible connection between quantity and quality. Evidently Mr. Meyer thinks that if you only get enough people born, the kind of children that are brought into the world, and the kind of training they are able to get, are questions of subordinate importance. He also dwelt on the unrest, the craving for excitement, the growth of crime, etc., all of which, he said, was probably due to the abnormal excitement of the War. That latter was quite an intelligible remark—for F. B. Meyer.

We are reaping the results of five years of War, but it is little short of impudence for men like Mr. Meyer to point that out. For it was precisely his class who helped to fool the people with talk of the "moral uplift" of the War, who told us that all the men were splendid, and the women were splendid, that the War had appealed to the ideal in man, and who promised us a new heaven and a new earth, and who resented any healthy view of the effect of war as an attack on the character of the men and on the welfare of the country. Of course, all governments at war have to lie, and lie the more strenuously as the war is prolonged. But the lies of government would be comparatively innocuous if they were not backed up and endorsed by those who are looked up to as guides in morals and religion. And if the clergy had pointed out to the people that however necessary the War was or might be, it could do no other than demoralize all in it—whether civilian or soldier—they would have expected a tonic effect, and might have lessened some of the evils from which we are now suffering. But the clergy played for profit. And they were as unscrupulous in their exploitation of the situation, as the very worst of the "patriots" who took advantage of the country's needs to plunder it with as little compunction as though they had been the advance guard of a conquering enemy. There may be some difficulty in getting the War plunderers to disgorge their wealth, because in a Christian country money is the one thing that is really sacred; but there is no doubt that the clergy are having to pay the price for the policy they pursued. And they do not like it. Towards the end of the War, a prominent Nonconformist minister said to us: "I think we clergy made a mistake, and I suppose you Freethinkers will see that we pay for it." I assured him that

he might depend upon that much. And I hope that Freethinkers will remember that when the flames of hatred and misrepresentation needed fanning to keep the War going, when the official lies needed backing to the same end, it was the clergy that fell over each other in their eagerness to carry out the work.

Christians are very loth to admit that women are human beings. Two women have been appointed Methodist local preachers, the first in the history of Methodism.

More news of the "starving" clergy. The Bishop of London was among the guests at an afternoon party at Buckingham Palace. The band of the Coldstream Guards provided the music. The late Rev. W. Scratton, formerly Vicar of Badby-cum-Newnham, left £30,080; and the Rev. H. J. Jauncey, of Bolton, Lancs, left £30,145.

We have said it so often ourselves that we are naturally pleased to find it being said by others. Here is Mr. Herbert Morrison, Secretary of the London Labour Party, saying that:—

Education is the only basic weapon for Democracy. An ignorant Democracy can be pulled all over the place by unscrupulous politicians, by *agents provocateurs*, and by leaders only a little less ignorant than their followers.

That is sober truth, and it contains the whole justification for the Freethought policy. It is a lesson that the Democracy of every land needs to learn. And when they set about learning it, it will not be long before they discover the further truth that there is no such enemy existent to sane thinking as theology. At present many of the labour leaders are afraid to speak out on this subject. When they do they will stand a much better chance of realizing their legitimate aims.

Rev. Dr. Selbie, Principal of Mansfield College, says that the question of education must be faced. But by that he apparently means the Churches must work for more religious instruction in the schools. Dr. Selbie might, were he not a clergyman, bear in mind the fact that we have never been without religion in the schools, and the result is what we see. Besides, Dr. Selbie professes to believe that the State should not teach religion—to adults. And one would like to know on what ground the State is justified in teaching it to children? The only reason we can see is that the adult will not have it, and that children can't resist. The helplessness of the child is made the occasion of attack, instead of its being an appeal for protection. Theology is a cowardly and a contemptible thing, and it does not improve with age.

The Church's care for education is partly explained in a letter by the Rev. J. R. Thomas, of Sneinton, Nottingham, in which he says: "We have a church school that supplies the parish church with altar-screens, choristers, organists, and choir-masters, and has done so for the past fifty years. Our school is the handmaid of the Church."

The Rev. Scott Lidgett informed the Education Committee of the L.C.C. that "teachers, with clergy, and doctors must not expect to be well paid, as teaching is a labour of love." We would be more impressed with this advice if we were convinced that the clergy were not in receipt of larger salaries than they get because they decline to take them. But so far as our information goes, the only reason why any clergyman ever takes a small salary is because he cannot get a larger one. And, bearing in mind the way in which we are constantly told of the "poor clergy," the advice strikes us as a piece of clerical "cheek." Besides, teachers do not profess, as teachers, to believe in the blessings of poverty. The clergy do, and therefore should not complain if they are asked to live up to their professions. We refrain from saying anything as to the relative value of the services of the parson and the teacher to the community. That will suggest itself to all.

Rev. F. C. Spurr told the Free Church Council concerning Spiritualism that, when we had done with fraud, we were

compelled to postulate a "mysterious psychic force, the nature of which was unknown"—which is exactly the kind of uninformed thinking that one would expect to hear at a Church gathering. There is not the slightest necessity for the invocation of this mysterious psychic force. Students of the more recent developments in abnormal psychology are not in the least at sea as to the class of phenomena with which they are dealing. The trouble is that on the side of both attack and defence the subject is handled by people who are very often quite incompetent to deal with it. Both appeal to the uninformed intelligence, the one by falling back on the fatally easy theory of "all fraud," the other by recounting a series of wonderful occurrences calculated to dazzle the uninstructed. As a matter of fact, the admittedly genuine phenomena connected with Spiritualism are well known in other circumstances that have not the remotest connection with survival after death, and the final refutation of Spiritualism is to be found on just these lines.

The rage for publishing absurd stories of the supernatural appears to have infected even the *Daily Herald*. In its issue for March 17 it wastes the larger part of a column in telling the story of a cheap coloured print "over the altar of a little private chapel in France" which oozes human blood. There is the usual testimony of an Englishman, etc., and altogether one wonders, with so much sensible matter that might be printed, why the *Herald* wastes its space on childish superstitions of this kind. Perhaps it feels that it must compete with some of the other papers which have secured mental degenerates to give them first-hand information about the next world. The whole thing gives a rather depressing glimpse of how little the mass of people are removed from the primitive savage.

Cardinal O'Connell, the Roman Catholic prelate of Boston, U.S.A., says that American husbands are too lenient with their wives, and that men should exercise authority in their homes. The lady Bostonians are irate with the celibate Cardinal, and want to know where the prelate finds his authority for such statements.

The *Bedfordshire Times* offers some comments on our recent criticism of its fears as to what would happen to the country in the absence of religion. It says that the number of people "who profess (or rather who possess) no religion is so small that it is difficult to found any conclusions on statistics, but anyone with a knowledge of human nature can imagine the state of things that would prevail in the entire absence of religious teaching." For ourselves, we quite refrain from allowing our flesh to creep at the prospect. And, really, if the number of people who profess, or possess, no religion is so small, then it seems that the lack of religion cannot be considered as a potent cause of whatever there is regrettable in present-day life. And that was exactly our case. The Christian cannot have it both ways. If the number of non-Christians represent a negligible portion of the population, then it is folly to attribute whatever wrong exists to the prevalence of unbelief. If, on the other hand, it is Christians who are in a miserable minority, to talk about the evil consequences that will ensue in the absence of religion is clearly absurd.

The truth is that, fundamentally, morality has nothing to do with religion. Religion only comes in as one of the many forces that affect the expression of morality. And it does not require a very profound study of life to see that one of the chief influences of religion is to provide a cover for what is often some very ugly aspects of human nature. Persecution is a case in point. It may plausibly be argued that the root of persecution is intolerance, and that intolerance is connected with other things than religion. That is true enough; but there is no other subject in connection with which persecution assumes the quality that it does with religion. In other connections a man is more likely to see an evil as it is. In connection with religion, it faces him in a way that serves to disguise its uglier features. And it is surely with intense religion that one so often finds a narrowness of character and a meanness that all would be ashamed

of in other directions. We advise the *Bedfordshire Times* to try again.

The *Church Times* for March 19 devotes its leading article to a discussion of "Uncovenanted Mercies," by which is meant that for saintly Nonconformists, God has arranged a kind of back door entrance into eternal life. Only members of the Catholic Church are privileged to enter by the front.

The *Church Times* is fully justified in its adoption of the charitable motto: "Nulla salus nisi in Ecclesia." The Gospel Jesus says: "No man cometh unto the Father but through me." The New Testament makes no provision even for a back-door salvation; it is an invention of the modern Church. As our able contemporary observes: "Christianity is the most exclusive religion in the world"; and in consequence of its exclusiveness, in conjunction with its utter impotence, it is now being itself excluded from the belief and practice of mankind.

A correspondent of the *Christian World* notes that, at the Free Church gathering at Leicester, one was struck by the absence of men from thirty to forty years of age. "It was a middle-aged and old men's assembly." We take that as very symptomatic. It means that the Churches are losing touch with the most virile thought of the day. Young men are ceasing to pay attention to what they have to say. In the general weakening of mere authority, the Churches stand to lose the most.

On the other hand, a very striking feature of the meetings held under the auspices of the N.S.S. has been for some time past the very large number of young men who are among the audience. That is one of the most promising indications as to the future of our Party and of the Movement it represents. In our meaning, it also means that the policy of the N.S.S. in never compromising in its statement of the case for Freethought is now reaping its reward. The War has shaken things up, and those young men who have lost touch with religion are disinclined to half measures. They are not afraid of the logic of their position; and that not only means more Freethought, but more Freethought with the courage to express itself clearly and plainly. And that is the kind of thing that thought in this country has sadly needed for very long.

A Wesleyan chapel at Golder's Green is to be pulled down to make room for a cinema theatre. This will be something like a conversion.

"Pastors Quit Pulpit to Earn Living" is the heading of a column in a Los Angeles paper. The unconscious satire of it is striking. It carries the implication that hitherto the livings have not been earned. And on that we refrain from expressing an opinion. But we wonder what some of these self-sacrificing preachers of the gospel of renunciation would say if they were asked to take up the lot of a Freethought advocate who has to go on year after year without the security of a single shilling, who never does get from his advocacy anything approaching a living wage, but who does not spend his time crying about the need—for a larger salary?

How You Can Help.

GET your newsagent to display a copy of this journal in a prominent position.

Show or hand your own copy of the paper to a friend who is not acquainted with it. It is surprising the number of new readers that can be made in this way.

If you do not file your copy, leave it in train or tram-car when read.

Send us on the name of anyone to whom you think that specimen copies of the *Freethinker* would be acceptable. We will see that they get them all right.

Send us any suggestions you have to offer as to the way in which our circulation may be increased.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

March 28, Maesteg; April 11, Stratford Town Hall; April 18, Swansea; April 25, Mardy.

To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—March 28, Stratford Town Hall.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—H. Courlander, £1 3s. 3d. Mr. Batten, £1 3s. 3d.

A. E. MADDOCK.—MSS. safely to hand. Thanks. Will publish so soon as we have cleared some of the articles already in hand. Hope you are well.

H. G. F.—Received with thanks. Appear next week.

X. Y. Z. (Wigan).—We do not know the book you name. There is another book by Dr. Foote which, we believe, is supplied by G. Standing, 9 Finsbury Pavement, E.C.

F. A. KING.—We will see that the paper reaches you regularly. Sorry to hear of your ill-fortune. Hope that things will soon improve.

A. E. READE.—Received, and shall appear as early as possible.

T. R.—Advice is always helpful—even when it is not followed. One or two of our friends have adopted the plan of inserting a small advertisement of the *Freethinker* in local papers, and generally with good results.

A. POWELL (Durban).—The paper is being mailed to you regularly. We are gratified at your high opinion of the *Freethinker*. We have many readers in South Africa, and hope to have many more. When things are more settled, we have in view the setting up of an agency for S.A. We feel sure that it would be a good thing, if we could hit on the right man to take charge.

"ATHEIST" (Wolverhampton) sends a P.O. for 10s. 5s. towards the funds of the Birmingham Branch N.S.S. and 5s. towards *Freethinker* Sustentation Fund. Both sums have been allocated as desired.

E. MORRIS.—We are getting things published as quickly as possible. But printers will not be hurried nowadays, and the want of available capital makes us proceed more cautiously than we should were we more fortunately situated in that respect.

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 B. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

BE TRUE.

To every poet, to every writer, we might say: Be true, if you would be believed. Let a man but speak forth with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition of his own heart; and other men, so strangely are we all knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him. In culture, in extent of view, we may stand above the speaker, or below him; but in either case his words, if they are earnest and sincere, will find some response within us; for in spite of all casual varieties in outward rank or inward, as face answers to face, so does the heart of man to man.—*Carlyle.*

Sugar Plums.

Owing to Mr. Cohen's absence in Leeds, we are indebted to Mr. Lloyd for seeing this issue of the *Freethinker* through the press.

To-day (March 28) Mr. Cohen visits South Wales. He will lecture in the afternoon, at 2.30, in the Coliseum, Caerau, and in the evening in the Gem Cinema House at Maesteg, at 7.30. There has been a great deal of discussion in the local press of late on the subject of Secularism, and large meetings are expected.

To-day (March 28) Mr. Lloyd lectures in the Town Hall, Stratford. We trust that friends in the locality are doing their best to make the meeting as widely known as they can. Mr. Lloyd's subject is "Dream Life and Real Life." The lecture commences at 7 o'clock. Admission is free, with the customary collection.

The Manchester Branch brought its season to a successful close on Sunday last with two lectures from Mr. Cohen. There were good attendances, a fine sale of literature—always an indication of interest—and, with free admission, satisfactory collections. It was pleasant to learn that the Branch is in a quite healthy condition, and Mr. Black, the able and energetic Secretary, and the rest of the Committee are to be congratulated on their close of a strenuous year's work.

We are pleased to learn that Sunday meetings have been resumed at Belfast, in the Abercorn Hall, 101 Victoria Street. A lecture will be given on Sunday, at 3 p.m.

Mr. John Thomas, B.A., delivered two very interesting lectures at Swansea on Sunday last to fairly large and appreciative audiences. The keen attention paid to the lectures may be judged by the numerous questions asked. Many strange faces were noticed at the meetings, which is very encouraging. On April 18 Mr. Cohen will deliver the last lecture of the season. It is to be hoped that all the members will help to make it a record one, thereby assuring a successful issue to the season.

It is desired that Freethinkers in North Finchley district, who are willing to assist in the formation of a Branch of the National Secular Society in that locality, should communicate with Mr. C. Lewis, 18 William Street, North Finchley. We hope that many will see their way clear to do so, and that a flourishing Branch will soon be the result.

We learn that Mr. F. E. Willis, of Birmingham, has just been appointed one of the Life Governors of Birmingham University. Mr. Willis's many friends in Birmingham and elsewhere will be pleased to hear the news, and on behalf of the N.S.S. Executive, of which Mr. Willis is a member, we beg to offer him our heartiest congratulations. Mr. Willis is well known in Birmingham, and is a frequent and acceptable lecturer on the Secular platform in that city.

The bound copies of *Determinism or Free-Will* have now been delivered, and all copies ordered have been sent out. If anyone has not received their copy information should be at once sent to our Shop Manager.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—On Sunday Dr. Dunlop delivered a very interesting address on "How to Give Minorities Representation." There was a critical audience and keen discussion. Next Sunday closes our propaganda for this session, when Mr. George Ives will speak on "Empires—Old and New." Mr. Ives has addressed us on several occasions, and is known to us as an interesting lecturer. Will all members please make an effort to be present at the closing meeting of the session, and bring along any suggestions for debates for the autumn.—F. AKROYD.

Religion, Rationalism, and Morality.

At the present time Theism is most commonly defended on the grounds of its utility.

Becoming increasingly unable to vindicate his anthropomorphic beliefs, the religionist takes refuge in asserting that conviction of the existence of a personal Deity exercises a salutary control over the believer's conduct. He argues that religion and morality are so inextricably bound together that the latter cannot exist without the former. Sometimes he paints a terrible picture of what must happen if religion loses its hold over humanity—an era of immorality and unbridled passions is to intervene; force, physical or intellectual, is to become the one arbiter in the affairs of mankind; human sympathy is, apparently, to disappear, and civilization perish.

Not infrequently the religious apologist supplements his argument that no code of conduct can be operative upon mankind without belief in its divine origin and sanction, by adducing disgraceful episodes from the life of some Freethinker; yet, inconsistently, grows indignant if an opponent attempts to demonstrate that the influence of "revealed religion" is pernicious by similar dunghill rakings, or by reference to certain unsavoury anecdotes concerning the Biblical patriarchs.

Now, whilst it may be true that the average Englishman has an indistinct idea that the moral standard by which he regulates his life is divinely established, and may, if transgressed, call down upon him divine disapprobation and punishment, religion is not the integral part of his life that the Theistic apologist claims it to be; his ethical code consists almost entirely of empirical generalizations, partly impressed upon him during childhood by his parents and teachers (these generalizations having been slowly built up from the experiences of successive generations of the race) and partly the result of inductions suggested by his personal experiences.

Religion does not, in the vast majority of cases, exercise an effective control over conduct, whether it be in the sphere of self discipline, in the regulation of behaviour in the small diurnal affairs of social intercourse, or in the maintenance of those more serious relationships which industrial and political activities call into being. Finally, one looks in vain for any large inspiration derived from the current theology; the last five or six decades exhibit no phenomena in any manner resembling the Crusades or the Religious Wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It is hardly necessary to point out that no man guides his life, consciously or unconsciously, in accordance with the precepts to be found in the Sermon on the Mount; to point out that such injunctions as "I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"; "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you"; and "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away," are tacitly assumed to be impracticable rules for the guidance of conduct; spite the eloquence with which the moral principles they illustrate are enunciated, and the rhetoric with which the Christian ideal is defended.

Even that practicable, if strangely hybrid, code of ethics obtained by "interpreting" the Sermon on the Mount, adding to it the least violent of the Judaic commandments, and adulterating the resulting combination with the dictates of common sense, which commonly passes for Christian morality, cannot truly be claimed as being intimately associated with Churchianity; otherwise the clergy would not be frequently complaining that

their churches are half empty every Sunday, whilst every cinema place is overcrowded. And even of the regular church or chapel-goers one may justifiably suspect that in many cases attendance at divine service is no more than compliance with convention, being considered a proof of "respectability." Whether their religious convictions are so strong that they would choose death or voluntary exile to a savage country in preference to denying them is, to say the least, questionable.

Nor, as already pointed out, does the idealism of the New Testament, or the various protean creeds which masquerade as Christianity, profoundly affect political principles. Even the Nonconformist Conscience (in England, at least) has almost ceased to be a factor to be reckoned with in politics; and whereas the disputes between King and Parliament, which culminated in the "Great Rebellion," were largely coloured by religious opinion, and were the cause of much theological disputation, scarcely anyone in our generation attempts, in discussions as to the worth of a political principle, or the probable effects of a piece of legislation, to introduce serious arguments deduced from religious belief. Bolshevism, a levy on capital, nationalization of the mines and railways, and all the other much-debated contemporary political questions, are discussed on their own merits, and without reference to their compatibility or incompatibility with any theological conceptions.

Turn to industrial matters, and the same divorce of religion from practical life is apparent. That close association of religion and industry which has bequeathed to us harvest festivals and the patron deities and saints of the arts and crafts, has ceased to exist. Such nostrums for industrial disorders as Whitley Councils, a minimum wage, and compulsory arbitration are entirely secular, and are defended or attacked solely on the grounds of their utility, and without any reference to their harmony, or lack of harmony, with Christianity.

The same lack of vitality in the current religion is observable if we contemplate science and art. In Mediæval Europe such learning as existed was to be found within the Church (whilst even during the Renaissance not a few of the leaders of the intellectual quickening were Churchmen); to-day, religion and organized knowledge are not only quite distinct, but many of their respective exponents are mutually antipathetic. Similarly, art, which in the Middle Ages found all its inspiration in religion, has progressively come to find less afflatus in it.

In short, it is absurd to speak or think of Christianity (or Churchianity, for that matter) as being either the basis of individual morality or as supplying the chief inspiration to altruistic or collective action.

One suspects that Lecky had Christianity in mind when he wrote:—

.....Frequently civilization makes opinions that opposed to it simply obsolete. They perish by indifference, not by controversy. They are relegated to the dim twilight land that surrounds every living faith; the land, not of death, but of the shadow of death; the land of the unrealized and the inoperative. Sometimes, too, we find the phraseology, the ceremonies, the formularities, the external aspect of some phase of belief that has long since perished, connected with a system that has been created by the wants and is thrilling with the life of modern civilization (*The Rise and Influence of Rationalism, Introduction*).

But it may be asked: "If the code of ethics by which the national life is regulated is not, for most citizens, intimately associated with any religious doctrines, on what is it based?"

As already pointed out, the somewhat indefinite moral code to which the average man or woman ultimately

refers an action when its morality is questioned, is one formulated from experience. This code, however, plays but a small part in maintaining those social and political relations without which social cohesion would be impossible. Early training, and the subsequent discipline of social intercourse; customs and conventions; the desire to have the good opinion of neighbours; legal restraints; and the social instinct, or, as Bagehot calls it, "an inherited drill," are all assisting in the subordination of the individual to the community. Fully to appreciate the part that these forces play in making social (or moral) life possible, it is requisite to glance at the development of our highly complex society from its primitive antecedent.

Fragments of evidence indicate that primitive social cohesion was essentially a religious phenomenon.

The earliest social bond holding together more individuals than composed a single family was a sense of sharing a common "virtue" or possessing or having access to a common source of "mana" (*i.e.*, an uncanny power, impersonal and contagious, able to bless or to curse, and which was "the wisdom of the sage, the courage of the warrior, the fear of the cowards").—(*The Responsible State*, by Professor F. H. Giddings).

Moreover, so soon as the most rudimentary moral code was consciously adopted, it was conceived to be of divine origin and sanction. Every action was regulated by custom, and every custom was of supposed supernatural ordainment. Thus, the closest possible connection existed not only between morality and religion, but between religion and all forms of communal action. Government was identified with priesthood, the patriarch of the family, or the headman of the clan or tribe being both ruler and high priest in the ritual of the tribal religion. Before embarking on any serious enterprise—such as warfare against some neighbouring people, the chase, or the sowing of seed (where the community had arrived at the agricultural stage of development)—the tribal deity or deities were consulted and their assistance sought by sacrifices. Briefly stated, religion, or belief in some supernatural existence was the warp running through all social activity, and the political community was coincident with the religious community.

Social evolution proceeded, religion was sublimated, (the supernatural agencies behind phenomena becoming more and more idealized); morality was refined and extended as racial experience accumulated, and eventually outgrew its tribal or national limits. *Pari passu* political organs were differentiated from the religious or sacerdotal ones: the ruler, whilst still claiming to rule by divine right as God's viceroy, no longer claimed to be descended from supernatural ancestors: legislative and administrative organs, absolutely distinct from the religious organization came into being. Finally, the complete divorce of government from religion took place, the king either being superseded by a popularly elected president, or, as in the case of England, being deprived of all real power, spite the unconscious assertion of belief in the divine nature of his rule by the retention of such titles as "His Majesty."

Along with the differentiation of the political organs from the religious organs proceeded a gradual weakening of the regulative effect of religion over that other great sphere of collective activity—industry: whilst it also became increasingly more loosely connected with individual morality, its place being taken by the "inherited drill," or the amenability of the individual to social restraints, and the other social forces to which reference has already been made.

To sum up this too brief account of the relations which have existed, at various stages in social evolution,

between religion and human activity, it may be said that belief in a supernatural power was of great value in assisting in the establishment of an authoritative set of rules for the guidance of conduct (indeed, without belief in the supernatural sanction of the ethical code it is doubtful whether it could have been operative when developed beyond the most elementary stage, and whether, therefore, social cohesion of more than the most primitive type could have been possible); that their value of this belief steadily decreased until in the most progressive countries religion is little more than a philosophic system, in no way intimately associated with practical morality.¹

(*To be concluded.*) W. H. MORRIS.

Pages from Voltaire.

II.

(Continued from p. 188.)

Criet.—But what arguments can be brought against the prophecies, against the miracles worked by Moses, or by Jesus, or by the martyrs?

The Count.—I advise you not to talk about the prophets, for every child knows what Ezekiel had for his breakfast;² although it would not be polite to mention the particular dish while we are at dinner. We all know the adventures of Aholah and Aholibah,³ of which it is difficult to speak before ladies; we all know that the God of the Jews commanded the prophet Hosea to take a loose woman⁴ to his bed and have sons by her. What except absurdities and obscenities do you find in these wretched prophets?

Let your poor theologians give up wrangling with the Jews about the meaning of passages in their prophecies, about certain Hebrew sentences in an Amos, a Joel, a Habbakuk, or a Jeremiah; about certain expressions concerning Elijah who was carried up to the celestial regions in a chariot of fire, the which Elijah, I may say in passing, never had any earthly existence.

Let them blush for the prophecies inserted in their Gospels. Is it possible that there are still people so weak and foolish as not to be indignant with the prediction of your Lord as given in Luke⁵:—

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.....Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled.

Surely it is impossible to have a more marked, a more circumstantial, and, let me say, a falser prediction. Only a fool would dare to say that it had come to pass, and that the Son of Man did come in a cloud with power and great glory. How does it happen that Paul in his first Epistle to the Thessalonians⁶ confirms this ridiculous prophecy by another which is even more impertinent? "Then we that are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we be ever with the Lord."

¹ Undoubtedly chattel slavery, which no Christian attempts to defend as a desirable form of economic organization, had a salutary effect over mankind in the early stages of social development, since it accustomed large bodies of men, by nature indolent as are all the uncivilized races of which we have knowledge, to sustained and regular labour, which excellent discipline would certainly not have been voluntarily adopted.

² Ezekiel iv. 12. ³ Ezekiel xxiii. 4. ⁴ Hosea i. 2 and iii. 1-2.

⁵ Luke xxi. 25-7, 32.

⁶ Chap. iv. 17.

However unlearned a man may be, he does know that the dogmas of the end of the world, and the building up of a new kingdom on earth were chimeras cherished at that time among all peoples. You find this opinion in *Lucretius*, in the Fourth Book, and, again, in the First Book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Herakleitos, long before had told us that the world would be consumed by fire. The Stoics had adopted this idle fancy. The half-Jews, half-Christians, who fabricated the Gospels were not slow in accepting so popular a doctrine, and they gave it currency. But as the world continued to go on its way, and Jesus did not come in clouds with power and great glory in the first age of the Church, they said he would be sure to come in the second age; then they promised him for the third, and so on from age to age this absurdity is renewed. The theologians are just like the charlatan I saw lately at the other end of the Pont-Neuf. As it drew near to evening he would put up before the people a cock and some bottles of ointment; "Gentlemen," he would exclaim, "I am going to cut off the head of the cock and then bring it to life again with the ointment; but you must buy these bottles before I do it." He could always find people simple enough to buy them. "I am now going to cut off his head," he continued; "but as it's dark and this performance is worthy of full daylight, we shall leave it for to-morrow."

Two members of the Academy of Sciences had the curiosity to return to see how the charlatan would get out of the difficulty; the farce lasted eight days running; but the farce of the expected end of the world has lasted eight centuries. After that, reverend sir, are you prepared to cite your Jewish or Christian prophecies?

Mr. Frevet.—You must not talk about the miracles of Moses to full grown men. If all those inconceivable prodigies had happened the Egyptians would have written about them in their histories. The memory of so many amazing facts would be preserved among all nations. The Greeks, who had knowledge of all Egyptian and Syrian legends, would have spread the rumour of their supernatural happenings from one end of the world to the other. But no historian Greek, Syrian or Egyptian, has a word to say of them. Josephus, a good patriot, a firm believer in Judaism, who collected so much evidence in favour of the antiquity of his nation, found nothing to support the ten plagues of Egypt, and the passage across the Red Sea.

You know that the authorship of the Pentateuch is still doubtful; what intelligent man could believe, on the testimony of a Jew—an Esdras or another—in such amazing occurrences completely unknown to the rest of the world? Even if your Hebrew prophets had cited these marvellous events a thousand times, it would be impossible to believe them; but there is not one of these prophets who quotes the words of the Pentateuch on this collection of miracles, not one who gives a detailed account of these adventures. You must explain this silence as you can.

Consider for a moment that the weightiest motives must have been required for these reversals of nature's processes. What motive, what reason could have existed in the mind of the Hebrew God? Was it to benefit an insignificant race of people? to bestow on it, a fertile land? Why did he not give his chosen people the land of Egypt, instead of working miracles, most of which, as we are told, were performed just as well by Pharaoh's magicians? Why did he command the angel of death to slay the firstborn of Egypt, to destroy all the animals, so that the Israelites to the number of six hundred and thirty thousand should run away like cowardly thieves in the night? Why divide for them the Red Sea that they might die of hunger in the desert? You appreciate the astounding absurdity of these actions. You

have too much common sense to accept them as truth, and to believe in the Christian religion based on Hebrew imposture. You appreciate the ridiculousness of the childish retort that you must not question God, that you cannot fathom the depths of the divine mind. No, we do not ask God why he created lice and spiders, because, although certain that they do exist, we are unable to know why they exist; but we are not so sure that Moses changed his rod into a serpent and covered Egypt with lice, although this parasite was not a stranger to his chosen people; we do not ask God; we ask the fools who dare to put words into the mouth of God, and to impute to him the excess of their foolishness.

The Countess.—My reverend friend, take my advice, and talk no more about the miracles of Jesus. Would the Creator of the Universe have made himself a Jew that he might turn water into wine¹ at the marriage-feast, where everyone was well drunk? Would he have been taken up by the Devil into an exceeding high mountain and have been shown all the wonders of the world?² Would he have sent the devils into a herd of swine,³ and that in a country where pigs were unknown? Would he have withered a fig-tree⁴ for not bearing fruit when the time of figs was not yet? Believe me, these miracles are as absurd as those of Moses. Come, tell us frankly what you think of them!

Count.—My dear lady, please have a little consideration for my vocation; allow me, if you please, to follow my trade in my own way. I have been rather mauled, no doubt, over the prophecies and miracles; but with the martyrs I am on safer ground. It was Pascal, the patriarch of Port-Royal, who said: "I am willing to believe in stories for which people have suffered death."

Mr. Frevet.—Ah, my dear sir, that is merely an example of Pascal's ignorance and bad faith. You would think, to hear you, that he had listened to an examination of the apostles, that he had witnessed their suffering. But what proof had he that they had suffered? Who told him that Simon Barjona was crucified at Rome, head downwards? Who told him that this Barjona, a wretched Galilean fisherman, had even been in Rome, had ever spoken Latin? If he had been condemned to death at Rome, if the Christians had known of it, the first church they would have built to the honour of the saints would have been St. Peter's, and not St. John Lateran; the Popes would not have missed that opportunity—their ambition would have found therein a good protest. To what are we reduced when, in order to prove that Peter Barjona dwelt at Rome, we are obliged to say that a letter dated from Babylon⁵ was really addressed from Rome? Whereupon a distinguished modern writer has drawn the conclusion that a letter dated from St. Petersburg must have been written at Constantinople.

We are quite aware that those who have written about the journey of this Peter are mere impostors. It is one Abdias who tells us that Peter came from the Lake of Genezaret straight to the Emperor at Rome, to have a match at miracles with Simon Magus. This same Abdias tells a story of one of the relations of the Emperor. This man was half raised from the dead by Simon Magus, and the miracle was completed by Simon Barjona; we are then told of the contest between the two Simons, one of them flying in the air, and having his legs broken by the prayers of the other. To this Abdias we are indebted for the celebrated story of the two dogs sent by Simon to eat up Peter. All these doings are repeated by Marcellus and Hegesippus. These are the foundations of the Christian religion. In them you see the absurd impostures fabricated by the

¹ John ii. 10.

² Matthew iv. 8.

³ *Ibid.* viii. 32.

⁴ Mark xi. 13.

⁵ 1 Peter v. 13.

vile rabble that made up the Christian community for a hundred years.

You have also an uninterrupted sequence of forgeries. They forged the letters of Jesus Christ, the letters of Pilate, and those of Seneca; they forged apostolic constitutions, acrostic Sybilline verses, gospels to the number of forty, Acts of Barnabas, liturgies of Peter, James, Matthew, Mark, etc. You have studied, no doubt, my dear sir, this infamous collection of lies which you call pious frauds; and you have not the honesty to admit, even to your friends, that the government of your Pope was established on such wretched fabrications, for the unhappiness of the human race.

Court.—But how could the Christian religion have raised itself to such a height on a rotten foundation of lies and fanaticism?

Mr. Freret.—But how could Mohammedanism have raised itself still higher? Its pious frauds are much nobler, its fanaticism more generous. Mohammed at least wrote and fought; Christ neither wrote nor would he defend himself. Mohammed had the courage of an Alexander with the intellect of a Numa; your Jesus sweated blood and water when he was condemned by his judges. Mohammedanism never changed, while the whole of your religion has changed twenty times. There is a greater difference between what it is to-day and what it was in the early ages than between your usages to-day and those of King Dagobert. Wretched Christians as you are! you do not worship your Jesus; you insult him by substituting your new laws for his. You make him an object of derision with your mysteries, your *Agnus dei*s, your relics, your Papacy; you make him ridiculous every year, on the fifth of January, in your lewd Christmas festivities, where you cover with derision the Virgin Mary, the angel who salutes her, the Holy Spirit by whom she conceived, the carpenter who was jealous of him, and the baby in the manger whom the three kings came to worship—a company worthy of so august a family.

Court.—Yet it is just this rubbish that St. Augustin found divine: "I believe it because it is divine; I believe it because it is impossible."

Englised by GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

(To be concluded.)

The Fourth Age.

IV.

GOD THE "SPORT."

"MAJOR, don't you think it a shame that this beautiful scene should be spoilt by a war?" We were leaving the month of May. The grass in the meadows was high, and poppies and cornflowers were just beginning to open in their virgin freshness. Dog-roses were blooming in the hedges, and, as these were the flowers I had known in my youth, my mind drifted backwards to the associations that these flowers recalled. It was a very commonplace remark I made—the answer was more practical. "I've been wondering," he said, "how many head of cattle I could rear on this part of the country." He had left South Africa to volunteer, but he, as a soldier, could not lose his grip on the arts of peace. We had very friendly talks; he suffered from sleeplessness, and one night the subject turned on God. The Major had some hazy idea of him as being a sporting old gentleman, who gave everybody a chance if they played the game. To my own intimate knowledge of my leader, he was only making God a reflection of himself, and when the argument began to tighten up—we both gave it up in despair. Prolonged thought was impossible under the conditions—a nice point for those who are interested in the play of thought and action

On one occasion, when I went down to the battered village of Senlis, I noticed in a ditch a child's perambulator. Byron

was severe in his judgment of Sterne when he wrote that Sterne preferred to weep over a dead ass abroad instead of supporting his wife at home. Well, it may appear laughable to the reader, but my mind constantly turned to that child's toy. Where was the little one now? Was she dark or fair? Was she alive? Was she safe? A few yards away, in a field, there was a wooden cross standing. Both the cross and the toy were inanimate objects. Desolation and destruction had thrown them together, and I cannot but think that this strange incongruity of things eventually had its effect on the mind. Pray, reader, whither would your thoughts wander if at the doorway of your cave was the grave of a soldier? or if, every time you came down into a dugout, you walked over a mound from which issued a curious smell? To mix the quick and the dead is not conducive to clear thinking. The fat, smooth-bodied judges; the lean, unctuous ones—what insolence for them to pass judgment on men who drank infamous French wines so that they might slip into forgetfulness!

Over the ridge in a valley lay the city of Albert. On a clear day it seemed as though one might casually walk down to it and count all the enemy shell holes in the cathedral. There must have been a special Providence watching, as no shells of ours ever touched it according to reports at home. I trust all active-service men will place their faces in cement when reading this. For an aiming point one must pick up a prominent object according to directions. The piety of officers and men being well known, I am sure they would, on religious principles, ignore any such advice.

There is the famous "Hallelujah Chorus" in one of the oratorios, but I don't think that it is as effective as when rendered by the artillery. This musical item consists of four to six salvos on various parts of the enemy's country. It is given sometimes four times a night, sometimes six. There is the usual cursing from the gunners, the sharp cry of command from the officer, the tinkle of charge tins, the clicking of breech blocks, and the roar of six guns firing together. This is the artilleryman's "Hallelujah Chorus." Who dares now question his deep religious opinions after being assured by those who would, if able, have stopped his rum issue? As a friend told me, and I can vouch for his veracity, he said that the soldiers must have had a double rum issue before they saw the Angels of Mons. The story itself smells of a Fleet Street public-house. The muddyminded journalists who were not, as some of us, reduced to eating grass or picking out oats from the horse's food, lived down to their reputations. I will not slander the public by saying that these were the tales they deserved. Journalism and religion are comfortable neighbours; they both exist as a barrier to a healthy intellectual life, and their chief art is concealment. The former conceals ignorance, the latter perpetuates it. When the Continent was something like a menagerie let loose that was their opportunity. In the hell-broth we found them both as scum at the top. And advice from both was worthless. Any sensible-minded major in command of a body of men was worth the lot put together—and they could have been dismissed—one to drink his printer's ink and the other to drink his holy water.

WILLIAM REPTON.

Correspondence.

THE ETHICAL CODE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. G. E. Fussell's interesting article in your issue of March 14 suggests to me the following facts, three in number, and the inference to which, as it seems to me, reflection on those facts leads. I should like any of your readers to tell me whether there is anything wrong with the statements, and, if not, whether they can avoid the conclusion and how?

- (1) By common agreement, if A takes that which belongs to B without his consent, he infringes a very widely accepted moral code, and one upon the strict observance of which the preservation of organized society largely depends.

- (2) Extreme necessity is the only justifiable exception, as (a) a drowning man may seize floating wood without asking to whom it belongs; or (b) a man on the point of starvation, circumstances precluding application for permission, might, perhaps, be very commonly held justified in taking food for his *immediate* need.
- (3) Governments, parliaments, and majorities take not only possessions (*i.e.*, taxes), but people's liberties, without even the pretence of immediate, urgent, and pressing necessity, and without any effective personal consent.

Now, I think it is clear, in fact I think it must be clear, even to those who desire to have governments and who are in the habit of voting for Members of Parliament, that this sets up a dual ethic. A genuine "non-ethicist" must, it seems to me, be one of two things—either an Anarchist or a muddle-head—because given (1) and (2) (and who is prepared to deny either?) (3) must produce the conclusion that governing bodies "infringe a very widely accepted moral code, and one upon the strict observance of which the preservation of organized society largely depends."

Governmentalists should either give up their belief in government or give up their belief in ethics, for, in clinging to both, they sacrifice their claim to sanity. What John Bright said of the oath, namely, that it establishes two standards of truth, may, with even greater force, be said of government. It establishes two standards of right. It makes the world like a draper's shop in which two kinds of yard-sticks are used, one measuring thirty-six inches and the other extending to infinity; for an elected majority claims the right to do *absolutely anything* for which it can push, frighten, bribe, or cajole a bill through its precious "house."

As though "houses" could be above the moral law. And as though the moral law, that is, the moral conception of any given land, race, time, or stage of development could be expressed in terms of numerical superiority.

That we have abolished absolute monarchy is perfectly true; but we have replaced it by absolutism plus monarchy. This is an "improvement for the worse." An absolute monarch was, *in theory*, not responsible to anyone; a majority which holds itself to be above the moral law is, *in fact*, not responsible to anyone. Constitution! Rubbish! There is and can be no such thing, because majorities, as we have seen during the past five years, can alter it instantly to suit the madness of the hour. Can I be said to have a physical constitution if each passing germ can *compel* me to find him a lodging within my system?

If space permitted, one could give chapter and verse to prove that the great religions have been great only so far as they have embodied Freethought and politics, great only so far as they have *abolished* laws.

ROBERT HARDING.

Obituary.

We regret to record the death of Mr. John George Ross, of 43 Coldharbour Lane, Camberwell, at the age of seventy-three. The burial took place at Tooting Cemetery on Tuesday, March 16, when a Secular Service was conducted at the graveside. Mr. Ross had been an enthusiastic worker in the progressive movements of the day, and was well known as a convinced Secularist. He was an ardent admirer and supporter of the late Charles Bradlaugh. He was one of the founders of the Cabmens' Trade Union, and for years served as its treasurer. He also did excellent work on the Westminster Board of Guardians. We tender our cordial sympathy to his bereaved family.—J. T. L.

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SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, John Russell, M.A., "Essentials: The Things that Belong Unto Our Peace."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (The Town Hall, Stratford): 7, Mr. J. T. Lloyd, "Dream Life and Real Life."

OUTDOOR.

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

COUNTRY.

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BELFAST BRANCH N. S. S. (Abercorn Hall, 101 Victoria Street): 3, A Lecture.

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MAESTEG BRANCH N. S. S., Mr. Chapman Cohen, 2 30, in the Coliseum, Caerau; 7.30, in the Gem Cinema House.

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