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## Views and Opinions.

### Religion and the Stage.

A writer in one of the weekly magazines recently raised the question of the advisability of depicting "sacred" stories and "divine" characters on the stage. It was pointed out that the arrival of the film and its utilization in the interests of religious propaganda had raised the question in rather an acute form, and there were evidently grave doubts in the writer's mind whether there would be preserved the proper spirit of reverence in the handling of sacred subjects. The subject possesses both a psychological and historical interest, and is worthy of a little attention. To begin with, there is nothing new in the dramatic representation of "sacred" scenes and characters. Indeed, it is highly probable that many of the Christian stories, now accepted as veritable historic happenings were never anything more than dramatic representations which it afterwards suited the powers that be to declare literal occurrences. And there is also the fact that the drama appears to have in its origin a magical or religious significance. Moreover, we know that during the mediæval period the miracle plays of the Church had a great vogue. Priests often took part in them, and the plays depicted various Biblical stories from the creation onward. These were performed with a primitive simplicity that would be shocking to modern believers. We have at least one instance of Adam and Eve appearing as they left the hand of the creator, while God was depicted as a venerable old gentleman with a long beard, and the conversations of the different characters left nothing to be desired on the point of frankness. Eventually when these performances began to be utilized for the purpose of satirizing the conduct of monks and priests they were discouraged by the Church and so fell into disuse.

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### Life and Religion.

The modern objection to the dramatic representation of religious doctrines and "divine" characters is that it tends to destroy their sanctity. But that objection was not raised in the days of old. Not even the sight of God the Father stumbling round on a dark platform before creating the sun, and the appearance of several people with lanterns when he commanded "Let there be light" managed to create an impression of profanity. It

is in this fact that there resides the psychological interest of the case. People were not then shocked by the dramatic representation of Biblical stories because their belief was real and living. People are shocked to-day because their belief is a pretence. When a belief is real visualization creates no sense of discord, and the men and women who witnessed the miracle plays were only seeing in a concrete form what they really believed. It is when a belief is no longer real, when it is a mere ring of phrases corresponding to no mental reality, that the actual contemplation of what one *believes* creates a shock and acts as a corrective. And the real objection to the stage representation of religious scenes and characters is that it makes the absurdity of what is believed in apparent. An audience that really accepted the supernatural as being a vital part of existence would never feel outraged at seeing some visible representation of it. But one that merely *expresses* a belief will as certainly witness such with discomfort or amusement. Mere belief feels there is something out of place. And so there is; but it is with it, not with the performance. It is believers and their pretended beliefs that are out of gear with the times; the performers have only made the fact plain. There is no profanation in the stage setting of a religious story; there is only an exposure. And modern religion, like other shams, dreads that above all else.

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### A Difference of Setting.

There is a further lesson from the objection to religious plays. In a modern society religion is kept alive mainly by a number of artificial devices. Consider the reading of a Bible lesson, say, in a church. There is usually a good building as a setting, everybody is in their best clothes and on their best behaviour, the Bible is read with the utmost gravity, and there is an air of solemnity over all. People are in an uncritical frame of mind, and they are sitting in an hypnotic atmosphere. Under such conditions one could read Old Mother Hubbard with safety. Consider the difference between reciting in a free and easy manner—

Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard  
To fetch her poor dog a bone;  
But when she got there the cupboard was bare,  
And so the poor dog had none.

with—

In the days when Josiah was king in Israel a woman of Samaria did seek for food for the one faithful companion left to her from all her husband's possessions. But when she sought for food, lo, there was none to be found. Then did the woman grieve sorely and cry, As my redeemer liveth I will yet find food for thee, thou good and faithful companion; and she girded up her loins and set out for a far place, while her dumb companion was left guarding her potsherd.

Recited under such conditions, not one in a thousand would ever consider whether it was fact or fiction that they were being told, and one can imagine the wonderful spiritual lessons that would be drawn from the story. And, quite clearly, what placing the story of Christianity

on the stage would do would be to rob it of its artificial and fictitious associations. The stories would be, to use a word of Wendell Holmes, "depolarized." People would see things as they are instead of through the distorted medium of an archaic form of expression and amid surroundings that, from long association, forbid active and hostile criticism. The theatre has no such associations; and therefore if it presents only the human aspects it is leaving out all that makes it religiously valuable, and if it attempts to depict the supernatural it makes the whole thing ridiculous.

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From the Brain Downward.

From any other point of view than the one suggested there can be no reasonable objection to the performance of religious plays. The pretence that religion is too "sacred" for the stage is just nonsense. A thing is neither worsened nor coarsened by being presented on the stage. All phases of domestic and family life are depicted, but no one suffers therefrom, while many benefit. No one has ever even hinted that the depicting of the love of one sex for the other—of parent for child, or of friend for friend—profanes or degrades such feelings. On the contrary, the tendency is for them to gain strength and clearness thereby. This is so because the stage is properly a mirror in which men and women see their own natures reflected. Religion is the one thing that suffers from such presentation, and just as it cries for police protection against a direct intellectual attack, so it protests against being subjected to a criticism that has its basis in life itself. It is also worth noting that it is the most cultured section of society which feels most acutely the impossibility of religious plays; the uncultured who accept it with the least diffidence. The explanation is, that the better education of the classes enables its members to appreciate the absurdity of religious teachings more clearly. And that is on all fours with what we know of the general history of religion. In what are comparatively civilized times, a new religion commences among the less educated members of a community. From various causes it may afterwards make converts from a more educated class, but it decays again in the inverse order of its growth—the intellect forsaking it first. All religions die from the brain downward.

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The Tonic of Opposition.

The healthiest thing in the world for each one of us is to see ourselves as we really are. We should seldom think the worse of ourselves for the experience, and would often think better of other people. The value would be quite as great for us to see our beliefs as they are. But this the religious man never does see. His beliefs are forced upon him before he is old enough to understand them, and when he does reach the age of understanding they are kept in a specially prepared atmosphere, and seldom brought into contact with the plain facts of life. The world is split up into two parts, sacred and secular, and the rules of common sense that govern one are allowed no influence in the other. The distinction is wholly artificial and mischievous. The world is a unity, and whether we call it sacred or secular is a mere matter of words. The very growth of the distinction between sacred and secular is an indication of the growth of unreality and hypocrisy. As we have said, when the belief in religion was really vital, dramatic representation aroused no antagonism. The people believed in Christianity, its supernaturalism was in accord with their mental condition, and the religious drama no more caused them to feel that religion was being outraged than we feel that the love scenes in a Shakespearean play make love a poorer thing. But

to-day religion answers to nothing real in the social or intellectual environment. It is out of touch with the realities of life. Freethinkers know this, and Christians feel it. Hence the outcry of believers when religion is presented to them in such a way that there is no mistaking its real nature. It is characteristic of all impostures to dread examination. But it is of vital interest to the world that they should undergo the ordeal.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## Christianity Historically Tested.

IN connection with the Anglo-Catholic Congress, recently held in London, there were several thanksgiving services, at one of which in Southwark Cathedral, a remarkable sermon was preached by the Bishop of St. Albans, a verbatim report of which appeared in the *Church Times* for July 9. The discourse is entitled "Faith and Venture"; and the preacher made use of the fact that for many years he had been in charge of an important South African diocese, saying:—

For nearly seventeen years it has been my good fortune and high privilege to be allowed to serve in a province of the Anglican communion where the Church is unestablished, self-governing, and practically unendowed, in a new country in the making, right up against the blackness of Heathenism. I have seen the faith of Jesus Christ tested in a hard school. I have seen it stand the test.

Clearly the claim made is that the Bishop saw Christianity stand the test in South Africa. Unfortunately, he does not inform us wherein the test consisted, or how the faith of Jesus Christ stood it. His meaning, doubtless, is that for seventeen years, at least, Christianity was a success in that far-off Southern land. But does history substantiate that claim? Take the following Christian principle so definitely laid down in Galatians iii. 28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." This is a fundamental principle, and serves as a test which Christianity has never stood anywhere, certainly not in South Africa where the colour problem is of such serious proportions. There the Christians have never been able to say, "There is neither white nor black, for we are all one in Christ Jesus." The blacks, though four times more numerous than the whites, have always been treated as hewers of wood and drawers of water—practical helots. It is estimated that there are 700,000 adult native males in the Union of South Africa, the majority of whom are employed in unskilled labour. Into the rank of skilled workmen they were not till quite lately permitted to enter. Practically they have a monopoly of unskilled labour, because the white men generally consider manual work beneath them, while to work side by side with natives would be unspeakable degradation to them. We learn that the colour problem is greatly complicated by the dreadful fact that now at last educated natives are forcing their way into some of the higher walks of life as clerks, lawyers, and doctors; but they are all excluded from membership in Parliament; and although they enjoy the rights of the franchise in the Cape province, their votes are almost wholly controlled by the whites. Surely, the Bishop of St. Albans must be aware of these facts; and yet he has the audacity to assert that he has "seen the faith of Christ tested in a hard school" in South Africa and has "seen it stand the test." Can it be possible that his lordship has seen only what he wished to see? We also admit the severe testing in a

hard school, but deny that the process has been triumphantly endured.

Christianity has not fulfilled the brilliant promises made by its alleged founder. It has not succeeded in bringing all mankind into an attitude of submission to Jesus' rule. It has not swept away the wrongs and evils which make life for countless millions an unbearable burden. With its proud doctrine of the Fatherhood of God it has totally failed to make the Brotherhood of Man a glad reality of everyday life. Instead of happy union it has introduced bitter and heart-breaking divisions into society. Even the Church itself has often been rent in twain by opposing schools and irreconcilable factions. The very sermon under review was delivered in the interest and for the glorification of one of the many parties in the Anglican Church; and between these parties there is frequently displayed a spirit the very opposite of brotherly.

The Bishop of St. Albans believes in the Holy Ghost as the infallible leader into all truth, and yet that we must seek for truth quite as diligently as if he did not exist. Then he says with the utmost simplicity:—

The more I have seen the faith once delivered to the saints tested by the hard facts of experience, or by knowledge gained through scientific research, the more convinced have I become that it stands the test every time, and is the faith for life. However old it is, through the loving inspiration of the Spirit of God working through men and women of single-minded purpose and goodwill it is ever new, and in it can still be found the one sure solution of all life's problems, however modern.

If that is true the question arises, how do you account for the mournful fact that the problems are still unsolved? Christianity has had an innings of nearly two thousand years, and it has not won and redeemed the world yet. Indeed, instead of gaining, it is steadily losing ground. Its hold upon the human mind is weaker to-day than it has been for fifteen centuries. The Bishop sorrowfully confesses that "we stand to-day amid the ruins of a shattered and broken world," in which case it necessarily, inevitably follows that Christianity has not stood the test. A shattered and broken world cannot reasonably be regarded as a convincing evidence of the triumph of the Cross. It is easy enough to aver that "in Christ, as we believe, lies the one solution of all the problems with which we are faced, industrial, social, political, economic, national, racial, international, and ecclesiastical," but the right reverend gentleman seems to forget that Christ is not a twentieth century discovery; but old as he is, it cannot truthfully be maintained that he has ever solved a single problem.

The Bishop calls himself an Anglican Catholic, and regards Catholic faith and order as superior to all others. He even goes to the length of expressing the belief that "in Catholic faith and order ever applied to the changing circumstances of life and man's needs lie Christ's means and method for establishing his kingdom throughout the world"; but he ignores the fact that Catholic faith and order are older than all others, and that during the long, long period of their operation the moral and social condition of the world has been lamentably corrupt and degraded. His lordship himself tacitly admits that Christ's kingdom is still a thing of the future, though he has been in possession of the means and method for establishing it for ever so many centuries. Why, then, is it still unestablished?

On July 2 there was a letter in the *Daily News* from the Rev. R. W. Cummings, Vicar of Hurst, Ashton-under-Lyne, in which he discussed the question of what the Bishops would say at the Lambeth Conference held this month. The Vicar of Hurst does not share the optimism of the Bishop of St. Albans, his claim being

that the Bishops dare not face reality. His language is most scathing:—

Passing from the atmosphere of the Labour Conference at Scarborough in June to that of the Lambeth Conference in July is like passing from God's open sunshine, amid the boundless plains, to the narrow confines of a shadowed crypt. It is like turning from the radiant face of youth to the decrepit wrinkles of senile decay.

Thus we see that the Vicar and the Bishop cherish totally different and conflicting views as to the quality of the work accomplished by the Christian Church. The former does not hesitate to affirm that, on the whole, the Church has done more harm than good; that Christianity, or "institutional religion," has been the most stupendous and tragic of all failures; and that between Tradition and Reality a wide, open gulf yawns. We are prepared to go much further than the Vicar by declaring that Christianity has utterly failed to stand the test because there is no truth in it, or because it is a fraudulent religion, pretending to be what it is not. Its morality has been described as "a series of regulations by which the will of the privileged is imposed upon the masses of the people, and by which permanence is given to the system through which their unjust gain is conserved." In any case, it is an historically discredited religion, and fully deserves the doom of extinction that now threatens it. Innumerable are its champions and unremitting are their attempts to preserve it, but despite all said and done to perpetuate it, its dissolution is as certain as to-morrow's sunrise.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Drama of Dreyfus.

Clericalism, behold the enemy!—Leon Gambetta.

CHRISTIANITY has persecuted the Jews with constant and relentless malice, has shed their blood like water, and heaped upon them every insult and injury, from the outraging of their women to the fastening on them of a hideous gaberdine. And this persecution is not a thing of the past. They are still brutally treated in the East of Europe, and the "pogroms" there are not only a scandal to all the Churches of Christendom, but a disgrace to civilization. Every injustice, every oppression, every cruelty, has been inflicted on the unfortunate Jews.

One is led to a restatement of these facts by the publication of a paragraph in the newspapers that Lieutenant-Colonel Dreyfus has had bestowed upon him the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour for conspicuous services in the War. In this bare paragraph is recalled one of the greatest legal fights the world has witnessed, and the crowning vindication of the unfortunate man who endured unspeakable things because he was a Jew. It is an awful story, and one of the blackest indictments of clericalism that our time has revealed.

Alfred Dreyfus was the first Jew who had risen to a position on the General Staff of the French Army, and the Catholics determined that he should be deprived of that honour. Working on the anti-Semitic feelings of the superior officers, they induced belief that Captain Dreyfus had sold his country's secrets to Germany. A court-martial followed, and, despite his protestations of innocence, Dreyfus was degraded publicly amid howls of execration, and sent to the Devil's Island, French Guiana. Five years later Colonel Picquart, on becoming head of the Intelligence Department, suspected a plot, and immediately pressed for a revision of the case. This was refused, and then began a wonderful fight of a

handful of brave men against an infuriated nation, for the French people then believed Dreyfus was a traitor, and resented any attempt at revision as an attack on the honour of the Army.

The chief champions of the unhappy Jew were all Freethinkers, and their names should never be forgotten—Emile Zola, the novelist; Georges Clemenceau, then a journalist; and Jean Jaures, who was assassinated at the beginning of the late War. These three heroes stood over the figure of the persecuted Jew, like Voltaire above the body of Jean Calas, and flung their reputations into the scale of justice. We of their own generation stand too near to see the full human value of that act of splendid audacity, but even to us it is a light whereby we may judge of these Freethinkers as men, an episode which illuminates and justifies their lives and work. With the publication of Emile Zola's terrible indictment, *J'Accuse*, France was roused from end to end, and the fight began which finally resulted in Dreyfus being declared innocent and "pardoned."

"What martyrdom for an innocent man; certainly greater than that of any of the Christian martyrs," wrote Alfred Dreyfus himself on one of the awful pages of his diary. Indeed, whoever reads his book, *Five Years of My Life*, without emotion is more or less than a man. Treated like a mad dog, subjected to every insult, condemned to silence, buried alive in a hut under a tropical sun, robbed of letters from his wife, it is a wonder that he lived through it all. For a parallel to it one has to go back to the seven-years' Gethsemane of Giordano Brun in his dungeon of torture before he was led out by brutes to a death of fire. Happily, in the case of Dreyfus, there was a gallant band who were fighting the martyr's battle. How they fought, and how they won, is one of the brightest pages in modern history. But this news was kept from Dreyfus. He knew nothing of what was being done for him in far-off Paris. But for his brave wife's loyalty he must have gone mad. Again and again during his terrible martyrdom her name was ever on his lips, "Lucie, Lucie!"

From first to last the voice of Lucie Dreyfus was an inspiration and a dream. She saved her husband from suicide, and—mark the cruelty of the penal system—only censored copies of her letters ever reached her husband, and he was deprived of the solace of her handwriting. She wrote: "We have spent five years of absolute happiness; we must live on the remembrance of it. One day justice will be done, and we shall be happy again; the children will love you." Weeks later she writes again: "I am proud of bearing your name, and when our children are old enough to understand they will be grateful to you for the sufferings that you have endured for them." All through these fearful years the voice of Lucie Dreyfus was an inspiration to her husband. "If great misfortunes are the touchstone of noble souls," Alfred Dreyfus wrote to her afterwards, "then, oh, my darling, yours is one of the most beautiful and noble souls of which it is possible to dream."

If newspapers were not prostituted to the base uses of commercialism, this story would be read by millions. But the claims of the murder cases, the police-court, and the journeys of royalty and cinema players, are paramount, and it is left for a poor Freethinker to set out a plain story of real chivalry, and of the love of a man for a woman which is infinitely precious. Amid the puerilities of politics, amid the sensationalism of criminology, amid the pettiness of details of "high life," such a story stands out like a lily in the mouth of Tartarus. There are things that cannot die, and the story of Alfred Dreyfus is one of them.

MIMNERMUS.

## Science and the Occult.

### VI.

(Continued from p. 453).

The first source of error is a much more frequent one than might be supposed, and affects nearly every person, skilled or unskilled, stupid or clever, susceptible or insusceptible, who is witness to or present at these exhibitions. This is the natural and inherent tendency of the human race to delight in mystery, to take pleasure in what it cannot understand, and in its readiness to attribute that, of which the significance and the explanation are not clear, to supernatural agencies. This tendency is unfortunately, indeed, at times played upon by certain persons, sometimes themselves deluded, but sometimes only fraudulent impostors, and perhaps most frequently half self deluded, who assure and assert, and, by mixing hysterical fancies, actual facts, and mystical ideas, produce a bodge podge or medley of fact and fiction, which in many cases can never be more than partially unravelled, and which they attempt only too frequently to withdraw from investigation under the pretence of its sanctity.—*Report of Committee on Mediumistic Phenomena, "Proceedings—American Society for Psychical Research"*; 1887; pp. 232-233.

MR. JONES tells us that his past experience as a magistrate in Burma, with his study of law and lawyers, helped him considerably in the gentle art of drawing a red herring across his questioners' train of thought. But again, the author tells us, he thought the thing had gone on long enough, and it was time to confess; but again, he says, "Fate stepped in." Several other groups of experimenters, following their lead, had been formed in the camp, notably in the Hospital House, and one fine morning they were electrified by the news that there also communications with the spirits had been established.

The Doc. came up to me as I was walking in the lane. He was all hunched up with glee.

"Faith," he said to me, "the sceptics have got it in the neck. Here's Nightingale and Bishop been an' held a long conversation with the spooks last night."

"I don't see that that will make much difference to the sceptics," said I.

"But I do," said the Doc. "The camp doesn't believe in it now because you're you and I'm me. But who in Turkey or out of it can suspect fellows like Bishop and Nightingale?—that's what I want to know."

"And why not suspect Bishop and Nightingale?" I asked.

"Agh! Ye might as well suspect a babe unborn. Not one of the two of them has the imagination of a louse. They're plain, straightforward Englishmen—not Celtic fringe like you an' me—an' the camp knows it."

"But don't you suspect them yourself?" I asked. "You said the other day that you suspected me, you know."

"So I did, but that's different, as I say. These two are genuine enough."

"No doubt," said I, for I was quite open-minded about the possibilities of "spooking." "Whom were they talking to last night?"

"Oh—just Sally, and Silas P. Warner, and that lot," said the Doc. "Same crowd of spooks as we get ourselves."

I glanced at him to see if he was joking. He wasn't. Lord! Doc. dear, how I longed to laugh.<sup>1</sup>

If the new "mediums" had invented their own spirits, it is clear that Mr. Jones, in spite of his own faked *seances*, was quite prepared to give them credit for a genuine performance. But he knew the spirits they were in communication with had no existence outside his own brain, because he had invented them. What puzzled him at the time was why they had not invented spirits of their own. He learned, long afterwards, that his were adopted because they thought his show was possibly genuine, and nothing could be more natural

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Jones, *The Road to En-dor*, pp. 16 17.

than that the spirits haunting one house should also appear next door.

The position now was rather curious. The new mediums knew their own show was a fraud, but were not sure about the parties next door. The majority of the camp were inclined to think there might be something in the performance of the new mediums, although they viewed the original pair with suspicion. However, they could not accept the one without the other, seeing that the same spirits appeared at both. And that eventually was what happened.

The little "rag" was now assuming larger proportions than the author had intended; circumstances were beginning to make it almost impossible to get out of it. If he confessed now, he would be giving away the others at the same time. Besides, as he admits,—

I did not very much wish to confess. The "conversion" of a large portion of the camp was in sight, for Doc. was quite right in his analysis of the situation, and the entry of Bishop and Nightingale on the scene had disposed everybody to further inquiry into the matter. The position was beginning to have a keen psychological interest for me.<sup>1</sup>

So Mr. Jones compromised with his conscience. A friend designed a poster of a *Ouija* board and glass, and a notice was placed beneath, saying that "ours was the original Psychical Research Society of Yozgad, that it had no connection with any other firm, and that we held *seances* on stated evenings. Our fellow-prisoners were asked to attend. The closest inspection was invited. The poster ended by saying that the mediums each suspected the other, and would welcome any inquirer who could decide how the rational movements of the glass were caused."

Shortly after this notice was put up the "mediums" were asked if they objected to a series of "tests." The Doctor, strong in his innocence, welcomed the suggestion. So did Mr. Jones; it was just what he wanted; if all were discovered, as he expected, he would take his punishment, there would be a good laugh all round, and that would end it:—

If by any fluke of fortune I survived, the testers would only have themselves to blame afterwards. It was now a fair fight—my wits against the rest—catch as catch can, and all grips allowed. Neither the Doc. nor I made any conditions, nor did we want to know beforehand the nature of the tests to which we were to be subjected. But I took my precautions. I secretly nicked the edges of the circle on which the letters were written in such a way that I could always recognize, by touch, the position of the board.

Now, it must be borne in mind that these brother officers were no simpletons. There were trained scientists among them. The Doctor himself was a bacteriologist. There was a geologist from the Soudan, a sapper scientist from India who knew all about wireless telegraphy and ether waves. And there were others. As the author himself remarks, they

were grown men. thewed and sinewed, with the varied store of wisdom that grown men acquire in their wanderings up and down the wide seas and the broad lands of this old Empire of ours. They were "enquirers"—not "true believers" as yet—and as I was to find out in due course, they were "no mugs" at enquiring (p. 12).

Probably no two mediums were ever tried out so thoroughly and yet came through the tests so triumphantly as these two amateurs, for the simple reason that no professional mediums would have submitted to such tests, or if they had, there would have been no phenomena, the safe refuge when tests are too severe.

This refuge, however, was not open in their case, it would have been a confession of failure.

The first test was to bandage the medium's eyes, but as Mr. Jones had created a picture of the board in his memory, this made no difference. The board was then shifted round so as to cause him to lose his bearings, but thanks to his intelligent anticipation of this manœuvre by secretly nicking the edge of the board this test also failed. Then "some friend," says the author, suggested turning the circle of letters face downwards and writing a number on the back of each letter, the numbers touched to be written down and deciphered afterwards. This test nearly proved his Waterloo, for he lost the run of the letters altogether. He observes:—

Opposite me the Doc. sat. He had nothing to trouble him, no problems to work out. His one task in life was to let his hand follow the movements of the glass, to wait for it to move, and then neither hinder nor help but go whither it led. To him it did not matter where the letters were—they might be upside down or inside out for all he cared. The Spook would take him there. He breathed easily, in the serenity of a full faith, while the glass moved slowly round and round and I thought and thought. I tried hard to construct in my mind a looking-glass picture of the board, and failed.....Then all of a sudden the solution flashed into my mind..... Instead of imagining myself to be looking *down* at the board from *above* the table, I only had to imagine myself to be looking *up* at the board from *below* the table to have everything in its right position once more. In thirty seconds the glass was writing as freely as ever. I do not think my friends ever realized the difficulty of the task they had set me, or how near we were that night to failure. Certainly I got no credit for the performance. For I, like the Doc., was only a medium. The credit went where it belonged—to the Spook.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the rival spook next door was going great guns. It produced some first class evidential matter, usually relating to some secret of a "lurid" past, grudgingly admitted by the victim to be true, and was exceedingly well informed on matters relating to the War.

(To be continued.) W. MANN.

## Miracles.

A FLOOD of light is shed upon the probable genesis of miraculous legends in the past by the report which has gone round the press regarding some extraordinary doings at Aix-la-Chapelle recently. The town is stated to have been in a ferment over an alleged miraculous picture of the Heart of Jesus, which, it was asserted, appeared every now and then to come to life; the wounds beginning to bleed, and traces of blood being clearly seen. Hundreds of people crowded about the house which contained this marvellous picture, and the police had to intervene to restrain the curious and superstitious mob.

Modern science, of course, has no difficulty in explaining a phenomenon of this sort. It is due to the presence on the surface of the picture of a minute organism which grows freely under favourable conditions of damp and heat, producing a secretion resembling blood. It would appear just as readily on the picture of a turnip as on a picture of the mythical Christian Saviour. The incident is susceptible of a simple explanation to-day, but it can be readily conceived that a few hundred years ago the whole Roman Catholic world would have accepted it as a miracle. Indeed, even at the present time, it is fairly certain that numerous Catholics will reject the natural explanation of the above occurrence in favour of the

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Jones, *The Road to En dor*, p. 17.

<sup>1</sup> E. H. Jones, *The Road to En dor*, p. 22.

supernatural one. For Roman Catholic philosophy boldly repudiates the axiom that a supernatural explanation should not be sought where a natural one is forthcoming.

The discovery of this microscopic organism sufficiently accounts for the tales of the "Bleeding Host" which have arisen at intervals in the history of the Catholic Church. In various localities the startling announcement was made that the Consecrated Biscuit had apparently exuded blood. Here was confirmation of the miracle of Transubstantiation with a vengeance! Here was unquestionable proof that the bread had really been changed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and that the mystery of the Eucharist was not merely a supreme effort of the imagination. The theory that the blood of Jesus was contained in the bread alone, and did not require to be conveyed to the communicant through the medium of grape juice—a theory only evolved when it was deemed expedient to withhold the cup from the laity—was triumphantly vindicated! Alas, what a falling-off must be here recorded. Instead of a God oozing gore we have only a God who has got damp, and, so to say, mouldy. Verily, science is the great iconoclast.

Many of the miraculous legends which were current in former ages and imposed upon the credulity of the multitude undoubtedly originated in deliberate fraud. It is not necessary, however, to postulate intentional deceit in the majority of cases. The prevailing ignorance suffices to explain quite adequately the former widespread belief in the miraculous—an ignorance that was fully shared by the bulk of the priests. The culture of the clergy—a small percentage of scholarly ecclesiastics in each generation excepted—has never at any period been conspicuously on a higher level than that of the laity.

According to the writer of the article on miracles in the *Harmsworth Encyclopædia*, "it is generally conceded that the New Testament miracles stand by themselves, differentiated alike from those of the Old Testament, of which we can hardly be said to possess contemporary evidence, and from the ecclesiastical miracles, which come from admittedly superstitious times." Now, this is a fine blending of truth and misleading statements. In the first place it may be asked, who concedes that the New Testament miracles are in a class by themselves? The contention that they are is nothing but a pure assertion on the part of the Christian apologist. In fact, the whole passage quoted embodies the superior *Protestant* attitude towards miracles. The Gospel marvels are to be accepted, but all anterior and subsequent miraculous claims are to be rejected. One may fairly ask why? It will be observed that the writer quoted objects to the Old Testament miracles because there is no contemporary evidence for them, but he also objects to the ecclesiastical miracles for which any amount of ostensibly contemporary evidence is brought forward. It is pointed out that the alleged ecclesiastical miracles happened in superstitious times, but can it seriously be maintained by any student of history that the period when the stories of the Gospel miracles were written was not also a superstitious age? There is no contemporary evidence for the Old Testament miracles forsooth! What contemporary testimony that will stand examination is there for the new Testament miracles?

The article from which we have quoted goes on to say that heathen wonders need hardly be taken into consideration at all. Again we may fairly ask why? The evidence for the heathen wonders is neither better nor worse than the evidence for the Biblical and ecclesiastical miracles. They are absolutely on all-fours. The real reason why a Christian apologist retains the Gospel miracles while repudiating all the others is because he

feels it *necessary* to retain the former. He must either stand by the veracity of the Gospel narratives or drop the Gospel Jesus. And what would become of him then, poor thing!

The further argument that "the evidence of any particular miracle may be easily oppugned, but the force of the whole presentation is not to be summarily diverted," is of very questionable validity. Whoever expressed this opinion must be a near relative of the baker who asserted that though he had a loss on each loaf he sold, he secured a profit out of his huge turnover. So far as the evidence for miracles is concerned, we fail to see how a hundred lying tales can have any stronger value than a single one. In closing his article, the writer alluded to presents what he considers as probably the surest line of defence in the case of miracles. This sure line of defence turns out to be simply a contention that if we admit certain preliminary postulates—which he enumerates, and which of course are all disputable—there is no *a priori* improbability in miracles. What a hopeless intellectual tangle theologians involve themselves in by refusing frankly to admit that miracles do not happen and never have happened.

Miraculous occurrences are not put forward with much confidence in modern times. The Roman Catholic Church still occasionally manages to scrape up the pretence of one, but our latter-day atmosphere is not conducive to their growth. In earlier days they were so numerous that they must have practically ceased to possess any miraculous significance, and to the common mind must at one time have seemed to be merely part of the order of Nature. That much-vaunted pillar of the Roman Church, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, mentions over seventy miracles which occurred in his own diocese within the space of two years! Miracles must have been going cheap in those days. With his customary acuteness, Gibbon, when dealing with the miraculous claims of Christianity, singles out the significant circumstance that the Saints of the Church were very chary of making personal pretensions to the miracle-working power. They all knew of miracles that had been wrought by, or through the instrumentality of, some other saint, but say nothing as to their own achievements, with which surely they ought to have been most familiar. For instance, St. Bernard records many miracles of his friend St. Malachi, but takes no notice of his own, which are left to be related by someone else. This may mean modesty, but it may conceivably mean something different.

Allusion has been made above to the element of calculated fraud which from the earliest times is found associated with the miraculous claims of the Christian Church. One of the most notorious of these frauds, which was ultimately unmasked, formed a tragic episode in the long and bitter controversy waged between the Franciscans and the Dominicans over the precise status of the Virgin Mary. The Franciscans were out-and-out Mariolaters; the Dominicans allowed a slight leaven of common sense to operate in their attitude towards the Mother of God. The former strenuously advocated the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception; the latter as vehemently opposed it. It should be remembered that this matter was an open question for centuries. The Vatican had not decided on which side of the fence it should come down. It finally determined in favour of the Franciscan view; but for a lengthy period the rival theologians were permitted to argue the question out.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century some of the followers of St. Dominic thought to influence public sentiment in the direction of their standpoint by trading on the general belief in the miraculous. A series of bogus apparitions were carried out in the Dominican

monastery at Berne, the actors in which personated the spirits of deceased individuals, and professed to convey the true opinions held in the other world on the vexed question of the Immaculate Conception. It all sounds quite farcical, but in the sequel there was very little farce for the principals concerned. The monks engaged in the conspiracy drugged a simple, raw novice, and branded him with the marks of the stigmata. This, of course, was regarded as a miracle, and added considerably to the fame which was already attracting crowds to the monastery from far and near. Unfortunately for the zealous Dominicans, during one of the ghostly impersonations the novice recognized the voice of one of the monks. Subsequently escaping from the monastery, the novice denounced the impostors, and the upshot of the affair was that the four monks chiefly responsible for the gross imposition paid the penalty of being found out, and were burned at the stake, doubtless to the great edification of all good Franciscans. But how many religious deceivers have flourished in life and have died in the odour of sanctity without being found out?

GEORGE SCOTT.

### Sir Victor Horsley.

THE late well-known surgeon, Sir Victor Horsley, who died in Mesopotamia, July, 1916, was not a Christian, though in his addresses to Brotherhood meetings he would quote the Bible. For him, "Christianity was Christian ethics and social service; these he took and worked into the fabric of his life; what he did not feel to want, he did not care to take, nor to provide for his children." In other words, he rejected the supernatural. The quotation just made is from Stephen Paget's biography of Horsley. Paget adds:—

If he had cared to be labelled, he would have written the label himself, Agnostic, in his big masterful hand. One of his nurses tells an amusing story of a lady who went to him, "because he is the special surgeon for my case; but, of course, if it hadn't been for that, I would never have gone to a man who is so very agnostic." It was no part of his plan of his life that he should be in quest of "the reason o' the cause an' the wherefore o' the why." It was not in his temperament; it was not in his education. He had not been through that mill of reading when he was young. It had pleased him well enough, in his University College days, to try to think of the Absolute; but that pleasure does not last long; and he did not find his way, in the later years, to any books which compelled him to listen to them. Popular theology and sham metaphysics were utterly distasteful to him.—(Paget's *Sir Victor Horsley*, published by Constable, 1919, p. 261).

Sir Victor was a determined critic of alcohol, and is a favourite authority with teetotallers. As certain forms of Christian Evangelicalism are in vogue among "Temperance" advocates, it may be as well to put on record Paget's testimony to Horsley's Agnosticism.

### Acid Drops.

All the Churches are doing what they can to exploit the after-War feeling as they were busy exploiting the War feeling while the conflict was on. Among other attempts we see that All Souls Church, Leeds, is appealing for £500 in order to set up a crucifix as a memorial to those who lost their lives in the War. The notion that all those who lost their lives were believers in Christianity is taken for granted, and it would be rather interesting if one could get the opinions of these people on the Christianity that is now trying to make capital out of their deaths. What we do know is that thousands of soldiers lost their last shred of religious belief as a consequence of the War, and had nothing but a feeling of disgust for the Church which could do nothing to prevent the catastrophe, and beat the War drum as loudly as any when the War broke out. Perhaps the memorial is intended as a satire on the deity whose care for the world was so well illustrated by the outbreak of the War?

We are sorry to see that the Rev. Mr. Guttery, who recently secured some attention from the papers because he said that there was no Atheism left in the country, has lost his voice—temporarily, we hope. Still, if the same thing had happened to an Atheist after he had said something against religion, we doubt not that some pious folk would not have been long in drawing the inevitable conclusion. We hope he will soon be better.

Fame is a fickle thing! Also a very chancey sort of a thing. Some Christian got hold of a copy of the Secular Society's edition of the *Mistakes of Moses*. Whereupon he returned it to the office addressed to "Colonel Ingersoll." Evidently we are in touch with someone who knows all about us, and who is not to be deceived by any artifice we may adopt. But we did think that Ingersoll would be well known. Wonder whether this gentleman has ever heard of Thomas Paine? But we can understand why such an up-to-date mind is not to be tricked.

They are putting up a memorial chapel at Ypres—trust the clergy to get what they can out of the War—and a *Daily News* correspondent found the British soldiers there, who are still engaged in digging out the dead bodies from the trenches, particularly expressive in their sentiments about religion. One fancies that what the correspondent says is only a part of what he could say; but here is a passage detailing a conversation with some soldiers in a cafe where a concert was in progress:—

The idea of the Memorial Chapel, as I have said, did not appeal to them. "Weren't there plenty of chapels," said one, "before the war—and what good did they do? Did religion do anything to stop the war? Did the parsons do anything? Did the women go to church do anything?" He looked round as if to challenge anyone to answer him. "Marie," he added, "let's have another pint."

The discussion went on for some time and became more bitter every moment. I waited for the man who had been so eager to join in the chorus to say something, and I was not disappointed. "What I'd like to do," he said, "would be to bring out every parson, and every damned politician, and every blinkin' old man at home and make them dig for bodies in the trenches round about Passchendale. That'd do more good than sticking up Memorial Chapels in Wipers." Then he looked round towards the bar.

"Marie," he said, "let's have another song!"

The *Morning Post* is a very religious, aristocratic, and royalist kind of paper, and we have it told us, in a leading article therein on July 15, that the War was a war of religion. Well, we always said that religion had more to do with the War than most people imagined, from the Kaiser, suffering from a form of religious mania, to the fact that religion had so largely helped to keep alive frames of mind without which wars would not be nearly so likely to occur. It is only fair to the *Morning Post* to add that it justifies the description on the ground that it was a War of right against might, but as every war has been that—although there has always been a dispute as to which was which—the distinction does not amount to very much. The great thing in which the War resembled those wars into which religion has largely entered was in its ferocity.

The *Morning Post's* remark is made in connection with a protest against the huge War Memorial it is proposed to erect in Hyde Park. And its complaint is that it is supposed to take a form that will commemorate no religious creed in particular. This it cannot stand. In that case we suggest that it should bear an inscription stating that the monument is indicative of the Christian religion which had controlled the world for many centuries, which blessed the cannon and the battleships with which the War was fought, that it was the religion of the Emperor of Germany, the Emperor of Austria, and the Czar of Russia, that the German soldiers all had "God With Us" on their helmets, and that in all the armies engaged Christian priests did their best to keep the soldiers up to the fighting pitch. And it might add that cannon were placed near the altar in St. Paul's Cathedral at a special service, in order to prove that God was on our side—with the help of big guns. We might at least be

thorough while we are about it, and a little more or less hypocrisy cannot matter much where the supply is so plentiful.

When the Israelites marched out of Egypt, their clothing, thanks to the miraculous care of God, declined to grow old. What a pity he cannot do the same for the stonework of Westminster Abbey! It would save all the appeals for funds to repair the crumbling stonework.

At the Annual Conference of the United Methodists, the Rev. Dr. Brook said that he knew a minister who, whenever he had the choice of a ministry, invariably took the one with the lower salary. We do not dispute the assertion, but we are quite sure that there would be no great trouble in getting the higher ones filled at once. And the advice of the New Testament was that they were to take no salary at all, but to rest content with the offerings of the faithful.

The blessings of "civilization" are many, and the benefits we confer upon the "inferior races" are among the things on which we pride ourselves most. If there is a set-off to our philanthropy in the shape of commercial developments, who shall blame Providence for that? But there are unpleasant aspects also. We take the natives the Gospel, but there are other things that accompany it. For example, it is pointed out by "Nature" that the natives are being mown down by certain loathsome infectious diseases, the consequence of their contact with the superior white folk. There is also a shortage of food, in consequence of the disappearance of game. One way and another the native is in process of disappearance. In one area the number of natives have declined from 12,000 to 120. Still, we are civilizing them, and if they are not sufficiently developed to take our diseases with impunity, it should be some consolation to these vanishing people to know that they are making way for a higher and a Christian civilization.

We are not concerned here with the economic aspect of the increased charges on riding, telephones, letters, and other means of communication between people, but there is one aspect that may be touched on in these columns, if only because it receives such scant attention elsewhere; this is, that every obstacle to the fullest and freest communication between people, whether living in this or in other countries, is a step backward in civilization. No nation advances when shut in on itself, and it is equally true of intercourse between classes. And if the nation had a mind to economize in the healthiest manner, it might well bethink itself whether it might not be in the long run cheaper to economize in other directions than in that of erecting more barriers between people than already exist. Estrangement consecrates misunderstanding, and isolation breeds degeneration.

When Mr. Lloyd George brought in his Land Values duties he said "The Bill is but a beginning, and with God's help, it is but a beginning." On July 15 the land tax was repealed, and the money that has been paid by the landlords is to be given back to them. So much for "God's help"! If it had been without God's help it could not have fared worse. But that is the worst of depending on the unknown for assistance. But when Mr. George relied on God he was not quite so thick with the Lords.

"Jesus beat Magdalene" was the heading in the *Daily Herald* of a recent date. At first sight it looked like a piece of New Testament scandal. Closer scrutiny showed it to be only the report of a boat race. But perhaps the writer of the headline had something more in his mind than a boat race when he wrote it. We suppose it is hard to keep up the religious pretence all the time.

Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool, is a Baptist Church, whose trust deeds are framed on orthodox, Calvinistic lines, logically necessitating the preaching of the doctrines of the Trinity, the Divinity of Christ, the Atonement, Regeneration, etc., by the minister. To such a creed the present minister, the Rev. J. Vint Laughland, being a Unitarian, cannot pos-

sibly subscribe, nor can he accept the constitution of membership in the Baptist Union. As a matter of fact, the overwhelming majority of churches are almost completely out of touch, theologically, with their trust deeds, which in most cases are glaring anachronisms. And yet the local Baptist Union has dared to excommunicate Pembroke Chapel from its membership. Technically, this action of the Union may be justifiable; but it is also decidedly reactionary, and calculated to be of enormous advantage to the cause of Freedom. Mr. Laughland is to be congratulated on having been the occasion of such an exhibition of narrow-mindedness and bigotry as is bound to be of tremendous assistance in the intellectual emancipation of Liverpool and neighbouring districts.

Of course, Mr. Laughland shares the fate of most advanced thinkers. His enemies, the orthodox, call him an Atheist, and delight in persecuting him. If they possessed the power they would burn him at the stake, as John Calvin burned Servetus. Mr. Laughland impresses us as a profoundly sincere man who has the courage of his convictions. It must be admitted, however, that the reverend gentleman's views, as expounded by himself in the July number of the *Liberal Christian*, border very closely, from the orthodox standpoint, on Atheism; and we are not surprised that sticklers for traditionalism have attached the label Atheist to his name. It will be remembered that Huxley vehemently objected to be called an Atheist, but in a letter to Charles Kingsley he frankly admitted that, from the Christian point of view, he *was* an Atheist. Naturally, as a clergyman, Mr. Laughland resents the charge of Atheism; but, after all, does he not preach an essentially non-Theistic, Secular Gospel, which is the grandest of all Gospels, being entirely and demonstrably true at every point?

The Vicar of St. Matthew's Church, Sheffield, says England is very "Heathen." There is so much ignorance of Christianity about. We would advise the vicar to do nothing to remove it if he wishes Christianity to retain its hold on the people. So soon as people understand Christianity they begin to give it up. If the Vicar were to take the overwhelming majority of active Freethought workers for the last hundred years he would find that they had been very ardent students of Christianity. When they understood it the inevitable consequence followed.

We have no doubt whatever that the Vicar sincerely believes that he understands Christianity. But that is quite a delusion. What he understands is Church Ritual. He knows quite well how he ought to stand when he goes through certain incantations and performs certain mummeries, but when it comes to an understanding of Christianity that is quite another matter. For instance, if the Vicar were asked to explain the real meaning of the belief in the Virgin birth he would be hopelessly at sea. If he were asked to explain why it is that people believe in miracles he would be equally helpless. One doesn't go to a parson for light on these things, one goes to the anthropologist. And the men who have taught us the truth about religion are precisely those who do not believe in it. The position, in fact, is simple. If you believe in religion you can't understand it. If you understand it you can't believe it. When that is said all is said.

Appeals to take up Housing Bonds have been issued by the Bishop of London, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, and the Chief Rabbi. These three men of God—or Gods—unite in dwelling upon the value of the investment, and the need of the country for more houses. The amount of trust in God in the appeals is microscopical. The Bishop of London implores people to invest with the same patriotism as they did during the War. We have no doubt but that the patriotism which secures a good and safe return for its investment is of the kind that will appeal to the Christian conscience. But it is worth pointing out that the Bishop's own Church has large sums invested in War funds, and it would really help quite as effectively if the Church were to forgo its interest, and so lighten the load that more loans are being raised to meet.



## SPECIAL.

Until the end of July, and in order to bring the "Freethinker" into contact with a larger number of people, we are prepared to send this paper for thirteen weeks, post free, for 2s. 9d, on receiving names and addresses from any of our present subscribers. Subscribers are not limited to sending one address; they may send as many as they please. This offer applies only to those who are already subscribers, and is part of a general advertising scheme, having for its object the creation of a larger circulation and a more extended sphere of service. New readers who receive the paper for thirteen weeks are not likely to drop it afterwards.

## To Correspondents.

DRIVER W. DENTITH, Barbers' Shop, 502 Battery, Fulwood Barracks, Preston, would be glad to make the acquaintance of Freethinkers in the locality.

H. UNDERWOOD.—All particulars concerning the Secular Education League can be obtained from the Secretary, 19 Buckingham Street, Strand.

C. MANSON.—Mr. Cohen will be visiting Scotland early in October. The particulars will appear in the *Freethinker* in due course.

E. LECHMERE.—A very interesting account of a curious experience. We intend making use of it as soon as possible. It would be well if all were in the habit of so carefully noting their abnormal experiences and their causes.

A. GILLAM.—We quite agree with you that there is room for more propaganda in Edinburgh, and also over the whole of Scotland. We do not know in what way we can assist you in your desire to help the work, but we would give all the assistance we could. But why not get into touch with either the Glasgow or the Edinburgh Branches of the N. S. S.?

R. H. LOVEKIN.—Thanks. A very informative article of which we will make use later.

*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. Vano, giving as long notice as possible.*

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## Sugar Plum.

We must apologize for a shortage in the paragraph branch this week; but the Editor is taking a week-end holiday, dealing only with matters that must receive attention. Even the Editor of the *Freethinker* needs a day off occasionally. Mr. Lloyd is kindly seeing this issue through the press.

## The Evolution of Natural Law.

THOUGH the earlier literature of Darwinism seems to have concerned itself mainly with the evolution of structure, it was soon recognized that the evolution of function is so closely interconnected with that of structure that the two cannot be scientifically separated. Structure and function act and react on each other throughout the whole evolutionary process, and the recognition of this fact has guided and informed all scientific investigation to an increasing extent as its scope has widened and deepened. And chiefly has it been the guiding principle in all attempts at the interpretation and unification of biological phenomena; for as the morphologist attempts to trace all complexities of structure to the primitive cell, so does the physiologist attempt to trace all the functions of living beings to the primitive functions of protoplasm, and the two lines of investigation are so closely interconnected that the one is almost meaningless without the other.

The latest investigations in biology—as illustrated by the remarkable researches of Loeb and others—are carrying us a step further, for the structure of the living cell is being interpreted in terms of the chemical structure of the complicated molecules of which it is composed, while its functions are being similarly affiliated with the purely chemical functions of these physical units. Here, indeed, the evolution of function assumes the more important aspect of the two, for while the earlier Darwinians were content to take their initial structural elements—their "fortuitous variations"—for granted, the modern evolutionist goes behind these structural data, and seeks for their causes not only in the functions and activities of living matter, but in the yet more primitive and elementary functions of molecules and atoms.

The evolution of function, then, seems to be the line along which later biological investigation is proceeding; but on the older chemical theory, which assumes the ultimate entity and immutable structure of the atom, these investigations would reach their limit in a physical or chemical interpretation. If the atom be the ultimate element of physical existence, it is obvious that an interpretation of biological and psychological phenomena in terms of atoms and their functions would be the final interpretation for science, and if science failed to furnish such an interpretation, the problem would have to be given up as insoluble. But the notion of the atom as an ultimate and eternal entity seems to be rapidly giving place to the notion of it as being itself a product of evolution, neither ultimate nor eternal, but derivative and transitory; neither simple in its structure nor passive in its reactions, but probably the seat of the most complicated activities, and owing all its marvellous properties to an enormous and incalculable fund of ultra-material energy.

In the light of this new and fascinating conception of the constitution of matter, no limit to the scientific interpretation of its varied activities can be or should be fixed. If matter be itself but a function of energy, an explanation of all other functions in terms of matter may quite possibly be unattainable until the nature of this material function becomes understood. We cannot understand all the activities of the universe until we understand the activities of the elements of which that universe is composed, and, so far from yet understanding these activities, we are only now beginning to be aware of their existence. Suppose that a child's box of toy building-blocks contains these in every variety of plane-sided solid—cubes, parallelepipeds, pyramids, prisms, and so on—while the pretty picture on the lid represents

a building adorned with rounded cupolas and swelling domes, with conical spire and graceful arch. An intelligent child would soon discover that to construct a building such as this with the building-blocks in his box would be impossible. However varied may be their rectilinear shapes he would soon realize the utter futility of attempting to produce rounded surfaces and curving lines with blocks possessing only plane faces and straight edges. But supposing he made the discovery that the blocks, instead of being fixed shapes and rigid structure, were made of some plastic material capable of being moulded into forms of infinite variety. The construction of the building would no longer be impossible, and so soon as the child learned how the blocks might be moulded into the necessary shapes the problem would be solved. The elemental atoms are the building-blocks of the universe, and we are now discovering that within them may lie hidden activities and powers hitherto undreamed of. This obscure region of the proto-material which science is only now beginning to investigate probably conceals energy functions of such refinement and subtlety, of such potentiality and scope as are capable of bringing about, by way of natural order and causation, all the highest manifestations of life and mind.

What we know of the evolutionary process seems to confirm this view. All material evolution can be expressed in terms of equilibrium, and we find that this equilibrium advances from highly stable forms in the elemental atoms, through the less stable forms characterizing chemical combinations, to the highly mobile equilibria of protoplasm in general, while the extreme limit of instability is reached in the delicate and sensitive equilibria exhibited by those special forms of protoplasm, nerve and brain matter. And we see that along with this advance from the stability of the atom to the high complexity and mobility of sentient protoplasm there is a progressive change in the nature of the functions exhibited. The "laws" governing the activities of matter seem to undergo, at these three stages of evolution, fundamental changes not only in degree but in kind, so that the chemical, the vital, and the mental "laws" differ profoundly from each other, and still more profoundly from the "physical laws" governing the activities of matter in the mass. Might not the meaning of this be that the increasing instability and mobility of the matter involved releases certain energy functions hitherto locked up and hidden in the stable equilibria of the atoms, and enables them to come into operation at these salient points in the evolutionary process? Thus, material evolution would be "evolution" in the truest sense of the word—a real "unfolding" of energies already existing in a potential form—a liberation of hitherto dormant functions when the conditions of equilibrium admit of their release. Hence we should conceive of the primordial energy as containing all the potentialities of matter, life, and mind; but such a conception in no way involves the assumption that any one of these actualities stands at the origin of the process. The term "potentiality of mind" need not imply mind or anything like it, any more than the potentiality of water contained in oxygen and hydrogen can be likened to water itself.

Physical "laws" admit of a similar interpretation. If matter be not primary but derivative the laws of matter must be derivative too, and what we know of proto-material evolution—meagre though our knowledge is at present—supports this view. Matter in process of dissociation passes through successive stages of kinetic energy—the ions, the negative electrons, and the X-rays—exhibiting functions and properties quite alien to the ordinary functions and properties of matter, but which

we may be justified in regarding as the raw material, so to speak, out of which the physical laws of matter have been evolved. The process of dissociation terminates in the complete disappearance of matter in the form of energy, and thus we are led to regard matter as the middle term standing between two complementary phases of evolution, proto-material evolution being a fall from the complete instability of immaterial energy to a condition of stable equilibrium in the physical atom, while material evolution consists of a rise to a condition of instability initiated and maintained by the energy functions involved in chemical combinations. Matter lies at the lowest point of a two-branched curve, the one descending from and the other reascending to the primordial energy of immaterial substance. Hence the most "fundamental" physical laws—the laws of motion, gravitation, etc.—may themselves be but products of the immaterial energy functions. There may be regions in space where these laws do not exist and where totally different laws may obtain, and the entire order of nature as known to us may be only a passing episode in the cosmic process.

Thus does science seem to be leading us to a conception somewhat akin to the Monism of Spinoza, without its metaphysical implications. That conception of one primordial substance with infinite attributes which A. W. Benn, in his *History of Modern Philosophy*, justly calls "the most dizzy height of speculation ever attained by man," does not seem very far removed from modern scientific Monism, if for "attributes" we substitute potentialities which may or may not become actualities, according to the course which the cosmic process may follow through infinite time and space. On this view matter assumes a new position, and "Materialism" a probably truer significance. Matter can no longer be regarded as the origin of all things, but it still has to be regarded as the gateway of all physical existence—as the "clearing house" of the universe, through which all immaterial energy has to pass before it can blossom forth into physical, vital, and mental being. Hence there remains no essential distinction between Mind and Matter, between "Subject" and "Object," between the "internal" and "external" worlds. This distinction is but an illusion inherent in the nature of consciousness, and our mental impotence in identifying Thoughts with Things is due to what Tyndall called "a demonstrable impossibility of self-preservation." To realize this identity we should require to be independent of the conditions of thought, and to be able to regard our minds, as it were, from an outside point of view—a self-evident impossibility. So Dualism gives place to Monism, and the antithetic conceptions of Mind and Matter, with their eternal and insoluble problems, are replaced by the simple notion of one primordial and universal existence of which both are functions.

The surpassing grandeur of this conception scarcely needs to be pointed out. Over the ocean of existence the mighty waves of rising and falling energy pass in eternal procession. In the troughs of these billows lie the origins of all material orders, while on their crests gleam here and there in transient splendour the white spray-clouds of Consciousness—the ghostly spindrift of these restless waves, "a moment seen, then gone for ever."

A. E. MADDOCK.

Verily there are rewards for our doing good to dumb animals, and giving them water to drink. An adulteress was forgiven who passed by a dog at a well; for the dog was holding out his tongue from thirst, which was near killing him; and the woman took off her boot, and tied it to the end of her garment, and drew water for the dog, and gave him to drink; and she was forgiven for that act.—*Mohammed.*

## Public Opinion.

THE all-sufficiency of public opinion, *i.e.*, the harmonized thought and desire of a very large proportion of the people, is not generally understood. Most people believe that men are controlled by officials administering statute laws, and that without such rulers and laws society could not harmoniously exist; but, in my opinion, the machinery of Government is not the real power in society, but only the semblance of it. The Houses of Parliament, the municipal council chambers, the law courts, etc., seem to me to be so many theatres in which a number of actors perform for the amusement of the people.

A public official, a ruler, has no more power to govern his fellow-men than has anybody else, except that he happens to be the person whom public opinion clothes with authority: that is to say, the person to whom a very large proportion of the people have decided that all shall submit. The power of every ruler resides wholly in the ignorance and superstition of the masses; or, in other words, in public opinion.

It is just the same with a law. A law has no power to enforce itself, and no law could be enforced unless a very large proportion of the people were willing that it should be. In fact, most of the laws of all countries are merely the customs of the people. But when the people get tired of doing a certain thing in one way they begin to do it in another, and then that new way becomes the law. Every statute law is but the writing down of how the lawmaker thinks the people want the thing done. If he guesses right, the people call him a great statesman, shout for him and pay him a large salary, but they would have done the thing in the way he prescribes anyhow. The only virtue about him is that he is a good guesser. He guesses how the people will do the thing, and then hypnotizes them into believing that he told them how to do it, and that they cannot get on without him. All goes well with him until he makes a bad guess, and then the people get along without him. What, then, is the use of having law-makers? None at all. The people do things as they wish. If the law coincides with their wish they obey it, as we say. If it does not so coincide they ignore it. Parliament is merely a theatre, and the politicians are merely actors, so that things would go on just the same without any Parliament. No force is required to make people do what they wish to do. Some force is now used to make some people obey the laws, but it is comparatively little. There is very little use for soldiers and policemen except to keep the working people in subjection. Think of the millions of people there are rubbing shoulders all the time, and how few acts of violence occur. Think of the countless business transactions and the comparatively few law suits that grow out of them. Indeed, nine-tenths of all the things we do are done without even a knowledge of what the law is on the subject, and without a thought that there is a policeman handy who may compel us to do this or that. Most people respect each other's rights, pay their debts, and perform their contracts without being physically forced to do so, and they would be still more inclined to do so if there were not so many lawyers and courts at hand whose financial prosperity depends on angry litigation.

It is often said that all this smoothness in most social affairs is the result of Governmental training in the past: that people have been clubbed into civility. I don't believe it. Civility has grown up regardless of laws. Men would be as peaceable and polite as they are now if there had never been a ruler or a law.

There are still on the statute books of many countries

laws against blasphemy by which is meant denying the existence of an arbitrary God or speaking sensibly about the Bible. In some of the American States, for example, the penalty for blasphemy is being bored through the tongue, or something equally savage. And yet blasphemers are fairly numerous there and are rarely disturbed, because public opinion is against the enforcement of such laws. They will, probably, never even be repealed, for when public opinion is against the punishment of an offender laws and courts are powerless to punish him.

Now observe wherein the law appears to be strong. If you fail to pay your taxes, the law falls on you like an avalanche. Why? Because ninety-nine people in every hundred believe that compulsory taxation is absolutely necessary to social existence. Observe that we are allowed to use money with only a certain kind of stamping or printing on it. Try to use any other kind of money, and the law will hit you with the force of a gun. Why? because nearly everybody believes that there should be only one kind of money. A priest takes some bread and wine, and mumbles over them. "Now," says he, "these are the flesh and blood of God. Nobody can do that for you but me." The devotee believes him, and therein lies the power of the priest. The usurers get the rulers to take a bit of gold, silver, bronze, or paper, and print something on it, and tell the people that it is money, and that nobody else can make it. The people believe them, and therein lies the power of the usurer. The very people who are half-starved because of our idiotic money arrangements would fight to enforce the laws that impoverish them.

Millions of unemployed—strong, healthy, able persons—sinking into despondency because they cannot make a living. Yet here and there and everywhere vacant land is almost as plentiful as air. Every man, woman, and child might be as rich and happy as they cared to but for a strong law that keeps them off the vacant land—strong only because the very people who faint and die would fight to uphold it.

Here is this lesson of the weakness of rulers and laws, and the power of public opinion, so plain and simple. Yet it takes so long, so very long, for people to learn it. They think that if they can only get a law passed to this or that effect, the thing they want will be done. But why bother about getting a law passed? All that is necessary is to get the people to want it done.

I believe that all persons should be free to form Mutual Credit Associations and issue their own money in free competition with the present protected banks. But if I could get a law passed to that effect by merely turning my hand over, I would not take the trouble to do even so simple a thing as that. All that is necessary is to get a sufficient number of people to think as I do.

I believe that whenever a bit of land is not being put to productive use, anyone who wishes to use it should be free to do so. But why go to the bother and expense of electing a man for the purpose of getting a law passed to that effect? It is only necessary that enough persons should hold this view in order that the present injurious and unjust monopoly of idle land should collapse. You do not need a law to make you free. Laws are made only to enslave men. All that is necessary is to simply ignore the law that keeps you in bondage.

Only those who wish to enslave others try to get laws passed. Show me a man who is trying to get a law passed, and I will show you a man who is trying to benefit himself and his class at the expense of others. Only those reformers who wish to force measures before people have learnt how to accomplish them, or wish to enjoy them, appeal to arms. Show me a reformer who shoulders a rifle, and I will show you a man who is

trying to set up one sort of tyranny in place of another sort. The sons of Freedom need no laws, no firearms. Freedom never yet was born in a legislature or on a battlefield. You cannot vote it, or legislate it, or shoot it into existence. It is born in the brain. Its cradle is a thought. Its clothing is an idea and a wish. It is fed on words. It is educated in the school of patience and endurance. It can only be achieved by each one understanding what it means, enjoying it himself as well as he can, and trying to plant the seeds of it in the brains of others. It is unspeakably sad that the people are so priest-ridden and ruler-crushed, and consequently so impoverished and unhappy; and it is pathetically ludicrous how they try to right themselves. We must alternately laugh at and weep over the great, blundering, broken-hearted clown, while helping to form that intelligent public opinion by which alone anything can or ever will be done for the betterment of the world.

G. O. WARREN.

### Freethought and Democracy.

WHEN professional actors are out of engagement, they often have inserted in theatrical papers an advertisement to the effect that they are *resting*. Now, that may mean they are tired of work, and need a little rest and relaxation, or it may mean that they have gone for a holiday, and do not wish to be disturbed; but it more often means that they are out of employment, and are open for engagements at the earliest possible moment.

At the present time *I am resting*. After forty years of official life, I have retired into the obscurity of my humble home at Peckham. I need rest, change of scene, change of occupation, entertainment; these I shall get. But so soon as the summer is over I hope to resume the work I love—the work in which I have been engaged for so many years—viz., the advocacy of Freethought, the work of the emancipation of my fellows from the thralldom of ignorance and superstition. I shall be free to lecture in all parts of the country, and I trust that my time will be fairly well occupied by the various Freethought and kindred Societies throughout the country. And let me say at once that my great desire is to address audiences composed almost exclusively of the working classes.

It is often said that the working classes have become absolutely indifferent to all questions relating to religion. That I do not believe for a single moment. But I am quite satisfied that they have had enough of the delusions of theology; that they have been fed up with the absurdities and anomalies of the Old Testament and the puerilities and superstitions of the New; but they have not become absolute nothingarians, with no interest in any subject but the question of earning their daily bread and spending their spare cash in gambling on horse-racing, attending football matches, or spending their evenings drinking in public-houses.

Such a view as the latter I know to be absolutely false of the great masses of the working class. Politicians are just beginning to wake up to the fact that the workers have very definite views on political and economical questions, and no doubt the priest and the parson will do their best to keep the women who have got votes away from the "evil influences" of those who are seeking to emancipate them from the intellectual serfdom in which most of them have passed their lives. But when the Old Theology is destroyed, when the masses have given up their belief in the inspiration of the Bible, and look upon it in the light of a human production, expressing the best ideas that our ancient and superstitious

forefathers were able to form respecting events which they believed to have happened, and narrating traditional beliefs respecting the history and evolution of the Jewish race—there is still a great deal to be learned respecting the world in which we live, the origin of all forms of animal life, the evolution of man from the ape-like form, and a number of other deeply interesting questions to every student of physical science. To get a full grasp of these and cognate subjects it is absolutely necessary to become a Freethinker. The mind must be unhampered by any form of religious prejudice; the student must be prepared to give up every vestige of belief that is not grounded upon evidence and reason.

Our Movement, that of aggressive Freethought, has always been a democratic one. The followers of the great Charles Bradlaugh were always found among the most intelligent members of the working classes. And his successor, G. W. Foote, did not become popular as a lecturer until he abandoned his highly cultivated and academical style of address and appealed in the plain, forcible, and homely language of the people, to the masses of his fellow-countrymen. And, after all, the working classes must form the backbone of any progressive movement. Men of science, philosophers, great scholars, and literary men of eminence we have in large numbers on our side. They make the discoveries, supply us with data upon which we formulate our arguments, and give us the fine literary craftsmanship that render their works so attractive and admirable as text-books for our lectures. Indeed, we could not do our work without their aid.

We have also thousands of highly educated persons in the middle-classes who are unquestionably Freethinkers; but when there is any persecution to be suffered, when there is any daring speech to be made in favour of intellectual liberty, the burden generally falls upon the shoulders of the poor working class advocate of Freethought to suffer the one or to risk the other. The great masses of the people are prepared to accept the fruits of their labour, but very reluctant to lend their aid in the most perilous hour of the conflict. When, however, the battle is over and the victory won, then is the time to look round and see what other tasks lie before us. Great leaders won for us, after a long and terrible struggle our freedom of the press, the *right* to give expression to our views on religious subjects, providing we expressed ourselves in decent language (which apparently means in language not calculated to disturb the tender susceptibilities of Christians) without the risk of being charged with blasphemy; the right to make affirmation in courts of law in lieu of taking the oath; also the right to make affirmation in the House of Commons on taking one's seat as a member of Parliament; and numerous other rights and privileges, such as a perfectly secular form of marriage before the registrar, and a secular form of burial service at the grave in any public cemetery; all these things we have gained after persistent effort and much persecution. Still there are other great battles to be fought, one of the most important of which is to rescue the child and the teacher from the tyranny of the priest and parson in our rate-supported schools by providing a purely secular education for the children at the public expense; and, further, to make all our municipal institutions purely secular in character by preventing either priest or parson exercising any ecclesiastic function as part of the business of the Council. It is sometimes said that the age of public lectures is over; that the people have neither the desire nor the patience to listen to lengthy addresses on science, philosophy, religion, or even politics, except in the latter case at election times.

This I do not believe to be altogether true. A poor speaker, with a dreary method of presenting his case, naturally fails to attract, but a lecturer who knows his case and who has a good delivery and a skilful and convincing method of argument and exposition very rarely fails to draw an audience even to-day. It is gratifying to know that the Freethought Party still possesses some of the best platform orators and debaters at present before the public, and I see no reason why lecturing as an art is likely to die out in the near future. It is sometimes hinted that the cinema will take the place of the lecturer as teacher of the masses in the near future. That may be so; but in that case the Freethinker will have to write the scenario for the film. And just as men of genius, like M. Brioux, the distinguished French dramatist, could write a successful propagandist play in *La Foi*, translated for His Majesty's Theatre by J. B. Fagan under the title of *False Gods*, during the late Sir Herbert Tree's management, so, I believe, we shall in time find an English playwright who will be able to write a successful Freethought play for the English stage when the people are ready for this form of instruction. Till then we must hammer away with our lectures on the platform carrying our message far and wide; we have a grand cause and noble principles. In the language of George Jacob Holyoake: "We too prefer a creed; but it must be a creed that is as definite as science and as flexible as progress—a creed that shall have its deepest roots in the human heart and count for its highest victory the permanent well-being of the people."

Such a creed, we believe, to be embodied in the principles and objects of the National Secular Society, and it is these principles and objects that we commend for the examination and approval of the great body of intelligent working men and women of this country.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

### An Experience.

I WILL not attempt to write a full biography of my last week's *Freethinker*, because by the following it will be gathered I have not enough "copy." The sun, in all its glory, was throwing down its scintillating rays, and the day was ideal. Having a few hours off, like journalists do occasionally, I wended my way to the river-side, and commandeered a seat near to the water. There were few people about, and, after reading the last paragraph (I always read every line), I espied a young couple of lovers approaching. The idea occurred to me to ascertain what the ordinary man in the street thought of the *Freethinker*, and I put it in the centre of the seat, title upwards. The young lovers, who looked as if their education had been sadly neglected, sat at the opposite end of the seat to me, and did not even look at the paper. I did not despair at the rebuke, for perhaps the poor souls were too busy! A few minutes later a lady of about forty summers came along, pushing, in a perambulator, a baby boy—such a bonny infant, with intelligent lips and a knowing look. She sat on the seat, and held the handle of the pram. Having nothing to do except "Does um littel tummy ache him den, my pittly toolip?" she caught sight of the paper, and, to soothe the child, gave it to him. I thought my object was to be destroyed (also the paper), when she moved away, the little baby laughing, and using the *Freethinker* as a fan. They had only gone a few yards when the infant resumed its cry, and, with a yell, threw away the paper as if disgusted. I followed, and recovered my journal, and again placed it in the centre of the seat. It had not been there long before an elderly dame, wearing

expensive *pincenez*, and of rather portly proportions, "flopped" down in the seat recently vacated. She was out of breath with her exertions, and, after a time, saw the *Freethinker* lying on the seat like some lost animal. Picking it up in a gingerly fashion, she adjusted her eye-glasses, and appeared to read the first two or three lines. With a crash and splutter of indignation, she threw the poor efforts of no doubt tireless journalists to its previous resting-place, and, with a stamp on the ground with a tiny, high-heeled shoe, moved to a seat higher up the river-side. Her conduct did not in the least perturb me, for I have been in the tropics and have seen many actions more disconcerting. I brushed my poor treasure with the sleeve of my coat, and replacing the paper on the seat awaited developments. I was again disappointed, however, for a workman (I presume he was a workman, for his trousers were tied with string immediately below the knees and his finger nails were long and dirty), unrolled his blood-red handkerchief from which he took two thick slices of bread and cheese and commenced to devour them at tremendous speed. With great care, after dining thus, he folded the blood-red handkerchief and put it away in his pocket. A much-used and stained clay pipe then came upon the scene, and after loading, reclined for an apparent usual and regular siesta on the seat. He remained in this dozing position for about a quarter-of-an-hour and then stupidly gazed around. Ah! I thought, now for something to write home about. The workman picked up the paper, and with an air of indifference stuffed it into his pocket, and went in the direction from whence he came. What he wanted with such a nice, clean, bit of paper the Lord only knows, but may he derive some pleasure from it if he has time!

Readers of this little article should experiment in a similar way with their copies of the *Freethinker*, and an interesting time will be spent in watching the faces of the various classes of people. The average man will destroy the paper when he knows its object—to educate the people—but, thank goodness, everyone does not do the same.

W. MALKINSON.

### Bible Knowledge.

IN Sir E. A. Wallis Bridge's *By Nile and Tigris*,<sup>1</sup> the well-known Egyptologist relates many anecdotes of scholars and experiences associated with the British Museum. Here is a note about certain fanatics who worried Dr. Samuel Birch by questions on Assyrian tablets and Bible Chronology:—

The immediate cause of their visits was George Smith's publication of the *Eponym Canon*, which had upset their systems of chronology of the last Assyrian Empire, and reduced them to despair. They first disputed the accuracy of his translation, and then of his copy of the text, and when they could prove neither wrong they accused the ancient Assyrian scribes of making mistakes, and not knowing their business. They produced large charts on which every event recorded in the Bible had a date assigned to it; and I heard one ingenious gentleman assert that in the majority of cases, certainly in all the important ones, he could name the year, the month, the day of the month, and even the hour in which a given event had taken place. On being asked by Birch when Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise he consulted his chart gravely, and then replied, "They were turned out of Eden at sunset on Friday, the 20th day of the month Tebeth, four thousand seven hundred and thirteen years before Christ." When asked how long they had lived in the Garden, he consulted his chart, made a rapid calculation, and said, "Eighty-nine days, and seven and a half hours."

Sir Wallis also relates how an odd fellow, who had "a good working knowledge of Hebrew," but not too much common

<sup>1</sup> 2 vols. (Murray, 1920).

sense, assured Dr. Birch that many of the monuments in the Museum were inscribed with accounts of Jezebel's life, of the loves of Samson, of Balaam's Ass, and other such history. On Dr. Birch expressing his wonder, and saying he did not know the Museum possessed such treasures, the odd fellow replied:—

"No, of course you don't, for you are one of the scholars, but you can't deceive me. You know quite well that the two stones which you have put in a corner downstairs are the Two Tables of the Law which God gave to Moses, and you tried to hide them from me because the text of the Commandments is different from that given in your Bible. They are the Tables which Moses held in his hands, and on the top corners are the impressions left by the thumbs of Moses."

"The man's belief in his discovery," adds Sir Wallis, "was genuine enough, and he was firmly convinced that all the learned Societies and all the experts in the British Museum were in league against him." (Vol. i., pp. 35-37.)

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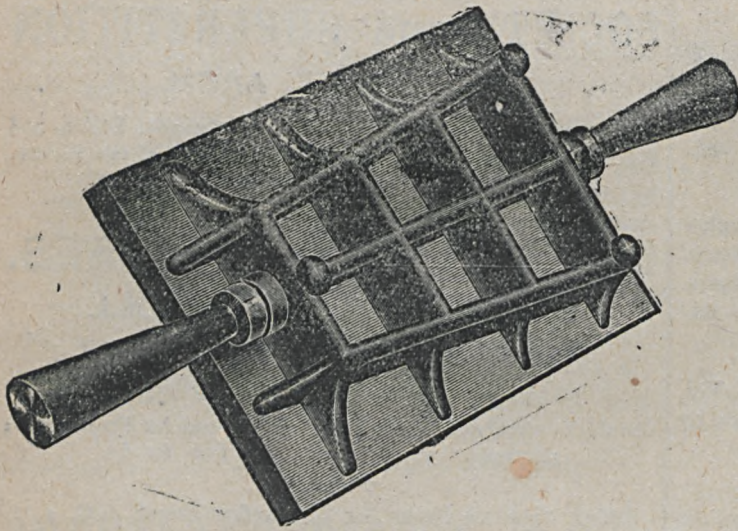
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