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Views and Opinions.

Church and Throne.

The Lambeth Conference is over, and all the Bishops are packing up ready to return to their respective flocks, who will no doubt suffer their arrival with the same composure with which they bore their departure. But before departing they paid a visit to Buckingham Palace, and on Saturday July the 24th, they were formally received by the King. They were headed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who assured the King on their behalf that they would all return home and do their best to help the Government in what it was doing. Of that there need be little doubt, so long as the Government does not try to curtail the privileges and power of the Church. If that is attempted, there will be the devil to pay. But the Church of England, with that qualification, has always been an obedient servant of the throne and Government, and Government and throne have not been unmindful of their obligations to the Church. I think it is Macaulay who points out that in the whole of its history the Church of England has only once been in open and direct conflict with the throne, and that was when, in the latter part of the seventeenth century, the Government wished to give a measure of tolerance to Roman Catholics. And, to go back to the same period, shrewd Charles the First saw clearly enough how well the Church and the crown hung together. One stone from the Church means two from the crown was his *mot*, and there is little fault to be found with the statement.

* * *

Providence and the War.

The King, or whoever it was who prepared the reply to the deputation, expressed his pleasure that so many bishops should meet together and "apply our common Christianity to the great moral, social, and political problems which civilisation is called upon to face," and also added an expression of "profound thankfulness" to "Divine providence" in bringing us through the war, and for what has happened since the Armistice with Germany. If providence is dowered with a moderate degree of intelligence, we fancy it would rather that

the reference to the war and its aftermath and its relation thereto should have been left unsaid. For when one remembers what the war was, the way in which it was fought, and the state of the world since the war with Germany came to an end, it does not seem that we have so very much for which we ought to feel profoundly grateful to a "providence" that might just as well have prevented the whole thing occurring. Of course, there is always the theory that things might have been worse. But then it is hard to see that they could have been much worse without providence than they were with it. Man *minus* God could not have behaved worse than man *plus* God has done. Providence stood quietly by while hospital ships were being sunk, and women and children bombed, while poison gas and explosive shells were used, while the children of whole nations were being starved to death, and bearing all things in mind the cause for "a feeling of the most profound thankfulness for the mercies of Divine providence" does seem a little hard to discover. Decidedly it is a trifle dangerous to call attention to "Providence." It might set people thinking, and that is always a dangerous operation—to some things.

* * *

Cant.

There was an echo of current cant in the King's remark that "a great opportunity lies before the Church of to-day if . . . she will identify herself with the social as well with the spiritual life of the people in the midst of whom she is placed," and the *Daily Telegraph* thinks "that sentence goes to the root of the matter." To my mind it is undiluted nonsense—current nonsense, but nonsense none the less. It loses sight of what is the essential fact of the situation. What is meant by such a statement is shown in the remark of the *Daily Telegraph* that there is a "very powerful" element in the Labour movement which is "the uncompromising enemy of all the Churches and of all religions," and that this is based upon the conviction that the Church is the enemy of reform. We are pleased to note the admission, although the notion that this will be removed by the Church professing to favour reform is very wide of the truth. If the Church, instead of a mere profession of good will towards social reform, were to show an active concern for its accomplishment, it would ease, but it would not save the situation. The notion that it would, is just one more proof of how hopelessly the Church and its advisers are out of touch with present day thought. Intelligent working men are not waiting for the Church to come forward as a kind of Lady Bountiful on the one hand, or as a spiritual guide on the other. They know from experience the exact worth of either pose. The demand to-day is not that the Church shall do more, but that it shall stand aside. A century of Freethought work has, at least, had that good effect.

It has made large numbers realise that social salvation is to be brought about by one method alone, and that is by intelligent co-operation and the right utilisation of all the means at our disposal. And to that end the question of whether there is a god is not of the value of a brace button. It is only of value now to disabuse people's minds of the delusion that such beliefs are of vital consequence to their well-being.

* * *

The End of the Game.

What the King's speech, and the *Daily Telegraph* writer does not—perhaps, will not—see is, that the rejection of religion is not ultimately based upon the Church being out of sympathy with reform, but upon the world losing faith in those ideas for which it stands. The power of the Church in social life rested upon the belief that people had in its doctrines, and while that belief remained all went well with it. But to-day that belief is waning rapidly. God, and a soul, providence, miracles, heaven and hell, belong to a series of ideas which, if not completely outworn, are rapidly becoming so. The goodness of certain priests would never have made religion, nor will the badness of other priests kill it. Why should it? We do not see men lose faith in government because a minister is a scoundrel, nor in the family because there are a certain number of bad husbands and wives. And Freethinkers are not such fools as to reject the religious idea because of the personal character of some who stand forth as its representatives. It is the character of the religious idea that is fatal to the pretensions of the Church. Intelligent men and women are asking why they should place in power a number of men, because they are priests, but who in not a single direction stand forth as better informed, or of greater intelligence than others? Why should the country spend many millions annually on their upkeep? Why should we pay a tax on our coal, amounting to hundreds of thousands of pounds annually, to the priests of a religion that is no more than a survival of savagery? Of what benefit is it that the Church should identify itself with our social aspirations? That all individuals should do so would be a real gain. But the Church in its corporate capacity! Of what benefit is that? It can tell us nothing that we do not already know on any of the problems with which we are concerned. It has no avenue of information that is not open to all. Its members can do nothing, as members, that they cannot do equally well as ordinary citizens. If the Church is to live it must show that it has something distinctive, something that other people and other institutions have not. And all it can produce in that line are a number of doctrines so grotesque that men and women of the world have a growing difficulty in listening to them with a straight face. The Church to-day stands as the representative of outworn ideas, and as the exponents of a discredited policy. It has for centuries played the game of the vested interests against the interests of the mass of the people. Those whom it has duped for so long are finding out its true character. Those whom it has served are beginning to realise that the day of its usefulness is nearly over. It has lost the confidence of the one and it is losing the support of the other. It still possesses some capacity for mischief; it has little power for good.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"What the Church Stands For."

(Concluded from p. 483.)

DR. GORE represents the Church itself as laying its chief emphasis, not upon doctrine, but upon life, and as being primarily, not the custodian and proclaimer of certain beliefs, not even the solemnizer of a great worship, but "a company, a society, a brotherhood, living a certain moral and social life." We are told that prior to his conversion Paul "breathed threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord," and found his chief delight in persecuting all he could find who were "of the Way, whether men or women," and the Bishop says that "this is the first name of the Christian Church: the Way." This is doubtless true enough; but it is surely an error to imagine that the name carries any ethical implications. As used in Acts ix. 2, the Greek word, *odor*, simply means a sect in religion, and might as well be rendered a cause, method, or mode. It is merely one of many primitive names applied to the Christian religion. The Bishop assigns several reasons for the unpopularity of the early Christians in the Roman Empire, in consequence of which they were driven in upon their own company, and had to develop a social and economic life for themselves. "If you piece together the sporadic scraps of evidence you get a vivid picture of that," says the preacher; "and it was what we should call thoroughly socialistic in spirit. It demanded that every member of the Christian society should work for his living." This also is, in the main, true enough; but it supplies no evidence whatever that the Christians were either better or worse than their Pagan neighbours whom they so heartily hated and despised, or that Christianity was the best of several religions then competing for supremacy. Indeed, there is nothing whatever to indicate that Christianity was based on any revelation from above, modern critics contending that "it is becoming increasingly certain that in the first century it achieved a synthesis between the Græco-Oriental and the Jewish religion in the Roman Empire." Doctors Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, in a new work, the first volume of which is entitled *The Beginnings of Christianity*, do not hesitate to express the conviction that—

The claim of Christianity to be a "faith once delivered to the saints" cannot bear the scrutiny of the historian of religions. To him it appears not a single religion but a complex of many, justified in claiming the name of Christianity by reason of the thread of historic continuity which runs through and connects its component parts.

Naturally the Christians regarded themselves as the light of the world and the salt of the earth, but Roman writers do not so portray them. They were deluded into the belief that they were heaven's favourites, and that the risen and glorified Christ was their hourly companion. As the Bishop truly says, "those inside the Christian Church naturally formed splendid anticipations of what the world would be when it was converted to Christianity. There could be no more war. There would be a splendid human brotherhood."

Alas, what a vain dream that brilliant prophesy was ere long seen to be. Furthermore, the alleged moral superiority of the early Christians at last appeals to us as a figment of the religious imagination. Of course, the Bishop maintains that the moral level went down "as soon as ever it began to be the fashion to be a Christian, as soon as it began even to cost men more to deny Christianity than to confess it"; but there is no convincing evidence that the moral level of the primitive Church was at all as high as his lordship avers. At any

rate, during the whole of the Middle Ages the average moral level of Christian living was indescribably low. Gregory of Tours (538-594) wrote a history of France, to which Gibbon, Hallam, and Milman make copious allusions. The latter, a former Dean of St. Paul's, says:—

It is difficult to conceive a more dark and odious state of society than that of France under the Merovingian kings, the descendants of Clovis, as described by Gregory of Tours. In the conflict or coalition of barbarism with Roman Christianity, barbarism has introduced into Christianity all its ferocity with none of its generosity or magnanimity; its energy shows itself in atrocity of cruelty and even of sensuality. Christianity has given to barbarism hardly more than its superstition and its hatred of heretics and unbelievers. Throughout, assassinations, parricides, and fratricides intermingle with adulteries and rapes (*Latin Christianity*, vol. i., p. 365).

Bishop Gore, being a Catholic, thinks ill of the effects of the Protestant Reformation in England, one of which was the development of a false nationalism. To be a citizen and to be a Churchman came to signify the same thing, with the result that morality became synonymous with good citizenship.

So there was able to grow up a whole industrial system rooted in anti-Christian principles, without any notice being taken of it, just as if the Church and religion had nothing to do with what affected the lives of the masses of the people. So, too, there was allowed to grow up a law of property based on neither reason nor conscience, property being made infinitely more valuable than persons.

Those are profoundly true words, and they must have greatly startled many of those who heard them in Westminster Abbey. Well, against such a Church, there has necessarily arisen, among the masses of the people, a mighty and well-nigh universal revolt which the Bishop strongly deplures, but while sorrowing over it he is just and bold enough to admit that "in its main principles it is wholly good." It is a revolt against organized religion, because organized religion has allowed itself to "become associated with an industrial system which seems to the awakened conscience of the masses of men to be an insult to personality, and a violation of the fundamental spirit of brotherhood, and justice, and equality of opportunities."

As already intimated, with most of Bishop Gore's utterances in this sermon we are in full agreement, the only point on which we join issues with him being the contention that the Church, as an institution, has ever stood for the highest and noblest things. We contend, on the contrary, that it has never stood for the highest and noblest things, and that, as at present constituted, it is quite impossible for it to do so. Is it not founded on a series of obvious lies? Its Lord, or Head, is a being who had a human mother and a Divine father, a being who went through life doing utterly impossible things, such as turning water into wine and raising the dead; a being who in dying made atonement to God for the sins of the whole world, and who, having so died, in three days rose from the dead and triumphantly ascended to heaven, where he still sits on God's right hand and reigns as king over the world. Does the Bishop think that thoughtful people can believe in the existence of such an unnatural, impossible being as Redeemer of the world which is still as unredeemed as it was before he came? He refers to the beautiful teaching as recorded in the Gospels; but is he not aware that the principles and rules of conduct enunciated in the Sermon on the Mount have never been observed in this world, and were not intended for this world at all? The Gospel Jesus shared the common belief that the end of the world was

close at hand, and his ethical legislation was meant for the new world that would follow. In answer to Pilate's question at the trial: "Art thou the king of the Jews?" Jesus said: "My kingdom is not of this world." He described it again and again as the kingdom of heaven which would come hereafter. Besides, Christianity looks and treats humanity as fallen and lost which is wholly untrue. It seeks to exalt Christ at the expense of humiliating mankind. As a consequence, humility, self-depreciation is one of the noblest Christian virtues, and self-reliance is denounced as a sin. Very passionately is the Lord besought to "make us ever distrustful of ourselves."

We conclude, therefore, that most of the things for which the Church stands are unreal, being supernatural, and that, when it takes its stand for social verities, it is influenced by unsubstantial, artificial motives. It dehumanizes even morality itself, when it advocates it, by deriving its sanctions from beyond the veil, instead of from the inherent needs of social life. It is on this ground, mainly, that we condemn the Church and endeavour to undermine its influence and power. We do not accept the Creed and the Bible, nor do we believe in Divine worship. Completely eliminating the supernatural, we concentrate attention upon the natural, upon human life, involving "a serious purpose and a great moral effort," upon the life that now is, with its golden opportunities and sublime possibilities.

J. T. LLOYD.

Democracy and the Press-Gang.

The Editor is the Angel of Glory, the Angel of Prayer, into whose ears are poured the cries, the protests, the complaints of men who suffer wrong.—*W. T. Stead.*

There are no common ideas in men's minds upon which we can build. How can men be united except by common ideas? The schools have failed the world. What common thought is there in the world? A loud bawling of base newspapers, a posturing of politicians.—*H. G. Wells, "The Undying Fire."*

"THE Press is, for the purposes of democratic government, practically the sole education which the mass of the people at present has." So say Dr. F. H. Hayward and Mr. B. N. Langdon-Davies in their book, *Democracy and the Press* (National Labour Press), a most timely publication, and one that ought to be scattered broadcast.

These two keen writers set out to criticize the modern press, and their most telling point is that the power of the editors and writers has been constantly diminishing of late years, and the power of the commercially-minded proprietors constantly increasing. They might have added that all have become the obedient servants of the bland and obsequious advertisement manager.

Journalists can neither do justice to themselves, nor serve the public honestly, in a press dominated by advertisers, vested interests, and commercialism. They must subordinate everything to the one object of securing huge circulations. Instead of imparting culture they must write down to the level of the groundlings. Hence, in a single issue of a daily paper, six columns will be devoted to the most trivial and mischievous things, whilst only six inches can be found for things of solid importance. Editors devote columns to the most brutal murder cases, and report verbatim all the salacious details of divorce and police-court cases. In the summer, when space is more plentiful, there is always the sea-serpent or the big gooseberry. In the worst agonies of a world-war room was always found for circumstantial accounts of "angels" on the battlefields, or of the alleged miraculous happenings to stone statues of the

Madonna. Let there be no mistake on this matter. The writers of this trash do not all believe it. It is not entirely due to fanaticism or ignorance, but is done simply to promote huge circulations. When an American newspaper-king was rallied on the sensationalism of his myriad publications, he laughed and said: "Readers want muck, and I see they get it." It is, in the last analysis, simply a matter of business.

In spite of their apparent rivalry, British newspapers are of one mind in suppressing advanced thought, which might create consternation in quiet rectories, and amongst half-pay officers and retired tradesmen. If persisted in, it might endanger the fat dividends. That is the plain reason why the conspiracy of silence against Freethought is so sustained and so wonderful. The editors who refuse Freethought advertisements, ignore Freethought books and speakers, know better than that Freethinkers are weak, foolish, and ill-conditioned persons, but they wish to curry favour with the many-headed orthodox. The imbecilities of the clergy, from the Bishop of London to Billy Sunday, are reported constantly in the papers, but the leaders of Freethought seldom have so much as a line devoted to their work.

The result is that newspaper readers are kept in blissful ignorance of the intellectual ferment that goes on outside the very narrow limits of the "respectable" press, that is, the press which is only a money-making concern. Journalists may be ever so ignorant, ever so shallow, and ever so disreputable, it is enough if they can write in a taking way, and flatter the prejudices and passions of their readers. They are also irresponsible, and after they have fomented enmities, flattered vested interests, and written "puffs" for advertisers, no one can bring them to book. Personally unknown, merged in the identity of a journal, they are nothing to the world. Most people do not read more than one newspaper, and therefore the hundreds of thousands who, some years ago, read an authoritative account of how a special correspondent had seen with his own eyes the diplomatic representatives at Pekin kill their wives to save them from the ravages of the Chinese, do not even now know that those wives lived to laugh over the story of their own death.

The "glorious free press" is one of the greatest impostors of the age. It exists to pervert and corrupt the public mind, so far as possible, in favour of certain interests, which are never openly stated. It is the obedient, humble servant of the patent medicine, and other, advertisers. The only real free press in England consists of a few journals founded and maintained for the promotion and defence of principles. They have relatively small circulations, they derive only a very little of their revenue from advertisements, and that they live at all is a tribute to the vitality of conviction, and the talent of their editors. They are starved by the neglect of advertisers, and they are subjected to a boycott which prevents them reaching more than a fraction of their potential readers. They are perpetually between the proverbial Devil and the deep sea, and their existence is a miracle more marvellous than any related in the Bible.

How does the influence of a small periodical compare with the influence of the owner of a group of papers? A story is told of a man who was trying to prove how broadminded he was, and how he read all points of view. "I take the *Times* myself," he said, "while my wife has the *Daily Mail*, and my daughter likes the *Mirror*. I bring home the *Evening News*, and on Sundays we see the *Weekly Dispatch*. As I look at them, I get all opinions." He might have added more papers, and he would have still absorbed the point of view of one man alone. O Democracy!

As an example of the extreme difficulties of conducting advanced periodicals, it is no secret that over nine thousand pounds was spent on *Justice* during twenty years, and it fell on evil days at last. The arresting personality of Mr. Hyndman could not make the paper a commercial success. The *Clarion* has had a much larger circulation than *Justice*, but even Mr. Robert Blatchford's popularity could not make the paper pay without subsidies from his readers. And if two such men cannot make such papers a business success, how is this to be done at all?

Freethought in this country is represented in the popular press by the *Freethinker*. A wider circulation for this journal is the best antidote to the conspiracy of silence and misrepresentation of the commercial press. If our readers do a little missionary work, and do it regularly, the boycott will soon be a thing of the past. A few thousand new readers would be the best help possible, and contribute most effectively towards the final triumph of what George Meredith called "the best of causes."

MIMNERMUS.

Design and Evolution.

THE attempted argument from the actual structure of the world and the universe as we see it, to a designing mind as its cause, has been a favourite one with both greater and lesser minds in the theological camp. It has been particularly so ever since an increasing number of intelligent men and women began to realize that the case for revelation based upon the scriptural records was hopelessly untenable. The teleological argument has an appearance of plausibility at the first glance, and vastly impresses shallow thinkers. It has been elaborated indefinitely, but in germ it is an *a posteriori* argument, and is thus apparently on rationalistic lines. Here, they say in effect, is a universe in being; it is a going concern; in numerous directions it exhibits marvellous adaptations which seem specially devised to achieve certain definite purposes; these are surely indications of an intelligence at work somewhere, and this intelligence—which is somehow incorporated with the operations of Nature—is what we call God. The champions of religion are willing to waive temporarily—for the purposes of the argument—any attempt at a precise definition of the said God, or any detailed specification of his attributes. It is enough for the moment if we will admit that some supreme power inspires and controls the operations of Nature. We have therein the idea of deity as a working hypothesis, and on this substratum as a foundation the most ornate of theological superstructures can be erected.

We have conceded that a certain amount of speciousness attaches to the teleological contention. Undoubtedly before Darwin gave us the clue there was much in Nature's methods that was puzzling to the investigator—much that seemed incapable of explanation without assuming a supervising intelligence. For example, the defender of belief in an over-ruling Providence used to cite the fact that the minute insects found on the leaves of trees are of identical colour with the leaf as a proof of the truth of his position. They were coloured in this way that they might evade the pursuit of their natural enemies, the birds. We know now, of course, that these green insects on a tree-leaf are but the survivors of a variegated array of insects. They are not evidence of a planning deity; they simply form an instance of the selective processes that constantly go on in Nature. They are an example of the survival of the fittest. All the insects which differ conspicuously from their green background tend to become eliminated, and by a gradual

process of exhaustion only the green variety are ultimately left to propagate their kind. This may be very benevolent on the part of God towards the green-hued insects, but what about the others?

Various attempts have been made, and are still being made, to bring the design argument up to date, and one or two considerations which have been advanced may here be noticed. The points upon which we touch were actually raised by a professional fellow-townsmen of our own in a volume of essays dealing with Evolution and Design. He confesses to being always more interested in learning what a layman of any capacity has to say for the faith that is in him. Somehow, although it may sound an unkind remark, the clergyman's defence of the supernatural interpretation of the universe, being unavoidably of a professional nature, is not always above suspicion.

The writer to whom we allude characterizes as remarkable the argument that "failures" should be put forward in disproof of design. If he meant that failures are not always to be taken as evidence of lack of purpose, he would be right. For instance, if we discovered in the studio of an artist several abortive and discarded attempts at a pictorial masterpiece, we should not regard these failures as indicating lack of purpose or the absence of design. Amongst human beings blunders and successes stand related to each other. Triumphs are built up from initial failures; and failures are every whit as good evidence of design as successes are, if—and when—we have some conception of the end the artificer had in view. With regard to the works of man, we have in general a knowledge of their object, and, in so far as we have that knowledge, we are competent to classify them as successes or failures according as they approximate to or diverge from the ascertained aim. What the purpose of God may be no one really knows, though many pretend they do. Moreover, from finite man we have no right to expect perfection; from an omniscient and omnipotent deity we have no right to look for anything else.

Here, however, our author attempts to turn the tables on those who oppose the teleological argument on the ground that the notion of design involves an importation of human thought into Nature. "So," he exclaims, triumphantly, "does the argument from failures." "Is it possible," he asks, "to identify a failure without having first determined purpose? Is there even a criterion of failure in any sense whatever?" Again: "The standard of imperfection is an arbitrary one, which imputes to man the power of judgment which is refused to him in the matter of design." In effect he maintains that those who object to the argument from design in Nature are not justified in using the argument from failure. It will be perceived that this contention is rather ingenious than ingenuous. Because it may justly be asked with regard to this success and failure argument "Who began it?" Scientists have merely retorted the apparent blundering and waste and cruelty in Nature upon the theologians who brought forward the wonderful adaptations in Nature as affording proof of the existence of a designer. In either case we have the establishment of a purely human criterion of judgment. If the intellect of man is competent to judge and appraise the seemingly beneficent dispensations of Nature it must be equally competent to pass verdict on what appear to be her maleficent manifestations. To put the matter in another way, either the teleologist is appealing to our reason or he is not. If our reason is not to be the judge, why waste time in elaborating the evidence for design in Nature at all? And if our reason is to be the judge we must claim to exercise it in all directions. From time immemorial the theologian has been graciously pleased to allow man the use of his

reason so long as its light led him towards God, but if it led him on any other course its guidance was not to be trusted. We are not inclined to tolerate such limitations in the twentieth century.

One consideration our professor seems to think most weighty, for he mentions it more than once. He insists upon the enormous periods of time required if we are to accept evolution and natural selection, and contends that geology refuses to date the birth certificate of the earth far enough back to allow for the infinite number of permutations and variations essential to the process of terrestrial development as conceived by evolutionists. Certainly it is absolutely impossible for anyone with a regard for accuracy to speak definitely respecting the age of the world, or the time that has elapsed since first it became the home of organic life. But if reliance on the present dubiety in the matter be the main if not the only stay of the supporters of the creation theory, then, indeed, is their cause in a bad way. It is true that those who hold by evolution may be inclined to exaggerate the antiquity of the earth as a necessary correlative of their theory; but it is not less true that those who believe in a special creation are disposed to strain things in the other direction. Between the two extremes the truth must be found. One thing is certain, the orthodox cosmogony is recognized to be utterly fallacious by all those whose opinion is worth anything.

Besides, as (curiously enough) the writer we are criticising points out himself on another page, the evolution of species may not have required such an immense expanse of time as many people imagine. We may suggest, in addition, that there is no decisive reason for supposing that the pace of evolution must necessarily have been uniform throughout the entire period of the world's history. At various stages the development of new types and the extinction of old ones may have been facilitated, and even enormously expedited by strictly natural causes. It must be remembered that the farther we cast back in the history of our planet the conditions revealed are more and more unstable. This means that changes abrupt in their nature and rapid in their sequence were quite in the order of things. Even if we confine ourselves to a much more restricted geological period than is favoured by certain scientists, the possibilities seem ample for the requirements of the evolutionist.

In the book to which we refer much is made of the marvels of adaptation with which the study of insects and parasites furnishes us, but these, in many cases, are more readily reconciled with the existence of a malevolent deity than with the conception of a beneficent god, such as is needed for purposes of Christian worship. We have reached too advanced a stage of civilization in these countries for religious people to worship a possibly malevolent deity; therefore the Christian God nowadays is Infinite Goodness and Infinite Love. The universe reveals no such being to the man of science, or to any one else who studies it. It is easy to say we see not the end in view, and are not qualified to judge of the method. Neither does the religious individual see the end in view, yet he pronounces the process good. This is because he begins his reasoning from the wrong end. God is good, says the Christian, therefore all his works must be good, whatever evidence there may be to the contrary. This may be satisfactory reasoning for a Christian, but it is scarcely scientific. Few things are more certain than that it is impossible to find the Christian god in Nature. One may conceivably reason "from nature up to nature's god," but Nature's god is not a suitable object for religious love and worship.

GEORGE SCOTT.

The Bible and the Koran.

IN view of the everlasting Eastern question, which is once more in an acute stage, it may be well to state the truth about the Mohammedan religion, as founded upon the Koran, in comparison with the Christian religion, as founded upon the Bible. Ignorance and misunderstanding, not to speak of downright misrepresentation, are extremely common on this subject. The average Christian is very imperfectly acquainted with the contents of his own Scriptures. It is not surprising, therefore, that he believes anything he is told about the Scriptures of the Moslems. His general idea is that everything connected with Christianity is divine, while everything connected with Mohammedanism is devilish; and that Jesus Christ was an absolutely perfect character, while Mohammed was a low, cruel, and cunning impostor.

Charles Wesley, in a hymn which is not included in the modern collections, referred to Mohammed as "that Arab thief." The founder of Islam, however, was not a thief. In a competition of thieving between Mohammed and Wesley, supposing the possibility of such a thing for the sake of argument, it is extremely probable that the Arab would be worsted by the Englishman. "That Arab thief" simply meant that one founder of Wesleyanism was disgusted at the thought that the devotees of the Crescent swept the devotees of the Cross out of Asia and Africa; took possession of Alexandria, Carthage, and Constantinople, three of the four great sees of the early Church; and left to Rome the undivided supremacy over the Christian world. This does not constitute Mohammed a "thief." The Christians were always as ready to fight as the Mohammedans, and if they got the worst of it, their failure does not prove their moral superiority. Nor does the fact that the banner of Christ went down in blood on hundreds of battlefields before the banner of Mohammed, in any way prove the superiority of the carpenter of Nazareth over the camel-driver of Mecca.

Mohammed was a far greater *man* than Jesus Christ. He showed no weakness in adversity. No agony of fear wrung the sweat from his proud brow. He never prayed that the cup of trial might pass from him. He did not cry out that God had forsaken him. When he fled from Mecca, with only one disciple, who complained that they were only two against the world, Mohammed exclaimed: "No, there are three of us; we two, and God." When his companion complained of the heat of the burning sun, Mohammed grimly said: "It is hotter in hell." And if he displayed fortitude in adversity, he also showed self-control in prosperity. When he returned to Mecca, no longer a fugitive but a conqueror, at the head of a victorious army of ten thousand men, he did not sully his triumph with the least excess. Not a house was robbed, not a woman molested. His life as an uncrowned king was one of great simplicity. He mended his own clothes, and milked his own goats. His ordinary food was dates and water, or barley bread. His occasional luxuries were milk and honey. True, he took several wives, but not until the wife of his youth was dead; and he lived in a polygamous age and country, where the practice was orthodox. His form and face were of the manliest beauty. His complexion was fine to the last; for, besides his temperance in eating, he abhorred strong drink, and this abhorrence was made a principle of his religion.

Mohammed did not pretend to work miracles. It is a Christian calumny that he kept a tame pigeon to sit on his shoulder and pick peas out of his ear, pretending that the bird whispered divine inspirations. The story is without the slightest foundation in fact.

The reproach that he used the sword to propagate his faith comes with an ill grace from the champions of a creed which has shed more blood than any other on earth. "We do not find of the Christian religion either," sneers Carlyle, "that it always disdained the sword, when once it had got one." Christianity was longer in getting the sword, but it made up for the delay.

No doubt Mohammed had a genuine belief that he was inspired by God. So had Jesus Christ, so had the prophets of Israel, so had all the Popes, and so have a number of mediocrities still living. We must allow for the time and the circumstances. Of course we may smile at the notion that the contents of the Koran were copied from a book supposed to exist in heaven in the handwriting of God. But the Christian has no right to laugh at it; for does he not believe that God gave Moses ten commandments, written with the divine finger on two tables of stone? Both the Bible and the Koran claim to be inspired, and the Christian need not call the Mohammedan credulous. As a matter of fact, the Koran is not disfigured like the Bible with a multitude of often puerile miracles. Mohammed appears to have accepted some of the wonders of the Jewish traditions, but he did not add to the stock with wonders of his own. Nor did he assert, like Jesus, that all who went before him were thieves and robbers. He was more modest. He admitted that Moses and Jesus were true prophets, and only claimed that he himself was commissioned to complete the revelation. That he did not rise to the conception that he also might in time be superseded, is but a proof that he was human, and that he had not grasped the full meaning of evolution.

It is not our object to compare the Bible and the Koran in every respect. The Koran is the work of one man; the Bible is said to be the work of sixty-six men. Naturally the latter is more varied, and in that respect more interesting. But whether the poetry of the one book is finer than the poetry of the other, only experts have the means of judging. The Arabic of the Koran is said to be singularly beautiful and melodious, but the book has not been translated like the Bible. Our Authorized Version is the work of centuries, and was completed when the English language was at the climax of its youthful vigour. Sale was a great scholar, but his version of the Koran is rather wooden. The translations of Rodwell, Palmer, and Stanley Lane-Poole give us a higher ideal of the original. Take the following specimen from the chapter on *Light*:—

But those who disbelieve are like a vapour in a plain; the thirsty thinketh it water, till, when he cometh to it, he findeth nothing; but he findeth God with him; and He will settle his account, for God is quick at reckoning:—

Or like black night on a deep sea, which wave above wave doth cover, and cloud over wave, gloom upon gloom,—when one putteth out his hand he can scarcely see it; for to whom God giveth not light, he hath no light.

But this article is not intended to be a literary criticism. Let us revert to our main purpose, and compare the Bible and the Koran within the more definite range of their teaching.

(The late) G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

Men deceive themselves in this, that they think themselves free. Now, in what consists such opinion? Solely in this, that they are conscious of their actions, and ignore the causes that determine them. The idea that men have of their liberty comes, then, from this, that they know not the cause of their actions, for to say that these depend on the will is to use words to which no meaning is attached.—*Spinoza.*

Acid Drops.

Mr. George Lansbury is a very admirable man in many respects, but he is far too much at the mercy of his emotions, and is apt to let them find unchecked expression instead of keeping them under the control of his judgment. Quite recently he made the acquaintance of the Northumberland and Durham Miner's Annual Demonstration, and was impressed as he may well have been with the crowds and the enthusiasm displayed. So he lets himself go in this manner:—

One other thing, and I beg my young friends to remember it. This movement in the North and elsewhere was founded on religion. The last of the agitators were Christians and local preachers. They were agitators because they were Christians.

Somebody must have been pulling Mr. Lansbury's leg. A very large number of the prominent workers among the miners were followers of Bradlaugh, and there was no more welcome figure than his at these annual gatherings. And from our own knowledge of the miners in the North, which goes back, we fancy, further than Mr. Lansbury's, we can speak with confidence of how much Freethought there was among these same "agitators." And if Mr. Lansbury will turn to Mr. and Mrs. Hammond's account of the miners' struggle for freedom, he will soon discover how little religion had to do with it. Meanwhile, we should like to put to him one question: If the men fighting for freedom were Christians, what were they against whom they were fighting? The answer to that should give Mr. Lansbury food for reflection.

We are continually having reminders that superstition is far from dead. In the more cultured circles of religionists we have the discussions on such supremely absurd things as the Sacrament—that survival of primitive cannibalism—the burning of incense, and wearing of vestments. And in the lower circles there are all sorts of primitive beliefs active. The *Daily Telegraph* of July 27 contained an account of witchcraft which came before the Glamorgan Assizes on the 26th. A man and woman were charged with obtaining a considerable sum of money and a number of articles, under pretence of curing some people of skin-disease, which, they said, had been induced by witchcraft. The man got six months and the woman eighteen months' imprisonment. There was something quite Christian in the sentences, as it was an old teaching of Christians that women were more dangerous than men, and the Devil had greater influence over them.

The people who *ought* to protest against this verdict are the clergy. For the judges treated witchcraft as though it were a myth. But the Bible says it is a fact, and if there is one thing clear about the Jesus of the Gospels it is that he treated intercourse with devils as a reality. "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" is still in the Bible, and the clergy are still certain that we must have the Bible in the schools. So, as usual, on the one hand, people are told they must believe in the Bible, and, on the other, are called fools if they act on its teaching.

Meanwhile we should like some one to tell us wherein lies the substantial difference between the money extracted by this man and woman from their dupes, and that taken from the rest of the people by the clergy of all denominations? When it comes to making money out of credulity the clergy are an easy first.

"The closer study of the Evolution hypothesis has strengthened the belief in a conscious purpose, and therefore of a Designer," declares the editor of the *Daily Mail*. In the next issue of the same paper the following paragraph emphasized the editorial wisdom: "A Headley (Surrey) chicken had a double neck, four wings, and four legs."

Prayer may move mountains, but is ineffective in softening the hard hearts of the ecclesiastical authorities. But the secular method of forming a Trade Union does produce

results. Since the clergy have adopted the same methods as their fellow-citizens, things have really happened. In the Norwich diocese the fees of clergy taking temporary duty will be raised 50 per cent., and £3 3s. will be paid for a day, and £1 11s. 6d. for a half-day.

At a meeting of the London Mendicity Society, the Duke of Northumberland said there were 250,000 begging-letter writers in this country. We wonder if the Duke included the 50,000 parsons in this estimate.

The late Bishop of Newcastle left £24,946; the Rev. F. Hancock, Dunster, Somerset, left £45,411; the Rev. J. S. Barras, Rector of St. Lawrence, Jewry, £2,754; the Rev. J. H. R. Barlow, Hanley Swan, Worcestershire, left £22,254. These facts will in no wise affect the robust belief of the Bishop of London that the clergy are "starving," and that he himself is "dead broke."

A lady reader sends us the following account of her experience:—

I was suffering from an attack of ophthalmia, and after having been in great pain for several hours it was with an intense feeling of relief that I could at last rest from suffering. I was lying awake, my left eye being bandaged, when I saw an appearance of black spots on the wall. Then forms and faces of different sizes appeared, some quite large, others very small. Quick as thought they glided from the left of the room to the right. Some were mere pale outlines, others were coloured and lifelike. One tiny ghost face I recognized as the revived memory of an original drawing which I had made of a woman's face many, many years ago. A great hairy face appeared at least a yard long. The whole of the ugly face was covered with rough brown hair. A piece of silk appeared with the figures of red rosebuds upon it. Then a curious and a beautiful form presented itself—a round plate, which was encircled with brilliant bubbles two or three rows deep. It suddenly raised itself upon its rim and stood upright, and in the centre was a small black figure. I saw ghostly hands of different sizes, shapes, and colours, with their index finger pointing to round white tickets which were stuck on a board. A tall figure appeared lifesized, clad in a long black cloak, looking like a tragedian. He had a pale face, with large dark eyes and black hair. He gazed at me over his shoulder. I now began to have a very nervous dread lest I should hear this ghost speak as well see him. So somehow or other I dismissed the whole thing from my mind and fell asleep. Some of the appearances were pale outlines which quickly faded away—a rapid succession of images floated by—it was as though I had been looking at pictures thrown upon the wall from a magic lantern.

White lead had been applied to my eye every half-hour to arrest the pain. This may have stimulated the optic nerve, thus causing me to see ghosts.

I once knew a lady who had been closely studying a theological subject, who, when she attended Divine service in Hereford Cathedral, saw the spectral image of Christ standing on the right hand of the high altar. She described the figure as having the same form and appearance as those which are so often seen depicted in pictures of the Christ.

It seems to me to be the duty of every scientist who has made the human brain a study to do all in his power to stem the flood of modern spiritism. Will they not state in clear and concise terms from whence illusions, delusions, visions, apparitions, ghosts, and dreams come? They are simply actions of the brain, and are inside our heads and not outside. But is it any wonder that belief in ghosts is firmly fixed in the human mind when people do most certainly see ghosts which are of course subjective, not objective; that is, they proceed from the brain of the seer and do not exist outside. A ghost made of a turnip is an objective ghost, but a ghost projected from the brain of man is a subjective ghost, and that is the whole difference. Which is the most real? They are both real in a manner, for they are both seen, and are both visual sensations, and are both actions of the brain cells. But those who see subjective ghosts, being unacquainted with the action of the brain, must of necessity believe in the material reality of ghosts; and although there are many occurrences which science cannot yet account for, yet facts which have been discovered and verified with regard to dreams, remembered sensations, hypnotism clearly point to the fact that ghosts come from the brain, and do not exist outside.

This is an interesting but not uncommon experience. Un-

fortunately, all who undergo it have not the well-balanced and informed intelligence of our correspondent. Hence the crop of delusions that spring up year after year.

A little girl on being asked to say grace by her uncle said: "For what we are about to receive may the Lord make us truly thankful—don't tickle me under the table, uncle, for Christ's sake, amen."

A blind man at Birmingham admitted to the local magistrates that he made ten pounds a week by begging, and the newspaper-men promptly made headlines of the matter. The clergy make millions by begging, but there are no headlines in this instance. But then the parsons are such artful beggars.

Speaking at a Wesleyan meeting at Hull, Dean Inge said he saw signs of a great outbreak of sexual indulgence and gross selfishness. Of course the Dean would think so! Does he not believe that the human race is descended from two thieves, that "God" was an executed criminal, and that the majority of humanity must go to Hades?

Jewels valued at nearly £1,000, belonging to the wife of the Archdeacon of St. Albans, were stolen from the Rectory. "Blessed be ye poor!"

"We have striven to govern the Indians as a Christian nation should do," declares His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury. There is not the shadow of a doubt about it. The Dyer Inquiry proves the matter.

The Vicar of Scalby has had the tablet containing the decalogue removed from his church. His explanation is that they give a distinctively Jewish code of law, and have no place in a Christian Church. If the Vicar deletes all that Christianity has cribbed from other religions, we are afraid he will have nothing at all left with which to decorate his church. And it is rather shabby, after all these years, to turn God the Father out of the business.

Sir Herbert Samuel says that the new administration in Jerusalem will not work on the Sabbath. But Jerusalem already has three Sabbaths—there is the Moslem one on Friday, the Jewish one on Saturday, and the Christian one on Sunday. Does that mean there will be no work for the officials on three days out of each week, or does it mean that only Jews will be employed, or does it mean a change of shifts, with the Government offices perpetually open? There seems room in the new administration for a W. S. Gilbert, if only one can be found.

The Rev. F. Wiseman told the Wesleyan Methodist Conference that the Church to which he belongs sprang from the "proletariat," which is just about as near the facts as is the statement that Jesus Christ was a social reformer. John Wesley did not belong to the proletariat, and was not vitally concerned with the questions that to-day concern the thinking members of that class. Wesley was a member of the Church of England, and to the end deplored separation from it. His concern with the mass of the people was to save their souls, and, as his teaching led to him being in opposition to the Established Church, he naturally found his hearers and the body of his followers among such as were not in social communion with the Church of England. One might just as well claim that the nobles, when they revolted against the King, were on the side of the proletariat. They had to get support from somewhere. That was the secret of their manœuvring; and the same is equally true of the early years of the Wesleyan Church. These people mistake a political accident for the manifestation of a conviction.

One who was described as "a leading luminary of a Baptist Church" made his appearance before Mr. Justice Horridge in the Divorce Court the other day. The petitioner found the man sitting on the edge of his wife's bed,

reading the Bible to her—or appearing to do so. Various other incidents were narrated, and in the end the sceptical Judge pronounced a decree nisi with costs. He could not have shown less faith had the man been caught reading the *Freethinker* under similar conditions.

Leopards do not change their spots, and, in spite of their protestations of Democracy, the clergy are as unprogressive as ever. At Southend-on-Sea an attempt has been made to obtain a licence for indoor concerts on Sundays in order to provide relaxation for residents and visitors whenever the weather proved unfavourable. But the parsons would have none of it. The application was fiercely opposed by the Rev. J. J. Whitehouse (Anglican Church) and the Rev. A. Markham (Nonconformist), and the obsequious Bench turned the application down. Thus, a town of over 100,000 inhabitants is tyrannized over by a handful of parsons who represent a paltry percentage of the population.

The Church of England is the wealthiest Church in the world, and it seems strange that the clerical authorities should have to hand the plate round for 250,000 for repairs to Westminster Abbey. Such a proceeding is all the more strange when one remembers that a very great deal of repairing can be done for a quarter of a million pounds. It seems to us that when this money is spent, the Christian religion will be past repairing.

Providence treats places of worship with high-sniffing contempt. Windsor parish church has been broken into and the collection-boxes cleared out. The synagogue in Artillery Lane, Whitechapel, has been partially destroyed by fire.

The Hon. Edward Lyttelton, D.D., in a sermon on "Law and Love," published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for July 28, declares that calamity is a witness to God. His argument is that "if violation of God's law, prevalent over a vast area of the earth's surface, prevalent among the foremost Christian nations—if that did not produce calamity, how could we believe in God at all?" But that is taking the problem at the wrong end. The vital question is this: If the foremost Christian nations are guilty of opposition to God's law, how can we believe in the sovereignty of God and in the efficacy of the Christian Gospel? If God there be, his will is not supreme, and his Christ is powerless.

The Rev. Frank Mason North, D.D., is an American divine who has the temerity to pronounce Confucianism, Buddhism, and Mohammedanism false faiths, Christianity alone being the true religion. Christ is *versus* Confucius, Buddha, and Mohammed, and "breaks through the moral deceptions of their false faiths." Amazing is the power of Christian prejudice!

We were in Belfast during the last great strike there, and were assured that, beyond the inconvenience inflicted upon the city by the strike, there was nothing of which anyone could complain. The people were well-behaved. But in that case it was a trade dispute, and religion did not enter into it. But religion entered largely into the recent riots in Belfast, and there were outrages, loss of life, and plenty of looting. The difference between the two events is very striking, and is proof of the influence of religion on life. Once that is introduced, a man's worst passions are loosed. The Irish question might be soon settled if both sides would forget their religion.

"Artifex," of the *Manchester Guardian*, asks, "Whence came this great desire of English people for the interference of the clergy in secular matters?" We are not aware that any such feeling exists. The great desire of most people appears to be that the clergy should keep their hands off secular affairs, and that is based upon their observing that, whenever they do interfere, the consequence is more or less harmful. Perhaps "Artifex" will tell his readers in what direction the interference of the clergy in secular matters has been beneficial to anyone but themselves?

To Correspondents.

- A. BESTELMAN (U.S.A.).—Thanks for correction. Will bear in mind for future editions. Pleased you think so highly of *Religion and Sex*. It has won golden opinions in all directions.
- A. HARVEY.—We are glad that your protest to the editor of the *Daily Herald* was so successful. We hope that your second attempt was equally fruitful.
- D. STICKELLS.—It is dangerous to give explanations of such experiences as you narrate without carefully checking all the details—so many little things are apt to be overlooked. But assuming the facts to be as stated, your own explanation of No. 1 seems to cover the ground. No. 2 might be due to the cause named—assuming that to be a *vera causa*, or it might be no more than an experience transformed in the light of after events.
- R. L.—What can one expect of a number of people who desire to decide their arrangements in social life in accordance with what some mythical person is believed to have said about 2,000 years ago?
- A. J. MARRIOTT.—We were compelled to stop the discussion, as it was taking up too much space, and it seemed to us that nothing new and material was being said. We agree with what you say as to self-defence.
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- Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.*
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Sugar Plums.

The Bill now before Parliament, which will in due course become law, raises the postage for newspapers from one halfpenny to a penny. This will mean a still further difficulty for papers such as the *Freethinker*, and will mean the raising of our annual subscription to 17s. 2d. All these rises have their effect and, as they are cumulative, the total result is considerable. There is hardly a week passes without an increase in some direction; one wonders when and where it will stop. Of course, those who have already subscribed will have their papers sent on without extra charge. It will mean a loss to us, but a contract is a contract, and we intend to honour our undertakings.

The unveiling of the statue of Abraham Lincoln in Parliament Square on Wednesday has a special interest to Freethinkers. Though it was, of course, not hinted by any of the distinguished speakers, Abraham Lincoln was an "Infidel." As his law partner, Herndon, testifies, he had no creed. Only in his later proclamations were references to God introduced. In the original draft of the proclamation was no reference to the Deity, but he consented to the introduction of the words "the gracious favour of Almighty God" at the suggestion of Secretary Chase.

In his great Gettysburg speech, which is learnt by heart by every child attending the American State schools, there

was no mention of God. This omission is rectified by the text-books, which insert the words in italics:—

.....this nation, *under God*, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

In this way is history concocted by the pious!

In his youth he absorbed Volney and Paine. At the age of twenty-six he wrote an infidel work which was destroyed by an officious friend who thought that it would ruin his career. His heresies were, however, no secret, and not more than Jefferson would he deny them. When denounced by his political opponents as an Atheist, even though it was probably an exaggeration, yet did he proudly refuse to deny the charge, telling Herndon that he would die first. The position of his statue *outside* Westminster Abbey, from which the ashes of so many great men have for lack of orthodoxy been excluded, is wholly appropriate. It will also be seen daily by thousands who would never notice it inside that beautiful but sectarian mausoleum.

Volney's *Ruins of Empires*—to give the work the abbreviated title by which it is best known—is one of those works which, so far as Freethought is concerned, made history. It is in itself a brilliant piece of writing, and is concerned with the elucidation of principles that are as vital now as ever to the progress of the race. For many years no edition of the work in English has been on the market, although in France it is being constantly republished. The older generation of Freethinkers will be glad to hear that the Pioneer Press has now in hand a revised translation of the work, which it hopes to issue early in the autumn. The work covers about 250 pages, and will be issued at as low a price as possible. We feel sure that those who are not acquainted with the work will read it with pleasure and profit, and it is hoped to make this the first of a reissue of the writings of great Freethinkers whose works are practically unknown to the present generation.

In 1911 Dr. William McDougall published a bulky volume entitled *Body and Mind*. The work endeavoured to show that the theory of a "soul" was necessary to explain mental phenomena, and it was boldly called a defence of Animism. The work was received with approval by the religious world, as Dr. McDougall was a medical man of some distinction, and the defenders of orthodoxy are never particular whether the arguments used in their defence are sound so long as the conclusion is what they desire. If our memory serves us rightly, we wrote a review of the work on its appearance, and we suggested that Dr. McDougall, although a medical man, was evidently unacquainted with a whole group of facts that simply would not square with his theory, which gave a rational explanation of some of the facts upon which he relied for his re-establishment of Animism. The facts to which we referred were not new; it was simply that he, in common with many others, had not given them adequate attention. We said then, and we repeat now, that abnormal and morbid psychology holds the key to much that meets us in the study of psychology in its normal phases.

Now, in an address delivered before the Psychical Research Society, Dr. McDougall goes back on his older theory that the "ego" is a unity, and says that during the past few years he has been dealing, theoretically and practically, with cases of nervous disorder. His conclusion is that "I am only one of several egos that my organism and person comprise." From this Dr. McDougall naturally infers that when one of these "egos" gets "out of hand" a different personality is manifested. In other words, Dr. McDougall is illustrating what is known as alternating personality, or dual consciousness, a phenomenon that has been under observation for quite eighty years, which we have often suggested explains a deal of what Spiritualists and others are puzzled about. The strange thing is that Dr. McDougall should still talk of a dominant ego, as though there were a commanding and original personality apart from the synthesis of those groups that manifest themselves in a case of dissociation. (We have only a newspaper report on which

to go, and it may be that we are doing the Doctor an injustice). It is really not at all a case of subordinate egos getting out of hand, but only the case of a whole getting disintegrated temporarily, and so manifesting the characteristics of some of the parts instead of those of the completed whole. Anyway, we are glad to see Dr. McDougall disowning his former position, and we are sure that an exploration of Spiritualism and similar hallucinations from this point of view will yield better results than much that is now being attempted.

In saying this we are not speaking without our book. We have been a fairly close student of morbid psychology for a quarter of a century, and it has often surprised us how little the average medical man knows of this branch of knowledge, and yet how authoritatively many express an opinion because they are medical men. And from actual experience, extending over years, we know how much of Spiritualism may be explained in the direction indicated. At the present moment we have under our own observation a case of alternating personality which fulfils all the conditions of first-rate mediumship. Fortunately, this particular subject has no leanings in the direction of "spirit control," and so none appears. Those who have digested the work that has been done during the past twenty years in the realm of morbid psychology, and in the development of the Freudian theory, are in no doubt as to the real explanation of the present spiritualistic "boom."

Faith.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.—*Saul alias Paul, "Letter to the Hebrews," ii. 1.*

Faith, that passionate and stupid affirmation of the absurd.—*Bakunin, "God and the State."*

"WHAT is Truth?" said the jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer. Bacon commenced an essay in this manner once, and, although I do the same, I hope that no one will endeavour to prove that I wrote the works of Shakespeare. Of course, if I merely said: "If you have not the faith to believe that I wrote *Hamlet* you are eternally damned." I would secure a thousand-and-one proselytes. If I took a few lessons in conjuring, etc., from Maskelyne and Devant and proceeded to produce spiritual emanations from my mouth and hair, I would be hailed as the Prophet of the Millennium Dawn.

There's only one thing stronger than faith—that's the stomach. There lies the reason why Christ fed the multitude with the seven loaves and the few little fishes. Even to-day (or rather yesterday) the people would have had faith in the Food Controller if he could have gone and done likewise. Faith is the negation of reason. Idiots have more faith than the most learned divine in the almanack. An idiot may think that he is the Messiah, or John the Baptist, or Beelzebub, and having faith in his belief he is that person—in his own mind. The same applies to Paradise. Religion is really a disease of the mind. It is insanity, which it is considered blasphemy to treat psychologically.

A proved fact, that is, a fact that can be believed in without a brain derangement, is incompatible with faith. The object of faith must be irrational. If it is not, then there is no faith. The most essential element, the *sine qua non* of faith, is the knowledge that you are taking something for granted. Holding a faith is merely buying a pig in a poke. Christ, or whoever invented the sayings ascribed to him and to his disciples, apostles, and all that crowd, saw that the only hope of the religion surviving was to build it up and prop it up with unquestioning faith.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should

not perish, but have everlasting life." This sentence, which is imputed to John, is one of the most astute "free gifts" ever offered by a cheap-jack to a set of gaping rustics. You think you are getting something for nothing, and you end up by getting nothing for your ALL.

Let us move backward into the world of mythology. When Adam had an apple for dessert after his lunch, and became very wise as a consequence of eating of the fruit (which modern inquirers have discovered wasn't really an apple after all), our revered ancestor had to do time—in fact, an hundred and thirty years, with hard labour. Having become wise, the old man transmitted his wisdom through the generations. The fact that the wise are few and far between is quite understandable when we consider the number the knowledge has descended upon and been divided amongst from that day till now.

With the arrival of the Messiah, Adam the Second, there came the opportunity to withdraw this forbidden knowledge from mankind. John iii. 16 explains how this was to be done. All men were to become believers; faith was to take the place of knowledge. In return for the loss of reason, the trusting ones were offered everlasting life. In fact, every man was to become another Adam in a universal Garden of Eden. But, unfortunately, something went wrong. The scheme failed. A few men continued to remain sane, and now faith has become an article analogous with the grocer's silk hat, which only makes its appearance on Sundays, and then only for the space of time necessary to get to church and back home again.

It would be a shock to the faithful if they understood how little faith they had. If they would only open their eyes (but, of course, they would cease to be faithful if they did), they would see that faith (the pure, unadulterated, unquestioning belief) has disappeared. Every elucidation of the divine word shows that there is a failure to accept salvation at its face value. And faith ceases to be faith when it requires a commentary.

Faith is fading away—but here comes the great question. 'What is taking its place? Reason? I wish I could answer *Yes*. The truth is that faith is leaving a void that is being filled up with wind. Religion, in fact, ceases to be a reality. It is becoming a stopgap between the people and power. It is a barricade that can and will be broken down—but not by Christian Socialists. There is a constant hesitation to mix religion with politics. *Mix!* The fear is ridiculous. The difficulty lies in divorcing religion from politics. The Churches are making a valiant effort to rule both heaven and earth, and they haven't failed—yet. But, in the words of the great latter-day prophet, "*Watch Russia!*"

H. C. MELLOR.

FAREWELL TO THE CROSS.

Straightway he raised the Cross high in the air;
Its shadow darkened space: into the deep
He threw it: then his terrible despair
Fell from him, as a sleep.

Falls from a young man on a summer morn:
Wondering and glad a lowly way he took
By pastures, flowers and fruit, and golden corn,
And by a murmuring brook:

And while were heard descending from the skies,
Or out of future times and future lands,
A bruit low and whispers, shadowy cries
Of joy and clapping hands.

John Davidson.

The Great Strike.

LONDON, the heart of the world, was paralyzed. The great city had been in this condition many times before. A comparatively small number of the community held up the people's spiritual food. What was to be done? Was anarchy to have full rein? Were the dogs of sedition, in order to gain their selfish ends, to be allowed to strike a well-ordered public below the belt! A living wage they wanted, forsooth! These mad creatures had been seen dallying with ices, sipping lemonade—and, yes, there was some truth in the rumour that not a few of them said yes to port. Furthermore, many of them were known to have had their incomes supplemented by knitted slippers and socks. If their present demands were granted, where would they stop? Obliquely, as it were, they were even accused of only working one day a week. Combination was all right if their united action was on sensible lines—but this was too sudden. Parliament began to frame prospective legislation to bring these crazy people to their senses; at least three months should elapse before a strike would become legal. This demand of theirs for £8 a week was folly drunk; besides, from what source was the money to come? These reckless Syndicalists, drunk with power, not representing the opinion of their Union, with ideas imported from abroad, and led by a few firebrands (see daily papers), had not stopped to consider this. Their propaganda was supported by gold from Palestine; it must be nipped in the bud, or the clamour at their gates of business would shake the foundations of the solar system.

Their secret meeting-places were known; zealous detectives, having no difficulty in disguising themselves as these workmen, entered and took notes. All the evidence tended to prove one thing—these fire-eaters and lemonade-drinkers were determined to starve the community into submission. Every man, they said, was worthy of his hire—higher and higher, said one with an Oxford accent. They were producers of special food, but were denied the fruits of their labour; therefore, if simple justice were not granted, they were prepared to hold out indefinitely. Some few of them, weak-kneed, seceded, and joined the ranks of the industrial workers, but they soon returned to the fold.

A strange and mysterious calm pervaded the city and suburbs on Sunday mornings. The industrial workers, who produced ordinary food as distinct from spiritual food, improved in the tone and quality of their language. Bugle bands were silent, and Sunday became a day when people passed into that peace which passeth understanding. A fly in the ointment, a rift in the lute—no action without reaction, as it were—this strike, which paralyzed London, had a curious effect. It twisted London into a huge query mark. And it fell out like this. If the industrial workmen supported the spiritual Syndicalists, farewell to the calm haven of home on Sunday mornings. If they did not give their support, then they supported their chances of hearing nothing noisier than the birds singing, and ex-service men would be spared the trouble of grinding their teeth and bitter thoughts at the sound of bugles. You may talk of green bicycle mysteries, divorces for duchesses, the winter abode of flies, Shakespeare and Bacon, should children run away to be married or have a piece of cake?—these, all these, were pigmies of polemics in comparison with the great one of support or non-support of the spiritual Syndicalists. At one time it looked like civil war; at another, from the heights, it was like Coleridge's pig:—

Down the river there plied, with wind and tide,
A pig with vast celerity,
And the Devil looked wise as he saw how the while
It cut its own throat.

In a few weeks amiability began to spread as rapidly as measles, or a wild duck from Fleet Street. It became as catching as laughter. People began to inquire sincerely how it came about that a man, after working a lifetime, finished his days in the workhouse. They wanted to know why the quality of food could not be improved—not forgetting quantity. They asked, with childlike ignorance, why clothes could not be more beautiful in style and colour. All these matters were discussed on Sunday evenings, for people were in an amiable mood—the after effects of peace and quietness on Sunday mornings. One or two objectors were easily silenced by being told that they wanted to go back to the good old days of a month ago. An astounding proposition came from one man named Gay in the crowd. This man wanted to know why milkmen could not announce the arrival of the one thing desirable by a short tune on one of those long-legged hurdy-gurdys. He said it reminded him of the days when he was a boy, and had never heard of spiritual food. He was silenced by being told to go and set a trap to catch sunbeams.

Gold-Flake Charlie, a particularly violent leader, was one of the first to scent danger, to vision the pig, or, as we say, one of the first to see the red light. Withholding spiritual food was dangerous; the people managed splendidly without it. And that put the spiritual syndicalists on the horns of a cleft stick. With fine wisdom and profound intuition, he pointed out that Nature abhors a vacuum. By some devious reasoning this was intended to mean empty churches. He further disclosed the fact that, without Sunday distractions, people would begin to talk about things that matter—and spiritual food was not one of them), *and that was the last thing on God's earth that was desirable.* The Morose Curate said that what was wanted was the spirit of the trenches in offices and workshops; he spoke for 50,000 who had never been there—but hoped to go when Snook's tours were in full swing.

As all things come to an end, good songs, good ale, fine days, and dog tails, so this strike fizzled out. The strikers were withholding something that nobody wanted. As pointed out, the consequences were too serious. The only quarrels that people had were chiefly about the amount of happiness that they could knock out of this jolly old world, before the old man with the scythe called on them. The strikers were beaten to a frazzle. They crept back to their jobs in the middle of the night, their clothes assisting them in their movements, and Sunday mornings again took on all the aspects of dementia. Bells changed, bugles blared, the Morose Curate became more morose. Gold-Flake Charlie took to smoking cigars, thus losing the marks of a great man—for cigarettes, monocles, and hats make public men; if this is doubted, I refer you to the daily papers. The daily papers, that not only tell you what to eat and drink, but will, in time, tell you whether your hat is on straight—this, no doubt, will be their last effort to get women to read them. The spiritual Syndicalists were staggered to find that babies had slipped down the edge of rainbows much as usual. They were astounded that lads and lasses had set up housekeeping together, much as usual. One thing that they did not express surprise at was the other matter—even *their* intelligence grasped the fact that if people were born, in time their houses got old and useless. This made their return all the more ignominious.

When last seen Gay was heard singing:—

Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to be with me
And turn his merry note
Unto the sweet birds throat,

Come hither, come hither, come hither ;
There shall we see
No enemy
But winter and rough weather.

He does not let trifles like broken 'strikes worry him ; in a moment of aphoristic exaltation he had said : " Give a dog enough rope and it will bite off its own tail to spite its face." I think he had been reading G. K. Chesterton's views on *Divorce* ; he says that this is the only subject on which the Catholic Falstaff can't have any. Be that as it may, the spiritual Syndicalists had the wind taken out of their sails properly ; even the church clocks striking sent down their backs a shiver of remorse mixed with unrealized dreams, and the striking sermon was forbidden to be mentioned in all parish magazines.

C.-DE-B.

Aztec Priestcraft at the Conquest¹

THERE is a universal similarity in the development of human institutions, however remote from their fellows a community may happen to be. The long line of descent from the utter barbaric to the elementary civilization bears analogous characteristics in all branches of the race, modified as these may be by the environment of the particular people.

In the case of the civilization of Anahuac just prior to the Spanish invasion and conquest, the Aztecs had arrived at a kind of civilization, which, in spite of its personal characteristics, had been paralleled by other races in the older world. The curiosity of that civilization, however, is that it combined some of the higher developments of modern culture with the utmost barbarism.

The Great Spirit, who is the god of the North American Indian, is understood by them to be incomprehensible. He it is by whom they have life : he it is who rules the universe. Equally to-day the most mature body of science believes that an unknowable force controls the universe by the application of itself, and the limitations which matter impose upon the results of that force. The Aztecs, however, had not arrived at quite so advanced a stage of philosophy. They were unable, by virtue of the lack of real scientific knowledge, to arrive at the understanding that all the phenomena of Nature are examples of the application of the same force. It was, therefore, necessary to their theology to explain the variety of natural phenomena as being controlled by a multitude of lesser gods, who were servants of the Great Spirit, the personification of Nature.

Of these lesser gods it was but natural with a warlike race that the most important should be the war god, Huitzilopochtli. It was in the worship of this god that their most barbarous rites were practised. While this god of war occupied so important a place in the hierarchy of a warrior and conquering people, there was, however, a good god of peace, Quetzalcoatl, who had endowed the people with all the arts of peace they knew. And myriad was the number of the lesser gods they worshipped.

Surrounding the worship of these gods was an imposing body of ceremonial which was carefully sustained by the priests. Other religions have received assistance from poetry and philosophy in the different stages of their development. The inspired poets have taken the vague mythology of their race, and made it tangible and concrete, after the fashion of Homer, Dante, Milton, and been followed at a later date by philosophic explana-

tions of religion, which have served the purpose of sustaining its ritual and its significance.

The Aztec priesthood owed nothing to poetry and philosophy. They were forced to depend for their effect upon the common mind of the people upon the intricacy and universality of their ceremonial, and it was by the development and the use of ceremonial that they secured their hold upon the people.

It was not so difficult for them in the existing state of their society to maintain themselves by this means as it would be for a modern priesthood in a civilized state. " The influence of the priesthood must be greatest in an imperfect state of society, where it engrosses all the scanty science of its time in its own body." In such a state of society the priesthood is naturally of paramount importance, particularly where it is well organized, and where it controls the whole education of the State.

The Aztec priesthood combined both these qualities. It was so organized that its vast membership was spread throughout the State in at least as complex a network as the political administration. Its ranks were carefully defined, and the duties of each rank was just as explicit. And it was ruled by two electoral chiefs, who were chosen, not on account of the situation of their families, but on account of merit displayed in some lower order. These two chiefs were of almost equal rank with the king, and were consulted by him on the great matters of state. Indeed, it was due to their opposition that the city of Mexico did not surrender, and was consequently destroyed by the conquerors ; so it can be seen that their influence was often exercised in matters that were really outside their purview.

The parochial clergy exercised an equally important influence in the lower branches of life. They were so numerous that they were able to exercise a sort of police control over the population, and the rites of the Church were so desperate that citizens were in complete subjection to them. Indeed, the civil polity of the State was not safe from their interference, for the absolution of a priest, after confession, was received in the place of legal punishment of crimes.

At the same time education was entirely in the hands of the priesthood. Children of the educable classes, upper and middle, were placed in a kind of conventual school held in the temples from the time they became old enough to commence learning. This applied to both sexes, and it was only when they attained marriageable years that they once more entered upon civil life. Their whole education was carried out within the temples by the priests, and it was only natural that their whole life should thus come to be bound up in the performance of religious ceremonial, and that they should be filled with " implicit reverence for religion and its ministers ; a reverence which still maintained its hold upon the iron nature of the warrior long after every other vestige of education had been effaced by the rough trade to which he was devoted."

This reverence was still further stimulated by the large number of churches which existed, and the almost daily celebrations of the Church, which were devoted to some one or other of the myriad gods of the Aztec pantheon. The ceremonial of these celebrations was extremely impressive in character, and, owing to the structure of the temples, was absolutely public. They were observed throughout the city in which they took place, and culminating, as they so often did, in human sacrifice, they could not fail to make a very great impression upon the populace.

Thus, at the time of the Spanish conquest, the Aztec priesthood exercised a controlling voice in politics through their chief priests, they controlled the whole education of the people, and they maintained their

¹ Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* is my authority for this article.

authority by a vast system of parochial clergy, a tremendous number of churches, and an almost daily performance of their impressive and dreadful ritual.

G. E. FUSSELL.

The Sergeant's Story.

We had a large and well-kept garden, with a fine display of flowers in front next to the high road. People passing by looked and remarked, and often stopped to get a fuller view. The garden was only five minutes' walk from a military hospital, and convalescent soldiers were among the admirers of our blossoms. Soon we got into conversation with them; the next step was to invite them inside, and it became a regular practice for soldiers to visit our garden and sit in it.

One of these visitors was Sergeant George Robinson. His head was swathed in bandages. One day, seeing me looking very hard at his wrappings, he said smiling, "I'm tied up like that nearly all over."

"Indeed!" I said. "Then you were well peppered."

"Peppered!" he exclaimed; "I came near to being riddled. Shell splinters."

After that he was silent, so I changed the subject, thinking perhaps I had offended him by raising it, and rather ashamed that he should notice my staring at his bandaged features.

The Sergeant became a regular visitor, and we talked on many topics.

One morning I was cleaning away a surplus of candytuft which threatened to monopolise a border under the wall, when a soldier opened the gate and walked in. I stared at him for a moment, then I recognised George Robinson, without the bandages.

"Ah, Sergeant!" I said, "you ought to be pleased at being out minus the rags."

"I suppose I ought to be," he replied, in a half-cheerful, half-grumbling voice; "but look how it's marked me!"

His head and neck were dotted with scars, and his left ear was shorn off close to the head.

"That's nothing," I said heartily; "the scars'll soon fade away, and otherwise you are unhurt. You ought to think yourself very lucky."

"Don't forget this," he remarked, pointing to his left ear.

"Hang it all, man!" I protested in genial indignation, "if that's the worst, you're fortunate."

"H'm, well, that is the most serious injury," he admitted half-regretfully. "But it was a near thing."

"There, now!" I burst out triumphantly, "you had a narrow escape, and are now almost sound and well again. It's Providential—"

I was going to say more, but at the word "Providential" he looked at me curiously, a smile spread over his face, he gave vent to a series of chuckles, then dropped into a garden chair and regarded me so quaintly that I had to laugh, and wait for him to explain the cause of his mirth.

"Providence," he grinned, and made amused noises in his throat. "That's just what the Corporal said."

I sat down in the nearest chair, and waited whilst he became serious again.

"Albert Pitt, Corporal in my company, was a great believer in Providence," he began. I nodded, and provided cigarettes for us both.

Sergeant Robinson resumed. "And was always talking about it, too. In fact, he would talk about anything. He was a Lancashire chap."

"That accounts for it," I interrupted.

The Sergeant cocked his eyebrows and looked at me quizzically, saying, "But he was a good sort all the same. There was sound sense in what he said, and he was a well-educated man. You don't always find those two things together—education and commonsense."

"From a business point of view Corporal Pitt was first-class. He'll get promotion before long. He was my right-hand man. He had a wonderful way with young soldiers and newcomers. Having a ready tongue, he put 'em at ease and made 'em forget their troubles. When Albert Pitt got talking he'd soon draw everybody into it, and no one had time to grouse or worry or be afraid."

"Bert was a Unitarian. Not that he ever paraded his religion or his sect; it came out quite accidentally. But he had a bee in his bonnet, and that was Providence."

"Yes," said I, "Unitarians seem great believers in a benevolent Providence."

"So it seems. We had so much talk in the trenches and dug-outs about Providence that I had to smile when you mentioned it just now. Not that it's altogether a laughing matter, because there's tragedy connected with it."

"Of course, we had all sorts of men in the company. Religious blokes, and men that believed in everything, anything, or nothing. When the Corporal talked of Providence fellows would search the newspapers, and their imaginations, for examples of Providential escapes from death and danger. Some did it because they agreed with Bert's views, but others were pulling his leg, and would tell most ridiculous tales of Providence. The scoffers and unbelievers would give instances to the contrary, and the stories we heard showing the interference, or otherwise, of Providence would fill a good big book. I heard Pitt spoken of as 'Corporal Providence,' and the smallest thing that happened Providence would be praised or blamed for it."

Sergeant George Robinson stopped to light another cigarette, so I said, "I know how it is when a lot of men get together."

"Especially out there," he said. "Everybody's nerves are a bit worked up, and when a subject gets started it is run to death."

"At the Front we are always burrowing like a lot of rabbits or moles. We pushed forward a line of trenches within a hundred yards of the Germans, and had to hold them. We lost a good many men, and they sent us some reinforcements. Fellows fresh from England, young chaps, some mere boys, with only about three months' training. We had our hands full. Then it was that Corporal Pitt was so useful. He seemed to be everywhere, and his ready tongue put many a young soldier at ease and bucked him up when he felt funky."

"One morning a heavy bombardment started, with signs that a bayonet attack would follow. So all our fellows had to get themselves ready. One embrasure was a particularly hot place. Shells flew over and round it all the time. When I passed along Bert Pitt was there with a group of men. He

was as cool as could be, seemed quite happy, and was conversing as easily as we can sit here.

"I went on a few yards, then stood looking along the trench to see how the men were disposed. A boy named Percy Stephens stood by himself in a bit of dug-out. A shell burst above, sent a few hundredweights of earth down by him, and sprinkled him well with mud and stones. It was more than he could stand. Pitt looked round to see the effects of the shell, and Stephens called across to him, 'Oh, Corporal, I feel so nervous. Can I come by you?'"

"'Yes, come on, lad,' shouted Albert cheerfully. 'Here's room for another.'"

"Percy went across. I stood where he had been, and noticed how he pulled himself together when the Corporal got hold of him.

"A minute later I got what you can see. A shell dropped amongst the Corporal's party. I felt an earthquake, everything seemed to be on the move, and down I tumbled with a sensation of being splashed with boiling water. Struggling to my feet I staggered across to the dug-out. Private Percy Stephens was killed. The five men were all badly wounded."

The Sergeant stopped, and looked gravely at me.

"Didn't expect otherwise," was my comment. "Shouldn't have been surprised to hear of them all being killed, but——"

I left my qualification unfinished, for Robinson raised his hand, anticipating me.

"That's the strange part. Corporal Pitt was not hurt, merely shaken."

"Marvellous! Was anything said about Providence?" I asked.

"Not at the time. But he brought it forward later as a proof, and also my case."

"But wasn't the death of young Stephens a proof to the contrary?"

"Bert didn't think so. Said it would not be Providence if everyone was saved."

"Then Providence only acts in particular instances," I said in surprise.

"So it seems. I told the Corporal he was becoming a Calvinist, or a fatalist, and not a believer in Providence at all."

I sat musing for a time, then Sergeant Robinson rose, saying, "I must be getting back. Think about it. Good-bye," and he went.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

In Nature's Cathedral.—Worshipping.

LARGE, towering trees, stretch upward, overhead.
Underfoot, lie withering leaves. The Trees have shed.
Dimmed by the boughs o'er head. A Sun of brass
Flings shafts of light around each place I pass.
The boughs and leaves have long been interlaced,
And with the solitude. A feeling chaste
Insinuates itself within my breast.
That sweet, chaste feeling, that our mirth recalls,
Except, that this feeling far more entralls.
And is not this feeling that now enchains,
Similar to the one, that always gains
Possession over folk, who worship off' in church?
Still, no church holds more beauty, or more good
Than this scene holds. This Nature church, which stood
Through unknown centuries, time's searching test.
This cathedral, of trees, and mellowed light,
With chants, from songsters as they wing their flight.

HUBERT STONE.

Obituary.

It is with great regret I have to advise the death of Mr. Thomas Wadsworth, a member of the Manchester Branch of the N. S. S., at his residence, 28 Cromwell Road, Stretford, on July 26. He was cremated at the Manchester Crematorium on the 29th. We have lost a good member in Mr. Wadsworth—ever a stalwart in upholding his Freethought principles, and an implacable foe to superstition.—H. BLACK, Hon. Sec.

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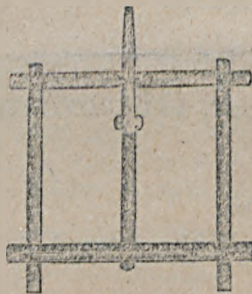
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