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Views and Opinions.

Freethought and Life.

In dealing with the meaning of Freethought in the "Freethinker" for August 15, I was compelled to handle the subject in a rather abstract manner. What was then said was, I think, enough to justify the historical importance of the attitude of mind which was there described, but a more elaborate demonstration of the social importance of Freethought is possible, and even necessary. For it would be very wide of the truth to assume that Freethought is no more than a form of intellectual exercise, or a species of mental dissipation with no particular bearing on the pressing problems of everyday life. Our avowed enemies, of course, know better than this. The unrelenting hostility of all religious organisations to outspoken Freethought is a testimony to the deadliness of our attack. They are prepared to make terms with anyone but us. Here they know that no compromise is possible. They recognise, as we do, that opinion is one of the greatest forces in life, and that to control opinion is to go a long way towards controlling life. That is the chief reason why both Church and Government struggle so desperately to gain and retain control of the machinery which makes for the formation of opinion. It is a confession that in social life it is the play of ideas and opinion that chiefly counts. To lose sight of that consideration is to play into the hands of the enemy.

* * *

Transformation in Evolution.

Let us commence by taking a broad view of the subject. The outstanding feature of what may be called the natural history of associated life is the supplanting of biologic by psychologic processes. We are not here concerned with the nature of mind, it is enough that the emergence of this new force, or new form of force, is an event of revolutionary significance in the evolutionary process. It gives a new direction to life. The race is still to the swift and the victory to the strong, but there is a new meaning given to strength and swiftness. Instinct,

cunning, intelligence achieves what was formerly achieved without their aid. The struggle for existence becomes, in a sense, transformed. One aspect of this transformation has been stressed by Kropotkin in his "Mutual Aid." He shows from numerous examples that the purely biologic form of the struggle for existence is checked by the psychologic factors of association and mutual aid. That in itself is of great importance, but there is a further distinction that may be drawn. In sub-human society growth takes the form of developing or strengthening an organic tool—stronger teeth or claws, the modification of a limb, or a new effect in coloration. The development is a part of the animal, is inseparable from it, and is transmitted by biologic heredity. In the case of man the means by which the difficulties of the environment are overcome are of a different order. In a sense his tools are non-personal, they belong to the race rather than to the individual, and they are transmitted irrespective of the qualities of the individual. Man does not develop a new tool through some modification of the existing structure, he creates inorganic aids in the shape of tools and inventions. And the net result of this is that merely as a biologic phenomenon human evolution is brought to a substantial stop. Some modifications of the organic structure still go on, but they are very slight and unimportant beside the play of the new factor in associated life.

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Ideas as Social Forces.

If the substantial truth of what has been said be granted, and it is difficult to see how it can be successfully denied, there follows one or two considerations of considerable importance. The first is that social history tends to become more and more the history of the group mind, even in its individual manifestations. The story of civilisation becomes a record of the piling up of idea on idea, and the transforming power of the whole over the environment. For tools, from the flint chip of primitive man down to the finished instrument of the modern mechanic are all so many products of human mentality. From the primitive "dug-out" to the Atlantic liner, from the stone spear-head to the modern rifle, in all the inventions of civilised life we are observing the application of mind to the conquest and subordination of the difficulties of space, time, and material conditions. Our art, our inventions, our institutions, all that we sum up in the expression "civilisation" are illustrations of the power of mind in effecting a transformation of the environment. And it is one of the peculiar distinctions of man that he has, in addition to the biologic heredity which he shares with the animal world, a special psychological heredity in virtue of which he becomes veritably the heir of the ages, and reaps the

benefits of the experience of past generations. It is this, indeed, which makes man what he is, and it contains the promise of all that he may become.

* * *

The Social Medium.

Man's heritage being of the nature it is, there is implied a "carrier" of a different kind from that which functions in the transmission of biologic qualities. Ideas simply cannot be transmitted in the same way and by the same mechanisms that structures are. The form which a germ shall ultimately assume, the organs that an animal will develop, are settled by forces that are resident within the organism. But the ideas that a man will entertain are settled mainly by forces from without. Biologically, what man inherits is, among other things, the capacity for acquiring ideas. But what he shall acquire, that is the things that are there for him to acquire, is clearly a matter outside the scope of biology. This "carrier" of the human heritage is constituted by what G. H. Lewes called "the social medium," and it is made up of a common language, a common stock of ideas, beliefs, and a common group of institutions—in a word, what we mean when we speak of human society. The child of parents living in the most civilised society in the world, if taken when very young, and placed amid a primitive people, would display little if any difference from those around him. He would think the thoughts as he would speak the language of the society in which he was living, subject only to such differences as could be explained by individual variations. Had Shakespeare been born among savages he could never have written "Hamlet." For the work of the genius, as for that of the ordinary individual, society must provide the material. Civilisation is built up of the products of human capacity, and it is these that form man's most important heritage, and ultimately shape the character of each of us. What we each have by biologic heredity is a certain structure, with its attendant qualities. But the expression and direction of these qualities and the control they give man over his environment, are determined by the society into which we are born.

* * *

Man and His Environment.

The material of civilisation, whether tools, inventions, or discoveries, are facts that may, therefore, be properly described as psychological. An institution, the Church, the Crown, the Magistracy, is not transmitted from one generation to another as a building or as so many sheets of paper, but as a series of mental facts. A piece of machinery is the incarnation of an idea, and is only a physical fact in a secondary and subordinate sense. And as it is these classes of facts that make human society what it is, it follows that the environment to which man must adapt himself is overpoweringly psychological in character. The world in which we move, with its art, its literature, its teachings, its customs, is actually a creation of the social mind. The houses in which we live, the machines we use to do our bidding, are products of our mental activity. More obviously so are our beliefs about the world by which we endeavour to regulate our lives, and which shape the character of each newcomer. However much the physical forces of the environment may determine the form and direction of civilisation in its earlier

stages, and although the ultimate properties of things must always be reckoned with, so far as civilised man is concerned, the measure of his development is the degree of his ability to subdue the environment to his needs, many of which—so far as what one may call cultural needs, as æsthetic and intellectual needs—are actually the creation of his own mental life. Neglect of the fact that desires become needs, and that desires are the great motive forces of man's life has made economics so uninteresting and so barren a study.

* * *

The Vital Issue.

I have so far been dealing with the distinction between biological and psychological heredity, and there is one instance in which the parallel between the two is complete. This lies in the fact that we can only understand a thing by its history. An organism may be *studied*, and its peculiarities noted from an example before us, but it can only be *understood* through a knowledge of its history. Similarly with institutions. A king may be honoured to-day because of his personal worth, but the reason why there is a king to honour carries us back to that state of mind in which the primitive priest and magic-worker inspires such fear and awe. When we ring bells to call people to church we perpetuate the fact that our ancestors rang them to drive away evil spirits. We wear black at a funeral because our remote ancestors sought to disguise themselves from the ghost, or we strew flowers at a funeral because food and other things were once buried with the dead man so that their ghost might accompany his to the next world. Our institutions and customs are born in the shadow of superstition, and superstition has played a powerful part in determining their form. Sir Henry Maine has shown to what a large extent ancestor worship has determined the laws of inheritance, Mr. Elton, in his "Origins of English History," has applied the same conception with peculiar force to our domestic institutions, while Spencer has dealt with all social institutions from the same point of view. And it is for this reason that before an institution can be modified or destroyed the ideas upon which it is built must be robbed of their authoritative power. That is also the reason why, ultimately, all struggles for reform resolve themselves into a fight between antagonistic beliefs. All reactionists show their consciousness of this by their conduct, and it would be well if reformers were equally alive to its truth and to its importance.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

MIDDLE-CLASS RELIGION.

The religion of this vast English middle-class ruling the land is Comfort. It is their central thought; their idea of necessity; their sole aim. Whatsoever ministers to Comfort—seems to belong to it—pretends to support it, they yield their passive worship to. Whatsoever alarms it they join to crush. There you get at their point of unity. They will pay for the security of Comfort, calling it national worship, or national defence, if too much money is not subtracted from the means of individual comfort; if too much foresight is not demanded for the comfort of their brains.—*Dr. Shrapnel, in George Meredith's "Beauchamp's Career."*

Many earnest and high-minded men prefer to belong to no ecclesiastical denomination.—*Lord Adam Gifford.*

Discredited Certainties.

THE Rev. J. Tolefree Parr is a Primitive Methodist minister who won distinction as missionary of the National Free Church Council. He is a typical evangelist of the old school, who always delivers infallible oracles which he claims to have received, directly or indirectly, from God. As such he has enjoyed considerable popularity, especially among the more emotional and less intelligent of Christian believers. A few Sunday evenings ago he delivered a sermon in the Metropolitan (Spurgeon's) Tabernacle, a report of which appeared in the *Christian World Pulpit* for August 18, with the title of "Christian Certainty." From the standpoint of a theological literalist, to whom the Bible is divinely inspired and inerrant, this is an excellent discourse, full of the very marrow of the Christian Gospel. A preacher has no right to be in a state of uncertainty on any point in the message which he believes he has been commissioned to deliver to a perishing world. With Mr. Parr as promulgator of alleged news from Heaven, we find no fault whatever, but rather congratulate him on performing the task committed to him very creditably. It is with the message, not the messenger, that we are concerned; and our verdict on the message, after due consideration, is that it is essentially untrue. The reverend gentleman is fully justified in representing the Gospel Jesus as saying, not "I think," "I suggest," "I submit to you," but "Verily, verily I say unto you"; but is he not aware that neither Jesus nor his apostles introduced anything new into the world, but merely gathered, appropriated, and associated with fresh names what had been commonplaces in other religions for many thousands of years, especially in Egypt, Syria, Persia, and India? In the face of such a fact, fully attested in pre-Christian literature, it is sheer folly to assert, as Mr. Parr does, that "all the problems of mankind, all the problems of all the races, white and black and yellow, Orient and Occident, find their ultimate solution in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ alone." Evangelists have always made this claim, many of them in total ignorance of the facts, but most of them through blind prejudice.

Let us examine the alleged certainties advanced by Mr. Parr, in order to ascertain their true character. The most important of these, of course, is the existence of God. On this head the preacher contents himself with offering threadworn old platitudes that have been trotted out by the divines for countless generations, which have now lost whatever weight they may have once carried. We must pronounce all inferences drawn from the experiences of the War as utterly futile. A soldier at the front may have said: "If there is not a God, then there ought to be"; but we have met not a few returned soldiers, and been privileged to read letters from others, who testified that the War killed their belief in God. In his desperation a drowning man catches at any floating straw, and Mr. Parr derives comfort from the fact that Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells have each a God of his own, though both differ fundamentally from the Christian Deity. Indeed, Shaw's variety has not half finished making itself yet, while Wells has already treated us to several versions of his. Mr. Parr quotes Carlyle's bitter saying to Froude, "God looks on and does nothing," and then adds, "but Carlyle was wrong." Was he? We admit that he was only half right, for surely the inactivity of God furnishes at least a probable evidence that he is not even a looker-on. No God worthy of the name could look on and do nothing. But *can* he look on, can he even exist at all, whom the creed defines as being "without body, parts, or passions"? At any rate, to call him love, and say that he is always at work in

the world is to give him an ideal character and rob him of it in the same breath.

The second alleged certainty is the reality of sin. In its theological connotation sin is a bugbear used by the pulpit to excite fear and alarm among ignorant and credulous people. Mr. Parr makes the following illuminating admission:—

As God has been thrust out of the thoughts of men, they have become less and less conscious of their sin, and one of the most disquieting signs of our times is the lost sense of sin. Walt Whitman says: "I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self contained; I stand and look at them long and long, they do not sweat and whine about their condition. They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins."

The truth is that without belief in God there is no sense of sin, and in proportion as the former decays the latter disappears. Mr. Parr goes on quoting: "Even Sir Oliver Lodge himself has said, 'The higher man of to-day is not worrying about his sins.'" Yes, sin is a creation of the theological imagination, and the sense of it is invariably the outcome of an intense belief in God. Evil abounds on the earth, it is true, but evil is a radically different thing from sin. As Professor Bury says:—

All evil results from the non-adaptation of the organism to its conditions; this is true of everything that lives. And it is equally true that evil perpetually tends to disappear. (*The Idea of Progress*, p. 337).

The third alleged Christian certainty is immortality. Mr. Parr is entirely mistaken when he declares that "the instinct of immortality among all tribes and peoples in all ages, has repelled the thought that death ends all." Is he not aware that a future life is not taught in the Old Testament except in one or two of the later books, that early Buddhism had no doctrine of immortality, that Materialism is the dominant philosophy in China to-day, which recognizes neither God nor a future state? We have the emphatic testimonies of such high authorities as Sir George Adam Smith and Dean Inge that for generations the belief in immortality has been steadily on the decline throughout Christendom. Mr. Parr, however, assures us that the War has been the means of reviving that belief. He says:—

I need hardly remind you that immortality has become the burning question of the hour. Multitudes who had lost their sense of God and Sin, had almost lost their sense of immortality. The War roused them from their torpor, the holocaust of lives, in many cases the loss of their own dear ones, stirred within them once more the hope of immortality, and they have eagerly seized hold of anything and everything which might confirm that hope.

It is not true that immortality has become the burning question of the hour, and it is equally false to assert that there has been any revival of the belief in God and the sense of sin. Is it not the complaint of the clergy of all denominations that a deep and hopeless religious apathy is settling down upon the people everywhere, not only that the masses are completely out of touch with churches and chapels, but that those who still attend them and remain nominal believers no longer respond to religious appeals to anything like the same extent that their ancestors did, and that in spite of the most tremendous efforts to check it, the drift towards Secularism keeps on increasing its momentum year after year without fail? The awful ravages of the War will in time be forgotten, the present craze to find out whether the dead live or not will ultimately die down, and men and women will apply themselves to the gigantic task of solving equitably and effectually all the economic and social problems by which they are confronted just now.

It is natural and easy enough for the divines to depreciate and throw ridicule on the teaching of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*; but as a matter of fact there is infinitely sounder philosophy and saner practical instruction in the art of living in the "Song of Myself" than in all the theological creeds of Christendom. Whitman envies the animals because they do not "lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins." Ere now, as, for example, in the Welsh revival of 1859, multitudes have gone clean out of their minds under an artificially produced conviction of sin. The animals are entirely free from such a distressful and often disastrous experience.

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God.

Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things.

Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago.

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

So they show their relations to me and I accept them.

They bring me tokens of myself, they evince them plainly in their possession. (*Leaves of Grass*, p. 68).

J. T. LLOYD.

A Letter to Mother.

A COOL EPISTLE FOR THE HOT WEATHER.

To Eve, late Garden of Eden.

MY DEAR RELATIVE,—Nearly fifty thousand clergymen inform me that you were the first woman, and the mother of the human race. If this be so, you are, necessarily, our first female blood-relation. You should be a relative of my own—true, a very distant one, but still a relation. The fountain of my filial affection is stirred, and I cannot rest in these "dog-days" until I have written to you. My affection is not unmixed with admiration. Your "husband," Adam, need, however, be under no misapprehension. I am writing, if your biography in the Bible be accurate, some few thousand brief summers after your last appearance on the earth. I have no portrait which would serve to give me any idea of your beauty, and Mr. Moses, the Oriental gentleman who wrote a partial account of your life, has, unfortunately, omitted to tell us of your personal appearance. We could have dispensed easily with poor Moses' account of his own funeral for a few salient facts about yourself.

Whether you were a blonde or a brunette must ever be a conjecture. Even the colour of your eyes is lost in the twilight of history. You must, however, have been divinely fair. The Garden of Eden must have been more delightful because of your presence, the earth brighter where you walked. The flowers were never so beautiful till they were held in your hand, or twined in your hair.

That you were a most exceptional person is proved by the statement that you started life at full age. It was, doubtless, unpleasant to commence your existence by being carved out of Adam's ribs whilst he was sleeping, but you will be glad to hear that subsequent operations under chloroform have been of inestimable service to your suffering children. You will also be pleased to learn, being a woman, that your own courtship was the shortest on record.

I can well believe that you were a pattern of the domestic virtues; but, pardon me for remarking, your first attempt at cooking was a failure. You not only cooked trouble for Adam about some apples, but your most distant descendants are still suffering from the annoyance. Permit me to mention that you were scarcely more successful at dressmaking. All the gar-

ments yourself and Adam wore originally were the close of day and the mantle of night. Even fig-leaves are no longer in the highest fashion. But, doubtless, the simple life has its attractions. You had no washing to do on Mondays, and you did not have to argue with the laundryman concerning quadrupled prices and a super-war-tax. Nor did you have to sew buttons on your husband's shirts, patch his trousers, get his overcoat out of pawn, or even argue with him concerning a long golden hair entwined in his manly shirt-front. You had, really, much to be thankful for.

One regret I have, however, and that is that Adam and yourself got into trouble at the time of the first assize. And your eldest son appears to have been inclined to homicide. I shall not pursue this painful matter, nor the unpleasant episode of your partner losing his employment in the Garden. It must have caused you much worry and financial embarrassment. Doubtless, it accounts for the fact that you were never married to Adam, either at a church or an off-licence. It is a thousand pities, because, as a result, the whole human race is illegitimate.

Do not imagine for a moment I am blaming you in any way. Evidently it did not shorten Adam's life, for, we are told, he lived to the very ripe age of nine hundred and thirty years. I only hope that he was not afflicted with gout or rheumatism during his declining centuries. I trust that he was tolerably well; he was intolerably old.

I notice that the trouble with Adam's employer appears to have been caused by a talkative snake. You listened to him, and the fat was at once in the fire. My own personal opinion is that the snake knew his business. He acted like the present-day ministers of religion, who get hold of the girls and let the majority of men go to the place so often mentioned in their sermons.

I would have written earlier, but your address is not in any geography or directory that I am acquainted with. Kind regards to Adam and the boys. Probably, I may never see you, but if you will kindly forward your present address to the editor of this paper, I will endeavour to get counsel's opinion on that left-handed marriage of yours, and see if there is any way of overcoming a grave ethical difficulty.

I am, Madam,

Yours faithfully,

MIMNERMUS.

Faith or Reason?

We are all fairly familiar with the claims of religion. Indeed, so long as the Christian cult remains a paying proposition—and it has an enormous amount of capital and vested interest at its back—we shall never be allowed to forget the nature of those claims. A venal press, with an eye to its own profit, assists the pulpit in its efforts to magnify the importance of Christianity to the life and well-being of the community. In fact, it is not too much to say that were it not that the Churches have managed to enlist the support of a large section of the press the stock of Christianity at the present day would stand at a very much lower level than it actually does.

Apart, however, from the bolstering-up of Christian claims, for which the churches are indebted to a press which does not really believe in them, we are familiar with these claims because they have been insisted upon from our earliest childish

recollection. Brought up as most children are, belief in, and fear of, the supernatural becomes a second nature to them. As a rule we imbibe our religion with our mother's milk, and, as has been wittily remarked, we would as soon think of analysing the one as of doubting the other in our early years at least. Indeed this attitude towards religion is characteristic of the great majority of church and chapel adherents throughout their entire lives. It never occurs to them to doubt, far less question what they have been taught. Certainly the supremacy of the human reason is to them a thing impossible of acceptance. The very idea is a heresy, not to be entertained for a moment. Faith is above and beyond the puny human reason, and to suggest that the tenets and practices of religion should be judged at the bar of man's reason, knowledge, and experience, is something that the average orthodox Christian recoils from with consternation.

We must admit the wisdom from a religious point of view of this reluctance to examine in a critical spirit religious beliefs and customs. They will not bear such examination, and the ordinary Christian of fair intelligence seems instinctively to recognise this fact. In a conversation which the writer had once with a Roman Catholic friend the latter candidly confessed that he would not read the books I had read, giving as his reason that he felt if he did read such books he might be led to travel the same way as I had gone. This absolute refusal to consider the anti-Christian case is the main strength of the Roman Catholic position amongst the better-educated members of that body. With the larger percentage of religious believers it is, of course, sheer ignorance that is the secret of their deep faith. They do not know any better, and what aggravates the case is that the bulk of them do not wish to know any better, or any different. With not a few of those who are competent to investigate for themselves it is fear which deters them; a vague fear of something—nobody knows precisely what—that may happen to them after they die if they reject the venerable fables of priest and presbyter.

Religion is defined as a system of faith and worship, or alternatively as pious practice. As far as the legible records of humanity stretch back we find evidence that religion of some kind there has always been. We find, as indeed we find down to the present day, that the greater the ignorance of a people the grosser are their superstitions, and the more abjectly do they grovel before the mysterious and the unknown. To the primitive savage there was so much in the nature around him and in the wider universe beyond which he could not understand, that he stood in constant wonder, awe, and even terror of natural forces which we to-day regard in the most ordinary fashion. Here, as we now know, we have one of the main springs of supernatural belief and religious worship. Early man, raising himself slowly and painfully from his purely animal condition, groping his way darkly towards knowledge, saw mystery everywhere, peopled universal space with ghosts and goblins, and created gods to account for every incident of his life and every action of nature of which he could not perceive the cause. In all this, combined with primitive ancestor worship, we have the germs of the most advanced, the most refined modern religion.

It is true we have gradually reduced the number of the gods to one, and are apparently in process of reducing the one to nothing; but it is still also true that, like the early savage, when the Christian uses the term God he does so to cover his own ignorance. Whenever a Christian runs up against anything he cannot explain, or cannot understand, he mutters the mystic word, God. Wherever the realm of science and human knowledge ends, there the dominion of God begins. Long ago people fancied gods and devils everywhere. Everything was regarded as the handiwork of one or other of these. People had gods and devils on the brain, and it was all nothing but the reflex of their own ignorance. Nowadays, with our deeper knowledge of the steady and orderly workings of nature, the difficulty is to discover any traces of god or devil—so earnestly believed in by our forefathers—or any necessity for postulating the existence of either the one or the other.

Modern science has declared that the universe is complete in itself; that there is no room for any god in it, and that there is no evidence of the existence anywhere throughout nature of any being suitable for the purposes of religious praise and worship. Nevertheless the praise and worship continues of this shadowy entity who, generation after generation, becomes more and more nebulous. He has been pushed out of one science after another, and has been discarded by intelligent and educated men and women because he does nothing and never has done anything; nor does it seem that there is anything left for him to do in the scheme of things. The net result of the researches of the philosopher and the discoveries of the scientist has been that God is practically eliminated from every department of human life and action. He has been proved unnecessary; he has been voted a nuisance; and this marvellous creative and directive intelligence which was formerly supposed to interfere in everything has been—if we may stretch a metaphor—politely conducted to the confines of the universe and dropped into the infinite void. This God who was once everywhere is found to be nowhere. Indeed it might be said—though it sounds paradoxical—that a god who is everywhere is for all practical purposes nowhere.

Still, in this more or less enlightened country of ours, God is believed in, and worshipped, and served—especially on Sundays. There seems a degree of comfort in believing in a God "of some sort," and a great many people *do* believe in a god of that sort. Their notions regarding him are frequently of the vaguest kind, and it must be conceded there is wisdom in indefiniteness, for there has never yet been produced a definition of God that is consistent in itself or with the facts of nature and experience.

The God idea has given rise to many forms of worship, and many varieties of religion have sprung up in the minds of men. We in this country are mostly concerned with the Christian religion, not because its adherents are more numerous than those of any other, nor because it is based on any truer foundation than any other, but because it is nominally the religion of our country, and nominally the religion of the more considerable nations of the world, though, it should be added, the last clause is less true than it was. Japan, a non-Christian nation,

is now in the first rank. In any consideration of the claims of religion upon our acceptance and allegiance there is no escaping the conclusion that the Christian religion has no more solid foundation in fact than any other form of religious belief. Despite what Christians may hold or say to the contrary the candid unprejudiced inquirer cannot fail to realise that there is no verifiable evidence whatever as to the truth or divine origin of Christianity. The most that can be said for modern Christianity is that it has disowned some of the crudities and barbarities of the religion of bygone days, and so has reflected the advance of the race in intelligence and humanitarianism to some degree. So true it is—though in a sense not appreciated by the religionist—that man's religious beliefs and man's conception of the deity unerringly indicate man's character. A blood-thirsty age worships a blood-thirsty god; a humane, magnanimous and elevated age has corresponding ideas of deity. It has been well said that whether it be true or not that God created man in his own image and likeness, it is incontrovertible that man has all along created his gods, and that God has been merely the envisagement of man's own fears, desires, and aspirations. And though Christianity in some of its modern forms has purified itself from many of the ferocities and degrading puerilities of the past, when we contemplate on the one hand the blatant barbarism of the gospel according to the Salvation Army, and on the other the abysmal superstition of modern Roman Catholicism, it is very obvious that a large section of mankind has a long distance to travel before we can boast of intellectual sanity as a general possession.

GEORGE SCOTT.

Science and the Occult.

IX.

(Continued from p. 518.)

We always want something that reality has denied us. People have given up hope of getting what they want through their own efforts, and are trying to get it in some other way. Some of them imagine that they are getting it in spirit-messages.

Everyone of them is deceiving himself. Sir Oliver Lodge is deluded in the same way as is the girl of eighteen who goes to the fortune-teller in order to find out about her future amours. Consider what his life has been. Brought up in a religious, God-fearing English home, he grew up to become a scientist and an absolute materialist. As he becomes older the thought of death is more and more distasteful to him. The instinct for survival is extremely strong. He wishes to live. His son, whom he loved more than anyone else on earth, is killed in battle, and the wish to live is supplemented by his wish that his son should be alive. All this may be unconscious to him. He finds it impossible to return to the old Christian conception of a hereafter, and so, like Swedenborg and the other prophets—for Lodge has something of the prophet in him—he makes up a hereafter as good or better than this one, with clubs, friends, and good cigars as in the present life. Who wouldn't want such a hereafter?—*Dr. A. A. Brill, Author of "Psychoanalysis." In an interview with R. L. Duffus.*

SPIRITUALISTS make much of the great volume of testimony to the truth of Spiritualism. But testimony without proof is valueless. At one time the belief in witchcraft was universal. Everybody believed in it—young and old, rich and poor, learned and ignorant. It has been calculated that nine million people were executed—mainly by burning—for the crime of witchcraft,

a crime we now know that does not exist and has been removed from the statute-book. We know that the people who testified that they were possessed by the Devil were under a delusion, and to-day would be under treatment by mental specialists, or in an asylum.

The testimony for Spiritualism is insignificant compared with the testimony in favour of witchcraft, and the advance of knowledge will, in time, reduce Spiritualism to the same position as that now occupied by witchcraft.

It is not a question of the honesty or integrity of the witnesses. The witnesses to witchcraft were honest enough. It is a question of whether they actually saw or heard what they described.

In explaining the success with which mediums impress their clients with their command of occult knowledge, the first source of error affects nearly every person who attends these exhibitions. That is, the natural tendency to delight in mystery, to take pleasure in what they cannot understand, and a tendency to attribute it to the supernatural.

The second source of error is universal to the human race, and is due to the inability of the vast majority of people to perceive accurately even a moderately complicated occurrence, still less to be able faithfully to recall the details after the occurrence has taken place.

Thirdly, the information supplied by the medium—when it is correct—is derived either (A) from previous information; (B) "fishing," by which the inquirer is led, unconsciously, to supply the information himself; (C) by ambiguous answers, so framed as to be capable of application to many events or many people; (D) by shrewd guesses. If the guesses hit the mark—and by their ambiguous character they often do—then that proves their spiritual origin. If, on the other hand, it turns out a failure, it is ignored or forgotten, or there is some mysterious hidden meaning in the message, to be revealed later on.

The first sitting—if the inquirer is a stranger—is generally unproductive. The more often you attend the better results you get, because the medium gets to know more about you from your self-revelations. When a medium makes a hit, it is either through previous knowledge or a guess. Now, as Mr. Jones points out:—

My own experiences as a medium incline me to the belief that whereas it may be possible to prove that a given person has had no given opportunity of acquiring a given piece of knowledge, it is *never* possible to prove that he has not had *some* opportunity or, in the alternative, that he is not guessing. That is to say, when a statement is correct, knowledge can sometimes be proved. Ignorance or guesswork can never be proved.¹

Therefore, when the medium makes a clever guess and it turns out to be correct; the medium can claim it to be the work of a spirit, but it is quite impossible for anyone to prove that it was merely a guess. That is only known to the medium.

The revival of Spiritualism we are now witnessing is only a passing phase. Those who are acquainted with the history of Spiritualism know that from the starting-point of modern Spiritualism in the spirit-rappings of the Fox Sisters in 1848, there have been periodical waves of this superstition sweeping over society. The Davenport Brothers, in 1864, created a tremendous sensation. Slade and Home another during the years 1871-6. Madame Blavatsky yet again in 1884, and Mrs. Besant in 1891.

The present boom is due to the persistent propaganda of Sir Oliver Lodge, latterly backed by the popular novelist, Sir Conan Doyle.

¹ E. H. Jones, *The Road to Endor*, p. 41.

It is worth while to notice that these revivals always appear under a different form. No attempt to revive the spirit-rappings of the Fox sisters, or the cabinet tricks of the Davenport Brothers, and the spirit-writing of Slade would stand a ghost of a chance of success. The physical phenomena of the *Dark Seance* is also played out since its thorough exposure by the public performances of the late Mr. Maskelyne. The Mahatmas of Madame Blavatsky are as dead as door-nails, and nothing will ever resurrect them.

The present wave began with telepathy and ended with communication with the dead; when the present wave subsides—we think it has reached its zenith now—and is forgotten, it will be succeeded by another in a few years time in some fresh disguise.

And is this conflict between the Ormuz of Science and the Ahriman of Spiritualism to continue—this systole and diastole for all eternity? Assuredly not. The Spiritualist stakes out a piece of territory, plants it with the rank growths of superstition, and says to science: "Hitherto shalt thou come and no farther." But the ploughshare of science, heedless of incantations or curses, pursues its way, rooting up the poisonous weeds and thorns of superstition, and sowing the seeds of truth and reality. And the territory so reclaimed by science never reverts to superstition while civilization and progress continues. Therefore there must come a time when there will be no more territory to enclose, then the conflict will cease.

It should be remembered that there are always emotional and unbalanced people who delight in the mysterious and the unexplainable. Others, weak and spineless creatures, who cannot face life relying upon their own strength, and, therefore, seek for spiritual or religious crutches to help them through. Others again fear death so much that they will believe almost any absurdity that guarantees them a second innings when this one is over. It is among this crowd that Spiritualism finds its recruits. Just, as in an epidemic of influenza, a certain percentage of the population fall victims while the vast majority escape, so it is in an epidemic of superstition, a certain percentage take the infection but the vast majority are uninfluenced.

(To be continued.) W. MANN.

Acid Drops.

It would not be safe, perhaps it would not be fair, to ascribe to the *Daily Mirror* a pressing concern for the well-being of religion in arranging a matinee of clergymen to witness, without payment, a performance of Mr. Maugham's play "The Unknown." Quite a number of prominent clergymen received free tickets, and other public men were asked to write for tickets. Apparently a number did so, although one would have imagined that any public man who wished to see the play would pay for his seat in the ordinary way. But the *Mirror* knows the British public apparently, and the same innate snobbery which leads people to almost sell themselves to be permitted to shake hands with royalty, led others to write for a free ticket, so that they might be counted in with a "distinguished" audience—even though it were made up of clergymen. We should say the expense of the performance would be written down to advertising expenses, and in that respect all concerned would be satisfied. The Paper will have had its advertisement, the clergymen who received the tickets unasked would feel that they were, indeed, an important body, and the public men who wrote asking the Editor to send them a ticket would feel flattered at finding themselves one of so "distinguished" a company.

The outstanding absurdity of the whole thing in inviting an audience of clergymen and their supporters to see a play, and then asking them whether they are of opinion that religious

faith was dead. What on earth could one expect a clergyman to say? If he replied that it was, the admission would be equal to his saying that his occupation was gone, and no parson could be expected to say that. A parson *must* say that religion is indestructible, and all that occurs is that faith is weakened in some people through a misapprehension of what true religion is. The few who ventured to think that the War had weakened faith, "hedged" by remarking that "true" faith would gain as people discovered the real nature of the problem before them. Mrs. Philip Snowden expressed the fatuous opinion that while the War had weakened faith in God of the orthodox, the Omnipotent should not be held responsible for individual sufferings—which makes one wonder what kind of a bogey Mrs. Snowden's Omnipotent is. Mr. Chesterton was quite correct in saying that the question of evil in the world is not specially raised by a war, but that does not settle the question of why evil is here at all. Mr. Harold Begbie was, as usual, lucidly idiotic in saying that God is no more responsible for the War than he is for the pain in a finger when it is put into a flame. Which, again, quite misses the real point. And Mr. Silas Hocking does not believe that faith has been injured by the War because goodness and honesty are as much honoured now as they were before the War. That leaves one almost speechless. Perhaps Mr. Hocking will next explain what necessary connection there is between honesty and goodness and Christianity. Once upon a time Christians used to say that all Atheists were scoundrels. Now they say that all good men are Christians—which is the same thing said in a more cowardly way. And little as we think of Christians we much prefer the Christian with courage—even though it only be the courage of blackguardism—to the Christian with no courage at all.

And the solemn farce of an audience of several hundreds of parsons invited to express an opinion as to whether their own teaching was played out or not! In no other country than this would such a pretentious piece of humbug be possible. A people with a sense of humour would have laughed the suggestion to death. And one really feels like congratulating those clergymen on their ability to keep a straight face through it all. But, perhaps, in their case practice accounts for much. For a body of men who have trained themselves to keep a straight face while repeating the pantomimic absurdities of Christian doctrines, may fairly count themselves equal to anything.

In an address at the Roman Catholic Congress at Liverpool, the Rev. Henry Day, said that "unnatural separation of the sexes" was the cause of bad morals. He did not point out, however, that the Roman Catholic Church had dotted the world with monasteries and nunneries, and employed an army of celibate clergy.

Being taunted in a House of Commons debate that he was responsible for the action of his predecessor, Sir Hamar Greenwood said: "I am the successor of Adam, but I am not responsible for original sin." The distinguished politician's name suggests that he was descended from one of the trees in the Garden of Eden.

Dr. Stuart Holden says that it is God's glory to conceal himself; and it must be admitted that in this mission he has been rewarded with complete success, though he has totally failed in every other.

Providence was so busy counting people's hairs, and recording the idle words spoken, that it did not notice the drowning of a twelve years' old boy at Friskney, Lincolnshire; a fatal boating accident on the Trent at Nottingham; and the drowning of a mother and child at Audincourt.

Outside a church closed for decorations and repairs at Guildford, Surrey, there was a notice: "God save the King. The church is closed."

A leader-writer in a London newspaper says that "the kinemas are filled whilst the churches are empty." So far

as Sundays are concerned in many towns the kinemas are closed and the Churches half empty.

In so-called "Christian" England the multiplication of fancy religions goes on apace. At Southend-on-Sea there is a body calling itself the "Faithist Scientists Church of Kosman." Sounds inviting, doesn't it?

The Rev. Dr. Horton is a man of many conflicting moods, whose speech is in consequence characterized by glaring contradictions, of which he seems to be utterly unaware. During the War, he regarded the Front as the most godly locality in the world. Such a work of God was going on there as would have been incredible had not the results been so absolutely unquestionable. There was no Atheism in the trenches, and it was his recommendation that all Atheists should be sent there, where they would be quickly converted. The War was calculated to bring the world back to God. Other clergymen expressed the same opinion, but Dr. Horton surpassed them all in the cocksureness and extravagance of his utterances.

Now that the Great War is a thing of the past, Dr. Horton realizes how utterly false those war-time sentiments of his were. In his last Monthly Lecture, published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for August 11, he adopts the language of pessimism. He says:—

The real complaint of the world to-day is this: it is the loss of God. The background has gone out of human lives, and whenever the background is lost the foreground becomes unintelligible.....God has faded out of the lives of men. They still retain the word, but the idea has gone, the practice has gone. Men do not shape their lives by the thought of what God wills. They do not order their days as in his presence; they do not refer to him for guidance and help; they do not return to him with penitence for their sins and seek his pardon and strength.

That is undoubtedly true; and the reverend gentleman is in despair. Nothing but destruction awaits a godless world. Curiously enough, God is wholly powerless. Not only he does nothing, but apparently he cannot do anything, to bring the world back to himself. The War, which he permitted for the world's good has proved a total failure.

An unusual oath was taken at Chatham Police Court by a sailor, who started, "I swear by the Admiralty." Doubtless, it would have been as effective as the usual formula.

The Bishop of Lincoln says that Spiritualists were "trying to open a door closed by God." There is more "bogey" in this statement than meets the eye.

The wife of the Rector of St. Thomas's Church, Chceetham, was charged at Manchester with stealing from shops, and released on her husband's surety of £20. She had been previously fined and imprisoned for similar offences. The restraints of a Christian education and environment are not very apparent in this instance.

Some religious folk are not overburdened with humour. At Blyth Bay four men and a woman were baptized by immersion in the sea, such immersions being thought necessary to salvation. The other millions of people are booked for another excursion.

Rev. W. T. Hands, recently returned from Queensland, says that the people there are much behind England in the matter of religion. We take that to be another way of saying they are much in *advance* of other people. For in religion the ordinary standards of value are frequently reversed. A religious man is never so sick as when he believes he is well, and never so confused as when he is spiritually enlightened.

A curious tale is reported in the *Times* from Australia. A woman made her escape from a convent near Wagga. Soon after she was arrested, at the instance of the Roman Catholic Bishop, as a person of unsound mind, and sent to a "recep-

tion house." A medical man who was called in found no trace of insanity, but the woman has been remanded for further observation. There the information ends, but the case is enough to show that the Roman Church is to-day much as it has always been, and that given the power it would act as it has always acted. And it has never given up the claim to deal in a "disciplinary" manner with its erring children. And "disciplinary" treatment covers everything, from a few prayers to the infliction of the death penalty.

The Bishop of Birmingham says "the beauty of character unfolded in the War is due to our free will responding to the movements within us of the Spirit of God." Every war-profiteer will hail the Bishop's statement with delight. Perhaps some may be induced to put something in the Church's alms-dishes.

So much religion is talked in "The Unknown," the new problem play, that the *Daily Graphic* says that someone altered the heading of a programme from Aldwych Theatre to "St. Aldwych Church."

"A Country Parson," writing to a daily paper, says that "the better-instructed clergy of to-day are increasingly unwilling to use the prayer for fine weather. Just so! But there are so many of the clergy who are no better educated than their predecessors of twenty centuries earlier.

The Earl of Shaftesbury sang two solos at a service at the Parish Church at Horton, Dorset. We hope that the Lord was suitably impressed.

According to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the number of people paying super-tax has increased from 13,937 in 1913-14, to 45,696 in 1919-20. Thus, what used to be called "the upper ten thousand," will soon be the upper fifty thousand. "Blessed be ye poor!"

Less than two years ago there was established by American Protestantism the "Interchurch World Movement," the object of which was to make Christians of all mankind within a few years' time. A big staff of workers was engaged, the great Greenbut Building, once a departmental store as large as Harrods, was leased for ten years, and huge sums of money were secured. But that remarkable movement has already collapsed. The enormous staff was suddenly disbanded at the end of June, with a month's salary in advance, and the Greenbut Building is now empty. The Movement failed through lack of unity among the different denominations, some of which vigorously opposed it. The Christianization of the world is a dream more unlikely to come true now than ever before.

What England needs, says Prebendary Fox, is not more opinion, but more faith in God. We can quite believe that Prebendary Fox is sincere in saying this. There is nothing so bad for his business as the free movement of opinion, and more faith means more business. That seems to be all there is in it.

Congratulations to the Birmingham Housing Committee. It has issued a number of prohibitions of what it calls luxury buildings. These include a dancing hall, a public-house, and a "place of worship." At all times churches represent sheer waste of labour. In the present circumstances they are almost a criminal luxury. The poor parsons will soon wonder what on earth is the matter with the world.

Christian philanthropy is a fearful and a wonderful thing. In the third report of the Committee on Public Accounts it is stated that £700,000 was advanced to the Young Men's Christian Association, out of which £100,000 only was repaid, and the remainder made a present of by the War Office to that religious body. We know now why the church folk were so jealous of the Y. M. C. A.

At Ryhall, Rutland, a chicken with two heads has been hatched. Providence doeth all things well.

To Correspondents.

J. P. HARDING.—There is nothing new in the story of Volney throwing himself down on deck during a storm and calling on God to save him. The same tale is made to do duty with nearly every prominent Freethinker. It is a tale which makes every Freethinker as contemptible as many Christians.

C. E. TURNER.—It is an ordeal, but if we must get through with it we must. The story of Paine's alleged drunkenness has been dealt with times out of number, but it is next to impossible to stop Christians circulating lies concerning their opponents. Nothing is too monstrous and nothing too absurd.

GEORGE TREBELLS.—MSS. to hand, with many thanks. Pleased to learn that you are well.

H. THOMPSON.—Should like to see every reader of the *Freethinker* a member of the National Secular Society. Your suggestion of a special badge or emblem for *Freethinker* readers is worth considering. We might provide one later, if we could get a suitable design.

J. WEEKS.—We have dealt several times lately with Lincoln and his religious opinions. There is no question of his Freethought to those who base their opinions upon facts. For others no number of corrections will be of much use.

J. BREESE.—The Scotch Highlands are glorious in September in any weather. They are better, of course, in sunshine, but there is a beauty about the hills in rain and storm that should appeal to one with a sense of artistry. We should like to be off on the same trip; hope your family will have a pleasant time.

P. SYMONS.—You are quite right in saying that Voltaire was a Deist. In his *Philosophical Dictionary* he argues at length for the existence of God. We are sorry we cannot give you the exact reference for the "If God did not exist it would be necessary to invent him." It is usually attributed to him, but we do not remember coming across it in his writings. The reply to it was made by Bakunine, "If there were a God, it would be necessary to destroy him."

R. DAVIES.—The two little books in the Home University Series, McDougal's *Psychology* and Russell's *Philosophy* will serve as a very good introduction, then get some such work as Stout's *Manual of Psychology*. After that you will be prepared for larger and more controversial works. Sully's *Human Mind* is beautifully clear, but rather bulky.

J. E. ROWE (N. Rhodesia).—We never advocated a policy of non-resistance. We have simply protested against the false character of the teaching that war is, at any time, ennobling or beautiful. The consequences of war are always bad, even when it is inescapable, and that is one of the things that when realised will go a long way towards putting an end to war. And we do not at all agree that war paid Germany for a long time. It did nothing of the kind. It demoralized the German people, who stand to gain far more through losing the War than ever they could have done by winning it. Neither a people nor a nation are great because they own large territories, they are simply large, and that is a very different thing.

G. A. CAMPBELL.—We know of no evidence for the "involuntary transmission of thought by corresponding atomic vibrations."

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

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

Sugar Plums.

The N.S.S. will not be represented at the forthcoming International Conference at Prague. In the existing circumstances the Executive was not able to arrange for a suitable representation and so the idea was abandoned. A letter was received from the promoters of the Congress expressing a hope that Mr. Cohen would be able to be present, but it is quite impossible for him to leave London for any length of time just now. There are quite a number of things demanding his attention, and some important new developments in the *Freethinker* office makes it necessary that he should be within call. Anyway, we wish the Conference every success, and we hope it will be a really international gathering, in the fullest sense of the word. Freethought, if it be worthy of its name and traditions, should be able to rise above the political and national animosities that are at present retarding the progress of civilization.

We are sorry to say that there is at present no signs of relief as regards the paper supply, which is an all-important consideration so far as the issue of a weekly journal is concerned. Paper is as dear as it was at the worst period of the war, and almost as scarce. Subscriptions are still on the rise, and no one can tell where they will stop. In this connection we are sorry to see that the *Nation* has been compelled to raise its price from 6d. to 9d., and another very useful weekly, *Common Sense*, has now gone from 2d. to 6d. Luckily, we are secure so far as supplies are concerned, but we have no control over the price. It is a question of "take it, or leave it." The market is clamorous, and paper makers are very independent. The easier days that we have been dreaming of and longing for, are still a long way off so far as we can see. There is nothing dull in running a Freethought paper in these times.

There is one aspect of scarce and dear paper which has a rather important social aspect. Books are getting steadily dearer, and in this country good books were always published at too high price. Now the price is getting so high that quite a number of books are being held up, and those appearing are at about three times the pre-war figure. The consequence is that the growing generation is being thrown more upon newspapers for their mental food, and as our newspapers are at present, a worse diet could scarcely be conceived. There are few editors who seem to have any sense of responsibility as to what they publish, so long as it is what they think will please the public, and help the particular and momentary purpose they have in view. The well-read man may check the statements of the papers with a certain amount of amusement and benefit. But others are at their mercy, and the War seems to have still further demoralized the Press, as it demoralized so many other things.

One of our readers, a deaf mute, sends us an article, which we hope to publish in a week or so, dwelling upon the way in which many associations run for the ostensible purpose of the afflicted, are turned to the interests of missionaries and religious organisations. We are not unaware of this, as our readers know, and have several times called attention to the prevalence of professional philanthropy and its evils. The afflicted have a legitimate claim upon society, and it is one that society should freely acknowledge and generously discharge, but not permit this to become the excuse for the maintenance of a parasitic industry such as professional philanthropy has become. It is an industry in which the public provides the capital for the business, and a handful of more or less "artful dodgers" secure the dividends. At the opening of the war this type saw its opportunity in the organization of Flag Days for any and every purpose, until the thing became such a public scandal that it was stopped. For our part we should like to see the opportunities for cadging that goes on sharply curtailed. And it is certainly a grave scandal to find the care of the blind relegated to private charity, and even appeals made for donations towards looking after the well-being of those men who have returned from the war blinded, and whose adequate maintenance should be a first charge upon the nation's resources.

Women as Saviours.

"ONLY believe, and ye shall be saved!".....From time to time, apostles of a new creed come forward with a panacea for the ills from which a sick humanity suffers, and promise it relief, if only their particular nostrum is swallowed. With the decay of religion, political and social enthusiasts have come to the fore, pressing the merits of the particular measures for which each stands sponsor. One of the latest to prophesy Utopia for us, if we will but listen to the message she bears from across the Atlantic, is Mrs. Margaret Sanger, who has come to these shores to preach the gospel of Birth Control among women.

The sex question is "taboo" in England, or rather it was, until George Bernard Shaw on the stage, and the Suffragettes in real life, made strong efforts to divest English society of Victorian prudery, which identified innocence with ignorance. But a platform has always been open for politicians and priests (these latter chiefly celibate, witness Father Bernard Vaughan and the Bishop of London) to urge on the public the necessity of large families. On the other hand, those who advocated prudential restriction of offspring have been frowned upon and consigned to oblivion. This has been largely due to ecclesiastical prohibition. The "medicine-men" have always claimed special jurisdiction over such a predominant human activity as sex. And as mystery and darkness best suit their sinister work, they have strenuously opposed the light of science being turned on this function.

Since Malthus produced his thought-provoking essay, the population problem has never been far from the minds of social reformers. A vast amount of literature has grown up round this subject. Though few now defend his premise concerning the geometrical rate of increase of man as compared with the arithmetical rate of increase for food stuffs, the neo-Malthusians base their exhortations on the tendency of mankind to out-grow the food supply available at the given moment. The Socialist contention, that given more equitable distribution and intensive agriculture, the world could support an unlimited number of inhabitants, disposes of Malthus' theory as a bourgeois reading of phenomena resulting from capitalist production rather than natural causes. One school of thought, of which Mr. J. M. Robertson is a leading exponent, declares the population question to be the crux of all social reform, while another looks to Socialism and the abolition of the Capitalist system as the only hope.

It is proverbial that women have little interest in abstract questions, and despite their vital concern in this matter, they have taken no part in the controversy, being content to follow passively the masculine lead. It will be remembered how, at the National Catholic Congress recently held at Liverpool, Father McNabb, according to a Press report, "bitterly attacked the immoral doctrine of the control of births, declaring that when his mother was asked how many she had in her family, she replied, "Eleven, thank God!"

But that was a generation ago. The women are beginning to realize that "if God sends the mouths," He does nothing to fill them. The War has opened their eyes, and the spectacle of a devastated Europe urges them to action. The infantile population of Germany and Austria have suffered so severely under the strain of prolonged war that it is considered hopeless to attempt to save them, all efforts now being concentrated on the future mother and her coming child. Famine and financial crises are threatening even those countries which have hitherto enjoyed immunity. It is under

these dire circumstances that Mrs. Margaret Sanger, protagonist of the Birth Control movement in the United States, is visiting England on a lecturing tour. To enthusiastic audiences composed mainly of working women, organized by the Co-operative Women's Guilds and similar bodies, she brings forward her method of saving humanity. "Abstain from bearing children" she urges, "for at least five years. In your hands, O Mothers, lies the hope of 'the world. There is not enough food now for the innocent children. Would you produce more to starve? Is the world a fit abode for the helpless little ones?" And she tells a league of mothers in Munich who have struck against motherhood until the Government will make a country fit for children. To Governments human life is cheap—cheaper than animals. It is the women, the life-producers, who must teach men the real value of life.

Who can gainsay her message here? It is surely more full of sane wisdom than the politicians or priests, who cry, "We must repair the ravages of war!" this same war, by the way, being largely produced by their own insatiate greed and time-serving.

There is nothing new in Mrs. Sanger's advocacy of the use of contraceptives to restrict the birth rate. It has, of course, been much practised in every civilized country. Even from Japan, a commission has been sent to America to examine the Birth Control movement and report on it to the Japanese Government. What is new about it, is her appeal to women to exercise their prerogative of choice as to whether they shall become mothers. To exercise this prerogative, they must have knowledge. Physiological facts concerning themselves and the origin of life should be imparted to women by trained nurses or doctors. In Holland, clinics, sanctioned by the Government, have been set up for this purpose. The benefits, claimed to be the consequence of such a course, include a lower infantile mortality than elsewhere; almost total abolition of prostitution, owing to early marriages; a marked change for the better in physical status. Other benefits which Mrs. Sanger would ascribe to a strictly limited humanity are the automatic solving of housing and child labour problems, and the abolition of war. Small wonder her audience sit hypnotised under the silver-tongued magic of this earnest speaker, who claims so much can be opened with one little key.

And yet—and yet—one has an innermost conviction that the remedy urged by Mrs. Sanger on the world is but second best. "You cannot," argued a woman doctor recently, against a Town Council's proposals to institute systematic instruction in prophylactics to prevent venereal disease—"you cannot, with impunity, run counter to the instincts of women." The same objection applies to the use of contraceptives. Both prophylactics and contraceptives, whatever may be urged in their justification, are primarily inventions of man in order to satisfy his passions without incurring any of the consequences. Not from religion, which has long since lost all power as a motive force—not from current morality, which is a contemptible compound of respectability and fear—but standing on the deep instincts of her own nature, the fully conscious woman will reject Mrs. Sanger's solution. That the use of contraceptives will tend to increase sexual indulgence can scarcely be disputed, so the freedom she claims to give women will result in their more complete subordination to men. Degradation, a coarsening of the finer nature, is involved for both sexes. When they do decide to have a child, where is the pure passion, rapturous joy, and fine idealism in which every infant has a right to conception?.....Vanished—and its psychic heritage is by so much dwarfed and curtailed.

Birth Control, through contraceptives, is an easy solution, a short cut which promises much. But nature

cannot be cheated. That this method is so largely prevalent, demonstrates how sick the world is, and to what a grievous extent woman's passivity has been carried. Woman, mistress of herself, carefully reserving all her higher forces for her great function of maternity, potential or actual, would have none of it. As creative artist of the new life, she would resent as a betrayal of posterity, any attempt by man to use for himself what was due to humanity. And men would then respond to her lofty ideals and find his happiness in working them out with her. The full psychic and spiritual life thus shared in common would enrich both natures and form an unequalled dower for both children.

Then knows he Love, that beckons and controls;
The body's love and mind's, whereof the soul's.

All the advantages claimed by the use of contraceptives would follow here. There would be no population question were mothers free, for they would never have large families, seeking quality rather than quantity. But this imposes a life-long sacrifice on the man..... True, and hence he devises a short cut !.....

But every woman, who has greatness of mind and heart to conceive an ideal, will dream of such a union. Were women but fully conscious enough to enforce their gentle sway of love, then indeed the Golden Age would be at hand. But they will scarcely gain it by descending to masculine expediency. Progress is attained, not by living down to the actual, but by embodying the ideal.

FRANCES PREWETT.

Changing Your Mind.

Some people never change their minds, just as some people seldom change their underclothing. Neither are pleasant companions. I have known parsons who could preach a sermon that was written ten years before, and also one who had written several hundred sermons up ahead so that he might take it easy in his old age. What a comfortable mind he had. He not only never changed it, but he knew beforehand that he never would. I have changed my mind many times during the last fifty years. I began to change it just as soon as I stopped believing things because other people said they were so—just as soon as I began to think things out for myself. And I have had a lovely time ever since I began to change my mind. In fact, I never began to really live until I learnt how to change my mind. It is a delicious sensation to discover that you have enough mind to change—a sensation that most people unfortunately know nothing about.

Some of my old friends say that they never know where to find me, but I have never cared to "stay put" so that they can always find me. As long as I know just where I am myself I am quite content, and although I have travelled over many different roads I have always known just where I was.

Once I was an orthodox Christian—believed in Jehovah, Jesus and the Holy Ghost; believed that each was God and that all three were the same God; that three times one were one, and that once one was three. It was poor arithmetic but sound theology. I believed in heaven and hell and the atonement, and that nobody was safe unless he had been sprinkled with water by somebody who had been similarly sprinkled and was authorised by a council of parsons to do the sprinkling. Then I began to think for myself, and I became a Unitarian because that church is a good halting place on the

road to the truth. But I kept on thinking, until now not only have I ceased to believe in any arbitrary God or any abode of everlasting bliss, but I have come to see that these two beliefs are the most potent levers for the poverty and subjection of humanity.

Moreover, I was once a Tory and regarded the working classes of all countries as fit subjects for exploitation by those who were smart enough and powerful enough to acquire wealth without earning it. Then I read Henry George's "Progress and Poverty" and Edward Bellamy's "Looking Backward," and I became a State Socialist. But I went on reading and thinking so that now if anybody should call me an Anarchist I would have to ask: What do you mean by that? Do you mean one who believes in the immediate and unconditional abolition of all titles to land except that of occupancy by use, thereby setting all vacant land free for use? If so, yes. Do you mean one who believes in the immediate abolition of all laws which enable the financiers and politicians to control the issue of money? If so, yes. Land is a necessity of life. Money is a necessity of trade. If both were set free immediately, nothing but good would result. No social confusion would ensue. The idle poor could go to work at once, and the idle rich would have to go to work soon—as soon as their principal was exhausted. For with free land and free banking there would be no monopolistic rent, interest or profits. In one generation there would be no paupers and few criminals, and a world in which there is no poverty and little crime is beginning to be happy.

Do you mean by an Anarchist one who believes in not preventing people from doing good and useful things by physical force? That a sheriff has no right to compel me by violence to pay for the support of a government of which I do not approve and without asking me how I wish my money to be spent? That there should be no statute laws that favour a man with a thousand pounds against a man with only sixpence? Do you mean one who thinks that people can be brought by education to regard each other's rights so intelligently and willingly that soldiers, policemen and bailiffs will be unnecessary? That we are growing more and more enlightened, and that we shall some day come to see that the necessary condition for true civilization is that each man shall be free—absolutely free—free in mind and body—free from the priest, the politician and the monopolist—and that being thus free he will naturally co-operate with his fellow-workers in the production of wealth, in schemes of education, in household arrangements, in social pleasures? Do you mean one who believes that public opinion backed by the boycott is a thousand times stronger than special legislation backed by guns? That men and women, under the influence of the plenty that springs inevitably from free land and free banking, would quickly learn how to take care of themselves and cease to depend on the priests and politicians? Do you mean one who believes that all that is wholesome in social life at this moment is enjoyed upon the principle of voluntary co-operation among social equals? If you mean these things, yes, I am an Anarchist, and you cannot compliment me more highly than to call me one.

But if you mean one who believes in overthrowing a government by violence in order to set up

another kind of government by violence; if you mean one who expects people to do things properly before they know how to do them at all; if you mean one who thinks right things can be done by secret plottings away from the eyes and ears of the whole people, as in the caucuses of the politicians, the board-rooms of the trust managers, and the reputed meetings of much weaker would-be destroyers of society by dynamite; if you mean one who believes in a general division or a common ownership of wealth, by which one man will get more than he earns and another less (as is the case now); if you mean one who does not take into account human history and human nature; if you mean the kind of half-brute and half-fool that most people create in their imagination and call an Anarchist, I am not an Anarchist, and you cannot wrong me more than to call me one. Nor do I believe that you can find any such as this last in this country except among the gangs of hoodlums who are the necessary product of usury, and among the soldiers and police who are hired by the usurers to defend their privileges. The popular typical Anarchist—the blood-thirsty brute armed with deadly weapons that we hear so much about—is more apt to be found among those who are hunting for him than anywhere else.

Yes, I have changed my mind often, and will change it again if the arguments offered to me are convincing. But you will observe that I have not gone sideways or backward. Each change I have made has carried me further away from religious and political superstition and, I trust, nearer to the truth. And because I have been honest in all my errors I judge that most men are honest in their beliefs, no matter how absurd they may appear to me. This is why, although I hate the Church as an organized authoritative institution, I respect individual Christians in their sincere beliefs; and although I look upon every form of government by violence as an unjust tyranny I respect individual Anarchists as sincere believers in the necessity for their particular form of tyranny; although I look upon Communism, Collectivism, Single-Taxism, State Socialism, and Trade Unionism as different forms of the same kind of tyranny, I regard the honest believers in them as persons who are sincerely trying to improve society.

To all those who have co-operated with me in the great work of human emancipation, either as contributors to or readers of *The Freethinker*, I offer my warm friendship, and because that co-operation has been eager and voluntary, I know that their pleasure in the work has been equal with mine, and that they share with me the hope that before another year rolls round the dawning light of Freedom's day will have grown brighter.

G. O. WARREN.

Let us make the best of this world and take our chance of any other. If there is a heaven, we dare say it will hold all honest men. If it will not, those who go elsewhere will at least be in good company.—G. W. Foote.

The fiery soul abhorr'd in Catiline,
In Decius charms; in Curtis is divine:
The same ambition can destroy or save,
And make a patriot, as it makes a knave.

—Pope.

Freethought on the Stage.

THE UNKNOWN: A PLAY. By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM. (Aldwych Theatre).

THEATREGOERS who have had reason to deplore the light-hearted and light-headed inanity of our dramatic entertainments for some time past, will be at least grateful to Mr. Maugham for his experiment in serious drama. They will be grateful, I say; but they will have to admit that he has failed. And he has failed just because the effort of hard thinking—hard for him, I mean—has been too much for his technique. His dramatic skill was adequate enough for the light, bustling themes of comedy or farce. There he could look down upon his character with the disinterestedness, the detachment of the creative artist; but in his new venture he has tried to handle a subject which calls for the deeper thinking, and the more adequate stage-craft of an Ibsen or a Chehov. Mind you, I don't for a moment say that he is not serious; indeed, it is precisely his seriousness, or his interest in the subject, that has brought about his artistic collapse. Freethought is new to him, and he puts forward the mere common-places of belief and unbelief as if they were new and original ideas. He appears to have had no clear notion as to how the problem should be worked out, or not enough courage to risk the censure of believers by making his Freethinker come out on top. He thus pleases neither party too much, which is, perhaps, what he intended to do. Anyhow, one of our democratic papers would not have arranged an afternoon performance for parsons only if Mr. Maugham had drawn the only logical conclusion from his premises.

However that may be, the story is briefly this. Young Major Wharton has come home on a short leave, and proposes to marry, before he goes back, his bride-elect, Sylvia Burroughes, who has waited seven years for him. This has just been arranged to the satisfaction of the lovers and the old people, a retired colonel and his wife, when the vicar's wife comes in, and mentions regretfully that, although Major Wharton was at church the day before, he did not stay for Holy Communion. His remark is the cue for a cross-examination of Wharton as to his belief or want of it, by his parents, good but conventionally pious people, who are deeply concerned with the spiritual welfare of their son, by Sylvia, a rather fervidly devout young lady, and by the vicar, who comes in after his wife. He is one of those angular parsons who think that they know all the weak places in freethought, because they have tackled an Atheist lecturer when they were working in some democratic London parish. He is an unsympathetic, narrow, dogmatic platitudinous cleric whose stock exhortations, joined to the innuendoes of his wife, bring Major Wharton, at last, to a complete disavowal of his belief in God, and this in spite of his natural unwillingness to give pain to his God-fearing father and mother. But the vicar scores heavily in the end, for Sylvia is influenced by his pulpit common-places to refuse to marry a man who has no idea of a God.

It is a poor sort of triumph for the parson, and before he has recovered from one shock, he has another. One of his most exemplary parishioners, a widow, Mrs. Littlewood, has lost her two sons in the War, and has forsaken the Church for the vain amusements of society. The vicar takes the opportunity of remonstrating with her in the Wharton drawing-room. His unwisdom brings down upon him a heart-moving indictment of the Christian God of love, the supposed God of the widow and the fatherless, who is omnipotent and beneficent, and yet works through evil and war. "If this deity is, indeed, as is said, all-powerful, all-just, all-merciful, how

can he rend and torture like this the millions who believe in him? Either he must be merciful, and powerless, or if omnipotent, more malicious than we thought him. Our estimate must, in any case, be revised." She works up to a splendid climax of moral indignation, and ends with an electric "Who will forgive God?" It is a passionate protest of moral human nature against the inhumanity of God. The heart had told her, as it had told Proudhon, that God is evil.

A *via media* is proposed by the Wharton's family doctor who imagines, like J. S. Mill, a limited diety that is really doing his best to counteract the forces of evil in the world, but is often sadly handicapped, and is always in need of our co-operation and encouragement. This dualistic belief is unacceptable alike to believer and unbeliever.

It would appear that Colonel Wharton has consulted a specialist about his health. The diagnosis has been sent on to the family doctor, who is forced by the blunt old soldier to tell him the truth in the presence of Sylvia and his family. He is told that he may die at any moment. A day later he passes away quietly at night, and in the morning Mrs. Wharton tells the sad news to Sylvia. She asks her to wait until her son comes in, and to tell him what has happened, and then goes to her room. The church bell is heard ringing for the Communion Service when Major Wharton enters. Sylvia intentionally avoids breaking the news to him, and tries to get him to go Communion by working upon his feelings, by telling him what comfort the knowledge of his presence at the Eucharist will bring to his father in the hour of death. It is a pious lie for the greater glory of the Church, for which the young lady would obtain an easy absolution. A few moments later his mother comes down and he knows the nature of the trick put upon him, and tells Sylvia in round terms what he thinks of her jesuitical principles. What understanding the two came to in the presence of the dead we know not. At any rate, I am certain that Wharton would remain a Freethinker to the end.

It is not, perhaps, a matter for wonder, that the actors did not acquit themselves as well as they would have done in the ordinary romantic drama. The ideas were new and strange to them, and it was this unfamiliarity which may have stood in the way of their creating a spiritual or mental atmosphere; on the other hand it may be that Mr. Maugham is not completely possessed by his ideas. It needs a Freethinking dramatist to write a Freethinking play. Those who happen to know the dramatic work of M. Jean Robyn will know what I mean. I especially commend to them his three-act play, *Les Cagots*.

HESTER BRAYNE.

Your gods are as avaricious as old age could make them. Every religion that starts up, beyond Persia, takes only as much truth to stand upon as will raise her safely to men's purses. The Egyptian priests have extensive lands; Attica is poorer in soil: there is requisite to have oracles too and sacrifices, gold and cattle, oil and milk, wax and honey. If this religion should be succeeded by another, as it must be when the fraud is laid open, the populace will follow those enthusiasts who threw down the images of the gods, and will help them the next morning to raise up others in the same places, or even those elsewhere, differing but in name. Pride will at first put on the garment of Humility; and soon afterward will Humility raise up her sordid baldness out of Pride's. Change in rituals is made purely for lucre, and under the name of Reformation, comes only to break up a virgin turf or to pierce into an unexplored mine. Religion with you began in veneration for those who delivered you from robbers; it will end in the discovery that your temples have ever been the dens of them.—Landoz, "Cyrus" to "Xenophon."

Morality and Happiness.

It is a contention of the moralists, implied if not definitely expressed, that the rest of the human race would be the happier if it were to be guided in its actions by their precepts. They hold that in whatever circumstances man finds himself, they have provided a universal formula for his guidance, and by so much as he falls short from that standard of conduct will he be the less happy.

They lose sight of the fact that it is as impossible to provide a universal rule of conduct as it is for an engineer to overcome all natural obstacles by one method. The development of the average man is as limited as the experience of his immediate surroundings will permit. He is known by the acquaintance he keeps, and that acquaintance is largely chosen for him before he is born by the effect of parenthood. Rarely indeed can a man rise superior to his birth.

His parentage gives him certain limitations, and though these limitations are largely those of possibility, the natural habitat of his parents does a great deal in placing him in the world. Moreover it provides him with those first contacts with material things and other human beings, which are the basis of a developing mentality. No man can own a very wide circle of friends however many people he may know, and it is natural that most of those friends should be of a sort, or of a group governed in its actions by the opinion of that group.

So long as an individual directs his actions in such a way as not to lose the respect of those people with whom he is thrown most intimately into contact, he cannot be particularly unhappy. If he does something which leads to his boycott by those friends he becomes unhappy because he is in a way an outcast from the herd.

It is the same whether his lot is cast in Streatham or Sydney Street. He is obliged for the sake of his personal comfort to conformity to the public opinion of that part. Indeed if he has been born in one or other of these places he is so inoculated with their point of view that it would require his utmost endeavour to put it aside.

Of course Streatham could not conceive of happiness in Sydney Street. It would be in a foreign country, and would be quite certain that its superiority should be recognised. Probably it would by the mockery of the populace whose imitations in certain directions are, if anything, even greater, than those of the more respectable suburbs.

In Sydney Street, however, there is life and death, loving and giving in marriage, just as there are in Streatham, and if certain professions are looked upon with aversion and disdain in the latter place they are regarded as the normal avocations of life in the former. Thus it comes to be that a term of imprisonment is regarded in the one place as the culmination of a life of crime, and nothing could efface its disgrace, while in the other it is looked upon as a normal possibility which may happen to any man. It is only a mischance, one of those slings and darts of outrageous fortune, which imply nothing more derogatory than ill-luck or lack of judgment, and would alienate no friend rather begetting the most universal of human emotions, sympathy.

The transfer of either system of morality to the other district would at once result in misery. It

would mean unaccustomed labour, and labour in which the normal efficiency was lacking. It would mean so grave an alteration of standards that the whole system of life would be torn up, and the ordinary human contacts would fail. The happiness which is the result of adaptation to environment would become impossible. The existence of a pure morality in either place would not fail to have an equally obnoxious result, that is obnoxious to people who have grown up into a system.

It appears, therefore, that any specified system of morality has little to do with human happiness. The human being is happy in respect of quite other things, not the least of which is being and behaving similarly to his friends. He is ape-like in his desire to be an undistinguished member of the tribe. He does not desire to be singular, but to be one of the plurality. Quite different is the desire to excel in the character of the plural. It is only unfortunate, perhaps, that the experience possible to any individual is so limited to his small circle that he cannot come into contact with all the standards of morality which guide the varying groups included in one state or nation. If he could and were able to select inevitably the clearly right rule of conduct there might be some justice in the claim of the moralists that the following of their precepts is the road to happiness.

G. E. FUSSELL.

Correspondence.

THE FLOWER HABIT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In that little satire, "The Mourning Habit," which appeared in your last issue, I was disappointed that no reference was made by "Y. C." to that kindred wasteful habit of wreath and flower-buying. Of course, it may not be carried to the extent in France that it is here; but I am sure anyone who gives the matter a little thought will see how foolish, wasteful, and irrational the prevailing custom is in this country of covering the coffin with flowers and wreaths at great cost, especially just now. What becomes of these flowers? Are they not absolutely wasted, thrown down the grave, which is then filled in?

It is hard to find a more scandalous waste than is involved in this idiotic fashion of buying as many wreaths and flowers as possible for funerals. Surely this is one habit that rational people should do their best to abolish.

H. RICHARD WRIGHT.

"WHAT ABOUT HELL?"

SIR,—The articles of "Mimnermus" are always interesting, but I see he has fallen into the same error in this week's *Freethinker* as that which I pointed out some time ago, viz., that the "Fire" in the Salvation Army's motto refers to Hell.

I suppose Roman Catholic and Church of England priests are not "half-educated men appealing to the ignorant."

I think Freethought is, or should be, sufficiently capable of standing upon its own legs, without recourse being had to the suppression, mis-statement or distortion of facts. *Fiat justitia ruat cælum.*

H. F.

DR. LYTTTELTON AND THE FREETHINKER.

SIR,—I am sorry if Dr. Lyttelton does not after all think it worth while to deal with the points raised in my letter published in your issue of June 20, as my only reason for writing was to get his view as clear as yours.

It would also be interesting to know how he would answer your "Acid Drop" criticism in August 8.

W. JAMESON.

Obituary.

One more sincere Freethinker has been laid to rest in our district, Mrs. Sarah Richardson, the loving wife of our old and valued friend, Mr. Newrick Richardson, of Chester-Je-Street, was interred on Friday, August 13. All who knew her, loved her, and her life of kindly deeds will be remembered while memory lasts. There was a large gathering of friends at the graveside and the appreciative hearing given to Councillor John W. White, of Stanley, who read the Secular Burial Service, spoke much for the deceased lady, and the awakening intelligence of the general public. The ceremony was impressive, and the personal reference to our late friend and the bereaved husband added a fine human touch to the gathering. Her last long, painful illness weakened her physically, but the fact that she requested Mr. White to conduct a Secular Service over her, proves that her intellect remained unimpaired. The sympathy of Freethinkers will go out to the lone husband whose open advocacy of the Secular Cause has earned for him the respect of the people of the North.—J.W.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice" if not sent on postcard.

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