

FREETHINKER

FOUNDED · 1881

EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN · · · EDITOR 1881-1915 · G. W. FOOTB

Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper.

VOL. XL.—No. 37

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1920

PRICE THREEPENCE

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Views and Opinions.

Professor Huxley and Blasphemy.

IN the *Freethinker* for August 15 we cited from Mrs. Asquith's Autobiography, at present running through one of the Sunday papers, her account of Huxley's talk on a matter of religion, during the course of a dinner party. She said that the Professor gave a blasphemous tirade on religion and remarked that "God was only there because people believed in him," while "the fastidious incognito 'I am what I am' was his idea of humour." Now I see from the *Literary Guide* that Professor Huxley's son, Dr. Leonard Huxley, is scandalised at the remarks concerning his father. He has written to the lady that his father was fully aware "of the amenities of social intercourse," and has invited her to withdraw the whole story. This Mrs. Asquith has declined to do, but has qualified her remark concerning the "blasphemous" remark of the late professor, by saying that she used the word as the equivalent of irreligious. Evidently Mr. Huxley does not like this, and in some way seems to think it a reflection on his father that he should be said to have talked in an irreligious manner. But one wonders in what other manner could Huxley have talked about religion, so long as he was honest to himself and to others? If he talked about religion at all, he must have talked in a way that would be to all religious people irreligious. There is no help for it; for all the talk about certain men who reject Christianity, and other religions, as being "yet profoundly religious" is so much verbiage, mainly motivated by fear of orthodoxy, born of hazy thinking, or intended to throw dust in the eyes of the orthodox.

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Why God Exists.

Now we quite agree with Mr. Huxley that the substitution of irreligious for blasphemous is not much of an improvement. In fact the two words are substantially identical. Blasphemy, as Ingersoll said, is mainly a question of geography, or one may add, of point of view. It is neither irreligious nor blasphemous to a Jew to talk disrespectfully or

mockingly of Christianity, nor to a Christian when Mohammedanism is treated in the same manner. In fact, the only workable definition of blasphemy is, talking about religion in a way that believers in it don't like. For it is, after all, the believer in it who is the only one who can ultimately say whether a statement is blasphemous or not. That is one reason why it is so easy to convict a man of the offence—the accuser, the jury, the witness, and the judge, are all finally the one person. It is a case of unanimity as a product of identity. And therefore to say that Professor Huxley, if he talked about religion at a dinner party, was talking irreligiously or blasphemously was only saying that he was not talking as a Christian would like. It is quite likely that Mrs. Asquith meant to imply that Huxley's *language* was of a coarse and vulgar kind, and in that case the example cited is singularly ineffective. For to say that God is only here because men believe in him is no more than a sober statement of literal truth. That is the only reason why Gods are here, and it applies to many other things beside gods. Everyone will remember how in "Peter Pan" Wendy asks the children in the audience for an act of faith in fairies because that is the only thing that will restore the dying sprite to health. It is equally so with that greater fairy, the theist's god. Believe in him and he is healthy, cease to believe in him and he is no more. Jupiter, and Osiris, and Brahma and all the gods of the past were alive so long as people believed in them. They would be alive to-day if people still believed in them. They could all be reborn if people could be brought to believe in them again. And that is as true of Javeh and Jesus as it was of Zeus and Osiris. That is why all gods are realities to those who believe in them and personified stupidities to those who do not. At its best, and with uncivilised minds, "God" is no more than a matter of belief. At its worst, and with civilised minds, it is an elaborate humbug, and a depressing hypocrisy.

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The Policy of "Hedging."

But while Mrs. Asquith assumed, as one would expect with the wife of a prominent politician, an air of shocked propriety at any one speaking disrespectfully of religion, it may well be that in private Professor Huxley would use a far different tone in relation to religion than he used in public or semi-public conversations. So far as we can recollect he never in any of his public utterances spoke of God as a mere belief. And yet it was a conviction that he *must* have held, unless we attribute to him a mental inability to understand the meaning of the scientific results of which he was so fascinating an exponent. And I for one think too much of his mental strength to come to any such conclusion.

Nor is it at all new for British public men to keep their inner feelings away from the public so far as religion is concerned. In his "Life" the late Alfred Russel Wallace remarked of Sir Charles Lyell that while he refrained from saying anything on certain aspects of the relations between religion and science, his heresy was dragged from him at the dinner table. And as a matter of fact—and a fact that is well within the knowledge of nearly all in touch with public life—what very many of our prominent men say about religion in public, and their attitude towards it in private are very different things. That is the besetting sin of our public life, and it has a disastrous reaction in many directions. If a prominent man wishes to say that he does not believe in the Christian myth of Jesus-Christ he does not say that plainly and without qualifications, but must accompany it with a mass of more or less insincere verbiage about his undiminished reverence for the sublime figure of Jesus, etc., etc. If he does not believe in a god he does not say so, openly and without qualification. He says that while he cannot see his way to affirm his belief in the gods of any of the religions around him, he is content to bow his head before the solemn mysteries of the universe, and to assume the position of a "reverent" agnosticism. If the ordinary religionist had a better sense of humour he would laugh the pretence out of fashion: if he were of keener intelligence, he would see through the sham at once. As it is what happens is that this profession of a non-existent reverence and respect for religious ideas fills the religionist with the conviction that however mistaken he may be in unimportant details, he has in his religion a number of very profound truths which the world cannot afford to lose. The real strength of religion in this country does not lie in the number or quality of its sincere believers; but in the hesitancy, the timidity, the moral insincerity of those who do not really believe in it. If all the public men in this country who do not believe in Christianity were to say so, the bubble of belief would collapse.

* * *

Public Men and Private Opinions.

It is simply impossible for one to believe in the absolute sincerity of these professions of respect for Christian doctrines in which the same people have no belief. If they were of the type of mind that had a sincere respect for them they would never have had the strength of mind to reject them. If a man believes in heaven and hell and god and angels and miracles and all the other odds and ends of Christian doctrines, then I can appreciate his having a respect and reverence for them. But if he does not believe in them, then I find it quite impossible to see what is meant by his professing respect for them, or his saying that such "profound" subjects deserve to be approached in a respectful manner, or his talking of the valuable truths they enshrine. They are no more deserving of respect than is the belief of some belated villager that his neighbour's cow has been bewitched by the malignant attention of some old women, or the conviction of those curious people who believe that rheumatism may be cured by carrying a potato in one's trousers pocket. Christian doctrines are neither profound nor valuable. As we said recently in another part of this paper, the beliefs in "God" and the virgin birth and the resurrection and miracles and heaven and the sacrament and the

divinity of Jesus, etc., are not at all profound; they are, in the light of our present-day knowledge, simply, and irretrievably silly. If a schoolboy said to his master that two parallel lines might meet, or twice two might equal five, the teacher would not say that they were statements which deserved respect and that although he did not believe them, still they deserved treating with profound reverence. He would say they were silly statements, and his only concern would be how to enlighten the mind of his pupil. And we really do not hasten the removal of stupidities by a sense of their importance, and by pretending that they may enshrine some truths of great value. There are quite enough fools to attend to the deification of the absurd without sensible men lending a hand to the work.

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All That is Needed.

So that while I should agree with Mr. Leonard Huxley that in speaking of Professor Huxley's "blasphemous tirade" against religion, Mrs. Asquith was using the words in a way that might suggest coarseness of language, I do not quite see on what grounds she is asked to withdraw the whole story. In public Huxley could argue with the greatest solemnity about the Gadarene swine and similar absurdities. But Mr. Huxley surely would not maintain that in private his father, with his ability and sense of the absurd could exhibit the same "respectful" attitude. Like so many others, he would be pretty certain to say more in private than he would in public—perhaps he would say more in private because he was under some restraint in his public utterances. And that brings me, finally, to the point that I have so often stressed, namely, the need for more courage on the part of our publicists, scientists, sociologists, and men of letters when they are dealing with the question of religion. If this were done the blasphemy laws might be swept away to-morrow. The restrictions which publishers place upon themselves in the issuing of books would be broken down, the press boycott would be weakened, and a generally healthier sense of freedom would prevail. Much as religion owes its maintenance to the unthinking qualities of the mass of believers, it owes its prestige to the silence and left-handed homage of those who should be the leaders in saying what is the truth concerning religion. One very brilliant scientific man, the late Kingdon Clifford, said that if Christianity were true its truth should be shouted from the house tops. If it were false, then that should be shouted from the house tops. There need be no concern that those who believe Christianity will carry out their part of the programme, and I think the more of them for doing so. All I desire is that those who do not believe in Christianity should imitate so excellent an example. At present those who occupy the tops of the tallest houses are deplorably silent, and when they wish to say that Christianity is a lie they do not shout from the house top so that the multitude may hear, they go down in the cellar and whisper it to a confidential friend. So it is left to those who can only get to the tops of houses of much lesser elevation to carry out Clifford's advice. Well, if that is all that can be done we must just go on doing it. Our voices are heard by some, if not by so many as we desire. And perhaps when we have made the road a little smoother, Freethought a little more popular, and

heresy more respectable, those who inhabit the larger houses may lend their roofs as platforms from which to proclaim the message of freedom and humanity.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Atheism or Agnosticism?

"WHAT'S in a name?" is an old question, but never out of date. Some names are perpetually out of favour, and some people are never happier than when engaged in the task of throwing odium upon them. Materialism is one of those terms. There is scarcely a scientist of note anywhere who proudly calls himself a Materialist. Buchner, whom the theologians used to denounce as a "crass Materialist," invariably repudiated the invidious label, and described himself as a monist. The same was true of Professor Haeckel. This renowned philosopher gloried in his monism. His objection to the term Materialism was based on the regrettable fact that the popular definition of it is radically erroneous and misleading. And yet, properly understood, no term could be more appropriate. Those who are not realists in the Aristotelian sense, nor idealists in the modern sense, are naturally shut up to materialism as the only available word which proximately expresses their view of the universe. Another term in constant disfavour is Atheism, and the number of people who employ it is extremely small. There is everywhere a strong prejudice against it. It is a word that "carries an unpleasant significance." A recent correspondent of *The Truth Seeker* blamed some British Freethinkers for advocating the use of it, and for not adopting the less offensive designation Agnosticism. Personally, I have no objection to the latter term, while I am full of admiration for the distinguished scientist who coined it. But it must not be forgotten that Huxley was, in a vague sense, a theist, though his theism never went beyond the recognition of "the passionless impersonality of the unknown and unknowable, which science shows everywhere underlying the thin veil of phenomena." While admitting that "there is no evidence of the existence of such a being as the God of the theologians," he rejected Atheism as being "on purely philosophical grounds untenable." It is now easy to understand why Huxley coined the word Agnosticism, and preferred it to any other, as an expression of his attitude to the ultimate mystery.

But when we come to examine the term we learn that it simply means the doctrine of ignorance. An Agnostic is a person who is devoid of knowledge—an ignoramus. An Agnostic, in relation to deity, is an individual who is without knowledge of any supernatural being whatever. He does not know whether such a being exists or not. He neither affirms nor denies his existence. Now, what is an Atheist? Etymologically, one without God. It is merely the Greek word, *theos*, with alpha privative prefixed, and literally rendered signifies the absence of, or without, God. Your good Webster gives the correct etymology, though he is led astray when afterwards he gives his definition of the meaning of the word. What those in Britain who label themselves Atheists understand by the name is, people without God. I wish now seriously to ask, what is the difference between people without knowledge of God

and people without God? After all is said and done, are they not one and the same? Let it, then, be clearly understood that an Atheist is a person, not against, but without, God. In this light, I can use the words Agnostic and Atheist interchangeably, because they both mean precisely the same thing. In his "Plea for Atheism," the late Charles Bradlaugh says: "The Atheist does not say, 'There is no God,' but he says, 'I know not what you mean by God; I am without idea of God; the word "God" is to me a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me.'" I am confident that, on this point, the great body of Freethinkers are in full agreement.

Of course, were there no theists there could be no Atheists. Theism is of necessity older than Atheism. I am now expressing myself etymologically. As a matter of fact, all men were originally without God; but they could not have said so to one another, because the fact was not known to them. Somebody must have conceived the idea of God and said, "I have," or "I believe in a God," before anybody else would have repudiated the idea, and said, "I am without what you call God, and cannot believe in him."

Someone may object, at this point, by asking, "If Atheism only signifies the absence of God, or of belief in him, on what grounds can the Freethought propaganda be justified?" This is a perfectly relevant objection, and it should be honestly met. Atheists do not say, "There is no God," but they do affirm that "there is no evidence of the existence of such a being as the God of the theologians." They do not deny the Divine Existence, but they do reject every definition of it ever set before them. They do not aver, "There is no Divine Existence," because they know of none, but they do declare concerning every theological characterisation of it, that it is self-contradictory and absurd. And they who prefer to style themselves Agnostics behave in identically the same way. Even Huxley was an uncompromising opponent of the Christian presentation of God. We are told that he "threw Christianity overboard bodily and with little appreciation of its historic effect as a civilising agency." It is somewhat difficult to locate Mr. Bernard Shaw philosophically, but there can be no doubt whatever that, in the true sense, he is a thoroughgoing Atheist. Though claiming to be a mystic, he never hesitates to announce, as he recently did in a public lecture, that "disbelieving with my whole soul in such a being (as the Old Testament Jehovah), I always did what Charles Bradlaugh did—made myself intelligible to those people who worship such a monster by saying that I was an Atheist; and in that sense I still am an Atheist, as it seems to me every humane person must be. That kind of God is morally inconceivable—the God who would send bears to eat up little children would be a wicked God—what Shelley called an Almighty Fiend."

Furthermore, no scientist can believe in God as the omnipotent and all-good creator, because to science creation is unthinkable. Matter is eternal, having neither beginning nor end. It is everlastingly changing its forms, but its sum-total remains absolutely unaltered. Again, it is impossible to conceive

of a perfect Creator producing an imperfect universe. If Nature was ever made, its maker lacked either omnipotent wisdom or infinite goodness, or both. On no other assumption is the existence of so much imperfection and suffering and evil explicable. Looking at the universe through scientific eyes, we realise that the existing state of things, or something like it, is the only conceivable one. Evolution, on the whole, perhaps, tends upwards; but there is in it no promise of either perfection or finality. It is change, endless change, in all around we see. The people who expect that society shall ever attain to an ideal state are doomed to disappointment. We should endeavour so to guide the evolutionary process as to secure steady improvement in social conditions, but perfection is an ideal that ever keeps receding as we strain after it. We are Nature become self-conscious and intelligent, not the self-consciousness and intelligence behind Nature become manifest; and this self-consciousness and intelligence we are to utilise so as to exercise purposeful control over humanity's future development. In any case, the facts of evolution make belief in an infinitely wise and good designer and ruler of the world utterly impossible. The history and present condition of the universe would wreck the moral character of any deity.

Once more, Atheism, in this sense, is regarded by the majority of British Freethinkers not only as an inevitable deduction from the facts of evolution as made known to us by science, but also as an essential condition of the moral progress of the race. From the pulpit constantly comes the cry, "No God, no morality." The Christian teaching revolves round the tenet that of ourselves we can do nothing, and insists upon submission to and trust in a personal God as man's chief duties. Accordingly, self-reliance is denounced as the worst and most degrading of vices and humble dependence upon the merits of another eulogised as the sublimest of virtues. Humanity is represented as by nature lost and helpless, lying under the wrath of the holy God, and doomed to eternal damnation; and the message of the Gospel is that escape from this horrible state and worse doom is possible only through faith in the finished work of Christ. When a man receives this faith as a special gift from God, he passes from a state of nature into a state of grace, in which he lives alone by faith. A Christian is a person who is indebted to another for everything, or who is and does nothing of himself or herself. "Without me," said Jesus, "ye can do nothing." Now, my contention is that a state of grace is artificial, parasitic, anti-human and demoralising, and a state from which one is in ceaseless peril of falling; indeed, one is only kept in it by endless supplies of grace from heaven. In such an atmosphere, true morality cannot grow. To thrive well and to be of real value, morality must be a home-product; not a delicate exotic, but a strong, healthy plant indigenous to the soil of humanity. As a matter of fact, is it not a truism that the Ages of Faith were not distinguished for the elevation of their moral practices? Thomas a Kempis, the author of that immortal book, *The Imitation of Christ*, was a remarkably holy man, a Christian gem of the first water; but during the age in which he lived and wrote, the early part of the fifteenth century, society wallowed in moral filth, and the leaders in deeds of shame were the clergy. Brothels were familiarly referred to as "Abbeys."

In Venice, an "Abbey" was established in order to "preserve the purity of the town." We are often reminded of the exalted piety of St. Bernard and his monks in France in the eleventh century. I am not anxious to dispute the "saintliness" of this illustrious teacher of the church; but when we consult such contemporary writers as Cardinal de Vitry, Ordericus Vitalis, and Abelard, we discover that the France of St. Bernard's day was sunk in unspeakable degradation and corruption. "The clergy," says the cardinal, "saw no sin in simple fornication," and Abelard informs us that in "nearly all the monasteries" of the country impurity flourished. In the sixteenth century we find Benvenuto Cellini glorying in being at once a shining saint and a notorious criminal. Both before and after acting the fiend he used to enjoy ecstatic spiritual visions, when the Blessed Redeemer communed with him, as it were, face to face.

With innumerable instances like the foregoing in their minds the bulk of Freethinkers are convinced that before this world, with its myriad forms of life, can have fair play, the unseen and eternal world, with its gods and angels and devils, must be dismissed. Morality is an affair exclusively between man and man, and in order to insure its due growth and development all that is required is to give all diligence to strengthen and purify the social instincts. This is all that is meant by militant Atheism. It is nothing but a vehement repudiation of all the gods in whom men have ever loved to trust, with the sole object of enabling the human mind to concentrate, to some practical purpose, upon the many puzzling problems of this world and life. In reality, there is no difference in meaning between Atheism and Agnosticism, and I, individually, can conscientiously employ either term at will. I am an Agnostic because I have no knowledge of God; and I am an Atheist because, having no knowledge of God, I am content and logically compelled to live without him. Believing, further, that all mankind share this ignorance of mine, I do not hesitate to characterise the divinities in whom many believe and whom a few really worship, as pure creations of their own imagination, and to assert that belief in and worship of such fictitious, superstitious objects have, on the whole, always served as hindrances rather than helps to the social and ethical progress of the race.

J. T. LLOYD.

Why should a good man hate sinners when it is error that drives them into wrong? It is not the part of a wise man to hate those that err, else will he be an object of hatred himself. Let him think how many things he does himself contrary to good conduct, how many of his actions need pardon, then will he be angry with himself. For a just judge passes the same sentence in his own case as in that of others. No one will be found who can acquit himself, and whoever calls himself innocent regards external testimony, not his own conscience. How much more humane it is to show a gentle and paternal mind towards sinners, not to persecute but to recall them. If you meet a man astray in the fields from ignorance of his road, it is better to direct him aright than to drive him away.—*Seneca.*

Hitting Below the Belt.

Christianity has never lost the instinct of universal dominion.—*Bible Society's Report.*

Neither will he (the sceptic) be betrayed to a book, and wrapped in a gown.—*Emerson.*

FREETHINKERS are familiar with the methods of the Christian editors who exclude or grossly misrepresent all matters relating to Freethought in the interests of Orthodoxy. Jealousies and unkindness and bitterness of spirit are in most human labours; but religion, with its insincerities and intellectual meanness, seems to hold a poison of its own which narrows the vision and blunts the edge of principle. Here is an example from a daily newspaper, in which, apparently, a cricketing correspondent, out of work, seeks to air his views on a psychological question:—

"The most paradoxical case I know was of an Agnostic father who tried to prevent his children going to church. His attitude was so violent that it produced a corresponding reaction in the children. One by one they were baptised, received into the Church, and became most religious. But every time they attended Church they lied about it and pretended they had been elsewhere."

This is an ordinary sample of Christian charity in practice, but few Freethinkers are fully aware that this peculiar Orthodox habit is extended to literature itself, and that the campaign of calumny is just as apparent in some books as in the newspapers and periodicals. Look, for example, at the so-called works of reference which are to be found in public libraries, and notice how Freethought and Freethinkers fare in their pages. Sins of omission and commission constantly leap to the eye of the reader, who may be ill-prepared for this exhibition of the fierce flash of the primitive spirit of Christianity. For, nowadays, Christians are no longer able to crush opposition, and they are obliged to answer its arguments, or make a show of defending their own doctrines. Feeling that the tendency of Rationalism is against them, and afraid to resist it, they bend before it rather than break.

One of the most popular series of the day is the Home University Library, which includes, among many other volumes, a work on *The Victorian Age of Literature*. This particular work was entrusted to the versatile Gilbert Chesterton, whose peculiar piety is so notorious that the editors apologise for his zeal and exuberance. They may well do this, for Mr. Chesterton uses his talents tyrannously in the service of the most reactionary of Churches. Other men have insulted Freethinkers, but Mr. Chesterton "out-Herods Herod," and has nothing but gibes and affronts for three generations of "intellectuals." From the account of Walter Savage Landor "throwing plates on the floor" to the urbane description of Thomas Hardy as "a sort of village Atheist brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot," the book is a burlesque. Algernon Swinburne, a poet of the rarest genius, who has enlarged the boundaries of song, is accused of composing "a learned and sympathetic and indecent parody on the Litany of the Blessed Virgin"—surely a most ironical suggestion in a Protestant country. In speaking of *Songs Before Sunrise*, Chesterton tries to belittle these superb lyrics by saying that this sunrise never turned up. Even the

popular Victorian authors do not escape censure, and are dubbed, spitefully, "lame giants." Women writers do not escape when they show any independence of thought. Emily Brontë, that shy genius who gave us *Wuthering Heights*, is described as being as "unsociable as a storm at midnight." Even Robert Browning, whose offence was his robust Anti-Clericalism, is accused of making "spluttering and spiteful puns about the names Newman, Wiseman, and Manning." The only Freethinker to whom Chesterton is passably civil is James Thomson, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, who, he informs us, pontifically, "knew how to be democratic in the dark." As Chesterton spells the poet's name with a "p," the compliment is a very doubtful one, after all. And Gilbert Chesterton is the man, be it remembered, who poses as the Saint George of our day, attacking the dragon of Freethought. He is the man who challenges the dogmatism of the Agnostic; seeks to convict Scientists of irrationality; derides Darwinism; and who pretends to find intellectual liberty and real progress inside the ring-fence of the least progressive and most reactionary of the Christian Churches.

MIMNERMUS.

(To be continued.)

Creeds and Critics.

Doubtless some of the less juvenile readers of the *Freethinker* may remember the sensation aroused in theological circles thirty years ago by the publication of a volume of essays dealing with the leading tenets of the Church of England, under the title *Lux Mundi*. The book—containing twelve essays in all—was the joint production of eleven Anglican High Church clergymen, who were avowedly anxious "to put the Catholic faith into its right relations to modern intellectual and moral problems." This statement of purpose has a fine sound, but to the plain non-clerical reader the collection of essays on the whole must have conveyed a somewhat different impression. Viewed as a concerted performance, it was a very clever effort on the part of the leaders of a powerful section of the Anglican Church to secure acceptance of the main conclusions of modern scientific investigation and biblical criticism without abating their own sacerdotal and sacramentarian pretensions. Though the book created such a stir at the time, it contained no new ideas whatever. All its admissions—which fluttered the doves of pious Anglicanism—had been commonplaces of German theological criticism for years before. Its startling effect was mainly due to the quarter from which it emanated—a quarter supposed to be the stronghold of theological conservatism in England.

Almost the entire field of divinity was covered by the essayists, and the various headings included faith; the Christian doctrine of God; the problem of pain; the preparation of history for Christ; the Incarnation; the Atonement; the Holy Spirit and Inspiration; the Church, the Sacraments; Christianity and politics; and Christian ethics. Though some of the subjects were handled with an amount of freedom sufficiently shocking to the rigidly orthodox of that date, it does not appear that the authors impaired their prospects of clerical advancement by their liberal views. Indeed, the writer of the essay which caused the greatest stir subsequently rose to episcopal

dignity as Bishop of Birmingham. Nothing was further from the minds of the contributors to the symposium than to quarrel with their bread and butter. The trend of their combined argumentation was in the direction of emphasising the necessity and practicability of reconciling the findings of modern thought with the doctrines of Christianity as held by the Church of England. Considerable adjustments might be demanded—and effected—here and there, but the authority and sanctity of the Church must be upheld as inviolable. When men of the reputation of the authors of *Lux Mundi* could so juggle with their consciences, can we wonder that the thousands of lesser men in the Church keep a tight hold of the loaves and fishes, and are content to oppose simple *vis inertiae* to modern destructive criticism.

Another of the contributors to *Lux Mundi* was Canon Scott Holland, who is still to the fore, and who still sees no difficulty in both accepting the verified conclusions of science and championing the claim of the Church to be the depository of eternal truth. I have just been reading a volume of essays written by the Canon, and published under the title which stands at the head of this article. Perusal of the book compels anew the wonder why or how some clergymen achieve the public fame which they enjoy. Is it the low general average of mediocrity associated with the clerical profession that causes individual clergymen of no special mental power, viewed from an outside standpoint, to be hailed as bright and shining lights in the ecclesiastical firmament? In a foreword to the volume under notice, praise, which seems very extravagant, is showered upon Dr. Holland. There is nothing in the book itself to justify such unstinted laudation. It is simply a mass of glittering rhetoric—and pulpit rhetoric at that. There is no doubt these essays would sound well declaimed from the pulpit, with the aid of a mellifluous voice and the proper locutionary effects; but as argumentative efforts they are sadly deficient.

The writer of the foreword says that "from the *Lux Mundi* era onwards he (Canon Holland) never wavered in his unshaken belief in the historical truth of the fundamental facts. It was not only that he made out a good case for them, he hardly left his opposing critics with any stable case at all." It would be somewhat remarkable to find anyone wavering whose belief was unshaken, and it may be suggested that no one is likely to dispute the truth of fundamental facts. The question is, are they facts. But let this pass. It must be said, however, that if Canon Scott Holland is noteworthy for leaving his opponents without any case the present volume furnishes small evidence of such capacity. It certainly shows him to be a past master in the art of piling up verbal flights of stairs—flights of stairs with a paucity of landing-places, and in the climbing of which the reader becomes dizzy, but never reaches anywhere. The following extract is in the best—or worst—pulpit manner:—

"For the lines of separation (between the spiritual and the material) are ever hazy and wavering, and the contact between the spiritual and the material is ever inclined to pass into actual fusion: and dividing frontiers get confounded: and things mingle and mix: and the process is complicated and intricate, and slides easily out of conscious control: and familiarity breeds carelessness: and the strain

of attention slackens: and fears die down: and false confidence grows through constant habit: and there is no sense of immediate danger, nor any sign of a forced crisis. Things glide: and slide: and adapt themselves and reshape themselves: and melt: and shift: and change. So, again and again, the lump absorbs and overweighs the leaven. The salt has lost its sting. The other world is lost in this world. Christianity and the civilisation of the day become indistinguishable. Who can say what is what?"

We could fill columns with similar verbosity, but in mercy to our readers we forbear. Do not ask us what it means. Some people may admire the above style of writing, and, to adapt a Disraelian phrase, if this is the sort of thing people like, then Dr. Holland's essays are just the sort of thing they would like. To argue with Canon Scott Holland must be like wrestling with a feather bed.

Dr. Holland makes a good many references to Sir Oliver Lodge. The clergy are very fond of the latter, and consider him a great authority. Even those in the Churches who profess to be indifferent to the attitude of science make an unconscionable fuss when any scientific man lends the slightest countenance to supernaturalism. The one per cent. on their side count for more in their opinion than the ninety-nine who are against them. Dr. Holland repeats the old story about the limitations of science. He says science deliberately omits factors with which it has no concern. Well, that is one way of putting it, but it can be expressed differently. We should rather say that science omits from consideration a factor which religionists assume to be inherent in certain problems, but of which science itself can find no indication. When Dr. Holland goes on to insinuate that science admits there are "agencies at work, deliberately ignored, and unregarded," he is making a statement that the overwhelming majority of scientists would disown. Science does not ignore any agencies in nature that give token of their presence. What science disregards are those agencies that are only evident to the eye of faith.

Dr. Holland thinks that the very latest science has made it possible for us to return to the scriptural view of miracles. How this can be he does not make very clear. The mechanical conception of nature is broken up, he avers. Biology has presented it with facts for which it has no categories. "We have not yet framed what we mean by miracle into the new intellectual setting." Theologians like the author of these essays may be trusted to make it fit in somehow. So far as his reasoning can be followed, he appears to take the line that what has formerly been regarded as miraculous may have been all in the order of nature, although it transcended the current knowledge. In other words miracles are always happening, only they are not miraculous.

There is only space to notice one other point. Canon Holland seems to hold that it is a disadvantage to science that its hypotheses should always be in process of self-correction. Far from being a reproach to science, this is to its credit. The theological dogmatist would dearly like to fasten the charge of dogmatism upon science, and affects surprise and a tendency to ridicule when science changes its ground in response to fresh discovery. There is no dogmatism in Science. Undoubtedly individual scientists may be wedded to

particular theories as to the constitution of matter, but that is because they consider ascertained facts lend support to such theories. Science is ever open to entertain new facts—and new theories if they are based upon facts. But theologians are taking false comfort to their souls if they imagine that any change of view science may enunciate on (let us say) the atomic theory affords any warrant for interpolating the God idea into the cosmic process.

GEORGE SCOTT.

Acid Drops.

Miss Edith Shackleton writes in the *Daily Sketch* that "after seeing what salvation assured Christians could do in the way of collective gloom, I went to my first British Association meeting with forebodings that almost amounted to terror. To be shut up for a week with men and women who have turned from what the Church calls higher things to study the parasites in the livers of rats, the probable date of the cessation of human life, the alternations of generations in the Laminariaceæ! Here would be hopelessness and incivility indeed! Actually a British Association meeting is among the most cheering and encouraging of human spectacles. If you want the inspiration that comes from being among sanely happy men and women, you should book your places for the Edinburgh meeting next year. It will cure the grouch better than a week at Aix. You will sense more real pleasure than during a month on Margate sands or in Blackpool Winter Gardens." We are not surprised at Miss Shackleton's discovery. To a healthy mind a meeting of undertakers discussing the best methods of increasing the volume of business would be more cheerful than the ordinary theological meeting. The depressing character of scientific studies is one of the fictions that theologians find it to their interest to encourage among what is an ignorant public. And when we speak of an ignorant public we have not in mind what is called the "lower" classes. The ignorance of the so-called educated classes in this country is one of the most depressing aspects of our civilisation with which we are acquainted.

Here is a sample. The *Daily Telegraph* has opened its silly season with a discussion on the question of "Is it a new world?" And following special articles, all of which say nothing in a more or less elaborate manner, it publishes letters that are even emptier than the articles. One letter, for example, explains that the reason for unrest is that the people are getting too much education. And, dreadful to relate, "as a professing Christian nation, we should feel ashamed that modern education neglects to instruct the youth of the country in the fundamental and immortal doctrines of Christian faith, by which alone we can have peace on earth." Now we are quite certain that many of the letters sent must be of a less idiotic tone than this. And when one of our leading papers uses its wisdom in selecting such rubbish for publication, one doesn't need further proof of the ignorance of our "educated" classes.

Still one more specimen. Canon Barnes preached a sermon in connection with the British Association meetings in which he definitely rejected that ancient absurdity—the Fall of Man. And a number of leading men—we beg pardon, a number of leading parsons is the correct expression—write venting their indignation, and the *Times* calls it a "courageous" sermon! Now here is a doctrine that any person with a pretence of education ought to be simply ashamed of accepting, and its rejection is treated as "courageous." Could one have a better illustration of the ignorance of our educated classes than that? Two thousand years ago the better thought of ancient Greece and Rome were laughing at such fables. To-day their rejection is treated as an act of courage. And we call the inhabitants of central Africa savages! The impudence of it!

One other aspect of the matter. The doctrine of the fall of man is one of the classic doctrines of Christianity. Christianity is built upon it. Every really educated man and woman knows that it is a lie. But the Christian Churches have been teaching it for centuries. They have lied themselves in its defence, they have suppressed the truth concerning the development of man so that this particular doctrine might not be doubted, they have imprisoned and slandered and persecuted men and women for saying that the doctrine was false; and now some of the leading representatives of the Church openly say that it is not true, and say, in effect, that the Church has all the time been teaching a lie, and that Freethinkers were right when they said it was a lie. What is one to think of a Church of that description? Has the world ever known an institution that has done more to demoralise human nature, or that has been more unscrupulous as to the methods it adopted to achieve its ends. We have many Christian readers; we should be pleased to have their opinions on the subject.

Evidence of the way in which the Lord blesses those who serve him is seen in the fact that among recent wills are those of the Rev. J. A. Labouchere, of Sculthorpe, who left £23,368, and that of the Rev. R. J. Hayne, of Yelverton, who left £35,927. Neither of these gentlemen desired to leave this money behind them. In all probability they would have preferred to have taken it with them. But they held it as long as they could.

The British and Foreign Bible Society announces that ten new translations of the Christian Bible are in hand. The most attractive of the list is that of the "Mackenzie River Eskimos," who will shortly hear of the exploits of Noah and his Ark, Daniel's adventures in the lion's den, Jonah's fishy adventures, and other famous pieces of fiction.

The output of New Testaments has dropped from about a million and a quarter in 1918 to 700,223 in 1919, a decrease due to the stoppage of the war. This fact emerges from the Bible Society's report. It seems a pity that the good work should only flourish in war-time. Perhaps the Bible Society may be persuaded to bombard Ireland with their books; or even to shower them upon Poland.

A Southend-on-Sea councillor has built a church with his own hands. He would have been better employed building a house, for there are about fifty churches and chapels in the town—and few are crowded.

We are not protected from making mistakes, and when we do make them we have no objection to open confession. All along we have thrown grave doubts upon the alleged revival of religion in this country. But it does appear to have actually occurred. And the place of its appearance is Belfast. The newspapers report that men walking through certain quarters of the city are likely to be held up by a band of men and the question put, "What religion are you?" Then if the answer is not satisfactory a broken head may follow. If that is not a revival of religion, we should like to know where it is. The great question in Belfast is openly whether you are of the "right" religion or not. Nothing else seems to matter. If you are of the wrong religion, then houses are burned, lives taken, whisky shops rifled, and confusion to those of the "wrong" religion drunk in proper manner. There is a revival of religion in Belfast, and we readily admit that we were wrong when we questioned its existence.

Quite seriously, it is not now open to anyone to deny that one of the root causes of Ireland's present state is religion. Between an ignorant form of Roman Catholicism and a bigoted and almost equally ignorant Protestantism, the country is divided into two hopelessly warring camps. Whatever other cause of trouble exists, they are made the more formidable because of religion. And, as usual, the

very worst aspects of human nature comes out in connection with religion. There is hardly any other cause in Ireland that we cannot imagine leading Irishmen to act to each other as they are at present doing. The great need of Ireland at the moment is a good big dose of uncompromising Freethought. The power of the priest on the one hand, and of Irish Presbyterianism on the other must be broken. Many educated Irishmen see this, but unfortunately few care to speak out. One day the impetus will come, and then we shall see things. Christianity ruined Spain, and it would, if unchecked, work the same result elsewhere.

This is the way the Rev. Bruce Cornford, Vicar of St. Mathews, Soufhssea, eases his feelings—we quote from the *Daily Telegraph* of Sept. 1. "The British working man has just one single thing to offer to his country and to his God—work. He has neither wit, education, culture, manners, experience, co-operate sense, unselfishness, nor, speaking collectively, any of the great qualities that go to make a commonwealth. If he cannot be induced to work, neither his life nor his person are of the slightest use to either God or man." All we have to say is that this ignorant, senseless, lazy, non-social useless animal is the product of a Christian training that stretches over nearly fifty generations. And we would just like to ask the vicar, if he really believes what he says, does he think that any other system could have turned out a worse product after so long a rule? Or suppose the working man were to repeat the indictment, merely putting "parson" in place of "working man," how would he reply? Our columns are open for his answer.

It seems to be becoming a practice to give parsons free tickets for theatrical performances. Three hundred parsons were invited to see "The Unknown," and now we see that five hundred were invited to attend the Lyceum to see "My Old Dutch," which the management claims will kill divorce. Of course, it is all good advertisement, and that is all there is in it. The claim that it will kill divorce is not a bit more absurd than the high ethical pose that accompanies the free tickets and their use. But we must play the humbug, even at home—perhaps it keeps us in form for outside operations. And the *Daily Herald* remarks, "It was a very pleasant sight to watch these honest British gentlemen laughing and weeping in turns at the sentiment with which the piece is crammed." Perhaps we had better leave that without comment.

It is astonishing that the "Lord" cannot answer a simple question in the right way. An evangelist, preaching in a tent of Methodists in Springville, Indiana, asked: "If lightning were to strike this tent to-night, how many would be ready for it?" Soon after, says the newspaper, a flash of lightning struck the tent, killed two ministers who were on the platform, burned the preacher, and injured some of the worshippers. But that did not answer the question. The question was, how many were ready for death? The reply was to show how many a flash of lightning could kill. And when the Lord fails to understand a simple question of this kind there is small cause that there is so much confusion as to what are his real wishes.

What is the use, asks Mr. G. K. Chesterton, "of a modern man saying that Christ is only a thing like Atys or Mithras, when the next moment he is reproaching Christendom for not following Christ." We quite agree that it is little or no use. The policy is either cowardly or muddleheaded. And that is why we have always protested against that type of heresy which consists in rejecting Christianity, and then finding a number of alleged reasons for admiring Christ, or discerning unapproachable moral beauties in the teachings of Christ. The figure of Christ is a manufactured one, and the teachings were brought together to illustrate the figure. But what both the figure and the teachings actually mean varies from age to age in the minds of believers. "Christ" is

a theological manikin that may be used with all kinds of dress. Ultimately there is no more in this veneration of Christ by unbelievers than an illustration of the truth that when once the poison of Christianity has been in the blood there are very few who manage to cleanse themselves from it.

The Irish Roman Catholic Bishop, Dr. MacRory, on being asked whether he would denounce the murder of District Inspector Swanzy, said that to do so might imply that the murder was committed, and that to do so might imply that it was the act of one of his own flock, and for all he knew it might have been done by "Atheists or Nihilists." We leave the Nihilists to look after themselves, although we should have thought the facts were plain enough to satisfy all. The bishop's insinuation is quite what one would expect from a representative of the Roman Church, and it is as cowardly as it is vile. And, after all, there is nothing like Christianity for encouraging the shady side of a man's character when he is built that way.

The late Rev. W. R. Wykes-Finch, of Chaddesley Corbett, Worcestershire, left estate of the value of £63,736. Miss E. Maynard left £10,000 to the Board of Finance of the Church of England. The late Bishop of Durham left £15,905. Where will they all spend eternity?

The Rev. E. N. Gowing, speaking of the approaching Church Congress, to be held at Southend-on-Sea, said that the speakers will represent "the mind of the world." We notice that Democracy will be represented by such star turns as "Woodbine Willie," Mr. George Lansbury, and Mr. G. N. Barnes, and that tickets are 7s. 6d. each.

A London paper states that a series of panels depicting "From Barbarism to Christianity" have been placed in the chapel at Christ's Hospital School. In the next column was a paragraph saying that four small boys were birched for stealing jam.

The *Daily Telegraph*, which has been of late publishing some fearful and wonderful remarks on various historical matters, says in its issue for Sept. 1, and as an explanation in part of what it has the impudence to call the "rebellion" in Mesopotamia, that the Arabs are a superstitious people. And that is really funny. For a paper published in a country where millions believe that a bit of bread and a drop of wine can be turned by the incantations of a priest into the blood and flesh of "Our Lord," where the members of the Royal family still wander around wearing mascots, much as a savage might wear his charms, where it is still believed that prayers might procure rain, where such things as the resurrection of the dead, the birth of a man without the aid of a father, where prayers are offered for victory in war, and where we have stories of bleeding statues still current, for such a people to say of others that they are very superstitious, is a gem of the first water. It makes one realise the truth of Hobbes' definition—religion is superstition allowed, superstition is religion disallowed. That is a really valid, the only valid distinction between the two.

At a meeting of the British Association, Miss V. Hazlitt said "the theory that between the soul of man and that of the brute was a chasm which could not be bridged might be upset." Just so! The lady did not suggest, however, that this might be because neither the man nor the brute possessed "souls" big or little.

A new book bears the quaint title, "God's Price." We believe the price of Oriental delities varies from five shillings to five pounds. And some metal ones are made in Christian Birmingham.

The Bishop of Zanzibar will be a speaker at the forthcoming Church Congress. We wonder if he will wear the usual petticoats, or the war-paint fashionable in his diocese.

A "Freethinker" Sustentation Fund.

It is with no small sense of disappointment that I am compelled to once more re-open the Sustentation Fund. Writing last year, I expressed the hope that it would be the last time it would be necessary to make such an appeal for help; and when the subscription price of the paper was raised in January of this year, I was quite hopeful that all that would be left to clear up would be the deficit accruing from the nine months—April to December—while the paper was still at its old price.

But in these times it is impossible to be certain of anything very far ahead. Early in the year there was another sharp rise in the price of paper, which is now almost as dear and as scarce as it was at any time during the War, followed by two rises in wages. Together, these advances have quite swallowed up the advantage gained in other directions, and we are practically where we were. That is, unfortunately, the history of the past five years—one difficulty no sooner surmounted than another presenting itself.

The consequence of these happenings is that we find ourselves with a deficit on the year's working of about £300, and it is that amount which I am asking the friends of the paper to make good. I have not asked the Accountant, who has charge of the books, to prepare an interim balance-sheet, but it may be taken that within a very small margin, above or below, the £300 represents the actual loss.

When the whole of the circumstances are reviewed, I fancy the friends of the paper will be surprised that the deficit is not greater. Wages are at present 150 per cent. above the pre-war level, the cost of machining the paper is about 175 per cent. above, and paper is still five times the price it was at the beginning of 1915. Had not the position of the paper improved, and of the business generally, the loss would have been almost unbearable. And in view of all the circumstances I think it may safely be said that few journals of the same class have had to make so small demands upon their readers, and when it is borne in mind that it is costing to produce the *Freethinker* over a thousand a year more than it was at the opening of the War, there is cause for encouragement rather than the reverse in the present position. It means that when things return to anything like a normal basis, the paper will be self-supporting. Even if paper alone drops to double the pre-war price that result will have been achieved.

It should be said that the increased costs referred to include only the wages of compositors, cost of machining the paper, shop wages, and incidental expenses. In every direction the most careful economy has been practised, and I think I may say that neither in the direction of labour nor elsewhere have I spared myself. Had I known at the opening of the War all that the maintenance of the *Freethinker* would have involved, I might well have hesitated making myself responsible for the task, but having done so there is nothing for it but to go forward. I have never sought responsibility, but I have never shirked it.

It has been a hard, and sometimes almost a disheartening time, but the man who is looking for comfort or for an easy time would do well to choose some other task than that of a Freethought propagandist. And when the outlook was darkest there was also the feeling that the cause which the *Freethinker* represents had been steadily advanced by its unfailing and uncompromising advocacy. In the stormy period through which we have passed the *Freethinker* has

never lowered its flag nor adulterated its message. I am proud to think that to-day it is what it has always been—the unconquerable advocate of one of the greatest of causes.

In this five years of struggle I have always been sustained by the consciousness that I had behind me the good will and could count upon the active assistance of the fighting Freethinkers of Great Britain, and indeed wherever the paper goes—and there are few parts of the world where it does not penetrate—I have never had cause to doubt this, and have every confidence that this support can be counted on in the present as in previous circumstances.

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to me, and all letters addressed Editor, *Freethinker*, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4. Acknowledgment of all sums received will be made in the *Freethinker*. The first list will be published in next week's issue.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

To Correspondents.

W. OLNEY.—Thanks, but regret inability to use.

R. B. S.—Impossible to answer the question, "Is might always right?" in a paragraph. So much depends upon the use of "might." If its meaning is restricted to the use of physical force, the answer is clearly in the negative.

M. S.—The subject is rather too large for these columns, besides being a little outside our scope. There are numerous works dealing with the subject, in which you should find what you require.

J. FOTHERGILL.—We are pleased to learn that the South Shields Branch is getting the work organised in the district for the winter. Shall be pleased to hear of other Branches that are following your example.

A. RUSSELL (Grays).—Probably a vague sort of a Theism. It is a pity that men like Matthew Arnold were not more outspoken and thoroughgoing in their heresy, but anxiety to placate the powers that be is a common enough fault. Things will be better one day.

V. D. HADLEY (Bristol).—There is no vital difference that we know of. Mainly it is a difference of method, and decision is a matter of temperament. The N.S.S. represents the fighting wing of the Freethought movement, as is to be expected from a society founded by Charles Bradlaugh. All particulars of the Society will be sent if you write the General Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.

A. RUSSELL.—MSS. to hand with thanks. We shall always be pleased to receive any excerpts which you consider suitable to our columns.

R. WHEELING.—Let us know in what way you consider we could help, and we will see what can be done.

G. A. CAMPBELL.—We are sorry that we are unable to find room for your letter, but, as you will see, your main points are touched on by other writers, and we are obliged to exercise a selection on account of space.

R. L.—Thanks for suggestion, which we have already acted upon. We will see how far we can carry out the same policy in the provinces.

Mr. F. S. KEEBLE writes heartily endorsing a suggestion that there should be a badge for readers of the *Freethinker*, which would serve the purpose of recognition. There is already a badge for the N.S.S.—unfortunately out of stock at the moment—but we see no objection to one for the *Freethinker* if a suitable one were forthcoming. Perhaps we may receive a suggested design from one of our readers whose abilities lies in that direction.

A. S. CORRICK.—See reply to R. L. above. He had written us on the same matter.

W. COLLINS and T. GRIFFITHS.—We have no separate fund for the distribution of free literature, but we are sending on some which we hope will be suitable. We never like missing a chance of doing good in this direction.

A. THOUMINE.—Next week.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—

The United Kingdom.—One year, 17s. 6d.; half year, 8s. 9d.; three months, 4s. 6d.

Foreign and Colonial.—One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

Sugar Plums.

A fortnight ago we remarked that one of the worst features of the steadily increasing cost of printing was that it reduced the number of good books available and threw the people more upon newspapers, which as an exclusive means of education was just about the worst possible. Now we see that Mr. John Murray, the publisher, says that he is obliged to refuse a number of manuscripts because of the high cost of production, and that the books which he rejects are of the better order. That is no more than one would expect. A book that used to be issued for 5s. is now priced at 12s. 6d. to 15s., and, although most of them seem to be putting on much more than even the present high prices of materials and labour warrant, some portion of the rise is inevitable. But we do not sympathise much with the publishers. They have always looked after themselves, and during the war, what with selling all their pre-war stock at greatly enhanced prices, and, owing to the fewness of publications, getting rid of stock that was more or less unsaleable before the war, they have all done very well. As usual, it is the public that will suffer most. And if they are not aware that they are suffering, that will only make their real loss the greater.

But when Mr. Murray says that the books rejected on account of cost are the better ones, the remark has only a relative value. Some of the best books are rejected by publishers, not because of the cost, but because they will offend the publisher's patrons. Outsiders have little knowledge or conception of the difficulty of getting a book published that will speak out the truth concerning things, and particularly when it is the truth about religion. We are only speaking out of our own knowledge when we say that some of our leading publishers are simply afraid to publish works of that kind, the value of which they freely admit, because they may give offence. And if some publisher is daring enough to take the commercial risk, the boycott is at once set to work to prevent its sale, and so make the publisher more cautious in future. Between them, publishers and newspapers largely control the avenues of publicity, and they exert a powerful influence in preventing the public getting in touch with ideas which it is thought better for them not to know. British Christianity has not an official "Index," but it has an unofficial one, which is almost as effective, and ten times more hypocritical.

One of our speakers, who recently delivered a secular address at the funeral of a friend, was surprised to receive a fee from the local authorities as the officiating clergyman. The reason is that there is a set fee, varying in the different localities, for performing such services. The clergy have a most elaborate system of payments for their services. They begin at the cradle and only finish at the grave. And in the case of the Roman Catholic priest they do not finish there. For they have masses for the man *after* he is dead. One must be very wary to escape the clergy, in this world or the next.

Mr. A. R. Williams writes:—"While on the subject of Freethought and the stage, I may call attention to 'The God of Gods' produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in the autumn of 1919. I have not seen it staged elsewhere. Every Freethinker should see it for the strengthening of his soul, and every Theist should come from it sadder and wiser. Should you find space to consider it in the *Freethinker* I imagine that Birmingham Freethinkers would be specially interested." We have no knowledge of the play. Perhaps some of our readers are more fortunate. There is plenty of room for Freethought both on the legitimate stage and on the film.

We are pleased to see that the West Ham Branch has arranged a lengthy course of Sunday evening lectures, running right through the winter. The meetings will be held in the Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167, Romford Road, and will commence at seven o'clock. The first meeting will be held on September 19th, when Mr. A. D. McLaren will lecture on "Jesus Christ: Myth or History." Mr. McLaren has been lecturing rather busily of late on the London platform, and we have heard his lectures spoken of so highly that we strongly advise our East London readers to make it a point of being present on September 19th. It will also encourage the promoters of the course to have to put up a "house full" notice on the first evening.

The Barnsley Branch commences its next session on Tuesday evening, September 14th. The meetings will be held every fortnight in Irvings' Studio. The Secretary will lead off with an account of the N.S.S. Conference. Readers of the *Freethinker* who are not members are cordially invited.

We beg to thank all those who have quite voluntarily sent on the increased postage to cover the sum of their subscriptions.

"Onward, Christian Soldiers!"

I.

"Is that old myth not dead yet?" Dr. Oscar Levy asked with astonishment, when his publisher urged him to contradict the assumption that Nietzsche's "malignant" influence on German philosophy contributed to the world war. No one who has read the great philosopher's works could have been free from malice in disseminating this statement, and it could have gained credence only on ignorant soil. Nietzsche's clear thought and powerful analysis formed a menace to the reactionary forces everywhere, and, as few people take the trouble to read and understand any profound thinker, those interested in suppressing or misrepresenting the German master's teaching had little difficulty in gulling their hearers. Was not Nietzsche responsible for the doctrine of the "Super-man"? Had he not glorified conflict, and condemned the Christian virtues as the "values of a slave, decadent and unhealthy morality"? So the religious scum, which came to the top during the war, seized its opportunity to slander the thinker who had dared to expose it. Responsibility for the evil thing of which that fateful month of August, 1914, was delivered should be laid on the shoulders of the philosopher who was anathema to all Christian believers.

Innumerable have been the causes adduced for the war, varying according to the temperament, the circumstances and the knowledge of the speaker. Since the dawn of his reasoning faculty, man has sought to find answers to perpetually recurring "Whys." When he could not discover the true reason, owing

to lack of knowledge or superficial thinking, he contented himself with any plausible reply. In this way, the whole fabric of religion has been built up on man's guesses about the universe. These guesses have been proved by the growth of science to be false, but to re-adjust ideas is a disagreeable process, and involves trouble. Thus, a wrong idea persists mainly through inertia on the part of those who support it. . . . Man has now attained approximately correct notions about the world, but as regards psychology and sociology—sciences underlying the art of living—he is not far removed from the infantile stage of guessing. His curiosity prompts him to question, but his mental laziness and his ignorance of psychic phenomena lead him to accept replies which impose on no trained intelligence, and which, on examination, prove to contain only a modicum of truth. Unfortunately, an explanation thus accepted, however false, serves to silence all future enquiry, and takes its place as a dogma not to be criticised.

Such has been the case with the world war. Men's curiosity was aroused as to its origin. They were nonplussed in the face of an event of such magnitude. They wished to reduce it to known terms—to find an explanation for it. And, of course, publicists were ready and eager to provide the information—all the more, as a wrong direction given to such a quest would probably prevent people getting on the right scent.

So the "man in the street," who had to go to the Front, and to pay the taxes, was told that the war was due to the assassination of the Austrian Archduke, and *John Bull* posters "To Hell with Serbia," indicated whither his resentment should flow. That was the so-called first cause: but as Archdukes have been murdered before, and no European cataclysm has followed, it was further attributed to the dynastic ambition of the Kaiser and the soulless materialism of the German. This had the additional advantage of putting the enemy in a bad light, and, by comparison, of self-glorification. Witness Asquith's pronouncement, "I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy with a clearer conscience and a stronger conviction that it is fighting not for aggression, not for the maintenance of its own selfish interests, but in defence of principles the maintenance of which is vital to the civilisation of the world." Sir, the vision of the countless skeletons in the battlefields of Europe grinning at the irony and hollowness of your words when contrasted with the actual facts is a sufficient commentary on them.

As time passed, these reasons were refined. The necessity of preserving the balance of power was adduced, with the corollary that Germany was overpopulated. Among a people unaccustomed to clear thinking this passed muster, only a few pausing to ask why, seeing that every able human being is a potential source of wealth, increased numbers should make war inevitable.

These academic "reasons" served for a period. The violation of Belgian neutrality was skilfully manœuvred to rouse enthusiasm and to deaden doubts. Its threat to our "sanctified" island was stage-managed by hordes of agents provocateurs whose reading of diplomatic history was so ridiculed by George Bernard Shaw in his historic broadside. What young man with a spark of honour could

possess "a soul so dead" to chivalry as to fail to respond to the flaming poster of a Belgian woman and child fleeing in terror from their burning homestead? Thought was silenced; the question "Why" was answered by an appeal to sentiment, and war reaped its harvest of death, together with maimed and broken lives.

But the years rolled on. The soldiers in Flanders and the thinkers at home began to doubt the wisdom of reprisals on behalf of Belgium, and again that persistent "Why" came to the fore. The previous answers had lost their efficacy, and were regarded with some impatience, much as children who have reached the adolescent stage of development look with contempt on the evasive replies formerly given them by adults. Economic grounds were first hinted at, and then openly discussed. Mr. Lloyd George's fervent appeals to the Deity to confirm the disinterestedness of the British rulers did not carry so much weight. The analysis of economic phenomena by Secerov showed how the replacement of primary commodities (agricultural products) by the over-production of secondary commodities (steel and iron) inevitably led to war. The sinister activities of financial groups revealed by the Russian revolutionaries and their publication of the secret Treaties left no doubt that the main object of the war was loot! But the previous "explanations" had done their work, and muddled the minds of the mass of people. And alongside this policy of "peaceful penetration" the publicists kept up a campaign of atrocity-mongering, with Nietzsche as chief villain.

FRANCES PREWETT.

(To be concluded.)

A Salvation Bubble.

When men propose to blow a bubble,
Lord, how many will subscribe for soap.

—Hood.

THE Salvation Army has always been run on what are called "up-to-date, commercial principles." Although professedly the main object of the Army is to secure the Salvation of its followers "against the wrath to come" of an angry God in the next world, those who run the concern, whether in this country, America or anywhere else where the Army has a considerable following, are on the look out for the best advertisement they can get for their organization from a purely worldly point of view, whether it be the patronage of the King and the Royal Family, or the approving smile of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The late William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, had a good eye for the main chance. When I first heard him about forty years ago, he used to hold forth in a small hall in the Mile End Road. A tall, powerfully built man, of middle age, with a strong rugged countenance, a hook-nose, a long black beard turning grey, he stood before his credulous followers and proclaimed the doctrine of "blood and fire," with intense earnestness. He was not a brilliant speaker by any means, but his manner was attractive and his style dogmatic, and he soon gathered round him a considerable following. At that time, the Army was decidedly unpopular. As the members of it marched through the streets, accompanied by a band and singing hymns to well-known secular tunes, they were frequently met with derision or hostility, not only in London, but in most of the large towns in the

Provinces, and the police often had to accompany the Army for its protection. The advertisement got in this way was the breath of life to such a movement.

When the Army had grown to considerable proportions, "General" Booth formulated a scheme for getting rid of the "submerged tenth." All he wanted he said, was a million of money for his purpose, and in a few years, all the miserable vagrants and the wretched degenerate members of the community would be turned into decent and respectable members of society. The money was collected, but the "submerged tenth" remains, and if the Government does not do something very soon to stem the tide of unemployment, "the submerged tenth" may become a very unpleasant section to deal with in the future. This, however, by the way. The Salvation Army has become popular, and I now propose to describe the latest method of advertising adopted by the American section of this movement. Whoever is at the head of it in America has grasped the value of the cinema as a medium for advertising its wares, and in a film now being shown at various picture palaces, entitled "The Fires of Faith," is able to present the most attractive features of the movement to the great masses of the people for their approval and support. A few weeks ago, I saw this film at one of the most handsome and commodious picture theatres in London. The writer of the scenario, however, has very little skill in dramatic construction, and the story, such as it is, is very incoherent, and consists of a series of episodes strung rather loosely together, in which the heroine, who is called by the delightfully humorous name of "Apple-pie Lizzie," is rescued from a life of dissipation by the Army, and the hero, who left a meeting that he attended in London in disgust, gets kidnapped by a gang of hooligans and transported to America. The opening pictures give us an account of the early days of the movement in London, with the late "General" Booth at its head—and then we are switched off to America, where all the leading characters find their way, somehow or other. We are then informed on the screen that the Salvation Army took an active interest in the great War from the first, and as soon as the American nation decided to take part in it, the Salvation Army resolved to "do its bit" for the glory of humanity. Then follow some startling and realistic scenes in which we see how the American soldiers, apparently not all Salvationists, got the Germans into some tight corners, and bayoneted them without mercy. We are also shown how they brought down aeroplanes, and how members of the Salvation Army rushed on the scene like members of the Army Medical Corps, and rendered first aid.

During these episodes, I noticed that supporters of the Salvation Army among the audience applauded the massacre of Germans just as lustily as they did the more humane actions of those who helped to bind up the wounds of the enemy. Personally, I could not, in imagination, see Jesus sticking men through with a bayonet, or firing upon aeroplanes, but apparently the followers of the meek and lowly carpenter of Nazareth, could see nothing inconsistent with the teachings of their Master, who bade them "turn the other cheek when one was smitten" in these proceedings. And so the film goes on to show how the hero rescued the heroine under very trying circumstances, and when this has been done often enough, the War terminates, with victory for the Allies. Of course, everybody applauds most vociferously; all the members of the audience have had a good time, have witnessed wonderful pictures representing a play in which thousands of people have taken part, the Sal-

vation Army, as an organization, has had a very fine advertisement, everybody seems satisfied when we rise to make our departure. But as I was coming through the hall, I met a young sailor who had just witnessed the show, to whom I remarked that "according to the film, it appears that the Salvation Army won the war." "No, Sir," said he, in a tone expressive of contempt, "I think it shows the Americans won the War, which I certainly deny."

But really what it does show is that the Salvation Army has taken advantage of the cinema to blow another big bubble, and it only requires a prick from the keen blade of reason to cause it to burst, as hundreds of other bubbles have burst before in the history of this little world of ours.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Italian Freethinkers and the Roman Jubilee.

For our Italian friends Monday, the twentieth of this month, is to be a day given over to rejoicing. It is the fiftieth anniversary of the entrance of Italian soldiers into Rome, the aim and result of which, as we all know, were the suppression of the temporal power of the Papacy, and the foundation of Italian unity. It is kept as a national holiday in Italy, and among the various enthusiastic and picturesque manifestations of the Italian spirit there will be one which we think is likely to be more impressive and more characteristic of the national temper on its intellectual and moral side than the others. It will take the form of a procession of Italian freethinkers and patriots to the *Porta Pia* to commemorate the happy deliverance of a whole people from the paralyzing grip of Holy Church, and its rebirth to mental and social freedom.

In Italy, as everywhere else, freethought has not had all the success it hoped for. It is still a long way from complete victory; but the war has left in men's minds a leaven of discontent with things as they are, and before another decade passes we may have made gigantic strides towards that ideal of human perfectibility which was the guiding star of all the more generous spirits of the eighteenth century.

We translate below an address to Italian freethinkers, printed in the official organ of the "Giordano Bruno" Society. It gives us the real meaning of the commemoration, it shows us that the Papacy was building its hopes on the triumph of German vandalism as a condition of the re-establishment of the temporal power of Romish priestcraft. And the worst of it all is that there are still people base enough to deplore the success of the forces of rationalism. This is the eloquent appeal of our Italian friends

AN APPEAL TO ITALIAN PATRIOTS AND FREETHINKERS.

"It is but a little while now to the fateful 20th September, 1920, and the amount of work before us is still enormous. We desire earnestly to make a complete success of the work we are doing, and so win the esteem of our members and sympathisers throughout the length and breadth of Italy. But our duty will still be a noble but barren affirmation if it is limited to a mere rhetorical celebration of a fact in itself important; but infinitely more important if we make it a symbol of the triumph of our non-clerical and humane civilisation. For us, indeed, the 20th September is an act of faith, purified in the memory of a great event in history; it is the synthesis of a glorious past which has a seminal action on the present, and is a guarantee for the future. It is the symbolic apotheosis of ideas rather than of facts. It is the idea of a United Country finding in a free Rome a counteracting influence to the sinister dealings of Guelph separatists, dealings which are discovered in the Italian popular party by the demands for new pontifical guarantees and so-called communal self-government. It is the fundamental idea of Italian history, to which there was, and is still, one obstacle, the antagonism between peoples differentiated by Austrian, Papal, and Bourbon servitude. It is the idea of the eternal antithesis between Italy and the Vatican, be-

tween civilisation and the Catholic Church; an antithesis by which we regard with the same disdain the clerical movement in favour of temporal power, and the Church's attack on the lay State (school, family, parliament). It is the idea of a conflict between freethought and dogmatic superstition, a conflict not merely local but world-wide.

Who, then, would dare to restrict the meaning of September 20th, 1870, to the mere liberation of Rome from the tenacious tyranny of the Pontificat? The battering down of the *Porta Pia* avenged the martyrs of Roman liberty and the martyrs of thought—it clipped once for all the sharp claws of the clerical beast of prey; it gave to Italy the sanction of supreme right. These facts are vastly important, but we see the ideas. We are not making a celebration, but putting up a fight. Our aspirations must be registered, not in vague, if moving, ovations, but in deeds.

The past is the future's point of departure. That is why in an essentially Italian festival we appeal to international solidarity, that is why we say not to Italians only but to all men: your duty is to labour in the cause of country, of humanity, of a civilisation which shall be non-clerical and democratic.

For us the 20th September is the downfall of the temporal power of the popes and the return of Rome to Italy. It will not be exactly a pleasant day for Benedict XV., and for our political masters who are in a conciliatory mood. It will horrify the present municipal papal council, for after voting £10,000 for the celebration, and electing a committee of well-known people which, by the way, never had a meeting, they thought they had quietly closed the whole affair.

The Hon. Soderini must be commended for his frankness. If no one else is sincere, he is, at least when he writes: 'It is no desire of terrestrial domination that moves him (the Pope) but the certainty that otherwise no one would believe in his independence. It is not the Pope who wants Rome, it is the whole world, which, for its own tranquillity, wishes that the city should belong to the Pope. And if the Pope makes himself the echo of this desire, he is actuated by love for his country. . . .'

How charmingly simple are the minds of these politicians!

G. U.

Correspondence.

FREETHOUGHT ON TYNESIDE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Our work has been advanced a stage; we are arranging for Mr. J. T. Lloyd to be in this district from October 17th till October 24th. It is proposed to deliver lectures in South Shields and Hebburn or Jarrow on these dates respectively. Lectures will be arranged for outlying places, as far as possible, for the intervening weekdays. There has been some expressed desire for an extension of Freethought propaganda in North-East Durham. Will all interested please make an effort and endeavour to make this venture a decided success. Mr. Lloyd has promised us the dates; everything else remains to be done. Will all concerned kindly communicate with me, either by writing or personally, at 3, Thompson Street, Tyne Dock.

J. FOTHERGILL,

Hon. Sec. South Shields Branch.

BIRTH CONTROL.

SIR,—Your contributor, Frances Prewett, in an article, seems to be rather inconsistent.

While admitting the great benefits derived from the practice of birth control in Holland, where it has Government sanction, she proceeds to say that such a remedy for poverty and misery is only a "second best," and that "nature cannot be cheated."

Well, I venture to say, sir, that the "lofty ideals" of a platonic nature which she advocates are not for ordinary men and women. I am quite sure that the "masculine expediency" which is sneered at is resorted to in most cases out of pure love for wives whose husbands recognise that they are something more to them than mere breeding machines.

And to say that "nature cannot be cheated" is surely incorrect. Nature is continually cheated in a thousand ways, and with untold benefit to mankind. It should be almost superfluous to say as much to a Freethinker.

I am led to the conclusion that anyone who asserts that "the fully conscious woman will reject Mrs. Sanger's solution" speaks in ignorance of the progress this movement is making, and which will ultimately become world-wide. A platonic solution may do for the angels—not for men and women.

All praise to Mrs. Sanger in her noble endeavour to lessen the miseries inflicted upon humanity by blind Nature.

JOHN BREESE.

WOMEN AS SAVIOURS.

SIR,—I was sorry to find that the article under the above head in the *Freethinker* of the 29th August, beginning so splendidly, should end in a wail of despair. I really think your lady contributor is needlessly despondent.

Surely the great gains now being admitted on all sides by control of births must outweigh any amount of purely speculative psychic and spiritual harm which your contributor seems to fear. The fact is, we know really nothing about the woman's view on sex. Man has bullied, swindled, and penalized her on sex questions for so long that it is even more difficult to get her natural feelings and instincts on this subject than it is to test her religious beliefs. Your correspondent foreshadows the woman of the future as one who will fight down the sex life to the last extremity. I doubt this because it depends too much on when man agrees to the idea, and that time will be, in all probability, never. It is also quite a speculation as to whether the majority of women would favour such a course, although they are at present so much under the man-code idea that a ballot on the subject would be quite unreliable. The reception of *Married Love* by our courageous writer, Dr. Marie Stopes, supports my contention however.

One other point: In fairness, Dr. C. V. Drysdale should have been named as the one unswerving exponent of the population question; Mr. J. M. Robertson is now more a "passive acquiescer" in it.

Y. C.

SIR,—Frances Prewett says women have an instinct against neo-Malthusianism. Some women have. So have some men. But all instincts are not good. We instinctively throw up our arms when drowning, and drown all the sooner. The instinct of shrinking from sex-pleasures, as unclean and degrading except when unavoidable, is no older and no better than the religious instinct of which it is part. The savage thinks someone like a man makes the lightning. This someone must be like the chief of the tribe, only still bigger and stronger. The savage chief is jealous; he does not like his subjects to be too happy and prosperous without his express leave. All bullies are like that. So the god must be jealous, too; and as you never know when he is looking, the savage gains a habit of thinking of happiness as dangerous and evil. Hence the Greek myths of gods punishing prosperous men for being prosperous. Hence also the Evil Eye, to escape which the Italian mother clothes her baby in rags. Hence, too, the instinct against sex-pleasures, which, being the keenest of all, are most likely to annoy the magnified savage chief. If the Benevolent Almighty of modern theory had been known 10,000 years ago, our forefathers might have thought our excess of sexual inclination was a generous gift from him to add happiness to life. But the gods of those days were all bullies, to be propitiated by humble sacrifice (of oneself or someone else). So all pleasure then known came to be regarded as sinful; and so little logic has man, and so much inherited instinct, that people still shrink from them, while believing in a kindly god or no god at all.

But it is almost comic to find a modern Freethinker thus sharing the faith of the believers in the Evil Eye, and casting around for some intelligible reason for her attitude. "Nature cannot be cheated by short cuts." Can't it! Every useful invention in the world, from clothes to wireless telegraphy, is a short cut and a cheating of nature. The world is very sick, no doubt; but the microbe of the world's chief disease is Frances Prewett's ideals.

C. HARPER.

"THE FLOWER HABIT."

SIR,—Under the above heading in the *Freethinker* for August 22nd is a complaint of the waste of flowers at funerals. There is truth in the indictment, but much might be said from the sentimental, to saying nothing of the commercial, side of the question, with neither of which I am concerned at the moment, but would call attention to the bad "habit" which has sprung up during the past few years of designating nouns as "habits." Some time ago I read in a New York paper the following choice specimen: "The Princess Maud has contracted the mandolin habit." Now we have "the cigarette habit," "the kinema habit," "the motor-car habit." Next, I suppose, we shall see "the corpse habit," "the coffin habit," and "the cemetery habit."

It is deplorable to note the decadence of the English language, e.g., the use of the word "Britisher" for "Briton," "proposition" for "undertaking," "demobbed" for "demobilised," and so on *ad infinitum*, while ungrammaticisms, errors in spelling, misquotations, and silly slang are conspicuous in our newspapers and periodicals every day, and it is a wonder that editors do not "contract" the "w.p.b." and "b.p. habits" more extensively.

J. KENNARD.

WHAT IS ATHEISM?

SIR,—Mr. Wells' challenge to Atheists is superfluous. He asks why the Atheist does not "call himself by some name which states what he is, instead of using a term which states what he isn't." In nearly every case, he does. He calls himself a Humanitarian or Socialist or Internationalist, which Mr. Wells will not deny are positive terms; and, after these, to mark himself off from the adherents of orthodox religions, he calls himself an Atheist.

Mr. Wells' quarrel with Atheism is primarily a matter of terminology. He chooses to hypostasize the moral impulse of man as "God," and to say "Atheism" when he really means rascality. Very well; but he should not complain when the ordinary Christian in the street and the ordinary Atheist in the street misunderstand him. The dispute, however, is more than a mere verbal one. In using the terms "God" and "Atheism" as he does, he is really playing false to the modern spirit in its secular quarrel with authoritarian reaction. From the eighteenth century on, at any rate, Theism and Christianity have stood for monarchy, clericalism, privilege, property, and persecution, while Atheism and Humanitarianism have stood for the republic, liberty, equality, and fraternity. The men of God have been such as Hegel, Newman, Bismarck, Pius X., and Pobiedonostseff; the men against God have been such as Shelley, Marx, Owen, Clifford, and Kropotkin. I do not ask on which side Mr. Wells is. As an old reader and admirer, I know. But why is he ashamed of his party?

Napoleon was not an Atheist. "Ne me parlez pas des hommes sans Dieu," said he. "J'ai connu les hommes sans Dieu en 1793. On ne gouverne pas ces hommes-là; on les fusille." In that saying, this tyrant summed up all tyrants.

ROBERT ARCH.

SIR,—What a trial Atheists and Atheism are to Mr. H. G. Wells. If they would only try to understand these terms as well as Mr. Wells does it would save him so much trouble and annoyance. It is such a bore to have to leave winding off *The History of the World* to an admiring audience like a five-reel cinema tragi-comedy drama. With a finality that to me as an Atheist does not appear to be final, Mr. Wells says: "Atheism means nothing less and nothing more than the denial of any sort of God in the universe." Atheism is, as Mr. Wells insists, a negative term. But not negative in the sense of absolute denial; only in the sense of having no knowledge of what the term God signifies. And to every particular definition of God the Atheist is able to advance facts which refute it—facts which are not manufactured for the occasion, so that in a sense Atheism is an impersonal attitude. The Atheist would be merely dogmatic in saying that in an infinite universe there might not be something somewhere of a God. But it is for the Theist to reveal his God and prove his existence. "Fundamental" is prolix. Either a man is an Atheist or he is

not. There are no varieties nor degrees of Atheism, as an Atheist he does not believe in a God. If he believes at all, he is a Theist. Atheism and true social service and all sorts of good things may not have a necessary connection, but, as Bacon says, and he seems to understand Atheism better than Mr. Wells, it "leaves a man to common-sense philosophy and natural piety." Atheism, with a capital "A," may not be so muddle-headed after all. The Atheist's free mind, interesting itself in these practical things, is freethought. His negative attitude is restricted as Atheist to the God idea. Apart from this, he may be, and usually is, a very positive Freethinker. And he does not, Mr. Wells notwithstanding, by "faith disbelieve," but by common sense and philosophy. There is nothing in the term "Atheist" or "Freethinker" by derivation or in practice that can excuse Mr. Wells' conclusion. The Atheist does not lose his temper if his critics either cannot or will not understand his position. "Freethinker" is, or ought to be, comprehensive enough for Mr. Wells to avoid misunderstanding. There is certainly nothing in the term either in derivation or practice that allows "a considerable variety of scoundrels" to be swept in under the same comprehensive negative.

M. BARNARD.

IS A BELIEF IN A SUPERNATURAL POWER UNIVERSAL?

SIR,—One of the chief arguments of Theists is their allegation that all mankind, down to the lowest savages, has some sort of belief, however crude and rudimentary, in a deity, which I also had taken for granted. At a meeting, however, which I lately attended, a missionary from Patagonia affirmed that the tribes in that region hold no such creed at all, but are absolutely desitute of all notion of a supreme being.

EVACUSTES A. PHIPSON.

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