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**Views and Opinions.**

**Do We Desire a Future Life?**

Take a hundred people haphazard and ask them, "Do you believe in a future life?" and it is probable that in all but a very few cases the answer would be in the affirmative. Brought up in a religious atmosphere, amid surroundings in which very few question accepted teachings, and quite unused to any form of self-analysis, the majority express themselves in accordance with their training and in terms of the current theology. And, naturally, we have a literary tradition which enforces what theology teaches because it has developed under its shadow, and to some extent echoes its teaching. Thus it is quite common to find in general literature the note that in some way a future life completes and embellishes this one, and also that those who do not believe are robbed of a comfort that others possess, and, what is more, feel it to be so. A groundless assumption is followed by an impertinence, for the next step is that those who profess to have no desire for a future life are abnormal, or, at best, only illustrating a passing phase of mind or temper. And yet I venture to say that the abnormality belongs, not to those who are without desire for a future life, but to those who fancy that the whole meaning of this life is to be found in some other state of existence. Moreover, I think it can be shown that an examination of the mind of the average man or woman will prove that there exists no real desire for a future life, little genuine belief in it, and no evidence for its possessing any power of comfort, so long as we separate it from various factors with which it has no necessary connection.

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**The Direction of Desire.**

Let me commence with myself. So far as I am able to understand my own frame of mind I have no conscious desire for any life beyond the grave. I am conscious of a desire for life, but no more. On the other hand, I am not conscious of any feeling against it; my mind is simply a blank, or, if I permit myself to speculate on the matter, then I can conceive circumstances under which a perpetual existence might easily become a curse, or, at best, a burden. And in this I can discover not the slightest cause for regret. Mentally, I can no more conceive existence after I am dead than I

can picture myself living before I was born. I can, on the other hand, quite picture the growth of what is to me an abnormal state of mind in either direction. Or if it is said that there is a desire to live again, not to gratify some purely selfish feeling, but that we may meet again those whom we have loved here, I can only say—still keeping to the territory of my own consciousness, which as evidence is quite as good as that of anyone else's—that I am not at all conscious of a desire to meet anyone in some other world. I do desire most strongly to meet them and be with them here; I regret most keenly the separation caused by death, but it is only by a misunderstanding of frustrated feeling that this desire is brought in as evidence for a future life. All that I am really conscious of is a desire for the companionship and affection of certain people. But it is quite gratuitous to argue from this a desire for communion after death.

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**The Indifference of Man.**

To this the reply may be made that I am only avowing myself to be a kind of human monstrosity, and therefore my feelings offer no criterion by which to judge others. Well, my whole argument here is that, far from being unique, I am perfectly normal, and that if other people will only analyse their states of mind and note their direction and application they will discover they are much the same as I am. We all have the same feelings, and fundamentally the same desires; it is in our beliefs concerning them, and in our interpretation of them that we differ most widely. And education may easily develop a quite morbid way of looking at life, or encourage a quite unwarrantable belief concerning the true nature of our states of mind. And it must certainly be admitted that at all events average humanity in its normal moments shows no overpowering interest in the question of survival. In social circles it is voted bad form to be always harping on the future state, and a discussion on death and immortality would be like a wet blanket in most gatherings. Thousands of preachers during their professional hours harp upon the future life, and upon its overwhelming importance. And yet the people to whom they preach show no greater interest in it than those who do not believe, and in the presence of death show no more fortitude and no less grief than those who have avowedly ceased to believe. Even the preachers themselves are driven to admit that their followers live far more for things of the flesh and the world than they do for those of the spirit and of eternity. To even rouse a fervid state of mind concerning a future life something unusual and startling is needed, or a morbid love of the mysterious must be excited, or one must be shaken out of his ordinary frame of mind by the impact of a great and overwhelming sorrow. Normally, man does not act as though he is longing for a future life. He is content, rightly and healthily content with the present.

**Theory versus Fact.**

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Now this state of things would be impossible if there existed any real desire for a future life. In every other direction we can estimate the strength of a desire by

the efforts made to secure gratification. We know, for example, that men desire wealth, power, position, fame, because we see them suffering any amount of fatigue and risking all sorts of dangers in quest of them. We cannot observe men doing anything whatever to gratify this alleged craving for a future life. The announcement of a new goldfield sends thousands hurrying to take advantage of the discovery. The announcement of a new argument for immortality leaves nearly everyone unaffected. They are content to express an easy-going assent to the belief, but it is never made the ground of applied effort or deliberate action, save in a rare case here and there, and then other believers are the first to allege insanity as the cause. If men really did possess a desire for another life, there should be the same eagerness for gratification that one finds in connection with other things. Life here would really and truly be, as the older theologians used to preach, a burden, and people would receive their call to another world as a welcome relief. But this, again, is not the case. Far from that being so, if one tells the most fervent believer that he looks as though he is going "home" he favours you with anything but a look of relief, and his first call afterwards is, not on the parson, but on the doctor. And even the clergy resent nowadays the charge that their chief business is to prepare people for another world. Practically, they also say that the next world will take care of itself. That is an admission that the desire does not exist. If it did, the clergy would be looked upon as benefactors instead of being treated with good-humoured toleration.

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#### The Pressure of Life.

The nature of life and of social evolution supplies a very valid reason for all this. In the first place, all development takes place in relation to a particular environment, and it is a simple impossibility for a feeling or an instinct or a desire to develop that is to bring us into relation with an environment to which the organism has no knowledge whatever. Whatever future is implied in animal development, it is in relation to a future that exists this side of the grave, not in relation to a future of which members of the species have no experience. Second, desires and feelings, like physical structures, are developed in proportion to their importance and utility, and it is quite certain that no desire can develop that is in direct conflict with the "will to live." But a race of people with whom death was an ever-present subject of contemplation, and in whom there existed a strong desire for a future life, would be a race so far enfeebled in the struggle for existence. Death would loom larger than life; it would become, as Christian theology has taught, all-important in comparison with this life, and the practical results would be disastrous. It is not a conviction of the certainty of death and the hereafter, but of the value of life, that is of consequence in the life history of the race. If death were regarded with terror the nerve of action would be paralyzed. And if the future life were regarded as desirable, the present one would be dwarfed, while the value of actions would be estimated, not by their social importance, but by their bearing upon a future state of existence. We can see both instances illustrated in the lives of individuals, and in that form society can stand it, as it can stand particular cases of insanity or crime or disease. But while society can afford these things as expressions of individual peculiarities or abnormalities, no society could exist were they to become general. And the net result of it all has been that while there has been both a literary and a theological tradition of the importance and the desire for a future life, there are actually few things about which men and women have bothered less. While all religions have been striving to develop in man a desire for a

future life, natural and social selection have kept it weak and fitful in the interests of the species. True, the thought of death can never be suppressed. It may be always in evidence, but our feelings concerning it are ultimately governed by the exigencies of life.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

### "Give Christianity a Chance."

CANON A. C. DEANE contributed an article, with the above title, to the *Sunday Pictorial* for October 10. Written by a dignitary in the Anglican Church, it is certainly a most remarkable production. It is maintained by the Hon. Mrs. Gell, in her interesting little book, *The Menace of Secularism*, that about the year 200 the Christian Church existed in this country. This is doubted by most scholars; but it is an established fact that Christianity was introduced at the close of the fifth century. It was in the year 597 that Augustine and his chanting band of forty monks landed on this island, and founded the Church at Canterbury. Without a doubt, such was the origin of the English Church, but there may have been a Welsh Church at a somewhat earlier date, though it must be admitted that even in Wales Christian inscriptions cannot be traced farther back than the middle of the fifth century. In any case, it is perfectly safe to assert that Christianity has been the dominant religion in this country for at least fourteen centuries; and yet, in this twentieth century, Canon Deane coolly asks us to give it a chance. Would not a period of fourteen hundred years afford an adequate chance for any religion? If during so long a time it did not succeed in winning the world and conforming it to its own ideals, is it not self-evident that it would have been weighed in the balance and found wanting? The Canon says:—

For a long while now we have tried organizing our national life—social, political, commercial, industrial—on a secular basis. And a pretty mess we have made of it! It would be a waste of time to go into details. All of us know the result only too well. To-day things are wrong—hideously, disastrously wrong.

The reverend gentleman is quite right when he states that things are hideously, disastrously wrong, but he is equally mistaken when he holds the attempt to organize them on a secular basis responsible for their desperate condition. Besides, does not the "we" spoken of include himself and the rest of the clergy, together with all other so-called Christian workers? What have all these people been doing all the time? Have they ever even tried to set things right?

Canon Deane cannot be ignorant of the fact that the present is the offspring of the past. To-day's problems are the inheritance that has descended to us from our Christian ancestors. Most of these problems are concerned with the relations between capital and labour. From the reign of Edward I. to the reign of George IV. about forty Acts of Parliament came into force, the direct object of which was to keep labour in subjection. Capital it was that legislated against the gaining of any degree of independence by its tool, labour. During the whole of that period labour was in a state of bondage to capital. A workman was only one step removed from a literal slave. He was free to work or not to work, and he could ask for an increase of wages; but if two or three joined in requesting an increase of pay or the shortening of hours, severe punishment was inflicted, such as imprisonment for any time not exceeding three months, or hard labour in the house of correction for two calendar months. The Acts against the organization of labour were popularly known as Combination Laws. By whom were they passed? By Christian employers in the English Parliament. Such laws were bitterly resented by the workers, and strong protests were issued against them

by prominent Freethinkers, such as Francis Place, Robert Owen, and Richard Carlile; but where stood the churches? Apart, in cowardly silence, while individual Christians, noted for their piety, like William Wilberforce, championed the Combination Laws. What we wish the Canon to realize is that things are hideously and disastrously wrong because they were made so long ago under direct Christian influence. What is being attempted at present is the redress of wrongs and the removal of evils for the existence of which the Churches are largely responsible; and nothing can be truer than that life can be satisfactorily organized only on a secular basis, for any other basis is but a phantom of the imagination. Surely, the reverend gentleman will admit that the only basis upon which industrial difficulties can be finally settled is that of justice, and justice between man and man is impossible in the absence of the sense of fundamental equality. What we are experiencing just now is the struggle to secure justice and fair play between employer and employed, and in the nature of things it is bound to be a painfully severe struggle, for as Professor Thorold Rogers truly says:—

I contend that from 1563 to 1824 a conspiracy, concocted by the law and carried out by the parties interested in its success, was entered into to cheat the English workman of his wages, to tie him to the soil, to deprive him of hope, and to degrade him into irremediable poverty (*Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, p. 398).

Canon Deane says that we "are out" to "vindicate the claims of labour," and at the same time to "uphold the rights of property." The chief property is the land, and those who lay claim to it are called "noble," and addressed as "lords," though the Bible declares that human possession of land is divinely disallowed. Is the Canon "out" to uphold the landlords, and at the same time to "vindicate the claims of labour"? Be that as it may, the point is that, according to him, the aims which he mentions and pronounces "excellent in their degree and place," are all to be "made subsidiary to one central purpose." He says:—

Suppose that all of us "were out"—not incidentally and occasionally, but continuously and openly to do the will of God? Suppose that at the time of the next industrial crisis (the present one is by no means over yet!), when representatives of rival views were met for conference, they began by kneeling down for two minutes in prayer? Suppose they placed themselves consciously in the presence of God, and asked that, beyond all else, they should speak in his spirit and aim at accomplishing his will? Would that make no difference to the result?

That is the merest, most contemptible cant. The reverend gentleman must be aware that kneeling down for two minutes in prayer would make no difference whatever to any serious result. Has it made any difference at religious gatherings when questions were discussed upon which divergent views were held? Did it prevent the right reverend bishops from coming to blows at the Council of Nicea in 325, when the first Christian Emperor occupied the chair? It is a notorious fact that theological controversies in all ages have been the bitterest and most acrimonious of all controversies. That is only an aside. The central and most vital point is that the will of God is a pure myth, an invention of the theologians to cover a mountain of ignorance. It is a trick of the pulpit to father all its delusions upon the Divine Will. Not long ago a preacher solemnly declared that it was a violation of the will of God to go to the theatre, or to take part in a dance. God's will and spirit are invariably identical with the will and spirit of the person speaking in their name. Besides, it is probable, or at least conceivable, that many, possibly the majority, of representatives at such an industrial conference would not be believers in

God at all, in which case the Canon's supposition would appear rather absurd. He frankly admits that at present his suggestion is both absurd and impossible.

Canon Deane insists upon putting all possible emphasis upon the proposition that "Christianity—real Christianity—has not been tried yet." What a sad reflection upon the Church believed to have been founded by the Divine Redeemer, who promised to dwell in and guide it by his Spirit to the end of time, and upon all its ministers, past and present, whom he is said to have appointed! The Gospel Jesus, all his apostles, and all subsequent divines must have been utterly deluded persons, if Canon Deane's teaching is true. Real Christianity has been in hiding somewhere all through the centuries, and Canon Deane has just discovered it, and exclaims, "Come, now, here it is, give it a chance." Unfortunately, however, he does not tell us what it is, or wherein it differs from the Christianity of history, which has been tried, and proved a dismal failure. Indeed, so complete is its failure, that the Canon does not hesitate to say:—

The blunt truth is that to-day this is not a Christian country. It is, certainly, a country which contains a very large number of sincere Christians. But a Christian country is one which consciously organizes itself with direct reference to God. That, as yet, we have not begun to do.

That may be true, though it contradicts the opinion of an overwhelming majority of the people. Not only clergymen from the pulpit, but judges from the bench, have proudly affirmed that this is a Christian country, in which it is a crime to make any attack on the Christian religion. But, on the assumption that Canon Deane's opinion is true, we ask, who is to blame for the present state of things? Jesus is reported to have said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself!" Writing of Jesus, Paul declares that "he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Paul announces further: "And when all things have been subjected unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subjected to him that did subject all things unto him, that God may be all in all." How does the Canon explain the non-fulfilment of such glowing prognostications? Why has the uplifted Jesus failed to draw all men unto himself? Why has he not reigned and put all his enemies under his feet? Is it from lack of adequate power? To unbelievers the explanation is easy and simple enough, but to ministers of the Word it must be stupendously difficult, even impossible. Will Canon Deane inform us *why* real Christianity has never been tried? What have God and Christ been doing during the last nineteen centuries? Has the Holy Ghost never entered the Church, as Jesus predicted that he would?

J. T. LLOYD.

## Shelley's "Sins" and "Sorrows."

The dogs bark—the caravan passes.—*Eastern proverb.*

He who fights with priests may make up his mind to have his poor, good name torn and befouled by lies and slanders.—*Helne.*

People swallow falsehood as a cat milk.—*G. W. Foote.*

SHELLEY, the poet, was an Atheist, and because of his opinions has had mountains of calumny heaped upon his memory. Even now, when his poetry is appreciated at its true value, and when the star of his genius has wheeled so long and so equably in the firmament of fame, the note of disparagement is by no means silent. It has simply taken new and more insidious forms.

In the old days, Shelley was regarded as a monster, pure and simple. Then, in the process of time, he was considered an ineffectual angel, and the final stage of misdirected criticism seems to be that he was a polite

lunatic. Professor Henry Morley, and scores of other writers, even went so far as to suggest that Shelley was so mad that he was an ardent Christian without realising it. This is only part of an infamous religious tradition. Shelley's Atheism incurred the hatred of the orthodox, and no enmity is more unscrupulous, more relentless, or more venomous. The abuse which was supposed to have killed Keats was exquisite politeness compared to the attacks made upon Shelley by scribblers who tickled the ears of the groundlings in order to earn a dinner. Shelley was treated like a mad dog by men who professed to love their enemies. This was done of set purpose. It was meant to discredit the writings of a man who looked scornfully at the Christian superstition, and who sang of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

As a consequence, the Shelleyan literature is a thing at which the imagination boggles. It embraces within its limits the writings of such notable authors as Browning, Matthew Arnold, James Thomson, Addington Symonds, and the ephemeral and often verminous publications of religious propaganda. Despite the large numbers of accounts of the life of Shelley, his biography yet remains to be written. And it is becoming increasingly plain that it will have to be written by a Freethinker.

Quite recently, a writer in the *Methodist Recorder* had a fling at Shelley's "sins and his sorrows," and there were the usual number of flies in the ointment. "Shelley," declares the Methodist writer, "was a greater poet than Landor"—but he "had no sense of humour, none at all." How often this nonsense has figured in Shelleyan criticism. Byron was a great humorist, and even he could hardly have bettered Shelley's satirical description of Wordsworth in *Peter Bell the Third*. The translation of the *Hymn to Mercury* is an exquisite piece of humour; whilst in Shelley's letters there are many delicate touches of fun which are sufficient to disprove the critic's silliness.

Naturally, a Methodist journalist, writing in a Methodist periodical, could hardly be expected to be a good judge of humour. But where this pious penman excels is in lecturing Shelley on the error of his ways. He not only upbraids the poor poet, who has been dead a hundred years, but shakes his fist at him. Shelley is held up to the Methodists as an "innocent creature," posturing before "the poor woman he had forsaken." It is quite clear that the Methodist journalist has never yet realised, and, probably, never will, that Shelley's greatest error was his marriage with Harriet, while his least mistake was his union with Mary, which was at first irregular. There are so many things not dreamt of in Methodist philosophy. The psychology of genius is a big subject, and not to be measured by the narrow ethics of a Nonconformist Sunday school. If the Methodist writer will reflect he will find that the private life of so pious a poet as Wordsworth is equally open to criticism, if judged by the rigid ethics of the tin-tabernacle. Instead of grumbling because our geniuses wear so curious and unusual an aspect, the best is to be for ever thankful that we have them at all.

It is plain as a pikestaff that Shelley married Harriet in a spirit of Quixotic chivalry. In the spirit of a knight-errant, he sought to rescue her from her persecutors. And they were both so very young. When Romeo, aged nineteen, woos Juliet, aged sixteen, neither considers the future consequences with the cold detachment of a Schopenhauer or a Nonconformist journalist. Shelley and Harriet were neither full-grown, and, when each developed, a calamity was almost inevitable. If Shelley "sinned"—if the wretched word must be used—with regard to Harriet Westbrook, it was not due to his philosophy, but to his chivalry. He married Harriet. Most other young Christian aristocrats would never have taken her to wife. But Shelley, being an Atheist, must have a

stone hurled at him. Byron, who knew him, and also knew the world, said of Shelley: "I never knew another man who was not a beast in comparison with him."

That will do!—The attitude of the Methodist reviewer is understandable. He is simply disparaging a man who devoted great genius and great enthusiasm to the propagation of views antagonistic to Methodism. It may comfort the reviewer to suggest that Shelley with his genius may have been right, and that the Methodist without any genius may be wrong. For Shelley looked beyond the tumult of revolt to the peace of a new society, and voiced the hopes and fears of the young generation against the cruelties and stupidities of the old.

MIMNERMUS.

## Supernaturalism at Bay.

THE Church in this country is in a hubbub over the recent sermon of Canon Barnes at Cardiff, in which he denied the truth of the special creation of man as described in Genesis.

Now, the clergy declare that they are persons who have been specially selected by God the Holy Spirit to proclaim the existence, character, and purposes of God the Father, as manifested in, by, and through God the Son. Moreover, they declare that the Bible is the word of God, and contains all that God thought it necessary to say to man; a book which they declare that men wrote at the dictation, or, at least, under the guidance, of God the Holy Spirit, and which is the infallible rule of faith and practice for man.

How can we account, then, for such great differences of opinion among many of the leading clergy as are now disturbing the Church? Not only have they the book which they say is the word of God the Father, but in that book it is stated that God the Son promised his disciples that God the Holy Ghost would lead them into all truth. Is it possible that when God the Holy Ghost was inspiring the men who wrote the Bible, he did not make God the Father's meaning plain? Or that God the Father was unable to say what he wished to communicate with sufficient clearness to make persons as intelligent as the clergy are understand what he meant? Or that God the Son was mistaken when he said that God the Holy Ghost would lead his disciples into all truth? It is hardly possible to accept any of these suppositions. If any of these three Gods, who, added together, we are told, make but one God, exists, we are bound to admit that he, or they, or both he and they, knew what he meant, and knew how to say what he meant so that the persons whom he has chosen to communicate his message to the rest of mankind would understand him.

Are we then to suppose that the clergy are so deficient in intelligence that they cannot understand the plain words of their heavenly Father? Certainly not, because not only are the clergy unable to explain what the Bible actually does teach, but everybody else is equally unable.

Consequently we are shut up to the conclusion that if there is any God he did not inspire the Bible, and did not select the clergy to deliver any message from him to us, and that the clergy know no more about him than the rest of us do.

I would rather believe in no God than in one who would cause a book to be written the meaning of which nobody can discover, and the controversies over which have been the cause of so much hatred and bloodshed that the world has been a kind of Bedlam and slaughter-house ever since it began to be generally read. When I believe in a God, he will be one who will be able to say things that everybody can understand and believe without having to become irrational, if not insane.

And, too, I would rather start out on my own hook to search for facts than be led by a number of messengers from God who cannot agree among themselves as to what is the message of God, and there is no mistake that their differences of opinion are now of a much more serious character, as regards the fate of the Christian religion, than at any previous time.

The theological discussions of the past were mainly over the interpretation of the Bible. All branches of the Church then admitted the existence of a man-like God, and believed that the Bible was the literal word of God. They fought only about what the word meant. Now, however, the discussions are mainly about the nature of the Bible itself.

Is it the word of God, or does it only contain some words of God? Was it verbally inspired, or inspired only in a sort of Pickwickian sense? Did the events it records actually happen, or are many of its stories only symbolical? Was the world created in six days, or is the first part of Genesis only a poem? Was there any Garden of Eden, and Adam and Eve, and tree of knowledge of good and evil, and tree of life, and talking serpent? Or is that story only a myth, meant to teach something or other, which, whatever it may be, is not very creditable to God, man, or woman, and leaves the snake, which is popularly supposed to be the Devil, in the position of being the only intelligent person on the scene? Was there any flood, any Noah, any ark, or is that story only a bit of flotsam from the wreck of old superstitions? Did the Red Sea open and let the Israelites pass through it on dry ground? Did the sun stand still at the command of Joshua, or is that a mere soldier's yarn like that of the angels at Mons? Did Jonah—but why go on?

The clergy are now asking these questions, which only Freethinkers used to ask; questions the very asking of which is an impugning of the truthfulness, and hence of the divine authority, of a large part of the Bible; questions which admit of but one ultimate answer. But this is not all. The asking of these questions has led them on to the asking of others which affect the very basis of the Christian faith and doctrine. The seriousness of the present situation among the clergy is that some of them are asking questions about the credibility of many things related about Jesus of Nazareth, God the Son, the second person in the Trinity, the very core of the whole Christian religion.

Was Jesus miraculously born of a virgin? Did he arise from the tomb and ascend in his bodily person into heaven? Did he cast demons out of men and women? Did he raise a dead and putrefying corpse to life?

Any rational person need not be told that such questions strike at the very basis of the Christian religion. They are not such as array Catholics and Protestants against each other. They are such as must eventuate in dividing those who ask and answer them into Supernaturalists and Rationalists. For the moment you begin to doubt the verbal inspiration, the literal accuracy of the Bible, you start on a road which must lead you either to reject it entirely as a divine revelation, or else go back to the theory of verbal inspiration. If you admit that a single line of the Bible was not directly dictated by God, the authority of the whole book is overthrown, for you thus decide that human reason may sit in judgment on the word of God. And if you are free to decide what part of the Bible is the word of God, and what part is not, then everybody must be equally free, and the book is shorn of all authority.

Canon Barnes and other heretical clergymen hold views that would be called infidelity if they were not in the Church; views which when Colonel Ingersoll proclaimed them were called Agnosticism, or Atheism; and that they are not forthwith turned out of the Church is proof positive that the Church is honeycombed with unbelief on the most vital questions—that

Christianity, in fact, is slowly but surely crumbling away.

The Church never did obey any but the most barbarous and the most sentimental commands of the Bible. Her history is a record but of cruelty on the one hand and charity on the other, both of which have been injurious to humanity; she has been the persecutor and the patron of the world; her watchwords have been gore and gush; her policy has been to impoverish the people by robbery, and then humbug and degrade them by almsgiving.

The Church never did follow the teaching of Christ either in letter or in spirit, and now it is ceasing to worship him; it never cared for any but a bloody and vindictive God, whom it persisted in calling a God of love in spite of all the proofs that he was a God of inconceivable hate, and now that this old-fashioned God can no longer be defended the more intelligent and honest parsons are becoming outspoken Agnostics.

So the good work goes on. Nothing can stop it. Fashionable parsons may utter pious platitudes, Salvation Army generals may bellow and bluster, Presbyteries and Councils may wring their hands and bewail the advance of rational thought; they cannot prevent the fall of supernatural religion. Even now the Churches are depending more on the charms of social ties and old associations than on any firm beliefs. The main reason why such men as Canon Barnes remain in the Church is because of old associations, just as a family cling to the old homestead after it has ceased to meet all their new needs. Attempts are being made to make it more comfortable for the doubters, but what of the children now being born? Will they care for the Church? Not many of them. Advanced books and periodicals will take the place of the Bible for them; the theatre will suit them better than the prayer meeting. Social clubs and the increasing number of Sunday excursions, lectures, and other good, rational things will break down the social power of the Church, as we Freethinkers are breaking down its religious power.

And the places that once knew the Church will know it no more forever. For when the present Church has crumbled away, no other will ever take its place. Supernaturalism will be dead, and only then will men and women begin to live rationally, and therefore happily.

G. O. W.

## The Utility Test.

RELIGIOUS sects are numerous enough in this country in all conscience, and we know how antagonistic they are to one another, how they neutralize one another, and how the pretensions of each are more or less scornfully repudiated by all the rest. But mutually irreconcilable as the various religious bodies are, they at least agree in one respect. They agree in insisting on the necessity of religion of some kind, and they all join in heaping obloquy on the individual who rejects supernatural belief. They are unanimous in asserting that religious belief furnishes the only true basis of right moral conduct. This is really the last ground whereon the defender of religion takes his stand. It is indeed the last ditch; and when we find Christians upholding religion, not because it is true, but because it is necessary or expedient, we feel we have touched the lowest level it is possible to reach in the matter of religious apologetics. That this low level may nevertheless afford fairly solid ground on which to build up Secularism is one recompense of the situation.

When we remember how vehemently Christianity has denounced the doctrine of utilitarianism in the past does it not suggest dramatic justice that it should itself be driven back upon the utilitarian plea, and endeavouring to find therein a refuge from which it can

make a final stand. Step by step the Christian Church has withdrawn, or is in course of withdrawing (with extreme reluctance), from every position she formerly occupied. She has discovered, after tremendous and long-sustained pressure from the outside, that the old view of the Hebrew Scriptures is untenable in the light of modern research and modern knowledge. Not a cleric of any competence as a student or critic upholds the old-fashioned conception of the Bible as the word—the inviolable and infallible word—of God. Such an idea is left to the zealous but narrow-minded Boanerges of Little Bethel or the myopic members of Bible-training institutes. Only the most ignorant obscurantists attached to the Protestant sects believe in the Creation story as narrated in the Book of Genesis. The clergy do not defend the Bible as they did in the old days. They merely apologize for it, and attempt to gloss over its immoralities and absurdities. Even the New Testament is going the way of the Old; and anything that can only be apologized for is irretrievably doomed.

What used to be considered the very fundamentals of the Christian creed are to-day being quietly dropped by the Churches, or laboriously explained in a symbolic sense. Within the very Church of England clergymen have declared that the miraculous element in the Gospels must be discarded, and are asserting that the virgin birth and the resurrection never happened—at least, not in the manner understood for centuries by the Christian Church. And although both in the Church of England and in the Scottish Churches the Old and New Testaments are still referred to as the word of God, that phrase has undergone a complete metamorphosis of meaning, and year by year less stress is being laid by the leaders of opinion in the Churches on the supernatural and miraculous element in Christianity. Even the clergy are beginning to see that if the claims of religion are to be maintained at all they must be recommended to the people on comprehensible human grounds and on none other. There is, indeed, no other that we can understand.

The common people, at any rate, are fast coming to the conclusion that a religious system which serves no discernible useful purpose in this world is really not worth troubling about. Hence the newborn anxiety of the clergy to identify themselves with reform movements and to pose as friends of the people. It need not be disputed that many clergymen are perfectly sincere in their desire to effect the social salvation of the people, but the fact remains that in so far as they are working on these lines they are acting not at all as apostles of Christianity, but as apostles of a much nobler gospel—the gospel of humanism. Be this as it may, it will not be gainsaid that the tendency nowadays on the part of the Churches is to keep the miraculous and the supernatural in the background as much as possible, and to concentrate attention on what is called the moral value of religion as apart from the question of its truth and its origin. This is the issue which will remain after all the nonsense of miracles and the puerilities of supernatural revelation have been finally scattered to the four winds of heaven by the common sense of an enlightened human race.

Is religion essential to morality? Is belief in a judging and punishing deity, belief in the existence of the human soul, belief in the immortality of that soul—is all this necessary to the maintenance of civilization and to the continued progression of mankind along the lines of advancement? In other words, is religious belief of some sort indispensable, not merely as a passport to eternal bliss beyond the grave, but essential to the best, fullest, and happiest life here? This is an issue in the controversy between religion and Secularism into which many other considerations must ultimately resolve themselves, and, indeed, are fast resolving themselves in practical minds. Is it an issue

of which Secularists need be afraid? Surely not! Without losing sight of the fact that in this country the primary issue is the truth or falsity of Christianity, we may with complete equanimity face the question whether religion or Secularism holds out the greater hope for humanity so far as this life is concerned. There is nothing to be ashamed of in the doctrine of utilitarianism.

In any discussion of this perennial controversy, if we seem for the moment to belittle or put on one side the question of the abstract truth of the principles underlying religion and Secularism respectively, it is only for the moment. Whatever may be the case with religionists, we must ever place the highest value on truth for its own sake. And it is precisely because we so highly regard the true and the good that we must emphatically decline to accept as true and good anything that will not stand investigation. But not all can rise to this high philosophic conception—this conception of the pursuit of truth though the heavens should fall. The ordinary individual is swayed by the tangible and demonstrably useful results flowing from the acceptance of religion or Secularism as the case may be. We see evidence of this attitude of mind in its vulgar form—and as associated with the crudities of religious belief—when people demand of Atheists: Where are your infirmaries? Where are your orphan homes? These Christians, of course, never ask us where are those other apparently necessary appurtenances of civilization in a Christian country such as gaols and brothels. Nor does it ever seem to occur to them that the existence of hospitals, lunatic asylums, poorhouses, convalescent homes, orphan establishments, refuges for women, etc., etc., but represent the efforts of human love and sympathy to correct the blunders of the deity they worship.

At the same time this frame of mind—this inclination to demand practical results—is by no means to be entirely reprobated. When the great mass of the people have learned to regard as of first importance the visible achievable results *here* of any given system of belief the doom of supernaturalism will be effectually sealed. Those who spend their lives striving to ameliorate the social condition of the people; seeking to improve their environment and to raise them physically and mentally; endeavouring to widen their outlook on life, heighten their aspirations, and deepen their thought—those who do all this may attach to themselves any religious label they choose, they are something much better than their creed. They are humanitarians and utilitarians—citizens of *this* world. And undoubtedly the tendency nowadays is to apply this test of utility to the influence of the spirit of religion on the affairs of this life. In bygone days what may be called the moral centre of gravity was fixed in the next world—that world of which no one knows anything, but respecting which we have had a multitude of guesses throughout thousands of years of human thought. In the past, certain rules of conduct were laid down for us by our spiritual guides—so-called, and generally self-constituted. We were to perform certain actions and think in a certain way, and we were to refrain from certain other actions because upon our scrupulous exactitude in such matters depended *not* our welfare here while we were alive, but our happiness somewhere else after we were dead. Happily, the moral centre of gravity is in process of shifting, and modern men and women are coming to recognise that systems of conduct and varieties of worship, creed, and ritual are absolutely valueless except as bearing on and influencing the life of man in this world.

GEORGE SCOTT.

An American orator, referring to the Pilgrim Fathers, said they suffered much, but the Pilgrim mothers suffered more, they had to suffer for their husbands.

### Found Out!

God heard of a new play  
 Performed with great success  
 At a fashionable playhouse.  
 He had read certain newspaper  
 Articles in which  
 Much Agnostic opinion was published  
 And God was sore afraid.  
 He had thought that the popular Press  
 Was invulnerable, but it was now  
 Apparent that much  
 Freethought and Atheism was  
 In vogue, and  
 God trembled.

So a time came, after many  
 Performances, that God said,  
 "I must hasten to see this play in  
 Which I am unknown."  
 So, journeying forth from his solitude,  
 God came to the playhouse,  
 And there witnessed the drama  
 Which had been inspired by his  
 Non-existence.  
 God heard the applause of the  
 Multitude, and was much troubled.  
 For he understood that the people  
 Knew him not.  
 So, after the final curtain,  
 God hastened him away from the playhouse wherein  
 The Unknown God was  
 Mocked by much intelligence.  
 And he returned him unto the solitude of  
 His Heaven, which also does  
 Not exist.  
 Then God, looking upon the infinite  
 Ether, said, "I am dissolved and  
 Cast into the melting pot of  
 Human reason."

But there was no answer; the great spaces of  
 Infinitude slept on in their  
 Eternal silence, and God was quite alone, for  
 Non-existent things are always  
 Quite alone.

ARTHUR F. THORN.

### Acid Drops.

Madame Tussaud has just added to the famous exhibition a portrait model of Father Bernard Vaughan. Close by are the models of the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Mr. R. J. Campbell, the Bishop of London, Dr. Clifford, and General Booth. Madame Tussaud's has already a Chamber of Horrors. May we suggest that the firm groups all these religious gentlemen under the general title of a Chamber of "Schnorrers."

A "United Christian Campaign" is being worked in Leeds by Dissenters and Churchmen, who in this are working together. They are appealing to all the trades union secretaries for their help in addressing meetings of the workpeople, and one leaflet that lies before us is headed "Christ or Chaos." And there is naturally the assurance that the only way to settle the labour unrest is to get the working class back into the Christian fold. That there is a genuine desire to get them back into the Church we do not doubt for a moment. But we fancy that the movement has more than that in view. For while it is the unrest among the labouring class that is made the occasion of the appeal, it is the moneyed class that these shepherds of the Lord have in view. They are over-desirous to persuade them that Codlin is their friend, and not Short, and that if they want to keep things as they wish them kept they must provide the Churches with the sinews of war. We would advise all in Leeds to keep an eye on the United Campaign.

In a leading article on "Children and the Bible," the *Daily Mail* says parents, schoolmasters, and the clergy "wish to know how they explain and interpret the Bible to children." We have noticed the anxiety of the clergy

to do this, but the other people mentioned do not appear to worry overmuch.

The "starving" clergy are still suffering. A newspaper paragraph states that "The Earl and Countess of Darnley have been staying at the Deanery, Durham, as the guests of Bishop Welldon."

Two farm labourers were killed by lightning at Newborough, Peterborough. Great volumes of water burst over the sea-wall at Torquay, and a postman was drowned. Diphtheria and scarlet fever are very prevalent in London and suburbs. Yet Christians still believe in a heavenly Father.

Dean Rashdall, says the *Christian World*, declares that a large proportion of the Anglican clergy and of other denominations cannot give to a working man an intelligible answer to the question, "How do we know that God exists?" Well, we should really like to meet any clergyman who can. They can all say that they believe it, and they can produce a number of more or less ingenious excuses when they ought to go on believing it. But that is all. And Dean Rashdall should be aware of the fact that so long as we use the word "God" in an intelligible manner the whole thing may be safely dismissed as a delusion. And if it is not so used then all we have is sheer verbal confusion.

Thus some letters have been appearing in these columns of late discussing whether an Atheist ought or ought not to deny the existence of God, and one of our correspondents asks for our opinion on the matter. We have no hesitation in giving it, and would say at the outset that the extreme care taken by many non-Theists to assure Theists that they do not deny the existence of God is a survival of the fear of religion, often with a dash of the fear of the social world. The Christian has for so long taught that Atheism was only another word for rascality, and that to deny the existence of God was the hall mark of depraved character, that even after many have been forced by their own mental development to reject the idea of God, they are fearful of offending the religious world over-much. For the charge of denying the existence of God is repudiated with an amount of moral indignation that is quite unexplainable as being merely a repudiation of a lapse in logic.

Now, the matter seems to us quite simple. If "God" means any of the gods believed in by any of the expressed formulæ of faith—the God of the Bible, or of the Westminster Confession, or of the Mohammedan religion, etc.—then no one has any hesitation in denying their existence. Each believer denies the existence of the God of the other believers without the slightest hesitation. He asserts them to be delusions, misconceptions, in a word, non-existences. There is no doubt and no hesitation here. And if "God" is used in the sense of connoting an over-ruling and creative intelligence, then all one has to say is that the proposition as laid down is sheer nonsense, and I deny the existence of any such thing on the same grounds that I deny the existence of a four-sided triangle or three-sided square. So long as we use the word "mind" intelligibly we mean mind as we know it, for mind as we do not know it is not mind at all. And therefore in denying that kind of a "God" we are only denying the existence of an absurd contradiction. To put the matter briefly, God defined is an absurdity, and its existence is denied by all sorts of people, both by Atheists and by those who have a rival god to uphold. God undefined means nothing at all. It is sheer, meaningless verbiage. And to identify "God" with mind, while divesting mind of all the qualities and conditions that characterize what we mean by mind is only another way of saying that it is not mind, and the proposition thus destroys itself.

What remains for explanation is the fear that some people show at being thought to deny "God." And that explanation is finally to be found in the fear that many still have of the social force exerted by religion. The Theist asserts, either in so many words or by implication,

that Atheism, if it means the denial of God's existence, is a sign of moral degradation. It is, at all events, socially reprehensible. And average humanity being what it is there arises the desire to in some way escape this censure, while at the same time not altogether denying the conclusions to which one's intelligence points. So the attitude of suspension, even though there is no real ground for a suspension of judgment, becomes attractive. I do not believe in the existence of a god, but I do not deny that god exists. Hence there is some hope of reclamation, some hope that if a little more evidence could be brought forward conviction would follow. While all the time every non-Theist whose rejection of Theism rests upon anything like a scientific basis knows that no such proof is possible, and that you can no more prove the existence of a God than you can prove the existence of a four-sided circle.

The Rev. T. W. Haworth, of St. Leonards, who left £30,753, left £100 to a church for a memorial of himself, requesting that prayers for his soul will be offered annually. The Rev. J. W. Jones, of Carmarthen, left £4,990. As their Master said, "Woe unto ye rich," we tremble to think where these unfortunate Christians are spending eternity.

More Atheists read the *Freethinker* than any other paper. Hence, an announcement on the hoardings of "Two Days with God," admission one shilling, should be of interest. The posters also announce that this remarkable "at home" takes place at Clapton Congress Hall, and that "God" will be supported by General and Mrs. Booth and other Salvationists. We fear that there will be more of the Booth family and the brass band than of the advertised visitor.

A young man who, barefooted, removed the cross and candlesticks in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, was certified to be insane. Obviously, the folk who bow to statues, sprinkle themselves with holy water, and cross themselves are sane.

A headline in a newspaper reads "Lunches in Church," and refers to St. Mary-at-Hill Church, Eastcheap, where visitors may bring their own lunches. No editor makes headlines concerning Roman Catholic churches, but in those buildings the congregation is supposed to eat "God."

How these advanced people do go on repeating the commonplaces of the Freethought world of about a hundred years since! How many year ago is it, for example, since Freethinkers pointed out the absurdity and the positive indecency of the Church marriage service? Now we have a lot of the advanced folk filling the papers with it as though it were a new discovery. Miss Edith Shackleton, for instance, writes in the *Daily Sketch* that

it would be useful if the marriage service were published as a cheap pamphlet displayed in scandalous shop windows. It might then deservedly be suppressed by the censor, and we should get a decent new one.

Miss Shackleton asks whether there is a single head mistress of a girls' school who dare read the Church of England marriage service, and explain what it means, and says so far as she is concerned she is not going to have the most important day of her life spoiled by muttering "smudgy lies." We are very glad to hear it. And we are also pleased to see that some of the writers in the general Press are beginning to nibble at elementary Freethought. The world is coming our way gradually. But if Miss Shackleton wishes to complete her message she should advise all girls to insist on marriage before a Registrar, which is a decent, cleanly, and legitimate ceremony. But perhaps if she did that the bold editor of the paper would not admit her article at all. Our newspapers are so courageous, and so straightforward.

The clerical trick of associating so-called "war memorials" with Roman Catholic symbols does not always meet with public approval. At St. Andrew's Church, Willesden, a Calvary has had its base sawn through.

In a recent issue of a religious weekly paper we noticed no less than fourteen displayed patent medicine advertisements. No wonder Christians continually assert, "There is no health in us!"

A daily paper complains that there are so many allusions to "Allah" in Oriental musical comedies, and calls it "attacking God." It seems to us that the "unco guid" had better stick to the tea fights in the parish halls, and leave theatres alone.

The Rev. Hugh Elder, speaking at the United Free Synod of Lothian, said it was a scandal to note the poor salaries of many of the clergy. If any other body of employees were similarly treated they would "down tools." That may be true, and certainly those who want the clergy ought to pay properly for them. But it would be useless for them to think of a strike. That can only be done in such case where the goods supplied are such as the community really need. A strike would be a first-class way of showing the people that they could get on very well without the "Black Army."

Canon Simpson, of St. Paul's, says that the older he gets the more desirous he is to get the Bible to all parts of the earth. Now that is really wonderful testimony. And it is so impartial! It is like a pill-maker praising his pills, or a brewer praising beer. Except that neither of the latter professions would advertise in the name of benevolence, and ask the public to provide the cost of the advertisement.

There is great alarm among the clergy of Aberdeen. At a meeting of the Synod of the Established Church on October 13. Sunday observance is threatened by the growth of bands in the parks, by public meetings on Sundays, and, worst of all, by football. The Rev. Mr. Smith said the position was desperate, but not despairing. There was still hope, and it was decided to call upon the Town Council to exercise what powers it possesses to prevent the desecration of the Sabbath. In other words, the policeman is to be called on to save God Almighty from annihilation. Poor Aberdeen!

The Rev. C. Mackie said that it was the insanitary condition of the houses that led to Sabbath desecration. Rubbish! The houses are much more sanitary than they were a century ago, and that did not prevent the development of the beastly and demoralizing Scotch Sabbath. Dirt and degradation never hinders the spread of religion; it rather aids them. Historically, Christianity rose to power in a period of social demoralization, and it has never yet had cause for fear from the prevalence of such conditions as these. The rejection of religion is a symptom of growing social and mental health, and most of the religionists know it.

On Tuesday a paragraph appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* to the effect that Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld had succumbed to his injuries. We are glad to learn that this has been contradicted in other quarters, though he was undoubtedly assaulted by anti-Semites. When we remember the long-continued and noble efforts made by this writer to throw light upon the true nature of the homosexual impulse, and to amend the penal code of his country, we recognise another soldier of science, who, whatever his nationality, is deserving of the gratitude of mankind. But gratitude, or even decency, where religious passions are aroused, have little influence.

The *Cambrian Daily Leader* reports a Merthyr preacher as saying that gambling goes on in the chapels every Sunday. He said that a sweepstake takes place among the boys as to the number of the hymn that will be sung. We fail to see anything irreligious in this. Casting lots is a well-recognised procedure in the Bible, and perhaps the boys are influenced by their Bible reading to have a gamble on the hymns. Besides, something must be done to make Church services more attractive. All authorities are agreed upon that, and this might be one of the moves in bringing theology up to date.



## "Freethinker" Sustentation Fund.

As will be seen from the accompanying list of subscriptions, the Sustentation Fund continues to make good progress. And it looks as though our readers are determined to do their best to bring the total up to the £1,000, which will secure the sums that have been promised on condition that the £1,000 is raised. As will be seen, we have already covered nearly three-fourths of the distance, that is, if we lump both receipts and promises together. If realised, this sum will not only wipe off the current deficit, but it will relieve us of all financial worry for the next two or three years, and perhaps altogether. By the time that sum is expended, we hope to have achieved our end of making the paper self-supporting.

The exact sum to date, as will be seen below, is £399 in subscriptions and £240 10s. in promises which will be redeemed if the total sum is realized. We thus need another £361 to achieve this end. Many have promised to "come again," but we can only put names on the list of promises where some definite amount is stated.

Meanwhile we continue to receive the most encouraging letters from our friends. Mr. Clifford Williams, whose own efforts on behalf of the cause are unceasing, writes:—

I sincerely hope that the £1,000 will be realised. This does not appear to be a large sum, when one considers the amounts raised annually by the Churches, but when one compares the effort with the means, it is then that one feels proud of the cause and proud of its leader. If the individual work you put in were sold in the ordinary commercial channels of journalism you would, of course, be much better off, but you would be less wealthy.

The apparent paradox represents a truth with which we quite agree.

"Blea Tarn" hopes that all his fellow-workmen will see that they are well represented in the subscription list before the Fund closes. Mr. J. Griffiths writes to express his thanks to all the *Freethinker* writers for maintaining the paper at so high a level. Mr. A. W. B. Shaw encloses cheque for £5, and says: "Need I say that were it possible the amount would be larger. However, it is a great privilege to be able to help even to an extent so inconsiderable. You have done miracles in keeping the paper going in spite of the many obstacles in your way." And Mr. F. W. Walsh, who in the midst of his year-long suffering can always think of the welfare of the cause, writes me a miraculously cheering letter, hoping that every reader of the paper will do something to put it in the position in which it deserves to be.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

Previously acknowledged, £321 2s. Sir W. W. Strickland, £11; A. W. B. Shaw, £5; J. Broadfoot, 5s.; F. W. Walsh, 5s.; Three Troedyshin Friends, £1 5s.; J. G. (Moretonhampstead), £1; A. K. (Plymouth), 2s. 6d.; J. Pendlebury, £5; Blea Tarn, 4s.; Dr. J. Laing, £5; C. E. King, £3 3s.; J. Kilpatrick, £2 2s.; A Few Dundee Friends, per F. Gloak, £2 13s.; F. W. Lloyd, 17s. 6d.; Dr. C. Beardnell, 5s.; Mrs. H. Parsons, 10s. 6d.; A. R. C., 2s. 6d.; J. Breese, £2 2s.; W. H. Hicks, £2 2s.; S. Hampson, 10s.; H. Spence, 5s.; E. Donat, 10s.; F. J. Stansfield, 5s.; J. Ralston, £1; Miss M. Rogerson, 10s.; "Bashem," £2; R. B. Fowler (second subscription), 5s.; J. Hyde, 10s.; W. P. Kernot, 5s.; Clifford Williams, 10s.; "Barkis," 3s.; T. Sharp, 5s.; P. M. (second subscription), 2s.; Mrs. Turnbull, 5s.; T. Turnbull, 5s.; H. W. B., 2s.; M. Wright, £1; Mrs. Baird, 5s.; H. Organ, 2s. 6d.; "Socialist," 2s. 6d.; J. A. Reid, 2s.; J. N. Hill, 5s.; F. B. Lawes, £2 2s.; D. Wright, 5s.; S. Cohen, 10s.;

J. Hardie, 5s.; J. H. Hannah, 2s. 6d.; J. Morton, 10s.; J. Railton, 5s.; J. Trevillion, £1; Oslia Tarn (Lanark), 4s.; D. C. Drummond, £1; J. Hawthorne, 2s. 6d.; R. C. Proctor, 10s.; G. Proctor, 10s.; Mr. and Mrs. J. Neate, £1 1s.; Thos. M. Brown, 15s.; S. Wells, 10s.; W. Milroy, £1; J. Ekins, 5s.; S. Hudson, £1; H. Glasson, 4s. 6d.; T. J. Dobson, 2s. 6d.; Mrs. M. Kent, 2s. 6d.; C. Eyer, 1s.; S. C., 2s. 6d.; A. B., 11s. 3d.; "Postman," 5s.; "Vera," 5s.; Thomas Jones, 2s. 6d.

Per J. Fothergill—J. Richards, 5s.; J. Freedenson, 2s. 6d.; W. Hannon, 2s. 6d.

Per Secretary Manchester Branch—Mr. and Mrs. H. Black, £1 1s.; Mr. and Mrs. Foulkes (Perth, W.A.), £1; Miss E. Williams, 10s.; Mr. J. T. Winckle, 10s.; Mr. W. Horrocks, £1; Mr. S. Hampson, 10s.; Mr. Mapp, 5s.; Mrs. Mapp, 2s. 6d.; Mr. and Mrs. Pulman, £1; Mr. T. F. Greenall, 5s.; Mr. Gateshill, 2s. 6d.; Mr. and Mrs. G. Hall, 10s.; Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Turner, 10s. 6d.; Mr. Wiseman, 10s.; Mr. and Mrs. G. Bailey, £1; "Anon," 5s.; "Mandra," 20s.; "Atheist," 5s.

Per J. Robertson—G. Robertson, 10s.; W. Napier, 5s.; J. Harvey, 4s.; "Old Boy," 1s.

Total, £399 0s. 3d.

PROMISED, provided the total sum raised reaches £1,000, including the amounts promised:—"Medical," £50; "In Memory of the late Sir Hiram Maxim," £50; Mr. J. B. Middleton, £20; "A Friend," £100; A. W. Coleman, £6; "Working Journalist," £3; X. Y. Z., £10; J. Morton, 10s.; R. Proctor, £1.

### To Correspondents.

R. B. F.—Many others beside yourself have written in approval of the idea of a *Freethinker* Fellowship. As we said, we should be pleased to do all we could to promote the idea. Perhaps a preliminary meeting could be arranged of those willing to co-operate. That would be the best way of getting to work.

ROBERT ARCH.—Pleased to hear from you again. Hope you are well. See "Acid Drops."

W. WRIGHT.—Neither the expression "cheating nature" or "breaking natural law" are strictly accurate, since all that is must be a part of nature. "Law" is only a generalized expression of the way in which things act, and under given conditions things can only act as they do act. "Cheating" can only mean that a process which by itself would end in one way ends in another way by the introduction of other factors. And if the factors of a problem are altered, the result is of necessity altered also. We note your appreciation of Miss Prewett's articles. Letter has been forwarded.

MISS R. HILL writes: "It is a great pleasure to have one's own ideals and thoughts expressed so well and so beautifully as they have been by Miss Frances Prewett." Miss Hill thinks the correspondence is bound to do good in awakening a sense of responsibility with young people, before and after marriage. And in that we cordially agree.

A. ALDWINCKLE.—Pleased to have your congratulations on our thirtieth "birthday." We wish it were our thirtieth birthday in a literal sense. We can see a lot of work before us that we should like to finish before we take our final rest. By the way, we wrote to the journal you sent, on the subject you suggested, but without result, as we foretold.

D. F. GLOAK.—Pleased to hear from you. We were speaking of you to some mutual friends at Glasgow when we were there.

J. KILPATRICK.—We have been on the point of writing you to know if you were still all right in the midst of the horrible times through which you are living. Relieved to find that you are where you were. Hope the family are also well.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.—Thanks. Shall appear as early as possible, but, as usual, our head is only just showing over a sea of manuscripts. Sometimes we feel inclined to issue a special number to use some of them up.

C. E. KING.—Your acquaintance with the *Freethinker* antedates our own appearance in its columns. The more pleased to have your support.

P. G. TACCHI.—Thanks for design for badge for "Freethinker Fellowship." The idea seems to be taking on, and so soon as one or two other things are out of the way, we might arrange for a preliminary meeting at this office of those who are interested and will undertake to run the Fellowship.

F. AKROYD.—Sorry your notices were sent after us to Scotland, and so could not get into last week's issue.

J. DRISCOLL.—We are quite with you in your view of the way in which the papers lend themselves to the advertising tour of the Prince of Wales. It is very enlightening. And, of course, when the empty-headed ones read accounts of the intense enthusiasm that is said to have taken place, they will feel that they should be enthusiastic likewise. Sorry, though we cannot use the verses.

A. HANN.—There is no objection to anyone promising a small amount towards the £1,000, and upon the same conditions that the larger amounts are promised. The sums so promised are conditional upon the whole of the amount being subscribed.

F. B. LAWES.—It is never too late to begin the journey along the right road. We have a very clear recollection of our first meeting in 1917 in this office, and also that we talked with the accompaniment of bombs dropping about. Shall hope to see you soon. Pleased to learn that the paper has been of help to you.

J. N. HILL.—Hope that your expectations will be realized.

D. A. ARCHIBALD.—We are afraid religion is not nearly so near death as many of us would like to believe. It is forced to be less aggressive, though, and that is something.

J. ROBERTSON.—Thanks for subscriptions. We note your hope that the £1,000 mark will be reached. Shall look forward to seeing you when we again come North.

W. VICARS.—The Fellowship badge could be made in the form of both tie-pin and button. Obligated for suggestion.

G. F. CLARK.—Glad to learn that the conference between "Church and Labour" ended in the discomfiture of the clergy. Of course, it is only one more attempt on the part of the "Black Army" to hoodwink the people. That is what they are there for, and one must admit that—from that point of view—they earn their salt.

G. O. W.—Hope you will find the removal advantageous. But it is a tiresome job at best. Please don't worry about other matter. There is no need to, but we appreciate what you say all the more.

R. C. PROCTOR.—Thanks for promise of further help. Hope your father is keeping well.

J. RAILTON.—We have a distinct recollection of your previous P.O. coming to hand. It must have somehow escaped insertion. We have now included both contributions, which will put the matter right.

D. C. DRUMMOND.—We hope we deserve your description of the *Freethinker* as "the straightest paper in the United Kingdom." It is our aim to at least deserve it. And it is a compliment to our readers that they by their conduct help us to that end.

CAN any reader give the address of the relatives of the late Mr. Robert Cooper, a veteran Freethinker, formerly a resident of Norwich?

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

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

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

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Where priests have much influence the gods have little; and where they are numerous and wealthy, the population is scanty and miserably poor. War may be, and certainly is, destructive; but war, as thou well knowest, if it cuts off boughs and branches, yet withers not the trunk. Priests, like ants, corrode and corrupt wherever they enter.—*Landor.*

## Sugar Plums.

May we venture to call the attention of those who receive their *Freethinker* by post to the fact that they will save both time and expense of postage if they will kindly remit when their subscriptions are due. Postage is an item in office work nowadays, and our friends will help us to economize in both the directions named by noting when their existing subscriptions run out. Some of our readers adopt the policy of sending on a sum to be placed to their credit, on which they can draw for both the paper and our other publications. We shall be pleased to open a credit account with any of our readers who would prefer this plan.

Mr. Cohen opened the season of the Manchester Branch on Sunday with two lectures in the Co-operative Hall. There were good audiences, and quite a good sale of literature, a specially quick run being made on the copies of the debate between Mr. Cohen and Mr. Leaf on "Does Man Survive Death?" Both afternoon and evening the proceedings were made more attractive by music and singing from Miss Francis, Mrs. Henshaw, and Mr. Tilley. The audience called for more, and showed their taste in the calling. Mr. Black occupied the chair on both occasions, and made an earnest appeal for continued and greater support.

In the afternoon Mr. Cohen was called upon to perform the ceremony of "naming" two children, the infant daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Turner and of Mr. and Mrs. A. C. Rosetti. The two children both behaved themselves in a most admirable manner on this, their first public appearance in a Freethought assembly, and we may hope that it is a promise of their becoming zealous workers in the cause when they arrive at suitable years. The ceremony is at least an expression of that hope so far as their parents are concerned, and that is all one is reasonably warranted in expecting. But the ceremony is always of interest to those who are present, and it is well that the great functions of life—birth, marriage, and death—should be kept before us in a way that maintains a full sense of their social significance.

The following may be of interest to our readers:—

Mr. H. E. Latimer-Voight, a reader of the *Freethinker* of seventeen years' standing, has been awarded an honorary testimonial, inscribed on parchment, by the Royal Humane Society "for having on the 4th September, 1920, gone to the rescue of two boys who were in imminent danger of drowning in the sea at Kingsgate (Kent), and whose lives he gallantly saved."

Our congratulations to so staunch a Freethinker as Mr. Latimer-Voight.

Mr. Lloyd is leading the strenuous life on Tyneside this week. He lectured at South Shields on Sunday last to good audiences, one feature of the meetings being the presence of a Baptist minister who knew Mr. Lloyd when he was in the pulpit, and who spoke in the highest terms of his work both as a Christian minister and as a Secular lecturer. On Monday Mr. Lloyd lectured at Greenside, near Newcastle; on Tuesday at New Herrington; and on Thursday evening at Jarrow. He finishes up at the Hebburn Miners' Hall to-day (October 24) at 3 and 6.30. That is a good week's work, and by the time it is over Mr. Lloyd will have well earned a few days' rest. We have every expectation that the campaign will be the means of stirring up things, and the South Shields Branch is to be highly commended for taking the matter in hand.

The Birmingham Branch commenced its work this season at the Repertory Theatre on Sunday last with a lecture from Mr. Clifford Williams. We are glad to know that the meeting was a good one, and that the lecture was worthy of the meeting. On Sunday next, October 31, Mr. Cohen lectures in the Town Hall. The Town Hall is one that takes a very large number of people to even comfortably fill it, and we hope that our Birmingham friends will do their best to see that there are few empty seats. The subject, "Do the Dead Live?" is one that should attract attention.

The last issue of *John o' London's Weekly* contains the following—quite without prompting, so far as we are concerned:—

I have been asked recently about a late-published and not sufficiently well-known study of Richard Jefferies, entitled *Richard Jefferies and Civilization*. This, I find, was published in 1914, and it is really only part of a larger work, entitled *The Life Worship of Richard Jefferies*, which Mr. Athur F. Thorn has completed, and which is about to be issued by the Pioneer Press.

The booklet is at present in the press, and we hope to have it on sale in the course of the next fortnight. It will be published at 1s., and is really an excellent piece of work. Those who know Mr. Thorn's work will hardly need that assurance. It is printed on superior paper, and will contain a portrait of Jefferies, for which we are indebted to the courtesy of the London Stereoscopic Company.

To-day (October 24) Mr. A. B. Moss pays a visit to Sheffield, and will lecture in the Tivoli Picture Palace, Norfolk Street, at 7 o'clock, on "The Glory of Freethought." Sheffield Freethinkers, please note. The chair will be taken by Mr. George Fletcher. The secretary of our Sheffield Branch is Mr. Thos. Dennis, of 30 Harbord Road, Woodseats, Sheffield, who will be pleased to hear from any local Freethinker willing to help make the meeting the success we are confidently anticipating. Mr. Moss has not visited Sheffield for many years, and those of the older Freethinkers who remember him will be glad to renew acquaintance.

On October 23rd a meeting of local Freethinkers will be held at Ivy House, 214 Lillie Road, Fulham, when a provisional committee will be elected to make the necessary arrangements for advertising Mr. Cohen's meeting at the Fulham Town Hall on November 27. Mr. A. J. Mathie and Mr. Eustace Steele are the prime movers in this endeavour to rally our forces in Fulham and the adjoining West London district, with the object of forming a branch of the N. S. S. Mr. Mathie has kindly consented to act as secretary, and will be pleased to hear from anyone who is willing to help. Address: A. J. Mathie, 32 Micklethwaite Road, Fulham.

Mr. A. Aldwinckle, whose letter on the subject of a *Freethinker Fellowship* we recently published, writes:—

I'm pleased that my idea of a Fellowship finds your support. Don't think for a moment, my dear Mr. Cohen, that it was in my mind to put extra work on your shoulders. That is out of the question. If I said that the *Freethinker* office might be used, I meant it more in the sense that the office might be used as a central point for addressing correspondence, etc., and that the President, Secretary, or whatever was arranged might call there to attend to same, all of which might be done without giving you extra work and without seriously inconveniencing the ordinary office staff, and, naturally, the whole thing is only in embryo, and even these preliminary suggestions are open to modification. I agree with you that the Fellowship on a voluntary basis would be more ideal than on a financial one.

As we have already said, we should be happy to place the office at the service of such a League, if formed, and it does seem to me that it offers possibilities. *Freethinker* readers are very scattered, and most of them would, we think, welcome some bond of union of a non-official character. Many have already written us, and what remains is for those who would like to push it to try and get together either by actual meeting or by correspondence.

We are all of us willing to accept dead truths or blunt ones, which can be fitted harmlessly into spare niches, or shrouded and confined at once out of the way, we holding complacently the cemetery keys, and supposing we have learned something. But a sapling truth, with earth at its root and blossom on its branches, or a trenchant truth that can cut its way through bars and sods, most men, it seems to me, dislike the sight or entertainment of, if by any means such guest or vision may be avoided. And, indeed, this is no wonder; for one such truth, thoroughly accepted, connects itself strangely with others, and there is no saying where it may lead us.—*Ruskin*.

## A Short History of the Art of Writing.

### II.

(Continued from p. 661.)

THE American Indians also had a limited number of conventional signs, *i.e.*, they were moving toward the ideographic stage of writing. For example, a circle with a line drawn through it stood for a dollar; a cross for ten cents; and an upright stroke for one cent.

A considerable amount of symbolism was also used in a chronological table, or winter count, which the Dakota Indians invented (Colonel Mallery, *Tenth Annual Report of American Bureau of Ethnology*). In this record each year was represented by a picture of some important event which occurred during that year. Thus a black upright stroke indicated that a Dakota Indian was killed; and a rude outline of a head and body covered with blotches recorded an epidemic of small pox.

But "the signs of advance from the pictorial to the ideographic stage which are to be noted among the Red Indians are more sharply marked in the hieroglyphs and phonetic characters on the stone monuments and manuscripts found among the relics of the vanished peoples of Mexico and Yucatan" (Clodd, *Story of the Alphabet*).

The people, commonly spoken of as the ancient Mexicans, consisted of two races, the Mayas and the Aztecs, of which the former, although conquered by the latter, were the more highly civilized, and, "like the Egyptians, had proceeded beyond pictures to hieroglyphs, where symbols, more or less arbitrary, stand for words or syllables, and the mind prepares itself to invent an alphabet (Mercer, *Hill Caves of Yucatan*).

The pictographic system thus created was applied to the purposes of every-day life. Matters of little importance were recorded on paper made from the leaves of the maguay plant, and "records intended to be permanently kept were painted on the prepared skins of animals, those of the deer and bear being more commonly used. These paintings or 'pintures' are usually executed on both sides of the skin, which was oblong in shape and often of great length, having the sides protected by boards" (Payne, *History of the New World called America*).

Unfortunately, both the Aztecs and the Spaniards destroyed many of the Maya records. However, there still

is preserved in the museum at Mexico a whole series of pictographs, exhibiting incidents as varied as the migrations of tribes, the annals of the people, sacrifices to the gods, and the education of children, the tasks set them, the punishments inflicted on them, and the food given them. To the hieroglyph there succeeds the gradually conventionalised sign.....the arrow, to denote an enemy; several arrows, several enemies; the direction of the arrow's point, the direction taken by the enemy; a piece of maize cake protruding from the mouth, to denote eating; horizontal lines, with arrow-headed characters on them, to denote the hoed or cultivated ground, some of these ideographs being coloured to correspond with the thing suggested (Clodd, *Story of the Alphabet*).

Simple abstract ideas could be expressed by means of these pictographs and ideographs. Starvation or famine was represented by a human figure with the ribs showing prominently: a noose was the symbol for robbery; and in a Californian rock painting sorrow is represented by a figure from whose eyes drop tears.

Places are also indicated by symbolic figures: *e.g.*, Chapultepec (or "grasshopper hill") is shown by a hill and a grasshopper; and Macuixochitl (the "five flowers") by five dots and a flower.

This ancient script furnishes examples of the change from pictorial to phonetic writing, of which the most

famous is probably the oft-quoted case of Itz-coatl (literally "knife-snake"), the name of one of the Mexican kings. This was originally represented by a reptile (coatl) with a number of knives (itz) projecting from its back, the upper part of the human figure being placed beneath it to show that it was a proper name. Later it is found written in rebus form. "The first syllable, *itz*, is represented by a weapon armed with blades of obsidian, *tiz* (*tli*), but the rest of the word, *coatl*, though it means snake, it written, not by a picture of a snake, but by an earthen pot, *co* (*mill*), and above it the sign of water, *a* (*tl*). Here we have real phonetic writing, for the name is not to be read, according to sense, 'knife-kettle-water,' but only according to the sound of the Aztec words, Itz-co-atl."

The scope of this essay does not permit of more than a very brief account of the systems of writing developed in the early Asiatic and European civilizations; but the following short account may enable the reader to see how the various systems of ancient Egypt, Western Asia, and Europe are related.

Beginning as pictographs, the meaning of which was not definite, the Egyptian signs gradually acquired a fixed meaning, and finally became phonograms. Egyptian writing eventually contained over 600 of these signs, many of them representing whole syllables. The art continued to evolve, and possibly as early as 3500 B.C. (according to Professor Breasted, *History of Egypt*), possessed a series of twenty-four signs, each of which represented only a letter; *i.e.*, they were alphabetic signs.

The Egyptian might then have written his language with twenty-four alphabetic letters if the sign-group habit had not been too strong for the scribe, just as the letter-group habit is strong enough with us to-day to prevent the introduction of a simplified phonetic system of spelling English. If we smile at the Egyptian's cumbrous sign-groups, future generations may as justly smile at our often absurd letter-groups (Prof. Breasted, *Ancient Times*).

The Egyptian scribe continued to use what are called "determinatives" in his writing. Thus, after three signs *ch-q-r* (the Egyptians did not write their vowels), the literal meaning of which is hungry, but which was understood to mean pauper, the writer adds a kneeling man, to show that the word refers to a person, and before him places another man with hand on mouth, this being an indication of hunger, thirst, or speech. These two needless signs are survivals from the pictorial stage of writing.

Possibly, as the writer of the article "Alphabet" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* suggests, the Egyptians did not profit by their invention of the alphabet because amongst them "writing was clearly a mystery in both senses—only possible at that period for masters in the craft, and also something like the writing of medical practitioners at the present day in Latin, which was not to be made too easily intelligible to the common people."

As the Egyptians used writing in their daily business, there presently arose a rapid or running hand in which each hieroglyphic sign was much abbreviated. This was called hieratic, and may be said to correspond to our handwriting, while the hieroglyphic corresponds to our printing. In the eighth century B.C. an even more rapid hand, corresponding in some ways to our shorthand, came into existence, being known as demotic.

In Egypt it was that ink, pen, and paper (the last made from a river reed called papyrus) were first invented.

Long before 3000 B.C. a race now known as the Sumerians had descended from the mountains to the east of the plain of Shinar (later known as Babylonia), and had reclaimed the marshes around the mouths of the Tigris and Euphrates. There they developed a

fairly high city-state civilization, and developed cuneiform writing. Upon a disc of soft clay held at an oblique angle to the body, the scribe scratched rude pictures, and then baked the tablet, either in the sun or in an oven, until it became hard. On the earliest surviving specimens of these tablets we can recognize the original pictures in which cuneiform writing began.

These pictures were made by means of a reed having a blunt, square-tipped end, and in making a single line the scribe impressed one corner of the square tip into the clay, then raised it to impress another line in the same way. Owing to the tilt of the tablet each line thus made was wider at one end than at the other, and hence every picture came to be made up of a number of wedge-shaped lines. The pictures thus became increasingly more difficult to recognize as pictures, especially as speed in writing increased; and finally all resemblance to the pictures disappeared. Sumerian writing came to possess over 350 signs, each of which represented a syllable or a word (with the exception later of the vowels and some pictographs which survived in the same way as did the Egyptian "determinatives"). The Sumerians never developed an alphabet.

This system of writing was adopted by the Semitic Akkadians when, under the leadership of Sargon (2750 B.C.), they conquered the plain of Shinar.

It was also used by the later Semites who overran the plain under the leadership of Hammurapi, king of the city of Babylon, from which town, of course, his empire took its name (2100 B.C.). We have a group of fifty-five of this great king's letters, besides a splendid monument bearing his laws, which is the oldest surviving code of laws in the world.

Clay coverings were used, the address being written on them, just as we write the address on the paper envelope which we employ. Fastened to the bales of goods carried by the Babylonian merchants throughout Western Asia were clay tablets bearing their names; and the use of cuneiform was gradually spread through that district by these traders.

Among other peoples who adopted the Sumerian system of writing were the Assyrians, who added two hundred signs of their own to those already in use. Assurbanipal, grandson of the notorious Sennacherib, who was the last of the great Assyrian rulers, and the most scholarly of them all, boasts that his father instructed him not only in riding and shooting with the bow and arrow, but also in writing. A collection of twenty-two thousand clay tablets was discovered in his ruined library rooms at Nineveh, and can now be seen in the British Museum. The earliest known library in Asia, they included works on science, religion, and literature.

The Chaldeans, after their triumph over the Assyrians, likewise adopted cuneiform writing.

W. H. MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

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### Notes From Ireland.

Fine things are to be met with in the now extensive range of what is known as Anglo-Celtic literature, the literature of Yeats, O'Sullivan, Russell, Colum, and Higgins, not to mention the body of prose writers. Before everything else, these are all artists, and, in their mysticism or their transcendentalism, Freethinkers to a man. The formalities necessary to the soul's salvation get scant courtesy from any of them, though if we want flat denials and glorious blasphemies we've got to turn to those "literary wild geese," Bernard Shaw and George Moore. However, they knock a good deal of fun out of the Bible. In Mr. Yeats' *Celtic Twilight* will be found mention of one Moran, a blind poet, who wrote a poem called *Moses* in

grand and solemn strains, but who, tiring of the solemnity, parodied his own verses in this fashion :

In Egypt's land, contagious to the Nile,  
King Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe in style.  
She tuk her dip, then walked unto the land,  
The dry her royal pelt she ran along the strand.  
A bulrush tripped her, whereupon she saw  
A smiling babby in a wad o' straw.  
She tuk it up, and said with accents mild,  
"Tare-and-agers, girls, which av yez owns the child?"

This, too, is rather good, from Lady Gregory's *Saints and Wonders*, a book to delight the hearts of all to whom the white flame of the imagination is the only reality :

There was a good, honourable, well-born priest, God's darling he was, a man holding to the yoke of Christ. And it happened one day he went to attend on a sick man. And as he was going, a swarm of bees came towards him, and he having the Blessed Body of Christ with him there. And when she saw the swarm he lay the Blessed Body upon the ground and gathered the swarm into his bosom, and went on in that way upon his journey, and forgot the Blessed Body where he had laid it. And after a while the bees went back from him again, and they found the Blessed Body and carried it away between them to their own dwelling place, and they gave honour to it kindly and made a good chapel of wax for it, and an altar and a chalice and a pair of priests, shaping them well out of wax to stand before Christ's Body.

But Ireland is not yet a wonderless country. The 1920 wonders, however, are not quite so ingenuous and irresponsible as those of the soul-free age. Almighty God, who communicated their lustre to the invisible stars, has, I believe, allowed a little more of his substance to drip down to us. The divine ichor, rather congealed by this time, may be seen trickling along in crimson channels from the eight eyes of the four three-and-sixpenny statues on exhibition in a house in Templemore, Co. Tipperary. Yesterday I bought a postcard for fourpence, and it shows clearly enough the eight disagreeable stains besides a row of discarded crutches. There is no doubt whatever that the cripples were not using the crutches when the photograph was being taken. A colleague of mine was one of a party that motored down a fortnight ago. The roads were rather bumpy in parts, and every time the car gave an extra big jolt, he cried, "Another hundred days' indulgence." At least, so he told me. Unfortunately, the car broke down, so that when the party did at length arrive they were too late to get God or the Virgin to do anything for them because the shop was shut. The following day he boasted that he didn't believe the thing at all (he is a man of exceptional intelligence). "Still, there's the blood," I reminded him. "That's true," said he, beginning to believe the wonder again. The spasmodic incredulity of such as he is a little unaccountable considering their periodic consumption of the Holy Crumbs. "Do you know what should be done with the blood?" I asked him. "What?" said he. "It should be scraped off and made into a round of white pudden."

The Protestants and Atheists of Dublin will be delighted, and the Catholics gratified, to learn that a statue to the Adorable Heart of Our Blessed Saviour may not improbably be erected in one of the city's main thoroughfares. It is high time. The nation is in a bad way at present, and unless active steps are taken immediately the well-bred "black and tans" will be likely to relieve it, which would be rather a pity.

Almost every day I pass a string of young jackasses on their way from the seminary to the university. As a rule, they are clad in the ordinary mourning clerical attire, but occasionally they slink along in scarlet petticoats and white overalls and peculiar headgear. But, no matter what they wear, they never excite the slightest comment. Oh, no! Were the wind to make parasols of their pale frocks and of their red-gold underwear, were the frost to hook icicles to their turkey-red noses, were the sun to stagger with laughter at the rigid frigidity of their features, still would these priestly fledglings slit along as the specially hallowed receptacles of the divine spirit. I wonder do these fellows believe in themselves? The supple-kneed populace believe in them, at any rate. Between the fools and the fooled there is little enough

wisdom in the world. The mightiest names in Ireland are those of non-Catholics, and, remembering that these form but one-fourth of the population, we may reckon, woefully enough, that we would stand four times higher than we do were it not for the ravenous cupidity of Roman Catholicity. Every family has relatives in the priesthood or in a nunnery. I expect that there are not less than one hundred thousand religious in this unfortunate little island. Try and imagine it, if you can. One hundred thousand of the laziest vagabonds that could be! And nine-tenths of every town steeped in poverty! Church spires as tall as the length of many a village! Priests whose tongues have chanted many a lie! Nuns who have wept more tears than any number of old maids!

I saw a woman bless herself before crossing a thoroughfare on which there was a great deal of traffic. God, seizing his opportunity, proved that he was more than an approximation to nothing, for she crossed the road without being run over. So did I. DESMOND FITZROY.

## Correspondence.

### THEORY VERSUS FACT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—With apologies to Mr. Jameson for my long neglect of his request, I now take up the challenge to answer your objection on p. 69 of *Parson and the Atheist*.

You begin by insisting on the difference between describing symptoms and diagnosing causes. This was in answer to my contention that personal conviction of someone's existence cannot be acquired second hand. You then give an illustration of your meaning by showing that Mrs. Eddy's conviction about a boil on the neck was expressed in her saying that it was "unbelief made manifest": but that the boil was a fact and the conviction something else. Here I do not follow your statement exactly: directly after this passage you say "states of mind are ultimate psychological facts," and then "their trustworthiness, their correspondence with external reality, furnishes the occasion for denial." I don't see how an "ultimate fact" is different from a "fact," or can furnish occasion for denial. Denial of what? Not of the fact, because you have just said it was an "ultimate fact," which means, I suppose, undeniable. Of the correspondence, then? But that is the question under discussion and the sentence would be a *petitio principii*. But perhaps I am only "chopping logic" here. Let me put what I believe you to mean as fairly as I can.

You mean that the boil is a fact, and the diagnosis nonsense or nothing, or anyhow to be treated as nothing. But it is a fact that the diagnosis is believed by a number of people, and that affects the question whether it ought to be treated as nothing. It is "rational" to dismiss without examination certain statements as mere falsehood when they are only believed by one or two people; but is it equally "rational" so to treat them if they are believed by a vast number of people?

For a long time I treated the affirmations of Christian Science as nothing because Mrs. Eddy's book was to me nonsense. But when I found hundreds of thousands of "educated" people believing in them, I thought, and think still, that the most "rational" thing to do is to suspend judgment, and try to understand why that belief exists. For I have found it by experience that every widespread opinion, if fairly, respectfully, and patiently examined, ultimately seems to be partly true; that is, that any careful statement of the opinion contains some truth, is not wholly nonsense, demands, therefore, consideration, or, as a great thinker said, "Truth is so vast I hesitate to say that anybody is wholly wrong." (Observe, in passing, that the remark can only apply to affirmations, not to denials. That is the difference between your treatment of a conviction and mine.

That difference arises, I think, from a confusion you make between a *fact of consciousness* and a *theory*. Your illustration about the boil is not *in pari materia*, therefore is not a parallel with my contention about a conviction of existence. Thus: The Christian Science statement about the boil is a theory or interpretation of a visible fact. But the widespread conviction that God exists is itself a fact. It is much else, no doubt; but the first thing to be said

about it is that the conviction exists. Now I maintain that in words you admit that this is true, viz., that the conviction is a fact; but when you compare it with a, to you nonsensical, theory about a boil you not only fall into a logical error, but tacitly assume that the conviction is false. The logical error is important, because it ignores a deep fact which underlies the whole discussion. Thus: the boil is an experience first, and the theory is subsequent to it, and built up on it. So at least you and I would say. But in history the order is reversed. The conviction as to God's existence, or at least a native readiness to believe in it, is common to vast swarms of men. A child starts with it, and on it builds his theory that God exists as a person. The fact is not a visible thing, but a fact of what is called consciousness. Now, possibly you hold that there is no such thing as consciousness, but I doubt it. If so, you will perhaps deny that any conviction is a fact, however widespread. There is, however, no hope of our discussion being anything but inconclusive unless you state plainly whether you believe there is such a thing as moral consciousness, by which I mean a universal disposition or tendency to assume some things as good, or true, or beautiful in comparison with others, and the life of Isaac Newton as higher than that of a cut-throat, sot, and humbug in one.

E. LYTTETON.

#### WOMEN AS SAVIOURS.

SIR,—After reading Frances Prewett's articles and the letters, etc., in reply it strikes me that the public of to-day are inclined to let the medical profession lead them by the nose, just as the priest has done in former years, and so are replacing one kind of medicine man by another. High ideals do not, as a rule, come out of the dissecting-room nor the sick-room, but out of the study of the scientist and the dreamer. I am with Miss Prewett, but my profession has convinced me that there are but few women sharing our ideals at present. Most of them are more eager for news of contraceptives than for new ideals. They smile at me in a superior way (you see, I have never been married) and lend me their books by lady doctors, after which I feel as though I had been forcibly held over a bad drain, and make for the eau de Cologne. Am thankful though to find there is one medico on our side. Please go on, Miss Prewett. Your thoughts may be only broken strands on the loom of time, but no one can say what threads the hands that come after will choose to weave into their design, and it is not given to any of us to view the completed fabric. Mrs. Walker is right; we need our economic freedom badly.

(Miss) H. M. COPE (Maternity Nurse).

#### ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S RELIGION.

SIR,—Shortly after the unveiling of the statue of this great man you claimed him as a Freethinker; well, using that description in its natural meaning, which is also its best sense, I have no wish whatever to dispute your characterization of him.

But if by that term you wish to convey to your readers that Abraham Lincoln rejected the Christian religion, what can be made of the following utterances of his:—

1. When as a labouring man, witnessing the horrors of negro slavery in America, he declared, "If ever I get a chance to hit this thing, I'll give it a blow, by the eternal God!"

2. In his second inaugural address at Washington occur these words, "With firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right."

3. About a year before his assassination he said to Joshua Speed, "I am profitably engaged reading the Bible. Take all of this book upon reason that you can, and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man."

4. On the authority of George W. F. Birch, D.D., of New York City (1895), we have it that Lincoln was a member of the "congregation" of the First Presbyterian Church of Springfield, Illinois; while it is said that he was averse to joining the membership of any particular church on account of the long and complicated statements of Christian doctrine contained in their Confessions, yet he made this remarkable deliverance: "When any Church will inscribe over its altar as its sole qualification for membership the Saviour's condensed statement of the substance of both Law and Gospel, 'Thou shall love the

Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbour as thyself,' that Church will I join with all my heart and all my soul."

TRUTHSEEKER.

[We have neither time nor opportunity at the moment to check "Truthseeker's" references. His law partner, Henden, and his wife, both of whom may be credited with knowing his opinions, affirm that Lincoln was never a member of any church, did not believe in Christianity, and when he went to church he went to mock and came away to mimic. And when Lincoln was asked to deny the charge of infidelity, he declared he would "die first."—ED. *Freethinker*.]

#### Toynbee Hall.

##### EDUCATIONAL AND OTHER ACTIVITIES.

THERE must be many Freethinkers who owe a debt of gratitude to Toynbee for a clear lead to mental culture. We ourselves have pleasant memories of the small groups of democratic Oxford men who brought something of the urbanity and idealism of Oxford to the crude reality of the East End of London. The new activities of this admirable educational centre is set forth in a syllabus which can be had from the Warden, 28 Commercial Street, E. 1. The autumn term began on September 27, and the spring term begins on January 10, 1921. There are classes and lectures on History and Government, of which we note a course on the Social History of England by Miss A. Lawrence. This is a free course, the usual charge being 2s. 6d. or 5s. Industrial History and Economics are naturally given an important place. There are five courses, including twenty lectures on "Problems of Contemporary Industries," arranged for and commended to members of trade unions. Students who are interested in the solutions of the Eastern question have two courses arranged for them by specialists. In literature and philosophy there are courses on Modern Political Ideals, Plato's *Republic*, Modern English Literature in its Relation to Present-day Life. This covers the period from the Romantic revival to the present, the lecturer being Mrs. Sherard Vines, of New College, an Oxford poet whose originality does not consist in flouting the average person. We hope something quite novel in the course on Psycho-analysis by Mr. E. Austin, for men only. There are also classes for French and Russian languages, Public Speaking, Folk Dancing, Gymnastics for women, Hygiene; and a number of clubs and societies to which new members are welcomed.

#### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

##### LONDON.

###### INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 7.30, Mr. Ernest Dales, "The Social War and the Christian Religion."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH, N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N.W.): 7.30, Mr. A. D. Howell Smith, B.A., "The Revision of Moral Values."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9): 7, Mr. E. Burke, "Human Nature and the Moral Sense."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "The Group Mind."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. A. Hyatt, "An Evening with the Best Authors."

##### COUNTRY.

###### INDOOR.

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Youngman's Rooms, 19 Lowerhead Row, Leeds): 6.30, Mr. Lew Davis, "Are Freethinkers Freethinkers?"

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "The Dangers of Spiritualism."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Hebburn Miners' Hall): Mr. J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Religion and Morals in the Light of Science"; 6.30, "The Prince of Peace in History."

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