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Views and Opinions.

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Education and a Future Life.

Last week I gave some reasons for believing that normal and healthy human nature is not really desirous of living in some future state of existence, despite the impression which is abroad to the contrary, an impression wholly due to the unthinking manner in which the mass of people take their views from those in a position of authority. In support of my fundamental contention I might have instanced the example of Buddhism, which furnishes us with several hundreds of millions of people whose creed teaches that personal immortality is a curse rather than a blessing. And if the reply to this is made that we have here an illustration of what teaching will do, there is an admission of the truth of my position that man's talk of a future life is no more than proof that people will, for the most part, express their feelings in the way in which they are taught to express them. But for various reasons I preferred to take the people who are cited to us as evidence rather than call in as witnesses those of an alien creed! And here one might say that if a careful inquiry were made along the proper lines it might be found that even with us there are a very considerable number who would regard a future life as anything but a blessing. That this may be so is admitted by a well-known religious writer, Dr. Mellone, in a small work entitled *The Immortal Hope*. He says, "It is possible that inquiries made more or less systematically among intelligent people might suggest that the strength of the desire for another life is overrated, that a vast number do not care, while many would prefer annihilation." That statement will be questioned only by those who are determined to square theory with facts by the simple process of closing their eyes to all that are against them. And to make much of the desires of such as have been reared in a religious atmosphere, and carefully guarded from the disturbing influence of all teaching that would upset received opinions, while ruling out a whole class of evidence as inadmissible, is a mere exhibition of sectarian bigotry.

Death Beds.

* * *

The suspicion of Dr. Mellone that inquiry might show that fewer people care about immortality than

many are inclined to believe is quite endorsed by that eminent medical man, Dr. William Osler. In his lecture on "Human Immortality," he says that "the desire for immortality seems never to have had a very strong hold upon mankind," and that the belief is less widely held than is usually stated"; and with reference to the supposed desire for immortality expressed when people are near the end, he adds the following important testimony:—

I have careful records of about 500 death-beds, studied particularly with reference to the modes of death and the sensations of the dying. The latter alone concern us here. Ninety suffered bodily pains or distress of one sort or another, eleven showed mental apprehension, two positive terror, one expressed spiritual exaltation, one bitter remorse. The great majority gave no signs one way or the other; like their birth, their death was a sleep and a forgetting. The preacher was right; in this respect man hath no pre-eminence over the beast, "as the one dieth, so dieth the other."

Professor Leuba, in a series of questions sent to college students and men of science, found out that not half of those who replied professed a desire for immortality, and his inquiries took no note of how far the reply in the affirmative was due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of normal feelings that would admit of a very different explanation. For it is just part of the position that people are in the habit of interpreting their feelings in terms of the current teaching, and thus play into the hands of the orthodox. We have seen this occur in the interpretation of nervous disorders in terms of demonic possession, and the same plan has been and is pursued with regard to the normal processes of life.

* * *

Life and Desire.

This last point leads us to what may be regarded as the heart of the question. It is not denied that many imagine they have a desire for a future life, but there is really no more reason why we should take a man's analysis of his feelings in this direction as being accurate than we would depend absolutely upon his explanation of the causes of some normal or abnormal physical state. All we are warranted in saying is that there is present *some* desire, but whether it is of the nature described is quite another matter. Now, I believe the correct answer to this question was given by the late Professor Metchnikoff. He set out with the question, Why is it, seeing that all men must die, there has not been developed in man an instinct that should meet so universal a fact in the same way that an instinct has been developed with regard to other normal happenings of life? In other cases, where a phase of existence is uniformly experienced, we find that there is developed in the organism some kind of a preparation for it. Thus there is a play instinct, which Professor Karl Groos has demonstrated to be a preparation for the more serious work of adult life. There is the gregarious instinct which fits man for corporate existence, and there is the sex instinct which expresses itself as the young human being approaches adolescence. So with numerous other instances. But with

death, save in an insignificant number of cases, there is no such preparation. Why is this? Why is man so ill-prepared for a fact that sooner or later he will have to face? Of course, this may be no more than another case of disharmony, or it may be more than that. At any rate, it is in the light of this mal-adaptation that we must look for an explanation of that clinging to life which is seized upon by the religionist as proof of a desire for a life beyond the grave.

An Interpretation.

* * *

We can start with the fact that there is an obvious desire for life with all normal animal forms. And we may put it in a rough and ready way—rather as a means of inducing a mental picture than as an exact description—that every human being starts life with a certain physiological impetus, or, what amounts to the same thing, the capacity for generating a physiological energy that will serve to preserve life, the psychological side of which is the *desire* to live. Now, if we assume that the life of the organism flows so smoothly and so unbrokenly that death comes at a time when the physiological power of the organism is completely exhausted, we should have a corresponding weakening of the psychological power also. The consequence of that would be that we should die as we sleep, not with a sense of losing something that we desire to retain, but with a sense of rest and relief. We should have lost the desire to live, because we had lost the motive power that kept the desire in being. But that, with a rare exception here and there, is not what happens. We die, as Metchnikoff insists, deaths of disease. Our deaths are deaths of violence, inasmuch as they are the result of the breakdown of parts of the organism, throwing the whole structure out of order, and occurring while the physiological forces and its resultant, the psychological instinct for life, is still strong. We shrink from death because we have not lived long enough to exhaust the desire to live; it is the cry of the organism to spend its still remaining possibilities of living.

* * *

Religious Exploitation.

It is at this point that the religious misinterpretation of a perfectly natural fact emerges. What the religionist has to deal with is the desire for life here. What he says is, You desire to live, but because you cannot live longer here there is evidence that you will live elsewhere, an altogether irrelevant and unwarrantable conclusion. This is shown by the fact that if life could be prolonged here no one would profess a desire to live elsewhere. There is no desire for a future life; there is merely a desire to live. There is a shrinking from non-existence, partly because of the reason already dealt with, partly because it is easier to think of oneself as continuing to exist than it is to think of oneself as passing out of existence. But the desire to live is, so to speak, fluid. It has no rigidly fixed form, but may assume any that is prompted by environmental influences. It is on this fact that the theologian builds. Just as the fullest life spells to one military glory, to another political or literary renown, so religion seizes hold of the formless desire for life, and explains and exploits it as a desire for a life beyond the grave. Thus, analysis explains both the persistence of the doctrine of survival and its failure to exert a commanding influence on life. It has been persistent because there have always been the fact of death and the desire for life on which it might build. It has failed to impress people with the paramount importance of the life beyond the grave because human feelings and instincts are developed with reference to the present life and to the present life alone. And thus, while people have accepted in theory the religious interpretation, social forces have effectually prevented their exercising a decisive influence on life. Life, in

the long run, is too strong for religion. The Gods, sooner or later, are compelled to bow before the forces they are fabled to have created.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"Who Will Forgive God?"

THAT is the most startling utterance in Mr. Maugham's play, "The Unknown." Mrs. Littlewood has lost two sons in the war, and her heart is broken. Her grief is too poignant to express itself either in speech or in dress. The vicar of the parish censures her for the apparent callousness of her conduct. He solemnly informs her that by playing bridge and wearing bright-coloured clothes she is giving his parishioners an exceedingly bad example. But he reminds her that we are all sinners needing the forgiveness of God, which he is graciously ready to grant to all who ask for it. She listens in silence, and then, her eyes ablaze and her heart wrung, she asks, "And who is to forgive God?" She loudly declares her own utter inability to do so. She goes much further than old Omar in the famous verse:—

Oh, Thou, who man of baser earth didst make,
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake:
For all the sin wherewith the face of man
Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take!

Mrs. Littlewood feels no need of God's forgiveness, nor can she give him hers. Now the Rev. A. C. Hill contributes an article to the *Christian World* for October 14, in which he endeavours to show that Mrs. Littlewood is merely the victim of "an old habit of mind," or of "the mood combatted by Milton," but "favoured by Byron." He says:—

Once more the Almighty is being challenged, and men are asserting and arguing that God is responsible for all the suffering of the world. Either it is declared frankly that for thoughtful men God no longer exists, that therefore his activities are no more in question; or it is said that the agony of the world is to be attributed to him, to his action, or to his abstention from action.

That Mr. Hill treats as the mood of the hour. Major Wharton has returned from the front a confirmed Atheist; and the war has had the same effect upon thousands of others. It is a deep-rooted conviction that if God exists he must be held responsible for all that happens. In the Bible he is represented as the Governor of the world; and the Governor of any country is answerable for the country's conduct. The Psalmist affirms that "the Lord sat as king at the flood"; and it follows of necessity that the drowning of the world was his act. The Psalmist adds: "Yea, the Lord sitteth as king for ever"; and in another psalm we read that "the Lord is king for ever and ever." The Bible does not hesitate to announce that God's will is supreme and universally prevails. If this is true, there is no possible escape from the conclusion that all events, of whatever nature, are but so many expressions of God's will, or are permitted in order that they may be overruled to show forth his glory. Of God's responsibility for good and evil alike there can be no doubt whatever.

Mr. Hill fails to come to real grips with Mrs. Littlewood's question. She asserts that she could not treat a worn-out horse as God has treated her. Mr. Hill points certain people who have mental troubles to "the soothing beauty and august majesty of Nature." It is perfectly true that John Stuart Mill found immense help in Wordsworth's poetry simply because it is a glorification and interpretation of Nature. Now, Nature is governed by inexorable law, over which we have no control; and it often brings upon mankind unspeakable suffering and sorrow. Volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, violent storms on sea and land,

often destroy thousands, if not millions, of lives. As Mr. Hill well says:—

Whatever may be the lot of the individual man, though he live or die, be healed or wounded, the mighty and majestic agencies of the natural world proceed on their pre-ordained and inflexibly pursued career. The seasons endure, heat and cold, summer and winter, come and go, and change not at man's bidding, or stay in their courses for all that man can say.

"Pre-ordained" is a theological term, and is altogether out of place as applied to the operations of natural laws. Even according to Mr. Hill, over these operations neither God nor man can exercise the least control. But how can the contemplation of Nature help such people as Mrs. Littlewood? We are told that God speaks to the distracted soul of man through Nature; but the only message that comes thus is, "Things are as they must be." We find no fault with Nature, *except when it is described as the work of a wise and loving God*, as the Bible and theology do describe it.

Much of Mr. Hill's article is wholly irrelevant. His appeals to Nature and to reason have no bearing on the question at issue. When he comes to discuss human life in its various aspects, he treats it as if God was not in it at all. He laughs all Utopias to scorn. He maintains that "the real world, with humanity stirred to wakefulness by the pricks of pain," is infinitely better than "the easy world, with a dulled and stupefied humanity." This is doubtless true; but it is a mistake to say that humanity has *chosen* the real world and the hard life. No other life is possible; we must take this or die. Curiously enough, God cannot be held responsible for this necessity: "To say that God is responsible for this choice and all its results is to say that God made Adam eat the apple, which repudiates the fable and denies the facts of experience." And now at last we reach the real point at issue. "Who is to forgive God?" the bereft mother angrily inquires. Mr. Hill answers, "Nobody, because God has done absolutely nothing." Listen:—

Especially is this charge formulated in the assertion, uttered or unexpressed, that God is the direct cause of, or is chiefly responsible for, the death, cruelty, and misery caused by war. That wars have happened, and may happen again, is one of the sad facts of our human story. But to make God responsible for their happenings, to charge upon God all the agonies they produce, is to introduce superfluous causes, to seek for an explanation afar when all the time there is a sufficient reason near at hand.

We congratulate Mr. Hill upon the wonderful ease with which he dismisses God whenever his presence is a source of inconvenience and mental worry. If he were a Secularist he could not furnish a more rational and strictly accurate account of the causes of the Great War than is contained in one paragraph of the article under review. God had absolutely nothing to do with it. In theory, God is King of kings and Lord of lords; in theory, he governs the world and all therein; in theory, "he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" But in practice, the King behind the kings is not in evidence; man governs or misgoverns the world himself; and no external will exerts the least particle of influence; and the amazing fact is that Mr. Hill holds the theory and recognizes the practice at one and the same time, without being sensible of any inconsistency. He is of opinion that once in a while God vacates his throne, or becomes inactive thereon; that now and then he "leaves a man to his own devices, to reap the fruit of his own doings." That is what he did during the late war, when Mrs. Littlewood lost her two sons. How marvellously accommodating to the theologians God is, to be sure. There

is certainly no abounding joy in being God under such limiting, narrowing conditions! Mr. Hill admits that he is obliged to work under the conditions of time and to be bound by the terms of human freedom. That is to say, God works under such conditions as render it literally impossible to make sure that he works at all.

"Will man forgive God?" Of course, to the divine such a question "reveals an erring mind." The one who asks it deserves our deepest pity. Intellectually the question is a vulgar challenge to be vulgarly met "by the plain statement that the High and Lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, does not apologize to the creature of his hands." Paul uses that argument in the Epistle to the Romans; and it is a legitimate argument for believers in the Divine Sovereignty. In the last paragraph Mr. Hill employs the following strange language concerning the question:—

Stated in terms of religion, the piteous cry of the broken heart, the bruised soul, it is to be answered in the words with which our Lord united himself to all the suffering children of men, when he taught us to pray, Our Father, Thy will be done.

It evidently does not occur to the reverend gentleman that, in those concluding words, meant to be so soothing and solacing to the bereaved, he contradicts all his highly sensible observations about the causes of the war. After all, God must have been in the war if those whose hearts it lacerated are now to be comforted by saying "Thy will be done." Poor Mrs. Littlewood of the play, whose two sons were killed in action, is now by implication assured that they fell according to the will of God, for she is exhorted to say submissively, "Thy will be done." Instead of thus submitting, she indignantly exclaims, "Who is to forgive God? Not I; never, never!"

We have no need to ask "Who is to forgive God?" because we do not believe in God. We as completely disbelieve as Mr. Hill believes in him. Instead of dismissing him occasionally, as during a war, like the reverend gentleman, we dismiss him altogether, and by doing so get rid of many puzzling problems. The divines are perpetually preaching sermons and publishing books to "justify the ways of God to man"; and the task is never finished. There are countless myriads working hard at it year in and year out; but not one wholly convincing and thoroughly satisfactory Theodicy has ever been constructed. In every argument there are weak links, and when pressure is brought to bear on it the chain snaps; and the whole work has to be done over again. Four years ago Principal Forsyth, who, we regret to learn, is now ill, published a volume of upwards of 200 pages, entitled *The Justification of God*; and an extremely able work it is. In reality, however, the justification of God, like the justification of a guilty sinner, is incapable of accomplishment. Mr. Hill has done his best; but in spite of all such attempts the number of unbelievers goes on steadily growing. Reason is gradually, but surely, supplanting faith.

J. T. LLOYD.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S.—Mr. J. T. Lloyd pays us a visit on October 31. For subjects see branch announcements. The committee are looking for a continuance of the good attendances at our opening lectures. At both lectures Mr. Leon Hampson (musical director at Market Street Picture House) will favour us with selections on the violin. On Saturday, October 30, we hold our first social and dance at 6, to be preceded by an "American" tea at 3 p.m. in support of the branch funds. A good rally of "Saints" will put the Social Committee in good humour for the winter's work.—H. BLACK, Hon. Secretary.

P.S.—What is an American tea? You bring a small article; you buy an article; you partake of tea; by so doing you help the branch to raise funds. We solicit your support.

The Child and the Bible.

Mythology and newspapers cannot co-exist.—*Mr. A. G. Gardiner, of the "Daily News."*

Speedy end to superstition, a gentle one if you can contrive it, but an end.—*Thomas Carlyle.*

Liberty's chief foe is theology.—*Charles Bradlaugh.*

CORRESPONDENCE has been published in the *Daily Mail* (London) concerning the question how the Bible should be explained to children, in view of the scientific facts which, owing to modern research, are now common knowledge among educated people. The discussion aroused great interest among parents, teachers, and clergymen, and the published letters showed that the keenest interest was taken by the ministers, who, after all, have material reasons for their known attitude on the place of the Bible in modern education.

In a leading article, the editor wrote of "the very great and obvious difficulties that face the schoolmaster and the child when they read the Bible," and he asked for "a lead from those who are able to give it." As the published correspondence was very largely the work of the clergy, or their satellites, the editor received little help from that quarter, and the discussion finished, as such things so often do, "in the air."

The plain fact is that in this country education has been hampered by the desire of the clergy, of whom there are 50,000, to ally religious teaching with the school curriculum. This desire has been further complicated by the fact that 25,000 of these clergy are opposed to the remaining 25,000. The teachings of the Established Church were considered by the Non-conformists to be wrong and harmful, whilst the instruction given by Dissenters was pronounced by Churchmen to be heretical and dangerous. Roman Catholics, in their turn, considered that Anglicans and Free Churchmen were alike so damnable that they had to provide their own schools. The Churchmen and Dissenters, however, agreed that the Bible might be read in the public schools, but that no theological doctrines should be taught. This is what is called the "compromise," and although it satisfied most of the clergy, who use it as the thin edge of the wedge, it still impedes education and fetters progress. For, the clergy know that so long as their fetish book is used in education, their own position is safe.

There are grave reasons, however, why the Jewish-Christian Bible should have no official place in the public schools. Its educational teaching is out of date, and comes to us "like the horns of Elfsland faintly blowing." What do our kindergarten teachers, for instance, make of such Biblical advice as: "a rod is for the back of him that is void of understanding"; "Thou shalt beat him with a rod"; "Chasten thy son, and let not thy soul spare for his crying"? Such Bible injunctions may receive the approbation of 50,000 clergymen, but they remain the essence of barbarism.

Moreover, parts of the Bible are unfit for children. If it were an ordinary volume, instead of a fetish-book, it would be pilloried as immoral, and excluded from every home and every school in the country. For in its so-called sacred pages may be found plain, unvarnished accounts of sodomy, rape, unnatural vice, and all manner of Oriental "frightfulness," written with all the nasty particularity and love of detail peculiar to all Eastern writers. The florid, heated rhetoric of the Bible leaves nothing to the imagination, and the least lettered juvenile could appreciate its glowing periods. Oriental nastiness begins where Occidental pornography stops, and the ordinary sex-novel is a model of purity and restraint compared with the lusciousness of the Bible. No novelist would dare to imitate it, for he

would be imprisoned and his books destroyed. Yet the clergy force the Bible, which contains all this abomination, into the hands of millions of children, knowing that they dare not read it in all its completeness to a mixed audience of adults.

Nor is this all! Bible chronology is simple nonsense. Only grossly ignorant, or mentally feeble, persons can believe that the universe was created six thousand years ago; that Adam, Noah, and Methusaleh lived nine centuries; and that Melchisadech had neither beginning nor ending of days. Philology gets no countenance from the blunders of the building of Babel, or the pious perversions of the tongues of flame at Pentecost. The mistakes of Moses would strain the credulity of a Gold Coast negro to breaking point. In sober truth, there is neither history nor science in the sacred volume. The atmosphere throughout is that of the *Arabian Nights* and Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. A snake talks; a whale has a boarding-house in his stomach; a pigeon acts as a co-respondent; and a donkey makes speeches. Fiery chariots, unicorns, dragons, flaming horses, giants, satyrs, and cocatrice figure in the sacred pages.

Concerning medicine, we find the long-discredited notion of demoniacal possession being the cause of disease. Fevers are rebuked; leprosy cured by a fig-poultice; and blindness removed by expectoration. Some favoured persons die twice; and another, still more favoured, never troubled the undertaker at all. Witchcraft is still insisted upon as being true long after it has been discarded by every nation pretending to civilization.

As for ethics, the least said the better. The lives and actions of the Patriarchs, and of the Kings of Israel and Judah, and other Bible heroes, are only paralleled in the Newgate Calendar. Some of the Psalms are a further proof that priestly ideals are, fortunately, not our ideals. In short, the Bible, from the page describing Adam and Eve starting life at full age, until the Second Person of the Undivided Trinity ascends into the ether like a flying machine, is a salmagundi of unrestrained Oriental imagination. The book is inconsistent with common sense and ascertained knowledge, and, sooner or later, it will have to be so regarded, in spite of the 50,000 priests in this country. For Freethinkers have set themselves the task of freeing the little children from the absurdities, immoralities, and barbarities of uncivilized times perpetuated by this grossly overrated fetish-book.

MIMNERMUS.

Plotinus, The Labourer, and Dean Inge.

III.

(Concluded from p. 668.)

LIFE is a quest, a battle, and a riddle. Christianity descends on youth, and makes the astounding claim that everything has been arranged, and youth, under threats, must fit in with the Christian scheme. One would like to know why the Lord made temperaments and stubborn knees? although one could for ever ask this kind of question as easily as shelling pease. Our modern Freethinker will penetrate deeper than the question-and-answer-type in the correspondence column of the *Christian Herald*. He will see survivals of bestial ancient ignorance in modern drawings by anonymous artists—these, but present expressions of the lower type of man for ever with us. Chaucer and Blake will help him to understand the type. Chaucer knew that the Reeve's Tale was as much an eternal part of life as the Knight's tale—that the "Wife of Bath" eternally exists—that the perfect type of womanhood exists—by comparison or contrast. The Christian concept of life is negative—note the game of

battledore and shuttlecock in this paper. If it says "Yea" to this life, it has made this world a very objectionable place to live in. Logically, its aim should be a world of hermaphrodites, and then, presto!—the millenium. No lives to be saved—no lives to be damned. None to be born—none to be baptized. If Freethought philosophy cannot embrace all races and all creeds, it is like calling a circle imperfect—there is no such thing. Confucius, with his "fraternal deference," had a wider outlook on life than those who can only see a wooden cross with a dead man on it. Dean Inge, with the obsession of his calling, cannot see that there are two methods of getting the Shudra caste to work—a healthy incentive or the knout. This last word is only another word for slavery—the repressed Christian complex.

If we as Freethinkers are handicapped in gaining the sufferances of all men and women by being unable to offer them the prize of immortality, our heads at least are clear on the only life we know. And if we insist on the liberty of the mind, we shall be satisfied with nothing less than liberty of the body. This agreed upon—what is our choice of inducement to work—a healthy incentive or the knout? In this respect the world's misfortune does not make us a bedfellow of the Dean; the cracks and fissures of society reveal to us the mental make-up of the apex of civilization. "See, my son, with what a little wisdom the world is governed," and read, my readers, the back-yard gossip of the saviours of society in Lieutenant-Colonel Repington's book, *The First World War*—when "we were all one." And, if you have any stomach left, read the war books, by English and German writers. This General should have two Army Corps to throw on to the flank of the enemy, that Field-Marshal should push forward with the first army and beat down opposition—and so on. Christian guardians of faith, Christian guardians of the sanctity of life—popes, archbishops, and cardinals, and deans, looking on whilst bodies of men were moved and mowed down on the shell-ridden chessboard of Europe. One is moved to wish that the Dean had had no worse experience of the war than to lie wounded in a shell hole for two days; he might then be disposed to look with a little human clarity on the workman; we do not even ask for an intelligent comprehension of the question—nor the connection between the system and war. As with all quack reformers, and press hoodwinkers, the effect is belaboured; this naturally passes for sense with the public,¹ who can see nothing riotously funny in the placards of the Press. On August 31 the *Times* placard read "More Grouse and Better Sport." On the same day its little gutter brother, the *Daily Mail*, announced "The Miners Will Stop Your Wages." At the back of this cynical depravity are ranged men like the Dean. In a note to an essay of Plotinus on "On the Good, or the One," we find: "But the vicious man, looking to his inward baseness, is indignant with himself and with his own essence, is astonished with externals, and pursues an association with others, in consequence of his inability to behold himself." We trust that the Dean will read Plotinus, as he has written so much about him; by reading him he may be induced to "see life steadily and see it whole," and to add his share in helping to solve labour troubles—and, as a man, without his uniform of office, many good men will rejoice to receive him in their company. For the world has risen above abusing effects; it now leaves that sort of thing to the apes of mediæval darkness—to be explicit, we mean the modern Press, within the shadow of the plutocrat and priest.

As promised, we suggest a few books that will repay study in an approach to Plotinus. The *Bhagavad*

Gita, Mrs. Annie Besant's translation will give a fair idea of man's Iliad on the mental plane. The lectures of Swami Vivekananda will be helpful in an attempt at the elementary science of life. *Mysticism in English Literature*, by C. F. E. Spurgeon (Cambridge University Press), can be recommended, but the reader must beware of the "tainted vocabulary" of theology—we should ourselves prefer to substitute for the name of God the symbol X—which, if known and demonstrable, would no longer be X. The chapter on "Sinology" in Schopenhauer's *Fourfold Root and Will in Nature* is an excellent cathartic for the Western idea of a God who allows measles and scarlet fever to afflict children, and nations of these grown-up children (military age eighteen) to exterminate each other. *Patangali for Western Readers*, price 6d., and *The Yoga Subras of Patangali* (5s. 6d.) both give tone and rest to the mind purged of Christianity—the Salvation Army movement of Europe. The "Everyman" edition of Plato, *Five Dialogues*, is useful. We must not omit *The Wisdom of Plotinus*, by C. J. Whitby (2s. 6d., William Rider & Son, Ltd., 164 Aldersgate Street, E.C.). With reference to the "Everyman" edition, we may say, that if the cost of mental sustenance advances in this manner (we believe this shilling book now costs 2s. 3d.), we shall soon be well on the way to primeval darkness, only illuminated by the four-farthing dips of Northcliffe—which may be desirable in an age when people not only challenge the existence of God, but ask for particulars of how men acquire fortunes. This latter atmosphere is becoming too unhealthy for the few who treat mankind as a milch cow.

With goodwill we recommend these books, with pleasure we take it as a privilege to write on Plotinus in the pages of the *Freethinker*. By words and deeds we judge a man. My defence of Plotinus and the Labourer may appear incongruous—I reply it is as incongruous as the colours of a rainbow on a mackerel's belly!² There is a unity in diversity. From the simple to the complex is the order of progress. If the Dean is found in the enemy's camp saying the same thing as the mob on top, he has not profited by reading Plotinus, nor glimpsed the wisdom of this remarkable man. Perhaps it is too much to expect of a Christian that he shall see life as a unity—mankind as one man. For our part we look on the workman as the body physical of the world. He demands health, food, and wise attention, and understanding, and, last but not least, equity. He requires these and not words—when he receives them Christianity's pitiful and slobbering tales of life hereafter in heaven will automatically come to an end.

WILLIAM REPTON.

When this our rose is faded,
And these our days are done,
In lands profoundly shaded,
From tempest and from sun.
Ah, once more come together,
Shall we forgive the past,
And, safe from worldly weather,
Possess our souls at last.
They are not long, the weeping and the laughter,
Love, and desire, and hate,
I think they have no portion in us after
We pass the gate.
They are not long, the days of wine and roses,
Out of a misty stream
Our path emerges for a while, then closes
Within a dream.
—Ernest Dawson.

² Possibly, the memory of two miners in my battery who were killed in action has incited me to attack this black-coated representative of love—for the Furies give one no rest, and spilt blood demands a spiritual settlement. Not to be evasive, I mean that a million dead are not going to be forgotten—try as our Press will to distract the nation, and the eternal truth in the Trilogy of Æschylus cannot be avoided by this nation.

¹ When words men hear, they usually believe,
That there must be something to conceive.

—Goethe's "Faust."

The Constructive Side of the Freethought Movement.

NOWADAYS many of our Christian opponents make little attempt to meet our arguments, but think that they score an important point by declaring that our work is entirely destructive. The charge comes with a good grace from the apostles of a creed that has used rack and stake to enforce its power, that has allied itself with the civil authorities to punish blasphemy, and even in our own days tries to inflict social ostracism upon its antagonists.

If the Christian edifice really can be demolished by a mere negation its foundations were never secure; but a slight acquaintance with the history of modern apologetics shows conclusively that what has shattered Christianity beyond hope of recovery is the positive, constructive nature of the evidence against it. The proof of the earth's existence during vast geological periods made the Biblical chronology untenable, scientific views concerning the evolution of man have destroyed belief in his special creation, and even the theologian feels that the Higher Criticism has seriously shaken the traditional account of the life and career of the very founder of his faith.

To this criticism, or rather denunciation, of freethought propaganda, we may justly retort that orthodox Christianity has been one of the most destructive forces in history during the last 1900 years. And it has sought to destroy ideas essential to human development. It has opposed every scientific advance in succession. That it should do so was inevitable from its nature. An infallible Church or a divinely inspired book must crush new thought that clashes with its claims, for the simple reason that all such thought impugns its infallibility.

Detailed accounts of the systematic hostility of the Church and Christianity to the truths of astronomy, medical science, geology, evolution, and historical criticism can be found in the writings of Cotter Morison, J. W. Draper, A. D. White, and others. There is no need to reproduce them here. The spirit of freethought, by urging men to seek out the causes of the effects which they observe, has done more in half a century to modify the conditions which engender social evils, and to eradicate disease, than Christianity accomplished in all its history. Scientific sanitation and the study of bacteriology are more constructive forces than casting out devils or expiatory processions.

The crusade against Darwin is still with us, but his assailants are practically confined to the lowest cultural grade in the community. The whole fierce struggle for the recognition of evolution is proof of the constructive side of freethought. It is interesting to compare the attack by Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, at the meeting of the British Association in 1860, with the sermon by Canon Barnes in August, 1920. Wilberforce not only tried to ridicule the Darwinian theory, but he attacked Huxley personally. The latter's reply is a *locus classicus* in the history of the recent warfare of science: "I would prefer to be a descendant of a humble monkey rather than of a man who employs his knowledge and eloquence in misrepresenting those who are wearing out their lives in the search of truth." And to-day the Rev. Canon Barnes urges us to "be honest with ourselves; whatever else the Genesis account of creation may be, it certainly is not allegory." Evolution, he declares, is accepted by practically the whole scientific world, and it is consequently unfair to boys and girls to teach them one thing in the scripture lesson and another thing in the geology class.

One of the most productive forces of the past century has been its sense of doubt. In periods when all must think alike those who do not conform are punished or

expelled from the group. Protest after protest, sacrifice after sacrifice, is necessary to free the intellectual life from group-views. Every aspiration for mental freedom, every claim to question ecclesiastical authority, or subject so-called sacred books to historical criticism, and every effort to free the public school from the control of the Church, has met with the united opposition of both the secular and the clerical powers. For over half a century it had come to be an understood thing that every expression of opinion on geology must be accompanied by an attempt to harmonize it with Genesis. The same spirit of orthodox authority for centuries shielded the whole of the so-called sacred scripture from honest investigation. It was the spirit of freethought that established intellectual honesty on a secure foundation by protesting that the blind acceptance of a creed is no virtue; that it weakens the love of truth and fosters hypocrisy. Yet our Christian opponents, who long deprecated, and even suppressed by force, critical examination of their creed, ask what we have to offer in place of their religion. In all times similar questions have come with the greatest emphasis either from interested prelates or from the least cultivated minds in the community. With few exceptions it is always the best minds that are least at ease concerning the traditional religion. To those who repeat, parrot-like, what will you give in place of Christianity? my answer is generally something like this: A creed tends to disappear with the disappearance of the evidence on which it built its claims. It then becomes useless. Hence we are not called upon to replace what is proved to be unscientific and unnecessary.

What has the Freethought movement done for free speech, for a rational Sunday, for the reform of such measures as the divorce law, for the recognition of cremation, and for the right of full investigation into the historical basis of the so-called inspired writings? In all such effort to construct a rational philosophy of life it is a small band of men and women who are the pioneers. New advances in thought do not come from the masses, who are either kept in bondage purposely by a privileged class, or are unable, owing to economic and other conditions, to make important contributions to the intellectual energy of the community. Blasphemy in a guinea volume matters little; in a penny pamphlet it is a heinous offence. If honest men to-day can speak their minds on the Biblical account of creation and the historicity of Christ, without fear of clerical or official persecution, they have to thank popular advocates of Freethought like Bradlaugh and Foote. Mental freedom, to be worth anything at all, must not be reserved for a handful of university professors; it must become the heritage of the common people.

Another eminently constructive influence must be placed to the credit of the Freethought movement. It has compelled Protestants to humanize their creed by interpreting it in terms of a "progressive revelation." The fight against witchcraft was forgotten long ago, and the abolition of human slavery is also a matter of history. But most of us can remember when hell was a very real thing. Think of what it means to the child, to the timorous even among adults, and to the mind generally, to be emancipated from such a belief!

The trained Christian apologist of to-day seems to realize the weakness of his position intellectually, for he emphasizes the value of religion from a moral and national point of view. There is no Christian challenge which Freethought can meet with more confidence. The moral plea for religious dogma is based upon fear of the ignorant masses, but Freethought will have no ignorant masses and will fabricate no false sanctions for conduct. It will substitute critical reflection for authority, and the law of cause and effect for the supposed law of God. Morality is dependent

upon experience. The child is not born totally depraved, but attains a moral life through a long process of training, as the human race itself does. Once understand this truth in the light of evolution, which tends to make "social" and "moral" almost equivalent terms, and you do more to promote human brotherhood than all the religious sermons ever preached. The morality of Freethought is constructive because it insists that human interests must be realized here, and not beyond the grave. It is the man who is convinced that there are no Gods upon whom he can call for help who puts forth his best effort for himself and his fellows.

Our opponents frequently ask jubilantly, Where are your hospitals and benevolent institutions? In the first place, we were not allowed to leave money for specific Freethought purposes. In the second place, wealth and privilege are not as a rule munificent supporters of Freethought. In the third place, public hospitals and dispensaries are much older than Christianity. They were known in Egypt in the eleventh century B.C., and in Athens in the fifth century B.C.

A religious crisis is impending in Protestant and Roman Catholic countries alike, though it does not assume exactly the same form in both cases. Empty churches and a dearth of candidates for holy orders are only the external signs of the crisis. The all-important fact is that the whole intellectual life of the day is influenced by a spirit which is not Christian. Rome has long contemplated the coming struggle. Her commission as the bride of Christ brings her now and then into direct conflict with the civil power, which has no rights over anything which she declares to be within her exclusive province. The Catholic does not, like the Protestant, feel the intellectual strain of the modern world. At least, he does not feel it in quite the same way. His Church is a vast international organization whose ultimate goal is world domination. The Protestant, on the other hand, will reconcile his creed with modern culture. But he no longer exercises any formative influence over people's lives. The clergy are deploring the estrangement of the masses from orthodox Christianity, and varied are the reasons given to account for it. This estrangement at least proves that for the masses Christianity is no longer regarded as essential. Man will not fight about the eastern position, or even the salvation of their souls, when they have other rational interests to occupy their time.

There are many who, concurring in our work from an intellectual standpoint, hesitate to give it active support, partly for social, partly for family reasons. Others, again, ask, Why kick a dead horse? One may urge all such objectors to remember that if theology is in such a state of decay, the theologian is still very active. We see him in control of education and opposing increased facilities for divorce. His churches are exempt from taxation, and his principal organization has the privilege of about thirty-three seats in the House of Lords. A creed which cannot keep pace with the cultural needs of the day thus keeps its dead hand heavy upon progress, and meets all opposition by simply deprecating movements of a "purely destructive" nature.

A. D. McLAREN.

In a little north of Ireland town, the parish church congregation were surprised to notice the unusual presence of a young man one Sunday busily engaged in reporting the minister's sermon. But the minister was more perturbed still, for, catching up with the young man as he crossed the lawn, the pulpit orator earnestly implored the youth not to circulate the sermon, for, said he, *I stole it.*

My life is not an apology, but a life. I much prefer that it should be of a lower strain, so it be genuine and equal, than that it should be glittering and unsteady.—Emerson.

Acid Drops.

The Church Congress is meeting this year at Southend, and on October 20 a paper was read by Sir William Barrett on Spiritualism. In view of the use made by Spiritualists of Sir William Barrett's name it is interesting to find him declaring that "it was his misfortune never to have any personal experience which led him to the assured conviction that the communications received by him really came from some relative or friend who had passed into the unseen." It is true that he went on to say that "trustworthy evidence compelled him to agree that survival after death had been experimentally proved in certain cases," but this only means that he is depending on second-hand evidence. And one would like to know how he can be certain that the evidence is here conclusive, and also to what does he attribute the evidence that was given him, but which failed to carry conviction. Altogether, it looks as though Sir William was one with a strong "will to believe," and that while his own common sense compels him to reject what was offered to him direct, his bias leads him to accept the evidence offered to other people.

On the same day the Bishop of Chelmsford dealt with the housing question, and proceeded on the now familiar lines of blaming the Church for what it had not done. He said:—

We are responsible very largely for the condition of England to-day. It is no use blaming the miners, the railwaymen, or the transport workers. What real serious effort has the Church made to remedy the admitted social evils during the last fifty years? Thirty, forty years ago a great Housing Commission marked certain districts of London as absolutely unfit for human habitation. Many of those slums are still there to-day, but has there ever been a great Albert Hall meeting of Churchmen to call upon the County Council to pull the slums down? Do not let us blame all Labour to-day for being perhaps too extravagant in their demands when we have apathy lying at our own doors. Therefore, let us view the whole situation to-night with real consciousness that we are not guiltless, and that the great body of Christians in this country have been apathetic, cold, and indifferent, and never said that by God's help we are going to make the great mass of the people happy and contented in their lives.

The Bishop's speech would have been a little more complete had he mentioned the fact that a great deal of this slum property belonged to the Church of England and to the Crown, or, at least, to the Duchy of Cornwall. But that would have let the cat out of the bag; whereas, to merely blame the Church now that everyone is finding it out, may lead some short-sighted people to continue to swallow the old stories. When the Church starts on a regular campaign for settling the housing question we shall believe that the parsons are in earnest about the matter. Not that that will alter our opinion of Christianity; it will only prove that, once again, life is beating religion.

On the following day Miss Maude Royden told the Congress that they must get out of the Prayer Book all ideas of God that were not acceptable to the twentieth century, and proclaim a God who is more like Christ. Well, we have heard before of parents who are said to resemble their children very strongly, and evidently this is one of those cases. The only way to preserve God the Father is for him to imitate God the Son. If he won't, there is no future for him. It is to be noted that Miss Royden's standard is not what idea of God is true, but what is acceptable. A God must be had at all costs.

The clergy stick to their own peculiar mediæval ideas concerning women with the noble firmness of mules. Now that women have the vote, the Church must pretend to fall in line with civilized opinion. Therefore, at the Church Congress, nine women were generously allowed to make speeches. That is the practical recognition by the Government religion of emancipated woman. And all it amounts to is "Words, words, words."

In her address before the Congress on the theatre, Miss Sybil Thorndike, the actress, and the daughter of a clergyman, said, "There are few of us who really tell the

truth to a clergyman." That, at least, is the truth, and it helps us to appreciate the value of what the clergy tell the public concerning the opinions of the people. In the main, those who talk to the clergy are divided into two classes. On the one hand, there are those who wish to get help, and they obviously have an interest in telling the clergy what they would like to be told, in order to secure the help they are asking for. And there is the other class, who regard the clergy with a good-humoured, half-contemptuous toleration, much as he regards a half-witted individual, and who consider it bad form to say anything that a clergyman would not like to hear. In either case the clergy get not what the people believe, but what the clergy would like them to say. If they would like to get the real opinions of the people, they should arrange for an exact report of what these same people say five minutes after the clergy have left.

Canon Barnes says that "between the religious revelation of Jesus and modern science there is no opposition. The two dovetail into one another with singular exactness." But Canon Barnes, who is a Fellow of the Royal Society, will find it difficult to explain, scientifically, the feeding of the five thousand. In this, as in so many other instances, the "dovetailing" will have to be done by a theologian who forgets all his science.

This is the way the *Church Times* describes the kind of person who is elected to office in the Church: "When someone is required to fill an office in the church the authorities seem to ask, Is he bald? Is he getting deaf? Is he going blind? Are his teeth dropping out? Is he getting shaky on his feet? Is his memory going?" Well, with all deference to our contemporary's superior knowledge of church affairs, what else does it expect? When you have a set of doctrines that belong to the youth of the world it is the safer plan to see that they are in the charge of those who have left their youth a long way behind them. It is always a bit of a puzzle to us how anyone other than those who are under nine or over ninety can take theology seriously. We should have thought that an ideal Church Council would be formed of a number of the cave men if they could only be brought to earth again. They would quite appreciate those things about which the *Church Times* is so greatly concerned.

For example, Canon Barnes preaches a sermon to the Congress at Southend in which he tells them that it must be regarded as established that man is not a special creation, but has sprung from the animal world. Marvellous! It is only just over fifty years since Darwin published *The Descent of Man*, although it was many years ago that the idea, with much evidence, was given to the world. And now this dare-devil of a Canon tells them that they must give up preaching that man is a special creation. The same reckless individual was the other day telling the religious world that they could no longer hold to the doctrine of the fall of man. Now, really, if the *Church Times* and Church people generally want these things preaching they should take every care that their preachers are suffering from senile decay before they are appointed, for they are things that any educated man or woman, if they are accused of believing, should treat as an insult. We do not think these things are not true; we know that they are not. And any person who teaches them opens himself to the suspicion of being either a knave or a fool.

And so the *Daily Express*, not remarkable for the brilliancy of its intellectual display in any direction, says that Church people need not be alarmed, because evolution is creation. That is charming, and quite in the line of the intellectual humbug that dominates the country. When the Christian talked about Creation, what he meant was the production of something from nothing, or, at least, the special manufacturing by an almighty intelligence of a particular form or thing. That is what the Christian meant, and for centuries he stuck to it. Now, says the *Daily Express*, it is quite all right. All you have to do is to use the old word, but give it a new meaning. Then you will be right all the time. That does explain many things—why newspapers can talk about journalistic honour, for example.

The impertinence of the pious almost passes belief. The Lower Edmonton Baptist Church sent a letter to the local Council protesting against their permitting Sunday sports, and followed it up with a threat to the effect that "in the event of the Council's refusal to heed our protest we shall do our best to provide a Council that will." What a happy place Edmonton would be with a Council elected to carry out the commands of the Lower Edmonton Baptists! And what freedom there would be if these latter-day cave-men had their way! Fortunately the Council met the impudence of the Baptists in the way it should be met, and some pretty plain things were said of this lot of pietists who are seeking the help of the Council to fill their emptying churches. Councillor Watts and Williams were specially straight in their comments on the threat of the Baptists—who are evidently not of the "particular" order, so long as they can get their way.

Preaching at St. John's Church, Westminster, on Sunday last, the Bishop of London said that he recently ordained a man who had prepared thirteen murderers for their death, and in no case had he found one without a longing for God. That is the kind of thing that a man of the type of the Bishop of London would regard as something of which to be proud. But we wonder what conclusion he draws from it? Evidently, not even he could assume that it helped to demonstrate the moralising power of religion, although in his case it is rash to conclude even that. Perhaps he meant his audience to conclude that if one wished to "get right with God," the best way is to go out and kill someone. He will then have due notice of the date on which he will meet God, a chaplain will be told off to look after his immortal welfare, and his "longing for God" will be satisfied. And it must be quite cheering to those who are killed to know that their murderer has a longing for God. And if he is reprieved, the Bishop will be quite anxious to ordain him to preach the gospel of the "Berlood" to a people who have never known the "spiritual uplift" of cutting someone's throat.

The Bishop of Chelmsford thanks God for the Christian Labour leaders. That we can quite understand, but whether the rest of the people have the same reason for thanking God is quite another question. For two things are certain. One is that the Christian Labour leaders would never be where they are but for the work of the non-Christian reformers; and the other that if there are to be Labour leaders, the Church would prefer them to be Christians. That will help to save something for the churches, and will help to materialize the ideal reform of the churches, which is that of bringing about a change in which everything shall remain as it is.

"Alpha of the Plough" is well known as one of the most thoughtful writers on the staff of the *Star*, and we are the more flattered to see so plainly an echo of our own teaching in the *Freethinker* concerning the doubtful benefits of immortality. In the issue for October 21st he says that if immortality were really a fact,

I fancy the general feeling would not be one of joy, but of terror. If anything could reconcile us to the thought of death it would be the assurance that we should never die. For the pleasure as well as the pathos of life springs from the knowledge of its transitoriness. All our goings and comings are charged with the sense of mortality. It is not alone the beauty of the sunset that touches us with such poignant emotion: it is because in the passing of the day we see the image of another passing to which we move as unflinching as the sun moves into the shadow of the night.

That is well put, and our readers will recognize it as an echo of our own teaching, and one that we elaborated in the published discussion with Mr. Leaf. "Alpha" well says that if a man found that he was marked down for deathlessness he "would find that the pleasure of life had vanished with its pathos. We should be panic-stricken at the idea of never coming to an end." We are pleased to see so much straightforward Freethought in the columns of a daily paper, and it may help to set some people thinking concerning the sentimental rubbish that is ventilated in connection with the comfort of believing in a future life.

To Correspondents.

R. W. B.—That particular brand of parson is not very much different in Paisley from what they are elsewhere. And there is only one cure—get some regular Freethought work going in the town. When the clergy find that they must alter their tone, they will.

C. F. J.—Sorry unable to use the verses. The topic, as expressed, hardly stands the length given it.

J. MUSKETT.—Pleased to see the Edmonton Baptists getting the snubbing they deserved. We should like to see other councils equally firm in dealing with such impertinent people.

MRS. L. GAIR.—Thanks for your collection towards the Fund and for the promise of further help. Certainly if every reader helped a little, the £1,000 would be raised with the greatest of ease.

F. COLLINS.—Your interest is encouraging, but the matter is now before our readers, and each one must judge for himself as to how far they are able or disposed to help.

J. HEPWORTH.—We are obliged for copy of the *Deaf Times*, which we have read with much interest. But we cannot agree with your idealizing of the word "Christian."

W. ELLIS.—We do not see that you quite meet the point, which is that death being a fact that we all have to face sooner or later, nature does not prepare us for it in the same way that it prepares us for the other general facts of life. And the indisputable fact is all we can say with certainty is that we have a desire to live. That we have a desire for immortality is pure assumption, and one that careful analysis does not support. Moreover, when we can appeal for an explanation to known forces it is always folly to appeal to unknown ones.

S. ROBINSON.—We agree with you than when a paper such as *Science Siftings* prints an article from an unnamed reader declaring that evolution is disproved, confusing Darwinism with evolution, and ending with the statement that "the majestic Bible record still holds the field," it looks as though it had let out all the science in the sifting. Perhaps that is the meaning of the name.

J. W. ENGLISH.—We are obliged for your promise of sending three other subscriptions towards the Fund before it closes. It really looks as though we shall have the pleasure of calling on those who have promised to send on their various amounts towards the £1,000. And we feel that they will receive the call with considerable pleasure.

E. DALY.—Pleased to hear from one to whom the *Freethinker* has been of so much help. We fancy if we were to hold a meeting of all who had been similarly benefited we should require a very large hall to accommodate them.

H. CUTNER.—We do not think it wise to venture on anything in the shape of an annual, with the printing trade as it is. When things are more settled we may try something of the kind. As a matter of fact, we have had something in contemplation for several years.

W. H. POWELL.—We only received the first of your letters, but that somehow escaped acknowledgment. Could you give us the exact reference for the quotation, so that we might look it up? Is it by Carlyle, or quoted by Carlyle? It sounds like the latter.

THE £1 5s. acknowledged in last week's Sustentation Fund should have read "From Three Troedyrhiw Friends," instead of as printed. We are sorry for the blunder.

W. S. BIRKS.—We returned the MSS. to the Isle of Man, and wrote you at the Poste Restante, Penrith. You should have heard from one of the places by now.

TWO MINERS.—The book was by F. L. Billington Grieg, and published at the Billiard House, Glasgow. Price 2s.

BENEVOLENT FUND N. S. S.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: H. Irving (Sale of Conference Photographs), £3 10s.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

The acknowledgments of subscriptions to the Sustentation Fund are held over until next week. Mr. Cohen has been taken suddenly unwell, but will be better in a day or two. Still, he is unable to be at the office this Tuesday, and some things must stand over till next week.

To-day (October 31) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Town Hall, Birmingham. The meeting commences at seven o'clock, and we hope that all our local friends will do their best to see that the hall is well filled. Mr. Cohen's subject is "Do the Dead Live?" and the lecture should be a *live one*.

Mr. Cohen has arranged to visit Pontypridd on November 21, and the local friends are working hard to make the meetings a complete success. In order to make the arrangements as complete as possible, a meeting will be held to-day (October 31) at 4 St. Catherine Street, Pontypridd. Special help is asked for from friends in Ferndale and other parts of the Rhondda Valley.

We are glad to learn that Mr. Lloyd finished his crusade on Tyneside with two good meetings on Sunday last. He has had good meetings during the week, and if that is the case in the midst of a coal strike in a colliery area, it is clear, as we have been continually pointing out, that the Tyneside has been far too long quiet. We hope now that the fact has been demonstrated, all local Freethinkers will lend a hand in order to see what may be done. The South Shields Branch deserves the highest commendation for its activity in the matter. Mr. Lloyd is, we are pleased to say, none the worse for his strenuous week's work. To-day he visits Manchester, and lectures at 3 and 6.30 in the Co-operative Hall, Downing Street. We hope that our Manchester friends will see that the hall is crowded on both occasions.

The N. S. S. Executive is endeavouring to open as many parts of London as possible to Freethought propaganda. Arrangements are being made for an experimental lecture at Fulham, and the Trade Union Hall, 236 Blackfriars Bridge Road (four doors to the south of the bridge), has been taken for all the Sundays in November. Mr. Cohen opens the course with a lecture on November 7, and we should be glad of the help of all our London friends in making the meetings a success. Some small handbills announcing the meetings are being printed, and may be obtained at either this office, or of Miss Vance at the N. S. S. office, 62 Farringdon Street. The subject of Mr. Cohen's lecture is "The Collapse of Christianity and the World's Peace." That should give rise to an interesting discussion. Especially if Freethinkers can induce their Christian friends to attend.

We are asked to state that on Monday next (November 1), at eight p.m., Dr. Leonard Huxley will preside at the first of a course of four lantern lectures which are to be delivered at Caxton Hall, Westminster, by Mr. Joseph McCabe on "The Evolution of Civilization." A complimentary course ticket will be sent to any head teacher on application to Mr. C. A. Watts, 17 Johnson's Court, E.C.4.

The *Deaf Times* for September reprints, with acknowledgment, from these columns the article by Mr. Motler on "The Priest-ridden Deaf." We have many readers who are deaf, and many who are dumb, and many who are blind and who have the paper read to them. But it may interest our religious friends to know that we have none among the insane. An insane subject is always religious.

A Short History of the Art of Writing.

III.

(Continued from p. 684.)

BETWEEN 1400 and 1200 B.C. the Arameans (or Syrians, to give them the name by which they are better known) settled in Syria; whilst in the same period the Hebrews conquered Palestine.

The Arameans, like all the Semitic peoples, possessed considerable financial ability, and extended their business activities far beyond the frontiers of their own little kingdoms. Finally they controlled the commerce of the Assyrian Empire; and their language became more common throughout the country than even Assyrian itself. Indeed, it eventually became the language of the whole of Western Asia, even taking the place of Hebrew; Aramaic being spoken in Palestine in the time of Christ.

By 1000 B.C. the Arameans were using alphabetic writing, which they had borrowed from the Phœnicians, another Semitic people, who had founded a series of small States along the coastline of Syria. Along with this alphabet, the Syrians also received the Egyptian pen, ink, and paper. Even as the Babylonian merchants had carried cuneiform writing throughout Western Asia, so now did the Aramean caravans, with their bills and receipts, carry the Phœnician alphabet through the same region. Eventually it spread down the Euphrates into Persia, and passed into the further Asiatic lands, to furnish at length the Indian people with their alphabet.

The Hebrews borrowed their alphabet from the Phœnician and Aramean merchants; and we still have a letter written in Aramaic characters by a Jewish community which appears to have migrated to Elephantine, in Upper Egypt, before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. Written in the fifth century B.C. to the Persian governor of Palestine, it tells how the Egyptian priests had burned the Jewish temple, and stolen from it the gold and silver vessels. For three years the Hebrew community had tried in vain to obtain permission to rebuild their house of worship; and then had decided to beg the Persian governor of Palestine to use his influence with the Persian governor of Egypt to grant them permission to build the temple anew.

The Hittites, a people who dwelt in Asia Minor, profited both by the civilization of Babylonia and Egypt. By about 2000 B.C. they had learned the use of cuneiform writing; and excavations have recovered fragments of the clay-tablet dictionaries used by them in learning to read and write. It may have been through the Hittites that the use of the clay tablet passed over into Crete. The decipherment of the Hittite cuneiform writing has recently been accomplished by Hrozny, an Austrian scholar.

Under the influence of the Egyptian civilization, which they received through the Syrian cities, the Hittites developed a system of pictorial writing. With hieroglyphic signs they engraved great stone records, resembling those made in Egypt. Unfortunately the key to this system of writing has not yet been found.

In the Persian Empire the Persian language was often written with Aramaic letters. The Persians, however, devised another alphabet of thirty-nine cuneiform signs, which they used for writing their language on clay tablets. It was also employed in making records on monuments, of which the most famous was the triumphal monument of Darius the Great (the Rosetta Stone of Asia, as it has been appropriately called), carved on the cliffs at Behistun. Three hundred feet above the base of the cliff is sculptured a bas-relief picturing Darius with a long row of fettered

prisoners, representing his defeated enemies. Surrounding this bas-relief are numerous columns of cuneiform writing (more than one thousand lines in all), wherein are recorded the chief events of the king's reign. The same account is given in Persian cuneiform, in Babylonian cuneiform, and in the language of the people of Susa or Elam, a country north-east of the head of the Persian Gulf.

Sir Henry Rawlinson, at the risk of his life, climbed this cliff, and copied the three inscriptions. Later he succeeded in deciphering the Persian and Babylonian portions, and so supplied the key to the Babylonian and Assyrian cuneiform writings, which hitherto had baffled scholars.

By 2000 B.C. the Cretans had developed a high civilization, and, possibly under the influence of the Egyptians, had evolved a system of hieroglyphic writing. Later, the hieroglyphic signs were much abbreviated, and reduced to simpler forms, until each picture consisted of only a few lines. Hence this rapid hand is called linear. Great numbers of the clay tablets containing records and business memoranda have been found among the rubbish covering the ruined palaces of the island, but the key to this system of writing still remains to be found.

There are several theories as to the origin of the alphabet now used in almost every civilized country. According to one of these, the Phœnicians developed their alphabet of twenty-two letters from the Egyptian hieratics. "With the papyrus paper," says Professor Breasted, "the hand customarily written upon it in Egypt now made its way into Phœnicia, where before the tenth century B.C. it developed into an alphabet of consonants, which was quickly transmitted to the Ionian Greeks, and thence to Europe."

But Egyptologists are not yet agreed upon this question.

Another theory is that the alphabet was evolved in Crete, and taken from there by the Philistines when they established settlements on the coast of Palestine. From them the alphabet passed to the Phœnicians.

But, wherever the alphabet originated, there is little doubt that its importation into Europe was by the Phœnicians to the Greeks. The Phœnicians were using their alphabet with so much freedom in the ninth century B.C. that it is safe to assume that they were in possession of it long before that period; and perhaps as early as 1000 B.C. they had substituted papyrus paper, imported from Egypt, for the clay tablet.

This alphabet contained no signs for vowels, and when the Greeks began to write their own language with it they used signs which stood for consonants that did not exist in Greek speech for their vowel sounds. The alphabet, thus amended, gradually spread throughout the Greek States; but for some time was used only for the purposes of administration and business. But by about 700 B.C. the painters of pottery jars were employing it; and shortly afterwards it was common among all classes. About 500 B.C. the method of writing from left to right was adopted by them, in place of the reverse one.

In the course of time the Latins adopted twenty-one of the twenty-four Greek letters. At a still later date two more of the Greek letters were adapted to the use of writing Latin.

The Romans introduced their alphabet into Gaul, Britain, and other conquered countries; and the Anglo-Saxons, when they had become civilized, adopted it, adding, however, three new letters. Two of these were Runic letters, and represented the sounds *th* and *ph*. When the English came under the influence of the Normans these letters were discarded; and the three additional letters have become *j*, *u*, and *w*.

Mention is made above of Runic letters. The Runic alphabet originated among the Scandinavians, who quite probably adapted it from some other script, since

no traces of any pictographic characters whence it may have been derived have been found. The sixteen characters of this alphabet are not unlike the Phœnician letters, and some philologists have maintained that it was derived from the Phœnician system. Other scholars, impressed by the resemblances between Runic and Greek and Roman characters, have suggested that it is a corruption of the Greek alphabet. This latter theory is quite a reasonable one, since in the sixth century B.C. the Goths swarmed in the regions south of the Baltic and east of the Vistula, and had trading relations with the Greek colonists north of the Pontus (Black Sea), from whom they may have gained a knowledge of the Greek alphabet. But the question of origin remains unsolved.

The Runic characters consist almost exclusively of straight lines, placed in various combinations and positions, and have usually been found incised on wood or stone. Even in the few manuscripts that have survived, the sharp, angular form remains. Monumental and sepulchral Runic inscriptions are found in the valley of the Danube, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Iceland, England (in those parts of the country once forming the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia), Scotland, and even occasionally in France and Spain, whither, presumably, Scandinavian invaders had carried them. The voyage of the Vikings to America, which they named Vineland (probably about 1000 A.D.), is commemorated in an epitaph cut in Runic characters on a rock on the Potomac: "Here lies Syasi, the fair one of Western Iceland, the widow of Koldr, sister of Thorgr, by her father, aged twenty-five years. God be merciful to her."

The Runic alphabet was displaced by the Latin on the conversion to Christianity of the peoples of northern Europe.

W. H. MORRIS.

(To be concluded.)

"Biting the Hand....."

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.

—As You Like It, Act ii., sc. 7.

PEOPLE with religious views, whether they know anything about science and scientists or not, are always ready to sneer and say that "what is gospel with the scientist one day is discarded the next"; or that "there is as much difference of opinion among the scientists as there is between various religious sects." We are constantly told by these belittlers of those who have devoted many years, and in some cases given their lives, in order to relieve the toil and ameliorate the miseries of mankind, that "What one scientist or all the scientists accepted yesterday is denied to-day, and what they accept to-day will be contradicted to-morrow." And so on.

Even the "bold" *Daily News*, at the very time when it has opened its columns to a "fearless" discussion of Canon Barnes' "daring" and "startling" address to the British Association, cannot refrain from a stab in the back at the scientists. A few days ago the writer of its notes "Under the Clock," commenting on the carved flint stone which Mr. Clem Edwards, M.P., recently found in a Berkshire gravel pit, said:—

Some ten years ago an expert announced the discovery of clear evidences of prehistoric wall-paintings in a cave on the Cornish coast, and a French authority on Neolithic art, after critically examining them, accepted them as genuine, until a local fisherman came on the scene and confessed that he was the artist. He had, he explained, cleaned his paint brush on the cave wall after painting his boat. *No wonder we are losing a little of our conventional respect for the dicta of the scientist.*

The italics are ours, but no italics are needed to see

that the *Daily News* writer is anxious to discredit the scientist for some reason or other. What does he suggest we should do? Throw away all our textbooks on physiology, anatomy, microscopy, navigation, astronomy, physics, mechanics, mathematics, medicine, etc.? Surely that would be the best way to show how little we care for the dicta of the scientists.

But, joking apart, it is quite possible to show that there are good reasons why scientists disagree on certain matters, and why it is a good thing they do. At any rate, there seems to be a general admission by the religionist that the scientists are open to conviction; that they are ready to change their minds at once as soon as new evidence comes to light. Apparently they can be said to show an open-mindedness that does not belong to the religious; and to be free from that dogmatism and bigotry that has always characterised the believer in supernaturalism. Further, whenever the scientists allow themselves to wander into the unknown and leave the dry land of fact, they are not apt to bind themselves with creeds and catechisms, articles and encyclicles. They hasten to assure us that what they believe is only a theory—as, for instance, the "Nebula theory," the "Atomic theory," the "theory of Evolution," "Einstein's theory," etc. With the religionists it is not a theory; it is a *fact*. Thousands upon thousands of children are told in our Sunday schools—and day schools, too—as a plain, un-garnished *fact*, that "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth"; and that "God said let there be light, and there was light"; and that "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul"; that God "prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah," who "was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights"; and later "it vomited Jonah upon the dry land"; and scores of other "facts" more wonderful even than these. Yet, strangely enough, the writer of "Under the Clock" says nothing about us losing our respect for the dicta of the religionists!

Of course, it is easy to understand this habit of sneering at the scientists. It happens to be the best way out of a difficulty, and the supernaturalists always take the easiest, not the manliest, way of doing that. When argument fails, they immediately begin to decry the scientist—not, of course, to disprove what he says—but just to show him up in the "blackest possible light." Even after they have accepted the theory of evolution, and managed, clumsily, to adapt their theology to its truths, they are not slow to greet with joy every calumnious statement about the scientist which alleges that he has changed this view, altered that theory, and made new discoveries which prove completely that what he held yesterday is no longer tenable.

And the religious gentleman who has no use for the scientist—when he is addressing a Christian Evidence Society's meeting in Hyde Park—will return home to-night by the scientist's train, in the wonderful scientist's tube, and will comfortably read his *Church Times*, although in the bowels of the earth, by the aid of the scientist's electric light; or some evening paper which, through the work and research of the scientist, brings him all the news of the globe a few hours after it has transpired and provides him with photographs of events which took place that very day; and when he gets home he will probably take up the receiver of his telephone and, with the assistance of the scientist, ring up some friend hundreds of miles away; or he may send a message to some person on the other side of the world, and be sure that within a few hours he will have his reply back, by the aid of the scientist's telegraph; or he may to-morrow travel to Paris by the scientist's aeroplane at 100 miles an hour, and hardly know that he has moved since he left the

ground; in fact, he cannot escape the ministrations of the benevolent scientist, who provides him with clothes by means of the wonderful loom; and his wife with fine raiment; and with choice dainties from tropical countries thousands of miles distant; and a thousand and one other things that he could not make himself.

Do these people who seek on every possible occasion to discredit science ever think that if it were not for it they might not be living to-day? That they might have been cut off by some terrible, devastating plague—and might, even to-day, go down in thousands if it were not for the sanitary scientist? Of course, the astute religionist will chime in here and say that if it were not for the "grace of God" he might have been wiped out by the bombs, or the shells, or the asphyxiating gas of the scientist, or picked off by the deadly rifle bullet of the scientist. But they did not use this kind of sarcasm during the war. They were glad to accept all the means placed at their disposal by the scientist when it came to defending Old England. They justified the war; religion gave its official sanction to it, and in many cases blessed the gups and consecrated the troops who were to use the scientist's weapons. Many of them prayed in public for the defeat of their enemies; and it is to be presumed that amongst those who hailed with delight the rumour that a French scientist had discovered a powerful explosive that would wipe out the German army in the twinkling of an eye, there were quite a number of religionists. So it is no use trying to blame the scientist for the war. The nation—the "Christian" nation—paid the scientists well to invent the most horrible machines to win the war; and no one ever heard of the Church as a body coming forward and protesting against the slaughter. In fact, they stood calmly by while a few brave individuals went to gaol for saying that the butchery ought to stop, and for inciting men to become conscientious objectors. But one thing they did not forget to do: they did not forget to allow parsons to be exempt from military service!

So, if the religionist cares, he may bring up this question of scientists "being responsible for the war." The Freethinker doesn't care a rap if he does, for it only serves to discredit and dishonour those who pretend to have such a loving, all-powerful God on their side, and to show that even God, mighty though he is supposed to be, couldn't do without the help of the scientist. Perhaps—if they are more than usually honest—they will come forward and tell us all the facts about the medical science that saved thousands of lives; that plucked men out of the grave, and restored them to their loved ones; that gave them new faces, and new limbs, enabling them to earn their living; that cured them of shell shock; and, even where it couldn't restore their sight, taught them to read and write and perform tasks which were believed to be possible only to those with full possession of their sight. Perhaps they will add that, notwithstanding the more crowded conditions of this war, and the more terrible trench conditions, the percentage of those who died from epidemic diseases was, thanks to sanitary science, remarkably small by comparison with previous wars.

But they are not honest enough to tell us these things. For them the scientist is a helpless creature who doesn't know his own mind for two minutes together!

And these sneering religionists have not the grace to say, "Thank heaven for the scientist!" The "grace of God" is the vague, meaningless term they use for the "providence" which ministers to their every want during all their waking hours, and while they sleep is prepared, through a myriad scientific means, to see that the comforts and amenities they enjoy to-day will be increased to-morrow. For them these blessings are due to the "grace of God," and the scientist is—nowhere!

JOHN WARD NEWTON.

Book Chat.

THE "ROARING YELLOW NINETIES."

THOSE of my readers whose memories reach back to the 'nineties of last century will find something to interest them in Mr. Bernard Muddiman's *Men of the Nineties*, just published by Mr. Henry Danielson, of 64 Charing Road. It is an enthusiastic, if not very critical, study of one side of the literary and artistic activities of the period. The group of writers and artists which surrounded Aubrey Beardsley and Mr. Arthur Symonds in what are known as the roaring, yellow days—the *Yellow Book* period—did its best to communicate a more or less unpleasant shock to the literary burgess. These bad, sad, glad, mad brothers in art, to use a collocation of epithets dear to the late Mr. Swinburne, were successful in a way, for the average amateur of letters was at that time very easily knocked over. The short stories, the poetry, the criticism, the black and white drawings with which he was bombarded from *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy* seem to have upset his complacent and traditional sentimentalism. He was unaware that this mild sort of intellectual effervescence was merely a belated importation of discarded literary methods and ideals from the other side of the Channel. He thought it the latest thing in art. He knew nothing of Baudelaire, Flaubert, Maupassant, or Huysmans, of Verlaine, Richepin, or Tailhade, and he had never seen the astoundingly cynical drawings of Félicien Rops, in comparison with whom poor Beardsley was a provincial sentimentalist. Unacquaintance with foreign literature is perhaps excusable in an Englishman; but it is less excusable that he should not have strengthened his defence by an acquaintance with Mr. George Moore's *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888), a light-hearted and wittily insolent onslaught on respectability, or with the same writer's realistic stories, *A Modern Lover* and *The Mummer's Wife*, which were strong meat beside the thin soup of a George Egerton or a "Victoria Cross." In the process of time the strong lemon yellow of the 'Nineties has faded to a dirty whitish ochre, and its once roaring voice has become a thin and ghastly squeak. Our emancipation nowadays is amazing. The movies treat us to a film of Wilde's *Salome*. Ibsen's *Ghosts* has ousted *East Lynne* from the suburban melodramatic stage. Our daughters use their German to read the plays of Wedekind, and their French to study the charming confessions of sexual abnormalities so thoughtfully collected for us by Mr. Havelock Ellis in his *Etudes de psychologie sexuelle*. I have noticed, too, that one of our proletarian educational institutions has a course of lectures on Psycho-analysis for men only. There is no doubt but that the war and other things have carried us a long way from the roaring, yellow 'nineties. Indeed, the vigorous unashamed realism of Mr. James Joyce and Mr. Wyndham Lewis would make the most daring of the young men of that period gasp with fright.

For Mr. Muddiman the outstanding figure in the Yellow group is Aubrey Beardsley, whose drawings appeared in the early numbers of *The Yellow Book*, and afterwards in *The Savoy*. Beardsley left an office stool to make pictures for the *Morte d'Arthur* in the fashionable, anæmic manner of Burne-Jones. His real sympathies lay rather in the direction of elaborate artificiality, the erotic literature of eighteenth-century France, the later Greek romances, the *Satyricon* of Petronius, Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, and the comedies of Congreve. It was the iridescent beauty of corruption that he saw, and revealed to us in this subsidiary order of literature. I have no doubt that this beauty was there, but not, to my thinking, so completely isolated from better qualities. Beardsley, like other men, got out of books precisely what he brought to them. He saw hideous corruption in Wilde's *Salome*, and did his best to discredit the play by his cynically libellous illustrations. He succeeded to a large extent, because people were prepared to accept any ill-natured comments on the play. Beardsley, in fact, was a more corrupt and sophisticated neo-Pagan than either Pater or Wilde, but without a tithe of their knowledge, their wide sympathies, their profound emotions. His conversion to the Church of Rome was, perhaps, as sincere as other conversions at the time.

Religion, as we know, is by no means incompatible with a fescennine temperament. I once knew a devout Protestant who experienced a not unnatural relief in turning from Law's *Serious Call* to the chaste comedies of Mistress Aphra Betin.

I am afraid I do not share Mr. Muddiman's enthusiasm for Beardsley's art, and I certainly find his verse and prose as uninteresting as it is overwrought. We are told, of all things, that he has the frankness of Chaucer. This of Beardsley, who, I am told, when a friend talked to him of "Dame Nature," retorted "*Damn Nature!*" pulled down the blinds, and worked by gaslight on the sunniest days. Mr. Muddiman, however, cancels his unfortunate remark by quoting with approval the estimate of a German critic who notes Beardsley's ultra-modern culture, his wheedling finesse, his beauty of corruption. There is no suggestion here of Chaucer, whatever there may be of Restif de la Bretonne or of Théophile Gautier at his worst. Again, when he mentions the illustrations to Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, our critic is apparently astray. He tells us that these drawings have the innocent frankness of nature although Beardsley himself called them "bawdy," and wished them to be destroyed with other offerings at the shrine of Our Lady of Limerick. Then he goes on to say that "phallism" is "unfortunately a considerable factor in the *Lysistrata*, as every scholar knows." Now every scholar knows, or ought to know, that the primitive form of religion called "phallism" has nothing at all to do with the play, which merely shows us the women of Athens uniting with the object of making their husbands conclude a peace with the enemy States. The method by which they secured a victory over the men involved a number of risky incidents. The Greek comic writers used a plainness of speech which we have relegated to the smoke-room, and this was the attraction of the play for a man like Beardsley. His fescennine temperament was in its natural element. No, I cannot think that he was the biggest man even of the tiny yellow group.

Mr. Arthur Symons, who kept the yellow flag flying in his magazine, *The Savoy*, is fortunately with us still, and it would not be good taste to say just what we think of his work. He reproduces pleasantly enough the peculiar intonation of Pater, and this artful imitation leads the unintelligent critic to assume that the resemblance is more than superficial. We are told that his theory of art as an escape from life is a reaction from his early years of Puritan suppression. It may be; and, to be quite frank, I have noticed that the sensuousness of the early poems, *London Nights* and such things, is often forced, and sometimes a little insincere. But Mr. Symons' prose has a perfection of style which is refreshing nowadays, when the tradition of good English has almost vanished, and, what is more, he has the insatiable curiosity and quick sympathy of the born critic.

Some of the best writers of the group died young. Dowson was its finest poet; his verse is not, as Mr. Muddiman says, the expression of a feverish crisis, but rather of weariness and resignation. All his poems have a dying fall, the melancholy cadence of spent passion, of a quiet waiting on death. His life, poor fellow, was wretched enough, but he had one consolation, the power to create things of beauty, which were at least joys for him and for us, if not, as the poet says, for ever. John Davidson, who is at present undeservedly neglected, had more vigour, and a far more complicated personality than Dowson. Like Mr. Hardy, he conceived the spirit of the universe as a malignant force, and, in Mr. Chesterton's witty phrase, "gave it a piece of his mind." Davidson was an Atheist who believed in a God, an exquisite lyrical poet with a bias towards preaching, a North Briton with a sense of humour, a Nietzschean superman with a craving for the approbation of the crowd. It is no wonder that he came to grief. Apart from Davidson, the most promising writer of the yellow group was Hubert Crackanthorpe. His short stories in *Wreckage* and *Sentimental Studies* show a complete mastery of the difficult art of the short story, an admirable restraint, and profound knowledge of the human heart.

A MINOR ROCHEFOUCAULD.

This yellow group represented only a small fraction of the intellectual activities of the period. There was the more vigorous school of Henley, Kipling, and Mr. Frank Harris, the mystical Celtic group, and the Freethinkers who gathered round Mr. J. M. Robertson in the last days of the *National Reformer* and the early years of the *Free Review*. One of these, Mr. Ernest Newman, gave a new direction to the criticism of music and laid the foundation of the reputation he now enjoys; another, Mr. Arthur Lynch, brought the boisterous energy of the Antipodes into the domain of English politics and philosophy. There were, of course, many other writers, but I here mention Mr. Lynch because he has just written a little book of thoughts and aphorisms called *The Immortal Caravel* (Philip Allan & Co., 5s. net). It is the third of a series of *Pilgrim's Books*, and is intended to fit the coat pocket of those terribly energetic people who find no difficulty in doing two things at once. I confess that I am not one of these. A little while ago I attempted to climb up Box Hill and read Meredith's *Essay on the Comic Spirit* at the same time. I soon came to rest among the heather, and even then I did not get as much out of the essay as I should have done if I had been seated comfortably among my books. Yet I would not be dogmatic in these matters, and Mr. Lynch's oracular, sententious, and argumentative thoughts and aphorisms on a variety of subjects are certain to suit those serious minds that demand from books not so much pleasure as a moral uplift. But while they may be uplifted, they are pretty certain to be upset.

No serious Freethinker who recalls the energy of Mr. Lynch's frontal attack on religion, his early hatred of vague thinking, will be upset by his apparent reversion to a sort of cosmic theism, his conception of nature as a something that includes, and yet is outside human nature, his insistence on faith, religion, and God. But he will be grieved as well as upset by what our aphorist has to say of Atheism:—

I cannot believe (he avers) that any serious thinking man can be an Atheist. What he means is rather a protest against a mean and narrow conception of Deity. He overthrows a simulacrum, a weak creation of man, a fetish, not the Eternal God whose decrees we touch at every step.

This, I imagine, was prompted by a spirit of compromise of which Mr. Lynch knew nothing, or very little, before he went into politics, and we take it for what it is worth. However, there are many good things in the book which cause us to forget the occasional lapses. The dry light of wisdom is in this thought:—

The tendency of woman's influence is towards a certain levelling of morals. Her idea of morals is limited and particular. It revolves too exclusively about the duties concerning herself. She elevates inferior types of humanity by diminishing their brutality; she tends to diminish heroic types, whether of men of action, or of thinkers, by drawing their thoughts and their habits to hers. Her seductions tend to ease, luxury, and enjoyment. Even her virtues effeminate man. It was a profound saying of Alexander that two great things always reduced him to the level of humanity: Sleep and women.

The tonic quality in the ethical teaching of our modern aphorist is its irrepressible and inexhaustible energy, its wise insistence on the positive virtues ignored or discredited by Christianity:—

To win, to do the work (he says) is better than attitudinising, better than men praying for help, better than solace, better than resignation.....What is called modesty, humility, or what not may become a base and cowardly crime.....Anger sometimes acts as a stimulant to thought, serenity does not mean placidity.....Do not delude yourselves with hypocritical explanations. Seek the truth with all the boldness of your nature. Your life becomes a thing apart perhaps, but you have only one life. Can you drown this in a squalor of hypocrisies and falsehoods? Every emancipated thinker will delight in Mr. Lynch's whole-hearted contempt for the conventional philosophy which is a cant of non-committal statements, of what, we are told, are "moderate sentiments":—

Here is, often, the mere cowardice of prudence. For the moderate may be false, and in my own experience I have seen in great crises how disastrous have been the counsels of the prudent man—prudent because limited both of heart and brain. The shores of nations are strewn

with the wreckage of prudent men. If two men are disputing, one saying that 7 and 6 make 13 and the other that 7 and 6 make 11, the moderate man comes in and plumes himself with the opinion that 7 and 6 make 12. The moderate man is often a smug hypocrite. The forever moderate man always is.

I have quoted enough, I trust, to show that there is still something of the old freethinking, aggressive, unregenerate Adam in Mr. Arthur Lynch. The reader who feels in need of a moral "bucking up" could not have a better companion.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Correspondence.

RESPONSIBILITY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The article in your issue of September 26 entitled "Responsibility" is a most thoughtful, truthful, and admirable thesis; but it contains an omission, of the contemptuous, lofty, off-hand, "scientific" kind, which is not only a blemish, but against which I protest as a humanitarian and in the interest of justice.

I allude to the greatest cruelty and source of agony in the entire universe, in the opinions of those qualified to judge—one far too important and widespread to be evaded, ignored, or neglected—viz., the unmerited sufferings of the lower animals—largely caused by that atrocity of "God," or Nature, which results merely from the fact of existence, first, of billions of innocent, helpless, harmless, highly sentient animals; and second, the existence of man, with a desire and ingenuity to torment and torture them to the top of his bent.

In every respect, where man suffers, so, too, do the lower animals suffer; in addition, they suffer from the mere power and desire, combined, of man, having a propensity to torture them.

"Ouida" well said that the greatest disgrace of the human race was its treatment of the sub-humans.

PHILIP G. PEABODY.

Boston, Mass., October 9, 1920.

[Mr. Peabody's criticism is justifiable on the basis of the article as published, but it would be unjust to the writer not to correct the assumption that the omission was due to callousness of feeling or contemptuous disregard of the feelings of the "lower" animals.—EDITOR.]

IS REASONABLE RELIGION POSSIBLE.

SIR,—I am thankful for your criticism (issue, October 17) of the letter you kindly printed in the *Freethinker* of the 3rd. I am sorry, too, that you give so much prominence to the idea of a personal God. Startling as such an assertion may seem, the idea of God has (as some millions of primitive Buddhists would tell you) nothing to do with religion. God's existence or non-existence is immaterial. All we can know about him is that, if he exist, any conception of him that we are capable of forming must necessarily be such as to hinder and not help the study of things we do know something about.

Your article consists of six paragraphs; the first combats the belief in a personal deity, which I do not hold and had not raised; the second agrees with me in my contention that there is no proved connection between Atheism and vice; the third (though it lapses, at once, into the fallacy that religion is a matter of God, soul, future state, miracles, and nothing else) does really tackle what I had said. It asks me if I will say "what part of genuine religion is not delusion?" Belief in the ultimate triumph of gentleness is not delusion, whether you express that belief by saying "the meek shall inherit the earth," or by saying "the universe is so constituted that a gentle act is more contagious than a violent one, or has an influence that spreads and penetrates more and is more enduring." Belief in the indefinite possibility of character sublimation is not delusion, whether you picture angels in a heaven or human beings filled with a boundless love. The drawing of an erroneous picture does not invalidate that of which it is a picture. Devotion to principle is not devotion even when the principle is thought of as a "person." The attempt to anticipate the wholly social impulses and their beatitudes is not delusion even if those impulses are spoken of as "the knowledge of the Lord." In paragraph 4 you deal with this branch

of the question, and you instance the National Secular Society. But this is a society for arriving at truth and for arguing it before those who do not, as yet, hold it; the Church is an organization for impressing truths already arrived at. In paragraph 5 we join issue. I assert that when, for instance, some prehistoric animal developed a disinclination to eat its own kind, morality had begun, and even earlier I believe we can trace it. But of "purpose" in the universe or of one who "purposes" I had not written, or even thought, one word. Cosmo-theism asserts that the universe can be proved to have sublime tendency, not that it can be proved to have sublime intention.

ROBERT HARDING.

[We have been obliged to slightly abridge Mr. Harding's letter, but not, we think, so as to interfere with the run of the argument.—EDITOR.]

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, Social Gathering.—Music and Dancing.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH, N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N.W.): 7.30, Mr. David W. Caddick, "Social, Economic, and Political Realities in 1920."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9): 7, Mr. J. H. Van Biene, "When we are Civilized."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, Dr. John Oakesmith, "The Man in Horace Walpole."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Christianity before Christ."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Town Hall): 7, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Does Man Survive Death?"

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