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Views and Opinions.

Let Us Pray!

One of the Islington Borough Councillors, a Mrs. Sharpe, recently moved that in future the meetings of the Council should be opened with prayer. Mrs. Sharpe's reason for moving this was that she wanted to see a better spirit prevailing at the Council meetings, and with unconscious sarcasm she added that members could not see themselves as others saw them. It was also said that the Mayor's Chaplain was quite willing to attend the meetings and do the praying, if the Council agreed to the proposal. We do not know if this gentleman is already paid for the job of looking after the spiritual welfare of the Mayor; if he is, he might be persuaded to do the two at a reduction on account of quantity. Nor had we any notion that the Mayor of Islington is such a desperate character as to need a whole parson all to himself to attend to his religious well-being. Ordinary folk manage to get along with a parson between some hundreds of them. It is true that murderers, after they are sentenced to be hanged, have a clergyman told off for their special benefit, and it may be flattering to the Mayor of Islington to feel that when he is decorated with the chain of office he is at the same time accorded the same privilege that is given to characters such as Jack the Ripper. Perhaps Mrs. Sharpe means by her motion to suggest that the Mayor is no better than the rest of the Council, or to comfort him with the knowledge that if his condition is so desperate that a special clergyman must be told off to keep him straight, the same kind of spiritual police surveillance is required for the rest of the Council. And the united body can collectively reflect that they are all black sheep in a bunch.

* * *

Citizenship versus Religion.

But it may also be probable that Mrs. Sharpe is neither a humorist nor a satirist, and that the poor lady thinks her motion a highly proper one. And as the motion was referred to the General Purposes Committee for action, one may assume that the Council is agreed that they all, severally and collectively, need looking after. There would most likely be considerable agreement on that point in the borough, however much disagreement there is as to whether the Mayor's Chaplain is the right person for the job. Still, one wonders on what ground a Borough Council decides

that it is warranted in appointing a gentleman to offer up prayers at the beginning of its deliberations. Churchmen who are on the Council, one can understand. They believe that the Church should be a department of the State, and that it is part of the duty of the State to teach religion. But there are also Nonconformists on the Council, and they profess to believe that the State should leave religion alone. And there are Socialists on the Council, who also profess to believe that the State should preserve an attitude of absolute neutrality in matters of religion. What do they think of the proposals? Moreover, the whole of the Council are elected, not for the discharge of any religious duties, or in the interests of religion, but for purely secular purposes. They are not on the Council as Christians, but as citizens, and their conduct should be guided by reflections that spring from the facts of a common citizenship and a common life. I am not denying the right of any member of the Council who doubts his ability to come to any sensible or just consideration of a subject without calling in the help of God Almighty to do so. They have as much right to do that as others have to go to the Pelman Institute, and they will possibly get as much help in the one case as in the other. All I submit is that if a man feels that he needs the help of God, it is his own affair, and he should consult God privately. It is no business of the Council collectively. God might give his help without a public advertisement. And the help of God should be shown in its results, not in a public advertisement that it is being asked for. Let all those who feel that God can help them deal with Council matters, ask him for that help privately. And then, when their wisdom sets the other members marvelling, they can disclose the secret of their superiority. That would be a really impressive advertisement of the power of prayer, and it is an advertisement that these religious people are after.

* * *

Peace and Piety.

Sir George Elliott, in seconding the resolution, said that opening with prayer could do nobody any harm, and it might do some good. That is indeed damning with faint praise. The help of God has certainly come to a bad pass when all that can be said on its behalf is that it *might* do some good. Perhaps Sir George meant that the Council was past praying for. In that case he would have sympathized with the Ingersollian story of the boy who inquired of his father, when he saw the chaplain in Congress offering up prayers, whether he was praying for the members. "No, my son," said the father, "he looks at the members, and then he prays for the people." Mrs. Sharpe took a more positive stand. She said she wanted the councillors to realize that "they were on holy ground"—in Islington! She also wanted peace, and the prevalence of a better spirit. Quite admirable aspirations, but, oh, the simplicity of it! Has Mrs. Sharpe never studied the accounts of those gatherings composed solely of praying experts? Does she not know that regularly the chaplain prays in the House of Commons that its members may be blessed with wisdom? Does she not know that religion is the one thing that people cannot discuss

with the same amount of peace and generosity that they can discuss other subjects? You may get peace and a friendly spirit of discussion in art, literature, science, or politics, but not in religion, and, above all, not with a body of Christians. Why, it was only the other day that Bishop Welldon was congratulating himself on having got together in the same church two bodies of Christians to take part in the same service. And he thought that in another fifty years such meetings might be common. And Mrs. Sharpe wants to get prayers in the Islington Council because it may induce a spirit of peace and friendship! And her seconder says, in effect, "Oh, let's have it; it may not do any good, but things can't be worse, even with prayer, than they are at present." I wonder whether that is what some people mean when they talk of the woman's point of view.

* * *

Standing up to Deity.

But suppose, as seems likely to be the case, that the Islington Council appoints its chaplain to open its discussions with prayer, and suppose, as also seems likely, that the Council shows no greater degree of wisdom, or of peacefulness, or of amiability, than other Councils. What then? Will Mrs. Sharpe have the courage to table a motion something like this:—

That this Council, having appointed a chaplain for the special purpose of invoking the spirit of peace and wisdom on its deliberations, and finding that the Council shows no more wisdom and no greater measure of peacefulness than it did, is of opinion that either (a) the chaplain's prayers are inefficient, or (b) that God will not listen to him, or (c) that God declines to bother himself about the affairs of Islington; and that a committee be appointed to investigate and report on the whole question; and it is further resolved that in the event of the committee reporting that the lack of result is due to God's ignoring the affairs of this important borough, the best endeavours of the Council be given to the carrying out of a policy of reprisals by securing that as many churches and chapels as possible be closed until such time as more attention is paid by the deity to the affairs of the district.

Some Christians would regard a motion of this kind as blasphemous. Much will, of course, depend upon the point of view, but to my mind it is just common sense. If the Council appointed a medical officer of health, and the health of the borough got worse, they would sack him, and either appoint someone else or declare the office useless. Is it not time they acted in the same spirit with regard to chaplains and Gods? After all, it is a slavish attitude to be thanking God for what he does—whether he does it or not. It indicates a deplorably subservient type of mind. God has done little enough for man while he knelt before him with his eyes closed. Perhaps if man learns to stand erect with his eyes open, things will improve.

* * *

Playing the Game.

Quite seriously, it is high time that some stand was made against this intrusion of religion into civic life by those who really value social freedom and religious equality. There is as much reason in opening a Council meeting with prayer as there would be in examining the entrails of a bird to discover if the omens are favourable for the opening of a new washhouse. It is, of course, a very old custom. There is not a savage tribe in the world that does not practice it—and there is not a civilized people in existence that ought not to be ashamed of it. Stroking St. Paul's to please the Dean and Chapter is a wise proceeding at the side of employing a medicine man to pray that the Islington councillors may be endowed with wisdom. If the Islington people want another or a better sort of councillor, let them signify the same when election time comes round. But it is not only the stupidity of the proceedings that is objectionable, the political aspect is equally so.

Christians in this country form one among a number of other religious sects, and to single out one and parade its representative at a civic function is to commit an injustice against all others. The business of the State is to see that all forms of opinion are protected so far as expression is concerned, but to subsidize, with either money or patronage, none. Nonconformists are already committed to this in principle, but they seldom illustrate it in practice. On the contrary, they are more easily bought by the State than are many others. But we have new movements which, under the names of Democratic, Socialistic, or Labour, profess a wish that the State of the future should mete out exact justice to all. Numbers of these were returned at the last municipal elections, and they have at least an opportunity to show that they possess more devotion to principle than the older parties. Hitherto, they have not given any pronounced sign in this direction. I suggest, therefore, that there is here a field for them to show their mettle. Let them insist that the custom of associating a civic function or a civic meeting with a sectarian parade shall be abandoned. Civic life can only assume its real importance when it is separated from all extraneous associations and is shown to be self-supporting and self-sufficing. It will, moreover, form an "acid test" for those who proclaim themselves to be reformers and to be in favour of equal liberty for all. And now more than ever it is essential that we should be able to distinguish our real friends from such as merely do justice to a lip-service and pay it a time-serving obsequance.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Immanuel.

IMMANUEL is a term that occurs only twice in the English version of the Old Testament (Isaiah vii. 14; viii. 8), and there is no agreement among critics as to its interpretation. The *Encyclopædia Biblica* mentions six different theories, each of which is supported by several distinguished Biblical scholars. The puzzling statement is as follows: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Literally, Immanuel means, "With us is God." Legarde, M'Curdy, and Porter identify the virgin, or maiden, with the wife of King Ahaz, or with some one of the inferior members of the royal harem. Consequently, it is but natural to identify Immanuel with Hezekiah. Hitzig and Reuss identify Immanuel with Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the child whom the prophetess bore to Isaiah soon after his meeting with Ahaz. The three great critics, Weir, Hofmann, and Orelli, regard the whole verse as allegorical, the maiden signifying the people of Israel as the bride of Jehovah, and Immanuel, the same people as regenerated by the active presence of the Lord. In agreement with such well-known commentators as Roorda, Kuenen, Smend, and Cheyne, the late Professor Robertson Smith says: "It does not appear that he (Isaiah) pointed his hearers to any individual. He says, only, that a young woman who shall become a mother within a year, may name her child 'God with us.' For before the babe begins to develop into intelligent childhood, the lands of Pekah and Rezin shall be laid waste." To us it is utterly immaterial which of these and other interpretations should be adopted, for, in the absence of direct knowledge, it is impossible to determine with certainty what the prophet had in his mind. The only thing of which we can be sure is that the context makes it impossible to take the words as a prophecy of the birth of Jesus Christ. Isaiah addressed Ahaz thus:—

The Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the

evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken (Is. vii. 14-16).

And yet, in spite of that statement, and the various interpretations put upon it, practically all evangelical divines treat the fourteenth verse as a distinct prediction of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. Entirely ignoring what the prophet says about the child soon to be born, whom his mother would call Immanuel, they declare with the evangelist Matthew that Jesus was born of a virgin that Isaiah's prophecy might be fulfilled. In the *Methodist Times* for December 9 there was published a Christmas sermon by the Rev. H. Maldwyn Hughes, B.A., D.D. The text is Matt. i. 23: "And they shall call his name Immanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us." The first thing to be noticed is that Matthew's quotation is inaccurate. According to Isaiah it was not "they," but the mother who would give that name to the child. Furthermore, according to Isaiah, before the child so named would be able to distinguish between foods, Assyria would certainly devastate the lands of Pekah and Rezin. Dr. Hughes, however, makes no allusion whatever to the prophet or his prophecy, but proceeds at once to characterize Jesus as Immanuel. Like the Church fathers of the early centuries, he indulges in great exaggeration. He calls Jesus the "Master Personality of History," forgetting, apparently, that Buddha, Confucius, and Mohammed are so described by their respective followers. We contend that it is an unpardonable "exaggeration to say that the whole world thinks of God differently since Jesus came," and there is no historical ground for the assertion that "no one else has exercised on the world an influence that is comparable with his." There are millions of people in the world who have never even heard of Jesus, and there are millions more who, having heard, turn deaf ears to his appeal. Even in Christendom there are myriads who conscientiously reject both him and his claims. If there were an Immanuel, would the existing conditions of life, even in Christendom, be creditable to him? Dr. Hughes says:—

The idea of God is not a matter of merely metaphysical or theoretical interest. It is a question of greatest practical import to which we can address our minds. When we think of the urgent practical problems that confront us to-day, those which relate to the pacification of Ireland, the healing of the wounds of Europe, the constitution and powers of the League of Nations, and the remedy for social and industrial unrest, we are tempted to imagine that those who insist on speaking about God dwell in a region that is very remote from life. Those impatient people who desire quick returns tell us: "If you want to bring home to us the Christmas message, speak of peace and goodwill. Do not seek to draw us away from the practical issues of life by speaking to us of anything so vague and abstract as God."

In that passage the reverend gentleman raises a problem which he is incapable of satisfactorily solving. Atheists are not impatient people who desire quick returns, but, rather, people who insist on the presentation of some positive evidence of supernatural intervention in human affairs; and such evidence Dr. Hughes fails to adduce. He merely affirms that "enduring returns are far more important than quick returns." Then he adds: "If you can change the idea of God you will transform the social system." But has he not already told us that Jesus gave the world a new idea of God nearly two thousand years ago? What effect has this new idea had upon the world? In an estimated world-population of 1,646,000,000, there are only 564,520,000 Christians, leaving still some 1,081,480,000 untouched by the new idea of God. Now, the query naturally arises, what has the new idea of God wrought in Christendom? Has it transformed the social system? Has it brought peace and goodwill in its train? Immanuel, the Prince of Peace, has been in the world for nineteen

centuries; has he succeeded yet in abolishing war, the very greatest of curses? Is it not rather true that the majority of wars in Christendom have been waged in his name and for his glory? While the late war was going on were we not repeatedly assured that its main object was to bring the nations concerned back to God? We agree that there are no short cuts to the golden age, no sudden, cataclysmic breaks with the past, and that enduring returns are far more important than quick ones; but what Dr. Hughes fails to produce is the slightest proof that the Christian idea of God has accomplished any good whatever in the world. Is it not a fact that the only thing Christianity claims to do is to enable us to flee from the wrath to come, or to get reconciled to God that we may not perish, but have eternal life in a purely imaginary world beyond the tomb? The attitude of Christians to this world is to be one of aloofness and hatred. They are in it merely as strangers and pilgrims on their way into another.

Dr. Hughes is an excellent theologian, no doubt; but theology has its dwelling in cloudland, and never descends to the realities of every-day life. Many of the clergy are profoundly interested in social and industrial questions, and they make desperate efforts to bring supernaturalism to bear on natural problems; but their invariable reward is total failure. Not a few of them, possibly the majority, leave social questions severely alone, and confine themselves to what they call spiritual affairs. These pride themselves upon being, not moral teachers, or social reformers, but preachers of the gospel of redemption through Christ. Their mission is to prepare men for the blessedness of heaven.

When Dr. Hughes expresses his unbelief in quick returns, or in short cuts to the ideal state, he in reality admits the complete impotence of supernaturalism in the natural world. Immanuel can only work on exclusively human lines, which is only another way of saying that he does not work at all in society. Though the Prince of Peace, he cannot make wars to cease. Though the king of men, his reign over them bears no good fruit. That is to say, he is Prince of Peace and King of Righteousness only in the belief of his followers, not in actual life. The world is dependent upon its own resources, and society is going through a very slow process of evolution. Human beings get their rights only as the result of fighting for them. As Tennyson says, "Progress halts on palsied feet," because moods of tiger and ape are still present in our nature. John Fiske is quite right in stating that "the fundamental characteristic of social progress is the continuous weakening of selfishness and the continuous strengthening of sympathy," which is equivalent to saying that social progress is a purely natural process. Consequently Immanuel is simply a figment of the imagination.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Sham of the Sabbath.

It is time to sling aside the antiquated rubbish of the clergy, and arrange our periods of rest and recreation according to the dictates of common sense.—G. W. Foote.

AMERICANS are fond of regarding their Republic as "the land of the free." Most foreigners, however, know that real freedom in the United States begins and ends with the gigantic statue of Liberty which confronts all who desire to make Uncle Sam's acquaintance. Already the docile Republicans endure the tyranny of Prohibition, and worse is threatened. It has been announced that the powerful Christian organization which has forced Teetotalism on the American people is lending its aid to the Lord's Day Alliance with the object of preventing Americans from enjoying themselves on Sundays. The proposals are very modest—for Christians. They include the prohibition of Sunday cinemas, sports, motoring, trains, dancing,

and even newspapers. One day each week the United States is to be transformed into the Benighted States for the good of the American soul, or what is considered as such.

Before we laugh at these threats towards our American cousins, let us remember that the historic attitude of the Puritans has been mainly that of the father who said to his son, "You've got to be pure in heart, or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life." This fanatical point of view must be taken into account. The Puritans may be the fiercest of fanatics, but they are as splendidly organized as Cromwell's Ironsides. There cannot be any truce between howling Dervishes who desire to force all to their own narrow ways, and those people who wish to live and let others live also. The clergy who desire to force the old-world views of the Jewish Sabbatarians on modern civilized folk are impervious to argument. It is as plain as a pikestaff that their desire is simply to fill their churches and chapels, and increase their influence and revenues.

We have Sabbatarians in this country, as we know to our cost. Despite all the efforts of liberal-minded people, the fifty thousand clergy, who evaded their responsibilities during the war, continue to challenge any attempt on the part of their fellow-citizens to spend Sunday as they wish. They stand up in their pulpits on Sundays, and say: "You must come in here because we have shut every other place except the public-houses. You have the alternative of spiritual, or spirituous intoxication."

Most people do not realize what this clerical hold-up of Sunday means. Think for a moment! It is one-seventh of a man's life—ten solid years of a man's life who lives to be seventy years of age. And this time is monopolized by the clergy and the publicans, so that a decent citizen is faced one day in the week with the grim alternatives of being a hypocrite or a beast. In some highly favoured places the unhappy citizen is graciously permitted by his pastors and masters to witness carefully censored cinema-shows so that he should not smile overmuch, or to attend so-called "sacred" concerts, compared with which a funeral service is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

No wonder intelligent foreigners think that Englishmen take their pleasures sadly. Throughout the continent of Europe men make Sunday a bright holiday, which lends colour to the whole of the week, and all the petticoated priests in the world could not alter it.

Why is the British working man denied relaxation which his Continental brother has in abundance? The workman cares as little for the clergy as the clergy care for him. The workman, too, has reason to doubt the reality of any friendly feeling, for the clergy, who restrict Sunday relaxation, have, through their representatives in the House of Lords, opposed so many useful measures of reform. The clergy are the most lugubrious members of the community, and they have succeeded in making Sunday the most tiresome day of the week, and, incidentally, made Britain the laughing stock of Europe.

The whole matter of "sacred" days is a survival of Oriental superstition, fostered by the clergy, both Anglican and Nonconformist. For, in any question of clerical supremacy, "presbyter is but old priest writ large." On the Sunday question the most bigoted Anglican parson stands side by side with the heretical Nonconformist clergyman. In order to safeguard their common interests, the ordinary citizen is cheated of one-seventh of his life in the name of an Oriental superstition he either half-believes or detests. How much longer is this tyranny to last? It is high time that this particular encroachment upon the freedom of the individual citizen to order his own life was stopped. A little common sense should show that what is good enough for the millions of Continental workers is good enough for the British working man. Drunken-

ness is the price, and it is far from being the only one, that Britain pays for its hypocrisy, for its intellectual and moral obtuseness. And these things are but part of the price we pay for Priestcraft.

MIMNERMUS.

Pages From Voltaire.

III.

(Continued from p. 796.)

THE QUESTIONS OF ZAPATA.

1767.

[Zapata, a master of arts, elected professor of theology at the University of Salamanca, presented the following questions to the Academic Council in the year 1629. They were suppressed. The Spanish original is in the Library of Brunswick.]

XL. I also need your assistance for the book of *Kings*, at least in so far as concerns the stories of Tobias and his dog, Esther, Judith, and Ruth. When Saul was made king, the Jews were in bondage to the Philistines. Their masters would not let them carry swords and lances; and, what is more, they were obliged to go to the Philistines when they needed to sharpen their ploughshares and axes. Yet Saul gave battle to the Philistines, and gained a victory over them. In this battle he led thirty-three thousand men, in a country which could not support three thousand souls; for at that time the Jews possessed at most only a third of the Holy Land; and at the present time the country cannot support a population of twenty thousand. The surplus was obliged to earn a living as assistants or go-betweens in the great cities of Balk, Damascus, Tyre, and Babylon.

XLI. I hardly know how I am to justify the action of Samuel in cutting into pieces King Agag, whom Saul had taken prisoner, and held at ransom. I wonder whether our king Philip would be praised if he captured a Moorish potentate, and, after making a solemn covenant with him, had him cut up into small pieces?

XLII. We have profound respect for David, who was a man after God's own heart; but I am afraid I am not learned enough to justify his actions by ordinary laws. I cannot uphold his conduct, in associating himself with four hundred men of evil character and burdened with debts;¹ in sacking the house of Nahal, the king's servant, and, eight days after, marrying his widow; in offering his services to Achish, the king's enemy, and overrunning with fire and sword the country belonging to the allies of this Achish, without respect for either sex or age; and moreover, not satisfied with his own concubines, ravishing Bathsheba from her husband, whom he slew as well as dishonoured. I find some difficulty in believing that God could descend, in Judæa, from that adulterous and homicidal woman who is counted among the ancestors of the Eternal. This objection I have already brought to your notice; it causes much pain to really pious souls.

XLIII. The immense wealth of David and Solomon, amounting to more than five thousand millions of gold ducats, is difficult to reconcile with the poverty of the country, and with the state to which the Jews were reduced under Saul, when they had not wherewith to sharpen their ploughshares and their axes. Our cavalry officers will shrug their shoulders if I tell them that Solomon had four hundred thousand horses and that in a small country which never had anything but asses, as I have already had the honour of mentioning.

XLIV. If I were to relate the stories of the atrocities committed by all the kings of Judah and Israel, I am afraid I should scandalize the weak-minded, rather than edify them. All of these kings made a practice of

¹ Samuel xxii. 2.

murdering one another a little too frequently. If I am not mistaken, this is an extremely unwise policy.

XLV. When I find this insignificant nation ever in bondage to some other nation, to the Phœnicians, the Babylonians, Persians, Syrians, and Romans, I am likely to experience not a little trouble in reconciling so much wretchedness with the magnificent promises of their prophets.

XLVI. I am aware that all the Oriental nations have had their prophets, but really I do not know how to interpret those of the Jews. For instance, how am I to interpret the vision of Ezekiel, son of Buzi, near the river Chebar; the four animals which had each four faces and four wings, with the feet of calves; the wheel which had four faces; the firmament above the head of the animals? In what way am I to explain God's command to Ezekiel to eat a parchment book, to have himself bound, to lie on his left side for three hundred and forty-six days and on his right side for forty days, and to eat bread spread with excrement? I am unable to penetrate to the hidden meaning of what the prophet says in the sixteenth chapter: "When thy breasts were fashioned and thine hair grown, and when thy time was the time of love, I spread my skirt over thee and covered thy nakedness. I girded thee about with fine linen and covered thee with silk, and decked thee with gold and silver, and thou wast exceeding beautiful. But thou hast made thee a house of harlotry in every street, and hast opened thy foot to everyone that passed by." You will remember, my masters, what Ezekiel says in this twenty-third chapter about Aholibah and her strenuous preferences *in rebus veneris*; do you consider that you would be worthy of her favours?

XLVII. It will be my duty to explain the great prophecy of Isaiah concerning our Lord Jesus Christ; it is, as you know, in chapter vii. Rezin, the king of Syria, and Pekah, a Hebrew petty king, were besieging Jerusalem. Ahaz, king of Jerusalem, consulted the prophet concerning the result of the siege; Isaiah replied thus: The Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good. For before the child shall know the evil, and choose the good, the land shall be forsaken of both her kings.....The Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria.....In the same day shall the Lord take a razor that is hired, and shave the head, the secret parts, and the beard of the king of Assyria. Then, in chapter vii., to ensure the fulfilment of his prophecy, the prophet lies with the prophetess; she conceives and bears a son, and the Lord says to his prophet: "Call his name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, that is, *make speed to take the spoil*; and before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria." Without your kind assistance it is impossible for me clearly to explain this prophecy.

XI.VII. In what way am I to interpret the story of Jonah, who was sent to Nineveh to preach repentance. The people of Nineveh were not Hebrews, and it seems to me that Jonah ought to have instructed them in the Judaic law before bringing them to repentance. Instead of obeying the Lord, the prophet fled to Tarshish; a storm arose, the sailors threw Jonah overboard to calm the enraged elements. God sent a great fish that swallowed Jonah; he remained three days and three nights in the belly of this fish. God commanded the fish to deliver Jonah; the fish obeyed; Jonah lands on the coast of Joppa. God tells him to go and preach to Nineveh, that in forty days she shall be overthrown if she repents not. It is more than four hundred miles from Joppa to Nineveh. Do you not consider that

these stories call for a more extensive knowledge than I possess? I wish I were able to confound the learned, who pretend that this particular story is borrowed from that of the ancient Hercules, who was shut up for three days in a whale's belly. But *he* dined sumptuously on grilled whale's liver. Jonah was not so clever.

XLIX. Please let me know what meaning I am to attach to the first verses of the prophet Hosea? God commanded him to take a harlot to wife, and to beget a son by her. The prophet obeyed with alacrity, and paid his addresses to Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim; by her he had three children, which children are a type. God also commands our prophet to take unto him another wife, this time it is a married woman, who had planted a pair of horns on her husband's head. The good man, Hosea, ever obedient, had no difficulty in finding a fair lady with a suitable character, at the reasonable price of fifteen pieces of silver and a homer of barley. Will you be good enough to let me know what was the value of a piece of silver among the Jews at that time, and what *you* would be prepared to offer for a lady if the Lord commanded you to take one?

Englished by GEORGE UNDERWOOD.
(To be concluded.)

The Food of the Yew Trees.

I LIVE quite near my lively and learned friend S., but it happens, in the swift flight of time, that years elapse between our meetings. Time passes very quickly with the busy brain of the live Freethinker, the man of intense and earnest happy psychology, whose prayer has been answered:—

Awake, my soul, and with the sun
Thy daily course of duty run.

A superb, but subdued, sweetly solemn, spectacular sun played a great part in this outing of a November day. In the rare meeting with my friend I tasted again the matured and sparkling intellectual vintage of the rolling years. The day and the man and the scene, memory and old association, all the accumulated riches of the mind, made Pope's couplet seem meagre and remote:—

Let us—since life can little more supply
Than just to look about us and to die—

Why, life when normally constituted and lived aright can supply infinitely more. Were it not for the human madmen, fools, and parasites, it would not only be sufficient unto itself, but overflowing with beauty, wisdom, goodness, vitality, and happiness, so much so that "death itself should die," or be but little regarded, and come at last to the weary as a welcome, quiet sleep and a forgetting. This thought forms one of the beatitudes of our Freethought faith. We have adapted ourselves, humbled ourselves, and our mother nature is indulgent and generous. This is but one thought of a thousand, which, if one were writing a book instead of a short *Freethinker* article, might be devoted to the glory of humanity.

The impression in the forefront of memory, a very familiar one, was obtained at the close of the day, as we (my travelling companion and I) returned through a deep hollow from the hamlet in the wide valley. A very steep hill rose in front of us, and we paused on a little grey bridge over a pretty stream, not for rest, but to prolong the sheer delight of the sylvan sunset scene. The little river of clear water, rippling over its shallows beneath, formed in a quiet pool, where it rounded and excavated a picturesque tree-crowned rocky bluff. Many green plants and delicate tendrils, with an occasional flower, here still defied the browning spell of autumn, and thus sheltered from "chill November's surly blast." To-day all was still and summer-like, but richer than the summer in the sombre, satisfying beauty

of the evening. A little way off was the house and studio of the famous Ayrshire landscape artist, Mr. George Houston, but we did not care to call on so great a man; we had still some reverence for the gods! As I looked at the little stream in its rocky channel I wished to be a musician to compose its "water music"; I would be an artist to paint the sun's round, perfect orb declining behind the naked trees, and carefully and lovingly diffuse on canvas that strange, still atmosphere, from the faint bluish-grey of the higher tree-ridges, to the dim brown of the lower, and the deep and solemn dusk of the far horizon, into which the all-too-splendid sun was sinking fast. Would we have a last glimpse of his passing glory from the higher levels? Yes, sure enough, there he was, from clear and white, he now seemed a great richly red balloon—my friend's analogy; and, as he said it, I saw it was just so—and so good-bye to the god of day. His story is finished, and mine not yet begun.

So to our tale, ae winter's day
Twa cronies took their leisured way,
Noo up the hill, noo down the brae,
Their footsteps fared,
Till, lo, they enter, and survey,
A green kirkyaird!

Green it was in grass and leaf, and there was green mould on the crumbling stones. It lay around a modernized, but what was an ancient, cruciform, pre-Reformation church, the church of Kilbirnie, Presbyterian now, and one of many, but once the only oasis in a spiritual desert extending from Paisley to Kilwinning! The priest began, the parson continues, will the Freethought lecturer profane it in his turn, and harangue those polished pews, under that exquisite sixteenth century carving—perish the thought! Our lively Freethought friend has a reverence for ancient things equal to his love for modernity and civilization and good English, and showed us round with all the decorum of a deacon; indeed, with all the pride of a parson on his native heath—I mean churchyard. There is a Scotch saying, "The nearer the kirk, the farther frae God." Our friend's bedroom windows looks into this acre of mortality. Asked if he did not think he was in too close proximity to it, he said, "No; I have never feared the face of the living, and the dead can do me no injury." He drew our particular attention to some lusty evergreen yews, and got us to observe and ponder them from the several angles of mental and physical vision. "There," he said, pointing to a splendid specimen growing amidst a confused heap of mouldering tombs, "where do you think that fine fellow gets his sap and his robust vitality? Undoubtedly," he said, "the ancient roots are down amongst the coffin lids of those old Presbyterians, and feed fat on the rich dust of the ancient parishioners. You can fancy," he continued, "those slow, persistent, searching roots slipping round and under those ancient dead, sipping their rich juices, and raising them, as you see in that lusty yew tree, to a glorious resurrection! a sure and certain one, withal, and a beautiful, for one can never tire of admiring, and musing over, those sepulchral yews."

Leaning against the church wall in front is a broken slab, of early sixteenth century date, with a familiar, if garbled, inscription, but ending with a quite distinctive, if confused, Freethought idea—the whole, literally, is as follows:—

Affliction sore with meekness I bore,
Physicians were in vain,
Till God he pleased to take me hence,
And ease me of my pain.
Here also lies one girl and two boys;
They were part of my earthly joys:
Oh, life's a jest, and all things show it;
I once thought so, but now I know it.

Poor old fellow (or old woman), he, too, like all mankind, was confronted with the puzzle of the sphinx.

What wrinkling perplexities! What long uncertainty; what quiet confident certainty at last in that "Now I know it." What common but unutterable pathos, too, in that simple reference to "one girl and two boys," "They were part of my earthly joys"—why, they were all he had—losing them, at least, he might say, "The glory and the loveliness have passed away from earth! Peace, peace, poor mouldering heart! and hearts that are beating still, more bravely, more nobly than they know."

Meek souls there are who little deem
Their daily task an angel's theme.

But oh, those ineffectual angels of an alien creed! And oh, those ineffectual sermons, inside the church, compared with those quiet, simple, natural sermons in stone outside! Also:

Beneath these nodding elms, that yew tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap.

there stands a massively built, small square erection, some seven feet each way, and inside of which, as seen through a stone aperture, there lies, prone and still in the dimness and the dust of centuries, the startlingly "life-like" effigies of a man and his "spouse" in full dress. The almost obliterated inscription on the outside seems to identify the tomb as that of the local Kers of Kersland. Tradition says the man once led the storming of Dumbarton Castle; while now he is beyond the reach and rage of military prowess and murder—that still shocks and shakes the world—in a stronger fortress still. The children of our host had, on a first ramble in the churchyard, peeped into this dim interior, and, catching a glimpse of the weird couple lying there, had run home in a state of great alarm and terror, for they thought they had gazed upon the unburied dead. Heavy coffin-shaped slabs, such as keep down "Daddy Auld" at Mauchline, cover other graves, a protection, we understand, against the Burke and Hare ghouls of other days. On one such was carved a lengthy sword, reminding our host of Heine's words: "Lay a sword upon my coffin, for I was a brave soldier in the army of human freedom," or words to the same effect.

"Do you still read the *Freethinker*?" I rather doubtfully asked our guide. "I should think I do," he replied. "I would not miss my *Freethinker* for anything." Alas, the nearer the kirk the far'er frae God!

There is a substantial wall round the cemetery, built about sixty years ago, previous to which it was overrun by all sorts of people at all hours of the day and night. Especially at the village fair was it the resting place and rendezvous of whisky revellers, and illicit revellers of another sort, or both combined, when the horse fair became a veritable holy fair. The same fair is still held, but more decorously, and no doubt many of those old-time lovers of religion, whisky, and women have returned to sleep here side by side in the quiet for ever more. Every foot of this ancient burying place is enriched with human remains. The spirit, and the spirits, gone, no one knows where, if it be not, as we suspect, all compounded, metamorphosed in the food of the yew tree. Better than the *memento mori* of the mouldering slab, better than the body, aye, and spirit, should thus be resurrected in trunk and limb and leaf of a beautiful tree, with soft shadows on the grass in summer, or in the winds of winter sounding the requiem of all who rest below. Why, 'tis (almost) a consummation devoutly to be wished! Such were the serious, yet happy, thoughts of a short November day. And, to conclude: As the beginning is beautiful as the sunrise, so the end of life may have its sunset splendid and serene: so will mortal man be sustained and soothed by the nobler creed, "as one who wraps the drapery of his couch about him, and lies down to pleasant dreams."

A. MILLAR.

Acid Drops.

In last week's issue Dr. Lyttelton put to us a direct question, which we think deserves a direct answer. It arises out of a practice of the late Lord Roberts. When a number of alternative policies were before him, Lord Roberts told Dr. Lyttelton that he never decided at once. He went to bed, commended the matter to God, and by the morning one policy stood out clearly before him. And, says Dr. Lyttelton, if I had told Lord Roberts that this "experience of his was the tag-rag of a decaying superstition, the great warrior would have answered by silence." And I am asked what we make of it?

Well, candidly, we are not at all impressed. Lord Roberts was only doing with God what most of us do without him. All of us, when we have a number of different policies before us, are in the habit of waiting awhile before coming to a definite conclusion. Sometimes we go to bed and "sleep on it," sometimes we go about our usual business, and wait for some line of action to present itself. And any psychologist would tell Dr. Lyttelton this means no more than that we have driven the matter below consciousness for the time being, but that the train of thought set going consciously is being pursued subconsciously. During the war, when the paper question was so acute, we had often to make decisions which involved nothing more nor less than the continuance of the *Freethinker*. Sometimes the issue was simple, and the answer came at once. Sometimes the decision was more difficult to arrive at, and we also slept on it, and came to a clear resolve later. Now, one would like to know, did God help us to see how the *Freethinker* was to be kept going? If he did not, why did Lord Roberts need a help that we were able to do without?

Dr. Lyttelton says that Lord Roberts would have been silent if told his belief was a symptom of superstition. That is quite probable, but then it happens that we are not at all impressed with the capacity of Lord Roberts as a philosopher. He may have been a perfectly worthy man, and a good soldier, but soldiers are not often notorious for their philosophical capacity. The profession seems against it. It is not that men of ability do not enter the military profession, but it is one of those occupations that dull the intellect rather than enhance its powers. It is, I daresay, the routine that robs the mind of its alertness and its adaptability, but the rigidity and the unadaptability of the military mind is notorious. And the clearest proof of all is that improvements in the methods of warfare have most frequently come from civilian armies, or from civilians who have assumed military leadership. The military mind does not seem capable of even understanding its own business. It was the raw levies of Republican France that over a century ago remodelled the art of modern warfare. It was the Boer farmers who marked out many of the features of the late war. It was a Polish banker who told the militarists of Europe what the next war would be like—while the professional soldier had to run his head against it before he realized what was in front of him. The only good fortune of one nation that sends out its professional soldiers to fight is that it has professional soldiers against it, and they both tread the same old paths in the same old ways. The two armies meet on a level of laboriously acquired stupidity.

So it is not at all a question of our being ahead of Pascal, Darwin, Goethe, etc., in point of mental ability, although we think that some of the people on Dr. Lyttelton's list would have been more in agreement with us than with him. It is a question of our having a better understanding of some things—which is not at all due to any greatness on our part—than they had, because we happen to live at a time when a better knowledge of them is available. Newton, Galileo, Bacon, and scores of the world's greatest men have believed things which a schoolboy would laugh at nowadays. And we can laugh at them because these great men have helped us to do so. And we think none the less of the great men of the past because they have bowed to some of the beliefs of their time. We are all children of the age in which we live, and we have

not the least doubt but that the people of a century hence will smile at some of our beliefs of to-day. That is involved in all that we mean when we talk of progress. There is cause here only for congratulation. It is when the people of to-day cling to the superstitions of centuries ago that we have a feeling of sadness. For then we realize that the labours of the past have not borne their best fruit, but serve only to act as a dead weight upon the present and the future.

Mr. G. H. Wells, writing of his recent experiences in Russia, let some light on the matter of the famous inscription, "Religion is the Opium of the People." Personally we believe it to be quite true, whoever said it and wherever it was written. But to harrow the feelings of the British public and to help keep the war going, a number of the Church papers, prominent Churchmen, and the *Times*, which was too pious to accept an advertisement for the *Freethinker*, told us that this inscription was placed on the sacred walls of the Kremlin by order of the Bolshevik Government. Now Mr. Wells says that it is upon the walls of a private house *opposite* the Kremlin, and that it was placed there by a former resident. So what the pious ones were annoyed about was evidently that the Russian Government did not at once order the inscription to be removed and the resident executed. That would have been done under the old Government of Russia.

We were also told by the same people that the Churches had been closed and the worship of God forbidden. We heard ourselves the Bishop of Birmingham tell this to a large audience, with a great deal of detail, and heard it endorsed by an alleged refugee from Russia. Mr. Wells says:—

The ten thousand crosses of Moscow still glitter in the afternoon sun.....The churches are open, the kissing of ikons is a flourishing industry, and beggars still woo casual charity at the doors. The celebrated miraculous shrine of the Iberian Madonna outside the Redeemer Gate was particularly busy. There were many peasant women, unable to get into the little chapel, kissing the stones outside.

Now all we can say is that, as Mr. Wells declares he saw these things, he is either a most deliberate liar, or the *Times* and the Bishop of Birmingham and the rest of them who made us shiver with terror at the stories of the suppression of religion are—we leave our readers to fill up the hiatus.

All through the war the *Freethinker* stood almost alone in pointing out that we must be prepared to pay a big price for the systematic cultivation of brutality that was being carried on in order to keep the war spirit alive. Had that lesson been more generally taught, we should have been better prepared for the inevitable consequences of the war. But all the scribblers of the country, whose chief desire was saleable "copy," and who could find in the agencies for carrying on the war a ready market for their wares, spent their time in blinding the public to the realities of war by writing miles of drivel about how "Tommy" played football, or smoked cigarettes, or killed himself with laughing in the trenches, or died heart-broken because he was not allowed to go "over the top" every morning before breakfast. Now that the war is over, and we are passing through the inevitable after-phase, the papers are being filled with equally stupid stuff about the nature and extent of the demoralization that is in existence. From being a nation of angels, we have become one of devils. And it is all simply so much saleable stupidity.

This, for example, is the way Mr. James Douglas writes in the *Weekly Express*: "The great war bred nobleness and devotion." It did nothing of the kind. It utilized the nobleness and devotion that civil life had developed. But, in spite of the war breeding nobleness and devotion, "the war spread moral plague and pestilence far and wide. The fibre of the nation was rotted by what Milton called 'the foul contagion,'" etc. The indictment of the nation is as stupid as was the laudation of the war while it was on. There is a reaction, and some people are losing their heads now, as they did when the war began. But the fibre of the nation is what it was. It is neither

better nor worse, for a temporary lapse from normal health is not of necessity a proof of the unsoundness of the organism. No one will accuse us of any desire to prevent freedom of speech, or thought, or writing, but we sometimes think that if the larger part of British journalists were to take a holiday for a year the public would have a rather healthier tone when they returned to their labours.

The Rev. E. P. Amphlett, Vicar of Powick, Worcester, is a very nice individual. So nice that we are of opinion his proper place is in heaven, and there should be many who would regard his departure hence with considerable satisfaction, if only as a reward for a character that will never receive its full recognition on earth. He is alarmed at the immorality of people and the laxity of public opinion with regard to certain matters. His particular aversion—the one that excites his greatest indignation—is that a girl who is about to become a mother is allowed to be married in a church. And: “a girl who is known to have sinned goes about in a brazen manner, and is not shunned by respectable people.” He follows it up with this gem:—“If the marriage is to be, let it be at a registry office, which is quite good enough to comply with the laws of the land, where there is no pretence of a religious service.”

Now that is what we call a *nice* kind of a man. Presumably he would like to revive the days of the *Scarlet Letter*, when those who “sinned” were branded and held up to the amusement of the pious, who to all intents and purposes were often more despicable characters than those who were undergoing punishment. Most decent-minded people would feel inclined to do all they could to help another correct a fault once he had committed it, but the Vicar of Powick is not built that way. It probably encourages him to maintain a good idea of his own superior morality to see that other people suffer as much as is possible from any fault they may commit. And the remark about registry offices is the kind of impertinence that one would expect from a person of Mr. Amphlett's type. We hope that when one of our Christian readers feels inclined to plume himself on the kind of character formed by Christianity, he will think of Mr. Amphlett.

Soon after this copy of the *Freethinker* is in the hands of its readers Christians will be celebrating the anniversary of the birth of one who was said to have been cradled in a manger. The Downham Board of Guardians are now offering a reward of £10 for the discovery of the parentage of a child found in a manger in West Dereham. Once upon a time there might have been a chance of setting up the child as one sent direct from heaven in order to celebrate Christmas. But times have changed. Mary is found “with child,” and her story of its divine fatherhood sets a religion going. If that had happened at West Dereham in 1920 we should have had the Board of Guardians offering a reward for the discovery of the parent, and, if she had been living in the parish of the Rev. Mr. Amphlett, that gentleman would have protested against her being married to Joseph by the Church, or being recognized by “respectable” people.

Over fifty lives were lost in the great gale which recently raged round the coast. Another example of the tender care of “Our Father which art in Heaven!”

Lord Hugh Cecil told a Putney audience that the Church must get back to the stern note of warning. Religion is too easy and comfortable. But his lordship ought to know that not even a Cecil can relight the fires of hell.

A Sunday League application for a licence for the use of the Hippodrome was refused by the Southend-on-Sea Bench. Curiously, the Bench included two prominent Churchmen, a leading member of the Salvation Army, and a well-known Nonconformist. The finger of Providence can almost be traced in this instance.

There is a growing demand for economy in the administration of national affairs. And being a Christian people

we are preparing to economize. The people are being appealed to by all the Churches for more money to carry on their work, and the Government, with its pious chapel-bred chief, is determined to cut down the expenditure on health and education—the two things that are vital to the real welfare of the nation. But the growing expenditure on the army, the navy, and the air force is to be continued. Being a Christian people, nothing must be allowed to interfere with that. The comments of historians of five hundred years hence on the sanity and honesty of the public men of to-day should be very piquant reading.

Canon Potter, of Surbiton, considers church bazaars “immoral, uneconomic, and unprincipled.” Presumably, he prefers spot-cash donations. The alms-dish is such a splendid piece of Christian evidence.

Explaining how the money is wasted in the Army, Captain Horace Wyndham tells in the *Sunday Express* of the useless number of highly-paid officers of high rank that are still being maintained in Belgium, France, and Italy by the British Government, as all part of the game of official “graft.” He adds that on the “Lines of Communication,” we still have seven chaplains, ranking as brigadier-generals, with full pay, about 120 other clergy, a large proportion of whom are colonels, plus some 400 “temporaries.” And all of these who have given themselves to the Lord's work are drawing good pay from the British taxpayer, and will return to tell the young men and women at Sunday schools and the like, how they sacrificed themselves during the great war. When it comes to a question of filling sinecure offices the Army will have to look to its laurels if it is going to get in ahead of the Church.

The Bishop of Birmingham says that he raises no objection to Sunday games provided they are not inimical to the spirit of devotion. That is very kind of the Bishop, and all it means is that he does not object to anything that does not interfere with him. The disinterestedness of the remark is striking. But what one would like to know is by what right the Bishop of Birmingham determines what kind of amusement a man shall indulge in on Sunday? It is sheer clerical impudence, and the sooner he realizes that the better.

Great amusement was caused in the House of Commons recently, when Mr. Lyle, by a slip of the tongue, referred “to the honourable and gallant member for Central Hell,” instead of Hull.

Canon W. Temple, who has been appointed by the Prime Minister (and the Holy Ghost) to the Bishopric of Manchester, is said to be a member of the Labour Party. He is a son of a former Archbishop of Canterbury. Who can now say that the Church of England is not democratic?

The Rev. F. B. Meyer has shifted his eyes from the naughty stage to the flighty dresses worn by ladies in private life. His latest pronouncement concerns advice to girls not to “wear boots which are indecent.” The only boots we know which are “indecent” are old ones; and people only wear that kind when they are compelled.

A Lord's Day Observance Society's advertisement starts with the words, “Do you love God?” This reminds us of the answer to a similar question by an American boy, “Well, I'm not so struck on him as all that!”

The Rev. Dr. Orchard has completely renounced the New Theology, and become “violently orthodox.” He is quite right in arguing that the idea behind the phrase, “Christ was God, but so are you,” means in the long run the negation of God; but he is entirely mistaken when he says that faith in the supernatural is returning with such violence that the Church of to-day needs to be “a bulwark of common sense against credulity.” We can see no sign of such a return, and most clergymen complain of the steady decay of faith and the triumph of their chief enemy, Materialism. And surely the Church shows no inclination to become “a bulwark of commonsense.”

NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS.

Some of our Subscribers will receive this week's copy of the "Freethinker" in a GREEN Wrapper. As the postal regulations forbid our inserting a printed slip inside the paper, we are adopting this device of reminding Subscribers when their renewals are due. We should be greatly obliged if Subscribers will remit as promptly as possible, or will send us a card in cases where they have made other arrangements for securing their weekly supply.

"Freethinker" Sustentation Fund.

THE purpose of this Fund is to meet the deficit incurred owing to the excessive cost of printing and paper, and to provide a balance to meet fresh deficits until such time as prices approach a normal level. The sum of £1,000 is being asked for.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

Previously acknowledged, £618 19s. 2d. C. J. Peacock, £10 10s.; H. Silverstein, 10s.; C. J., £5; G. F. Shoults, £4; E. K., 5s.; J. Robinson, 2s. 6d.; "John's Mamma, £1; Tom Shield, 2s. 3d.; J. Bingham (second subscription), 6s.; J. R. Lickfold, 10s.; T. Pasey, 10s. 6d.; W. Porteus, 5s.; A. R. Clark (second subscription), 2s. 6d.; "Dilatory," £1; R. Eaton, £1 1s.; H. C. T. L., £1; E. P. Beer, £1; W. Wickham, 3s.; Teddy Cottrell, 2s.; A. K. Kemp, 5s.; E. Langridge, 5s.; S. W. Soper, 5s.; H. Hedley, 2s. 6d.; T. Owen, 5s. Per W. A. Williams—G. Turner, 2s. 6d.; A. Greenlees, 2s. 6d.; John Duff, 2s. 6d.; W. A. Williams, 2s. 6d. Total, £647 11s. 5d.

PROMISED, provided the total sum raised reaches £1,000, including the amounts promised:—"Medical," £25; "In Memory of the late Sir Hiram Maxim," £50; Mr. J. B. Middleton, £10; "A Friend," £100; "Working Journalist," £3; X. Y. Z., £10; J. Morton, 10s.; R. Proctor, £1; National Secular Society, £25; F. Collins, 10s.; H. Black, £1 1s.; T. Sharpe, £1 1s.; Mr. and Mrs. S. Clowes, £1 1s.; J. Breese, £3; A. Davis, £2 2s.; J. W. Hudson, £1; "Anno Domini," £5; Collette Jones, £5.

Total promises, £244 5s.

To Correspondents.

G. H. FARMER.—Came across it in the course of rambling round a bookshop. Hope to see you soon.

J. HUTCHISON.—We quite agree with all you say about the value of the oath. It is a curious comment upon the value of the opinion of many of our judges and magistrates, when they are called upon to deal with a question that is outside the routine of the law, that they should so often talk nonsense concerning the oath, when their daily experience should be enough to show them of what little value it is as an aid to truth-speaking.

JOHN'S MAMMA.—We should be very pleased to visit the Southend district if arrangements could be made. There are very many Freethinkers in the district; all that is needed is for someone to pull them together for work. Thanks for invitation, which we should be pleased to accept when occasion offers, but we have little time for anything in the nature of joy-trips.

P. ALLOTT.—Thanks for verses. Hope to publish soon.

ETHEL OVERYON.—We commented on the absurdity of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fairy photographs a week or so since. Any photographer will tell you how such plates are prepared. It is too silly for lengthy treatment. Sir Arthur thinks that such things are studies in evidence; they are only studies in delusion.

R. BROWN.—Sorry we did not follow your instructions as regards the previous letter, but the disregard was quite unintentional.

W. PORTEUS.—Everyone can do what he can towards doing what he would like, and no one can ask for more. We thank you for your goodwill.

T. PASEY.—We remember being at Birkenhead, but have no recollection of what the subject was. Glad you think we have put in a lot of good work since then for the good old cause. It is worth it.

P. G. HASTIE.—A local flood on a large scale is quite possible, but the Biblical story will not fit a flood of that kind. The Biblical flood is a universal one, and that is an absurdity. The presence of sea shells on high mountains is a result of either the subsidence or elevation of portions of the earth's surface, and that is always going on.

J. BREESE.—Quite good. Will make use of your suggestion next week.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

We beg to call the special attention of subscribers to the notice printed at the top of the "To Correspondents" column. The postage on copies of the paper is now double what it was, and it adds considerably to our weekly bill to be sending copies of the paper to those who no longer desire them. We shall, therefore, be obliged if those who receive their copy in a green wrapper, and who wish to order it locally, will please drop us a card to that effect.

The horrible weather on Sunday at Liverpool naturally had its effects on the meeting in the St. George's Hall, but, all things considered, the attendance was a remarkable one, and offered every encouragement for the local Branch to launch out on a future occasion. Mr. Cohen's address was followed with the closest attention and evident appreciation by those present, and a very gratifying circumstance was the number of people who seemed quite new to our meetings. That is an indication of wide interest and future converts.

A number of friends braved the blizzard, and came over from Chester, and a pleasing and quite unexpected feature of the evening occurred when the Chairman, Mr. Egerton Stafford, presented Mr. Cohen with a handsome Russia leather wallet on their behalf, as a mark of appreciation of his work in the Freethought cause. The presentation came as quite a surprise to the lecturer, who thanked the friends in a few brief words. Such things go a long way towards making what might be a very arduous task pleasant, while the feeling that one has the appreciation of men and women who are fellow-workers in a cause which appeals to all that is best in human nature acts as a constant spur to renewed efforts. We were pleased to learn that there is some prospect of a Branch being started in Chester, and of regular work being attempted.

We regret to say that Miss Kough, who acts as Miss Vance's eyes and general assistant, met the other day with

an accident while getting off a 'bus. She sprained her ankle badly and grazed her leg, and is at present confined to bed. As the favours of Providence seldom happen singly, Miss Vance is also confined to her room, so callers at the N. S. S. office will understand why there is no one to receive them. Correspondence will, however, receive due attention, as Miss Kough's accident only prevents her moving about. If those who have messages, etc., for the General Secretary will leave them at the *Freethinker* office, they will be forwarded to their destination.

We announce with regret that our friend, Captain John Latham, who has been resting since his leaving the army, and was a frequent visitor to the *Freethinker* office, and ever ready to assist in any way possible, is now returning to South Africa. He leaves this country on December 13 (while this copy is passing through the press), and expects to arrive in Cape Town about January 5. He sails in the *Durham Castle*. Captain Latham has many friends in South Africa, and they will, we are sure, be as pleased to welcome him back as we were sorry to bid him good-bye. We have asked him to keep us posted, in the shape of an occasional article, on African matters that are of interest to British Freethinkers, so that we shall hope to be in touch with him in that manner. For the present we must rest content with wishing him a pleasant voyage and a good time when he reaches his destination.

It will be seen that we are making good progress with the Sustentation Fund, but unless all those who intend sending are simultaneously seized with the resolve to discharge the obligation to themselves at once we shall not close the Fund by Christmas. But the letters we receive leave no doubt that the total will be raised in a very short time. Mr. C. J. Peacock sends us a very cheery note in enclosing his cheque for ten guineas, and Mr. G. F. Shoults writes, "May I say that to me it is a pleasure to subscribe to a journal that has throughout the trying times of the last five years maintained an even balance." We can only say that we should have been the more pleased had we maintained a financial balance as well as a mental one, but the fates were too strong. Still, we hope for brighter times in the future.

"A Friend," who is already down on our list of promises for £100, writes:—

It is a fine proposition Mr. F. Collins makes of 10s. gifts. As we only require £142 to make up the £1,000, with the promises, if 184 persons will give 10s. each, I will make the odd £100.

That is a very generous offer, coming on top of a promise of £100 and a subscription in addition. But, candidly, we think the rest of our readers ought to be able to make up the required amount between them. There would then be no need for us to make another call on our friend's generosity. Anyway, it is certain that the £1,000 will be subscribed, and there is still one more week for it to be done before 1920 closes.

There have been many requests for an index to the *Freethinker*, and this year we are having one prepared, with title page. It will be ready as early in January as possible. It will be interesting to note how many are required, and, if the number ordered justifies it, the index will remain a permanent feature of the paper. We are also having bound some complete volumes of the *Freethinker* for 1920. These will be sold to purchasers at the price of the year's subscription, plus the bare cost of binding. Orders for these should be given as early as possible, as there will only be a limited number available.

The Friars Hall, Blackfriars Road, has again been secured for the whole of January, and the course will be opened by Mr. Cohen on Sunday, January 2, with a New Year's address on "The Old Freethought in the New Year." We again ask for the help of all our London friends in making these meetings known as widely as possible. It is very difficult, and very expensive, to advertise in London on a large scale, and those who can help in making the lectures known will be giving the Society real help.

We are asked to announce that to-day (December 19) Mr. Cameron Roberts will lecture in the Shop Assistants' Hall, 297 Argyle Street, Glasgow, under the auspices of the local Branch of the N. S. S. on "Science and Morality." The lecture is at 12 noon, and we hope that the local "saints" will crowd the hall.

The recent controversy over the religious opinions of Abraham Lincoln overflowed the columns of the *Freethinker*, and appeared in those of the *Nation*. It will, therefore, be of interest to our readers to learn that next week we shall reproduce a facsimile of the original draft of the famous Gettysburg speech in Lincoln's own handwriting, with a brief article on the matter by Captain Latham. As many of our readers may feel inclined to take an extra copy or two of this issue, for propagandist purposes, we should be obliged if they would order as early as possible. It will be a first-rate number for a Christian to get hold of.

Psychopathic Religion.

Of all phenomena encountered in studying the pathology of mental disease none are perhaps more striking than those furnished by persons emotionally stimulated to religious frenzy or exaltation. The following notes, compiled by the writer at a recent service—orgy—exhibition—of the peculiar cult known as the Holy Rollers, or Pentecostal Revivalists, provide material corroborative of the view that these people are subjects for Kraft Ebing or Havelock Ellis.

At the meeting of this rabid sect were about 800 people. The sincerity of the devotees is evident from the enthusiasm and abandon with which they roar out the cacophonous doggerel serving the purpose of hymns. Women were in the majority, though many otherwise apparently sane men took part in both the song service in the large tent and in the poojah that followed later in the smaller one. The musical service does not differ materially from the average camp meeting, the brand of evangelism dispensed being of the truculent hell-fire variety—cruel, stupid, illogical. The psychological effect of music upon the atrophied brains of these people is used to the utmost by their leaders. It is well known how dogs howl at certain sounds. Deep down in animal nature lies some instinct that responds to the stirring effect of music upon the emotions, and the gospel hymns with their rousing tunes, swinging rhythm, and brutally primitive words, form a vital element in the mechanism of religious stimulation.

The leader of the rites is a woman, vigorous, magnetic—a strong personality; she dominates these enthusiasts like a teacher handling an infant school; they are completely under her spell, entire lack of reasoning power rendering them easy prey to the fervid attacks of a woman with a facile tongue and inexhaustible nerve energy. By an audience composed of such people dogma is mistaken for fact, abuse for argument, incoherent ravings for divine inspiration, and emotional frenzy for spiritual power.

The worshippers, with the bodies of men and women but the minds of infants, have a particular fondness for the repulsive symbolism of blood. They talk it, sing it—and, in make-believe, drink it. Misguided, sweet-looking young women stand hymn-book in hand and shriek out the desire to be washed in blood. It is a deplorable spectacle.

But if such grossness characterizes the "song service," what of the heathen ceremony that follows in the "prayer tent"?

On the straw-covered floor scores of men and women are squatting, kneeling, or lying. Many of them have their arms extended to the canvas roof, imploring the "power" to descend upon them. In some cases the hands or arms are kept in constant motion, jerking

spasmodically for an incredible length of time, yet seemingly without fatigue. And from the fanatic mob rises a babel of strange sounds, for all are howling, shouting, singing, weeping, giggling, or "speaking with tongues."

Groups form from time to time around someone who feels a desire for "the power." The victim kneels, with eyes closed and arms extended. The others stand or kneel and invoke the spirit with reiterated yells of "Oh-la-l-ce-tee! Oh-la-i-ee-tee! Jesus! Jesus! Doodle-ah! Oh, doodle-ah! Hallelujah! Send the power! Doodle-ah! Send the power!" and so on, *ad libitum*. The syllables of gibberish interpolated into the invocation are supposed to be an example of "speaking with tongues," this being one of the cardinal points of the faith, but close observation reveals the fact that the same sounds recur with regularity, there being little or no variety of phonetic combination. Thus it is clear that these utterances are merely memorized cat-calls, having no meaning, and therefore no spiritual power.

The condition of the subjects, prostrate on the dirty straw, suggests variously hypnosis, catalepsy, coma, trance, or sleep. The most striking phenomena are furnished by those who maintain without tiring a muscular agitation that would normally exhaust a person in a few minutes. At this orgy one devotee—an elderly woman of slender build—lying at full length, with eyes closed, kept her arms extended vertically and in vigorous motion for fully an hour. Perspiration poured from the face, which her friends fanned with untiring zeal.

The priestess of the cult possesses a singular hypnotic power over these people, a few mesmeric passes sufficing to "put them under." In some cases the seizure is so sudden that the subject falls abruptly, as if shot, being received into the arms of an assistant, who breaks the fall and lowers the victim to the ground. At this meeting, one brawny man, fully six feet two inches in height, reeled over in less than sixty seconds under the spell of this woman's influence, and remained in a comatose condition to the end of the session.

That the phenomena of religious frenzy are cognate with certain forms of sexual excitement is well known, and the actions of these people clearly indicate the nature of the physical reactions incident to their spasms of emotional exaltation. Confirmation of this view is furnished by observing the hysterical laughter of the women, many of whom doubtless suffer from suppression or distortion of normal functions, the diverted instinct seeking this outlet for expression. On this occasion one of them continued a hideous and unnatural laughter for the entire evening.

Consideration of this cult may lead to the conclusion that its adherents do little positive harm, which tolerant view is perhaps commendable enough but for one serious fact, namely, that their children are dragged to the meetings and forced under the morbid influence of hypnotic treatment in order to produce the phenomenon known as "speaking with tongues." Naturally an infant mind falls an easy prey to these sorcerers, and the combined effects of fear, bewilderment, and unconscious imitation will sometimes elicit a few incoherent mutterings that are at once seized upon as evidence of the little sufferer's response to the incantations.

One child, at the orgy in question, a flaxen-haired mite of five or six, was lying on a bench in misery with sleepiness—the hour being about eleven—and quietly crying, with her pink fists against her eyes. She might well desire to shut out the scene of spiritual degeneracy. Her mother, an attractive woman of about thirty, was stretched upon the straw close by, in a condition of feverish agitation, uttering peals of senseless laughter. A heavy man seated beside her stimulated the hysterical excitement by hand-clapping and exhor-

tation. It appeared that the child had been subjected earlier to a dose of hypnotic bullying, but had entirely failed to "speak with tongues" or to evince any signs of response other than fright and exhaustion.

That the minds of otherwise normal children should be warped by the inculcation of this nonsense is a matter for legal interference. Assuming naturally that what their parents do must be right, they thus acquire a distorted view of life and morals, their sense of proportion inevitably needing readjustment in later life, when the worthlessness of such fantastic mummery comes to be known.

FRANK VINCENT WADDY (U.S.A.).

Atheism—Positively.

I HAVE been reading (with at least the usual enjoyment) through a bundle of *Freethinkers*. Unfortunately, I am always late in reading our wonderful old paper, as I receive them in lots of six to a dozen at a time. Still, this (perhaps) adds to the pleasure of perusal. It helps to prove the truth of the reply I once made to a Ju-Ju man who twitted me with selling old numbers of the *Freethinker* in my mission work as advocate of Free-thought. I told him I could always sell old numbers of the *Freethinker*—which was more than he could do with old copies of any religious journal. 'Tis true. The *Freethinker* is, in a real sense, literature. Its matter, as its style, is not merely not ephemeral, but stands good for re-reading for almost any length of time. Possibly the finest work (in every sense of the word)—certainly the most arduous and long-continued—for the glorious cause of Free-thought, is represented by the thirty-nine volumes of the *Freethinker*, which have upset more than the Thirty-nine Articles.

I have felt "inspired" to write this, after reading Mr. Wells' letter in the issue of September 5. Mr. Wells appears to be piqued at being taken to task for that common (one might almost write vulgar) dodge of using the noble name of Atheist as an epithetical missile. He tries to exculpate himself by raising the other (and different) point that "Atheism" is merely a negative term. It is well known to many (if not to world-wide historians) that *no* word is *merely* negative; much less such a one as Atheism. Even the word "nothing" (which is a fairly full negative term) necessarily implies "something," standing in mental relation to it. The word "Atheism" inevitably carries with it the positive, as well as the negative, connotation. If Atheism be styled the negative side; Free-thought is the positive side—of the self-same philosophy. The human who denies the existence of any God or Gods that have been defined or described; or who disbelieves in the existence of "God"—who "knows nothing of 'God'"—undefined and undescribed, consequently puts humankind in the place of all the Gods—that never were.

Revelation and inspiration being denied, human reason and human knowledge as guides are thereby asserted (and this not alone to philosophers). And so on. Each negative—each denial—of the religious belief connotes a positive—an affirmative—contrary from the religious idea, in that particular connection.

I remember J. M. Robertson, in Glasgow in 1891 or 1892, on one occasion dealing with this question in discussion after his lecture. He said that looking out, in one's mind's eye, into space—and out—and out—we cannot conceive a limit to space. We cannot conceive a line where space ends, and beyond which there is *nothing*. (That would be truly a Wellsian negative.)

Similarly, throwing our thoughts away back, or forward, through time, it is impossible for us to think of a "beginning" or an "end" of time. We cannot conceive a time when there was no time. There *may* have been a beginning of time; there *may* be an end of

time to come; we cannot think of it; we cannot conceive either. Then he went on to point out the necessary implications that followed from these negatives, these disbeliefs. We are conscious that we are alive, here and now. That's positive. We know that we can make *this* life happier, or more miserable, by the way we use, or abuse, our reason and knowledge—by the way in which we co-operate, or otherwise, with our fellows in making this world and this life better and happier. This is a good illustration of the facet (noticeable in the history of the world) that every negative has a positive; otherwise there would be no negative; and "two negatives make an affirmative."

It seems to me (if humbly I may dare to criticize the historian of the world) that these (and similar) fundamental fallacies of Mr. Wells are due to the fatally facile (if forcible) pen he wields. He writes, and in attractive style, before he fully realizes the positive, as well as the negative, implications of all that he does so positively write. So in his *Sociology*. He gained a vogue (for a time), in part at least, with matter that some of us had put forward from "orange boxes" from 1891 onwards. He appears to have written before he had fully thought out the political application of the principles and precepts he had—adopted. Hence his variegated, if breezy, career in, and through, the Socialist Parties (*not* "Party," Master Printer, pray) of Great Britain. Much the same process has taken place with him in philosophy, as in sociology. Hence these tears!

In conclusion, I would like to refer to E. Egerton Stafford's letter in the issue of September 21 regarding Mr. Bradlaugh's statement of the Atheist position. I write from memory, and have no books at hand to which to refer; but I think it is correct to say that, while Bradlaugh said that the word "G-O-D" conveyed no meaning to his mind—and though he neither affirmed nor denied its existence—he *did* deny the existence of Jahveh, Holy Ghost, Jupiter, Osiris, Horus, Christ, or any other "God," defined and described.

My own opinion is that the man or woman who denies the existence of an *undefined, undescribed* "God" is nearly as foolish as the person who affirms its existence. In other words, Atheism is the only wear for those sensible humans who take as their motto, *La vérité oblige*.
ATHOS ZENO.

The Reformer.

VEIL his truths in a mist of lies,
And freeze his heart's appeal.
Hound him, scourge him until he dies
Who strives for an ideal.

Oh, hate him as only Christians can,
Trample his pride in the mire,
Grind his dreams in the mills of man,
Who ventures to aspire.

You who kiss Jehovah's feet,
Yearning for Judgment Day,
In church with saintly self-conceit
Close your cold eyes and pray:

O Lord, our thanks words cannot tell
That we are not as he,
Who will not leave thine earth the hell
Thou madest it to be.

Guardian of the select and blest
Grant, grant through Jesu's Blood,
Thy faithful servants this request:—
Let him not do us good,
Dear Lord,
Let him not do us good!

R. RANDERSON.

Earthbound.

THE picture play, "Earthbound," now being shown at Covent Garden, is the old, old story.

Dick and Jim (both married), and Harvey (unmarried), have acknowledged for their governing principles the following mixture:—No God, no sin, no future life, the survival of the fittest, and everyone for himself.

Dick's wife "Knows everything, and fears nothing," and loves Jim: a worldly woman.

Jim's wife "Knows nothing, but fears everything," including her husband: a sweet woman.

Jim is being drawn by Mrs. Dick to desert his sweet wife—against his will, of course. When the sweet wife discovers this, she swears Mrs. Dick will never have him, and at once tells Dick. Dick gently but firmly obeys the unwritten law (as it is facetiously called in America), and shoots his friend Jim.

Jim's astral shape, cleverly shown on the film, flits here and there among the survivors, sometimes seen, sometimes unseen. When Dick stands in the dock, it persuades Dick's wife to go and testify that she "made Jim love her": and so saves Dick from the death penalty. Jim's astral shape finally confronts his wife, the sweet one, and she forgives him, and then blesses his departure over the garden and up the mountains (cleverly shown on the film) away from the unfortunate "Earthbounders."

Beautiful pictures, fine actors, but to anyone who has thrown superstition overboard, how feeble it is.

The so-called governing ideas of the three men—no God, no sin, no future life, etc.—are a weak attempt to associate bad ethics indissolubly with Atheism. It needs only to reply to that charge that sin or bad ethics will exist apart from any belief or disbelief about anything.

The play centres round the struggle of sex possession, which man inherits from his brute ancestors, and which can only be conquered by strength of rational thought and action.

Jim's sweet wife, when she swore Dick's wife would "never have her Jim," and Dick's revolver shooting, the recourse to the unwritten law, are plainly the evidence of the sex possession instinct of the human race. Their action is both irrational and immoral, and might have been very different had they studied evolution.

Harvey, the philosopher, winds up by saying, "Love misused, shakes the foundations of creation," whatever that may mean.

The play is called "Earthbound," but it is a poor attempt to show us that we can escape being earth-bound by looking for a God and an after life. How much more useful would the play have been had it shown that everything points to our being unable to escape our earth-binding.

As shown on the film, either of the following names would be far more suitable:—"Hidebound" or "Fogbound."
Y. C.

The persecutor can never be certain that he is not persecuting the truth rather than error, but he may be quite certain that he is suppressing the spirit of truth. And, indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that the religious doctrines I have reviewed represented the most skilful and at the same time most successful conspiracy against that spirit that has ever existed among mankind. Until the seventeenth century, every mental disposition which philosophy pronounces to be essential to a legitimate research was almost uniformly branded as a sin, and a large proportion of the most deadly intellectual vices were deliberately inculcated as virtues.....In a word, there is scarcely a disposition that marks the love of abstract truth and scarcely a rule which reason teaches as essential for its attainment that theologians did not for ages stigmatize as offensive to the Almighty.—*W. H. Lecky*.

Book Chat.

A STUDY IN CONTRAST.

The Mourner: A Play of the Imagination in one Act. By G. H. Murphy. (Pioneer Press. 1s. net.)

Arachne. By Adelaide Eden Phillpotts. (Cecil Palmer. 3s. net.)

It would be hard to find better illustrations of the divergent tendencies in modern imaginative literature than the two plays I have placed at the head of this article. Both writers are young, and have the artist's confidence and delight in creative energy. The works they now present to us are their book-bills on Parnassus, which we, the careful custodians of the Muses, are willing to endorse, not so much, perhaps, on their actual face-values, as on their promissory value—the promise to pay up at some future date. Mr. George H. Murphy is a young Irishman who is known to our readers as "Desmond Fitzroy." He has courage and undoubted talent, we hope to be able to say genius, when time has brought fuller sympathy, deeper knowledge, and greater command of his material. At present his intellectual fire is hidden in a cloud of Celtic smoke. It makes a fine effect at a distance, but does not invite a near approach. To vary the metaphor, it is a picture the beauty of which can be glimpsed only in one kind of light, from one angle, and at a certain distance. The critic who is not unsympathetic to new manifestations of art, and yet has in mind the best traditions, is naturally just a little at sea when he is faced with something so wholly new and strange. It will not surprise us if this play is reviled in some quarters, and damned with faint praise in others. Like the work of Charles Wells, it may have to wait a couple of generations before it has justice done to it.

The scene of the play is an ante-chamber of death. The room is draped in black and lit by a dim lamp, the furniture like the draping a dead black, the hue of unrelieved sorrow and despair. Desmond, the protagonist in this little tragedy of the soul, is a young heretic, who, with a soul-companion, has fled the dull commercialism and conventionality of city life to live in closer communion with nature and the human spirit. When the play opens, the child born of this ideal union is dead, and the young mother is given up by the doctor. What is necessary for us to know about these children of sorrow is conveyed by the talk of a neighbour, the young man's sister—both quite normal people—and a child, an elfishly beautiful little creature who plays the part of chorus in this spiritual fantasy. The dead baby is laid in a black coffin on the black table, and the macabre situation is made more gruesome by the actions of the elfish child. Desmond comes in from the bed-room beside himself with grief, savagely refusing the consolations of religion, dismissing even his beloved sister in his one wish to be alone for the ultimate moments of life with his heart's choice. Oona passes away quietly in his arms before a dying fire in this sombre chamber of death.

There is an element of unreality in the play, but it is not greater than in some other frankly symbolical representation of life. In reading we do not feel the possible absurdity of the situations: how they would affect us over the foot-lights is another matter. The atmosphere is right. It is a poetical evocation of despair and grief; a little overwrought perhaps in emotion, but vibrant with the simple sincerity of an ardent and troubled spirit.

In the dramatization of a Greek legend by Miss Phillpotts, whose first excursion in poetic drama was sympathetically noticed in these columns by Mr. Lloyd some four years ago, we have, as I said, an excellent contrast in artistic method. The two poets have this only in common. They see the world from the angle of youth. Mr. Murphy rejects the restraints of verse; Miss Phillpotts accepts them because for her they are not impediments to creative energy, but rather the forms of artistic service in which she finds perfect freedom. She has what is so rare to-day among our younger poets, an unflinching sense of poetic rhythm. In that direction she requires no discipline, her lyrical pieces have the simple directness of the Elizabethan songs. They are not over-weighted with imagery, and for that reason seem to crave the emotional heightening of music. In the drama she has just published the interest is rather lyrical than dramatic. It reminds us of Flaxman's outline illustrations of Greek legends, with, perhaps, the

addition of flat washes of pure, simple colours. We accept the limitations which such a treatment of a dramatic story implies, and we are unwise if we do not rejoice in its untroubled loveliness. Arachne is a girl of genius, an artist in the spinning of beautiful gossamer webs, a pupil, too, of the goddess Minerva. Like other artists, she is arrogant and thoughtless, and in a moment of anger she demands her freedom from service to the Muse. She even challenges the goddess to compete with her in spinning. Her thoughtless arrogance and childish waywardness bring upon her a metamorphosis into a lower form of nature. In the bare story the moral is obvious, but Miss Phillpotts disguises it with lovely rhythms, with witty and gracious dialogue in the lighter Greek manner, and with suggestions of contrast in character. Yet, if I may say so without offence, both of these young poets are on the wrong path, or, to be more correct, they are not on the path at all. They have not yet found themselves. Mr. Murphy needs the discipline of a definite artistic study, the wisdom which comes with second thoughts, while Miss Phillpotts needs the experience which comes to the artist on the wings of pain and sorrow and joy, which bring a fuller and wider sympathy with human life, the understanding heart and mind. Yet I am confident that in these *primitia* of talent there is a promise of future genius.

HESTER BRAYNE.

Freethought on Tyneside.

We are now at the close of the year, and it may be interesting to indulge in a brief retrospect of our past work.

It would be futile to contend that our work has been maintained at as high a level as it should have been, but that, we hasten to add, casts no reflection upon the few devoted men and women who have kept things going. On the contrary, their work deserves the highest commendation, and the results may fill them with encouragement. But ours is essentially a pioneer movement, and it appeals to the few who are strongest of purpose. Many years ago the local centres of organized work, at Jarrow, Newcastle, South Shields, and district, were much stronger than they are now, and, still more recently, lecture tours extending over a month were common. Of late we have fallen from that high estate, the causes of which we need not now examine. But at all times the number who will face the prejudice that an avowal of Freethought will arouse must be comparatively small, and it is not for us to dogmatically insist who shall assume the mantle of martyrdom. We remember in our Christian days listening to the late Charles Bradlaugh, and wondering that the crowd should allow him to pass unscathed. And it is a curious circumstance that the first news of the great Freethinker's death came to us from a Methodist preacher, who remarked that the world had lost a great and a good man.

During the past year we have on Tyneside attempted and done something. Some of the older Freethinkers have been reminded of their former glories, and heartened accordingly. The flag of Freethought has been planted on new ground, and the pioneers of the great movement of ours are showing signs of activity. "Every one" has been our watchword, and we have tried to carry it out in practice.

It is a quite pardonable clannishness that prompts us to claim that Tyneside is as favourable a place for our work as any part of Britain. The ideal of liberty is firmly planted on our hills and dales, and our principles are receiving daily illustrations in the movements and tendencies around us. The old things have failed to satisfy the growing needs of life, and it should be our duty to take full advantage of this fact. There are, of course, other tendencies also at work, and perhaps the situation is best described in the following words of Professor Gilbert Murray on *The Failure of Nerve* :—

Mankind has not yet decided which of two opposite methods leads to the fullest and deepest knowledge of the world: the patient and sympathetic study of the good citizen who lives in it, or the ecstatic vision of the saint who rejects it.

On that point we, however, have no doubt, and there are hundreds in this district who are mentally prepared for the message we have to deliver. The thing is to get their courage to the starting point. On the initiative of the

South Shields Branch something has been done to rouse the district to a sense of its responsibilities, but there is much that remains to be done. Our immediate task in the new year should be to get together all who are willing to help. When we have occasion to review what has been done we may have the pleasure of announcing that the present efforts have been consolidated and extended. Those who feel as we do on this matter, and who are willing to help in any way would do well to remember that the immediate rallying points are Mr. H. Bole, 14 Railway Terrace, New Herrington, and Mr. R. Atkinson, 38 Milton Street, Greenside, and the undersigned, at 3 Thompson Street, Tyne Dock, South Shields. J. FOTHERGILL.

Correspondence.

ALL FOR TRUTH.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Dr. Lyttelton seems to have taken the remarks contained in my letter rather badly. It was not my intention to sneer, but to attempt to correct what I considered to be very erroneous ideas put forward by him. If he can answer satisfactorily the points I raised I shall be glad, because I am open "to be persuaded."

I am out for the truth, and this is the reason why I have been converted from Christianity. My conversion was not rapid; I was forced to leave one position after another because they became untenable, and I shall leave my present one if Dr. Lyttelton or anyone else can render it untenable.

After years of reading and thinking, I am convinced that what is distinctively Christianity is not true.

W. MAYBANK.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 7.30, Mr. J. H. Van Biene, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH, N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N.W.): 7.30, A Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Christianity before Christ."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, H. W. Nevinson, "The Truth in Ireland."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. W. H. Thresh, A Lecture.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Shop Assistants' Hall, 297 Argyle Street): 12 noon, Cameron Roberts, M.A., B. Sc., "Science and Morality." (Collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Youngman's Rooms, 19 Lowerhead Row, Leeds): 6.30, Mr. J. Walker, "The Attitude of the Church to Labour."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. A. P. McLaren, "Fourteen Years in Europe—the Notes of a Freethinker."

PROPAGANDIST LEAFLETS. 2. *Bible and Teetotalism*, J. M. Wheeler; 3. *Principles of Secularism*, C. Watts; 4. *Where Are Your Hospitals?* R. Ingersoll; 5. *Because the Bible Tells Me So*, W. P. Ball; 6. *Why Be Good?* G. W. Foote; 7. *Advice to Parents*, Ingersoll. Often the means of arresting attention and making new members. Price 1s. per hundred, post free 1s. 2d. Samples on receipt of stamped addressed envelope.—N. S. S. SECRETARY, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

President:

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Secretary:

MISS E. M. VANCE, 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

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