THE
FREETHINKER
FOUNDED · 1881
EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN ·· EDITOR 1881-1915 G. W. FOOTE
Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper.

VOL. XLI.—No. 4 SUNDAY, JANUARY 23, 1921. PRICE THREEPENCE

PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

Views and Opinions.

(Concluded from page 34.)

Body and Mind[1]

When the Freethinker asserts that all we know of mind is a phenomenon that stands to the body in the relation of function to organ, the retort is that we know of no means by which neural action can become transmuted into thought. The two things, it is said, are incommensurable; they belong to two different orders of existence, and by no known means can we see how the one gives rise to the other. If that were quite the right way of looking at the matter, or an accurate way of stating the problem, the objection would still be inconclusive. For it assumes that our present ignorance is eternal, and indestructible. It is making our want of knowledge the measure of possibility. And that is always a dangerous policy to adopt. But there are, in this connection, only three conceivable hypotheses on which we can work. We may assume that neural action is the cause of thought, or that thought is the cause of neural action, or that neither is the cause of the other, but that the two are so arranged that a particular kind of neural motion is always accompanied by mental phenomena. The last hypothesis, which once enjoyed a certain fashion, may safely be set on one side, and we are thus left with the first two. And here it should be quite plain that whatever difficulty there exists in the way of accepting mind as a function of neural activity, holds with equal strength, at least, against the theory championed by the religionist. If we are to reject the functional theory because we cannot see the connection between brain and thought, then we must reject the connection of thought with brain action for the same reason. If there is really an "unfathomable abyss," "a bridgeless gulf" between the two, the gulf remains a gulf between the two whether we are standing on the one side or the other. You cannot walk over a bridgeless gulf merely by starting the journey from the other side. You cannot reject the causal connection between mind and matter for the purpose of refuting materialism, and then reaffirm the connection for the purpose of establishing spiritualism. If there really is a gap between the facts, and not merely in our knowledge of them, the gap remains, whether we approach it from the spiritualistic or the materialistic side. The very terms of the criticism directed against the materialist effectually disposes of the position of the religionist. The latter cuts down a bridge with elaborate ostentation, and then professes to be able to walk across the gulf.

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What is "Function"?

What is really at issue in this question of the connection of mind and brain is the precise meaning of "function." When we say that A is the function of B, what is it that we mean, or ought to mean? It will be as well to take a simple illustration by way of answer. The prime function of a muscle is contractility. It is this function which is manifested when the hand grasps an object. But the constituent parts of a muscle are cell and cell fibres, and if these cells are examined singly they exhibit only the normal irritability of cells in general. It is their combination, their organization, and, one must assume, the potentiality of certain powers that give us the function of contractility. The cells are indispensable to muscular action, but it is the peculiar combination of specially developed cells that gives us the specific muscular phenomena. So far, the position is quite clear. But if we try to separate the "function" from the structure of which it is the expression, we soon find that we are attempting an impossibility. Or, if we ask why the movements of certain cells should result in the flexing of a muscle, the only answer is that the one thing accompanies the other. Or, if it were possible to push back the investigation a stage and show how certain qualities in the cell resulted in muscular action, we should be still in the same position with regard to this special quality. We only know the capacities of a thing by observing what the thing does. And we express the result of our observation when we say that A is the function of B. The function of a thing is what it does. If we keep that consideration clearly before us, the confusion that surrounds the subject will soon disappear.

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First Principles.

Biologically, a function is the activity of an organ, or the activity of a collection of organs. Whether we are dealing with muscle and contractility, brain and thought, or organism and life, does not matter in the least. We have the structure and we have the function, which is the expression of its activity. And so far as anyone can see, or so far as anyone knows, life and thought are functions of a particular organization. To say that they are more than this is a pure assumption, and those who make the assumption are bound to give evidence to support it. It will not do for them first of all to make the statement and then demand that someone else shall give proof that the statement is not true. To tell us that no trace of life can be found in certain forms of existence, or that no trace of mind can be found in certain organs is only to add an absurdity to an assertion. Naturally, if one reduces an organ to its parts, or an organism to its organs, one will never find there the properties that were mani-

[1] Previous "Views and Opinions" on the subject of "Immortality" appeared in the *Freethinker* for October 24, 31; November 14, 21; December 5, 12, 1920; January 2 and 16.

fested in their combination. For the function is not the expression of the physical or chemical properties of the tissues merely, it is that plus the powers of combination and organization. Except, therefore, the added complexity, the difficulty of conceiving how brain action gives rise to thought, is no greater than that of seeing how any function is related to its organ. In every case, all that can be shown is that given a certain structure and certain conditions a particular result ensues. There is no question in science of "why," there is a question of "how" only. And that question is answered when we have shown all the conditions under which a given phenomenon occurs. In simpler matters the answer has already been found. It is delayed in relation to life and mind because here the conditions are so much more complex. And, as usual, the religionist is building his case on our existing ignorance, with an inward prayer that it may never be removed.

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How Not to Do It.

It will be seen that much of the confusion is the result of raising the question in the wrong way. People look for the undiscoverable and then complain when they do not find it. In asking "How does neural action become *transformed* into sensation, or how does it *produce* thought," two things that are inseparable in fact are separated in thought, and are then treated as distinct existences. These terms are quite out of place except as a rough and ready symbolism used with the necessary qualifications and reservations. The only sense in which the once famous "The brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile," is true, is that as in the absence of the liver there is no bile, so in the absence of a brain there is no thought. But production implies separation, and it is here that the confusion arises. It is said, for example, that neural action cannot be the true condition of thought because one can trace the complete circuit of a given series, from the excitation of a peripheral nerve on to the discharge that occurs in the brain cells, and then follow a similar return series ending in action. These are complete in themselves. How then can we assert consciousness to be a consequence of the physical series if the series is complete in its absence? Yet mind is there. But how is it possible to connect two things if there is no point at which the two can be connected?

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A Point of View.

Naturally, if we are looking at two sets of separable facts the case of the vitalist seems unanswerable. But the whole strength of his position results from his being permitted to raise the issue in a way that allows him to assume as true nearly all he wants. For suppose that instead of using language which assumes that we are fronted with two things, we regard the bodily and mental phases as two sides of the same thing, the whole matter is simplified and we can see our way more clearly. All the confusing talk of brain producing thought disappears, and we are left with the essential problem, that of determining the conditions under which a particular phenomenon occurs. And the cardinal fact here is that what under one set of conditions is viewed as brain or molecular motion, is viewed under other conditions as thought, and we may describe the resultant of the conditions in either of the two forms. Thus an aerial wave striking the retina may be described in terms of a series of nervous shocks, or in terms of colour, but the two descriptions do not refer to different things but to the same thing described from an objective or subjective point of view. We have the same thing illustrated in the fact that a series of vibratory shocks may be described in terms of light, heat, or sound. There is a reality of differentiation without there being a differentiation of existence. We cannot see how motion should produce thought, nor can we see how thought should produce motion. That is because we are loking for the impossible. But we can see that the same thing under different conditions may present different aspects. The psychic fact is not merely the equivalent of the physical one, it is the same fact viewed on the one hand objectively and on the other hand subjectively. Two things have been separated in thought that are inseparable in fact, and having separated two aspects of the same thing, as we might separate length from breadth, we forget that the distinction is one that we have created for our own convenience, and treat as though it were an objective reality.

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The Vital Issue.

Here, as in so many other cases, confused language leads to a confusion of thought. Owing to the way in which the question is phrased the real issue is never brought plainly before the mind. And in this particular instance we have the added confusion resulting from the persistence of primitive conceptions of the nature of man. There is not the slightest doubt to-day as to the mode of origin of the belief in the duality of man. And in the development of more scientific thinking there has not only been the fight of an established opinion to maintain itself, but the fact that while our best thinking reaches out beyond the present, the language in which we strive to express our thoughts is coined for the service of old ideas from the rule of which we are striving to free ourselves. That is the principal reason why I have, at the risk of being tedious, dwelt upon the importance of stating the question at issue in a way that should be as free as possible from ambiguity. "What do I mean?" is always a question of importance, and "What ought I to mean?" is hardly less so. And here we certainly ought not to set out with such questions as "How does the brain produce thought?" or "How are life and organization united?" That is allowing one's opponent to state the case in a way which secures him all he wants. The union of the two things is apparent. It is the possibility of their separation that is in question, and it is stupid for the Freethinker, as is often the case, to permit the religionist to so state the matter that the issue is already decided before the discussion commences. We do not know life and organization as separable things. We cannot even think of them as separable. And it remains for those who say they can be separated to prove it. It is enough for the Freethinker to take his stand upon observed facts, and to be guided by the inevitable inferences they suggest.

Chapman Cohen.

Olive Schreiner: Freethinker.

IV.

Her Philosophy of Life.

The *Nation* is wholly mistaken when it states that the *Story of an African Farm* is "an attack on life itself." It is nothing of the kind. The lives of Lyndall and Waldo were rendered miserable by the fact that they were born and spent their early years in an execrable environment, an environment in which only ignorant, simple-minded, and credulous people could find happiness. On one occasion, these children went with their father to town, to Church. They listened to a sermon on the text, "He that believeth not shall be damned." Who the preacher was we know not, but he was an ignorant, narrow-minded, callous-hearted Calvinist.

> The day before, the magistrate's clerk, who was an Atheist, had died in the street, struck by lightning. The man in the pulpit mentions no name, but he talks of "The hand of God made visible among us." He tells us how, when the white stroke fell, quivering and naked, the soul fled, robbed of its earthly fila-

ment, and lay at the footstool of God; how over its head has been poured out the wrath of the Mighty One, whose existence it has denied; and quivering and terrified, it has fled to the everlasting shade.

Was it possible for children endowed with superior brains to listen to such horrible stuff without feeling angry and miserable? Was it any wonder that every drop of blood in their bodies rushed to their heads, and that they felt inclined to cry out, "He lies! he lies! he lies; the man in the pulpit lies!" In the evenings their father used to read sermons to them, and among the things they heard was Jeremy Taylor's following description of hell:—

The torment comprises as many torments as the body of man has joints, arteries, etc., being caused by that penetrating and real fire of which this temporal fire is but a painted fire. What comparison will there be between burning for a hundred years' space and to be burning without intermission as long as God is God?

As an inevitable result, the beauty of the world did not appeal to them. The flowers were nothing to them but fuel for the great burning. They looked at the walls of the farm-house and the matter-of-fact sheep-kraals, with the merry sunshine playing over all, without seeing them.

But we see a great white throne, and him that sits on it. Around him stand a great multitude which no man can number, harpers harping with their harps, a thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands. How white are their robes, washed in the blood of the Lamb! And the music rises higher, and rends the vaults of heaven with its unutterable sweetness. And we, as we listen, ever and anon, as it sinks on the sweetest, lowest note, hear a groan of the damned from below. We shudder in the sunlight.

And yet, despite such an unfavourable, painful environment, Lyndall and Waldo succeeded in constructing for themselves a new environment of books and conversation. At school the girls' teachers were "cackling old women, who were without knowledge of life, without love of the beautiful, without strength." It was suffocation to breathe the air they breathed, but Lyndall made them give her a bedroom "without the companionship of one of those things that were having their brains slowly diluted and squeezed out of them." She bought books and newspapers, and sat up to read and write at night. She epitomized what she read, and composed essays and plays. When she returned to the farm she thoroughly enjoyed her frequent talks with Waldo, and had she not made her supreme mistake, which resulted in her death at seventeen, she would probably have had an exceedingly happy life. Even as it was, after the birth and death of her child, and during her terrible illness, she clung to life with all her might. "I am not afraid of the world—I will fight the world," she wrote; but the very idea of dying was hateful to her. And she had delightful visions. To her nurse she said:—

I see the vision of a poor weak soul striving after good. It was not cut short, and, in the end, it learnt, through tears and much pain, that holiness is an infinite compassion for others; that greatness is to take the common things of life and walk truly among them; that happiness is a great love and much serving. It was not cut short, and it loved what it had learnt.

Waldo's life was clouded with disappointments, cruelty, treachery, and suffering; but he never lost heart, never quarrelled with life, never yearned after death subsequently to his losing the Christian faith. He wanted to see and taste life. That was why he left the farm and spent a year and a half wandering "up and down, up and down." A number of strange experiences befell him; but he was never miserable. "I had glorious books," he wrote, "and in the night I could sit in my little room and read them." When he got tired of his nomadic life he returned to the farm and settled down, doing his usual work. One day, after putting his tools carefully away, he went out to sit in the sunshine, and a balmy, restful peacefulness seemed to reign everywhere.

Waldo, as he sat with his knees drawn up to his chin and his arms folded on them, looked at it all and smiled. An evil world, a deceitful, treacherous, mirage-like world, it might be; but a lovely world for all that, and to sit there gloating in the sunlight was perfect. It was worth having been a little child, and having cried and prayed, so one might sit there..... There will always be something worth living for while there are shimmery afternoons.....Beauty is God's wine, with which he recompenses the souls that love him; he makes them drunk.....Sitting there with his arms folded on his knees and his hat slouched down over his face, Waldo looked out into the yellow sunshine that tinted even the very air with the colour of ripe corn, and was happy.....Ah! life is delicious; well to live long, and see the darkness breaking, and the day coming! The day when soul shall not thrust back soul that would come to it; when men shall not be driven to seek solitude, because of the crying out of their hearts for love and sympathy. Well to live long and see the new time breaking. Well to live long; life is sweet, sweet, sweet!

Here we have a glorification of life, rather than an attack on it. Waldo loved life with all his heart. He learned to live close to Nature's heart and to realize the grand unity of all things. In spite of all the hardships, deprivations, grinding poverty, and injustice that fell to his lot, he was not a pessimist. He invented a machine for shearing sheep, upon which he worked hard for nine months. Bonaparte Blenkins, pretending to admire it as the product of a real genius, put his foot on it and crushed it into the sand, saying, "Looks better now, doesn't it?" Waldo lamented its destruction profoundly; but the spirit of revenge never entered his heart. Indeed, when the old villain got into trouble and was obliged to flee, Waldo fed him and gave him money.

The *Nation's* obituary began with the quotation: "And it was all play, and no one could tell what it had lived and worked for. A striving, and a striving, and an ending in nothing." Then follows this deduction:—

Such was the verdict of the girl of nineteen upon human life, as shown in that premature and passionate work of genius, *The Story of an African Farm*. And such, one might think, would be the verdict today of the woman who has just died, seeing life becoming more and more a fever and a delirium—"a tale told by an idiot.....signifying nothing."

The quoted passage occurs twice in the story. We first find it at the close of chapter X. in part I. After the malicious smashing of his machine, Waldo very naturally felt deeply hurt and was sad. His dog tried to comfort him, but finding that his friend took no notice, "he walked off to play with a black beetle. The beetle was hard at work trying to roll home a great ball of dung it had been collecting all the morning; but Doss broke the ball, and ate the beetle's hind legs, and then bit off its head. And it was all play, etc." The passage occurs again as a kind of motto to part II. But while there is much that is sad and saddening in the second part, there is no despair. Lyndall herself did not despair of the future of woman. She says:—

She must be content to wait long before she can even get her feet upon the path. If she has made blunders in the past, if she has weighted herself with a burden which she must bear to the end, she must bear the burden bravely, and labour on. There is no use in wailing and repentance here.....By our errors we see deeper into life. They help us. If she does all this—if she waits patiently, if she is never cast down, never despairs, never forgets her end, moves straight to-

wards it, bending men and things most unlikely to her purpose— she must succeed at last. Men and things are plastic; they part to the right and left when one comes among them moving in a straight line to one end. I know it by my own little experience.

Olive Schreiner never descended to pessimism. She cherished glowing hopes concerning the future of the world. She moved in an atmosphere of serenity and cheerfulness, and her aim was to be of service to her fellow beings. She was a Secularist who worked for the welfare of mankind in this world. In a letter she says: "The only man to whose moral teaching I am conscious of owing a profound and unending debt is John Stuart Mill; when I got home to Europe and found men and women whose views exactly coincided with his, indifferent to his works, or ridiculing them as old-fashioned, it was keenly painful to me, because they had been the channels through which the spirit of current modern science reached me."

Olive Schreiner was a great personality. It was impossible to meet her without realizing her superiority; and to know her intimately was an unending inspiration. Her talks were far greater than her writings. To her sincerity and truth were dearer than life. What she hated most of all was hypocrisy. In the memories of her friends she is immortal, and her influence upon social life will always be of a wholesome, elevating, and sweetening character. J. T. LLOYD.

Honouring Henley.

For proud and fiery and swift and bold—
Wine of life from heart of gold,
The blood of his heathen manhood rolled
Full billowed through his veins.—*James Thomson.*

THE announcement of a collected edition of the works of William Ernest Henley, with the honoured imprint of the House of Macmillan, rouses mixed feelings. Had so stately an edition been issued years ago, it would have helped to widen the reputation of a very brilliant writer and critic during his lifetime. As it is, it will but increase the wreaths upon his tomb.

Henley was a most stimulating writer. Nearly everything that he has done is vital. He may offend, but he never tired his readers. There is no suspicion of the midnight oil. It may be reckless, robust, untamed, but it has always life in it. We can trace the influence of many great writers in Henley's pages, as far apart as Heine and Whitman, but for all that, both as artist and critic, he was a man of dominant personality. He wrote as no one else wrote, and he saw everything quite fresh with his own eyes, careless alike of established reputations or contemporary opinion. Courage was the motto of his life and of his work.

He had to pay the price. Because of his individuality, he had to wait for recognition. In the pathetic preface to the first collected edition of his poems, the author said: "After spending the better part of my life in the pursuit of poetry, I found myself, about 1877, so utterly unmarketable that I had to own myself beaten in art, and to addict myself to journalism for the next ten years." What Henley did for journalism and for literature as editor of the *National Observer* and the *New Review* was remarkable. Indeed, the *National Observer* was long recognized as the most brilliant literary periodical of its time. It was audacity itself; the last word in courageous criticism, in contempt for its enemies, in originality of treatment. It did not matter that the paper was professedly true-blue Tory. On its purely literary side it was always advanced, and on the side of "the intellectuals."

To glance over a list of Henley's contributors is almost to reckon up a decade of writers. Here it was that Stevenson printed his scathing "open letter" concerning the ill-fated Father Damien. When those worthy tradesmen, Messrs. Harper, objected to an outspoken chapter in Hardy's masterpiece, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles,* it found a warm welcome in the pages of the *National Observer.* In the same paper appeared Kipling's rollicking *Barrack-Room Ballads.* Sir James Barrie wrote much for Henley's paper, and it was in an article by the editor that *The Little Minister* was hailed first as "a book of genius." Andrew Lang wrote delightful verses for the paper, and among the nest of singing birds of the journal were W. B. Yeats, T. E. Brown, Katherine Tynan, and Alice Meynell. G. W. Steevens' finest work, *Monologues of the Dead,* appeared in the same pages. In short, the *National Observer* appealed to critical tastes, to the cream of British intellect. Many a man whos name stands high to-day had to thank Henley for wise encouragement, for his first start. He was unwearied in aiding his contributors, he would work up their articles and stories himself, if necessary, until perfection came.

This strong, vehement man, who suffered much undismayed, was himself a born singer. His work was never garrulous nor flat. He never sang except when the mood was on him. His earliest published verses, *In Hospital, Rhymes and Rhythms,* showed the man's nature, and revealed that mixture of realism, defiance, and tenderness, which one has to go to François Villon to rival.

Henley filled his work with pregnant phrases, and there is enough in him to make the reputation of many poets. If anyone doubts Henley's true poetic gifts, let him read his *London Voluntaries.* Henley grasped as no poet before him the genius of the Metropolis of the Empire, the greatest city of the world. He even found poetry in Trafalgar Square:—

For earth and sky and air
Are golden everywhere,
And golden with a gold so suave and fine
That looking on it lifts the heart like wine.
Trafalgar Square
(The fountains volleying golden glaze)
Shines like an angel-market, High aloft
Over his couchant lions, in a haze
Shimmering and bland and soft,
A dust of chrysoprase,
Our Sailor takes the golden gaze
Of the saluting sun, and flames superb,
As once he flamed it on his ocean round.

On the subject of death Henley always wrote with dignity. One remembers Stevenson's appreciation of certain memorial verses, which conclude:—

So be my passing
My task accomplished and the long day done,
My wages taken, and in my heart
Some late lark singing,
Let me be gathered to the quiet west,
The sundown splendid and serene,
Death.

It would be possible to cite a score of noble and inspiring passages from his poetry. For example:—

The pomp and power
Patrolling space.
Of round on round of shining soldier stars

Generous thoughts
And honourable words and deeds,
That make men half in love with fate.

The ancient river singing as he goes
Now mailed in morning to the ancient sea.

The lines which uttered his own proud defiance of fate are already on the road to immortality:—

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeoning of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishment the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

There could be no fitter summary of a life courageously, defiantly spent in battling against disease, opposition, and many buffets of fortune. On this note of manly defiance let us take leave of him. MIMNERMUS.

The Origin of Christianity.

II.

(*Continued from page 43.*)

It appears that the sign of the cross was in use as an emblem having certain religious and mystic meanings attached to it long before the Christian era; and the Spanish conquerors were astonished to find it an object of religious veneration among the nations of Central America. "*Chambers Encyclopædia*," Art "Cross."

The Cross has been used everywhere and throughout all times as a means of marking and adorning. Among pagan tribes, both in the Old and in the New World, it occurs under every possible form as representative of natural forces—or accessory to idols; and after the crucifixion of Christ it became the true symbol of Christianity. *Hertzog's "Religious Encyclopædia,"* Art "Cross."

PRESCOTT, the historian of the conquest of America by the Spaniards, tells us that the Christian conquerors:—

> could not suppress their wonder as they beheld the Cross, the sacred emblem of their own faith, raised as an object of worship in the temples of Anahuac. They met with it in various places; and the image of a cross may be seen to this day, sculptured in bas-relief on the walls of one of the buildings of Palenque, while a figure bearing some resemblance to a child is held up to it, as if in adoration.

Prescott remarks: "It must be regarded as a curious fact that the Cross should have been venerated as the object of religious worship both in the New World, and in regions of the Old where the light of Christianity had never risen." That is to say, in the New World of America, and in the Old World before the time of Christ.[1]

Bishop Colenso says:—

> From the dawn of organized paganism in the Eastern World to the final establishment of Christianity in the West, the Cross was undoubtedly one of the commonest and most sacred of symbolical monuments.

And adds:—

> Of the several varieties of the Cross still in vogue, as national and ecclesiastical emblems, and distinguished by the familiar appellations of St. George, St. Andrew, the Maltese, the Greek, the Latin, etc., etc., there is not one amongst them the existence of which may not be traced to the remotest antiquity. They were the common property of the Eastern nations.[2]

BAPTISM.

Another widely spread rite adopted from the pagans was that of Baptism, which most Christians regard as originating with Christianity. In a Popular Encyclopædia we read:—

> The idea of a purification by washing with water, however, did not originate with the Christian Church. The Christians themselves recognized that this ceremony had formed an essential part of the religions of many of the ancients, and that the ritual of Baptism had been regarded as a purification for many sins. *Everyman Encyclopædia*. Art "Baptism."

The Rev. Dr. Giles says,[3] "The idea of using water as emblematic of spiritual washing is too obvious to allow surprise at the antiquity of this rite. Dr. Hyde, in his treatise on the Religion of the ancient Persians, chapter xxxiv., p. 406, tells us that it prevailed among that people. The passage, translated from the original Latin, here follows":—

> They (the ancient Persians) do not use circumcision for their children, but only baptism or washing for the inward purification of the soul. They bring the child to the priest into the church and place him in front of the sun and fire, which ceremony being completed they look upon him as more sacred than before..... Sometimes, also, it is otherwise done by immersing him in a large vessel of water, as Tavernier tells us. After such washing or baptism, the priest imposes on the child the name given by his parents.....Afterwards, in the 15th year of his age.....the priest bestows upon him confirmation, that he may from that time be admitted into the number of the faithful, and may be looked upon as a believer himself.

Just as is the custom in the Church to-day. The rite was also known and practised by the ancient Greeks. Lempriere says that the candidates for admission to the Eleusinian Mysteries, which were, he says, "the most celebrated of all the religious ceremonies of Greece." "As they entered the temple, they purified themselves by washing their hands in holy water."[4] On the second day the initiated "were commanded to purify themselves by bathing in the sea."

In the Persian religion of Mithra, says Professor Franz Cumont, the greatest authority upon the subject, "The sectaries of the Persian god, like the Christians, purified themselves by baptism, received by a species of confirmation the power necessary to combat the spirit of evil."[5]

In the ancient Babylonian temples, says Professor Morris Jastrow, "The 'unclean' person was sprinkled with water.....The water was, of course, specially sanctified for this purpose."[6] That is "holy water."

The Babylonian temples were provided, like our Christian churches, with fonts of holy water. That orthodox Christian, Professor Sayce, tells us that:—

> The temples of Babylonia were provided with large basins filled with water, and used for purificatory purposes, which resembled the "Sea" made by Solomon for his temple at Jerusalem, and were called *Apzi*, deeps, or abysses. It was with these deeps that the *pâsîsu*, or anointing priest (whose office it was to purify and cleanse), was specially concerned. The abysses doubtless stood in the open-air in the great court within which the temple itself was erected.[7]

"These basins," says Mr. Edwards, in his book *The Witness of Assyria* (p. 96), were not introduced by the Semitic Babylonians, but were used ages before by their predecessors, the Akkadians." In *Records of the Past* (New Series, i., p. 96), will be found an inscription of the Akkadian king Ur-Ninâ, in which we read: "The temple of the Goddess Gatumdug he has erected. The great Apzu he has constructed.....The small Apzu he has constructed in the temple of the Goddess Ninâ, lady of destinies, he has placed it." This tablet was found at Telloh, the site of the ancient city of Lagash, or Shirpurla. It is in the ancient Akkadian tongue, which became a dead language about 2000 B.C.

The reign of Ur-Ninâ is dated by Professor Jastrow as 2975 B.C.[8], and, therefore, long before the time of Solomon and his temple. In fact, we know now that the Jews borrowed all their religious ideas from the Babylonians, Assyrians, and other nations they were in contact with.

THE SAVIOUR GOD.

The idea of a Saviour God was known to the ancient world thousands of years before the time of Christ. Mr. Dunbar Isidore Heath, the Cambridge scholar, in his learned work, *Phœnecian Inscriptions* (p. 5), tells us:—

> We find men taught everywhere, from Southern Arabia to Greece, by hundreds of symbolisms, the birth, death, and resurrection of Deities, and a resurrection, too, apparently, "after the second day," *i.e.*, on the third day (Lucian, *De Dea Syria*, p. 6).

[1] Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, p.p. 465-88.
[2] Colenso, *The Pentateuch Examined*, Vol. VI. p. 113.
[3] Giles, *Christian Records*; 1877, p. 204.
[4] Lempriere, *Classical Dictionary*. Art "Eleusinia."
[5] Cumont, *The Mysteries of Mithras*, p. 190.
[6] Jastrow, *Religious Belief in Babylonia and Assyria*, p. 312.
[7] Sayce, *Lectures on the Religion of the Ancient Babylonians*, p. 62.
[8] Jastrow, *Religious Belief in Babylonia*, p. 425.

> We find propitiation thoroughly accepted by the death of a first-born son.

Sir Gardner Wilkinson, the great authority upon the ancient Egyptians, says:—

> The peculiar character of Osiris, his coming upon Earth for the benefit of mankind, with the title of "Manifestor of Good" and "Revealer of Truth"; his being put to death by the malice of the Evil One; his Burial and Resurrection, and his becoming the Judge of the Dead, are the most interesting features of the Egyptian religion. This was the great mystery; and this myth and his worship were of the earliest time and universal in Egypt.[9]

Dr. Dollinger, the Christian theologian, frankly admits:—

> However they may differ in matters of detail, all agree in placing in the very clearest light the ancient belief of Egypt in the immortality of the soul, rewards and punishments after death, a judgment according to which these retributions were awarded, and the practice of intercessory prayer for the deceased that the judgment might be propitious.[10]

And, as we shall see, these beliefs were equally well-known in Babylonia and adopted by the Greeks long before the time of Christ. W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

The Birth of God the Father.

THE reader will know that in grammar terminology a proper noun stands for one particular object or individual, and that a common noun stands for any individual belonging to a class of objects which resemble each other in all essential features.

If this, then, be borne in mind it will be readily understood that it is only by the magical methods of "dissolving views" that a common noun or class name can be made to do the duty of a proper noun, *e.g.*, the term "dog" cannot stand without hopeless confusion and ambiguity for *any* dog, and at the same time as the individual name of some particular dog. But in the case of the Christian God this change has been accomplished.

Many years ago I wrote a short essay, which, by the bye, never saw the light, purporting to show how the "trick" was done. I had forgotten all about it until I read the other day what the editor said about the god-idea in his new book. And with a view to showing how different and divergent trains of reasoning lead to a central truth, as all roads were said to lead to Rome, I was tempted to revive the still-born.

How the general name, god, came to function in the Christian Church as the name of its particular deity requires no great learning to show.

It came about by the chance meeting and fusion of two distinct intellectual vogues which sprang up in the Mediterranean world during the centuries immediately preceding the beginning of our era. The one was theosophic, the other metaphysical.

The Jewish priest and prophet, due to being dowered with an extra measure of self-esteem, had gradually promoted or elevated their tribal and titular god, Jahveh, to the status of a supreme deity.

The gnostic, on the other hand, had evolved a godhead who was without name or priesthood. This speculation, however, resulted at the hands of the Pauline Christian gnostics in the total abolition of the *god-class*.

How was it effected?

In this wise. In Greece there flourished in the 4th century B.C., a remarkable man, named Plato, who taught mankind the respectable and fine art of self-delusion. For his "divine" services he is ever since held in highest honour; for nothing pleases man more keenly than to be deceived. We see that human trait exemplified in the intense delight which children manifest in respect to Father Christmas; and the child in man enjoys the like deception to the end of his days.

Now this nighomniscient metaphysician, and the great progenitor of the whole genus, disclosed to man a new marvellous "truth," viz., that common and abstract nouns, that is, names of classes and qualities, stood for *entities* in the realm of spatial Nowhere.

It was a piece of information that should rank as a "revelation," for surely, neither Ezekiel nor Daniel disclosed anything more surpassing in chimerical marvellousness, *e.g.*, what was connoted by the terms dog, pig, rat, god as well as by the words justice, goodness, etc., existed as perfect entities in spatial Noland, of which the particular individuals were only imperfect copies. These "spiritual" entities were subsequently and very appropriately styled *platonic ideas*.

So the entity corresponding to the term god bore the same relation to the particular gods as did the platonic pig or rat bear to pigs and rats in general.

The platonic god was, of course, the perfect divinity—the very godhead, of which the various local deities were only more or less distorted and misshapened caricatures.

Now in Pauline Christianity these two streams of thought met. Jahveh, as we said, had become in the eyes of his worshippers the supreme God— indeed the sole god; while the gnostic godhead had become an object of very intense and real belief.

But the intolerant and haughty monotheist could never dream of admitting the existence of a *class* of gods, and it was equally impossible for the gnostic, Christian, or otherwise, to consider the pagan gods as *un*real or *non*-existent. To the gnostic mind they were as real as pigs, dogs, and rats. What was then to be done? Was there a way out of the dead-lock?

The resourceful ingenuity of the Paulinite proved itself equal to the task, and discovered a way out of the impasse without slaying or banishing a single god. The annihilating trick was accomplished by the simple device of degrading them all, save *one*, his own, from the dignified status of gods to the inglorious and ignomonious position of demons.

The Jewish Jahveh, alone, was allowed to retain his divine status, who was then united with the platonic god or gnostic godhead, and the two coalesced into one deity, and therewith, *God, the Father, was born* who has ever since exulted in the class name as his own. And the trick of making a common noun function as a proper name was accomplished. But we are so accustomed to calling the senior partner of the Trinity by the name of God that we are quite oblivious of the fact.

KERIDON.

A RULE OF LIFE.

WHAT is required for the securing of our moral, rather than our immoral, state? Attention. Attention to the consequences of our actions; attention to the nature of our feelings; attention to the meaning, the bearing, and the effects of our words. Look to these! Look around ye! Look within! Ye need no other rule; ye need no other law. Would ye ascertain which of your rules are just? Put them to this test. Examine where they run; what they hit, and what they miss. Trace them through all their consequences, to all their results. Believe not they are right because they are your rules, but test them by the actions they produce, and those actions again by the simple good or evil of their results.—*Frances Wright.*

The Ideal is in thyself; thy condition is but the stuff thou art to shape that same ideal out of. What matters whether such stuff be of this sort or of that; so the form thou give it be heroic, be poetic.—*Carlyle, "Sartor Resartus."*

[9] Wilkinson, *Ancient Egyptians;* Popular Edition, Vol. I., p. 320.

[10] Dollinger, *The Gentile and the Jew;* 1862, Vol. I., p. 462.

Acid Drops.

It is, says the *Christian World*, a difficult ethical subject for a church to decide when money offered for religious purposes is "tainted" and should be refused. The remark is made apropos of a vicar's refusal to accept thirteen pounds raised by a whist drive and dance in aid of a war memorial. We never cease to marvel at the peculiar tenderness of the religious conscience, and there are not a few who will be surprised to learn that there is any money which the churches regard as tainted. For instance, there is the large sum of money— the interest on the three millions invested by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in war bonds—against which we have not observed any protest on the part of the Vicar of Eaton. There is the slum property owned by the same body, and the rents of which go to the upkeep of the Church. There is the money given to the Church by men of business who get it in all sorts of ways, against which some sort of ethical cavil may easily be raised.

And historically, one would like to know what money has the Churches—all the churches— had which was not tainted? In the days of the slave trade, who supported the Churches more liberally than the slave-owners? When the worst days of the factory system were in being, were not the factory owners the most generous givers to the Church? Is there a form of rascality from which the Churches have not benefited? And if it had been one of those gentlemen connected with the armament rings, whose direct interest it is to keep the minds of the people filled with preparations for war, and so bring war about, or if someone who had grown fat on forcing up the prices of food, or otherwise fleecing the people, or one of those loud-mouthed "patriots" whose sole interest in the war was to secure huge contracts and rob the country right and left, in these cases the Vicar of Eaton would see nothing wrong in taking *their money*. A most peculiar thing is the Christian conscience. It is the most elaborately organized piece of humbug the world has ever seen. It can profit from slavery, from financial trickery, it can take money gained through the deaths of millions of men, and fan the passions that leads to war. It can erect war memorials in churches and so do what it can to encourage the military spirit of the rising generation. But to take money from a whist drive! That is quite a different thing, And it was, after all, only £13. The insult was so small.

The new Chinese minister to London rejoices in the high-sounding name of Wellington Koo. As "Wellington" is not a native Chinese name, perhaps Mr. Koo belongs to the small and select body of "Chinese Presbyterians," which the British and Foreign Bible Society is so concerned about, and about which the world knows so little.

A wife-killer, named George Lever, was executed at Maidstone Prison. The newspapers state that he was "very penitent, and paid great attention to the chaplain." He has gone to heaven. His unfortunate wife, being killed unprepared, has gone to another place.

Religion is said to be without money and without price. That is theory. In practice it is somewhat different. At the Southwark Cathedral Carol Service the programme was headed: "Please give at least two shillings; it is hoped that all mean people will have stayed at home."

Bournemouth Town Council has approved of Sunday concerts during the winter season. "Kill-joys" please note.

"A week of prayer" was inaugurated at Queen's Hall, London. Copies of the programme were to be had in many languages, including the dialect of Uganda. We think that "the language of Uganda" was the most suitable for such uncivilized proceedings.

There is a quantity of valuable material for the psychologist in the memoirs of Count Witte, now running through the *Daily Telegraph*. The articles throw considerable light on the mentality of the rulers of the nations, and what Count Witte says of pre-revolutionary Russia makes one think that a change of any kind would have been for the better. It also leaves one wondering how the old Empire managed to endure so long as it did. Count Witte's picture of the late Emperor is that of a narrow-minded, intolerant, ill-educated, and essentially ignorant man. The following conversation between Count Witte and the Grand Duke Nicholas is almost unbelievable in the revelation of its belated and ignorant superstition :—

> "Tell me frankly, Sergey Yulyevich," he said suddenly, "is the Emperor, in your judgment, merely a human being or is he more?"
>
> "Well," I retorted, "the Emperor is my master and I am his faithful servant, but though he is an autocratic ruler, given to us by God or Nature, he is nevertheless a human being with all the peculiarities of one."
>
> "To my mind," remarked the Grand Duke, "the Emperor is not a mere human being, but rather a being intermediate between man and God." We parted.

To think of men of this type, and a man whom we tried to place back in power over the Russian people, is a revelation of the small degree of wisdom with which the peoples of the world are governed. And the worst of it is that the conception of a king as being something more than a human being is far from dead in other countries. Among ourselves we should scarcely find many who would openly confess to the belief, but when one sees the slavish attitude adopted by large numbers of people towards the King, one realizes that the belief in the divinity of royalty is far from dead.

A retired farmer, claiming possession of a house at Henham, said he had seen a ghost at the house he occupied. The ghost wore a shirt, trousers, and braces, and called "mother" several times. It sounds realistic. Perhaps the poor bogey had lost a trouser-button.

Oh those journalists! The *Sunday Express* says boldly, we all learned the Lord's prayer at "mother's knee." Perhaps the editor did. Some boys learned it on father's knee—face downwards. Most learned it at school at another gentleman's knee. Similar position.

Theological works are not so popular as they once were. Compared with the output of 1914, last year's figures show that works on religion have dropped from the second to the fifth place. Fiction always leads.

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners have given a thousand guineas towards the Westminster Abbey Fund. Poor curates and poorer church workers will ask why stone buildings should be so dear, and flesh and blood so cheap.

The *Star* reports a case from Brussels which illustrates how close is the connection between religion and morals. A woman was charged with shoplifting, and on visiting her home, the detectives found over the mantelpiece of her room a carved image of St. Anthony with a couple of lighted candles before it. The woman explained, "I pay my devotions to St. Anthony, and I light my candles in his honour every time I go out shoplifting. This is to obtain his gracious protection in my enterprise." Before leaving the flat the woman blew out the candles "as a punishment for failing to protect me." There is nothing strikingly new in this. Readers of criminal records know how common it is for criminals in Catholic countries to offer prayers to the saints for help in their operations, and there is really little difference between this and the way in which the Churches ask for the help of God when one of the governments of the world sets forth on one of its filibustering expeditions on a large scale. And we greatly appreciate the action of the woman in punishing the saint for not looking after her properly. That shows religion has not robbed her altogether of her courage. If all religionists had the pluck to kick when their deity misbehaved himself or neglected his duty, we should think more of them. But with most, the more they are trodden on the flatter on their stomachs they get.

The *Manchester Guardian* of January 11 contains an advertisement asking if "all Christians who are on speaking terms with their master pray earnestly on January 13 for the Anglo-Saxon nations." Now we like that. It shows business gumption. It dosen't want the prayers of every Tom, Dick, and Harry, but only those who have some influence. We should not be surprised to find that those responsible for the advertisement are business contractors who during the war have felt the benefit of having a "pal" in the government. And note, again, that the "Master" is not to be bothered with prayers for everybody, only with prayers for the Anglo-Saxon nations. All the rest can go to blazes. And it is no use piling too much work on the Master, anyway.

What unconscious perverters of the truth the ordinary Christian advocates are! Our readers will remember how the papers were filled with the accounts of the manner in which the Churches in Russia were closed, and all religion forbidden, the priests killed, etc., etc. Now that the truth can no longer be concealed, or because some other policy demands a different game, accounts are appearing of the revival of religion in Bolshevik Russia. Thus the *Church Times* for January 14 contains an account of the way in which new Christian bodies are springing up in Moscow and Petrograd—the very strongholds of Bolshevism. There are about a hundred Christian Brotherhoods in Petrograd, and the article declares that the Churches are in full swing everywhere. The report concludes that "A new orthodox Church is in process of construction. It will be free and more Christian. The revolution has brought liberty to the Russian Church and broken her chains of slavery." But not a word of apology for the former colossal lying concerning the suppression of religion and the forcible closing of the Churches. And the people who read these things, and for whom they are written—as we know from our experience during the past five years— read lie after lie, and never dream of comparing the last one with those they have previously had served out to them.

Some clergymen are fond of asserting that only Atheists commit suicide. They will be shocked to hear that the Rev. A. H. Stevens, rector of Little Parndon, Essex, chose this method of ending his life.

There are prayers for folk at sea, but it is the lifeboatmen who save lives and not angels. During last year 580 lives were saved by lifeboats, seven lifeboatmen sacrificing their lives for their fellows.

When the war began we said that the question on which the British public would have to make up its mind was whether it hated Prussianism or was merely jealous of it. Events proved that a number of people here were only jealous of it, and they have striven, not without considerable success, to domicile it. Evidence of this crops up in many ways, but here is an instance from the *Sunday Times*. Discussing the question of the unemployed, we are told that the ex-service men have a more direct claim on the State than have "mere citizens." What an expression! Mere citizens! Could one have a better illustration than that? It is the soldier, or the ex-soldier who must come first. All the rest are only mere citizens. The most ardent Prussian never made a more significant remark than that. When we become a civilized people, we shall probably learn to place all who serve the State on the same level as regards the responsibilities of the State towards them. We have the temerity to think that a man with a wife and family at home, and who is unable to find work, deserves the concern of all, whether he has been in the army or is only a "mere citizen." Imagine; Darwin, or Spencer, or Lister, or any of our leading men in science or literature would have been mere citizens. Colonel Blank and Major Dash would have ranked as their superiors in the eyes of the *Sunday Times* writer. What a long way off from civilization we are yet!

The report of the Central Church Fund contains some interesting news. Of the candidates for ordination no less than 563 withdrew from entering the service of the Lord, and many of them became Police Constables. This is passing strange! Either policemen are becoming flat-chested, or parsons are unusually athletic.

The Rev. A. J. Waldron has been taking an active part in the Dover Election, on the Polson side, and the papers describe him as "vicar, playwright,' and divorce-law reformer." The Rev. P. Edwards, better known as "the fighting parson" has been championing the cause of Major Astor. It seems to be a case of Greek meeting Greek.

Major Talbot is the headmaster of the Grammar School, and he delivered an address before the Incorporated Association of Headmasters. In the course of his address he said:—

> In no other country in the world had the individual been so free to express his opinions as in England. There had been a wide and sane tolerance which had rarely permitted religious persecution. The instinct of England had never suffered from repression.

This is just one of those statements which while not telling a direct lie suggest anything but the truth. We are not so much concerned with whether other people are freer than we are or not, so much as whether we are as free as we might be and ought to be. And if Major Talbot will pay a little attention to facts, he will find that not alone has there been plenty of legal persecution for religious opinions, but also that non-legal intolerance—a much more demoralizing form of persecution—has been as rife in England as in any other place in the world. Why there are thousands of people to-day in this country who simply dare not let it be known that they do not believe in so childish and so stupid a superstition as Christianity. Editors are afraid to publish anything against it. Some publishers are afraid to issue books against it. Politicians are afraid to let their opinions be known about it. And in his own profession Major Talbot must know that there are hundreds of teachers who would regard an advertisement of their non-Christian opinions as effectually damning their chance of promotion. It is just this kind of talk that has gained John Bull so world-wide a reputation for hypocrisy. It is not that he is worse than others, as he will insist that he is so much better than others. When the patent truth is that taken on the whole it requires one of Sam Weller's high power microscopes to detect any difference between him and other people. There are variations in the degree of developments of various qualities with different peoples, but the sum remains pretty much the same.

The authorities at Christ's Hospital, Horsham, are selling the old books in the school library. One seventeenth century volume bears the quaint title, "Diarye of a Sinfull Worm," and was written by John Thoresbury. Before we all laugh, let us remember that hundreds of thousands of Christians think they are "miserable sinners." Perhaps they will recover their pride when they get their "wings" in the "next world."

The present Lord Byron is a clergyman. The world-famous owner of the title was neither a reverend nor reverent.

There seems quite a wide-spread attempt to introduce an official religion into the local councils of the country, and we should not be surprised to find that it is part of an organized movement. We have already called attention to several of these attempts, and now we see that a similar move has been made at Lowestoft. The *Eastern Express* for January 13 reports that at a meeting of the Council a Mr. Rushmere moved "That all Council meetings be opened with prayer by the Mayor's Chaplain." The Mayor resisted the proposal, and ultimately the motion was rejected by 24 to 7. We congratulate the Council on having come to so sensible a decision. But it would be well for Freethinkers in all localities to keep a look out on what is taking place in these local bodies. Their activity may not only serve as a check on the Christians, it may also serve to put a little backbone into some of the labour leaders who so sadly need it when dealing with religion. Their fear of a clerical collar would be laughable did it not tend to have such serious results.

"Freethinker" Sustentation Fund.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.

Previously acknowledged, £850 1s. 8d. "Medical," £25; G. Jones, 2s. 6d.; H. J. Earthy, 10s.; J. Lucas, 10s.; E. Egerton Stafford, 10s.; J. T. Ives (Barnsbury), 2s.; H. Kennedy (second subscription), £1 1s.; J. Bingham (third subscription), 4s. 6d.; J. Collins, 2s. 6d.; J. Lauder (Transvaal), £5; S. Crowther, 2s. 6d.; A. H. Deacon, 2s. 6d.; T. Taylor, £1; E. Youell, 10s.; P. Lamb, 2s. 6d.; W. T. L., £1; Cutler, 5s.

Per Secretary Manchester Branch—Miss E. Williams (second subscription), 10s.; J. Hampson, 10s.; S. Hampson, 10s.; T. F. Greenhall (second subscription), 5s.

Per Plymouth Branch N. S. S.—Mr. and Mrs. McClusky, £2 10s.; Mr. Goldman, £1; Mr. Tucker, 7s. 6d.; Miss Brown, 6s.; Miss Arton, 5s.; Mr. Smallridge, 5s.; Mrs. Richards, 5s.; Mr. J. Churchill, 1s. 6d.

Per E. Pinder—S. Leeson, 5s.; L. G. Woolley, 2s. 6d.; W. Marston, 1s.

Total, £892 10s. 2d.

PROMISED, provided the total sum raised reaches £1,000, including the amounts promised:—"In Memory of the late Sir Hiram Maxim," £50; Mr. J. B. Middleton, £10; J. Morton, 10s.; R. Proctor, £1; National Secular Society, £25; F. Collins, 10s.; T. Sharpe, £1 1s.; J. Breese, £3; A. Davis, £2 2s.; J. W. Hudson, £1; Collette Jones, £5; T. C. Kirkman, £2; G. J. Dobson, £1.

Total, £102 4s.

This Fund will close on January 31.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

January 23, Birmingham; January 30, Glasgow.

To Correspondents.

Those Subscribers who receive their copy of the "Freethinker" in a GREEN WRAPPER will please take it that the renewal of their subscription is due They will also oblige, if they do not want us to continue sending the paper, by notifying us to that effect.

J. LAUDER (Transvaal).—Thanks for good wishes. We hope the New Year will be a pleasant one for yourself.

A. E. MADDOCK.—MSS. and remittance to hand, with thanks. We received your contribution for the Sustentation Fund and it was acknowledged in our issue for December 5. We are glad to hear that the newspaper correspondence bore good fruit. It usually does when space can be got from the editors.

W. L. DEWAR.—We shall be pleased to redirect any letter that you may send to the office, but it is against our rule to give the address of contributors. The person to whom you write will then please himself as to whether he will reply to you direct or not.

R. SIMPSON.—There is no reason whatever why you should not order your copy of *Theism or Atheism* through any newsagent in the kingdom. They will then procure it through one of the wholesale agents. You can order it at any of W. H. Smith's bookstalls if you wish to do so. If you have any trouble in procuring it, please let us know.

J. R. FYSH.—Pleased to hear from you again, and to gather that you are meeting with some success in your fight with the Missionaries. If only the people who subscribe to them knew the exact truth concerning their methods there would be a drawing in of funds. Glad to hear that we have a number of readers even so far away as the New Hebrides. Will send on the literature as soon as your order reaches us.

R. H. DUFFY.—Thanks for subscriptions from the Plymouth Branch. Shall be glad to be down your way again, and attempt to stir up the people.

EDWIN WORSNOP.—Your reply received and will appear in next issue.

G. O. W.—If not too much trouble we should like to see the MSS.

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 venture to call the attention of all intending subscribers to the fact that our Sustentation Fund closes with the next issue of this paper. As will be seen, the sum now required to complete the whole amount is very small, and there is no doubt whatever as to this being forthcoming. We are counting the promises as being paid, as we know those who gave them, and know also that their word is as good as their bond. We shall have something further to say on the matter next week.

Mr. Cohen's meetings at Barnsley must be pronounced a complete success. The Miner's Hall is a very handsome building and furnished with great comfort. And from the platform the meeting looked well in the afternoon with nearly every seat filled, but better in the evening with all seats occupied and people standing. There were friends present from Huddersfield, Sheffield, and other places, and all appeared to follow the lectures with appreciation and enjoyment. The local Branch had worked hard and well to make the meetings a success, and the result was well earned. Mr. Irving occupied the chair at both meetings, and Mr. Littlewood and Mr. S. Cohen worked hard with the literature. A good supply of *Freethinkers* had been sent down, but unfortunately, from one point of view, not as many as were needed, as they were practically all sold at the first meeting. The venture will encourage the Branch to go ahead with renewed energy, and we are sure it will secure fresh triumphs.

Birmingham friends will please note that to-day (January 23) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Repertory Theatre, Birmingham. The lecture commences at 7, and admission is free. We hope that our Birmingham readers will see what they can do towards bringing their Christian acquaintances along. Next week Mr. Cohen lectures in the City Hall, Glasgow.

We are asked to announce that a meeting will be held to-day (January 23) at 7 p.m. at "Gowers," 153 Lillie Road, Fulham, with a view to forming a local Branch of the N. S. S.

There was an improved audience at Friars' Hall last Sunday, and Mr. Thresh's first lecture on Evolution evoked much interest. Great regret was expressed that the audience was not larger, and we hope that next Sunday it will have swelled considerably. If members and friends would do their best to bring an orthodox friend the result should be a strong accession to our ranks.

Mr. F. W. R. Silke writes from Cape Town:—

Last week I attended the funeral of one of South Africa's greatest daughters, Olive Schreiner, a great

member of a great family. Her brother, William Philip Schreiner, married an aunt of my Mother, and Olive Schreiner has been known to our family for very many years. The Schreiner family were in some respects peculiar. Some of the members of the family were intensely religious, my uncle was only half-heartedly so, but Olive Schreiner was an uncompromising Atheist. Apart from the evidence of her works, I have abundant evidence of her Atheism. She was the daughter of a German missionary, but cast off her religion at a very early age. She was buried, according to her request, without religious ceremony of any kind. There were no speeches and I was sorry that some secular service could not have been read.

Mr. Lloyd visits Manchester to-day (January 23), and will lecture in the Co-operative Hall, Downing Street, at 3 and 6.30. As this will be the last meeting of the Branch in this hall, we hope that the local friends will see that it is well filled. Mr. Lloyd's subjects are "Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Rattenbury, and the Portrait of Jesus," and "Earth a colony of Heaven."

The bound volume of the *Freethinker*, with elaborate index and title page, will be ready for sale by the end of the month. It is strongly bound in cloth and gilt lettered. The volume will, we venture to think, compare in interest with any other volume in the country, and many of our readers will doubtless wish to have so interesting a mass of Freethought writings in this permanent form. The price of the volume is 18s., postage 1s. extra. This means that we have only added the bare wholesale cost of the binding to the cost of the paper itself. As we have only a very limited number of copies for sale, those who require them should write *at once*.

For the benefit of those who have preserved the issues for 1920, we can supply the covers for binding, with index and title page, for 3s. 6d., postage 4d.

The North London Branch has a real live clergyman occupying its platform to-day (January 23). As discussion follows the lecture, we have no doubt that Freethinkers will see that that part of the programme does not die of inanition. Fuller information in "Guide" notice.

TRADING RELIGION.

A MAN may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believe things only because his pastor says so, or the assembly so determines, without knowing any other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy. There is not any burden, that some would gladlier post off to another, than the charge and care of their religion. There be, who knows not that there be of Protestants and professors, who live and die in as arrant an implicit faith as any lay Papist of Loretto. A wealthy man, addicted to his pleasure and to his profits, finds religion to be a traffic so entangled, and of so many piddling accounts, that of all mysteries he cannot skill to keep a stock going upon that trade. What should he do? Fain he would have the name to be religious, fain he would bear up with his neighbours in that. What does he therefore, but resolves to give over toiling, and to find himself out some factor, to whose care and credit he may commit the whole managing of his religious affairs: some divine of note and estimation that must be. To him he adheres, resigns the whole warehouse of his religion, with all the locks and keys, into his custody; and, indeed, makes the very person of that man his religion; esteems his associating with him a sufficient evidence and commendatory of his own piety. So that a man may say that his religion is now no more within himself, but is become a dividual movable, and goes and comes near him, according as that good man frequents the house. He entertains him, gives him gifts, feasts him, lodges him; his religion comes home at night, prays, and is liberally supped, and sumptuously laid to sleep; rises, is saluted, and after the malmsey or some well-spiced bruage, and better breakfasted than he whose morning appetite would have gladly fed on green figs between Bethany and Jerusalem, his religion walks abroad at eight, and leaves his kind entertainer in the shop trading all day without his religion.—*Milton, "Areopagitica"* (1644), *Arber's Reprint*, p. 63.

A Sociological Study of Religion.

III.

(Continued from page 39.)

THE problem which presents itself to the sociologist may be briefly stated thus: If, as there seems very solid grounds for believing, primitive religion had its genesis in man's ignorance of natural laws, and the concomitant fear of natural phenomena, why, as barbarism superseded savagery, and civilization took the place of barbarism, and the sum total of human knowledge increased, whilst life becomes increasingly secure, did not religion gradually disappear? Why, instead of becoming ever more complex and powerful (up to a point in social evolution), did it not dwindle with every advance made by science, and with every institution that added to the security of life?

Now, if we make a comparative study of religions, we notice one significant fact: religious systems, in every stage of culture, are always closely associated with other institutions, which serve a necessary social function—political, juridical, economic, etc. Before making any deductions from this fact, let me give a few examples from the multifarious cases that exist:—

> In all the religions of the world the relation of men to their gods is regarded in the first instance as being a relation of the community to the gods of the community. The gods protect and assist the community: the community worships the gods.....The relation is not between the gods and any particular member of the community. Religion.....was an affair of the community rather than of the individual....." *(Comparative Religion,* Jevons.)

And Dr. J. Estlin Carpenter, in *Comparative Religion*, also notes that "Prayer in the lower culture is rarely individualized. It is almost always a social act. Common prayers for food or rain, for protection against danger, the removal of pestilence, victory over enemies, represents the wants of all." And such communal prayers must have done not a little to strengthen the social bond in primitive communities, and to develop a social consciousness among its members.

Almost every tribe has its initiation ceremonies, and, indeed, as Dr. Carpenter truly remarks, "in many tribes adult life may almost be described as a continuous initiation." Whilst the object of these rites is primarily to impart mystic virtue to the novice (by his association with whatever the community holds sacred), *the candidate is incidentally trained to perform his duties as a member of his social group.* "Initiation in native Australia," says Dr. Marett, *(Anthropology)*,—

> is the equivalent of what is known amongst ourselves as the higher education. The only difference is that, with them, every one who is not judged utterly unfit is duly initiated; whereas, with us, the higher education is offered to some who are unfit, whilst many who are fit never have the luck to get it. The initiation custom is intended to tide the boys over the difficult time of puberty, and turn them into responsible men. The whole of the tribal males assist in the ceremonies. Special men, however, are told off to tutor the youth.....a lengthy business, since it entails a retirement, perhaps for six months, into the bush with their charges, who are there taught the tribal traditions, and are generally admonished, sometimes forcibly, for their good. Further, this is rather like a retirement into a monastery for the young men, seeing that during all the time they are strictly taboo, or in other words in a holy state that involves much fasting and mortification of the flesh. At last comes the time when their actual passage across the threshold of manhood has to be celebrated. The rites may be described in one word as impressive. Society wishes to set a stamp on their characters, and believes in stamping hard. Physically, then, the lads feel the force of society. A tooth is knocked out, they are

tossed in the air to make them grow tall, and so on .....rites that, whilst they may have separate occult ends in view, are completely at one in being highly unpleasant.

Spiritual means of education, however, are always more effective than physical, if designed and applied with sufficient wisdom. The bull-roarer, of which something has been already said, furnishes the ceremonies with a background of awe. It fills the woods, that surround the secret spot where the rites are held, with the rise and fall of its weird music, suggestive of a mighty rushing wind, of spirits in the air. Not until the boys graduate as men do they learn how the sound is produced. Even when they do learn this, the mystery of the voice speaking through the chip of wood merely wings the imagination for loftier flights. Whatever else the high god of these mysteries, Daramulun, may be for these people.....and undoubtedly all sorts of trains of confused thinking meet in the notion of him.....he is at any rate the god of the bull-roarer, who has put his voice into the sacred instrument. But Daramulun is likewise endowed with a human form, for they set an image of him rudely shaped in wood, and round about it dance and shout his name. Daramulun instituted these rites, as well as all the other immemorial rites of the tribe or tribes. So when over the heads of the boys, prostrated on the ground, are recited solemnly what Mr. Lang calls "the ten commandments," that bid them honour the elders, respect the marriage law, and so on, there looms up before their minds the figure of the ultimate law-giver, whilst his unearthly voice becomes for them the voice of the law. Thus is custom exalted, and its coercive force amplified by the suggestion of a power—in this case of definitely personal power—that "makes for righteousness," and, whilst beneficent, is full of terror for offenders.[1]

In thus giving morality a supernatural sanction, there is no doubt that religion has served a useful purpose among primitive and impulsive peoples, with whom the powers of abstract reasoning are not sufficiently developed for them to realize that wrongness of conduct has its inevitable natural punishment, which cannot be avoided.

Again, the primitive meal is always more or less a sacrament, to which are attached many taboos; whilst, in the words of Dr. Carpenter, "In processes of time, birth-rites, marriage-rites, funeral-rites, not to mention subordinate ceremonies such as those of name giving and food taking become domestic sacraments."

Birth is another thing that comes to be placed under divine protection. The Babylonians—

> looked to the spouse of Marduk, "creator of all things," to whom as Zerpanitum, "seed-creatress," the processes of generation were especially referred. Or with ceremony and incantation the child was set beneath the care of Ishtar, queen of Nineveh, the goddess of the planet Venus. The Greek prayed to Hera, Artemis, or Eileithyia; and all round the world superhuman powers, for good or ill, gathered round the infant life, whose aid must be sought, or whose hurt averted." (*Comparative Religion*, Carpenter.)

Religion also comes to be associated with the winning of food. Messrs. Spencer and Gillen have given us some exceedingly interesting accounts of ceremonies practised by the Arunta, an aboriginal race of central Australia. The object of these rites is to make food, whether animal or plant, multiply and prosper. The witchetty-grub men, for instance, make their way along a certain path, which tradition says was traversed by the great leader of the witchetty-grubs of the far-off days, when the grubs were transformed into men, and became by reincarnation the ancestors of the present totemites. The path leads to a place among the hills where there is a large stone surrounded by a number of small stones. The big stone is thought of as the adult animal, and the little stones as its eggs. So the witchetty-grub men tap the big stone, chanting at the same time a request that it will lay eggs. Then their leader rubs each man's stomach with the little stones, saying, "You have eaten much food. The Kangaroo men and the Honey-ant men also perform certain rites with a view to obtaining the multiplication of food.

W. H. MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

[1] The Australian native belief that their code of conduct, and the rites connected with life and death were first instituted by Daramulun (or Nurelli or Nurrundere), is paralleled in all cultures. The Babylonian Sun-god gave the laws embodied in Hammurabi's Code of Laws; Zeus gave laws to Minos, Appollo revealed the Spartan constitution to Lycurgus; Zaleucus received the laws for the Locrians from Athena; Vishnu and Mann drew up the laws for India; and Jahveh gave the Jewish laws to Moses.

In the Company of the Damned.

THOSE who are still under the impression that disbelief in Christianity is confined to a few, obscure in position, and comparatively uneducated, will receive a rude awakening if they happen to open Mr. McCabe's *Dictionary of Modern Rationalists* (Watts and Co., 45s. net). They will see pass before them the names of many hundreds of heretics, most of them eminent in science, art, politics, or literature, and the world, with its innate flunkeyism, and, one imagines, be a little more inclined to look upon Freethought as something more worthy of attention than they had thought. For a very large proportion of people still attach quite a fantastic importance to a name, a title, or social position. In fact, if one can imagine Jesus Christ returning to earth again, one feels that his Christian followers would advise him to get the Prince of Wales to preside at the opening of his first meeting, in order to give his campaign a proper send off. For the reason above given, if for none other, the Dictionary will serve a useful purpose in indicating to such as are not already aware of the fact, the large part played by Freethought in the history of the world, and for the same reason Mr. McCabe deserves thanks for the immense amount of labour he has put into this work. It is a task that a man might well be excused for declining.

Still, the man who sets about compiling a Dictionary of Freethinkers is asking for trouble, nor will Mr. McCabe be surprised at receiving his share of friendly criticism. It is almost impossible to notice at any length a work of this kind except in terms of criticism. A Dictionary of Freethinkers could only approach completeness as the result of its being a labour of love and the task of a lifetime. It cannot be undertaken with complete success, so to speak, to order. The Dictionary of the late J. M. Wheeler, a born burrower among books, was the work of very many years. He was thus able to go much farther back than Mr. McCabe, and in certain respects escaped some of the faults of the present compilation.

My first point of difficulty is concerning Mr. McCabe's line of demarcation. He takes the term Rationalist to include all Theists when they "do not conform to the authority of any branch of the Christian Church." Needless to say, Mr. McCabe does not abide by that impossible definition, otherwise he would include all Jews, Buddhists, and a few million others. And he proceeds to say that the belief in immortality will provide "a definite crucial test." It will certainly come as a surprise to many that a man may not be called a "Rationalist" if he believes in immortality, but is entitled to be called one while accepting the master superstition of a belief in God. To be of any value at all the line should be drawn at the belief in God—with those exceptions where special service to the general cause of Freethought entitles one to inclusion. The objection to that, I fancy, would be that it makes "Rationalism" synonymous with Atheism, which it must be if it is intellectually sane.

I am also puzzled at the apparently arbitrary way in which some names are put in and others left out. There are names included of undoubtedly worthy men, but who have done no more than many thousands of humble rank and file workers. And there are some left out who certainly ought to have been in on account of the work they did for Freethought. Of this class I will only name the late Robert Forder, for many years Secretary of the N. S. S., and who wrote, spoke, and fought for Freethought during some very trying years in its history. In the wider world of thought I note the omission of many names that might well have been put in. There is no mention of Robert Eyres Landor, the brilliant but lesser known brother of Walter Savage Landor. Kropotkin and Bakunine are included, but Lenin, certainly a name for good or ill in the world, is omitted. Mrs. Besant, Thomas Hardy, Oscar Wilde, Thomas Love Peacock, Freud, Jung, Dr. Otto Rank, Karl Abraham, are a few of the names we miss in running through the list. There are also many gaps in the names that represent French literature.

In dealing with some of the personages named in the Dictionary, Mr. McCabe must, I think, have been misled by following more orthodox collections. There is, for instance, a slighting and misleading reference to Gerald Massey, whose later years, we are told, were spent "in futile investigations into the history of Spiritualism and Mysticism." That is to give a quite misleading impression of Massey's work. Those who have read his works on Egyptology—they cover nearly 4,000 pages, quarto—will know that they are anything but mystical, and that they are only incidentally concerned with Spiritualism. They are monuments of research, and represent forty years of close study. His theory is that from a primitive sign language there was developed in Egypt a mythology which was never accepted by the priesthood as being anything else than what it was, and that the Christian Church reduced the whole thing to sheer nonsense by giving the myth an historical setting. The theory may be right or wrong, but it is decidedly misleading to call those ideas mystical. They are terribly concrete.

So, again, when dealing with Lester Ward, we find a curious omission and a no less curious misstatement. Readers are not informed that Ward was for some years a very militant Freethinker. During this period he edited a paper, *The Iconoclast,* which was as militant in its advocacy of Freethought as was the *Freethinker* in its most militant days. One day I intend reprinting some of the articles for the benefit of my readers. In describing the character of Ward's work we are told that the "Dynamic Sociology" was "a complete sketch of the conscious organization of social evolution." I confess to being puzzled as to what this means. It sounds equal to a conscious organization of the solar system. And it is certainly not what Ward taught. Ward's position was that the development of the true human society involved the play of mind in social life, and that the distinctive feature of human society was the creation and development of a psychological nexus. That is an understandable proposition, and the reader will find it fully described in his *Psychic Factors of Civilization.*

The Problems of Life and Mind, by George Henry Lewes is described as in four volumes. It is really in five. The fifth is lettered differently on the outside, but if one opens the volume its character is plainly described on the title page. There is also an error in describing the *Testament* of Meslier. It is said to have been published in 1762, presumably by Voltaire. The book was not published until 1861. What Voltaire did was to copy a little of it only. It was this which was published in 1762.

Mr. McCabe has a strange reluctance to ascribe direct Atheism to many of his characters. This is quite understandable with those who are afraid of the name, but it is not so easily understandable with some others. One would, for instance, like to know on what ground Continental Freethinkers are described as Rationalists when so many of them called themselves Atheists. Zola, we note, is so described. The general term out of this country is the proper one. But it *is* curious to be told of Bradlaugh that he "preferred" to be called an Atheist, as though he would have tolerated any other name, and to find that accompanied by the explanatory quotation "I do not say there is no God." The further explanation should have been given that Bradlaugh, as is well-known, *insisted* on being called an Atheist, and in reply to those who said that the name was open to misrepresentation, declared there was then all the more reason to fight for it and to fight under it. G. W. Foote, it is also said, "professed" Atheism. Like Bradlaugh, Foote insisted on being called what he was. James Thomson, who was a militant and outspoken Atheist, is merely said to have written "Rationalist articles," which in terms of Mr. McCabe's definition of a Rationalist might lead the unwary reader to assume that he believed in God. Both Holyoake and the late Charles Watts are also let go with the mere title of Rationalist.

Still, when all is said and done, the lengthy list of names forms a wonderful procession of eminent men and women who have managed to get through life without religious beliefs. That in itself will be an education to many, and for that reason we hope that the Dictionary will find many readers in both private and public libraries. And it may be the knowledge that Freethinkers form so goodly a company will encourage others to be more outspoken in their opinions. It is a sad reflection upon the amount of courage possessed by our public men, and an indication of the terrorism exerted by religion that it should be left for writers such as Mr. McCabe to make public what the opinions of these people were on the subject of religion. And he must know many living men and women who would be in his Dictionary but that they are afraid to let the world know their real opinions. It is not much use saying that these people lack courage. That is obvious, but if they are content to conceal their opinions, saying that they are cowards will not affect them. What we have to face is the fact that the average man is a coward. There would not be so many wars and so many soldiers were men less fearful than they are. And even when concealment is no longer tolerable, we still have to deal with the modified timidity which finds expression in compromising terms and forms of opinion. We must take the moral cowardice of average humanity as a fact and make what we can of it. And the only effective way of dealing with it is to work for a social state in which opinion may be expressed without incurring penalties, and in which the concealment of beliefs may well be regarded as an act of degradation. The average man is not particularly devoted to truth, neither is he anxious to tell or live a lie. Whether he acts a lie or tells the truth depends mainly upon which offers the line of least resistance. And it is for each to do what can be done to make the better way hold fewer pains and penalties in the treading than it does at present.

C. Cohen.

Though the seasons of man full of losses
Make empty the years full of youth,
If but one thing be constant in crosses,
Change lays not her hand upon truth;
Hopes die, and their tombs are for token
That the grief as the joy of them ends,
Ere time that breaks all men has broken
The faith between friends.

—*Swinburne.*

Book Chat.

The Heritage of Charles Lamb.

I suppose that those of my readers who appreciate the rare note of distinction in journalistic prose have often found pleasure in the essays which see the light occasionally in the columns of the London *Star* under the signature of "Alpha of the Plough." I happen to know a man of taste who religiously cuts them out, and sends them with admiring and persuasive superlatives to his friends. As a rule I distrust and dislike superlatives, but in this instance, and in the main, I do not find them distressingly inopportune. I have been reading the latest collection of essays by "Alpha" which is called *Windfalls* (Dent and Co., 6s. net), a charming book, charmingly illustrated by Miss Olive Gardiner. If the critical appreciation I shall attempt to make does not increase the delight of those who know the essays, it will, at least, confirm a wise predilection for fine letters. My intention is to show the reader what he will miss if he does not make a companion of this urbane, sagacious and eminently companionable writer.

Let me begin by saying that our essayist has nothing of that contempt for authority and tradition which nowadays is apparently the privilege of our younger men for whom Tennyson is a sugary poetaster and Mr. Hardy a Wilkie Collins spoilt in the making. The rowdy fun of a critical "ragging" has no charm for him. He does not talk wildly about wiping out the work of his predecessors, of better men, and starting with a clean slate. He knows that what is good in him is the result of his literary heritage in combination with the imponderable quality which we call talent or genius. He also knows that there are no fixed forms in art, that these vary more or less with the spiritual content, or with the thought and emotion, if you prefer it put in that way. In fine, he is aware that the only thing we expect is that an essayist should justify himself by having a vital interest for those of us who are familiar with what has already been done in his domain of literature. By this test of comparison, I find that our essayist does not let me down; at least not in his best work, for there are always sure to be inequalities here and there. Even the alert intelligence of a Montaigne or a Lamb is not always wholly wide awake, and what is more, the writer of less strenuous and more spacious times had not the excuse of being obliged to fill a column of an evening news-sheet.

"Alpha," I may say, has all the wise restraint of the true artist. He knows exactly when he has said enough. He does not so much point a moral as insinuate one, allowing it to sink into our minds of its own weight. I imagine that he would not feel much hurt were we to miss, or even to ignore it. But the Freethinker is usually what we call a good reader, one who brings an intelligent sympathy to books that attract him, and who is not likely to miss a moral implication because it is not rubbed in. My readers may take it from me that they will not be disappointed if they make a friend of "Alpha." He seems, also, to be something of a Freethinker, at least he does not show an obvious bias towards any form of religious belief, although, of course, what he may choose to call himself is another matter. In a pleasant essay *On Superstition* he confesses ingenuously that he would not walk under a ladder, that even if he could bring himself to walk under one, he could not be perfectly sure that he was not doing so as a sort of negative concession to superstition. There is a fine shade of artistic subtlety here. He goes on to remark that,

> these shadowy reminiscences of antique credulity which we discover in ourselves play no part in the lives of any of us. They belong to a creed outworn. Superstition was discredited when science revealed the laws of the universe and put man in his place.....It is pleasant to be about when the light is abroad. We do not know much more about the Power which
>
> Turns the handle of this idle show
>
> than our fore-fathers did, but at least we have escaped the grotesque shadows that enveloped them.

That is so; but although we do not see our fate in the clouds, our happiness or misery in the flight of birds, and have ceased to refer the happenings of life to sooth-sayers and oracles, we are not yet quite outside the dark circle of superstitious practices. The popular faith of to-day is not so very different from the gross superstitions of yesterday. I should like the private opinion of our essayist on the efficacy of prayer for the sick, for rain or fine weather. Yet, I suppose, we must be thankful for a measure of rationalism in a writer of this kind. A larger dose of iconoclasm might have scared away his readers, and for us who can read between the lines there emerges the genuine Freethinker in this admirable passage on immortality from the essay *On Waking up*. It was noted, I believe, by my friend the editor in one of his articles on the same subject.

> It is an agreeable fancy of some that eternity itself will be a thing of sleep and happy awakening. It is a cheerful faith that solves a certain perplexity. For however much we cling to the idea of immortality, we can hardly escape an occasional feeling of concern as to how we shall get through it. We shall not "get through it," of course, but speech is fashioned only by finite things. Many may, from Pascal to Byron, have had a sort of terror of eternity. Byron confessed that he had no terror of a dreamless sleep, but that he could not conceive an eternity of consciousness which would not be unendurable. We are cast in a finite mould and think in finite terms, and we cling to the thought of immortality less, perhaps, from the desire to enjoy it for ourselves than from fear of eternal separation from those we love and friendship we would fain believe to be deathless.....An eternity of happy awakenings would be a pleasant compromise between being and not being.

This explanation of the desire for immortality is phrased, as you will see, with commendable force and brevity. Its appearance in the pages of an evening paper is proof the seeds of freethought are scattered widely, and not infrequently fall on good ground. We are also pleased to see that "Alpha" shares our enthusiasm for that champion of freedom in thought and action, Thomas Paine. In the essay *On Great Replies* a discrimination is made between the great and the merely clever or witty answer which can be made by anyone with a sharp tongue and a quick mind. But a great reply, we are told, does not so much answer the point as obliterate it. The current of thought is changed from mean to sublime things, from the gross to the spiritual, from the trivial to the enduring. Napoleon could no more have made a great reply than a rabbit could play Bach. The great reply comes from a rare and profound soul, and with such profundity of spirit "Alpha" finds in Paine of whom he says with refreshing candour and eloquence that

> the venom and malice of the ignorant and intolerant have, for more than a century, poisoned the name and reputation of a great man—one of the profoundest political thinkers, and one of the most saintly men this century has produced, the friend and secretary of Washington, the brilliant author of the papers on *The Crisis*, that kept the flame of rebellion high in the darkest hour, the first Foreign Secretary of the United States, the man to whom Lafayette handed the key of the Bastille for presentation to Washington. The true character of this great Englishman flashes out in his immortal reply to the bishop who had discoursed "On the goodness of God in making rich the poor." And Paine answered, "God did not make rich and poor, God made male and female and gave the earth for their inheritance."

There are any number of quotable passages in these little essays, but they are infinitely better when they come upon you as a surprise. and it shall not spoil the pleasure of my reader by anticipating his delight. He has here something of everything. If he hunger and thirst after ethical instruction and has the wit enough to find it in unlikely places, I can promise him a treasure trove in these essays; if he prefer kindly and humorous comments on national idiosyncracies, transcriptions of life in the open-air, the criticism of a scholar on books and reading, and on the manners of men he will find them here, and he may even come across an occasional paradox which will give him a sort of mental shaking up, or a remark which will stir him to opposition; but he will not find a dull page in the book. If he does, I am afraid that I shall have to remind him that a reader gets out of a book precisely no more and no less than what he brings to it.

George Underwood.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIANITY AND LIFE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Why is it so many Christians assume, without a scrap of evidence, that Freethinkers do not read "both sides?" Why, most of us have not only been surrounded by religion from birth and had it forced on us at school, but have read nearly every apologetic work worth reading. Speaking for myself, I think I could safely say that I have read *more* Christian works than Mr. Worsnop and could probably make out a better case than he, in favour of Christianity. However, as he wisely puts aside questions concerning the Virgin Birth, etc. (though it would not be unfair to ask him why?) and wishes to deal with the Ethical Teaching, perhaps he would be good enough to answer the following few questions: Does he believe it to be a good thing for us all to *hate* our parents, our wives (or husbands) and our children? If not, will he tell us how we can become disciples of Jesus? Would we bring about the Paradise he speaks of if we all went about cursing fig trees, doing no work except telling each other obscure parables and violently cursing everybody who disagreed with us? Is it the highest ethic to turn away from one's mother and brethren and loftily ask: "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?" Or; "Woman what have I to do with thee?" Is it the loftiest of idealistic teaching to "pinch" a large number of pigs so as to find a home for an assortment of Devils and then drown the lot? If Mr. Worsnop was invited to dine with a friend and sat down with filthy hands, would he turn on his host with impudent abuse simply because he was politely reminded of the existence of a tap? If not, why not? Supposing I objected to the sale of picture postcards and other souvenirs in the doorway of Westminster Abbey, would I have the right to borrow a cat-of-nine-tails and with righteous indignation chase all the sinful sellers out of the Abbey yard? If I pleaded that I was doing exactly what Jesus taught by example, would that have any weight with the police? If not, why not? Will Mr. Worsnop tell us if he believes that when Jesus taught that ".....no man cometh unto the Father but by me," and "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers'" we were being shown a much needed lesson in modesty and humility, and, therefore, the paradise he speaks of will come much nearer if we all took the lesson to heart? I could ask Mr. Worsnop a hundred questions on the Ethical Teaching of Jesus, but perhaps the above will do to go on with. I only hope he will set to work and answer them, and at the same time tell us why he is so optimistic as to imagine that his Paradise would really be fit to live in? Why if everybody were really real Christians—oh horror!

H. CUTNER.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

SIR,—The "Does Truth Remain?" of your correspondent, H. Truckell, appears a little aggravating, especially if one should attempt to view it as possessing the comical "absolute" position. The principle of Natural Selection, as laid down by Darwin, is a relative truth, and certainly did not exist before his day. Darwin was in possession of certain material which to his predecessors were denied. After his summing up he came to the conclusion that their "truths" died with them. The Ancients were under the impression that the Ptolomaical system was *the* truth before the "discoveries" of Copernicus. That the absolute "gravity" of Isaac Newton should possess flaws is not very complimentary to "truth." Did the falling of an apple prove the "truth" to Newton? Not according to Einstein, for he goes so far as to "prove" an incidental force of the "absolute gravity" in his *Relativity*. Probably the "truth" is a toy, and can be likened to a child's rattle, for in the pell-mell of becoming, nothing can be fixed, not even the "truth." If any of us attempt to conceive "abstract immortality," "imperishable wholes," the "indestructability of matter," etc., we are either consciously or unconsciously playing the clown to the senses, for appearances are all we know or can ever know.

A. DOWNING.

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.

FRIARS HALL (236 Blackfriars Road): 7, Mr. W. H. Thresh, 2—"Evolution—The Earth and its Inhabitants."

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 7.30, Bazaar and Social.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH, N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N.W.: 7.30, The Rev. William Armstrong, M.A., Y.M.C.A., "Is Religion Necessary?"

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9): 7, Mr. J. H. Van Biene, "Positive Evils due to Religion."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "Keats as a Pagan Poet."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, "Christianity and the Growth of Militarism."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ASSOCIATION OF ENGINEERING AND SHIPBUILDING DRAUGHTSMEN (Merseyside Branch): Thursday, January 27, J. W. Murray, Esq., "Philosophy of Life."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH, N. S. S. (Repertory Theatre, Station Street): 7, Mr. C. Cohen, "The Physiology of Faith."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Shop Assistants' Hall, 297 Argyle Street): 12 noon, Business Meeting to consider proposals *re* acquisition of permanent meeting place.

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Youngman' Rooms, 19 Lowerhead Row, Leeds): 6.30, Mr. A. Whitaker, "Neitzsche."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Co-operative Small Hall, Downing Street): Mr. J. T. Lloyd, 3, "Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Rattenbury, and the Portrait of Jesus"; 6.30, "Earth a Colony of Heaven."

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CHAPMAN COHEN.

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Secularism affirms that Progress is only possible through Liberty, which is at once a right and a duty; and therefore seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action, and speech.

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