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Views and Opinions.

Freethinkers and Christians.

I have a good many strange questions asked me from time to time, and I have had one from a correspondent who enquires whether I believe that all Christians are either rogues, or fools, or both? Indeed I do not. I have met a fair number of Christians who would fall into one of the three groups, but I do not rest any part of the Freethought case upon them. They serve but a useful purpose in reply to the believer who dwells upon the superlative excellence of Christians, and, by inference, upon the comparative inferiority of Freethinkers. And it is in such cases a perfectly justifiable reply to point out that the super-excellence of Christians exists only in the imagination of polemical defenders of the faith; it receives no confirmation from either every-day experience or from the police records. Quite naturally in a society where the overwhelming majority of men and women call themselves Christians one is bound to find among them a great many excellent characters. That is inevitable, since it is one of the conditions of social life that its members shall, on the whole, conduct themselves in such a manner as will not threaten its existence. That is true of all groups, no matter what they call themselves. And it is equally inevitable that there shall not be altogether wanting faulty characters among such as call themselves unbelievers. Christianity has no monopoly of the virtues of human nature, neither should it claim a monopoly of the vices. And to parade a good man as evidence of the truth of Christianity is quite as stupid as to shout when a Freethinker is found misbehaving himself, as though while blackguardism is to be tolerated in a Christian, it should not exist with a Freethinker. We grant Christians a share of the virtues because we recognize that they are human beings, and they must grant us some small share of the vices for the same reason. And after all, as criminal statistics prove, we are not grasping in this direction. We pay our full share of prison rates, and take less than our share of prison accommodation. We pay towards the maintenance of prison chaplains for the benefit of the Christian inmates of those institutions, but the number of Freethinkers in prisons has not yet forced upon the Home Office the need for Freethought lecturers in those establishments. So we beg of the Christian, in his fairness, not to weary us with talk of the super-excellence of believers, and so invite the inevitable retort. And

in his charity we beg him not to grudge us a modicum of rascality in a world where without the peccant Freethinker the Christian would occupy a position of solitary indignity.

* * *

The Use of Religion.

Really, my complaint against Christianity, as against religion in general, is not that it engages the attention of all the bad characters, but that it wastes the energies of so many good ones. From the point of view of the scientific sociologist the better the clergyman the stronger the case against the clergy, the more profound a man's belief in the importance of religious dogmas the stronger the case against religion. As the strongest defence of a king to-day is that he does not interfere, so the strongest defence of religion would be that it had no influence on what men and women did. But that, unfortunately, is not the case. It has an influence both negative and positive. Generally, it interferes by diverting attention from what are the real problems of life. When thousands of otherwise worthy men and women are found spending their energies upon questions that cannot, in themselves, affect human life in this world one way or another, we can only regard that as a quite useless expenditure of time and energy. And when they are further convinced that by so doing they are carrying out a work of the highest importance to the world, the evil is still more pronounced. For it means that religion provides for them a means of gratifying their social instincts in a way that shall produce the very minimum of social benefit with the maximum of moral satisfaction. They become less concerned than they otherwise would be with the removal of genuine social evils, more tolerant of their existence, and quite satisfied that they are doing all they can or ought to do towards their removal. If one considers what it would mean if all the time spent in attending to what are called "spiritual" questions, was given to consideration of purely social issues, some idea may be formed of the social waste represented by religion in a civilized country. In this respect Christianity has always represented a gigantic "dope" which has served to delude men and women into the belief that they were playing an altogether admirable part in life, whereas they were in reality helping to perpetuate the very evils they imagined they were mitigating. And the better men and women they were the greater the harm they did. As usual it was not the admittedly evil character against which society needed to be on its guard. It was the "good" one that was doing it the most harm.

* * *

An Indictment of Christianity.

This point has been so well put by a Spanish writer, Dr. Falta de Gracia, that I cannot do better than quote him at length:—

The notion of justice is as entirely foreign to the spirit of Christianity as is that of intellectual honesty. It lies wholly outside the field of its ethical vision. Christianity—I am not referring to interpretations which may be disclaimed as corruptions or applications which may be set down to frailty and error, but to the most idealized conception of its substance and

the most exalted manifestations of its spirit—Christianity has offered comfort and consolation to men who suffered under injustice, but of that injustice itself it has remained absolutely incognizant. It has called upon the weary and heavy laden, upon the suffering and the afflicted, it has proclaimed to them the law of love, the duty of mercy and forgiveness, the Fatherhood of God; but in that torrent of religious and ethical emotion which has impressed men as the summit of the sublime, and been held to transcend all other ethical ideals, common justice, common honesty have no place. The ideal Christian, the saint, is seen descending like an angel from heaven amid the welter of human misery, among the victims of ruthless oppression and injustice, bringing to them the comfort and consolation of the Religion of Sorrow. But the cause of that misery lies wholly outside the range of his consciousness; no glimmer of any notion of right and wrong enters into his view of it. It is the established order of things, the divinely appointed government of the world, the trial laid upon sinners by divine ordinance. St. Vincent de Paul visits the living hell of the French galleys; he proclaims the message of love and calls sinners to repentance; but to the iniquity which creates and maintains that hell, he remains indifferent. He is appointed Grand-Almoner to His Most Christian Majesty. The world might groan in misery under the despotism of oppressors, men's lives and men's minds might be enslaved, crushed, and blighted; the spirit of Christianity would go forth and comfort them, but it would never occur to it to redress a single one of these wrongs. To those wrongs, to men's right to be delivered from them, it was by nature completely blind. In respect to justice, to right and wrong, the spirit of Christianity is not so much immoral as amoral.

Rather a lengthy quotation, but it well depicts one of the cardinal flaws in Christianity, and one that is too often overlooked in a sentimental admiration of virtues that are so often displayed because it requires a small degree of mental development for their manifestation.

A. Useful Creed.

The quotation given also indicates one of the reasons why Christianity has found itself so acceptable to the powers that be. When St. Vincent de Paul visited the French galleys his visit carried with it no threat to the French government. His mission made the galley slaves more content under their slavery than they would have otherwise been. But it brought the abolition of the brutal punishment of the day not a step nearer. It made people content to tolerate conditions that should have been made intolerable. And the net result of this preaching of love and of the Fatherhood of God to the oppressed was the existence of punishments so brutal that to read about them to-day fills one with doubt as to their very existence. The preaching of Christian love found, and left, the prisons of Europe vile torture chambers. It was the burning satire and the fervent appeals to justice and intelligence of the Atheist Beccaria and the heretic Voltaire that drove torture from the prisons of Europe and established a more scientific conception of the nature of crime and of the treatment of the criminal. And that, I repeat, is characteristic of the influence of Christianity. It was its chief function to make men content under injustice; to bear with it as part of the world order, as a discipline of the body in this world so that the soul might benefit in the next. No wonder that the ruling powers everywhere gave their support to the Christian Church. Where else could they find an institution so admirably adapted to their purpose? Naturally, they had no objection to people being made as happy as possible under the conditions—so long as the continuance of the conditions was not threatened. It was not their desire to make people unhappy, for unhappiness meant discontent, and discontent might lead to rebellion. What they required was a teaching

that should impress upon men submission, and should see in the tortured and submissive Jesus of the Gospels, led like a lamb to the slaughter, the true type of human excellence. And changed though the conditions may be to-day, and modified though the teaching of the Church may have become, it is still essentially the same game that is being played. Bad men are still able to disguise from themselves the real nature of their conduct by surrounding it with a halo of religious verbiage. Wronged ones are still taught that it is part of the divine order of things that they should experience the ills that are afflicting them. And good men are still made to feel that they are doing their duty in confining themselves to solacing people under injustice and wrong, when they should be directing attention to the fact that injustice and wrong should be abolished. Most decidedly I do not believe that all Christians are fools or rogues. A proportion are, but the majority are men capable of doing a man's work in the world, and by their work putting a speedy end to the ills that afflict society. A Christian is a man *plus* a belief. The Freethinker is trying to destroy the belief in order to liberate the man.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Abandonment of Hell.

II.

(Concluded from page 99.)

MR. LEGGATT, in the sermon just mentioned, is commendably frank from beginning to end. To the question, "Is God in hell?" he returns for himself personally an affirmative answer. Another query suggests itself, namely, "What is God doing in hell?" but to this no reply is given. Curiously enough, Mr. Leggatt's text is Psalm cxxxix. 8: "If I make my bed in hell, behold he is there." He is fully aware that the Hebrew word "sheol" used does not mean hell in the Christian sense, but simply the abode of the dead, generally the grave. His point is, however, that God, being omnipresent, is of necessity in sheol, whatever is meant by the term. The argument, as such, is perfectly sound; but the contemptuous reference to "the wise men who study these things" should not have been introduced. Mr. Leggatt is a New Theologian who believes in the Larger Hope and the propriety of prayer to and for the dead, but when he affirms that God is in hell, one would like to know what he understands by hell, a point on which he affords us no information whatever. The bulk of the discourse deals with the hypothesis that man's fate is not irrecoverably fixed at death, or that he may repent, give his heart to Christ, and be saved in the next world, and that it is a Christian duty to pray for the dead. We have no argument either for or against that two-fold hypothesis, because we do not believe in the next world at all; but we have a decided objection to his treatment of hell. He says:—

The fear of hell has been the hangman's whip to keep the wretch in order, but the remarkable thing is how small effect it has had when it has been most used. I do not think that the fear of hell will bring any man to heaven. As an old woman said to me in a village where I used to preach when a student, and from whose shrewd mother wit I learned much sound theology, if the love of God does not bring a man to heaven, the fear of hell never will. The truth is, it works the other way round. It influences the wrong people, and it influences them in the wrong direction. It causes misery to some. It drives others into the desert of unbelief.

All depends, of course, upon whether hell as the abode of the damned, in which they are to be everlastingly tormented, is a reality or not. If it is, as the orthodox Church has always held it to be, then we should surely

be afraid of it. The Gospel Jesus taught that it would be better for a man to lose his hands, feet, and eyes, if they cause him to stumble, than to preserve all his members and "go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." John the Baptist, too, when the Pharisees and Sadducees went to his baptism, said to them: "Ye offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" Addressing the same class of people Jesus is reported to have said: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" If John and Jesus were right, beyond a doubt the wrath to come and the damnation of hell are proper objects of fear. He would be a fool who would treat them lightly, or ignore them, and revivalists are quite justified, on Biblical grounds, in urging their hearers to flee from the wrath to come, and also, in order to induce them to do so, they do perfectly right in enlarging on the awfulness of abiding for ever under the wrath of God, or of being endlessly burned in the unquenchable fire. On the same assumption, Father Pinnamanti, of the seventeenth century, conferred a boon upon Christendom when he published his now famous work, *Hell opened to Christians*, for his object in doing so was "to caution them against entering into it." And it is sheer nonsense to contend that the fear of hell has had but small effect upon those who have had it. Does not Mr. Leggatt know that the overwhelming majority of people, in all ages and countries, gave their hearts to Christ and joined the Church primarily in order to escape hell fire? Throughout the Dark Ages the supreme object in submitting to the discipline of the Church was to be delivered from the dismal prospect of spending eternity in the Bottomless Pit. Mr. Leggatt tells us of a brother and sister who equally shared the fear of hell, yet it prevented neither the former from being a ne'er-do-well nor the latter from nearly losing her reason; but he forgets that the same thing is often true of the hope of heaven; several of those in whose lives it shone like a brilliant star have been unmitigated scoundrels.

The natural inference from the preacher's observations on the fear of hell is that he does not regard hell as an object of fear; but if it is not an object of fear, the only possible conclusion is that it does not exist, or that it is one of the many Christian dreams. Mr. Leggatt's great point is that the fear of hell has never brought anyone to heaven; but if hell is not an object of fear, what evidence is there that heaven exists as a real object of hope? To New Testament writers hell is fully as real as heaven, and the Devil as objectively existent as God; but in reality heaven and hell are alike undiscovered countries, and God and the Devil are alike objects of belief, and not of knowledge. In almost all the pulpits of to-day the most noticeable feature is the utter silence about the Devil, and the Dean of St. Paul's assures us that "we can no longer believe in a localized heaven and hell," and that a congregation loses interest in a sermon if the preacher begins to talk about them. He goes further still, and asks, "Would any preacher who wishes to be 'acceptable' choose the text, 'If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable?'" And yet Mr. Leggatt talks about heaven as if he knew it far better than he does the country in which he now lives, whereas, in point of fact, he knows absolutely nothing about it. That nobody possesses any trustworthy information about either heaven or hell is amply proved by the fact that no two divines agree as to what they are. Many ministers in this country and America, some forty and fifty years ago, heaped blame upon Charles Haddon Spurgeon because he boldly preached the everlastingness of hell fire, saying:—

Thou wilt look up there on the throne of God, and it shall be written, "For ever!" When the damned jingle the burning iron of their torment they shall say,

"For ever!" When they howl, echo cries "For ever!"

"For ever" is written on their racks,
"For ever" on their chains;
"For ever" burneth in the fire,
"For ever" ever reigns.

Many still remember how fiercely the late Dean Farrar protested against that conception of hell fire, going the length of declaring that he would willingly resign all hope of immortality "to save a single soul from the hell of Mr. Spurgeon." Commenting on that protest the late Mr. Foote says:—

Is not the hell of Mr. Spurgeon the hell of the New Testament? Does not Jesus speak of everlasting fire? Why seek to limit the duration of hell by some hocus-pocus of interpretation? It is idle to pretend that "everlasting" means something less than everlasting. If it means that in relation to hell it must also mean it in relation to heaven. Dr. Farrar cannot have two different meanings for the same word in the same verse (*Flowers of Freethought*, Vol. I. p. 34).

Practically no well read, scholarly clergyman of to-day says anything about hell, or even makes any mention of heaven. As Dean Inge has often told the public, for about sixty years the English pulpit has been uttering its protest against the old Evangelical doctrine of reprobation, assuming, good naturedly, that "even the wicked and impenitent will not fail of ultimate happiness. Then all reference to the future life gradually disappeared from popular preaching, except as a rather perfunctory consolation to mourners." Sir George Adam Smith expressed the same view twenty years ago in his work entitled *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*. The truth is, according to the admission of leading theologians, that the belief in immortality is steadily decaying. A stupendous effort has been made during and after the war to recover it, but with very slight, if any, success. The abandonment of hell is symptomatic of a general intellectual trend towards disbelief in the supernatural, particularly in a future life; and it is perfectly clear that in the absence of its threefold doctrine of hell, purgatory, and heaven, Christianity cannot long survive. Very gradually this world and this life are coming into their own, and man, by observation and obedience, is steadily rising to the honourable and happy position of being at once servant and lord of Nature. In other words, knowledge is supplanting faith, fact, fable, and reason all forms of superstition. And this vast change from heaven to earth will result in the reorganization of society on lines of justice and natural brotherhood.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Yankee Messiah.

There is no darkness but ignorance. —*Shakespeare*.

The vain crowds, idly wandering, led by lies.—*Lucretius*.

The divine stands wrapt up in his crowd of mysteries, and the amused laity must pay tithes and veneration to be kept in obscurity. —*Geo. Farquhar*.

"SMITH" is not a sacred name, and "Joe Smith" does not appear as a name especially entitled to wide respect. Yet Joe was the only member of his family who founded a religion. And the Smith family, as a former, cheery, Dean of St. Paul's has noted, "is the largest and most respectable in the world." So numerous is it, that Mark Twain dedicated one of his books to John Smith, in the pious hope that all persons of that name would buy a copy, in which case the author would die rich and famous.

Our Joe Smith founded the Mormon religion in 1821, a hundred years ago. So that the origin of this particular religion is well within the historic period, and a real account of the Latter Day Saints, as they call themselves, should have value in shedding light on religious origins. Mormonism in the spring of this

year celebrated the centenary of its inception, and an unbiased statement of this strange religion is interesting.

The story of Joe Smith is one of the bright, particular romances of religious history. The son of an American farmer, he alleged that he received a revelation from "heaven" engraved on golden plates. With the growth of the infant church in Missouri came persecution and the move to Utah, which, after much suffering, resulted in considerable success and commercial prosperity.

There is no limit to human credulity, and the evangel of this Messiah, Joe Smith, has its psychological value. In common fairness, it must be admitted that Mormonism is not more grotesque than the Christian religion, which so many people are paid to believe is true. Mormons believe in an inspired book; so do the Christians. Mormons are anthropomorphic; so are Christians. The belief in the Divine ordination of polygamy may be paralleled in the earlier part of the Christian Bible. The resemblance by no means ends there, for Joe Smith, the founder, was killed, and the young church was subjected to ruthless persecution. Curiously, Brigham Young, who succeeded the prophet Smith, and who introduced polygamy to the Mormons, was a carpenter. Serious students of this nineteenth century religion would do well to read Sir Richard Burton's *City of the Saints*, a brilliant account by a great traveller who knew the book of the world no less than the world of books. Hepworth Dixon, a former editor of *The Athenæum*, has also written an account of the Latter Day Saints under the title of *Spiritual Wives*.

The Book of Mormon, the title given to his volume of revelation by Joe Smith, is a very serious and stodgy work of inspiration. It is alleged to have been written on gold plates by a Hebrew prophet who emigrated to America six hundred years before the Christian era, and two thousand years before Columbus discovered the continent, and to have been recorded by him as a direct revelation to himself from heaven. Mormons conceive of deity as a flesh-and-blood personality; of human beings as of the same divine substance, and of their own social system as the Kingdom of God on earth. The latter statement has been the subject of much ridicule and sarcasm in the States, where they admire and seek to emulate the higher and nobler Christian ideals of Tammany. The original Joe Smith was murdered for his views; but, as is so often the case in religious systems, Joe Smith, the second, was more fortunate than the founder. He enjoyed an annuity of £15,000 a year, like an English Archbishop, and left five wives and forty-two children to mourn his loss when he quitted a sinful world.

Owing to the too "benevolent neutrality" of the Christian United States Government, Mormonism, is, for the time being, almost at a standstill. A certain amount of recruiting still goes on in England and the Continent, usually under cover of the Christian Bible, and the converts, who are largely half-educated folk, are taken to Salt Lake City. With the decay of Evangelical Orthodoxy, proselytizing must become more and more difficult, and Joe Smith's religion, like the older evangel attributed to Jesus Christ, will be threatened with extinction.

The story of Mormonism is on all-fours with the story of Christianity, and so many other religions. In the case of Joe Smith, we know that it originated in a clumsy fraud by a half-insane fanatic, aided by a handful of devoted followers, who made converts among credulous and ignorant people. We can see, in the case of Mormonism, how this "religion" became the accepted faith of a large and flourishing community. I hope I shall not be thought unsympathetic, but all this has for me a great fascination. Before the integrity

of the analytic method of the psychologists, these religions should be examined in detail and explained. To a Freethinker they pass like a carnival procession, grotesque, grandiose, pitiful. In matters of religion, "What fools these mortals be." MIMNERMUS.

A Sociological Study of Religion.

VII.

(Continued from page 102.)

PASSING from this period of placid industrial life to the urge and hurry of the new era ushered in by the application of machinery and steam to industrial processes, with the concomitant growth of factory life, we find two noteworthy characteristics of religious life. The first is well represented in the person of Hannah and Martha More. In commenting upon a famine which caused grievous suffering among the working classes with whom they were carrying on their evangelical work, Hannah More says,—

.....let me remind you that probably that very scarcity has been permitted by an all-wise and gracious Providence to unite all ranks of people together, to show the poor how immediately they are dependent upon the rich, and to show both rich and poor that they are all dependent on Himself. It has also enabled you to see more clearly the advantages you derive from the government and constitution of this country to observe the benefits flowing from the distinction of rank and fortune, which has enabled the high so liberally to assist the low: for I leave you to judge what would have been the state of the poor of this country in this long, distressing scarcity had it not been for your superiors.....We trust the poor in general.....have received what has been done for them as a matter of favour, not right.....³

Mr. and Mrs. Hammond, in their valuable work *The Town Labourer, 1760-1832*, says of Wilberforce,—

Wilberforce.....is the best representative of this religion, and a study of his speeches and writings shows that the tendency to regard Christianity in politics as only one of the sanctions of the existing order was no accident, but an essential part of its spirit.

The writers then proceed to give some quotations from a tract entitled *Practical Views of the System of Christianity*, in which the author demonstrates the manifold advantages—from the Christian standpoint—of being poor.....Furthermore, "Paley showed to his own satisfaction that there was scarcely any respect in which the poor were not more fortunate than the rich." They also quote the following from a paper published in 1798 by Arthur Young, with the title, *An Inquiry into the state of mind amongst the Lower Classes*.

A stranger would think our churches were built, as indeed they are, only for the rich. Under such an arrangement where are the lower classes to hear the Word of God, that Gospel which in our Saviour's time was preached more particularly to the poor? Where are they to learn the doctrines of that truly excellent religion which exhorts to content and to submission to the higher powers?

Arthur Young went on to suggest the building of a great number of churches in the form of theatres, with benches and thick mats for the poor, and galleries and boxes for the higher classes. Commenting upon which the Hammonds remark, "Twenty years later, one Englishman out of seven being at that time a pauper, Parliament voted a million of public money for the construction of churches to preach submission to the higher powers." Here are some further excerpts from the same excellent book:—

The religious philanthropy taught two main lessons. The first was the duty of private benevolence. The

³ The Mendip Annals.

rich and comfortable ought to visit the poor, to teach them the Bible, to take an interest in their welfare, to give them advice, alms, and soup, to found societies like the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor.....The second lesson was the lesson of subordination and discipline. The rich and poor were equal in the sight of God, but the effective recognition of equality was to come in another world. In this world the poor were not to presume on that principle; they were to learn patience and gratitude. The Evangelical religion made a special feature of gratitude.....It was in the new industrial districts that the Evangelical revival had the most rapid and lasting influence.....

In short, religion became, even as Loria has argued it ever is, the means for keeping a slave class in subjection to a master class. Those of my readers who may wish to learn something of the physical and moral degradation that accompanied the Industrial Revolution, and something of the disorganization in social life—a disorganization that seems to have come perilously near to social disruption—cannot do better than read the excellent and authoritative work from which I have so liberally quoted. They will learn therefrom, also, with what a dread the ruling class regarded the very mild aspirations of the new industrial proletariat, and how they were ready to employ any and every means for keeping the slave population in subordination to themselves.¹

The other feature of the religious life of the period covered by the Industrial Revolution was the Evangelical revival. Here, again, I will let the Hammonds speak.

It was in the new industrial districts that the Evangelical revival had the most rapid and lasting influence in building up a religious life outside the Established Church.....On this population, partly neglected, partly dragooned by the Church, there descended a religion that happened to supply almost everything that it wanted. The Church offered no function to the poor man.....The Chapel invited him to take a hand in the management of the affairs of his religious society.....As a mere exercise in self-government and social life, the Chapel occupied a central place in the affections and the thoughts of people who had very little to do with the government of anything else.....For the Methodist movement carried the self-governing tradition of the Old Nonconformist Chapel, which had shared in some degree the calm and cold philosophy of the Church into a wider world and touched that world with a living passion. The old Jewish civilization became actual and vivid to the men and women who listened to the rhetoric of the new type of preacher. The Sunday-schools, that spread rapidly over the north of England and the industrial districts, were primarily institutions for interpreting this civilization to children brought up in factories and mines.....A revival fed the imagination of the new population on the exciting history of a fierce and warlike race living under conditions very unlike those of Manchester or Leeds, leaving a literature rich in metaphor and image, which awakened, amid the bare and colourless life of the new civilization, dreams and reveries and visions full of awe and splendour. It is significant that this religion spread most quickly, and in its most extreme form, among the workers living in the deepest gloom, for the miners were particularly given to Methodism. Perhaps the very dangers of their employment prompted them to seek this special and miraculous sense of protection, just as the belief in the miraculous salvation of religion is particularly strong among the deep-sea fishermen of Brittany. This religion did for the working class what Greek and Roman literature did for the ruling class: drawing aside the curtain from a remote and interesting

world, seeming thus to make their own world more intelligible.

That the religious life of this country during the closing decades of the 18th century and the opening years of the 19th was determined in its nature by the change in economic conditions seems to be sufficiently well established.

The examination of the interrelations of industrial organization and theology in modern England will be delayed until the last section of this monograph, when we come to inquire whether it is probable that religion will ever completely disappear.

Let us now briefly investigate the connections between political and religious systems.

The dependence of religious forms upon political ones is clearly stated by Jevons in his *Comparative Religion*.

In the beginning, indeed, in all cases, the political community and the religious community are co-extensive and identical, and for long after the disruption of either is taken to involve the disruption of the other. The worship of the Babylonian pantheon, for instance, lasted no longer than the Babylonian empire.

And again,—

The community by whom a god was worshipped was in all cases, save that of Buddhism, originally a political community, and the worship was conducted in the interests of the community. The central religious rite, that of sacrifice, was accordingly in the hands of the ruler or of the ruling class, who were warriors.

Moreover, the particular forms into which religious energy flows are determined very largely by conditions of political existence. As Jevons says in the work already quoted from,—

In a small community, therefore, such as that of the Israelites,² which had a hard struggle for national existence, that is, for existence as a political and a religious community, it was natural that energy should be concentrated on the practical task of surviving in this world, and should not be dissipated in speculation as to the fortunes of individuals in the next life.

Among the ancient Persians, who were also a practical people, and who were, moreover, a conquering nation, there was, in consequence of their conquests and political success, opportunity and leisure to speculate on the next world. The direction their speculation took was obviously determined by the circumstances of their case. Speculation as to the next world arose while the Persians were still a closely-knit race and a conquering community: it was the closely-knit community which had conquered in the struggle for existence in this world—a struggle of the faithful band of the worshippers of Ormuzd against the followers of the evil principle who made up the rest of the population of the world—and it was the community which would gain the victory over the followers of Ahriman in the next world also.³

As amongst the ancient Persians, so also amongst the modern Mohammedans, paradise is reserved, for those who are members of a particular political community.....All men outside the political community are unbelievers, and, as such, are condemned to hell.

² Whilst the Jews remained a free, nomadic people, Jahveh was a fierce tribal deity. But with the destruction of the Jews as a separate political unit (Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and Judah by the Chaldeans in 586 B.C.), Jahveh was developed into the righteous creator and ruler of the universe. See Old Testament book bearing the name of Isaiah, chapters xl.-lv., inclusive.

³ The deterioration of the Persian religion was probably not unconnected with the political decline of the Persian empire. The development of the Persian eschatology was plainly aided by the growing consciousness of the fact that not before the last day would the ultimate triumph of Ormuzd and his faithful followers, the community of the Persians, come. Religious interests was transferred from this world to the world to come.—Jevons *Comparative Religion*.

¹ It was largely because of fear of the spread of the ideas that had sprung up with the French Revolution to this country, that the dominant class built barracks for the soldiery, who previously had been billeted in public and private houses. They were segregated lest they "fraternized" with the proletariat.

On the other hand,—

Egypt.....had already become an empire, fused of many separate communities, each with its own local god, or gods, before the belief in the next world assumed the vivid form depicted on the monuments. Thus, imperial Egypt became possessed of a pantheon.

And yet again,—

Where, or when, the community's struggle for existence tasks or overtakes its strength, the loss of the individual counts little, if by it the community may survive: "to every man upon this earth death cometh, soon or late." And the god of the community, just because he is the god of the community, takes the community's view. A man has no standing before him save as a member of the community; in his individual, personal capacity, the man has no claim upon the god. And if he has none in this world, neither has he in the next. No claim was recognized, or even made, in the religions of Assyria, Babylon, or of the Israelites, or of the early Greeks and Romans; all men went down alike into the nether world.

On the other hand, the religions which arose in successful and cosmopolitan organizations, such as the Eleusian and Orphic mysteries in the states of the Hellenic civilization, or Christianity in the Roman Empire, promised personal immortality to their adherents.

W. H. MORRIS.

(To be continued.)

Writers and Readers.

AN IMPRESSION OF KEATS, 1795—1821.

I TAKE it that I have no need to assure my readers that I am not one of those Freethinkers who carefully avoid poetry which is not in some way the expression of a rationalistic type of mind. Nor am I one of the fatuous propagandists who find pleasure in compelling every poet of out-standing merit to come within the fold of Freethought. The city of creative art is a noble and spacious one, and its freedom is not bestowed on the condition of adherence to any particular philosophy of life. The devout supernaturalism of Crashaw, Christina Rossetti or Coventry Patmore is not more alien to fine poetry than are the atheistic humanitarianism of Shelley, the spiritual antinomianism of Blake, the naturalism of James Thomson, or romantic paganism of John Keats. The genuine lover of poetry, to borrow Voltaire's fine phrase, has preferences but no exclusions.

If I may be allowed to say it, without inviting the charge of immodesty, it is precisely in virtue of a gift of critical sanity that I am now preludeing the chorus of praise which will go up to Keats on Wednesday next. The 23rd February is the centenary of the death of the young poet at Rome from consumption of the lungs. It is a pity that he did not live long enough to know that the kinship he once claimed with Shakespeare, Spenser and Chatterton was largely justified. The illusion of the immortality of fame would have brought comfort to him in his long drawn-out suffering; more especially as the Christian doctrine of a life after death had apparently no meaning for him. Of his attitude to religion there is no definite record, and even if there were there is no need to attach much importance to the theology of poets which is usually rather vague. It invariably results in what is contemptuously described as chatter. Keats' friendship with Leigh Hunt, who was brought up on Voltaire, no doubt brought him into contact with Freethought of a mild deistic sort, and the more definite Atheism of Shelley's earlier work may have helped to strengthen his natural revolt from the commercialized orthodoxy of the age. Hessey, an evangelical believer and a member of the firm which published Keats' first volume, is reported by Severn as declaring his "regretful remembrance of having heard poor Keats utter the most extraordinary and revolting opinions." He may have had in mind the poet's pagan ideas on the subject of death? We know that Keats had provided himself with a bottle of laudanum as a lethal escape from the agony of a too protracted death,

and that he reproached Severn for refusing to give it him when the end was near. It has been noted that he attributed Severn's untiring devotion and affection to his "Christian faith" and deprecated his own petulance. At such a moment, and by the inevitable approach of an all too early death, we cannot blame a man over much for not standing squarely to his opinions. Yet, it is curious to note that Severn was not proving, as he thought, the innate religious bias of the poet's mind when he tells us ingenuously that Keats asked him to read some of the more eloquent passages in Jeremy Taylor. It is not hard to understand that Severn mistook his friend's natural craving for beauty for a desire of religious consolation. However that may be it is good to think that the tired spirit passed away in an atmosphere created by the sweet sustained harmonies, the subtle cadences and dying falls of the loveliest of seventeenth century prose writers.

John Keats was born in 1795. His parents belonged to what we should call the lower middle class. He was put to a fairly good school, but was taken away at an early age and apprenticed to a surgeon. His imagination, like Shakespeare's, was not hampered by the fetters of a long drilling in Greek and Latin verse-making. He might have been a capable surgeon, for he had much more of energy and practical common sense than his admirers imagine, but his health and emotional temperament were against him; or to put it more correctly, the call of poetry was too strong. He gave up medicine and turned to literature, moving in a set which was ridiculed later by North British criticasters as the Cockney School. The chief figure in this group was Leigh Hunt, who was a fine poet at his best, and at his worst not only bad but detestably bad. Keats' first book was published in 1817 and fell quite flat. The critic's ears were not fine enough to catch new elusive melodies. They passed over one of the finest sonnets since Milton, the one "On reading Chapman's *Homer*." They could see nothing but wordiness in a passage like this:—

Here are sweet peas, on tip-toe for a flight;
With wings of gentle flush o'er delicate white,
And taper fingers catching at all things,
To bind them all about with tiny rings.

We hate them for their stupidity, but, alas, we may be doing the same for some Keats of our later day.

"*Endymion*, a poetic romance" was issued in 1818. It is a re-creation in the romantic spirit of a Greek myth, and is divided into four books of a thousand lines each. The story is as hazy as that in Meredith's *Modern Love*. At least, it is so at the first reading, but when you have made a habit of reading it you find that its indistinctiveness of outline is no small part of its charm. Its impression of nature will remind you of Turner at his best. It is an absolutely new note in English verse, as unlike Shelley as Shelley is unlike Byron. Most people, I am afraid, even lovers of our verse, praise it without taking the trouble to read it. This is plain because they always stress the qualities which, for those who know, are not the best. I invite anyone to say if he knows a finer hymn to Pan in all English verse, or in classical verse, for that matter, than the chorus in Book I., or a more heart-easing melody than the song beginning "O Sorrow, why dost borrow" in Book IV. You get the whole of Keats in *Endymion*. You even get his opinions on such high matters as statecraft and regal pomps and splendours in the splendid opening of Book III. It is all the rankest radical sedition, the poet's indictment of those—

Who lord it o'er their fellow-men
With most prevailing tinsel: who unpen
Their baaing vanities, to browse away
The comfortable green and juicy hay
From human pastures.

Naturally, it stirred to anger the patriotic gentlemen who undertook to direct the public taste. One of them, with Scottish urbanity, told the poet that it was a better and wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet, and advised him to go back to the shop to his plasters, pills, and ointment boxes, and try to recognize his own imperturbable drivelling idiocy.

In the preface to *Endymion*, which shows the fine critical temperament of the poet, the weak spots are in-

licated unerringly. This weakness is diagnosed as the yeasty ferment of adolescence, from which proceeds a certain mawkishness, a cloying and sometimes vulgar sentimentalism. It is there, certainly, but not so obtrusively that we cannot easily ignore it. It says much for Keats' sanity that he was the first to see this fault, and in his last volume there is little or nothing of it. The *Lamia* volume was published in the July of 1820. This supreme contribution to the treasures of English poetry was dismissed with ignorant contempt by men who were capable of taking something like the correct measure of Wordsworth and Byron. And yet Keats has had a wider influence on our verse than any other poet of his time. He is the acknowledged master of Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti and William Morris. Those who know Keats know him by his last book, and it must be admitted that they have the best of him there. They have the supreme lyricist in English poetry. The odes are triumphantly lovely in idea, in form and phrasing. The one ballad *La belle dame sans merci* is apparently a simple artless little story, yet if you come to analyse its effect you find that it is not simple at all but so subtle and complex that you find new and unexpected meanings every time you read it. It is just life transfigured by art.

The sonnets everyone knows, or should know, especially the last one. They are greater than Rossetti; or they seem so to me, because they are less laboured in form and not quite so scornfully perfect. The narrative poems are favourites with lovers of preraphaelite art in which decoration, luxuriously or delicately coloured, plays an important part. Let me give one example of Keats' lyric quality. It is a little song, not too well-known, which dwells in my memory as lovingly, as persistently, as an air by Berlioz.

Asleep! O sleep a little while, white pearl!
And let me kneel, and let me pray to thee,
And let me call Heaven's blessing on thine eyes,
And let me breathe into the happy air
That doth enfold and touch thee all about,
Vows of my slavery, my giving up,
My sudden adoration, my great love!

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Acid Drops.

Those of our readers who may be looking over their income tax papers—they will not be permitted to overlook them—will, if they turn to the list of estimates printed on the back, observe that the demands for the financial year are for Army, Navy and Air Force, £230,429,000. For education, Ministry of Health, etc., £90,346,000. That is the way we are preparing the world for universal peace, creating a huge vested interest that shall be vitally concerned in seeing that it never comes to pass. Once more we ask, Who was the liar who first said that man was a reasonable being? If every religious paper in the country would print those figures in bold headlines across the top of its pages we might soon have a little more attention directed to it than is at present the case. The world is really being organized for war, and still more war. And when it comes there will be another campaign of lying to prove that the other fellow commenced it.

The American woman who started fasting in order to get her husband to join the Church, and who declared that God had told her it would bring her husband round, has taken food—and the husband is still where he was. We should say that he has good grounds for a divorce.

A Chicago paper says that the new chaplain of the Senate has been elected to the post because of his character for brevity in the praying line. That is certainly as good a recommendation that a chaplain could have.

Frances Johnson, a Sunday-school teacher, was fined £20 or 51 days in prison for stealing £225 at Birmingham. The value of a Christian training is not marked in this instance.

The Bishop of Llandaff (in conjunction with the Holy Ghost) has decided to make a new diocese in Monmouthshire. Presumably, a new diocese will necessitate a new bishop, who will require a new income—and a good one.

A decoration of sculpture for the London County Council Hall is intended to depict "the creation of Eve." We wonder if the artist has visualized Colonel Ingersoll's striking description, based on "Genesis," of the Almighty, with Adam's rib in his hand, making up His mind whether to start the world with a blonde or a brunette.

Along with Dean Inge, Dr. Orchard has the knack of saying some very straight, and, therefore, awkward things to the Christian world. His latest deliverance is that the choice for Christians is rapidly becoming one between Catholicism and Atheism. It will be remembered that this was also the opinion of two men, otherwise so widely separated, as Cardinal Newman and Charles Bradlaugh. We need hardly say that we quite agree with the conclusion. Just as on the wider issue there is no logical midway house between Atheism and Theism, so on the narrower issue, if a Christian has any sense of logic, and trusts to its guidance, he is bound to go back to a form of faith of which the Roman Church is representative, or forward to the Atheist position. Compromises of any sort cannot last for ever.

In this connection it is worth noting that, so far as we are aware, not a single notice of Mr. Cohen's last book, *Theism or Atheism*, has appeared in the ordinary press. We are not complaining because we did not expect otherwise. The work is of too uncompromising a character and is written too plainly for the press to say anything about it. They cannot make an effective reply, and they dare not say anything in its praise. Fortunately, we do not depend upon the press for publicity, and what is gained without its assistance is secure from its silence. And everyone will be pleased to learn that the book is selling steadily, as steadily as anything that has been published during the past few years.

The Chief Constable of Hartlepool stated at the local Licensing Session that Sunday cinemas had proved a great factor in reducing drunkenness. Yet the Churches say "no play, all pray," and insist on a Sunday of gloom.

The controversy concerning Sunday recreation has called attention to the fact that the old Sabbath Act of Charles the Second is hopelessly out-of-date. Also that only three per cent. of Londoners are church goers at all, let along regular worshippers.

A musical editor is quite upset at the news that German organists are being engaged in Irish churches. But, why not? Jesus Christ was not an Englishman, or even an Irishman.

Speaking at a meeting of Protestant Dissenters on February 10, Mr. John Massie said that what they wanted was to put an end to "the State preference of one Church and the establishment and endowment of it." The matter does not seem to us properly expressed. The proper aim should be to put an end to the State preference of all Churches. We doubt if Mr. Massie would agree, in spite of his being a prominent member of the Liberation Society. For this would involve the exclusion of religious ceremonies from all our public and civic functions. Anything less than that would only mean the disestablishing of one Church and the immediate re-establishing of the lot. The proper rule should be for the State to leave religion severely alone, giving to religious organizations the same amount of legal protection and privileges that are given to organizations in general. But Christian notions of liberty are traditionally peculiar.

Archdeacon Wakeford, Precentor at Lincoln Cathedral, has been found guilty by the Consistory Court on charges

of immorality with an unknown woman at a Peterborough hotel. Formerly he was a well-known Liverpool Vicar, and during the coming Lenten Season is advertised to deliver a series of five mid-day sermons at Liverpool on "Christ." We can well imagine what the exclamation of the "Man-in-the-Street" will be when he reads this! Perhaps the Reverend Gentleman has taken too seriously his Lord and Master's remarks when the woman taken in adultery was brought before him. It would have been quite a good defence. We would advise the Archdeacon to "take it to the Lord in prayer."

A somewhat different case is that of the Vicar of St. George's, Millom, Cumberland. He is suffering from "encephalitis lethargica" (sleeping sickness). He sleeps for most of the 24 hours and the doctors say that his present state will continue for some weeks. Personally, we care but little how or with whom the clergy sleep, but we are seriously concerned as to when the members of their congregations are going to wake up!

Trinity Church, Kingsway, put out the following notice on February 11: "Stolen from God. Two brass candlesticks, part of the ornaments of the altar." Now suppose the candlesticks are recovered, will the owner prosecute? If the owner cannot be brought forward, how will those who do establish the fact that they are trustees for this property? And if not, in what way will the takers of the candlesticks be liable? It seems to us that they might put in a claim that there was no legal owner at all. Perhaps some of our legal readers will help us untangle the matter.

We have before observed that the controversy set going by Canon Barnes' statement that he did not accept the truth of the story of the fall of man, as given in the Bible, indicates that a large number of members of both Churches and Chapels are still living in the dark ages. People who had any real right to call themselves educated would no more discuss the truth of a fable of that kind than they would be found discussing the historical accuracy of "Jack and the Bean-stalk." That a man who dares to say that he does not believe in the Adam and Eve story should be hailed as a daring thinker makes one realize that there is still a good deal of spade work in Freethought yet to be done.

But a curious comment on the matter reaches us from the *New York Literary Digest*, which quotes the *American Churchman* as saying that Canon Barnes took too much for granted because "the results of Biblical criticism, which the great majority of the clergy now assume that all men are moderately familiar with, have not yet permeated the resistant mass of Christian opinion. People do not know as much about the results of modern Biblical scholarship as some of us suppose they do." That we take to mean that so long as the people do not know the truth about the Bible there is no need for any of the clergy to let the cat out of the bag. That gives one a fair measure of the intellectual honesty of the pulpit. Their business is not to tell the truth, even so far as it is known. The rule is to keep on preaching the same old lie until there is a danger of being found out. Then the policy is to so tell the truth that it is little more than the old falsehood. And yet some folk are surprised to find the mental calibre of the clergy sinking generation after generation. The pulpit is rapidly becoming a place that only a fool or a rogue can occupy.

The *Boston Pilot*, speaking on behalf of the Roman Catholics, quietly settles the matter. It says that, "The decisions of the highest tribunal of the Church on Biblical matters does not leave this matter open for discussion. It has been settled once and for all." It says that for Catholics "The doctrine of the fall of man can never be expunged from the Bible. It is the word of eternal truth." We suppose that does settle it, and we certainly have more respect for that decision than we have for those who, while giving up the doctrine, stick like glue to the emoluments.

The Leeds Education Committee proposes to make a yearly grant of £250 to the local Roman Catholic College. We sincerely hope that the Board of Education will decline to sanction the vote. A strong local agitation ought to be started against it being done, and the Labour party ought to be to the front in the agitation. But we are not very hopeful of help in that direction. The Labour leaders seem rather too fearful of giving offence to the gentlemen of the black robe.

In the House of Lords the other day the young man who is pleading his own case in the action for wrongful commitment to an asylum, took occasion to quote the Bible and to refer to certain things as "unchristian." At this Lord Haldane intervened and reminded him that they could not listen to any argument that went beyond the law of the land, and that "Parliament had over and over again passed statutes overruling the principles of Christianity." We have no doubt but that his lordship had in mind the recent decision in the Bowman case, in its way the most important ever given in the long struggle for religious liberty. That settled once and for all the old-fashioned belief that Christianity was a part of the law of England. What remains to be done now is to see that all the laws which discriminate in favour of religion should be wiped away. It is bound to come one day. The only question is, when?

There seems to be a revolt going on all over the world against the Puritan Sunday, even though in the United States there is at present in process a violent attempt to reintroduce the old-fashioned and radically immoral day of rest. But we have before us a cutting from a paper published in Dutch Guiana which contains a leading article evidently written to counteract the introduction of a "secular" Sunday. In the course of the article, the writer discovers that the reason why we won the war was because we were a nation that had maintained a Puritan Sunday. According to some of our own clergy the war was brought upon us because we did not keep the Sunday as we ought to have done. Now we wonder which is correct? The inference we draw from the article is that the "Sawbath" is in a bad way.

When the police of Detroit rounded up a gang of coal thieves, the other day, they found they had caught a minister of the gospel, one Rev. Isaiah Wilson. With the help of his associates, the reverend had sidetracked and unloaded ten carloads of coal in the past few months. Perhaps the organized band of looters thought to be in fashion and so appointed to themselves a chaplain.

—Truthseeker (New York).

Those interested in a free Sunday will be amused to hear that the clergy play cricket on that tabooed day—when they are out of England. In Nairobi, Uganda, a cricket match was played on a Sunday, two members of one team being parsons. "How's that, umpire?"

In the State of Virginia it is required that one must advertise in the local press that one intends to carry weapons. That will explain the following which is sent us from a correspondent:—

NOTICE

To Whom It May Concern:

The undersigned O. C. Huston, residing at Seventh avenue, in the City of Huntington, Cabell county, West Virginia, by occupation, minister of religion, will, on January 18, 1921, the 13th day of the January term of the Circuit Court of Cabell county, West Virginia, make application to the said court for a license to carry a pistol, as provided by Section 7, Chapter 148, Code of West Virginia.

J10-10t

O. C. HUSTON.

Now what is the matter with prayer, we wonder!

Women are not so docile nor so submissive from the Church's point of view as they used to be. Miss Maude Royden, who is a zealous Churchwoman, has struck hard against the ecclesiastical attitude on divorce. She said that the clergy failed to recognize that "all marriages made in church were not made by God."

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements

February 20, Workman's Hall, Ton Pentre; February 27, Friars Hall; March 6, Swansea; March 13, Leicester; March 20, Stratford Town Hall; March 27, Leeds.

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.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—R. Moore, 5s.; T. Wilkins, 5s. Per F. Rose (Bloemfontein)—B. Epstein, £1 1s.; H. Meyers, £1 1s.; A. Cohen, 10s. 6d.; S. Cohen, 10s. 6d.; L. Lenk, 5s.; A. Schwartz, 10s. 6d.; F. Rose, £3 3s.

S. J. BUSH.—Sorry that we are unable to use the poem. The sentiment is a worthy one but the expression of it not quite all it might be.

W. ALLEN.—We quite agree with you as to the effect on Free-thought propaganda, but it is one of the inconveniences that we have to face. And principles must stand above personalities.

J. MORTON.—Received. Many thanks.

T. ELSEY.—We should have no objection to meeting anyone in debate provided he was worth debating with. The trouble is to get some of that type. Those who have the intelligence to conduct a debate that would be worth listening to have usually enough intelligence not to take it on.

H. IRVING.—Pleased to learn that your Branch has offered to supply the Barnsley Public Library with a weekly copy of the *Freethinker*, and that the Committee has accepted the offer. It will not be your fault if the Barnsley folk are not well acquainted with the "One and Only."

MR. A. HARRY HERON, of Eccleshall Road, South, Sheffield, would be glad to hear from Mr. G. L. Mackenzie. Perhaps Mr. Mackenzie will oblige.

F. C. WYKES.—Thanks. Quite useful, as you will see.

The "*Freethinker*" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to the office.

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.

To-day (February 20) Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Workman's Hall, Ton Pentre, near Pontypridd. He will occupy the platform afternoon and evening, and we are informed that big meetings are anticipated. We hope to hear that these have materialized.

Branches of the N. S. S. will by this time have received their notices concerning the selection of a place for the forthcoming Annual Conference. We hope they will also be considering the question of what motions they desire

placing on the Agenda, and also the election of delegates. There will be one or two rather important matters on the Agenda this year.

We desire to call special attention to the Secular Education League, an advertisement of which appears in another part of this paper. We need not say anything to Freethinkers of the great importance of the work carried on by the League. It has succeeded in bringing all sorts of men and women into line on this important question, and it represents a machinery that will be of great value if ever the question comes to the front as a political issue, and that is bound to occur sooner or later. Meanwhile, the League proceeds with its propaganda, and it would be a thousand pities for the League to have its work brought to a standstill for want of funds. At the moment it is greatly in need of financial help, and there are a large number of our readers who might feel disposed to join the League. The Secretary is Mr. Harry Snell, and the address of the League 19 Buckingham Street, Strand, W.C. We commend the matter to those of our readers who feel inclined to help the League, either with a subscription or by becoming a member.

The West Ham Branch is holding another of its Social Evenings in the Metropolitan Music Academy, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, on Saturday, March 5. There will be the usual programme of games, songs, and dances, from 7 o'clock till 11. Admission is free, and all Freethinkers are invited.

We have been rather disappointed in the demand for the bound volumes of the *Freethinker*, and also for the index and binding cases. We have many applications from time to time for index and title page, and the preparation of an index has meant a deal of work to say nothing of the expense. We have still a number of covers and index on sale, and are sending these to those who require them at a charge of 3s. 6d. Up to the present it looks as though the demand will not warrant our repeating the experiment another year. And yet there seems to be a demand for the bound volumes, judging by copies of them we have seen advertised at fancy prices in second-hand booksellers' catalogues.

The Cremation Society has elaborated a scheme for the free registration of all who wish to place on record their wishes while living. We are informed that a very large number of registrations have taken place. The Society's offices are at 52 New Cavendish Street, London, W.

There was an improved audience at the Friars Hall on Sunday last to listen to Mr. Lloyd's lecture on "The Story of the Earth." The platform to-day (February 20) will be occupied by Mr. Thresh. His subject is "The Evolution of Man." We trust the audience will show a still further growth in point of numbers.

The casualty list in the newspaper world continues to grow. The death of the *Globe*, the oldest evening paper in London, is followed by the amalgamation of the *Athenæum* with the *Nation*. In the provinces the same thing is also taking place. In all cases it is the high cost of printing that is held responsible. We think we have every reason to congratulate ourself on being still in the land of the living, and quite healthy.

We have had several enquiries about the remarkable book *Communism and Christianity*, written by an equally remarkable American Bishop, William Montgomery Brown. The author is an ex-Bishop of the American Episcopal Church, and a thorough-going Freethinker. Both he and his wife are admirers of the *Freethinker* and its work, and we now hear from them that the first large edition of the book has been exhausted, and a second one is expected in the course of a few days. Of this edition they are sending over several hundred copies and desire these to be sold for the benefit of this journal. We are obliged to them for their generosity, and as soon as they reach us their arrival will be made public.

Elijah.

FOR the past five years, during the Operatic Season at "The Old Vic," I have paid my annual visit to hear the beautiful and melodious music of Mendelssohn's "Elijah," given in operatic form instead of in the original setting of oratorio; I have gone, not as a religious exercise, but as a lover of good music, rendered by a splendid company of talented vocalists, an efficient orchestra and a well trained chorus of close on fifty performers. I have heard the part of Elijah sung on one of these occasions by that talented baritone Mr. Thorpe Bates; on another by Mr. Allen Engles, and last but not least by Mr. Joseph Farrington, each of these accomplished vocalists not only having sung the music, but enacted the part of the Hebrew prophet with rare skill and dramatic effect.

This year the staging of the opera has been more complete, in some respects, than in any previous year. But all the time I have been listening to the music I have been thinking of the absolute improbability of the story of Elijah raising the widow's son to life by such a palpably absurd method as stretching himself on the child three times, crying unto the Lord: "O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again." How far the return of the soul was helped by Elijah stretching himself on the child thrice we are not informed by the narrative (see Kings xvii. 21), but we are told that "the Lord heard the voice of Elijah and the soul of the child came into him again, and Elijah delivered the child unto the mother who said: "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth." This episode is introduced into the opera, but the raising of the child is performed inside the widow's abode, the interior of which is not seen by the audience. Before this, however, Obadiah (the tenor), one of the faithful among the children of Israel, sings the beautiful solo "If with all your heart ye truly seek him, ye shall ever surely find him, thus saith our Lord," which assuredly implies that the majority of the Israelites who had forsaken their god Jehovah, and had listened to the prophets of Baal, had not approached the subject in all sincerity and with the single object of finding out which of these Gods was the true God. So Elijah, when he comes again among the people, proposes, with the approval of the multitude, to put these Gods to the test. He suggests the following method, which seems extremely reasonable and practicable to the people. And Elijah came unto all the people and said: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." (Kings xviii. 21.) In other words, Elijah's statement of the real issue was unanswerable. "Then said Elijah unto the people, I even I, alone, remain a prophet of the Lord, but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men." Now although Elijah was in the ridiculous minority of one, he, nevertheless, was prepared to back his God against that of all the prophets of Baal. So he made the following suggestion and challenge as a test:—

Let them (the Baalites), therefore, give us two bullocks, and let them choose one bullock for themselves and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood and put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock and lay it on wood and put no fire under; and call on the name of your gods and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God; and all the people said "It is well spoken." (Kings xviii 23,24.)

Then the contest opens. In the opera it leads to a glorious chorus. The Baalites call upon their gods with great vigour, and at considerable length; but as there was no time limit set in the terms of the agree-

ment, I suppose the Baalites would have gone on calling until the crack of doom, if Elijah had not interposed with the supposed usual infidel suggestion and sneer, which, in these days, if spoken in some open spaces or public parks would expose him to the risk of being charged with blasphemy, or at least with "using insulting language calculated to cause a breach of the peace," for we are told that it came to pass, at noon (I can vouch for that, as far as the opera is concerned it occurred in the afternoon performance), that Elijah mocked them and said: "Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure, he sleepeth and must be awakened; and they cried aloud and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets till the blood gushed out upon them" (verses 27, 28).

Then came Elijah's turn. And, of course, he took the stage for it. After having seen that the bullock was in order on the altar, he directed that four barrels of water should be poured on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood; this he told his followers to do, not once, nor twice, but three times—and then he began to call upon his god—"Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word." And the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice. And when the people saw it they fell on their faces—and they said, "The Lord he is the God! The Lord he is the God!" (verses 37-39). And so you see in this case, dear reader, the Israelites had ocular demonstration.

Now the scene of the electrical spark coming down from the wings at "The Vic" was most effective, and it would have puzzled most of the members of the audience, Christians or Freethinkers, to have guessed how it was done; but the illusion was perfect, and immediately the spark had fallen, a great flame was kindled, and grew and spread, so that the bullocks, or whatever was used as a stage substitute for them, were consumed and turned to ashes. Soon, of course, the whole multitude was converted at one stroke by this triumphant demonstration, and shouted out "The Lord he is the God!" But Elijah was not satisfied. He wanted to do what all religious autocrats have done when they have had the masses behind them. So he straightway called on the people to "Take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them, and Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slew them there" (verse 40).

After this Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel, but he cast himself down again and "put his face between his knees." The young child of the widow, however, is sent up as a messenger into the mountain side to notice if anything is to be seen from that altitude, but he returns and says that he *can see nothing*; he is told to go again and again, and when he have gone seven times—everything in the Bible goes in sevens or forties—he replies, that it came to pass that "Behold, there arose a little cloud out of the seas like a man's hand; and he said go up, say unto Ahab: Prepare the chariot and get thee down that the rain stop thee not."

And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heavens were black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain and Ahab rode and went to Jazreel. And the hand of the Lord was on Elijah and he girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jazreel (verses 44-46).

Shortly after Elijah finds that the people are enraged against him again, consequently he takes a day's journey into the wilderness and he begs that the Lord should take away his life, for he says "I am not better than my father," which from a human point of view is probably true. Elijah dies and ascends to heaven, but not in the fashion mentioned in the second book of Kings (ii. 11), for it says there that

"Behold there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." With all their wonderful stage effects at the "Vic" they could not give a realistic representation of "chariots and horses of fire," but they did the best they could and showed Elijah going up the mountain side, and when he reached the top a flash of light played over the mountain and the prophet disappeared.

The opera, which follows the Bible story very closely, including all the episodes recorded above, contains some glorious melodies and lovely choruses in Mendelssohn's matchless style, and though the Freethinker may find rich material for controversy in Elijah's dialogue with the Baalites, he will find nothing but the most enchanting music from the opening recitative of Elijah to the grand chorus at the close. It has, however, often struck me when attending these annual performances that Christians do not ask themselves why their God does not try and convert unbelievers to-day by some such method as that adopted in the glorious religious days of the prophet Elijah.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Theosophy.¹

THE survival of superstition in so-called cultured modern society is almost enough to make one despair of the value of education.

When the most preposterous nonsense is garnered and cherished by minds capable of acquiring wisdom, it is but human if many, who have hoped for much from the spread of education, begin to ask—is it worth it? Is it worth while trying to spread the principles and teachings of Freethought, if so many of the learned not only accept but teach superstition?

It is worth while; very largely because there is so much hard work and fighting to be done for Freethought, in the sense of thought that is free from the power of other-worldism in all its forms.

In a small work on *Theosophy*, by Mrs. Annie Besant, who is acknowledged to be both educated and cultured, we are treated to a body of superstitious ideas of the most barbaric kind.

At the outset, Theosophy is put before us as a means of knowing God, based as it is on the belief that men can obtain, and have obtained, direct knowledge of some being who is external to and immanent in the universe. That is, "Theosophy is derived from two Greek words—Theos, God; Sophia, Wisdom—and is, therefore, God-Wisdom, Divine Wisdom." "The obtaining of 'a direct knowledge of God' is—as we shall see in dealing with the religious aspect of Theosophy—the ultimate object of all Theosophy" (p. 9).

No proof of the existence of the God concerning whom we are to be blest with so much wisdom is given, of course. It is enough for the Theosophist to assume that there must be "Somebody" somehow in the great "Somewhere." Given a capital letter or two and a body of doctrine, worthy of any of our primitive ancestors, can be formulated.

If the God of Theosophy does exist, we are no better off than with the God of any other superstition.

The world-system as described by Theosophy is arranged so as to provide for the attainment of perfection, by methods which are wasteful, painful and slow, as we shall see.

Theosophy has its exoteric side which propounds dogmas to the intellect, and an esoteric side which reveals truth to the spirit. The one is seen and can be defended by reason; "the other is grasped by intuition—that faculty 'beyond the reason' after which the philosophy of the West is now groping" (p. 10).

¹ The quotations are from *Theosophy*, by Annie Besant (*The People's Books*—Jack).

Which is but the old and pathetic little stage-trick by means of which religion seeks to save its face under the claim of a special means of knowing things. It never seems to dawn upon any religionist that revelation by intuition is essentially bad, if only because "God" reveals one thing to one believer and the opposite to another, and then "kicks" them both that they are right. The danger of religious intuition, as it is called, lies in the fact that it constitutes its own authority, and disregards appeal to the facts of life. Every religionist who believes he has intuitively received divine wisdom, believes himself to be right on the authority of his own intuition.

Whatever the value of intuition to individual Theosophists, Mrs. Besant is evidently convinced that its authority on the side of theosophical doctrines is not sufficient to supplant the teaching of Christianity.

Hence, a few words of condescending patronage.

She informs us that in reply to the attack upon Christianity by Comparative Mythologists, Theosophy has discharged her guns and saved the situation for the friends of religion, by turning Comparative Mythology into Comparative Religion. Thus:—

The name Theosophy, which, as we have said, is Greek, was first used by Ammonius Saccas, in the third century after Christ, and has remained ever since in the history of religion in the West, denoting not only Mysticism, but also an eclectic system, which accepts truth wherever it is to be found, and cares little for its outer trappings. It appeared in its present form in America and Europe in 1875, at the time when Comparative Mythology was being used as an effective weapon against Christianity, and, by transforming it into Comparative Religion, it built the researches and discoveries of archaeologists and antiquarians into bulwarks of defence for the friends of religion, instead of leaving them as missiles of attack for its enemies" (pp. 12-13.) "Into that Europe Theosophy suddenly came, asserting the Gnosis as against Agnosticism, Comparative Religion against Comparative Mythology" (p. 14).

There can be no rational objection to accepting truth from any nook and corner of the universe, but it is important that we should be careful about its outer trappings. If I may so phrase it, truth in false dress is not entirely true.

To talk of Comparative Religion as having saved Christianity from the attacks of Comparative Mythology is to talk nonsense. Comparative Religion is but a department of Comparative Mythology, and the work of the Comparative Mythologists will continue to destroy the pretensions and expound the natural development of Christianity whatever Theosophists may do in striving to erect "bulwarks of defence for the friends of religion."

Myth does not cease to be such when it is called religion; and Mrs. Besant is but propagating myth when she professes to find the origin of all religions in a "Brotherhood of Divine Men, which sent out one of its members into the world from time to time to found a new religion."

The mythological nature of Theosophy is revealed in the way in which Mrs. Besant treats of the nature of man.

Man, we are told, has an etheric double which permeates and extends beyond his physical body. It is upon this etheric double that the health of the dense body depends. The "double" draws its energy direct from the Sun, and having divided it into streams, conveys it to the various organs of the physical body. Death is the complete withdrawal of the double from its dense counterpart, but the "etheric double" is able to remain with the conscious part of man's make-up for about thirty-six hours after death. Then it "is thrown off by the Man as of no further use" (p. 27).

This, which is put forth as science, is not the lowest stage of degradation to which the "science" of Theosophy descends.

We are informed that there is connected with our earth an astral or aethereal sphere, and in order that man may have experience of the astral world he is provided with an astral body which sometimes accompanies the physical body. This astral body "appears as a cloud, or as a defined oval, according as the owner is little or much developed" (p. 28).

So wonderful is this astral body that I quote the following rather long passage to illustrate the intellectualism of Theosophical science:—

When the man in his higher bodies draws away from the physical—as he does every night in sleep—then the astral body assumes the likeness of the physical. Astral matter being very plastic under the influence of thought, a man appears in the astral world in the likeness of himself, as he sees himself, wearing the clothes of which he thinks. A soldier, slain in battle, and appearing in his astral body to a distant friend, will bear his wounds; a drowned man will appear in dripping clothes. While human beings in the astral world normally wear human forms, the inhabitants of that world, who have not had physical bodies—higher fairies, nature-spirits connected with the evolution of plant and animal life, and the like—wear bodies that are constantly changing their outlines and sizes. Sportive elementals—as native spirits are often called—will sometimes take advantage of this plasticity of astral matter to swell themselves up into huge and terrible shapes for the sake of terrifying untrained intruders into their world. Some drugs, such as hashish, bhang, opium, and extreme alcoholic poisoning, so affect the physical nerves as to render them susceptible to astral vibrations, and then the patients catch glimpses of some inhabitants of the astral world.

The horrors which torment a man suffering from delirium tremens are largely due to the sight of the loathsome elementals that gather round places where liquor is sold, and feed on its exhalations, and are attracted round by the effluvia of his own drink-sodden body" (pp. 28-29).

It is thus that the nightmares and myths of early man are persisted in by modern Theosophists, in spite of their claims to culture and learning; and we are asked to drug our minds by accepting for truth the worst elements of primitive thought.

Just as the savage, in his ignorance, accounted for pains and pleasures by imagining the existence of a good or evil spirit within the body, so Mrs. Besant accounts for them by means of the "astral." And just as exorcism was believed to drive out evil spirits and wrong actions were wont to drive out good spirits for the savage, so in the philosophy of Mrs. Besant will anaesthetics and mesmerism drive away the "astral." "All feelings of pleasure and pain in the physical body are due to the presence of the interpenetrating astral, and, if this be driven out by anaesthetics or mesmerism, feeling disappears from the physical body" (p. 29). E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

(To be concluded.)

A Cleft in the Hills.

It was Sunday—all those bloodless but thrilling adventures of mine seem to happen on Sunday, perhaps the only day in which I have leisure to seek them—what wholesome aroma of the dear old brown moist earth and tawny tangled herbage by the wayside—the frost had gone and the mists of our Northland had rolled apart, and ever so gently quiet blue skies smiled amid the soft fleecy clouds of a Winter day—there was yet no sunshine, and the air was cold, but in earth and skies there was a hint of Spring, already in the strong heart of the primrose plants the buds would fain be showing—there was much of the "maniac winter" to come—we knew it would come and go—like all our troubles this, too, would pass—we would hold fast by

the present and rest and rejoice in the lull in the storm, in the cleft in the hills!

My old friend John was with me, who was sixty-five, as some readers may remember when he figured in the "Robes of Pan," now nearly seventy years of age, but still able to drive the engine of an express passenger train at sixty miles an hour, a little slower of step perhaps, slow and sure and keen in his judgment of men and things, almost bigoted in his intellectual honesty, a damned nuisance to all right thinking people, almost boring to his likes at times with his eternal querulous criticisms of God and man, God's ministers and man's masters. He is a Freethinker—if such an opinionated old gentleman can be called such—and ought to have been a ruffian, but was merely a placid, kindly, considerate, generous old man. No perfect saint either, but with sufficient moral and intellectual gold in his make up to redeem his worst sins—while the latter, if he had them, were his misfortunes rather than his fault.

We came upon the cleft in the hill, not accidentally, for it was our objective, where it branched off from a roadway set in a rugged limestone ravine and opposite an extinct limekiln. The snow waters of the little stream from the cleft, and from the hills beyond, shone cool and silvery in the quiet light, and tinkled musically under the roadway on its way to replenish the reservoir. All was bare around this little cleft, with its tangle of hazel, dogrose, honeysuckle, hawthorn, sloethorn, and bramble sprays, supporting, amid their dark stems, the dried brown leaves of fern and bracken, all in most delightful contrast and disorder; the grey, lichened, mossed and ivied rock beneath, shimmering by the silvery pool, completed the more immediate picture. Where the winding S-shaped channel deepened, or where the rocky soil rose higher, the tiny jet of water glissaded rather than fell, smoothing in its passage the black and shaggy moss on a sloping rock. So constant and so swift, how long had it trickled there, varied by the brown and leaping torrent when it rained in the hills? We could not tell, the stone is very hard, and protected by the moss, wears but little, but it wears, so much was evident in the slight indentation of many hundred years. Why, then, are so many rationalists so unreasonably impatient with "the eternal rock of holy scripture," which is not eternal, and which is changing while we gaze? Under this water slide in the deeper inner grot, my friend stooped over the stream to hear what it was saying, as when a boy he used to listen to the familiar voices in the babble of many waters like poor little Paul Dombey when he wondered:—

What are the wild waves saying,
Sister, the whole day long?

Sweet, if a little sad, was the aspect of my fellow worshipper in this mother church of nature.

So pathos is mingled with pleasure, so the one inspires the other. So the church of humanity stands the test of time while creeds like Christianity pass away. That impossible Proteus of vicarious pain, the suffering Christ, is unnecessary even as a symbol; the human and actual are poignant and persuasive enough. To all but the morally irreclaimable—for whom vicarious atonement may be the only salvation, and not in this world, and not saving this world from them—the heavens and hells of the present can alone make men happy, moral, good and wise. The Christian heaven is not so attractive after all, for here our treasure is, while the Christian hell loses its terrors in the frequent hells we have on earth. But to avoid what may seem to the metaphysical mind a too abrupt and crude conclusion, it may be here, and quite pertinently asked: Does the contemplation of this one terminable, however happy, existence fully satisfy the higher infinite yearnings of the human spirit? To which it may be answered quite frankly that, given such a yearning, it

does not; but it is the commonest of common experience that our strongest yearnings have a more immediate, mundane, and intelligible connection; the desire for immortality is merely the wish, sublimated and confused, for longer life in the world as we know it; life is a precious thing in the general estimation, and it is but natural we should wish to enjoy it as long as possible, and if not in actual fact, we are most of us fain to enjoy immortality in imagination. But even without such beautiful, beneficent, comforting illusions many have lived useful and happy lives, many have been exalted here above their believing fellows, and in the minds of men, in the heritage of the race, even in this poor, old, hammered, actual, despised world, have attained to that nearer, dearer immortality of fame. Because:

They made the world better ere they fared
Beyond the Bourne-ev'n that last scene of all undoubting
dared!

Let us return. Let not these good, importunate people drag us away from our growing intimacy with mother earth in the cleft in the hills. Ferns were still green under the tangle, and beautiful mosses wet with dew, and a kind of spear-pointed, attenuated, mediæval ivy leaf clustered about the rock, suggesting the picturesque garb and romance of ancient times. Here the rabbit had its burrow, where the timid creature hopped too and from its mossy threshold, watchful of its thousand foes. Sheep nibbled contentedly amid the little heaps of red earth, reared by that industrious blind miner the mole, who, we are told, lines himself a luxurious central nest, with galleries in all directions along which he runs at will, till the fell trapper, guided by the tell-tale mounds, bowstrings his little black belly and the busy subterranean sultan is no more. Such is life—and death—to mole and man, the former happy, the latter sudden and painless, let us hope! The upper section of the S forms a grass-grown pulpit rock, with hazels clinging round. In a clump of the latter is a last year's nest filled with dried leaves. We wonder a moment how and whither the family have fared. Bird and animal housekeeping, like man's own, is all so uncertain. It is at least a mere "sporting chance," so we all grow wary—all but the fools—for as our loved Rabbie has said:

The best laid schemes o' mice and men
Gang aft agley,
And lea' us nought but grief and pain
For promised joy.

And so, to quote the immortal William, "Let's take the instant by the forward top," as John and I have tried to do.

ANDREW MILLAR.

Correspondence.

AN EXPLANATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I thank you for your courteous reference to myself, even when I displease you by my seeming lapses and aberration. But here you are not quite just on the facts themselves. Politics have not made me enamoured of "compromise." That blessed word, so beloved on the Front Bench, has rather come to be synonymous, in my mind, with "compounding a felony." It is the mark of the office-seeker and the scoundrel. In "The Immortal Caravel" there is no plea for "faith," and especially as against reason. I say that all faiths and all religions must be tested with the utmost rigour, and that when they fail to stand that test they must definitely go. Certainly I reject "Atheism," but that, in my mind, is not on a par with the rejection of false religions. I say (p. 105) "Whatever be our destiny the way is to be found by thought, by reason, by science." Now science searches for "law" in the Universe. Law means pre-arranged order; as our knowledge expands our sense becomes increased of a harmonious order of things developed on simple principles. In some way that implies thought. "God geometrises," said Plato. Descartes had something of the

same conception, which is certainly not anthropomorphic. All this is consistent with my previous writings, and it is within that scope that my remarks must be understood.

ARTHUR LYNCH.

[Dr. Lynch's letter refers to a review of a work of his that appeared so far back as October last. We do not understand what he means by the sentence "Law means pre-arranged order." It means nothing of the kind. It is the statement of an observed order.—EDITOR.]

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL.

SIR,—Mr. Jameson gives me another salutary prod, and at last I can try to respond. Let me first say that, after looking through the *Parson and the Atheist* the other day I desire to withdraw what I said about Trotsky. It was a hastily taken illustration, and I think Mr. Cohen had the better of me there. The point I am asked to notice was made in a review of Mr. Cohen's book. I can't lay my hand on it this moment, but feel sure that it was a challenge to this effect: The problem of evil only exists for Theists. For an Atheist there is no such thing. Not the same perhaps, but not very unlike. For us it is impossible to comprehend the way God brings good out of evil. If He does so in this life He will do so in another. That is our belief, and I only mention it to show where we know our minds fail to grasp the full order of truth; in other words, to explain the whole of the facts. But the Atheist has to explain why he calls or thinks anything evil or good. He can't help using the adjectives and ordering his life accordingly. We have just the same convictions about good or evil, but we treat them as planted within us by God and we believe He thinks of them as we do. But how did these convictions get into our minds if our Maker did not plant them? That question is a very tough nut to crack, as the history of philosophy abundantly shows. It is quite difficult enough anyhow to be called a problem. I am not trying to show that we have fewer problems than the Atheist: not at all; we both are confronted with very many that are at present insoluble. Nor do I think we should either of us be better off if we had none.

E. LYTELTON.

CAN WE FOLLOW JESUS?

SIR,—I would point out to your correspondent, Mr. H. Cutner, that Jesus did not teach his followers to hate their fathers and mothers in the sense in which Mr. Cutner gives it; does not a soldier who goes to fight, of his own freewill, for his country, forsake his father and mother for what he considers the higher duty? This is precisely what Jesus meant; he was giving his followers the highest form of Christian discipleship; as with Freethought so with Christianity, there are some more true to their faith than others. With reference to the "Thieves and Robbers" Jesus said, "I am the door of the Sheep," and his reference to Thieves and Robbers meant that His teaching was the only true teaching and that all others who differed were wrong and dangerous as are Thieves and Robbers. Your correspondent does not seem to have taken into consideration that the texts were uttered nearly 2000 years ago and addressed to Eastern people who had a great liking for "imagery," hence the beautiful parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan; there is also the difficulty of translations; consequently, intelligence must accompany our readings and thus avoid a rigid, cast-iron interpretation, else we shall often go astray. Let us apply "Common Sense" in these matters; can your correspondent bring himself to believe that any teacher, be he Jesus, Buddha, Confucius or Cohen would teach his followers at one moment "To love one another" and at another moment "to hate their parents," and does he think the late Lord Salisbury, Gladstone, the present Lord Robert Cecil, not to mention scores of other eminent men, would follow a teacher who taught such contradictions. I will now return to the original question, as stated in my first letter. I repeat that the present unsatisfactory state of the world is no proof whatever that Christianity (as a teaching or religion) has failed, but we are where we are because men have refused to apply his teaching. St. Paul says: "The fruit of the Spirit is Love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against such there is no law." Why does not Mr. Cutner give your readers such texts as these, of which there are hundreds, instead of constantly gnawing at the bones (difficult texts) when there is such solid food put

before us. Will he oblige your readers with the Ethical teaching of Freethought; it would interest me very much. The ex-Kaiser knew the above text, may have preached from it, but preferred to ignore it and follow the scent of his ambitions, which resulted in the Great War; is the text to blame or the ex-Kaiser? The same holds good with regard to Christianity, its medicine is perfect, but the patient must take it, else it is useless. When man the world o'er tries to live in harmony with the above text, then, indeed, shall we have "Paradise." I am afraid most of us prefer the line of least resistance and the avoidance of discipline.

EDWIN WORSNOP.

BRADLAUGH'S LIFE.

SIR,—Mr. J. M. Robertson's new book on Bradlaugh is interesting and entertaining. It is a history of fights from the beginning to the end. "The ex-guardsmen acquired a somewhat military manner in affairs," pp. 116, and it was this which aroused so much opposition in his day, as some people object to coercion. We have suffered enough from it during the last few years. Military methods ensure obedience, but it is an enforced obedience which is only tolerable during a war. The author says, "As a debater he was scrupulously courteous," p. 117, and "To Bradlaugh, personal vindictiveness was alien," p. 119. I disagree with both these statements as I remember Bradlaugh on the platform, and have letters written sixty years ago which confirm my own impression. I happened to be present when a well-known Freethinker came to my father begging for his help, saying, "Bradlaugh has threatened to ruin my business, and he will do it, too." Mr. Robertson makes his usual remarks about the Holyoakes, p. 70, George Jacob, who never took an oath, and his younger brother who did. I only know of one occasion when Austin Holyoake took the oath, which was for the very legitimate purpose of getting back money and books stolen from the firm. The books were returned, but not the money.

E. HOLYOAKE MARSH.

INNOCENCE ABROAD.

SIR,—In reply to Mr. George Underwood, I may say that I am pleased when I annoy him, or, in other words, challenge the ideas of his own particular world. I have no desire to stir the mud in chapter 19, Genesis, but with my gloves on I take this: 26. "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." It was taught that God punished Lot's wife in this manner; I thought then, and think so now that it was a mean and peevish act. With naked hands, and breathing the sweet air of comedy I take this, the speech of a fairy queen to the translated Bottom:—

And I will purge thy mortal grossness so,
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go.

The contrast is set down and I would not lift an eyebrow to influence any reader's choice. The impression I gathered from reading *The Golden Ass* was that the central character had transgressed the laws of Venus, and was translated for that reason. William Blake compresses the book into one sentence, "The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." But, Sir, supposing the Prodigal Son "couldn't abide veal," or again, supposing that he had never left home! The story resolves itself into a plea for the retention of a tribal instinct. Our modern Christians might point the moral of what happens to anyone who forsakes the Church; they are welcome to it or anything else that supports authority. Our cheap dramatists know the kind of goods to supply; the "Woman who took the wrong turning" appeals to the type incapable of appreciating Apuleius. That type may find sufficiency in the Prodigal Son—I find it passable—and pass on to Blake. I did not state all the stories in the Bible; as the story of Joseph is mentioned by your correspondent, I might say that, in my opinion, "God's Providence" mars it. To me, Jael and the Nail is a very pointed and primitive story, an admirable exclamation mark! What pathos and power of penetration it contains! God created everything according to Christian teaching; if this is part of the accepted faith of Christians, how can an artist create anything—everything was created by God? The Christian artist can merely produce—but that is the Christian's particular difficulty as well as your correspondent's. I would go further and say that a Christian artist creating

anything gets perilously near emulation of his God. No, Sir, we cannot find any light on the sanity or disease of genius up that blind alley. I merely asked a question, and this innocent little darling has provoked a torrent of questions from Mr. George Underwood. Some of them arise, and some do not, but they cannot be adequately treated in a letter. The question about Calderon, if I may say so, requires to be stated a little clearer. Assuming that Elgar is the greatest composer of the age, it may be that he is a genius first, and for various reasons a Christian afterwards. When your correspondent has told me in precise terms the precise religion of the author of Shakespeare's plays, and we have the absolute truth, the last question will be answered. In the meantime, Sir, our Christian opponents will note with what scrupulous regard for truth their affairs are handled by Mr. George Underwood, and also, I trust by myself. But there is just a suspicion in my mind that my friend has taken a holiday with my innocent little darling.

WILLIAM REPTON.

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, "The Evolution of Man."

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 7.30, Mr. Maurice Maubrey, "A Grave and a Resurrection."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH, N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N.W.): 7.30, Mr. Fred Thoresby, "If the Labour Party were a National Labour Party."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9): 7, Mr. F. Shaller, "Freethought Martyrs."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "The Age of the Cinema."

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

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ASSOCIATION OF ENGINEERING AND SHIPBUILDING DRAUGHTSMEN (Merseyside Branch): Thursday, February 24, Professor L. R. Wilberforce, D.Sc., "The Gyrostat—Its Uses and Applications."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Shop Assistants' Hall, 297 Argyle Street): 12 noon, Mr. J. Burns, "Chess: A Social and Religious Study." (Silver Collection.)

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SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (3 Thompson Street, Tyne Dock): 6.30, Annual Conference and Agenda; 7, A Reading.

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