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Views and Opinions.

Blasphemy.

I spent last Thursday and Friday, March 3 and 4, in the depressing atmosphere of the Assize Court at Birmingham. The first day was spent listening to a series of cases, many of which illustrated the little hold science has on our courts of law. To listen to cases in which young men of twenty-five have been for ten years of their life engaged in a criminal career, to learn that they have been sent to prison some seven or eight times during that period, and then to find that the law can do nothing more intelligent than to inflict another term of imprisonment, with the absolute certainty that it will only lead to yet another one, helps one to realize the need for some clearing out of the mass of pompous platitudes and hoary imbecilities that are enshrined in our law courts, and to deal with the criminal and with crime in something approaching a sane manner. In such cases the courts themselves are confederates with bad social conditions and defective education in the manufacturing of confirmed criminals. A doctor who said to a patient, “The medicine I gave you had no effect for good, it may even have made you worse, so here is another and a larger bottle of the same mixture,” would be declared a fool and would soon lose his patients. But the law goes on doing that year after year, generation after generation, and does it with such solemnity, and with such an air of wisdom, that few appear to see the absurdity of it all. The only notion is that the criminal is someone to be punished, and attachment to righteousness is shown by the readiness with which you inflict punishment without the slightest regard to the causes and conditions that make the criminal what he is.

* * *

Geographical Blasphemy.

But of all the absurdities enshrined within our legal system, there is none that is more offensively absurd than the law of Blasphemy, and it was the hearing of a Blasphemy trial, described elsewhere in this issue, which took me to Birmingham. Blasphemy is a peculiarly religious offence, and in this country it is an offence that is specially connected with Christianity. Blasphemy laws are laws that are made by Christians, on behalf of Christians, for the defence of Christians. That is not all. It is Christians who take a man in custody on the charge of Blasphemy; it is a Christian judge who listens to the charge being made out; it is

a Christian jury which decides whether an offence has been committed. No one else but a Christian has any voice in the matter, except as a victim. And even a sheep is allowed to bleat when the butcher comes along with the knife. Blasphemy cannot be committed in this country against any religion but Christianity. You may say what you please against Mohammedanism or against Judaism, or against any other ism than Christianity, and no action under these idiotic laws will lie. It is Christianity alone that must be protected by law, it is the Christian's God alone who needs the protection of the policeman to keep him on his throne. God, say the preachers aloud, lives in the hearts of his followers, to each other they whisper, “but unless he is looked after by P.C. 342 the Lord help him and us.” The defendant in the Birmingham case received a sentence of three months' imprisonment for his blasphemy. If that is meant to empty him of his contempt for Christianity it is sadly inadequate. A lifetime would hardly be enough to divest a healthy mind of its contempt for so poor a thing as organized Christianity.

* * *

The “Average” Christian.

The prosecuting Counsel foolishly defined Blasphemy as consisting in the offence of bringing the Christian religion into derision and contempt. He was corrected by the judge in his summing up speech, which really made out a much better case for the prosecution. He explained what is now the offence of Blasphemy at common law as consisting in dealing with Christianity in terms of ridicule, or in such a way as to give offence to Christians. And who were to judge on this matter? Not an independent tribunal consisting of members of another religion, and who might, therefore, be presumed to have a degree of impartiality, but Christians. And he carefully explained to the jury that when putting themselves in the position of the Christian whose feelings have been affronted they must not take the extreme fanatical Christian, ready to fly into a temper at the slightest word against his religion, nor must they take the other extreme, but just the average Christian. The average Christian? Not the enlightened and educated Christian, but the average one. Now I wonder would any Protestant care to trust his liberties in the hands of the average Roman Catholic? Would any Catholic care to trust his freedom to the mercy of the average Protestant? Anyone knows that the average man or woman is neither by education nor temperament fitted to judge on so important a matter. It was a rule admirably adapted to give bigotry an air of judicial impartiality. A question which involves issues of so great nicety as the degree of licence permissible in controversy, or the point at which good taste ceases and obscenity takes its place, or whether there should be one rule for controversy in matters of politics and another for controversy in matters of religion, is to be left to the average Christian! While judges take that view, and impress it upon a jury made up of “average” Christians, bigots never need fear getting a verdict against them.

Dignity and Impudence.

The old law of Blasphemy consisted in an attack on the Christian religion. That was frankly an embargo on opinion, and much as one may dislike such things, there was at least a certain strength and dignity about it. But opinion is naturally a difficult thing to control, and besides, the divisions of opinions among Christians themselves make it so glaringly absurd to say that you must not attack the Christian religion that even Mr. Justice Salter's average Christian would see its ridiculous side. So a new definition of blasphemy was established. You might say what you pleased about Christian doctrines, even of the fundamentals of Christianity, provided you did it soberly and respectfully, and in such a way as not to wound the feelings of Christians. And that robbed the Blasphemy Laws of their last rag of decency and converted them into a gross outrage on common sense and justice. It made lack of education, not something of which the community ought to be ashamed, but an offence for which the individual should be punished. The man who could word an attack on Christianity in polished satire, or biting invective, or scholarly sarcasm would escape scot-free, presumably because the "average" Christian is too thick skulled to be affected by it. But the man who had none of the graces named, who for lack of education, or for want of natural endowment expressed the same things in plain common language must either keep his mouth shut or go to prison. It is not an offence to bring Christianity into contempt, provided you do it solemnly and with oppressive profundity. But it is an offence to laugh at it, to ridicule it, to make it quite plain to the dullest understanding that Christianity to-day is a religion fit only for knaves or fools.

* * *

Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

Consider one or two things. It was amusing to note the purchased indignation of the Counsel for the prosecution over the following passage:—

That where the Bible reports Jesus as saying, In my father's house there are many mansions, "the word" mansions should read *flats*.

That said the counsel is blasphemy, and the judge agreed with him. But suppose someone had said:—

No one but a very simple individual would believe in a heaven in which there are many mansions.

That would not have been blasphemy. If I say "it is now agreed that it is scientifically absurd to believe that a woman was made from a bone taken from the side of man," that is quite in order. But if I say "It is not true that woman was made from a bone as one might make a brace button or a knife handle," that is blasphemy. If I remark that if there is a God he works in a way that cannot commend itself to any just mind, that his methods of allotting rewards and punishments are curious and variable, and governed by no rational motive, that is quite in order. But if I say,—

There is a creator called God
And his ways are remarkably odd,

that is blasphemy. Now will anyone tell me what is the essential difference between the two sets of statements? Are not their meanings identical? And on what reasonable ground can the one set be declared permissible and the other indictable at common law? To say that no attack on religion will be permitted is understandable and so far dignified. But to say that it must not be attacked with satire, or with ridicule, or with sarcasm, save it be done in ways current in the "upper circles," is to make the whole thing contemptible. And the crowning point in the whole proceedings is that nothing is commoner in hotel smoking rooms, in trains, in music hall and theatrical performances than alleged humorous stories about

religion. Can we wonder that with a religion such as Christianity there is so much hypocrisy and humbug abroad. What else could Christianity breed? If a religion like that doesn't find a man a humbug it inevitably leaves him one.

* * *

A Strain on Gravity.

Mr. Justice Salter was very emphatic that one must not ridicule Christianity. The remark came out with quite a snap. But will Mr. Justice Salter please explain what a poor individual is to do who happens to be dowered with a sense of humour, and in whose hands the Bible is placed as an inspired book, and who is further faced with Christianity as God's own religion? When he reads that God made the world in seven days somewhere about seven thousand years ago, that he made man out of dust, and woman out of a rib, that he found the world very good, and then drowned it because it was very bad, that he held the sun and the moon still so that two tribes of savages might finish a fight, that he paid one of his followers a visit and showed him his "back parts," that he caused bears to devour some children for calling one of his servants bald-head, that he himself was born of a woman without a father, that he was his own father at the same time that he was his own son, that a man named Jesus walked on the water, had long conversations with the Devil, fed thousands of people with a few handfuls of food, cured men of blindness with spittle and dust, raised them from the dead, and was finally raised from the dead himself. What on earth is one to do with such a tissue of Chinese nightmare-like absurdities but laugh at them? It really should be borne in mind that there is a limit to a man's control of the muscles of his face, and that in any case there are as many muscles pulling the corners of his mouth up as there are pulling them down. If there is a god, there is only one way to prevent his religion being laughed at, and that is by his establishing a religion that a reasonable person can look at with a straight face. To give man a ridiculous religion, while at the same time endowing him with a sense of humour, and then for mere mortals to punish him for laughing is an outrage on common sense. At least they might have the decency to charge the deity with being an accessory before the fact.

* * *

A Disgrace to Civilization.

Blasphemy laws in a civilized country are an outrage on justice and a huge hypocrisy. We are just sending out to India as Viceroy a man who was till the other day the Lord Chief Justice of England. But Lord Reading is a Jew. And being a Jew he must believe either that Jesus Christ was pure myth or that he was the illegitimate child of a Jewish woman hiding her disgrace under a fantastic story of immaculate birth. Could there be a greater outrage on the feelings of the "average" Christian than that? But Lord Reading is quite safe, it is only if you say the same thing in a humorous way that there is trouble ahead. And the removal of the Blasphemy laws is not a question of encouraging indecent or abusive language or conniving at a breach of the peace. It is not as Freethinkers that we raise objection to the regulations prohibiting these things. Our claim is that there are already adequate regulations against these offences in the ordinary laws which apply to all citizens and to all subjects alike. Our objection is to a set of laws that are aimed at one class of the community alone, and which practically makes the same person prosecutor, jury, and judge. And that is not justice, that is a travesty of justice, it is legalized injustice. The Blasphemy laws are the surviving remnants of one of the darkest and most disreputable chapters in human history. They are a blot upon any country that tolerates them, for their ultimate, their sole aim, is to attack opinion, and they

will never disappear until men and women who are summoned to serve on juries decide it is time that this disreputable chapter in our history should be definitely closed. While those laws remain on the statute book liberty is never secure. They are there for any wave of bigotry that may sweep over the country to use, and use them the bigots will whenever they get the chance. It is not from choice that the leaders of Freethought are no longer attacked, and that only poor and obscure men are charged. It is necessity that has reduced the bigots to this pass. They bide their time in the hope that things may be more favourable one day. It is for those who really value liberty of opinion, to whom the phrase is something more than mere words, to say that this survival of one of the worst periods of European history shall no longer disgrace the country or dishonour the name of freedom.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Bankruptcy of Religion.

THE Rev. Dr. Hutton, of Glasgow, contributed an article to the *British Weekly* for February 24 entitled "Whither?" in which he makes most remarkable admissions. In the first sentence he declares boldly that "the whole idea of what constitutes man, the idea which, on the whole, we associate with Christianity is breaking down and falling into ruins." He confirms Nietzsche's observation "that there has been only one Christian in this world, and he was put to death on Calvary." While asserting in one sentence that "for two thousand years Jesus Christ has been the conscience of the Western world," he admits in the very next that "no State has ever consistently embodied his ideas of God and life in its legislation and social practice." Dr. Hutton says:—

What seems to be taking place—if in great masses of people it has not already taken place—is that human nature, the soul of man, his habitual and instinctive attitude towards things in general, is steadily repudiating the laws and principles and manners which formed the moral inheritance of our race. The outstanding change in the very elements of human nature which has taken place, or is taking place, before our eyes is the slow departure of the thought of God. I am not saying that we are worse to-day than we used to be. Who am I to judge? What I am saying is that we are different; and it is a difference not upon the surface, but at the very source and foundation.

More damaging admissions could not be made by a Christian minister concerning the religion which it is his profession to champion. "Religion is not popular with the crowd to-day. They are too busy attending Cup-ties." The Rev. F. Townley Lord, after quoting that statement in an article in the *Christian World*, asks: "Why cannot the Church arouse an equal enthusiasm for the nobler conflicts of the moral life? Why is it that a vast number of any Cup-tie crowd have passed through our Sunday-schools and have lost their interest in the religion of our Churches?" The fact is that the Churches cannot draw the crowds, or arouse anything like the enthusiasm displayed at a football match. Dr. Hutton has not the temerity to affirm that the departure of the thought of God results in the demoralization of our nature. It may, indeed, be true that the generality of mankind are even better to-day than they used to be.

Curiously enough, the Rev. Mr. Norwood, of the City Temple, disagrees with Dr. Hutton. He, too, admits that the Churches have lost their power, but claims that this does not necessarily mean that religion is perishing. Unfortunately, Mr. Norwood does not tell us what he means by religion, or by the spirit or soul of religion as distinguished from its body. In

a sermon on "The Universal Religion," published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for March 2, he makes the amazing assertion that "there is no Secular history except the history that is untire." The first thing that strikes one on reading such a statement is its unqualified silliness. There is not a scintilla of sense in it. Of necessity all history is Secular. Secular history is, of course, the history of this world, and as this is the only world of which we have any knowledge, there can be no other history. Even the Church is a Secular institution, and its history is Secular. The reverend gentleman seems to imagine that secular and profane are synonymous terms; but he forgets that secular is opposed not to sacred, but to eternal. Now the claim made by the divines is that religion has to do, primarily, with eternal realities, or the things of the next world, "the things that are above," as Paul calls them. In other words, religion is essentially a supernatural concern. Dr. Hutton expresses his belief that mankind are renouncing religion, turning their backs on God, and making this world their all. According to him that "something which had to do with God and the Unseen" is being slowly abandoned. Mr. Norwood declares, on the contrary, that "religion is not dying unless all history has misled us." Then he says:—

The spirit of religion is just now a disembodied spirit; but it is the soul that makes the spirit, and not the body that makes the soul. There will be new forms of expression by and by more suited for the time for which they are made, and then will begin the old process over again; but man will always be religious; he cannot be anything else; and the religion that is true will survive all shocks and changes in time.

We frankly confess our utter inability to fathom the depth of meaning in the first sentence of that extract. Where is the disembodied spirit of religion, and how does the reverend gentleman know that it exists at all? If disembodied, is it not invisible, and if invisible, how can its existence be demonstrated? Mr. Norwood's psychology is startlingly new to us. On what fact or facts does he base the statement that "it is the soul that makes the spirit," and wherein does the latter differ from the former? If accurately reported, it passes our comprehension how he could have framed such a sentence. We now come to the proposition that "the religion that is true will survive all shocks and changes." In the first place, is there a religion that is true? Unhesitatingly we answer, No. Our firm conviction is that Christianity is dying because people are finding out that it is untrue. Intelligent men and women cease going to Church because it has been brought home to them that the clergy are as ignorant of the supernatural as they themselves are. The Fables of the Above have become entirely unbelievable to them. There are people, no doubt, who simply neglect religion and forget God; and these may be won back, as during revivals they generally are, but those who have thought themselves out of religious beliefs are permanently lost to the Church.

Dr. Hutton is fully justified when he contends that "the great Word of our religion, the Word which man neglects at his peril, is the word Salvation. The great idea of religion is 'being saved.'" Sixty years ago that word received its due emphasis, especially at revival meetings. Parents used to plead with their sons and daughters to attend Church or Chapel in order to get saved, and getting saved signified being freed from the law and made a child of God, or being delivered from under the wrath of God, and from the dread of hell-fire. To-day the overwhelming majority of fairly enlightened people do not experience the need of salvation. They have no sense of sin because they have no sense of a God who is either for or against them. What they yearn for is self-enlargement and

self-expression. They have no sense of responsibility except to the society of which they are members. To them Christianity has no value whatever, and they are convinced that life would be wholesomer and sweeter without it.

J. T. LLOYD.

"The Great Lying Church."

In religion,
What damned error, but some sober brow
Will bless it, and approve it with a text.—*Shakespeare.*
You do not believe, you only believe that you believe.
—*S. T. Coleridge.*

A newspaper paragraph states that the famous church at Loretto, Italy, has been destroyed, and it is interesting to recall that the Virgin of Loretto has lately been proclaimed "the Madonna of the Airmen." Doubtless, the Pope hoped, by this action, to give additional popularity to a very famous and profitable shrine.

The riddle of Loretto is easily read by all but Roman Catholics. The faithful are invited to believe that the house in which the Virgin Mary brought up her family at Nazareth remained there for thirteen hundred years. This in itself is an astounding story, but religious faith is capable of an even greater strain. The story continues that some of the angels at length became alarmed for the safety of the old house, and, failing an appeal to the landlord, they intervened on their own sacred account. One day the house vanished, leaving not a brick behind. The compassionate angels had carried it right across the Mediterranean to the coast of Dalmatia, where it remained for three years, whilst the angels recovered their breath. Then the angels again pulled together and took the house on another journey across the Gulf of Adriatic to Loretto, where it was fixed without a chimney-pot being out of place.

Of course, Loretto possessed not only the Virgin's house, but an image of the lady herself, which was almost as old as the building. The story goes that the image was carved by an old friend of the family, better known as "Saint" Luke. Its shrine was one of the religious show-places of the world. Among other adornments the image had a gold crown with over three hundred diamonds, and eighty-eight rubies, the gift of the pious Queen Christina of Sweden. During the French Revolutionary wars the shrine was sacked, and the image taken away. This time there was no angelic intervention. The image was restored when Napoleon made terms with the Pope. A few years ago the revenues of this shrine were estimated at £12,000 a year. The Loretto image has been credited with similar "miracles" to those of Lourdes and other popular shrines, which miracles can be easily explained by those who have made a study of faith healing. All miracle-workers, however, it will be noted, whether Roman Catholic or otherwise, stop short at the restoration of an amputated limb.

This child-like credulity is passing wonderful in grown men and women. To study it is to essay an inquiry into the psychology of a crowd, and an ignorant one at that. Let there be no mistake on this point. Roman Catholics are mainly ignorant folk. They are not allowed to read any books or publications criticising their religion. They are told that by doing so they are in danger of eternal damnation. Even colporteurs of Protestant Bible Societies are ill-treated in Roman Catholic countries, for a zealous Papist will no more read a Protestant version of the Bible than he would read the theological works of Doctor Martin Luther. No Roman Catholic may even become a Freemason, because priests object to all secret societies other than their own. If a Catholic young man attends a Freethought lecture, he sins more grievously than if he stole his employer's money.

The one sin can be repaired, for a price, but the other leads to loss of faith—and Hell.

Even the priests are ignorant, with the exception of the higher clergy, who are educated on narrow lines. In the United Kingdom, for example, a large number of priests are recruited from the Irish working class. Mr. Joseph McCabe, who was a priest for years, has told us that:—

Of science, history, and philosophy, in the modern sense, they, as a rule, know nothing. The system of philosophy to which they devote one or two years is a weird, semi-mediæval mass of word-spinning, of no use whatever in modern life..... Though I was professor of philosophy for four years, and had studied under Cardinal Mercier at Louvain, I remained ignorant of the very names of the chief English, German, and American thinkers of the time.

What a confession! The Church of Rome is the Church of the ignorant. The countries in which it flourishes compose the tail-end of civilization. Poland, and some of the Central-American Republics, are almost entirely illiterate. Not much better is the educational level of the Catholics of Spain, Portugal, Italy, Catholic Canada, the rural districts of Austria, and Belgium. Even in Germany, England, and the United States, the vast majority of the Catholics are the least educated of the community. In plain language, the Roman Catholic Church represents the lowest culture in modern civilized society. It marches at the tail-end of the procession of civilized humanity. It pretends to be the vanguard of Light and Liberty, a proceeding which caused Thomas Carlyle to dub it "The Great Lying Church." MIMNERNUS.

The Origin of Christianity.

VIII.

(Continued from page 149.)

The austere ideals of sanctity which they (Christianity and Buddhism) inculcated were too deeply opposed not only to the frailties but to the natural instincts of humanity ever to be carried out in practice by more than a small number of disciples, who consistently renounced the ties of the family and the state in order to work out their own salvation in the still seclusion of the cloister..... For it should never be forgotten that by their glorification of poverty and celibacy both these religions struck straight at the root, not merely of civil society but of human existence. The blow was parried by the wisdom or the folly of the vast majority of mankind, who refused to purchase a chance of saving their souls with the certainty of extinguishing the species.—*Sir James Frazer, Adonis, Attis, Osiris, 1906; pp. 202-203.*

Not only did the Christians appropriate the pagan rites and ceremonies; pagan sacraments and holy images; pagan signs, symbols and festivals, but they also appropriated the pagan holy places and temples, after dispossessing and sometimes murdering the pagan worshippers. When the great cathedral of St. Peters, on the Vatican Hill at Rome, was being enlarged in 1608-9, many inscriptions were found, says Frazer, which proved that this cathedral occupied the site of a Sanctuary to Cybele, the great Mother of the Gods,¹ with whose worship that of Attis was closely allied, for the yearly celebration of his death and resurrection took place in the sanctuary of Cybele, who was held by some to be his lover, by some to be his mother.

Again, Sir James Frazer, after remarking that:—

The type created by Greek artists of the sorrowful goddess (Aphrodite), with her dying lover (Adonis) in her arms, resembles, and may have been, the model of the *pietà* of Christian art, the Virgin with the dead body of her divine Son in her lap, of which the most celebrated example is the one by Michael Angelo in St. Peters.²

¹ Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 173.

² *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, p. 157.

Goes on to observe:—

In this connection a well-known statement of Jerome may not be without significance. He tells us that Bethlehem, the traditional birthplace of the Lord, was shaded by a grove of that older Syrian Lord Adonis, and that where the infant Jesus had wept, the lover of Venus was bewailed.²

Mr. J. M. Robertson, commenting upon this statement of St. Jerome, remarks:—

There can be little doubt that the cave shown as the God's birthplace at Bethlehem had been from time immemorial a place of worship in the cult of Tammuz (Adonis) as it actually was in the time of Jerome.⁴

The early Christians were perfectly well aware that the same story they told of Jesus Christ was told by the pagans of their gods; they met the objection by declaring that the devils knew beforehand of the coming of Christ and counterfeited his life in advance.

Justin Martyr, who lived between the years A.D. 100 and A.D. 165, and wrote one of the earliest Christian apologies, says explicitly that when Christians declare: "our Master, Jesus Christ, to be born of a Virgin without any human mixture, and to be crucified and dead, and to have rose again and ascended into heaven, we say no more in this than what you say of those whom you style the sons of Jove."⁵ Also: "Plato and we are both alike agreed as to a future judgment, but differ about the judges; Rhadamanthus and Minos are his judges, Christ ours."⁶ He also notices the symbol of the Cross, which "you use everywhere in your public processions." And explains that the "evil spirits, by their instruments, the poets, dressed up fables to represent these things as already past and over, on purpose to defeat the good designs of His coming."⁷ And further:—

These devilish spirits no sooner understood by the prophets that Christ was to come, and the ungodly to be punished with fire, than they trumped up that crew of Jove's sons above said, imagining by this forgery to debase the world into an opinion that these prophecies concerning Christ were just such another pack of lies as the fables of the poets.⁸

This, we suppose, is the only case on record of a forgery taking place before the thing to be forged had come into existence. Unfortunately, we do not know what reply the pagans made to this novel argument as the Christians very carefully destroyed all the pagan criticisms of their creed so that none of them have come down to us, although many were written. We should like to have Lucian's remarks on the subject, if that witty pagan had considered such trash worth notice.

Eusebius, Bishop of Cæsarea, the first historian of the Christian Church, who lived between the years A.D. 264 and A.D. 349, gives the following title to the fourth chapter of the first book of his *Ecclesiastical History*: "That the religion published by Jesus Christ to all nations is neither new nor strange." And St. Augustine, in his *Retractations* (i. p. 13), written about the year A.D. 426, declares explicitly that: "the thing itself, which is now called the Christian religion, was really known to the ancients, nor was wanting at any time from the beginning of the human race."

We have now shown that all the rites, ceremonies, sacraments, holy days, and festivals, the belief in a divine being, born of a Virgin, who died for the good of mankind, whose death was mourned with bitter lamentations, and whose resurrection was hailed with joyous rapture, were all perfectly familiar to the pagan

world millenniums before the time of Christ. Not only in one corner of the world, or in one religion, but among all the civilized nations. Among the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Phrygians, the Persians, and later, but long before the time of Christ, among the Jews, the Greeks, and the Romans.

We have only given a short *résumé* of the evidence in proof of the antiquity of these ideas; those who wish to pursue the subject can do so in the large and expensive works of Sir James Frazer, notably, *The Dying God*, and *The Scapegoat*, volumes 3 and 6 in the *Golden Bough* series, and the same writer's *Adonis*, *Attis*, *Osiris*. Also Mr. Legge's *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*, and Mr. J. M. Robertson's *Pagan Christs*, and *Christianity and Mythology*.

Our next task will be to show how Christianity came into existence. But before dealing with this subject we shall prove that the four gospels, upon which Christianity is founded, are not historical documents. That they were not written by Palestinian Jews—certainly not by ignorant fishermen, as they purport to be—that they were not written in Hebrew, but in Greek and by writers who were strangers to the country. And lastly, that they are not contemporary documents, but written long after the times they profess to record.

W. MANN.

(To be Continued.)

Are the Clergy Frauds?

A true answer to this question is delicate and difficult. No general statement of any class of people can be made without qualification. Some of the clergy are frauds and some are not. There are some bad men among them as there are in every class of men. But many of them are good, in a general way, and some of them are very good men, both in general and particular. I will not now consider the clerical liars, thieves, drunkards and libertines, though there is no doubt that there are such even among the very well-known and highly paid clergy. That there are frauds goes without saying, and some of them escape disgrace even when it is pretty well-known that they are impostors.

But it is not fair to condemn an entire class of men because a few of them are notoriously bad. I mean, then, to discuss the question: whether the average respectable parson or priest is a fraud even if he is honest in his business affairs and clean in his sexual relations.

What do I mean by a fraud? I mean one who does not believe what he preaches, or one who does not preach what he believes, or one who conceals his doubts, or one who does not live according to what he professes to believe. A fraud is an insincere man, an inconsistent man, a man without the moral courage to live up to his professions, or to confess that he does not do so.

In view of this definition, consider the actual facts with regard to the clergy, keeping well within the range of those well-known facts. It is not necessary to intrude on the consciences of the clergy and attempt to pass judgment on their motives. No person is capable of judging another person's motives. I, therefore, leave motives out of the question entirely. I do not inquire whether the clergy mean to be frauds, or whether they know that they are frauds. I merely inquire whether they *are* frauds. It is a fact that the vast majority of the clergy do not believe in the precepts of Jesus, and do not conform to them in their own lives. Never mind whether those precepts are true or false, wise or unwise. I merely assert that all orthodox clergymen proclaim that Jesus was God and at the same time deny the truth of most of his teach-

² *Ibid*, p. 157.

⁴ Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 329.

⁵ Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, xxviii.

⁶ *Ibid*, viii.

⁷ *Ibid*, xxx.

⁸ *Ibid*, lxx.

ing and the wisdom or practicability of his manner of life. They declare that he was "the way, the truth and the life," but they turn from the way, reject the truth, and will not even try to follow the life. Jesus forbade the laying up of treasures on earth; forbade taking anxious thought for the morrow; commanded to sell all one's goods and give to the poor. The clergy declare that Jesus is their master, their guide and their God, but they nearly always take the highest salary they can get, insure their lives and property, and are no more apt to give their money to the poor than are rank infidels.

Jesus forbade the use of titles. All clergymen use one title, at least, and are rather proud of it, and some of them are so greedy of having more than one that they are willing to wink at any device by which it can be obtained. Jesus was very simple-minded. He believed in an Omnipotent and All-Loving Heavenly Father who would do anything for us in response to earnest prayer. He said that sickness would be healed by prayer, that poisonous snake bites would be cured by prayer, that mountains would be removed by prayer. The modern clergy believe no such thing. The Jesus-like Faith Healers have no greater enemies than the clergy, and I will wager that there is not a parson or priest to-day who will show that he believes in the teaching of Jesus by letting a rattlesnake bite him and depending entirely on prayer to save him from the natural consequences.

If the clergy would speak right out their real thoughts and say that many of the teachings of Jesus are untrue, although he was God, all would be fair. We should then know that their God was an ignorant and impracticable crank and how to take both him and them. But the average parson flares up in a moment if you point out that Jesus did not know what he was talking about on several important points. He will tell you that Christian civilization has resulted from the teachings of Jesus, notwithstanding the plain fact that Christian civilization is built upon usury and violence, both of which were denounced by the Galilean, and if you ask him why he does not live according to those plain teachings, he will tell you that they were not meant to be practised in this day and generation, and to follow out the precepts of Jesus would seriously disorganize the admirable arrangements of modern society. We all know the various excuses clergymen make for not following the precepts of Jesus, but the real reason is because if they did they would be poor, and they would not enjoy all those worldly honours that are so dear to vain and shallow natures. It is fashionable to worship Jesus, but it is vulgar to follow him. And the reason why the clergy, as a rule, make no attempt to follow him is because they are mostly frauds. Another fact is that there is hardly one of the clergy who does not preach as truth that of which he himself doubts the truth. Many a parson will tell you that he believes in the divinity of Christ, or the virgin birth, or the reality of hell and heaven. But if you ask him if he ever doubts these things he will confess that he does. He may plead that the Devil makes him doubt, or that doubts arise from his own sinful heart, whatever that may mean. But he doubts, nevertheless. If he publicly admitted his doubts he would be an honest man. But because he hides his doubts and preaches his shaky beliefs as certainties, he is a fraud.

Everyone knows that there are many priests in the Church of England who do not fully believe in the Thirty-nine Articles, many ministers in the Presbyterian Church who doubt some of the Westminster Catechism, and so on throughout the various Christian creeds and their paid advocates. All these doubting clergy are frauds, because they encourage people to think that they *do* believe in all these things, and if many of them were examined before an authoritative

committee they would deny their doubts. Now it is not a pleasant or an easy thing to stifle your doubts or pretend to believe what you do not believe. There are few joys comparable with the joys of freedom. There is hardly any pleasure so great as that of speaking your mind, boldly, honestly, and truthfully. And no man would forgo that pleasure unless he were tempted to do so by freedom from pain, poverty, or social ostracism. Nobody can possibly believe that the clergy would conceal their real opinions if money, power and respectability were to be obtained by speaking them.

How do freethinking parsons, like Canon Barnes for example, feel while they go through their Prayer Book service, which declares that Jesus was born of a virgin and that babies are regenerated by sprinkling them with baptismal water? Why, some of them say that the word virgin was applied to any married woman who was faithful to her husband; and as for baptismal regeneration, they say that is what the Church teaches, not what they believe. They simply read the service, that is all. Now, would any man quibble and whip his conscience into justifying such humbug if there were not some worldly benefit to be gained thereby?

But I can forgive the clergy for all their intellectual immoralities much more readily than I can forgive them for their enmity to the poor. Whatever may be said of Jesus, as portrayed in the four Gospels, it must be admitted that all his sympathies were with the poor. It is plain enough that he did not understand why the poor were poor; he knew nothing of economics, as that science is only now coming to be understood after centuries of thought and experience; his solution of the problem of poverty, that the rich should give their wealth to the poor in charities, is not the true solution. But he loved the poor, he lived among them, was one of them, and all his censure and denunciations were reserved for the rich. His heart was in the right place.

But the modern clergyman praises the enterprise and intelligence of the rich and blames the poor for being poor. He accuses them of laziness, drunkenness and extravagance. The clergy of to-day are the apologists for and defenders of unearned incomes arising from the unjust monopolies of banking, land and trade. If a rich monopolist and a poor worker are members of the same church, the parson will be for the rich parasite and against the honest worker. There is hardly a clergyman living who would not be delighted to have the most greedy monopolist join his church. The causes of poverty are now well understood, but the clergy are in favour of continuing those causes. They may urge that they are ignorant of economics. That is true to a great extent. But they have no business to be ignorant. The plain fact that Jesus was the poor man's friend while they are his foes should force them to recognize the falsity of their position. They cannot possibly read the story of their Lord, as they call him, and not see the immense difference between what he was and what they are. If they can, if they are so blindly ignorant as that, they are not fit to teach and lead the people.

I again insist that I do not presume to question the motives of the clergy. It is possible that most of them may be quite conscientious. Nothing is easier than for a man to debauch his conscience and then follow it in its horribly diseased condition. But the plain facts indicate that the clergy, as a class, are shamefully dishonest men, intellectually. The kindest thing that can be said of them is that they are blind leaders of the blind; and as long as the people allow themselves to be hoodwinked by clerical mock piety and false promises they will continue to fall into the ditch of poverty and superstition.

G. O. W.

Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.—1 *Thessalonians*, v. 21.

Days on the Downs.

WHO wants to taste the joy of life? Come up on the Downs, where Life races wildly. The south-western wind plays havoc with a massive mountain of cloud, which splashes the earth with warm stinging drops. The cloud is tossed and torn into myriad pieces, some whirling with giddy impetus across the wide spaces of sky, others are dissipated in rings of vapour. The western sun shines forth anew, jewelling every dripping blade of grass. The pine tree trunks gleam wet and red, and they toss their grey heads in triumph as the wind, passing through their branches, makes music aloft. Buoyant, exhilarating, life-giving, the clean sweet air rushes joyously onward, invigorating all it touches.

The song of life is loud and insistent. "Life!" chants the muffled sound of the horses' hoofs, as riders canter over the springy turf. "Life!" chatter the swarming birds as they perform their amazing evolutions in the teeth of the wind. "Life!" call the scudding clouds to each other across their wide playground. And the pressure of full life thrills the solitary human, standing on the rim of the globe, washed by warm rain, uplifted by the rarefied air, intoxicated with space. Around and before stretches lap on lap of rolling ground, each folded deeper in the purple mist of distance, until finally the sweeping line of the horizon stands almost black against the lowering clouds.

The tremendous drama of Night and Day is played out on the edge of the Downs. Never does that great lover, the sun, appear more glorious than in his struggle against Time, which inexorably divides him from his beloved Earth. Flaming with anger, he flings heavenward blood-red beacons which suffuse the sky from East to West, transforming the heavy leaden clouds into masses of glowing copper. Marvellous and unnameable are the gorgeous shades in which he swathes his glory. In his eager longing once more to embrace this wondrous planet he throws searchlights into every secret cranny and decks her with a mantle of light which enhances her beauty tenfold. Jealously the clouds shut down on him, but with impatient ardour he thrusts them aside. Fiercely contending for life and love, the splendour of each moment surpasses the last. The wind stills its violence to gaze on this great panorama. The clouds are vanquished by the passion and vehemence of the dying Titan, and he sinks in a sea of molten glowing light. Long after he has disappeared, his despairing gleams, reflected from the under-world, hold back the gathering shadows that threaten to enfold the earth.

Fronting eastward, one sees a different world. Colour and detail are lost in vague indefinite masses. Hidden amongst the dark thicket, the thrush, with rich fluting melody, sings a requiem to the day that has gone, and inspires the hearer "with the rapture of the forward view." From behind the speeding clouds the moon issues in full majesty, and sails forward, bathing the world in her cool silver radiance. Passive and still, wearied by the fierce ardour of her lover, the earth submits to this chill embrace, resting till called forth to life and joy by the dawn.

* * * * *

On a cold day in winter, the heath presents no friendly aspect to man. It lies desert and chill to the searching breath of the east wind, which whistles sourly through the long dried bents and hemlock stalks. The hawthorn bushes raise their bared branches in dumb endurance, abandoned by the merry company of birds that haunted them while their store of berries lasted. One solitary blackbird remains, with feathers puffed out ballwise as he reels weakly from

twig to twig. Against the dull grey brown of the uneven ground is plainly visible the rich russet colour of a distant hare lopping leisurely away. A flight of crows pass noiselessly overhead. All life seems reduced to a low ebb in the teeth of the snarling winter wind, and the sky, thickly blanketed with grey cloud, is pressing closely on this wide unsheltered expanse to shroud it in chill vapours.

* * * * *

The long road on the edge of the Downs is bordered by trees, blasted and stunted by exposure to the winds that sweep across the heights. But the bushes beneath, sheltered by their stern guardians, are bursting into bud, the honeysuckle, always most venturesome, even opening its leaves. The white chalky paths run athwart the hillocks, now visible, now disappearing from view, as though playing hide and seek. Against the sky, washed clear with soft rains, rises a note of music, prolonged, then swelling into a cascade of sound. One cannot locate the lark before another has risen, and yet another, each expressing such tumultuous joy that their frail tiny bodies, almost invisible in the heights, seem incapable of transmitting such a flood of ecstacy to the listeners below. One watches them breathlessly as they mount ever higher, ceaselessly singing. The eye wearies with watching, but the song continuously reaches the ear in golden showers of sound. Then it is heard nearer at hand. The small bird, the embodiment of Life's joy, flutters downward, maintaining to the last his impassioned outpouring. Suddenly his song breaks short, and he takes a dive earthwards with such impetus that it seems impossible that he will not be killed on coming in contact with the ground. But his outspread wings, acting like a parachute, protect him from harm, and the songster, so insignificant in appearance, is lost to sight among the dry tufts of grass, where he will later make his nest.

The ground birds are alike in their inconspicuous colouring and slight markings which render them indistinguishable from the earth on which they live and move and have their being. But the birds that frequent the trees and bushes dare to deck themselves in brighter colours. Regard the playful blue tom-tit, and note how proud he is of his delicate blue and gold coat. He is willing to show himself off for you, being aided in his aerial evolutions by his long tail, with which he balances himself in graceful mode. He is a most cunning architect too, and builds a domed nest for his family, the entrance being at the side, too small to admit the hand of a human intruder.

But the dainty tom-tit, with his pardonable vanity, possesses only a pleasing twitter. Nature, it seems, deals out compensations. The gift of song is reserved to the more soberly clad birds. This is doubtless due to the transmutation of energy.

Along the winding track comes a heavily laden figure. A thin curl of blue smoke rises through the still air. It is an old gipsy woman, bearing her pedlar's baskets, and comforting herself with a discoloured clay pipe. She passes by indifferently, wending on to her kindred, who are camped on the heath.

FRANCES PREWETT.

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade,
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroyed, can never be supplied—
If to the city sped—What waits him there?
To see profusion that he must not share;
To see ten thousand baneful arts combined
To pamper luxury, and thin mankind;
To see each joy the sons of pleasure know
Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe.

—Goldsmith (*The Deserted Village*).

Acid Drops.

The Salvation Army announces that it is about to turn its attention to the conversion of the rich. We have heard that kind of thing before, but we doubt if in practice it means more than a more energetic attempt to get the rich to subscribe liberally to Salvation Army Funds. Will the Army hold its street meetings, with band accompaniments in Park Lane, or Mayfair? Everyone knows they will not. Will they enter the Ritz, or the Waldorf Hotels, and annoy their customers as they worry the poorer classes in the more ordinary public house? Everyone knows that they will not do that either. The Salvation Army has always known on which side its bread was buttered, and like the rest of the Churches, it will think twice before it does anything that will offend the man with the long purse. It is one of those pieces of smug humbug that the Christian Church is so prolific in.

Assuming that the Salvation Army proceeds with its mission of converting the rich, what will it amount to? It will certainly not make an attack on any of the real social evils that exist. It will not make an attack on the land system in this country—one of the worst in Europe. It will do nothing to weaken the sacredness of the rights of property, even when those rights conflict with the moral health of the community. It will not attack a single real evil of a really fundamental character. It will insist only on the rich believing in Christ Jesus and his gospel and subscribing liberally to the Salvation Army funds. And the Army will take the money so given, spend a little of it patching up some of the wrecks created by the very evils from which the rich derive their revenues, and so perpetuate the misery they affect to deplore. When the Army has the courage to go to the rich ground landlords of London and tell them that it is they, more than any others who are responsible for the slums, and the misery that springs from the slums, tells them that and refuses the money of these people, then we shall believe in the genuineness of the Army. Until they do that, we shall continue to regard the Army as no more than a gigantic bluff.

The truth is that the Army, with its instinct for money hunting, sees in the present position a chance of exploiting both rich and poor. On the one side its pretended attack on the rich will serve to enable it to establish some sort of a hold over the unthinking working class. Even the working man is getting tired of being preached at, as though he was the only one whose character stood in need of attention. He has stood that kind of insult from the clergy and from preachers of all classes for so long that he is beginning to resent it. And it will serve to allay the unrest of the Sunday-school type of labour man and the labour leader with his perfectly idiotic verbiage about Jesus, to feel that the rich as well as the poor are getting their dose of evangelization. And it will also help the Army with the rich if it can show that it has some power to keep the poor "in order." That is one of the great things for which the religious organizations exist. Their function is to keep the people content, and we should be the last to assert that they have not well earned their keep. And the rich will be quite ready to help the Army in its crusade against drink and sloth. For they do not want workmen to be drunken, to be lazy, or to be discontented. On the contrary, they have a greater desire, and a greater interest in their being sober, industrious, and contented, the more contented the better. And the more the Army can get people into the frame of mind of praising God that their soul is saved, and counting nothing else of consequence, the better the rich will be pleased. We see no reason whatever why the Army should not have a splendid financial haul from its descent on the rich classes. It is no more than a species of pious blackmail.

Speaking in the Lower House of Convocation Canon Wood indignantly described how he saw a clergyman dressed in a grey coat and a yellow waistcoat. He said it was a visible sign of failure, of their failure to recognize they are men set apart from other men, and are not of the

world! That is what we have always said. A clergyman's business is with heaven—he is of no earthly use.

At a university "rag" at Bangor, Carnarvon, a number of students masqueraded as Red Indians, captured a Roman Catholic priest, and offered him for sale by mock auction. It is not reported whether he realized "thirty pieces of silver," as did the Founder of his religion.

A clergyman, out for the day, was charged half-a-crown for a plate of ham and threepence for a roll at a London railway restaurant. He complained to the Westminster Profiteering Committee, who dismissed the complaint. Doubtless, the brother-in-the-Lord will now carry that plate-of-ham to the Throne of Grace.

Very little has been heard lately of Mr. R. J. Campbell. His prominence in the papers at one time was a fine sample of newspaper advertising. Essentially a shallow-brained man, his most striking quality was that of reproducing the last thing he had read, and having no solidly based philosophy of his own, this was not a difficult thing to do. And, of course, when a certain section of the public—a by no means small one—reads week after week that a certain man is a profound thinker, they are quite ready to acclaim him as such. And by the same rule when the papers drop him, he drops also. The cause of his going up is the cause of his coming down.

But we saw a note the other day of a sermon by Mr. Campbell on the subject of conversion. And in the course of the sermon he told of "a confession made to me casually by a prominent Irish statesman whose name is as well-known to you as that of any man living. He said he was an Agnostic and had not reflected much upon religion at all, when all at once, without his being able to assign any reason for it, except his wife's prayers, he turned round and found himself convicted by the spirit of God." The hopeless stupidity of statements such as these almost defies comment. Of course, Agnosticism is such a vague and usually meaningless word, that one doesn't quite know what is meant by it here. It was evidently of a not very robust order. And if the wife moved the eminent statesman with her prayers, and his opinions were not very strong, there seems an explanation of the whole phenomenon. But how does this statesman discriminate between being convicted by the spirit of God and brought into submission by his wife's tongue? And we would like to know the name of this converted Irish statesman. But names are never forthcoming.

The other day the County Council of London had before them the question of a vote of some £14,000 for erecting war memorials in the schools. There is one view of these war memorials with which we have a deal of sympathy, our objection is that the memorials are too specialized. Why not make them memorials of public or distinguished service in general? Why place it before children that it is only, or chiefly, in connection with military service that a memorial is placed in view of the other scholars? A school that produces an Edison, or a Darwin, or a thinker or writer of distinction has far more cause to be proud of its record than a school that has produced a score of distinguished soldiers. It is not, after all, difficult to produce soldiers. There is not a country in the world that cannot produce them with ease by the hundreds of thousands. No matter how poor a country may be, or how backward in the arts and sciences it can always produce soldiers. Let us have memorials of distinguished people in which soldiers, so long as the undeveloped state of society make soldiers a necessity, shall have their place, but only a place. There is no need whatever why the school children should have placed before them the names of soldiers alone, as though they performed the principal services in a civilized country. To have under an old scholar's name the inscription "He helped to make soldiers unnecessary" strikes us as a much higher kind of testimonial than the one that is given to those that gained distinction in military service. If we want peace we must work for it.

Special.

ANOTHER trial for blasphemy has come and gone, and with the usual result. And so long as a jury of Christians are permitted to determine whether an attack on Christianity is couched in a form that is agreeable to their feelings a verdict of guilty is an almost foregone conclusion. Almost, but not absolutely so, for one imagines that not even Christians can remain permanently impervious to enlightenment, and will, therefore, one day resent having their religious opinions placed under the guardianship of the police force. It dishonours no Freethinker, educated or otherwise, to be prosecuted for blasphemy. The dishonour belongs wholly to the Christians, and to the society which permits it.

I spent two days last week, March 3 and 4, time that I could ill-afford, in connection with the trial at the Birmingham Assizes of J. W. Gott for blasphemy. And I regretted more than ever that the offer of the N. S. S. Executive to undertake the defence of the blasphemy charge was not accepted by Mr. Gott. In that event the defence would have been adequately conducted, and I am sanguine enough to believe that the trial might have had a different ending. An acquittal might not have been secured, but the jury might have been brought up to the point of disagreement and that would have been something gained. But in the face of Mr. Gott's refusal the Society was powerless.

The indictment in this case consisted in a number of counts, only one of which was concerned with blasphemy. The remaining counts dealt with sending through the post an "obscene" book and a certain "obscene" article, the said "obscene" thing being Malthusian literature and appliances. On that point I need only say here that bearing in mind that the things which the court declared to be obscene are sold openly in Chemists shops all over the country, and, as the Counsel for the defence stated, were sold in government canteens throughout the war to the soldiers, it looks as though other countries will have to look sharp if they wish to overtake English public life in any competition for unblushing humbug and hypocrisy. To sentence one man for selling what is openly sold elsewhere is to rob decent people of any respect they may have for legal methods and procedure.

In my judgment the whole of the case was a spectacle of mismanagement. The prosecution was one of the feeblest I have seen, and the defence does not appear to have been properly instructed. Before another judge the result might have been other than it was, but it was quite clear from the summing up what the judge expected, and indeed one of the questions that he put to Mr. Gott struck me as better fitted to the mouth of a cross examining Counsel than to that of a judge. The truth is that in a blasphemy case both solicitor and counsel need a certain amount of guidance, and when that is not forthcoming the consequences are bound to be bad.

To commence with, the whole of the charges were jumbled together by the prosecution, and with the obvious intention of creating a general prejudice. The first task of the defence should have been to apply that the charges, being distinct in nature, should be taken separately. This was not done, and the prosecution was left undisturbed in that manœuvre. Next, Mr. Justice Salter intervened and informed the prosecuting counsel that he need not read the passages that were declared to be obscene or blasphemous, it would be enough to name the passages, and pass the documents up to him. To my surprise this was allowed to pass unchallenged. In my judgment the defence should have insisted on having all the passages indicted read out openly, and if that had been insisted on, I am of opinion that the judge would have been compelled to

give way. It is noteworthy that in another case, part of which I heard, a case of the very filthiest nature, the details were gone into without any kind of protest. But that was not a charge of blasphemy. If the counsel for Mr. Gott had insisted on having the passages read any possibility of prejudicing the jury would have been avoided.

For consider the monstrous unfairness of it. A man is charged with publishing certain things of a blasphemous character. The point for the jury to decide is are they really blasphemous. And the judge opens the case by saying that he cannot have such things as those read in court, they must only be indicated. What is this but pre-judging the whole affair? It is assuming that the passages are all that the prosecution allege they are, before any arguments have been heard, or any evidence offered. Could one imagine a policy better calculated to prejudice the mind of a jury? The case is settled before it is opened, the verdict is assumed before it is delivered. That is not justice, it is a travesty of justice. And I hope that when anyone else is charged with blasphemy he will insist on having all the indicted passages read out openly. If that is not done he should decline to take any further part in the case. That would at least leave the injustice of the procedure open and undeniable.

The jury took about fifteen minutes considering their verdict, and during that time they were supposed to read over and discuss a 94 page pamphlet and other documents. And when they returned with a verdict of guilty on all counts, their spokesman actually had to be prompted by others as to what verdicts they had arrived at in relation to the various counts, and the clerk of the court to explain what was the meaning of one or two of the counts they had been considering. Then the judge announced that the sentence was three months on each of the two charges and payment of the costs of the trial. He was evidently not distressed over the verdict.

It was, I repeat, a mismanaged case from beginning to end. And I must also say here that Mr. Gott, by the methods he pursues, really plays into the hands of his persecutors. He might sell all he sells, did he adopt other methods. I do not say this by way of justifying or palliating his persecutors, but in these matters one ought to make up one's mind whether one desires to defeat blasphemy prosecutions or not. If the former, then there is really no sense in so going to work as to play into the hands of one's enemies. Unfortunately, the bigots will not to-day attack those who know how to defend themselves. They add cowardice to bigotry and so make the whole thing more than usually contemptible. Elsewhere in this issue I have dealt with the more general aspects of blasphemy. And I can only repeat here that there is only one thing to be done with these barbarous laws, and that is for all decent and self respecting men and women to demand their abolition.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

To Correspondents.

P. A. BLOFIELD.—Thanks, but we have no use for parcels of papers now that the paper shortage is at an end. The only use for them now is distribution, and that might probably be done at your end. We are obliged all the same.

H. HALL.—The paper was not sent from the office. It must have come from some well wisher.

A. ALDWINKLE.—Thanks for what you are doing to get subscribers in Paris. The paper is being sent to the address given. We will deal with the other matter in a week or two.

T. HOOD PHILIPS.—Pleased to have your high opinion of *Christianity and Slavery*. Shall be glad to hear from you on the subject named when time and inclination permits the writing.

G. ATTEWELL.—The N. S. S. offered to do what it could, but its offer was refused. We regret the outcome as much as you do yourself. It is a pity, but a fight must be conducted on the right lines if it is to be either successful or dignified.

L. MUSKETT.—Boys stoning to death a harmless little monkey is, as you suggest, a very pertinent comment on the value of religious education. But kindness to animals is no part of Christian teaching. And much of our "sport" is only regularized brutality.

T. SHARPE.—Sorry covers have not been sent, they are now being forwarded. The receipt of the guinea promised was included in the general acknowledgment that all the promises had been redeemed.

J. ROBINSON.—Next week.

E. T. EAMES.—We hope you will find the *Freethinker* satisfactory as an advertising medium.

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. 6.; 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 (March 13) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester, at 6.30. We hope that the hall will be as well filled as usual. On Sunday next (March 20) London Freethinkers will please note that he lectures at the Town Hall, Stratford, on "What we pay for Christianity." We trust that our friends are making this meeting well known, and are doing their share in circulating the lecture slips announcing the lecture. They can be had from either the N. S. S. Secretary or from the *Freethinker* office.

Mr. Cohen had at Swansea on Sunday last the largest meeting he has yet held there. And judging from the interested attention paid him during the course of his address, it is evident that Freethought is growing in one of the most religious centres of South Wales. The state of trade there is at present very bad, and we expect that must have made some difference to the financial results, but in other respects the local Branch deserves every congratulation on its season's work.

We are asked to announce that Dr. Leonard Huxley will preside at the Twelfth Conway Memorial Lecture which will be delivered by Professor A. C. Haddon at South Place Institute, Finsbury, on Thursday, March 17, at 7 p.m. The subject will be "The Practical Value of Ethnology." Admission is free.

We are pleased to hear that Mr. G. Whitehead made a fine impression on the audience at Friars Hall on Sunday last. His lecture was followed with attention and appreciation by all present, and we hope to find him

active on the Freethought platform in the future. There is plenty of room for men speakers, and plenty of work for them when found. The lecturer to-day (March 13) is Mr. J. T. Lloyd. We hope that London friends will be there in goodly numbers.

Mr. Cohen must ask the indulgence of correspondents this week. On Wednesday last he went to Birmingham, he only returned from there late on Friday to rush off again to Swansea on Saturday, and with only his own pair of hands to attend to the work of bringing out the *Freethinker* and see to the other things demanding attention, some things must be put off for a few days. There is also a bit of a shortage in the paragraph department. But as Mr. Cohen is already responsible for over nine columns in this issue, most readers will think that quite enough.

A Sociological Study of Religion.

IX.

(Concluded from page 139.)

BUT whilst the machine processes of modern industry directly affect the industrial workers, they indirectly affect every member of our society. Anthropomorphism is becoming steadily more and more to be relegated to our intellectual attics and lumber rooms, only to be brought forward—half piously, half shamedly—on certain abnormal occasions. Life is becoming too secure and orderly for the average person really to believe in a capricious power that interrupts the working of natural laws; and the deity has accordingly been relieved of practically all his former mundane duties, whilst still, to some extent, functioning as a celestial judge who is to determine each individual's future life. And certainly there is none of that definiteness of conception of the future state of bliss, such as was to be found in the mediæval ages, when it was possible for such a grossly anthropomorphic tale as this to be told:—

God, having one day gone out with the saints and the apostles for a walk, left Peter at the door of heaven with strict orders to admit no one. Soon after a tailor came and pleaded to be let in. But Peter said that God had forbidden anyone to be admitted; besides, the tailor was a bad character, and "cabbaged" the cloth he used. The tailor said the pieces he had taken were small, and had fallen into his basket; and he was willing to make himself useful—he would carry the babies, and wash or mend the clothes. Peter at last let him in, but made him sit down in a corner, behind the door. Taking advantage of Peter's going outside for a minute or two, the tailor left his seat and looked about him. He soon came to a place where there were many stools, and a chair of massive gold and a golden footstool, which were God's. Climbing up on the chair, he could see all that was happening on the earth; and he saw an old woman, who was washing clothes in a stream, making away with some linen. In his anger, he took up the footstool and threw it at her. As he could not get it back, he thought it best to return to his place behind the door, where he sat down, putting on an air of innocence. God now re-entered, without observing the tailor. Finding his footstool gone, he asked Peter what had become of it—had he let anyone in? The apostle at first evaded the question, but confessed that he had let in one—only, however, a poor limping tailor. The tailor was then called, and asked what he had done with the footstool. When he had told, God said to him: "O you knave, if I judged like you, how long do you think you would have escaped? For long ago I should not have had a chair or even a poker left in the place, but should have hurled everything at the sinners.

But besides the anti-anthropomorphism development which is to be perceived in modern social life, there is another extremely interesting movement. In expressing this, I cannot do better than reproduce one

of my essays that recently appeared in the *Humanist* ("The Corporate Consciousness," *Humanist*, September, 1920).

An interesting phenomenon for the student of the development of human thought, is the emergence in many minds during the last few years of a conception of a corporate consciousness, or a personality of the human race, which is more than the mere sum total of the aggregate minds of the race at any given time, even as the human personality is something more than the aggregate of the cells forming the body.

Some have given to this conception the appellation "social mind"; others prefer to speak of the "genius of the race"; Mr. Ernest Belfort Bax has given us the designation "social consciousness"; and Mr. H. G. Wells "God the Invisible King"—for that phrase appears to be little more than a rather mystical symbol for the connotation of this idea. He tells us that "modern religion declares that though he (God the Invisible King) does not exist in matter or space, he exists in time just as a current of thought may do; that he changes and become more even as a man's purpose gathers itself together; that somewhere in the dawning of mankind he had a beginning, an awakening, and that as mankind grows he grows. With our eyes he looks out upon the universe he invades; with our hands he lays hands upon it. All our truth, all our intentions and achievements he gathers to himself. He is undying human memory, the increasing human will. But this, you may object, is no more than saying that God is the collective mind and purpose of the human race. You may declare that this is no true God, but merely the sum of mankind. But those who believe in the new ideas very steadfastly deny that. God is, they say, not an aggregate but a synthesis. He is not merely the best of all of us, but a Being in himself, composed of that but more than that, as a temple is more than a gathering of stones, or a regiment is more than an accumulation of men. They point out that a man is made up of a great multitude of cells, each equivalent to a unicellular organism. Not one of these cells is he, nor is he simply just the addition of all of them. He is more than all of them."

And in phraseology less fanciful, Professor Soddy makes much the same declaration in his volume of essays, *Science and Life*. "There is a continuity that endures in the creative achievements of humanity," he says, "whether, as the Theist believes, in the form of a personal Deity, or whether as a collective memory, engraved in type or ancient saga, and from which, whether we read or not, we can hardly escape."

Variouly expressed, this idea seems to run like a thread through all modern thought. Perhaps it is merely part of the reaction against the exaggerated individualism of the last century; perhaps it is a manifestation of the imperishable human craving after an intelligence greater than that of man, and of a purpose that transcends the life of individuals and even the lives of nations and civilizations. The hold of the orthodox faiths and philosophies and systems of opinions upon mankind is weakening; political and social systems are crumbling into decay, or have fallen in abrupt ruin, in light of which events thoughtful men are compelled to reconsider their political creeds; new, and amorphous social ideals are stirring in the minds of many men and women; and amid all this ruin, and conflict, and travail, it is natural that many should seek for a new faith, and should endeavour to see in human affairs something more stable and enduring than the flux of human energies in a seemingly capricious manner, and something more purposive than the short-sighted policy of opportunist politicians, or the self-centred interest of the average citizen. In a conception of the essential oneness of the whole human race—including past, present, and future generations—many doubtless find the unifying and stimulating idea for which they crave; whilst in the consideration of a human progress which is practically continuous, despite local fluctuations, they discover a purpose and an end which justifies altruism and self-abnegation in the

individual. And in the contemplation of the achievements of the race, they perhaps feel the satisfaction that the French sociologist, Tarde, makes his historian of a future age experience, in that delightfully satiric fantasia, *Underground Man*. "For our worthy ancestors deceived themselves finely when they persuaded themselves that social progress led to what they termed freedom of thought. We have something better; we possess the joy and the strength of mind which attains a certainty of its own, founded, as it is, on its only sure basis, the unanimity of other minds on certain essential matters; on this rock we can rear the highest constructions of thought, nay, the most gigantic systems of philosophy."

In brief, as the social system grows ever more complex, and ever more able to guarantee the individual security of existence, it comes ever to encroach on that part of his emotional nature that was formerly the territory occupied by religion. It is to humanity, socially organized, that the individual turns for that sense of satisfaction and security that the god-idea once gave him; it is to the accumulated knowledge of his race that he turns for the positive knowledge that revealed religion once claimed to provide; and—among the most highly developed individuals—interest in the future of the race has taken the place of interest in his own possible existence after death.

With Professor Clifford he comes to say:—

The dim and shadowy outline of the superhuman deity fades slowly from before us; and as the mist of his presence floats aside, we perceive with a greater and greater clearness, the shape of a yet grander and nobler figure, the figure of him who made all Gods and shall unmake them. From the dim dawn of history, and from the inmost depths of every soul, the face of our father man looks out upon us, with the fire of eternal youth in his eyes, and says, "Before Jehovah was, I am."

W. H. MORRIS.

Laughter in Church.

A short time ago the Bishop of St. Albans, a well-known dignitary of the Church of England, made the startling announcement that he was in favour of laughter in church; indeed, he appeared to think that the whole service was too solemn, and that a little mixture of laughter might be profitably introduced into the proceedings. Personally, I have often thought the same myself, but so far, as a Freethinker, I never ventured to say so audibly, as I have always considered that it would be a gratuitous piece of meddling on my part, or on that of any outsider, to offer any suggestions in this direction, until I got a lead, so to speak, from the clergy themselves. But now the course is quite clear, and anybody who desires to help the Bishops and the clergy to make the Church Service less melancholy and to impart to some portion of the proceedings a more cheerful aspect is open to offer suggestions in that desirable direction. In the whole course of my experience of Christian sermons from the pulpit I have never heard any of the clergy of the Church of England crack a joke in their discourses; but I have heard the celebrated Charles Haddon Spurgeon make many a good joke from his rostrum at the Tabernacle in Newington Butts. But then, of course, Charles Spurgeon was a very exceptional man, and was witty as well as eloquent and dramatic in his method of appeal to his vast congregations of credulous followers, and his witty sayings flowed as naturally from his eloquent tongue as his passionate denunciations of the sins and wickedness of mankind in general and unbelievers in particular. Often he said, with a sly twinkle in his eye, that the sons of the Devil ought not to be allowed to have a monopoly of all the wit and humour of the human

race. Another of his sayings was that the Devil should not be allowed to have all the good tunes. They had no organ at the Tabernacle, and a gentleman with a very lusty voice led the whole congregation with the hymns, the words of each verse being read out before the singing; but as a musical performance it was a melancholy failure.

But with regard to the Bishop who said that he was in favour of laughter in the Church, he did not particularize enough; he did not say whether the clergy were to do the laughing or the congregation; nor whether the congregation were to laugh at the jokes of the vicar or the curate, or the congregation was to laugh at them when they tried to palm off a regular old chestnut for a new and original joke of their own manufacture. Nor did he say whether any penalty would be imposed for laughing in the wrong place, or laughing too boisterously some time after the alleged joke had been uttered, and the hearer was too obtuse to appreciate the point at the time. Of course, all these things would have to be considered and provided for, otherwise the service might develop into a disorderly meeting.

For instance, most of our readers will remember, some years ago, before the war, the unemployed and Socialists took it into their heads to attend church and at various portions of the service to interrupt with such ejaculations as Hear, hear, or Amen; but suppose, when the wealthy members of the congregation were reciting the Litany and described themselves as "miserable sinners" and declared in good round voice that there was "no health" in them, the vast majority of the congregation sent up a peal of derisive laughter, would that sort of response meet with the approval of the simple-minded Bishop who was in favour of laughter in Church? Or again, when the clergy were reading "the lesson of the day" and the vicar or the curate read the seventh chapter of Exodus which describes how when Moses and Aaron went down to Egypt, Aaron, in order to convince Pharaoh that he and Moses represented the Lord, threw down his rod and it turned into a serpent; and when the wise men and sorcerers and magicians of Egypt saw it, they threw down their rods and they turned into serpents also, which went wriggling about on the earth, and finally the serpent produced from the rod of Aaron gobbled up all the little serpents and that proved the divine hand of Jehovah was in this business, and thus Moses and Aaron scored in the first round of miraculous performances or clever pieces of legerdemain before Pharaoh. Suppose I say, that when such passages as these were read the congregation began to titter, then to smile, then to laugh right out, how would the Bishop like it? And suppose the laughter became more uproarious as the curate went on to read about the manner in which Moses and Aaron, with the aid of their invincible rod turned the rivers into blood, following that with a plague of frogs, which got into the houses of the Egyptians, and into the bedchamber, and under the beds and created an awful disturbance, and when the frogs had been produced with such profusion that they seemed to have infested every spot, Pharaoh called on his magicians and they produced a lot more frogs, and even then the Egyptians did not cry "Hold, enough"; suppose the congregation shrieked with laughter, would the curate venture to relate the story of the plague of lice, and flies even though some profane member of the congregation protested that he now knew what became of flies when there was a shortage of the species in the winter time?

Or if the "Lesson of the Day" was the Story of Balaam's adventure on his talkative ass, or Jonah's manœuvres in the interior of a whale, or a number of other extraordinary stories from Holy writ, would the Bishop rejoice to learn that the congregation rocked with laughter in their pews as they listened to the

solemn delivery of the narrative by the curate. And if the members of the congregation were allowed to express their feelings by uncontrolled laughter at what appeared to be ludicrous, would they not be allowed to express their indignation at passages that appeared to them to be horribly wicked, or brutal, or obscene?

Another thing. If the adult members of the congregation could laugh at what they considered funny remarks in the sermon, was there anything in the way of prohibition against the children joining in the laughter? At this point the real trouble would begin, because children, no doubt, would want to cause a little of the laughter on their own account. When I was a boy, I remember going to church in company with a large number of scholars from the school at which I was educated. Over a hundred of us were marched up into a high gallery where we had to sit for over two hours. The sermon alone, I should think, lasted close upon an hour. The boys behaved themselves, I consider, extremely well for boys, but when the rector began to divide the latter portion of his sermon into firstly, secondly, thirdly, fourthly, and lastly, and then having spoken at considerable length on these points, came to one word more and I have done, and then went on for another quarter of an hour, the boys became restive; some of them commenced to munch sweets, and one boy took out his pocket handkerchief, I suppose for the purpose of wiping some perspiration from his troubled brow, and forgot that he had deposited his marbles therein, when they dropped out of the handkerchief on to the gallery and rolled with provoking regularity and noise down all the steps, which set all the boys laughing, and some of the parents also, and even the solemn faced occupants of the best family pews could scarcely refrain from smiling, I remember that the rector, so far from approving of that kind of interruption, waited until the Beadle had collared hold of one boy (who happened to be the wrong one) by the collar and lead him, like a prisoner, out of the church. The boy began to blubber and caused such a disturbance that the rector was constrained to bring the *final word* of his discourse to a rapid conclusion. That is the only occasion upon which I heard laughter in church, but I am not quite sure that that is the kind of laughter, even from boys—who we all know will be boys—that would meet with the approval of the Bishop of St. Albans, who does not see why we should not have laughter in church.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Writers and Readers.

THE MENACE OF JOURNALISM.

One by one the illusions, the "vital lies" of our civilization are dropping off through inanition, or are suffering a more violent death at the hands of competing and more vigorous illusions. Long before the war came along to put the finishing touch on philosophic liberalism there was hardly a kick left in it; and now it is cherished only by a few antiquated politicians who had the misfortune to be suckled in that creed outworn, and who are so short-sighted as to mistake a memory for a living principle. The party-system, or political game, was given away by Mr. Belloe and his friend Cecil Chesterton. The frontal attack of theirs was met by the callous cynicism of the business politician, or by the abuse and banter of press-men hired to put forward the opinions of their masters. But it went home; we cured ourselves of the bad habit of taking politics seriously; we saw through the game of government by accommodation.

If we were relieved of one or two of our illusions we were steadfast in our belief that our newspapers gave us what they honestly held to be the truth. When I say we, I mean those of us who are not naturally incredulous, who have no inside knowledge, or not enough curiosity to

note the varying degrees of importance given by different papers to events in which we happened to be interested. What we saw in print we accepted as the truth. The editor and his staff were honest fellows who were not afraid to say what they thought, within, of course, the limits set by the paper's policy. We did not dream that the big advertisers had any real pull, even when they began to encroach on the political and literary space. We judged the importance of events by their position, and by the space devoted to them in our news-sheets. The exceptionally cautious reader alone took the trouble to compare versions sent out by opposing interests. In fact, before the war came along and forced us to dissociate many of our ideas, we hugged the illusion that the press and independence of opinion were indissolubly bound together.

But 1914 had hardly ended before we saw that the gigantic conflict, as far as we in England were concerned, was to be run on the lines of "big business." Our commercialized government at once grasped the fact that it is as easy to make people patriotic or brutal or finkish by screaming posters and a deluge of handbills, as it is to make them buy one of Lord Leverhulme's soaps, or join a Pelman class. The press, with a few exceptions, played wholeheartedly the game of intimidation and bluff arranged by its masters, and a grateful government saw to it that the capitalist owners did not suffer when paper soared to twelve times its pre-war price. In the end the mendacity of our scribes became so crude that it scarcely deceived the stupidest of patriots. It served its immediate end, no doubt, by dragging out the war, but it lowered journalism in the eyes of all thinking men. It left with us a tonic, if not very comfortable, suspicion.

Now Mr. Upton Sinclair, an American poet and idealist, comes along with a damning indictment of American journalism. His new jungle story is not so upsetting to squeamish stomachs as was his strenuous attack on the infamous Chicago meat packers. Its appallingness is rather psychological than physical, and its appeal is wider because, by implication, it is an attack on the ideals and methods of European journalism. *The Brass Check* was first published in the early part of 1920, and has now gone through seven or eight large editions. Mr. Sinclair is his own publisher and his agents here are Messrs. Hendersons, 65 Charing Cross Road, W.C., who have a cheap edition at 3s. 6d. net. The book is a big one of some four hundred pages, as full of facts as an egg is full of meat, and with all the grip of a fine realistic novel. Although, as I have said, Mr. Sinclair is an idealist, there is not a line of vague declamatory sentiment in the whole book. There are facts, damning facts behind every statement, and the owners of the press of America are aware of it. This unusual combination in Mr. Sinclair of forensic acumen, or tough-mindedness, and lofty unselfishness is puzzling to them. It has no place in their philosophy of life. For the last ten years they have moved heaven and earth to get a grip on him. Nothing this side of homicide would stop them; but he is now master of all their tricks. It is instructive to see a group of hustling millionaires held up and shown up single-handed by a Socialist poor in worldly gods, but incredibly rich in ideas. And yet there are people who would have us believe that ideas, the movement from above, play a mere subsidiary part in the evolution of society in comparison with, what is called, the economic urge.

The Brass Check is, as I have said, a magazine of damning and damnable facts; it is also a model of lucid and logical arrangement of these facts. It is split up into three parts: (1) The evidence: (2) The explanation: (3) The remedy. The evidence is composed of thirty-four chapters which give vivid sketches of Mr. Sinclair's personal adventures among the savages of "God's own country." He gracefully apologises for what may seem his egotism, but I, for one, cannot detect any immodesty. He is a big figure in the democratic attack on one of the strongholds of capitalism, and therefore cannot always avoid the lime-light. Naturally, an idealist who stands up for the Colorado miners, who tackles Rockefeller on his own ground, who defies a powerful business organization like the Associated Press, and tells wholesome truths about

the inner workings of influential newspapers and magazines, such a man is not going to be let off lightly. Professional muck-raker, insane driveller, Socialist ranter, free-lover, Anarchist, Bolshevik, these are some of the names thrown at Mr. Sinclair; but his enemies were not contented merely to call names. They tried his patience and grit in more brutal ways. They lied about his conjugal worries, they stole his correspondence and even his personal property. They laid in waiting for him, but he had (and has) all the cuteness of Brer Rabbit. Now that he is his own publisher he has, I suppose, a better chance of snapping his fingers at them, if only they are unable to get at him through his printer and paper mill.

The second part lays bare the causes of what Mr. Sinclair openly calls a *prostitute press*. "Journalism," he says, "is one of the devices by which an industrial autocracy keeps its control over political democracy..... it is the business and practice of presenting the news of the day in the interest of economic privilege." Now, if you want the causes analysed for you, if you want them supported by facts carefully collected for years, and enforced by the persuasive enthusiasm of a man who is inspired by the noble idea of an absolutely independent press, you will find what you want in this part of Mr. Sinclair's book, and then you will be prepared for the remedy or remedies.

One of the most amusing, and for the Freethinker, instructive chapters of the book is that mordantly entitled *The Elbert Hubbard Worm*. "The Egyptians," Mr. Sinclair reminds us, "had sacred beetles, and Capitalist Journalism has sacred insects of various unpleasant and poisonous species." Hubbard, who was known to the profane as "Fra Elbertus," mine host of the Roycroft Inn, and the patron saint of East Aurora, New York, was a pretty specimen of the journalistic Scarabæus. He had an instinct for paying advertisements. He would write up a cereal food—grape nuts, shredded wheat or what not—with an emotional, heart-to-heart touch which would bring tears from your eyes and dollars from your pocket. The Chicago packers paid him, not as handsomely as he would have wished, for slating *The Jungle*. He wondered how anyone could be deceived by such insane drivel. He lied about the wage slaves of the Copper Trust, and crawled on his belly to the office of the Rockefellers suggesting to the millionaire that a judicious and truthful write up of the Colorado strike would "benefit the world." He was always after benefiting the world. It was his particular stunt and it paid him well. He sold his well printed, artistic looking little magazines by the million. The gullible American took to his sentimental slush as a duck takes to water. I remember picking up one of his "Little Journies" some while ago on a book stall. It was a stupidly sentimental and amazing unintelligent write-up of Charles Bradlaugh whom he acclaimed as a reformer. Hubbard's "human touch," his impudent assumption of spiritual intimacy with the great Atheist is agonizing to those who knew both the man and the worm. But his twaddle is no bad specimen of the worm as a mendacious, crawling sentimentalist. On the last page of his booklet he mentions that when Bradlaugh was dying the House of Commons introduced and passed a resolution expunging from its records all references to his having been expelled and debarred from his seat. When the dying man was told this he said: "Give them my greetings—I am grateful. I have forgiven all, and would have forgotten it save for this." Here he paused, and was silent. After some moments, he opened his eyes, half smiled, and motioning to Labouchere to come close, whispered: "But Labby, the past cannot be wiped out by a resolution of Parliament. The moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on, not all your tears shall BLOT A LINE OF IT."

The story is, of course, quite untrue. Bradlaugh was unconscious when the news came of the passing of the resolution, and remained unconscious to the end. Nor was Mr. Labouchere present. But doubtless the majority of those who have read Mr. Hubbard's book will not be in a position to correct the lie.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIANITY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—May I be allowed a word on the Worsnop v. Cumer discussion. It is extremely difficult to say a lot in a few words, but I will do my best. Neither of these gentlemen appear to me to place their finger upon really fundamental matter, so perhaps the intrusion of an old reader may be excused. In the first place, it is in the highest degree improbable that a man ignorant as an African savage should have anything of importance and value to communicate to the human race at all. Christ's belief in demoniacal possession, the efficacy of prayer, the working of miracles and in the everlasting torment of hell-fire places him in the same category as a witchdoctor. Even the ethics of the New Testament, when divorced of superstition, show us nothing that had not been said previously by the philosophers of the Ancients. And the conclusion must follow that, in the main, had we been born in another country and climate our religious belief would have corresponded thereto. It would really clear the air if Mr. Worsnop would define to us what is a Christian? I find, in practice, nearly all Christians differ on this point. Furthermore, would Mr. Worsnop carefully tell us how much of the supernatural, as Christians, we must believe in, and, if any, how much must be rejected. I was taught to believe in God the Father, God the son and God the Holy Ghost, also in Heaven and Hell, in miracles and prayer, in angels and devils. Do these beliefs correspond to certain *definitely ascertained and verified facts*? Are they essential to Christian doctrine? In fact, it has always appeared to me that Christianity is on the horns of a dilemma, that in view of human nature it is impossible of practice and that no man *has ever lived* who attempted to put it into practice, and, furthermore, it falls considerably short of man's highest ethics. In support of the first two propositions, I will give Christ's own words in Matt. v. 40, "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also." Matt. v. 41, "And whosoever shall compel thee to go with him one mile, go with him twain." Matt. v. 42, "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." I think we can confidently assert that no Christian would attempt such impossibilities; can we, therefore, infer that *no Christian in practice has ever lived*. In conclusion, I wish to show that Christian ethic is wanting. The highest and noblest moral action is self-sacrifice *without expectation of reward or fear of punishment*, and yet from one end of the New Testament to the other the motives to all actions are the bribe of heaven and the fear of hell-fire, Eternal damnation and the wrath of Almighty God. Can indeed anyone, not blinded and bigoted by long association with religion and its devotees, really conscientiously read their New Testament and remain a believer?

R. F. TURNEY.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

SIR,—Dr. Lyttelton says why am I convinced of my own existence, but surely he does not mean this as a parallel case to the belief in God? My reply is that one's own existence is too obvious to admit of proof, or of *honest* doubt; and the existence of other people is much the same. But the existence of God is the very opposite, more difficult to believe than to doubt, and all the so-called reasons for it are open to other interpretations. That is why I ask Dr. Lyttelton how he knows that the conviction of God's existence is reliable, and I say once more that an answer would oblige.

W. JAMESON.

The feeling heart, the searching soul,
To thee I dedicate the whole!
And while within myself I trace
The greatness of some future race,
Aloft with hermit-eye I scan
The present works of present man—
A wild and dream-like trade of blood and guile,
Too foolish for a tear, too wicked for a smile.

—Coleridge (*Ode to Tranquility*).

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 post card.

LONDON.

INDOOR.

FRIARS HALL (236 Blackfriars Road, four doors south of Blackfriars Bridge): 7, Mr. J. T. Lloyd, "Freedom; True and False." (Silver Collection.)

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

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, off Kentish Town Road, N. W.): 7.30, Dr. J. C. Mascavenhas, F.C.S., "What Does England owe to the Catholic Church?"

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9): 7, A Lecture.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C. 2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "The Discrediting of Government."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. W. H. Thresh, "Wonders of Insect Life."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ASSOCIATION OF ENGINEERING AND SHIPBUILDING DRAUGHTSMEN (Merseyside Branch): Thursday, March 17, Dr. Johnstone, "The Herring Fisheries: An Historical Survey."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Shop Assistants' Hall, 297 Argyle Street): 12 noon, Mr. J. Gray, "Some Observations on Religious Teaching in Schools." (Silver Collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Youngman's Rooms, 19 Lowerhead Road, Leeds): Every Sunday at 6.30.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. C. Cohen, "Freethought: What is, and what is not."

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N. S. S. (3 Thompson Street, Tynce Dock): 6.30, Mr. Cohen's proposed visit; 7, Mr. J. Fothergill, "The Value of Discussion."

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