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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page
<i>Christianity and Morals.—The Editor</i> - - - - -	193
<i>"What is God Like?"—J. T. Lloyd</i> - - - - -	194
<i>The Gentle Art of Irony.—Mimnermus</i> - - - - -	196
<i>The Development of the Resurrection Story.—A. D. McLaren</i> - - - - -	197
<i>The Origin of Christianity.—W. Mann</i> - - - - -	198
<i>The Origin and Development of Morals.—A. E. Maddock</i> - - - - -	202
<i>Pages from Fontenelle.—George Underwood</i> - - - - -	204
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions.

Christianity and Morals.

It will come with something of a shock to the average Christian to be told quite plainly and without circumlocution that his religion is of an intensely selfish and egoistic character, but the fact is so. It will shock him because he has for so long been in the habit of camouflaging his real tendencies, and has been for so long told, and telling others, his religion is the very quintessence of unselfishness, that he has not merely imposed upon himself, but has actually succeeded in imposing upon a very large number of his critics. And this imposition is part of the general scheme in virtue of which the Christian Church has given currency to the legend that the doctrines taught by it represented a tremendous advance in the development of the race! In sober truth it represented nothing of the kind. Every student knows—it is now generally admitted by even Christian writers of repute—that the elements of Christianity were existing in the older pagan cults. But it is not by measuring those elements with the form they assumed under Christianity that one can decide the question. This can only be done by bearing in mind the fact that the best thought of antiquity was rapidly throwing off these superstitions and leading the world to a more enlightened view of things. And then we see Christianity re-affirming and re-establishing the old superstitions in their crudest forms. We have in the New Testament the affirmation of the crudest forms of demonism, the doctrine of the miraculous asserted in a form that can only be met with to-day in the most unenlightened parts of the earth, and a general view of nature that none but savages would or could entertain. From the point of view of general culture the retrogressive nature of Christianity is unmistakable. It has yet to be generally recognised that the same thing is true from the standpoint of religion. One day the world will appreciate the fact that no greater disaster ever overtook partly civilized humanity than the triumph of the Christian Church.

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The Christian Motive.

But I commenced with the statement that Christianity was an essentially selfish creed, masking its egoistic impulses under a cover of unselfishness and self sacrifice, and to that I return. And first of all, it will be said that the charge breaks down on the fact

that Christian teaching is full of the exhortation that this world is of no moment, that we gain salvation by learning to treat its prizes as of no value, and that this is carried to the point of even personal sacrifice. All this is too well-known to need discussing, but it does not affect in the least what has been said. There is, I may admit, a profound truth in the statement that a man must give himself to find himself, or as the pithy Eastern saying has it:—

All I had I spent,
All I saved I lost,
All I gave I have.

And it will often happen that a man finds at the end of life that his gifts are his most enduring possessions. But there remains a vital difference in the consideration whether a man gives up the world in order to save his soul, or finds his soul as a consequence of losing the world. In this matter it is the aim that is important, not only to the outsider who is passing judgment, but also, and more importantly, to the agent himself. And the first point to be noted here is that the Christian appeal is essentially selfish in character. It is something done with the avowed purpose of getting something in return. If other people are to be saved, it is because their salvation is believed to be necessary to the salvation of one's own soul. That this involves, or may involve, a surrender of worldly possessions is of no moment. If one believes in immortal salvation and damnation, and in the near presence of God, with the intensity that the typical great Christian types believed, it would be foolish for him not to surrender things of comparatively little moment for things of such, obviously, transcendent importance and value. And to do Christians justice they have been the first to affirm that but for the prospect of being paid back with such tremendous interest for what they were doing, they could see no reason why they should be good at all. This is the reason for doing good that the New Testament holds out. You are to give in secret that you may be rewarded openly. You are to throw your bread upon the water that it may be returned. What you do here is in the nature of an investment on which you will receive a handsome dividend in the next world. And your readiness to invest will be proportionate to your conviction of the soundness of the security. But there is no perception of the truly ethical basis of conduct. There is no perception of the inevitable consequences of conduct on character. It is essentially an appeal to what is grasping and selfish in human nature, and while you may hide the nature of a thing in words you cannot hinder the natural consequences of its working out in life. And the consequences of this Christian cultivation of the narrow and selfish is seen in some of the most deplorable features of European history.

* * *

Spiritual Egotism.

What the great Christian figures had in mind was, in most cases, not the removal of suffering and injustice, but the saving of their own souls. If they believed that this could be done by getting away from human society altogether and living the life of a

hermit, they did so. If they thought it involved forsaking wife and family they left them without compunction. Thus, speaking of no less a character than the great St. Augustine, a Christian writer, Mr. A. C. Benson, says:—

I was much interested in reading St. Augustine's *Confessions* lately to recognize how small a part, after his conversion, any aspirations for the welfare of humanity seem to play in his mind, compared with the consciousness of his own personal relations with God. It was this which gave him his exuberant sense of joy and peace, and his impulse was rather the impulse of sharing a wonderful and beautiful secret with others rather than an immediate desire for their welfare, forced out of him, so to speak, by his own exultation rather than drawn out of him by compassion for the needs of others.

Much the same thing may be seen in a study of the great Christian figureheads. St. Francis commenced by leaving his parents, so did John Fox centuries after. And in that Puritan classic, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, there is a striking absence of emphasis on the value of the social and domestic virtues. To have suggested that these were necessary to man would have brought down scornful remarks on "filthy rags of righteousness," mere morality, etc. The whole aim of the saints was, ultimately, a personal one. It was not even a refined or metaphysical selfishness. It was a simple teaching that the one thing essential was to save one's own soul, and that anything done here would meet with its reward in the life to come. If it can be properly called morality, it was morality deliberately put out at the highest rate of interest. It was like the Church of England investing three millions in war stock at five per cent., and then claiming credit for its patriotism in helping the country in the day of its need.

* * *

Compensation.

In their attacks our opponents cannot avoid unconsciously proving the truth of what has been said. Their complaint here is, in the main, not that naturalism fails to give a reasonable account of the nature and development of morality, but that it is unable to satisfy mankind and to serve as an incentive to right conduct. And when we enquire as to what precisely is meant by this, we learn that if there is no belief in God, and if there is no expectation of a future life, then there remains no inducement for the average man or woman to do right. It is the moral teaching of St. Paul that if there is no resurrection from the dead, "then let us eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." We are still in the region of morality as a deliberate investment, with the threat that if the interest is not high enough or certain enough to satisfy the dividend hunting appetite of the true believer, then the investment will be withdrawn. The complaint of the Christian against the morality of Freethought is not really that it is too low, but actually that it is too high. He doubts whether Christian human nature can rise to it, and whether, unless you can guarantee the Christian a good reward for his not starving his family or robbing his neighbour, he will continue to place any value on decency or honesty. Freethought removes, says the Christian, moral "restraints." The use of the word is illuminating. To the Christian morality is no more than a system of restraints. It stops a man doing what he wishes to do, and if he goes short of enjoyment here, it seems to him only reasonable that he shall be compensated for his mortification hereafter. Man is a born criminal, God is an almighty policeman, that is the substance of Christian morality.

* * *

Christianity and Life.

Is the present state of the world quite without a causal relation to the Christian conception of morality?

Is it quite without significance that those nations that have taken most warmly to Christianity should be what they are? For when we wipe out all the disguising phrases which man uses to deceive himself and others—and it is almost impossible to persistently deceive others unless one does deceive oneself—put on one side all the fine phrases about Imperial races; carrying civilization, the white man's burden, peopling the waste places of the earth, etc., etc., what have the Christian nations of the world been for a full five centuries but so many gangs of freebooters engaged in world-wide piracy? All over the world they have gone fighting, stealing, killing, lying in a steadily rising crescendo. And everywhere they have done these things under the shelter of their religion and with the sanction of their creed. And this has been so because their religion has offered no effective check to the cupidity of man, but has only to find an outlet for that cupidity in a disguised form. To borrow a term from the psycho-analysts, it "rationalized" certain impulses, and so provided the occasion for their continuous expression. Christianity's intellectual weakness is to-day so apparent that it no longer admits of effective disguise. What the world has next to appreciate is that its moral bankruptcy is no less assured. The sentimentalism which leads so many who are not professing Christians to indulge in maudlin rhapsodies over the morality of Christianity is only part of the huge imposture which the Christian Church foisted upon the world. Christian morality is the morality of the stock exchange plus the intellectual outlook of the savage. And with that combination our surprise should be, not that the world is what it is, but that with such a combination in power for so long the world has reached its present imperfect state of development.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"What is God Like?"

Is it not passing strange that after all the countless ages of history such a question should still need to be asked and answered? Is not this fact alone an adequate indication that the question is absolutely unanswerable? There are people, however, whose one business in life is trying to answer the unanswerable, to solve the insoluble, to see the invisible; and the worst of it is that some of them succeed in working themselves up into such a mental state as enables them to conclude that they have performed the stupendous miracle. So assured are they that they know God that they cannot tolerate those who deny his existence. Atheists have always been treated as fools who deserve no consideration. Zophar tauntingly asked Job, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" Jehovah is represented as telling Moses that man could not see him and live. In John i. 18 we read: "No man hath seen God at any time"; but this statement contradicts Jacob's testimony as recorded in Genesis xxx. 11: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." The truth is, however, that the Supreme Being, so minutely described in certain parts of the Bible, and in all later theology, is neither visible nor comprehensible, and nobody can say what he is like. This is why the world teems with so many different and conflicting conceptions of him. According to the Athanasian Creed the Catholic Faith, which all must "keep whole and undefiled," or perish everlastingly, is this: "That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance." Then follows a long and most intricate treatment of the nature and relations of the three Persons constituting the Holy Trinity, notwithstanding the fact that in this very Creed the following frank admission occurs: "The

Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible."

A common error fallen into by believers is to claim that they know God by experience, or by their enjoyment of what they call personal communion with him. This by no means implies that they are necessarily hypocrites, all it signifies being that they mistake belief for knowledge. What we doubt is, not their truthfulness, but their interpretation of an actual fact; not their enjoyment of alleged communion with God, but their inference from such an experience. It is not essential that a being must exist objectively to render fellowship with him possible. Do we not all live on terms of great intimacy with fictitious characters created by poets and novelists? The only difference is that Christians believe in the objective existence of the God with whom they commune, whereas we never dream of attributing objective existence to the creations of literary artists. Now, our contention is that the Christian God is fully as mythical as was Osiris, with whom the ancient Egyptians believed themselves to be personally intimate. Osiris was as real to their imagination as Jehovah was to that of the Jews. If you read the *Psalms* side by side with the *Book of the Dead* you will be surprised at the similarity between them. What Jehovah was to the Psalmists and Osiris to the writers of the *Book of the Dead*, that exactly is the Christian God to his devotees: As we all are aware, even now the world is full of deities, and they differ in strict proportion to the differences between their respective creators. There is not a scrap of more evidence of the objective reality of any one of them than there is of all the others. Let it be emphasized, therefore, that just as Professor Flinders Petrie speaks of the myth of Osiris, or of Horus, so may we write of the myth of the Christian God. Subjectively he is often joyously real to his worshippers, but objectively there is not the faintest trace of him anywhere.

What is God like? He is exactly what his worshippers wish to become. He is in their own image and after their own likeness, *only on a larger scale*. He differs from them in quantity much more than in quality. The *Christian World Pulpit* for March 16 contains a sermon by Dr. George Jackson, Professor of Pastoral Theology at Didsbury College, Manchester, which he recently preached in Westminster Chapel, London. It is entitled, "What is God like?" The Gospel Jesus teaches that God is much more anxious to give good gifts to them that ask him than human parents are to give good gifts unto their children. Dr. Jackson says:—

In these words Jesus tells us of the kind of God in whom he himself believed and would have his disciples to believe likewise. For in these words, if I understand them aright, Jesus tells us that if we would know what God is like we must begin with what is best in man; we must begin with love, with love at its highest, at its holiest; and we must remember that God is like that.

The reverend gentleman begins to unfold that teaching by reminding us of three Bible stories which he relates in his own exquisitely beautiful style. They are stories illustrative of the sublime love of mothers. The mothers are Sisera's mother, Rizpah, and the mother of Jesus, and after telling the stories the preacher applies them thus:—

Says Jesus, it is love like that, the love that waits and watches and is most wonderfully kind; the love of a Rizpah, the love of a Mary—it is love like that that tells you best what God is like. If ye, being evil, will do such and such things, how much more will your Father which is in heaven. Always this is what Jesus would teach us; always it is through love that God is revealed: nothing more is needed, nothing less will suffice.

Dr. Jackson states the teaching of the Gospel Jesus

about God with delightful lucidity and directness, and we cannot but admire his method. But the vital question that confronts us is, what evidence is there that a God of love exists and is supreme? The Rev. Mr. Gillie, in his Presidential Address to the National Free Church Council at Manchester declared that "God has more to do in the world just now than ever before." The only rational inference from that assertion is that God's work in the world in the past must have been a stupendous failure. If he has more to do to-day than he had yesterday, it inevitably follows that the world is worse now than it was then. Mr. Gillie admits that it is worse, that "the powers of evil have been intensified." He proceeds thus:—

Without exaggerating baleful portents, the honest mind discerns a shamelessness and an aggressiveness in evil with which we were unfamiliar. There has been something like a hysteria of self-indulgence and vice. It is a day of moral epidemics. The Devil roareth like a lion while he still seduceth like a serpent.

Surely that is not creditable to the God whose very being is love, to the Heavenly Father whose self-chosen task is the redemption of his erring children. Mr. Gillie alludes to two master strokes, the execution of Jesus being the master stroke of sin, and his resurrection the master stroke of God. Then he assures us that "the day of the triumph of evil is the day for a new outburst of creative Christianity." Curiously enough, having drawn such a lurid picture of the triumph of evil the reverend gentleman has the temerity to claim that "in some respects England is more Christian than it was half a century ago," in that "a social conscience has been created." In any case, a social conscience is not a distinctively Christian virtue. In so far as it exists at all, it has been created during the gradual decadence of Christianity. It is a purely evolutionary product, the natural outcome of the spread of intelligence and the ripening of the social sense.

It is impossible to exaggerate the value of love as a domestic and social factor; but that a God of omnipotent love sits on the throne of the world is the emptiest of dreams, a fact completely demonstrated by Mr. Gillie's own description of the condition of the world after nineteen centuries of Christianity. What is needed is love, but not Divine love, which has never done anything to show that it is a reality. What society requires for its own ennoblement is love of this world, the love forbidden by St. John, the love of man for every brother man. In the bosom of this love is social justice, which Christianity has never brought into practice. This love alone is redemptive, ennobling, and exalting. As Meredith puts it:—

I say but that this love of Earth reveals
A soul beside our own to quicken, quell,
Irradiate, and through ruinous floods uplift.

J. T. LLOYD.

To be happy is to have measured happiness to one's own needs; there is no surer way of not quarrelling with life than not to expect too much from it.....The universe is a fact: we do not control it, we have to accept it. Dry and bitter though they may be, these truths are not barren. It is something to have learnt that among the problems which have most engrossed the human mind there are some which have no solution, and even no meaning. And the acceptance of things as they are, the habit of taking them as the ineluctable conditions of life, is a pretty good teacher of resignation. If we do not suffer any the less, we are less irritated by suffering; anguish is no longer mingled with bitterness, regrets with anger. The protest of the human moral sense against the immorality of nature and history remains; this is desirable; but it loses the feverish and childish form of rebellion. "O Universe!" said Saint Marcus Aurelius, "What thou wilt, that will I also."—Edmond Scherer.

The Gentle Art of Irony.

I take possession of man's mind and deed,
I care not what the sects may brawl,
I sit as god holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all.—Tennyson, "Palace of Art."

BYRON once said that "ridicule is the only weapon the English climate cannot rust." Yet it is not popular in this country, and irony has many enemies. Simple people, who must be literal or nothing, dislike it. Ladies, more often than not, do not care for it at all. And those other wearers of petticoats, the priests, whose professional gravity prompts them, look askance at it as being something unseemly.

Without it is based on seriousness, said Heine, who was himself a master of the lash, wit is only a sneeze of the reason. Every great wit in literature has been a man of serious aims, and the greatest writers have been the greatest wits from the far-off days of Aristophanes to those of Anatole France. Some of the best masters of irony have been among the most earnest soldiers of progress. Perhaps the most perfect examples of irony are to be found in Voltaire's *Candide*, the wittiest book in the world. Here is an example taken at random. When Candide was to be punished as a military deserter:—

He was asked which he would like the best, to be whipped six and thirty times through all the regiment, or to receive at once twelve bullets in his brain. He vainly said that human will is free, and that he chose neither the one nor the other. He was forced to make a choice. He determined, in virtue of that gift of God called liberty, to run the gauntlet six and thirty times.

After Voltaire, Heinrich Heine is perhaps the most brilliant ironist. For seven years prior to his death he lay sick and solitary on a "mattress-grave," his back twisted, his legs paralysed, his hands powerless, his sight failing. "God's satire weighs heavily upon me," he said:—

The great Author of the Universe, the Aristophanes of Heaven, was bent on demonstrating with crushing force to me, the little so-called German Aristophanes, how my weightiest sarcasms are only pitiful attempts at jesting in comparison with His, and how miserably I am beneath Him in humour, in colossal mockery.

The untameable humourist kept his most wonderful jest for the last. Reproached by friends for his levity in religious matters, he said: "God will forgive me. It is His trade."

A splendid example of sustained irony is to be found in Gibbon's famous fifteenth chapter of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, sketching with masterly skill the rise of the Christian religion. We all realize Gibbon's position. He was pretending to give an account of the early Christians from the orthodox standpoint, so as to hoodwink the pious. This is how he does it:—

But how shall we excuse the supine inattention of the Pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason but to their senses? During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and the laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the Church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alteration in the moral and physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this

miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, curiosity, and devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history.

Gibbon is ostensibly censuring the sages for overlooking the Bible miracles. In reality, he is denying their occurrence by slyly pointing out that there is no contemporary record of them from disinterested sources. How masterly is Gibbon's command of language! He gives an impressive picture of the Christian knight-errant who,—

as the champion of God and the ladies (I blush to unite such discordant names) devoted himself to speak the truth, maintain the right, and protect the distressed.

A far more genial satirist is Anatole France, who, in *My Friend's Book* describes Pierre Noziere's childish passion towards the saintly life with inimitable grace and irony:—

My sole idea was to live the life of an ascetic. In order to lose no time in putting my ideas in operation, I refused to eat my breakfast. My mother, who knew nothing of my new vocation, thought I was ill, and looked at me with an anxiety that it pained me to behold. Nevertheless, I persevered with my fasting, and then, remembering the example of Saint Simeon Stylites, who spent his life on a pillar, I climbed up on to the kitchen cistern, but it was impossible to live there, for Julie, our cook, promptly dislodged me. I next decided to imitate Saint Nicholas of Patras, who gave all his riches to the poor. My father's study window looked out on to the quay, and from it I proceeded to fling down a dozen coppers or so which had been presented to me because they were new and bright. These I followed up with marbles, humming-tops, whip-tops, and eelskin whip.

"The child is crazy," exclaimed my father, as he shut the window.

I felt angry and mortified at hearing this judgment passed upon me, but I remembered that my father, not being a saint like myself, would not share with me in the glories of the blessed, a reflection from which I derived great consolation.

Swift, like Voltaire, was also a master of irony. Voltaire recommended *The Tale of a Tub* as a masterly satire against religion in general, and Thackeray denied Swift's belief in that Christian religion which he had defended so ironically in his deadly and venomous *Arguments Against Abolishing Christianity*. Perhaps the most striking example of Swift's peculiar humour is *A Modest Proposal*, which is a reasoned proposition to use up for food the superfluous children of poor people. Irony will also be found in Fielding's *History of Jonathan Wild the Great*, in the acidulated pages of Flaubert, and under the polite sentences of Renan. It also lurks in the robust humour of Rabelais, and in the suggestive pages of Denis Diderot. The greatest living English writer, Thomas Hardy, has shown himself a master of irony, particularly in the concluding chapter of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, in which he makes play with "The President of the Immortals." But the dictionary definition of irony must be altered. It is not nearly enough to say that it is "a mode of speech expressing a sense contrary to that which the speaker intends to convey." It may be true of the simple, elementary irony of the Cockney who called after the lady cyclist with large feet, "Hullo! Trilby!" but it by no means defines the more complex irony of literature. We much prefer George Meredith's definition:—

If instead of falling foul of the ridiculous person with a satiric rod to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him with a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether, indeed, anything has hurt him, you are an engine of irony.

This is superbly said by one of the greatest masters of the lash in our language.

MIMNERMUS.

The Development of the Resurrection Story.

THE narrative of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ as given in the New Testament is one of the most instructive illustrations extant of the stages by which, under conditions suitable for development, the human passes into the divine, gradually acquires new supernatural features, and provides the nucleus of a powerful cult.

The statement often made that the earliest record of the resurrection is found in the fifteenth chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians is misleading. Even admitting the genuineness of the whole chapter, the apostle's direct testimony is not to a resurrection at all, but to visions or apparitions several years after the supposed event, which neither he nor any of the disciples claimed to have witnessed. He is relating one of the "varieties of religious experience," not the activities of a man corporeally resurrected from the grave. The present writer was always taught that the story of the empty tomb formed the first link in the chain of evidence for the resurrection. This Paul never mentions. In his list of appearances of the risen Christ he omits all reference to the experience of Mary Magdalene and the other women, the starting point of the story in the four Gospel compilations. On the other hand, his third appearance of the risen Christ—the remarkable apparition to the five hundred brethren at once—is passed over entirely by the evangelists. It is significant, too, that the appearance of the risen Jesus to his brother James is mentioned by Paul, and, with a considerable accretion of legendary detail, by the compiler of the apocryphal Gospel of the Hebrews, but is not recorded in the canonical Gospels. Nor does the Pauline account give any indication whatever of the place of the appearances, or the exact time after the crucifixion when the first apparition occurred. Paul's risen Christ is expressly declared to be not flesh and blood, and the natural inference from his story is that the vision to the others was precisely similar. Lastly, Paul nowhere narrates an actual ascension of Christ, though had he known anything of it he would almost certainly have referred to it, for the exalted master is one of his favourite themes.

What did Paul see? "A light from heaven"—just what high-strung religious natures so often see in suitable circumstances. Paul was prone to "visions and revelations" (2 Cor. xii., Acts xvi.), and so was Peter, who is credited with seeing his master walk upon the water, and with being the first to whom the risen Christ appeared. According to Acts x. Peter beheld a vessel descend from heaven, "wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts and creeping things of the earth," while chapter xii. relates how a resplendent angel of the Lord appeared and struck off his fetters as he lay in prison. At the time of Christ's transfiguration (Mark ix.) before Peter, James and John, Elias and Moses both appear unto them. But all the books of the New Testament, together with the apocryphal writings, cannot exhaust the list of devout men and women to whom visions of Jesus Christ have been vouchsafed. The apologist's usual answer to subjective explanations of the first appearances is that expectancy, the natural source of such apparitions, was not present in the case of the disciples. But the notion of some form of resurrection is prominent in all apocalyptic literature. Even Herod (Matt. xiv., 2) mistakes Jesus himself for the risen John the Baptist.

In the Gospels the risen Christ appears in bodily form, and a critical examination reveals folklore in process of development, and the retouching of the story as early Christian thought took on more colour from the Oriental and Greek myths which prevailed in the Eastern Mediterranean during the first century.

These latter steadily gain ground on the small nucleus of history, and mould it into conformity with the popular superstitions of those whom the missionaries seek to convert. Mark, the oldest of the four Gospels, gives us the genesis of the story about the visit to the grave and the empty tomb. The meeting with the "young man" at the tomb is probably the keynote to the tradition in its original form. He develops quite naturally into an angel, for in the popular belief of the time angels were charged with the care of departed souls (Luke xvi. 22). But the concluding twelve verses of Mark are late and unauthentic. What the original conclusion was has been the subject of whole libraries of conjecture. Probably it was regarded as so unsatisfactory a "proof" of the bodily resurrection that it was deleted when the latter became accepted as a cardinal article of faith. Matthew's concluding chapter explicitly declares that the two Marys took hold of Jesus' feet; but it is seriously at variance with Mark in regard to the conduct and state of mind of the two women. Nor does Matthew say anything of the important appearances in Jerusalem when the apostles were reassembled. But in Luke the details of a corporeal resurrection are noticeably enriched, and Jerusalem is the only scene of the manifestations. When we reach the fourth Gospel, as far as chapter xx., which seems its natural close, Jerusalem is again the scene of all the manifestations; but a concluding chapter is added in which the appearance to the disciples in Galilee is narrated in circumstantial detail. John's tomb, it may be noted incidentally, is an elaborate affair, quite different from the rock-grave of the others, and the Lord's body is sumptuously embalmed, like the royal corpses of the time. Yet this Gospel, admittedly farther from historical reality than any of the synoptics, is the very one which has taken the firmest grip on the religious consciousness of Christendom.

According to Mark, the women fled from the sepulchre and told nobody anything of what had occurred. Luke makes them return and narrate everything to the Eleven "and the rest." According to Matthew, on her way back from the sepulchre the first time Mary Magdalene had seen the risen Lord and clasped his feet; but in John she is forbidden to touch him, and she says nothing of an angelic message. John also makes Christ, despite his material body, appear to the disciples through closed doors and show his hands and feet. Add to the discrepancies the fact that a strong weight of orthodox critical scholarship regards several important passages as late interpolations, such as those referring to the watch at the sepulchre.

The story of the ascension in the clouds marks another stage in the transmission of the Christ-tradition. It is consistent with current notions on heavenly ascent, and is doubtless based on the similar stories concerning Enoch and Elijah. But notice how unevenly the new story rests upon the general background of the New Testament narrative. Matthew says nothing about it, or about the final disappearance of Jesus. According to Mark and Luke the risen Christ parted from the disciples on the day of his resurrection. Luke says, "and was carried up into heaven," though there is some doubt about the text. In the Acts, however, compiled by the same Luke, the ascension takes place forty days later. In the first two centuries of the Christian era belief regarding the ascension appears to have been no more uniform than any other belief. Exactly how Christ ascended, and the degree of materiality of his person were the subject of endless theological speculation. To the difficulties of that age we have to add that of a spherical world, revolving and rotating. Further, if heaven is, as we are now assured, not a locality at all but a state of mind, where is the right hand of God to which Christ ascended?

The meaning of Christ's descent into hell has also been the subject of reams of learned comment. On his descent into Hades he even preached to the spirits in prison (1 Peter iii.), and the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus gives a detailed account of his sojourn in the under-world, reminding one, in some respects, of the visit of Aeneas to the shades, as related by Virgil. The writer of Revelation assigns to the Son of Man "the keys of death and of Hades," to indicate that his power extends to the souls in the under-world. The control of this realm, it should be noted, was one of the special prerogatives of Isis. The general idea of a world of departed souls, each working out its own sentence of ghostly pain, is common to the religious thought of the time. The New Testament writings merely reflect this idea, which survives to-day in the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and his descent into Hades, are links in the chain of myth, which assumes wider proportions as the deifying features are enlarged in order to win the popular consciousness for the new faith. The masses delight to weave a mythical texture round their central heroes, and there was at hand a whole budget of saviour-gods and mystery religions to point the way. Initiation into the sacred mysteries, and the promise of redemption are essentials for any religion which is to influence the common people. The ideas of death, resurrection and redemption all play a part in the myths connected with Marduk, Attis, Adonis, Isis and Osiris. On the other side of the deifying process, Lysander, the Syrian house of Seleucus, the Egyptian Ptolemies and Julius Cæsar, were all regarded by the Ephesians as of divine rank, and Ephesus was a most important centre of early Christian missionary effort. The translation to heaven of the Virgin Mother of Christ, celebrated on the 15th day of August every year, is one of the most solemn festivals of the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Greek Churches. The apologist tells us that no early Christian would consciously borrow from Isis and other mythological figures. But the ideas associated with them permeated the religious world of the time, and, whatever the original contents of the New Testament, late accretions are admitted by all scholars without exception.

A. D. McIAREN.

The Origin of Christianity.

X.

(Continued from page 183.)

The Christian story, as the Gospels narrate it, is a big bubble. You approach it critically, and it bursts. Dogmatic Christianity built upon it a paper balloon kept afloat by gas. All so-called lives of Christ, or biographies of Jesus, are works of fiction, erected by imagination on the shifting foundation of meagre and unreliable records. Rabbi J. M. Wise, "The Martyrdom of Jesus of Nazareth," p. 123.

FURTHER proof that the Gospels were not written by Palestinian Jews is forthcoming by a critical examination of their contents. The writers know, in a vague kind of way, the names of some of the towns and villages and the names of some of the rulers and leading men among the Jews and Romans, but when they come to use them in their story they make as many howlers as a first year school boy writing an historical essay.

For instance, Matthew and Luke betray their late date by making Jesus speak of the "righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar" (Matt. xxiii. 35; Luke xi. 51). For Josephus tells us that Zacharias, the son of Baruch, was slain in the temple

at the siege of Jerusalem, more than thirty years after the death of Jesus.¹ Christian apologists have pretended that Jesus was referring to Zechariah, the prophet, who lived 840 years before Christ. But is it likely that Jesus, in referring to the righteous blood shed since the time of Abel, should end with Zechariah 840 years ago when there had been so much righteous blood shed since then? Moreover, Zechariah the prophet was not slain in the temple, in fact there is no record that he was slain at all.

Again, when the soldiers were instructed to say that the body of Jesus was stolen from the tomb, we are told, "this saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continueth until this day" (Matt. xxviii. 15). A writer dealing with the events of his own time does not say that a certain report of an event continues "until this day"; the phrase denotes many years after the event. So do the references to the Church and the founding it upon Peter (Matt. xvi. 18), for the Church did not come into existence until long after the time of Christ.

There is no doubt that Mark—considered to be the oldest of the Gospels—was written after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year A.D. 70, for in chapter xiii., as Dr. Carpenter points out: "The anticipated tribulation in verse 19 is already matter of retrospect in verse 20; the terrors of the destruction of the temple and the fall of the city are over."²

Matthew Arnold, "the Apostle of Culture," points out many other anachronisms, he says:—

He (John) speaks as if they and their usages belonged to another race from himself—to another world. The waterpots at Cana are set "after the manner of the purifying of the Jews"; "there arose a question between John's disciples and a Jew about purifying"; "now the Jews' passover was at hand"; they wound the body of Jesus in linen clothes with spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury"; "there they laid Jesus, because of the preparation of the Jews".....A Jew talking of the Jews' passover, and of a dispute of some of John's disciples with a Jew about purifying. It is like an Englishman writing of the Derby as the English people's Derby, or talking of a dispute between some of Mr. Cobden's disciples and an Englishman about free trade. An Englishman would never speak so.....Again, twice the fourth Gospel speaks of Caiaphas as "highpriest of that year," as if the Jewish highpriesthood had been at that time a yearly office, which it was not. It is a mistake a foreigner might perfectly have made, but hardly a Jew. It is like talking of an American "president of that year," as if the American presidency were a yearly office. An American could never adopt, one thinks, such a way of speaking. Again, the disciple who, at the highpriest's palace, brings Peter in, is called by the writer of the fourth Gospel "an acquaintance of the highpriest." One of the poor men who followed Jesus an acquaintance of a grandee like Caiaphas!.....which is like the exaggeration of calling a London working-man, who is in the throng round a police court during an exciting inquiry, and has interest enough to get a friend in, "an acquaintance of the Secretary of State." As the social distinctions of Palestine are confounded, so are its geographical distinctions. "Bethany beyond Jordan" is like "Willesden beyond Trent." A native could never have said it. This is so manifest, indeed, that in the later manuscripts Bethany was changed into Bethabara, and so it stands in our version. But the three earlier and authoritative manuscripts all agree in Bethany, which we may pronounce certainly, therefore, the original reading. Nevertheless, the writer knew of the Bethany near Jerusalem; he makes it the scene of the raising of Lazarus. But his Palestinian geography is so vague, it has for him so little of the reality and necessity which it would have for a native, that when he wants a name for a locality he takes the first village that comes into his remem-

¹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, Book IV., chapter v., §4.

² Carpenter, *The First Three Gospels*, p. 290.

brance, without troubling himself to think whether it suits or no.²

Matthew speaks of "Bethlehem, and in all coasts thereof" (Matt. ii. 13), being evidently under the impression that Bethlehem is on the sea. It would be as accurate to speak of the coasts of Birmingham as the coasts of Bethlehem. Mark, not to be outdone, speaks of Jesus "departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the Sea of Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of the Decapolis" (Mark vii. 31). If Jesus did this he must have performed a miracle and shifted the Sea of Galilee to the other side of the Decapolis, for the Sea of Galilee lies between the Decapolis and Tyre and Sidon. The same ignorance is displayed by Luke; Dr. Estlin Carpenter notices:—

The geographical confusion into which the writer (Luke) is betrayed in his account of the journey through Samaria and Galilee implies that he was not himself familiar with Palestine.⁴

The same writer also observes:—

The vague phrase, "a city of the Jews," suggests that the writer was himself not a Jew. He was a Gentile writing for Gentiles, whose claims he takes every opportunity of establishing.

The Gospel writers' ignorance of contemporary history is phenomenal. Matthew says that Christ was born "in the days of Herod the king." Luke says it took place when "Cyrenius was Governor of Syria." But Herod died in the year 4 B.C., and Cyrenius was not made Governor until the year A.D. 6, a discrepancy of ten years! Again, Luke dates the coming of John the Baptist in the fifteenth year of Tiberias Cæsar, Lysanias being tetrach of Abilene. "But," says the learned author of *The Gospel History*, "Lysanias was put to death, at the instigation of Cleopatra, no less than thirty-four years before the birth of Jesus, and neither Josephus nor any other contemporary historian speaks of any other Lysanias" (p. 86). The Rev. Dr. Giles, in noticing the same error, observes:—

It is suggested by those who doubt the accuracy of St. Luke's Gospel that he ignorantly makes Lysanias still alive, being deceived by the fact that the country was still called the Abilene of Lysanias, in honour perhaps of its former governor. It is in vain that harmonists and commentators have attempted to reconcile these conflicting accounts.⁵

As we shall see, the Gospel writers were equally ignorant of the laws and manners and customs of the Romans as of those of the Palestinian Jews.

(To be Continued.) W. MANN.

Acid Drops.

We dealt last week with Justice Darling's discharge of women jurors in a recent case. But we see that he has now made a further statement on the subject, in which he says that he believes his action will meet with the approval of decent women in the country. Now we strongly object to that word "decent" in this connection. It begs the whole question at issue, and is one of those cowardly phrases with which conservatism and stupidity protects itself against attack. It labels all who do not agree with Justice Darling, and particularly any woman who has the courage to stand in favour of a really clean social atmosphere, as indecent. In the mouth of an ordinary person the word might be excused, but in the mouth of a judge who is in the habit of weighing the implications of his language the phrase is quite inexcusable. If Justice Darling had said that *most* women would agree with him no fault could be found with the statement. To put it as he does is an insult to women of courage and genuine decency.

² Matthew Arnold, *God and the Bible*, pp. 142-145; Ed. 1839.

⁴ Carpenter, *The First Three Gospels*, p. 334.

⁵ Rev. Dr. Giles, *Christian Records*, p. 191.

The clergy are leaving no stones unturned in order to raise money to augment their salaries. A London daily paper says: "A plan is being evolved under which the children in Sunday-schools will be asked to contribute their pence." This is almost as chivalrous as taking sweets from a child's mouth.

A newspaper paragraph states that a pike caught at Fleet Pond, Hampshire, contained, when cut open, a sixpence and a live perch. This is not nearly so distressing a case as that mentioned in Holy Writ of a whale having a live prophet in his interior as a "paying guest."

Providence is very playful on occasion. On his way to Rome Cardinal Bourne was robbed in the train, losing five suit-cases and money. We imagine that his eminence's language was Scriptural and forcible.

The Bishop of London is reported to have said, "The business men of London are not such fools as to put their sons to such a rotten profession as preaching." We fancy that his Lordship has been wrongly reported. What, we think, he said was, "The business men of London put only the rottenest of their sons to the profession of preaching." We fancy that is the correct version because it is difficult to imagine a Bishop saying anything but the truth.

Mr. Cohen's forthcoming visit to Huddersfield appears to have had a disturbing influence on some of the local clergy. One of these, the Rev. Thomas Toplady, takes up a large part of a half column advertisement in the *Huddersfield Examiner* warning people of one who was vile enough to say, in a recent issue of the *Freethinker*, that "Our English Sunday is certainly one of the most demoralizing and the most depressing of all human institutions." Of course, one cannot expect a clergyman such as Mr. Toplady to agree with that, it is his business to teach otherwise. And the Huddersfield people have a further insight into the character of the man who is to lecture to them by being presented with the quotation "Atheism is inevitable." That, to Mr. Toplady, is so horrible as not to need comment.

Mr. Toplady is under the delusion that it is enough to prevent the opening of picture houses on Sunday to point out that if they are opened the owners of the buildings will earn money by them. Well, why should they not? Why should these men be asked to work for the amusement of the community for nothing? We presume that Mr. Toplady raises no objection to being paid for his Sunday labour. True, he does not amuse his congregation, at least, not willingly. But the essential question is not whether people get paid for attending to and providing Sunday entertainments, but whether these things are desirable. And if they provide material for the health and happiness of the community, those who provide the means have the same claim for payment as for other services. The truth is that, the clergy, knowing the Christian character, hope that if they can prevent payment Christians will not open their places, and thus leave the parsons undisturbed in their Sunday trading.

Our "Views and Opinions" for February 27 seems also to have upset one of the writers in the *Workshop Guardian*. He calls them "spleenish," though why that name it is hard to see. Perhaps it was the only one he could think of, and with most newspaper writers any word does so long as it looks all right. He also complains that he had to pay a penny excess postage. But as he had the paper sent him by someone he appears to have got his copy very cheaply. We are sure it is the best pennyworth of reading he has ever bought, and the fact of his not appearing to appreciate it only proves his great need of literature of a more educative character than he is in the habit of getting. We advise him to persevere with the treatment. Its effects will soon be observable to his friends.

According to the latest returns, the deaths in London for one week from two diseases were, cancer 121, con-

sumption 121. During 1919 there were 821,050 cases of tuberculosis notified in England and Wales, and the deaths from this disease numbered about 40,000. Yet many well-meaning folk repeat the phrase "Our Father which art in heaven"!

Providence has playful moments. Dr. J. Maxwell, formerly secretary to the Medical Missions Association, died after attending church. The same day a scholar leaving Sunday-school at Woking was knocked down by a taxicab and killed. There is no moral, but had they been leaving a Freethought lecture, there would have been a very serious and impressive one.

In his Rectorial address at Glasgow University, Mr. Bonar Law said the best things life could give were, "apart from religion," human affection and work. There's rectorial wisdom while you wait. Ireland is suffering from too much religion; and a million and a quarter English men and women can't get work. And Mr. Law offers them—rhetoric.

The Rev. F. W. North, formerly British chaplain in Moscow, can hardly claim to belong to the "starving" clergy. He was voted £5,000 by the House of Commons "for services rendered."

A man was fined three pounds the other day at Luton for breaking up a Church service. His excuse was that after he went into the Church his mind became a blank and he did not know what he was doing. The magistrate declined to accept the excuse, and we are not surprised. Emptiness of mind is a good enough reason for going to Church, but it is no justification for misbehaviour once having gone there. And people must be cured of bad habits, if possible. So doubtless this man will stay away from Church in the future.

During the war allotment holders in Edinburgh were allowed to work on Sundays, in spite of some old by-law to the contrary. For the Christian conscience, being a unique product, could reconcile itself to a desecration of the Sabbath for no other purpose than getting on with war. One is not surprised. A religion which enshrines cannibalism must be expected to have a kindly eye to anything that involves killing. But the war is over, and some of the people of Edinburgh are persisting in allotment digging on Sunday, and the Town Council, as there is no one to kill, is concerned about this departure from Christian practice. So a Committee has just reported on the matter, and has recommended that as there is evidently a feeling in favour of gardening on Sunday this be permitted up to ten o'clock in the morning. May we suggest that those who wish to be permitted to work on their plots all day on Sunday should start growing some kind of vegetable poison to be used in killing Germans, or Frenchmen, or Americans, or whoever we are likely to have the next war with. The pious Edinburgh Council will then see the advisability of Sunday labour. That there is no salvation without the shedding of blood is one of the cardinal doctrines of official Christianity.

We have often pointed out that the strength of slavery lies in the slave, not in the slave owner. Once the slaves are possessed with the idea that slavery is wrong—not merely that it is inconvenient to one here and there—its days are numbered. Illustrations are constantly cropping up, and the latest is a memorial signed by women of the English Church Union protesting against women being permitted to preach to "other than to women and children," on the ground that "no part of the Catholic Church has recognized women as being capable of receiving the grace of Holy Order." The truth of this last is undeniable, but one would have thought that the objection would have better come from men. But, as we have said, it is the attachment of the slave to his chains that gives slavery its strength, and we suggest that these very pious women of the English Church Union should insist on the right of the husband to give the wife a good thrashing whenever he thinks it would be for her

spiritual health. Of all slaves the religious slave is the most hopeless. That is why the Churches have always seen to it that slaves should get plenty of religion.

Bravo Huddersfield! On the Huddersfield Town Council, at a recent meeting, Councillor Arthur Sykes moved that the minute of the Education Committee which formed the basis of religious instruction in the schools should be deleted. The motion was proposed in an excellent speech, and was supported by several other speeches, both on the resolution and on a subsequent amendment. Councillor Topping well said, speaking as an "Agnostic and Freethinker," that ultimately Secular education would turn religion altogether out of the schools, and Alderman Dawson announced himself as a firm believer in Secular education. The resolution was lost by thirty-three votes to eleven, but the fact that eleven should be brought to the point of voting for the resolution is encouraging. Another attempt may easily be more successful. And we hope that the further attempt will be made. Huddersfield will be the better for it.

There is to be a definite Christian Party figuring in the Urban Council elections at Barking. The Christians have been long suffering. But the limit has been reached. The Council has resolved to permit boating on Sunday, also bowls and tennis. So the various denominations have united to put forward definite Christian candidates who shall oppose this attempt to allow people to be happy on Sunday. Now there will be a chance for the Labour party in that district to show whether they have the courage to stand up to the clergy or not. This is a very plain issue, and it will be interesting to note if the people of Ilford have the sense to tell these clerical Sunday traders to keep to their Churches—so long as their Churches will keep to them.

The following from a leading article in the *Leeds Mercury* is worthy of note:—

Priests, said Gibbon, think the worst and know the least of mankind. Their ignorance is indeed appalling; but what impresses us about the ecclesiastical mind most is not its ignorance. It is its curious inversions and distortions. In the House of Lords, for instance, the other day the Bishop of London sapiently observed, "The law educates the people." We could hardly think that lawyers themselves believe anything so palpably untruelaw has notoriously lagged behind general enlightenment and the moral conscience of the public. We wonder if the Bishop of London thinks that the law of England was an educative influence in the early 18th and 19th centuries. If he does he must be singularly ignorant of English literature.....Has the Bishop ever heard of the Fleet prison and the hulks? Has he ever read of the horrors of debtors' gaols? Of young women and boys sent to Botany Bay for paltry pilfering?

We dare say the Bishop may have heard of these things, although his state of intellect is such that no one would be surprised to find out how much he does not know. But the Bishop's Church has been the great apologist for all government and legal barbarities, and one cannot expect him to denounce the institution that does so well by him. And he has never had intelligence enough to be silent. He speaks where more sensible men hold their tongues.

A very interesting experiment is being made in America. Twenty-one Chinese students in the University of Chicago have sent out a circular asking one thousand leading Americans (1) What is your idea of God? (2) Do you believe in God? (3) Why? They say that their object is to find out what it is in which people believe, whether the belief is real, and whether it has any social or ethical value. If the answers are fairly answered the replies should prove interesting and instructive. We should be obliged to some of our American readers if they will keep us posted.

The Rev. Edward Lyttleton, speaking at Kensington, said "Excepting an earthquake, nothing is so disturbing as a ghost." Christians, however, do not worry overmuch about their own Holy Ghost. Perhaps they reflect that this particular bogey had his fling twenty centuries ago.

O. Cohen's Lecture Engagements

March 27, Leeds; April 3, Huddersfield; April 24, South Shields; May 6, Failsworth.

To Correspondents.

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

T. BATTEN (S.A.).—Thanks for newspaper cutting. The case is interesting. Our best regards to Mr. Courlander and to yourself. We shall hope to meet you if ever you visit this country.

"ENLIGHTENED."—You will probably find *The Literature of the Old Testament*, and *The Making of the New Testament*, both in the Home University Library, the best books for your purpose. They will be the better because they are not written by avowed Freethinkers.

H. R.—We quite agree with you that Bradlaugh's *Plea for Atheism* is a pamphlet that ought to be kept in print. Were the copyright ours it would be kept on sale, as it exhibits Bradlaugh at his best in a philosophic attack on the master superstition. But the copyright belongs to his daughter, and we have no control over it.

H. S. ENGLAND.—Thanks. "Uncle William" shall appear, but in general verse must be short and pithy to secure insertion. There will be no possibility of Mr. Cohen considering a visit to the States this year. Perhaps later.

H. DAWSON.—There are some railway bookstalls in the country that stock the *Freethinker*, but not many. But it can be secured by ordering at any railway bookstall in Britain.

C. W. MARSHALL.—Many thanks. We will attend to the matter. We are greatly obliged to all of our readers who do what they can towards increasing our circle of readers.

J. R. LICKFOLD.—Will bear in mind your suggestion in the event of a new edition of *Theism and Atheism*. But we have printed a good supply, as very small editions mean increasing the cost to readers, and our aim has always been to issue things at as low a price as is possible.

S. G. MASON.—We are obliged for leaderette from the *Herald*. We congratulate the writer on his belief that "Religion, if it is of any worth, must stand its own ground without being bolstered up by the police and the prison." Unfortunately most of the Christians in this country are of an opposite opinion. They believe that unless the policeman stands behind God Almighty the chance of his maintaining his hold on the people is small.

G. PARSONS.—When we said that on a question of sex relations there was no guarantee that one of his Majesty's judges would be any better informed than a costermonger, we had no intention whatever of reflecting upon either the intelligence or character of costermongers. We are sorry that what we said should have given the least offence, and would gladly substitute that useful personage the "man in the street." We regret that that particular illustration was used.

HAR DAYAL (Sweden).—Pleased to know that you have received so much benefit from reading *Theism or Atheism*. We are sending you the *Freethinker* as requested, and also a list of Mr. Cohen's other works.

J. B.—We have read your letter with considerable sympathy and interest. It is monstrous that when two people make a mistake in matrimony that they should be compelled to perpetuate the error unless one or both of them add to their blunder, degradation. The conception of marriage needs placing upon a sane and sensible basis, and for that to be done one must cleanse it from the unclean associations of Christian celibacy. It is that which prevents marriage being all that it might be and ought to be.

C. W. B.—We quite agree with your criticism. During the summer will consider the question of reprinting Ingersoll's pamphlets. Thanks, we are keeping quite well, but frightfully busy.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—I. H. Mann, 10s.

J. ROBINSON.—The wording was Richard in the letter received here. We now note that the name should have been Michael, not Richard, Stitt.

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

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

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Sugar Plums.

To-day (March 27) Mr. Cohen lectures, afternoon and evening, in the Trades Union Institute, Cross Stanford Street, Leeds. His subjects are "Freethought, What it is and What it is not," and "What we pay for Christianity." It is expected that many visitors will be present from the surrounding district, and arrangements are being made to provide tea for them between the afternoon and evening meetings. The meetings have been well advertised, and we hope the hall will be filled on both occasions.

Next week (April 3) Mr. Cohen will visit Huddersfield. It is some years since there were any special lectures in the town, but there are a large number of Freethinkers in Huddersfield and neighbourhood, and Mr. Cohen hopes to meet many of them during his visit. There should be again an active Branch in the place pursuing a steady propaganda. The lectures will be delivered in the Victoria Hall, a building which, we understand, is centrally situated and well known. We trust that local Freethinkers will see that the meetings are well advertised. Arrangements will be made to provide refreshments for visitors from a distance. If those who require tea will write Mrs. E. Taylor, 164 Scar Lane, Milnsbridge, near Huddersfield, they will help to make things easier.

We see from the *Daily Herald* that some sort of a move is being made by certain of the Labour Leaders to organize a protest against the way in which freedom of speech is being interfered with by the police and the government. It is high time that something of the kind were done, although up to the present the Labour Leaders have not shown any very great devotion to the idea of freedom when their own particular positions were not attacked. And to cry out then, and then only, robs one's cry of nearly all its force. It converts what should be a call into a cry to one's own friends. It is quite certain that the authorities, under the reactionary influence set up by the war, are going to quite unwarrantable lengths in their interference with freedom of speech and publication. In some case they act with all the arbitrariness of the police force of the old Russian Empire, and it is quite useless when this occurs to merely protest in party papers or to hold meetings in which one addresses one's friends.

We suggest to those concerned that what is needed is a committee formed of representatives of all parties, and which shall hold itself absolutely aloof from all party questions, and shall concern itself with the work of safeguarding freedom of speech and publication. Any cases that arise could then be fought with judgment and discretion, and fought, in the main, through the Courts. For the English law is, after all, not so fundamentally

unjust as not to provide remedies for some of the most glaring cases of persecution that have recently occurred, and even when the circumstances are otherwise, there is nothing like a well fought case in the courts to bring the matter before the public. If a committee of that kind were organized we should certainly do anything we could to assist it.

We do not think we are exaggerating, nor are we alarmists when we say that there has been no time within the last hundred years when freedom of thought stood in as great danger as it does at the moment. The war made the country used to suppression of all kinds, and the government took advantage of that to the full. And now that the war is over the authorities are exploiting the reactionary feeling created by the war to the full. The police are taking to themselves powers which they dare not have taken fifty years ago. Printing plant is destroyed, and the issue of papers forbidden, both things absolutely illegal less than ten years ago, and there is now a bill before Parliament—which that gathering of placemen and reactionists will certainly pass—which aims at taking from the subject the power of appeal to the High Courts by forming tribunals of a quasi-judicial character. And so far as we can see the Freethought party is the only one that is seriously concerned with the right to freedom of speech, independent of what the opinion expressed may be. Neither of the principal political parties are concerned about it, and we have very little hope of the Labour Party in this direction. The Freethought Party, which stands for freedom of thought for all, no matter what the opinion may be that is advocated, is the one party that appears to have any solid conviction on this matter. And, therefore, there never was a time when the making of Freethinkers was of so great national importance as it is at present.

That we should have reached this point need surprise no one. It was evident to us all along, and we have been saying this for years, that Freethought would never be in so great danger as when it was nearest the moment of actual triumph. For that would mean that all the interests threatened by freedom of thought would combine for its undoing. The war gave the occasion for both an enormous growth in anti-religious feeling on the one side, and for reaction to pursue its ends on the other. The weapons of suppression are being sharpened, and we may yet see them used in a way that they have not been used for generations.

The lecturer at Friars Hall to-day (March 27) is Mr. A. B. Moss. On this occasion he will preface his lecture with a dramatic recital, Buchanan's *Fra Giacomo*. This may serve as an additional reason for Freethinkers bringing a Christian friend along. We hope to hear that the hall is crowded. As this is the last lecture of the season there is an additional reason for all who can be present to attend.

THE HARVESTS OF DEATH.

Nature hath given us one harvest every year, but death hath two; and the spring and the autumn sends throngs of men and women to charnel-houses: and all the summer long men are recovering from their evils of the spring, till the dog-days come, and then the Syrian star makes the summer deadly; and the fruits of the autumn are laid up for all the year's provision, and the man that gathers them eats and surfeits, and dies and needs them not, and himself is laid up for eternity; and he that escapes till winter only stays for another opportunity, which the distempers of that quarter minister to him with great variety. Thus death reigns in all the portions of our time. The autumn with its fruits provides disorders for us, and the winter's cold turns them into sharp diseases, and the spring brings flowers to strew our hearse, and the summer gives green turf and brambles to bind upon our graves, calentures and surfeit, cold and agues are the four quarters of the year, and all minister to death; and you can go no whither but you tread upon a dead man's bones.
—Jeremy Taylor (1613-1667).

The Origin and Development of Morals.

(Concluded from page 182.)

III.

THE NATURAL EVOLUTION OF MORALS.

We now reach the important and baffling question over which all the pre-evolutionary theories of morals have stumbled. Granting the universality of an individual feeling of desire for and of right to welfare, how does that individual feeling become a social feeling? How comes it that the individual passes beyond a feeling of desire for and right to his own welfare, and acquires a feeling of the desirability and rightfulness of the general welfare of the community in which he lives? To this question the doctrine of evolution, as applied to a few simple and generally accepted data of Psychology, furnishes a satisfactory answer. These data are comprised under the two well-known psychological principles of Association and Abstraction, which are as capable of accounting for the rise and development of the moral sense as they are of accounting for the rise and development of the intellectual faculties. And though the psychological processes of Association and Abstraction and the physiological processes underlying them are not yet completely understood, there is no more need of introducing an element of mystery in the one case than there is in the other. The physical association of individuals in communities must give rise to a mental association among their feelings. Each individual, feeling his own desire for and right to welfare, and perceiving a similar desire for and sense of right to welfare in other individuals in association with him, his feelings in respect of his own welfare become associated with other individuals' feelings in respect of theirs. And by the process of Abstraction, which always accompanies and supplements every process of Association, the feeling of a general, impersonal desire for and right to welfare gradually develops, but is always strictly limited to the actual community in which it develops. The mental association and the resulting moral sense never extend beyond the limits of the physical association in which they arise until this physical association becomes itself extended, which seems to be a sufficiently good indication that the one is directly dependent on the other.

But this perceptual or intellectual association is not the only one, nor does it account for the complete ethical sense. An individual may thoroughly recognise and comprehend the abstract notion that the community possesses a right to welfare, without feeling any sense of obligation on his own part to act in furtherance of it, either generally or in the case of particular individuals. The moral sense would be incomplete. But along with this intellectual association there operates at every stage of the advance an even more fundamental process of emotional association. This is exhibited in the familiar fact of sympathy—the fact that among associated animals a certain feeling of pleasure is aroused in each individual by a perception of the pleasure of other individuals, and a feeling of pain by the perception of pain, and this is explained by psychologists as an association between the perceived pleasures and pains of others and similar pleasures and pains experienced

by the individual itself. This it is that supplies the emotional element in the moral sense that gives it its warmth and glow. This it is that identifies the feelings of the individual with those of his fellows; that enables him not only to perceive but to *feel* the joys and sorrows of others as he feels his own, and gives him the sense of moral obligation or duty with regard to them.

For convenience of discussion the natural basis and the natural evolution of morals have been treated separately, but it must be remembered that no such separation really exists. Man has never existed merely as an individual. From the moment of his birth every human being has been a social animal, the earliest social group being the family into which he was born, even if that family existed apart from any higher association. So the evolution of morality must have arisen and begun to operate coevally with its basis, and the pleasures and pains of the self must have been associated with the pleasures and pains of others from their very inception.

Finally, to account for the "innate" character of the moral sense, evolution throws over the subject its clear and convincing light. The processes of Association and Abstraction have their physical concomitants in the structure of the brain. The moral feelings thus arising are registered in the actual nervous organisation, and are preserved and handed down by heredity in those communities which benefit by the social advantages they bestow.

Thus do we arrive, by way of a perfectly natural process, at the fundamental principle of morality, the Law of Right and Duty—for Right and Duty are merely two aspects of the same thing. The welfare of the social aggregate is the supreme Right. The obligation of the individual in respect of that welfare is the supreme Duty.

IV.

THE SOCIAL EVOLUTION OF MORALS.

This fundamental and universal ethical standard or Law of Morality having been reached by way of natural evolution, further advance proceeds on the social plane and hence may be termed the social evolution of morals. The abstract Law of Morality, finding its supreme sanction in the welfare of the social aggregate, remains ever the same, but as the aggregate itself expands the law acquires a wider and wider scope, a fuller purport, and a deeper significance. The earliest social group is the Family, and as families become associated into Clans, clans into Tribes, and tribes into Nations, the group allegiance broadens and extends. The sense of duty in respect of the family—the family conscience—evolves into the tribal conscience, till finally the fully developed national conscience is attained. And on the higher plane as on the lower this ever widening process of Association is accompanied and supplemented by the process of Abstraction. The lower allegiance does not become entirely supplanted by the higher, but merges into it, and the elements common to both are woven into a higher synthesis. Allegiance to the tribe is not in itself antagonistic to the family allegiance, for there are certain conditions necessary to the welfare of the family which, for that very reason, are also necessary to the welfare of the tribe—such, for instance, as the protection and care of the young. Similar common elements enter into the association of tribes into nations, and with every

successive expansion in the scope of the moral sense the process of Abstraction enforces and confirms the moral sanction. If any element of social duty recognised as right for a lower group is also found to be right and necessary for the higher group into which it passes, that element of social duty becomes thereby still further strengthened and moralised. There is a continuous process of adjustment of relations between the lower aggregate and the higher one into which it is merging—a striving for the attainment of an equilibrium between their conditions of welfare. There must always be certain conditions of welfare equally important for both aggregates, since both are acquiring a common interest, and these favourable elements are retained and incorporated into the higher moral code, while the antagonistic elements disappear. And the process is even yet incomplete. Associations between nations, necessitated by modern conditions of trade and mutual intercourse, are slowly developing what might be called a super-national conscience, though yet but a vague and feeble one.

The final outcome of this process is to evolve a body of moral feeling which is what we commonly call the "conscience of humanity." The rights and duties coming under this code are the rights and duties common to all social groups—the conditions of life and conduct essential to the welfare of men in association with one another, whatever the form of that association may be. These are the final residua, the pure gems of moral truth remaining after the dross has been removed; as in a gem-sorting machine the heavier and more precious stones are left after the light and worthless materials have been swept away by the cleansing current. This moral code is what is known collectively as the "Rights of Man," but instead of deriving its authority from the supposed "natural rights" of individual man in his primitive state, as was at one time held, we find that it has been slowly developed throughout long ages of social evolution, and derives its high and paramount authority from the moral law.

Finally we have to consider the purely sociological factor in Ethics. Natural and social evolution have prepared the ground, but the growths that spring up thereon are of human cultivation. The moral sense of man—the conscience of humanity—everywhere and always the same, provides the fertile soil in which these social growths are planted and can flourish; and very monstrous and grotesque some of the earlier growths have been. These are the "social institutions" which have prevailed among men from time to time, rising, flourishing, and dying out as man's knowledge may advance and his relations to his environment may vary. And these social institutions fall broadly into three groups—Custom, Religion, and Law.

Custom seems to have been the most primitive form of social institution. No community of men, however primitive and savage, has yet been discovered without some form of Custom firmly established among them, and even the more intelligent among the social animals exhibit certain settled modes or habits of conscious behaviour which may quite fairly be described as Customs. And in the primitive stage, as is well known, these customs often assume the most grotesque forms. It would appear, indeed, that no rules of conduct could be too absurd, no commands or prohibitions too purposeless, no "taboos" too unreasonable to be imposed and sanctified by

custom among savages. But in every case the underlying sanction is the moral sense, for all these customs are followed and respected because they are supposed to bring about the welfare of the community in which they have arisen—because they are supposed to be “right.”

Religion follows very closely on Custom, indeed they are usually found together, and in the case of Religion the moral sense plays an even more conspicuous, though not a more real part. The commands of the deified chief or king, and later of the supreme God, are to be obeyed because they are “right,” and religious codes and decalogues are supposed to have been supernaturally given, though the precepts they lay down are based on a moral sense more or less firmly established in the consciences of men. So strong, indeed, is the moral sanction that its power is invoked to support purely ritual or sacerdotal codes which have no real moral significance at all. And as with Custom so with Religion, absurdities, falsities, and cruelties abound. Religious institutions have often been marked by appalling atrocity, and religious rites have often reeked with blood. No more striking instance can be given of the potency of the moral sense in man than the case of the unresisting victims of human sacrifices. We find no record of any protest against this ghastly superstition, even among the more advanced communities. The silent submission of its victims must have been mainly due to a conviction that their sacrifice was for the common good—for securing the welfare of the community by propitiating the ghost of the departed chief or king, or the powerful national God—and that hence it was “right.”

Last in order of time comes Law, and as definite systems and codes of law do not find their place among social institutions till societies have become more or less civilised, and men have advanced in knowledge and intelligence, Law does not, on the whole, exhibit as many marks of primitive ignorance as do Custom and Religion. But, like them, it is of course based on the moral sense. However wicked may be the law, however cruel the despot who enacts it, there is always claimed for it the sanction of Justice and of Right.

Thus, then, do we see that Ethics is truly a science, and that it owes nothing, or less than nothing, to Religion. The higher religions may have done something towards enforcing morality by holding out hopes of heaven and threatening terrors of hell, but it is questionable whether this has not been more than counterbalanced by their evil service in turning the straight course of moral conduct into the crooked paths of cruelty and wrong. A. E. MADDOCK.

No creed for me! I am a man apart:
A mouthpiece for the creeds of all the world:

A martyr for all mundane moods to tear;
The slave of every passion, and the slave
Of heat and cold, of darkness and of light;
A trembling lyre for every wind to sound.
I am a man set to overhear
The inner harmony, the very tune
Of nature's heart; to be a thoroughfare
For all the pageantry of time: to catch
The mutterings of the Spirit of the Hour
And make them known.—John Davidson (*The making of a Poet.*)

Pages From Fontenelle.

[Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle was born at Rouen in 1657. The works by which he is remembered were all written before the end of the seventeenth century, although he lived on until 1757. *Dialogues of the Dead* (1683) is one of the most delightful books of any age. It is a sort of *Enchiridion* for those who refuse to take life too seriously, who welcome irony as a consolation for wisdom, and hold that paradox is the salt which alone makes ethics and politics palatable. His best book was an explanation of the Copernican system for the frequenters of fashionable drawing-rooms. *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686) found many readers. It was both the effect and the cause of an interest in scientific ideas and method. It prepared the path for Voltaire and others who rewrote in a popular way the psychology of Locke and the physics of Newton. His most important work was a *History of Oracles* (1687). The thesis is that oracles were not the work of evil spirits, and did not cease with the introduction of Christianity. The natural ignorance and credulity of men invited the artful designs of the priests who were not slow to profit by popular ignorance. When the human mind became enlightened the antique oracles were silent; it was philosophy that killed them. This seems innocent enough; but the Jesuits saw from the first its inherent impiety. All that Fontenelle says of oracles may be said of miracles. Indeed, as a Voltairean historian of French Literature says: “This innocent criticism of the ancient belief in oracles is the first attack which the scientific spirit directs against the foundations of Christianity. All the purely philosophic arguments used by later writers against religion are to be found, potentially at least, in this little book.”]

DIALOGUES OF THE DEAD.

Anacreon and Aristotle.

Aristotle.—I could never have imagined that a writer of songs would have dared to compare himself to a philosopher with a reputation as great as mine.

Anacreon.—I grant that you did amazingly well as a philosopher. Yet I, with my songs, did not escape being called the “wise Anacreon”; and I must say that a philosopher is scarcely worthy of the epithet “wise.”

Aristotle.—That title was given you by people who did not pay much attention to the meaning of words. What had you ever done to deserve it?

Anacreon.—Who, I? Nothing but drink, sing songs and make love. The wonder is that people called me “the wise” at such a price, while they called you merely “the philosopher.” This meant no end of trouble to you; for how many whole nights have you sat up, disentangling your knotty questions of dialectic? How many huge volumes have you written on abstruse subjects, which, it may be, you yourself did not understand very well?

Aristotle.—I admit that you took an easier road to wisdom. You must have been very clever to have got more of fame with a lute and a bottle than the greatest of men have achieved with vast labour and sleepless nights.

Anacreon.—You may pretend to laugh at it, but it is more difficult to sing and drink as I did, than to philosophize in your way. For a man to sing and to drink, as I did, required that he should stand away from violent passions, that he should not strive for things not dependent on him, that he should ever be ready to take the world as he finds it. In short, we must arrange a number of little affairs in ourselves, and although this calls for no great argumentative skill, it is not, I take it, so very easy to manage. But we may, at much less expense, philosophize as you did. We need not then cure ourselves of either ambition or avarice; we have an open welcome to the court of Alexander the Great; we draw a half-a-million crowns' worth of presents, and they are not all used in physical experiments, although such was the donor's intention; in a word, this sort of philosophy brings in a number of things somewhat opposed to philosophy.

Aristotle.—You have heard a good deal of scandal about me here, but, when all is said, man is man only in virtue of his reason, and you can have nothing finer than to teach men how they ought to use it in the study of nature, and in solving all the problems which she presents to us.

Anacreon.—That is just how men destroy custom in all things! In itself philosophy is a good thing, and might be of use to us, but because she would be in the way if people employed her in everyday affairs, or if she dwelt near them to keep a rein on their passions, they have sent her to heaven to look after the planets, and keep a check on their movements, or if men walk out with her upon earth it is to have her criticize all that they see there. They always keep her busy as far as possible from themselves. However, as they wish to be philosophers at a small expense, they have extended the meaning of the word, and give it now for the most part to such as seek for natural causes.

Aristotle.—Quite so! but could you give them a better name?

Anacreon.—A philosopher's business is only with men, and not with the rest of the universe. An astronomer considers the stars, a physicist nature, a philosopher considers himself. But who would choose to be a philosopher on so hard a condition? Hardly anyone, I imagine. So we do not insist on philosophers being philosophers, we are content if they are physicists or astronomers. Speaking for myself, I was by no means inclined to speculation, but I am sure there is less philosophy in a great many books which pretend to treat of it, than in some of those little songs which are nothing to you; in this one for example:—

If gold would bring me length of days
I'd lay up golden treasure;
And when Death comes, without amaze,
I'd give him more than measure.

But since we mortals cannot gain
New lease of life with gold;
Why should we sigh and weep in vain
Our wretchedness untold?

Be mine good cheer, and rosy wine,
Sweet converse with a friend.....
When I in my love's arms recline,
Come late or soon the end.

Aristotle.—If you desire to confine philosophy to questions of ethics you will find things in my moral works that are quite as valuable as your verses. The obscurity for which people blame me, and which is present perhaps in certain parts of my work, is not to be observed in what I have written on that subject; and most people will agree that there is nothing in them more lucid and more beautiful than what I have said of the passions.

Anacreon.—What an error! It is not a matter of defining the passions by rule, as I hear you have done, but of keeping a check upon them. We give you philosophers our troubles not to cure but to contemplate, and you have discovered a method of morals which touches them almost as little as does astronomy. How laughably funny it is to see people preaching contempt of riches, for money, and chicken-hearted wastrels coming almost to blows over a definition of magnanimity.

Englised by GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

THE LITTLE VAGABOND.

Dear mother, dear mother, the Church is cold;
But the Alehouse is healthy, and pleasant and warm.
Besides I can tell when I am used well
The poor parsons with wind like a blown bladder swell.
But, if at the Church they would give us some ale,
And a pleasant fire our souls to regale,
We'd sing and we'd play all the live long day,
Nor ever once wish from the Church to stray.

—Blake.

Correspondence.

SUFFER! LITTLE CHILDREN.

HOLY BIBLE, MODERN VERSION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As yours seems to be the only paper which has the heart to pity and the courage to denounce the shocking cruelties committed on helpless children in this most civilized and Christian country by parents, guardians, and, oftenest of all, by teachers, I wish to appeal, in the name of common humanity (let alone our assumption of superior virtue to that of other nations, as exemplified in our lavish charity to German and Austrian children), for the total abolition of corporal punishment in the State schools, as at least an example to those who cannot be so directly influenced by public opinion as our paid so-called servants, but really arrogant and tyrannical masters, the officials. Mr. Fisher, in a speech at Croydon the other day, gave vent to many beautiful sentiments regarding the improvement of education, the abolition of war, and so forth, but not a word as to the persistence of this cowardly and barbarous anachronism, which, in its setting up of cruelty and brute force as the proper corrective of evil or error, is a direct and powerful inculcation of the basest exercise of our quarrelsome and invasive instincts, and that, too, on the impressionable and plastic minds of the millions of children compelled to attend these public institutions, which are in many respects the most debasing and demoralizing in their influences and atmosphere the majority of them will ever enter. Herbert Spencer, in his book on education, declares that the principles and laws of school life should be similar and parallel to those governing the outside world, but whereas in ordinary society reason and justice are alone recognized as the arbiters between right and wrong, in the schools our little helpless children are absolutely subject to the caprice of the teacher, who is at once judge, jury, and executioner, without the right of appeal or even explanation, and can be punished practically in any manner which his own irascible, malicious, or truculent instincts may dictate, even girls being thrashed by tyrannical, brutal masters (mostly stern, callous, cold-hearted Scotchmen), as in the revolting case of the poor child O'Keefe, who drowned herself rather than go back to school to suffer again such disgusting indignity. We read years ago in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that the black slave-maid of Mrs. St. Clare pleaded with her harsh mistress not to send her to be flogged, not so much because of the torture itself, as that it would be inflicted by "a man, and such a man." Yet this foul crime, which seemed too atrocious even to be perpetuated on mere "niggers," may be, and is, practised on our own little innocent white children without protest or question, the children themselves being absolutely forbidden to complain, even to their own mothers (as was decided recently in a court of law), while the masters, as one said to me, are impregably shielded in their cruelty by public opinion, the Bench, their own haughty Union, and behind these the whole force of the British government. In the last analysis there is absolutely no excuse for corporal punishment, except the weakness of the victims and the barbarous cowardice of the teachers. It is not necessary for discipline, as the experience of Sunday and private schools shows. At the "Academy for Young Gentlemen," where I was put for five miserable years, and where many of the boys were rough, malicious, conscienceless bullies, perfect silence and order were maintained without any use of the cane, and, indeed, no man who is unable to dispense with this is fit to be a teacher at all. He should be a driver of swine! Moreover, in France and other countries corporal punishment is strictly forbidden by law, while in some not only that but even harsh speaking is prohibited. It will be time enough to talk of the ending of war against adult soldiers when this fiendish and perennial legal torture of our sweet, trustful, defenceless little ones is for ever abolished.

EVACUSTES A. PHIPSON.

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

SIR,—I meant that one's own existence is *self evident*—does Dr. Lyttelton mean that the existence of God is so, when he says they are parallels? The existence of

other people is not obvious because we assume it—even philosophers *can't help* doing so; but there is no such compulsion about the belief in God. If Dr. Lyttelton thinks these are parallels, I invite him to answer Mr. Cohen's interpretation of the alleged evidence in *Theism or Atheism*, in the course of which, perhaps, he might answer my question.

W. JAMESON.

BELIEF IN GOD.

SIR,—Reading the correspondence in our paper, I have often felt somewhat disappointed; there is such a difference in tone and treatment of subject to that of our regular contributors. The writers seem to avail themselves of the opportunities to display certain of their qualifications or attainments; the subject matter being of minor importance. Dr. L. criticises Mr. J.'s phraseology, and "supposes (that) Mr. J. means 'too obvious to require proof, or to admit of doubt'" when he says "too obvious to admit of proof." Then Dr. L. says "Mr. J. cannot conceive that I think of any belief in my own existence as parallel to the belief in god." (L. c. please, Mr. Printer.) Surely the idea might have found expression in more homely terms, and still have been as correct as "The reason why.....is obvious to Mr. J. and me is that....." However, the existence of a god is often unwarrantably assumed, and then an attempt is made to disprove it. Why make such an assumption? The question is, Is there such a god as that about which Dr. L. and others talk so glibly? Is there any evidence or proof available? I don't know of any, hence god is merely a symbol and of much less meaning than when read from right to left. Then the necessity for child-like belief is always emphasized, but to me, belief (the adult brand) means lack of knowledge. Would it not be absurd to ask me to believe in something of which I might have some knowledge? When one knows a thing or person, there can be no necessity to believe. One knows. Belief then, is evidence of ignorance. I fail to see that any cogent reason can be advanced for a belief in any such god as that in which Dr. L. seems to believe. Besides, a god who can stand (or sit) idly by at a time when it might practically demonstrate to great advantage its existence, power and goodness is not entitled to any consideration whatever. Then reference is made to one's experience and convictions. Well, I have neither experiences nor convictions that any god may have done anything for me. I may not have been a great success in life, but I don't blame any god for that; neither am I disposed or moved to give to it any credit or praise for just what I am.

GEO. T. WHITEHEAD.

SUNDAY THEATRES.

SIR,—I have just read your article on the "Sabbath" in the *Freethinker* for February 27. Of course, I agree with you—surely anyone who thinks at all must do so. But as I am an actress, the paragraph referring to the theatres interested me very much. You say, "Make it compulsory on all theatres to close one day in the week." If all the theatres decide on the same day, all well and good, but if in different towns they chose different days, how shall we journey from one town to another? As it is, we spend all our Sundays (day of rest?) travelling and don't quite see how we'd manage if we had a performance on Sunday night. Very often we don't arrive in a town until after the usual time for "ringing up," and then sometimes we have to look for "digs." Of course, if all the theatres decided on the same day I think most of us would prefer travelling on a week-day, as Sunday is a dreadful day on the railways, slow trains, plenty of changes and no connections, and one often has to wait hours for the next train, and more often than not the refreshment rooms are not open and there are no fires in the waiting rooms. Oh, yes, for many reasons I agree with the opening of theatres on Sunday if only it can be managed.

VERA M. WARD.

What is a people? An individual unit of society at large. What is war? A duel between two individual people. In what way ought society to act when two of its members fight? Interfere and reconcile them, or repress them.—*Volney*.

Branch News.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S.

The annual meeting was held on March 20 at Downing Street with a fairly representative section of members present. The statement of accounts, read by the Secretary, showed the Branch finances to be in a sound position, with a membership totalling just over one hundred. Mr. F. C. Monks was unanimously elected President. Mr. J. Crompton is the new Treasurer, Mr. Langford having resigned, and Mr. D. Mapp is now the Librarian. The Committee for 1921-22 consists of: Messrs. Turner, Willis, Unsworth, Pulman, Collins, Rosetti, Mrs. Bayfield and Miss Williams. Mr. Bayford, 16 Arnside Street, Rushholme, accepted the post of Secretary owing to the resignation of Mr. Black.

The general meeting was followed by an enjoyable Social and Dance, and our thanks are again due for the excellent programme supplied by the Failsworth choir under the able baton of Mr. Jones. Some excellent recitations were given by Messrs. Ogden and Corner. Miss Horne again sang us some pleasing songs, as also Mr. Grundy, and Miss Williams presided at the piano. Master C. Black played a couple of violin solos accompanied by Master Robinson. Will members please watch the *Freethinker* columns for announcements *re* Summer Rambles.—H. BLACK.

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. A. B. Moss, "Freethought in the Churches." (Silver Collection).

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, Stratford, E): 7, Mr. E. Burke, A Lecture. MEN (Merseyside Branch): Thursday, March 31, J. Hamilton,

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

ASSOCIATION OF ENGINEERING AND SHIPBUILDING DRAUGHTSMEN, "Man: and his Buildings."

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Trades Union Institute, Cross Stamford Street, Leeds): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 3, "Freethought: What it is and What it is not." 6.30, "What we Pay for Christianity."

"BILLIARDS IN MUFTI." By a Freethinker and *Punch* contributor. You'll smile, whether you play Billiards or not, and in the unlikely event of your doing neither, you'll certainly exclaim "It's CLEVER!" No home complete without one. Post free, 2s. 3d. from MACCONNELL & MABE, New Street, Bakewell.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN First this time. We have now a Beautifully Illustrated Catalogue of Fashions of Readymades for Women and Children for the present season. The number is strictly limited, and we can send them out only on the condition that they are returned to us—we pay carriage both ways. For value and stylishness we are sure the goods cannot be excelled. Hitherto the ladies have given us but poor encouragement. We sometimes wonder if most of them still go to Church.—MACCONNELL & MABE, New Street, Bakewell.

WHEN Buying a Piano, Sewing Machine, Gramophone, Wringer, Baby Carriage, Furniture, or High Class Toys for the Kiddies, try HORACE DAWSON. Terms arranged with *Freethinker* readers. Send inquiries.—"DAWSON'S CORNER," Wood Green, N22.

Pamphlets.

By G. W. FOOTE.

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