

# The FREETHINKER

FOUNDED · 1881

EDITED BY CHAPMAN COHEN    ■    EDITOR 1881-1915 · G · W · FOOTE

*Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper.*

Vol. XLI.—No. 17

SUNDAY, APRIL 24, 1921.

PRICE THREEPENCE

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## Views and Opinions.

### What is to Follow Religion?

The charge most frequently brought against Freethinkers is that their principal aim is destruction. It is an accusation that neither Freethinkers in particular nor reformers in general merit. They are far more interested in building up than they are in pulling down, and one must attribute to sheer lack of perception the fact that so many have their eyes fixed upon the one aspect of the reformer's work and so steadily ignore the other. In a revolution it is the noise, the street fighting, the breaking of old rules and the shattering of old institutions that attracts the most attention. The deeper aims of the revolutionists, the work of reconstruction that is attempted, escape notice. The old order shrieks its loudest at the threat of dissolution; the new can barely make its voice heard. Actually, the charge to which reformers are open is that of too great zeal for reconstruction, a belittling of the difficulties in the way of effecting a radical change. They make too small allowance for the occurrence of the unexpected and the incalculable, both of which play a part, and often a large part, in human affairs. And they are so obsessed with the idea of reconstruction that destruction seems no more than an incident by the way. Were they less eager for reconstruction they would be more concerned over what it is that is pulled down. The two greatest "destructive" movements of modern times, the French Revolution of 1789 and the recent Russian Revolution are strongly illustrative of this. The main figures in both movements were men who were obsessed with the idea of building up a new world. And they saw this new world so clearly that the present one was, to a very considerable extent, lost sight of altogether. It is, in fact, the mania for reconstruction that is chiefly responsible for the destruction that horrifies those whose vision can never see any kind of a world but the one to which they have grown accustomed.

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### Religion and Character.

Those who are so fearful of the consequences that will follow the disappearance of religion argue as though human conduct was governed by a single idea—and that the religious one. But at the very utmost religious beliefs represent a part only of the vast mass of influences that determine conduct. And when we see how largely these beliefs are dependent for their

existence upon stimulation and protection, it is not likely that their relation to life can be of a very vital nature. Left alone religion withers and dies away. And the decisive proof that religion does not exercise a controlling influence for good is seen in the fact that it is quite impossible to arrange men and women in a scale of social values that shall correspond with their religious beliefs. A religious person may be a good and useful individual, or he may be quite the reverse. A profound religious conviction may be accompanied by the loftiest of ideals or by the meanest of motives. The unbeliever may be, and often is, a better man than the believer. Whenever in the business world a profession of religion is made the condition of employment, the fact is taken not as an indication of shrewdness, but only as a sign of bigotry. And normally we find men and women of all creeds and of no creed at all playing the same parts in social life and exhibiting the same mixture of good and bad qualities. Religion does not provide us with the least indication of a controlling factor. How, then, can it reasonably be argued that its disappearance will make so vital a difference to life?

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### Conduct and Creed.

It was argued by the late Sir James FitzJames Stephen, himself a Freethinker, that as men have been for a long time in the habit of associating moral feelings with the belief in God, a severance of the two may entail moral disaster. It is, of course, hard to say what may not happen in particular cases, but it is quite certain that such a consequence could not follow on any general scale. One has only to bring a statement of this kind down from the region of mere theory to that of definite fact to see how idle the fear is. If, instead of asserting in a vague way that the moral life is in some way bound up with religious beliefs we ask what moral action or moral disposition is so connected, we realize the absurdity of the statement. Professor Leuba well says:—

Our alleged essential dependence upon transcendental beliefs is belied by the most common experiences of daily life. Who does not feel the absurdity of the opinion that the lavish care for a sick child by a mother is given because of a belief in God and Immortality? Are love of father and mother on the part of children, affection and serviceableness between brothers and service between brothers and sisters, straightforwardness and truthfulness between business men essentially dependent upon these beliefs? What sort of person would be the father who would announce divine punishment or reward in order to obtain the love and respect of his children? And if there are business men preserved from unrighteousness by the fear of future punishment, they are far more numerous who are determined by the threat of human law. Most of them would take their chances with heaven a hundred times before they would once with society, or perchance with the imperative voice of humanity heard in the conscience.

And in whatever degree the fear may be justified in special cases, it applies to any attempt whatever that may be made to disturb existing conventions. Luther complained that some of his own converts were behav-

ing worse as Protestants than they behaved as Catholics, and even in the New Testament we have the same unfavourable comparison made of many of his followers when compared with the Pagans around them. A transference of allegiance may easily result in certain ill-balanced minds kicking over the traces, but in the long run, and with the mass, the deeper social needs are paramount. There was the same fear expressed concerning man's political and social duties when the relations of Church and State were first challenged. Yet the connection between the two has been quite severed in some countries, and very much weakened in many more, without society suffering in the least from the change. On the contrary, one may say that man's duties towards the State have been more intelligently perceived and more efficiently discharged in proportion as those religious considerations that once ruled have been set on one side.

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#### A Question of Values.

It is always difficult to depict what the future, at any great remove, will be like. But we may safely assume that no possible change in religious opinions can alter the fundamental facts of social life. The tragi-comedy of life and death would still go on through the usual number of scenes ending in the same happy or unhappy manner. The glories of art and the greatness of science, the complexities and wonders of the universe, would remain whether we believed in a God or not. Our scale of values may well undergo a change with a weakening of religious belief, but that is something that is taking place all the time to a greater or lesser degree. We shall probably place a greater value upon some qualities than we do at present, with a smaller value on others. It may, for example, be taken for granted that what are known as the ascetic qualities are not likely to increase in value. The cant talk of Christianity has always placed an excessive value upon what is called self-sacrifice. But there is no virtue in self-sacrifice, as such. It is, at best, only of value in exceptional circumstances, as an end it is worse than useless. With Christianity it was given a high value, first because it helped men and women to tolerate injustices which they would otherwise never have tolerated; and also because Christianity pictured this world as a preparation for another life in which present pains and deprivations were counted to man's credit in the next life. The key note of a rationally organized society will be self-development, not self-sacrifice.

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#### A Hope for the Future.

That involves an enlargement of our conceptions of justice and of social reform, two things lamentably weak in any expression of legitimate Christianity. There will be less time wasted on what is called philanthropic work—which is often the most harmful of all social labours—and more attention paid to the removal of those conditions that have made the display of philanthropy necessary. There will not be less feeling for the distressed or the unfortunate, but it will be emotion under the guidance of the intellect, and the dominant feeling will be that of indignation against the conditions that make human suffering and degradation inevitable, rather than a mere gratification of purely egoistic feeling which leaves the source of the evil untouched. That will mean a rise in the scale of values of what one may call the intellectual virtues—the duty of truth seeking and truth speaking. A society in which religion does not hold a controlling place is not likely to place a very high value upon such precepts as "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed," or "Though he slay me yet will I trust him." But a very high value will be placed upon the duty of investigation and the right of criticism, and one cannot easily over estimate the con-

sequences of a generation or two brought up in an atmosphere where such teachings obtain. It would mean a receptiveness to new ideas, a readiness to overhaul old institutions, a toleration of criticism such as would rapidly transform the whole mental atmosphere and with it enormously accentuate the capacity for, and the rapidity of, social progress. But we can well afford to let the future look after itself provided we deal intelligently with the present. A world without religion would be a world in which the sole ends of endeavour would be those of human betterment or human enlightenment, and probably in the end the two are one. For there is no real betterment without enlightenment, even though there may come, for a time, enlightenment without betterment. It would leave the world with all the means of intellectual and aesthetic and social enjoyment that exists now, and one may reasonably hope that it will lead to their cultivation and diffusion over the whole of society.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### "The Unchanging Christ."

We are assured that "the assertion that Jesus Christ is the supreme personality of history is a truism," and the Rev. H. Maldwyn Hughes, B.A., D.D., declares that this is admitted even by those who hate him. In a sermon, published in the *Christian World Pulpit* for March 23, Dr. Hughes makes several statements which are incapable of verification and which he does not even attempt to prove. We have never come across such people. Multitudes do not believe in Jesus, but unbelief is not synonymous with hatred. According to the records the Gospel Jesus was violently hated by the leaders of his nation, but the bulk of his contemporaries merely rejected his claims and disregarded his teaching. To-day, the majority throughout Christendom utterly ignore him, treating him as if he had never existed. So far are they from regarding him as the supreme personality of history that they scarcely ever think of him at all. And yet Dr. Hughes has the temerity to say that "attempts to neglect him have failed as ignominiously as efforts to discredit him." If this were true there would be no need of the clergy, their sole business being to persuade their hearers not to neglect him. Is not the reverend gentleman aware that the "masses" are spoken of by the pulpit as lapsed, and that there is no more difficult task than that of getting into vital touch with them? Christianity is nothing but a name to them. The doors of churches and chapels are never darkened by them, and they hold the parsons in derision. It is easy enough to affirm that "Jesus Christ challenges the centuries"; but nothing is more evident than that he has never reigned as king. Christ is unchanging only in his impotence. Dr. Hughes maintains that "behind all the questions that are agitating the world is the supreme question, What shall we do with Christ?" but surely he cannot be ignorant of the fact that this question is so far behind all other questions that few ever dream of asking it. Dr. Hughes preached this sermon before the National Free Church Council recently held in Manchester; but the President of the Council, the Rev. R. C. Gillie, sounded a much less optimistic note in his address from the chair when he said that "without exaggerating baleful portents, the honest mind discerns a shamelessness and an aggressiveness in evil with which we were unfamiliar," and that "there has been something like a hysteria of self-indulgence and vice." If Mr. Gillie is right, it follows that Christ's challenge to the twentieth century is practically of no avail.

Dr. Hughes's first point is that Christ's message and purpose are unchanging. Of course, they are; but that signifies nothing. In so far as Christ's teaching is true it is of necessity timeless and universal, and was

well-known long before the Gospel Jesus was heard of. The Buddha and Confucius had given beautiful expression to it, without connecting it with any form of supernaturalism, and with much of it Jesus, as a reader of the Old Testament, must have been intimately familiar. There is no evidence whatever that "he drew his inspiration from the unpolluted wells of Truth," and that "for that reason he spoke in the language of every age and nation." We should like to know where the unpolluted wells of truth are and how inspiration can be drawn from them. Dr. Hughes avers that Jesus "appeals to the twentieth century as to the first, to the West as to the East"; but the twentieth century makes but a feeble response to his appeal, and in neither East nor West is his teaching taken seriously. Mr. Wells tells us, in his *Outline of History*, that Jesus was a communist, and that the Church was founded on Communistic lines, and there is much to be said for the great novelist's view; but the Churches of to-day, as were those of the Middle Ages, are great upholders of private property, wealth, privilege, and personal advantages. In other words, the teaching attributed to Jesus is severely ignored by Christians generally, and the divines generally are hard at the work of divesting it of its socialist character. Even Dr. Hughes is of opinion that what Jesus gave men were not rules, but principles. For example, when Jesus said, "Swear not at all," "Resist not evil," "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth," Dr. Hughes asserts that he did not intend that such sayings should be regarded as rules of conduct, to be strictly obeyed, but that they should be treated as general principles. Jesus himself, however, is made to say, "Everyone which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man." Dr. Hughes observes:—

We are sometimes told that morality is a matter of custom, and that therefore moral standards vary with the varying customs of different lands and ages. That may be true of rules and regulations, but not of principles. As Garibaldi said to Mrs. Josephine Butler, "Principles never pass away; they are eternal, world-wide, unchangeable." Because principles are unchanging, Christ's teaching is unchanging. "The words that I speak unto you," he said, "are spirit and life." Some of the forms of thought and speech which he used have had their day and ceased to be, but the living spirit of his teaching abides, and is ever seeking nobler and more perfect embodiments.

Curiously enough, the reverend gentleman praises the so-called teaching of Jesus with marked extravagance, but omits to give a single sample of it, and never mentions the fact that in so far as it touches social life it is a dead letter.

The second point emphasized by Dr. Hughes is "the unchanging power of Christ." He declares that,—

the mass of men have never realized how powerful was the personality of Jesus of Nazareth. He is usually thought of as simply the embodiment of the gentler virtues—a pale Galilean dreamer. That is not the impression produced by a careful reading of the Gospels. It was not the impression left on the mind of the early Church. Paul says, "It is no weak Christ that we have to do with, but a Christ of power."

Let us examine this point carefully in order to ascertain whether it is true or not. Assuming, for argument's sake, that Jesus actually lived as recorded in the Gospels, there is no escape from the fact that the impression which he made upon his contemporaries, even by means of the mighty miracles ascribed to him, and the amazing incidents said to have occurred during the crucifixion, was so slight and insignificant that no writer of contemporary history so much as mentions his name. Besides, it is absolutely undeniable that the overwhelming majority of his countrymen pronounced his claims false and his teaching dangerous. His own

nation angrily rejected him. His followers were few and ignorant. After his death, and alleged resurrection, they only numbered about a hundred and twenty. He never wrote a line, and there were no stenographers to take down his spoken words.

And yet, despite that incontrovertible fact, it is confidently alleged that "Christianity could not have done the work in the world that it has done if it had not been for the impression made upon the contemporaries of Jesus." Let us press nearer still to the core of this point as to the powerful personality of Jesus. What impression did he make upon his twelve disciples who were in closest touch with him throughout his public ministry? From the Gospels we learn that it was so superficial that one of them betrayed him for thirty pieces of silver, and that the rest, after he was sentenced to death, cowardly forsook him and fled. Whatever power the Gospel Jesus claimed to possess and whatever mighty deeds he performed, such was the impression he left on the minds of those who were nearest and dearest to him.

Dr. Hughes is convinced that what is needed most at this juncture is "a renewal of faith in the unchanging power of Jesus Christ." Then he adds:—

Christianity is not an untried theory. It has nineteen centuries of experience behind it. The Church has often failed, and Christianity has been credited with its failures. But where Christianity has been tried it has never failed. The consentient witness of nineteen centuries is, that the Christ with whom we have to do is a Christ of power.

It is perfectly true that Christianity is not an untried theory, and that it has nineteen hundred years of experience behind it; but the testimony of history is that it has completely failed to transform the world. Dr. Hughes admits that the Church has often failed; but surely that admission involves an unforgivable insult to Jesus Christ, who promised to dwell in the Church for ever. He is the Church's Head, and it inevitably follows that the failure of the Church implies the failure of Christ. Besides, when and where was Christianity tried and proved a success apart from the Church? According to New Testament teaching, Christ is nowhere if not in the Church. Of course, Dr. Hughes explains the failure of the Church in the usual fallacious way:—

There have been times and places when and where Jesus Christ could not do many mighty works because of the unbelief of men. It is our unbelief that is placing restraints upon the mighty power of Christ to-day.

It is quite true that the power of Christ is the same to-day as yesterday, and that is, non-existent, just as he himself is. Christ exists alone to those who believe in him, and his power in the world has been, as is, a minus quantity.

J. T. LLOYD.

## Victoria the Respectable.

By the grace of God, defender of the Faith.

—Inscription on Coinage.

The carpenter said nothing, but "The butter's spread too thick."

—Alice in Wonderland.

THE whirligig of time brings in its revenges. So says the proverb. Gladstone's statue, "in London's central roar," exhibited but one solitary wreath on a recent anniversary of his birth. A predominant figure in British political life for half a century, Gladstone was hardly cold in his grave before his life's record was being revised. Generations after Beaconsfield's death his statue is loaded with flowers by the descendants of people who regarded him as a pariah. Byron, who woke one morning to find himself famous, and whose poetry was perused with the same avidity as the Waverley novels, is now but little read. Shelley, who

woke many mornings to find himself called infamous, is now recognized as one of the glories of our literature. Wellington, dying at an extreme age, had long outlived his popularity; whilst his great rival, Napoleon, our life-long enemy, upon whom had been exhausted the vocabulary of vituperation, is acclaimed as one of the world's greatest men.

A similar reversal of verdict has now been applied by Mr. Lytton Strachey to Queen Victoria in a book published by Messrs. Chatto and Windus. Mr. Strachey writes with that mischievous humour which is the delight of our French neighbours, and which should make his book one of the most popular of volumes.

Mr. Strachey makes fun impartially. Speaking of the queen's infancy, he says:—

The child herself was extremely fat and bore a remarkable resemblance to her grandfather (George III.). "It is the image of the late King!" exclaimed the Duchess, "It is King George in petticoats," echoed the surrounding ladies as the little creature waddled with difficulty from one to the other.

Her succession to the throne is described as the opening of a new era. She succeeded William the Fourth, who is limned as:—

A bursting, bubbling old gentleman, with quarter-deck gestures, round, rolling eyes, and a head like a pineapple.

Such is Mr. Strachey's picture of the original of the stone statue that guards the city end of London Bridge, who used to make love to the handsome Mrs. Jordan. "Silly Billy," however, gets off more lightly than the queen's uncles, who are described as,—

nasty old men, debauched and selfish, pigheaded and ridiculous.

The queen was married to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, who was, if possible, more straight-laced and doctrinaire than his devoted wife. He designed workmen's cottages, and he conceived the idea of International Exhibitions in order to promote friendship among European countries. At Balmoral a castle was built after their own ideas, and the Teutonic prince, after being sculptured in full Highland costume, designed "Balmoral" and "Victoria" tartans with which to decorate the walls and floors. By the kindly decree of Providence, Albert the Good did not live to see his eldest son called as a witness in a tropical divorce case, but the Evangelical queen was greatly perturbed. She wrote to the awful Mr. Delane, of the *Times*, asking him if he would "frequently write articles pointing out the immense danger and evil of the wretched frivolity and levity of the views and lives of the Higher Classes." A courtier to the finger-tips, Mr. Delane did write one article five years later upon that very subject, but, apparently, too late to achieve the desired purpose. Mr. Strachey's sighs are almost lyrical:—

Ah! If only the Higher Classes would learn to live as she lived in the domestic sobriety of her sanctuary at Balmoral!

The queen's grief was overwhelming when Albert died of typhoid fever. For forty years a picture of her husband, taken after death, and framed with immortelles, hung over her bed. His room was kept as he left it last, and servants were employed in laying out his clothes as if he were still alive. To the outside public her grief was expressed in marble and metal in Kensington Gardens in a design somewhat resembling a dinner-cruet. It was a fitting apotheosis of a period without parallel in English history.

We must not, however, make so much game as Mr. Strachey. The old Duchess of Kent was ever assiduous that her daughter, Victoria, should grow up into a Christian queen, and no one can deny that she succeeded admirably in so training her. The old queen

was narrow, strict, old-fashioned, and, probably, more surprised at the junketings of her two Jubilees than the youngest of her subjects. What is even more astonishing is that privy councillors, statesmen, generals, admirals, and rational human beings, should have worshipped such a woman, and conducted themselves in such a humiliating fashion before her. The astute Lord Beaconsfield laid the flattery on with a trowel, but he was not English, and he was gratifying an ambition. Perhaps we had better not be too ready to sneer at Queen Victoria, but reserve those marks of affection for the Victorians. They were self-complacent folk and deemed themselves the heirs of all the ages. And now their age is a synonym for a narrow and conventional view of life, and justly regarded as the last phase of Feudalism.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Origin of Christianity.

### XIV.

(Continued from page 245.)

The way was prepared for Christianity on every side. The figure of Christ is drawn in all its features before a line of the Gospels was written.—*Albert Kalthoff, "The Rise of Christianity," 1907, p. 115.*

ONE must bear in mind the fact that the four Gospels were not, and could not have been written in Palestine, that they were not composed in Hebrew, or even in Aramaic, the language of Palestine at that time, also that the four Gospels are not the earliest documents of Christianity, many of the so-called apocryphal gospels are older, so are the Epistles of Paul and Peter and the Acts of the Apostles which follow the four Gospels in the New Testament. The writer of the Acts in chapter eleven, verse twenty-six, very indiscreetly lets the cat out of the bag; he says: "And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." Not at Jerusalem where it was supposed to have originated. Paul himself was not a native of Palestine, he was born of Jewish parents at Tarsus in Cilicia and was by birth a Roman citizen. He had never heard Jesus speak, or even seen him, all he knew of Jesus was hearsay.

In ancient times the Jews seem to have been scattered over the world even as they are to-day; in 588 B.C. we learn from Jeremiah (xliii. 7) they had formed a settlement in Egypt. In 332 B.C. Ptolemy, son of Lagus, carried away a large number of Jewish captives to Alexandria, the Greek city founded by Alexander the Great, where he gave them the full rights of citizenship. Many others emigrated there of their own accord. In a very short time they became so numerous that the north-east angle was known as "the Jews' quarter." It was here, as we have seen, that the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, to the great scandal of the Jews in Palestine who regarded its translation into a Gentile language as sacrilege. Says a learned writer:—

The Jews, at the time of the first spread of Christianity, were dispersed over the whole world; and in Greece and Asia Minor occupied a quarter, and exercised influence in every town. The Seleucides had given the right of citizenship to these Asiatic Jews, and had extended to them some sort of protection. The close association of these Jews with Greeks necessarily led to the adoption of some of their ideas. Since Ezra, the dominant principle of the Palestinian and Babylonish rabbis had been to create a "hedge of the Law," to constitute of the legal prescriptions a net lacing those over whom it was cast with minute yet tough fibres, stifling spontaneity. Whilst rabbinism was narrowing the Jewish horizon, Greek philosophy was widening man's range of vision. The tendencies of Jewish theology and Greek philosophy were radically opposed. The Alexandrine Jews never submitted to be involved in the meshes of

rabbinism. They produced a school of thinkers, of whom Aristobulus was the first known exponent, and Philo the last expression, which sought to combine Mosaism with Platonism, to explain the Pentateuch as the foundation of a philosophic system closely related to the highest and best theories of the Greeks.<sup>1</sup>

The Jews who remained behind in Palestine, in the absence of alien religious ideas and philosophies, retained their old orthodox and formal ideas intact. On the other hand, the foreign Jews, owing to the impossibility of attending at the temple at Jerusalem, and through contact with Greek learning, combined with knowledge of the many religions from the east and the west, which the tolerance of the Greek rulers allowed to practice, all tended to widen their ideas and slacken their interest in their old faith. They became to a large extent Hellenized. In time they adopted the Greek language and lost knowledge of their own, especially was this the case with their children. This was the main reason for the translation of the Hebrew scriptures into Greek.

Deismann, who has made a life study of the languages prevailing in Palestine and contiguous countries, and speaks with authority, says:—

The majority of the Hellenistic Jews of the Dispersion probably spoke Greek as their native tongue: those who spoke the sacred language of the fathers had only learned it later. It is more probable that their Hebrew would be Graecized than that their Greek would be Hebraized. For why was the Greek Old Testament devised at all? Why, after the Alexandrian translation was looked upon as suspicious, were new Greek translations prepared? Why do we find Jewish Inscriptions in the Greek language, even where the Jews lived quite by themselves, *viz.*, in the Roman catacombs. The fact is, the Hellenistic Jews spoke Greek, prayed in Greek, sang psalms in Greek, wrote in Greek, and produced Greek literature; further, their best minds thought in Greek.<sup>2</sup>

Deismann says that he does not know of a single Jewish inscription in Hebrew outside of Palestine before the sixth century A.D., and if Deismann does not know of one, you may rely upon it that one has not been discovered yet.

It was among these Greek speaking Jews living out of Palestine that we must look for the origin of the Greek New Testament, not to natives of Bethlehem, Nazareth or Jerusalem.

Besides the four Gospels and Epistles there are a number of so-called "Apocryphal," or spurious Gospels, to distinguish them from the four which Christians claim to be the only genuine ones. Such are the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of James, and many others. Many that we know were once in circulation have disappeared altogether. Before the Canon of the Bible was formed they were of equal authority with the four Gospels we have now; when the Church came into existence it had to make a choice as to which works were authoritative and which were not, the four Gospels, the Epistles and the Book of Revelation were chosen to form the Canon of authoritative Scripture and the rest thrown out, many of them were deliberately suppressed and destroyed by order of the Church as heretical, and they have been the subject of unmeasured abuse by the orthodox ever since. Bishop Ellicott says of them:—

Their real demerits, their mendacities, their absurdities, their coarseness, the barbarities of their style, and the inconsequence of their narratives, have never been excused or condoned.

We know before we read them that they are weak, silly, and profitless—that they are despicable monuments even of religious fiction.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Baring-Gould, *The Lost and Hostile Gospels*, 1874, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Adolf Deismann, *Bible Studies*, 1909, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> Bishop Ellicott, *Cambridge Essays*, 1856, pp. 153-157.

How Christians know these things before reading the works themselves the Bishop does not explain. It is needless to say the rationalist makes no distinction between orthodox and heretical gospels; he finds the same demerits, mendacities, absurdities, and inconsequence, in the orthodox four Gospels as the Bishop finds in the Apocryphal ones.

It often provides amusement to the rationalist to find that a point of view which he, and others before him, have held as a matter of course in opposition to the orthodox opinion is suddenly discovered and brought forward as an entirely new and novel idea. Deismann provides a case in point—and we must remember that Deismann always writes from the Christian standpoint. Deismann, speaking of these Apocryphal Gospels, after remarking that much that was of value "was intentionally destroyed," further observes:—

Why, even at the present day, most of these productions come to us bearing the same stigma: we are accustomed to think of them as *Apocryphal*, *Heretical*, *Gnostic*, and as such ignore them.

Deismann not only condemns this attitude, but he goes farther, he says:—

The superstitions of the imperial period do not permit of being divided into three classes: *Heathen*, *Jewish*, *Christian*. There is frequently no such clear distinction between the faith of the Heathen and the Jew and that of the Christian. Superstition is syncretic in character: this fact has been anew confirmed by the extensive recently discovered remains of the Literature of Magic. And yet it is possible, with more or less precision, to assign certain fragments of these to one of the three departments named.<sup>4</sup>

This is only adopting a point of view which is a commonplace among rationalists. W. MANN.

(To be Continued.)

## Cruelty to Children.

THE letter of Mr. Phipson in a recent issue of this paper has done a service in bringing to light the fact that, even at this time of day, there are persons, supposedly rational, who can endeavour to justify the beating of children.

It is a pity that Mr. Phipson somewhat spoils his case by the manner of its presentation—the reference to cold-blooded flogging "Scotchmen" is a case in point. I have many teacher friends in Scotland, and without exception they are all opposed to corporal punishment. Indeed, quite half a dozen names come to my mind of Scotsmen and Scotswomen (not "Scotch" please) who take a leading part in British educational reform. Yet Mr. Phipson is quite right in his main proposition, and deserves all the support we can give him, for corporal punishment is a display of ignorance and ought never to be tolerated.

A spanking father of three small boys, the eldest being but six, has been good enough to contradict that point of view. According to this correspondent:

Corporal punishment is all well and good *if given with justice* (*italics mine*).....it is far better than allowing a child to grow up soft, stupid and selfish and out of hand. I have recently come into contact with several children who have never been smacked, and I thank goodness that they are not living in my house.

I willingly accept the statement of "Parent" that his children are well behaved and happy and that they regard him as the best of pals. But do you think that if I asked Jock (aged three) why he loved daddy, would he answer that it was because of the spankings received when he was said to be naughty? Yet that is substantially what "Parent" is trying to make out.

<sup>4</sup> Deismann, *Bible Studies*, p. 272.

I submit that the reason those three children love their father is that they find him a good considerate friend and play-fellow, and that they never receive chastisement unless, *as they are taught to believe*, they "deserve" it. But I say that children never ought to be beaten, and in smacking those dear little boys (mere infants) "Parent" is committing a double wrong, for he is fostering the "righteous" flogging spirit in their little minds. I think I hear Jock, thirty years after, saying, as he smacks his bad lad (for not shutting the door!), "My father gave us all regular spankings, and it did us a world of good."

Now, what in the name of reason is "beating with justice?" Who judges? Is it not the parent or teacher, and does he inflict punishment only after considerations of justice? Not a bit of it. If you can give me *one specific instance* where corporal punishment can be administered to a child *with justice* I will say, "go on, and thrash him soundly."

But I am on sure ground, for the infliction of physical pain as a corrective cannot reasonably be defended.

Like Mr. Phipson I am appalled at the beatings and thrashings permitted in the home and the school. Only the other week there was a frightful case of a headmaster who beat a boy so cruelly that the lady teacher and the other pupils were in tears and imploring him to desist! Of course, the master pleaded that justice was on his side, for the boy had rung a bell when forbidden to do so. The child's body was a mass of weals and bruises, *and the ruffian of a master was fined 10s.* That's "justice" for you in an English court! My instincts are all savage ones, and I say deliberately, that had it been my boy who suffered, I would have forgotten all about civilization, and that headmaster would have had "rough house" with some justice.

I have had considerable experience with children, having had thousands of all classes through my hands professionally, and the proportion of well behaved ones is very small. Indeed, it saddens me beyond measure to see beautiful little children (they are nearly all that) being ruined for life by the folly of their parents. Heavens, what deceit, what priggishness, what depravity and cruelty have I not seen instilled into little infants. What a world of foolishness to be unlearned, how difficult the task of making free men and women out of such material! Quite the worst children are those who are smacked the most, but the converse is not necessarily true, for allowing a child to grow up "soft, stupid and selfish" is a poor alternative to the smacking ideal, but I am not writing of those parents who are too lazy to correct or even to beat their children. "Parent" is all wrong when he thinks that the unsmacked kiddies of parents *who abstain from beating on conscientious grounds* will become soft marks.

My children do not get spanked, and I also thank goodness they are not living in "Parent's" house. If my oldest "soft, stupid and selfish" boy were to see this just father "breaking in" his three children, aged six, four, and three, by "a few sharp smacks to that part of the anatomy which bears injury with fortitude," I fear he would get "completely out of hand." In all probability your correspondent would be surprised at the "just" passion displayed, and my lad would certainly take his brothers out of such a reformatory.

Those who beat children are mostly ashamed of their conduct, and in seeking for an excuse to salve their consciences, they lay a firm hold of "justice." Let us examine that plea.

My six children differ very widely in temperament, yet each is a creature of his heredity and environment. If Eileen, aged six months, curls up her feet and does other monkey tricks we remember having read Haeckel, and talk learnedly about the child's growth being an epitome of the evolution of the race, or some

such grandiose phrase. But when Paddy, aged three years, does something taught him by a simian ancestor, and when John, aged twelve, flies into a fearful temper over some trifle (to me) exactly as his father and grandfather did before him, what justice would there be in smacking them? We cannot get back to the monkey now, and it would do little good for someone to give me a hiding. Still, there are some things that must be forbidden the little ones, and foolish outbursts of temper are to be deprecated and checked. There are clever ways of doing this which need not be elaborated here, but the point is that *beating is always unjust.* Whose fault would it be if "Parent's" child returned from that visit to the badly behaved family and conducted himself like a fiend? Obviously the blame would rest with the father, who, knowingly, allowed a child of tender years to make a prolonged stay in a home whose management he disapproved of.

Touching this "obedience" plea, and the door shutting episodes, it is noticeable that the father of X and Y (are these men widowers?) speaks politely and says "please" to his children, while "Parent" contents himself with issuing a command. "Shut the door, Jock," he says, and in effect he adds, "or I'll wallop you soundly." He gets the door shut, and we are made to believe that the other daddy didn't get obedience because he was soft and hadn't the force argument behind his request. Now, if a parent asks a child to do something quite reasonable, and then permits a battle royal to take place about it, and allows the matter to drop there, he is neglecting his duty. But it is exactly this easy going parent that your correspondent thinks ought to administer corporal punishment to make his children improve in behaviour! How could he do it "with justice?" The beatings would be served out all wrong, and that's just the tragedy of the matter, for most parents and teachers are quite unfitted to have the care of the kiddies.

I am not quite so sure about the love of children for the parents who do not spare the rod. Let me tell a true story. In my youth I became very friendly with a young Englishman of quite exceptional abilities. He was painter, musician, and poet, and had won distinction in the three arts. He impressed everyone he met, yet, although sober and ambitious, he had lost scores of chances. I found out that poor Frank—ordinarily a good-natured, jocular companion—was liable to flare up in fearful homicidal tempers seemingly without cause, and these outbursts were invariably followed by fits. Frank's father had been a blacksmith and a very poor man. I was taken once to see the widow in the country. Her other children were of the usual stupid farm servant class. We were seated at tea and somehow the conversation veered round to reminiscences of the father who had died when they were all young. The mother had a story about stolen apples, and stupidly asked Frank if he remembered the hiding dad gave him on that occasion.

Frank's eyes nearly jumped out of their sockets. He rose from the table, his face purple with passion and horrible to look at.

"Do I remember?" he roared. I give his exact words. "By Christ I do, and I could go now and dig up his — corpse and bash his face."

I heard later, that that night Frank had one of his fits and had been very violent.

Now here was a case of an ordinary dull couple having a genius for a son—a child of great spirit whom no beating could break in—and his whole life was clouded by their stupidity and cruelty. If my friend is alive to-day, the chances are that he is in an asylum or prison.

I could go on *ad infinitum* giving instances of adults whose unsocial tendencies could directly be traced to flogging in the home or school.

The worst feature about beating is that, like poison,

the dose has always to be increased to be effective. If we beat a child in the home we have no reason to complain if an over-worked teacher adopts the same argument in school, for it is doubly hard to control by reasonable methods a child habitually influenced by force.

Properly speaking, spanking is a lazy habit. It is so much easier to give a slap than to point a moral or to make an appeal to a child. To many parents corporal punishment must save a lot of trouble. An Aberdeen lady with a very large family was once asked if so many children did not give her a lot of bother. The good lady smiled complacently. "Oh, ma bairns are nae trouble ava. I'll jist tell you the secret. I gie them porridge and milk and a weel skelpit backside three times a day regular."

J. EFFEL.

### Acid Drops.

The *Catholic Times* (April 9) is seriously alarmed at what it describes as an attempt to banish religion from the Austrian schools. It publishes a lengthy extract from a Vienna letter, the gist of which is contained in a few lines. "Only those children who insist upon it will be permitted to go to Mass or the Sacraments. We are now being governed by a combination of Jews and Freemasons. What is to become of poor Austria?" We have heard of this unholy alliance before, and we may expect to hear of it again, or something equally veracious, whenever men and women in self defence strive to keep Rome in her place. That place is not the national public schools. Poor Austria! Under the beneficent régime of Franz Joseph, of pious memory, she was truly "Austria felix," and the faithful were sure of their ground in all that concerned the educational system. Those were the halcyon days when the Government worked systematically to crush the Italian language in the Trentino, and used the school as the principal means to this end. Under the same benign rule, during the Balkan War of 1912, it was no uncommon thing for Czechs to be assaulted in the streets of Vienna, and even in parts of Prague, for showing sympathy with the Christian Balkan Allies in their struggle to shake off the yoke of the infidel Turk! What protest against these practices ever emanated from the Roman Catholics of Teutonic Austria?

This question deserves more than a passing notice. It is a remarkable fact, and deserves the special attention of all friends of progress, that the overthrow of despotic government in Europe was immediately followed by an effort to liberate the school from the yoke of superstition. Moreover, this is the gravamen of the charges brought by clerical reactionaries everywhere against the new administrations in Russia, Germany, Bohemia, and Austria. At a recent political meeting in Marylebone, leaflets abusing the Bolsheviks and their supporters were distributed. With political systems as such we are not concerned. But that the first of these indictments should be that the Bolsheviks had abolished religion from the schools is a significant lesson for all workers in the cause of Secular Education. Religion was excluded from the schools of New Zealand and some of the Australian States more than half a century ago.

Another point to be noticed is that permission to give religious instruction in State schools to "those children who insist upon it" is a very real concession. But, of course, it will not satisfy the demands of the clerics, who, at the best, will only allow definite objectors to withdraw their children from such instruction. This means the capture of the child whose parents are indifferent on the matter, and fixing a stigma upon the few little "heretics" whose parents are very far from being indifferent on what is taught as "God's word."

The *Church Times*, in its issue of April 15, devotes its first leading article to an earnest advocacy of asexuality, which it pronounces the only solution of the difficulties

raised particularly in connection with mixed juries. It is maintained that "in all such cases the principle to adopt is that all should act as if sex did not exist." But is not our contemporary aware that asexuality is a New Testament principle? Paul declares (Gal. iii. 28) that in Christ "there can be neither male nor female." Even the Apostle did not always act upon his own principle, while the Church has always totally ignored it. The Anglican Church to-day acts almost as if it did not exist. A woman is not allowed to preach from a pulpit, nor may she address a mixed congregation. Her audience must be composed of only women and children. Asexuality is as yet unknown in the House of God. Is not a woman as competent to address mixed congregations as a man? Miss Royden is declared to be one of the best preachers in London, and yet the Bishop of London refuses to recognize her.

The *Daily Express* (London) recently published an article on "The World's Champion Liar." It contained no reference to the late Theodore Roosevelt, who deserved that title on account of his description of Thomas Paine as "a filthy little Atheist." As Paine was clean, six feet high, and was not an Atheist, the libel consisted of three lies in three words.

Canon Barnes is progressing slowly towards intellectual emancipation. He admits that the Apostle Paul was not infallible; that he was mistaken on several important points, such as the doctrines of the Fall and the Second Advent, and that the Gospels "show—let us be quite candid—the confusion of statement which always arises when history is preserved, not in writing, but in men's minds." But he still clings to several superstitious notions, such as that "evolution was designed to produce spiritual beings, who can survive bodily death, if they accept Christ's dogma of immortality" (the italics are our own); that the emergence of the soul is the last stage in biological evolution; and that the resurrection of Christ is a well attested fact and a key to the secret of the universe. As yet, he is neither a thorough-going evolutionist nor a consistent theologian.

Sixty and seventy years ago the Principality of Wales was a profoundly religious country, but even there, we are informed, the future of religion is in grave peril. Sir Henry Jones, a Glasgow professor, who was born and brought up in North Wales, is now on a visit to his native land, and has been giving expression to a feeling of great anxiety in regard to the religious attitude of his fellow-countrymen. He confesses that the spirit which bows to mere authority is on its deathbed; but being a clergyman, he declares that the inherent truth of religion is destined, ultimately, to triumph. He is afraid, however, of what may happen during the period of transition between the rejection of all outward authority and that final triumph. In reality, what is in serious doubt is the final triumph. The trend even in North Wales, judging by the signs of the times, is away from what is called spiritual or vital religion, and, through formal religion, towards no religion at all. In South Wales this trend is much more pronounced.

The *Record* (April 7) has the usual cut-and-dried evangelical remedy for the industrial crisis. "The lack of the spirit of fellowship and brotherhood is working disaster, and the nation needs to recover its Christian ideals." We like the word "recover." Our contemporary discreetly avoids expressing any definite opinion on the subject of mining royalties but the attitude of prominent Anglicans to the early efforts of the workers, especially in the rural districts, to form combinations, and the reports published some years ago on the condition of the slum property belonging to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, hardly inspire confidence in "Christian ideals." As the labour movement makes headway we shall hear more of the efficacy of applied Christianity. When the industrial workers were sunk in abject misery and had no political rights worth mentioning, the clergy, as a body, gave little countenance to measures of a concrete nature likely to curtail the privileges of the ruling class. "Christian ideals" are writ large in our own

religious history, as well as in the intercourse of nation with nation. "Servants, obey in all things them that are your masters according to the flesh" (Col. iii. 22). "Servants, be in subjection to your masters with all fear not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward" (1 Peter ii. 18).

There is one comment that may be made on the article by our friend "Mimmermus" in last week's paper. It will be of interest to *Freethinker* readers to learn that the Christianity of Prince Albert was a very doubtful quantity. That he was not an orthodox believer appears to be quite certain, and it is probable that in a less "exalted" state his opinions might have been more pronounced. His friend, Baron Stockmar, actually suggested that the Prince of Wales should not be educated in "the supernatural doctrines of Christianity." This was not agreed to. Had it been, we could hardly have expected the earlier years of Edward the seventh to have been of so spotless a character.

The Rev. Dr. Poole, Dr. Meyer's successor as minister of Christ Church, Lambeth, is said to be a humourist, but what strikes one more forcibly is that he is an uncompromising kill-joy. He makes game of "ragtime nonsense, with its kick-up and flash and dust-raising, and its heathenish display of bells and cymbals." He speaks contemptuously of "going to the movies, and sitting chewing gum or chocolates, and nudging each other and going mad over Mary somebody in the latest reel." But the gem of the attack is the one on dancing, which we give verbatim:—

If you could go to the dance often and come to the prayer-meeting, bringing Christian fragrance into the Church, I'd say, "God bless you, dance." But do you know I never saw a dancing crowd worth that" (snapping his fingers), "in church!"

Under the Old Testament the dance and worship went together. King David was a man after God's own heart and at the same time a notorious dancer, but in Puritanical Nonconformity all carnal pleasure is tabooed. Nature and grace are not on speaking terms within its borders.

Of what conceivable use is it to keep on repeating the old lie that God loves the world and in brooding over it, as an eagle fluttereth over her young? Dr. Orchard makes the sad confession that humanity is as near to being lost as it can be. Europe is dying and nowhere in the world can the reverend gentleman see the light rising. Certainly not in the West, for America has got all our vices and some others of her own, while the East is being crushed under the cruel heel of militarism. Then this able divine of many conflicting moods exclaims:—

We have been going on with an optimism which has no religious basis—on a fatalistic optimism that because to-morrow is to-morrow it must be better than to-day. Who believes it to-night?

And yet Dr. Orchard believes that God exists and loves the world. Again we ask, of what earthly use is it to cherish such a fruitless belief? It is only a bewitching dream that never comes true.

A parson, writing in the *Daily Mail*, says to thieves "the alms boxes offer a standing temptation. If you put on a cheap lock they smash it. Put on a strong one, and they ignore the lock and smash the box. Provide an iron-bound box with a heavy lock, and they cart the lot away. Clamp the whole thing to the wall, and they wrench out the plugs." Such devotion is almost worth commemoration in a stained-glass window.

The Rev. F. Naish, vicar of Upnor, Rochester, states that his wife now goes out to work in order to augment the family income. Tens of thousands of wives do the same thing, but their husbands do not send advertisements to the papers in order to excite sympathy.

The clergy often say things which they know to be untrue. Dr. Maud, Bishop of Kensington, preaching lately

in St. Paul's Cathedral, stated that man is "what Christ, the Son of Man, in his resurrection has revealed him to be, triumphant over all material conditions." His lordship knows as well as we do that every step of his journey from the cradle to the grave man is strictly subject to and governed by material conditions. Do what he may he cannot get away from them. He can utilize them only by adapting himself to them. He is born, grows, matures, begets children, works, decays, and dies under their rigid sway. Bishop Maud himself is as much under the dominion of the laws of Nature as the despised Secularist, and it is sheer folly on his part to speak as if he were not.

The *Church Times* (April 15), the doughty champion of the Anglican Catholics, devotes three columns of precious space and printer's ink to the judgment of the Chancellor of the diocese of Exeter, directing the removal of a crucifix erected as a war memorial in the churchyard of St. Stephen's, Devonport. In this church, whose congregation evidently has a keen appreciation of the aesthetic, "votive candles are sold to the public at their own price." Whether this means the price of the candles or of the public is not quite clear; but the important point to notice is that the money is "voluntarily placed in a box." There are three Communion tables, with a crucifix on each; two holy water stoups with water—nothing else—and a red lamp is kept burning before the Reserved Sacrament. Notices were given out that Mass would be celebrated, and prayers were invited for five persons who were dead. The various images were draped in purple. The vicar entered in a cope, which he took off, and turning to the congregation, held up a crucifix also draped in purple. After some further ceremony, the covering drapery was removed from the crucifix, which was kissed by the vicar, while the choir chanted the Reproaches. The crucifix was likewise kissed by four acolytes. Yet our scientists assure us that it is at least a few million years since the anthropoids beat the other monkeys hollow and the long march to a human brain began. The gentlemen of institutions like St. Stephen's also doubtless ask what we have to give in place of religion; but whether they are in favour of opening the theatres on Sunday or not, we are unable to state definitely.

The *Lord's Day* is the organ of the Society for Promoting the Due Observance of the Lord's Day. According to the April issue, Sunday games and amusements are causing serious concern to the Anglican and other religious denominations. The Bishop of Chelmsford complains that, while the number of Sunday-school scholars has been decreasing "to an alarming extent" during the past few years, the cinemas arrange special entertainments on Sunday afternoons for children, who can actually be seen lining up in queues. Charabancs, moreover, are often filled with the happy little "Sabbath-breakers." His lordship is afraid that all this will have "a very detrimental effect on the future." It certainly will. "Alarming" and "detrimental" are old friends, part of the stock-in-trade of the soul-saver's vocabulary. For all that, they are purely relative terms. Every idea that enlarges the intellectual outlook, that makes life attractive without recourse to superstition, is "alarming," especially to the clerical or sacerdotal mind. Apparently, the Lord's Day Society is out to prohibit moving picture shows, the opening of theatres, motoring for pleasure, and cricket, football and golf on Sundays. Some years ago the Churches of all the Protestant denominations in Victoria, Australia, made a similar attack on "Sabbath desecration." One prominent Nonconformist, as he would be called here, when asked what kind of Sunday he desired, promptly replied: "A Sunday that will make it easy for people to go to Church, and difficult for them to stay away." These are the spiritual guides who want to know what we have to offer in place of Christianity, and as soon as a healthy substitute is provided, they call upon the secular arm of the law to suppress it by force.

Kinema services are being introduced at St. Mark's Church, Camberwell, South London. The clergy had better be careful in this matter, otherwise the congregation will imagine that "Tarzan of the Apes" is a Bible character.



C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.  
May 1, 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.

F. ROSE (Johannesburg).—Letter with remittance for literature, etc., to hand. Thanks for securing new subscribers. That is a very practical and permanent form of assistance, which we greatly appreciate.

PETER.—Thanks for suggestion, but we wrote on the matter you suggest on the same occasion last year. It is hardly necessary for us to repeat it this year. We shall always be pleased to see anything you care to send whenever you have the time and the inclination to write.

A. ALDWINKLE.—We are obliged for your new reader. It is good of you to send round the circular as you are doing, and the results are bound to be good. If a thousand of our friends would follow your example we should soon feel a very substantial benefit.

A. THOUMINE.—Thanks for snap-shot. It is very amusing and illustrates what we have so often said—that if religionists only brought a proper sense of humour to bear on their creed our work would be as good as done.

J. E. FYSH (New Hebrides).—We have received your letter and the pamphlets have been sent. The other letter to which you refer will doubtless arrive in due time. Thanks for your kindly thoughts of us. They encourage one at the work. We met some of our old Chester friends when we were lecturing in Liverpool in December last. Hope you will keep well.

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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.

We hope that all intending visitors to the Swansea Conference will have taken note of what we said last week. We are hoping that the trouble in the mining industry will be over by then, and a week-end at Swansea, with its beautiful bay, and the coast scenery of the neighbourhood, will be worth the spending. There was a misprint in giving the name of the entertainment secretary as "Dunpree." It is our old friend Mr. B. Dupree who is meant, and intending visitors should write to him as early as possible at his address, 60 Alexandra Road, Swansea.

We called attention last week to the gross injustice which we consider is done to the work of Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs.

Besant by Dr. Marie Stopes. Her case illustrates the easy way in which the world manages to bury those Freethinkers who have done so much for it. They are able to do this the more easily because when Freethinkers are dead it is a costly business to keep their work in front of the public. Their books and pamphlets go out of print and they are gradually forgotten by all but the Freethinking antiquarian. One day we hope to do something to overcome this. We have for long had in mind the issuing of a series of books and pamphlets which should present, with brief biographical details, the best work of the Freethinkers of the past century. It is a matter of money only, and at present that expenditure is impossible. But we *will* make a start one day. Perhaps one day that long looked for millionaire will finance an undertaking of that kind. It would be a really great work if it were done, and would stand as a living monument to the great men and women of the past.

One extreme is suggested by another, and as we have just been suggesting the spending of large sums it is a natural transition to turn to the collecting of small ones. In this instance it is the collection of the churchy threepenny-piece. The fine weather is on us and that offers many opportunities to introduce this paper to new readers and so see that their threepences eventually reach this office. There is no disputing the proposition that there are enough people in this country willing to subscribe to the *Freethinker* if only the paper is brought to their notice. And the very best kind of help that anyone can give us is to find new readers. It is the best help for both the paper and the cause it represents. May we, therefore, hope that a number of our friends will give themselves earnestly to this work of propaganda during the coming summer months.

Bearing in mind the disturbed state of Ireland we are not surprised to learn that the Belfast Branch of the N. S. S. finds it impossible to continue its propaganda in the existing circumstances. It is a pity that this should be so since there is hardly another country in Europe in which there is so great a need for Freethought as there is in Ireland. But to preach Freethought by open propaganda in Belfast we can well believe to be at present impossible, and the Branch has decided to suspend operations for the present. After winding up the affairs of the Branch there is a small balance in the hands of the treasurer, and that is being handed over to the funds of the Society. Thus, for the time being the Belfast Branch closes an honourable career in an honourable manner. But it will commence again one day, and when it does the Executive of the Society will be ready and pleased to give whatever assistance, financial and otherwise, lies within its power.

Our London brigade is getting ready for the open-air summer campaign. The importance of this avenue of approaching "all sorts and conditions of men" has long been recognized by workers in nearly every cause, and there is no need to emphasize it. The Churches have a superabundance of imposing structures, but only a few of them any congregation worth mentioning. The Y.M.C.A. and kindred organizations have also plenty of bricks and mortar, supplied without stint by wealthy privilege, and they are consequently in a position to utilize a whole host of subsidiary channels—educational schemes and boarding facilities—to convince the ordinary citizen of the social value of religion. Probably in London he stands in little need of such conviction. But despite their advantages, these religious institutions, if not actually in distress, are far from happy. Their material equipment is a poor substitute for ideas or intellectual honesty. We have no fine buildings, but even without them we are making some headway, and we do not ask for the forcible suppression of the "movies," the concert halls, the ritualists, or any other rivals.

The Bethnal Green Branch commences its summer outdoor lecture season this year in Victoria Park on Sunday next (May 1) with a lecture from Mr. A. D. McLaren. This season the lectures will be in the afternoon instead of in the evening, commencing at 3.15. We hope that East London Freethinkers will make it a point to be present

in order to give the Branch a good send-off and Mr. McLaren the audience he deserves.

Among all the forms of robbery to which the public were subjected during the war there was none quite so shameless, and on behalf of which so little justification could be offered as the paper ramp. Huge fortunes must have been made, and it would be interesting for someone to compile a true return of the wealth of the principal paper making firms of the country before and after their great effort in the name of patriotism—such a return to include the value of machinery and building at both dates. But the other day Mr. H. G. Spicer wrote to the *Times* asking for some form of protection to protect the poor paper makers from foreign competition. Mr. H. G. Sotheran, the well-known bookseller, in reply, said he had pleasure in illustrating the terrible conditions of the paper trade. He says, "I have just passed an invoice from his (Mr. Spicer's) firm for ten reams of catalogue paper at £1 3s. 4d. per ream. The price of this before the war was 9s. a ream." That is very neat, and one can understand the distress of the paper makers if they had to sell paper at no more than, say, three times the pre-war price.

Mr. A. B. Moss lectures to-day (April 24) at the Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, at 7. He will lecture on "Poets of Progress," and the address will be illustrated by selections from Shakespeare, Buchanan, Shelley, and others. Admission will be free, and we trust there will be a good audience.

## Religion as a Social Factor.

It must be admitted that religion has played a very important part in the life of man from an early age. But that is different from admitting that religion is a necessary social factor in the unqualified sense claimed by religionists.

Religion always has been, and, while it continues in vogue, will be a manifestation of human feeling and thought dependent upon man's state of evolution, as determined and conditioned by his environment and his capacity for reacting upon the latter. It is, therefore, a relative factor in human social development, and, as knowledge and wisdom increase, both as social possessions and in social importance, religion should gradually disappear from the face of the earth.

Although at times it is distressing, it is sometimes amusing to note the arguments with which religious people seek to support the theory that man must have religion if he is to make social progress. Rationalism is made to cut a very sorry figure indeed, but the distortion reflects but little credit upon the mind of the religionist.

In a work on *Heredity and Selection in Sociology*, Mr. G. Chatterton-Hill informs us that, "Rationalism affords no sanction for individual suffering, or for all that conflict which is the essential condition of progress" (p. 506).

Now, Rationalism is not called upon to sanction or find a sanction for individual suffering. It accepts the fact of such suffering and seeks means whereby suffering may be eliminated from human life, to the utmost extent that natural conditions will allow.

Much of the suffering in the world is unavoidable, while a great deal could be avoided if we only exercised a little reasonableness more frequently. But whether suffering is inevitable or not, it is foolishness to frame a philosophy in order to sanction suffering.

With regard to conflict as an essential condition of progress, no rationalist, worthy of the name, is likely to deny the necessity of conflict in every sphere of human activity.

Conflict is a fact, the question is, whether it must for ever take the crude forms of war, commercial competi-

tion, and religious strife, with all the worst elements of human nature manifesting themselves, as it has so often done in the past.

Conflict in some form or other presents itself to us in every sphere of life, but there are many forms of conflict which are not of the highest value to social life. War is undoubtedly the unavoidable outcome of certain inter-tribal or inter-national conditions, but that is no justification for the conclusion that war will always be a mode of human conflict. The very fact that war is conditional gives grounds for the hope that it will some day be abolished from the sphere of human strife. And, if rationalism finds no sanction for war, as a necessary mode of human conflict, and if religion does find such a sanction, so much the worse for religion.

On page 506 of *Heredity and Selection in Sociology*, Mr. Chatterton-Hill says, that a social force,—

if it is to fulfil its primary function, namely, that of ensuring the maximum of social integration and cohesion, must envelop the individual in every moment of his existence; it must give to the individual a supra-individual ideal which shall be always present to him, which shall shape all his actions, which shall confer a supreme value on his existence, a value which is restricted neither in time nor space. Such an ideal must not only be supra-individual; it must be supra-social, transcending society, whose sanction for individual action is insufficient. And, finally, and because of these preceding conditions, such an ideal must be supra-rational.

It is thus that the religionist engages in the death struggle for his religion. Being unable to find satisfactory justification of the continuance of his religion in terms of every day human life, he indulges in all sorts of supra or transcendental justifications, to the glorification of irrationalism and the mystification of the unwary.

While it may be admitted that, as far as the individual is concerned, it is possible to have a supra-individual ideal, in the sense of an ideal which implies working not merely for his own benefit but for that of society at large, there seems to me to be no justification for a supra-social ideal, an ideal beyond or above society. In fact, such an ideal is an impossibility, except in the realms of the worst kind of metaphysics.

An ideal which extends beyond the particular society to which an individual belongs does not transcend human society; it is but a more comprehensive social ideal than that which is limited by the needs and aspirations of a given social formation.

A so called supra-social ideal, with its religious transcending of normal reality, is in large measure but a reflex of a social ideal projected into the realms of impossibility. Your kingdom of heaven is your ideal but impossible kingdom on earth transplanted into dreamland, with a god wearing a halo in place of a king wearing a crown. A veritable admission that the dreamer has, in many respects, lost touch with normal reality and, in fact, has despaired of ever accomplishing a rectification of society under such conditions as make social existence at all possible.

That an ideal must be supra-rational is but the old plea that religion is beyond the sphere of rational comprehension and, therefore, outside the realm of critical examination and judgment. A plea made against the social value of the use of reason by an author who is trying to use his reason all the time.

If religion is supra-rational, why employ reason in its service at all?

Perhaps Mr. Chatterton-Hill realizes that religion is within the domain of rational comprehension more so now than ever, and he is constrained to use his reason in order to find means to gloss over the social failures of religionists in the present as in the past.

In what way social progress is to be attained by acting under the sanction of supra-rational ideals when

such ideals too often equate with irrational ideals is not easily seen. That much of our social life is the outcome of irrational acts, in the sense of being as nearly devoid of rationality as possible, is readily granted. But if the object of each man and woman were that of ordering his or her life in more and more rational manner, social progress would be much more rapidly accomplished, and there would be no need of supra-rational sanctions for the details of everyday life.

Mr. Chatterton-Hill is so hard pressed in his attempt to prove the necessity of a religion as a social force that he says, when speaking of Japan, that "it may very likely be an Atheistic religion" which holds that civilization together. Then, crowning glory of all, he proceeds to say, "Atheism itself can only hope to become a social force in so far as it forsakes those strictly rational principles on which it is based" (p. 506).

This is sheer falsification of sociological argument in the interest of religion.

If by "religion" were meant nothing more than a binding force, then we should have no objection to Atheism being described as a religion; but it would still retain its leading characteristic of applying reason to the problems of life. And the value of Atheism, as a social force, would be very largely in the application of reason to the ordering of social life. Irrational Atheism would be as preposterous as any other irrationalism.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

(To be concluded.)

## A Confession of Faith.

Fewer people would be religious if fewer people were moral cowards or credulous fools. —*Ibid.*

THE older I get the more I become convinced that the one cause immediately worth fighting for is the Free-thought cause; in another word, Liberty, in the various sense advocated in the immortal phrase of the sublime John Milton; Liberty, in the words of Ingersoll, a word without which all other words are vain; liberty even to be a Christian; liberty, says some smart shallow sophist, to be a murderer? no, but liberty to suppress murder, the murder of men, and what is even more important, the murder of ideas. Men and ideas may both be had, but the emancipated intelligence, and the necessities of social life, may be trusted to see to that in this sense no man must be free to commit crime; crime in this sense—a sense quite irrelevant to the immediate issue—must have its natural and social consequences, while the more scientific—not the legal and artificial aspect—of crime, in the newer truer outlook, may see us far on the road to its total elimination.

Meantime, press, pulpit, and parliament suffer from an excess of compromise, when it is not something worse. Vital and fundamental questions are examined with kid gloves and coloured spectacles. These are removed when a "great war" is on, when compulsion, of the uglier but honester kind, becomes, in the wisdom of statesmen, necessary. Then "the machinery of government" is revealed to the curious eyes of its children, who see and know it for what it is, but their memories are short, their credulity long, or their magnanimity sublime! But a flash of light will sometimes illumine the dullest brain—the glow of that mental magnesium wire which is well described as "insight"—I leave out details, but just lately I had abundant, nay, overwhelming reason for the conclusion that religion, formidable as we know it to be, is but an incidental in the path of Freethought and progress. There are friendly and kindly pressmen, Parsons and politicians, of the three "estates," but they are mostly superficial and time serving, if in

some very amiable, some comfortable complacent way, mistaking their mental attitude for practical wisdom and profound philosophy. They live on the surface of things, and swim with the stream, and in that way are always up-to-date, and fit for "the best society." They know the deeps are underneath, and may be excused for not venturing down there, but the deeps are never to be deceived, and in due course will find them or their successors. A true and skilful letter to an editor is, for instance, not welcomed, simply because it is true and skilful; there is a terror of the truth; one seems to hear an imploring voice say, "For heaven's sake do not give the show away!" the show of religion, and all the innumerable side shows. Burns satirized the first in the lines:—

Hypocrisy in mercy spare it,  
That holy robe oh dinna tear it,  
Spare't for their sakes wha aften wear it—  
The lads in black;  
But that curst wit when he comes near it  
Rives't aff their back.

And not alone the "lads in black" wear this comfortable cloak; and not alone the religious layman, in the varied clothing of ordinary men; your church-going, time-serving Atheist is your true infidel, and his tribe is legion; the free *thought* party is not a small party, while the medicine man of the pulpit is often the greatest infidel of them all, unless, peradventure, as is often the case, he be an amiable sincere and credulous fool, a man you cannot help liking (or pitying, which is akin to loving), as you love a child for its innocence and candour, its prattling faith in fairy tales. As for me, in all probability, crude and evil compared with the cultured graciousness of God's good men—as our own editor has often remarked, we cannot allow our Christian friends a monopoly of the vices incident to humanity, we would be fair and reasonable even in that—as for me, I stand confessed, I am an Atheist; even if the fact is a deplorable one, I cannot help it. I need not even say I am open to conviction; all men are; it is in the nature of things, else were even Freethought propaganda hopeless. Belief and unbelief are not moral issues, but only the pretence of these. As the lungs must breath, the brain must think. Primarily the one process is not physical and the other metaphysical: in the latter conclusions, of a kind, are come to, convictions formed, honestly formed but guiltily concealed, and here metaphysics, obscurantism, begins. A man may conceal his religious as well as his irreligious bias; the same causes operate in both cases, authority, public opinion, etc. The cultured and thoughtful Atheist (can there be such a thing?) does not plume himself on standing thus confessed among his fellows; he knows it is but the virtue of necessity, and that he might as well be proud of having been born a Scotchman, a thing he could not help, that there was no merit in, yet natal luck that must be the envy of the world!

Frankly, the man who is always boasting his "godlessness" is on a par with the more numerous fellow who keeps shrieking that Christ has saved him, surely not the least of the miracles! Both are nuisances. But what, it may be asked in more serious vein, is the particular virtue in belief in a God, *per se*? The objective belief may be the cause of subjective modified behaviour, but the impulse to belief or disbelief is in itself no criterion of morality. It is admitted, for instance, that the poet Burns had a reverent leaning towards a vague deism; also that he was a "sinner," with God; it is impossible to believe that a man like Robert Burns could have been a monster, without God. The mature mind of Burns merely retained the impress and aroma of the social and religious folklore atmosphere, his bright, young spirit was steeped in between the Ayr and Doon, streams made classic, not by his religion, but by his humanity. As

one reared in the same county and in a similar atmosphere I do not envy Burns his religion, nor deplore it; I had it, and I outgrew it, not without protracted pangs. Perhaps if Burns, and others, and myself, had not been so insistently taught we were "miserable sinners," we might have been better men. Let that pass. What I do regret, in conclusion, is that I had not, like Burns and Scott, soaked in such a wealth of folklore, or had a more retentive memory. Those old wives' tales were ridiculous, but priceless. Such fragments as I remember, invested with all the eager, pensive, fearful romance of dawning life, are the broken pillars of the temple of the mind, that might have been one classic psychological whole. Take such a story, told us as a solemn warning, as that of the "Dying Atheist," who cried out: "Paine's *Age of Reason* has ruined my immortal soul! and almost immediately expired!" If the mind of the child could accept the awful implication of the story, and like its elders it could and did, is it any wonder that Paine and Voltaire were, and are still, in religious circles anathema to all. The play is larger now, and not so intensive, not so exquisite; but Paine and Voltaire are not the villains of the piece, nor Foote the lurid hornless devil of a London haze. Alas, the glory has departed! Hell is out, and the Devil is dead. The Bunyan allegory is ended and the real life story begun. Still, in Dickens' phrase, Lord keep our memory green!

ANDREW MILLAR.

### A Note on Henry IV.

OUR modern ideas about the theatre are so confused that when Shakespeare is presented to us, simply and without affectation, we find ourselves brought face to face with some astonishingly plain and obvious truths. We are reminded, for instance, of the proper usages of the stage. So many volumes have been written about the psychology of the theatre, the relation of the actor to the acted, the metaphysical basis of comedy and kindred subjects, that it comes as a slight shock to discover that these matters can be explained in a few simple words; or, better still, illustrated by a producer of wisdom. When all is said, the actor can do no more or less than act. The stage manager, or the producer, as he is now somewhat grandiloquently called, can do no more than help the actor out of such minor difficulties as the arrangement of movements within a limited space, the rehearsal of effective situations which can only be judged by a single, controlling eye, and the solution of problems connected with properties, "off" effects and so forth. It is true that the producer can prevent actors from acting, by trying to teach them to act according to some theory of his own; as has been attempted in recent years. But Mr. Fagan, in his production at the Court Theatre, has wisely refrained from using an artificial formula. He has produced Henry IV. almost as one imagines Shakespeare himself might have produced it at the old Globe Theatre. The result is a moving chronicle of historic drama, and a feast of wit and humour.

Shakespeare, in presenting such characters as Wart and Mouldy, Feeble and Bull-dog, takes care not to obtrude them. They are instances rather than real people. We could not endure them for long. They are Nature's bad deeds. We pass them in the street with a shrug or a shudder. But Shakespeare serves them up just as they are. He is sure of his handling of them, confident of the effect they will have upon us. If Feeble were a little more feeble we should suffer hysterics; if Mouldy were still further gone, he would be, indeed, spent. Shakespeare gives them just enough life to make us wish they were dead. Shadow is his mother's son. God help him—and us! In wit-

nessing the scenes in Shallow's garden, we scarcely laugh outright, and yet feel the force of laughter constantly rising within us. Shallow's hypocrisy becomes as monstrous as Falstaff's gross body; Falstaff's contempt for him becomes, in a measure, an apology for his own licentiousness and lawlessness. Shakespeare sets them talking and places old Silence in their midst. Life is thus epitomized in varying grades of vitality. There is Falstaff, still boasting of his prime, a man full of the pride of the flesh and absurdly over-nourished, defiant of time and learned in its usages; Shallow the "forked radish," a weak man long out-played, cherishing the material advantages of his state, yet eager to reclaim, even for a moment, the joys of youth and potency; Silence, a defunct creature, lapsed into mere contemplative somnolence and mechanical reminiscence. Stirred by wine, he breaks into lugubrious song and faintly clutches at indistinct memories.

What, I, I have been merry twice and once, ere now.

Pistol is but a foil to Falstaff; a mere drunken sot, an inebriated lunatic. He has raced the road to ruin with Falstaff; but nature has revenged herself upon him. His brain is eaten up, he spots incoherently, swaggers and threatens, offers love and violence and can perform neither. He is of a kin with Bardolph, only the latter retains his sense of loyalty to the fat Knight. Shakespeare illustrates the superior vitality of Falstaff by showing the effect of his vices upon lesser men; they fall by the way. They have a natural aptitude for sin, but they lack the stomach of the master.

Shakespeare never outrages nature, and Falstaff is so credible a figure that we neither laugh inordinately at his actions nor weep over his downfall. He is the just embodiment of the prodigious. He partly accounts for himself, and by satisfying our reason in some respects and inviting our sympathy in others, he impresses us with a sense of true comedy. He is a being whom we can neither reject as grotesque nor entirely accept as natural. He wastes his substance and yet never wears to a shadow. He eats and drinks faster than time can devour him; the salt of the earth and all goodly things renew themselves in his colossal organism. He assimilates disease and wine with equal aplomb, and transforms all evils into the better parts of himself.

"There's a whole merchant's venture of Bordeaux stuff in him; you have not seen a hulk better stuffed in the hold," says Doll Tearsheet, whose woman's instinct leads her affections towards the sap rather than the rough exterior. Doll loves him for the rich vices that keep her poor in virtue. His unrepentant licentiousness is her justification for her own existence. She fawns upon him, almost worshipfully, as though recognizing the apostle of her creed. As a character, she is the finest of Shakespeare's worse women; and in the scenes between them we are shown the limit of Nature's indulgence. Shakespeare loved to exhibit the human animal stretching its faculties to their utmost. If we do not laugh at his great sinners it is because the comedy of their actions strikes deeper into our natures than the objects that arouse our every day hilarity. They produce the spiritual laughter of which Meredith wrote, the laughter which is none the less philosophical because it is almost unheard.

Thanks to Mr. Fagan's wise methods of stage-management, the actors have a real chance to prove their individual skill. Mr. Frank Cellier's performance as Henry IV. reveals him as a student as well as a player. Admirable was his delivery of the speech:—

Oh, sleep, O gentle sleep  
Natures' soft nurse, how have I frighted thee,  
That thou no more wilt weigh my eyelids down  
And steep my senses in forgetfulness!

And his pause, before speaking the final line,—

Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown

made the hackneyed utterance seem like an inspiration.

Mr. Basil Rathbone dominated the great scene in the bed-chamber, and proved himself worthy of the responsibility. If only our modern producers would trust the actors to act instead of fitting them into a decorative scheme, we might yet have a theatre worthy of Shakespeare. It is in this respect that Mr. Fagan's production marks the return to sanity. All the minor parts—if they can be called such—were played with remarkable individuality. Mr. Alfred Clark's deportment and general appearance aroused expectations that were not quite realized. He was a little too restrained, and rather inclined to emphasize the wit of the man without showing his utter abandonment to coarse pursuits. It is practically impossible to overdo this part. But perhaps Mr. Clark's reticence was excusable, for the real Falstaff is somewhat strong meat for our West-end audiences. WILFRED CLAY.

## Pages From Fontenelle.

### DIALOGUES FROM THE DEAD.

#### *Seneca and Scarron.*

*Seneca.*—I am besides myself with joy to hear that the Stoics are still in being, and that you were a professor of that sect.

*Scarron.*—Without boasting I may say that I was more of a Stoic than you, or Chrisippus, or even Zeno your founder. You were all able to philosophize at your ease, especially yourself who had ample means. And for the other two they were never banished or thrown into prison. But, for my share, I endured poverty, banishment, imprisonment, and what not? Yet I made it appear that these evils touched only the body, but could not reach the mind of a wise man. Grief attackel me in every way possible but always suffered a shameful defeat.

*Seneca.*—I am charmed to hear you talk so heroically. By your language alone I should know you for one of the greatest Stoics. Were you not the admiration of your age?

*Scarron.*—That I was, indeed. I was not content to bear my misfortunes patiently. I went further, and insulted them, if I may say so, by mockery. Constancy would have brought honour enough to another, but I went as far as gaiety.

*Seneca.*—O Stoic wisdom! Thou art no chimera then, as thou art falsely represented. Thou art really to be found among men, and here is a wise man who by thee was made no less happy than Jupiter himself. Come, let me present you to Zeno, and the rest of our masters! How delighted they will be to behold the fruit of those admirable lessons with which they blessed the world.

*Scarron.*—It is an honour to be introduced to such illustrious ghosts.

*Seneca.*—What am I to tell them is your name?

*Scarron.*—Paul Scarron.

*Seneca.*—Scarron? Surely I know that name! Have I not heard you talked of here among a goodly number of modern princes?

*Scarron.*—Very likely.

*Seneca.*—You wrote for their amusement several little poems?

*Scarron.*—I did.

*Seneca.*—Then after all you were no philosopher?

*Scarron.*—Why not?

*Seneca.*—Well! you know it is not the business of a Stoic to write drolleries, and study to make people laugh.

*Scarron.*—I see that you are a stranger to the perfections of mirth. I tell you all wisdom is concealed in it. Ridicule can be extracted out of everything. I would undertake, with all the ease in the world, to extract some of it even out of your own works. But

everything does not produce what is serious, and I defy you ever to turn my works so as to make them yield any. Now, does not this prove that the ridiculous is present everywhere; and that the things of this world were not intended to be treated seriously? I myself have turned the divine *Æneid* of your immortal Virgil into burlesque poems, and I am of opinion that it is impossible to take a better way to make it evident that the serious and the ridiculous are such close neighbours, that they almost touch each other. Everything is like those inventions in perspective in which you see broken figures so dispersed here and there that, if you look at them—from one point you see an emperor, then, if you change your position, you see a beggar.

*Seneca.*—For your sake, I am sorry that the world did not understand that your amusing rhymes were purely contrived to lead people into such profound reflections. You would have been honoured much more than you were, if people had been able to see in you a great philosopher. But it was not easy to detect your more solid qualities in the verses you chose to publish.

*Scarron.*—If I had written big folios to prove that imprisonment, poverty and banishment ought not to extinguish the spirit of joyousness in a wise man, would they have been worthy of a Stoic?

*Seneca.*—In that I see a task of no difficulty.

*Scarron.*—And yet I wrote I know not how many works which show that in spite of banishment, poverty and prison, I possessed just this lightness of heart. Was not this of greater value? Your treatises on ethics are merely so many speculations on wisdom; but my verses were a perpetual practice of it in the different stages of my life.

*Seneca.*—I am certain that your alleged wisdom was not an effect of your reason, but of your temperament.

*Scarron.*—Then, I take it, you have quite the best sort of wisdom.

*Seneca.*—The temperamentally wise are but droll wisecracs. Is it the least to their credit that they are not stark mad? The happiness of being virtuous may sometimes come from nature, but the merit of a wise virtue can never come to a man except by reason.

*Scarron.*—People seldom pay any attention to what you call reason, for if we see that a man has a certain virtue, and if we are able to satisfy ourselves that it is not his by nature we set little or no value on it. Yet seeing that it has been acquired by so much trouble we ought really to value it more; no matter, it is a mere result of reason, and inspires no confidence.

*Seneca.*—We ought to rely even less on the inequality of temperament in your wise men. They are wise only as their blood pleases. We must know the inner organization of their bodies before we are able to estimate how far their virtue will go. Is it not incomparably better to be led only by reason; to make ourselves independent of nature, so that we may fear no surprises?

*Scarron.*—Certainly that would be better, if it were possible, but unfortunately nature always keeps a jealous guard over her rights. She has her initial movements which no one can take away from her. They are often well under way before the reason is warned, and when it is ready to act it at once finds things in great disorder. And it is even then doubtful if it can do anything to put matters straight. No, I am not at all surprised to find that a great number of men put no confidence in reason.

*Seneca.*—Yet to it alone belong the government of men and the ordering of all this universe.

*Scarron.*—Yet it seldom manages to maintain its authority. I have heard it said that some hundred years after your death a Platonic philosopher asked the reigning emperor for a little town in Calabria. It was in ruins, and he wanted to rebuild it, and police it

according to the rules laid down in Plato's *Republic*, and give it the name of Platonopolis. The emperor refused; he had so little confidence in divine Plato's reason that he was unwilling even to trust it with the government of a tiny ruined town. You see thereby to what extent reason has destroyed its credit. If it were valuable in even the slightest degree men would be the only creatures that could value it, and men do not value it at all.

Englished by GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

## Correspondence.

### THE HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—If "Unorthodox" can prove the harmony of the various accounts of the Resurrection in the New Testament his achievement will be appreciated in some quarters. The Rev. Alfred Plummer, D.D., in his *Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew* (1909, p. 414), frankly admits the discrepancies, some of which "are real difficulties," while "others are of small importance."

It may be freely admitted, says Dr. Plummer, that, whether or no the evidence for the appearance of our Lord after his death and burial is as good as could be reasonably expected, it is not all that we should have ourselves desired.

Professor A. S. Peake, M.A., in his popular lecture, *Did Jesus rise again?* (1904, p. 12), is equally outspoken on this head:—

Of course the discrepancies create a very serious problem for certain theories of inspiration, but they are theories with which I have nothing to do this afternoon; all that I shall attempt to do is to disengage the essential fact; and the essential fact is, I submit, not necessarily set aside by the difficulties and contradictions in the various narratives.

It is the "orthodox" critics that are perturbed about divergencies in the reports of their witnesses. I am not. My article lays very little stress upon them. To me they are only contributory evidence that the Resurrection narrative, like the story of the Virgin Birth and the descent into Hades, is mythical. I further believe that, by a careful study of the books of the New Testament, in chronological order, and in the light of the period and the environment of their compilation, one can trace the growth of the Resurrection myth.

A. D. McLAREN.

### THE CRITICISM OF HYMNS.

SIR,—I have just read an article in your paper in which you quote some remarks of mine about hymns, which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*, and then proceed to comment upon them as if they were a defence of hymns. Nothing, you say, ever tempts me to disappoint the fine expectations of Churchwardens, Nonconformist preachers, Bible-class leaders, etc.; but in this you are mistaken. Several persons, who may have been Churchwardens or Bible-class leaders or what not, and who were certainly orthodox, saw that the passage in question was an attack upon hymns and wrote to me to protest against it and the whole article. Read that passage again and you also, I think, will see that you have misunderstood it. When I say that the matter of hymns, if not their manner, is above criticism, and that their sentiments are accepted as those of a minor prophet rather than of a minor poet, I speak ironically. Even my orthodox correspondents saw that; but then they probably read the rest of the article, which is an attack upon a particular hymn. You, I take it, did not read, and assumed—why I do not know—that if I wrote about hymns at all, I must be defending them; hence your mistake, which ought to be evident even to your own readers.

A. CLUTTON BROCK.

[The article in question appeared in our issue of April 3, and was written by our contributor "Mimnemosus." We regret that Mr. Clutton Brock should feel that he has been misrepresented. We did not ourselves see the article in question, but the comments on the passage given appear to us legitimate.—Editor.]

## Obituary.

London Freethinkers will not be surprised to hear of the death of John Francis, better known as "Jack" Henley, who had been in failing health for some time, in his 58th year, the immediate cause of his death being heart failure. He joined the N. S. S. in his early youth and was for many years Secretary of the West London Branch, during its most prosperous times. Being at that time a barrister's clerk, he devoted the whole of his leisure and money to the propaganda he loved till his last hour. Being partially paralyzed on the right side, he was unable to maintain his position and his circumstances materially altered. For some time he assisted in the publishing business of the Pioneer Press when at Newcastle Street, but afterwards drifted into casual work obtained from his old Freethought associates. His quiet unassuming demeanour gave no indication that he was a man of wide reading and a good classical scholar. In accordance with his often expressed wish, his body was sent to the School of Anatomy to make, in his own words, his "small contribution to science." Always a confirmed Atheist, he bore his many troubles and ailments with the greatest philosophy. He passed away quietly at Highgate Hospital on April 8 in the presence of the undersigned.—E. M. VANCE.

## 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.

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

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9): 7, Mr. A. B. Moss, "Poets of Progress," followed by Dramatic Recital.

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Engineers' Institute, 167 Romford Road, Stratford, E. 15): 7, Mr. H. White, A Lecture.

### COUNTRY.

#### INDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (297 Argyle Street): 12 noon, Annual General Meeting of Members. Good attendance wanted.

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Youngman's Rooms, 19 Lowerhead Road, Leeds): 6.30, Mr. A. Haigh, A Lecture.

SWANSEA AND DISTRICT RECEPTION COMMITTEE (60 Alexandra Road, Swansea): 6.30.

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