

The

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## Views and Opinions.

### Christianity and Truth.

The superiority of the type of character developed by a belief in Christianity is an accepted commonplace among Christians. And they appear to be genuinely surprised when the outsider refuses to accept the statement as unquestionable. And yet when the doubter wishes to test theory by an appeal to facts he hardly needs to go beyond the ranks of the Christians themselves for evidence. For not only does he fail to find in actual experience the Christian better than the non-Christian, but he finds them accusing each other of offences great and small, and, more remarkable still, tracing these delinquencies to the very Christian belief which but a moment since was asserted to be so powerful an incentive to uprightness of character. Of course, this is often accompanied by the saving clause that these others did not hold a "true" Christianity, but the others are equally certain that the truth rests with them, and that all the rest cherish a lie. And between them who shall decide which is the true version of Christianity and which is the false? Certainly not the Freethinker. And it is also worth noting that while there is so much cordial disagreement about a purely theoretical matter, namely, as to which is the true version of the Christian gospel, there is substantial agreement that Christians are no better than they should be, and often a great deal worse than they ought to be. If Christianity cannot make men agree in a matter of belief, it does seem to bring them to the practice of a common sort of conduct—of the wrong kind.

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### The Bible and the Church.

I have been reminded of this aspect of the Christian life by the receipt of a pamphlet by Mr. G. G. Coulton on "The Roman Catholic Church and the Bible." The pamphlet is occasioned by the holding of a Roman Catholic Congress at Cambridge, and Mr. Coulton is disturbed at the advertising advantage the Church may get from having its congress in an English university city. To show the nature of the Roman Catholic claims and defence, Mr. Coulton, not for the first time, takes several leading writers, such as Cardinal Gasquet and Canon Barry, and charges them with gross errors in their statements concerning the historical position of their Church, and also with persisting in these statements after the errors had been made plain. Mr. Coulton also charges the Roman Church with not

giving the people a true version of the Bible, and with keeping the Bible away from the people so long as it could. It is only fair to Mr. Coulton to say that he appears to make his charges good, but they very largely form a domestic quarrel between the two bodies of Christians, and one in which a Freethinker has no special need to interfere. Nor can it be surprising to a gentleman of Mr. Coulton's learning and ability to find that Roman Catholic defenders of the faith do not stick to the exact truth when defending their Church—perhaps one ought to put it, do not, when dealing with religion, abide by the standard of truth accepted in secular life. Religious people are never scrupulous of the truth when it is a matter of defending their religion, and Christians are notorious offenders in this direction. Mr. Coulton must know that in the records of Christian controversy the charge most frequently met with is, not that the controversialists were mistaken in their views, but that they were deliberately lying, or forging, or inventing, in order to make good their claims. What I have said so often before I may now say again, and that is, that in the whole history of the world there is no institution that presents so terrible and so unbroken a record of deliberate lying as does the Christian Church. Other institutions have lied on occasion; the Christian Church appears to have lied as a policy and by tradition.

### Forgery and Faith.

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It is plain that Mr. Coulton does not see the full significance that many of his statements will have to one who is outside both the Christian parties. We may take, as an illustration of this, a quotation given from Professor Tout to illustrate the statement that "Forgery ran rampant all through the Middle Ages." This is, "Such great persons, such powerful societies, were accomplices in falsification that it required a rare share of public spirit for a humble critic to expose too coarsely their method of manipulating documents..... all practitioners had the 'benefit of clergy'.....I do not find that the Church courts ever took cognizance of forgery at all." "The great forgers were the monks," interpolates Mr. Coulton, and he cites again from the pages of Professor Tout the views of a distinguished Jesuit scholar of the 17th century who "was so puzzled how to treat the great structure of pious fraud that surrounded the early history of ancient monasteries and the lives of its saintly founders, that he came to the rash conclusion that all documents contained in early cartularies were deliberate falsifications by eleventh century monks." That, we may add, is not the opinion of this Jesuit scholar alone. That eminent scholar, Father Hardouin, in a work published in 1766, denounced the whole of the ecclesiastical histories of the Church as so many fables deliberately concocted by the monks. And there is scarce a writer of authority who has not given testimony as to the habit of the Church to manufacture evidence when it was not to hand.

### A Tainted Source.

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Now let me, as an outsider, note the full significance of these things. The Church that is pilloried as being

one of the greatest and one of the most shameless of forgers, the Church which has stopped at no lie and no trickery, at no creation of "histories," and at no suppression of the truth that would serve its purpose, the Church that has done these things is the oldest Church in Christendom. It is the largest Church in Christendom. It is the Church that carries us back nearest to the age of "pure" Christianity, which serves as a link between that age and ourselves, and in the absence of which the Protestant Church is left hanging in the air, a mere modern creation, of no antiquity and of no authority. True, it talks of a primitive Christianity, as though there was a definite and acknowledged form of faith to which it returned, but that is hardly less of a distortion of the facts than the lying which is denounced by Mr. Coulton. For when we get beyond the era of the organized Christian (Catholic) Church, what we meet is not a definite form of faith, either written or oral, but a number of loose, incoherent, and contradictory beliefs which were put into a definite shape by the very Church whose absolute untrustworthiness is now declared. And if the Church which carries us back so near to the alleged foundations of the Christian faith is so hopelessly untruthful, and so lost to a sense of intellectual decency, what becomes of the moral influence of Christianity about which we have heard so much? It is obviously a myth. The stream is tainted at its source, and any improvement in its purity at a later date must be attributed, not to Christian, but to other influences. The Church has become more sensitive to the demands of truth as it has become less Christian.

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#### Birds of a Feather

Mr. Coulton is angry with the Roman Church because it has done so little to secure a correct translation of the Bible, because it has favoured renderings that supported its own claims, and because it tried to keep the Bible away from the people. These are all grave faults, although my reasons for thinking them so are not, perhaps, those of Mr. Coulton's. It is always a bad policy to keep books away from the people, although that is not a peculiarity of the Roman Church. The Protestants practise it wherever and whenever they can, and our so-called government does it to-day with very little in the way of protest from the Christian public. It was wrong for the Church to render passages so that they backed up its claims, but the Protestant Church also does that. I need go no further than the translation of what should be "slave" as "servant" in the New Testament for evidence of this. Nor am I quite sure that I should agree with Mr. Coulton as to what constituted a true translation of the New Testament. I am certain that a literally correct translation would not be a true one. A really true translation would have to convey the superstition-soaked atmosphere in which the people lived who made Christianity. And that our present translation, with the gloss placed upon the reading by the graces and shades of literary artifice, does not do. Mr. Coulton does not make it plain that the whole of the Bible translation represents a special language that has grown up in connection with the Bible, and has been used for the Bible alone. Bible language is a language that was never spoken by any body of people at any time in the world's history. The English of the Bible is a "lingo" that has grown up in connection with the Bible alone, and any attempt to give it a truer meaning of the original by translating it into the vernacular has always met with the bitterest opposition from the Protestant clergy as well as from the clergy of the Roman Church. The Elizabethan version of the Bible does not contain the English of the Elizabethan period, it is merely a translation that was made during that age.

#### The Christian Tradition.

Finally. Mr. Coulton writes as though the practice of lying for the greater glory of God was a practice that began and ended with the Roman Church. That is not the case. The Protestant Churches—all of them—took it up with avidity and practised it with the greatest industry. Where the mistranslations of the Bible suited their purpose they retained them. Where the forgeries and interpolations of ancient writings chimed in with their historic pretensions they kept them, even though they were the handiwork of Roman Catholic forgers. The myths of early Christian history—such as suit their case—they retain and fight for. And in the art of inventing and publishing lies about their opponents they have left the older Church small pretensions to superiority or to greater ingenuity. From the earliest record of monkish miracles down to the last published missionary report the stream of Christian lying runs unbroken. There is no need to take a Freethinker's word for this, the charges made by one group of Christians against other groups prove it. The Freethinker merely adds his own experience to the general indictment. And in proportion as the Churches have been able to dominate the social arena, to that extent they have served to pollute our public life. Very largely other public lying is made possible because they who lie are dealing with a public that has for generations been brought up without a real regard for truth, who have been taught that—to quote one of Mr. Coulton's Catholic writers—lying and falsification were permissible if "the end in view were otherwise just and good." This is a damnable doctrine, we agree, and we are pleased to see Mr. Coulton denounce it. But we should be better pleased and more interested if Mr. Coulton, or someone else, would explain how comes it that persistent, wholesale, and concerted lying has been one of the characteristic features of the Christian Church.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

#### Pulpit Arrogance.

THE Rev. R. F. Horton, M.A., D.D., minister of Lyndhurst Road Congregational Church, Hampstead, is in the habit of delivering on the first Sunday in every month what has come to be known as the Monthly Lecture. In the *Christian World Pulpit* for July 13 there appeared the Monthly Lecture for July 5, entitled, "The Dawn! The Dawn." The signs of the dawn are the settlement of the coal dispute, the prospects of peace for Ireland, and the news that the new government of India has already produced a very marked change in the popular feeling. These hopeful developments, the reverend gentleman ventures to insist, are the outcome of "that day of national prayer which last week (the last Sunday of June) precluded them." We venture to insist, on the contrary, that the national day of prayer had absolutely nothing to do, directly or indirectly, with the favourable change that has taken place in industrial and political problems. Be that as it may, however, we contend that Dr. Horton's description of the situation is fundamentally mistaken. He declares that unemployment, industrial and political struggles, and the cry for self-determination on the part of small nations are not the cause of our troubles. Those who imagine that they are, he affirms, are the victims of "a total delusion." Even if those distressful problems were satisfactorily solved to-morrow the situation would remain practically unchanged. He says:—

These are not the causes of our trouble; they are the result of our troubles. These things might all be settled to-morrow and there would be no great improvement, for the trouble of our time is not material

but spiritual. What has gone wrong with us is not the superficial accidents of social organization, but the essential realities of the life of man. The disease is much deeper, indeed, the cause of our unrest is found in the fact that these questions are so absorbing.

Dr. Horton's conception of human life is radically false. He regards it as being normally "lived between spheres of spiritual reality above and beneath." Above, of course, in heaven, a spiritual life unexplored, and beneath is hell. "That is the normal life of man," the reverend gentleman exclaims, but we pronounce that life in the highest degree abnormal. According to theology the normal human life is essentially religious, lived in the fear and imaginary vision of God; and yet psychologists agree in relegating religious experience to the abnormal department of their science. Now, Dr. Horton candidly admits that the modern world in general, and Christendom in particular, have got rid of both heaven and hell. In other words, men everywhere are repudiating the belief in the supernatural, and living on the assumption that this world and life are our all. He charges the Socialists and some Labour leaders with having "made it their great point that man has been ruined by his attention to the spiritual world," and the Socialist Sunday-schools with teaching the little children that hitherto man has been thinking of God and his own soul when he ought to have concentrated thought and energy on his welfare in this world. Dr. Horton seems incapable of stating the Secularist case accurately. It is not true that the Socialists aim only at their *material* welfare. The miners were not fighting merely for more money, but for such wages as would enable them to raise the standard of living. Among them are men and women who love literature and art, and who are anxious to give their children the education calculated to stimulate and feed their minds. It is a libel to represent them as people who "concentrate upon the material" to the neglect of the intellectual and ethical interests of life. Has the reverend gentleman never come into contact with workmen's halls and workmen's clubs, with their well-stocked libraries and other provisions to excite and satisfy their love of science, poetry, and art? If not, what right has he to denounce them so severely in a middle class church at Hampstead?

Dr. Horton is guilty of deliberately misrepresenting the people whom he castigates with his rhetorical lash. Their crime consists in getting "rid of all notions of heaven and hell and God and the soul," and living exclusively for their own day and generation. The worst said against them is that their life has degenerated into "a constant effort to get material wealth and enjoy the conveniences and comforts of the present world." This may be true of a small number, but in its application to the bulk of the population it is a thoroughgoing and wicked falsehood. And here, as in most other cases, one lie leads to another. Having dropped heaven and hell, God and the soul, and devoting themselves solely to the affairs of the present life, the result is that these Secularists make earth hell. After all, hell has not been got rid of, the truth being that Secularists are in hell now. This will be an item of interesting news to them; and the question they naturally ask is, on what grounds does the preacher make such an unintelligible assertion? First of all, he finds confirmation of his statement in the revelations of the Divorce Court, but he forgets that most of the people who figure in the Divorce Court are firm believers in heaven and hell, God and the soul, as letters read therein abundantly show. Indeed, a judge recently protested against the frequent allusions and appeals to the Deity found in such epistles. The same remarks apply to the gay folk who spend their Sundays on the river. Professed Secularists amongst them are few and far between. Judging by appearances, one would naturally infer that they are supremely happy.

But this Hampstead pastor, looking into their hearts, assures us that they are in torment and know not what happiness is. This is an unadulterated lie; and one soon discovers that the reason for so characterizing these gaudy Sunday crowds at Boulter's Lock and elsewhere is that they are "trampling underfoot the day of God and the worship of his house." The only thing Dr. Horton knows about them is that they prefer the river to the sanctuary on Sunday.

Dr. Horton defines the life led by his Secularists as "modern Paganism"; but whatever terms may be used, the conclusion never varies, namely, that under Secularism "earth becomes a hell." Take the following:—

The human soul is not capable of being satisfied with the earth. Let the earth be all its can be, let it give to a man all its richest treasures and joys, and the poor soul of man will pine and starve, and sink into despondency and into despair. Earth becomes a hell. The cuckoo cannot live in the hedge sparrow's nest where it was born, and man cannot live in the earth which is his native place. He has wings and he must fly, and this is not his home.

George Meredith, a much greater man than Dr. Horton, loved the earth with his whole heart, and felt absolutely at home in it. It amply supplied all his needs. To him it was, not a hell, but a rich and glorious paradise, in which he found complete enjoyment. So he sang, with heart aflame:—

Earth your haven, earth your helm,  
You command a double realm;  
Labouring her to pay your debt,  
Till your little sun shall set.

To him love of earth was the highest, noblest, and holiest passion of which our nature is capable. St. John says: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him." Meredith touches a higher and truer note when he exclaims:—

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

On earth man is neither a stranger nor a pilgrim, but a native, whose only home is here, not elsewhere. We are children of the earth, and as our mother she is everything to us.

Dr. Horton predicts that "a change is coming—a great, vital, radical change—over the thoughts of men and the conception of human life." The reverend gentleman's reputation as a prophet stands very low indeed. Most of his prophecies have been falsified by the event. It was he who told us that a most marvelous, almost incredible work of grace was accomplished among our soldiers in France and Belgium. It was afterwards demonstrated that there was no truth in his statement. He even believed in the angels of Mons. We, too, believe that a wonderful change is coming, and is already in operation, but it consists not in the re-establishment of superstition, but in the substitution of reason for faith, of fact for fable, of earth for heaven, and of man for God.

J. T. LLOYD.

## The Black Army and the Red Flag.

We think our civilization near its meridian, but we are yet only at the cock-crowing and the morning star.

—Emerson.

Speedy end to superstition, a gentle one if you can contrive it, but an end.

—Thomas Carlyle.

THE clergy never tire of telling people that the brotherhood of man is one of the primary elements of Christian doctrine. They now ignore all their patriotic platitudes concerning the "God of Battles," and bid men and women turn their eyes to the "Prince of Peace." The Founder of the Christian Religion, they

tell us now, proclaimed: "Blessed are the Peacemakers." The clergy themselves have, however, never earned for themselves this benediction, although the Pope sought to impose what was called "the truce of God" several times during the late war, although not much could be gained by postponing a fight to the death between embattled millions for a few short hours on Christmas Day or Good Friday. Such minor palliations are of small moment compared with the grim fact that the clergy never set themselves in opposition to militarism itself.

Turn to the history of our own country, and refer to the record of the Church of England since the Reformation. Britain has waged over a hundred wars, great and small. In every instance the Church has been the obedient, humble handmaiden of the Government; blessed the regimental flags, and sung Te Deums for victory. The Prayer Book, issued with the sanction of Parliament, assumes always that justice is on our side, and reminds credulous worshippers that "there is none other that fighteth for us but only Thou, O God."

In the late war whole nations, professedly Christian, were engaged for years in wholesale slaughter. Europe was a streaming slaughter-house, in which perished the flower of the manhood of the Christian world. It is a complete indictment of the Religion of Christ, which has proved itself the most powerless and hypocritical thing on earth. The millions who profess to be followers of the "Prince of Peace" were entirely unaffected by his teaching. When passion or self-interest was aroused, every commandment and every precept was forgotten. Nor is this all, for a few persons were actually treated as criminals for attempting to take the Christian religion seriously, as with the Quakers, the Conscientious Objectors, in England, and a few Communists and Socialists in Europe and America.

So far as the prelates of the different Christian Churches are concerned, the profession of Christian ethics is a mockery and a delusion. Whether they be Roman Catholic cardinals, Anglican bishops, Non-conformist divines, or priests of the Greek Church, the fact remains the same. As for the brotherhood of man, no one remembering the awful treatment of Jews and Freethinkers throughout Europe for many centuries can but see that Christian doctrines are of one aspect, but its practices of another.

The clergy are now very anxious to persuade everybody that they have had a very important share in the improvement of the condition of the people. They wish to forget the great war, and their own shameful share in it. Hence, we are not surprised at the inclusion in a Church of England hymn-book of some pathetic appeals to the sympathies of the British working-man. Listen to the dulcet tones of the clerical siren:—

Sons of Labour, think of Jesus  
As you rest your homes within,  
Think of that sweet Babe of Mary  
In the stable of the inn.  
Think, now, in the sacred story  
Jesus took a humble grade,  
And the Lord of Life and Glory  
Worked with Joseph at his trade.

"Where are the snows of yesteryear?" Where are the hymns of hate, the spiritual songs of hell and the blood of the Lamb? Where are the fervent appeals to regard the Union Jack among the sacred symbols of our national religion? Without elaborating the matter, this change of front is disingenuous and by no means clever. Is it possible that the growth of the Labour Movement has frightened the dear clergy, and they are preparing for the dreadful day when the Red Flag flies at Westminster? Someone ought to remind the Black Army of clergymen that it is possible that mediæval

beliefs may be found quite incompatible with materialistic efficiency. With every generation the social conscience becomes quickened and more sensitive; men cannot accept to-day ideas which were accepted quietly by their badly educated forefathers. Christianity is a great illusion, and the clergy fail invariably to get to grips with vital affairs. The world-war produced horrors and evil enough, but there is a bright lining to the blackest of clouds if this awful outbreak has shown once and for all that Christianity is but a superstition, and that the Gospel of Christ is of the things that perish. The collapse of the Churches is too complete to be glossed over by the glamour of false sentiment and assumed heroics. Let the people disband the Black Army of priests, and work our their own social salvation without the fables of a foolish faith. Modern man has surely outgrown the dogmas of outworn Oriental creeds, and civilized man is better and nobler than the gods of decadent and debased superstitions.

MIMNERMUS.

## God and the War.

If ever there was an event calculated to break down the belief in a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God the recent great war was such an event. It does not, indeed, prove that there is no God and that prayers are never answered, but it raises a tremendous question as to why, if there is any God, and if he has any power to do anything, he was so remarkably deaf and inactive at that time.

There is not a human being in existence, perhaps there never was one, even in the most barbarous ages of the world, who if he knew that such a catastrophe was about to happen and could have prevented it, would not have done so. But the prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God of the Christian world must necessarily have known that this war was coming because he knows everything; and he must necessarily have been able to prevent it, because he can do anything, and yet he gave no warning and did absolutely nothing either to prevent this needless slaughter of some ten million persons or to mitigate the sufferings of the survivors.

The inference from all this is inevitable. No honest mind can escape it. Either there is no God or else he is capable of an indifference to human suffering that is more callous than that which is possible to the very worst of men.

The efforts of Christians to escape from this dilemma are futile in the extreme. It is said that we do not know death to be an evil; that if God took a number of these slaughtered people to heaven it was no evil, but a great blessing to them; and that if a great number of them went to hell, it was only what they would have done if they had died a natural death. But every sane man can see that these are mere words, words, words. If, if, if! When you drive a man with an unprovable belief into a corner he will always take refuge in an "if" of some kind. If death is not an evil. If these people were taken to heaven. Does it make no difference how one gets to heaven? Suppose that death is not an evil, filth, fright, slavery or torture are evils, and these were the daily lot of millions of people for the four years the war lasted, and of many thousands since. These are evils as heartless, as horrible, as it is possible to imagine. And on the omniscient and omnipotent God theory God is responsible for them because he must have foreseen them, could have prevented them, and did absolutely nothing.

I do not believe there is any God who could have prevented the war. I believe that it was the result of perfectly natural causes. The poor mothers and wives who cried out to God to guard and bring back to them

safely their men-folk prayed, as I think, to a being who does not exist. The victims of the war suffered in accordance with natural law precisely as do the victims of a volcanic eruption. War invariably causes immense suffering to innocent people, and, in my opinion, there is no God who can help that.

Christians teach their children that God can do anything. But there is not a single fact to prove that anything ever does or did happen in this universe except according to the orderly operation of natural forces. The earth quakes and a city falls down, causing widespread death and disaster. There is not the slightest reason for believing that there is any God who has anything whatever to do with such an event. It is wholly the result of natural causes.

The peace of Europe may fitly be compared to a dam artificially constructed against the flood of war. It is always unsafe because it is based on the ignorance and superstition of the masses and built by the trickery of the diplomats. In 1914 certain rulers and financiers, to gratify their ambition and greed, determined to break down this dam, well knowing that whatever happened their own precious persons could reach a place of safety. So the flood of war came along sweeping millions to their doom. It was natural. There was no use to pray at any time during the awful catastrophe. The whole performance was in strict accordance with natural law. Now, it is very strange that when all this is pointed out to intelligent people they do not admit its truth. They know it is true. Every thinking person knows that miracles do not happen; knows that the course of nature cannot be changed by prayer. And yet many of them persist in talking of "the visitations of God," the "providences of God," and the like, just as if they believed in such things.

I often think there is some uncanny charm in the word G-o-d that bewitches the most intelligent persons. Lots of men and women who admit fully the invariable action of natural law—men like H. G. Wells, the late H. Fielding-Hall, and T. L. M'Creedy, for example—yet persist in saying that they believe in a personal God, or, at any rate, in a God of some sort. When they say personal god they don't mean a god that is anything like what we mean when we speak of a personal being on earth. They mean a being who has no form, who isn't in any particular place and who can't do anything except according to natural law. They mean that there seems to them to be intelligence, will and purpose in the universe. This they call God, but when they use that word they do not mean anything that is not the universe. They mean something that they cannot explain, because they do not understand it. But they will use the word G-o-d. Why? I don't know, unless that it is so hard for an individual to break a habit which mankind has formed. The men who invented the word G-o-d meant something by it. They meant a big man. And that is what the orthodox Christian thinks he means until you pin him down and make him try to explain what he does mean. Then he finds that he doesn't know, but he goes on believing in his Divine-Something-or-Other all the same. But what thoughtful and intelligent persons mean when they say God is simply the unfailing order of the universe. But what is the sense of calling that God? They might just as well call it Jabberwock. Neither word means anything that anybody knows anything about. In an illustrated copy of *Alice in Wonderland* you will find a picture of a Jabberwock, but it isn't the picture of any creature that anybody ever saw. And so, if anyone were to try to make a picture of God he would have to draw a man, or nothing that anyone could possibly recognize. What is the sense of using a word that does not mean anything except to those who believe that God is a magnified man?

Nothing but harm can come from thus holding on to a word after the meaning has gone out of it. And

great harm does come of it, because we thus encourage people to believe that there is a being of some kind who can and will do for them what they cannot do for themselves. And the sooner we all understand that there is no such being the sooner we will set to work to right the wrongs from which we and our fellow workers now suffer.

As regards the war, for instance, as long as people believe that a god had anything to do with it they will not fix their attention upon the actual facts of the case. If you can make people believe what the religious press said: that God sent the war because many people now refuse to accept the "scheme of salvation," you never can make them believe what is really true about it—for that cannot possibly be true. Such a brutally vengeful God is unthinkable—except to an orthodox Christian, who believes so many impossible things that nothing daunts him in the way of a belief.

The fact is that society indirectly, and the financiers, diplomats and rulers directly, are to blame for the slaughter and torture of all those millions. Society permits the growth of a pleasure-loving class of rich idlers who become wholly indifferent to the comfort and happiness of the workers. The millionaires, who are as cosmopolitan in their habits as in their tastes, and as much at home in Berlin as in London or Paris or New York, have nothing to fear from any war, and are therefore careless about the security of peace. Nay, more. Every great war involves enormous war loans of which these millionaires are the chief holders, and thus enables them to shackle the workers more heavily with the chains of usury.

How much more truthful it is to cease calling such a disaster a visitation of God and place the blame where it really belongs.

Look at the miners killed and wounded in the mines, the women that are forced to live on poor and insufficient food, the babies that stifle in the slums, the millions of human beings that are growing up starved in mind as much as in body! Christians tell us that all this is God's will and that we must humbly submit to it. But that is pure cant. All these poor wretches suffer because of usury, which enables a few privileged idlers to riot in luxury at the expense of the world's workers.

This god who is supposed to control human affairs is a pure and simple invention, but he is mighty useful to the over-wealthy and careless class. They use him to excuse all their greediness and lack of chivalry. He keeps people poor; he kills people; he does everything but give people employment—the capitalists do that. That is the orthodox Christian gospel.

The poor should be thankful to the rich and to the politicians for everything they enjoy, and blame God for everything they suffer.

Chattel slavery was maintained as long as it was only because people were made to believe that it was the will of God. The monopolies of banking and of land are upheld to-day by the same fallacy. There is not a tyranny extant that is not supported by the belief in a God. That fallacy is the predominant vice or weakness of the human mind, and the word "god" should cease to be used until some fact can be found to correspond to it.

I am quite aware that all this will sound very shocking to many persons, and I shall be called a "blasphemer." But I cannot help that. It is for me to speak the truth as I see it; because that is the only way to get others to see the truth. If everybody would be absolutely truthful the word "god" would go out of use. When we mean the universe we would say so. When we mean natural law or conscience we would say so. And when we come to something we know nothing about we would not call it anything.

Why can we not be truthful? Why do our pious legislators open all their official meetings with appeals

to Almighty God and expressions of trust in his guidance? The sham, the humbug of it, when we all know that they trust only in fraud and violence. Why do Christians say that God killed and tortured the countless victims of the war when we know that the millionaires and the rulers caused it? Why do they say that God makes a few people over-wealthy and the vast majority disgracefully poor when we know that land monopoly and money monopoly, based on ignorance and superstition, do it all? Pious lies! How horrible they are! And, alas, how potent for evil!

G. O. W.

## Buddhism and Freethought.

### II.

(Continued from page 422.)

[By consent of the Editor, the title of these articles is changed to one more appropriate.]

ALTHOUGH "the gods" are considered as of very secondary importance, nevertheless, from the Buddhist point of view, it is recognized that all men and women are not on the same level, either of mind, morals, or physical development; they are at different stages of evolution, so to speak, and the diversities among them are innumerable. Thus, although the worship of gods, prayers, sacrifice, rituals, and so forth were not taught as essential by Gotama the Buddha, they were not specifically condemned, except where they led to cruel practices, blood sacrifices, fanaticism, bigotry and intolerance.

The outstanding feature of true Buddhism is its broad, all-comprehending toleration. Some not unfriendly critics are of opinion that this is the main weakness of Buddhism. They instance the corruptions which crept in and obscured the original teaching of the Master, often in diametrical opposition to the essential principles originally laid down by him. They point to various practices, "magical" and otherwise, to the rites and ceremonies, prayers, and so forth, of the so-called "Northern" Buddhists, and they criticize the laxity of many of the "monks" of both Northern and Southern Buddhism. This is all very true and deserved. It is, however, evidence that human nature is the same in Buddhist countries as elsewhere. But, admitting all this, it cannot be said that these things have led to the infamies which disgrace the history of Christianity, for example. Buddhism, in all its 2,500 years, has never persecuted in the name of the Buddha, nor backed up its missionary enterprises with the sword. This, at least, must be allowed to the credit of the Buddhist rule of toleration.

Such criticisms as these are at once frankly acknowledged by leading Buddhists to-day, and there is a movement afoot to cleanse the Dhamma (teaching) of the extraneous accretions which have collected about it. At the same time, it is recognized that, as children must have toys to keep them out of mischief, so there are undeveloped folk who cannot do without some sort of objective symbol, such as an image, a set formula for repetition in order to steady their minds, extraneous aids of one sort or another. And if these are in themselves harmless, what do they matter? As an eminent exponent of Buddhism puts it: "If, on the whole, the underlying spirit leads to a beautiful and noble life, and manifests itself in kindness, charity and tolerance, in forbearance and forgiveness, in fortitude and cheerfulness, in a sense of the largeness and mystery of things, why should not a little superstition be permitted?"

Nevertheless, to the educated Buddhist, and from the point of view of the higher Buddhism, the difference between the savage witch-doctor dressed up in

paint and feathers, and rags and bones, grovelling before his wooden fetish, and the archbishop in his mitre and robes before the altar of his cathedral, is only one of degree, not of kind—in all essentials they are identical.

The aim of Buddhism is to produce a frame of mind such as will lead a man to develop himself morally, mentally, and (to use a very un-Buddhist expression) "spiritually," so that he will be able to stand on his own feet without the necessity of leaning on creeds and dogmas, prayers and sacrifices, churches and priests. Thus the Buddhist teaching begins always with morality, conduct. And, since the *argumentum ad hominem* is the most forcible with most people, it is to self-interest that the first appeal is made. For this reason hostile critics, mostly Christians, accuse Buddhism of being a religion of selfishness—as if Christianity were not open to the same charge, since the main object of the Christian is to save his own miserable soul! These critics never go further than suits them.

Buddhism teaches that nothing can happen without an adequate cause, and that this happening, this effect, becomes in turn the cause of further effect, and so on. Whatever a man thinks, says, or does, produces its effect upon others, and also upon himself. It is upon this law of *karma*, which may, in this connection, be called the law of consequences, that Buddhist morality is based. There is no idea of a divine fiat about it. All that is said is: If you do such-and-such things, such-and-such results will follow. It is as if one should say to a child: If you put your finger in the fire it will be burnt. There are no commandments in Buddhism. The rules of morality are laid down, and the reason given for their observance is that it will lead to results fraught with happiness, and leading to an amelioration, a diminution of the suffering and the sorrow which are the inevitable concomitants of sensate life. If a man does not believe it, and thinks he will do better by pursuing opposite courses, Buddhism has no pains and penalties to inflict upon him. It says, in effect: Very well, but when catastrophe, calamity, tribulation, sorrow and pain follow, as they certainly will in the natural sequence of cause and effect, of consequences, you must blame no one save yourself. If a man could see the effects of evil-doing, not only upon others but upon himself, he would be so utterly appalled that he would cease from it. The main object of the Buddhist teaching, at the outset, is, therefore, to open men's minds, to make them see. Thus Buddhism is called the religion of enlightenment. This is the meaning of "the Buddha"—the Enlightened One. It is by appeal to reason, not to emotion, that Buddhism seeks to establish itself. The emotions have their place, of course, but they should never be allowed to dominate. Thus the Buddha eschewed "miracles," that is to say, the production of "phenomena" which might mystify ignorant people and fill them with awe or terror for the time being. Once, when asked to perform "a miracle of magic power" for the conversion of certain obstinate people, the Buddha replied: "I despise and reject the miracles of magic power and divination. I and my disciples gain adherents only by the miracle of instruction." If, for example, I were to say that I am what the Theosophists call a "Mahatma," and to prove it made my typewriter play tunes like a piano, all that would be proved would be that I could make the machine do something unusual, but it would be no evidence of my pretension. As the Bhikkhu Subhadra well said: "There are no miracles. A miracle, in the strict sense of the word, would be an arbitrary violation of the laws of nature by some superhuman being. No such thing can happen. Buddhism teaches that everything happens according to law without exception."

In the last article reference was made to the causa-

tion (karma) going back to before this present life. The doctrine of re-birth is the logical extension of karma. But, from the Buddhist point of view, there is no "soul" involved in the process. There is no transmigration, or metempsychosis, or reincarnation. This is where Buddhism differs from Hindu Theism and modern Theosophy alike. It is a point which is not clearly understood even by some of those Europeans who consider themselves to be authorities on Buddhism. It puzzles them. But when clearly explained, as it can be, there is nothing whatever in the idea that is unreasonable to the Freethinker who has got rid of the "immortal soul" superstition. E. UPASAKA.

(To be Continued.)

### Acid Drops.

Mr. Harold Begbie is well-known for his bursts of sloppy religious journalism, which he doubtless finds quite a good "stunt" so far as the newspaper world is concerned. In the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* for July 8 he publishes an account of an interview with an unnamed employer of labour in the North of England, who is of the religious type towards which Mr. Begbie gravitates, or which gravitates towards Mr. Begbie. The article is full of the perils of Materialism, and as religion is used as the antithesis of Materialism, Mr. Begbie and his capitalist quite fail to realize that the greatest materialist—in the ethical sense—of all, is the religionist. The significance of this sort of thing is that a materialism which most decent people condemn is used to disparage a materialism which affects religion. And that is one more illustration that current religion not only tends to make men stupid, but also to undermine whatever honesty of character they happen to possess.

Mr. Begbie's capitalist is shocked that the materialism of the working man is leading him to be so disposed as to get all he can out of capital and give as little as he can in return. That is very bad, but what puzzles us is in what way this differs from the determination of capital to get all it can out of labour and give as little as it can in return. Not having the spiritual consciousness of Mr. Begbie we fail to see in what respect one is better than the other, or why one is not to be regarded as the necessary complement to the other. The terrible thing is that the "problem of our industrial future is being debated and is being decided by men who acknowledge no higher authority than man's." But the present horrible condition of the world has been brought about by those who did acknowledge some higher authority than man's, and we defy anyone to make a bigger mess of things than they have done. And so long as we go on, in both politics and religion, permitting men to make a mess of things and then confirming them in their office, and praising them for the way they get us out of the messes they get us into, so long the world will continue as it is. When we bring common-sense into both politics and religion there will be some chance of things improving.

This big employer is convinced that there must be a religious revival, which we presume means that the one class must keep its eyes fixed on things above, while the other looks after the things below. That is not at all surprising. There is no better instrument in the world for effecting material exploitation than religion, and Mr. Begbie's employer is only following a very old policy. Only the ones who have but a passing acquaintance with history are apt to reflect that it was when men's minds were filled with things of the other world that the land was filched from them, the Church grew most wealthy and most tyrannical, and men and women were forced to labour under the most degrading of conditions. We are told that "Religion alone can save us." Much depends here upon who are the people covered by the "Us."

In his will, proved at £14,074, the Rev. F. A. Minnett, of Cambridge University, stated that he desired an ample

grave, vaulted and cemented, with fourteen inches of brickwork. This should prove a cosy corner whilst awaiting the last trumpet!

Paupers are now being tempted to attend church services. The Oxford Guardians have purchased a dozen suits of clothes for casuals in order that the sartorial quality of the church parade should not be unduly imperilled. The men are not allowed to wear these special garments after their devotions, except to return to the workhouse.

The playfulness of Providence is extraordinary. At Edmonton, Middlesex, a plague of small flies held up the road traffic, the drivers being unable to see owing to the insects getting in their eyes. Flies have been making many of our country lanes almost impassable.

The *Challenge* has recently been publishing a series of articles on "The Future of the Ministry." In the issue of June 17 not only is the dearth of candidates for the ministry admitted, but it is declared that there seems to be "little likelihood of sufficient new clergy becoming available, at any rate during the next few years." If present indications are a safe guide the difficulty of finding suitable candidates for "holy orders" will become intensified with the years. All the denominations are making the same complaint, and the party which calls itself "progressive," and relies on the Higher Criticism and restatements of "fundamentals" to prove its claim to the title, is not attracting the best intellect of Young England. That is the most hopeful sign in a country in which religious doctrines are accepted as nothing more or less than social conventions, and where it is "bad form" to tell the truth about them. The Anglican Church will look in vain for another Hooker or South, to say nothing of the Lightfoots and Stanleys of only a generation ago. Even the Roman Catholics, who claim to be making some advance in a country where at one time any evangelical vulgarian commanded attention by shouting down the Scarlet Woman, have no Newman or Manning to-day. For a long time men of the intellectual dimensions of Hilaire Belloc and the late R. H. Benson have been highly acceptable to the cause in England.

This contrast between yesterday's and to-day's defenders of the faith is not noticeable merely in the nation's intellectual life, its roots go down to the foundations of character. Father Vaughan, the Bishop of London, and the Rev. F. B. Meyer have all distinguished themselves recently—and this distinction is the really important point—by solemnly warning the community that its morals are not what they ought to be. The slit skirt and the transparent stockings are apparently a material asset to some of our spiritual guides; others have directed their attack against the moving pictures. Can those who know the life and career of a man like Newman or Lightfoot imagine his exploiting "the sins of society" in return for a whole page of advertisement in every newspaper in England?

Reviewing Bernard Shaw's play, *Back to Methuselah*, the *Daily Telegraph* says: "the blessed privileges of the early heroes included a life of a thousand years or so." A critic might observe that the "blessed privilege" of journalists is to write nonsense. The pity of it is that they are paid for doing so.

A good joke concerning the grandmotherly regulation disallowing the name "Mecca" being used in a play on the ground that the title might "offend Orientals" has been published by the *Sheffield Weekly Telegraph*. It says that a wag rung up the manager of the Shaftesbury Theatre and advised him to withdraw the play *Out to Win* as it might give offence to the Australian cricketers.

During the recent record heat-wave at Montreal one parson preached in a bathing suit, and another one in his shirt-sleeves. Let us hope that they did not preach on the subject of Hell. It would have been too realistic.

Known as "the miser," the late Frederick Staples, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, who lived a solitary life, and died of starvation, left £23,292, half of which sum he bequeathed to the Salvation Army. In this way is superstition perpetuated.

For telling fortunes a woman was sentenced to a month's imprisonment at Crewe. Fifty thousand clergymen in this country alone tell people what will happen to them in the next world, and receive money for so doing. No magistrate sentences the parsons.

The *New York Times* is jubilant over the religious aspect of the 1920 census returns. The increased subscriptions to the Churches and the enthusiasm for foreign missions are said to be especially satisfactory. This missionary fervour is peculiarly worthy of note in view of the recent revolting reports of the conflicts between the negroes and the white population of Georgia. An American merchant who subscribes largely to the Christian missions in China was once asked his reason for doing so. "Because," he answered, "every American missionary in China is worth 200 dollars a year to me." The religious experience, according to a well-known authority, does not consist in "understanding" God, but "in feeding upon him." This is certainly true of Christianity.

The *Star* reports, as something worth recording, that Jewish Rabbis of the three sections of Jews, Orthodox, Liberal, and Reform, were invited, and accepted the invitation, to see the performance of *The Stepchild of the World*. The *Star* says these ministers never come together. It is astonishing the spirit of brotherhood that religion develops, no matter in what form one happens to find it. What would the world do without religion?

"Still Gasping for Water" was the heading in a religious contemporary. It did not refer to the place so often mentioned in theological books, but to the results of the recent prolonged drought.

From the *Daily Herald's* own correspondent we learn that ex-heroes are being persecuted at Newhaven. The leader of the ex-service men, Mr. A. E. Richardson, states: "We are being driven out of the town by the Council, the Board of Guardians, and the clergy, because we have dared to demand work or maintenance." Can Mr. Richardson expect anything different from the clergy who were too proud to fight and whose exemptions totalled 50,000—a week's casualties? In the next great war clerical recruiting agents may get their deserts, that is, unless soldiers still think that the "spiritual comfort" of a skirted priest is necessary for their wives.

The "free lance," now almost as extinct as the dodo, will note with amusement the breeze between our gifted Premier and Lord Hugh Cecil. Both are, were, will be, or may be interested in the working class. Both are notoriously religious. The Premier was more vocally religious in his "out of office" days. Vive la bagatelle!

Almost all that I had been content to believe for so long—that there existed natural barriers between different races, nations and classes; that wafs were unavoidable and probably healthful; that rulers of either were endowed with innate superiority or acquired wisdom and knowledge by ruling; that it was necessary to humbug the mass of people, to humour their prejudices, to tell them what they liked to hear in phrases of resounding eloquence which had no meaning; that certain races—the British, for example—had a right to dominate other races, and manage their affairs in the general interest of law and order—all these beliefs had dropped away from me in the course of five years.

The above is an extract from Mr. Hamilton Fyfe's book entitled *The Making of an Optimist*. It is almost good enough for a "Sugar Plum," but we remember that men have been imprisoned for saying such things.

Dr. Keating, formerly Roman Catholic Bishop of Northampton, has been enthroned Archbishop of Liverpool. The Founder of the Christian Religion was not "enthroned," but was executed as a common criminal.

In the *Christian World* (July 7) the Rev. F. C. Spurr writes vigorously in denunciation of landlordism and its grip on this country. The occasion of Mr. Spurr's diatribe is the demand by the Commissioners of Woods and Forests of a premium of £600 and an annual rental of £950 for the renewal of the lease of Regent's Park Chapel. He is not advocating any specific measure of reform. What Christian reverend ever does either in regard to the land or any other question? Mr. Spurr simply desires "to remain upon the territory of justice" in "enumerating certain radical principles." We should like to know if he thinks it "justice" to exempt churches from taxation?

The Bishop of Liverpool, in asking Dean Bennett not to preach at a local place of worship, said the Church was "under discipline." The dean, in reply, said the request was an "eleventh hour" affair, and he did not like "being made a public fool of." How these Christians love one another!

The Christian ideals concerning marriage and divorce, originated many centuries ago by celibate priests, are found to be out of harmony with modern ideas. Divorce suits in this country alone have increased from 1,267 in 1913 to 5,763 in 1919. The figures available for the present year show a still further increase.

The Rev. E. W. Brereton, of Wickford, Essex, won a prize in a local beauty show, ladies acting as judges. To parody the famous quotation, "The daughters of men saw the Son of God that he was fair."

Lord Gisborough presided at the second meeting of the British Israel Congress at King George's Hall, Y.M.C.A., Tottenham Court Road. In the course of his address he said: "There were numerous other references to show that the Anglo-Saxon and American peoples were the chosen people selected by God as the human instrument to fulfil His great scheme for the whole universe." Other races were undoubtedly created to cause trouble in the universe. Nor should the Anglo-Saxons and Americans be too puffed up at being the "chosen instruments to fulfil His great scheme," since Einstein has conclusively stated that the universe is not so infinite as it used to be.

Under the heading of "Changing His Religion," the *Daily Mail* (London) has a circumstantial story of a seaman who changed his "religion" from Church of England to "Atheist," and who was reconverted on the ninth day. Doubtless, the whole story is as true as the Gospels, but the fact remains that Atheism is not, and never has been, a "religion."

The *Trinidad Guardian* reports a very sensible remark made by the magistrate in the City Court, Tobago. A witness presented himself to be sworn, and while calling himself a Christian was ready to be sworn in the Hindoo fashion. Whereupon the magistrate remarked that "swearing was a ridiculous practice. All that should be done was to get the man into the box, let him know that if he lied he would be sent to gaol, and go on with the case." That is the soundest of common-sense. The oath is a survival from the time when God was believed to take an interest in human affairs, and was ready to punish those who told lies after taking an oath. But either because he tired of the work, or because if he had blasted all his followers who told lies he would soon have wiped them all out, the man who tells a lie in a court, if the judge fails to detect him, runs no risk from any other quarter. So we agree with the Trinidad magistrate that the oath is all nonsense. All the same we can see that magistrate getting into trouble with the local clergy. For if public officials take to blurting out the truth in this way, what will become of the Christian religion?

**To Correspondents.**

- G. AMBLER.—Sorry we cannot give the address. The last we had was Birmingham.
- W. REPTON.—We are terribly crowded for the moment.
- J. D. MANUS (Cape Town).—Our criticism of the Christian's Bible of necessity includes that of the Jews. And it is the Christian religion that immediately troubles us in this country. The rest is only illustrative material.
- E. WRIGHT.—We are not generally impressed by the success that would follow the treatment of ethics as an art, in the sense you imply. It would probably lead to the development of some first class prigs. The best school of morals, certainly applied morals, is life. And we are doing all we can to promote morality when we leave the way clear for a healthy functioning of man's moral aptitude. There is no such thing as a purely destructive policy.
- L. W. MANN (Barbadoes).—We have seen the "manna" story before, but we fail to see how it helps the Bible story. Mr. Cohen will deal with the subject of Spiritualism in a week or so, and will then do his best to reply to your remarks.
- J. KEY.—Thanks for address. Will see that paper is sent.
- H. IRVING.—Write to Miss Vance on the matter. If you can get a hall for some time during the autumn Mr. Cohen will pay you a visit. Thanks, we are fairly well. Hope to get a little rest soon.
- G. BARE.—We quite appreciate your comments on Mr. Aldwinckle's letter, and agree with you both. Anything that would bring Freethinkers into closer touch with each other would be a move in the right direction. The N. S. S. will get some more badges done in the near future. It is the excessive cost that has stood in the way up to now.
- F. ROSE (Johannesburg).—Many thanks for offer. Shall be delighted to meet you when you come to England.
- C. F. BUDGE.—We do not believe that Mrs. Besant claims to be religious as Christians use the term. In any case, no one is called upon to "explain" the strange tricks and turns that the human mind may take in order to justify the soundness of a general proposition.
- C. C. DOVE.—Received with thanks.
- G. O. W.—MSS. to hand. Thanks. We are keeping all right, but we take very hot weather unkindly—also for our future, if Christians are correct.
- We have been obliged to hold over till next week several letters and other matters requiring notice in this column. The "Freethinker" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to the office.
- When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible.
- Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.
- All Cheques and Postal Orders should be crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."
- The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—
- The United Kingdom.—One year, 17s. 6d.; half year, 8s. 9d.; three months, 4s. 6d.
- Foreign and Colonial.—One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

**Sugar Plums.**

We publish this week the celebrated essay of the late Gerald Massey on *The Historical Jesus and Mythical Christ*. Massey's intimate knowledge of the mythology of ancient Egypt makes this essay one of peculiar value, and we think that readers of it will agree with us that no clearer proof of the pre-Christian origin of the whole of the Christian legend was ever given to the public. It will serve as an eye-opener to Christians and a store of ammunition for Freethinkers. Not a reader of this paper should be without a copy, and he will be doing no harm if he keeps another copy by him for the benefit of his Christian friends. We are republishing it at its original price of sixpence, with the addition of an introduction, giving a general outline of Massey's work, by Mr. Cohen. In the present state of the printing trade that is worth noting. The postage will be three-halfpence extra.

Many Freethinkers are in the habit of persuading themselves that the era of boycott is about over. We wish it were, and if it were our chief troubles would be over also. But two reminders are recently to hand to remind us that there is much work still to be done. One of our readers at Bournemouth thought he would follow the example of some others and insert an advertisement of the *Freethinker* in a local paper. The advertisement was returned "with a lame excuse for not publishing it." Our friend thinks this might discourage others. We do not think so. It is far more likely to rouse Freethinkers to more strenuous efforts to break down so paltry a tyranny. After all, the Christian's fear of the *Freethinker* is one of the greatest compliments they can pay it. And all we can say is that we hope his fear is justified.

Another reader sends a clipping from the *Stockport Express* which conveys the information that the Libraries Committee has declined to permit a regular supply of the *Freethinker* to be placed on the reading room tables. The *Socialist Standard* we see is under the same ban. Well, this is a matter for the local Freethinkers and others to attend to. We should like to see them make it pretty warm for these local wiseacres who are so certain as to what the other people should or should not read. Presumably, if they had their way they would not let the *Freethinker* lie on anyone's table. A Christian's idea of liberty is a glorious thing.

Members of the Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch are particularly requested to bear in mind the Branch meeting on Sunday, July 24, at 3 p.m., in the Trades' Hall, 12A Clayton Street, and to make an effort to attend as the important matter of winter propaganda arrangements will be under consideration. Secularists in Newcastle district not yet connected with the Branch will also be welcome.

A week or two ago we answered a correspondent with reference to a lecture announced by the Rev. Mr. Hayes, of Chatham, on "Richard Jefferies: an Atheist who loved God." One of our readers drew Mr. Hayes' attention to the reply and to our assumption that he intended dealing with the "Sunday-school story" of Jefferies' conversion. He also referred him to Mr. Thorne's excellent booklet which we publish. We are glad to find that Mr. Hayes repudiates the story of the conversion of Jefferies, and says that he intended basing his lecture on Mr. Thorne's essay. So far good, and we are glad to find that our assumption concerning Mr. Hayes was incorrect. The "conversion" stunt belongs, after all, to the lower stratum of the religious world, and it is time that decent people dropped it altogether in controversy.

All the same we do not agree with the use of the word "God" in relation to Jefferies. There is no justification for calling a man's conception of nature "God," and the use of it is certain to mislead and cannot possibly enlighten. "God" has always had a fairly definite meaning attaching to it, and it is well to bear this in mind when one uses the word, and not use it with either a reserved or a new one. When that is done the result is to mislead, however much one may be without the intention of doing so. We suggest this to Mr. Hayes for his consideration.

Mr. Whitehead finished his lecturing visit to Leeds, and we are glad to find reports excellent meetings. We print elsewhere in this issue a report of his lectures, which would have appeared last week but for the post being late in delivery. The Executive is sending Mr. Whitehead back to Wales for a return visit, and we are sure that his meetings on the second tour will be quite as good as they were on the first occasion. Then he may probably again visit the North of England. We should like to see several lecturers going round the country in this manner next season.

The Birmingham Branch are arranging for a "Ramble" to-day (July 24). The meeting place will be at the Steelhouse Lane Tram Terminus at 2 o'clock or Chester Road, 2.45. The destination is Sutton. We are writing this in a temperature of about 88 degrees, and we feel inclined to hope it will rain—or snow.

## Oriental Mysticism.

THERE exist certain fundamental distinctions between Superstition, Religion and Mysticism which are sometimes overlooked. I have elsewhere (*Freethinker*, Vol. xxxvii., No. 30, "Some Definitions") attempted to define Superstition as "Belief in supernatural agency operating in the physical world," and Religion as "Belief in supernatural agency operating in the moral world." Following the same line of thought, Mysticism may be defined as Belief in supernatural agency operating in the metaphysical world. Thus, while Superstition contains a distinctively physical element, this gives place to a moral element in Religion and a metaphysical element in Mysticism. Superstition was probably the root from which both have sprung, but while Religion branched off in the direction of morals, Mysticism branched off in that of metaphysics, though it must be noted that the lines of demarcation between these three departments of thought are not absolutely clear-cut, but present many overlaps. Thus all religions contain many superstitions and mystical elements mixed up with their moral contents.

Now, as the physical world and the moral world do give us certain evidences of their existence, absolute or relative, while we have no evidence of the existence of a metaphysical world at all, Mysticism would appear to be an even more baseless fabric of a vision—an even more insubstantial pageant of the fancy—than either Religion or Superstition. An illustration may make this clearer. Belief in astrology and belief in palmistry are superstitions, but they deal with ordinary physical phenomena. Sun, moon, and stars, and the lines on the palms of the hands really exist, and hence it may sometimes be possible to convince a believer in these superstitions, if he possess sufficient intelligence to appreciate rational argument, that the movement of these celestial bodies can have no conceivable influence on human destiny, and that a man's character and prospects of happiness or misery are not dependent on the superficial markings of his epidermis. On the other hand, the beliefs in the doctrine of the Trinity and of the Logos are cases of Mysticism, and no amount of reasoning can dislodge these beliefs. They hang in the air without even a pretence of a foundation, and a structure which needs no foundations can never be undermined. Where Mysticism is concerned the heaviest blows of Reason have as much effect as a sledge-hammer wielded in a vacuum, and to empty a man's mind of mystical ideas by reasoning with him is about as hopeful a business as trying to empty a barrel of air by bailing it out with a pail. Mysticism may be regarded as Superstition on a higher plane of irrationality. It is Reason raised to an indefinitely high power, but unfortunately with a negative index, minus  $n$ , whereby it tends to disappear altogether when the index is made large enough. Thus, in mathematical language, its "limit for  $n$  infinite is zero," that is the complete negation of Reason, or more briefly, insanity.

It is this transcendental quality of Mysticism which gives it its fictitious strength and its remarkable power of appealing to a certain order of mind. To your whole-hearted and thorough-going mystic the more incredible to the ordinary mind a statement happens to be, the more worthy it is of belief, while a proposition which sets human reason completely at defiance—such as that three are one, or one is three—at once gains his most earnest and solemn assent.

That Mysticism is mainly, if not entirely, of Oriental origin is generally admitted. All the existing great religions of mankind are of Eastern origin, while no new religion, great or small, has ever been started in the West; and when European impostors

indulge in mystery-mongering (such as the late Madame Blavatsky, of discreditable memory), they usually have to go to Eastern Mysticism for their inspiration. As real Science is essentially a product of the West, so real Mysticism—the pure and genuine article—is essentially a product of the East. This tendency of the Oriental mind towards Mysticism is rightly attributed to some fundamental racial characteristic, but this characteristic must itself have had a cause, and this ultimate cause is found by modern social science to reside in the influence of physical and climatic conditions, organized in the race and handed down by heredity from the remotest ages. The physical conditions of life in the tropical climates where the ancient civilizations arose were less exacting than those in the temperate regions of Europe, and the conflict of man with nature in these regions assumed a severe and strenuous character which the warm and equable climates of the tropics never entailed. A rigorous climate demands constant exertion on man's part for the maintenance of life, and physical activity, is thus fostered, and, since nature can be successfully made to subserve man's purposes only by the careful study of her processes and the patient discovery of her laws, mental activity is also fostered and inevitably turned in the direction of physical science. The whole mental bias tends toward the practical and material, and away from the purely speculative or contemplative order of thinking. In the East, on the other hand, nature instead of challenging man to conflict showered food upon him at the expense of little or no exertion, and vast slave populations existed to meet all the practical demands of life. Here, accordingly, superior minds could give themselves up to metaphysical speculation, and weave out of their inner consciousness those dreams of Mysticism which an ignorant populace were ready enough to accept as solemn truths for the very reason that they were utterly beyond their comprehension.

Compared with the mental toil undergone by the modern scientist—the mathematician laboriously computing his tables, the astronomer minutely calculating the infinitesimal displacement of a star, the physicist devising some crucial experiment—the task of the oriental sage in elaborating his baseless metaphysical systems must have been a mere child's play of the intellect. To the contemplative mind nothing is easier, and in some moods nothing is pleasanter, than to give the rein to "the thoughts that wander through eternity," to let the fancy rove unchecked through the illimitable regions of speculation, and to indulge without restraint in a sort of intellectual reverie. And when these reveries are indulged in on an empty stomach, or under abnormal bodily conditions—by the Buddhist sage sitting fasting under a Bo tree, or the Hindoo Fakir trying to solve the mystery of existence by continuous contemplation of his navel—the vague and cloudy metaphysical systems thus evolved might well assume a semblance of reality and certitude quite independent of such commonplace considerations as evidence or verification. But while this habit of mere speculation is the ordinary and recognized method with the oriental sage, it is the very tendency which the scientific mind of the West strives ever to resist. With the modern scientist the "scientific imagination" is kept within very strict limits. No hypothesis is entertained unless it be founded on real causes, and it is never raised to the dignity of a "law" unless it has been verified either by observation or experiment.

And the results in both cases are obvious enough. Knowledge once gained by the laborious methods of science stands on a firm and sure foundation, and can only be overthrown, if ever, by new knowledge similarly gained and standing on a foundation even firmer and more secure. But the baseless conclusions arrived at by the easy and pleasant process of pure

speculation are utterly worthless as knowledge. All the metaphysical systems evolved by all the sages who have ever taught philosophies or founded religions have not given humanity as much real knowledge as has often been acquired by one night's patient vigil in an astronomical observatory, or one carefully conducted experiment in the laboratory of the chemist.

These Oriental metaphysical systems are sometimes defended on the ground that they contain ethical elements which have been valuable to humanity. But morals are happily independent of both metaphysics and religion, and Eastern religious systems have been always vitiated by their mysticism. In the Middle Ages in Europe philosophy was described as "the handmaid of religion," and this was true enough at that time, for philosophy was then, under the deadening influence of the Catholic Church, represented by that ridiculous travesty of it called Scholasticism. But in the ancient East it would have been more true to describe religion as the handmaid of philosophy—or rather, metaphysics—and we see this well exemplified in the most ethical of all Eastern religions, Buddhism. Here the ethic is mostly high and noble, but it is built on a foundation of sand, the doctrine of Karma, which is Mysticism pure and undefiled. This weird fantasy—surely the strangest sort of sanction for morals that has ever emanated from the mind of man—is thus referred to in Mr. J. M. Robertson's latest work, *A Short History of Morals*, pp. 165-167:—

The Buddhist system frankly avows that this is an unintelligible mystery—one of four imposed upon the believer.....The dogma is twofold, and both parts are blank affirmations, with no pretence of rational proof. The Karma is a result of the past actions of conscious persons, embodied in a person who is not conscious of that past; and the sufferings he is alleged to undergo for the past deeds of the Karma arise from the action of others, in regard to which there is no pretence of showing any causal connection whatever. The victim is simply told to believe that so it is, and the sole ethical remedy prescribed is that he is not merely to do nothing wrong, but is to become absorbed in the desire to get rid of all other desires.....If the doctrine of Karma were once logically grasped and believed it would make an end of reasoned ethic altogether.

Of course, the foregoing remarks are not intended to condemn the study of these Oriental systems as they are being studied in the West, that is in an attitude of scientific investigation and complete mental detachment, with no reference whatever to their truth or falsity. As the modern study of the superstitions and magical practices of savages—given us in such works as Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, for instance—have thrown much light on the mental development of early man, so the examination of these ancient Eastern religions and philosophies may tell us much concerning the peculiar genius of the Oriental mind and the peculiar developments of its culture. But these studies, like all others, can yield fruitful results only when undertaken in accordance with strictly scientific methods, when it follows that more useful work in this line has been done by European orientalists such as Rhys Davids, Max Müller, Barth, or Monier Williams—to mention only a few of the earlier contributors to a vast and ever growing literature—than by Eastern scholars themselves. Thus it happens that we are now treated to the quaint spectacle of a Buddhist monk from Ceylon going all the way to Oxford to study the classical documents and the ancient scriptures of his religion at the feet of European professors.

I will conclude this article with a brief personal anecdote. Many years ago I happened, in the course of some survey work, to be encamped at a remote village in Ceylon near a Buddhist Temple, in charge of which were two or three priests. With the aid of a rather intelligent Sinhalese overseer, who could act as interpreter, I sometimes amused myself by conversing

with these priests, and once asked them, in connection with some talk about their lunar festivals, whether they had any idea of the size, distance, and physical character of the moon. They shook their heads and replied, incredulously, "How can one know such things as that?" I remarked that our knowledge about the moon was a very elementary bit of astronomy, and went on to state that even the distances of several of the fixed stars had been ascertained, and not only so but that some of the material substances of which they were composed were quite well known. At this they only smiled, but their looks seemed to betray a sort of opinion about my veracity which politeness forbade them to express.

Here the significant thing was, of course, not the ignorance itself, but the utter scepticism as to the possibility of acquiring such physical knowledge and the complete lack of interest in the subject: "How can one know such things as that?" And yet doubtless they knew, or thought they knew, all about the "Doctrine of Karma," and felt not the least doubt or misgiving as to the means by which *that* knowledge could have been acquired. In this contrast resides the whole difference between the Eastern and the Western mentality. It is this curious attitude of mind, which ascribes the highest degree of certitude to the things least capable of proof or verification, that lies at the root of Oriental Mysticism. A. E. MADDOCK.

### The Faithful Malefactor.

THE poor woman with the issue of blood suffered many things of the physicians; the subject of our sketch has come off no better at the hands of the theologians. They have sacrificed his reputation to support a dogma. They call him "the penitent thief," and, not content with his tenebrous past, they make out that he carried his bad disposition to the cross, and there mocked Jesus, when the two of them and another were in their torment. Then, say they, came a sudden change. The scoffing, cynical, case-hardened wretch got alarmed for his sin, and sought and found mercy in the blood of Jesus, though it had not yet been shed. This is alleged to prove that the worst of men may be saved at the very last minute, if they do but fly to Jesus and plunge into his blood. What it really proves, is that the "study" of the theologians, like that of Chaucer's doctor is "but little in the Bible." For, if the Biblical account of the matter be true, the above version of it is false in all its principal details.

Matthew xxvii. 38, Mark xv. 27, Luke xxviii. 33, and John xix. 18 declare that two persons were crucified together with Jesus, there being one on each side of him. John does not tell us what manner of persons they were, or how they behaved upon the cross. Matthew and Mark affirm them to have been "robbers," and add that they joined the mob and the churchly authorities in affecting Jesus with reproaches. Luke, however, calls them "malefactors," and says that *one* of them insulted Jesus, for which the *other* rebuked him, saying, "Dost thou not even fear God seeing thou art in the same condemnation? and we, indeed, justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss." Having thus spoken he exclaimed, "Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." To which Jesus replied, "Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

According to this account, one only of the two men crucified with Jesus did him injury, whilst the other actually showed him respect, and even defended him against the sole person over whom he could have any influence, namely, their fellow sufferer. Here, then, the two first evangelists differ from the third completely, and hence a choice has to be made. For we

must either believe with Matthew and Mark that Jesus was reviled by both his partners in misfortune, or else with Luke, that he was reviled by one of them and supported by the other. This was soon perceived, for the work vulgarly called *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, a performance traceable in some form or other to the commencement of the second century, setting aside what is peculiar to Matthew and Mark, adheres to the account in Luke and runs thus:—

Pilate handed the scourged Jesus to be crucified, and with him two robbers, the one named Dismas, the other Gestas.....And they hung the two robbers with him, Dismas at the right and Gestas at the left..... Gestas said unto him, If thou art the Christ free thyself and us. Responding, however, Dismas confounded him saying, Dost thou not fear God, thou who art in this judgment? For we justly and worthily receive those things which we have performed, but this man hath done no evil. And he said to Jesus, Remember me, Lord, in thy kingdom. Jesus, however, said to him, Verily, I say unto thee, that to-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.<sup>1</sup>

The course taken by the above writer on this occasion, contrary to his general practice, is highly commendable, but the query still remains, was he correct in his choice? Is Luke really preferable to Matthew and Mark as an authority upon the matter at issue? This point must be considered, but first of all it should be observed that although Matthew and Mark disagree with Luke about the incident, Matthew must be left out of account because he wrote after Mark and used Mark's work, following him here as he often does. Thus, Mark and Luke are the persons actually responsible for the variance. Luke, like Matthew, used the work of Mark and kept more closely to it, as a rule, than Matthew did, both in arrangement and in detail. This makes the divergence before us the more significant, Matthew here displaying greater fidelity to Mark than Luke does, which is against their respective habits. In his preface Luke declares that "many" others have handled his theme, but that he himself begins after "having traced the course of all things accurately from the first." Thus, he sets up a special claim for wealth of information and closeness of research, and also implies that he had exercised judgment upon the reports of his predecessors. The conduct of the persons crucified with Jesus may have been a point where Luke felt justified in revising one of his favourite sources for some other authority which seemed preferable on this occasion. Alas, if he made any such choice, it cannot be verified, so we must try to see which of the two, he or Mark, appears the more worthy of credit in a general way. Of all the evangelists Mark is the one who most loves striking situations and dramatic effects. He and he alone tells us that, at the Temptation Jesus "was with the wild beasts"; that upon the cure of Peter's mother-in-law, "all the city was gathered together at the door"; that, another time the bearers of a palsied man could not approach Jesus for the crowd, there being no room, "no not so

<sup>1</sup> This is the exact rendering of the Latin text (*Gesta Pilati*, 10); the Greek text (*Acta Pilati*, 10) is almost word for word the same as that in *Luke*, the chief exceptions being the proper names. The *Gesta* calls the men "robbers," the *Acta*, "evil doers," using the very same word employed by Luke and by him only. It is worth noting that the same thing occurs in the Vulgate, which falsely brings Luke into line with Matthew and Mark by giving "robbers" in every case as the true version. For the *Gesta* and *Acta*, and the story of them, see Tischendorf's *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Ed. Leipzig, 1876). Dismas and Gestas, whose names are spelled differently in different manuscripts of the above works, are called Matha and Joca in *Bedæ Collectan*, and Zustin and Visimus in *Xaverii Histor. Christi*. The Greek Church on the 23 of March, and the Roman Church on the 25 of March celebrate the one who took the better path. He was an assassin, according to Leo, and committed fratricide, according to Gregory the Great.

much as about the door"; that the Twelve, just after their vocation, "could not so much as eat bread" because of the throng; that the demoniac of Gerasa, who frequented the sepulchres, was given to "cutting himself with stones"; that the swine filled by the devils which forsook the man numbered "about two thousand"; that the woman who lost blood, so far from benefiting by the doctors, "rather grew worse"; that Jesus, on reaching the house of Jairus, found "a tumult and many weeping and wailing greatly"; that Herod, delighted with the daughter of Herodias, told her to ask and he would give, adding, "unto the half of my kingdom"; that at the Transfiguration the garments of Jesus became so white as "no fuller on earth can white them"; that the lunatic boy "fell on the ground and wallowed foaming" when his father invoked the aid of Jesus, who thereupon commanded the unclean spirit to forsake the lad, which it did at once, *tearing* him, however, till he became *death-like*, and "many said, He is dead"; that Jesus, in his zeal for the Temple, would not suffer anybody to carry a vessel through it; that the woman who anointed Jesus "brake the cruse," apparently to open it as quickly as possible; and that Pilate marvelled at the early death of Jesus, a striking testimony to the suffering involved. There are many other touches of the same or of a similar kind, for Mark, like Daniel Defoe, was a genius in this line. It is possible, therefore, that although acquainted with the story of how Jesus, crucified between two persons, was reviled by the one and defended by the other, he may, nevertheless, have thought fit to represent both as reviling and neither as defending, in order by this means to heighten the scene through leaving Jesus utterly friendless, and making him out to have been the victim of remorseless persecution even from his own companions in misfortune. Luke, though free from the suspicions which beset Mark, is open to others no less grave. He never tries to astonish us or make us shudder, but he attempts, with remarkable success, to please our fancy, warm our better feelings, and draw our tears. He is prominent among the evangelists, and it might well be said among all writers, for imaginative delicacy, tenderness of heart, and appreciation of the sublime and beautiful in conduct. He records the salutation of Gabriel, the canticles of Mary and Zacharias, the anthem of the heavenly host, and the swan song of Simeon. He gives the visit of the angels to the shepherds, the Presentation in the Temple, the offer of salvation to the poor, the forgiveness of the sinful woman who had deeply loved, and the delivery of the wistful listener from the reproaches of the busy helper, fain to get her into trouble for idleness. He is careful to note that the girl recovered from death was an only daughter, and the lad restored to his senses an only son, and that the young man brought back to life on his bier on the way to the sepulchre was "the only son of his mother and she was a widow." He says that when a disciple cut off a man's ear in defence of Jesus, Jesus healed it; that when Peter denied Jesus, Jesus broke him down with a look; that Jesus, going to the cross, forgot his own sufferings to bemoan those of the women accompanying him on his tragic path; that that Jesus, in the horrors of crucifixion, asked God to forgive his murderers, saying, they knew not what they did. Luke exhibits the same taste by his omissions, particularly in the material which he and Matthew derived, independently, not from Mark but from some other chief source likewise accessible to them in common. The story of the man cast into outer darkness to gnash his teeth in fetters, because he had gone to a wedding in his ordinary clothes, is a case in point. Another, is the awful and iterated reference to the quenchless fire, and the undying worm, though it occurs in *Mark*, and doubtless occurred also in the other important source above mentioned. These were the

sort of things Luke could not bear, so he left them out, as he did the affair of Jesus cursing the barren fig-tree, for which he substitutes a parable about a tree of that kind spared by the gardener at the request of the owner.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be Continued.)

### Report of Yorkshire Lecturing Tour.

AFTER storm comes calm. After the excitability of South Wales comes the stolidity of Yorkshire.

I addressed seven meetings in Leeds. With the exception of that held on the Sunday afternoon on the Moor all were successful and well attended. The Moor meeting was an unadvertised experiment on a pitch which has fallen into disuse since the war, and faced also with the competition of a band we did not get as large an audience as we had hoped. The rest of the meetings, held in Victoria Square, were good. On the Monday, owing to the presence of Annie Besant in the Town Hall, we managed to get a huge crowd after her meeting. Some of her well dressed congregation listened with supercilious smiles and put several questions. A clerical gentleman had several shots but refused my invitation to oppose me on our platform. Judging by the appearance of its adherents, Theosophy might be defined as superstition in a fur coat! But it is as shy of argument as the variety less resplendently attired!

There is nothing comparable to the feverish behaviour of the Welsh Christians to chronicle in respect to Leeds. The only similarity is in the poverty of the reasoning of both Welsh and Yorkshire opponents when on our platform. Several Leeds' representatives of various denominations opposed us with the usual results. We made many new members, sold much literature, and under the circumstances of bad trade, took decent collections. The sale of *Freethinkers* was especially good.

I have extreme pleasure in thanking Mr. Youngman for his kindly hospitality and his efforts to make my stay in Leeds most pleasurable.

Altogether twelve excellent meetings were held in Leeds, eleven of them in Victoria Square. The opposition as usual was feeble. It included representatives of the Mormons and the I.B.S.A. American Christianity does not differ much from the English variety except in its accent, which was very pronounced! A feature of the series was the very close attention paid to the lectures and the presence of many of the auditors at all the meetings. Quite a number attended the whole twelve.

The literature sales and collections were good considering the slack times. At least a score of new members should result, and interest has been stimulated. I was congratulated by a number of people who were not Secularists upon the reasonable nature of the fortnight's propaganda.

GEORGE WHITEHEAD.

### Correspondence.

#### SOME DESULTORY CRITICISM ON THE NEW EDITION OF VOLNEY'S "RUINS."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As I was instrumental in bringing the new translated edition of the *Ruins* into existence, may I be permitted a few desultory criticisms.

In the first place, to exalt Volney it does not seem necessary to throw stones at Voltaire for accepting Frederick the Great's invitation to Bedlam—I mean Potsdam. Considering the education this unhappy man had undergone from his father, the wonder is that he was not madder than he was. *Tantum Religio*. Voltaire accepted the invitation from the Prussian king as the most audacious Freethinker, if not Atheist, of his day, and the moment he conceived himself to have been insulted by that individual packed up his traps and lampooned his quondam friend without mercy. Frederick was altogether on the side of French Freethought and the confirmed and active enemy of Goethe and his religious Mysticism in consequence. Tyrant or not he was a great and audacious Freethinker.

A great book or work which opens a new gate and road to knowledge is necessarily full of technical blunders. It is only the courageous people who venture to make them. As a matter of fact, it is the two Latin peoples, *viz.*, the Italians and the French, who have opened almost all the gates to our modern knowledge (such as it is), and particularly the latter, perhaps. The Italians: astronomy, electricity and magnetism, the evolution of symmetry, anatomy, geology and criminology (Galileo, Galvani and Volta, Lombroso and Beccaria, etc.). The French: the science of light, scientific psychology, photography, radium, analytical geometry, the groundwork of modern sceptical mathematics, evolution, modern hierology, and, above all, perhaps, the new idea of society with its common-sense watchword of Liberty Fraternity and Equality.

Dupuis and Volney seem to be the founders of modern Hierology, but on the origin of the God idea, the arguments of Herbert Spencer and Grant Allen are much more convincing. But one set of iconoclasts are as necessary as the other. Lamarck's blunders in his scientific biology do not prevent his being the father of evolution. If in these notes I have ventured upon a point of interrogation, it is certainly not for want of respect and admiration for the author of the *Ruins*. Before doing so I would venture upon a purely technical criticism as to printer's errors. They are nearly all small and insignificant. There is *Porteus* for *Proteus* (page 201 of the notes). Page 199 (notes) we have *precession*. Is not the word generally used "*Precession*"? As a matter of fact, if the circle of the signs of the Zodiac, constructed from that in the book itself, which I enclose, be correct, the *Precession* is due to a revolution from right to left, so that at present the vernal equinox coincides with two or three degrees into Aquarius. To come to more general criticisms. On page 90 the author infers that Egypt saw the origin of astronomy, and on the following page he writes: "Thus the Ethiopian of Thebes called stars of inundation or of Aquarius, those under which the river began to overflow; stars of the ox or bull, those under which it was convenient to plough the earth.....etc." But in note 48, page 99 the theory of Dupuis is accepted that owing to the precession of the equinoxes 17000 years ago (about) the sign *Libra* coincided with the vernal equinox *Aries* with the autumnal one. Consequently, to get *Aries* back to the vernal equinox and *Taurus* to the April ploughing, which, according to the theory, originated the names of these two constellations, we require a previous precession or backing, and as *Libra* and *Aries* are distant from one another by 180 degrees or six signs that means, roughly, an addition of 12690 years to the 17000 years ago when *Libra* coincided with the vernal equinox. In other words, we should have to admit that the signs of the Zodiac were named by Egyptian agriculturists nearly 30,000 years ago and determined either then, in Egypt, or elsewhere at a still more remote period.

Page 103 Volney writes: "Your mitre, your crosier, your mantle are emblems of Osiris." As a matter of fact, ancient Accadian or Chaldean sculptures represent the sacrificial priest wearing the skin of the sacrificed fish, with its head forming his head gear (whence the mitres of our bishops). The practise, therefore, if connected with the spring sacrifice at the opening of the year, must date, at least, from 390 B.C. But it must be supposed that the tablets representing this holy function are much prior to 390 B.C. Therefore, if the fish sacrifice is a vernal equinoctial one it must date from 25770 years B.C. If an autumn equinoctial one from 13080 B.C.

In note to page 98, page 199: "The deity acquired even a sex from the gender of its appellation." This seems arbitrarily putting the cart before the horse, perhaps. Why may not the grammatical gender derive from the imagined sex of the object?

On page 102 Volney writes: "Indians it is in vain..... your god Vishnu is but one of the thousand emblems of the sun in Egypt and his incarnations in a fish, boar, lion, turtle.....are nothing more than the same star....." The sequence of the incarnations here given is not very accurate. The order if I mistake not is fish, turtle, boar, dwarf, Vishnu with the spear, and ? lance, Man-lion. This sequence harmonises so exactly with the modern ideas of human evolution that it gives rise to the suspicion that the Hindus, like the scientific Mohammedans of the Middle Ages, had grasped more or less vaguely the idea

of evolution. It should not be forgotten that Asiatic savants 6 or 7000 years ago were much nearer the flint age than we are, and may have had traditions about it that have since perished. The new science that in Europe has proved the great antiquity of man, it, also, due to a Frenchman (Bourchier de Perthes) dates but from yesterday, but the succession of Avatars harmonises altogether with our most recent and common-sense conclusions as to the origin of human beings. Human dentition and the now demonstrated origin of the horse from quite a small animal lead to the inference that the present human monster, like the milder gorillas and orang-utans sprung from a race of vegetarian dwarfs; these generally increased in size when weapons were invented and they could devour animals. Having no looks and few intellectual enjoyments, enjoyment of the more animal passion took the place of music, science, literature, art and so on. In plain words, cannibalism sprang not from necessity—and after it, war—but mainly to glut their erotic sadism, of which modern war and religious cannibalism are a continuation, in a spiritual and more pernicious form. This theory will, I fear, hardly find favour with our old-fashioned sciolists whose vanity it flatters to pretend that humanity was raised to its present altitude by science and progress, by their efforts in fact, nor to the dogmatists in original sin, for without their dogma all excuse is taken away from them to make themselves disagreeable all round, the main object of it.

It harmonises, however, very well with the legends of a golden age, and the tradition and intrusion of the Chinese ascribing to humanity primitive goodness and not inherent natural sin, cannibalism, etc., being not an inherent vice of humanity, but a relatively transient perversion. However this may be, one cannot refrain a smile at the consternation our inflated, purse-bound men of God would have felt in the sweet by and bye (had there been one) on meeting there the souls of their ancestors not in the form of Naraha Sinhas, but as humble little creatures, hurry-scurrying about in the form of marmosets or small howling monkeys. And yet that is the conclusion of common-sense. It is only a defective scientific imagination that can picture animals the size of small houses springing up all at once full sized out of nothing; on the other hand the reconstruction of genealogues generally shows the gigantic animal evolved from a smaller one, though the giant may again dwindle as in the case of the monstrous lizards of the chalk and lias once more down to pygmy ones.

W. W. STRICKLAND.

#### THE W. H. HUNT FUND.

SIR,—No case quite like Mr. Hunt's has occurred in our generation. It is an instance of slavery in its crudest and most relentless form. You have here a Colliery Co. arrogating the possession not merely of their workers' bodies but their minds and most secret thoughts. Mr. Hunt was instantly dismissed solely for having sought knowledge—discharged and turned out of his home. "Mr. Hunt lost not only his employment but his home. To get a dwelling-place at all he has had to buy a house, and every penny of his savings of years has vanished." He is, moreover, heavily in debt as a consequence, and still unemployed. The response to my appeal does the gallant few infinite credit, but will have to be much more general ere it does the Freethought cause any honour. I am sure when all have fully realized the situation in its whole enormity there will be few, indeed, who will not send some aid. We can all do something, and contributions are not expected from C3 purses. I propose keeping the Fund open until the 30th of this month, and the opportunity to strike a blow in defence of Freethought is free to all. The following is a list of donations received to date: D. Macconnell, £1; "Burton," 3s.; S. Clowes, 3s.; W. B. Columbine, £5; Miss D. W. Coleman, 10s.; A. W. Coleman, 15s.; R. Gibbon, 5s.; F. H. Hart, 2s.; T. G. Finlay, 10s.; D. S. MacDougall, 2s. 6d.; James Davie, £1; Jas. C. Banks, 10s.; Anon., Weston-Super-Mare, £1; Thomas Dunbar, 10s.; R. Muir, Junr., 5s.; W. H. Hicks, 10s. 6d.; W. H. Wildsmith, 5s.; A. Rowley, 5s.; Birmingham Branch, per J. Partridge, £1; Frank Terry, 10s.; Mrs. F. Terry, 10s.; Fred Terry, 10s.; S. Clowes, Senr., 2s. 6d.; S. Clowes, second time, 2s. 6d.; W. Wilson, 10s.; Mr. Umpleby, 1s. 6d.—Total, £16 2s. 6d.

D. MACCONNELL.

## 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.

FULHAM AND WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Hammer-smith Labour Hall, 154 Goldhawk Road, W.): 7.30, H. E. Moore, B.A., "The Recent Progress in Mind Study."

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road): 8, Debate: "Does the Universe Indicate Design?" Affirmative, Rev. Father McNabb; Negative, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe.

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

#### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 6.15, Mr. E. Burke, A Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Regent's Park): 6, Mr. A. D. McLaren, "Christianity and the Modern Mind."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 3.15, and 6.15, Mr. Corrigan, Lectures.

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