

The FREETHINKER

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Views and Opinions.

A Losing Fight.

No one, said Anthony Collins, ever doubted the existence of God till the Boyle Lecturers began to prove it. The satire is historically inaccurate, but it contains an important truth. To begin with, the mere attempt to prove the existence of God is calculated to awaken doubts where none before existed. To discover that a belief which has been impressed upon one as an absolute truth is in need of justification establishes the legitimacy of doubt and opens up the possibility of one being, after all, in the wrong. To find the unquestionable denied, the certain rejected as false, and even defenders of the faith making a concession here and a modification there, may easily arouse uncertainty as to what remains. And it may further be said that the religious apologists never convince anyone who does not already believe. The utmost these gentlemen ever do is to reassure some and retard the emancipation of others. But I have never heard of anyone who seriously disbelieved in the existence of a God being brought back to the point of believing by any of the so-called theistic evidences. In this matter the religionist is all along playing a losing game. He is denied victory from the very hour the battle opens. The most he can do is to stave off the moment of complete defeat. If he retains his position for a time well and good. If he can prevent some of his supporters from giving a measure of help to the enemy he is still more fortunate. And all the time he has the depressing knowledge that the attack against his main position goes on developing with increasing deadliness.

Proving Too Much. * * *

Take, as an illustration of what has been said, that very powerful eighteenth century classic, Butler's *Analogy*. No one can read Bishop Butler, either in his *Analogy* or in his sermons on moral subjects, without feeling that one is in contact with an intelligence of no mean description. In those days the Church had not yet sunk so low that one of its dignitaries could attract attention merely because he said things that in the mouth of an ordinary man would be heard without surprise and considered as no more than one would expect from a man of average intelligence. Life had not then bitten so deeply into Christianity as it has now done, and the position then was different from what it is to-day. The chief enemy of Christianity

then was Deism—the belief of those who opposed a God of nature to the God of the Bible. These Butler caught in a cleft stick. Against those who pitted the God of nature against the God of the Bible he convincingly argued that the marks which characterized the one characterized the other. Consequently, the one was as bad, or as good, as the other, and to reject the one while retaining the other was absurd. Butler's argument was unanswered and unanswerable. But there was another conclusion suggested by his argument. This was that while it might be absurd to reject the God of the Bible in favour of the God of nature, might it not be equally absurd to believe in either? That, in fact, was the logical outcome of Butler's work. He saved people from becoming Deists only at the logical expense of driving them to Atheism. Burke said that Butler's work suggested more doubts than it removed, and that is not true of Butler's *Analogy* alone, it is true of all apologetic works before and after him. The clergy, if they were wise, would never argue their faith, they would assert it. Above all, they should never argue with unbelievers. They do not convert the unbeliever; all they do is to open the eyes of believers. It is absurd to appeal to reason on behalf of an unreasonable creed. Reason never brings a man to heaven. On the very highest authority it has often sent one to hell.

* * *

The Direction of Progress.

It must be admitted that, in the main, professional Christians have learned this lesson—at least in relation to militant Freethought. They remain almost silent concerning it. It is seldom directly mentioned. Even a paper such as this one, of its class as widely known as any paper in Britain, is scarcely ever mentioned, not even when paragraphs and ideas are lifted directly from its pages. The pretence must be maintained either that militant Freethought is quite dead, or it is nearly dead, or that it would be folly to deal with it. Where, recently asked one of these Christian apologists, is the Freethinking that terrified our ancestors in the eighteenth century? And as that form of the anti-Christian attack is not now prominent it is calmly assumed that Freethought is powerless or dead. But these gentlemen are looking in quite the wrong direction for the heretical ideas of a century and a half ago. To find them they must look, not in our ranks, but in their own. The Christian Churches are now preaching as part of their creed things for which, less than a century since, men and women were being sent to prison for publishing. The anti-Christian teaching of Voltaire and Paine was not killed; it was adopted by Christians, and highly paid professors are now preaching it as "advanced Christianity." The most advanced Christians are now only voicing the commonplaces of a century old Freethought. Save amongst the more ignorant of Christians, the orthodoxy of Paine's day is as dead as a door-nail. And never has there been a clearer case of a handful of men and women, without either wealth or position, forcing a powerful and wealthy institution such as the Christian Church to disown some of its most ancient teachings

and adopt the ideas of its adversaries. It is a phenomenon that should encourage those who find the present fight somewhat discouraging. Some of the clearest evidences of the influences of our work are to be found within the Churches. The clergy are "liberal" to precisely the extent that we force them to be so.

* * *

God as Myth.

But the clergy remain the clergy, and it does not follow that, because circumstances force them to teach things they previously denounced, they have become more receptive to new truths. The plea that what these people are fond of calling the "Materialism of the Victorian era," or the unbelief of Paine and Voltaire, is dead, is mere camouflage designed to hide the fact that the attack on religious beliefs still goes on, and is far more deadly than ever. One well-known Christian controversialist recently took me to task because in my *Theism or Atheism?* I said that to the informed mind it is no longer a question of whether there is a God or not, but solely one of studying the conditions that gave rise to such a myth and the circumstances of its development. And yet another Christian writer was "astounded" that, in another work, I could have said, the old question of whether Jesus Christ was an historical character or not was rapidly losing, if it had not already lost, all importance. And yet both statements are substantially true. If all that we now know of primitive thought is accepted, if we can really trace the beginnings of the belief in supernatural powers to the ignorance of primitive humanity, if we know the facts upon which that belief was based, and now interpret those facts in an entirely different manner, and if we can trace the modern ideas of God back to these primitive beginnings—if these things are true, then we no longer need waste time in discussing the evidence for and against the existence of a God. We know that the whole thing is nothing but a myth, and to discuss the possibility of the existence of God is equal to discussing whether the giants and fairies of Hans Andersen's tales may not actually exist. We have settled the question of the existence of God when we have determined the question of the origin of the belief.

* * *

A Hopeless Fight.

Substantially, the same thing holds of the question of Jesus Christ. The historical question has here given place to the psychological one. We need no longer discuss whether Jesus walked on the water, or was born of a virgin, or raised men from the dead, or turned water into wine. We know, if we know anything at all, that none of these things ever happened. All we really have for discussion here is how people came to believe in such things. And for that purpose the study of the mental conditions of peoples in a less advanced social and intellectual state than our own is far more to the point than all the books of biblical criticism which are poured out from the religious Press. And all this means that for over half a century the point of attack, the method of criticism, has been changing. The Christian no longer hears quite so much of the old Freethought attack, but it is giving place to another and a more deadly one. The Christian does not mind so much discussing the old form because it keeps attention off a far more destructive assault. The attack made by both anthropology and psychology he will not meet because he has nothing in his controversial armoury to meet it with. He cannot disprove what both these sciences teach, and if he admits the truth of their main teaching his whole structure vanishes into thin air. So his old dilemma remains. If he declines the challenge of modern thought he loses the more educated and the more worthy of his followers. If he attempts to meet it he demonstrates

the more surely the hollowness of his beliefs. So he goes along making a little concession here and another there. And the worst of it, for him, is that Christian apologists cannot, now any more than in the days of Collins, avoid opening the eyes of those whom they would willingly keep unenlightened. Some sort of defence they must make, and the only kind of defence possible is one that brings nearer the hour of ultimate defeat.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Evangelism.

THE National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches has been in existence for twenty-seven years, and this year's Assembly has just been held at the Central Hall, Liverpool, under the presidency of the Rev. Samuel Chadwick, Principal of Cliff College, and an ex-President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference. Mr. Chadwick has been well-known for many years as an exceedingly popular preacher. He has a very ready, pungent wit and his intellectual endowments are much above the average. As the custom is, he was formally inducted to the chair by his predecessor, the Rev. R. C. Gillie, minister of Upper George Street Presbyterian Church, London. The new President chose as the subject of his address "The Call of the Kingdom and the Response of the Churches," a brief report of which appeared in the *Times* of March 8. According to the President, evangelism, the preaching of the kingdom of God, is the supreme business of the Church. In a sub-leader the *Times* observes that Mr. Chadwick's address emphasizes the truth that the Church has nothing directly to do with the secular affairs of mankind. How foolish it is, therefore, to ask, during any social, economical, or political crisis, "What are the Churches doing?" Of course, directly they are doing nothing at all, because it is not their Divinely appointed mission to concern themselves about earthly things. They are not centres of social reforms, but preaching stations of the kingdom of heaven. Curiously enough, Mr. Chadwick naively admits that his conception of the business of the Church is generally regarded as obsolete. "It has become the fashion," he says, "to disparage the Church and neglect evangelism." But the Church is disparaged because it has never done the work which it claims to have been founded on purpose to do. This is the outstanding charge against it, that, whilst said to be the instrument of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, it has utterly failed to bring the world into the kingdom of truth and righteousness, or in every-day life to bow the knee to the Prince of Peace. Mr. Chadwick excuses the failure by saying that "the kingdom which our Lord thought out once for all was one, however, which he refused to secure by turning the hard stones of poverty into the bread of plenty, and to-day the people who want this world's good things do not go to Christ for them."

To ordinary people the attitude of the Gospel Jesus towards riches and poverty is self-contradictory. In some passages he is represented as pronouncing poverty the most delightfully ideal state to be in. "Blessed are ye poor," he says, "for yours is the kingdom of God." The rich could never enter into that kingdom except by selling their goods and giving alms. He affirms that the deceitfulness of riches chokes the word of the kingdom. In other passages we find him in close touch, even dining, with the rich, and recommending his disciples to win for themselves friends with their dishonest money, so that when it came to an end there might be a welcome for them in the eternal home. The application of that teaching in the history of Christendom has had a most demoralizing and humiliating effect upon social life. The poor have always existed in order that the rich might enjoy

the luxury of doling out alms to them. Both classes are blessed, the one because it has nought but need, the other because it has and can give away the good things of this world. The Church has never asked the question, "By what right is one class enormously rich and the other deplorably poor?" In other words, the Church has never troubled itself about the social problems of this life, and never set itself the noble task of solving them on lines of justice and brotherly love, with the result that the poor, the workers generally, give the Church a wide berth.

Mr. Chadwick admits that deep down in their hearts men think that Jesus made a mistake, that he ought to have looked deeper into the problem of riches and poverty; but the President of the Free Church Council disagrees with them, and maintains that Jesus contented himself with issuing a programme. Very well, but what was the programme? Read Luke iv. 18, 19 and you will see. The first item in it is the following: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor." What Gospel did he preach to the poor? This: "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke vi. 20). But that Gospel is fundamentally false, and has done both rich and poor incalculable harm. Grinding poverty is a curse, and not a blessing, and so are riches, whether made or inherited. This point is magnificently illustrated in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The poor beggar, however pious, had to be satisfied with the station in life in which the Lord had placed him; and the only comfort the poor can glean from that parable lies in the possibility that the stations of rich and poor will be reversed hereafter; and a woefully illusory comfort it is.

The President indulged in the usual twaddle of the old-fashioned evangelist. Take the following sample:—

The responsibility of the Church is to evangelize the world, and its first business is to make converts. There is no substitute for the Gospel, no equivalent for the new birth. People will not come into the kingdom by crowds, but one by one, and only then if Christians who seek to persuade them manifest heat, passion, certainty, and sacrifice. It would be a calamity to send some new-born souls into some churches. It would be like putting a new-born babe to the breast of a corpse, instead of into the shepherd's heart. This passionate seeking for souls and fostering of them was the only way into the kingdom.

Two comments may be made on that choice passage. The first assumes the form of a question, Where does God come in, and what has become of the mission of Jesus Christ who is called the Saviour of the world? Have they both retired from business, and handed the whole work over to the Church? That is the only logical inference from Mr. Chadwick's language. The other comment concerns the marvellous charitableness of the President of the Free Church Council towards "some churches." What entitles Mr. Chadwick to sit in judgment on other churches? He arrogates to himself a right which he does not possess. He has positively no knowledge of the Gospel, his relation to it being simply that of mere belief. Innumerable different and conflicting interpretations are put upon the Gospel, and he has no right whatever to assert that his interpretation is the true one, while that adopted by, say, the Dean of Carlisle and Principal Major is hopelessly false. All the divines alike are dealing with matters of which no knowledge is obtainable at any quotation.

All the extracts already given are within quotation marks in the *Times*' report, while the last paragraph is not. In this paragraph occurs a most remarkable assertion in the words of the reporter:—

In the world of thought there was a changed

mentality. Materialism as a philosophy was done with. We now hear of the diaphanous vestment of Nature covering but not hiding the reality, and personality—human personality—was being recognized anew for what it really is, with all its potentialities for time and eternity. Such a period, he claimed, is of all times the most favourable for evangelistic appeal. As with individuals, so with nations, everybody and everything is bankrupt now, except Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

Only on the assumption of the accuracy of the report do we dare to criticize this last extract. Where has Mr. Chadwick discovered "the changed mentality?" In what standard work on psychology is it taught? Let us know what accredited physicist of to-day holds the view that Nature wears a transparent vestment which covers without hiding the reality? Who has seen and can describe that reality? Psychologists have always recognized personality, for psychology is the study of the facts of consciousness or personality. It is perfectly true, as Dr. Sidis points out, "that facts of consciousness are not of a physical, mechanical character"; but it is equally true that the seat of personality is in a physical substance, and that it is a physical substance which is conscious; but no psychologist known to us speaks of "the potentialities of personality for time and eternity." That is a metaphysical or theological inference warranted by no known facts. Eternity is an undiscovered realm to natural science, and there is no other means of discovering it. Faith discovers nothing; it simply imagines all sorts of things. Mr. Chadwick's theology consists of a collection of figments of the imagination; and upon this he bases a Gospel which lacks all power save that which the man who preaches can put into it; and with this Gospel to evangelize the world, he very wisely leaves God out of account, for of a God's activity there is absolutely no evidence.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Secret of Shelley.

Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever.

—Robert Browning.

The drowning of Shelley on that fatal July day in 1822 was, in all probability, the heaviest loss that English literature has ever sustained.

—G. W. Foote.

THOUGH the newspapers be full of tumult and tragedy, there is always a paragraph or so into which the meditative reader may turn aside as into a quieter place. In one of these paragraphs there is mention that the centenary of Shelley's death will be celebrated during the present year. Shelley himself would have been astonished at so remarkable a display of publicity. "Hushed is the harp, the minstrel gone," but the spell holds. Reviled and persecuted during his lifetime, the name of Percy Bysshe Shelley is now one to conjure with. Those Continental critics who have excellent tastes in poetry know it well. In the *New World* it is known as a famous name. As for English folk, it dwarfs for us most of the nineteenth century writers, although there are some of the most considerable in our literature.

The secret of the antagonism to Shelley is not far to seek. The poet was an Atheist, and he had to pay very dearly for his opinions. His undoubted genius was treated with the scantest courtesy, and his very virtues presented in the worst possible light. On account of his views he was expelled from Oxford University; and years after he was declared by a Christian judge to be unfit to be the custodian of his own children. Men were imprisoned and fined for selling his *Queen Mab*. This campaign of calumny, and persecution was due simply to Shelley's Atheism. For no other reason he was declared to be a bad and

vicious man. Thus Christians cast libellous dust in the eyes of the unthinking public, and incapacitated them from seeing the real facts of the case. Incidentally, they sought to discredit the cause to which Shelley dedicated his life.

Great, noble, and beautiful qualities met in this great poet. Splendid as his life-work was, he, the man, was greater and rarer. Heir to a rich man, he might have lived a life of ease and indulgence. The narrow, aristocratic circle into which he was born would have honoured him for it, but he thought continually of other and higher matters. His antagonism to tyranny, religion, and custom seemed madness in the son of a wealthy nobleman of many acres. Accordingly, society denounced him, for it had long agreed that all reformers were criminals. Treated like a mad god during his short life, it was fifty years after his death before his unquestionable genius was admitted grudgingly. Even at the celebrations at Horsham, some years ago, the poet's Atheism was discreetly ignored, and his association with the stupid county families emphasized unduly.

Shelley was no monster, but a rare humanitarian. So unselfish was he, in a selfish world, that he almost seems like a visitor from another planet. To help the needy and relieve the sick seemed to him a simple duty, which he carried out cheerfully. He inquired personally into the circumstances of his charities, visited the sick in their homes, and kept a list of poor persons whom he assisted. At Marlow he suffered from an acute ophthalmia, contracted whilst visiting the poor, afflicted lace-makers in their cottages. Leigh Hunt has told us that Shelley, finding a woman ill on Hampstead Heath, carried her from door to door in the hopes of meeting with a person as charitable as himself, until he had to lodge the poor creature with some personal friends. He protected his friend Byron from the blade of an assassin; "I cannot understand it," said Byron, "that a man should run upon a naked sword for another man." Shelley's purse was always open to his friends. Peacock received from him an annual allowance of £100, and he gave Godwin and others thousands of pounds. So practical was Shelley in his philanthropy that he even attended a London hospital in order to get medical knowledge of service to the poor he visited. When his cousin, Medwin, was ill for six weeks, Shelley was by his bedside the whole time attending him like a nurse. Without a murmur, without ostentation, this heir to one of the richest nobleman of England devoted himself to his fellow-men. Byron, who held Charles the Second's cynical view of mankind, acknowledged Shelley to be the best and purest-minded man he had ever met. Trelawny, who knew Shelley very intimately during his later life, declared that this Atheist "loved everything better than himself."

Dead at twenty-nine, posterity has but the outcome of Shelley's cruder years; and the assurance of something nobler and wiser was stopped by the tragedy of his untimely end. What Shelley might have been we cannot conceive; but in his short life he penned some of the finest poems written during a thousand years of his country's literature. He also devoted himself to the service of Humanity, and, in his few years of life, he made good the superb boast of a later poet concerning Liberty:—

I am the trumpet at thy lips, thy clarion,
Full of thy cry, sonorous with thy breath;
The graves of souls born worms and creeds
grown carrion,
Thy blast of judgment fills with fire of death.

I shall burn up before thee, pass and perish,
As haze in sunrise on the red sea-line,
But thou from dawn to sun-setting shalt cherish
The thoughts that led and souls that lighted mine.

MINERNUS.

The Religion of Jesus.

I HAVE been reading *Food for the Fed-up* by the Rev. C. A. Studdert Kennedy (familarly known during the war as "Woodbine Willy"), and I am going to make it the starting point of a brief enquiry into the religion of Jesus—the religion which so many Christians tell us we do not understand, and even some Freethinkers tell us is quite distinct from "Christianity."

Mr. Kennedy is a modern university trained young man who, as a popular "padre," must have come across all types of men from the devout Christian believer to the totally irreverent unbeliever. He won the M.C., so must have shown personal courage in the field, and he has found himself faced with the great difficulties of his creed to which he feels, as an earnest and sincere believer, a complete answer must be found. The headings of the chapters of his book are taken from, "I believe in God the Father Almighty (?) and in Jesus Christ, His only Son (?), who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, dead and buried, He descended into Hell, the third day He rose again from the dead, He ascended into Heaven and shall come again at the end of the World to judge the Quick and the Dead"—a rignarole which the vast majority of educated Christians are not by any means too keen to subscribe to. Mr. Kennedy, however, realizes that if historical Christianity is true every word in the above creed is true, and so, half-heartedly pointing out how difficult it is to believe some of the things (such as, for instance, that God is Almighty), he finishes up each chapter with almost an absolute surrender to everything, no matter how foolish, so long as it is thoroughly orthodox and thoroughly Christian.

But it is in its perfectly senseless exaltation of Jesus both as a "Divine Man" and a "Human God" that Mr. Kennedy shines so brilliantly. His adoration equals, if it does not exceed, that of those poor unfortunate nuns who became brides of Christ in the spirit, but whose fervid prayers to their beloved one were models of passionate infatuation in the flesh. Not that Mr. Kennedy condescends to give you any real tangible argument why Jesus should be so exalted. He seems to take it for granted, and if you do not agree with him he professes to be very upset as he says, "If a man or woman rejects the Character, I find myself wondering what is the matter with them, where is the yellow streak?" You will notice that the reverend gentleman has absolutely no qualms about it. If you do reject Jesus, there really must be something the matter with you, and you are bound to be, of course, a coward. It never occurs to him that some of us feel that if there is a yellow streak it is much more likely to be in a Christian. For, as Pascal pointed out, a Christian is at least running no risk, whether religion is true or not, while an Atheist faces the risk without a tremor that religion is true. A Christian has nothing to lose if all the heavenly Pantheon is but a myth, but an Atheist is risking his immortal soul if there is a heaven and hell and an eternally burning lake of fire in which he may be plunged for ever and ever. Mr. Kennedy believes that after death there will be a "Great Assize." "I cannot, and I dare not, picture that Great Assize" he wails, and in the same breath he looks for *our* yellow streak. It is not we who are afraid but he; we neither fear "a flaming hell," nor (as he does) "the Eyes of Christ"—in fact, it is perfectly childish and quite unworthy of any educated man to try at this late hour to frighten us with any threats whatever of the hereafter. Even Christians have to turn away with a smile at these old attacks on "infidelity."

But one can see how little this twentieth century exponent of his faith knows what he is up against in

his few notices of Atheism. Of course, he has to mention it as he must have rubbed shoulders with not a few unbelievers in the army, and, perhaps, even he has read a pamphlet or two on Freethought, so you will not be surprised to learn that "a real atheist (small a) would not need to commit suicide, he would be dead already." This is apropos the statement that "you must have a god or gods," and to show you that you must, you immediately get, by way of an example, the drunkard's real creed, "I believe in Alcohol Almighty, Lord of all good living, bestower of True Peace. I believe in the fiery Spirit that can give the coward courage and make the dumb man speak, that soothes all sorrow, dries all tears, and gives the weary rest." It is difficult to criticize seriously the silly statements made on the page the above is taken from. For one thing the "real Atheist" has not got a "god or gods." In all probability he takes an intelligent interest in the things that make life worth living—in music, art, poetry, and general literature, as well as in social welfare, and it is simply rubbish to say that these are his "god or gods." Christians are always taking it for granted that other people find it necessary to adore some deity, no matter what sort so long as it is a deity, and, of course, a deity must have a creed. And as an example of the sort of creed an Atheist must have you get this drunkard's creed. Is there very much difference between the working of Mr. Kennedy's mind and of those who directed the mid-Victorian evangelistic atrocities—the *British Banner* and kindred journals? Mr. Kennedy admits that "There are a large number of men and women who are deliberately opposed to Him (Christ), a larger number in Europe to-day than there has been for many generations," and one would have thought that he would have made himself thoroughly acquainted with the reasons of their disbelief. Alas, he has "just been reading a book written by one of their teachers," and in it, he says, the author "gathers up all the scum and filth of modern civilization and serves it hot as stinking soup." It really is curious how the earnest Christian believer always manages to come across this sort of book as being representative of our teaching, a book which describes only the seamy side of life without a scrap of joy or humour or love to make it worth living, but only "a cesspool of undiluted cruelty and filth, on the edge of which our civilization stands and staggers unsteadily." I always suspect descriptions of this sort, especially when no titles are given of the books described, and I always call to mind the way in which that premature masterpiece, *The Elements of Social Science*, used to be described by Bradlaugh's opponents when they blamed him for it and at the same time did their best to hound him to his death. And as the book in question seems to have some Neo-Malthusian tendencies—for its author claims that "we must legalize and recognize not merely prevention but abortion and infanticide as well"—cannot you see how Mr. Kennedy's righteous Christian anger can hardly keep, as he admits, "within the bounds of the English Dictionary, or outside the range of the laws of libel." The average Christian nearly chokes when he gets on to the population question, and he would stifle every bit of discussion on it, forgetful of the fact that about the first really great work on the subject—a world masterpiece—was written by a Church of England clergyman. Yet how few of his "brothers in Christ" have agreed with him! It is the despised Freethinker who saw in Malthusianism the possible solution of the difficulties of our whole social and political economy, and therefore, with certain variations from the original doctrines, has never ceased to put it forward when discussing the problems of poverty, war, and disease. And yet, in spite of his horror of the book he speaks about, of Freud and his followers, and of the sexual

question altogether, it is amusing to find Mr. Kennedy admit that "the connection between religion and sex is undoubted and undisputable," and "there is no doubt that the teaching of the Church on the matter of sex has been, and often is still, marred by ignorance, stupidity and cowardice." And what do you think is or ought to be the solution?—the solution to the work of Freud and sex difficulties and over population? Why, the Christian Creed, the Creed that "comes marching with its drums"—the Creed which "asserts violently that the higher order of goodness which came with Jesus came in a unique way (the Virgin Birth) and a way which delivered it from any contamination by lust." If this means anything at all it means that so long as we believe in Jesus, "Who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," there is not the slightest need to worry over such trifles as over population or psycho-analysis or poverty or all the other social and economic evils that abound in our civilization.

When a man has got the Jesus cult very badly there really is no limit to his extravagance. Mr. Kennedy says, "If John Mark invented Jesus then there existed at that time a literary genius before whom Shakespeare pales into utter insignificance." The naive foolishness of this makes one wonder what literature the reverend gentleman has read—whether he has, indeed, ever read Shakespeare at all. Apart from the fact that there may have been an actual Jesus totally different from the Jesus of Mark, how can the invention of a Jesus make Mark superior in literary ability to Shakespeare, who has invented the most marvellous galaxy of human beings—real live people most of them—that ever sprang from one man's brain? The idea is just as silly as the idea that Jesus is the greatest spiritualistic medium that ever lived or the greatest Christian Socialist or the greatest anything else that his adorers are constantly imagining. And though we get page after page of the most fulsome admiration of Jesus—just as boring as the stuff one gets in those Christian tracts which are usually sold at "100 for 6d. post free"—Mr. Kennedy admits that "to the making of books in attack and defence of the Divinity of Jesus Christ there is no end and the study of them is not merely a weariness to the flesh it is a positive poison to the spirit; they obscure the real issue," and follows up his own condemnation with this *Food for the Fed-up*, quite the most unpalatable and wearisome food I have ever tasted.

Mr. Kennedy does not exactly feel comfortable in the presence of hell. He believes in a "Great Assize," but hell makes people think of eternal punishment, and that rather upsets the "food" idea he wants to introduce, so he has a very simple way of getting over the difficulty. Instead of "He descended into hell" say "He passed on to Paradise" which, while agreeing somewhat with the Freethought contention that the Christian Paradise would be very likely hell to most of us, is not exactly the meaning Christians would die for. After all, hell is that wonderful abode so graphically described by Father Furness or it is not. If Mr. Kennedy is ashamed of the hell Jesus so strongly believed in, I say, good luck to him; but he cannot logically call it Paradise. We get nearly twenty-four pages of argument about it though, and I defy anyone to emerge from the struggle of what they all mean and tell us what Mr. Kennedy really believes about hell—or even if there is one (I mean, of course, a real one). We do get, however, the good news that "Red with his blood, the better day is dawning" and "those hands majestically bleeding," which show that the efficacy of the blood of Jesus holds a real place in the *Food for the Fed-up* that he wishes us to swallow.

But it would be really wearisome to discuss the book any further. My apology for noticing it at all is that

one would have thought going through the terrible war might have opened Mr. Kennedy's eyes to even a little truth and a little sanity in matters of religion and its utter uselessness as a message for this generation. Instead, we get a re-hash of the same old arguments in favour of Jesus that have filled thousands of tomes, and the same old avoidance of all criticisms tending to put Christianity in its proper place as a compendium of worn-out and silly superstitions which have not in these days even the excuse of consistency. The Churches have failed one hears everywhere—let us now get back to Jesus. Very well, let us get back to the Founder of Christianity. Let us examine what he says and see if we can get the truth at last.

(To be Continued.) H. CUTNER.

A Pagan Day.

Wander at will without care or fear
In the open air on the Sundays;
With thought well poised, and sane, and clear
All day if you can on the Sundays:
Drink deep and long of the wholesome air,
And woo the wild as you outward fare,
In leafy Summer or Winter bare,
Creating your own sweet atmosphere—
You'll find your reward on the Mondays.

YEA, verily, it is a wholesome urge; a grateful exercise of the mental and physical man; a cure for all the artificial ills that flesh is heir to; for the clubbed and cobwebbed brain of the over earnest seeker after truth, utility, righteousness, place, position, power, wealth or fame; all the eternal and insistent phantoms that pursue the man, and man pursues. The natural man is all the week, perhaps, cabined, cribbed, confined, bemused with books, demeaned with too much greatness, soured, jaundiced, sleepless, careworn; if he retain a gleam of native wisdom, he will seek surcease of heartache on the open road, in the open air, on the Sundays. He will let the ancient vital pagan in his turgid blood bestir itself again. He will get up at leisure as I did on a particular Sunday morning and from the window hear the blast and see the sleety blizzard of a hopeless morning driving from the southeast, while aloft, in the storm factory, ominous clouds are driven swiftly over the gloomy vault of a day in mid-January. Will he anchor by the fireside, already crowded with lively youngsters, or will he go to church? He may pity even that poor slave, the clergyman, who must leave his comfortable study to preach his perfunctory sermon perhaps in—a cauld cauld kirk, an' in't but few, and—amazing imbecility of the people—and the parson—perform yet again that unvarying round of perfect mummery, that bit of consummate acting, the same in fifty thousand churches, on fifty-two days in the year.

There are, of course, secular superstitions almost as silly, and as soothing to a certain class as irritating to others. Take literature and its critics. What perfect play-acting is here also, what inspired drivel, canon, custom, faith; tragedians and comedians all. One is here reminded of a pond of ducks, or a brood of chicks, with their quack-quack, cheep-cheep, yaup-yaup, all the scrape and cackle of the literary farmyard.

Perhaps I am only disgruntled by the disappointment of the dismal day. From such and all other uncharitableness to free me I determined to have my walk. Were I a beggar, I thought, I would first of all solicit old clothes, and hide myself in heaps of them against the winter's flaw; find some lee dykeside, and boil my tea, and eat my crust, feeling thus the freest of the free, enjoying robust gastronomic satisfactions denied to pampered epicures. How the muse has descended! Yet not at all, for your beggar and your king differ but in rags and robes, quite superficial

things. Cunningly have I sought the more sheltered paths, and dodged the storm, and clothed even as some comfortable "gaun-body," I am warm within and awake to all without. Over the white and melting snow of the uplands I have reached an idyllic corner in the wild. I cross a rippling burn, stand a little in the lee, and aloft, above a strangely solemn and steadfast little hill, see the storm-scud racing in full career. At my feet, a white and fallen grass stem, its branches hung with liquid pearls, revealing—

The very law that moulds a tear
And guides the planets in their course.

I am in the presence of the infinite, but with the finite fain to be content. My walk already has done me incalculable good. The solemn little hill, the flying cloud-wrack overhead, the tinkling streamlet, the snowy fields, the happy solitude; and these in warmer fancy contrasted with the leafy glade, the glint of the blue hyacinth and primrose of other seasons—of hope and of memory. But ever present is the Great Consideration: how to be happy, even within the philosophical limits of the sadly sweet Leopardi? We must be warm within, and calmly poised in sanity and ease. Within abides the spell, the charm, the illusion, that colours all without; a subjective sense that yet feeds upon the objective scene. This Book of Nature has been little read, even by Shakespeare. Art is so far but a poor copy of this actual—that is sometimes borne in upon the mind of the most ordinary man with the lightening-flash of natural inspiration; while much that passes for such is mere dissipation and delusion.

The green bramble leaf under the hedgerow mingles with the withered spray of beech or oak; the ivies and the mosses creep and glisten under these; a robin, a black cap, a cutty wren, all perky and unruffled in the storm, hop lightly here and there; the smallest of the three, the wren, chattered at me from a boulder in the stream—the cheeky little egotist! Two or three blackbirds clucked and screamed and darted along behind the hedge—all old friends of mine, exemplars and remembrancers; theirs no written philosophy, no foolish faith, nor mansions in the skies; but worms in Winter and loves and nestlings in the Spring. Man, however, has sought out inventions, and would fain transcend his pagan clay and pagan day, but so far no further has he found his way, nor even "flies" so well as his feathered fellow-mortals.

ANDREW MILLAR.

Acid Drops.

The Rev. F. C. Spurr, we believe, is President-elect of the Free Church Council. Perhaps he is to be elected because he sees farther than most people—or if he does not see farther he sees things that are invisible to others. For instance, he sees that we are on the edge of a great revival of religion, and there will be a tremendous turning of the heart to God. We have heard all of this before; in fact, the tremendous revival is always coming but never arriving. Mr. Spurr was conducting a revival meeting at Baeup, and at these gatherings people go to hear certain things, and would be very much disappointed if they were not said. And Mr. Spurr is too old a hand not to give them what they want. In fact, it seems needless to date this expression of Mr. Spurr's. He has been saying it every year since he has been preaching, and he will say it so long as he keeps on preaching. In the main, it is about all he has to say.

All the same, Mr. Spurr should be careful not to make statements that can be easily disproved. We do not mean that he should confine himself to verifiable truth, that would be too much to either ask or expect of a Christian evangelical preacher. But he should not, as a mere matter of policy, say things that anyone with enough intelligence to stay away from a revival meeting can

easily prove to be untrue. He told his audience that Mr. H. G. Wells, who ten years ago was a Materialist, is now getting back to God. But Mr. Wells was no more a Materialist ten years ago than he is to-day. And "God" is a very elastic term. It means anything or nothing, and with Mr. Wells it means nothing. Moreover, what Mr. Spurr obviously wished his audience to infer was that Mr. Wells was coming back to Christianity. He did not tell them that Mr. Wells, in the book cited by Mr. Spurr, contemptuously refers to the orthodox Christian deity as a "stuffed scarecrow of divinity." But he was quite safe in so misrepresenting Mr. Wells before such an audience.

Again, Mr. Spurr said that Sir Ray Lankester said, when he was asked to write a paper on the decay of Christianity, that so far from religion dying, in his judgment, the future was with those principles that are in Christianity. Now we are quite aware that Sir Ray has given utterance to some very peculiar opinions, some of which are, we believe, indefensible. But we do not believe that Sir Ray ever said anything so stupid as that Christianity was not decaying. And it will be observed that Mr. Spurr does not say that he said that. He merely wishes his audience to infer that Sir Ray Lankester said it. For it all turns on the expression "principles that are in Christianity." Christianity embodies quite a number of things that are no more Christian than they belong to any friendly society or trades union. Does Mr. Spurr wish his audience to believe that Sir Ray Lankester is of opinion that the future lies with the belief in the divinity of Jesus, or the resurrection, or doctrine of vicarious atonement, or the biblical miracles? If he does not mean this, what is the good of quoting Sir Ray to prove that the future is with Christianity? Are these the tactics of the clerical cardsharp, or are they intended to indicate the intellectual level of the flock?

The Salvation Army's "Self Denial" week has been chronicled by our obsequious and time-serving Press. As "the Army's" female soldiers collect from the general public at railway stations and crowded places it almost seems that it is really other people's self-denial after all.

Southwark Diocese officials are asking for a modest £20,000 a year from church people in aid of curates and lay-readers. As the canny Scotsman said, "There's no harm in asking."

This is the season of Lent. Our readers have learned this already from the pastoral letters of several ecclesiastical dignitaries published in the daily Press. There is a very fine touch of irony in the appearance at the same moment, in the religious journals, of numerous letters on the precise meaning of the physical resurrection. Matthew (xxvii. 52-53) seems to have had no doubt about it. After Jesus Christ's resurrection the tombs opened, and "many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised." They actually went into Jerusalem "and appeared unto many." There was a real "physical integument" gripping these saintly hosts, at any rate. It's a pity Matthew didn't get their names and addresses, also a detailed record of their ghostly experiences. But what finally became of them? Did they go back to their tombs, or live out another term of distressing existence in this vale of tears? Dean Alford thinks they went up with Christ at the ascension. We have our own opinion on the subject; but in the meantime, especially as it is the Lenten season, we merely remark that a change on so vast a scale should teach humility to all of us—even to Principal Major and the editor of the *Church Times*.

The *Daily Herald* on March 5 selected for one of its "Great Names" Thomas Paine, the sketch of Paine being written by Ivor Brown. But we wonder why the heading was *Tom Paine*. On reading the article it would appear that the probable reason for this is that Mr. Brown is far from being acquainted with Paine's work and influence, and knows nothing of the objections there are to putting the name in that way. There is a caricature of

Paine's political opinions, a very scant recognition of his world-wide services to humanity, and the absolutely false statement that Paine wrote his *Age of Reason* as a protest against Atheism. The *Age of Reason*, as everyone knows who has read it, is frankly an attack on Christianity. Mr. Brown could never have read the work, and if that is a sample of the information given out by the *Herald* as information on the world's great books, we suggest that they suspend the feature in future. Paine's principal writings can be bought even to-day at a shilling each, and there is no excuse for one who claims to instruct his fellows being ignorant of their nature. Or if a man is ignorant there is no compulsion for him to write about them.

A remarkable letter was read at an inquest at Twickenham on a domestic servant named Edwards, who drowned herself in a bath. It began: "My dearest Jesus, I love you. I promise with great love to be nearer you for ever and ever, Amen. I am very sorry to grieve you." A verdict of suicide whilst insane was recorded. There are, however, quite a lot of people who use similar language. They are sane, as they have need to be.

Mr. E. H. Hayes, in his pamphlet *Children's Worship* (p. 30) published last year, quotes the following from a children's hymn-book, apparently still in use in some English Sunday-schools:—

Life is waning,
Death is gaining,
Crowded is the yawning tomb;
Hands are shaking,
Hearts are breaking,
While the peaceful flowers bloom.

This is from an "anniversary hymn," and we advise the proletarian Sunday-schools to look to their laurels or before long they may have serious rivals in the manufacture of revolutionaries.

At Birmingham recently a number of Communists were prosecuted on a charge of "incitement to commit crime." According to the *Birmingham Post* (March 2), Mr. Wilfred Day, the prosecuting solicitor, said that Communists "incite people first of all to blaspheme." We are not concerned here with the political or economic aspects of Communism, but such an appeal as Mr. Wilfred Day's very easily secures the favour of a court of justice in England, and that fact does concern us very intimately. This attempt, by hook or by crook, to drag a charge of blasphemy into such cases, or to mix it up with the tirades against the proletarian Sunday-schools, should be an object-lesson to those Freethinkers who say that we are only flogging a dead horse.

The question of Sunday games in the public parks is rousing a good deal of discussion in different parts of England. The *Westminster Gazette* (March 2) says that there are 52,000 registered park tennis players, and that to close the tennis courts in the public domain to so many players on their only free day in the week "seems unfair." This is greatly daring in the way of protest, and we advise the *Gazette* to be faithful to its traditions. We are glad to see that the Morecambe Town Council refused, by 14 votes to 5, the application of the Free Church Ministers to insert a clause in the lease of the proposed new golf course prohibiting play on Sundays. One councillor described the application of the "free" churchmen as blackmail. The supporters of the Labour Party in Leeds have also decided to give no countenance to Sabbatarianism, pertinently remarking that "those who conscientiously dislike Sunday tennis need not take part either as players or spectators." The clergy will be astonished, perhaps indignant, to hear that.

We are pleased to see in the *Manchester Guardian* of March 8 a lengthy article by "Artifex" (the name veils a well-known Manchester churchman) on the subject of Blasphemy. He explains that he has been driven to write the article because of several copies of Mr. Cohen's pamphlet sent him by friends, some of them asking

him to deal with the matter. "Artifex" has nothing to say of the pamphlet by way of criticism except that it is "temperate and closely argued," and instead of challenging its statements he is so far complimentary as to remark "I should be very sorry to have to write a reply." That is very nice, but what we should like is either a reply from the religious world, or a more strenuous support given for the abolition of the blasphemy laws. To secure this was the object for which the pamphlet was written.

Of the prosecution itself "Artifex" says that in his opinion the sentence on Mr. Gott was severe, so severe that a harsher word could well be used. And he says:—

Of the absolute inexpediency of such prosecutions I have no doubt at all. I should have supposed that the belief it was possible to meet argument, whether good or bad, by force had been long ago discredited. Any system of belief which needs prisons, and whips, and the force of the police to support it must be weak indeed. Such a sentence as that passed on Gott would win a vast amount of sympathy for the side he supported, no matter what the subject under discussion.....But that is doubly the case when he prisoner is suffering from an attack which professes belief in love, and should choose to be persecuted rather than to persecute. I have good evidence that the treatment of Gott has done more harm to the cause of Christianity, and more good to that of Secularism and Atheism than anything that has happened for the last ten years.

We think that the *Freethinker* and the N. S. S. may claim credit for this. But for these two the prosecution would have worked its will with very little publicity. But we made up our minds that the bigots should have all the publicity possible, and that stupid, or vindictive, or narrow-minded judges like the late Lord Chief Justice (who takes from the country an extra £2,100 per year on his pension for acting as a warming pan for eleven months) and Justice Avory should be exhibited for what they are. It is scandalous that the liberties of men should be at the discretion of people of this stamp, and we hope that the indignation aroused through the publicity given will not be without its effect. We must make the bigots pay, and if the circulation of the *Freethinker* was what it ought to be we would see that they paid the bill in full.

We are often asked where our benevolent and charitable institutions are, and the question usually emanates from men whose "spiritual" personality is about on a par with that of the average Christian Evidence lecturer. Occasionally, however, one comes across a choice instance of that fine Christian charity of the heart which is superior to the benevolence of institutions. At a recent meeting of Burton-on-Trent Guardians, the Rev. Father J. Drinkwater protested against any grants of outdoor relief "to people living immoral lives." He called attention to a case where an unmarried couple with illegitimate children were receiving relief, and reminded the Board that relief to a single woman with illegitimate children was expressly forbidden by the Regulations. It is always one particular kind of "immorality" that makes the liveliest impression on the imagination of the Roman Catholic prelate, and perhaps the same may be said of the Puritanical Protestant. Some of these patrons of exalted moral ideals are evidently prepared to visit the sins of both fathers and mothers upon the children of at least the first generation.

At Peckham recently Mr. J. C. Radwell, and at Streatham Mr. A. W. Joiner, representing the International Bible Students' Association, have been proclaiming that "millions now living will never taste death." Mr. H. James, a Christadelphian, has declared that in "these last days" Jerusalem is to be restored to pre-eminence and glory, and that Russia is suffering retributive justice for persecuting the Jews. If this justice includes the starvation of children it is a dispensation of Providence which reflects little credit on him. But we used to think most men were ahead of their gods, at least morally. We may have to revise this opinion. In the meantime we are being afforded substantial evidence of the value of the Bible as a character-builder.

An ex-priest, Eugene Jung, has been sentenced to death at Strassburg on a charge of attempted murder. Formerly a Strassburg parish priest, Jung was latterly a master at a high school for girls. It is a grim comment on the alleged value of a religious life.

To swear like a bargee has become a proverb. Hence it is curious to hear that the Rev. A. B. Parry Evans is known as "the bargemen's bishop." May we expect a less expansive vocabulary among the converted bargees?

Dean Inge declares that the English people are being transformed into pleasure-loving folk. If this be so, it should sound the knell of the religion of the Man of Sorrows.

An attempt to revive old-fashioned dances is being made, with the full approval of the clergy in Paris, says the *Continental Daily Mail*. The approbation of the clergy seems singularly appropriate. No body of men has ever led people such a dance as priests.

The late Rev. J. Eadon-Eadon, of Westbourne, Sussex, left estate of the value of £46,499. The poor man will never twang a harp in heaven.

For a long time India has been seething with unrest, and during the past week the subject has figured prominently in our newspapers. The purely political aspects of this matter are outside our range. But we note from the *Yorkshire Post* (March 9) that the Government of India is seriously considering proposals for severing the connection between the Church of England and the State. Our contemporary seems to think that the disendowment of the Anglican Church will not weaken it in India. When the English Press ventures an opinion on such questions we expect some such saving clause as that. The bare existence in India of this Church as an "established" institution, drawing some measure of support from the Indian Exchequer, calls for the strongest protest from every fair-minded man and woman. At home the Establishment's influence on the cultural and moral life of the nation is not edifying, to say nothing of its material cost. The very idea of transplanting this institution to India is a concrete lesson in what Christianity is capable of, given the power. This, too, is the universal religion which is to substitute the spirit of Christ for the spirit of caste! In the secular life *noblesse oblige* does apply, occasionally, even in Europe. But where Christianity is concerned, the end justifies the means, and the perquisites of ecclesiastical privilege constitute a very large part of the end.

We referred recently to the death of one of the Peculiar People who refused medical aid during his illness. It is a sign of the mental and moral health of the community that there is so little notice taken of such occurrences. The indifference of the crowd to what stands outside its immediate material interests is expected, but we are not supposed to be all "crowd" in England. Our intellectuals, we presume, are too busy discussing whether souls go east or west when they "pass out" to give any attention to the preservation of life within the body, and to clear away the rubbish that is systematically shot into the minds of defenceless children.

The reverends of the cloth are always presuming to lecture the world as to its needs. The *Liverpool Daily Post* recently published the Lenten pastoral issued to the Roman Catholic churches of the Liverpool Diocese by Archbishop Keating. "The one great necessity of the moment" is "a free and energetic Church." The same issue contains the report of a sermon by Rev. Dr. David S. Cairns, who pleads for Christianity to satisfy "the need of a broken world." We suppose each of the respected admonishers refers to his own particular physis as the panacea for the "present discontents." The other medicine-man is always a dangerous impostor.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

March 19, Leicester; March 26, Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool;
April 9, Huddersfield.

To Correspondents.

J. M. (Bacup).—We are obliged for all you have done to advance the cause and for putting our publications into circulation. That is always a useful kind of service, but with trade as it is at present it is more than usually valuable.

E. HERBERT.—There is no reason whatever why you should not order books directly through any newsagent in the kingdom. And we are willing to supply any responsible bookseller with our books and pamphlets on such terms that they will run no risk whatever of loss.

W. SKATE.—We should be curious to know if your letter was inserted. The article was an exhibition of deplorable ignorance. See "Acid Drops."

W. J. HARDING.—Thanks for cuttings. We do not sacrifice ourselves in working for Freethought. The work is hard but it is agreeable, and it is what we like. And it relieves us from the attentions of the income tax collector. Perhaps he is the one who regrets that we did not take up with something else. We do not.

T. HERSHAL.—Why should we explain why dangerous animals were made? We did not make them, nor do we know that anyone else did. Animals of all sorts exist, and the quality of "dangerous" is very much a matter of point of view. A tiger is a dangerous animal to a man. But a man is a dangerous animal to a sheep. And a Freethinker is a dangerous person to the late seat-warming Lord Chief Justice.

E. A. PHIPSON.—Sorry that we had already refused quite a number of letters on the subject of your communication, and we do not care to reopen the subject. Articles of the kind to which you refer are very acceptable to a number of our readers, and the business of an editor is to remember that he does not run a paper for a few but for all.

W. COLLINS.—Sorry the matter was overlooked. It has now been sent.

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

The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving as long notice as possible.

Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press" and crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."

Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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

The "Freethinker" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office to any part of the world, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—

The United Kingdom.—One year, 17s. 6d.; half year, 8s. 9d.; three months, 4s. 6d.

Foreign and Colonial.—One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

Sugar Plums.

To-day (March 19) Mr. Cohen will lecture at 6.30 in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. He will deal with Bishop Gore's latest book on the *Belief in God*. Next Sunday (March 26) Mr. Cohen visits Liverpool, and on the invitation of the acting minister, the Rev. J. Vint Laughland, he will lecture in Pembroke Chapel. Pembroke Chapel was for many years associated with the Rev. Mr. Aked, and is one of the best known chapels in Liverpool. The subject will be "Freethought, its meaning and its aims." The visit is, we are informed attracting considerable attention in religious circles, no similar

invitation having ever been given to a leading Freethinker, and we hope that our Freethinking friends will also make the visit as widely known as possible.

It was an unusually fine day in Manchester on Sunday last, and that, probably, was responsible for the afternoon meeting being rather smaller than Mr. Cohen is in the habit of having there. But in the evening the hall was quite full, the audience being a record one. Mr. Black acted as chairman at both meetings, and the audience was favoured with some very fine singing from Mr. Fred Crompton, a well-known singer in Manchester. Judging from the hearty applause at the close of each song Mr. Crompton's efforts were fully appreciated, as, indeed, they deserved to be.

Freethinkers will be glad to learn that Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner, Charles Bradlaugh's only surviving child, has been made a Justice of the Peace for the County of London. The administration of the law will, we are sure, gain in both sanity and justice from the appointment. A number of ladies were sworn in at the same time as Mrs. Bonner, but she was the only one who affirmed.

Mr. Lloyd, we are pleased to hear, had two good meetings on Sunday last at Glasgow, at which we are not surprised. There are few men on the platform who can give a better lecture than Mr. Lloyd, and the Glasgow folk know a good thing when they come across one. To-day (March 19) Mr. Lloyd will lecture in the Picture House, Station Street, Birmingham, on "The Bankruptcy of the Christian Religion." The lecture will commence at 7, and admission is free. We fancy this is the last lecture at Birmingham this season, and we hope to hear that the audience is a record one.

Major Edwin Donaldson is the candidate who is opposing Sir Robert Horne for the Hillhead division of Glasgow at the next election. One of our friends put to him the question as to whether he was in favour of the repeal of the Blasphemy laws, and was answered in the affirmative. Mr. W. Paton, Labour candidate for one of the divisions of Ayrshire was also questioned on the same subject and gave an equally satisfactory reply. We hope that our friends all over the country will keep up this questioning, and if they do a good body of men and women should go back to the new Parliament pledged to abolish the Blasphemy laws. But we would impress all who put questions that they should ask the candidates whether they are in favour of the abolition of both statute and common law. Otherwise they may prove themselves as dishonest and as cowardly in the matter as did Mr. Shortt, the present Home Secretary.

We are glad to be able to report that a Bill for the Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws will have been introduced into the House of Commons by the time this issue of the *Freethinker* is in the hands of its readers. We hope to report more fully next week.

The West Ham Branch is holding another of its Social Evenings in Earlham Hall, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, on Saturday, April 1, at 7 o'clock. There will be the usual programme of songs, dances, etc., and all Freethinkers are invited. Admission is free.

We regret that owing to a slip of the pen in a paragraph in this column last week we acknowledged a letter from Mr. as well as from Mrs. Bayfield. It was the name of another correspondent that was intended.

We congratulate Judge Atherley Jones on his protest against the revival of the method of the thumbscrew in connection with prisoners. It appears that the police are using a new kind of cogged handcuff which tightens as a prisoner struggles. In the case under the judge's notice the handcuff had tightened itself so much that it took over an hour to get it off, and it must have been positive

torture to the poor devil who was wearing it. Judge Atherley Jones protested against the use of that kind of handcuffs as being a "most barbarous instrument," and added, "we don't want to go back to the days of thumb-screws." We hope the protest will be noted. Not too many of our judges are graced with ordinary kindness of character when dealing with prisoners, and the way things have been going since we set out on the war, unless the public look out we shall find ourselves suffering under the old German offence of behaving disrespectfully towards officials, with the application of torture if we do not take the punishment thankfully.

We are asked to announce that the Moncure Conway lecture at South Place this year will be delivered by the Hon. Bertrand Russell on March 24. His subject will be "Freethought and Official Propaganda," and the chair will be taken at seven o'clock. Admission will be free, but there are some reserved seats at one shilling each.

Phantasmagoria of Alcohol.

THE soul of Edgar Allen Poe seems to have been whelmed with sorrow, to have plumbed the very nadir of despair, and the tragedy of his life is reflected in his writings. In very truth he could depict the terrible sufferings of the habitual drunkard, the lost one who seeks his remedy by the path of drugs, hedged about as that way is by the arabesques of disordered imagination, and yet in moments of recurrent sanity but a dull, grey, monotonous and soul-destroying road.

His action was alternately vivacious and sullen. His voice varied rapidly from a tremulous indecision (when the animal spirits seemed utterly in abeyance) to that species of energetic concision—that abrupt, weighty, unhurried and hollow-sounding enunciation—that leaden, self-balanced and perfectly modulated guttural utterance, which may be observed in the lost drunkard, or the irreclaimable eater of opium, during the periods of his most intense excitement.

What he describes so poignantly there is no doubt that he had experienced to the last degree. His nervous, high-strung temperament was lost in a life that seemed to provide him nothing but suffering, and his mental bias in favour of the unusual was pushed to further extremes by his use of the very drugs he describes until his mind became a very saturnalia of the horrific.

The unending woe of the alcohol-ridden in his case did but obtrude itself in his writings as the ecstasies of other inebriates have provided prettiness. He could more readily perceive the hollow cheek and hag-ridden brow than the glory of life, and he turned naturally to those ancient works most compatible to his taste, wherefrom he developed that accuracy of spiritual destitution only found in such circumstances as he depicts.

Ancient families, whose line draws to a close through lack of infusion of new blood, provide most readily those queeresses of the mind for which his distorted imagination craved.

He declares that he went to work systematically, adding careful word to careful word, and piling up the effect which was to be produced. He declares that no sculptor could have been more choice in the selection of his instrument, and the result which he obtained would go far to prove his contention.

Through all the fearsome tales runs the same thread of distaste for life in fact, and the stories lean for their support on the artificialities which great wealth and warped intelligence have to provide. Only in the seclusion of those seven chambers of the masquerade could such a ball have taken place, and only with the tearing, rending death outside, at last breaking its way in to rend the masquers, could the mentality of the participators have been kept at such a stretch to break at last.

That is the cause so frequently relied upon. Circumstance of a most unusual character are brought to bear upon persons naturally only to a partial extent able to cope with such incidents. These persons are caught in the grip of a more insane force than that besetting the normal individual, which is more commonly but comic, whereas Poe is all in favour of high tragedy.

Beyond the immediate circumstance is often a ring of indefinable dread, a quivering of the spirit at the unseen and uncomprehended. And this drives the distraught to seek the remedy of opposite effects. Dreaming in the blackness of sorrow for a lost wife leads the husband of Ligiae to wed, with the most appalling and disastrous results a lady of a structure both mental and physical directly opposite to the dead. What satiety of misery he had achieved by seclusion was broken up by the coming of the new wife, who by her very difference raised unfailing memories of her who had passed away. Similarly, the seclusion of his home, the blackness of his corridors, and the grey tinge of the exhalations from his walls drove Usher, in his painting, to portray—

an immensely long and rectangular vault or tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white and without interruption or device. Certain accessory points of the design served well to convey the idea that this excavation lay at an exceeding depth below the surface of the earth. No outlet was observed in any portion of its vast extent, and no torch, or other artificial source of light was discernible, yet a flood of intense rays rolled throughout, and bathed the whole in a ghastly and inappropriate splendour.

The mind of the reader, as well as that of Usher, is impinged throughout the tale upon a sense of bleakness, of desolation, of spiritual perturbation of no ordinary degree, and suddenly by virtue of this picture is flushed at once by a flow of blood brainwards to its complete and utter comprehension of the circumstance of the story. It is as if the very turning point from sullen to vivacious intoxication had been achieved in some monstrous manner.

It would seem almost impossible that the mind capable of so distorting life could have had a happier vein. Yet, in turning to other pages, the glory of nature in its more homely aspects, though far removed from city and human noise, is portrayed with an intensity of devotion only equalled by the ecstasy of the revel in the horrible in which Poe commonly indulges. Even so, his mind leans so much more towards art than to nature that on seeing Landor's cottage he declares that "Its marvellous effect lay altogether in its artistic arrangement as a picture," thus giving the hint that may have led Wilde to some of his most obscure ideas.

Intense pain drowned in intense pacification by drugs has given to minds, highly sensitive and superstrung, the emotions which have had the power of placing before the world pabulum of literary arabesques both before and after Poe, but it would not seem that in any of this type was the sensational gift allied so strongly to that exiguous industry so carefully wrought out in Poe's own show of his method. And rarely has a writer been so uniformly successful in producing a harmony such as to deceive the intelligence of so vast an audience. The truth is perhaps that the world is so accustomed to its everyday aspect of life, that it is tired of the lusty joy so common in such trifles of happiness, and thus the vision of Prometheus, be he a great or little chained soul, twisting in agony at the rending of the eagle's beak, must attract. And Poe was no more a stranger to the beak and claw than he was powerless to set out his visions in a prose to bring them home to the reader.

Working the Oracle.

It is a matter of unbounded satisfaction or profound regret (I really forget which, but it is really one or the other) that many matters which used to scare the people of the olden times clean out of their skin, and impel them to commit suicide to save themselves from slaughter, are now treated with as much contempt as a dead cat or a defeated politician.

F'rinstance, the time was when a ghost was looked upon with a greater amount of respect than a duke, or even a champion pugilist. To-day we laugh the spooks to scorn, and a man would no more think of being scared by the sight of his "father's spirit" than he would by the sight of a long beer. Some years ago I offered £10 for an introduction to a genuine ghost, and another tenner if the "called back" party furnished me with enough information from across the "border" to fill a column, but nothing ever came of it, except a few weeks' retirement on the part of an unscrupulous and unlucky ghost impersonator, whose legs came in contact with a charge of rocksalt from a gun that went off a little before he had time to do so.

Formerly, no old mansion was reckoned to be of any importance unless it had a "ghost's walk" in some part of the grounds, or the picture of some melancholy matron which at certain times stepped out of the frame, and went mooning around the corridors dropping splodges of blood at every step. Nowadays the "ghost's walks" are turned into lawn-tennis courts, or prize poultry-yards, and instead of pictures of murdered dames, most mansion walls are decorated with pictures of Derby winners, or high-kicking maids "mid nodings on."

Nothing struck more terror into the superstitious souls of our great great grandfathers, however, than the sudden appearance of a comet. No sooner did such a stellar stranger appear than some prayerful crank stalked round in his shirt informing one and all that a certain prophecy was about to be fulfilled, and the world would shrivel up like an old boot on a hot stove unless the people repented and wore abominable clothes, and lived upon salt fish and prayed all day and night, with short intermissions to enable them to subscribe to some religious institution of which he was the spiritual boss. As a rule, the bulk of the people did as they were told, but when the dreaded day predicted had passed, and nothing more serious had occurred than the death of the town bull, they began to condemn the comet, and condemn the prophet; and everything jogged smoothly on—till the "next time."

Quite a number of persons still stand in fear of a comet even now, or a vanishing trick like Elijah's famous whirlwind act; for the ignorance of the multitude respecting astronomical matters is as great to-day as it was during the troublesome time of the Pharaohs—a matter which gives rise to much needless alarm and much persecution to unfortunate editors, who are popularly supposed to know everything. When the government has the manliness to make astrology an indictable offence then we shall have relief from these things, and not before. It was not a long while since that some one predicted that the earth would be swamped by a deluge, and then you couldn't borrow an umbrella or a pair of goloshes from anyone. The next inspired idiot said a comet would strike and demolish the earth in a twinkling. Whereupon many excellent people tied their beds and carpets about their persons and put cotton in their ears, and sat down on the cellar floor in dreadful expectation of the shock. Hardly had that alarm passed off when another astronomer came around telling people that the Niagara Falls would be dry in less than nineteen thousand years, and after that nothing would do but people should hurry right over there for a farewell

look, and in less than twenty-four hours there weren't people enough in the district to entertain a Japanese hermit.

Astronomical fellows are always letting loose more or less startling assertions upon their duller brethren, and, apparently, this one-sided game will continue to be played till the end of time. But none of our tuft-hunters would give a twopenny dump to shake the tail of a comet. They would cheerfully give their scalps to be allowed to shake the hand of a duke.

Every schoolboy knows (as the historian would say) of Elijah's memorable razzle-dazzle in the air in his fiery aerial chariot or airship which took the prophet to "his home on high." A comet-like ascension, he did not miss the 'bus either, for, had he done so, he might have tramped it bare-footed along the Milky Way, and have caused "ructions" by kicking his toes against the morning milk cans. Any more flashing comets of that kind (as a sign or a wonder), all the tobacco-chewers are to be killed, also young ladies who wear stays, and men who bet on the wrong horse. If I understand correctly, the only people to be saved are those who drink lemonade out of a dipper, and play whist with their maiden aunts. THE OWL.

Book Chat.

It has been a pleasure to me at various times to direct the attention of the intellectually curious to the work of Mr. Arthur Lynch, and to express my admiration for the versatility of his mind. I believe, however, that he has a certain objection to the word "versatility." Such an objection I can understand if it were applied in the way of derogation. But I use it to express my sense of his mental elasticity, his aptitude for dealing, in a more or less capable fashion, with subjects that are usually thought of as disparate, if not absolutely exclusive. We are not, perhaps, surprised to find him turning with ease from fiction to sociology and scientific literary criticism; but there is something amazing in the elasticity of a mind that is capable at one moment of the artistic creation of a sonnet-sequence, and at another of the close reasoning of an elaborate study in psychology.

Mr. Lynch now turns his attention to moral philosophy. His new book, *Ethics: An Exposition of Principles* (Cassell, 7s. d. net), is based upon his work in psychology, which, he claims, is revolutionary. What is noticeable about all Mr. Lynch's work is that, while claiming to be strictly scientific and impersonal, it is in reality stimulating personal. The temperament of the writer counts for more than he thinks. It makes certainly for strong, vivid writing which is sure to attract the non-scientific reader; but the student of Aristotle and Hume is pretty certain to be irritated or amused by topics dragged in by way of illustration or digression. Such interesting subjects as the physique of Napoleon, ancient Greek and modern English athletes, of the poetry of Dante, Blackham, the Australian wicket-keeper's love of the nightingale, are not, perhaps, strictly in place in a scientific treatise on ethics, at least, if they had to come in, their place was at the foot of the page. Frankly, I am not disposed to find fault with the anecdotal method, but then I make no pretence to be scientific.

The aim of this successor of Herbert Spencer is to establish a scientific system of ethics, one which "shall find in the constitution of the world itself the directives of human action." The earlier systems are, of course, woefully incomplete. They are divided into two groups: the authoritative method dependent on divinity "real" or imputed, and the empirical or academic method which is the method used by all the accredited ethicists up to Mr. Arthur Lynch. In Part I, "Survey and Clearance," Mr. Lynch disposes of his predecessors in moral philosophy. No one of them has a glimpse of the truth vouchsafed to him, not even Spencer, whose doctrine of evolution is inadequate and whose system of ethics needs revision.

Having cleared the way Mr. Lynch expounds his own theory, and proposes as the foundation of morals a "tripod," as he calls it, consisting of three principles of truth, energy and sympathy. These principles are illustrated in Mr. Lynch's best anecdotal manner, but we fail to be impressed by the originality or scientific character of his discovery. They do certainly express his independent and energetic temperament and the bias of the man of action. The impersonality of science, I am afraid, is not in them. I am inclined to agree with M. Lévy-Brühl when he says that a science of ethics does not exist. However that may be, Mr. Lynch himself has no trace of philosophic scepticism and he talks as boldly of a scientific ethic as some critics do of *une critique scientifique*. What is really new and startling to those of us who know Mr. Lynch as a Freethinker is that part of his book which deals with the problem of the immortality of the soul and what he takes to be the purpose of life. Here we find a reversion to a sort of vaguely defined Theism which impairs the value of what he modestly calls the Aletheian (*i.e.*, true) system of ethics.

The Freethinker is, and always was, an ardent lover of liberty, and I have no doubt he will thank me for recommending him a little anthology of revolt in which the world's thinkers and publicists give us the benefit of their wisdom on such subjects as government, law, political power and democracy, State slavery, freedom, self-government and anarchism. The pamphlet of 100 pages is called *For Liberty*, and is published by Messrs. C. W. Daniel, Limited, for sixpence. The quotations, which are not all scrappy, cover a wide field, ranging from Plato to Oscar Wilde, and make up a little book admirably apt to encourage those of us who have the misfortune to take life seriously, and to amuse those who have a measure of healthy cynicism in their mental make-up.

Another little pamphlet issued by Messrs. C. W. Daniel, Limited, is *Reflections on Political Justice* (4d. net), a selection from the writings of Wm. Godwin by Mr. S. C. Potter. Godwin is invaluable for an understanding of the philosophic ideas and ideals of Shelley, and himself is interesting as a precursor of Kropotkin and later philosophic anarchists. To those of my readers who want to know something of Godwin and his disciples I take the opportunity to recommend Mr. H. N. Brailsford's *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle* (Williams and Norgate, 2s. 6d. net).

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

As It Was in Bible Times.

THE following passage from Professor Schweitzer's *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest* (1922) is not an unfair representation of the state of mind of "God's people" in relation to disease, and of that of Jesus and his disciples.

"My name among the natives in Galoa is 'Oganga,' *i.e.*, fetishman. They have no other name for a doctor, as those of their own tribesmen who practise the healing art are all fetishmen. My patients take it as only logical that the man who can heal disease should also have the power of producing it, and that even at a distance. To me it is striking that I should have the reputation of being such a good creature and yet, at the same time, such a dangerous one. That the diseases have some natural cause never occurs to my patients; they attribute them to evil spirits, to malicious human magic, or to the 'worm,' which is their imaginary embodiment of pain of every sort. When they are asked to describe their symptoms, they talk about the worm, telling how he was first in their legs, then got into their head, and from there made his way to their heart; how he then visited their lungs and finally settled in their stomach. All medicines have to be directed to expelling him. If I quiet a colic with tincture of opium, the patient comes next day beaming with joy and tells me the worm has been driven out of his body but is now settled in his head and devouring his brain; will I please give him something to banish the worm from his head also."

(*On the Edge of the Primeval Forest. Experiences and Observations of a Doctor in equatorial Africa*, p. 35.)

A God in a Box.

WHAT blasphemy! the pious will exclaim. A God in a box! How shocking! The wretch who dares to utter such language should be severely punished; the wretch who dares to write it should be hung. Nay, hanging is too good for him; he ought to be burnt, broken on the wheel, or slowly tortured to death.

But soft awhile! The blasphemy is not ours. We did not put this God in a box; the Jews did it. Whatever blasphemy is implied in the title of this Romance must be charged to their account. The Bible warrants every statement we make, and we challenge contradiction. We found this God in a box and did not put him there. We merely lift the lid and show him inside.

It is a veritable fact that Jehovah of the Jews, who became God the Father of Christianity, was originally a lump of stone, or some other fetish, enclosed in a wooden box. His devotees carried him with them in all their wanderings. When they fought, they took him into the battle to ensure victory. He was their star of fortune, their glory, and their pride. While they retained him, and kept him good-humoured, they were prosperous in peace and war; when they provoked him, they were chastised with famine, plague and slaughter; when they lost him they sank under the frown of fate, and became the prey of foreign conquest or civil dissension. They gave him, as meat and drink, the flesh and blood of animals; and sometimes his altars were polluted with a darker sacrifice of human life. Like all fetishes, he was *tabu* except to the priests. No layman was suffered to approach him; invading his privacy was sacrilege, and punished with instant death.

When the Jews carried and carted Jahveh (the proper form of Jehovah) from place to place, they were in a very low state of culture. They had not advanced beyond fetish-worship, which is the primitive form of religion. It might easily be inferred, from the fourth verse of the third chapter of Hosea, even if there were no other evidence, that the worship of teraphim, or images, was a feature of primitive Judaism. But we are not confined to this source of information. When Jacob made tracks from Uncle Laban's with both his daughters and all his sheep and cattle worth having, the old man had to go a seven days' journey after them to recover his gods. Rachael had stolen the whole lot, without leaving her father a single God to worship. Laban hunted high and low for his teraphim, but never found them; for his cunning slut of a daughter covered them over, and while he searched her tent she sat upon them—hatching.

Jahveh also was no doubt a portable family god. He first calls himself the god of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Afterwards he calls himself the god of Israel—that is, of the descendants of these patriarchs. He never calls himself the God of all mankind. On the contrary, he admits the existence of other gods, and is openly jealous of them. The Jews, in turn, always speak of him as *our* god. He was their own Jahveh. They "ran" him, and were ready to back him against the field.

We are first introduced to this God in a Box in the twenty-fifth of Exodus. Jahveh was sick and tired of roaming about, and having casual interviews with his prophet in a burning bush, in a public-house,¹ or on the top of a hill. He determined to settle down and dwell with his people. Moses was instructed, therefore, to build him a residence. He was to have a tent all to himself, a first-class article, made of the very best stuff; fine linen of various colours, badgers' skins, rams' skins, and goats' hair; with brass and silver for the fittings, and gold and jewels for the decorations. Inside the tent, which our English version dignifies with the name of tabernacle, there was to be placed a nice snug box for him to lie in, instead of squatting ignominiously on the floor. The Bible calls it an ark, but the Hebrew word so translated means a box, a mummy case, or a treasure chest. He was also to be supplied with furniture and domestic utensils; a wooden table overlaid with gold, three feet long, eighteen inches broad, and two feet three inches high, with golden dishes, covers, spoons, and bowls; and a golden candlestick bearing seven lights, with golden tongs and snuff-dishes. Altogether it was a very genteel estab-

¹ The Lord met Moses at an inn. See Exodus iv. 24.

lishment for a bachelor god. When Jahveh came to inspect it he said it would do capitally, and took immediate possession. Directly he entered it the place was filled with smoke; a fact which surprises those who fancy the Devil is the sole dealer in that commodity. No doubt Jahveh found it very useful. His priests, who were accustomed to incense, could stand the fume, but intruders were smoked out.

The priests were ordered to keep some shewbread always on that table, so that he might have a snack at any time. This is a common thing with fetish worshippers. Tylor says that pots and other necessaries are put in the fetish huts still, but "the principal thing in the hut is the stool for the fetish to sit on, and there is a little bottle of brandy always ready for him."² Probably, although it is not so stated, the Jewish priests gave Jahveh a drop of something to drink; for it was a thirsty climate, and the old fellow often betrayed a sanguinary violence of temper, which too often springs from intoxication. There is, indeed, a suggestion of this in Judges ix. 13, where we read of "wine which cheereth God and man."

The dimensions of the table were in keeping with those of the ark, which was three feet nine long, two feet three broad, and two feet three deep. That was the old deity's size.

We might wonder how Christians could think that God Almighty ever got inside such a box, if we did not know that they still imagine him to be in a little piece of bread.

Now what was really inside that box? We will not indulge in conjecture, nor cite "infidel" authors, but go at once to a great Dutch scholar, who has lectured on the religions of the world before the cream of Biblical students in London and the University of Oxford.

When we observe how the ark was treated and what effects were ascribed to it, it becomes almost certain that it was held to be the *abode* of Jahveh, so that he, in some way or other, was himself present in it. Then only is it that we can explain the desire of the Israelites to have the ark with them in their army, their joy at its arrival, and its solemn conveyance to the new capital of the empire in David's reign. Now was the ark empty, or did it contain a *stone*, Jahveh's real abode, of which the ark was only the repository? This we do not know, although the latter opinion, in conjunction with the later accounts of the Pentateuch, appears to us to possess great probability.³

Mr. Grant Allen supports the same view in a very outspoken article in one of our leading magazines. He concludes as follows:—

I do not see how we can easily avoid the obvious inference that Jahveh, the god of the Hebrews, the god of Abraham, and of Isaac and of Jacob, the god who later became sublimated and etherealized into the God of Christianity, was in his origin nothing more or less than the ancestral fetish-stone of the people of Israel, however sculptured, and perhaps in the very last resort of all the monumental pillar of some early Semitic sheikh or chieftain.⁴

The last suggestion is doubtful. Wilkinson says that some of the Egyptian arks contained the emblem of Life and Stability, and the sacred stone of the Hebrews may also have been a sexual symbol.

More orthodox English writers treat the subject with euphemisms. Eadie says: "This sacred chest was the awful emblem of the Jewish religion." The *Speaker's Commentary* says: "Now he was ready visibly to testify that he made his abode with them. He claimed to have a dwelling for himself." Old Bishop Patrick says: "It was his cabinet, as we now speak, into which none entered but himself."

Kuenen's surmise is strengthened by all our knowledge of fetishism. At each end of the ark was a cherub, evidently a sacred fowl of some kind, facing inwards, and bending down over the ark. This is the attitude of worship. They were adoring the image within.

Being covered with gold, the ark looked like solid metal, though it was really made of slittim wood, according to Jahveh's directions. Kimchi says that slittim

wood is the best kind of cedar. Aben Ezra says it is a sacred wood that grows in the wilderness by Sinai. Smith's *Bible Dictionary* describes it as an acacia. Jerome, in his commentary on Isaiah xl. calls it *lignum imputribile*, an incorruptible wood. And if he is right the ark may yet turn up somewhere.

The ark was topped by a mercy seat of pure gold. "There," said the Lord to Moses, "I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims." And in David's time he is described as "the Lord of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims."⁵ Clearly he fixed himself there at communion time.

Now what was the mercy seat? It was simply the lid of the box. The Hebrew *Kapporeth* means to cover, and the holy of holies is called the house of the Kapporeth.

Here then the whole case lies in a nutshell. If Jehovah and God the Father are indeed the same, we may say to the Christians—your God was once carried about in a box, and used to get out and sit on the cover.

It is highly probable that the Jews borrowed their ideas of an ark from the Egyptians. Sir John Gardner Wilkinson⁶ says that "one of the most important ceremonies was the procession of shrines," which is mentioned in the Rosetta stone, and frequently represented on the walls of the temples. The lesser shrine was an ark or sacred boat. Like the Jewish ark, it was borne by priests. It was also carried in the same way, by means of staves passed through metal rings at the side. Wilkinson further remarks that the wings of two figures of the goddess Thmei or Truth, overshadowing the sacred beetle of the sun, contained in some of the Egyptian arks, "call to mind the cherubim of the Jews."⁷ The chosen people seem to have "borrowed of the Egyptians" in more senses than one.

According to Plutarch the body of Osiris was enclosed in the Egyptian chest, or ark, in the month of *Athyra*, when the sun was in the sign of the Scorpion. This ceremony was performed on the seventeenth day of the month, and on the night of the nineteenth the priests proclaimed that the lost Osiris was refund. His resurrection, like that of Christ, was on the third day.⁸ Apuleius also mentions the Egyptian ark carried about by the priests.

Pausanias informs us that the simulacrum of Bacchus was found in an ark, which was said to be the work of Vulcan, and which was the gift of Jupiter to Dardanus. It appears from Eusebius that the Phœnicians had an ark, or chest, before which they celebrated the mysteries of the *Cabiri*. Suidas seems to indicate that chests or arks, were sacred to Bacchus, and to the Goddesses, Ceres and Proserpine.⁹

The Bible is remarkably precise in its details as to the ark. It even informs us who made it. There was only one man in all Israel whom Jahveh thought fit for the job. This was Bezaleel, of the tribe of Judah, a kind of jack-of-all-trades, and what he did not know the Lord taught him. He wove the linen, tanned the skins, carved the wood, made the brass fittings, beat the gold, cut the stones, and fixed up everything. G. W. FOOTE.

(To be Concluded.)

Correspondence.

"THE OTHER SIDE OF DEATH."
TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Referring to the Rev. E. Lyttelton's letter in this week's *Freethinker*, I cannot quite see that it would be an unpardonable error to begin an enquiry with a conviction that it is impossible for an object to be visible to the normal eye, unless that object possess sufficient solidity to intercept rays of light, and that it is impossible for an object (albeit, a "spirit") to possess form and tangibility without likewise possessing weight and cohesiveness to resist atmospheric pressure. Your correspondent would probably agree with me that arguments based upon a total disregard of natural laws are not likely to be very convincing.

⁵ Samuel vi. 2.

⁶ *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Massey, *Natural Genesis*, vol. ii., p. 443.

⁹ Drummond, *Oedipus Judaicus*, p. 96.

¹ *Primitive Culture*, vol. ii., p. 144.

² Kuenen, *Religion of Israel*, vol. i., p. 233.

³ *Fortnightly Review* ("Sacred Stones"), Jan., 1890. Since included in *The Evolution of the Idea of God*. See pp. 125, 126.

I think your correspondent should be able to concede that the lawyer who imagined he had touched materialized spirits may have been suffering badly from an "à priori conviction" that disembodied spirits do actually exist and are able to make themselves tangible or visible by assimilating solid matter in some unexplained way unknown to chemists or physicists. Your correspondent will see that we must either regard this mental attitude as a disqualification, or we must give serious consideration to the à posteriori convictions of the persons (not few in number) who, having carefully examined the evidence placed before them, found themselves forced to conclude that self-deception was the chief if not the only factor in the production of that evidence.

It has not been my good fortune to meet, but I may be permitted to admire, the "able philosopher and logician" who testifies that the existence of spirits with whom communication is possible is "scientifically proved up to the hilt." But why does your correspondent (if guiltless of irony) describe his informant as "unimaginative"? Surely, the person who is capable of expressing a very questionable opinion in the terms of incontrovertible fact must possess a highly flexible imagination of which any professional fictionist might well be proud!

I feel sure that the Rev. E. Lyttelton will always receive the utmost courtesy from your readers, and he will not pay them the doubtful compliment of supposing that they can accept an *ipse dixit* as proof of anything.

When the actual existence of the disembodied "spirit" has been conclusively proved it will be quite time to go into the less important question of its alleged performances. At present, so far as reliable information goes, it seems to belong to the same natural order as a certain "Mrs. Harris," concerning whose existence your correspondent may remember one Betsy Prig's emphatic opinion.

EDWARD GRANVILLE ELIOT.

SIR,—Dr. Lyttelton's poser to you in this week's *Freethinker* under the above heading should be a warning to you to be more careful when next you try to prove that there are no witches now, and that there were none in Biblical times or since. You must be scientific and start with a supposition that anything is possible or that anything can happen, and that for all you know your office air may be full of ghosts. For instance, if you want to solve the mathematical problem of the Trinity it is no use your starting with such an exploded belief that twice two make five (or is it four, I forget, and I haven't the multiplication table handy). Be scientific, please, and remember that Dr. Lyttelton, having been Headmaster of a great school, is justly entitled to be scientifically uncertain of anything. I could also name a lot of very hard-headed people, some of them smart butchers in business, expecting any moment the Second Coming of Christ, who believe in ghosts.

M. STEINBERGER.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday and be marked "Lecture Notice" if not sent on post-card.

LONDON.—INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Johnson's Dancing Academy, 241 Marylebone Road, near Edgware Road). No Meeting. Discussion Circle meets every Wednesday at 7.30, "Coronet" Hotel, Soho Street, W.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Pancras Reform Club, 15 Victoria Road, N.W., off Kentish Town Road): 7.30, Mrs. Margaret Wynne Nevinson, J.P., "The League of Nations' General Principles."

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W. 9, three minutes from Kennington Oval Tube Station and Kennington Gate): 7, Mr. F. Shaller, "Christianity and Woman."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E. C. 2): 11, Hon. Mrs. Bertrand Russell, "Rise of Secular Ethics in the Eighteenth Century."

COUNTRY.—INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Picture House, Station Street): 7, Mr. J. T. Lloyd, "The Bankruptcy of the Christian Religion."

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (19 Lowerhead Row, Leeds, Youngman's): 7, Mr. Arthur Page, "The Latest Wireless Developments, with Practical Demonstration."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "The Foundations of Faith, with special reference to Bishop Gore's *Belief in God*."

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