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## Views and Opinions.

### Do We Need a Religion?

I am indebted to a friend for a cutting from a recent issue of the *Manchester Daily Dispatch* containing an article by Professor Julian Huxley on "Scientific Minds and Religion"—an article I should otherwise have missed seeing. The editor is good enough to add a note to the article stating that it shows the need for religion felt by a "Rationalist," and also explains that Professor Huxley is of opinion that the time has come for "Rationalism" to become constructive. I do not know whether I ought to call myself a Rationalist or not; it is not a name I care for as it seems to cover almost anyone from a liberal Roman Catholic to an avowed Atheist, and I have a constitutional dislike to names and words that may mean anything and usually mean nothing. But if I do come under the heading of Rationalist, then all I can say is that the last thing in the world I feel the need of—so long as the word is used with due regard for its essential meaning and its historic implications—is a religion. I never knew a good religion, although there are religions with varying degrees of badness. And the distinction between constructive and destructive, when used with regard to Freethought propaganda, strikes me as mere verbiage or cant, when it is not used as a cover against the assaults of the religious world. For there has never been a Freethought propaganda that has been wholly destructive; and there has never been a so-called constructive propaganda that was not at the same time destructive. Constructive and destructive are not antithetical terms at all. They are two sides of the one process. A purely destructive attack on the Christian religion, for example, would take the form of a man standing in the public street and shouting "Christianity is not true!" And that does not occur. Every attack on religion is accompanied by reasons justifying the attack, and that obviously means supplanting false teaching with what is considered the truth. Professor Huxley may be a very eminent biologist, but he clearly has a deal to learn concerning the nature and history of Freethinking propaganda.

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### That "Blessed Word."

Professor Huxley points out, quite properly, that science leaves no room for a personal God. That recalls a similar sentence by his famous father, only the

father had the clarity of mind to point out that a personal God was the only kind of God that mattered. A God that stands merely as the symbol for an unknown and impersonal force is not a God at all. It is a mere name; it does not indicate thinking, but its absence. It cannot be called "destructive" because one cannot destroy with a word that means nothing, and it is certainly not constructive, because it adds nothing to the knowledge we already have. Again, when we are told that "an Absolute God" (his father would have said that the capitals were used as bear-skin caps are worn by the Grenadiers—to frighten people) "is by the nature of things unknowable," I beg to say that it is not unknowable, it is simply nonsense. For a proposition to become an object of thought it must be thinkable, and an unknowable thing cannot be thought about and thus be made the subject of either affirmation or denial. A thing may be unknown, but so far as it is thought about it is as the possibly known. An Absolute God is the illegitimate offspring of a bastard theology and a false metaphysic. It has no greater intelligibility than a four-sided circle, and discussing its possibility is to make the theist a present of the first game of the rubber.

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### Why Not Rome?

Having got rid of that peculiar creation, an Absolute God, Professor Huxley proceeds on his search for a new religion which he as a "Rationalist" desires, and evolves something which he flatters himself constitutes the essence of religion, for he says "The opposition to-day is not between religion and no religion, but between two different formulations of religion." And here is the magic formula that is to make the lion of rational criticism lie down with the lamb of historic religion:—

Religious realities are permanent. There are permanent powers in the universe that act upon man's life; there is in man's mind the permanent capacity for reverence, awe, and mystical experience, the permanent need for an authority greater than the authority of an individual, a race, or an epoch, the desire to bring into inner harmony with external facts, the necessity for mediation by specially gifted souls to the average man.

Now so far as I understand what Professor Huxley is driving at, it seems to me that this formula would suit admirably some of the more liberal sections of the Roman Catholic Church. They will be quite with him in the assertion that religious realities are permanent, that man has the capacity for mystical experience (which is seldom more than a flood of feeling which the subject has neither the knowledge nor the desire to analyse), that man needs an authority greater than is supplied by a race, or an epoch, and also that he needs someone to mediate between him and the "permanent powers in the universe." It appears to me that Professor Huxley is going a long way round to find what the Roman Church in some of its aspects already provides. I can quite assure him that he will find nothing like this in a Freethought that has—so to speak—become aware of itself.

### What is Religion?

To come to closer quarters. What are the religious realities that are permanent? If we are to trust scientific investigators into the origins of religion—and unless we are to find the realities of things in their origins I hardly know where to look for them—the very essence of religion consists in belief in those supernatural beings which are believed to control the life of the savage, as well as to control all that we mean by Nature. The father of modern anthropology, Professor Tylor, did indeed define the essence of religion as consisting in a belief in the supernatural, and, using the word “supernatural” with the necessary understanding, I have yet to come across a more honest definition or one that is in closer accord with the facts. And I gather from some sentences in Professor Huxley’s article that he accepts the account which the anthropologists give of the origin of religious ideas, and recognizes that the gods owe their existence to man’s anthropomorphizing natural forces and endowing them with his own capacities. So much we hold in common. But if the gods owe their existence to man’s misunderstanding of the nature of the forces at work around him, if the gods actually represent conclusions drawn from inadmissible premises, what becomes of the conclusions once the premises are rejected? The gods actually then represent what Tylor well called them, a psychological blunder. You confess their origin in the ignorance of primitive humanity once you admit the account which scientific investigators give. You may reject that account and retain some sort of a god; but you simply cannot have both. And once the gods, and the raw material of superstition out of which the gods are made, are rejected, it is idle to talk of the permanent realities of religion. One might as reasonably talk of the permanent realities underlying the belief that certain old women travelled through the air on broomsticks. And, indeed, it has a permanent reality in the fear and ignorance and credulity of uninstructed mankind.

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### Some Verbal Narcotics.

All the rest of the qualities that Professor Huxley drags in as illustrating the permanent realities of religion have no more to do with the essentials of religious belief than have the fluctuations of the Stock Exchange. Reverence and awe have no essential connection with religion, and that fashionable expression “mystical experience” means no more than a flood of feeling which the subject either does not understand or does not stay to analyse. Dr. Crichton-Browne found many of these “mystical experiences” to be the penumbral forerunners of an epileptic attack, and John Addington Symonds found nitrous oxide a quite effective method of entering that realm of mystical experience which Professor Huxley finds an essential of religion. As to the need for an authority, I willingly concede that the imposition of authority has always been a feature of all religion, but that is merely because a religion once established is bound to guard itself against criticism, and it has no other guard save authority. But whatever permanent authority man needs or feels must come from the race and from no other source. Unnumbered generations of social life, with its continuous eliminations, developments and modifications, have been moulding man’s nature in the one direction. He is born into a State where customs and beliefs and institutions meet him and impose upon him their authority. His nature is so moulded that willy-nilly he responds to the calls and the promptings of this larger social life, and his sense of a larger, deeper life is no more than the racial call to a nature that has been moulded for response. The phenomenon contains nothing more religious or more “mystical” than this, and it is a pity that Pro-

fessor Huxley did not spend the time to carefully analyse the factors of the problem before him, instead of encouraging the religious world by proclaiming the need felt by a “Rationalist” for a religion. The need is quite imaginary, and in any case is no more than a confession of a personal idiosyncrasy. Freethought in general is, I hope, made of sterner stuff.

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### Need We Sell the Pass?

I confess that one gets a little tired of the anxiety of a certain class of people to proclaim that Christians have always been right about essentials, and Freethinkers always in the wrong, save for the more superficial and less important things. For that is really what it always amounts to. All this talk about the essential realities of religion amounts to saying to the religious world, “You have always been right in assuming the existence of a God, and a soul, and perhaps in a future life, but you have been wrong in the form in which you have presented these great truths to the world.” And to the Freethinker it says, “You have been correct in your assault on religion, but only so far as superficial things are concerned. In the deeper aspects of life the religious world has been on surer ground, and has grasped a deeper and more fundamental truth. You were right about the character of the clergy, but not about the things for which the clergy stood; right in denouncing the Genesiac story of creation, but wrong in rejecting the ‘permanent reality’ illustrated by that story.” That is a very pretty way of making peace with the world of respectable theology, and one reflects that peace may always be made with an enemy by giving all he demands. But I do not believe that Freethinkers so ill-understood their case, nor do I believe that theologians have had such a profound grasp of the “permanent realities” as Professor Huxley’s harmonizing would have us assume. The nature of religion is indicated in its origin, its influence by its history, and its condemnation by both. Freethinkers have no need of a religion. What is needed is intellectual clarity and moral courage. These qualities enabled our forerunners to win victory in the past, and it ill becomes their successors to “sell the pass” when victory is so near.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## “The Value of Christianity.”

THE Rev. A. C. Headlam, D.D., Regius Professor of Divinity and Canon of Christ Church, Oxford, is an exceedingly able and well-known Anglican theologian, and was for several years Principal of King’s College, London. He is also a voluminous writer on Biblical criticism, and was joint author with the late Professor Sanday of a commentary on the Epistle to the Romans. It necessarily follows that he is eminently qualified to undertake the duties of a Christian apologist, and that if he does not succeed in the discharge of those duties, no one else will or can. In a sermon recently preached in St. Mary’s, Oxford, which appeared in the *Guardian* of October 27, Dr. Headlam endeavours to prove the divinity of Christianity by its fruits in the world. To this end he institutes a comparison between Christianity and Mohammedanism; but, unfortunately, the comparison is vitiated by a wholly unjustifiable bias in favour of the former. It would be out of place here to discuss the political aspect of the late war between Greece and Turkey; but it is undeniable that the cause of the war was King Constantine’s mad dream of Greek imperialism, and that the atrocities committed by the Greek troops were fully as horrible and numerous as, if not more so than, those perpetrated by the Turks. Furthermore, ac-

ording to the best available evidence, it was Greeks, not Turks, who set Smyrna on fire. As Mr. Garvin well says: "Mr. Lloyd George, after Constantine's return, not only backed a wrong horse; he backed a dead one. Stone dead." Dr. Headlam enlarges upon the brutal manner in which the Moslem makes war; but has he forgotten how the Christian makes war? To say the very least, there is not much to choose between the two methods. Dr. Headlam asserts that "Mohammedanism almost always has meant the consecration of massacre"; but has not Christianity almost always meant the same thing in its treatment of Pagans, heretics, and inferior races? Did not Pope Sylvester II call the Saracens "Sons of the Destroyer Satan," and invoke the Church universal to rise up against them? Did not Pope Urban II in his memorable speech at the Council of Clermont "consecrate massacre"? The Crusaders were assured, in God's name, that whatever they might do in the attempt to smash the Infidels would be right and praiseworthy. Now listen to Dean Milman's testimony:—

No barbarian, no infidel, no Saracen, ever perpetrated such wanton and cold-blooded atrocities of cruelty as the wearers of the Cross of Christ (who, it is said, had fallen on their knees and burst into a pious hymn at the first view of the Holy City) on the capture of that city. Murder was mercy; rape, tenderness; simple plunder the mere assertion of the conquerors' right. Children were seized by their legs, some of them plucked from their mothers' breasts, and dashed against the walls, or whirled from the battlements. Others were obliged to leap from the walls; some were tortured, roasted by slow fires. They ripped up prisoners to see if they had swallowed gold. Of 70,000 Saracens there were not left enough to bury the dead; poor Christians were hired to perform the office. Everyone surprised in the Temple was slaughtered, till the reek from the dead bodies drove away the slayers. The Jews were burned alive in their synagogue. Even the day after, all who had taken refuge on the roofs, notwithstanding Tancred's resistance, were hewn to pieces. Still later, the few Saracens who had escaped (not excepting babes of a year old were put to death to avenge the insults to the dead, and lest they should swell the numbers of the advancing Egyptian army. The ghost of Bishop Adhemur de Puy, the Legate (he had died of the plague at Antioch) was seen in his sacerdotal habits partaking in the triumph, not arresting the carnage (*Latin Christianity*, Vol. IV, pp. 188-9).

That monstrous massacre had been consecrated beforehand by the Pope, and the cited account of it is from the pen of a dignitary of Dr. Headlam's own Church.

Dr. Headlam proceeds to contrast Moslem and Christian rule. It is not our desire to applaud the Turkish method of governing, but we are bound to protest against the reverend gentleman's emphasis on the contrast between it and the Christian. America is a Christian country; but does Dr. Headlam dare to justify its conduct towards the Indians who are steadily becoming an extinct race? Great Britain glories in being a Christian country; but has he the temerity to defend the manœuvres by which it obtained possession of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal Republic? Does he approve of the meagre justice meted out to the coloured races in the various states of South Africa, or of the wicked intrigues by which the Matabeles and Mashonas were dispossessed within living memory? He may affirm that British rule is better than any other, which may or may not be true; but that would be begging the question at issue, which is the value of Christianity estimated by its fruits. We may come nearer home still and ask the Professor whether or not he regards the existing social conditions in this country as a worthy fruit of the Chris-

tian religion? It is easy enough to decry the Soviet rule in Russia, about which he knows so little beyond that it is conducted on non-Christian lines, which, after all, is about the sole argument used against it. We are surprised to find that even Dr. Headlam has the audacity to put in a good word for the rule of the Tsars, tyrannical and desperately cruel though it was, merely on the ground that it was Christian, and to denounce that of the Soviets simply because it is not Christian.

Dr. Headlam admits and deplors the fact that "throughout the whole of Europe there has been in recent years a tendency to repudiate the claims of Christianity alike as an intellectual, a religious, and a moral system"; but he is radically mistaken when he states that "militarism tried to divorce itself from the rules of Christian morality." This was not true even of German militarism before the World War, its teaching being that the rules of Christian morality apply only to individuals in their social life, and not to states in their relations to one another. The truth is that organized Christianity is rooted and grounded in militarism. Is it not a fact that by far the majority of persons immortalized in our cathedrals are distinguished warriors? Time was when conquered barbarians consented to accept Christian baptism rather than meet death at the point of the sword. Yes, Christianity and militarism naturally go together, while mankind are getting tired of both and attempting to oust them. This is in part admitted by the Professor:—

We are seriously wondering whether our old civilization can stand. If I was to attempt to characterize the state of Europe at the present day, I should say that a large section of its people have disowned their allegiance to the Christian religion, and are attempting to live without its assistance, and that the result is not satisfactory. What I would put to you is that our modern civilization has been the creation of Christianity and the Christian spirit, that it cannot exist without its support, and that the reason why it is trembling in the balance is that we have been faithless to Christianity.

We are in substantial agreement with that extract, especially with the statement that modern civilization is a fruit of Christianity. So it undoubtedly is, and both are doomed to pass away together to make room for the modern human spirit which is beginning in earnest to assert itself. So far it has never had a chance, but is at last slowly creating its chance. Humanity is working its way to the front, and when it gets there truth and righteousness shall rule. Dr. Headlam recognizes the fact that "Christianity does not condemn wars, any more than it condemns an earthquake; it does not necessarily seek to avoid war." Of the truth of that admission history supplies all-convincing evidence. And yet the clergy declared, while the war was on, that when it ended there would be an end to war for ever and Christianity would be all-triumphant. That prophecy has not been and is not likely to be soon fulfilled. Dr. Headlam is nearer the truth than those clergy were; and it is becoming clearer to all how essentially powerless for good Christianity really is, while many are of opinion that the only hope of the world lies in its complete disappearance.

Dr. Headlam closes his sermon on a humanistic note. The meaning of Christianity, he tells us, is extremely practical, the only course it puts before men being, "to do righteously, whatever be the consequence." But, surely, there is nothing distinctively Christian about that course. It is the course insisted on in all the great religions. Buddhism recommends it on purely Atheistical lines, and Confucianism does so on almost the same lines. The same thing is true of Secularism, which is a philosophy of life for

this world alone. What Professor Headlam calls the way of Jesus Christ has proved a notorious failure. The only way destined to succeed and that cannot fail is the way of Reason, which recognizes the natural brotherhood and solidarity of mankind, and which insists upon equal justice and fairplay to all. But reason is in fetters as long as supernatural belief holds the field and the next world is regarded as the only place in which perfect human relationships can be realized.

J. T. LLOYD.

## Freedom and the Press Gang.

Miching mallechs, this means mischief.

—Shakespeare, "Hamlet."

A drop of ink makes millions think.

—Byron.

NEWSPAPERS are less free and outspoken than they used to be. The power of the editor and the writers has been constantly diminishing of late years, and the power of the commercially-minded proprietors constantly and steadily increasing. All have, in their turn, become the slaves of the advertisement manager.

Journalists can neither do justice to themselves nor serve the public honestly in a Press dominated by advertisers and vested interests. In spite of their rivalry, the British newspapers are of one mind in suppressing advanced thought, which is understood to be fatal to fat dividends and bonuses. The conspiracy against Freethought is passing wonderful. Editors devote columns to the most disgusting murder cases, and report verbatim all the salacious details of divorce and police court cases. In the summer, when space is plentiful and must be filled, there is always the sea-serpent and the big gooseberry. In the midst of the Great War room was found in the attenuated newspapers for circumstantial accounts of "angels" on horseback on the battlefields, or of the miraculous happenings to stone statues of the Madonna. Let there be no mistake on this point. The writers of this trash do not all believe it. It is not entirely due to fanaticism or ignorance, but is simply done to tickle the ears of the groundlings and to promote huge circulations. It is, in the last analysis, a matter of business, although it is but a sorry trade. Journalists, even in Fleet Street, know better than that Freethinkers are weak, foolish, and ill-conditioned persons, but they wish to curry favour with the many-headed orthodox. The imbecilities of the Bishop of London, and other clergymen similarly afflicted, are reported nearly every week in the newspapers, but the leaders of Freethought seldom have a line devoted to them, unless it takes the form of abuse.

The result is that readers of newspapers, of whom there are millions, are kept in blissful ignorance of the intellectual ferment that goes on outside the very narrow limits of the so-called "respectable" Press; that is the Press which is first and last a money-making concern. Journalists serve proprietors of newspapers, individuals, or syndicates. They may be ever so ignorant, ever so shallow, and ever so disreputable; it is enough if they can write in an attractive way and flatter the prejudices and passions of their readers. They are also irresponsible, and after they have fomented enmities, flattered vested interests, written "puffs" for advertisers, sold their pens to the highest bidder, no one can bring them to book. Personally unknown, merged in the identity of a newspaper, they are nothing to the world.

Newspapers to-day are solely commercial propositions. The "glorious free Press" of Old England is one of the most brazen impositions of the age. It bears less relation to truth than the poster and the circus. It exists to make money, by fair means or otherwise, but to make money. It exists to pervert

and corrupt the public mind, as far as possible, in favour of certain interests which are never openly stated. It is simply the prostitution of the pen.

The only really free Press in England consists of a mere handful of journals founded and maintained for the promotion and defence of principles. They have comparatively small circulations, they derive tiny revenues from advertisements, and that they live at all is a tribute to the power of conviction and the talents and personalities of their editors. Journals of this type have enormous difficulties to contend against. They are starved by the neglect of advertisers, and they are subjected to a boycott which prevents them reaching more than a mere fraction of their potential purchasers. They are perpetually between the proverbial devil and the deep sea, and their existence is more marvellous than any miracle mentioned in any of the sacred books of the East.

As an example of the difficulties of conducting advanced periodicals, it is no secret that thousands of pounds were spent on the *National Reformer* during its career, and it fell on evil days at last. The arresting personality of Charles Bradlaugh could not make the paper a commercial success. The *Agnostic Journal* had a chequered life, and even the talents of its editor could not make his paper pay without subsidies from his readers. And if two such men with deserved reputations could not make such papers commercial successes, how is the thing to be done at all?

Freethought in this country is represented in the popular Press by the *Freethinker*. A wider circulation for this journal is the best antidote to the conspiracy of silence and misrepresentation of the money-making Press. Let every reader introduce it to as many people as possible.

MIMNERMUS.

## Pagan and Christian Civilization.

### VIII.

(Continued from page 710.)

Horace mentions the two sons of Quintus Arrius, who used to feed on expensive nightingales. The variations in the accounts of these and similar anecdotes show that the details are untrustworthy, and that their only value consists in the general credence they obtained. The frequent repetition of such stories (including that of Cleopatra's pearl) has led to the conclusion that such incidents were common. But in reality these "solecisms of luxury" were considered abnormal even then..... These incidents no more illustrate contemporary luxury than the luxury of the eighteenth century is indicated by a Prince di Conti, who bestrews the ink of a letter with diamond dust, or the daughters of Tepper, a Warsaw banker, who in 1790 had their coffee made on a sandalwood fire.—Friedländer, "Roman Life and Manners Under the Early Empire," Vol. 2, p. 141.

CHRISTIAN apologists are never tired of dwelling upon the extravagant luxury of Pagan Rome, they cite the testimony of Seneca, Pliny the elder, and other Pagans, who deplored and denounced the growth of luxury in their times. But, as Friedländer points out, a source of error common to many modern writers is the unreserved assent to the condemnation of certain forms of luxury, which further examination shows to be innocent and sensible, and mark a welcome advance in civilization and prosperity. The views of antiquity were more austere; their lives were far more in accordance with nature than ours, therefore every artificial satisfaction of needs created by civilization appeared to them not only superfluous but unnatural:—

Our three main authorities on Roman luxury happen to be Marcus Varro, Lucius Seneca and Pliny the elder, men of peculiarly simple and strict habits, who acted on a principle of abstemiousness beyond the average of their contemporaries. This is especially true of Seneca, who in his youth abstained

for a whole year from flesh, and, on the advice of Attalus, denied himself every forbidden and superfluous pleasure; he gradually became less severe, but even in his old age, would not avail himself of oysters, mushrooms, scents, wine and warm baths, and practised great moderation in the few pleasures he permitted himself. The effects of his abstemiousness were shown by the condition of his body at the time of his death. He, Pliny and Varro, with very little qualification, condemn every comfort, every refined and superfluous enjoyment. Seneca and Pliny are inclined to advocate a return to Nature.....Varro disapproves the importation of foreign foods. Pliny thinks the artificial growth of asparagus a monstrous piece of gluttony; he and Seneca—Seneca repeatedly—declaim against the cooling of drinks with snow as an unnatural luxury. Snow is now, and has been for centuries, indispensable to the poorest Southerner. Addison, who visited Naples in the beginning of the eighteenth century, thought a famine of snow, like a famine of corn elsewhere, would cause a revolt.<sup>1</sup>

Just as ice is an absolute necessity during the hot months, in America; thirty years ago the export of ice from the Arctic reached a figure of £500,000, but this has been displaced now by manufactured ice. Pliny, to judge imperial luxury, compares it with the time when meal was the principal food, eaten out of earthenware pots; "as though this simplicity," says Friedländer—

could have survived after Rome had become the capital of the world, with every commodity from every zone pouring in, and after a highly developed civilization had multiplied needs and pleasures, made them more refined and more widely spread. To such writers glory and splendour, grace and comfort, seemed as undesirable as the seamy side of civilization. Their grievance is as ill-founded as that of a modern who would set back the hands of the clock to a time of unpaved, unlit streets, when windows had no panes, and forks were unknown.<sup>2</sup>

The late Archdeacon Farrar, in his *Witness of History to Christ*, gives utterance to the most wholesale and sweeping indictment of Paganism. He says:—

My brethren, we know alas!—well, perhaps, could it be known no more—what was the condition of the civilized world when the true Light first dawned upon its darkness. We know its haughty power, its brilliant refinement, its unutterable shame. Arrayed like the Apocalyptic harlot in gems and purple, its heart was strong with cruelty and diseased with lust. Robed like the blaspheming Herod in tissue of silver, within it was eaten of worms.<sup>3</sup>

The Archdeacon goes on to assert that this description is true not only of the emperors and the patricians, but of the populace, of which, he says, "A Petronius and an Apuleius paint for us their sinful amusements, their gluttonous debaucheries, their sanguinary rage." "Nor was this only," he declares, "the thick scum on the surface of a guilty capital.....the same poison had infected each sweet rural village and seaside town." And he cites the remains discovered at Pompeii as illustrating "the curse of a Paganism which had lost all reverence for man's chastity or woman's honour."<sup>4</sup> It is characteristic of the disingenuous methods of the Christian apologist to say that the villages and seaside towns were as bad as the larger towns, and then cite Pompeii as an example. Pompeii was a seaside town, but it was also a noted pleasure resort of wealthy Romans, a sort of ancient Brighton or Deauville. As Friedländer observes:—

The evil effect of immoral art is hard to estimate. Propertius reviles the wall-pictures that shocked the

eyes of women and girls, and such pictures are elsewhere mentioned. But moral women seldom were thus exposed; in Pompeii even, a carnival of licence, obscene pictures are only found in the brothels. In Paris of about 1750, profligate manners were far worse than in imperial Rome; there the coats of arms on the coaches were replaced at great expense by disgusting pictures, a fashion introduced by the women, whose carriages were the more licentious.<sup>5</sup>

And when we learn that:—

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, female dancers not infrequently performed on the stage and elsewhere absolutely naked,<sup>6</sup>

we cannot see that after considerably more than a thousand years of Christian rule, much progress had been made in public morality; in fact Friedländer declares that morals were "far worse" than in Pagan Rome.

The fact is that Christian apologists, in their eagerness to denounce and defame the ancient Pagan civilization in the interest of their creed, have made far too much of the highly coloured and exaggerated accounts drawn by the Roman satirists of the society in which they lived. Of Juvenal, whose satires have been made such use of in this respect, Sir Samuel Dill says:—

Juvenal is a rhetorician with a fiery temperament, who will colour and exaggerate if he will not invent. He is intensely prejudiced and conventional, a man to whom desertion of ancient usage is almost as bad as a breach of the moral law, a man incapable of seeing that the evils of a new social movement may be more than compensated by the good which it brings.<sup>7</sup>

Further on, the same historian speaks of him as "the embittered man of letters, humiliated by poverty, yet brimful of Roman pride." (p. 104). And again as:—

A soured and embittered man, who viewed the society of the great world only from a distance, and caught up the gossip of the servants' hall. With the heat of an excitable temperament he probably magnified what he heard, and he made whole classes responsible for the folly and intemperance of a few. (p. 142.)

Petronius, another satirist, adopts another method:

Juvenal would blast and wither the objects of his hatred. Petronius takes the surer method of making these people supremely ridiculous. (p. 104.)

Martial, the contemporary and friend of Juvenal, "caters unabashed for a prurient taste." "The truth is," concludes Sir Samuel Dill:—

that society in every age presents the most startling moral contrasts, and no single comprehensive description of its moral condition can ever be true. This has been too often forgotten by those who have passed judgment on the moral state of Roman society, both in the first age of the Empire and in the last.

In spite of the folly and depravity of rulers like Caligula and Nero:—

That there were large classes among whom virtuous instincts, and all the sober strength and gravity of the old Roman character, were still vigorous and untainted, is equally attested and equally certain..... The old Roman character, whatever pessimists, ancient or modern may say, was a stubborn type which propagated itself over all the West and survived the Western Empire.<sup>8</sup>

(To be Continued.) W. MANN.

<sup>1</sup> Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners*, Vol. II, pp. 141-142.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 143.

<sup>3</sup> Farrar, *The Witness of History to Christ*, p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>5</sup> Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners*, Vol. I, p. 245.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 93.

<sup>7</sup> Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, p. 87.

<sup>8</sup> Dill, *Roman Society from Nero to Marcus Aurelius*, pp. 142-143.

## The Myth of the Virgin Birth.

It is a matter of no small difficulty for a completely unprejudiced mind to adequately picture such a doctrine as the Virgin Birth being taken as a matter of sober and historic fact, and yet there must obviously be many who take it as such. To some extent taking it in this way may be made a little less difficult by the accompanying belief that it took place only once in human history, and then in the case of an individual who is believed to be more than human. And whichever one of the two beliefs is seriously held, the acceptance of the other should not be a matter of great difficulty. It is Voltaire's criticism of the beheaded saint, who walked a hundred paces with his head under his arm, over again. Voltaire said that he could believe ninety-nine of the steps. It was the first one that he found difficult. And if one believe that there was born in Judea over nineteen centuries ago a person who actually is God, one is straining at a gnat while swallowing a camel to jib at the story of the Virgin Birth. It is the first step that counts.

But for those who take the story of the Virgin Birth seriously, or for those who wish to have an outline of the history of the legend, with a running criticism of its rationality and its historic evolution, we can safely recommend *Shaken Creeds; the Virgin Birth Doctrine*, by Jocelyn Rhys (Watts & Co., 76). The author describes the historic circumstances in which the belief arose in the Christian Church, deals with the exceedingly doubtful nature of the documents in which that story is narrated, the controversies to which it has given rise, even within the Church itself, and the various streams of influence which at length presented the doctrine to the world as a basic article in the Christian creed. This aspect of the matter is very well done, and although it has been done before—perhaps with a more vigorously iconoclastic touch—the moderation of tone may probably serve better with those who prefer to see ancient and established superstitions handled gently. There is also a lengthy chapter—the longest in the book—on the birth legends in other religions, which alone should be enough to demolish the credibility of the Christian story.

But to our mind the most interesting chapter in the book is the one dealing with the "Superstitions and Myths about Conception," and we regret that the author did not devote more space to this, and also to showing that in this we have the real origin of the Christian myth. As in so many other cases when we are dealing with religion, it is anthropology which reveals the real secret. As Mr. Rhys points out, sexual procreation ranks in human history as a discovery. The mother is always there, and her part in the act of birth is obvious. For that reason divine visitants have always contented themselves with dispensing with a father only. A miracle worth talking about would have been one in which the mother was absent also.

Now anthropologists have called our attention to the fact that even now there are tribes of people existing who do not associate the man with the birth of a child. That is believed to be due to an incarnation of one of the tribal ghosts. And collating the various superstitions on this head existing in all parts of the world, it is assumed that this was once a very general belief, that it was as common and as natural to undeveloped people as is the belief in a flat earth.

That being so, it would follow that as the subject of procreation became better understood, what was once common to every child born, would be reserved for favoured specimens, and we do know that far beyond the very primitive stages, uncivilized folk view the peculiarly sexual functions of women with superstitious awe, and as bringing her in a very special sense into close contact with supernatural powers. So it would appear probable that as the knowledge grew, a birth to which the tribal god stood in the relation of father would be reserved for special individuals, and at length it would be the mark of one being out of the common. If this line of reasoning be sound, it follows that we have here the anthropological root of the many stories of the virgin births of great men and of the Christ myth, just as we have in the Christian mass a survival of the primitive practice of religious cannibalism. We hope that, in the event of another edition

of his work, Mr. Rhys will work this vein fully. It will repay effort.

There is only one word of criticism we have to offer on Mr. Rhys' work, and that, so far as the purpose of the book is concerned, is of subsidiary interest. "No one," he says, "whether scientific or superstitious by temperament or upbringing, denies the absolute possibility of a human virgin birth.....It is not the *prima facie* incredibility, but the lack of evidence which forms the stumbling-block to the belief."

We entirely dissent from this. The conception of the birth of a human child without the co-operation of male and female is as near an impossibility as one can get. The examples of sexual reproduction given from the plant and the lower animal world are quite beside the point. One might as reasonably assert that there is nothing improbable in man, as we know him, living in the sea, because so many other kinds of life live there. The admission that there is nothing inherently impossible in the story of a virgin birth is the kind of thing one expects from a casuistical Christian, not from a work written to confute the doctrine.

And it is not the lack of evidence that forms the stumbling-block to this and similar stories. There is just as much evidence for it now as there ever was—neither more nor less. And short of chaining a woman up from early girlhood, and preventing her meeting any male, no kind of evidence could be produced. Beliefs in such things as the virgin birth are not matters of evidence, but proofs of the existence of certain stages of cultural development. And so long as the belief is treated as a matter of evidence a clever Christian controversialist can put up a very good fight indeed. To a savage there is nothing inherently improbable in virgins giving birth to children, any more than there was something inherently improbable in Jesus turning water into wine. But just as knowledge enables us to say with absolute certainty—and without any examination of the assumed evidence—that water was never turned into wine, so we are able to say without troubling about the so-called evidence that never yet did a human virgin give birth to a child. For, on the face of it, the only evidence that can be produced is that some people believed the miracle occurred. And to that end the evidence of the Bishop of London is as good as that of the Apostle Paul. But belief in the miraculous does not depend upon evidence, but upon the existence of a form of intelligence to which the miraculous is not repugnant. When that form of intelligence is outgrown miracles cease to happen. To look for evidence of a miracle is already to have questioned its veracity. And when all is said and done it is the inherent impossibility of a miracle that is its final and complete disproof. The keenest apologists of the Christian Church have recognized this, and they were right. And when one does not see it, when one goes round seriously looking for "evidence," one suspects the kind of intelligence that lands its possessor in the spiritualistic séance room, and which may at any time give birth to the boundless credulity of a Conan Doyle. C. C.

## Immortal Muscles, Aphides, and Ants.

You say that consciousness, thought, reason,  
And all the myriad activities of the brain  
Survive the life of that organ.

You might as well assert that muscular activities  
Survive the life of the muscle.

I never look down upon the crowded streets  
From my office window in the twenty-second story of the  
great sky-scraper,  
And see the throngs of men and women jostling each  
other far, far below me,  
Without the thought—  
"Every one of those insignificant little ants,  
Hurrying hither and thither  
Believes itself immortal!"

Pshaw! You might as well talk about the immortality  
Of the Aphides on a rose bush!

HOWELL S. ENGLAND.

## Acid Drops.

For Armistice Day the Archbishop of Canterbury drew up the following prayer:—

In remembrance of those who made the great sacrifice,  
O God, make us better men and women, and give us  
peace in our time.

The wisdom displayed in that prayer is not impressive. If the making of good men and women rests with God he might be expected to make us "good" without being asked. And to ask him to do so because of the number who were killed in the last war, is suspiciously like saying, "O God, surely you have allowed enough to be killed already to satisfy you, and therefore you might give us peace 'in our time.'" We are not concerned with anyone else's time, they must look after themselves, but you have certainly had a good 'kill' with us, so please be content for a little while." And it is quite a safe prayer. Militarists and anti-militarists can both say it. It really means nothing, and it commits no one to anything. And if there is another war, it will not prevent the clergy from donning khaki and strutting round as so many recruiting sergeants, or from drawing officer's pay and being kow-towed as full-blown military officials. We suggest a good prayer for all seasons would be, "O God, we pray thee to keep the people as silly in the future as they have been in the past, for then they will continue to believe, and thy reign will endure for ever and ever."

The Archbishop has also issued a prayer asking for the divine direction of the electors and the bestowal of wisdom on those elected. We wonder if that is meant as a reflection on those previously elected. At any rate we do not believe that any House of Commons that is likely to be elected will impress the average man so that he will believe so much wisdom could not have been collected in one building without a miracle. On the other hand, when we have seen or talked to some of the members of Parliament we have often wondered by what miracle several thousand men and women were brought to the point of voting for them. But we shall be interested in watching the kind of answer that is given to the Archbishop's prayer.

Mr. Arthur F. Thorn's clever advertisement writing in *John O' London's* of November 4 would not lose anything in value if the name of the *Freethinker* had been included in the list of papers to which he has contributed. Also, in the same issue, the printer's devil who separated Chapman Cohen with a comma deserves a medal. This name was included in a list of writers set out and formed quite a formidable array of mental sustenance for a working man.

During his year of office, the Mayor of East Ham, Councillor Stokes, has attended every church in the borough. At the end of his twelve months he should be invaluable, either as a practised theologian or as the leader of any great party that is not hampered by unnecessary modesty in speaking of its services to the community.

Mr. George Harvey, the U.S.A. Ambassador, says that the rib story in Genesis was put there after the rest of the laws and legends had been framed to maintain the subordination of woman. But his countryman, Mr. W. J. Bryan, accepts the Biblical account of a special creation and is stumping the States denouncing the teachers of evolution. The rib story was "special" enough to suit the most exacting definition of the term.

The Duke of Marlborough is Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire. The Bishop of Oxford prohibited the Duke's attendance at the Oxford Diocesan Conference, and made the matter a subject of prayer at the throne of Grace. The Duke is said to have instructed his solicitors. The Establishment is not a happy family. But it represents officially Christian England, and its spokesmen stand on about the same intellectual and spiritual level as some of our other public men.

Lord Middleton has presented the Rev. J. G. Thornton to the rectory of Wollaton, near Nottingham, "which is worth £540 with residence." The Bishop of Bath and Wells has presented the Rev. E. T. Bonsey to the living of Wiveliscombe, Somerset, "which is worth £600 with house." We like the business-like phraseology in which these items of news are announced by the Press. There is the sure stamp of settled convictions in six hundred a year, with house.

According to the Rev. T. R. Glover, such pamphlets as *The Mistakes of Moses* do not trouble Christians of to-day. They know their Bible too well. We fancy this was said at the time when the pamphlet first appeared. In fact it is always said, officially, by the leaders of the Churches. And yet they are always in deadly fear lest these pamphlets should be circulated among their people. But perhaps the best comment on Dr. Glover's statement is that the Pioneer Press has disposed of two large editions in a little over two years, and in the course of the next few weeks another will be published. So that someone has a use for the old pamphlet after all.

The truth of the position is that as one swallow does not make a summer, so a few parsons who are shrewd enough to see that the old form of Christianity is on the wane, do not constitute a general advance on the part of the clergy as a whole. The majority of these have not advanced at all, and anyone who reads the religious papers will be quite aware that the old doctrines are being defended as though Darwin had never lived and comparative mythology had never been heard of. And there are masses of laymen in this country who are on the same level. The vogue enjoyed by certain preachers of the most crude theology and the least educated forms of bibliolatry afford absolute proof that there is still very much work to be done before even orthodox theology is dead. And with this class there is still a good field for works such as the more popular of Ingersoll's pamphlets and Paine's *Age of Reason*. All Freethinkers who come into contact with bodies of Christians know this quite well, and those who forget it may have a very rude awakening one of these days. One of the revelations of the war was the enormous amount of crude superstition that was current in our midst. In that instance it was exploited for war purposes. But it may just as easily be exploited to other ends.

There seems an incurable vein of snobbery in large numbers of people, and it comes out very strongly in the columns of newspaper writing on the marriage of the ex-Kaiser. It puzzles us why anyone wants to bother whether the man is married or buried. He is down and out, and it is far better to bury him in the obscurity from which he should never have emerged than pander to his own diseased egotism and the flunkeyism of other people. Had it been possible the heaviest punishment that could have been given him would have been to let him walk about the streets of Berlin with not a soul paying more attention to him than they did to any other passer-by. The amount of space given to chronicling the most trivial movements of anyone who belongs to the royal families of the world, is far from a healthy sign of public life. Why a king stepping into his motor-car should be thought of such absorbing interest as to warrant a quarter-page illustration, and John Smith getting on a tram-car be of no interest at all is very puzzling.

At Guernsey on November 1 a horse was sold to pay the Church rates owing by Mr. Peter Albert Mahy. Mr. Mahy objects to pay Church rates on the very sufficient ground that he does not want that particular church, having a similar absurdity of his own. But the incumbent of the Established Church has the law on his side, and so the horse was sold. We have every sympathy with Mr. Mahy in his protest, but we should feel much more strongly in his favour if he were not agreeable to the other forms of endowment enjoyed by the other Churches, and to the State patronage which all Churches have—and fight for. Gods are very expensive items, and always have been. And yet when people make up their

minds to get on without them it is surprising how little they miss. Man can get on very well without his gods, it is his gods that cannot get on without him. They feed on the incense offered them, and grow fat on the misery of their worshippers.

Shadow-boxing, dancing, and leap-frog are among the attractions used to draw audiences by Salvation Army cadets in Derbyshire. Dancing is no new phenomenon in religion. We don't know whether leap-frog is or not, but it will doubtless prove attractive if the Salvation Army lassies take part in it.

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners are considering an offer of £500,000 for the site of All Hallows' Church, Lombard Street, London. This is one of about a score of churches in this part of London, the average attendance at which, according to a "census" taken last year, was nineteen. Needless to say, these properties are exempt from payment of rates and taxes.

In a biography of the late Sir Arthur Pearson the author says that when Sir Arthur started the *Daily Express* he told his staff that in all their writings they must remember "the cabman's wife." This rubs well with the policy of the late Lord Northcliffe to edit his paper for servant girls. Of course, there is no special reason why a cabman's wife or a servant girl should not be as worthy and as intelligent as anyone else. But what both these newspapers meant was that they intended to appeal to the lowest common measure of intelligence in order to build up large circulations. And yet, while we shiver with horror at the burglar or pickpocket, we crown men of this stamp with laurels, endow them with titles, and Church and Press slaver praise on them when dead. Our own opinion is that the ordinary burglar is a far less dangerous member of society than the one who deliberately lowers the value of the intellectual currency.

It is to be hoped that the Y.M.C.A. Institute, Glasgow, was duly honoured on the occasion of a lecture given by Sir Basil Thomson. This gentleman's subject was "The Criminal as he is." Probing in the muck heap of effects will prevent any understanding of causes; an interrogation of the stewardship of England, Sir Thomson included, would reveal some ugly facts. Or is one of them already revealed in the subject of the lecture and the place where it was delivered?

Mr. L. Jones, chairman of the Merthyr Health Committee, has had a shock. The sanitary arrangements in connection with twenty-four houses at Heolgerigg caused him to exclaim, "I did not think it possible for such a state of affairs to exist in Christian England." As Christians profess to be more interested in the next world than the present one, we wonder if hygienic sanitation comes under the Blasphemy Laws. On their own showing Christians are static, and it is left to disreputable Atheists to point out the advantage of water and sewer pipes. There is also left to disreputable Atheists the herculean task of reversing the habits of thought, but that is a subject for a book—not an "Acid Drop."

In the "Grocer" there appears an account of a "clerically dressed man" who informs shopkeepers that he represents an organization of consumers. This man is in the "confidence trick" line, and the compliment to the Church in the uniform is rich, rare, and penetrating.

The fact that the English law will not permit a woman to be divorced from a man even if it is proved that he is a homicidal maniac and confined in an asylum, was properly characterized by the Lord Chancellor (Lord Birkenhead) as inhumane, unjust, and immoral. So the law declines to grant Mrs. Rutherford a divorce because her husband was not caught committing an adultery. As Lord Birkenhead said, the remedy for this atrocious state of affairs lies outside the Law Courts. It rests with Par-

liament, which means with public opinion, and it is to be hoped that public opinion will soon express itself in an unmistakable manner.

The Lord Chancellor might have gone further and pointed out that the greatest obstacle of all to a rationalizing and a humanizing of the law of divorce is Christianity. All the prejudice that reformers have to fight in this matter is created by Christian teaching and maintained by Church influence. Without the slightest regard to the health of family life or to a rational morality the powerful high Church party in this country—with many other Christians assisting—continue to declaim that marriage must be insoluble, which often—in practice—means the encouragement of illicit association between the sexes. So the reformer is met with the stupid cry of what "Our Lord" said on the subject of marriage, or what the Church has laid down on the matter, when a sensible people would discuss this and similar matters, not in the light of what some uneducated Jewish peasant is supposed to have said some two thousand years ago, but of what common-sense and the needs of to-day demand. Here, as in so many other cases, Christian morality degrades rather than elevates.

The Ecclesiastical Commissioners have sanctioned a new diocese at Guildford, and have graciously allowed the new diocese to be responsible for the upkeep of Farnham Castle, the episcopal palace of the diocese of Winchester. This palace a former bishop declared to have "three miles of stair-carpet," and to be a "white-elephant."

The *Star* (London) always scintillates brightly. In a recent issue it contained a review of a new book by a group of Christian Socialists, and remarked: "We do not hear of Christian Tories, or Christian Liberals; why of Christian Socialists? It seems as ridiculous as Christian Philatelists."

In its issue for November 1 *Punch* says that what "is likely to handicap the Moslems in the event of their wanting to wage war is that all the poison gas appears to have been cornered by the Christian countries." That is quite true, but then the Christian nations have for many centuries been supreme in the art and practice of international slaughter. That, indeed, is the one thing in which Christian nations can claim superiority over others, and whenever non-Christian nations have wished to develop their capacity for making war it has always been to the Christians they have gone. But we do not think the Moslems need despair. If they do go to war and fall short of poison gas which, after screaming ourselves hoarse against the Germans for using, we have made a part of our normal fighting equipment, if the Moslems require this, they will soon find some Christian nation that will supply them. For equal with the lust for power among Christians is the desire to amass money. And to do Christians justice they have never shown any disinclination to equip other nations, even though the arms supplied might be turned against their own. Naturally it takes a mind soaked with Christianity to reconcile both practices.

Among the various faddist pamphlets we have received recently is a twenty-page booklet entitled *Reality—the Absolute*. This is not, as might be supposed, a Spiritualistic work, but merely the ambitious effort of a budding philosopher, who may one day startle the world with an even more bewildering doctrine than the one he expounds in this pamphlet, which in short is "the principle that the Unseen or Spiritual is real," and consequently "spiritual phenomena are real," physical phenomena are unreal. In other words, this is the beginning of a Cubist doctrine in religion. But though we may deplore the entry of Futurism into the realms of art, it will probably be an amusing experiment in religion. For instance, here is an attempt to clothe a truism in a new costume: "Why is it so many people do not believe in God? I venture to say that it is because they believe in Mammon, or in the material world, and they cannot believe in God and Mammon at the same time."



## C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

November 12, Birmingham; November 16, Weston-super-Mare; November 19, Plymouth; November 26, Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool; December 3, Stockport; December 6, Labour College, Earl's Court; December 10, Leicester; December 17, Watford.

## To Correspondents.

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

H. S. MILLEN.—Our comments on the way in which certain Labour speakers play to the religious world obviously refer only to those who do so. We know that there are many who avow themselves Freethinkers or Atheists, and we have pointed out time after time that but for the work of Freethinkers the Labour movement in this country would be a very poor thing indeed. We have not the slightest doubt but that the appeal to Jesus by some of the Labour leaders is no more than a vote-catching game, but we must take things as we find them.

A. BOSTLEMAN (Chicago).—You do not think less of the average member of Parliament than we do. But we shall try to do what can be done with the material in hand. Sorry to note one part of your letter. We understand that Freethought was making good headway in Chicago. Of course, if a teaching is "watered" so as to attract the weaker ones the usual consequence is a form of teaching that is not worth having. It is a dangerous policy trying to please everyone. By far the best plan is to please oneself, and then leave the rest to the course of events. A larger number admire straightness than is recognized by the "trimmer."

A. CAMPBELL.—Yes, it is good propaganda, apart from other consideration, to ask candidates a question about the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. We hope with you that every candidate will be pressed for a definite reply to the question. Thanks for making the *Freethinker* more widely known. We think you should be able to get the printing done cheaper locally than sending the order to London.

J. A. REID.—A good idea, but we have to go cautiously in the matter of printing just now. Will bear it in mind.

W. GREEN.—A. T. Swaine's *The Earth: Its Genesis and Evolution* (Griffin and Co.) and James Geikie's *Historical Geology* (Chambers's Elementary Science Manuals) would probably be helpful to you.

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

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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

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

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

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

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be 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.

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## Death of J. W. Gott.

AFTER what was said last week none of our readers will be surprised that J. W. Gott is dead. He died in the early morning of November 4 in the Victoria Hospital, Blackpool. At the time of writing I have no particulars of his death, but among his last requests were that he should have a Secular funeral, and that he should be buried at Bradford, where his wife lies. By the time this copy of the *Freethinker* is in the hands of its readers these wishes will have been carried out. The interment was fixed for Wednesday, November 8, Mr. McLaren going down to conduct the service. Mr. Gott leaves one daughter—married—and to her we offer on our own behalf and that of many others, the sincerest sympathy.

My own acquaintance with J. W. Gott goes back for nearly thirty years. When I first knew him he had a very promising clothing business in Bradford. But his real interest was in Freethought propaganda, and he was ready to spend both himself and anything he had in the Cause. He was always ready to give a helping hand, and helped many, some of whom in after years stood aloof on a pedestal of rigid respectability when he in turn needed their assistance. His outstanding fault was his absolute lack of discretion where propaganda was concerned, and lack of a certain sense of values when opportunities for work presented themselves. But of his sincerity there could never be the slightest question, and there was not the slightest trace of malice or ill-will in his nature. His good temper was constant. I should be surprised to learn that anyone could truthfully say he ever did him a bad turn, and I am quite sure that very many could tell of help cheerfully given.

When he came out of prison in August last—it was the fourth term he had served for "blasphemy"—he came to the *Freethinker* Office to see me, looking the wreck of his former self, but as ready as ever to return to his own form of propaganda at once had he received the slightest encouragement. But that was impossible, and, as we all know, he went to Blackpool in the hopes of recovering something of his old health. The generosity of our readers enabled him to do this, and I am sure that whatever opinions any of them had of the comparative value of his work, they have reason to be proud of the fact that they recognized a principle was at stake, and both in providing funds for the legal fight and for his illness after coming out of prison showed that the principle was more than the man, and that whatever others might think or do, they did not intend to stand back in the face of an application of the infamous Blasphemy Laws. I thanked them then for what they did and I thank them again. They, at least, have no cause to feel ashamed of the part they played in the struggle.

"Coarse" and "vulgar" are handy terms to throw at a Freethought propagandist, and they who use them lavishly ought to reflect that they are part of the historic armoury against Freethought. Paine was accused of these offences, so were Hetherington, Carlile, and Holyoake, and the phrases did service against Bradlaugh and Foote. All weapons tainted by Christian usage should be wielded with wariness by Freethinkers; they are suspect in their origin, and I am quite sure are sometimes no more than an indication that the one using them is afraid of what Christians may think of him. We all ought to think of converting Christians, but it is not wise to allow their opinions of us to influence what we do or say. Christians will only cease to persecute when Freethinkers make it either impossible or unprofitable for them to do so.

It has often been said that the respectable Agnostic only escapes the virulence of the Christian attack

because there is the more objectionable Atheist in the front line bearing the brunt of the assault. With him out of the way the "respectable" unbeliever would not have nearly so easy a time. That truth is capable of a probably much wider application. And when I am faced with the problem of a man such as J. W. Gott, I often wonder how much of the security I enjoy do I owe to those people of unbreakable determination who will say what they think of current religion, and in a manner which seems to them suitable? At any rate, while I am by taste and temperament inclined to pursue a path somewhat different from them, I hope I shall never be either foolish or cowardly enough to ignore the probability that they serve to make the Christian bigot a little less savage than he would otherwise be. And after all, there is not so much sincerity and moral courage running loose in our Christian soaked society that we can afford to restrain our appreciation of its presence, even when manifested in ways that are not exactly our own.

When Mr. Gott was leaving prison the bigot who did duty as deputy chaplain said to him, "Well, Gott, you will not live long and so will not be able to carry on your evil work much longer." That was quite a Christian expression, quite worthy of the Judge who sentenced a sick man to nine months' hard labour, and who assumed such airs of superiority over the man he had at his mercy. Of the two men I would much prefer the company of the prisoner. He had given everything for his opinions. What had the Christian judge given for his? Would he have served four terms of imprisonment for them? The judge might reply that he was doing his duty. But there is a world of difference between paying for doing your duty and being paid for it. A very ordinary character may achieve the latter; it takes more than an ordinary character to rise to the former.

It might be too much to say that Mr. Gott's last term of imprisonment killed him, but there can be no doubt that it materially shortened his life. And that, together with the fact that men are still imprisoned for speaking disrespectfully of the idiotic and sometimes obscene doctrines of Christianity, is what every Freethinker worthy of the name will bear in mind. When the deputy chaplain used the brutal words I have cited, Mr. Gott replied, "long or short I shall do my best to end your creed." That was the right spirit, the spirit that made Freethought in the past, the only spirit that can keep it clean and useful in the present. Right or wrong in his methods, J. W. Gott gave his life to the work that, after more than thirty years of speaking and writing, I still believe to be the most important that any man or woman can do. And I for one shall set aside a few minutes on November 8 to give thought to one whose courage never quailed in fighting one of the worst superstitions that ever afflicted humanity. Whether J. W. Gott will really be the last prisoner for blasphemy remains to be seen. He will be, if every Freethinker in the country makes up his or her mind that he should be. It is time that the "infamous" disappeared from every country with any real claim to be called civilized.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

My father's rejection of all that is called religious belief was not, as many might suppose, primarily a matter of logic and evidence; the grounds of it were moral, still more than intellectual. He found it impossible to believe that a world so full of evil was the work of an Author combining infinite power with perfect goodness and righteousness. His intellect spurned the subtleties by which men attempt to blind themselves to this open contradiction.—*John Stuart Mill, "Autobiography."*

## Sugar Plums.

To-day (November 12) Mr. Cohen visits Birmingham. He will lecture in the Brassworkers' Hall, 70 Lionel Street, at 7, taking for his subject "The Challenge of Freethought to the Churches." He will have something to say on the relation of Freethought to the Parliamentary elections.

In spite of the rain and the counter attractions of election meetings the Stratford Town Hall was well filled on Sunday last when Mr. Cohen lectured. The address was followed with the greatest appreciation by all, and there were a few questions at the close. It was also evident that the lecturer's appeal to Freethinkers to make the question of the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws and Secular Education test questions at the elections met with considerable response from those present.

Mr. Lloyd's lecture which was to have followed Mr. Cohen's, is, as we announced last week, unfortunately cancelled owing to the hall being required for election purposes.

We are pleased to hear that Mr. Lloyd had two very good meetings at Glasgow on Sunday last. Mr. Lloyd was in splendid form at both meetings, and his addresses delighted his numerous friends and admirers who were present. They were enthusiastic in their appreciation, which is as it should be.

By the time the next issue of the *Freethinker* is published the elections will be over and we shall know whether the gentlemen who look after themselves or those who fail to look after other people are elected. But we again, and for the last time, beg to impress upon Freethinkers the necessity for keeping *our* questions to the front. It is not, we think, too much to ask Freethinkers to make their questions a living issue so far as their votes and influence are concerned. Let it be made quite clear that no candidate will receive a vote who declines to vote for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws. That is the only way to make candidates realize that we are in earnest and that we are worth bothering about. And it will help to make men like the late Home Secretary, Mr. Turncoat Shortt, realize that Freethinkers do not forget politicians who so unblushingly promise their full support for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, and then turn round and advocate the retention of this relic of barbarism.

The Labour candidate for the Rutherglen Borough has promised to give his support, if elected, to a Bill for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Mr. P. W. Raffan, candidate for the Ayr Burghs, replies that he is quite opposed to all restrictions on the full and free expression of religious conviction. That is not quite definite enough. Even Mr. Shortt said that. What we want to know, without any circumlocution, is whether a candidate is opposed to the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Any answer save a plain yes or no is an evasion. We hope to receive more replies to questions, but we dare say many have not yet been received. We are ourselves awaiting replies to our own queries.

Mr. A. B. Moss lectured twice at Manchester on Sunday last, and we are glad to learn, with great satisfaction to those present. Mr. Monks, who is now Councillor Monks, presided at the afternoon meeting, and Mr. Black in the evening. A few questions followed the lectures.

A series of four Wednesday evening lectures has been arranged by the R.P.A. at the Essex Hall, Essex Street, Strand. The course will be opened by Mr. Joseph McCabe with an address on "Recent Exposures of Spiritualism." The lecture will be illustrated by lantern slides. Admission to each lecture will be sixpence, with reserved seats at one shilling.

We have made frequent reference to the steady propaganda that has been for some time going on at Weston-super-Mare—thanks to the efforts of one friend there. There have been frequent complaints from the public in the local Press against a flood of "blasphemy" being let loose on so chaste a place as Weston, and now it is threatened by an even worse disaster in the shape of a visit from Mr. Cohen. The Town Hall has been taken for the evening of November 16, and Mr. Cohen will deliver a lecture there on "A Freethinker's View of the World." This will give the parsons and the editors of the papers a chance of seeing what the flood of blasphemy really means. We are looking forward with some interest to the meeting.

## Historical Misnomers.

### II.

(Concluded from page 717.)

LOUIS' rule for a king was: "Never let yourself be ruled; be ever master; never have a favourite or prime minister." Although the words came from the teachings of Mazarin, the very spirit belonged to Louis, for the simple reason that he could not tolerate a superior mind near him. Yet he was compelled to have advice in the long run, and the result was that it came more often than not from inferior people. In spite of his talk of not allowing himself to be ruled, history shows that he was in fact ruled (though probably without actually perceiving it) by the women of the court, an influence which has been stigmatized as "almost uniformly baneful" in the history of France. Michelet insists strongly on the influence of the women over Louis. If he did not admit "ministers" into his scheme of government, he had "agents," who were very much the same, and he was very fortunate in the selection of many of these. Colbert, for instance, was the real power of France after Mazarin's death. This was the man who maintained the Richelieu-Mazarin politics, who built up the finances, the army and navy, the industry and commerce, which enabled Louis to "play the capable man." Outside of the Louvre or the Palace of Versailles, where he "looked the part" as a king, Louis the *Grand* was in truth Louis the *Petit*. True, his armies were the wonder of military Europe. But their greatness came from the organizing of Colbert, the brains of Vauban, and the strategy of a Condé or Turenne. Louis' idea of campaigning was the brilliant court equipage, instead of the bivouac. It was this love of display that led him to undertake sieges in the War of Devolution, so that he could maintain a pretentious camp, instead of adopting mobile tactics and fighting battles. The result was almost disastrous for France in that war. In spite of the martial halo which surrounds the name of Louis, he was no soldier, and indeed, his personal courage was even doubted. The martial throng was to Louis all that could be summed up in its "pomp and circumstance," and possibly the real soldier thought inwardly of him what Hotspur thought of the "gilded popinjay."

As an administrator and legislator he is equally disappointing. It has been said of him that he busied himself with administration but had no organizing gifts, and decreed laws without the slightest idea of legislation.<sup>1</sup> How indeed could any man make laws who could not read the laws? What could be expected from a monarch who proposed a "Council of Conscience" to decide all questions of public casuistry, so afraid was he of public opinion? He is said to have been "full of religious feeling" and a staunch Catholic. It must have sat lightly on his shoulders. His persecutions of the Huguenots, one of the blackest

stains of his reign, need not therefore have been prompted by his religious antipathies, for we see him ready to ally himself with "Protestant heretics" whenever it served his own political aggrandisement. In this very episode of the Huguenots, we see plainly how blind he was to the real interests of France, and could only see his own regal importance. These Huguenots were one of the industrial supports of France. His dragooning instead of converting them, drove them into exile where they carried with them their arts and manufactures, helping to increase thereby the industrial prosperity of France's enemies, and what is more, to supply men and money to be used in their armies.

If we look deep enough, it will be seen that both the War with the Grand Alliance (1688-97) and the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-13) were prompted by Louis' inordinate lust for power. First it was the Empire that caught his fancy (and he persuaded himself that he was "worthy to be the Emperor of all the earth"), and then it was the Spanish dominions that stirred his desires. For these ambitions Europe was plunged into incessant war, with all its attendant misery and desolation. His egoism was insatiable. At home, as well as abroad, his vanity to play "the capable man" brought consequential evils. His reckless expenditure of the public treasury in the maintenance of a frivolous and luxuriant court when the people were groaning under taxation, reveals him in his true colours. It may be urged that his "protection" of art and letters should be placed to his account, but he did not originate this, for it had already been the scheme of Richelieu, and even in the establishment of the Academies (those of Inscriptions, Sciences, Architecture and Music), it is probable that it was the work of Colbert.<sup>2</sup> Louis patronized art and literature but to what end? Was it because of his literary and artistic tastes, or was it because authors and artists fitted themselves to flatter his vanity? In truth, the "protective" spirit was a curse, as Buckle rightly shows,<sup>3</sup> since it produced fawning sycophants instead of genius, for there is no reason for supposing that the *littérateurs* Corneille, Racine, and Molière, the musicians Lully and Cambert, and the painters Lebrun and Mignard, could not, or would not have produced their great works without this "protection." France had already given us Rabelais, Montaigne, Charron, Callot and Poussin without it.

To sum up the question of the justification for the title of *Le Grand Monarque* in Louis XIV, in spite of the foregoing negative evidence, is by no means easy. If Louis is merely to be viewed as the expression of France's glory at that period, then we can afford to allow the epithet to pass unchallenged. France was gloriously and triumphantly great at that time. But she was great in spite of Louis, and it would be more just to speak of *La Grande France* to reflect the greatness of those days. If, however, the claim of *Le Grand Monarque* is to be tacked on to the "personality" of Louis, then we must protest. To those who only see the "purple" of Louis and not the raiment of the people, one can only paraphrase what Paine said to Burke: "You see the plumage but forget the dying bird." Nothing is clearer in history than Louis' responsibility for the sapping of the foundations of the country. The whole of his reign is taken up with wars. Yet history does not seem to reveal that France was threatened in any way, and there was every possibility that the peace of Europe would have been maintained had it not been for Louis. Yet, what was the result of it all? Much of his claim to the title of *Le Grand* belongs to his military successes, and when the last of his treaties came (that of Utrecht, 1714), France was the loser. She won military fame, and

<sup>1</sup> This is the view of Kitchen and Grant.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. Civ.*, Chap. xi.

<sup>3</sup> Kitchen, *Hist. of France*, III, 150.

gave to Europe the dragoon, the bayonet, and the military band, but she lost (together with the Huguenot *émigrés*) a million of her sons. Louis' took over a centralized government which, at least, was paying its way, but he left his successor a state of bankruptcy. He raised his navy from some thirty ships of war to nearly two hundred, but Fénelon shows us the trades languishing, commerce annihilated, and the towns depopulated. The court at Versailles, crowded with courtiers, with *fêtes* resplendent, was the very cradle of Europe's "good manners." But the countryside and even the towns were starving. There were Louis XIV shoes, Louis XIV furniture, and what not, inventions and originality without end, but it only concerned "society." Not an edict could be thought out, however, that would benefit the body politic. Louis could "patronise" when he could be master, but a Pierre Bayle, one of the greatest intellects of the day had to languish in exile because he was a Huguenot. The steady decline of France which followed his period, and which was only arrested by the revolution, must to a considerable extent be placed to his account. No monarch can carry the mark of *Le Grand* with this imputation standing to his discredit.

H. GEORGE FARMER.

## A Bishop Advocate of Evolution.

DURING the last few weeks I have attended some short lectures, or "chats" as he prefers to call them, delivered by the Lord Bishop of Woolwich (Dr. Hough) during the dinner-hour in the Borough Market, given ostensibly for the edification of the salesmen and porters engaged therein or any parishioners who happened to be in that locality at the time. For the information of Londoners who are not acquainted with the neighbourhood, I may say that the Borough Market may be most readily approached by some stone steps at the foot of London Bridge on the Surrey side of the Thames. And to those who care to pay a visit, I may say that the first building they will come to at the bottom of the steps is the noble edifice now called St. Saviour's Cathedral, wherein they will find many objects of great interest including the tomb of Edmund Shakespeare, the brother of the great poet and playwright. This beautiful church is in the Borough of Southwark, the inhabitants of which can boast that two men of supreme genius once lived and moved and had their being in that Borough, viz., Shakespeare, who was the manager of the Globe Theatre on the Bankside, and Charles Dickens, who lived near the Marshalsea Prison, and many of whose characters in *Little Dorrit* came from the same neighbourhood.

This much I have said by way of introduction, because Southwark is no mean Borough and because, among other things, I had the privilege and honour of having been born in it, and lived and worked in the neighbourhood for over forty years. And so when I stepped into the Borough Market a few weeks ago one Tuesday mid-day I was on very familiar ground. Before the Bishop began his address, the Rev. Wade Geary, his assistant, made some brief introductory remarks on the meaning of the word God which seemed to resolve themselves into this: That God expressed himself in Nature, and we saw by that there was a purpose in life; that human life was meant to be good, and all that was not good was destructive of life. By the time the Bishop mounted the rostrum, which consisted of a costermonger's barrow, a crowd of about fifty persons had gathered round the speaker; market-porters and waterside labourers, however, were conspicuous by their absence, as lectures of this sort were not exactly to their taste; indeed for the

most part I should imagine they found more satisfaction in listening to songs like "'Enevry the Eighth I ham," by the lively cockney comedian Harry Champion, than devoting any portion of their time to a discourse even by a Bishop on "God the Father." On making careful observation, I found that the audience consisted largely of clerks and managers of the wharves and warehouses in the Borough, with a fair sprinkling of working men and one or two officials engaged in the Market. For about twenty minutes or half an hour the Bishop chatted interestingly on God and the Christian Faith; told his hearers confidentially that God did not want people to believe in a religion that was not reasonable; and that this God manifested himself in Jesus Christ. Thus God became man without ceasing to be God. How this was done he did not tell us. The Bishop glided off in another direction and told us that he did not believe that God made man less than six thousand years ago in the Garden of Eden; that story, he said, was an allegory. He believed in the doctrine of evolution, that man had come up from the lower animals by slow stages, and that this evolution had taken millions of years. Thus the teaching of Canon Barnes had already won adherents, even in the person of the Bishop of Woolwich and his chairman, the Rev. Wade Geary. After talking in a discursive manner for a while, the Bishop then said that he was open to receive questions bearing on the subject, and I at once opened fire by asking how the Bishop reconciled the statement that he believed in the evolution of man with the declaration in Genesis that man was created by God somewhere about 4,004 years before Christ, according to the chronology inserted in the authorized version of the Bible and circulated in millions. The Bishop replied that the chronology of the Bible was made by Archbishop Usher, who, after all, was an ignorant person who knew nothing about science and as much about history. I might have said that if the Bishop added up the ages of the descendants of Adam down to Noah, and then again from Noah down to the time of the alleged birth of Jesus he would find that it came to about 4,000 years, and that the Archbishop was as near correct as possible, but somebody else chimed in with a question and the point was lost.

The second question I asked was if the Bishop thought the story of the Fall a mere allegory, what became of the Atonement; if the first Adam did not fall what need for the second Adam to come down and die to blot out man's sins? To this the Bishop replied that man did fall through sin, though not in the way described in Genesis. I asked other questions, but as I did not wish to monopolize the time of the Bishop, I made room for others. There were three other questioners, but as most of them wanted to ram the Bible down the throat of the Bishop I came up again with further questions. One was, assuming Jesus to have been conceived miraculously, how a child that was formed and developed by the food and nourishment taken by his mother Mary in the ordinary way, and who, of course, was the result of untold ages of evolution, could be said to be incapable of sin? To this the Bishop replied that as he was going to deal with the subject of the incarnation the following week he begged of me to wait till then. Accordingly I waited, but the answer given by the Bishop on the following week reminded me of nothing so much as the way in which a conjuror tells you how a trick is done—when you have heard the explanation you are about as wise as you were before. After all, it amounted to what Shakespeare called "words, words, words, damnable iteration." When I had asked the worthy Bishop two or three further questions he suddenly found that he had another appointment, so he descended from his improvised rostrum, bade us all "good day," and left his able assistant, the Rev.

Wade Geary to answer for him. Then followed a very lively scene; a number of very zealous Christians who really believed that the Bible meant what it said, bombarded the rev. gentleman with questions, telling him in plain terms that the Bible did not teach evolution and that he was deceiving his hearers by telling them that Darwin was more reliable on science than Genesis, and further, that the Bible was unreliable even in its history. After a terrible heckling of the rev. gentleman, who displayed considerable dialectical skill and fenced some of the questions with a dexterity that was worthy of a better cause, I rescued him from his over-zealous and too candid friends by asking him whether it was not a fact that Bishop Colenso had written in much the same strain in his great work entitled *An Examination of the Pentateuch* over fifty years ago, and was excommunicated by the Church for so doing? And further, whether it was not on account of the general spread of knowledge on scientific and historical questions that a certain section of the clergy were now trying to reconstruct their creed; to both of which questions he answered in the affirmative.

On the following week neither the Bishop nor his assistant put in an appearance, but Canon Aitken and Rev. W. Potter were sent as substitutes. The Rev. W. Potter, who is manifestly an earnest and conscientious clergyman with very little knowledge of controversial literature on the subject, gave a very fair statement of the Gospel story of the Crucifixion, but offered no proof of its statements. He merely told us that the Apostles of Christ believed in the Resurrection and he considered that that was the real foundation of the Christian Faith. The Rev. Canon Aitken spoke quite eloquently to the same effect, and told his hearers that if they did not believe in Christ and endeavour in their lives to practise the teachings of their Lord and Master they were practically crucifying him afresh. When the time for questions came, I asked the learned Canon if it was not a fact that the disciples of Jesus were Jews and the people among whom he lived were Jews, and if so whether it was not true that the vast majority of the Jews had always denied that Jesus was the expected Messiah, or that they ever crucified him? He replied that many of the Jews became Christians, and the well-known Rabbi, David Montifiori, was at present engaged in translating or editing the New Testament. What that had to do with the question I really do not know. I then asked if he could give me the name of one contemporaneous historian who mentioned the name of Jesus or the story of the Crucifixion? He replied, *Tacitus*. At once I pointed out that *Tacitus* was not born till after Jesus was dead, and did not write till many years after the alleged crucifixion, and therefore could not be regarded as a witness in any sense of the alleged events in the career of the Nazarene. Somebody then called out "St. Paul," to which I replied that St. Paul never saw Jesus in his life, and as Canon Aitken did not say he did, I took it for granted that he agreed with me on that point. And then, as I expected, somebody in the crowd shouted, "Josephus"—and that gave me my opportunity. I asked the Canon if he regarded Josephus as a witness, and he replied, "Certainly"; then, said I, turning round to the audience, allow me to say that even Christian authorities are now agreed that the passage in Josephus is a forgery; even Dean Farrar had to admit that. The Canon did not deny it, but said that he would look the matter up. And so the controversy ended. Of one thing I am convinced, that is that this last declaration made a profound impression upon the crowd, some of the members of which must have heard for the first time that Christians forged evidence whenever they thought it necessary to bolster up the weakness of their case. No wonder that a certain section of the more highly

educated members of the clergy, among them Canon Barnes, the Bishop of Woolwich, Dean Inge, and others, are endeavouring to reconstruct their creed. It certainly needs it. In accepting the doctrine of Evolution as part of their new teaching they do not seem to recognize that they will have to give up all the miracles of the Old Testament—which some of them no doubt will be only too glad to do—but the miracles of the New will have to follow, one after another, until they are left without a shred of supernaturalism upon which to build their faith—and what will the poor clergy do then? I am afraid that their occupation, like Othello's, will be gone. In the meanwhile we must be on the look out for "The Bishop's next move."  
ARTHUR B. MOSS.

## Book Chat.

### AN INTRODUCTION TO VOLTAIRE.

THERE are, I believe, a number of not unintelligent Free-thinkers who, while loyally recognizant of the big qualities of Mr. J. M. Robertson's studies in religion, politics and history, confess to finding them a little too solid—too heavy, shall I say?—for their mental digestion. This is, of course, no more than what one might expect. But unfortunately, our friends proceed to blame Mr. Robertson for setting before them the kind of food they cannot assimilate, instead of cursing nature for not giving them a stronger digestive system. When one of these sufferers complained to me the other day, I reminded him that Rousseau was the victim of a similar inaptitude, although in him the defect was physical rather than mental. When he was vainly seeking his pleasure in Venice with a lady of that virtuous city, she thoughtfully advised him to leave women alone and study mathematics. With equal thoughtfulness I suggested that my friend should leave Mr. Robertson alone and study philately or psycho-analysis.

In all seriousness, however, I hasten to assure those who share, or are willing to share my interest in Mr. Robertson's work that it has other qualities besides solidity and exhaustiveness. When he is obliged by exigencies of space to get a big subject into a small compass he is quite equal to the effort required. I know nothing better than his essay on the seminal influence of Montaigne on Shakespeare, or the little book on Elizabethan Literature (*Home University Library*). Another excellent example of artistic compression, and one with which I am more immediately concerned, is the summary of the life and work of Voltaire, just issued by Messrs. Watts & Co. in their *Life Stories of Famous Men*. It is far and away the best small book in English on the subject. Lord Morley could be eloquent, and even perferedly dithyrambic at times, but his book was marred by inconsistency of critical opinion, while General Hamley and Mr. Espinasse did not give sufficient importance to Voltaire's militant Freethought. Voltaire's fame diminished when the Romantics revolted from the ideals of the eighteenth century, and later on every Catholic, lay and clerical, expended his spirit in a waste of shameless vituperation. Even an academic rationalist like M. Faguet could show that he was unduly prejudiced, although afterwards he did make an effort to compare scientifically the political ideas of Voltaire with those of Montesquieu and Rousseau. This careful denigration was followed by the more genial criticism of M. Champion and M. Lanson, to which Mr. Robertson now brings the support of his independent study.

Mr. Robertson gives unity to his sketch by criticizing the whole of Voltaire's multifarious literary energies in terms of his temperament. He finds him a "lean bundle of taut-strung nerves reacting instantly, often violently, to every kind of stimulus." This is the explanation of his many inconsistencies of conduct. He was ever an

ardent lover of truth; but when occasion served he could lie directly or indirectly. Rousseau he denounced as a monster of immorality for stating in print that he (Voltaire) was the author of the anonymous freethinking homily known as the *Sermon of the Fifty*. He was not above making money by underhand schemes, and yet was an open-handed giver whenever there was the smallest claim on his generosity. He held that the best form of government was an absolute monarchy, and that if a God did not exist you would have to invent one to keep the common people from getting out of hand. Yet the trend of his work is both democratic and anti-religious. He could believe in the unrestricted liberty of printing, holding that books are never dangerous, and then demand the arrest and imprisonment of everyone who printed anything against him. He could write with Shakespearean contempt of the day-labourer, the landless man, and afterwards spend energy and money to shield him from religious and judicial oppression. Voltaire is pre-eminently Montaigne's idea of man inconstant and diverse; change being with him, as with all human beings, an accompaniment of growth. Even the most logical of men do not think and say to-day precisely what they thought and said yesterday.

Voltaire is the representative man of letters of the age of prose, the eighteenth century. He left his mark on the whole of European thought. He was the acknowledged master in every genre save comedy—tragedy, epic, satiric and light verse, philosophic fiction, history, philosophy—he handled all these with the sure touch of a master. He represented tragedy not only in France, but also here in England. Hill's adaptation of *Zaire*, under the title of *Zara*, kept the boards from 1735 to 1812. *Candide* was translated in 1759, the year of the original publication at Geneva. I have no doubt that the sober Englishman found its wit and satire a little scandalous, and its philosophy too indecent a removal of the rags which cover the hypocrisy of human nature. But it was, and is, impossible for anyone to read it and not admit that it is a creator of values. In history, too, he was a pioneer, a liberator of thought. Remy de Gourmont notes that when the scholarly M. Solomon Reinach was projecting a general history of religions he would find no better guide to the period of Christianity than Voltaire, whose *Essai sur les Mœurs* is the clearest and most logical history of civilization.

The Freethinker is naturally more interested in Voltaire's frontal attack on religion. The energy, wit and brilliance of his Freethought writings will be obvious to those who have studied the examples of his method which I have had the pleasure of turning into English for this paper. Hundreds of these semi-anonymous pamphlets were written in the last twenty years of his life. Even at this time of day they are effective propaganda, and will be out-moded only when Hebrew Monotheism and Pauline Tritheism have passed out of the memory of men. It is, I am aware, the custom of a sort of rationalist to depreciate the value of Voltaire's Freethought and to remind us that he was not a Renan or Arnold. But, at any rate, without the preparatory efforts of the eighteenth century the rationalism of our own age would not have been possible. Mr. Robertson's exposition of his side of Voltaire's energetic talent is in my opinion eminently fair and well balanced when compared not only with Lord Morley's estimate, but also with that of the Voltairian M. Lanson. The usefulness of the little book would have been increased by an appendix giving particulars of the English versions of Voltaire.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD.

Farewell, a long farewell, to all poetry which, in an age where there is so much to do, teaches us inactive contemplation; or which, in a world where there is so much need of devotedness, would instil despair. Welcome to the poetry of the future, of humanity! though that does not imply forgetfulness of, or irreverence towards, the great men of the past.—*Giuseppe Mazzini*.

## 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 (160 Great Portland Street, W.1.): 8, Debate—"Is There a God?" Mr. Oscar Baker v. Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe.

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. T. F. Palmer, "Religion in the Light of Science."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2.): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "The Attack on Civilization."

COUNTRY.  
INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Brassworkers' Hall, 70 Lionel Street): 7, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "The Challenge of Freethought to the Churches."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Shop Assistants' Hall, 297 Argyle Street): 11.30, Mr. B. Goldberg, "The Foundations of Reason." (Silver collection.)

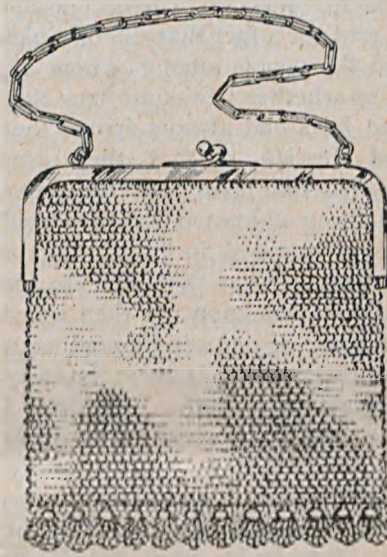
LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (2 Central Road, Duncan Street, Shop Assistants' Rooms): 7, Elder Jacobsen, "Mormonism and Science." Questions and discussion invited.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. W. Percival Westell, F.L.S., "Notable Personalities in the London Zoo." (Lantern Illustrations.)

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Plymouth Chambers): Tuesday, November 14, at 7.30 p.m., meeting of members *re* visit of Mr. Chapman Cohen. All members urgently requested to attend.

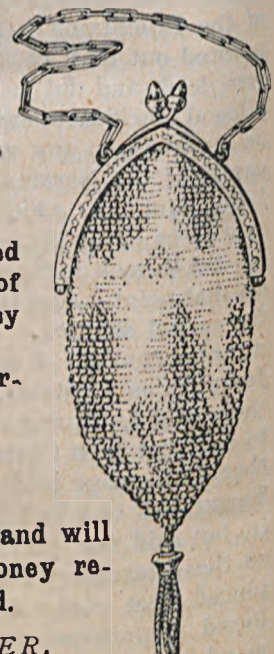
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