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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS.

	Page
Search the Scriptures.—The Editor - - - - -	193
Providence.—J. T. Lloyd - - - - -	194
Our Pastors and Masters.—Mimnermus - - - - -	196
Running Away From Life.—Prince Hopkins - - - - -	196
Easter.—J. M. Wheeler - - - - -	198
Mr. Blatchford and Spiritism.—J. W. Poynter - - - - -	202
Prestige and Criticism.—G. E. Fussell - - - - -	203
South African Jottings.—Searchlight - - - - -	204
Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.	

Views and Opinions.

Search the Scriptures.

In an essay written many years ago James Thomson instanced the Bible as an example of the perils of authorship. A better illustration could not be found. The prevailing religion has it that it is God's word, written in order that his children might know right from wrong, and which if faithfully followed would lead all of us to live in peace here and procure for us immortal happiness hereafter. So far, good. The programme is excellent, it is the performance that is at fault, for whatever may be the consequence in the next world of believing in the Bible, the results have been quite disastrous in this. The divine author managed to express himself so badly that there has never been an agreement as to what on earth he meant. If his message was intended to get his followers to live at peace with each other the result has been the exact opposite. They have believed together and they have fought together, and the harder they believed the more fiercely they fought. There was no great difference of opinion among them as to its being really God's message, the only difference was as to what he meant by it; and the longer they wrangled over it the more divided they became. "Search the Scriptures," they were commanded, "for in it ye have eternal life." It was a search—a kind of puzzle competition—in which the successful searcher had heaven as a reward and the unsuccessful one found himself in hell. Of course, it is not for me to say whether the Bible is God's word or not. I do not know enough of the work of "divine authors" to be able to pass a confident opinion. All I do know is that if an earthly writer sent me an article the meaning of which no two of my readers could agree upon I should bar that writer in future and advise him that the first duty of an author is to write so that there can be no mistake as to his meaning. The pity is that the divine writer did not bear that elementary rule in mind when he set out on the never too easy path of authorship.

* * *

Explaining the Bible.

In defence of this author it must be said that he took a precaution not within the power of many writers. He decreed it to be a mortal offence for anyone to criticize his work, and for a very long time the pains and penalties attaching both in this world

and the next kept criticism dumb; but some braved the punishments in this world, and they learned to laugh at those promised them in the next. When the number of these daring souls became so large that suppression was no longer a practicable policy, the divine author's representatives on earth tried another line. They said criticism might be permitted—and they would do it themselves. So they began to re-interpret "God's Word." They did this first of all by seeing how much of the truth must be admitted, and then reading the Bible so as to get that meaning out of it. If God said the world was made in six days, that, they explained, did not mean six days, it might mean six periods of anything up to a million years each. When he promised doubters eternal hell, it only meant for a certain period. When it told men to take no thought for the morrow it meant don't be over anxious, for care killed the cat, and so might not be good for human beings. And so on indefinitely. But even this method has its limitations. The words themselves were always there, and some people might wonder if God meant these things why he did not plainly say so. Thus we come to the final stage, which consists in taking out the words themselves and substituting others that will mean what they are afraid the Bible must mean. And if this is persisted in, and this version of the Bible becomes the standard one, the old reading will, in course of time, become forgotten and Christians will be able to point to the more recent version as what God actually said. This took place in the case of the command in the New Testament which orders *slaves* to be obedient to their masters, for which was substituted the harmless *servants*, and it may well happen with the Bible as a whole.

* * *

How to Revise.

Quite recently a committee of bishops revised the Ten Commandments so as to leave out some very ugly features. Now an authoritative committee suggests doing the same thing for the Psalter, which will be found towards the end of the Church of England Prayer Book, and consists of the Psalms selected for use at morning and evening prayers and on other occasions. An ostensible reason for this is that "owing to the desperate condition of the text" the meaning is not quite clear. It fails, they say, to give "satisfactory sense." The expression is significant. It is not that the translation does not give the sense of the original, but that it is not satisfactory. One will not be far out in saying that it is unsatisfactory because the reading of many parts is so revolting to common-sense and even to common decency, that the Church stands to sink lower in public estimation than it is by keeping the Psalter as it stands. Thus we have the picture of the Church of England using for centuries language which they declared to be part and parcel of "God's Holy Word," and finally, under pressure of civilized common-sense, for very shame's sake, revising it in the interests of decent moral feeling; and, as though to make the situation completely grotesque, it proceeds to a new dishonesty in the name of a higher

morality. It has not even now the decency to throw overboard the grotesque superstition of some Mumbo-Jumbo having inspired the Bible, and say quite plainly that it has exactly the same origin as any other book in the world, and must be judged exactly as any other book is judged. If that were done there would be no need for these constant revisions. But that would imply a completely honest Church—and, as we said last week, the age of miracles is over.

Christian Love. * * *

These are some of the delightful sayings which it is proposed to omit from future readings in the Church—it will be noticed what a spirit of Christian love they breathe and how much they must have done to civilize the world and get men to live happily together:—

Break their teeth, O God, in their mouths.

Let them consume away like a snail, and be like the untimely fruit of a woman; and let them not see the sun.

The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his footsteps in the blood of the ungodly.

Let their eyes be blinded, that they see not.

Let them fall from one wickedness to another; and not be written among the righteous.

Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow.

Let his children be vagabonds, and beg their bread.

Blessed shall he be that taketh thy children and throweth them against the stones.

There is more of the same sort of thing, but enough is as good as a feast, even in the case of good Christians lustily cursing. One is not surprised that the committee desires to eliminate such things, and would be still better pleased if people would forget they were ever there. For the Bible is, we are told, a book that has taught men to love one another—it has civilized the world. It is unpleasant for someone to bring forward such texts and ask: "Were these things done by the influence of texts such as these?" No wonder the Bible was so highly thought of by the German military party. If they wanted a hymn of hate and brutality where could they find a more convenient text-book than the Bible—and coming to them with all the authority of the Christian God, too!

True to Type. * * *

It cannot be said that these things are deleted because they are foreign to the spirit of the Bible or to historic Christianity. They are in the closest affinity to both. In the Bible "God's enemies" are invariably denied justice, and the punishments of the Bible are invariably brutal. They expressed the minds of savages, and Christianity continued the story. A creed which could evolve the doctrine of eternal damnation, which could gloat over the prospects of unbelievers being tortured in hell, and could say through the mouths of some of its greatest exponents that children "scarce a span long" paved the floor of hell when they died without baptism, a Church which for centuries continued the most brutal torture of men and women for the fantastical offence of heresy, cannot say that these texts did not express its innermost spirit. Nothing could have expressed it better. It enabled Christians to satisfy their most brutal and most intolerant feelings under the guise of a religious duty. To have prayed openly that the children of those opposed to you should be dashed against the stones, that they who differed from you should be blinded, and that all sorts of evils should dog their steps, to have wished these things openly and without disguise would have shocked most. But to be able to do it in the name of God and to have felt that one was carrying out a religious duty in so wishing, this was a sure way of satisfying brutality and savagery while inducing a feeling of comfortable moral satisfaction. For our part we shall be sorry to

see these things deleted from either the Bible or the Prayer Book. We should wish to keep them there in the interests of honesty.

* * *

How to Understand Religion.

There is only one way in which one can honestly present to a modern public what the writers of the Bible actually had in their minds, and that is to re-create something of the environment, and so appreciate something of the mental state of those who wrote it. To read the Bible so as to get out of it the meaning which suits one is radically dishonest, and is recognized to be so in the case of every book other than the Bible. Thus, if we say that when the Bible speaks of an animal as being "unclean" it means what we mean when we speak of a thing as unclean, that is, as every scholar knows, grossly inaccurate. Unclean in the Bible means something that was sacred to the gods, its nearest equivalent in modern language is holy, something taboo to ordinary men and women. To pretend otherwise is not to interpret the Bible honestly, but to deliberately play upon the ignorance of the public, and that, unfortunately, has been the feature of religious exposition on that subject. In this way the fact that in dealing with the Bible we are in contact with a people who were precisely on the level of many uncivilized tribes to-day has been hidden, and the ordinary Christian has come to visualize them as being even more advanced morally and "spiritually" than we are ourselves. But moral and intellectual culture does not spring from the air, they must depend upon a number of things, few of which were within the mental grasp of the Bible people. A people who could believe in the things they did believe in simply could not have entertained the many lofty ideas and feelings with which they are credited. The proper, the honest, the scientific way to study the people of the Bible is to range them side by side with those semi-civilized tribes with whom we still find the same beliefs as those expressed in the Bible, and very often the same terms of expression. If we got into the habit of doing this we should at last make a genuine understanding of the Bible possible with ordinary folk, and if we did this we should not go to savages to impose our religion upon them. We should go to them as anthropologists have learned to visit them, to contrast and compare our religion with theirs and seek from them enlightenment as to the real meaning of the many superstitions our ancestors have bequeathed us.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Providence.

If God exists and is the creator and preserver of the Universe, the belief in Providence follows of necessity, however strongly appearances may contradict it; and yet it is an undeniable fact that to-day many have abandoned the belief in Providence who still believe in God. In an article on the subject in the *Christian World*, "J. W." says:—

During the war unnumbered, simple, religious souls had their faith in a watchful Providence shattered; they prayed with deepest fervour for their beloved, yet their prayers failed to protect them against poison-gas or bursting shell, trench fever, or the horrors of a lingering death from exposure in "no-man's-land." They are "souls bereaved," indeed, for to their natural sorrow there is added the sense that God failed them, mysteriously, incomprehensibly; and in too many cases the poet's "Most beliefless, who once most believed," sums up their position. Their whole religious training had spoken of God as One who might so easily have rescued son or husband from peril by the mere exercise of his will. Why had he not done so?

Such being the case, "J. W." gives an extract from a private letter asking for a restatement of the doctrine of Providence, saying: "Sunday after Sunday there go up from our pulpits petitions asking God to do things which intelligent people in the pews know that he will not, or possibly cannot do, and the result is disastrous to religious reality." "J. W." endeavours to supply the restatement of the doctrine of Providence asked for. He briefly traces the evolution of the doctrine from earliest times when people sought to secure the favour and protection of the Gods "by acts of homage and sacrifice." The Patriarch Jacob "vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house, and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (Gen. xxviii, 20-22). A loyal worshipper of Jehovah was assured that he would not be injured either by "the terror by night," or "the arrow that flieth by day," or "the pestilence that walketh in darkness," or "the destruction that wasteth at noonday." "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee" (Ps. xixi, 5-8). As a matter of fact such specious teaching has never been verified in actual experience. This "J. W." frankly concedes, saying:—

Experience shows us every kind of undeserved suffering befalling the worthy and upright; useful and inspiring lives cut short by fell disease or accident, while a monster like King Leopold lives beyond the Psalmist's span without a shadow of earthly requital; some notorious scamp coming through Armageddon without a scratch, while sterling character and moral excellence are mown down in swathes; a lifetime's frugal savings swallowed up in a bank failure, while Government contractors and profiteers amass fantastic fortunes. Was that the best he could do? Or did he, like Caliban's divinity, proceed as he did, "just choosing so"?

The question which forces itself upon us is, how can a man who writes like that still believe in Providence? "J. W." tries hard to answer it, but totally fails. He employs a wholly irrelevant illustration. He imagines a customer or caller entering a huge department store, and insisting upon being attended to by none but the managing director. Naturally his foolish pretensions cannot be gratified, the business being "worked by a whole hierarchy of heads of departments, managers, sub-managers, and so on down to the merest junior behind one of the innumerable counters." On being informed of all that and directed to the very counter where he can purchase what he needs, the customer is not likely to draw the irrational inference that the manager is a myth "coined from nonentity." Now, according to "J. W.," "we have been far too much in the habit of regarding God as an absolute and omnipotent Monarch, ruling the whole of his subjects by the direct exercise of his power." Such a conception of the Divine Monarchy he repudiates. He says:—

We take the view that God exercises his Sovereignty and Providence, on the one hand, by the unflinching action of laws devised by his supreme wisdom and benevolence; and, on the other, that he delegates authority and commits the execution of his will to free agents, his children, all of whom derive their powers from him, and are responsible for their use or misuse to him. But the emphasis is to be placed on man's freedom to obey or to disobey God; and to the question, "Who withstandeth his will?" the obvious answer is, "We all do, in every act of disobedience and sin." Thus his Providence manifests itself signally in prophets and apostles, teachers and healers, artists and poets, discoverers and inventors; through these and such as these he inter-

venes for good in every field of beneficent activity. All men are potential agents of his Providence.

Against that view there are two overwhelming arguments. The first is its utter unscripturalness. In the Bible God is represented as almighty and his will as absolutely supreme. In Daniel iv, 35, we read: "All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say unto him, what doest thou?" In Matthew x, 29-30, we read: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father; but the very hairs of your head are all numbered." The second argument against "J. W.'s" view of Providence is the impossibility of its verification. That the Universe is governed by laws is obvious to every earnest observer; but that these laws were "devised by his (God's) supreme wisdom and benevolence" is merely a theological assumption completely incapable of demonstration by means of a single veritable fact. The belief that there is a Supreme Being who exercises care, control, and guidance over the universe in all its parts and contents rests on no solid foundation whatever. The laws of Nature possess no moral character, nor are they guided in their operations by any sense of either benignity or malignity. They represent grim physical and chemical necessity, and these are the laws by which we ourselves are being governed from the cradle to the grave. "J. W." ignores this scientific interpretation of the Universe altogether and plays with the utmost familiarity with what George Meredith calls "the fables of the Above." He pretends to know God much better than he does his fellow-men, and writes quite confidently of his decrees and intentions, whereas in reality, of anything beyond and above Nature he knows absolutely nothing.

Writing in total ignorance of the supernatural he succeeds in portraying God as a miserably weak and defeated Monarch. He tells us what the true significance of his view of Providence really is:—

It means that God himself does not get his will carried out whenever men choose to act contrary to it. When we recognize this, and realize that the responsibility for such catastrophes as the war is man's, we shall no longer accuse him of indifference; we shall understand that, so far from indifferent, he is intensely grieved and disappointed with man's wrongful use of his gift; that we can actually thwart his purposes, and that so far as we refuse to carry them out, he is defeated.

There is nothing new, of course, in that argument. It has been used by the advocates of man's free-will innumerable times before; but it is an argument that robs the Divine Being of the sovereignty ascribed to him in the Bible and renders him man's inferior. He is a being who feels unspeakably sorry for human troubles and sorrows, who stood helplessly by, and wept tears of deepest distress over the horrors of the war; and as we think of it all we begin to feel unutterably sorry for him. Such is the God depicted by "J. W."—a weakling, who is at once sorry and impotent in the midst of his vast but perplexing Universe. The writer of the article does feel genuinely sorry for him in his powerlessness to govern the world, but he finds comfort in the belief that "it is Christ crucified who takes our hearts captive," not the God who, knowing that the world is desperately evil, can rise to nothing higher than the emotion of inexpressible sorrow for it.

The only conclusion to which we are led is that both the Bible and "J. W." present us with views of God and his Providence which are fundamentally false. The writer of the article under discussion is fully justified in rejecting the sovereignty of God as taught in the Bible; but the doctrine he substitutes for it is

equally false, but immeasurably less dignified and awe-inspiring. For a god represented as infinitely above the world and gloriously capable of transforming it, he offers a god who, contemplating the wickedness and wretchedness rampant on earth, can do scarcely anything better than feel inexpressibly sorry, and for whom we are exhorted to cherish profoundest sorrow. As we trace the course of the evolution of the human race, and note the facts of its history, we find it entirely impossible to believe in any god at all. As soon as we realized the gravity of the situation we found our only possible refuge in Atheism. No god at all is much preferable to an infinite and omnipotent God who can redeem the world but does not, and to a finite God who cannot save lost humanity, but is grieved at his heart because of his impotence. Atheism alone is a consistent and logical theory. J. T. LLOYD.

Our Pastors and Masters.

The entire training and life of England's ecclesiastics seem to render the majority of them utterly incapable of taking in facts patent to everyone else.

—*The Duke of Argyle.*

RECENTLY at the House of Commons a portentous address of congratulation to the Labour Party on being recognized as the official Opposition in Parliament was presented by Canon Donaldson, of Peterborough. This was signed by four hundred Church of England priests, who have not hitherto been regarded as favourable to, or even interested in, the Labour movement. Indeed, this sudden conversion to Democracy is very remarkable in a body of men who have for generations been regarded as a branch of the Civil Service, and the most obedient, humble servants of the landed and feudal interests.

This sudden interest of the clergy in Labour politics is novel. That form of superstition, which is facetiously known as "the Government Religion," is, in the last analysis, a creature of Parliament, and from time to time, comes to its creator for repairs and alterations. The creator, under the microscope, is a cynical association known as the House of Commons, having many forms of religion, and looking upon the pampered Church which it patronizes as a special constable, whose duty it is to frighten people from attending too strictly to the real affairs of life by promising them rewards when they are no longer alive.

Among the clergy are a number who pretend that the Holy Church which they belong to represents a religion independent of Parliament and politics. Most clergymen are Peter Pans, and are notoriously innocent of the culture of their own priestly profession, but the ignorance is unpardonable when they see from time to time the ritual, government, and doctrines of their sacred Church being declared by Acts of Parliament, framed by Freethinkers, Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, Jews, Unitarians, and the other religions or non-religions professed by the six hundred members of Parliament.

The clergy, as a body, have always pretended to be entirely uninfluenced by political motives. Their record, however, from a Democratic point of view, is notoriously hostile to liberty. The Established Church fosters loyalty to the Throne, and enjoins prayers for individual members of the Royal Family. It invariably supports the existing order of things, and is hostile to change. Until a few years back it held an annual service in memory of that padded and half-forgotten buffoon, King Charles the First, whom it professed to regard as a holy martyr of the Church of Christ.

The Established Church has always been a bulwark of Reaction. Many clergymen would deny this hotly,

but, fortunately, the record is in plain print in hundreds of Parliamentary publications. The votes of the Bishops of the Church of England in the House of Lords are sufficient to rouse the lasting hostility of all right-thinking persons, and their shameless opposition to all progressive measures shows how hopelessly the clerical caste is out of touch with democratic aspirations. The Bishops voted against admitting Nonconformists to the universities of their own country. They were hostile to removing the civil disabilities of Roman Catholics, Jews, and Freethinkers. They opposed the introduction of free education, and have ever since done their utmost to get their own sectarian schools supported at the expense of the ordinary citizen. They voted against admitting women as members of London borough councils. None voted for the abolition of flogging women in public, thrashing women in prison, and the use of the lash in the Army and Navy. To-day they are everywhere opposing divorce, and they are camouflaging the worst features of their superstition by deleting the barbarities and indecencies of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. Scores of measures for the bettering of the conditions of the working-classes have been opposed by these purse-proud prelates, and their record is sufficient to carry its own condemnation.

Elsewhere one knows what a Church stands for. You say this implicitly obeys the Pope and the College of Cardinals, and that is faithful to the Westminster Confession, and another yields homage to the Eastern Patriarchs. Ask, however, what the Anglican Church stands for to-day and what man can tell you? One priest points to the Red Flag of Democracy, while another looks reverently at the Altar and the Throne. When your back is turned they both laugh in their dainty lawn sleeves at the simplicity of laymen.

MIMNERMUS.

Running Away From Life.

THE chief difference between the psychology of even twenty years ago and that of to-day is that the former looked on man as "the rational animal" whereas to-day we should rather call him "the rationalizing animal." It used to be thought that reason was a "faculty" set above desire for the latter's control. It is now held that a desire can be controlled only by a stronger desire or by a group of desires. Reason is a sort of lawyer retained by the desires to show them how they may get what they want, or to apologize for their acts, afterward, to conscience.

Conscience is a little parrot who keeps repeating phrases that it overhears from others. "Now you must be industrious," or "you must not muss up your new suit," it says to a little boy when he wants to sprawl on the green grass. So the lawyer, Reason, "gets busy" to explain that the boy's real ground for wanting to sprawl on the grass is so he may be in condition to work all the harder next day and earn a brand new suit. This is what the psychologist calls "rationalizing." It is a method of putting that parrot, conscience, to sleep.

But even this "rationalizing" is a more strenuous activity than our brain likes to follow, once we are sprawled full length in the sun. Our mind then goes into what is called reverie, which is simply the painting of pleasing pictures in the clouds. The harder time we have, meeting the reality of life, the more we like in imagination to get away from it altogether through the medium of day-dreams. In his dreams the vagrant tramp imagines he is a king or a millionaire, until something brings him, with a sickening feeling, back to reality.

Behind both "rationalizing" and "dreaming" of this kind is a common mechanism, the "pleasure principle." This has for its object to shield us a little while from painful truth. The more pleasure-loving we are, the more we thus flee from the harsh facts of life. But unfortunately, like the opium pill, it ends with reality crashing in on us with a greater thud than ever.

Not only individuals have their rationalizations and dreams; peoples and races have them too. The race which wishes to steal another race's land, or which finds its war-profiteering interfered with, calls itself Yaveh's chosen folk, or rants about "making the world safe" for something it doesn't practice at home. Every people creates or adopts a series of dreams also about the universe, through which it appears that to meet life as it is, and better conditions in this world for the masses, is unnecessary, because, after living here only a little while, good dreamers will be graduated into another existence where all will be blissful.

The earliest and crudest form of such belief is evolved from animism. Childlike men tended to vent their feelings without restraint; if they were angry, then to kick something; if thinking of a beloved one who had died, to call his name and address words to him; if pleased at something, to give thanks.

Next they began to "rationalize." For example a child might ask, "Dad, why did you kick the stone hatchet when it hit your finger? Why do you talk to grandpop, when he has been dead a month? Whom are you thanking because you speared so many salmon?" Then up spoke "Reason" in the father: "Because the hatchet meanly wanted to hurt me, and can feel my kick," or "because Grandpop's double or breath (spirit) or shadow (shade) still exists, and appears to me in my dreams." Or, "because there is a salmon Totem, which brought all these fish to my spear."

At the present time, as the result of a great war which created in millions of hearts the desire for converse with sons, brothers and lovers killed in that war, we have a return of belief in spirits. Even when this superstition was at its post-war height, however, it had fewer adherents than it had at the crest of its wave in the last century. It illustrated, however, the power of strong desire to revive even among a few men of scientific achievement, most primitive kinds of belief in absurdly material "spirits" that lived in a heaven where they smoked cigars and drank whiskey.

Another lesson which spiritism teaches is that so soon as the public evinces a willingness to pay for proofs of the most absurd "phenomena," there will be charlatans ready to supply it. Men like Joseph Rinn in New York have a standard offer of a cheque in four figures for any "phenomena" they cannot duplicate by simple trickery. The *Scientific American* now offers a like prize. Others, like Clyde Maskelyne in London, give never-ending expositions of the complete repertory of spiritist tricks. One medium after another is exposed. The criminal records are full of accounts of how "reputable mediums" who "give only private sittings" and "never accept pay for them" are connected with bucket-shops and fraudulent stock companies in which they induce their dupes to invest, employ private detectives and have central lists of indexed names from which they get information by telegram, and pay commission to persons who circulate in "good society" to convince intended victims with tales of their "marvellous" doings.

Although new inventions like "ectoplasm" and faked photographs of "ghosts" and "fairies" are continually being added, most of the modern medium's tricks are used by savage voodoo doctors and shamans. The line of development, therefore, has been away from spiritism through polytheism, monotheism, and

now to some mystic entity or non-entity such as the "elan vital" of Prof. Bergson, or the "collective unconscious" of the C. J. Jung school of psychoanalysts, or the "adepts" who inspire the leaders of theosophy, or the beings who, according to a school led by Gurdieff (whose apparently very able system of psychological development I am, at this writing, in France to investigate at their institute near Fontainebleau) live in worlds of 4, 5, 6, or 7 dimensions.

In all these religions the basis of belief may be said to be a desire to evade the duty of practical homely aid in making this present world a better place to live in. We have no reason to believe that if we have souls at all, they go away from this planet after death, and are not simply reborn here. Really no proof of a soul has ever been evinced. On the contrary, physiology, psychology, and medicine combine to prove that we have no power whatever of remembering or thinking or feeling at all unless the appropriate nervous mechanism is present. What should a soul be that remembered nothing, thought nothing, and felt nothing? All that we are is of this earth; and if it is to live again, it lives here, and must face the duty of making here a place fit to be its home.

Neither can we depend on beings superior to humanity to do our work for us. There are plenty of tests for a superior being. If he is all-wise and all good and all powerful, he will not permit catastrophes like the great war, which bring untold misery and destroy the strength and characters of millions who trust in him. He might also be expected to preserve his churches erected in his honour from destruction by lightning. Or by a single act of his will, instead of the clumsy and unsuccessful devices hitherto used, to convince all men of his existence.

A similar argument will be found to apply to each of the other metaphysical hypotheses above mentioned. But the majority of men will refuse to apply the same tests to religious hypotheses that they do to science or business, so long as they are seeking to evade reality.

Another mental factor in religion is sex. The very language of religion is full of words which show how closely it is linked up with this, in the human mind. Thus Jesus is the Heavenly Bridegroom, whom we are to love. The Church is his Spouse. The marriage ceremony is said to "symbolize the holy union of Christ with his Church." Nuns are regarded and regard themselves as "wedded to Christ." The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is called Holy Communion.

Similarly, the cross, baptism, and nearly all of the trappings and ceremonies of the Church—and these, by the way, are mostly thousands of years older than Christianity itself, and were formerly pagan customs—are easily shown to have a sexual significance. But the reader who has no time to undertake scholarly researches in that line will find proof for his eyes if he will attend, as a critical observer, the next revivalist meeting in his town. He will see antics and facial expressions unmistakably sexual; and more "dignified" religion has merely evolved from this type.

The primal thing, then, which makes men continue irrational is their persistent immaturity, their panic-stricken retreat into fantasy and myth-making when confronted with reality. And reality is like a giant which grows bigger every time we flee from him. If we don't face him at the start, he eats us up in the end.

In sum, our evasiveness gives us gods and metaphysical fantasies. In return, god-belief and metaphysical fantasy keep us from facing reality.

PRINCE HOPKINS.

Religions are various, but reason is one, and we are all brothers.—*Chinese Proverb.*

Easter.

They relate that the sacred tree is cut on that day on which the sun comes to the apex of the equinoctial axis; on the next day they go round with trumpets; on the third day the sacred ineffable fruits of the god Gallus are cut. After these are the Hilaria Feasts.—F. C. Julianus (*Imperator*), "*De Matrem Deorum*."

Thammuz came next behind,
Whose annual wound in Lebanon allured
The Syrian damsels to lament his fate,
In amorous ditties all a summer's day,
While smooth Adonis from his native rock
Ran purple to the sea, supposed with blood
Of Thammuz yearly wounded.

—Milton, *P.L.*, i, 446.

It is said that when St. Augustine landed in England he found the Britons observing Easter in the Asiatic way. There was nothing strange in this. If an intelligent Pagan were able to revisit "the glimpses of the moon" and observe our celebrations of Good Friday and Easter, he would smile when told that the observances were in celebration of a certain Jesus who was put to death in Palestine eighteen hundred years ago, and who, on the third day, rose again. He would say in astonishment: Why is not this your Spring Festival such as has been observed by every nation? How came you to hold the anniversary of a man's death on a movable date? The man who stole the saucepan and made a new lid for it took good care that the lid fitted. But the Christian lid, put on the old Pagan saucepan, does not fit. The fact that your Easter shifts according to the phases of the moon shows it is our astronomical festival. But you say it is not a man you celebrate, but a God. Of course it is; the great god of gods, the power of revivification symbolized in every tree, and in the visible luminary, the life-giving sun, who has now crossed the vernal equinox and rises again triumphant over winter and death. Have you never heard how we celebrated the resurrection of Adonis, even as the Syrians did that of Tammuz, the Egyptians of Osiris? Go, read in Theocritus how those delightful gossips, Gorgo and Praxinoe, babble at the festival of the god, how they listen to his dirge, and rejoice at the decorations.

Matthew Arnold says:—

Adonis was the sun in his summer and in his winter course, in his time of triumph and his time of defeat; but in his time of triumph still moving towards his defeat, in his time of defeat still returning towards his triumph. Thus he became the emblem of the power of life and the bloom of beauty, the power of human life and the bloom of human beauty, hastening inevitably to diminution and decay, yet in that very decay finding "hope, and a renovation without end."¹

What does the name Easter tell us? What connection has it with Jesus of Nazareth? According to Bede and the best modern authorities, the word Easter is derived from Eostre, the Saxon goddess of the east, signifying the dawn and spring, whose festival our forefathers celebrated at this season. The Saxon *Oster* means "to rise." Throughout the Pagan world the revivification of vegetation was celebrated with festivals, which symbolized the reproductive powers of nature. The time when the sun passing over the vernal equinox proclaims himself redeemer of the world from winter is naturally that of the feast of the Passover, not the mythical crossing of the Red Sea but the yearly passage of the world from the bonds of winter to the life and vigour of summer. At this season the Egyptians held a feast to Isis, and the palm was carried about as the symbol of reproductive power and triumph long ere Palm Sunday was supposed to

signify the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem. Easter is probably allied to Ishtar, the Assyrian goddess of love and fecundity, who was said to have descended to hell. She is similar to the Phœnician Astarte and the Ashtoreth of the Zidonian for whom Solomon built the Mount of Corruptions (II Kings xxiii, 13) at Jerusalem. The Syrian God Tammuz or Adonis, was first mourned and then believed to have risen from the dead. The same fable was related of the Egyptian God Osiris. These gods all represented the reproductive power of Nature, and were celebrated at spring festivals.

There is no trace of the celebration of Easter as a Christian festival in the New Testament (Acts xii, 4, is a mistranslation; *Easter* should be *Passover*), or in the writings of the apostolic fathers. Early in the history of the Church we hear of two divisions of the original Salvation Army, who disputed for centuries about the time when Easter should be kept. Eastern churches, comprising many Judaizing Christians, kept the 14th of Nisan, the Jewish Passover, but the Western Church, composed mainly of Gentiles, on account of the connection of the resurrection with the day of the Sun, kept always the first day of the week. At the end of the second century Pope Victor wrote an imperious letter to the Eastern Church, commanding them to conform to the Western practice. They refused, and were stigmatized as heretics. Epiphanius tells us:—

Some began the festival before the week, some after the week, some at the beginning, some at the middle, some at the end, thus creating a wonderful laborious confusion.

At the Council of Nice, under Constantine, it was fixed as now, on the first Sunday after the full moon happens upon or next after the vernal equinox. As the Egyptians excelled in astronomy, the Bishop of Alexandria was appointed to give notice of Easter Day to the Pope and other patriarchs. This, however, did not ensure uniformity. We learn from St. Ambrose (Epist. 23) that in 387 the churches of Gaul kept March 21, while those of Italy postponed it to March 28, and those of Egypt a week later still, to April 5. Similar discrepancies are mentioned by Gregory of Tours in the year 577; nor did they disappear till the eighth century.

The fact of Easter being a movable feast proves its astronomical origin, and the differences among early Christians show their ignorance of the date when their god-man is alleged to have burst the bonds of death. They have never even fixed the year of that extraordinary occurrence with any certainty. While the Gospels make Jesus prophesy that he would spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, the narratives make him to have spent only one day and two nights. According to the Synoptics, the crucifixion took place on a Friday, the first day of the Passover, but according to the established principle of the Jewish calendar, the first day of the Passover never can fall on Friday. To make the crucifixion happen on the Passover is as improbable as to allege that an Irish Fenian was hanged on a Sunday. At that time there were no courts sitting, and certainly no execution could be permitted according to Jewish law. It is most unlikely that the Roman governor of Judea would so offend Jewish prejudice as to permit an execution at the time of the Paschal feast.

That the Western Church in early times celebrated the last supper on the one day and the resurrection on the next indicates that the Christian festival sprung from the old Pagan offerings of bread and wine to the sun-god being mixed up with the Jewish sacrifice of the Paschal lamb, and this may have led to the legend of the Lamb of God having been put to death at the time of the Passover, the period of the year when the

¹ *Pagan and Mediæval Religious Sentiment: Essays in Criticism*, p. 196.

representative sacrifice was offered to ensure the fertility of the soil.

It is difficult for Christians to realize how close was the resemblance which the rites adopted by the Church in honour of Christ's resurrection bore to those practised by the Greeks, Phœnicians, Syrians, Egyptians, Hindoos, and many other nations in honour of the god of resurrection, under the name of Adonis, Dionysos, Thammuz, Osiris, Krishna, etc. Godfrey Higgins in his *Anacalypsis* (ii, 106), says:—

We have already seen that in Hindustan and Britain the procreative power of Nature was celebrated on the day of the vernal equinox by Phallic rites, Huli festivals, May poles, and April fools, and is even yet continued in these extreme points of East and West—of India and Britain—where the young girls, with their swains, little suspect the meaning of their innocent gambols—gambols which, if our devotees understood, they would view with horror. On the same day in Persia, the triumph of Good over the Evil Principle took place—the triumph of Light over Darkness, of Oromasdes over Ahriman. At the same time, in Egypt, Phrygia, Syria, were celebrated the deaths and resurrections of Osiris, Atys, and Adonis. In Palestine, again, we find, on the same day, the Jews celebrating their Passover, the passage of the equinox from the sign of the Bull to that of the Ram, and of the Sun from the inferior to the superior hemisphere; and, to conclude all, on this day we Christians of Europe still continue to celebrate the victory of the god Sol, known to all nations above enumerated by his different names—by us “The Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world”—on Easter Sunday, having risen to life and immortality, triumphing over the powers of hell and darkness.

The ancient Christian year began with Easter. Religious worship was celebrated by night; and the vigils continued till cock-crowing announced the birth of the new sun. Then the stillness of the midnight vigils was broken by the joyful acclamation, “The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen indeed!” Easter day was celebrated with every demonstration of joy. In the Roman Catholic Church we may see more of the Pagan element. At cock-crowing tapers are lighted. St. Peter's at Rome is illuminated, and the vicar of Christ, his vestments blazing with gold, pronounces a blessing upon the world from a high balcony at midday. Eusebius, in the sixth book of his *Ecclesiastical History*, chapter eight, tells us that on one occasion the early Christians were celebrating “the solemn vigils of Easter,” when to their dismay they found that oil was wanted. Narcissus, Bishop of Jerusalem, commanded water to be brought, and this he miraculously changed into oil in order that the celebration might be duly observed. This story shows that the early Christian Easter was quite similar to the Pagan solar festival.

J. M. WHEELER.

(To be Continued.)

Acid Drops.

We are all familiar with the plea that if we leave religion alone it will gradually die from causes other than a direct attack upon it. We should have more respect than we have for the statement if we did not feel that it is very often little more than a piece of “rationalizing,” an excuse for not doing what is the most unpopular of work. But there is one other cause responsible for this statement, and that is the fact of people knowing so little of the opinions of the mass of their fellow citizens as to have actually persuaded themselves that Christianity is no longer believed in, that it is quite dead, and all that is needed is to clear away the corpse with the respect usually paid to corpses. We should be very pleased indeed if we could subscribe to the latter view, but when

one has been engaged in Freethought work as long as we have, and so are constantly running up against religious beliefs, so comfortable a conviction is not to be easily entertained.

We have been led to the above reflection by a review of Mr. Cohen's new book, *Essays in Freethinking*, which appears in the *New Age*, by “A. E. R.” The writer is evidently not at all unfriendly to the views expressed in that volume, but he is surprised at the vitality of Freethought, and, by implication, the dullness of Freethinkers, who fail to realize that religion is no longer of importance in everyday life. We trust that the staff of the *New Age* will not object to our saying that this attitude illustrates the wrapping of oneself in a mantle of superiority and shutting oneself off from contact with the everyday world of reality. The *New Age* is a very interesting and a very thoughtful journal, but its writers seem to have formed themselves into a sort of Mutual Admiration Society, and to have decided that those outside their own membership really do not matter. They do not represent the world. And that is really a dangerous position to get into. Liberal minded people who meet only liberal minded people are apt to forget that beyond their own very small circle there is the great world which if it does not receive notice will sooner or later pay attention to them in what may be an unpleasant manner. We would advise “A. E. R.” to leave for awhile the limited society of the *New Age* and take a trip over the West of England, or Wales, or indeed anywhere in the British Isles apart from the small intellectual centres of the big towns and cities, and he will then discover that, unfortunately, religious indifference is not nearly so great as he imagines. We wish he were right and that we were wrong, but we cannot think so; and we think his opinion results from the very common delusion of taking one's own small circle of selected friends and acquaintances as a picture of the world. That is a very common delusion, and we have met with it often; but the fifty millions of inhabitants in the British Isles are—save a small minority, still dominated by the grossest superstition, and it is with them we have to deal. If “A. E. R.” doubts this we advise him to make a direct attack on Christian beliefs and he will soon find that he has greatly mistaken the strength of the force on the side of religion. So we decline to agree that “Mr. Cohen's knowledge and gifts of exposition are simply wasted by being brought to the anti-Christian focus.” He is quite aware that greater popularity and certainly more cash and ease might be gained by his using whatever abilities he possesses to some other cause, but he will keep on as he has been going, and for the same reason that he has done it hitherto—because so many prefer the easier and the more popular road.

The Bishop of Stepney appeals for funds in order to establish a church in East London which shall be served by a Jewish preacher who shall preach in Yiddish. In this way he thinks the Jews may be converted to Christianity more quickly. What we wonder at is why should a Jew be converted to Christianity? He has nothing to gain on the score of religion. His own religion has quite as many stupidities connected with it as Christianity has, so why should he bother to acquire a new stock; and on other grounds why should he become Christianized. Jewish family life among the poor is notoriously better than it is among poor Christians. They are far more sober. What have they to gain in becoming Christians? There is surely no moral gain in a Jew becoming a Christian. Of course, there may be gain in other directions, and this is very often a deciding factor. “Rice Christians” are as common among converted Jews as they are among converted Hindoos. Some years ago we challenged the Society for the Propagation of Christianity among the Jews to produce Jewish converts to Christianity who had been members of the Christian Church for, say, five years, and who had not some obviously financial interest in being converted. No reply was made to the challenge. Probably the Society knew the character of its converts too well to accept. At the present rate of conversion and apologising, by the time the Jews are converted they will be the only Christians in existence. All the others will have outgrown their religion.

There should be widespread dismay at the War Office. Professor Soddy states that one thing about X-rays is that they cannot be used in war—scientists cannot destroy anybody with them yet—they can only be used to cure people. We shall believe the Church to be sincere when it broadcasts (yes, we must be popular) this kind of news from every pulpit, and puts away childish things such as girl guides and boy scouts.

The plan upon which the average preacher works in defending or expounding Christianity appears to be very simple. First of all, find out all that is thought to be good and call that Christianity. Then find out all that is believed to be bad and call that anti-Christianity. Thus, the Rev. W. L. Boulton, preaching at St. James's Church, Derby, said that Buddhism aimed at destroying family relationships. Christianity aimed at consecrating them. Perhaps it was by telling people to forsake their fathers and mothers and follow him that Jesus sought to consecrate family life, or by telling them that in the next world there would be neither marriage nor giving in marriage; and when his Church preached the excellence of imitating Jesus by leading a celibate life, that also was consecrating the family relationships. Now if the Russian Bolsheviks were to teach these things we should soon be told what a devilish doctrine it was, but attaching the name of Jesus to it makes a deuce of a difference.

Now we are beginning to learn all about it. The last war was fought to end war. It was to be never again, and the sword was never to be sheathed until the spectre of war had been banished from Europe, etc., etc. After that we learn that in the opinion of the Government there will be no war on a "major scale" till 1929—there may be quite a number of little ones, just to keep our hands in and help school cadets, etc., but nothing nearly so large as the last one for nearly six years! Between then and now we shall be spending our time in getting ready for it.

Meanwhile the old game goes on. Just as in the case of Germany, so now in the unspoken case of France. First a country is selected in order to measure its fighting strength against ours. Then it was Germany, now it is France. The cry is started that we must have a larger fighting force for purposes of defence. Then when that has gone on for a year or so, the country is boldly named—it will be France, we expect, this time, that is aiming at destroying our country—and the newspapers begin with painting the supposed enemy that is out to destroy us; and every journalist, in both countries, who is desirous of gaining attention by writing scare articles, is hard at it raising the war fever under the guise of wishing to see his country protected. Finally, from some incident or other, war comes, and then those who have for years been sowing the seeds of hatred and mistrust, who have been lying as only the professional journalist and the hard-pressed theologian can lie, and have helped to create the war, fold the mantle of the prophet around them with a satisfied "I told you so!" Not one in a thousand among the public has the common-sense to reflect that if these same writers had spent their time in encouraging mutual trustfulness between the peoples, and preached peace instead of war, the result might have been the other way about.

What these men have discovered is the simple fact that it is easier to play upon the fears of people than appeal to higher motives. Preach danger and every coward will at once give ear. Preach something that appeals to man's love of the higher aspects of life and you will be appealing to a small minority. Every politician knows this, every journalist knows it, the Christian Church realizes it more than either. That is why it based its preaching for so many centuries upon man's fear of hell and the danger of rejecting the gospel. The Salvation Army understood it when it built up a vast movement upon "Blood and Fire"—a form of words which merely as a symbol was enough to disgust decent men and women, and in the literal sense was well calculated to demoralize far more than it benefited. To appeal to the Church is

hopeless. It will remain, as usual, silent while the war is being prepared, and very vocal on behalf of war once it is declared. But we are quite convinced that if the journalists of Europe would at some international conference undertake to write no articles for five years advocating preparations for war, and write no articles on the war-like preparations made in other countries, if they would, in addition, write articles in praise of peace and against war, we have a very strong feeling that more would be done than has yet been done to make war really a thing of the past; and once it was shown that this sort of thing was profitable even the Churches might follow with the same policy. That is one of the good things about the Churches. If they have no principles to uphold, one can at least depend upon them preaching the thing that pays. All we have to do is to make it clear that it will pay.

The heroic Bishop of London has threatened to die on the door-steps of the House of Lords before he will consent to public-houses being opened till 11 o'clock. What a daredevil the man is to be sure! And what would he have done had he been invited to the marriage feast of Cana and had seen his Lord and Master turning water into wine for the people who had already well drunken? But we note the Bishop has never threatened so drastic a step against any of the other and graver evils with which we are troubled. It is quite safe to hold out such a threat in the case of the public-houses. It is on a par with the risks he ran during the war.

We have considerable sympathy with a protest made by the *Church Times* against the prevailing mania for the regimentation of the people. There are plenty of so-called reformers who would have us ruled by governmental regulations in what we shall eat and what we shall drink, and when and where we shall eat and drink, to say nothing of what we shall wear and where we shall go. When it becomes an offence to buy a pennyworth of chocolate after a certain hour of the night, and it is gravely debated in a law court whether a man is or is not to be punished because he has had a bar of chocolate from an automatic machine after 8 o'clock in the evening, a good many will think that things have gone a little too far. Liberty is, after all, still something worth having to some of us, and there can be no liberty where there is no possibility of an alternative.

Incidentally, the *Church Times* makes a remark that goes further than it thinks. It says that if the mass of the people acquiesce to the regulation of their lives by the police, and if a government should get into power that is opposed to religion and inclined to suppress religion, the people who have been drilled by their bishops to obey orders, will obey orders from sheer force of habit. "They would not have the moral strength to resist." Now with that we are inclined to agree, and it forms one of the counts in the indictment against the Christian Church. Man's capacity for self-determination is like every other capacity he possesses—it strengthens with use and weakens with disuse; and the cultivation of obedience to authority, which has been one of the characteristic features of the Christian Church is among the greatest of the evils it has inflicted upon the race.

This has seemed to us the correct method of reply to those Christians who have argued that if men lose their conviction of the truth of Christianity the consequence will be a moral catastrophe. On a large scale this is an impossibility, but in individual cases this may well occur. If a man has been brought up from boyhood to regard religious beliefs as the only reason and the only basis for decent conduct, it may happen that in cases where there is small intellectual endowment, he may rush into licence in the matter of conduct; but the fault here is that of the Christian Church. Had it trained its members healthily, had it developed the social side of their nature they would have been able to stand without any artificial prop. It is the best teacher who teaches his pupils to do without him. It is the bad one who leaves them unable to stand alone.

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.

C. BAKER (Harrismith).—Letter received. The effects of your constantly pegging away are bound to show themselves in time, not that they are without results now, but one must not expect to see the fruits at once of all we do. Like you we wish that Freethinkers would take a more aggressive attitude towards Christian moral influence. It is the thing upon which Christians harp most to-day, and it is often allowed to go by default. Mr. Cohen may write again on the subject shortly.

N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges: A. Bullock, 2s. 6d.; Derwent Branch, 2s. 6d.; Manchester Branch, 12s. 6d.

N.S.S. GENERAL FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: Derwent Branch, 2s. 6d.; Manchester Branch, 12s.

F. W. HAUGHTON, E. PASSANT, AND OTHERS.—We do not know what there was that has made so many write us concerning the pleasure they have derived from the last few issues of the *Freethinker*, but we are pleased to have their appreciation all the same. All we can say is that we do our best to make each number interesting. The work is never scamped so far as we are concerned, although it is no light task to run a weekly paper single-handed, and contribute anything from eight to twelve columns weekly to its pages. When we add to this a very large correspondence and much other work that never appears in public, it looks as though we shall never rust out, whatever else happens.

J. E. SIMPSON.—Let us know when you are ready. We shall always be pleased to do anything we can.

H. MAY.—We have corrected that impression time after time, but it seems that we must do so again. We wish it could be taken once for all that the *Freethinker* does not benefit in the slightest degree, directly or indirectly, by any legacy that is left to either the National Secular Society or the Secular Society, Limited. The *Freethinker* can only benefit by what is given to it direct, and the public are pretty well informed as to the extent of that assistance.

J. STEPHENS.—Sorry we cannot supply you with particulars of the life of Logan Mitchell. His book, *Christian Mythology Unveiled*, was also published under the title of *Superstition Besieged*. By his will he left a sum of £55 to any bookseller who had the courage to publish his work. It is said, but we do not know upon what grounds, that he committed suicide.

A. W. COLEMAN.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops." It is strange to find people who will attack eagerly almost anything drawing back and finding some excuse from not attacking religion. Either religion is too strong, or it is too weak, or it will pain people unnecessarily. Any form of "rationalizing" so long as they are not asked to make open war upon the strongest enemy of human progress. Thanks, we are keeping well, and getting as much sunshine as is possible through the office window.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

There is a melancholy pleasure in publishing the following message sent by Mrs. Sydney Gimson to a Women's Friendly Society only a few days before her death. It will also serve as a fitting comment upon the obituary notice which appeared in our last issue:—

DEAR FRIENDS,—Three months in bed, surrounded by the love and untiring devotion that guard me from every unkind thought or anxiety, shows that heaven is not far away. We do not need death to take us there.

We can all help create it by our own efforts.

Set a high ideal and do one's best to live up to it.

Words of appreciation come when least expected and show that efforts are not wasted.

Ask for no recognition, expect none, it is not wanted.

We had a great leader, but there are no people too small to be useful. The seed they sow has a way of blossoming far away and in unexpected places—often they know nothing about it—the more reason for not being discouraged when there is no visible result.

It is a little grandchild's birthday to-day—the work we leave incomplete is carried on by the next generation—we trust to the world's advancement.

Your fellow worker,

JEANNIE L. GIMSON.

In the normal course of events we ought to be approaching the season of fine weather when all of us move about more than during the winter months, and we hope that we shall be excused for again pressing upon our friends the need for introducing the *Freethinker* to new readers wherever possible. Generally speaking the book trade is in a wretched condition at present, and will remain so until trade revives. Comparatively we do not think we have felt the bad times so much as most, but we have felt them, and when one is without resources even a little fall is felt. There is, of course, always the resource of again asking our friends to make good losses, but we are putting off that disagreeable task as long as possible, and in any case, and from every point of view, the better plan is to increase sales and so enable the paper to pay its way. To this end it should be remembered that every new reader counts, and everyone who can effect the capture of a new subscriber is giving us help of the very best kind. The *Freethinker* has won golden opinions from all quarters during the past few years, and we think that is a sign of promise. Anyway, we trust all will remember that the sign "New Readers Required" is a standing one with us.

Those who can distribute back numbers of the paper need only send a postcard saying how many they can judiciously give away and they will be sent post free from this office. Those who would like the paper sent on to friends for a few weeks need only send along sufficient postage to cover the sending and that will be done. There are only two ways in which the sales of this paper can be increased. One is by public advertising—for which we have not and are not likely to have sufficient means, unless that long-looked for millionaire dies and leaves a substantial legacy for the purpose. The other plan is to ask our friends to introduce the paper as widely as possible. So in default of the former method we must fall back on the latter.

The following is from the *Weston-super-Mare Mercury*:—

FREETHOUGHT LECTURES AT TOWN HALL.

At a meeting of the Town Hall and Pavilion Sub-Committee, a letter was received from the Honorary Secretary of the National Citizens' Union stating that they had had several complaints from their members who had attended a recent public meeting in the Town Hall addressed by Mr. Chapman Cohen, and expressing the hope that careful consideration would be given before this gentleman was allowed the use of the Town Hall for further meetings.

The Sub-Committee recommended that if further application is made by Mr. Cohen for the use of the Town Hall his application be submitted to the Town Hall Committee for their consideration.

We shall see what will occur and whether Weston is so far behind other towns in the kingdom as to refuse its

town hall for a Freethought meeting. We do not know what the Citizens' Union is, but it is evidently composed of some very fine bigots who must regret that the stake and dungeon for heretics is out-of-date.

We are very sorry—although it is no fault of ours, but entirely owing to no copy of the paper being sent us—that no mention was made in these columns of a very courteous notice which appeared in the local Press of the death and funeral of a very sturdy Wood Green Freethinker, Mr. Stewart. We knew him many years ago as one who was always ready to lend a hand when there was work to be done, and who was with us in some very stiff open-air fighting—physical fighting. The paper says that he died as he lived—the friend of man and the unflinching enemy of superstition. A better epitaph could no man have, and there is a sad pleasure in adding our testimony to its truth.

We are asked to announce that the last social evening this season of the West Ham Branch will be held on Saturday, April 7, at 7, in Earlham Hall, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate. There will be the usual programme of songs, games, etc. All Freethinkers and their friends are invited, and admission is free. We trust the gathering will be successful and send the members away in good fighting spirits for the open-air propaganda which will soon be starting.

The other Tuesday evening Mr. Cohen opened a discussion on the Blasphemy Laws at the Working Men's College, North London. The Discussion took the form of moving a set resolution "That the Blasphemy Laws be Abolished." There was a formal opposer, and then the students of the College joined in the discussion. It was evident that not all were aware of the existence of the laws, and there was the usual impression that the Blasphemy Laws had something to do with the prevention of bad language. Of course, they have not and never have had. But the tone of the discussion was good, and there is evidently a very liberal tone prevailing at the College. The place was crowded, and in the end the resolution was carried with only six voting against. We hope it is a forecast of what may happen in the House of Commons. But we are not over sanguine of any attachment of that House to such a thing as intellectual freedom. Much will depend upon whether our friends in the constituencies can make it plain to members that it is not to their interest to oppose the measure.

In the course of a few weeks we shall be holding the Annual Conference of the National Secular Society. It is therefore time that Branches and others began to submit to the Executive any resolutions they wish placed on the agenda. The afternoon session will be given up to the reading and discussion of papers dealing with the work of the N.S.S. and the bearing of Freethought upon current problems. Those who intend submitting papers to be read at the Conference should notify the Executive as early as possible. This innovation was a very successful feature of the last Conference and we have no reason to suppose it will be less so at the forthcoming one.

Mr. Cohen's lecture at the Town Hall Stratford on Sunday last was one of the most successful yet held. The hall was not full when the lecturer and chairman came on the platform, but it filled up well before the chairman had concluded his opening remarks. There was the very closest attention paid to the lecture throughout, and hearty applause at the end. The chairman made a very strong appeal for assistance to be given the local Branch in its coming summer campaign, and we trust it will meet with a good response. We understand there was a good sale of literature, a quantity of the new pamphlet by Dr. Draper being sold.

We again remind our readers of the course of Sunday afternoon lectures at South Place Chapel which are to commence on April 8. The first lecture will be given by Mr. Rosetti, and Mr. Cohen will close the series. These

will be the last lectures indoors in London this season, and London Freethinkers should do their best to see that they are quite successful. The hall should be filled on each occasion.

We are pleased to learn that Mr. Rosetti had a very fine meeting at Manchester on Sunday last. The change of meeting place resulted in many new faces being seen among the audience, and there was a good demand for literature at the end of the meeting. That is, in itself, a testimony to the interest excited by the address, and the assumption is borne out by the report that Mr. Rosetti was in "splendid form." Long may he remain so.

Mr. Blatchford and Spiritism.

No student of the growth of popular opinion in this country, whether in regard to religious or other matters, will underrate the influence which has been exerted by Mr. Robert Blatchford. Ever since his first sensational success with *Merrie England* he has exercised that influence potently over a large public. The charm of his style, the pathos and human appeal which run throughout all his work, and the crisp directness of his logic—all these factors easily account for that influence—and who will say it is not well merited? The present writer would certainly not say so, even though on many great and fundamental matters he cannot see that Mr. Blatchford is right.

Mr. Blatchford has recently taken up the subject of Spiritism—or, perhaps it would be better to say, he has addressed himself to it with more interest than in the past. In an article, headed "Do I Believe in Spiritualism?"—published in the *Sunday Herald* of March 4—he goes into this matter rather fully, and it affords an opportunity to follow out the train of thought which he suggests.

Mr. Blatchford sums up his position thus:—

Do I believe that the personality survives and that we can converse with the spirits of the dead? I think I must answer that I *do* believe those things, but though I may believe them I do not *know*. I do not see how the claims of the Spiritualists can be otherwise than true; but I do not know that they are true.....I have, as yet, never had any personal experience of a psychic nature. But I am seeking such experience and hoping to find it.

But what can be meant by "believing" and not "knowing"? What is that but *faith*? And what is faith? What is it but to believe a statement, not of one's own first-hand knowledge, but on the authority of another? Such an act is quite reasonable. We do it every day. In matters of religion its rationality or otherwise depends entirely upon the *reliability of the authority*. On this matter the present writer here says nothing. He has his own belief thereon, but it is not relevant to the present article. Why he mentions the subject at all is simply this: As faith, in matters of religion, would in any case simply be the belief in a thing on the authority of another, how can Mr. Blatchford's attitude to Spiritualism, as evinced in the above quotation, be really reasonable? He "believes" personality survives death; but he does not "know." Now why does he *believe*? It can—since he has had "no psychic experience" himself—only be on the authority either of the spirits of the dead, or else of living human witnesses. Really, however, we can dismiss the former of these alternatives, for, not having had "psychic experience," he cannot derive the belief, first-hand, from the "spirits" themselves. It must, then, be derived from living human witnesses. That, however, is simply to say that he *goes by the evidence*. If, however, the evidence is convincing to his mind, then he *does* "know"! But he says he doesn't! It seems to come to this: Mr. Blatchford thinks Spiritist

claims *plausible* but *unproved*. Is not this exceedingly perilous reasoning? Any number of false beliefs look plausible! The only rational criterion ought to be: Is so-and-so *true*? Are its claims *proved*?

Mr. Blatchford, however, refers with emphasis to the number of eminent people who, he says, believe or believed in Spiritism: to Marryat, Flammarion, Conan Doyle, Thackeray, Dumas, etc. What does *that* prove? Every considerable belief has eminent adherents. All that fact, *per se*, proves is that a given belief seems plausible. We get back to the position stated above.

There is also considerable perplexity in Mr. Blatchford's statement of his conception of what the "spirit world" is. We gather that it is simply a continuation of the present life with certain modifications. Those modifications, however, leave the ordinary human emotions unaltered. Love, friendship, etc., persist. There is "good, human, homely sense." There is "kindly human feeling." "Spiritualism," says Mr. Blatchford, "is a sacred thing. What does it mean? It means that human beings believe in survival after death, that they long to meet again with loved ones they have lost."

Look at it more deeply, however! Does this life consist only of "kindly, human feeling," of "good human sense," and of "loved ones"? Far from it! Are there not knavery, jealousy, envy, hatred, strife, failure, inconstant friendship, rivalry in affection? Is not life a web in which the evil is inextricably mixed with the good? If, then, the "spirit world" be simply a modified continuation of the present life, will the evils continue as well as the good? And how can it be otherwise, supposing the Spiritualist theory to be correct? In this life evil and good are not separable, but inextricably intertwined. In a life which is merely a continuation of this, how could it be otherwise there also? If I met my "loved one" yonder, and found her to be estranged from me by another, what would the meeting be but gall and wormwood? This is not a "sneer," but a statement of a common human tragedy.

It may be doubted, then, whether the Spiritualist "spirit world" would be desirable, even if actually a reality. The orthodox Catholic conception of the "beatific vision" is very different; according to it, the just souls see all things in God, and there is no sin, suffering, or imperfection in that vision. To the present writer this seems the only desirable conception of a future life; but who would wish a mere repetition of this present *vallis lachrymarum*? Does not, then, Mr. Blatchford allow his judgment of Spiritism to be unduly swayed by his emotions?

But a far more drastic criticism of Spiritism can be advanced: Even assuming (which in reality the present writer does not affirm; but even allowing for argument's sake) that there is sufficient evidence to make it probable that some Spiritist phenomena do genuinely come from a "spirit world," yet it would still remain utterly impossible to accept Spiritism as a philosophy, for it has no possible means of verifying the identity of its "spirits."

The fundamental fallacy of Spiritism—in the sphere of its logic—is its confusion of the various values of "tests." In this ordinary world, if I see a friend, if that friend has the voice, appearance, knowledge, and other mental and physical characteristics known to me as his; then I know him to be the person to whom those characteristics belong. But *why* do I so know? Simply because I live in a world whose natural laws forbid certain alterations, or simulations, as utterly impossible. But the Spiritists assume the existence of a spirit-world where these physical laws do not prevail (or, at any rate, where they cannot *prove* they prevail); and then they proceed to verify its phenomena by the laws of *this* world! How can material

proofs verify the identities of beings who are not material?—or, to put it in other words, how could the tests applicable to this known, earthly sphere verify the credentials of beings of another and unknown sphere? It comes to this: Even if we allowed the genuineness of Spiritist phenomena, in the sense that some of them seemed probably to be derived "supernaturally," yet we should still have to condemn spiritism as useless, for it could not possibly verify the *identity or reliability* of its "spirits" even if they really were spirits.

The present writer is concerned solely with pure truth. If a thing is true, *believe* it; if false, *deny* it. He has refrained from stating his own beliefs, though they may be deduced from parts of the article. All he is concerned with here is Mr. Blatchford's semi-defence of Spiritism. In these matters the only reasonable attitude to take is that of Socrates in Plato's "Philebus": "We surely do not now desire to enter into a contest, in order that what I lay down, or what you do, may gain the victory; but we ought both of us to unite in fighting for what is the most true."

This being so, the present writer would conclude that Mr. Blatchford's thoughts on Spiritism suggest the following considerations: The fact that "eminent people" may accept it, is no proof of truth; the appeal to *emotion*, and desire to meet loved ones again, is a fallacy if interpreted as tending to belief in Spiritism, and, finally, the absolute impossibility of any "tests of identity or truth," *even if the initial "supernatural" origin be allowed as probably true*, would always make the cult utterly vain and futile as a philosophy.

J. W. POYNTER.

Prestige and Criticism.

THE new writers' complaint against the big names of the best seller is by no means a new one, although it is almost universal. This complaint it carried to great length, particularly with regard to the measure and quality of criticism given to the respective work of the established and unestablished writer. Naturally, far less attention is devoted in review to the first novel, or other literary work of an unknown author than is devoted to a new work by one whose reputation is already made and is based upon the sure foundation of popular esteem.

So far as the critic is concerned, it is not a matter of injustice to the new aspirant who has just commenced author, as the latter should be the first to realize. There is for the critic far less material in one work, speaking generally of course, than there is in a body of work, which has perhaps occupied a writer for the major portion of his life. There is a better basis for esteem in the comparison of a new work with work already done and weighed in the balance.

The critic's job is not always an interesting one. Many hours are spent reading extremely dull books, but the interest attaching to the estimation of a new work from a practised hand is very great. Not only can it be compared with the work that has already been done, but there is a substantial back-ground against which it can be placed for the purpose of comparison with the work of previous generations. In plain language the *tedium vitæ* of reviewing is so great, that it is a joy to strike a job which promises a facile supply of material as well as the interest of perusal.

Apart from that significant fact, however, there is the undoubted influence of prestige, the suggestion of which not only helps to sell the new book, but also must be felt in some degree by the most dispassionate of critics. He is familiar with this man's work, possibly even he feels respect for it. The wonder and

admiration which go to make up respect form an effective milieu for the development of appreciation. They are indeed, the psychological elements of a real appreciation.

Then again, the critic is not without the human necessity to feel that what he is doing is received with approval by his fellow-men, and that necessity of his nature inclines him to give more space, more elaborate consideration, and a more meticulous judgment to the work of someone who is already popular with the great majority of the reading public. It is inevitable that this should be so. It is, indeed, a natural disposition of the human mind.

If it were possible to altogether abnegate this desire for social approval and the fear of the popular judgment which will condemn an adverse review of a big or a popular author, it would be possible to be critical in the absolute and advanced sense, but unfortunately for the estimation of current work, that is quite impossible.

With regard to the work of the new man, it may or may not be excellent in character, or it may give promise of better work, more complete artistry, and developed synthesis when the writer has become more practised in the technique of his art, but it must be remembered that the critic approaches him as a stranger, just in the same way as he is approached by the members of the reading public. He is a new name, untried, untested, possibly the possessor of a new esoteric style which will render him difficult of access, and still more difficult to esteem.

A really genuine desire to appraise the work at its correct value may infuse the mind of the critic. He may be utterly disposed to an entirely unbiased view. The whole stock of his learning may be brought to bear upon the problem of this new addition to the ranks of those who have commenced author, but ever-present in his sub-conscious mind, ever urging him to be indefinite, to state his judgments in such a manner that they may be double-edged, that they may be interpreted in either way, is the fear that the book may not be well received. This again is desire for the approval of his readers, and militates against the utterly dispassionate character he would wish to assume as a real critic.

In writing criticism, there is, as in everything else, a reaction not only between the critic and the things criticized but also between the critic and those who are seeking his advice regarding the thing criticized. A critic wants to stand well with the public, not only on account of his desire for social approval, but also that they may respect his judgments, and may continue to accept them.

He is therefore obliged, much in the same way as what is rather absurdly known as a "creative" artist, as distinct from a critic, to lay himself out to criticize in such a manner as to please the public. He must say more or less some of the things which he believes the public will think. After all, he is only an advanced member of the public, and only creates their opinion in so far as he has the book before them, in addition to which the substantial advantage of the printed word is, of course, on his side.

It is not possible to controvert the authority of the Roman character. The printed word is something impersonal. It is effective because it is apparently something apart from a concrete personality. Although it is a product of a human person, that person does not appear; all that appears is the printed word. It is more authoritative than handwriting, because that has the element of personality intimately connected with it, and in spite of the degradation of the printed word in this modern time, it still possesses, and will continue to possess its authoritative character for just that reason alone.

A critic cannot fail to be aware of this advantage,

part of his stock-in-trade, part of his value in the market of the world, although he expresses it as his responsibility to his public. That feeling of responsibility, added to his natural instinct for social approval, and to the fact that there is more interest in dealing with the work of an established author, is the real reason for the consistent complaints heard from budding genius. Budding genius must become aware of this, and most forgive a weakness in the critic from which it is no doubt exempt itself.

G. E. FUSSELL.

South African Jottings.

ALTHOUGH Hickson's Faith-healing Mission is now past history as far as the Union of South Africa is concerned, he still looms darkly on the social horizon, as is shown by occasional letters to the South African Press. "Seeker After Truth" writes to the *Natal Witness* :—

Now that the visit of Mr. Hickson is over I should esteem it a favour if you would allow me space in your valued columns to ask if there are any genuine cases of persons who have been cured through his recent courses of faith and prayer? Personally, after many enquiries, I have failed to hear of an authentic case. Now, sir, at the expense of being denounced as an unbeliever and harmful person to have any doubts I claim to have a few grains of common-sense left me. The raising of false hopes, the assertion that a person is cured of his or her individual complaint—when such is not the case—is to my mind a fallacy, and does more harm than good. I would ask those who profess to be such firm believers to note the fact that there are 124 so-called "Faith-healers" in London alone (vide *John Bull*), and that according to *St. Saviour's Parish Magazine* Mr. Hickson's Mission benefited to the extent of over £500 subscribed in Maritzburg.

To this letter "Supplier of Truth" rejoins :—

In reply to "Seeker After Truth" who states after many enquiries he has failed to hear of an authentic case; he also claims to have a few grains of common-sense. Now, sir, I will give you an authentic case, which is myself. I have suffered for the last twelve years with a rather serious complaint and have undergone operations, but without success—several doctors attended me, but no success was made whatever. I went to Mr. Hickson's Mission in Maritzburg, and ever since then I showed improvement, the pain left me, and to-day I am healed. Now, sir, where does the raising of false hopes come in? You certainly must have faith otherwise you cannot expect to be cured. Regarding the £500 by which the Mission was supposed to have benefited, "Seeker After Truth" seems to forget that Mr. Hickson must travel and live, also that no charges are made by him. I think the above should satisfy "Seeker After Truth."

Truth is stranger than fiction, but in this case fiction comes an easy first, and "Supplier of Truth's" statements are just about as valuable as his composition is loose. It is "The Old, Old Story" over again, and the writer, the disease, the doctors and the miraculous cure are all alike the creatures of phantasy. If this does not satisfy "Seeker After Truth" nothing in our opinion ever will. Theologically speaking, we know faith will remove mountains, but we have never found it a serviceable lever. We have faith, tons of it, in the gullibility of the average religionist and bread and butter newspaper readers, but our reserve stock of faith in honest doubt is much greater. A single fact is worth a thousand assertions be they asserted ever so strenuously, and facts are not the goods in which "Supplier of Truth" deals.

Mr. Joseph McCabe leaves Liverpool on March 31 en route for Australia and New Zealand, where he will be occupied with a long, extended lecturing tour over the Southern Continent. It has been suggested that he should visit South Africa on his return voyage and deliver a course of lectures in the larger centres of the Union. It is to be hoped that all friends of the Cause will do their utmost to bring this suggestion within the sphere of practical politics and rally round their flag. Clericalism has had some of its top-notchers visiting the Union lately in the persons of the late Father Bernard Vaughan, S.J.,

and the Rev. Basil Bourchier. The former was an optimist, for he set out to convert South Africa to the "true faith," but the latter was a decided pessimist who desired to face the music—I mean "facts"—and frankly confessed that people were bored stiff with religion. South Africa is still unconverted to the "true faith," and as, in the words of the Rev. Basil Bourchier, people have "no use for religion," Mr. McCabe ought to have a walk-over. Seeing that clericalism has had such a long innings it really does seem time that Secularism had a look in; and in Mr. McCabe it has a redoubtable champion. It goes without saying that Mr. McCabe will find South African Rationalists as warm in their welcome and as appreciative of his great gifts and noble services to the Cause as those elsewhere—and we trust his whole tour will be a huge success.

A certain Mr. John Galtres has been telling the readers of the Durban *Guardian*, a Labour weekly, that Labour needs the Churches, and in reply to opposition from the Secular side waxes sarcastic about the *Reynolds* of forty years ago, and the small "knot of Secularists," for whom he appears to have nothing but unmitigated contempt. What the *Reynolds* of forty years ago has to do with Labour to-day nobody seems to know. But it may enlighten Mr. Galtres to learn that the *Freethinker* has a world-wide circulation, and this is not the only English Freethought journal. That certain leaders of the Labour movement are dominated by clerical influence we know only too well—and all politicians are opportunists. But to suggest that the Secularists in the ranks of Labour form but a "small knot" is farcical in the extreme. Evidently, Mr. Galtres deems the readers of the *Guardian* a very gullible lot, and quite ripe enough to fall to the sickle of the ordinary garden variety of soul-saver. We should advise him, however, for the good of his mental health to do a little reading. A very good course would be the history of industrialism during the last 100 years, and some excellent text books are to be had in the shape of McCabe's *The Church and the People*, and Chapman Cohen's *Socialism and the Churches*. A few good pamphlets might assist Mr. Galtres' mental digestion and soothe his fevered imagination. Mr. McCabe's *Does Democracy Need Religion?* is quite good and gives plenty of illumination on the subject. Another excellent pamphlet is Mr. Chas. Gorham's *Failure of Christianity*. These can all be procured from the Pioneer Press, and the cost of the whole set including postage is less than two shillings.

Lurid paragraphs as to the alleged effects of Atheistic propaganda in Russia from time to time adorn the columns of the Yellow Press, and minds of a certain mentality take it for granted that sexual immorality is one of the direct consequences of irreligion. But these pious scribes and smug moralists seem quite oblivious of the fact that if the ascetic doctrines of Jesus and Paul had been able to maintain their ascendancy there would have been no European society for them to write about. The race itself would have been blotted out long since. We may also remind them of the fact that there is in Russia to this day a religious sect, the Skoptsi whose creed is based on Christ's counsel of perfection in Matt. xix, 12, and xviii, 8-9, and whose main feature is, as their name indicates, sexual mutilation. They might also note with profit that the Holy Russian Church furnished history with a Rasputin as the Western Church did a Pope John XXIII. They who live in glasshouses must not cast stones, and when we examine the record of the Christian Church in the Ages of Faith instead of in our own day, when modernism and rationalism have eaten into her vitals, we shall estimate at their true value the fairy tales of these journalistic fledglings. Writing of this period in his *European Morals*, Lecky says:—

We may not lay much stress on such isolated instances of depravity as that of Pope John XXIII, who was condemned, among many other crimes, for incest and adultery; or the Abbot-elect of St. Augustine, at Canterbury, who in 1171 was found, on investigation, to have seventeen illegitimate children in a single village; or an Abbot of S. Pelago in Spain, who in 1130 was proved to have kept no less than seventy concubines; or Henry III, Bishop of Liege, who was deposed in 1274 for having sixty-

five illegitimate children; but it is impossible to resist the evidence of a long chain of councils and ecclesiastical writers, who conspire in depicting far greater evils than simple concubinage. The writers of the Middle Ages are full of accounts of nunneries that were like brothels, of the vast multitudes of infanticides within their walls, and of that inveterate prevalence of incest among the clergy which rendered it necessary again and again to issue the most stringent enactments that priests should not be permitted to live with their mothers or sisters.

I wonder if these brilliant luminaries of the literary firmament have ever heard of that form of sanctified sexual indulgence which received the sanction of the Church and was known as Marchetta or Marguette? If not they might glance at Mrs. Gage's *Woman, Church, and State*, and Michelet's *La Sorcerie*. To these good gentlemen of the Press we must observe that their sophistry will really not work. And the truth of the matter is that Atheists in Russia have inherited the evil legacy bequeathed them by the Church of the "Little Father," and they are making a plucky attempt to reduce their social edifice to order. Whatever the merits or demerits of Marxian Communism may be, there can be little doubt that these intellectualists by improved educational development, and their war against superstition, are proving their claim to be in the van of human progress.

SEARCHLIGHT.

Correspondence.

"GOD'S METHODS"—A REPLY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It becomes quite evident that Mr. J. T. Lloyd's non-Christian attitude renders him incapable of comprehending the Christian point of view, therefore as a critic of my book, *The Mystery of the Ages*, he is discussing matter wholly outside his experience, and all he can offer in respect of them is a series of negations. I am reminded of the fable of the fox which lost its beautiful brush-tail in a trap and came amongst the other foxes tailless, but with a joyful message that he had never felt so happy as since he had lost his tail, and he proposed that all the other foxes should forthwith get rid of their tails also and be happy with him. But they soon laughed him out of court, and said they would rather keep the endowments which they had never been without and which had grown into a beautiful maturity with their own growth.

This is quite the feeling which comes to me when Mr. Lloyd presents his "joyful negations" one by one!

It is futile to discuss "God's Truth" with a man who does not believe in it, and Mr. Lloyd will not believe even this, that persons who profess that they *know it*, as I profess, have come at their knowledge by *faith*. This is quite reasonable because from childhood onwards the major portion of the facts that we know are known by us only through the medium of faith. For instance, I have never seen Australia, but I know it exists—but only by faith. If I waited to believe "in Australia" till I saw it I would be a fool, for the weight of evidence is that my fellow-men are not liars in this respect.

Of course Mr. Lloyd may "defy" me to prove many things, but no one can prove the existence of colours to a blind man, and in discussing spiritual matters with "unbelievers" I hold that they are in the position of the blind man—and they are so by their own confession.

That which is outside a person's own experience can never be understood by him nor really *known*, except by *faith*.

B. N. SWITZER.

NIETZSCHE AND FREETHOUGHT.

SIR,—The article of Mr. William Repton in the *Freethinker* of March 18 set me wondering, not for the first time, why so many Freethinkers pay extravagant homage to Friedrich Nietzsche. To judge by their eulogies, one would think that no one had ever effectively attacked Christianity until he began to write.

Everyone who has read Nietzsche knows that the greatest Freethinkers of modern times—Schopenhauer, Spinoza, Bruno, Voltaire, Wagner, Darwin—came in for as much depreciation, and even abuse, at his hands as ever Christianity did. Not only so, but Nietzsche is not even a consistent Freethinker. Taking one of his books alone

(*Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Helen Zimmern, 1907), I find the following choice specimens of Nietzschean "philosophy":—

1.—"The falseness of an opinion is not for us any objection to it.....The question is, how far an opinion is life-furthering, life-preserving, species-preserving, perhaps species-rearing."—Therefore, to attack Christianity as false is irrelevant.

2.—"There is perhaps nothing so admirable in Christianity and Buddhism as their art of teaching even the lowest to elevate themselves by piety to a seemingly higher order of things, and thereby to retain their satisfaction with the actual world in which they find it difficult enough to live—this very difficulty being necessary."—Therefore, support the National Society for the Education of the Children of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church.

3.—"Knowledge for its own sake"—that is the last snare laid by morality."—Therefore, away with science!

4.—"They wish even to make women into free spirits and literary workers; as though a woman without piety would not be something perfectly obnoxious or ludicrous to a profound and godless man."—Therefore, Freethinking men, keep your women religious.

5.—"The way in which, on the whole, the reverence for the Bible has hitherto been maintained in Europe, is perhaps the best example of discipline and refinement of manners which Europe owes to Christianity."—Comment is needless.

I notice from the quotation at the head of Mr. Repton's article that we Atheists must not "set a frigid abstraction such as Truth or Humanity" in the place of the old gods. If Mr. Repton does not wish to serve truth or humanity, what is he out for?

ROBERT ARCH.

THE RETREAT OF THE GODLY.

SIR,—For many centuries the so-called Christians have called the Bible "the inspired Word of God." They said, particularly when they were paid to say so, that it contained nothing wrong. Suddenly the gangsters of this maudlin crew see the necessity for making many alterations in the Psalms, to wit, the whole of the 58th Ch. is to be dropped. Verse 9, "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his footsteps in the blood of the ungodly." Certainly it is time that went west! Verse 7, "Let them, the ungodly, consume away like a snail, and be like the untimely fruit of a woman, and let them not see the sun." Lovely sentiments!

This and a lot more of the same kidney have to go, and truly the Revised Psalter will not be any the worse by the Advisory Axe. But what gets me in a tangle is the query: Has the Archbishop of Canterbury been taking £15,000 per annum for about twenty-three years under false pretences, or are "Randall Cantuar," "Cosmo Ebor," "A. F. London," etc., about to commit sacrilege?

FRED WHITBY-EDWARDS.

EASTER.

If Easter, instead of being a Nature festival, celebrated the death and resurrection of a real person, it would be at a fixed, not at a movable, date. The man who stole the saucepan, and made a new lid, took care that the lid fitted. But the Christian lid put on the old Pagan saucepan does not fit. The adjustment of the date sufficiently shows the astronomical character of the feast. It must be near the Spring equinox, after a full moon, and on the day sacred to the sun; the circumstance proves that the Church compromise had no reference to alleged historic facts, but to the reconciliation of various views of Nature worship.....Easter comes to us an ancient heritage, laden with myriad memories, extending back to the dark barbarism of the past. Old festivals and customs link us to the fathers who have passed away and the children who will follow. They serve to tell of the slow progress of mankind in sloughing off its superstitions.....If we drop the paltry, unrepeatable thaumaturgy of a Jerusalem ghost, we can yet rejoice in the perpetual reappearance of life from the gloomy tomb of winter. If we cease to worship a dead god, we may still find scope for all our devotion in serving a living humanity.—*Freethinker*, April 10, 1898.

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.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—No meeting.
SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY.—No meeting.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (2 Central Road, Duncan Street, Shop Assistants' Rooms): 7, Mrs. Baxter, "Important."
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