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Views and Opinions.

Christianity and Truth.

Thoughtful and critical readers of Mr. Lecky's *History of European Morals* will not forget a very striking instance in which, while all the historian's facts pointed in one direction, his conclusions concerning them indicated a quite different one. On the one hand he drew a picture of the steady demoralization of society under Christian influences. The fearful effects of the ascetic epidemic, the narrowing of human sympathies, the coarsening of manners, the decay of the civic and intellectual virtues under Christian influences were all indicated in a very telling array of facts. Then as an unconscious sarcasm on the facts themselves came the astonishing declaration that Christianity had presented the world with an ideal character capable of acting on all ages and on all men, and that "the simple record of three short years of active life had done more to regenerate and soften mankind than all the disquisitions of philosophers and all the exhortations of moralists." I do not know a more startling contradiction between the facts presented by an historian and the conclusion he offers to his readers. It is a striking example of the difficulty of getting away from preconceived notions. To have said what the facts so obviously indicated, that the alleged influence of Christianity for the moral betterment of the world was a pure myth, would have required a detachment of mind of which few are capable. Something had to be said that would allow room for inherited sentiment. If in every age it was found that Christians were not better than others, but sometimes worse, if instead of there being a marked improvement under Christianity there was a marked deterioration, and if these facts could not be denied, then religious sentiment must be placated by vague talk about "true Christianity," or the laudation of an imaginary Jesus, with an equally imaginary picture of his influence on the world. Religion will be the last thing about which the truth will be generally taught.

* * *

Bible Morals.

An illustration of the same kind of thing occurs in a book just written by Mr. W. L. George, *The Story of Woman*. The case is not quite so glaring as that of Lecky's, but it belongs to the same class, and illustrates the same influence of established teachings on

certain minds, even when the facts before them should supply a sufficient corrective. With Mr. George's book as a whole I am not now concerned. It is not by any means exhaustive, and it has evidently relied too much upon popular summaries such as Mr. H. G. Wells' *History of the World*. There are many underlying biological, sociological, and even religious factors operating in the history of woman, of which Mr. George takes hardly any notice at all. When we find a writer talking of the Biblical prohibition of certain animals as articles of food as "sanitary laws," we may be certain that we are not listening to a scientific guide. These are no more than illustrations of certain totem animals being considered religiously unclean, examples of which may be found in almost all parts of the uncivilized world. In the same manner the Biblical Jews are credited with a certain "moral impulse" because they had not the harem. It does not occur to the writer that a harem is not a very likely institution among a nomadic people, and that, on the other hand, the Jews had no objection to polygamy, and the buying of wives appears to have been a common practice. And, as Mr. George points out, it was quite normal for the husband already polygamous, to keep as many "favoured slaves" as he pleased, it does not appear that—judged by modern standards—the impulse towards a lofty morality was quite so overpowering after all.

* * *

Christianity and Women.

The fault of Mr. George appears to be that he has taken the valuation of Christianity and of non-Christian peoples as set up by Christian apologists. Thus, we are informed that the reason why Christianity spread was because there was nothing to set against it. "The old Roman world had ceased to believe in Mars, Venus, Jupiter, in these absurd divinities with faces and amours, capable of human jealousy and love." This is sheer superstition, since the plainest of facts is that the belief in the pagan divinities continued for centuries after the date given for the formal establishment of Christianity. The pagan temples were for the most part closed by force, and even when the pagan deities formally disappeared they reappeared again in the form of the minor Christian divinities. Indeed, Church historians frankly explain that the only way in which it was found possible to wean the people from pagan practices and beliefs was to give pagan ceremonies and festivals Christian names and dates. Mr. George is not giving us history; it is certainly not anything approaching a scientific study of the position of woman; it is just a mixture of journalism and watered-down theology. Again, we are told that "until the Christians came, all over the world men had several wives and favourites; the wife was a chattel," and that "the Christians brought in three points of view which were entirely new, and which affected woman profoundly. The first idea was that marriage was undesirable; the second was that if marriage were contracted it could never be dissolved; the third was

monogamy, the idea that no man may have more than one wife." One opens one's eyes! The undesirability of marriage did not commence with Christianity. It existed long before it, and was based upon the same religious ground as the Christian view, that marriage being an indulgence in the "pleasures of the flesh" it was hostile to man's spiritual development. It is a bad and an immoral teaching, and Christians preached it with fervour, but they need not be saddled with its creation. Second, the early Church did not say that marriage was indissoluble. It was dissoluble for several reasons—among others, for the apostacy of one of the partners. Mr. George has confused indissolubility with the forbidding of remarriage. And this was due to the fact that as all marriage was looked upon by many of the most powerful of Christian teachers as fornication, a second marriage was regarded as the worst form of that sin. Finally, monogamy was not Christian at all. There is not a line that is clearly in favour of monogamy in either the Old or the New Testament. Milton and Luther, and Bishop Burnet, with many others, were quite agreed that there was nothing in Christianity which condemned polygamy as being wrong. In the whole of the New Testament there is only one line that clearly deals with the matter—"Let the Bishops have but one wife," and the restriction of the advice to Bishops is significant. Monogamy is strictly, so far as we are concerned, a Greek and Roman ideal. There are no pictures of domestic felicity in the Old and New Testaments that would commend themselves to modern ideas. There are few pictures of domestic ideals in the great Christian writers for very many centuries. It is Greek and Roman literature that supplies us with these. The Christian ideal was purely and religiously Eastern in its low view of the relation of the sexes, in its implied, or avowed, unclean nature of the sex relations, and it was only the cleansing influence of non-Christian ideals that drove the Christian Church into a saner ethic.

* * *

Chaotic Criticism.

Theoretically, says Mr. George, "the Christians intended to treat women far better than had done the ancient world, but it was not to be expected that they should live up absolutely to their higher ideals." Again, the cart is put before the horse. There is no hint of any such desire in the New Testament. There are no women among the disciples. They are commanded to be in submission to men. There are no marriages in heaven. The Christians, says Mr. George apologetically, inherited the Asiatic point of view on women; they could not help it, for there was no other point of view. That is nonsense. If there was no other point of view, and the Christians could not help adopting the Asiatic one, what becomes of the desire to treat women better? But the better point of view was there. Egypt had established the equality of the sexes, in theory at any rate. Later Rome had almost reached the same point, and Plato had laid it down definitely that in the eyes of the State there were neither men nor women, but only human beings sharing a common citizenship. And the curious thing is that Mr. George, when he does notice the facts, calmly transcribes from Christian writers, prefacing it with the remark that "Nearly all the Christian masters look upon woman as a danger, and for that reason only come to detest her." Such expressions as "Woman, thou oughtest always to walk in mourning and rags, thine eyes filled with tears of repentance"; "Marriage is at best a vice"; "Marriage is unholy and unclean"; damns the value of his praise of the influence of Christianity as does the saying that "The early Christians were clear that man contained within himself some spark of the

divinity, while woman contained only something of man; that she was further removed from the divine spark; that she was glorious to man and not to the spirit." The Rev. Principal Donaldson, a very eminent Christian scholar, put the point more strongly. He said that if we defined man as a male human being, and woman as a female human being, what the early Christians did was to take the male away from the man, and the human being away from the woman. To say that woman was a dangerous animal, loaded with fatal sex attractions, comes as near as possible to the Christian view of woman.

* * *

The Propagandist and Truth.

I confess that the chief attraction of Mr. George's book lies in its being representative of a class. Year by year scores of books are poured out in which the vested superstition of the country is dished up under various forms. If writers do not believe in Christianity they keep it to themselves, or they take away the value of any criticism they may offer by unnecessary concessions about the pure ideal of primitive Christianity, or the folly of blaming Christianity for the faults of human nature, etc., etc. If they venture to speak the truth no publisher will have anything to do with them. Some years ago I published a small book on *Woman and Christianity*, and I venture to say that there is not a single publisher in the country who would have issued it. He would have wanted this taken out or some qualification put in, alterations made that would have destroyed its real value. Writers and publishers are alike afraid of the Churches. One dare not write, the other is afraid to publish. And meanwhile the Christian Churches go on making history, or seeing that others make it, to suit their fraudulent claims. It is an illustration of one of the few truths in the Christian scriptures—"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." You cannot at one and the same time be "respectable" and tell the truth. You cannot carry on the whole-souled work of a genuine propagandist unless you are blessed with a capacity for a supreme disregard of the opinions of the crowd, whether the crowd belongs to Mayfair or Whitechapel. One *must* make one's choice, for sooner or later the choice is forced on one. And the work of the real propagandist is ultimately that of so affecting conditions that even journalists may one day write what they really believe in place of handing on traditional misrepresentations, and bolstering up senseless superstitions.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Damning Admissions.

THE Gospel Jesus is represented as giving expression to many supremely precious truths. The mistake which most Christian divines make is to suppose and assert that such truths originated with him, whereas, in reality, they had been the common property of the religious world for several centuries prior to his time. The Gospel Jesus is also held responsible for other utterances, which are not merely extravagant, but palpably false. Most of these are to be found in John's Gospel. The Rev. John Bevan, M.A., of Balam Congregational Church, has chosen one of them as the text of a most remarkable discourse, which is published in the *Christian World Pulpit* of May 7. The text is John xii. 32: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself." Of these words Mr. Bevan says: "It has always seemed to me that this strange utterance marks the very greatest prophetic hour of our blessed Lord. With a

prophet's insight, intense and clear, he sees the whole world struggle as finished, and speaks of the victory as already achieved." Curiously enough, the preacher, in the second paragraph of his sermon, makes the following self-contradictory statement:—

Jesus had lived before men a life entirely new, both in type and quality, and by word and by deed he had striven to show men new values of living, new values of love, new values of labour, new values of sin and suffering, new values of life and death, a whole set of new values which they did not receive in his day, and which they have not received since, and which we do not accept at the present time.

The only logical inference from such language is that Jesus lived and died in vain. However noble and sublime his ideals may have been, the world has utterly ignored them. The Gospel Jesus said, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out." That does not sound like a prophecy, but like a positive statement of an accomplished deed, or rather of a deed in the process of accomplishment. But Mr. Bevan says: "It is not history; it cannot be history; it is prophecy of a very sublime kind." The preacher is convinced that Jesus believed that his new values of life would be immediately accepted and put in operation by the world, and that the preachers of to-day must share the same belief. "We have got to believe," he says, "that the preaching of the values of life will produce the same acceptance, and will go on to produce the same transformation of human life and society." We may ask, of what use is such preaching? That Gospel has been constantly preached by countless millions of men of God for nineteen hundred years, and is still being preached with equal assurance to-day. And yet, in spite of all that, Mr. Bevan feels bound to make the following melancholy confession: "I do think, in fact I am certain, and we have got to mark this down straight away, that ordinary men and women do not accept Christ's values of anything." We are in complete agreement with him. Jesus and his alleged teaching are wholly dead, quite as dead as their creators, and are never likely to come to life.

Well, with such undeniable facts before us, to what conclusion are we inevitably forced? Whether the Gospel Jesus ever actually lived or not, is it not absolutely beyond dispute that the religion which bears his name has been, and is, the most colossal and tragic failure the world has ever seen? There has been no Saviour of the world, no Redeemer of mankind, and no Prince of Peace. Mr. Bevan does not go so far as this. He believes in Christ with all his heart and worships him as Lord; and yet he has the courage to address his hearers as follows:—

I put it to you, was Jesus right? Is he the Saviour of the world? Is he? Well, he is not saving it. There are more people dying without him than living and dying with him. Men and women are dying in darkness. I am not talking about the Heathen. I am talking about people here in London and all over the world; people who are educated, who have knowledge, civilization, but who are not ruling and fashioning their lives according to the values laid down by the blessed Lord.

"Well, he is not saving it." A truer sentence was never penned. So far is Jesus from saving the world that according to Mr. Bevan's own admission, "the social conditions were not perhaps so bad in his day as they are now." After nineteen centuries of Christianity social conditions are admittedly worse to-day than they were when Jesus is alleged to have lived. It is perfectly true that men and women, Christians as well as non-Christians, are dying in darkness, neither thinking nor seeing anything beyond death. The late Professor William Osler, in

his lecture, entitled "Science and Immortality," says:—

I have careful records of about five hundred deathbeds, studied particularly with reference to the modes of death, and the sensations of the dying. The latter alone concerns us here. Ninety suffered bodily pain or distress of one sort or another, eleven showed mental apprehension, two positive terror, one expressed spiritual exaltation, one bitter remorse. The great majority gave no signs one way or the other; like their birth, their death was a sleep and a forgetting. The Preacher was right; in this matter man hath no pre-eminence over the beast—"as the one dieth so dieth the other."

The present writer, during about thirty years of his life, witnessed more than five hundred deathbeds, and his report would have been very similar to the one made by Dr. Osler, who was Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford. The truth is that the overwhelming majority of people "die in darkness," whether Christian believers or not. That is the natural order, and no one possesses knowledge of any conscious existence after death.

Mr. Bevan pretends to be very angry with people who even suggest to him that Christianity is dying out or that the Church has lost its power. Why should he be angry with them when he himself admits that his religion has been, and continues to be, powerless to transform the world? Yet he complains thus:—

I am sick to death of people telling me, You are a back number—I don't mean personally, but talking about the Church. A doctor said to me some time ago, "Yes, Bevan, my lad, it will about last your time, the Church will. You have got your job all right." I am sick to death of people talking like that, a Christian man, too, the son of a minister. They tell me we have lost the ear of the people, that we do not count at all. We can have our conferences and meetings, and work very hard, ministers and people, and yet we do not make any difference. It does seem as though the present generation was not being brought by Jesus to himself. Men and women are, in the vast majority, living without Christ. Christ's standards are not being used, are not being accepted.

We utterly fail to understand why Mr. Bevan should be sick to death of people who affirm what he admits to be true. If the Church has not succeeded in recreating and rightly directing society, which he frankly admits to be the case, why on earth should he find fault with people who declare that it does not deserve to survive? And we boldly ask him what has the Church ever done for the welfare of the world? It has caused innumerable bloody wars, it has set nation against nation, it has made converts at the point of the sword, it has pursued a policy of cruel and deadly persecution towards heretics and unbelievers, and poured out upon the earth rivers of innocent blood; but what great and lasting social reform has it ever achieved? In asking such a question we are thinking of the Church as an organization, not of individual Christians, many of whom, in obedience to the sense of humanity, have served their fellow-being splendidly, independently of and sometimes against the opposition of the Church.

Mr. Bevan resents the statement that ministers have lost the ear of the people, and that they do not count at all. Here, again, we hold that he is the last man who has any reason to complain. If it is true that "Christ's standards are not being used, are not being accepted," as he himself admits, of what service can ministers possibly be to mankind? And is it not an indisputable fact that churches and chapels are being more and more deserted year after year? Only those who are endowed with exceptionally fine preaching gifts draw crowded congregations to-day.

Nevertheless, it is not the inferior quality of to-day's preaching that is emptying the sanctuaries, but the ever-increasing spread of Secular knowledge. As Dr. Osler puts it:—

Science minimizes to the vanishing point the importance of the individual man, and claims that the cosmic and biological laws, which control his destiny, are wholly inconsistent with the special providence view in which we were educated—that beneficent, fatherly providence which care for the sparrows and number the very hairs of our head.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Poet Who Lived Poetry.

The bloom, whose petals, nipped before they blew,
Died on the promise of the fruit.

—Shelley, "Adonais."

THERE were multitudes of names in the tragic roll of the dead of the last war which could be said in sober truth to be a loss to their country; but few were associated with greater pathos than the career of Rupert Brooke, the soldier-poet, who died at Lemnos. For many saw in this young genius the hope of a continuance of a noble poetic tradition, and watched with fascination the opening of what promised to be a great and memorable career. It was sad irony which closed in the war the years of study before the great task for which they were to fit him had been but well begun.

The feelings of Brooke's admirers must be like those of the survivors of a shipwreck when, the morning after the storm, they view the relics that the capricious sea has spared from the contents of the sunken vessel. Their joy at the sight of each relic is insufficient to compensate for the sad memories it awakens of equally precious treasures lost. Nor is this feeling attributable merely to the fact that an early death snatched from us a poet of genius. Many such might pass without exciting these keen feelings of regret. The world would be grateful for what it had received, and would not concern itself with speculations as to how much greater might have been their achievements had more time been allowed them. No one in the case of Rupert Brooke can banish the thought of what might have been of the future that was denied him.

"There are only three things in the world," said Brooke with proud egoism: "one is to read poetry, another is to write poetry, and the best of all is to love poetry." He himself did all three things triumphantly. Indeed, his short life was packed with experience. He assimilated culture at Rugby and Cambridge, and he travelled widely. When the war broke out he took his place as a soldier. He was with the Antwerp expedition, and sailed for the Dardanelles. Now he lies in a soldier's grave in Lemnos after a brief and happy life.

This young poet was at heart as much a Pagan as a youthful Greek of the classic period. The young man for whom the passing hours had such possibilities of joy or sorrow was conscious always that they could never return. Young as he was, he realized, as truly as Virgil did, "the sense of tears in mortal things." In the most exultant moments of life he was conscious of the shadow of death, and it thrilled him to a finer tenderness:—

And has the truth brought no new hope at all,
Heart, that you're weeping yet for Paradise?
Do they still whisper the old weary cries?
'Mid youth and song, feasting and carnival,
Through laughter, through the roses, as of old
Comes Death, on shadowy and relentless feet,
Death, unappeasable by prayer or gold;
Death is the end, the end!
Proud then, clear-eyed and laughing, go to greet
Death as a friend.

Again and again the young singer reverts to the working of this Nemesis. In many a lovely line we get hints at the tragedy which was at the core of the Greek conception of life, this physical repulsion from final dissolution, for which there was no consolation. His sympathies were ever with the youth who feels in his blood the hunger of an unshaped desire, and revolts against the Fate which would subdue it. Listen to this beautiful sonnet:—

Breathless, we flung us on the windy hill,
Laughed in the sun, and kissed the lovely grass.
You said, "Through glory and ecstasy we pass
Wind, sun, and earth remain, the birds sing still,
When we are old, are old!" "And when we die
All's over that is our's, and life burns on
Through other lovers, other lips," said I,
"Heart of my heart, our heaven is now, is won!"
"We are Earth's best, that learnt her lesson here,
Life is our cry. We have kept the faith," we said,
We shall go down with unreluctant tread
Rose-crowned into the darkness!" Proud we were,
And laughed, that had such brave, true things to say,
And then, you suddenly cried, and turned away.

Rupert Brooke was first and last a poet, and translated his poetry into action. How fine was the inspiration that prompted him to request that any money that he left should be divided among three of his fellow-singers. "If I can set them free," he said nobly, to write the poetry and plays and books they want to, my death will bring more gain than loss." It reminds us of Shelley, shielding Byron's body from an armed assassin. "I cannot understand it," exclaimed Byron, afterwards referring to the heroic act, "a man to run upon a naked sword for another."

Idealist though he was, Rupert Brooke had a keen zest for life. "Is there anything better," he asked, "than sitting at a table and eating good food and drinking good drink, and discussing everything under the sun with wise and brilliant people?" The sentiment would have pleased Shakespeare, who used to foregather with his friends at the "Mermaid," and would have won the assent of Frederick the Great, who invited the best brains in Europe to meet Voltaire at the royal festal board.

Rupert Brooke was happy in his friends, and he has written some delightful things on friendship. Hear him:—

There is nothing in the world like friendship.
There is no lust in it, and therefore no poison. It is cleaner than love and older; for children and very old people have friends, but they do not love. It gives more and takes less; it is fine in the enjoying, and without pain where absent, and it leaves only good memories. In love all laughter ends with an ache, but laughter is the very garland on the head of friendship."

Brooke had a light side to his nature. He would write "limericks" for his friends, and was fond of good stories. He liked one of a Cockney soldier, who had been fighting from Mons to Ypres, and was asked what he thought of his experiences. The Londoner said: "What I don't like about this blanky Europe is all those blanky pictures of Jesus Christ and his aunts and uncles behind bits of blanky glass." Brooke's commentary was caustic and characteristic, when he added: "It seems to express perfectly that insularity and cheerful Atheism, which are the chief characteristics of my race."

Sometimes the smiles and tears are very near, as in the droll poem on a dog, who did what he wanted "for a day," which he made a red-letter one. "He fought with the he-dogs, and winked at the she-dogs," and ran amok generally. Then:—

When the blood-red sun had gone burning down,
And the lights were lit in the little town,
Outside in the gloom of the twilight grey,
The little dog died when he'd had his day.

Brief quotation only partially illuminates the genius

of the young poet who was cut off so untimely. The war wrought a change in Rupert Brooke, and afterwards he sang with richer inspiration. In his latest poems he showed more passion. In his own charming way, and, as though he fully realised his own fate, he wrote a beautiful sonnet, which must always remain his own proper epitaph:—

If I should die, think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth, a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

MIMNERMUS.

The Progress of Freethought.

SINCE the publication of Professor Thomson's book, *Science and Religion*, two more professions of faith, or belief, by distinguished scientists have issued from the Press. The first, by Bertrand Russell, the mathematician and writer on philosophy, entitled *What I Believe*. The second, by Sir Arthur Keith, the anatomist and anthropologist, entitled *The Religion of a Darwinist*.

They both differ from Professor Thomson's book in two respects. First, they are not written in defence of religion, and are published at the democratic price of half-a-crown and two shillings respectively, while Professor Thomson's book attempts a defence of religion, and is published at seven-and-six. Whether it is worth three times as much as one of the other two, each reader will judge for himself; but it is pretty certain that the lower-priced ones will have the largest circulation. And this is an indication of progress.

We can remember the time when eminent scientists were very chary of making any public profession of faith if it ran contrary to the prevailing beliefs. Even when they threw doubts on Genesis they anxiously disclaimed the title of Atheist or Materialist. They knew that they would have to face a lot of mud-slinging, not only from the religious press, but from the daily and weekly papers. They would also be liable to social ostracism, which, in the case of a married man, would extend to his wife and family, and might even imperil his position as a teacher in the college or institution where he taught as a professor. In any case, there was bound to be unpleasantness.

Nor were the publishers any more disposed to publish such works unless at an exorbitant price, as it was known that the Government did not approve of cheap Freethought books, but had not so much objection if a high price kept them out of the hands of the masses. Cheap popular Freethought at that time was published by poor men like Truelove, Bradlaugh, Watts, Foote, and others, generally at a loss, sometimes made good by supporters of the cause.

John Stuart Mill knew that there were many who had no belief in the orthodox views, but made no public profession of their unbelief. Mill thought it was time—this was fifty-two years ago—for all the friends of liberty and progress to speak out, and declared:—

The world would be astonished if it knew how great a proportion of its brightest ornaments, of those most distinguished even in popular estimation for wisdom and virtue, are complete sceptics in religion.¹

To-day all that is changed; instead of the Press slinging mud, they often offer bouquets to the sceptic, and handle the religious defences with a dubious and, in some cases, a cold and indifferent air. We could

not help noticing this contrast in a notice of the three books we have mentioned, which appeared in *The Nation and Athenæum* for April 25, by that able and clever writer, Mr. Leonard Woolfe, in his weekly article. After observing "Mr. Russell's brilliancy is amazing," he goes on to describe Professor Keith's work as "an extremely interesting little book," and points out that "Sir Arthur Keith has beliefs, but he has no religious beliefs at all in the sense of Sir Thomas Browne's 'religio.'" He continues:—

Professor Gilbert Murray some time ago gave an address, with the title, "The Religion of a Man of Letters," and Sir Arthur Keith remarks with some surprise that, though his path of study and Professor Murray's had been far apart, they had arrived at much the same kind of beliefs. If he reads Mr. Russell he will find the same thing with regard to him. In fact, the religion of the scholar, the scientist, and the philosopher are practically the same.

There are a large number of things which they believe, says Mr. Woolfe, "but I do not think that there is a single one for which they could not give you a scientific reason. When they open the inmost recess of their mind there is no 'religious' belief there in the sense of a non-scientific and irrational belief."

Then, in the last paragraph, as a sort of make-weight, Mr. Woolfe concludes:—

I should, perhaps, add that I read another book on this subject, *Religion and Science*, by J. Arthur Thomson, which seems to take a diametrically opposite view. . . . I have the greatest respect for Professor Thomson as a scientist, and I have found some of his scientific writings delightful, but this present book is singularly unconvincing. The reason is that where he writes about the sphere of science he is clear and precise, but whenever he comes to tell us about the other sphere he gives us nothing to catch hold of. In fact, the cupboard seems to be almost as bare as Sir Arthur Keith's and Mr. Russell's.

Which bears out the criticism we made in these columns (May 10) that it was "surprising that he should consider it worth while to write a book about what was left (of religion) from the destructive criticism of science."

No, religion cannot depend upon the good Press it commanded in the palmy days of the Bridgewater Treatises. Its pitiful apology, by an eminent man of science, is dismissed in a few cursory words, pointing out its weakness and inadequacy, at the end of an article praising the works of two distinguished unbelievers, declaring their unbelief in supernatural religion, and condemning it as a force inimical to civilization. And all this in a highly respectable sixpenny review. How are the mighty fallen!

The Christian apologist of to-day displays a very chastened spirit to that of his predecessors of the early nineteenth century. The harsh, hectoring, fulminating invective has been quietly abandoned. So has the haughty assumption of moral superiority. The religious apologist is conscious that he no longer has the crowd at his back; he cannot even depend on the police as he could of old. The positions are reversed; it is he who is fighting the up-hill battle now, and he is all sweet reasonableness, and appeals to the emotions. But all this is unavailing: religion, discredited at the bar of science, condemned by its history, stripped of its moral pretensions, will never retrieve the authority over the civilized races it has exercised in the past.

Bertrand Russell, in his *What I Believe*, frankly accepts the extreme Materialist position. He says:—

What we call our "thoughts" seem to depend upon the organization of tracks in the brain in the same sort of way in which journeys depend upon roads and railways. The energy used in thinking

¹ J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*, 1873 (p. 45).

seems to have a chemical origin; for instance, a deficiency of iodine will turn a clever man into an idiot. Mental phenomena seem to be bound up with material structure. If this be so, we cannot suppose that a solitary electron or proton can "think"; we might as well expect a solitary individual to play a football match. We also cannot suppose that an individual's thinking survives bodily death, since that destroys the organization of the brain, and dissipates the energy which utilized the brain-tracks.

God and immortality, the central dogmas of the Christian religion, find no support in science (Bertrand Russell, *What I Believe*, pp. 12-13).

What howls of indignation, what floods of vituperation and invective would have greeted such a pronouncement fifty years ago! To-day no one effects surprise; it is accepted as the natural belief of a scientist, and a high-class weekly, reviews the book approvingly, and declares that the religion of the scholar, the scientist, and the philosopher are practically the same.

Yet preachers still rant about the exploded doctrines of Materialism! Materialism was never more firmly entrenched in the scientific world than it is to-day. The resources of the past fifty years have added enormously to the strength of the Materialistic philosophy.

W. MANN.

(To be Concluded.)

Consider the Children.

MAN has a responsibility to himself, his wife and his children, his children that have arrived, but a far greater responsibility for those still to be born, to consider whether or not, for their own sakes, these ought to be born at all. This whether or not will depend on the need for them—leaving aside for the moment the wholly barbarous military need of food for cannon for endless wars that only breed endless wars, wars that must ever be cumulatively more cruel and destructive of life and progress, whose only logical, conceivable end would seem to be at last the wholesale massacre of the human race, and, if man must grow no wiser than he has been and is, a consummation devoutly to be wished. Well, then, parents must consider the need for children, carefully, calculatingly, humanely, even to the extreme of a childless world, better depopulated by a merciful prudence than by the merciless and stupid barbarism of world wars. Apart, then, from the clerical, military, and other insistence on the need for cannon fodder parents must consider their need for children, the room for them—not so much in space as in opportunity—the conditions under which they are to live, and the question—is it a settled one?—whether it is better to be or not to be born at all. The higher type of man will feel a responsibility also for the children of his neighbour, a very noble solicitude, for all the children of all the earth of every race and creed and culture. Till reason, reflection, naturalism, and the critical spirit, as manifest in Freethought to-day, ultimately illumines the human mind, at home and abroad, "civilized" and savage, the world will be much as it is. Even to the worst man the world is a wilderness and a perplexing maze, and the wayfaring man though a sage may readily err therein. Even the man armed with all available and exact truth, in the search for its unknown but necessitated complement, may find himself lost in the solitudes of speculation, out of touch with the actual world, useless to himself and it, growing wiser, but also infinitely sad at last amid all the unregarded, unwanted harvest of his toil while the fatuous smile of the pious optimist, the

man who has found and is contented with the mythical Christ, triumphs over him! But, patience, good pioneer, you have advanced too far from your base, there is no line of communication, you dwell in intolerable because solitary light, you must await the eye and mind of the million, who still sit in darkness gladly, before getting used to the noonday sun. You are the light-bringer indeed, but light that dazzles and offends "the unprepared mind." Retrace your brave steps to the base of well-meaning ignorance and fear, give the people just a little elementary learning so far denied them in the churches and the schools. Teach them the sacredness of sex, the biology of childbirth, the personal, not national religious or political, rights of children, born and to be born, and whether or not, in certain circumstances, they should be born at all—in the eyes of the churchman, the militarist, and the muddle-headed generally a frightful crime; in the eyes of the rational humane and just the most obvious teaching of common sense. It may be there are in our sex nature overmastering impulses that, even in the best and wisest, set at naught all prudence, but the thoughtful man or woman, without becoming a religious or morbid ascetic, though conquered often will never wholly abandon his efforts to be rationally continent, knowing that nature sets no bounds, within his limits, to the propagative powers of man, and that the God of the Christians sanctions man to multiply and replenish the earth, both without regard to consequences. Nature is a "mechanistic automaton" without mind and without morals—so far as even Sir Oliver Lodge knows at present.

The Christian's "God" is supposed to be the author of nature and all its manifestations. Ingersoll has said that "Nature produces without purpose, sustains without intention and destroys without thought. Man has a little intelligence, and he should use it. Intelligence is the only lever capable of raising mankind." In the same place he says, "The gutter is a nursery.....Can we prevent this Missouri of ignorance and vice from emptying itself into the Mississippi of civilization?" Well, nature cannot, save in the remote finality of her inexorable processes, which has little concern with the immediate needs of the race; and as for "God," it would appear that to him this river of pollution is sweet as Babel's stream—or is it that he is blind to his blunders, as he is deaf to his victims' most anguished prayers?

Therefore, let parents, and parents to be, take stock of the children they have, or those to come, and not irrationally run to seed like phanerogamous animals, and not under any supposed fiat of nature or the "Almighty's will" allow calamity to be of so long life, but see to it that those already here are made happy and that those to come will not come calamitously, to themselves, or to their parents—especially to themselves.

A. MILLAR.

Born in iniquity and conceived in sin, the spirit of nationalism has never ceased to lend human institutions to the service of dissension and distress. In its material effects it is altogether the most sinister as well as the most imbecile of all those institutional encumbrances that have come down out of the old order. The national mob mind of vanity, fear, hate, contempt, and servility still continues to make the loyal citizen a convenient tool in the hands of the adversary, whether these sentiments cluster about the anointed person of a sovereign or about the magic name of a Republic.—Thorstein Veblen, "The Theory of the Leisure Class."

The presumption, therefore, is that conversion has a connection with the sublimation of the sexual libido.—Alfred Clair Underwood, D.D., "Conversions: Christian and Non-Christian."

Acid Drops.

We hope the attention of the editor of the *Daily Express*, Mr. James Douglas, has been called to the case of Mr. Henry Ball, ex-Mayor of Southend. Mr. Ball had just returned from a local preaching engagement, and dropped dead. Presumably the Lord had called him home. All the same, we do not expect that the relatives of Mr. Ball will be very appreciative of the Lord's attention.

The Home Secretary, at a meeting of the Bible Society, expressed a wish that there should be a Bible in every prison. It is a pity that the Home Secretary, instead of attending Bible Society meetings, does not make himself acquainted with the prisons over which he exercises a considerable authority. There is actually a Bible in every cell. We can assure him that every provision for religious gratification is made in prisons. Everyone who goes there is expected to have a religion, and nothing startles the officials more than to have a prisoner declare he is without religion. They are evidently astonished that a man without religion should get under their care.

"Anatole France was in the fullest sense of the word a Freethinker. I do not mean by that an anti-Christian fanatic."—The *Bradford Pioneer*. The greatest French Atheist of this age has not been dead a year, and already the Christian apologists are insulting his memory by attempts to show that he was really not very unorthodox after all. It is the old, old game that the Christians play with practically every Atheist of note. He is denounced and persecuted by the churches whilst he lives—unless his reputation is too great for organized religion to dare openly to attack him—and immediately after his death is begun the process of canonization. The lying propaganda carried on by Christian apologists about the beliefs of famous Freethinkers after their deaths is infinitely more dangerous than their open opposition to them during their lifetime. One can imagine that if the *Bradford Pioneer* had made this apology for Anatole France during his lifetime the great Freethinker—had he thought the insult worthy of his notice—would have replied with one of his suave yet mordant epigrams, that would effectively have exploded the paper's absurd claim. It is far safer to attack such a man as France when he is dead; and Christians have never been particularly noted for their moral courage.

But really the insolence of this claim almost forces admiration from us for such a blatant, unashamed capacity for deliberate lying. No one who has read France's masterpiece, *Penguin Island*, with its burlesque of the church legends and traditions, and its delightfully suave exposure of the nonsense that is called theology, can doubt for a moment that he was an Atheist. Who but an Atheist could have written such passages as occur in the chapters on "An Assembly in Paradise"? Who but a Freethinker have put such passages into the mouth of God: "And, although in essence I am immutable, the longer I endure the more I incline to mildness. This change in character is evident to anyone who reads my two Testaments"; or, "It is too true that in all the councils held under the inspiration of my spirit, in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa, fathers have torn the beards and scratched the eyes of other fathers. Nevertheless, they were infallible, for I was with them," and, "In order not to impair human liberty, I will be ignorant of what I know, I will thicken upon my eyes the veils I have pierced, and in my blind clear-sightedness I will let myself be surprised by what I have foreseen." If such delightful satires upon the nonsensical theology of the Christian churches was not written by an ardent anti-Christian, we should like to read something that was.

rather be a hound than an Archbishop!' What he evinced was the joy of the hound when he gets his teeth into the fox's fur, and swallows the hot and tormented blood." Thus writes H. W. Nevinson in the *New Leader*. Well, this love for blood is a common trait in enthusiastic Christians, particularly professional theology-mongers. And it is not surprising that devotees of the faith which takes a morbid delight in dwelling upon the "Blood of the Lamb" should display such perverted tastes. There is probably an action and reaction here: Christianity, with its coarse allusions to blood, probably appeals to the members of the community in whom the animal passions are strongest, whilst by its unhealthy suggestion, carried on from week to week, it enhances the already existing tendency. The Salvation Army provides many illustrations of this in its speakers, who mount the rostrum, relate the beastliness of their lives before their conversion, and then reveal to the observant onlooker the superficiality of the change that religion has worked in them by their fervid calling upon "The Blood of the Lamb," and the use of similar phrases.

"Beastly narrow-mindedness" has ruined the church of St. Aldhelm's, according to an "old parishioner." Once the church was packed every Sunday, but now the congregation musters only nine or ten adults," he added at the vestry of the church. Some people objected to the use of the Cross, and others to the use of the word "altar" in the hymn, "We love thine altar, Lord." Altogether an edifying spectacle of the much-advertised Christian brotherliness. Well, the "old parishioner" may be appalled by such goings-on, but they are in accord with the best traditions of Christianity, and we suggest that here at last is a real example of the long-awaited revival of the Christian spirit. Such ridiculous bickerings as have ruined St. Aldhelm's were characteristic of all the early church councils, the only point of difference being that the fathers did not limit their opposition to verbal form, but assaulted one another bodily about a host of nonsensical problems connected with their theological system. We suggest that most of the Christian worthies would be thoroughly at home among a St. Aldhelm's congregation, provided, perhaps, that there were no police present to prevent one Christian making an assault upon a brother or sister in Christ.

Pleading for research to ascertain the causes and contributory factors of mental disorder, Sir Frederick Mott, President-elect of the Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain and Ireland, urged at the Royal Commission on Lunacy that every encouragement should be given to local authorities to embark on it. Explaining that with the exception of Dr. Maudsley, who gave half his fortune for research work, no one has come forward prepared to finance investigations into the cause of insanity, Sir Frederick said: "It is the old metaphysical idea. We have not got away from demonology yet." And we have not got away from demonology yet for the very simple reason that we have not yet got away from religion. It is, after all, as logical to believe in a malignant spirit or spirits that cause insanity as it is to believe in a deity. And it is, indeed, sound orthodox Christian teaching that insanity is caused by the possession of demons. Jesus believed firmly in it, as did his disciples and the early fathers of the church. Little by little medical science has forced religion to give up its claims, and to admit the natural causation and cure of physical maladies. In the realm of psychological disorders, which has not received the same amount of study as pathological disorders, the religious frame of mind still exists, blocking the way—as it always has blocked the development of human knowledge—to the investigation of insanity, and the alleviation of human suffering, by its outworn superstitions. Some day, when the bill of suffering that Christian doctrines have caused, is made up, no small item will be included under the heading of diseases either directly produced by the hysterical Christian doctrines, or perpetuated by Christian superstitions.

"By God!" said a hunting parson to me once, 'I'd

At times one is disgusted with a certain type of politician who is prepared to belaud Christianity for political advantage. The latest offender is Mr. William Leach, ex-Under-Secretary for Air, who has stated that the Christian churches could formulate an excellent political programme from the New Testament. Some of the items, he suggested, were:—

(1) The abolition of riches. It was made perfectly clear in the New Testament that it was almost impossible for the rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The rich were advised by the Master Christian to sell all that they had.

(2) Non-resistance to evil. That would lead them to the position of a conscientious objector in the late war. They would refuse to pay taxes which were for warships or armies. It would, in short, lead them to jail.

(3) The abolition of prudence. Take no thought for the morrow.

(4) The abolition of public prayer. There was a good deal of condemnation in the New Testament of the gentleman who wished to pray in public to show he was a pious individual.

Mr. Leach commented that no more revolutionary doctrine ever was propagated than they found in the New Testament. Unless one has got to accept a doctrine as useful merely because it is revolutionary, that is no particular recommendation of Christianity. "The churches would not, never had, and dare not, attempt to formulate such a programme," he added, showing a glimmering of sense. The fact is—and we have little doubt that off the platform Mr. Leach would candidly admit it—Christianity is impracticable, and whenever it has been even partially put into practice human suffering and degradation has inevitably followed.

Lowestoft has decided, by a majority of one on the Town Council to have Sunday games in its public places. There were various reasons given by the opposition for voicing against the proposal, such as the bowling greens would be used on Sunday by those who played on weekday, as though it were a crime to do so. But the only straightforward ones were those who frankly said they did not believe in permitting people to play games on Sunday. That is the proper Christian spirit—never satisfied unless it is coercing someone or other. Two members said that Sunday bands had done much to empty the churches, and Sunday games would empty them still further. Christianity is a fine religion when one comes to think about it. It has God Almighty behind it, but a Sunday band or a Sunday game of bowls threatens to knock it all to pieces! If ever we adopt a religion we will try to at least pick one that can stand up against a game of bowls.

The Rev. T. P. Kirk asks why we always associate God with things of an unpleasant character? We say it is "God's Will" when a motorist drives over a precipice or a child is murdered, but do not say the same when it is a fine day or we do a good business deal. We sympathize with the complaint. If we associate God with one thing we ought to associate him with the other. Presumably the genuinely religious man does. He thanks God when he gets the better of another man in a sharp business deal, and sees God's hand when the other fellow swindles him. That is quite all right as a matter of logic, but in practice it would mean that many would wake up to the realization that one could never depend upon what the deuce God would do next. We really think the better plan is to follow the Atheist, and leave God out of it altogether. It would be much kinder so far as the deity is concerned, and so much more reasonable so far as common-sense goes. But we do not suppose that simple plan would meet with the approval of the Rev. Mr. Kirk.

Says the *Irish Times*: "Based on the immutable ground of faith religion fears no discovery of the laboratories, and from the deeper knowledge of the wonders of creation piety draws fresh reason for reverence." Clearly that kind of word-spinning goes down with

many, or it would not be written. All the same, one wonders what are the wonders of creation that give faith religious faith-justification? Nor is it from the laboratories that religion has received its deadliest blows. The labours of the laboratories have helped to make us conversant with the reign of universal causation; but religion has been killed in the minds of clear-thinking men and women by the knowledge now available that all the religions in the world had their origin in the mistaken guesses of primitive savagery, that the high gods have no better claim to reality than have the good and evil spirits that once peopled the world of un-instructed humanity. Belief in gods is one of the earliest illusions of the race. That is the cardinal fact of the situation. Nothing else matters. And all that comes after that are so many specious excuses invented to keep this primitive illusion alive.

The Rev. A. Cumming, Vicar of Addlestone, Surrey, is wroth with the wireless. He complains that there is no longer a full church to the Lenten services, and people give as an excuse for non-attendance that they listen in at home to a service. So the Vicar denounces wireless wholeheartedly. It interferes with his business, and anything that does that must be bad. All the same, we fancy that the people do not stay away from church because they wish to listen to a wireless service at home. They go to church because it is the "respectable" thing to do, and the wireless just provides them with an excuse for following their inclination rather than the fashion.

The Congregational Church has just raised one more fund of over £500,000. When one compares the huge sums of money raised to keep Christianity alive and the army of men employed to the same end, one may reasonably ask what would happen if Christianity had to meet Freethought to-day on equal terms? Given anything like these, and there would not be enough of Christianity left at the end of a single generation for anyone to bother about.

The *Manchester Guardian* says that Charles Bradlaugh "often gave three lectures, each occupying one hour, in one day. He crowded into one hour more than most men got into three. His ten-minute replies to speeches which followed his lectures were models of condensation." Perhaps the secret of this is that Bradlaugh had something to say, and wished to enlighten the people rather than to please them. When a man works along these lines he can afford to be brief and clear.

How to Help.

There are thousands of men and women who have left the Churches and who do not know of the existence of this journal. Most of them would become subscribers if only its existence were brought to their notice.

We are unable to reach them through the ordinary channels of commercial advertising, and so must rely upon the willingness of our friends to help. This may be given in many ways:

By taking an extra copy and sending it to a likely acquaintance.

By getting your newsagent to take an extra copy and display it.

By lending your own copy to a friend after you have read it.

By leaving a copy in a train, tram or 'bus.

It is monstrous that after forty years of existence, and in spite of the labour of love given it by those responsible for its existence, the *Freethinker* should not yet be in a sound financial position. It can be done if all will help. The Paper and the Cause are worthy of all that each can do for them.

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.

D. MARR.—There is nothing in the article by Mr. Joad on a future life that calls for special notice. It is one of the class of articles that leaves the matter where it was, because the writer leaves out the one thing that matters—namely, all that we know concerning the origin, which gives the real nature of the belief. The judicial attitude of not being able to come to a conclusion in the face of conflicting evidence is a mere pose and nothing more. Thanks, however, for sending on the article.

L. HESSE.—Large numbers of people protested against the use of the B.B.C. by the parsons for preaching religion, but the company probably feels safe in satisfying Christians. Still, it does good to let them know "there are others." The Reformer who sees no reason why religion should be fought is not uncommon. It usually means it does not pay to fight it. Sincerity—bearing in mind the place religion occupies in the world, should take one of two courses. Either support religion or fight it.

J. BROWN.—There is no reason why in a constituency in which the issue is of importance the question of tithes should not be directly raised at a general election. The income derived from tithes is given in the annual report issued by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. It is published at about 1s.

W. KARASZI.—*Lysistrata* is one of a series of small volumes published by Messrs. Kegan Paul at 2s. 6d. per vol.

"ALETHIA."—We are neither surprised nor annoyed at what you properly call the dishonesty of Christian apologists. At least ninety per cent. of them are either stupid or dishonest. This has been the case ever since they began discussions with the old Roman writers, and it is not likely to die out yet awhile. Thanks for calling our attention to articles.

A. W. COLEMAN, J. L., AND OTHERS.—We are glad to have so many commendations of what one calls our battle cry, "Guilty and Proud of It." Of course, what Lord Morley meant was not that he did not attack Christianity, but that he attacked by way of explanation, which is a quite different proposition. And we are assured that until Freethinkers face Christianity in a quite determined and uncompromising attitude we shall never get where we might be. We know that essential Christianity is a hotch-potch of savage superstitions, and we must make Christians realize that we do know it, and mean what we say.

W. JAMESON.—We cannot see the purpose of your letter. The first, strikes us as irrelevant and the second as unreasonable. There is certainly nothing in the paragraph to suggest the opinion that we do not admit the possibility of error. And for the second there is nothing more "unnatural" in controlling the number of births than there is in controlling the direction of a flash of lightning. It is just a subject that should be discussed on its merits, and freed from the indecency with which Christian education has associated it.

A. MILLAR.—Shall be very glad to see you at the Conference on Whit-Sunday. We are hoping to greet a great many old friends on that occasion.

S. OLSON.—There is no actual rule, so far as we know, that would keep an Atheist from joining the English Freemasons. But there is a theistic oath which prevents many doing so. The continental lodges, we believe, have no such oath.

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

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

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

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

Lecture Notices must reach 62 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, 62 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 "Midland Bank, Ltd., 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 at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—
One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

Sugar Plums.

Arrangements for the 1925 Conference are now complete. On Saturday evening the President and principal officials of the N.S.S. will be at the Grafton Hotel, Tottenham Court Road, at 7.30, to meet and welcome all old and new friends. The Conference itself will be held in the Palm Court of the Grafton Hotel at 10.30 and 2.30. These will be business meetings, for members only. Between the two meetings there will be luncheon provided at the same hotel, tickets 2s. 6d. Those who intend to be present at the luncheon will help by making their intentions known to the Secretary.

In the evening a public demonstration will be held in the Scala Theatre, full particulars of which will be found on the back of this week's *Freethinker*. We want all our London readers to lend a hand in making this meeting as widely known as is possible. The Scala is a very handsome theatre, and should be packed to the doors. A small handbill, of the pocket variety, has been prepared, and friends will give a real help by undertaking their distribution. London is a very difficult place to advertise, and for that reason we are asking our friends to lend a hand.

We have received more letters from correspondents with regard to increasing *Freethinker* sales. One writes that he finds the price of 3d. an obstacle to getting some to subscribe. That may be quite true, and, of course, if the paper were a penny, or only twopence, more might be induced to subscribe. But we kept the paper at twopence right through the war, and only increased the price when costs rose still further after the war had finished. And, short of some millionaire taking the burden, we do not see any chance of reducing the price at present. As an illustration of this, we see that the *New Age*, published at sixpence, has managed to bring its announced loss down to £500 a year, and is asking for that sum to be guaranteed annually if the paper is to continue. From that readers may gather some idea of the burden we have had to shoulder during the past ten years.

Another sends the curious complaint that some to whom he has offered the paper find it too "deep" for them, and timidly suggests that it might be made—shallower, we presume. We have, we hope, never made the mistake that solemnity was of necessity wisdom, or that obscurity indicated profundity. Bright, clear, and even lively reading is possible with every subject, and desirable. But we have no intention of converting the *Freethinker* into a kind of weekly "Snip-Snap," in order to attract a circle of empty-headed readers. Our aim is not to write down to the most stupid of the population; we cannot hope to compete with the churches and chapels, or with the numerous weeklies with large circulations for the patronage of that class. And they would be of no use in any case. We aim at giving a journal to those of the people who have an average amount of intelligence, and are not afraid to use it. Finally, it must be remembered that the primary aim of the *Freethinker* is not merely to sell a large number of copies, and so create a business property. Its primary aim is to carry on a propaganda, to hold certain ideas and principles before the people in the sure

and certain conviction that they stand for what is true and useful. If we were aiming only at selling something, we hope we have too much intelligence to waste our energies in trying to make Freethought propaganda a paying proposition. So we are afraid we cannot make the *Freethinker* shallow and mentally cheap, even with the promise of larger sales. The *Freethinker* must remain the *Freethinker* to the end. It has been true to itself and the Cause for over forty years, and it will continue to follow that rule.

Meanwhile we are glad to note that some of those who have written have declared their intention of seriously taking up the work of acting as advertising agents for the *Freethinker*. Naturally, we hope that their efforts will be crowned with success. Every new one counts in one of the hardest and one of the greatest of fights.

Miss Ettie Rout (Mrs. F. A. Hornibrook), whose *Sexual Health and Birth Control*, has won deserved appreciation as a wholesome, sane, and fearless study of an important subject, has just issued another work, *The Morality of Birth Control* (John Lane, 5s.), which deals with another aspect of the same topic. The author modestly says that her aim has been "not so much to state my own opinions . . . as to disentangle and weigh the general opinions of other people, and to state the facts as to the social influence and hygienic effects of the exercise of birth control and of its suppression." This is certainly done with thoroughness and with effect. Every argument of importance against birth control is fairly stated, and the replies soberly stated, and care appears to have been taken to suppress rhetorical exaggeration—the fatal lure of ardent advocates of unpopular causes. The work is essentially clean and wholesome, and they who have read *Sexual Health and Birth Control* will need little assurance on that point.

One point clearly brought out by Mrs. Hornibrook is that birth control is no new thing in the history of the race. Some form of it is consciously practised even among primitive people, and, in addition to these conscious controls, there are the great natural forces of war, etc., which are constantly exercising some degree of birth restriction. But one very strong argument in favour of birth control is the extent to which civilized society tends to exercise death control—that is the degree to which we learn to eliminate the forces that make for untimely deaths or deaths from disease. From all points of view, social, and individual, intellectual, moral, and æsthetic, we are brought face to face with the question, and we have to choose between dealing with it wisely and consciously, or unconsciously and unwisely. There is sound wisdom in the admonition that "Like every other aspect of science and ethics, sexual morality is flexible, provisional, incomplete, ever advancing and receding, ever changing in form, and yet the more it changes the more it remains the same. We laugh at our ancestors for thinking the earth was the centre of the Universe, and yet we ourselves perpetrate a similar error when we imagine ourselves in the centre of time with no more knowledge to acquire, no more freedoms to win, no more ethics to evolve."

The Bolton Branch has, we learn, opened its summer campaign, and we wish them every success during the season. To-day (May 24) by the Town Hall at 8. Messrs. Addison and Partington will be the speakers.

Mr. George Whitehead has just completed a successful week's lecturing for the West Ham Branch. The meetings have been well attended, questions numerous, and satisfaction obvious. During the week ending May 23 he has been, and will be, lecturing for the South London Branch. Next week he will be lecturing in North London, at Highbury Corner, every evening at 8 o'clock.

Three of Different Mien.

A POPULAR Scots comedian sings a song wherein he informs his audience that he belongs to "Glesca," and that when he has had five or six "nips o' whusky" "Glesca" belongs to him. That, of course, is not a general characteristic of the Scots people, although they are anything but willing to admit inferiority to any other race. Thirty or forty years ago, a song was popular over the Border with a refrain that went something like "Manual labour and intellect; We bang the world in that respect," and, putting it to a Scotsman on the quiet, there is no doubt that he would admit there was something to be said in favour of it. However, I have come across a boast that puts these music-hall pleasantries out of court altogether. And the author of it was a widely travelled man and had ample opportunity of comparing other countries with his beloved Scotland. William Lithgow was born at Lanark in 1582, and in the course of his travels, fell into the hands of the Spanish Inquisition, and was used abominably during his imprisonment. Although by no means a theologian, he kept up the reputation of the combative Scottish churchman for incisive language when dealing with the Popes and the Roman Church. He let himself go as thus:—

What a thief was Boniface the Seventh! What an atheistical Pope was Leo the Tenth! What a heretical Pope was Honourous the First! What a perjured Pope was Gregory the Twelfth! What a beastly Pope was Sergius the Third!

and so on with the usual Christian amenities. But it was when he came up against the "ignorant malice of an imperious and abortive geographer, brought up in the schools near Thames and Westward Ho! at Oxford," who had evidently been saying ungallant things about his native land, that he penned the following boast:—

That for courteous penetrating lenity; industrious tractability; prompt and exquisite ingenuity; nobly taught vivacious and virtuous gentility; humane and illustrious generosity; inviolate and uncommixed national pedigree; learned academical and ecclesiastic clergy; for sincere religion and devout piety; affable and benevolent hospitality; and zealous orders in spirituality; so docible a people and supreme a regality; and for true valour, courage, and magnanimity, there is no kingdom or nation within the compass of the whole universe can excel or compare with the Scottish nation.

That could hardly be bettered except, perhaps, by hearing the patriotic Scot expound the "inviolable and uncommixed national pedigree" clause. The voice of Lithgow was not as one crying in the wilderness, for Sir Thomas Urquhart, a contemporary of his, wrote a tract wherein is recorded "the true pedigree and lineal descent of the most ancient and honourable name of the Urquharts in the house of Cromartie since the creation of the world until the present year of God 1652." I have seen it argued that Gaelic was spoken in the Garden of Eden, and I am now inclined to think that "braid Scots" is the language spoken in the glorious company of Heaven.

Andrew Fletcher, of Saltoun (1653-1716), is remembered chiefly for having said "he believed if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make all the laws of a nation." But his fame rests on a more secure foundation than the very questionable wisdom of such a pronouncement. It is based on his undoubted mental and physical courage. And he made no ballads; his active life was spent in making laws and defying and fighting the dominance of the English rulers. He was a radical and somewhat of a Republican at a time when to hold

such opinions, not to speak of actively propagating them, meant serious disabilities. If he possessed any caution it was submerged in his truculent temper, and he was not adverse to violence, either in or out of the Parliament House. Some of his opinions and suggestions are curiously modern. He was for annual Parliaments and had the politician's faith in that tinkering remedy. He glimpsed that the manipulation of finance was at the bottom of some of the mischief, and got as far as suggesting that money should be lent without interest. He gave support to a proposal to improve the finances of Scotland by a liberal issue of paper money, although the idea of regulating prices along with it seems not to have occurred to him. He was "large" in his religious opinions, and was a fervent lover of "Liberty." That is a word or thing that can take on an infinitude of meaning, and in Fletcher's case it had decided and drastic limitations. He believed that "freedom" in certain cases could best function in a condition of slavery and proposed as a remedy for the excessive unemployment then prevalent in Scotland the enslavement of the idle common people. He justified the scheme by pointing to the magnificent public works and art of ancient Greece and Rome, all brought into being in a society based on slavery. And with the slimness of the politician he suggested that his proposal should be executed with dispatch and secrecy, so that the people, who, he said, "are such enemies of work and labour," could be roped in before they could retreat to the hills and mountains. To give an added moral sanction to the affair, some hundreds of the more irreconcilables were to be presented to the State of Venice for service in the galleys against the common enemy of Christendom, the Sallee rovers. That may seem a somewhat callous thing, but it is not so very improbable, for slavery is implicit in most of the schemes of modern thinkers on the subject. The difference between then and now is that whereas Fletcher was open on the matter, it is now smothered under a pretended regard for individual liberty. Nevertheless, Fletcher was a great force in the forward march of things; he thought freely on subjects that are still cluttered up with superstition, and many of his opinions still circulate in Scotland and elsewhere as liberal thought. One of his biographers says he died "Christianly," but then a man hardly dare die in any other way in those days.

A hundred years or so after Lithgow's time lived my Lord Braxfield. He was a member of the Court of Session, and, with Lord James, shared a love of what was then termed a "hanging circuit." Raeburn painted his portrait; a coarse, beetle-browed individual, with a face that would have enabled him to pass either for the judge he was or as a low type of burglar. Judges are a notoriously prejudiced class of men, but none of them, even in that day of corrupt legality, came near Braxfield in his disregard for ordinary fair play. He was in the height of his power in the day of the Corresponding Clubs, and the very idea of reform was anathema to him. "Come awa," he said to a juryman engaged in a political trial, "and help us to hang some o' thae dawmmed scoondrels." He carried his hatred of the men who came before him to an astonishing length. "You're a verra clever chiel, maun," he said to one prisoner who had pleaded guilty for his life, "but ye wad be nane the waur o' a hanging," and hanged he was. In the books dealing with the social life of the period the legal fraternity are shown, generally, in their most pleasant guise. They were a witty and convivial set of men, but, with a few exceptions, a more corrupt crew never disgraced the annals of a nation.

Braxfield presided at the trial of Advocate Muir, the Edinburgh lawyer, who was accused of sedition,

and the circulation of Thomas Paine's works was made one of the counts of the indictment. Braxfield packed the jury and acted as prosecuting counsel. "It would be an abuse of the term," said Lord Cockburn, "to say that he made a judicial charge." Some years after, one William Lockhart, wrote begging letters to the judge, and backed up his claim for cash by recalling how he had made enquiries about the opinions of the jurymen they were not sure of, and so had enabled "fair and honest juries" to be at Braxfield's command. The sentence of fourteen years' transportation was, according to some authorities—Lord Colchester, Grey, Sheridan—illegal, there being no statute then in force to warrant it, but when it was referred back to Braxfield he stormed the matter down and bluntly argued that the first thing to be considered was the safety of the landed interest. The Whigs carried the fight to the House of Commons, but party feeling was too strong, and Muir went across the seas to Botany Bay. "God help the people," said Fox, "who have such judges," and perhaps the only hopeful thing in the affair, apart from the men who bore the brunt of the fight, is the extraordinary influence wielded by the writings of Paine. But it did not brake Braxfield very much. He went on in the old way to the end of the chapter; swilling claret or whatever the drink was then, and dispensing his own particular kind of justice. I don't know that there is any cure for that sort of thing. A few centuries of selective breeding might cope with it.

H. B. DODDS.

Domestic Politics.

SOME little while ago I received a letter from a cynical old bachelor friend who, after saying that my articles in the old paper were a source of never-failing delight, observed that my growing note of seriousness was rather ominous; adding, "Tell me, does marriage always have this sobering effect even on the most volatile and scintillating of intellects?" I replied that whilst the position of an intellectual dilettante had its charms, it was apt to become rather unsatisfying to a serious thinker. To be really useful and not merely entertaining one's writings must be purposive—hence my growing note of seriousness. I promised, however, that I would continue to wear the cap and bells occasionally, if only to demonstrate the blitheness of my heart—even beneath the cares and worries of profane matrimony. I further hinted that my telegraphic address was *not*: "Henpeck." Alas—!

Like most ardent democrats, in matters domestic I favour a benevolent autocracy. A benevolent autocracy has much to commend it—when one happens to be the benevolent autocrat. As a matter of fact, the lady who presides over my domestic destinies has lately been abusing me most vilely. For several weeks in minor domestic tactics she has scored a series of moral successes that seriously threaten my supremacy. By imperceptible degrees she has sapped my *morale* until my resolve to carry out certain well-meant advice about beginning as I intended to go on is already a thing of shreds and patches. Last week, for instance, I suffered a serious reverse. It fell out—or rather *we* fell out—in this wise. It appears that in a moment of pre-marital weakness I declared that I would always take her to the pictures at least once a week. To be quite candid, I have no recollection of ever having made such a rash promise, but I recognize that such a futile argument carries no weight with one who *knows* differently. Admitting, therefore, for argument's sake the truth of her assertion, I sought to show that my promise had been wrung from me by intimidation and was not the out-

come of my own unfettered volition. This being so, I argued that a promise made ("extorted," I think, was the term I used) under such conditions was not recognizable before the law, and I was not bound morally to honour it. Unhappily, my wife has not the legal mind. This argument—so well knit; so lucidly and eloquently put; so pre-eminently reasonable—left her quite cold. Or rather it left her white hot. She declared that my argument was a wilful and characteristic piece of procrastination: sheer pedantry that irritated and annoyed her. She didn't put it quite like that, but that is what she implied. Actually she said, "It's just like you to stand and argue until it's too late to go. I'm fed up!"

Wimmen is wimmen, thet's their style;
Talk reason to 'em an' they'll bile.

I suppose it was inevitable at this point that the cup-of-tea incident should be dragged into our sordid affair. The cup-of-tea incident I should explain was the result of another promise (I seem to have made promises with all the recklessness of a Parliamentary candidate who didn't expect to get in) in which I undertook to take my spouse a cup of tea up to bed every morning until death us did part. This promise was the most short-lived of any I ever made. I fell from grace "on the morning of the third day." I have never quite been able to make up my mind why my wife permitted such an early lapse on my part. Did she find the mingled threats, pushes, and entreaties, by which she sought to rouse me too exhausting; or did she think the lapse would prove a useful method of shaming me on future occasions? Judging from the frequency with which she reminds me of it, I incline to the last hypothesis. The fact that the position is now reversed, and that she now brings me a cup of tea lends strength to this view—it is an additional stick with which to beat me into shame-faced silence. The depth and subtlety of the fair sex is quite Oriental to the phlegmatic male mind.

To return to the subject of debate. It appeared that John Barrymore was starring at the Coliseum. My wife said she *adored* John Barrymore. I took the very natural view that such adoration in a respectable married woman was highly reprehensible; it positively bordered on the indecent. I added that I didn't know what girls were coming to nowadays. She curled her lip and supposed I was jealous. I swore and—although it wasn't really relevant to the issue—abused her cooking. I said she would have made an excellent cook to an Old Testament patriarch—every dish was either a burnt offering or a bloody sacrifice! At this point we went to the pictures!

In moments of philosophic calm I praise the pigs that my adorable wife has no "religious instinct." It would be unbearable did she try to drag me off to church, or stealthily secrete tracts in my pyjamas. "Religious instinct?" Why she doesn't even think there *must* be *Something*. Her most positive conviction is that when we are dead we are done with. Fortunately for her peace of mind she does not realize the tremendous heresy implied in this matter-of-fact opinion. I do not disillusion her. I hate blue stockings. I much prefer them silk. There are, however, times when I feel like taking her aside and whispering that she musn't say it too loud lest she places herself outside the pale of civilization and incurs the pious horror of all right-thinking people. I have a sort of premonition that when the vicar calls she will turn her hazel eyes upon him and coo gently: "But don't you think, vicar, that when we are dead we are done with?" I break into a cold sweat every time I think about it.

Of course, you didn't know we were expecting the vicar? I didn't myself until this morning. An austere-looking female whose orthodoxy and chastity

were alike unimpeachable—informed me of the treat in store for us, when she called to see if we'd take the Parish Magazine. I broke the news gently to M'lady, and asked her what she thought about it.

"I shall wear my little pink," she answered irrelevantly.

We have discussed the vicar at length. What is he like? How shall we receive him? I think he will be fat and pompous, and wear an air of infinite condescension and gold-rimmed spectacles. My wife favours silvery hair and a spiritual appearance. But how to receive him? That, as Hamlet said, is the question. Shall I advance in my most bourgeois manner, grasp him heartily by the hand, and exclaim: "Ah! My *dear* vicar, delighted—delighted!—welcome to The Poplars." Or, should I ignore his outstretched hand, and murmur sardonically, "Good afternoon, sir, I think I've met most of the other local tradesmen!" I rather fancy the latter course. I've rehearsed it several times. The wife says I musn't be so insulting. Women are *so* touchy.

I have placed my difficulties before Joseph Clive: considering he is only sixteen weeks he possesses a wonderful amount of acumen. "Offspring," said I, "we are expecting a visit from a man of God, and considering you have so recently come, trailing clouds of glory, from his spiritual headquarters, I thought perhaps you might enlighten us as to the most fitting manner in which to receive the reverend gentleman." If anything, Joseph Clive seems more appalled at the prospect than either his mother or myself. Words quite failed him on this occasion. He tried to speak, but it ended in a gurgle and a splutter. I have often noticed how intense emotion deprives one of the faculty of speech. But there was that in the eye of Joseph Clive that boded ill for the vicar's best trousers should he lay his pious hands upon his (J. C.'s) person. I confided my fears to his mother. The possibility seemed to dismay her. Personally I regard it as an excellent opportunity of seeing whether fastening one's collar at the back curbs one's flow of language in those moments when the veneer of civilization is stripped from off one and man is cast ruthlessly back on his primal passions and instincts. We shall see

We have decided to receive the vicar courteously, and with due regard for his calling. After tea I am at liberty to take him in the garden and gently pole-axe him—which shall be done thoroughly. When the vicar arrives he will find me in a state of repressed excitement; my wife in her little pink; and Joseph Clive in his best rubber pants—for the vicar's especial safety.

VINCENT J. HANDS.

Drama and Dramatists.

AFTER witnessing "Caesar and Cleopatra" at the Kingsway Theatre we are convinced that the writing of history should be left to dramatists. In our imagination we can see the kept fingers of the historian fidgetting with the truth; with one eye on his domestic exchequer and the other on the Apollonian stiff necks of his time, posterity gets something called history that is as near to facts as the moon is to the earth. In the prologue Mr. George Bernard Shaw right royally insults his audience with a feast of intellectual fireworks, and, with the lifting of the curtain on the first act, he sails majestically into the subject with that great endowment of his, the terrible gift of familiarity which is the speech of great men. In brief, this act rapidly sketches the coming of Caesar to Egypt, with some sly pokes at the Egyptian gods.

Much merriment was evoked by references to the sacred white cat that could not withstand the amorous call of a black one, with the result that it left the arms of Cleopatra and was lost. With his old love for odd situations the author brings Cæsar to earth after addressing the Sphinx, but, in an exquisite display of counter fooling, the noble Roman gets even with Cleopatra for her plain and unvarnished description of him as "an old gentleman." The sound of the bucina in the distance, is, for his purposes with her, Cæsar's voice, it is the tread of Cæsar's legions, it is Cæsar approaching the throne of Cleopatra, whereas, in reality, it was a burly fellow's breath through brass. With his imperious manner, Cæsar gradually compels her to take on sovereignty, and, at the curtain, she realizes that she has been talking to him all the time—the old gentleman, thin and stringy. In the second act, which is a pretty lampoon of the disposal of thrones, Rufio, with typical resourcefulness in finding a seat for Cæsar, seizes a bronze tripod, which is before the image of the god Ra. He shakes off the incense, blows away the ash, and plants it down behind his master. Cæsar sits down on it, whilst fierce whispers of "sacrilege" go round among the Egyptians. The boy king's speech from the throne was one long shriek of delight, reminiscent of the Athenian player's tragedy in the "Midsummer Night's Dream." The prompting was delicious, and, in the palm of his hand, our author held up to view the divinity of kings with an ugly faced eunuch as chorus.

The bays of the conqueror appear to be clever camouflage for baldness, and Cleopatra, with the same capacity for giving advice as loving, tells Cæsar that he should rub his head with strong spirits of sugar. The reverence surrounding antiquity at this point begins to wear a trifle thin, but our author has already warned us in the prologue that all the characters are just like ourselves. Cæsar, in all the glory of his armour, departs to battle—and Cleopatra calls after him, just like wives used to call after their civilian husbands at Waterloo Station during the last war for Peace with Honour—to come back safe.

The third act is in the nature of comedy. Britanus, who characterises an inhabitant of an island, a day's voyage from Gaul, is perplexed about Cleopatra staying at a lighthouse without the companionship of a matron; but she, with the same cure for everything as the Queen in "Alice in Wonderland," wants his head cut off, which would certainly leave no room for argument.

In the next act we find that Cleopatra has grown. Cæsar's influence has been at work. She has progressed to such an extent that Rufio calls her a filthy little Egyptian rat, and Cæsar's right-hand man, to run no further risks for his royal master or himself, despatches Ftatateeta, the Queen's chief nurse. Act five gives us the farewell of Cæsar to Egypt with his promise to Cleopatra to send Mark Antony.

Such in mere outline is this interpretation by our author of Cæsar's activities in Egypt. He has humanized the story, and he has the faculty of thinking in generations. Clemency is the keynote of Cæsar's philosophy, and there are in the play passages of beauty, of rhetoric, but, greatest of all, of common sense. Cleopatra has not known him long, but, with a woman's intuition, she can say of him: "He has no hatred in him; he makes friends with everyone as he does with dogs and children. His kindness to me is a wonder; neither mother, father, nor nurse have ever taken so much care for me, or thrown open their thoughts to me so freely." And, in the making of a great man, which is conquest of self, the greatest victory, we get a clue in a speech of Cæsar, whose mind is working in another direction

from that of an Egyptian with his head full of ambition, and smothered in clouds of sorcery, magic, and bewitchment by cats:—

Pothinus.—Natural! Then you do not resent treachery?

Cæsar.—Resent! O thou foolish Egyptian, what have I to do with resentment? Do I resent the wind when it chills me, or the night when it makes me stumble in the darkness? Shall I resent youth when it turns from age, and ambition when it turns to servitude? To tell me such a story as this is but to tell me that the sun will rise to-morrow.

Huxley stated that it did not matter what views a man held: only what direction he faced. For this reason, although Mr. Shaw has views on everything, the dramatist is determined to give a positive contribution to the growth of mankind, and he, at least, faces the future with hope. The character of Cæsar in the play was a triumph of simplicity over barbarian ideas; to laugh at history, to learn something from it, to leave the theatre with a sense of having gained something from seeing the play, is an experience rarely enjoyed, yet this is possible with the play before us. It has the lightness, brightness, and sparkle of Bizet's or Donizetti's music; it has the gorgeous colouring and contrast in costume of civilizations, and congratulations are due to the producers, who illustrate the Book of Shaw. It is essentially a play, in our opinion, of character; free thought has been exercised on these figures of the past to give them a meaning for the present—almost the only reason—for going to the cupboard of history.

Mr. Cedric Hardwicke, who takes the part of Cæsar, plays the "old gentleman" with the perfect comprehension that he portrayed the old baggage, "Churdles Ash," in "The Farmer's Wife." There is a whimsical melancholy sustained throughout in his voice and gesture; there are touches of weariness, but the nobility of this character is expressed in the fact that out of its plenitude of power, there is an abundance to be given to the girl Queen. Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Cleopatra gives us a clear-cut engraving of one of history's naughty women, and Mr. George Hayes as Apollodorus looks handsome, and justifies Mr. Shaw's inclusion of the lyrical note in this extravaganza. Without exception, the whole company give the impression that they enjoy their parts, and a visit to the Kingsway Theatre will be its own reward. In the pomp and pageantry of antiquity there will be seen the god idea tossed about like a shuttlecock, with the ultimate conclusion that as all gods are born in the head it is about time that something useful was born in that quarter for a change. At least, Mr. Shaw, through his character of Cæsar, has evolved what to us appears to be a gracious and simple ideal of nobility, and ratified the saying of Confucius:—

The nobler sort of man is dignified, but not proud;
The inferior man is proud but not dignified.

Forward, then, ye dramatists, and write our history with your ideals steadily in front of you; and, if there must be tears, let dramatists of the New Age be sure that they are tears of laughter, and model their style on that of our Aristophanes in a tweed suit.

WILLIAM REPTON.

That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamos; but it won't scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions. What's the result? In machinery it does very well; but in morals and religion and politics it is working at a loss that brings it nearer bankruptcy every year.—*Bernard Shaw.*

Correspondence.

WHAT IS FREETHOUGHT?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your correspondent's letter under the above heading leaves us wondering if there is a catch in it. When one claims the title Freethinker a natural sequence asks of what degree and for what reason.

Those believers who, from "God's creative scheme by evolution" accrue an emotion at the expense of the work of unbelievers, do they not enjoy freedom of thought, and at the same time demonstrate the parasitic relation of religion to knowledge? If Freethought is free from "prejudice against persons and ideas," why not also free from prejudice in favour of persons and ideas which has resulted from the extensive and exclusive advertising of the Gospel Jesus concerning the liberation of mankind. The Freethinker, in extending sympathy to all persecutions of sincerity of purpose during the age-long human struggle from darkness to light, why should he withhold that from Jesus, historic or mythic? But what a platform from which to attack the follies of fools; to arouse the slumberer, whose chief desire is another five minutes in bed!

In his last paragraph your correspondent sees folly in creating a God in man's image, but the quintessence of sanity is aspiring to the image of a god whom man has made.

Thus, perhaps, is justified the question put to you in the first paragraph: "What is Freethought?"

J. G. BURDON.

A FREETHOUGHT LIBRARY.

SIR,—The New York Public Library, in a commendable spirit of detached impartiality, desires to develop as comprehensive a collection of English Freethought literature as possible. In no other place, I believe, can it accomplish more good.

The library makes all such accessions available for public use expeditiously. It takes special care of pamphlets. They are bound and catalogued carefully, and preserved beyond this generation.

Will you be kind enough to publish this letter, together with an appeal from you to your readers to send this institution as much out-of-print and current Freethought books, pamphlets, periodicals, etc. (out-of-prints will be especially welcomed, including stray periodicals), as their generosity and interest in the furtherance of Freethought prompts them to do. The opportunity is great, and the response cannot but be prompt and generous. To avoid duplication it is suggested that prospective donors communicate with the library first, sending a list of titles. The address of the New York Public Library is 476 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

J. LEVY.

MADAME BLAVATSKY.

SIR,—If Mr. J. T. Lloyd will read a pamphlet, *A Modern Cagliostro*, by G. W. Foote (now, I believe, out of print), he will find the true character of that imposter, Madame Blavatsky, clearly described.

R. S. P.

JESUS AND MIRACLES.

SIR,—There is one passage in Mr. Knapp Fisher's letter in the issue for May 10 where one wishes he had been more explicit, for it is there that I fancy his difference from Freethinkers lies.

Speaking of Jesus, he says: "Finally, I am forced to conclude that the miracles, which may have been distorted and exaggerated, are founded upon fact." Now leaving aside for the moment the still doubtful question of whether Jesus ever existed, the only records we have of the miracles are found in the gospels, the reliability of which Mr. Knapp Fisher himself doubts, as when he says: "The lapse of time since he lived . . . create a need for a very tentative acceptance of the letter of the gospels." Does Mr. Knapp Fisher's Scientific Spirit of Enquiry force him to accept these early writings as evidence that the miracles were "founded on fact"? If so, I suggest the spirit lacks the necessary scepticism to be truly scientific.

What exactly does Mr. Knapp Fisher believe happened *before* the miracles were "distorted and exaggerated"? If he believes Jesus so altered the physical

and chemical properties of water as to be able to walk on it, the question of whether he walked a yard or a mile is immaterial. Similarly, if John relates how Jesus turned six pots of water into wine, presumably without the addition of alcohol or fermenting agent, it still remains a miracle, if it could be shown to be a mere cupful. Exaggeration doesn't alter it. And, granted miracles were performed, why stop there? If Jesus was a supernatural being, why does Mr. Knapp Fisher doubt the Virgin Birth, resurrection, holy trinity, or any other Christian dogma?

If, on the other hand, he believes that Jesus swam the distance from shore to boat, and that the writer of Matthew let his imagination outrun his veracity, it remains a miracle no longer. If all Jesus did was surreptitiously to introduce colouring matter into the water, the distortion of the story removes the miracle, and what becomes of the "direct power over nature," which, we are told, Jesus possessed in superlative degree?

It is on such questions of accepting myths and dogmas on insufficient evidence and on belief in magic and supernatural powers of all kinds, that Freethinkers differ from the majority, and by his belief in a man who could alter the laws of nature at will, Mr. Knapp Fisher seems to me to be on the side of the supernaturalists.

HAROLD C. WOOD.

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 postcard.

LONDON.—INDOOR.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Oliver Goldsmith School, Peckham Road, S.E.): 7, Dr. F. H. Hayward (assisted by the Peckham and District Co-operative Choir, R.A.C.S.), Celebration "W. S. Gilbert."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., D.Lit., "Wealth *versus* Civilization."

OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 6.15, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, a Lecture.

FINSBURY PARK BRANCH N.S.S. (Finsbury Park): 11.15, Mr. G. Whitehead, a Lecture.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Hyde Park): Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays. Speakers: Messrs. Baker, Hanson, Hart, Keeling, Drayton, and Ryan.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 6, Mr. A. D. McLaren, a Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): 3 and 6, Mr. G. Whitehead will lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Outside Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. E. C. Saphin, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.—OUTDOOR.

BOLTON BRANCH N.S.S. (Town Hall steps): 8, Messrs. Addison and Partington, "Was Jesus Christ a Social Reformer?"

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S. (Town Moor, near North Road entrance): 7, Discussion—"Did Christianity Abolish Slavery?" Mr. R. Atkinson and Mr. Leo Ames.

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