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Views and Opinions.

Freedom of Thought.

A little time ago we received a copy of the *Chicago Tribune*, which contained an article lamenting the decline of individual liberty in the United States. The article made some rather startling statements, the accuracy of which we have no means of estimating, but judging from other papers that reach us there is much cause for uneasiness on the part of those Americans who do value freedom of intercourse as one of the best elements in their life. We are the more inclined to regard the article as being well based in fact, because it is a phenomenon not peculiar to the United States. It is common to the civilized world, and it is one for which the civilized world may yet pay dearly. Among ourselves—to deal with what we are best acquainted—regulations and orders flourish as thickly as dead leaves in autumn, and the more we have of them the louder becomes the cry for more, each batch of regulations bringing in their train an army of officials who represent a dead weight upon the productive capacity of the country. As we have often pointed out, the growth of authority is one of the marked features of recent years. The power of the Government grows from year to year, and within the State, organizations large and small cultivate and extend the element of authority. In Parliament the independence of the individual members becomes steadily less, and the orders of party leaders tend to become supreme. The individual is told that whatever his private opinions are his duty is to obey the party resolutions. He is, apparently, not to think, but to vote. Outside, in spite of what is being said about the revolt and restlessness of the working class, the really striking thing is the way in which the individual opinion bows to the order of this or that leader. We are all getting into the habit of moving and acting, not as so many individuals, each with a will and an opinion of his own, but as an unimportant unit in a crowd. For many years reformers thought it to be their duty to educate their followers in a taste for freedom. To-day the impulse seems to be in the other direction.

* * *

The Individual and the Herd.

I am not disputing for a moment that organization, and the subordination of the individual to the whole,

has its good side. It clearly has that. Living together we cannot act alone. We must join others if we are to do good, but in many instances individual opinion must bow, in the case of action, to that of the majority. I merely wish to emphasize the point of view that in our haste to gain an immediate good we may be sacrificing what is a larger and better ultimate good for all concerned. Politics is the natural home of compromise, it is also the one in which coercion is most easily, most naturally, and most plausibly applied. The development of political action during recent years, the growth of mere authority and of coercion during the war years, the vista of a more perfect society being achieved through State action, are helping us to lose sight of the fact that all these things have their ultimate and only reasonable justification in the greater happiness and the fuller life of the individual. The herd finds its justification in the life of the individual member. But it is a variation from the typical group mind that is responsible for the development of the herd, and although it may be argued that even this variation is only a little deeper expression of racial life, yet its character as an individual expression remains; and we have always the standing example in the Christian Church of the tremendous social evils that follow all attempts to suppress that.

* * *

Opinion and the Law.

Commenting on the recent trial of Communists the *New Leader* said that this was the first trial in our generation for proclaiming a forbidden opinion. On this that usually well informed writer, Mr. C. H. Norman, points out that this is not the case, and advises the Labour Party generally that it would do well to consider the wisdom of taking a lot of legislation off the Statute Book (presumably those restricting freedom of thought, specially) before putting more on. And he goes on to say:—

It is possible to prosecute anyone who disputes the divinity of the Bible, or the morality of the Communion Service; who criticises the judges or the judicial administration, who holds a public meeting on Sunday, who conducts Sunday trading, who criticises the morality of the King, and even that of his immediate predecessors.

To that the editor of the *New Leader* appends a note in which he says that "blasphemy prosecutions are never in our time for expressing opinions, but for expressing them in ways likely to cause disorder." The editor is so far right that during the past two or three generations prosecutions have theoretically involved that (there has never, it may be pointed out, been an actual breach of the peace), but the real ground has been that the speeches or the writings indicted outraged the feelings of Christians, and did not attack religion in a respectful manner. Of course, the real ground for a blasphemy prosecution has always been because Christians objected to the opinions held, and only the force of liberal opinion compelled them to camouflage their

motives. But Mr. Norman has evidently forgotten the case fought by the Secular Society, Limited, which secured a House of Lords' decision establishing, once for all, the right to reject and criticise any and every Christian teaching, always with the proviso that it must be done in a respectful manner. That was a great fight, it was carried to an issue by the N.S.S. and the Secular Society, Limited, and the case has become the leading one throughout the civilized world. Mr. Norman is wrong on a point of law, he is correct enough on a matter of actual fact. The editor of the *New Leader* appears to lose the fact in a legal technicality.

* * *

The Sunday Law.

With regard to Sunday meetings Mr. Norman appears to have mistaken the law which prohibits a charge for admission to a meeting held on Sunday for one which prohibits a meeting being held. Any meeting that is legal on a week-day is legal on a Sunday, provided no admission money is charged. On that point I may say that a good way to end that law is to break it, and if the proprietor of a hall is willing to lend his premises the N.S.S. is always ready to test the matter. I fancy it would then be found that the administration of the Act would not be quite so easy as it is thought to be. But there is no law against holding a meeting on Sunday. Whether the meeting can become the subject of action depends upon what takes place, and that, of course, applies no less to meetings held on week-days. But we quite agree with Mr. Norman that the Labour Party would do well, as would all who are interested in reform, to make the repeal of all laws that restrict the equal freedom of thought and speech one of their immediate objects. A bad law is a dangerous law so long as it exists. That it has not been applied for a long time is usually due to the fact that circumstances are not favourable to its application. But the other side of that is the fact that given a change in the existing circumstances there would be found plenty to put it into operation.

* * *

The Education of Opinion.

It is a significant thing, but with the exception of religion there is no law in this country that does technically interfere with matters of opinion. There is nothing to make any form of political or social opinion illegal. One may advocate Republicanism, or Communism, or any other 'ism, and it is within the power of the House of Commons to repeal any existing law and to pass one of an entirely opposite character. There are laws against inciting to a breach of the peace, and one is bound to admit that these may be stretched so as to virtually amount to an attack on opinion, but with genuine publicity, and a public educated to value freedom of thought, there would be a very efficient check upon that. There is also a law which prohibits propaganda among soldiers or sailors calculated to incite them to disobey orders, although it is puzzling to see why a propaganda which is quite permissible among civilians should not be permissible among soldiers. Perhaps one day a government may be found that will treat soldiers as mentally responsible human beings, instead of treating them as so far immature that they cannot be trusted as civilians are trusted to weigh the value of arguments that are placed before them. But with these exceptions, the English law is quite favourable to freedom of expression—technically, that is. Its working out in matters of actual operation is sometimes quite another matter. A law was passed a few years ago making it an offence to disturb a public meeting, but that appears to have be-

come a dead letter. It is the one law we should like to see vigorously and rigorously applied.

* * *

Intolerance as a Religious Heritage.

John Stuart Mill remarked that the trial and crucifixion of Jesus Christ has not succeeded in teaching Christians the need for toleration. On the contrary, I do not believe there is any other religion that has so striven to make persecution for opinion a sacred duty, and which has done so much to infect the body social with this virus. There was published the other week a reprint of a charter of protection granted to the Nestorian Christians by the Caliph of Bagdad in 1138. In doing this the Caliph was only following precedent, not creating one. He promised the Christians full protection for their life and property, for their churches and monasteries, and in the carrying out of their religion. The editor of the document, A. Mingana, D.D., points out:—

The need has always been felt for an authoritative statement throwing light upon the relations between official Islam and official Christianity at the time when Islam had power of life and death over millions of Christian subjects. Individual Christians may have suffered persecution at the hands of individual Muslims; isolated cases of Christian communities suffering hardship through the fanaticism of a provincial governor, or a jurist.....are also recorded in history.....but such incidents, however numerous, are to be considered as infractions of the law and the men who brought them about were breakers of the law, as all criminals are breakers of the law.....However imperfect official Islam may have been in some social aspects, statutory intolerance was not among its defects.

Of what period of Christian history could one say this with truth? It was the Christian Church that covered intolerance with the cloak of religious duty and moral obligation, and if Mr. Norman searches he will not find it a matter of great difficulty to discover the reaction of this Christian teaching upon social and political life.

CHAIPMAN COHEN.

"Food for a Hungry World."

SUCH is the title of a sermon by the notorious American evangelist, the Rev. William A. Sunday, which appeared in the *Christian World Pulpit* of December 17. Mr. Sunday is a Presbyterian minister and, of course, a Fundamentalist to the backbone. The discourse is based on the amazing miracle of feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes. Naturally such a meal was an impossibility, and yet we read that after it was over "they took up that which remained over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full; and they that did eat were about five thousand men, beside women and children." Mr. Sunday is in his element, and begins thus:—

Some folks do not believe in miracles. I do. A denial of miracles is a denial of the virgin birth of Jesus. The Christian religion stands or falls on the virgin birth of Christ. God created Adam and Eve without human agencies. He could, and did, create Jesus supernaturally. I place no limit on what God can do. If you begin to limit God, then there is no God.

In that declaration Mr. Sunday occupies solid ground. Without a doubt, Christianity does stand or fall on its alleged miracles. Without them it loses its peculiar significance and authority. Matthew Arnold's *Literature and Dogma* did much to undermine Christianity in the English-speaking world by its eloquent insistence upon the utter valuelessness

of the so-called proof from miracles. It is perfectly true that the object of *Literature and Dogma* was to strengthen the case for what it called "the natural truth of Christianity," but the Christianity which Arnold tried so hard to uphold was not the Christianity of the orthodox Church. The alleged truth of Christianity is not natural but supernatural, and depends almost wholly upon the belief in the reality of miracles and the supernatural. "Billy" Sunday has no patience whatever with preachers who hold that miracles "are more of a hindrance than a help." He pictures one of them as "proceeding to spout his insane blasphemy." To be sure, if the God of the Bible exists, there can be no limit to his power, and nothing can be easier to him than to perform the mightiest miracles.

But what about scientific discoveries and modern knowledge generally? Like all Fundamentalists, Mr. Sunday laughs them to scorn. He waxes pathetically sentimental, saying:—

People are dissatisfied with philosophy, science, new thought—all these amount to nothing when you have a dead child in the house. These do not solace the troubles and woes of the world. People will tell you that when they were sick and the door of the future was opening in their face, the only comfort they could find was in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christianity is the only sympathetic religion that ever came into the world, for it is the only religion that ever comes from God.

There you have prejudice and narrowmindedness in all their hideousness; but the whole passage is as orthodox as it can be, and the preacher could give you the New Testament as his adequate authority. In Acts iv. 11, 12 we read of Jesus thus: "This is the stone which was set at nought by you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." The truth is that the Christian religion and modern science are fundamentally irreconcilable. They offer two entirely different and conflicting interpretations of the universe. If the one is true the other is of necessity false, and it seems impossible for anyone to swear by both at the same time. And yet there are some divines, like the Bishop of Birmingham, who accept the doctrine of evolution, but they can do so conscientiously only at the expense of relinquishing their belief in the historicity of the early chapters of Genesis, or, in other words, of repudiating the doctrines of the creation and fall of man as presented by Paul in the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. The Fundamentalists, however, both in America and this country, do not hesitate to cling to the Bible as the infallible word of God and to Christianity as the world's only hope. To them science is a false philosophy, a tacit denier of God and the spiritual world, and as such must be rejected and opposed as the fatal enemy of the human soul.

Now Mr. Sunday stoutly maintains that the world is hungry for Christianity as it is taught by the Fundamentalists. He says:—

If one were to believe all the magnificent articles in current and religious literature, one would think the world is disgusted and indifferent to the religion of Christ. I believe exactly the opposite is true. In no century since the morning stars sang together has there been more real hunger for genuine religion than in this. And yet many a preacher, instead of trying to feed this spiritual hunger, is giving some book review, staking a claim out on Jupiter, or talking evolution, trying to prove we came from a monkey with his prehensile tail wrapped around a limb shying coconuts at his neighbour across the alley. The world is not disgusted with

religion, but is disgusted with the worldliness, rituals, ceremonies, and non-essentials in which we have lost religion.

That is a fair sample of Mr. Sunday's buffoon style, dense ignorance, and offensive egotism. Ignorance and egotism usually go together; and both are apt to exert an uncanny influence upon the style of speaking or writing. Mr. Sunday's ignorance of science is abysmal, and this is the reason why he can denounce it with such colossal assurance. He has no patience with any style of preaching which is not in harmony with his own. "Some sermons," he exclaims, "instead of being a bugle call to service, are showers of spiritual cocaine." While he declares that the world is hungry for true religion he also tells us that "the Church, in endeavouring to serve God and Mammon, is growing cross-eyed, losing her power to know good from evil." In his opinion, so far is Fundamentalism from redeeming the world that he is forced to make the following lugubrious confession:—

I am satisfied that there has never been a time when it is harder to live a consistent Christian life than now. I believe the conflict between God and the Devil, right and wrong, was never hotter. The allurements of sin have never been more fascinating. I do not believe there ever was a time since Adam and Eve were turned out of Eden, when traps and pitfalls were more numerous and dangerous than to-day.....Out of every two church members, one is a spiritual liability; four out of five with their names on our church records are doing nothing to bring the world to Jesus. There are twenty million young men in this country between the ages of sixteen and thirty. Nineteen million are not members of any church; nine million attend church occasionally; ten million never darken a church door. Seventy-four per cent. of our criminals are young men under twenty-one years of age. In the past twenty-five years the age of prostitutes has fallen from twenty-six to seventeen years of age. Five hundred girls fifteen years old and under were divorced or widowed last year. Juvenile crime increased in one year from thirty-two per cent. to a hundred and thirty-eight per cent.

That is by no means pleasant reading. One's heart bleeds with pity in mere contemplation of such a lamentable state of things. And yet the country so described by one of its most popular preachers taboos science, idolises the Bible, and bitterly persecutes all who refuse to bow the knee to the leaders of the Fundamentalist movement which seems to sweep the country just now. This enraged agitation against the theory of evolution, this vigorous advocacy of Fundamentalism, and this furious denunciation and, whenever possible, cruel punishment of Modernists synchronize with an alarming increase of immorality and crime throughout the land. Now, what inference are we to draw from such curious and contradictory facts? Is any other conclusion even conceivable than that Christianity, in any and all forms, is a gigantic and, to its zealous and loyal preachers, heart-breaking failure? The truth is, even according to Mr. Sunday's admissions, that America, for some years, has been growing morally worse under Christianity, and in spite of the absence of all scientific teaching. The failure of Christianity is intelligible only on the assumption that it is not true. For the same reason it has failed in all other countries. No country under the sun can boast that it has been delivered from all its evils by the Christian religion. The world's hope lies not in supernatural religion, but in Humanism, towards which the Catholic Church was rapidly tending prior to the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation.

J. T. LLOYD.

Codding Christians.

To Cod: to hoax, to take a rise out of, to humbug, impose upon.—*New English Dictionary.*

Rough work, Iconoclasm, but the only way to get at truth.—*O. W. Holmes.*

I would have all men come out of Christendom into the universe.—*John Davidson.*

CHRISTMASTIDE is one of the great festivals of the Christian Religion, and, according to its priests, is associated with some of the most momentous happenings to mankind. They say that at this season, two thousand years ago, the "god" of their religion assumed human form. He is asserted to have lived thirty years on the earth, and, during that short period, to have done the most marvellous things. For instance, he had but one parent, and popular prejudice runs in favour of two. His death was also out of the common. After burial, he is alleged to have risen again, appeared to some friends, and finally left the earth like a Crystal Palace balloon. For all we know he may still be wandering in the ether of the upper air, "imprisoned in the viewless winds, and blown about the pendant world," as an old poet puts it. Nor is this all, for from childhood's days he performed miracles. He is said to have restored the dead to life; to have given sight to the blind; to have turned water into wine. His most astounding feat, however, was to feed five thousand people with a few loaves and fishes, the fragments remaining over from the banquet being in excess of the original amount. Which, as old Euclid would say, "is absurd."

These marvels, and many more, are to be found in the four gospels of the Christian Bible. According to the priests, unless a man believes this story he will be damned to everlasting penal servitude. If you should think this sentence monstrous, you must remember that the human race was condemned to death because "Adam" and "Eve" stole an apple, or some other fruit, of some not excessive value. Apparently, the Christian ways are more open to criticism than the Bench of Sloppington-on-the-Swizzle, notorious for harshness towards poachers.

This "Jesus" story of Christmas is simply a fable agreed upon, and foisted upon a festival which was already very old before the Christian Religion was founded. Paganism supplied the background, for some of the features are directly traceable to the Saturnalia of the Ancient Romans, and others to the Druidic religion of Britain. It is this peculiar blending of Paganism and Christianity which makes the festival so paradoxical. The figure of Jesus in the legends is a sombre one, but Christmastide is a time of jollity, of wine and wassail, of feasting and merriment. Why "God," who is described as eternal, should have a birthday, schooldays, and be executed like a common criminal, is a matter for Christians to settle among themselves. Freethinkers regard Jesus as a purely mythical personage, like all the other saviours and sun-gods of antiquity, who were generally born miraculously of virgin mothers, and whose careers, like that of Jesus, were marked with very marvellous occurrences. Whether there was a man called Jesus, who lived and made chairs and tables in a province of the Roman Empire, is a matter of microscopic importance. Those who profess and call themselves Christians worship the figure in the four Gospels, and not a Galilean workman, and they have done so for nearly twenty centuries.

"God's birthday" was not kept regularly until many generations after the supposed date of the birth of Christ. When first observed it was held on vary-

ing dates. The precise time of Christ's birth, like that of James de la Pluche, was "wropt in mystery," but it was not in December, even according to the gospel legends. It was in competition with the feast of Saturnalia, one of the chief Roman festivals, that Christmas Day had its date fixed in December.

The clergy have always had a keen eye for businesses, and a sound instinct for proselytising. In the past the priests sought for adherents by increasing her festal days, and she crushed opposition by bribing the weak and silencing the strong. In the twentieth century the game still goes on. To-day the priests are cajoling apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries, and at home by instituting pleasant Sunday afternoons in the place of painful Sabbaths, and by hypocritically identifying the clergy with social measures which appeal to the working classes.

Priests are still coddling Christians, and they are doing it almost as well as they did twenty centuries since. Ordinary citizens are too ill-educated to check the clerical statements, and, even when aware of the trickery, too busy earning their living to worry about priests and their practices. And people are too innocent and too easily satisfied to oppose Priestcraft. Because a score of priests use the vocabulary of Democracy, the average person thinks "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world." Mr. Everyman never asks what the rest of the 50,000 priests are doing for the People. He seldom reads anything except a Sunday newspaper, devoted almost entirely to criminality. Even daily newspapers are too often used for "spotting the winner" in the races rather than for gathering real information. So it follows, as in the case of Prohibition in the United States, that a well-organized minority is actually in control simply through the inertia of the great majority. The Black Army in Britain has its representatives in every town and every village in the country, and when they act their unanimity is wonderful. If war is imminent, all the gush from the pulpits concerns "the god of battles"; whilst in the piping times of peace "the old, old story" is altered to suit the occasion. No wonder old Martin Luther declared the Bible to be a nose of wax, capable of being twisted to any shape.

Coddling the people would not be so easy a task if the clergy had not control of education. As it is they so mould the minds of children that each generation comes to their greedy hands as sheep to the shearers. A few thousand of the stronger-minded ones may break away in after life, but the vast majority regard the Churches with respect simply because they were taught to do so for so many years during adolescence.

This pleasing pastime of coddling Christians is nowhere carried to such high perfection as by priests, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Nonconformist. They celebrate the birthday of a man-god who never lived, and scoop in the cash offerings of the innocent faithful. Indeed, the Christmas festival itself, with all its hypocritical professions and its legendary associations, is largely patience and make-believe. It is the paradox of paradoxes that two millions of persons should be unable to find work at a time when every pulpit rings with the rhetoric of "peace and goodwill to men." Christmas, so far as the Christian Churches are concerned, is an organized hypocrisy, a fitting celebration of an event that never happened. Perhaps, when the ordinary citizen is better educated than at present, he will no longer allow himself to be "coddled" by a clerical caste, which, after all, is but a savage survival in a civilized community.

An "Insufferable Ass."

The "Freethinker" and Mr. McCabe.

FROM the *Literary Guide* for January I gather that Mr. Joseph McCabe is wroth with the *Freethinker*. He explains that at intervals the *Freethinker* contains "anonymous" references to him, which if the said references occur in the "Sugar Plums" column quite removes anything of a sinister nature, since that column is never signed. But all the same I am quite ignorant of anything of an offensive nature ever having appeared there, and I am in the dark as to the nature of the offence in that direction. But Mr. McCabe explains that "there are limits to even my patience," and descends upon my unfortunate self with all the solemnity of a delayed but an offended and inevitable Providence. And after reading what he says I am tempted to remark that without knowing the limits of his patience, it is quite clear there are marked limits to his sense of humour, and in view of the air of offended majesty assumed, we are left wondering whether the "J" before his surname ought not to stand for Jove—who also hurled his thunderbolts about when mere mortals trespassed on his divine patience.

But, the offence. This is twofold. The first one is concerned with a paragraph which appeared in the *Freethinker* for Oct. 4 as a notice of the published report of his discussion with the American "Professor" Price on "Evolution." Mr. McCabe says this was written by an "insufferable ass," and as I happen to be the "insufferable ass" who wrote it I desire to proclaim my asinity by reproducing the offending item. Here it is:—

The discussion between the American Professor Price and Mr. Joseph McCabe, which took place recently in London, is now published by Messrs. Watts & Co., price one shilling. It can hardly be said that the disputants realized the chairman's hopes that they would come to grips on the subject, but it is very late in the day to be seriously discussing the question of the truth of evolution. We have only noticed one thing which should have been corrected before the debate was allowed to appear, and it must be due to a verbal slip on Mr. McCabe's part or to an oversight in reading the proofs. Mr. McCabe is made to say that fifty years ago a great man of science launched the doctrine of evolution upon the world. That is of course absurd, and we note it here because we have seen the same statement made of late by a number of ill-informed journalists. Anyway if the discussion sends people reading works on evolution it will do good, and if their reading leads them to understand the methods and principles of science, as distinct from mastering a kind of museum catalogue of specimens, it will do more good still.

Mr. McCabe's comments are as follows (I omit the account of the number of miles he will travel between October and February, as with my type of ass more attention is paid to the kind of head a man has upon his shoulders than the number of miles his feet carry him):—

It seems that not only was my debate (of the real object of which he has no conception) a waste of time, and not only did I never get to grips with my subject, but I made a howler of which no child of seven who reads his *Freethinker* could be guilty. It seems that, like a lot of other "ill-informed journalists," I made the absurd mistake of saying that evolution was launched upon the world "fifty years ago."

It may be a confession of my shameless asinity, but after reading Mr. McCabe, and re-reading what I wrote, I am at a loss to know what Mr. McCabe is riled about. Anyone who will read the paragraph will see that I did not say Mr. McCabe never got

to grips with his subject; I said that the *disputants* never came to grips, which I humbly suggest is not quite the same thing. And as Mr. McCabe complained that "three-fourths of my speech has been ignored," it really looks as though they did not come to grips. Jove has allowed his temper to overcome his judgment. Further, as Mr. McCabe, with his childlike love of authorities, strongly emphasized the fact that there was not a University professor in the world who questioned the truth of evolution, it seems my remark as to it being late in the day to debate the truth of this hypothesis was quite justified.

Next comes the remark about Darwin and the hypothesis of natural selection. I had imagined that I put my correction very mildly, very carefully, and very politely. I said that Mr. McCabe had either made a verbal slip, which should have been corrected, or it was an error of proof-reading. Mr. McCabe has neither the common sense to admit the slip nor the grace to feel thankful for my pointing out the error—but Jove never did like to be corrected. I did not say that Mr. McCabe made a howler; I merely pointed out that it was there, and absolved him from all blame for its existence.

But we will see what Mr. McCabe actually did say:—

Possibly my opponent will find millions of facts against evolution, but remember the issue behind this debate to-night—aye, remember the issue behind this world controversy. Something over fifty years ago a great man of science launched the doctrine of evolution upon the world. Generation after generation, decade after decade, scientific men have fought out that issue.

If an "insufferable ass" may presume to criticise Mr. McCabe, I venture to say that that statement is loosely worded, and shows still looser thinking. I have always been under the impression from the little I have learned of the philosophy of science, that if there are any facts against a scientific hypothesis that hypothesis is unsound, and that, so far, there are no facts at all against evolution. If there were, evolution would be damned beyond redemption. There are facts which some believe cannot be accounted for on any accepted theory of evolution, but that is quite another thing. But the statement I complained of is there, and I corrected it because I had noted the same remark in several newspapers just at that time.

Not being able to bring himself to admit a slip, Mr. McCabe professes to have had some mysterious and unstated object in making the statement. He says: "No one in his senses could possibly believe that I know nothing about evolution before the *Origin of Species* was published. My meaning (launched upon the world) could be ignored only by a fool or a malevolent person." Of course I may be a fool—Mr. McCabe will probably agree one day, if not at present, that a man may be a fool without knowing it—but I do not think I am malevolent. And I quite fail to see any purpose in his misstatement. Mr. McCabe expressly repudiates (p. 50) making any defence of, or discussing, Darwinism or any special theory of evolution. If that is so there could be no purpose in talking of a great scientist launching, not a theory, but *the* theory of evolution, fifty years ago. An ass's advice is that when one makes a slip, it shows a little redeeming sense to admit it and so to have done with it. And, after all, there are some things that a man who *thinks* evolution, instead of merely knowing it, simply could not say.

Which makes me wonder whether the real annoyance is based upon the last four lines in the offending paragraph, that it is far better to understand the

methods and principles of science than it is to master a mere catalogue of scientific facts which any industrious young man, without the slightest perception of the real nature of scientific thought, can acquire at a well stocked library. The former requires mental capacity, the latter asks for no more than industry. If Mr. McCabe thinks that must refer to him, I can assure him that I gave that advice to young men who came to me for guidance long before Mr. McCabe left his monastery, and have repeated it many times since.

The other item to which Mr. McCabe takes exception, although it has nothing whatever to do with him, was an answer to a correspondent. I often get applications to lecture to outside societies and movements, but as they usually want me to lecture on some fairly innocuous subject I generally refuse. (I had such an application a fortnight ago from South Wales, but declined, as I was only interested in lecturing to that society on the one thing it didn't want to hear.) In this case a friend wrote asking me whether I had received an invitation to lecture to a Northern Society, and appeared to think that I ought to have accepted it. I replied that I was not a professional lecturer, ready to go anywhere at any time, and to "mug" up any subject they wished to hear about; I was lecturing for a special purpose, and with that purpose my interest in the platform ceased. Mr. McCabe appears to connect that with himself, which so far as my intention was concerned is absurd. I do not think about Mr. McCabe nearly as much as Mr. McCabe appears to think about himself. And although it may sound very strange to Mr. McCabe I really do not take an interest in the platform, as such. To me it is a means to an end, and that end is certainly not a professional one. The party to which I belong do not need to be assured of that. My services have always been given to all sorts of things connected with Freethought, often for nothing, and always for very near to nothing. Frankly, if there had been something there I would have taken it. But I have nothing to say for or against professional lecturers, as such. It is a man's own business how he chooses to get his living, and, if he gets it honestly, no one has the right to call him to account. But I am quite at a loss to see how my answer, one I have given very often privately, as well as publicly, concerns Mr. McCabe. Mr. McCabe may add to his total mileage in comfort. My reply had nothing to do with him. And if an "insufferable ass" may venture to offer a word of advice to Jove, it is to bear in mind that there really is a difference between the compilation of facts, and sound and useful scientific thinking, and that there is nothing that will so soon land a man in trouble as egotism carried to its extremes. CHAPMAN COHEN.

A Question.

If spirits can communicate
With us—as Conan says,
There's just one little detail
I have pondered o'er for days.

Assuming that the premise
Of the Spiritists' a good-un,
P'raps they'll solve a problem
For a sponce that's rather wooden.

Are spirits pure abstractions,
Sans bodies, brains, and hearts?
Or real objective things,
That one can subdivide in parts?

Now the answer's up to you, sirs,
Enlightenment I beg-o!

What are the elements that make
A disembodied ego?

E. C. AINE.

The Father's Heart.

There is a willow grows aslant a brook.—*Hamlet*.

THERE are in common and obscure life and death tragedies as grand and moving, as profoundly pitiful as any ever invented by Shakespeare. One such was recalled to mind—if it needed recalling—the other day as I stood on the soft turf in a little mecca at the end of a short cycle run. Here a tree leans over a bend in the river and a deep swirling pool, whence the shining of the river, this day under the autumn sun, ripples away between its green banks on its now short journey to the sea. Soft, tawny grass, knowes, bushes, and brambles compose the immediate nook by the river, behind, the busy highway, behind that the wooded acres of an earl's estate, a smaller stream flows through the noble woods and joins the river at the bend. Parting the bushes at its mouth one can trace its channel far into the dim forest, its waters speckled with brown leaves just begun to fall. A dead wild-fowl of some kind caught in the confluent eddy drifts slowly out from the margin herbage, its head drooped in its waters of oblivion, its long yellow limbs trailing spectrally in the deeps below; the dead thing is caught in the main current and borne away also in the shining of the river to the completer oblivion of the all dissolving sea.

So the stage is set in an autumn scene, but our drama happened in the spring, in early spring while yet the green leaves were thin and few and the wind was chill. Two boys let loose from the village school—an elder and a younger one, sensing this beauty spot and one with the reviving year, eager and anticipatory, but, alas, unwary of nature's menace, even in her bowers of innocence and ease—came here to play. The younger boy had climbed out on the leaning tree, there was a cry, a splash, and he was struggling in the deep water. The elder and poorer but sublimely heroic lad cried to him, "Never mind, Jimmy, I'll save you!" and quickly divested himself of his few rags of clothing—a fatal act—and plunged naked into the icy waters. He was a swimmer, but must have been instantly stricken with the cold. His body was recovered where it sank, that of the younger boy was found by his father a week later laid amongst the sand and driftwood near the sea—by the father, who had searched the river night and day, looking for and lamenting his little son. We who write did not know the fathers or the sons, but who that has children of his own does not know them all and feel what crushed the mother's and the father's heart, yea, the hearts of all who heard the simple tale, and one, at least, could cry with the brother of Ophelia: "Oh, God, do you see this!" and more and more scorn to look for "Providence" in such calamity. A touch of nature makes the whole world kin—nay, it makes it heroic. One, at least, not physically brave had he been there; ah, had he been there! moved by that poor lad's native, impulsive heroism, felt he would have risked a thousand deaths to avert such early hapless fate. No need of the sacrificial Christ to implant such spirit in the heart of man, such is common to, and the glory of, humanity at its best. A thoughtful young Christian reading some of our local notes on the incident at the time modified his opinion of the writer on discovering that "he had a heart." Truly so! and in such admission the young man revealed his own, to us no revelation, not Christian only, but human wholly: let our young friend make that great discovery and he will be introduced to an infinitely wider and better world.

The father's heart will be comforted by now, perhaps enriched by sorrow. In the pretty cemetery.

of Kilwinning, Ayrshire, some small respect is paid to hero's clay. Just inside the railings a marble cross, with commemorative inscription, marks the elder boy's grave; the younger lies apart; but so joined in death the playmates should have shared the same spot of kindly earth. But in our memory they are not divided. We think of the lines:—

And there she spied her two pretty babes
Coming down by the greenwood sidie, O.

In fancy, when we revisit the scene, we think of the lost laddies as gentle shadows on the shining of the river, as, constant, impassive, unremorseful, unremembering, it glides on through the years, for ever, its green banks smiling in our joy and woe: only man dreams and grieves. ANDREW MILLAR.

Acid Drops.

Another wonderful corroboration of the truth of Spiritualism! An ex-governor of Exeter prison tells how an executed murderer reappeared in the prison—not to him, but to the chaplain. It appears that before the execution the chaplain, who was already a Spiritualist, asked the murderer to show himself after death. The murderer dutifully obliged. He told the chaplain that he had gone straight from the scaffold "into the light," and was then working to help others who had committed the same crime as himself. He was also helping the girl whose life he had taken. Curious how well this dovetails in with some aspects of Christianity. Of course, if the Chaplain had not been a Christian the revelations concerning the next world would have been different. And others of a more ethical turn of mind would explain that the departed spirit had to spend a certain time in "darkness" before he saw the light. Somehow or the other the next world generally harmonises with one's expectations.

The *Christian World* thinks the religious service sent out on Sunday evenings by the B.B.C. is not overdone. Certainly not in the amount of intelligence displayed by the preachers. The stupidity of the sermons is so uniform that one finds it hard to believe it is natural. It almost looks as though they must have carefully rehearsed during the week in order to avoid saying something sensible.

From a note in the *Times* we gather that the appeal in the Dayton evolution case is not being proceeded with so far as the Tennessee Supreme Court is concerned. There is another action challenging the Tennessee Act as unconstitutional, and this will be heard in the United States Federal Court. We hope that will proceed to an issue, as we fancy there is very good ground for those who are bringing forward an action. In regard to religion the Constitution of the United States is much more advanced than our own since it expressly renounces any interference with religion. This is not, of course, always carried out, but the fact of its being so gives objectors a good jumping-off ground. And there are cases recorded in which Supreme Courts have properly carried out this interpretation of the Constitution.

"What is God Doing?" To this question the only rational answer is Nothing. Thomas Carlyle utterly failed to get hold of any other intelligible reply. It was his lamentable complaint that so far as he could see God had never done or said anything at all. "What was God doing when the industrial revolution swept over England, bringing such a mass of misery and social injustice in its train?" Nothing. "What was God doing when the slums were being built?" Nothing. "What was God doing when the war was being fought?" Nothing. "What has God been doing during these dreadful years of peace?" Nothing. Such are questions asked by the Rev. C. S. Woodward, M.C., in an article in the *Guardian* of December 11, to which he tries in vain to return affirmative answers, for the

simple reason that such answers are neither experimentally nor historically possible.

Our one and only "Woodbine Willie" is still at it. This is his latest. "Jesus troubles millions of people and is always troubling me. Dead men tell no tales. Jesus is always telling the tale." Now we know why the cleric is so good at invention—he is schooled in the art by a past master at the game. "He worries me to death or rather He worries me to life.....He stings me into thinking, when I do not want to think." Our reverend friend should ask his God to put a little more punch in Jesus' sting. For if we may judge by Willie's outpourings, He never stings half hard enough to enable his disciple to produce more than a very pale imitation of what intelligent people call "thinking." By the spasmodic way in which the article is written, reminiscent of Dicken's old Sal. Gibbs at his jerkiest, we fancy the Lord stung Willie in a portion of his anatomy considerably lower down than his head.

We should very much like to know where exactly in the Bible Miss Maude Royden can find justification for her teaching the purely pagan doctrine of a healthy mind in a healthy body. The dirty old Fathers of her Faith could not. In an article on "What Education does a Woman Need?" she says that her sex should be taught that it is as natural for a woman to live in a healthy and vigorous body as for a man. And she adds: "We Christians should realize that, if the body is the temple of the spirit, it should be as notable for its vigour and beauty as the body of the Greek athlete." Shades of St. Simon Sty-lites! we wonder what the God-inspired Early Fathers would say to that! In word and example they consistently taught and acted on the belief that the body is vile—Miss Royden calls it a temple. If history is true, they made their own bodies vile enough, and gloried in doing so. Under their able tuition the Christian races, in striking contrast to the Greek and Roman, became almost the dirtiest on earth. There seems little doubt that the terrible plagues which periodically wiped out multitudes were the direct result of this disregard of cleanliness. But the Christian God said nothing; he was obviously waiting for Miss Royden to be born that she might correct the false teaching of her pious forerunners. What liberal theologians like Miss Royden seem to be doing is adroitly dumping the purely Christian ideals which enlightened minds find repulsive, and substituting pagan ideals, as the only method by which the unwary can be held to an Asiatic creed which the world has outgrown. So much the better for the people, perhaps. But is such manœuvring intellectually honest?

In the same article Miss Royden advocates the imparting of sane sex-knowledge to children, and concludes: "I cannot help hoping that the new generation will be less obsessed and more natural in their attitude towards the whole sex question." So do we, but, again, Miss Royden should bear in mind that the force which has made the discussion and teaching of sex an unclean subject is the Church to which she belongs. Christian purity is about the most unclean thing with which history presents us. And Christian influences will have to grow much weaker than they are before sex questions may be discussed with the frankness and freedom that should attend them.

Miss Clemence Dane is a writer who specializes in exclamation stops. Like this: She volleys them forth so prolifically that we suspect she feeds on American advts.! We fancy the printer puts in a few automatically where she omits them! They hit one in the eye at every other sentence! But perhaps that is just her woman's way! To turn from manner to matter, we think the following from her article, "The Pleasures of Lying" (in *Eve*), sheds some light on the decline of religion:—

There is far too much truth-telling going on nowadays for comfort. Telling the children stories is growing an impossible business. The fairies joined the

unemployed long ago, and now the Münchhausens are following!

What are you to do, she asks, with a small boy who says, "I like *true* stories!" when you tell him your favourite myths? Well, the grown-ups of to-day are saying the same thing to stories from the pulpits; and parsons are asking the same question, and supplying various solutions thereto—drop the incredible—teach simple ethics or economies or science—call the incredible allegory—centre on simple Jesus and his teaching.

After your rebuff, says Miss Dane, "You weakly fall back upon Jonah and the whale, which is in the Bible and surely credible. But it fares no better!" To this the child retorts, "I expect it was a submarine if all were known." Now if a child says that to one Bible story, what will he say, when he grows up, to the other "surely credible" stories like the Virgin Birth, and other quaint myths? We fear the parsons, like the fairies, will join the unemployed.

Speaking of lying, she says that to lie for gain is a dirty business; "but lie for the love of it and the lie becomes a work of art, to be respected as such. The perfect liar doesn't ask to be believed: he only asks to be listened to!" Now we know exactly how we should treat the cleric. We must respect him as an artist. And things in general seem to have come to such a pass that he appears nowadays to ask only to be listened to, not believed. Later, Miss Dane tells us: "From the days of Adam and Eve on, it is the lie, the trick, the false step, that has made history....." It certainly has made Christian history. So much so that the Churches ought to canonise Ananias and adopt him as their patron saint. The trouble with the Churches to-day is that people are treating them as was treated the boy of the story who cried "Wolf, wolf!" when there was none. The majority of people are ceasing to believe them whether they speak the truth or not.

We have a suspicion that Miss Dane has been reading Oscar Wilde's essay, *The Decay of Lying*, and has tried to adapt it to religion. But Wilde was an artist and a master of his subject. It is rather dangerous to challenge comparisons, and Miss Dane is really not a feminine Oscar Wilde.

Lord Balfour was selected to deliver the annual lecture of the Herts Memorial Trust, and judging from a newspaper report only appears to have played the same old tune, and managed to evolve the same old fallacies. The particular one here was concerned with the attempt made by scientific Freethinkers to explain away religion, and their pointing out that religion rested on fallacious grounds. Lord Balfour puts it that because a belief could be explained by non-rational causes it was not to be treated as non-rational. But that is not a correct way of stating the case. The scientific Freethinker does not say that religion arose from non-rational causes; what he says is that in its origin religion arises as much from an act of reason as anything else. Why it loses caste later is because the grounds on which this reasoning was based is, in the light of later knowledge, seen to be faulty. It really looks as though Lord Balfour put the case in the way he did in order to be able to disprove it.

One other point by Lord Balfour. Many of the customs we believe to be good apart from religion have arisen from non-rational causes. That is true, if it is meant that many of our institutions have arisen under pressure of social selection without those who established and obeyed them being aware of why they did so. But there is a world of difference between a custom or an institution, non-rational in its origin, but being justified by reason later, and a belief, such as religion, being shown by later knowledge to be quite unreasonable. It is strange how plausible these fallacies sound when delivered from a platform, and yet how easy it is to show their nature when one seriously considers them.

Recently Mr. J. M. Keynes, the economist, published a pamphlet entitled *A Short View of Russia*, in which he maintains that Bolshevism exhibits the revolting attributes of a religion, chief among which being intolerance and bloody persecution. For Freethinkers the most interesting feature of this treatise is the author's attitude of opposition to religion. Mr. Keynes tells that he was "brought up in a free air undarkened by the horrors around us which have less and less interest for most people unless it be an agreeable form of magical ceremonial or of social observance." Naturally, such remarks do not please the *Church Times*, and in its "Notes and Notions" for December 11 the writer displays at once his unfathomable prejudice and ignorance by saying:—

Truly the economist, like the mathematician, is liable to get out of his depth when he writes about religion. I presume that Mr. Keynes lives with a small circle of highbrow unbelievers, with no knowledge whatever of the working world with its faith, its hopes, and its apprehensions; otherwise, so intelligent a man could not write such preposterous nonsense.

Bishops and missionaries occasionally hear some plain speaking from unexpected quarters. In a popular weekly, Lord Headley, a Muslim, says:—

Self-righteousness is not the least of the failings of our religious leaders. The existence of glaring social evils at their very doorsteps does not prevent them from raising their voice in violent denunciation of the adherents of other creeds on points of mere dogma or national custom.

What has called forth this rebuke is that the fatuous Bishop of London has complained that 30,000 Christian girls have been forced into harems, and he asks his lordship to co-operate in getting them released from their slavery. Lord Headley retorts that compulsion and injustice have no sanction from Islamic teaching, and adds that the kind of talk about Islam we hear from the Bishops and other leaders of the State religion of England irritates and insults millions of the King's subjects in the East. He pointedly remarks: "The missionaries, on whom the bishops rely for their reports, are capable of the grossest misrepresentation." They tell unsophisticated people at home all manner of rubbish about Muslims and their creed. Lord Headley states he is doing his best to find out the real facts of the "slave-girls" story, and he will "interview people who can be relied upon to give the unvarnished truth." We think our happy warriors of God will be pleased to learn that. As a final shot, Lord Headley tells the bishops that when they have begun to succeed in building Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land they will be assured of "an attentive hearing from the simple-minded Muslim. Until then the East will treat their sermons and their fulminations alike with indifference and contempt."

From all this Freethinkers will realize that there would not be half so much brotherly love in the world were it not for the endeavours of our Christians and Muslims with love of God in their hearts.

Those who assure us that religious persecution is an evil of the past are radically mistaken. The history of the Church has never been free from the sad tale of cruel persecution. It is not free from it to-day. In the Anglican Church there are two powerful parties which are constantly persecuting each other. The Catholics have not a good word to say of the Modernists, and the latter are equally intolerant of the former. The chief object of attack at present is the Bishop of Birmingham, who happens to be a Modernist. Ever since his appointment a year and a half ago, the *Church Times* has indulged in the most violent denunciation of his views and official actions. In its issue of December 11 nearly three columns are devoted to condemnatory letters from clergymen with Catholic sympathies. Thus is suggested anew the ironic phrase: "Behold, how profoundly the followers of Christ love one another."

"Freethinker" Endowment Trust.

THE purpose of this Trust is to acquire sufficient funds which, by investment, will produce an income of £400 annually, the capital remaining intact. It is an endowment secured by legal Trust Deed, administered by five Trustees, of whom the editor of the *Freethinker* is one. It means giving the *Freethinker* permanent financial security, and is thus a businesslike and sound scheme, which should commend itself to all supporters of the Cause. A full explanation of the Trust was given in the issue of the *Freethinker* for October 4, and further information will be given to anyone interested.

Already received, £3,476 6s.

Owing to our going to press early with this issue, due to the Christmas holidays, we are holding over the complete list of subscriptions until next week. We may then give a date for the closing of this special appeal.

As announced, we hold promises of three sums of £50 each, to be redeemed on condition that seventeen others will promise a similar amount.

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the "*Freethinker* Endowment Trust," and crossed Midland Bank, Limited (Clerkenwell Branch). All letters should be addressed to the Editor, *Freethinker*, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

To Correspondents.

Those subscribers who receive their copy or 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.

B. LOEWE.—(1) It is incorrect to speak of natural selection as producing the best forms of life. It does nothing of the kind. The finer forms of plant or animal known to man are produced by eliminating the struggle for existence. Left alone they soon revert to lower forms. What Natural Selection does is to maintain a certain level, but not the highest possible level. (2) What Natural Selection does is to eliminate, not preserve. Its action is destructive, not constructive. Where there is no elimination there is no Natural Selection. (3) We have every respect for the work and the ability of Haeckel, but in our opinion Darwin was a far greater intellectual force. Your other question would require an essay to answer so as to avoid misunderstanding.

J. MEERLOO.—The distribution of spare copies of the *Freethinker* is bound to do good, and leads to many new readers being obtained. Your experience with the Salvationist is interesting and amusing.

R. GAUDIN.—Always pleased to have the appreciation of comparatively new readers. We are fairly well assured of the good wishes of the old ones.

(MRS.) T. J. KING.—Your letter to the B.B.C.—one of a very great number on similar lines, will do good, if it only lets the Company know that there are others besides Christians in existence. The reply that this being a Christian country they ought to afford reasonable facilities for the broadcasting of "non-controversial matter dealing with the Christian faiths" is one of those pieces of delicious impertinence for which Christians are notorious. Putting aside your own objection, the matter broadcasted would not be subscribed to by all the Churches.

S. SCOTT.—The report of Dr. Patterson's lecture will certainly prove useful. We are always obliged to readers who keep us posted in such matters.

E. TRUVELOVE.—Next week.

K. G. (Poplar).—We quite appreciate your action.

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

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

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press," and crossed "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 discussion between Mr. Cohen and Canon Storr at the Stratford Town Hall, on Sunday afternoon, January 3, are now complete. Admission to all parts of the hall will be free, but there will be a limited number of reserved seats—also free. We have a few tickets for these seats at the *Freethinker* office, and they will be sent out in order of application. Those who do not receive a reply to their application will please understand that the tickets have all been given away by the time their letter arrived.

The invitation to debate reached Mr. Cohen from the Vicar of Stratford on behalf of the Men's meeting of the Stratford Parish Church. And as it is more profitable to address Christians than Freethinkers the invitation was accepted. The arrangements have all been made by this body, with the approval of Mr. Cohen, and the subject suggested to him was "Should we Believe in a Personal God?" Canon Storr will open the discussion, to be followed by Mr. Cohen, and there will be two subsequent speeches by each disputant. We advise all who wish to hear the discussion to be there in good time as the hall is likely to be overcrowded. The discussion will commence at 3 o'clock.

As was announced last week the N.S.S. Annual Dinner is fixed for the evening of Tuesday, January 12, at the Midland Grand Hotel, St. Pancras. The time is 7 o'clock; reception at 6.30. The place is a guarantee of excellence, and there will be the usual first-class musical entertainment, with speeches, etc. The price of the tickets is 8s. Last year there were some disappointments with those who applied too late for tickets. These had only themselves to blame, as it is impossible to arrange a dinner unless those responsible know how many will attend. And to admit all who turn up without notice, is only to inconvenience such as have acted with greater consideration. All those who intend being present must, therefore, notify the Secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, not later than January 9. All tickets out that are not returned by that date will be considered sold. Tickets may be obtained from either the N.S.S. or the *Freethinker* Office.

Too late to make the announcement last week we were informed that we should go to press with this issue on the Monday, instead of, as usual, on Tuesday. This will make no difference to readers, but it will explain why letters that reached us after the first post on Monday, the 21st, could not receive attention in this issue.

Several times we have been asked to open a Sale and Exchange column for the use of readers. We have decided to give it a trial, and shall commence the experiment with the first issue in the New Year. The column will be for the use of private individuals, and the charge will be sixpence per line. It should be a success, as a number of our readers must have articles for disposal, and Freethinkers may as well use their own journal as any other.

A Falling Faith.

II.

(Concluded from page 806.)

As the Rev. Thomas Hardy rightly observes, it is impossible to have a stream of thought in circulation for a hundred years without its penetrating far beyond the bounds of its intellectual disciples. And this has been the case with immanentism: "To-day, fiction, *belles-lettres*, the evening papers, when they condescend to the deeper things of life, are immanentist in their outlook. Even the consequences of wrong-doing are subject to revision by sentiment. God is not going to be harder on us than we would be on others."¹ He says that George Macdonald's epithet which he penned to lighten the gloom of Calvinism:—

Here lie I, David Elginbrod;
Have mercy on my soul, Lord God,
As I would have if I were God,
And thou wert David Elginbrod,

is now the accepted theology of every parish.

It certainly can be said of this outlook, in a far more complete sense than the Evangelical poet said of the object of his devotion, that "it takes its terror from the grave." Death is no longer the asset to the preacher that it was to Hervey and Blair. The age-long-spell of the *Dies irae* is broken. It is questionable whether any Hamlet to-day would "pause," arrested by the thought of "what dreams may come." He would be far more likely to say with Walt Whitman: "No array of words can express how at peace I am about God and about death." We face the unknown in the happy confidence that whatever it may bring we are masters of the situation.

Which bears out what we have said over and over again. Christianity, described as the religion of love, in reality founded its empire on fear. Fear of the stern judge and judgment day, with the flames of hell in the background. People have lost that fear, and Christianity has lost its fulcrum. If the clergy want to fill the empty pews they will have to recreate that atmosphere of terror that was the life-blood of the old faith. If they can do that they will fill the churches again; if they cannot they are doomed; and the only way they can succeed is by a return to the ignorance and credulity of the Middle Ages. And when we consider how the civilization of Greece and Rome was succeeded by the thousand years of the Middle Ages, who will deny the possibility? Another war of the magnitude of the last would go a long way towards creating the necessary conditions.

"Man," continues the Rev. Thomas Hardy, and it is a remarkable admission for a clergyman to make, "is emerging from the cumbrous trappings of Divinity, and 'the Service of Man,' rejected in its doctrinaire presentiment, has become the established religion. The first table of the Law has disappeared in favour of the revision of the

second by Cotter Morrison."² Speak of our responsibility towards our fellows, and you are understood, "but tell the average man that it is his duty, *e.g.* to worship God, and you speak a language which no longer conveys any meaning." To such a pass has religion come in these days! The despised and abused Secularist may largely take the credit for this state of affairs. His advocacy—year in and year out—in the parks and open spaces, where he has appealed to the "average man," the "man in the street," and the long campaign conducted by this journal, also written for the average man, have had their effect. How else could the "average man" be influenced by Freethought? Certainly not by the newspapers, who have always thrown their weight on the other side; they never allow a real Atheist to state his case in their columns. Future historians will some day give the Secularists credit for this.

The Rev. Thomas Hardy goes on to say that it was long thought that the proper corrective to immanentism was the sense of sin. It was all very well to speak of flowers and heroes and the light of setting suns being God, but what about the passions and customs popularly associated with Piccadilly? "The last apologist to give expression to this line was Mr. G. K. Chesterton when he packed a whole polemic into three words: 'Is Piccadilly God?'" And, adds the Rev. Thomas Hardy, "the only sense in which Piccadilly could be pronounced Divine was the sense of Bacchus and Priapus. To-day, so greatly has the moral background changed, so different a thing has morality become, that I think the strayed reveller in Piccadilly would answer Mr. Chesterton's question with an imperturbable 'Why not?'"

To the great majority of men and women to-day religion makes no appeal. To them the spiritual strivings of a Luther, a Baxter, or a Wesley, would be simply incomprehensible. Tell men and women of the joys of the spiritual life, says Mr. Hardy, they will reply: "You may have them, and welcome; for their own part they are content to rub along with a Bank Holiday now and then and a little something at Christmas." As for a future life:—

that has come to be largely a question of spooks. There may be such a thing as "survival," but they are not going to gamble on it, and to be quite frank, they do not see that Christians bank much on the life to come. "We can only live once," is the maxim we hear daily. If, on the other hand, we should chance to survive death, we are confident, as has been already said, that we shall worry through somehow. At any rate, we are quite sure there is no hell.

It is an old standing charge, made by the baser type of Christian, that the Atheist only wants to get rid of God, and all supernatural restraints, in order to give free rein to his passions and lead an immoral life. Mr. Hardy repudiates this libellous charge *in toto*. He says:—

The Christian pulpit and prophetic persons like Carlyle rang the alarm, but no cataclysm has resulted from the steady persistence of Shelleyan views of life. Later on, George Eliot assured her generation that "with the passing of Christianity, the last of the mythologies, human character would at length gain stability," and in proportion as Christianity — supernatural Christianity — has "passed," her confidence seems to have been justified. We cannot appeal to our population as Isaiah did to his, and say: "There is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." There is much soundness in it, and, for purpose of prophecy, the social hell seems to be as unreal as the theological.....It is not possible to say to the masses: keep the old faith or else plunge

¹ Rev. Thomas Hardy, "The Predicament of Christianity," *The Hibbert Journal*, October, 1925.

² Rev. Thomas Hardy, *Hibbert Journal*, October, 1925.

the nation and empire into ruin. It is not true, and they know it not.

But the primary concern of Christinity, Mr. Hardy points out, is with the soul; "it is impossible to understand the Evangelical or Tractarian revivals unless we return in imagination to this possessive idea of the soul." Everyone believed themselves to be equipped, in Wesley's phrase, with:—

A never dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky.

But here again, he says, "the ground of appeal gives beneath our feet. We are no longer unanimous in recognizing the soul as an entity." Psychology has no use for the soul. It discusses all the problems of life and mind and ignores the soul. Instead of a soul, the psychologist finds only "instincts, impulses and dispositions," and, continues Mr. Hardy: "I have an uneasy feeling that if this *olla podrida* owes its solidarity to the kinematic of life, death may mean the dispensing of the lot and the end of the fundamental complex." "In view of these signs of the times it is difficult to see how much longer an appeal to men and women on the score of their possessing a created entity endowed with immortal life." The Modernists are busily at work trying to adapt the old faith to the new conditions, a hopeless task, as the Rev. Thomas Hardy points out:—

Christianity, then, so far as its original object is concerned, seems to be in the trying position of an inventor who finds that his machine is no longer in demand. The conditions that once made it acceptable have passed away. Recognition of the predicament explains the frantic attempts of the Modernists, in all his varieties, to adapt the content of Christianity to the changed outlook. The "adaptation" could only resemble that of the lady of Riga. Either the Modernist is sanguine beyond all parallel or he is not living in the same world with the modern man. His tactics might have had a passing success in the eighties; to-day he is a belated visitant, the harbinger of a summer—or winter—already here. That Christianity will be continuous goes without saying, for all thought is continuous, but it will be so in the sense in which the poet became "the violet of his native land." To hope to retain the original impulse of Christianity in a world which has quietly dropped the supernatural is not Modernism, but madness. To offer men union with God, when God is no longer recognizable, to hold out moral deliverance when men walk at liberty, or a means of fulfilling one of a thousand ethical ideals when we are under no obligation to fulfil any, or salvation for souls whose existence is, to say the least, problematic—all this is the *ne plus ultra* of a forlorn hope.

The only gleam of hope this candid clergyman can see is in the story of Jesus. He says: "Wholly as the supernatural has passed out of our calculations, passionately as the Christian ethic is challenged, there is observable amongst us a kind of proprietary interest in Christ which shows no sign of decrease." This is a broken reed to rest upon, for when the researches of the learned into the mythology of the Gospels percolate down to the "average man," as they inevitably will, the proprietary interest in Christ will vanish. When a learned and highly-placed official of the Church like the late Canon Cheyne can speak of "the myth of Christ," the average man will suspect that Christianity has been founded upon a fiction and delusion.

W. MANN.

Science is a first-rate piece of furniture for a man's upper chamber, if he has common sense on the ground-floor.—*Oliver Wendell Holmes.*

The "Kasidah" of Haji Abdu.

MR. OSBERT BURDETT, a writer of ephemeral essays, recently put it on record that Fitzgerald's "Omar Khayyam" was the most gloomy poem in the English language. He was seeking to depress the estimation in which "Omar" and writings of a similar cast were held by the lover of good things in the poetical way and thought it good argument to refer to John Davidson as having committed suicide through chagrin at missing recognition. Davidson really sought to express in poetic form the patriarchal view of life; the idea that man should be master of life, should dominate it and rejoice in the domination. It was the positive outlook on life that Davidson sang, in direct descent from the great artists that laid the foundations of the Italian Renaissance. He was, in his day, typical of Freethought at its very best, although he refused to wear any label. "Omar Khayyam" is in the same school, in essentials; a courageous facing of facts; a buoyant front to fate and that dominance which endows with beauty even the dread sentence of annihilation. Neither Fitzgerald nor Davidson can rightly be accused of gloominess in the sense that they despaired or lacked a philosophy of life. "Omar," or Fitzgerald, for he took great liberties with the original, in emphasizing the joy of living and Davidson in denouncing the lowly value set by the religion of the Nazarene on worldly things, were both insisting on the necessity of man asserting his power and dominating his environment.

Another of this brotherhood is Hájí Abdú el-Yezdi (Sir Richard Burton), whose *Kasidah* has been published in a cheap edition by Philip Allen & Co. It cannot be compared with the Rubaiyat as a poetical composition and it lacks the element of subtle kindness that underlies a good deal of the Persian's work. It is really an epic of Materialism; Buchner's *Force and Matter* in verse form; a note of pessimism with a half-hearted insistence on a life lived in obedience to the inner law as a philosophy of living. Still, he stands up bravely to the buffets of fate and there is no pingeing, or very little of it, when the time comes to "turn down an empty glass."

The poem opens with a rather fine description of dawn and a camel train taking the desert road to Mecca. There is a lament and a protest against the fate that makes life a series of partings: "Why must we bear this yoke of Must," and the first book ends with:—

And now farewell,
Go vanish from my life as dies
The tinkle of the camel's bell.

The second book reviews all the systems of thought that has appealed to the minds of men. The speculations of men on the why and wherefore of things appears to have been a string of doleful whimperings, at least, in the Western world. In the East, the destiny of man was shrouded in a submissive bowing to fate. The Buddha is supposed to have refused to recognize the deity on account of the cruelty of things, and Confucius taught his people that if there were gods they were too far off to concern themselves with mortal man. This recognition of fact makes all the difference between East and West. God never does anything there: "He is great," they say, "but he lives too far off," and they settle down to extract as much joy out of life as possible. Hafiz, the poet, saw it symbolically in a plentitude of houris with "the white black eye," and a brimming wine cup and Omar in the exploiting to the full of human companionship. In the West God is just as slothful, but keeps his adherents in a

perfect nightmare of suspense as to his intentions. The poet has scant patience with the Jesus whose vision of eternal bliss is met with "Too much of words or yet too few! What to thy Godhead easier than one little glimpse of paradise to ope the eyes and ears of man," and he laments that a great splendour faded from the skies when the cry went up that Great Pan was dead:—

Yea, Pan was dead, the Nazarene came
And seized his seat beneath the sun,
The votary of the Riddle God,
Whose one is three and three is one.
Whose sad'ning creed of herited sin
Spilt o'er the world its cold grey spell;
In every vista showed a grave,
And 'neath the grave the glare of Hell.

The religion set up by the great Arabian—"the lank Arab, foul with sweat, the drainer of the camel's dug; gorged with his leek green lizard's meat, clad in his filthy rag and rug"—is also reviewed and dismissed with scorn as the destroyer of the ancient culture fostered by the kings of old. The man who by the sheer force of genius united a hundred warring tribes into an aggressive movement that influenced one-fourth of the human race and remains so that, to quote Meredith Townsend, "it should after twelve centuries still be so vital that an Asiatic, base to a degree no European can comprehend should still, if appealed to in the name of Mohammed, risk a throne to defend a guest," counts for nought with Hájí Abdú. He is among the things abhorred; the descendant of the highest and purest blood in Arabia is contemptuously dismissed as a camel driver. And so on down the ages, where the "struggle for existence" is etched in with an intensity that leaves no room for the helping hand. The word spinners of both East and West are hustled off the scene with a chorus of denials, as are the lesser oracles who talk learnedly of God's foreknowledge and being, and seek to explain the very mysteries that keep them in being. The conclusion is reached that there is no Heaven nor Hell:—

These be the dreams of baby minds,
Tools of the wily Petisheer,
To fright the fools his cunning blinds,

and man is urged to live in obedience to the Higher Law, which consists in seeking the "True" and keeping a bold bearing in front of the mystery of things. The idea that perhaps, after all, there may be a god behind the scenes is examined and treated with some amount of petulance, and finally dismissed in favour of annihilation. One cannot help contrasting the serenity with which Omar approached the same idea:—

Some of a burly Tapster tell,
And daub his visage with the smoke of Hell;
They speak of some strict testing of us—Pish!
He's a good fellow and 'twill all be well.

Living in accordance with the "true" may be all very well, once it is known, but Hájí Abdú is somewhat vague on the matter. In the "Notes" to the poem, however, some light is thrown upon the attitude he takes up regarding his relationship to his fellows. He warns the reader against the excessive worship of facts: "Judge not nor curb by 'facts' the thought" which I take as a protest against the scientific piling up of data, as distinct from a true interpretation of it. Progress, in that sense, was anything but progress to the poet, who more often saw retrogression in the process; in that and "the mighty development of egotism resulting from the pampered sentiment of personality." That is the inevitable outcome of a democratic system which throws overboard the garnered wisdom of the old traditions and elevates the individual to the highest

heaven. Burton was himself intensely individualistic, but it was a trait from within and not bestowed by legislative action. He stood far aloof from the ordinary citizen who by virtue of marking a ballot paper considers he is influencing the destiny of the nation. He was a positive unit in the scheme of things, although he lived long enough in the East to realize that the deification of individuality prevalent among peoples with the democratic idea was destructive of the finer social values. The comparative lack of thinkers and artists in Europe as against scientists is good enough proof of that, and so to Burton as poet, the chaotic spectacle of a continent of Number-oners was a saddening thing and lent a pessimistic colour to his work. But for those who like an Oriental flavour with their poetry the *Kasidah* won't be the least of the verse that reflect the wisdom of the East.

H. B. DODDS.

A Dissertation on the Cinema.¹

READER, when the fret and worry of thy working day is over and thou feelest the need of some simple relaxation—some recreation—some amusement that calleth not too much demand upon thy already jaded nerves, to what wouldst thou resort? Thy faculties are dormant; mental inertia hath overcome thee, yet thou wouldst not willingly allow thy sluggish brain—or perchance, liver—to master thee. Cerebration may be an effort yet the mere thought of total mental stagnation is abhorrent to thee. *Dum vivimus, vivamus.*

The evening news-sheet contains only a repetition of the morning's dire happenings. In your present mood, prophecies of imminent revolution, bankruptcy and ruin, fail to move you. Neither the Cooking of your country's goose nor asseverations to the contrary by a doubting Thomas, vastly interest you. Those trusty friends, your well-thumbed folios, for once fail in their appeal. The voice of Ariel, conducted to your very fireside by the taut wires swinging in the blustering October wind, also fails to seduce you.

Should you be a free agent: as yet not ensnared into hymenial bondage; an egotist *par excellence*; the scorn—and envy—of every citizen (perchance your bachelorhood is as burdensome to you as their conjugal bliss to them)—you flee in desperation from your household gods. Your manhood revolts at the idea of stimulants either spiritual or spirituous. The empty vapourings of pulpit or tap-room alike allure you not. With moth-like lack of reason you instinctively seek the thoroughfares where the lights are brightest, and perhaps pause before a brilliantly lit vestibule wherein are displayed, larger than life, lurid and multi-coloured posters depicting melodramatic scenes from the "film" that is being shown within.

By the shade of Daguerre, reader, you are confronting one of the innumerable temples wherein is displayed one of the scientific and artistic wonders of your time. Mayhap you have often paid the moderate sum for admission and gone to sit in the inner darkness; one among a host of other dumb souls seeking to please the eye—aided by incidental music—at the expense of the reason. Yet if you have any regard for the literature of your country, and fondness for the legitimate drama, or are at all dainty in your æsthetic appetites, you have nearly always been

¹ It is to be hoped that the critical reader will excuse the obvious inferiority of literary style on the plea that the gentle Elia has undergone a similar mental deterioration to that of every other notable "shade" that has "returned" via a spiritualistic medium.

—and nearly always will be—doomed to disappointment. The cinema will turn you away empty in 999 cases out of 1,000.

Somebody once said that a people gets the government it deserves; it also gets the religion it deserves; and in the case of the cinema, it certainly gets the "photo-plays," "heart dramas," "society dramas," and "epic dramas" it deserves. Verily, our descendants will have a poor opinion of the mentality of the early twentieth century should a record be kept of the "reels" which have drawn thousands of pounds from our over-taxed pockets.

It matters not what the theme of a particular film may be; athletic and handsome male "stars" and beautiful females of the same species, vie one against the other in presenting thrills or "stunts" to which the threadbare plot must be entirely subservient. Plot, did I say? Truly, the producers of this trash are—with rare exceptions—all dwellers in Philistia. A tribe weaned on the penny-dreadful, tutored by the daily journals and, graduating at a little Bethel, improve their minds later in life by assiduous study of the "Best-seller." By what other means could the type of mind be trained that evolves the platitude, hypocritical, perverted, and spurious representation of life as seen on the screen? Where, but from the study of the captious in our pictorial press, could such elementary and trite literary efforts originate as the sub-titles that increase our boredom?

Truly, it could almost be believed that the film industry is monopolised by an international aristocracy of wealth and power which, in conjunction with the churches, propagate only ideas that will keep the peoples in a state of ignorance and subjection.

The pity—the tragedy of it is, that an art with such infinite possibilities for good should be thus prostituted. The educational value of the cinema is incalculable. Why should not the world's literary and dramatic masterpieces be presented to the public without dismembering them beyond recognition and, in the process, foully murdering them?

Yet, properly directed, the cinema can become an art in itself. Not only an art for presenting the other arts; not only a means of presenting adapted versions of novels or a burlesque representation of life; but an art, difficult to define and difficult to attain—the art of the ideal "photo-play." An art wherein as much careful attention must be devoted to the composition of the photo-pictures as is taken in choosing and developing the theme.

And in what form, reader, do you think this rare excellence—this *rara avis*—this unique attainment, has been evolved? Not in "epic-dramas" or tragedies; not in dramas about "society" or the "heart" or in historical romance; not even in ordinary comedy. No, it is in none of these things where some approach to perfection lies, but only in the *low comedy* of Charlie Chaplin where *real art* is displayed.

W. THOMPSON.

Correspondence.

BLACK ART AND "WHITE CARGO."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The good-natured criticism of your contributor, Mr. H. Irving, would have been more effective—and more appreciated if I had been correctly quoted. In "Books and Life" I wrote: "'White Cargo' and the 'Sailor's Return' are photographic art, but neither assist in the coming of age of the human race, and so long as nations cannot make up their minds to accept the inevitable, so long shall we have Mr. Garnett and

the author of 'White Cargo' running round with their cameras." The part italicized was omitted. Not content with this my metaphysical use of the word cameras is misinterpreted, and is the cause of an irrelevant paragraph on the actual benefits of photography with which I entirely agree. The word "neither" is relative to the two plays only and leaves the issue clean.

"White Cargo" gives us a picture of vilified white womanhood. This is easy because it is negative; my excursion in dramatic criticism has not been chiefly to find technical excellence in acting (this can be had by the yard in popular weeklies) so much as to find evidence of growth in mankind. "White Cargo" is static, and its chief attraction appears to be what the black woman is not wearing. The audience hissed when Tondeleyo tried to poison her white husband; the only black woman on the stage was a bad one. We are only growing up slowly, and a play such as this is like gin and winkles to a baby. I want to find positive virtues and anyone can gather the others by the sheaf. In the book of Ruth there is an example of the growth I have in mind: "Thy people shall be my people." Before the loving cup was passed to the German Ambassador, English soldiers had been falling in love with German women and marrying them.

I do not look for propaganda in the drama because it is there and can be seen by the blind. "White Cargo" I am told is having a splendid run in America—its spiritual home, for the descendants of pious slave dealers are suffering for the sins of their fathers with a "colour" question, and this is also a legacy of the British Empire.

We know now what Vasco da Gama, Frobisher, and Columbus guessed at; the world is a little house. As I do not believe in "original sin" nor the utter depravity of human nature, I am sentimental enough to think that a white and a black mother would understand each other quicker than a merchant from Birmingham and a negro in West Africa. If Mr. Irving likes "White Cargo," it is purely a matter of taste; I left the theatre feeling I had lost something. He will, I hope, forgive me for saying so, when I state that this play is theological in so far that it deals with the worst side of human life. These pictures are subjects for pity or mild amusement, but it is gross flattery to call them tragic. I can only reply to his remarks about "how climate can reduce human beings and trees to rottenness," by saying that coconuts do not grow at the North Pole. I do not say that black women should marry white men; I am not in the confidence of the author of all things, and do not know what is his design. But one thing is reprehensible to me, and that is the constant supply of humbug about the superiority of white virtues as compared with black. In this respect I trust I am a good European and something more.

Mr. A. G. Gardner, in the *Daily News*, thinks that Europe might cease to be a menagerie—this after the sentiment has been expressed in this paper some weeks ago. Dramatists are myth-makers; we are at present in the valley of universal sickness, but I look for the dramatic myth-maker who will in unmistakable language show us that we are all children of chaos and the world our fatherhood. But he will not be the author of "White Cargo."

WILLIAM REPTON.

S.P.E.

SIR,—I am sorry the number of the "Tract" reviewed in last week's *Freethinker* was wrongly quoted as No. XXI. The correct number is XXII. (my mistake is not unnatural as No. XX. has not yet appeared). I ought to add that it is published by the Clarendon Press, at Oxford, it consists of 48 pages of very interesting matter, and is supplied free to subscribing members of the S.P.E. The price to non-subscribers is 2s. 6d., but no price is mentioned on the publication itself.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

Ethical metaphysics had obscured the primitive idea of immortality, which is nothing but the idea of indefinite duration.—*Oliver Wendell Holmes*,



Wood; Magic.

WHEN once the setting sun paused on a hill
Charmed by the music from a God,
Our world would say—the story hath some skill,
Fit for old wives or men who drowse and nod.
That was far off and long ago
When leisure gave us time to know
The simple truths that pass our way,
For which we have no time to-day.

The Golden Age hath vanished is the cry
All now is dross, and mud, and flying wheels,
Vainly we turn and yet for something sigh
That force nor passion this grand sight reveals;
This is to-day, and all grey days,
(Hell take the crooked, feverish ways)
That lead us captive from our quest
To find the Islands of the Blest.

The Golden Age is here, for in the air,
A spendthrift robin with his honeyed note
Bids we four mortals halt, and with it share
The wisdom from his delphic throat.
Empires and thrones may come and go,
But this is all ye need to know,
The Golden Age is here to-day
Simplicity will point the way.

We could not move, for magic held us fast;
As though we died if we one note should miss:
The first note was as sweet, and sweet the last,
As any moment that we spend in bliss.
This was to-day—not long ago;
The care-free robin told us so,
No matter what our world shall say
The Golden Age is here to-day.

WILLIAM REPTON.

PIETY AND SELFISHNESS.

This character of constant egotism shows itself chiefly, and with most directness and energy, in theological thought, each believer being always intent on his own individual interest, which is so preponderant as to swallow up all other considerations. Not even in the sublimest self-devotion can the Christian put his individual salvation out of sight. To do so indeed was justly regarded by the Church as a dangerous aberration. Still the frequent clashing of these imaginary interests with real interests furnished a wise priesthood with a powerful means of moral discipline, in obedience to which admirable sacrifices have often been made with advantage to society; and yet not true sacrifices, since they proceeded from a prudent weighing of interests. The benevolent and disinterested feelings innate in man must no doubt have shown themselves even under such a régime, and even in some respects were indirectly stimulated by it. But though the Christian doctrine could not prevent the working of the benevolent instincts it must have seriously impaired their character; so seriously that probably we do not yet fully know their nature and intensity because they have never yet been left to their own direct working. Moreover, there is every reason to suppose that the constant habit of considering the eternal interests that must be dearest to every believer in Christianity has, by gradual affinity, developed in man, with regard also to his temporal interests, an excessive caution, an undue taking thought for the morrow, and so at length a regard for self stronger than his fundamental organization required, and therefore capable of abatement hereafter under a better moral régime. Whether this conjecture be well founded or not, it is undeniable that theological thought is by its nature essentially concerned with the individual, and never, directly, with society. To the eye of faith, especially monotheistic faith, social life has no special end of its own, and therefore no existence.—Auguste Comte, "Discourse on the Positive Spirit."

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