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Views and Opinions.

Our Censors.

The other day we received a letter from one of our readers complaining that his local library committee had refused to place a copy of Fielding's *Tom Jones* on its shelves because it considered it unfit for promiscuous circulation among young people. Such actions are too common to excite surprise, although that does not prevent them exciting contempt. Personally we would much rather have to do with the "young person" who had read *Tom Jones* and appreciated it, than with one who had read it and been shocked at its contents. There is no more manly novel in the English language than *Tom Jones*, and certainly none of a more philosophic character. There is more sound sense and genuine humanitarianism in the introductions to the various books than there is in a gross of current "best-sellers" with their disguised sex appeal and their unhealthy sentimentalism. We cannot conceive a decent young man or woman being worsened by reading Fielding's great novel, although we do not deny the possibility of some seeing a great deal that is undesirable in it. But that is due more to the person than to the book. It is with books as with life in general. What one gets out of it depends upon what one brings to it. A man who brings a filthy or an unhealthy mind to it will reap the consequences of his make-up. But the man who is the happy possessor of a moderately clean and healthy mind will derive enjoyment, information, and philosophy to which the other is immune. A hard-working religious committee out for the "purification" of everything does more to induce genuine uncleanness than any other body we can think of.

* * *

Vivacious Goodness.

But one need never be surprised at such actions as the one above noted. Sitting as a censor of other people's actions is a job that delights the average British Christian. To begin with it is so much easier to look after the morals of other people than to attend to one's own. It gives one the comfortable feeling of being very, very good, without going through the trouble of becoming so. And if one is engaged in the purification of the stage, or of

"obscene" books, or indecent pictures, or things of that kind, it is simply astounding what an amount of enjoyment can be derived from the work. To study these things without forming oneself into an "Association for the Suppression of Vice" might expose one to suspicion, but with an Association respectability is assured. One need only watch the average British Christian abroad—if unaccompanied by his womenfolk—working to discover the lower class cabarets and questionable music-halls to moralize this. He is engaged in a holy crusade, and his experience abroad helps him to warn the young when he comes home. We do not know that the benefit of this inquisition is very apparent, but it is certain that it is taken up with avidity and is pursued with enthusiasm. Whether it be a movement for the suppression of vice at home, or for bringing other peoples up to the almost unapproachable level of our British morality, the fact is observable. The British Christian not merely loves his neighbour as himself, he loves him better than himself—at least he is always trying to make him better than he is himself. The neighbour, of course, retorts in kind. And so, by a wise dispensation of providence each is provided with employment without anyone being affected—unless the creation of a peculiarly insular form of religious hypocrisy be placed to the credit side of the account.

* * *

Public Nuisance.

All the same, it is unfortunate when this class of people get into places of public power, and so have the chance of inflicting themselves upon the general public. Then their ignorance finds expression in practice and everybody is more or less concerned. One has almost ceased to be surprised at the attitude of a large wholesale distributor of books and papers declining to handle certain productions because, in his opinion, it is not good for the public to read them. So also one has become accustomed to the Library Committees of some Urban or District Council—whose opinions on literature are about as important as those of a cow on landscape gardening—deciding what books the ratepayers should be permitted to read. Even if they were reading men the situation would be absurd. A public library should be a place where representative literature could be found, and it should be found there because it is representative. And for the ordinary Library Committee to sit in judgment upon a Fielding, a Boccaccio, a Sterne, or a Swift, is about as colossal a piece of impertinence as one could conceive. The only thing more amazing than this is the docility with which the British public submit. Their tameness is eloquent of a docility of disposition engendered by a lengthy course of Mrs. Grundyism. Boccaccio's Jew decided that the Roman Church must have God Almighty at the back of it, since otherwise so vile a thing could never have persisted. And really one might base a plea for British greatness on the ease with which we submit to stupid rules and regulations.

A Plea for Freedom.

We do not believe for a moment that even "young people" need the extreme watchfulness displayed lest they should read "undesirable" books. We are not now considering children, who are obviously not concerned with the kind of books that come under the censor's ban. Neither are we arguing that the class of books to which objections are usually taken shall be made a compulsory part of anyone's course of reading. To select for reading is one thing, and this we all may do more or less. But to deny access to certain classes of literature because we do not think it good that other people should read them is quite another and a different proposition. No one will, we think, readily accuse Ruskin of any desire to place within the reach of young people unclean or debasing books, and yet here is his advice, deliberately given, as to the reading for girls:—

Whether novels, history, or poetry be read, they should be chosen, not for their freedom from evil, but for their possession of good. The chance and scattered evil that may haunt or hide itself in a powerful book never does harm to a noble girl, but the emptiness of an author depresses, and his amiable folly degrades her. And if she can have access to a library of old and classical books there need be no choosing at all. Keep the modern magazine and novel out of your girl's way; turn her loose into the old library every wet day and let her alone—she will find what is good for her. Let her loose in a library, I say, as you do a fawn in the field. It knows the bad, bad weeds twenty times better than you, and the good ones too, and will eat some bitter and prickly ones, good for it, which you had not the slightest thought would have been so.

Ruskin's exception in the case of the modern novel and magazine is on account of their emptiness and folly—not because of a puritanical readiness to detect something "unclean" where often nothing of the kind exists. We do not know that we would even draw the line in the case of the novel or magazine, empty as they are. If young men and women care for *The Rosary* or the like, they will not care for it the less on finding it barred. Still, Ruskin's advice is fundamentally sound. He is driving home the lesson that what a person derives from a book depends upon the reader. It is not a question of the book, so much as it is one of the general education of the individual and of the social environment.

* * *

The Morality of Freedom.

We would treat adults at least as liberally as Ruskin proposes to treat young girls. We do not say there is less reason for censorship with the old than there is with the young. We do not believe there is. From personal observation we do not believe that what are called immoral books have any attraction for young people—so long as their immoral character is not dwelt upon by their elders. We have never found young people attracted by them, for the reason that they are not written in an attractive way. The average boy or girl will not be violently attracted by the minute analysis of some artistic decadent, although it may attract those of a more advanced age. The road to a healthy morality, here as in so many other directions, lies in the direction of freedom. But that is the last lesson that governing bodies, whether they be councils or governments, appear to learn. All of them develop the itch for control, for interference, all of them are more or less afraid of freedom of thought and expression. Some of our medical friends hold, and we believe with truth, that so long as we are not dealing with a diseased organism, the food that one needs is best indicated by one's tastes. We be-

lieve much the same is true of our mental food. To paraphrase Ruskin, let us resolve to turn the developing generation free in the world of books. Each will know better than we can tell what is good for him or her. It is an ill policy to have so far given up the Christian doctrine of original sin in theology and then to re-establish it in the world of morals. Freedom and development are not opposites; they are two sides of the same thing. But that is the last lesson that our religion-soaked civilization seems inclined to master.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Chips from Anatole France's Workshop.

(Concluded from page 484.)

THE Dialogue on Metaphysics and the Existence of God is followed by several other dialogues, the first of which is that on Old Age. The debaters in this Dialogue are not Floris and Thémine, but A. F. and Opt, A. F. being Anatole France himself, who attacks Old Age, and Opt, an optimist, whose business it is to defend it. It is a great surprise to many of the distinguished artist's admirers to discover him among the enemies of Old Age. He informs us that in man Old Age begins at sixty, but naïvely admits that when he was sixty, he felt none of its symptoms. More astonishingly still, he tells us, with sparkling eyes, that when he was seventy-five he was not even expecting Old Age. Indeed, it appears that the idea of writing this Dialogue did not occur to him until he was about seventy-seven, for according to M. Corday, the editor of *Under the Rose*, "among the documents and material he gathered about him, some articles from medical reviews are dated 1922 and 1923," and we know that when he died in October 12, 1924, he was in his eighty-first year. We may feel fairly certain that at seventy-nine he was still actively engaged in literary work. Now read this astounding paragraph written by A. F.:—

One evening during the present spring, I was crossing the bridge of stone which leads to Tours, when the sound of lamentations and imprecations broke upon my ear, and I beheld a pair of arms waving in desperation in the airy void. It was our common friend, the friend to whom we are indebted for so many joyous hours, our pocket Molière, the charming George Courteline, who was denouncing Old Age as the arch enemy of the human race, Old Age of whose onslaught he, so far, bears but the very earliest hints. "What would you say, Courteline," I enquired, "if you were as old as I am?" Courteline had the good sense not to reply, and I, too, said nothing more. But be assured that my silence lays a heavier burden of reproach on Old Age than was poured forth upon it by the indignant outbursts of Courteline. Old Age, in my opinion, is the worst of ills. It robs a man of strength and vigour, of desire, and all the good things of life, aye, not excepting his thirst for knowledge, which in the case of most men is the sole thing that makes life worth living (pp. 97, 98).

Opt listened to that eloquent but comical tirade with ironic laughter in his eyes, asking himself whether his master was joking or not, and then made the following reply:—

How unjust of you to complain of the passage of the years, you for whom Fate has reserved the happiest and most gracious senescence! Old Age has but touched you lightly with his finger-tips, leaving you all your faculties, all your intellectual endowments unimpaired, even to that thirst for knowledge which, according to you, is the only

reason for living. It has robbed you of none of the rich possessions of your prime (pp. 97, 98).

We agree with Opt. Of what earthly use is it to find fault with and rebel against the inevitable? For all our wrathful grumbling and denunciation we cannot alter it one iota; therefore why complain? A. F. says of his hero, Courteline, that he "has a whole-hearted hatred of Old Age, which as yet he knows not. He detests it in advance," and surely this was an unnatural and unwholesomely morbid attitude of his towards the decaying years of life. To our mind, there is unjustifiable and hurtful morbidity about the following passage:—

It is true that what renders Old Age cruel to men is that it brings them nearer death. But the degree of fear with which they regard it varies according to the shape in which it presents itself to their imagination. The belief that death will bring us face to face with an angry God is a very different thing from the belief that it will merely send us back into the nothingness from which we came (p. 102).

What is ignored in that passage is that death is fully as natural as birth and that we neither come from at birth nor return at death into nothingness. There is no such thing as nothingness. Death means not loss but change; and in all so-called dead matter there inheres the potentiality of life. Knowing this, multitudes of us fear death as little as we fear sleep.

The remaining Dialogues are, concerning the Future, on Sex-Modesty, and concerning War, but while they all contain instructive and amusing matter, it will doubtless prove more interesting to Freethinkers if we return to the subject of the first Dialogue, namely, the Existence of God. The extracts supplied in the first portion of this article were taken from the Dialogue in its final form as found in Chapter ii., which chapter extends to only eighteen pages in *Under the Rose*. Now Anatole France was a literary artist who bestowed infinite care and patience upon the composition of his works, and this was quite as true of him in old age as it had been during the years of his prime. This first Dialogue underwent endless revisions, and at each fresh revision so many notes would be improved, shortened or lengthened as the case might be, and so many more omitted altogether, until the Dialogue assumed its final form and length. M. Corday has been good enough to gather those rejected observations and notes together, arrange them carefully, and make a present of them to the author's friends and admirers in the literary world. They are to be found in Chapters iv. and v., and cover sixty-eight pages. Some of the further observations concerning Metaphysics are intensely humorous. To illustrate in what Metaphysics differs from Physics Floris says to Thémine:

I must have recourse to a parable to make you understand it. Ask a housewife to tell you what a *purée* is. She will tell you that there are *purées* and *purées*. There is the thick *purée*, in which a spoon will stand upright. Well, that is Nature, Physics. Then there is the *purée* that has been strained through a sieve—thin, slushy stuff and as clear as water. That is Metaphysics. Metaphysics differs from Physics in that the best part of it has been left behind in the strainer (p. 39).

Thémine is angry and accuses Floris of being "insulting, outrageous, flippant." "Why," he said, "there is not a single good wife who does not practise Metaphysics every morning when she goes to market. She considers chickens, eggs, fish, vegetables in their essence, and she doesn't worry about particularities which don't assist her to get her commodities at a reasonable figure." Floris jests and

pretends to be well pleased with his opponent's thesis, suggesting that the "good wife had other opportunities of indulging in Metaphysics when shopping":—

She says, "Life is hard—one hardly knows how to get along." She freely indulges in abstractions. She generalizes. When she says, "I have lost my cat," she is in the domain of Physics. But when she adds, "The cat is an ungrateful animal," she no longer beholds a real cat, but the ideal cat (and the only real one, for, you must understand, the ideal is the sole reality). In a word, she emancipates herself from everything of a contingent nature, she soars in mid-air, she speeds on daring pinions toward the untroubled regions of Metaphysics pp. 41, 42).

Now from Metaphysics to Theology is less than a step, the difference between the two being of a purely imaginary character. We knew long ago that Anatole France was an incorrigible Atheist. We knew it the moment we opened *The Gods are Athirst*, and everything of his we have ever read confirms us in that knowledge. It is quite impossible to peep into *Under the Rose* without coming definitely and finally to that conclusion. Whenever Anatole France writes of God you can easily see that he is enjoying a big laugh:—

To govern mankind, He took it into His head to become moral, without any preliminary training. For having lived a whole eternity by Himself and enjoyed His pleasures alone, He had no morals and could not have any. In His dealings with man, He adopted the morality of a savage, as one might have expected He would. His cruel and outrageous deeds have been set down in a portentous book (p. 58).

Of the freewill theory to exonerate the Deity from all responsibility for the fall and sinfulness of man he makes short work thus:—

He handled the situation badly. It was as if a showman were to take it into his head to reward or punish his puppets for the features he had given them and the deeds he made them perform. If a showman were so ill-advised as that, his puppets would say, "We didn't ask to play this comedy, and we have played it as you made us play it. You pulled the strings. You have no call either to praise or blame us" (p. 59).

The few extracts we have made show clearly what position Anatole France occupied in relation to the Christian religion. He said: "I do not believe in dualism in Nature. The same laws govern all living creatures, and nothing more survives of man than of any other creature. Could anyone with any reasonable degree of intelligence think otherwise?" (p. 86). He was almost prepared to assert that Jesus had never lived. Once, after death had robbed him of one who was very dear to him a gifted and attractive Abbé paid him a visit in the hope of converting him to Christian belief. He described in glowing terms "the alluring prospect of meeting his beloved friend in another and better world. Anatole France listened to him with the most patient and polite attention. Then suddenly he interrupted with a question: 'Shall we be able to have our *café au lait* in the morning?' To me that is the most delightful moment in a love affair. The Abbé, somewhat crestfallen, took his departure" (p. 94).

J. T. LLOYD.

Words, as a Tartar's bow, do shoot back upon the understanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle and pervert the judgment.—*Bacon*.

The laws of conscience, which we say are born of nature, are born of custom.—*Montaigne, "Essays."*

A Dean in a Domino.

The Bible and *The Arabian Nights* are the books from which the West can derive the best conceptions of the East.—*H. A. L. Fisher.*

Dismiss everything that insults your own soul.—*Whitman.*

PRESENT-DAY theologians do not count for much in the literary world. Mild echoes of Renan and Strauss may flutter some sheltered homes and country rectories, but sincerity and not opportunism must always be the foundation of good writing, whether it be secular or religious. The Roman Catholic Church, which can boast of a Newman and Francis Thompson, now has to put up with Messrs. Belloc and Chesterton. The Anglican Church, which still possesses millions of money, can now only point to Dean Inge as a literary champion worthy of serious attention. Hence his latest book, *Lay Thoughts of a Dean* (Putnam) has a somewhat larger significance than is usually accorded to works by reverend and right-reverend authors.

If there is a cultured cleric within the folds of the Anglican Church that man is perhaps Dean Inge. This lends importance to his views on so many post-war problems. For this volume is actually a reprint of articles contributed to the press, nearly all dealing with topical subjects, and all of interest. The Dean is modest too. In his apology for the publication he points out that such articles are really as ephemeral as sermons, but he is careful to add:—

If the preacher or the amateur journalist has strong convictions, and has tried to put them in a form which he hoped might reach a large number of people, it is perhaps not unreasonable that he should wish to give his utterances a rather longer life.

To a Freethinker the Dean's utterances on religion are of first importance. Combating a German critic's contention that religious faith is irrational, Dean Inge remarks: "Though I believe absolutely that the mystical experience is a true, healthy, and normal one, it seems to me to be closely bound up with the reason, imagination and moral will."

This seems to be an entire evasion of the difficulty raised by the Continental critic. Such Christian dogmas as that of the Virgin Birth, are, from the scientific point of view, irrational, and the "mystical experience" of believing such a dogma is no proof whatever of its truth. A child may derive extreme pleasure from the fairy tale of "Little Red Riding Hood," but that is no proof that wolves talk, or that the story is true. A Latter Day Saint may take comfort from the story of the angel's revelation to Joe Smith, but that does not prove that the gold plates inscribed with the angelic message of "The Book of Mormon" had any real existence outside the imagination of Mr. Smith. Away from the religion of which he is an exponent, Dean Inge is critical enough. Writing of auto-suggestion and kindred subjects, he is much firmer in his utterance:—

For my own part, I will have nothing to do with this world of make-believe. It is an abomination to me. I believe that my reason was given me that I may know things as they are, and my will that I may bring my refractory disposition into harmony with the laws of my Creator. I will neither twist up my mouth when I am in the dumps, nor tell myself that in all respects I am getting better and younger and handsomer every day. If I can help it I will play no tricks with my soul.

If the Dean would only approach the Christian Religion in the same spirit his theological meditations would be better worth reading. But the Dean is first and foremost a Churchman, and secondly an

Englishman, and he never overlooks the one or the other. For example, he is very John Bullish in his attitude towards Russia. Relying on newspaper statistics of mortality in Russia since the Revolution, he breaks out: "Let those who have blamed me for doubting the actuality (not the possibility) of moral progress say whether past history records anything approaching the scale of these horrors."

This is an extraordinary confession to make. The Dean, be it remembered, is cultured, and far better educated than most clergymen. Yet it appears that he is ready at a moment's notice, on the strength of a mere newspaper paragraph, to bolster the absurd clerical contention of the wickedness of humanity. It is highly probable that the so-called Russian "mortality statistics" are the merest political propaganda, and as true as the war-time statement that the Germans burned their dead soldiers to make grease. As for the Dean's challenge concerning the "horrors" of past history, it is really difficult to understand that he should have never heard of the Holy Inquisition, or the witch-hunting in America, to cite but two instances of religious fanaticism. One expects such colossal innocence from Catholic priests and young curates, but that a dignitary of the State Religion should be no better equipped is a matter of some surprise.

Indeed, these "Lay Thoughts" have an autobiographical character, and, in conjunction with the previous volume, *Outspoken Essays*, throw a searchlight upon an interesting personality, none the less valuable because it has so much in common with the ordinary citizen. What could be more illuminating, for instance, than the Dean's frank confession that on the first news of the Battle of Jutland he could not sleep, since the first messages suggested disaster to the British Fleet. One likes the Dean none the less for such frankness, but it is a pity he reserves such outspoken feelings for purely secular matters, and becomes frigidity itself when discussing theology.

The Dean's range is a wide one, and the essays deal with literary, social, political, and religious subjects. One of the most arresting is entitled: "Religion in England after the War," but, curiously, whilst many matters are introduced in the essay there is little about religion. Perhaps it is as well, for a really frank statement of post-war religion in this country might prove embarrassing to the faithful. Never in the religious history of England has religion been at so low an ebb. Only about one in twenty of the population now attend any place of worship, and only a proportion of these trouble the pew-openers of the State churches. Sunday recreation has spread among the middle-class, formerly the bulwark of the Anglican Church, whilst it is notorious that the working class care as little for religion as the wealthy folk at the other end of the social scale. The Church's teaching, indeed, the teaching of all the churches, is more and more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The rising generation has little interest in religion. So widespread is this disintegrating process that even the Jewish people, hitherto so faithful to their faith, are beginning to adopt modern methods in their worship, thus breaking away from the teaching of many centuries. It is a sign of the times. Religion is actually in the melting pot, and will in a few generations be replaced by Secularism, which, by directing men's thoughts to the service of humanity, rather than to the service of imaginary deities, will reshape human destinies to larger and nobler issues.

MIMNERMUS.

It is not the eating of knowledge, but the digesting of it, that makes the student.—*Sir Arthur Keith.*

Why Not Atheist?

If science investigates an alleged fact, and, after due research, finds no atom of evidence to confirm it, it does not hesitate to assert that that alleged fact is unworthy of credence. Is it not time that the Rationalist, who, in his claim to be guided by reason, is truly scientific, abandoned his attitude of compromise and asserted his disbelief in a god?

We have been shown by Frazer, Grant Allen, and others how the idea of a god arose, and how with the help of a priesthood it captured and held the human mind until in time it evolved into the many forms of religion that now appeal to mankind; but none has shown us that the root-idea of a god represents anything more than an idea—man's notion of some personal and very human power directing the universe and interesting itself more or less in man's affairs. Yahuh, the adopted god of the Christians, is no exception.

The suggestion that there may be a "first cause" or "supreme intelligence" hidden away in space and at work behind the phenomena of nature, to which the name god may be applied, is merely an attempt to substitute for the idea embodied in the word god a less incredible conception. But though we have no evidence of such a power, it certainly would be rash to deny the existence of a directing force in nature. If, however, it exists, it may be assumed to differ entirely from what we describe by the word God. It most surely would be impersonal. It might be conceived as analogous to the nucleus within the living cell from which proceeds the directing force that orders the cell's activity. If that be conceded, then it would seem to be foolish to accord it the status of a god, for it would be impervious to human appeal. In other words, no religious system could rationally be built upon so indefinite a foundation.

Thus we may safely cast aside all conceptions of a god which do not make him an anthropomorphic being, and when we do that there is nothing left.

Thus there seems to be no valid reason why Rationalists should not declare themselves Atheists, except the opprobrium that attaches to the word. Taken in its literal meaning the word means godless, and necessarily does not imply the assertion that there is no god.

There have been many attempts to justify the assumption that the god of the Christians is an existing reality, all more or less begging the question; but they are far outweighed by the negative evidence. The Bible has been shown to be a very human document and carries no weight as evidence. There is no evidence that prayer has been answered, or that the assumed mercy and loving kindness of Yahuh has prevented him from inflicting countless miseries upon mankind; in fact, it cannot be proved that supernatural influence in mundane affairs ever has taken place. The laws of nature as established by science, and the long chain of causes and effects that stretches behind us in time exclude the idea of such interference.

The plea that man has an inborn religious instinct must be abandoned. What is regarded as such is the result of his early training. If religious training ceased, and particularly if the very young were excluded from it, this so-called instinct would disappear.

That which has kept religion alive and brought it to its present stage is the existence of a priesthood, a body of men, to put it bluntly, who preach falsehoods for a living. With no evidence to justify belief in a God the priesthood is not only useless, but a harmful agency. If a God actually existed, it would be a presumption, for it would imply that the "all-

wise and all-powerful" is unable to make known his will to mankind. How long would the priesthood exist if the stipends of the priests were not forthcoming?

Whichever way we regard the question the facts all go to prove the non-existence of the orthodox deity, and therefore I plead for courage on the part of Rationalists to admit their disbelief in God.

In view of the bad odour that clings to the word Atheist, no doubt many prefer to term themselves Agnostics, but actually that term is too vague and hardly would have been coined and used by the great Huxley if he hadn't wished to cover every conception that has been dignified by the name of God.

Rationalists may draw a clean line between the orthodox deity and the power behind nature (if there is such a power), and with perfect consistency they may deny the former without concerning themselves with the latter, the nature of which probably they will never fathom.

To sum up, therefore, we may say, "Yahuh is unproven," and "X, the unknown directing force of the universe, so far as we know, either is non-existent or, if it exists, has none of the attributes that we regard as essential to the status of a god." Why, then, should the Rationalist be ashamed to admit his Atheism? Or, since "a rose by any other name would smell as sweet," let him coin an elegant synonym. Perhaps "hylicist" might meet the case.

W. S. ROGERS.

Vicente Blasco Ibanez.

TWENTY years ago a teacher was lecturing his class on the various literati of Europe, and in his reference to Spain his definition was, "A one-man country." He went on to expound the fact that Cervantes was the only outstanding literary genius that Iberia had ever produced. But to-day no teacher can adopt such an attitude.

Since the time mentioned, the reading world has learnt to digest and appreciate the wonder writings of Vicente Blasco Ibanez, and Spain no longer labours under the stigma of literary poverty, whatever other evils may be her lot—and they are many.

Cervantes wrote in a flowery fashion, presenting his idea and ideals in the style of fables so that those who might be offended by direct speech could be lulled into somnolence by the protestation that the writings were but fairy tales.

On the other hand, Ibanez adopts a directness which is indeed refreshing to those whose minds are satiated with the sycophantic utterings of too many of the present-day novelists. Truly, he is an exile from home in consequence, but that does not lessen the quality of his works. Whether his theme be peace or war, ancient or modern, the reader can always rest assured of being able to read every word with intensity and of finding food for a sermon in every line. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, *La Bodega*, and *Sonnica* are widely divergent in theme and portrayal, but this generalization applies to them all—it is impossible to drop the book until the end is reached.

Ibanez is best known in this country as the author of *The Four Horsemen*, and to those who took active part in the bloody cataclysm of a decade ago this is a real live story which could have been written only by one who actually saw the events welded into it. The fighting at the Marne or the scene of the elder Desnoyers and the Senator plodding through the maze of trenches are truthful and—Oh! so different

from the travesties of the "glorious duck-board walks" so favoured by our English writers.

However, in my humble opinion, *La Bodega* is by far the greatest of Ibañez's work, dealing, as it does, with the pitiable conditions of the agricultural serfs of Xeres. Written as far back as 1903, it still shows the grip in which all Papist countries are still held.

The central figure in this story, Salvatierra (Saviour of Earth), is a keen Atheistic Communist, and throughout the book the author makes this character his mouthpiece. A future is visualized when all the honours and professions shall be abolished. "And the doctors?" is at once asked. Noting the astonishment created by an affirmative reply, Salvatierra reasons thus: "Diseases will cease because those that now exist are due either to the ostentation of the rich, who eat more than their bodies require, or to the fact that the poor eat less than is necessary to the sustaining of life."

At a later stage there is a long dissertation on the evil and wickedness of Charity, which is described as "egotism masquerading as a virtue, the sacrifice of a small share of the surplus divided at will," and then,

Charity, sustaining the unfortunate wretch for an instant that he might gather strength was as virtuous as the peasant woman who feeds the fowls in her corral and keeps them well fattened until the moment when she is ready to eat them.....God had gone over to the rich; he looked upon it as a virtue of glory everlasting whenever any of the wealthy, from time to time, shared a fragment of their fortune and preserved it intact, considering it a crime for those at the bottom to demand a decent livelihood.

Others of the characters are so portrayed in the story that one can recognize them at every turn as being everyday, alive people. For instance, Pablo Dupont, the head of the wine firm, is an intensely religious man, who takes every opportunity of utilizing secular advantages and, whenever possible, ascribing the good results emanating therefrom to his Deity. As an insight:—

The vineyards were to be blessed so as to be rendered immune from the peril of Phylloxera—after having been planted with American vines.

Again:—

In the meantime the priest turned the leaves of his book without being able to find the prayer befitting the occasion. The Ritual was exceedingly precise down to the last detail. The Church worms its way into every avenue of life: prayers for women about to give birth, for water, for light, for new homes, for recently constructed vessels, for the bed of the newly wed, for those about to undertake a voyage, for bread, for eggs, for every sort of eatable. At last he discovered in the Ritual what he was looking for: *Benedictio super fruges et vineas*.

One could fill quires of paper with quotations from this work and reams of paper with the thoughts which each quotation would engender, but suffice it to say that any Freethinker in search of something with which to while away an hour need never worry about the theistic and anti-social rubbish whilst *Le Bodega* is still in print, and, once having read that, he will be led to search out for himself every written word which comes from the pen of this great Spanish teacher.

L. M. WERREY-EASTERBROOK.

Acid Drops.

There were the usual number of sermons preached in connection with the meetings of the British Association, and they covered most of the usual ground. Sir Oliver Lodge played the part of prophet, and Dean Inge that of "reconciler," and the only distinction between them is that Sir Oliver's position is the safer—for the moment. Since we wrote last week, a full report of Sir Oliver's sermon has appeared, and it leaves one wondering how unscientific a man of science can be when he touches religion. For example, Sir Oliver tells us that hitherto science has limited itself to the investigation of the material universe, but that now our attention must be directed to the "interacting universe of ether." But if the ether does exist, and even that remains to be proved, it comes as much under the scientific conception of matter as anything else. Some few years ago Sir Oliver himself asserted this, and we should much like to know what has caused him to alter his opinion.

Another curious statement is that now the British Association has a special section devoted to Psychology, it may be more inclined to pay attention to the existence of a communication with a world of intelligence outside our own. It seems a strange thing to say of one of our leading scientists, but that kind of statement leaves one wondering just what Sir Oliver thinks the *science* of psychology deals with? If there actually exists such an inconceivable thing as "mind" apart from structure—an existence that is as conceivable as a square without four sides—its existence would be shown by general scientific methods, without any reference to the special department of psychology. And if it exists our present psychological method and apparatus would not fit it at all. It is a pity that Sir Oliver should thus fall into the vulgar spiritualistic habit of using "Psychology" as a term to cover all sorts of "mystical" nonsense.

Dean Inge, in the course of his sermon, said that the great gain of to-day was the growth of the scientific temper in all departments of life and thought, greater attention is being paid to "strict truthfulness, a growing thoughtfulness for the welfare of posterity, and, above all, an increasing recognition of our duty to non-human fellow creatures." Well and good, but it is to be noted that these benefits have come from science, not from religion. It has not been the work of religion—particularly the Christian religion—to emphasize truthfulness, thought for posterity, or care for the lower animal world. The humanization of life has been due to the influence of science and a curtailing of the power of religion. Dean Inge says the educated Christian is succeeding in fitting his creed within the framework of the universe as science presents it. That may be, but all it means is that Christians are beginning to drop all that science has shown to be false, and hanging on to as much as is not directly disproved. And that suggests the question of the value of a religion which, whenever its teaching can be brought to the direct test of verifiable fact, is shown to be false.

The comic man of the moment was provided in the person of the Rev. Dr. C. O'Hara, S.J. He said that the British Association had a great deal of knowledge, but there was only one personality that knew all, and that was Christ. Catholics had sources of information which were more valuable, and which put science in its proper place. After that there seems no more to be said.

A defending solicitor in Bow County Court informed Judge Parry that his client said the accident was an Act of God. The Judge's comment was that he was throwing responsibility on a third party. He might have declined to consider it as the responsible party was outside the jurisdiction of the court. We remember that during the War, in a case that was concerned with

If those things are true all reason is taken away, which is, as it were, the light and lamp of life.—*Cicero*.

some people who had been killed by a raiding German aeroplane, a patriotic jury returned a verdict of murder against the Kaiser. One day a jury may have the courage to do the same with regard to these alleged acts of God. If people mean what they say, the verdict would be justifiable.

The most stupid of men will sometimes say sensible things. A fool can no more be invariably foolish than a wise person can be invariably sensible. Thus the Rev. Campbell Morgan told a congregation the other day that "there was not one Christian man or woman who had not at some time or other wondered what God was doing." Not only that, but also why on earth he does it? Still, a good Christian having once dared to ask himself what the devil God was doing, or why the devil he does it, immediately concludes that he is doing everything well, and lets the matter go. This is, indeed, one of the benefits of Christian faith. Even if a Christian does happen to rise to the point of asking a sensible question about God, his religion may be trusted to prevent his giving a reasonable answer.

Sentence of four months in the second division was passed on Jane Burke and Nellie Moynihan, proprietor and teacher respectively at the Franciscan Convent School, Ashton-under-Lyne, for cruelty to a girl aged eleven years. The prosecutor said the school was not administered by the Roman Catholic Church. In passing sentence, Mr. James Openshaw, Chairman of the Salford Hundred Quarter Sessions, said: "Any provocation a child would have given would have been entirely insufficient to justify anyone inflicting punishment such as you have been found guilty of." There is enough material here for a book, but the report above might shut the mouths of those who want to know what is going to be put in the place of religion.

"Woodbine Willie," in a recent article, full, as usual, of exaggerations and sweeping assertions, accused the whole human race of lacking sincerity and love of truth, and of being given to wholesale lying. A reader retorts that "Willie's" onslaught might fruitfully be directed to the Church which pays him his salary. He adds:—

Are not the seeds of an easy tolerance of lies and half-truths sown in pulpits and Sunday-schools where dogmas and beliefs are taught which a little knowledge easily disproves? The Churches still teach doctrines which long ago have been modified or else exploded.

That's a nasty knock for "Willie." It is equivalent to the physician's being told to heal himself. We suggest our clerical friend takes the hint, and in future addresses his diatribes to his dog-collared friends, and particularly to those who trot around in little boys' gaiters.

The twopenny papers will not have the new Messiah and neither will a correspondent in the *Spectator* (price sixpence). In the sixes and sevens of a theological vocabulary he gives the following opinion, which leaves the issue as clear as Thames mud:—

If the message comes from an indwelling Christ, it should bear the hall-marks of the Christ—of His wisdom, His love and His understanding, and be something that should give the needed help and guidance to our confused and restless world of to-day.

In the hunt for a scape-goat those who cannot look within are always straining their eyes for signs without, and in this particular pastime Christianity will always find the raw material in its victims who are never taught to rely upon themselves. In the meantime the new Messiah must be classified as an "also ran."

After the ground has been made safe by pioneers who have paid the price for criticising religion, we may expect the great organs of public opinion to follow on. As an example, we find in the *Daily News* views and opinions that were suffocated twenty years ago. Discuss-

ing the "golden rule," a writer in that paper unburdens himself as follows: "The Church has nothing to do with this problem. Priests are more a hindrance than a help. Set creeds, dogmas, theological hair-splittings and unholy quarrels about the Sacrament are so much intellectual litter." This appears to be the answer to those who want to gauge the progress of Freethought.

The perversity of Dean Inge's idea gives them a fascination and a value that cannot be said of those of his professional brothers. At times, he appears to be struggling, with a foot in each camp and his head in another quarter of the mental battleground. He writes much, and, by the rule of average, must eventually chronicle something that proves him to be a member of the human family instead of a Dean. In his *Lay Thoughts*, recently published, he states a truism that may be caviare to the general, but for an old man, he sees clearly; we state this with no disrespect and trust that our youth will note his adaptability to move with questions of the present day. How many interests will greet the following?—

This victory of the defensive over the offensive saved civilization. How many of us have reflected on the frightful danger to the future of humanity contained in the discovery, during the Great War, that no town can any longer be defended? To me it seems that this terrible discovery may herald a return to the Dark Ages, unless the nations agree to make an end of war.

This is the logic of fact that needs constantly to be heard; it has no connection with the fiction of theology, and if the Dean progresses at this rate, there will be only one paper left in which he can express his views.

The President and the Secretary of the Methodist Conference are not satisfied with the contributions the brethren have been popping in the collection bag. The godly are exhorted to give more systematically, more scientifically, and more cheerfully. They are advised to adopt a new scale of values in giving, and to put more conscience into the job. Seemingly they have been paying for their Sunday amusement on the *ad valorem* principle. This clearly shows how even the righteous are becoming debased by commercialism. We suggest the best thing for our parson friends to do is to rouse up the torpid consciences of these mean givers by preaching into them the fear of hell-fire and eternal damnation. Necessity urges desperate measures.

Germany, as well as America and England, has been smitten with the Tennessee distemper. An elementary school-teacher at Offenbach has recently been dismissed by the Hesse education authorities, after a two-years' controversy, for teaching children that man's first ancestor was an ape, and secondly, that devils do not exist. The Hessian educationalists are to be congratulated on their wisdom in ridding the schools of a thoroughly depraved character. A person who doesn't believe in devils nor that man was descended from a wicked Adam is obviously an unfit instructor of innocent youth.

The Methodist Conference Pastoral address does its best to cheer the "dear brethren." We are living in tempestuous days, old landmarks have been swept away, swift changes have come, and there are new parties and new cries. The age wants something, and will not be happy till it gets it; but it knows not what that is. There is a revolt against things as they are—a dumb desire to fashion a better world. So there is a seeking for new forms in art, literature, music, politics, and in the Church. Thus the Pastoral opens fire. There is one thing it omits to mention. The age may not know exactly what it wants, but it emphatically does know what it does not want. And that is—the patent nostrums of the Churches. Wails from hundreds of pulpits about declining church attendance indicate this clearly enough.

What we should like our Methodist friends to explain is why the strong desire to fashion a better world should

reveal itself at the same time as a revolt against things as they are, and especially against one of those things—religion. The plain man might fancy that the churches had been doping the people all these past centuries, making them content to suffer anything however oppressive it might be, and blinding them to the need for better conditions. The plain man's fancy would, of course, be altogether wrong. For have not the churches stood for social betterment, improved labour conditions, progress and change? And do not the votes of Christian leaders in the House of Lords clearly reveal it?

The Methodist Church, however, does not fear the change and movement now going on. It is not daunted by the difficulties it sees before it—it welcomes them “as a spur and dynamic to more eager and inventive action.” For “was not Methodism born amidst the rationalism and coarse brutality of the eighteenth century?” It has, we learn, that high gift of adapting itself to new conditions. What the Pastoral means by this is that the difficulties will spur the Church to more inventive *fiction*. There will be more ingenious attempts to make semi-barbarous Eastern notions fit modern problems to which obviously they have no application. There will be a continued shelving of discredited dogmas and Bible atrocities, and a more adroit explaining and re-interpreting of the teachings that remain after expurgation. By the look of things the parsons are in for a busy time. The tasks before them call for much mental agility. Unfortunately for the Church the new reapers in the Lord's vineyards are declared to be of a none too high mental standard. And we cannot quite see how they are likely to make a success of the business before them. Perhaps, however, the Lord may not wish the churches to succeed against the difficulties now confronting them. He may think society will be better served if all the parsons become producers instead of continuing to be parasites.

The Bishop of Hereford at a school prize distribution recently declared that if we directed our lives aright we should always be asking questions. The man who could answer his own questions and steer clear of bias was going to be a useful member of society. His lordship's first statement prompts the comment: If we are to direct our lives aright, not only should we be always asking questions, but we ought to be completely free to ask every kind of question on every kind of subject, “sacred” or secular. And not only free to ask, but also free to state the opinions we arrive at as a result of finding answers to our questions. To put it briefly we would say, freedom of thought and speech is an essential condition for the rightly directed life. No doubt a good number of the Lord's servants would agree with that statement. Nevertheless, we have noted there are remarkably few who favour it in actual practice. In regard to the Bishop's second assertion, since Free-thinkers do ask questions and do avoid the narrow bias of their Christian friends, they must be useful members of society. That they should find clerical replies unconvincing and seek solutions of their own, and what is more, tell other people their conclusions, is a state of affairs decidedly unfortunate for the church. For it is the doing of that which has diminished church attendance. Still, men and women who believe thought and social life to be more healthy and more nearly tuned to progress while its basis is rational rather than supernatural, are unlikely to shed tears over the church's troubles.

The Bishop commends the asking of questions. We should think more of his commendation did it not happen to coincide with the fact that the church has now little power to suppress questioning. The last remaining weapon of suppression—the Blasphemy Laws—is more and more being regarded with disfavour by enlightened Christian minds. Free questioning, free thinking, has become fashionable, and so his lordship of Hereford discovers he favours the fashion.

Dr. Duever, in dealing with the function of punishment in social life, told the British Association, that social reformers to-day were convinced that young delinquents especially required a clinical examination, both medical and psychological, before sentence was passed on them. Prof. Burt emphasized the fact that mass treatment could achieve no satisfactory results. Every case needed a personal interview, and an examination by doctor and psychologist for the purpose of discovering whether moral defects were largely the outcome of disease or of faulty environment. We are afraid there is rather more determinism in these statements than will please our Christian defenders of the Free Will theory.

Wallasey Corporation has appointed a special committee to deal with what are considered objectionable features of beach life at New Brighton. It appears that men and women loll about in bathing dress, and mock religious services with ukelele accompaniments to hymns are held. Obviously our Puritan friends have been prowling around and are seeking to suppress this awful depravity. Still, if they will close all places of amusement on Sunday they must expect visitors to amuse themselves in other ways.

According to a writer in a daily newspaper, clergymen in 2026 will encounter opposition from cash registers. The gentlemen of the cloth will take a second place with mechanical money boxes at such functions as marriages; need we wait until 2026 to prove that they are little more at these functions in the present time?

A London rector, in the interests of the business of the old firm, has inserted an advertisement in a newspaper asking all those in trouble to ring him up. From the report before us his crop does not appear to be very promising; the majority of the cases were from unhappily married people, and from young girls who had had a tiff with their sweethearts. There are no published records of perplexed people who have asked what must they do to be saved, or instances from applicants who require the address of a church that is not overcrowded. And this is the profession that the Americans presumed to offer suggestions in the art of publicity.

A Sportmanship Brotherhood has been formed in America, and many schools have applied for charters. Its code runs thus:—

The Code of Honour of a Sportsman is: To keep the rules; to keep faith with his comrade and play the game for his side; to keep himself fit; to keep his temper; to keep from hitting a man when he is down; to keep his pride under in victory; to keep a stout heart and accept defeat with good grace; and to keep a sound soul and a clean mind in a healthy body.

We note the Code makes no reference to God nor to “man's duty to God.” It has largely, perhaps wholly, a social implication. The sportsman is to refrain from doing or is to do certain things that he may not be offensive to his fellows; he is to preserve his self-respect and so keep other's good opinion of him! and he is to keep a healthy mind and a healthy body that he may give of his best in whatever he undertakes. The Code one might say is healthily pagan. And no doubt thousands of boys grown to manhood will consider it suffices them through life without their needing to carry around that odd medley of superstition and doubtful ethics known as the Christian religion.

Failure, declares a Wayside Pulpit poster, is often the first stepping-stone to success. Try again. We are afraid we cannot recommend the churches that use this poster to take their own advice. For the preliminary to trying again is that the Churches should first discover the true cause of their failure. But this cause, which is that religion no longer appeals because people believe it to be neither true nor useful, the churches refuse to recognize.

To Correspondents.

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

J. W. MARSHALL.—An excellent criticism of the Canon, but too late to be of use.

S. J. SMITH.—See "Sugar Plums."

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

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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.

Although we have not yet finished with the summer months, we have to look ahead, and it is time those interested began to think of the autumn and winter campaign. Personally, we should like to see new ground broken in many places, and there are such places in which this could easily be done. What is required is that a few local Freethinkers should make enquiries as to suitable halls and then send on the information to the N.S.S. offices. There is not a town of any size in the kingdom in which a good audience could not be brought together if the business of arranging a meeting is properly done. We hope some of our friends will seriously consider the matter.

An article by "Anglicanus," criticizing a recent article which appeared in these columns, appears in the *Week-End Advertiser* (Natal) for July 10. We are not much concerned with the criticism, which is weak enough, but its tone calls, perhaps, for a word of comment. The writer says that hitherto he had looked on Atheists, Agnostics, and Freethinkers as honest, intellectual people who have sometimes suffered for the eccentricity of their opinions. But, alas! this good opinion is no longer justified by the facts, and the facts are that the *Freethinker* has spoken disrespectfully of Paul, and hinted at the probably disreputable character of some of the primitive Christian sects. From which we gather that "Anglicanus" is ready to treat Freethinkers as decent but misguided eccentrics so long as they will join in the common twaddle about the admirable character of the New Testament personalities and of the early Christian sects. All we can say is that the truth about these latter have seldom been allowed to appear, and there has been far too much lip-homage paid to Christian ideals and characters by those who have given up Christianity, but who have lacked the

courage to speak out. We fancy that a regular dose of the *Freethinker* would do "Anglicanus" some good.

Frankly, we do not value or treasure these Christian compliments to the *Freethinker* as being a fairly intelligent, possibly honest, and amicable individual, but one who falls short of the high standard attained by Christians. It is all part of the impertinent egotism nourished by Christian belief. Whether we gain the good will or the respect of Christians never troubles us in the least. What we are concerned about is getting at the truth, and we have never known the fearless pursuit of truth, accompanied by direct speech, to gain the respect of many Christians. The policy of the *Freethinker* during the whole of its existence has been to express the whole truth so far as its writers see it. All we are editorially concerned with is that they shall express themselves clearly and decently. Whether this gains the goodwill or the illwill of anyone never troubles us in the slightest degree, and we hope it never will.

Freethinker readers will be interested to learn that our ever welcome contributor has in the press a volume of *Memories*, which will be published shortly from the offices of the *Ayrshire Post*. Mr. Millar has an attractive pen in his own department, and we shall look forward to the appearance of *Memories* with considerable interest.

During the Eighteenth Congress of Esperanto, held in Edinburgh from July 31 to August 7, 1926, La Internacia Ligo de Liberpensuloj held a meeting which was attended by fourteen members from five different countries. Mr. R. Stevenson read a paper on the progress of Freethought in Scotland. After an historical sketch of the religious persecutions in Scotland he recalled the dictum of Bradlaugh, "No man ever saw a religion die, but religions do die," and stated that religion in Scotland was rapidly declining. Candidates for the ministry were few and the quality was also declining. He cited the fact that at St. Andrew's University in one year only seven candidates were entered for the clerical profession. A report was read of the activities of the Ligo during the three years of its existence. It publishes its own journal in Esperanto and has articles in various Freethought papers in different countries, some of which have organized Esperanto classes. The membership is 450. The meeting recommended that an Ethical Service be organized at future Esperanto Congresses. Greetings were sent to members who were taking part in the Congress of the Labour flank of Esperanto in Leningrad.

Our highly-civilized press with its accustomed air of smug rectitude has recently been denouncing the barbarity of Spanish bull-fights. Yet it cannot find space to condemn British barbarity equally vile—hunting the carted deer, fox or otter hunting, hare chasing, trapped pigeon slaughtering, and rabbit coursing. If it did, circulations would suffer. In that case, of course, silence is indeed golden.

Dr. Saleeby declares we ought to get our clothes off frequently in order to receive the sunlight upon as large a surface of the skin as possible. Summer sunlight enables the blood to accumulate precious elements for resistance against disease germs. The Doctor "thinks people ought to use the seaside more for sun-bathing." He would like to see, too, our urban parks and squares used for this health-giving practice by those unable to get away from the big towns. According to this, then, the custom of the modern generation to wear as few clothes as possible is based on a sound and healthy instinct. Conversely the practice of the prudens, male and female, who condemn these modern notions and shudder at the sight of bare arms, reveals a thoroughly unhealthy state of mind which is correctly labelled when called Christian. And if Dr. Saleeby's suggestion for the use of public parks becomes generally adopted,

what a shudderful time our Puritans will enjoy, filling the air with their lamentations and protestings!

A reviewer, in noticing *Race and History*, by E. Pittard, makes the pertinent query that has an obvious answer. "It may well be asked," he writes, "how it comes about that only a few of the best universities of Europe or America have made adequate provision for the study of anthropology?" And in the following words he gives matter over which to ponder and grow wise:—

If appeals to prejudice and passion speciously disguised as Racialism, race-consciousness, or what not, are constantly made with success by politicians, it is largely because there exists no educated public opinion capable of recognizing, and hence of resisting, the equivocations latent in terms of this class.

If the study of Adam is allowed to escape from the "old book," the consequences might give less reason to weep over than the spectacle thrust before us at present. As the high-water mark of disintegration the profession of the priest requires a lot of beating.

An Irish Monkeyville.

Out of the considerable correspondence now going on in the press regarding Theology, the Bible, Modernism, etc., I cull the following: "I believe we are at liberty to approach the Bible with a perfectly open mind, and if we do so with earnest and seeking minds, the truth will speak to us from its pages." If this is ironical, it is the highest form of irony, if it is intended seriously, it is imbecility. Does he not know that to possess the open mind is to discredit the Bible?

No believer in Christianity has the open mind with regard to this book. The open mind invariably starts by doubting, then enquiry, discussion and enlightenment follow in due course. The great crime is to doubt in dealing with Christianity or its sacred book—doubt being the super crime. Belief does not permit of doubt, it rests on no evidence, it is not the result of observation and experiment. When it contradicts, as the Bible does, the known and established laws that govern the world, the origin of its inhabitants, its formation, as well as the worlds surrounding us, then, these facts must be jettisoned, and belief in the miraculous substituted.

All through history, the sceptical or scientific mind is the open mind; while the religious or believing mind is the closed one. A sacred book is kept above criticism (in fact it is a crime to criticise it) by the closed minds, and they are produced through it being set up and worshipped; and yet, here is an individual after this has been going on for eighteen centuries saying that you are at liberty to approach the Bible with the open mind. If that were so all and sundry could criticise it, but you cannot, as the writer must surely know.

You are required not to criticise it, but to approach it reverently. Why? If you find it state untruths, that it is absurd or obscene, what obligation is there on your part to approach it reverently. You may indulge in a number of meaningless platitudes about its age, literary value, etc., but you must take care not to say anything derogatory about it, that might hurt the "feelings" of Christians, who are very thin-skinned when being criticised and extremely thick when criticising other people. Do not ridicule it. Bless you, they can't stand ridicule. If you doubt me, write to the press and see what they will allow, or, for a change, try the Broadcasting Company, see what they will pass on the films, or to what extent any of our leading men in literature, science, or art will speak their real mind about Christianity.

Its influence, a malign one, I admit, has been successful in one respect, it has produced the greatest organized hypocrisy ever known. For the manufacture of a race of moral cowards it has shown itself to have no equal, and it has so doped the mass that they delude themselves with the idea that they are free, forgetting that their atmosphere has never permitted them to know what freedom is.

Quite recently we had a Christian clergyman lecturing on toleration, the different hot gospellers were at one another's throats as usual, so he thought a little soothing syrup would be efficacious. A sheep enlarging on the fallacies of vegetarianism, or a burglar holding forth on the rights of property, seem to me less incongruous than a clergyman giving tongue on toleration. Why, his very religion is, of all others, the worst, the most intolerant, the gospel of exclusive salvation. All who do not conform to his peculiar creed are doomed to eternal destruction. What sort of a psychology can be deceived by the above, only the closed mind; the mind that keeps all religions and creeds going, that represents about ninety-nine per cent. of the population in this supposedly enlightened country. But on every side all through the ganut wherever you turn absurdity is patent.

Take, for instance, the question of ethics, this is bound up with their Bible and their priest, and we find the common belief that no morality can exist without religion. Could anything be more absurd? What has morality to do with Christianity—nothing! It existed before it, and merely means the preservation and well-being of the race. Four-fifths of the world utterly reject our sacred book and our Christianity.

I have always thought that the Christian stood on a lower moral or ethical level than a non-Christian. The Freethinker leads a decent life here, because it is a decent life, without hope of reward.

On the other hand, the "true" Christian only leads a decent life here because he hopes for a reward out of all proportion to his merits. A reward that a moneylender amongst the poor or a landlady sub-letting on a pre-war rent are angels in comparison. For his creed is that if he obeys his Church here, and follows her orders, in the world to come he will occupy the boxes, while his fellow creatures who differed from him in their opinions will be burning in the pit, and he will have the pleasure of seeing them cooking. What a nice pleasant sort of creed!

As to the authenticity of the sacred books—the Old and New Testament—modern criticism has utterly exposed the fallacy. The discoveries by churchmen in their own interests will have no weight with impartial critics who are seeking the truth, not engaged in bolstering up a creed. Interpolation and forgery have been reduced to a fine art by ecclesiastics and lying for the glory of God is not a modern innovation. When their power was so great that they moved kings like pawns on a chess board and had armies and navies at their beck and call, it was not the discovery of truth nor the benefit of mankind that was their chief concern—no—it was their creed and, incidentally, themselves. When they were unselfish, and no one will deny them this virtue, in many cases it was for the promulgation of a slave ethic, and an indifferent, if not debased, morality, with the zeal of a fanatic and an utter disregard for the feelings and opinions of others. When, however, this virtue was dispensed with, it became pure and simple, a means to aggrandise themselves and live on others, whilst holding them in mental and, for many years, physical slavery as well.

The great mass of our people are still as ignorant as they were five hundred years ago. Politicians will not tell the truth, professional and business people, when they do know, are afraid of the consequences, scientific men dare not, if they wish to hold their position, the press cater for the mass, and the truth is strictly suppressed, anything critical or derogatory to religion is immediately blue-pencilled. The censor sees that films are only to be used to show "reverent" pictures and scenes about Christianity. The wireless is run by the B.B.C. strictly on orthodox lines—freedom of opinion is not allowed; any discussion on religion being confined to one side only; that is, the Church side. All venues for the dissemination of free opinion on this subject are closely watched in order that any attempt to enlighten the mass and expose the mythical absurdities on which Christianity rests may be nipped in the bud. The crowning exploit, however, is that they have made the British people a source of wonder to others.

The harmony existing amongst the Presbyterians, possibly the strongest and most tyrannical religious body here, may be gauged from the controversy now raging amongst themselves. A notice has appeared calling a "monster demonstration" against German Rationalism and Modernism, and proposed new formula, which is to be held to-night (9/6/26), in the Y.M.C.A. Hall, Wellington Place. To show what they are fighting over in this age of science, 1926, I take the following from the *Belfast Telegraph* of June 8, 1926:—

**PRESBYTERIANS! GIVE EAR!!
NO MIDDLE GROUND.**

Your Father's Faith v. German Rationalism and Modernism.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Bible is the Word of God. The Book judges Man. 2. Jesus Christ is God the Son which no other is. 3. The Birth of Jesus Christ was Supernatural. 4. The Death of Jesus was Expiatory. 5. Man is the product of Special Creation. 6. Man is a Sinner fallen from original righteousness and apart from God's redeeming Grace is hopelessly lost. 7. Man is justified by Faith in the atoning blood of Christ; result supernatural regeneration from above. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Bible contains the Word of God. Man judges the Book. 2. Jesus Christ is a Son of God in the sense in which all men are. 3. The Birth of Jesus Christ was Natural. 4. The death of Jesus was Exemplary. 5. Man is the product of Evolution. 6. Man is the unfortunate victim of Environment but through self-culture can make good. 7. Man is justified by works in following Christ's example; result natural development from within. |
|---|---|

In the above schism we have the Dayton drama enacted over again. We were told by clerics as well as the press that the States was sixty years behind us, whilst under our noses we have an Irish Monkeyville in Belfast, the home of Presbyterian Fundamentalists.

Now I wish to state at once that I have far more respect for the honest, if ignorant, eighteenth century Christian than I have for the so-called Modernist, who clothes his knowledge in the garb of dishonesty. The Fundamentalist has nothing to do with knowledge, but only with belief—he rejects reason, and substitutes faith; evidence is not required but credulity is, first, last, and all the time. The Modernist, under the name of German Rationalism, which is a misnomer, and dishonest in itself, wishes to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, to

reconcile the irreconcilable, and to try and give new life to an old faith by pretending that it is compatible with evolution.

It will not do to try and come in under the wing of evolution by trying to make their belief coincide with modern knowledge. To take No. 5. Man is the product of evolution. Then where does God come in? If man has been evolved from a speck of protoplasm to his present position by changes spread over millions of years, then his creation in one act is inadmissible as well as his Creator. Then (3) if Jesus Christ's birth was natural, then he was not a God, nor can we allow that he worked miracles, or had a miraculous ascension or died as an atonement for our fall. If the fall goes, then the redemption is superfluous. The dishonesty of the Modernists is patent.

What is meant by German Rationalism? Rationalism is based on reason; it is deduction from reason and is universal and not confined to any race or country. To speak of German Rationalism is like talking about Christian virtue. Virtue is a quality common to all; Christians have it, but so have all others. The Modernist is irrational because he will not face the conclusions that modern discoveries bring him up against. He tries to hedge and evade them in order to give his creed a longer life. Whilst adopting the line of least resistance he tries to hold his creed and modern conclusions at the same time, which is impossible. He is, in short, a walking, talking, voting hypocrite.

The Fundamentalist, whilst using his reason in other things, draws the line at his religion. The more absurd its miracles, the more preposterous its statements, the more impossible its ethics, the more tenaciously he clings to it. His mind is a living proof that he is a product of artificial selection by elimination; in short, evolution by artificial selection. If this were not so, in no other way could we account for this type of mind, in an age of science and literature. No evidence has any effect, belief no more.

Mr. Gladstone, President Kruger, and the late Mr. W. J. Bryan in the States are notable examples of brilliant men having a type of mind completely closed where their faith is concerned. In the light of modern knowledge, life exists in everything, and the old divisions of organic and inorganic are only artificial and for convenience. They do not really exist, all may be reduced to electricity, nothing is stable, but everything is motion and undergoing change. This being so, the old ideas, primitive faith, must go by the board, but will it?

I guarantee the Fundamentalists—your "father's fathers"—will have a majority of seventy-five per cent. anyhow, if not more, and that means inoculating the rising generation with this Oriental Mythology at their most impressionable age. We do not ask, nay, we do not expect, that adults educated a generation ago, when our knowledge was not what it is now, we do not ask them to change, but we beg of them not to handicap and withhold the latest knowledge available. Why should our ignorance set the limit to their wisdom?

We have no more right to debar our children from the knowledge of modern conclusions than we have to withhold from them the benefits of sanitation which has reduced the death-rate from 80 per 1,000 to 16 in less than a century. This is the real danger; it is not knowledge or those who possess it, and still more will broadcast it, regardless of consequences to themselves, that will have the say. No, it is the honest, but ignorant, mass who can top the hole. He who can command the heads, irrespective of what is in them, calls the tune. More's the pity.

R. BROWN.

The Myth of Prometheus.

II.

(Concluded from page 506.)

WE thus find that two myths, derived from almost exactly opposite parts of the world, possibly mean the earth was removed farther from the body which supplies us with light and heat. The Bible supports this interpretation in no uncertain manner. In Haggai ii. 6 we find: "For thus saith the Lord of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land." The Roman Catholic Bible has "move" instead of "shake." The word shake or move may refer to an earthquake, but Isaiah is more explicit—xxiv. 18-20:—

The windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard and shall be removed like a cottage.

The Roman Catholic Bible says "removed like a tent of one night." This cannot possibly mean the up and down motion of an earthquake, but means a shifting of position.

If the law of conservation of energy holds good in all cases, we can definitely state, that, if there came into the solar system a huge mass of matter which disrupted a planet and the broken parts of the two colliding bodies were distributed among the other planets, then each of these would be removed farther from the sun. We can take the combined masses of the two bodies as at least equal to masses of the planet Mercury, the moons of all the planets, the rings of Saturn, and the asteroids. How much matter fell into the sun and the planets and disappeared from sight cannot be estimated. Maui, the Devil, must have been of enormous dimensions to have wrecked the solar system in the manner described in the myths.

The next point to be considered is how far was the earth removed from the sun. Even a million millions is too small, because the difference between aphelion and perihelion is three million miles and the ordinary man hardly recognises the variations in the apparent diameters of the sun. The distance which the earth was removed must therefore have been much greater than three million miles. A light is thrown upon this point by the Mayan system of chronology. *The Guide to the Maudslay Collection of Mayan Sculptures*, published by the British Museum authorities, states on page 10:—

Before proceeding farther, it will perhaps be best to give a short account of the chronological system elaborated by the early Maya. Starting with an arbitrary count of 260 days, it seems to have been modified so as to bring it into relation with the solar year. The first attempts were unsuccessful, since it resulted in a succession of periods of 360 days. The addition of five unlucky days brought the time count within one whole day computation of the solar year, but the underlying principle of a 260-day count remained unaltered.

Taking into consideration the high level of Mayan culture, one is struck by the improbable fact that the race, which elaborated such a complex system of chronology, were unaware that the year contained 365 days, and blundered into the discovery. Again, what has a period of 260 days to do with any known scientific fact. It is, to me at least, apparent that the Mayas were dealing with something new, hence their blunders. If, prior to this great catastrophe, the solar year contained only 260 days, then many

of the myths of mankind are easily explainable. The sun would have been then 74 million miles distant, and its apparent diameter would have been 40 minutes, instead of as now 32 minutes. A decrease in size that would have been noticeable and give rise to the Greek myth that the fire was taken from the sun. The heat received by the earth would, by such a change, be decreased in the proportion of sixteen to ten. Such being so, the mammoth elephants could have existed in the forests of England, France, Spain, and Central Asia during the existence of Palæolithic man. That our continent suffered severely is the meaning of the Rape of Europa by Zeus.

Assuming that the plant growth of our planet was at one time much more luxuriant than now, and, also, as I believe our atmosphere was greater, being, according to my calculations, 17 lbs. per square inch, we are enabled to give a reduced estimate of the time taken for the formation of the coal fields, and also for their existence in northern latitudes, thus lessening the antagonism between the geologists and the astronomers regarding the age of the earth. This age has been calculated from various data to be as low as ten million and as high as a thousand million years. The astronomers incline to the lower and the geologists to the higher estimate.

All the religions of the world are based on this great calamity which our earth underwent. The leaders of religion in the subsequent ages have told their followers not only must they believe the facts they related, but also their explanations of the reasons for the occurrence of the events. That the ancient explanations were the best that could have been in those times put forward I have no doubt, but I certainly fail to see why one should be damned in this life and also for eternity because he refuses to believe an ancient theory. One might as reasonably be sent to prison and afterwards hanged, drawn, and quartered for disbelieving in the theory of Phlogiston or even the existence of ether. What had taken place is obvious. The priest made theories, including the conversations of the deities, had been elevated into facts, and these additions were manifestly false, the truth of the whole story was naturally suspected.

In conclusion I must thank the Editor for giving me an opportunity of placing my theory before the public. It is to me extremely doubtful whether any other paper than the *Freethinker* would have published it as a whole, and also whether any publisher would have issued it in book form. This theory, attacking as it does, religion, and also certain branches of science, could only have been put forward in piecemeal had it not been for the existence of a paper devoted to freedom of thought. By, however, putting it forward in piecemeal, and thus not showing the connection between religion, mythology, astronomy, and geology, the continuity of the idea would have been lost, and the theory, right or wrong, have suffered in consequence.

WILLIAM CLARK.

Mr. G. Whitehead's Mission.

Mr. George Whitehead writes: "We had at Blackburn a series of seven very successful meetings, finishing with one on the Sunday evening which was really magnificent. All the week the lectures were listened to with sympathetic attention, and the Blackburn mission ranks altogether as one of the best of the season. Our thanks are due to Mr. Glassbrook and his enthusiastic son for valuable help given during the week. From August 16 to August 29 I shall be lecturing every evening on the Town Hall steps, Bolton." E. M. V.

Correspondence.

AGNOSTICISM OR ATHEISM?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. H. Cutner must be patient with me. I can see I have really an awful lot to learn. I have to learn, for example, that when Mr. Cutner quotes that great Agnostic, Ingersoll, as saying Agnosticism and Atheism are identical, and then intimates that Ingersoll's views are exactly the same as those of that equally great Atheist, Charles Bradlaugh, he is really trying to express the view that Agnosticism is "not Atheism." Yes, I have a lot to learn before I can arise from the mire of Agnosticism in which such minor intellects as Darwin, Ingersoll, Leslie Stephen, Spencer, the "foolish" and "stupid" Huxley (to quote your last editorial) have wallowed—and soar majestically to the sublime heights of Atheism where I may be "militant" and "aggressive" and—who knows?—even get myself locked up for "Blasphemy" one day, with Mr. Cutner and the formidable array of authorities he mentions as my guardian angels, I may take my place among the lesser saints of Atheism and have a day in the Freethought calendar devoted to me as one of the Athanasians of Secularism. On the other hand, I shall probably remain a humble, ignorant, unenlightened and despised Agnostic who sees no merit in orthodoxy of any kind or in "aggression" of any brand, and who is secure in his own invincible ignorance of the matters on which his fellows of all other shades of opinion talk so much and prove so little.

EPIPHATHA.

SIR,—In the event of my election to the Papal office I will appoint Mr. Cook Jesuit-in-Chief! He does, however, begin to show some appreciation of the real issue when he declares that "Agnosticism, in its essence, is applicable only to the purely philosophic aspects of Theism"; it emphasizes my main point, viz. that Agnosticism has to do with certain problems in philosophy and not with the God-idea at all, for Theism, in its essence, is pre-philosophical. All forms of Theism involve the conception of a supernatural personality. I reject God for the same reason that most sensible folk reject the evil, and "Ephphatha" rejects "Jehovah"—it is too absurd for rational discussion. And it is not made less absurd by "shrouding it in the cloak of philosophy." When "philosophy" gets to work on the God-idea it usually divests it of personality to start with—thus destroying its Theistic nature—and the final result is usually some extraordinary proposition, the sheer unintelligibility of which compels Agnosticism. Whatever the result may be it is not the God of Theism.

"All that Atheism necessarily involves is the rejection of all forms of Theism" (C. Cohen: *Theism or Atheism?*). It is the application of common sense to "man's giant shadow," whether expressed in terms of "philosophy" or savagery, or whether accompanied by cosmic guesses or cross-word puzzles. It has nothing to do with ultimate origins or ultimate anything; and even Mr. Cook should see that you can't apply common sense or anything else to that which lies "beyond and above human experience." VINCENT. J. HANDS.

SIR,—I wish to express my appreciation of the trouble taken by "Ephphatha" to bring to a satisfactory issue the controversy on Agnosticism, and to acknowledge with no less appreciation the liberal manner in which you have placed your columns at the disposal of the disputants. When a few enthusiastic dogs get tugging at the same stick, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate them, and I fear it has nearly come to the point when you will positively have to beat us apart and chase us all home.

"Ephphatha's" rejoinder this week rather makes me wonder whether he and I mean quite the same thing when we speak of suspended judgment. When a man says he must suspend his verdict, I understand him to mean that he gives no verdict at all. When he says he must suspend his decision, I take it he makes no decision at all. When he says he must suspend his judgment,

I imagine he has formed no judgment at all. So much for that. Now, if I hold up before you a closed bag, and ask you to judge what is inside it, you are quite justified in refusing to do so. Within limits prescribed by the size of the bag, it is as likely, before investigation, to be any one thing as any other. Now suppose we accept, as one of our premises, that I cannot, in the terms of the case, know any more about the contents of the bag than you do. If, then, I commence to "define and elucidate" to you the nature of those contents, the more elaborate and detailed I make my description, the more probable it becomes that I am wrong. That is one very important point. And here is the next: As regards the question what is in the bag, you rightly suspend judgment. As regards the question whether it is what I say it is, I fail to see that you should suspend judgment at all. On a sheer question of probabilities, you may form the opinion that I must be wrong. To put it colloquially, it would be an astonishing fluke if I were not. At this point let us accept a premise solely for the sake of argument—I mean the premise implied by "Ephphatha" that Ultimate Reality expresses something that exists, and, further, that in the nature of the case it is "beyond our powers" to "define and elucidate" it. Now it is just that Ultimate Reality which is in the theological bag, and he has told us in the course of the discussion that theologians know no more about it than he does, i.e. nothing. Then surely there is a strong *a priori* probability that in Theism they have given us the wrong answer. But over and above this we have "Ephphatha" telling us that to give the correct answer to this ultimate problem is in any case "beyond our powers," which I take to mean beyond human powers. The strong probability, then, becomes a logical certainty. No human answer can possibly be the right one. His case leads to an extreme and dogmatic Atheism, and it would not do for him to object that the Agnostic position refers really to the question, what is the nature of Ultimate Reality? This is not the question at issue at all. It is not what is in the bag that we are asked to decide, but whether it is what the theologian says it is.

With regard to the classification of theological propositions as those which can be settled by evidence, and those which cannot, I must express myself in entire disagreement. My whole point there was that if you cannot settle the question whether or not God is omnipotent, no conceivable amount of evidence will settle a question of possibility in any other direction, because if God *might* be omnipotent, then he *might* upset anything whatsoever in any way whatsoever. I suggest to "Ephphatha" to follow this train of thought resolutely in the direction of the lump of lead.

What do I mean by Atheism? To be perfectly honest I mean more than mere A-theism, or being without God. I mean being without God for the definite reason that I have formed the judgment, the opinion if you will, that He does not exist. I do not necessarily mean that Force does not exist, or Energy, or the totality of things, or something behind things, or Ultimate Reality, or Love, or Good, or Truth, or anything like that; I only mean God. MEDICUS.

FOR FAVOURS RECEIVED.

SIR,—Will you permit me to thank Mr. Vincent J. Hands and Mr. Andrew Millar for their respective notices of *The Fourth Age*. There has been a resounding volume of silence about it from some fifty papers to whom a copy was sent for review. *C'est ne fair rien*. I do not complain. My first gentle critic reads into it "embitterment"; it was written in 1919, but Time since that date has taught me to have a mind like a sieve for some things. Perhaps the Great War was the last between big nations; and understanding of economic causes may, in future, put the brake on passions. It is more sensible to fight for flowers and music than the obscene and stupid activities of international money-lenders; there is reality in the former, but for Hodge to clout Fritz or Jacques under the sign of the three balls is a spectacle that cannot be endured. At least, he will have to know what it is all about, but the newspapers are not fitted for the task of telling him. There

have been recently reports of friction between English tourists and French people; to France we go again this year, and as best I can, I shall talk to fishermen, shopkeepers, and agricultural folk, for a visitor is an ambassador of his own country. In Paris I have French friends waiting with a welcome; Pierre is learning English and is enthusiastic over Dickens. His sister knows Shakespeare through the *Midsummer Night's Dream*; so that the value of the franc is only incidental to our mutual interests when we pass the Customs, and each of us must stand up to our written words with living deeds.

Mr. Millar's remarks on the brevity of the book is natural and true; it must be a reaction towards the many ponderous lectures endured from professors in my search for a straight path in life. That he has written kindly of it in spite of this is encouraging.

WILLIAM REPTON.

NO COMPROMISE.

SIR,—Having just come out of Durham Gaol, where I have been for three months under the E.P.A. Acts, my experience as a declared Atheist may be of interest to Freethinkers in general. When before the Governor I put myself down as of no religion, and consequently it was put on my record sheet, "No chapel." There were some who said I had punished myself unnecessarily by not going to chapel. I found it no hardship to one who can spend his Sundays in reading. There were those who, to escape the monotony of prison life, put themselves down as religious when they were Atheists like myself. I am writing this so that any Freethinker may not be tempted to compromise his convictions on this question. When the assistant chaplain visited me, he enquired as to my reason for being of "no religion," and asked my definition of an Atheist?

I answered that an Atheist was one who did not believe in a god, and could not see God in either earth or sky or sea, or in any part of the universe. His reply was that that was not Atheism, but just Agnosticism. I asked him for his definition, and he said it was no part of his business to define Atheism, and left the cell. My object in writing is to encourage those who may be situated in like circumstances, and to encourage Atheists to declare themselves "No religion and no chapel," thus remaining true to their convictions.

V. M. HARDY.

CONGRATULATIONS.

SIR,—It is with the greatest of pleasure that I have read in the *Freethinker* that Miss Vance has recovered from her recent indisposition. Miss Vance has been for many years the Secretary of the National Secular Society, and her work on behalf of Secularism is well known to all in connection with the movement. I do hope that Miss Vance will be with us for a good many years to continue her work in connection with the above Society in the furtherance of Secularism. On behalf of the officers and members of our Society, and other Freethinkers I hereby convey the best wishes for her speedy and complete recovery.

B. A. LE MAINE,
Hon. Secretary,

The Non-Political Metropolitan Secular Society,
Marble Arch, W.2.

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