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TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Received, from a valued contributor, "The Christian Battle Field." Held over.

Received: 'The Liberal,' the 'Iron Clad Age,' and the 'Investigator.'

L.S.—You object to organisation. Why do you not object to the organic relationship of your brain, heart, lungs, &c? A short course of physiology would probably induce you to change your mind.

Received: 'The Sunday at Home,' a religious weekly serial published at Dunedin. The tone is evangelical.

H.S.W.—Thanks for paper. The conclusion is worthy of a great reasoner, and "Slaves-of-anti-Biblist" must silence the Freethinkers of Hokitika.

The Secretary of the Wanganui Freethought Association acknowledges the receipt of a large volume entitled 'Bible myths and their Parallels in Heathen Mythology,' from our friend "Blue Pencil."

The Freethought Review.

WANGANUI, N.Z., APRIL 1, 1884.

MATERIALISM.

It must be confessed that the crude and superficial materialism which was popularised by such writers as Voltaire and Baron D'Holbach (so-called), and in more recent times by the author of the "Vestiges of Creation," Dr. E. Buchner, and others, has tended to bring discredit upon a mode of conceiving the universe which, properly presented, is essentially sound. I say essentially sound, in the sense that a monistic theory of the two worlds known to us as the unconscious and the conscious, may be made perfectly self-consistent, not in the sense that any cognition of "things in themselves" is, or can be, possible to the human intellect. As Mr. G. H. Lewes acutely remarks in his "Problems of Life and Mind"—"To know things as they are to us is all we need to know, all that is possible to be known; a knowledge of the 'super-sensible'—were it gained—would, by the very 'fact of coming under the conditions of knowledge, only be knowledge of its relations to us,—the 'knowledge would still be relative, phenomenal.'" In this respect, at least, those two great metaphysical champions of orthodoxy, Sir William Hamilton and Mr. Mansel, are at one with Mr. Lewes. Indeed, Mr. Mansel prefixed the following quotation from Sir William Hamilton's "Discussions on Philosophy" to his celebrated Lampton lecture, "The Limits of Religious Thought":—"Our whole knowledge of mind and of matter is relative, conditioned—relatively conditioned. Of things absolutely or in themselves, be they external, be they internal, we know nothing, or know them only as incognisable, and become aware of their incomprehensible existence only as this is indirectly and accidentally revealed to us, through certain qualities related to our faculties of knowledge, and which qualities, again, we cannot think as unconditioned, irrelative, existent in and of themselves. All we know is therefore phenomenal—

"phenomenal of the unknown." I have premised this much because the opponents of modern materialism—or, as I should prefer to call it, MONISM, to avoid misleading associations—constantly speak of materialism as if it was an attempt to explain the universe in the ontological sense, as to which all materialists, who have really thought out the subject, agree with Mr. Leslie Stephen, and "utterly disbelieve in any so-called ontology," "regarding it as a barren region haunted by shadowy chimeras, mere spectres, which have not life enough in them even to be wrong, nonentities veiled under dexterously woven masses of verbiage." What the ontologist attempts is to "spin out of his own mind a demonstration of the ultimate nature of things in general," and fails, simply because a demonstration or an explanation can only mean a perception that some particular fact is included in some more general or at least better known fact, and the totality of being cannot be referred to any higher generalisation than itself. From Kant to Hegel, the whole history of the profoundest speculative philosophy only shows that "the greatest athlete cannot get off his own shadow."

"A man is a sound reasoner when his thoughts accurately reflect the external world," and this implies not only a logical mode of thinking, but getting rid of illusions due to an earlier stage of thought. Metaphysics have been useful, in Berkeley's phrase, so far as they have laid the dust we have ourselves raised, while building up the edifice of knowledge. They have, too, taught us the limit of our powers, and perhaps strengthened those powers themselves. They are the gymnastics of our youth, but may well be abandoned in our manhood for labours which, if less arduous, are certainly more productive. Apart, then, from the domain of the unknowable, a glance at the history of opinion teaches that very early in the evolution of thought, as Mr. Herbert Spencer has lately reminded us, the human imagination transferred its own consciousness to the external world, but considered both material. Most of the ancient Greek philosophers held a similar opinion, and so did many of the early Christian fathers. The idea that the thinking substance, or soul, was immaterial seems to have been first brought into prominence by Plato, and was held by the later fathers, and, through Aristotle, by the Schoolmen, and is the common opinion now. Along with this opinion similar notions prevailed as to the nature of the Gods or God. God and soul were and are affiliated ideas, and have their common origin in conditions proper to the "theological stage" in the history of humanity. It is no doubt possible to represent all experience in terms of mind, as Berkeley, Mill, and many others, have done, and then to claim a reality for mind which is denied for matter, which is indeed substantially the position assumed by Indian philosophy; but the fallacy involved in this conclusion was long ago exposed by Hume, and Mr. Spencer has shown in his "Psychology," "that the thing primarily known, is not that a sensation has been experienced, but that there exists an outer object." It is impossible to condense the admirable reasoning by which he establishes and illustrates the doctrine of "Transfigured Realism," which means, that however unlike our sensations may be to the cause of them, they have an external cause; that in short the "object of cognition has an independent existence." We find, in fact, that just as a legal opinion which is contrary to common sense is probably bad law, so a metaphysical opinion (such as pure idealism), which is contrary to common sense, is probably bad metaphysics, and is certainly false science. We have then practically only to deal with that world of matter and force which science recognises according to its actual relations as known to us, and here we are at once met by the acknowledged fact that within our experience mind never exists apart from matter. More than this, Geology teaches that at a period, estimated by Sir William Thompson at not less than 100 million, or more than 400 million years ago, our globe had only sufficiently cooled down on its surface to support life in its lowest forms, and therefore we may infer that somewhere about that period life and possibly consciousness began to emerge from what we call inorganic matter. But say the opponents of