

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

LITTLE JESUS.

THE four canonical Gospels are remarkably silent about the youth of Jesus. They tell us of his birth, or rather two of them do; they introduce him again at the age of twelve, and a third time at the opening of his ministry when he "began to be about thirty years of age." Singularly enough, on the hypothesis that the Gospel life of Christ is history and not mythology, these are the very ages of the salient points in the Egyptian story of Horus, who, with his virgin mother Isis, was worshipped for centuries and perhaps millenniums before the rise of the Star of Bethlehem; twelve being the oriental age of puberty, and thirty the ancient age of manhood.

All we know of Jesus, if we know anything, is his public career, which only lasted for three years; although, indeed, Irenæus, one of the principal Fathers of the second century, and the first who mentions the four Gospels, distinctly says that he lived to the age of fifty. Then again, if we subtract all the miracles, which many Christians find it more and more difficult to believe, so little is left that Jesus becomes an infinitely more shadowy figure than Buddha or Mohammed. And before the opening of his public life all is obscurity, except for the one occasion when he went up as a boy with Mary and Joseph to Jerusalem.

Now this is very tantalising, not to say provoking. Even if the evangelists thought the childhood of Jesus of no importance, they might have told us what he was doing between twenty and thirty. That is generally the season when a man's wild oats are sown if he has any. Was Jesus fond of the ladies, or were they as fond of him as they have been since? Did he court, or flirt, or even "spoon"? Did he win the heart of a Jewish maiden who died prematurely and saddened his life? Or did he keep fancy-free, and only snatch a harmless kiss now and then from a Semitic maiden with pouting lips and eyes of sleepy fire? Was he occupied all day in Joseph's workshop? Were his evenings spent at home? Did he always look sedate, or did he sometimes, on festive occasions, take an extra glass of the "wine that cheereth God and man"?

What was Jesus doing as a boy? Did he go to school? Was it the fortune of some Jewish school-master to teach God Almighty? Did he begin chiselling and planing at fourteen or fifteen, and was he dexterous or clumsy at the business? How did he get on with Joseph, and Joseph with him? What was his reputation among other boys? Did they regard him as a milksop or a brick? Was he ever in a street fight? Did he ever come home to his mother with a sanguine nose and a suspicious blackness under the eyes? Was he prone to taking the part of smaller boys when beaten by their superiors in size and weight? Or did he walk through the life of a schoolboy with indifference, and only begin to show any positive quality when he started preaching?

None of these questions can be answered, and the Christians are content to remain in ignorance. They are an incurious race. Perhaps they think they have enough incredibility to swallow without troubling for more. But the early Christians had more curiosity, and a stouter stomach for marvels. And they were well supplied by the scribbling impostors of that age. Among the gospels which are styled apocryphal by later and more fastidious generations, there is one called the Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ. This document must have been very interesting to the women and the young folk of both sexes. It was in use in the second century, and was partially credited, at least, in succeeding ages by Eusebius, Athanasius, and Chrysostom. Portions of it have passed into Christian and oriental tradition. There is even a distinct reminiscence of it in Milton's *Ode to the Nativity*.

According to this gospel, which is probably as accurate as those in the New Testament, the little Jesus soon displayed his supernatural powers. While he was in swaddling clothes, and sucking his mother's breast, he cured an old woman of an unspecified malady. Perhaps it was the gout, or rheumatism, or sciatica; or perhaps he cured her of old age by making her twenty years younger. Anyhow, this old woman vowed to serve him, and she carefully preserved the fragment of his circumcision in an alabaster box of old oil of spikenard; indeed, it was out of this very box that Mary afterwards anointed the Master's head and feet.

When little Jesus was taken to the Temple, and blessed by old Simeon, the angels stood round him adoring, like a king's guard. Down in Egypt the principal idol fell prone, owing to his being in the city, and a possessed boy was cured of devils by touching his napkins which were hung on the clothes-line—the demons flying out of the lad's mouth in the shape of crows and serpents.

After frightening a lot of robbers, little Jesus cured a tongue-tied young woman by kissing her, to the great delight of all the inhabitants of the town, who thought that God and his angels were come down among them. He also assisted a lady in peculiar circumstances. Going to the river to bathe, the devil flew at her in the form of a serpent, coiled himself about her body, and would not be dislodged. But little Jesus sent him packing, and the next day the relieved lady gave him a washing in perfumed water, which she kept as a memento of the incident. A girl standing by, being washed in this water, was cured of leprosy; and some time afterwards the leprous son of a great queen was healed by the same treatment. Unfortunately that water is lost, or it would have saved Father Damien a world of labor and self-sacrifice.

The next exploit of little Jesus seems suggested by the Book of Tobit. He assisted a young bridegroom who had been prevented by sorcerers from consummating his marriage. There was also a young man who had been turned into a mule by witchcraft; little Jesus was placed on his back, and the mule became a young man again. After this we may credit the

story of the Golden Ass so charmingly told by Apuleius and Lucian.

At Matarea little Jesus caused a well to spring forth, and a balsam was produced from his perspiration. At Memphis he saw Pharaoh, and did many miracles which are not recorded severally.

Returning to Bethlehem, he cured two sick youths with the water in which he was washed. This seems to have been a common miracle. It is wonderful that Joseph did not set up a sanatorium and make a big fortune out of the babe's ablutions. As he had to keep the child, without begetting him, it was only fair that he should make what he could by the connection.

Saint Bartholomew, when a child, was cured of a deadly sickness by being placed on the bed of little Jesus. What healed him was the smell of the Savior's garments, which was probably far from delicious. A leprous woman and a leprous princess (we are not told of what family) were cured by the contents of his washtub.

A more startling miracle was performed in the case of a young girl, whose blood was sucked every night by Satan in the form of a dragon. She also patronised the washtub, and took one of little Jesus's napkins; with this she confronted the dragon, and he fled from her for ever.

Judas Iscariot is next brought upon the scene. It appears that he lived in the same village as little Jesus, and was a very naughty boy. Satan got inside him and made him bite the people around him. In default of such victims, he bit his own flesh. On one occasion, while out at play, he tried to bite Jesus, but could not; he then punched little Jesus in the ribs and made him cry. At that moment Satan flew out of Judas and ran away like a mad dog.

When seven years of age, Jesus was playing with other boys. They made clay horses, donkeys, and birds, and Jesus made his figures walk, and fly, and eat and drink. For this he was avoided as a sorcerer, and had afterwards to play by himself.

Little Jesus also took all the clothes out of a dyer's shop, put them in the fire, and brought them out again with the proper colors. He was also of great assistance to Joseph, who was a clumsy carpenter; when the things he made were too short Jesus stretched them, and when they were too long he shortened them. Once he spent two years in making a new throne for the King of Jerusalem—a gentleman who only existed in the story-teller's pious imagination. When he came to fix it, he found it was of the wrong size; so Joseph laid hold of one side and Jesus of the other, and they pulled it out to the required dimensions.

Little Jesus turned boys into kids, and the kids into boys again. He made a serpent, that had bitten a boy called Simon, suck the poison out of the wound, so that the serpent died of its own venom. He cured James, who had been bitten by a viper, by blowing on the wound. Being accused of throwing a boy from the top of a house in playing, he made the dead boy cry out that another lad was the culprit. He also gathered up in his mantle a pitcher-full of water that Mary had spilt on the ground. On a Sabbath day he played at making clay birds, and being rebuked for his desecration, he made the clay sparrows fly away chirping. The boy who rebuked him was sent to kingdom-come for his presumption.

Little Jesus went to school to learn his letters, but the precocious child taught his schoolmaster, who exclaimed "I believe this boy was born before Noah." A more learned master offering to whip him, the poor pedagogue's hand withered, and he soon died. When Jesus went up to the Temple, at the age of twelve, he argued with the doctors on law, astronomy, physics, and philosophy. But afterwards he concealed his miraculous powers and knowledge until he was baptised by John, when the Holy Ghost

roosted upon his head or shoulder in the form of a dove.

Here endeth the Gospel of the Infancy. It delighted, and possibly edified, many of the early Christians, who accepted it as the Word of God. It is now treated, at least by Protestants, with neglect or contempt. But its stories of Jesus are essentially of the same character as those in the four Gospels. They are told with less art and unmixed with doctrine, yet this is a proof of their primitive origin. Had they been redacted by the writers of the third and fourth centuries they would not have displayed so faithfully the childish credulity of those who first developed the legends of Jesus Christ.

G. W. FOOTE.

PAINE'S APHORISMS.

It has justly been objected to proverbs, maxims, and aphorisms, that they are seldom exactly true. But this is, as Stuart Mill observes is, unfortunately "an objection to all human knowledge." An aphorism should not be taken as an axiom. Time does not permit of setting down every possible qualification of any statement, and the good writer is he who gets nearest to the mark, not with a hundred little taps, but at one single blow.

Thomas Paine had all the leading qualities of a great style. His thought was clear and simple, his expression direct, forcible, and illuminated by those strokes of invention which show the master.

Paine's incisive turn of mind led him to lay down some pregnant saying, or telling truth as the keynote, which was at once the starting-point and summary of his theme. The laconic compactness of many of his sentences warrant their being classed as aphorisms, for aphorisms should be, as Sancho Panza says of his proverbs, "short sentences drawn from a long experience," or, as some others have said, "the wisdom of many concentrated in the wit of one." Paine's aphorisms, however, are not like so many proverbs and sayings, mere trite truisms, which serve as substitutes for thought—they are rather thought-provokers.

"These are the times that try men's souls," he wrote at the head of No. 1 of his *Crisis*, published during the American War of Independence, and the saying became the war-cry of the colonists. Little enough in itself, the phrase was just the spark to fire enthusiasm and make his readers feel their times were equal to all that had gone before, and contained as great opportunities for heroism.

Another phrase, "He pities the plumage and forgets the dying bird,"* exposes the sentimentalism of Burke with his fond regard for dead chivalry and his callousness to the sufferings of the "swinish multitude." Shelley was so struck with Paine's phrase that he made it the title of one of his pamphlets. On Burke, too, Paine used the telling simile, in his *Letter to the Addressers*, "He rose like a rocket, he fell like the stick."

"A man may write himself out of reputation, when nobody else can do it," says Paine, and the caution is one that should be kept before the minds of prolific authors. "The press is a tongue to the eye," is another of his suggestive similes.

"From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step" is a saying ascribed to Napoleon. It was, however, taken from Paine, for whose works Napoleon, in early life, expressed great admiration, saying the *Rights of Man* should be printed in letters of gold. What Paine says in the *Age of Reason* (pt. ii., *ad fin*, note) is, "One step above the sublime makes the ridiculous,

* My friend, Mr. W. H. Burr, who contends that Paine was Junius, may be glad to notice the parallel of Junius speaking of the "divinity that doth hedge a king" saying, "The feather that adorns the royal bird supports his flight. Strip him of his plumage and you fix him to the earth."

and one step above the ridiculous makes the sublime again."

"The pen is mightier than the sword" is another saying found in Lord Lytton's play of *Richelieu*, yet, if my memory does not deceive me, I have come across the same sentiment in Paine. "A man never turns a rogue, but he turns a fool" is another of those sayings of Paine which have been attributed to various authors, and which is vastly more suggestive in its inexactness than any careful disquisition.

How much geology is anticipated and called up by his saying "The caverns of the earth are museums of antiquity." How true is Paine's saying that "the learning any person gains from school education serves only, like a small capital, to put him in the way of learning for himself afterwards."

"It is error only, and not truth that shrinks from inquiry," is a saying which occurs in one of his political pamphlets, but is especially applicable to religion. "If I do not believe as you believe, it proves that you do not believe as I believe, and this is all it proves." Of mystery, he says, "Mystery is the antagonist of truth. It is a fog of human invention that obscures truth, and represents it in distortion." How forcible, too, is the observation that "any system of religion that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a child cannot be a true system."

What can be better than this, on citing the Bible against the Bible: "False testimony is always good against itself;" this on the story of the Crucifixion: "They make the transgressor triumph and the almighty fall"; or this, on the Incarnation: "The belief that Jesus Christ is the son of God, begotten by the Holy Ghost, a being never heard of before, stands on the authority of an old man's dream."

Many of our best writers, from Bacon downwards, have dealt with death, but few have excelled this from the *Crisis*: "Death is not the monarch of the dead, but of the dying. The moment he obtains a conquest he loses a subject."

"The world is my country and to do good my religion" is a splendid saying, dividing at once the cosmopolitan humanity of the *Age of Reason* from the exclusive intolerance of the past.* "Where there is no liberty there is my country" is an equally splendid phrase which Paine used on coming to Europe just before the French Revolution.

I have only culled a few of the sayings of Paine almost haphazard. It would be easy to gather a textbook of political wisdom from his writings, but such passages I have avoided. Pope, who perhaps herein magnified his own office, declared that "Nature's chief masterpiece is writing well," and Dr. Johnson said that anyone who wished to attain this art must give his days and nights to the study of Addison. I venture the suggestion he will also do well to devote an odd hour or so to the study of the much-abused "rebellious needleman," Thomas Paine.

J. M. WHEELER.

"What's the admission to this here show, stranger?" "No charge for admission, sir; this is a church." "Wall, for a free show there don't seem to be much of a rush."

A writer in *Notes and Queries* has re-opened the question of the derivation of the word "religion," citing Cicero for *relegare*, to read again; Lactantius for *relegare*, to rebind; St. Augustine for *re-eligare*, to re-elect; and Aulus Gellius, for the ascetic view, *relinquere*, to leave. The controversy about the word is, however, simple compared with the controversy as to religion itself.

* The *Age of Reason*, by the way, is a capital title, which we conjecture may have been suggested by the famous phrase of Burke's, "the age of chivalry is gone." The *Rights of Man*, another good title, was perhaps suggested by Burke's speech on the Army Estimates, Feb. 9, 1790, in which he said the Revolution had set up a sort of institute and digest of anarchy called the Rights of Man.

A HELPLESS GOD.

BY HUGH O. PENTECOST.

(From the *Twentieth Century*).

[CONCLUDED.]

"Ah, but," says my Theistic or Christian friend, "give him time; God will make everything right in his own good time." Give him time! If you will give us time we ourselves can do what is necessary to be done, without God's help. But in the meantime see how many people are hungry, and suffering the torments of the damned—privation, fear, mortification, sickness, ignorance, despair and death at the end of a life that has yielded little but pain and defeat.

"It is a matter of evolution," says the man who tries to fit Darwinism into his theology. Then let us worship evolution, or curse it because it is so slow, but let us not say we have a God if he is bound hand and foot by evolution.

I protest that I do not mean to be irreverent. If I could in any way find a good god, and he would make me understand how his goodness and the world's badness are reconcilable, I would worship him. I cannot now see how he could justify himself for his failure to do something, but if he could I would worship him. If he would satisfactorily explain to me how it happens that the people who say they know him best, know all about his purposes and his will, know that he would do a great deal for the world if the rulers, and legislators, and monopolists, and policemen would only let him, are generally themselves the very people who are hindering him from doing anything, or else are they who do all they can to strengthen those who are standing in his way—if he would satisfactorily explain this curious and puzzling circumstance I would worship him. If I could find this God I would point out to him a number of causes that make the people poor and miserable—they are not far to seek; thousands of persons understand them as well as I—and then if he would satisfactorily explain to me why he does not influence the minds and move the hearts of the people to see these causes and remove them—they are all removable—I would worship him.

I do not mean to be irreverent; I do not hate God, as people say. How can I hate a being whom I never saw, and who never did anything for or against me that I know of? I do not wish to escape the restraints of religion for the purpose of doing evil. I am willing to submit my daily life to the scrutiny of anybody, and will venture to say that it is not more stained with evil than that of the average Church member. I would even be willing to stand a comparison with those who are a little above the average. I do not wish to uselessly crash into people's beliefs, from which they derive comfort or moral strength. But I do wish you to be sensible; to not hug delusions to your breasts; to see clearly that there is no God who can do anything, either for good or evil; that the word God is only a word which means nothing at all; that the clergyman is not the messenger of God, but just a man hired to preach many things that are not true, and whose salary would at once be cut off if he did not defend, by speech or silence, the causes of poverty and misery; that the lawmaker, office-holder, and policeman are not God's ministers of justice, but simply men hired by the persons who spend the taxes, to uphold the system that breeds poverty and misery; that everything that is done to make human life less miserable must be done by men of thought and action; that nothing can be hoped for from God, for if there is any God he is deaf, dumb, blind, and paralyzed—a helpless God.

Teacher: "Now, can any one of the pupils tell me what is meant by the nave of the church?" Bright Boy: "The man who takes up the collection."

THOSE PIGS ONCE MORE.

HUXLEY'S reply to Gladstone in the current number of the *Nineteenth Century* is a charge of dynamite blowing his *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture* to fragments. After giving abundant reason to believe that the keepers of the herd of swine were not, as alleged by Mr. Gladstone, "Hebrews bound by the Mosaic law," but Gentiles, he returns to the real misdemeanor, the wanton destruction of other people's property. He says:—

"But really, whether they that kept the swine were Jews, or whether they were Gentiles, is a consideration which has no relevance whatever to my case. The legal provisions which alone had authority over an inhabitant of the country of the Gadarenes were the Gentile laws sanctioned by the Roman suzerain of the province of Syria, just as the only law which has authority in England is that recognised by the sovereign Legislature. Jewish communities in England may have their private code, as they doubtless had in Gadara. But an English magistrate, if called upon to enforce their peculiar laws, would dismiss the complainants from the judgment seat, let us hope with more politeness than Gallio did in a like case, but quite as firmly. Moreover, in the matter of keeping pigs we may be quite certain that Gadarene law left everybody free to do as he pleased, indeed encouraged the practice rather than otherwise. Not only was pork one of the commonest and one of the most favorite articles of Roman diet; but, to both Greeks and Romans, the pig was a sacrificial animal of high importance. Sucking pigs played an important part in Hellenic purificatory rites; and everybody knows the significance of the Roman *suovetaurilia*, depicted on so many bas-reliefs."

"Suppose a modern English Sabbatarian fanatic, who believes, on the strength of his interpretation of the fourth commandment, that it is a deadly sin to work on the 'Lord's Day,' sees a fellow Puritan yielding to the temptation of getting in his harvest on a fine Sunday morning—is the former justified in setting fire to the latter's corn? Would not an English court of justice speedily teach him better?"

HEAVEN ON THE STAGE.

They get a lot of work out of Heaven, on the stage. Heaven does all the odd jobs for them that they don't want to go to the trouble and expense of doing for themselves. Heaven's chief duty, on the stage, is to see to the repayment of all those sums of money that are given or lent to the good people. It is generally requested to do this to the tune of "a thousand-fold," an exorbitant rate, when you come to think of it.

Heaven is also expected to take care that the villain gets properly cursed, and to fill up its spare time in bringing misfortune on the local landlord. It has to avenge everybody, and to help all the good people whenever they are in trouble. And they keep it going in this direction.

And when the hero leaves for prison, Heaven has to take care of his wife and child till he comes out; and if this isn't a handful for it we don't know what would be.

Heaven, on the stage, is always on the side of the hero and heroine, and against the police.—*Jerome K. Jerome*, "In *Stage Land*," p. 25.

Our esteemed and ever-lively contemporary, the *Ironclad Age*, of Indianapolis, Nov. 29, reprints Mr. Wheeler's "Why we Attack the Clergy" and Mr. T. Clark's lines on Job from our pages. A Happy New Year to you, Dr. Monroe. May the shadow of the *Ironclad Age* never grow less!

Col. Ingersoll nails another lie on the head, as the following from the *Chicago Inter-Ocean* will show:

A clipping was shown me to-day from your paper, in which it is stated:

1. That ten years ago I made a prediction that ten years from that time two theatres would be built for one church; and
2. That Chaplain McCabe had written me a letter calling my attention to the prediction, and stating that the Methodists were building four churches a day.

There are two mistakes in this article: First, I never made the prediction; and second, I never received any letter from Chaplain McCabe on the subject. With these exceptions the article is correct.

R. G. INGERSOLL.

REVIEWS.

Discovery of the Action of Oxygen on the Heart and Brain. By E. T. CRAIG.—In this pamphlet Mr. Craig claims to have been the original discoverer that excess of carbonic acid in the blood was the cause of heart disease, and cites a letter from Dr. C. Black, who made this discovery known in the pages of the *Lancet*, in which he says: "My testimonial makes you safe on the question of priority."

The Status of American Spiritualism. By J. J. MORSE, 80 Needham Road, Kensington, Liverpool; 1890.—Mr. Morse is a spiritist lecturer who paid a four years' visit to the United States. His account of the movement in that land of its rebirth will repay the perusal of those interested in spiritism, whether as a phase of philosophy or survival of superstition. Mr. Morse confesses: "There can be no question that the bulk of the public movement has been considerably contracted, that the meetings are not so large as in former years, that the places holding meetings are not so numerous, that the effort to sustain meetings involves a greater strain, and that the quality of many of the lectures does not equal that of former years." The Mind Cure, Christian Science, Theosophy and other phases of credulity have superseded spiritism in the minds of those ever on the look out for some new fad, while also, as Mr. Morse observes, "numerous exposures of rascality have left their slimy tracts across our fair fields." Mr. Morse does not mention the recantation and reversion of Maggie Fox, one of the original founders of modern spiritism. He gives the usual statement about the number of active spiritualists being between three and four millions. But the circulation of the three or four weekly papers advocating it does not corroborate this estimate. With this exception Mr. Morse's statement seems fair and moderate. Spiritualism is among the forces helping to break up Christian orthodoxy, even if it replaces it with another delusion.

THE SALE OF SOULS.

Here is an advertisement from the circular of an Ecclesiastical Office which does business by selling the cure of souls: "The Advowson of a Very Desirable Rectory.—Situation very beautiful and healthy. Soil, gravel. Climate dry and bracing. Two miles from railway station, and within easy reach of several good towns. Good hunting, shooting and fishing. Society select. Population, 290. Income, net, £784 15s. 9d. Weekly services. Very little visiting required. The Church and Rectory House are in good condition and certified by Diocesan surveyor. Immediate possession."

This means £780 a year, with next to nothing to do, to any sky-pilot who can lay down sufficient money to purchase the living. But how can the buyer be assured of immediate possession? The matter is worked in this way. The person in possession, presuming him to be the seller, cannot resign, but what he can do is to accept another living, whereupon his own becomes *ipso facto* vacant. Or if, as is usually the case, the possessor of the living is not the owner, and refuses to die or quit, he is offered a consideration to accept another living. The clerical agents keep in hand a small stock of meagre livings of the class known as donatives, and these are used as instruments for the removal of a man who is wanted out of the way. The latter accepts one of the livings, and a certain sum of money which, of course, comes either directly or indirectly out of the agent's clients' pocket, and leaves the road open for the future incumbent.

A peculiarity of these "donatives" is that they are, to a great extent, independent of the bishops. They can be accepted or resigned without his interference, and so, judiciously used, serve for the traffickers in souls a very useful purpose.

The *Brighton Guardian* replies to a letter from Mr. C. E. Ford, in which that gentleman gives the criminal statistics of Hindustan as under:

Europeans	criminals	1 in	274
Eurasians	"	1	509
Native Christians	"	1	799
Mahommedans	"	1	856
Hindoos	"	1	1361
Buddhists	"	1	3787

The *B. G.* says Mr. Ford is somewhat rash in assuming that the introduction of Europeans always means the introduction of Christianity. But how is it the native baptised Christians have a larger proportion of criminals than the native Hindoos and Buddhists. Christ said "By their fruits ye shall know them."

ACID DROPS.

Price Hughes has been spouting at Accrington and boasting as usual of the power of Nonconformity. He instanced its driving Parnell from the leadership of the Irish party, although that was done (if it is done) principally by Mr. Gladstone's letter, and Mr. Gladstone is a Churchman. After boasting in this way, it was curious to hear the little Methodist Pope admitting that the men of every country in Europe are regularly absenting themselves from places of worship. Well, and what is the reason of this? Oh, says Price Hughes, it is because we don't apply the principles of Jesus Christ. Stuff and nonsense, sir! It is because Christianity is played out, intellectually and morally. Men of sense and education will have nothing to do with it, unless they are committed to it and their living lies that way. They leave it to showmen like Booth and epicene spouters like Price Hughes, well aware that as it began in lies so in lies it will end.

Price Hughes takes his wife about with him as the head of the Sisterhood. This is a leaf out of Booth's book, but Mrs. Hughes will never equal the woman whose corpse was trundled about by the Grand Old Showman.

By the way, Price Hughes, like the consummate (though not colossal) humbug he is, talked to the Accrington folk for half an hour on the drink question. He has the impudence to pretend that Christianity is in favor of teetotalism. Now, in the first place, it is not, for the Bible contains many a good drinking text, and the most miraculous of Jesus Christ's miracles was the turning of seventy-five gallons of water into wine; and, in the next place, what a time of day to find out that the Bible is a temperance book! It was never discovered until the Temperance movement won ground without the help of the clergy. When the clergy saw the thing was succeeding they shouted "Hallelujah! we did it!" It is a lie; it is also a lie to say that the Bible favors teetotalism; and it is a greater lie to say that Price Hughes has any partiality for the truth.

Said one of the Indian ghost-dancers to an agent who wished to have dancing stopped, "It is our Church just the same as the white man's Church, only that we don't pass round the hat."

It is not generally known how large a feature dancing was of ancient religious worship, though Bible readers have some hint in David's dancing before the ark, and in Ps. cxlix., 3, "Let them praise his name in the dance." Our word *choir* comes from the Greek "to dance," and dancing was at one time a part of worship, even in the Christian Church. Corybantic Christianity did not commence with the Salvation Army.

The Indian Messiah's full name is Johnson Sides, not merely Johnson, as we gave it out recently. Let us be accurate about the names of the white and red men's gods and saviors—Jesus Christ and Johnson Sides.—*Ironclad Age*.

Mr. Pain (we are glad he spells it without the *e*), dating from the "Prizeries," Folkestone, advertises a curious Prize Competition. The entrance fee is two shillings, receivable of course by Mr. Pain; and the prizes are from £30 to £1, also payable by the said Mr. Pain. The competitors have to count the number of times certain letters occur in stated portions of the Bible. Mr. Pain's method of earning a living is, to say the least of it, peculiar; and our readers will notice with a smile that he baits his hook for Bible fish.

The Rev. T. N. R. James, rector of Luckington, Wilts., got off easy with a fine and costs of £7 16s. for hitting a choir-boy over the head with a Prayer Book, in brutal fashion. If the boy had hit the parson he would probably have got a month.

An action for libel seems likely to arise out of the Passion Play. A German lady novelist has just published a story in which the Christus of the play is made to fall in love with a lady of dubious propriety. The scene is laid in

our own time; and as Joseph Mayer has played the part of Christus for three decades in succession, he considers himself libelled by the story, and has demanded redress.

In one of Carlyle's letters in Wemyss Reid's *Life of Lord Houghton*, he speaks thus of religion and priests in Belgium: "They have still a remnant of quasi-worship among them, and crowds of the nastiest, ugly, fat priests, whom you could not occasionally divest yourself of a horrible passing desire to slaughter, and cure as bacon."

The Rev. N. E. Howe, vicar of Swindon, has been suspended from his living for three years for improper conduct with a young lady.

Another little massacre of Christians at Sze-chuen indicates that the heathen Chinese has not lost his loathing of the foreign devils and their religion. In the eyes of the celestial Christianity is a pernicious religion which comes to destroy filial affection, the basis of their own morality and religion.

The appeal of Father Cas, the Belgian missionary, to the High Court of Calcutta against the sentence of one hundred rupees fine, or two months' imprisonment, passed upon him by the magistrate of Lohardugga, Bengal, has not merely failed, but has resulted in the substitution of a sentence of eight months' imprisonment. This curious case appears to have arisen in a quarrel between the missionary and a Bengal Zemindar which resulted in a hostile affray with Zemindar's retainers, in the course of which shots were fired on both sides, and Father Cas broke the arm of one of his antagonists by a ball from a Winchester rifle. Father Cas, it appears, after the manner of missionaries, forced his presence where he was not wanted.

Thomas Henderson, a prominent pietist of Newark and secretary to the Barnbygate Wesleyan Sunday-school, is wanted to answer a charge under the new Criminal Law Amendment Act.

Last Sunday evening a parson and a lady were sitting in a certain railway waiting-room. A porter was cleaning lamps outside, and as he worked he whistled a popular hymn. The parson and the lady looked pleased. *She* remarked that the Church service was ingrained in the working people's minds, and *he* said "Yes, in spite of much Atheism being abroad." Just then the porter started singing—

There was a man in Kensal Green,
He was an ancient sire,
He drank so much of whiskey hot
That he set the Thames on fire.

Curtain! N.B.—We didn't hear this from the parson.

Was Moses a Writer? is the *ad captandum* title of a book by the Rev. A. Sayce. One might fancy he had some evidence that the traditional law-giver went in for journalism. Not at all. All he does is to show that the art of writing was in existence before the time ascribed to Moses, and then you can jump to the inference that Moses wrote down the elaborate ceremonial laws of tabernacle worship in the wilderness—if you like.

The *Maldon Express* records the death of an eccentric, who, when walking out, would never look back, fearing that if he did so he would, like Lot's wife, be changed into a pillar of salt. If anyone marvels that this old legend should exercise such senseless influence at the present day, they should observe that Jesus Christ said "Remember Lot's wife," and this utterance is regarded as divine by all orthodox Christians.

A clear proof that Christian charity don't begin at home. First Tramp: "Where did you get that fine overcoat?" Second Tramp: "In the big house at the corner." First Tramp: "I went there this morning shivering with cold, and they wouldn't give me a rag." Second Tramp: "I didn't ask for clothes for myself. I told 'em it was for the poor heathen in Central Africa."

It is reported that an occurrence unprecedented in any religious service happened at a confirmation held at St. Paul's Church, Deptford, by the Bishop of Rochester.

Whilst the last hymn was being sung, a collection was started. Thereupon the Bishop exclaimed, "An offertory during confirmation? Never heard of such a thing. Let us pray."

The *Inquirer*, noticing Mr. Wheeler's article on Unitarianism, or, rather, noticing a letter from the Rev. W. Rodger Smyth, sent to that journal in answer, takes exception to the latter part of the statement that Dr. Martineau is "the ablest exponent of the least advanced school of modern Unitarians." The editor goes on to say that Dr. Martineau belongs neither to the least nor the most advanced school of Unitarians. This is a matter of opinion, but when he says "Probably the writer has not read *The Seat of Authority in Religion*" he is wrong on a matter of fact. If the editor had read Mr. Wheeler's article he might have gathered that that work was referred to as a proof that the least advanced school of Unitarians had advanced. The editor of the *Inquirer* would have done well to leave the article to be dealt with by Mr. Smyth, who did read it.

Liverpool has two bishops, both full of the Holy Ghost, though supplied from different taps. One is a Protestant and the other a Catholic, and the love that is lost between them would not add to the warmth of a toad. One of the Catholic bishop's underlings, Father Dubberly, has been holding forth on the Archbishop of Canterbury's judgment in the Bishop of Lincoln's case. Throughout his discourse Father Dubberly was girding at Bishop Ryle, who is a sturdy plain man (having buried two wives and married a third), and objects to all kinds of ritualism. All the chief points of Christ's life are taken, and the Catholic preacher shows that from Bethlehem to Bethany (or wherever it was the Savior levitated) there was plenty of display. Indeed, Father Dubberly goes so far as to surmise that Bishop Ryle would regard the ascension as a transformation scene in a pantomime. Certainly these Christians are a happy family.

Miracles pay nowadays better than in Palestine. There is, says the Paris correspondent of the *Daily News*, much jealousy in the French Episcopacy at the sudden rise of the See of Tarbes, owing to the pilgrimages to Lourdes. It was one of the least important in France thirty years ago. The Episcopal income is now higher than that of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and all because of the miraculous fountain above which the girl Bernadette claimed to have seen the Virgin Mary. The priests always take care that the Almighty works his wonders for their benefit.

The *Christian Million* sees a sign that England is still religious in the fact that next after "fiction" the largest number of books published are classed under the head "theological." But query. Should not this division come in the same category as the first? Some prefer their fiction to be human, others superhuman.

They say that Stead's telegraphic address is (or ought to be) "God, London." Perhaps "Tartuffe" would be equally recognisable.

According to the *Speaker*, the late Dean Church was offended by Buckle's dogmatism. He liked men to be honest but also—and especially, it would seem, if they were Freethinkers—to be humble. "Thus the fact that Mr. John Morley disowned the creed of Christendom did not prevent him from writing two of the most charming volumes in Mr. Morley's series of 'Men of Letters.' He believed Mr. Morley to be profoundly sincere, and he disclaimed the right of sitting in judgment on his attitude towards the Christian Faith."

This is very comforting, but we should hardly have given humility as one of Mr. Morley's distinguishing characteristics. Nor, on the other hand, did Buckle display any immodesty. He said what he thought the truth as though he meant it, just as Huxley does; and no doubt this is offensive enough to the scholarly trimmers of the Church of England.

It is also comforting to know that Dean Church would not sit in judgment on Mr. John Morley. But as that is already done by the Athanasian Creed, which is part of the Church Prayer Book, little is gained by the Dean's forbearance.

The late Baron Huddleston was a bigoted old gentleman. We shall never forget the look of horror with which he held up our prosecuted Christmas Number for 1882 in the Court of Queen's Bench and said that "no man could doubt it was a blasphemous libel on our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." His dear brother North sat on the bench beside him and concurred in this pious sentiment. However, it was a good while ago, and Huddleston is dead, and will never hear any more blasphemy, unless he is gone to the wrong place, where blasphemy is said to be pretty common. Besides, the old gentleman (we mean Huddleston) did one sensible thing before dying. He ordered his body to be cremated, and the process was duly carried out at Woking.

Maurice Philips, writing from Madras in the *Independent*, says: "Nearly 2000 years after the coming of the Son of Man, nearly nine-tenths of the human race are ignorant of him, and even of those who know him only a small number have found life in him." D'Holbach said, last century, that if God had spoken all the world would be convinced. That so many are ignorant of Christianity or reject it is a sufficient refutation of its divine claims.

The Bishop of Nova Scotia has an exalted view of the authority of priests. The congregation of a church in Charlottetown deposed their pastor on account of ritualistic practices. The bishop elevated him to an archdeaconry. Being called upon to induct another rector chosen by the parishioners, his lordship said: "It is not the people's place to watch if their rector teaches orthodox doctrine, or to criticise his preaching. They should be willing to learn from their minister. They should receive him as Jesus Christ himself. Then (exclaimed the bishop with emphasis) would you dare to criticise Jesus Christ?" Yes, when Christians dare to examine their own idol the days of priests will be over.

There is a story of a former preacher at the Temple Church, who, one hot Sunday, thought he would refresh himself by a walk in the Temple Gardens until the time came for his sermon to be delivered. The garden was locked during service time, and an old woman temporarily in charge of the gate was deaf to all appeals for admittance. "I think you cannot know who I am," said the preacher with dignity. "I am Dr.—and have come here to preach the sermon to-day." "Then the more shame of you to want to be walking about the gardens, instead of going in to the service," retorted the undaunted old dame.

The Rev. C. Lambert, vicar of Baydon, Wilts., tells a strange story of having met a man without any head on a moonlight night, between Aldbourne and Baydon. He (the man without the head, not the vicar) suddenly disappeared. The vicar (not the man without the head) does not say what he had been eating and drinking previously.

Mr. Robert Buchanan's bouncible letter to the *Times* in reply to Professor Huxley is justly censured in the *Speaker*. Our contemporary, however, thinks the Professor himself is too apprehensive as to the dangers of a silly fanaticism which is being nursed into colossal proportions. Those whom Booth rescues from the Slough of Despond "may be trusted to exercise their faculties like other citizens," and "in that event the probability is that General Booth's theological fold will not contain them." Certainly there is some force in this contention, but we believe it will only apply to a certain per centage. Whether any real social good is effected or not, the gain to the Salvation Army in money, prestige, and recruits, is hardly contestible.

Blasphemy is spreading with a vengeance! Some of our readers have heard the story of the Cornish parson whose congregation was given to wrecking. One morning, in the middle of the sermon, the news was spread through the church that a ship was ashore, and the whole male half of the congregation prepared to leave the house of God. "Stop," cried the parson, "stop sinners and resume your seats." They did so, and the man of God, bounding down the pulpit steps, cried "Now then, let us start fair!" Such is the old yarn, and it was actually worked up into a three-column story in last week's *Speaker*—a respectable six-penny journal!

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, Dec. 21, Hall of Science, Old Street, London, E.C.; at 7, "The Son of a Ghost."

Dec. 28, Hall of Science, London.

January 4, Milton Hall; 11, Hall of Science; 18, Huddersfield; 25, Hall of Science.

February 1, Hull; 8, Leeds; 15, South Shields; 22, Newcastle.

March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, Hall of Science.

April 12, Camberwell.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LITERARY communications to be addressed to the Editor, 14 Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C. All business communications to Mr. R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded, direct from the office, post free to any part of Europe, America, Canada and Egypt, at the following rates, prepaid:—One Year, 6s. 6d.; Half Year, 3s. 3d.; Three Months, 1s. 7½d. Australia, China and Africa:—One Year, 8s. 8d.; Half Year, 4s. 4d.; Three Months, 2s. 2d. India:—One Year, 10s. 10d.; Half Year, 5s. 5d.; Three Months, 2s. 8½d.

SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS.—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 3s.; Half Column, 15s.; Column, £1 10s. Special terms for repetitions

It being contrary to Post-office regulations to announce on the wrapper when the subscription is due, subscribers will in future receive the number when their subscription expires in a colored wrapper.

S. STANDRING.—Glad to hear of your encounter with Celestine Edwards. We suspected that the *Eastern Argus* report was unfair, but did not know its full depth of meanness. Such "victories" are easily won. Edwards himself is a stupendous ignoramus. He once charged Thomas Paine with helping to kill Louis the Fourteenth! Thanks for your good wishes, which we reciprocate.

J. KASPARY.—If you want a letter inserted in any journal you should write civilly. You have a perfect right to think Atheists ignorant, conceited and dishonest, but you must have a good deal of the middle quality to expect us to print your effusions.

A. WILLCOX.—See "Acid Drops."

LECTURE NOTICES must reach us not later than first post on Monday, Dec. 22, as we go to press on that date, owing to Christmas holidays.

P. JAMES.—(1) We are quite aware that Mr. G. B. Shaw is still an Atheist. Only a few months ago we printed his public profession of Atheism at a meeting of the Shelley Society. (2) Yes, the Booth articles will be reprinted. (3) We have a notion of reprinting the Atheistic part of the *System of Nature*. But we should have to make a fresh translation, as the current one is not too accurate, and often exaggerates the diffuseness of the original. (4) Thanks for the cuttings.

BIBLE ROMANCES.—The date referred to is that of the Babylonian originals. The word you inquire about denotes a dog-headed ape. Witches were butchered for raising a tempest so late as the reign of James I.

E. SIMS.—We agree with you that Mr. Forder deserves a good testimonial. You speak of his kindness and attention. So do all. We do not believe he has a single enemy.

T. CLARK.—Your newsagent should insist on his wholesale agent exchanging unsold copies. We supply the trade on sale or return. Thanks for your efforts to promote our circulation.

J. P. SILKSTONE.—The Booth articles will be reprinted.

B. C. H.—May be useful. Thanks.

C. DOEG.—See "Acid Drops."

R. G. LEES.—We know of no limit.

H. LYON.—All right. The date is now entered.

P. S.—No bequest for a Freethought purpose is legal. Four years ago a sum of £500 left by Mr. Spencer, of Manchester, to assist the local Secularists in raising a hall, was intercepted on this ground. Your Christian friend may be too dense to understand this, but the Freethinkers who lost the £500 cannot share his scepticism.

W. THOMAS.—We have lost sight of our old artist, otherwise we should have issued a double number next week. If we can manage it our first number in the new year shall be a double one with illustrations, but we are not able to make a definite promise.

FORDER TESTIMONIAL FUND.—We have received the following: Dr. Laing, 10s.; J. Lumb, 2s. 6d.; W. J. Paul, 5s.; E. Sims, 5s.; S. H. Coles, 2s. 6d.; O. Fitzwater, 1s.; Blackburn Branch, 10s.; J. H. Levy, 10s.; J. G. Fisher, 2s. 6d.

R. WRIGHTMAN.—It is rather too long for reproduction in our pages. Delighted to learn that the Sunderland Branch is making good progress. Mr. Foote's health is all right at present.

W. JOHNSON.—Thanks for your offer to take 10s. worth of the Booth pamphlet. We should be glad to see an active Branch at Wolverhampton.

J. SAUNDERS (Reading).—We note your emendation of the story, that the sovereign was given for a lecture against tobacco not against Freethought. The verses are hardly up to your former level.

CONVERTED CATHOLIC.—The Confessional is a delicate subject and needs to be dealt with by a dexterous pen. We are glad to hear that your conversion to Secularism has made you sober and studious. You will find a tract by Mr. Wheeler on the Bible and Teetotalism in our cheap "Freethinker Tracts." You do not say in what special subject you desire our literary guidance.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Fritankaren—Liberty—Freethought—Open Court—Menschenthum—Lucifer—Neues Frereligioses Sonntags-Blatt—Freidenker—The Liberator—Der Arme Teufel—Secular Thought—Boston Investigator—Western Figaro—Midland News—Wolverhampton Express and Star—Watts's Literary Gazette—Flaming Sword—Maldon Express—Marlborough Times—Lancashire Evening Post—Countryman—Midland Free Press—Grimsby News—Northampton Reporter—Twentieth Century—Progressive Thinker—Echo—Brighton Guardian—Portsmouth Evening News—Sussex Evening Times—Swidon Advertiser—La Verité—L'Eclair—L'Egalite—Bulletin des Sommaires—Ironclad Age—Temperance World—Brighton Gazette.

FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish to call our attention. CORRESPONDENCE should reach us not later than Tuesday if a reply is desired in the current issue. Otherwise the reply stands over till the following week.

SUGAR PLUMS.

Next week's *Freethinker* will be published on Tuesday instead of Thursday, in order that the Christmas holidays may not interfere with our circulation. It will contain a special article by Mr. Foote on "The Son of a Ghost." Mr. Wheeler will also contribute an article on "Old Christmas Customs."

Mr. Foote lectures at the London Hall of Science on Sundays, December 21 and 28. He will deliver two special discourses on "The Son of a Ghost," and on "The Star of Christ in the Night of Faith."

Manchester was very cold and foggy on Sunday, but fair audiences came to the Secular Hall in the morning and afternoon, and a full one in the evening. Mr. Foote's opponents were the Rev. Mr. Collier, who was didactic, as usual, and a comical person named Coleman, who, without being witty, caused immoderate laughter. Such discussion is not very edifying, but it seems to be the best the Christians are prepared to offer.

We are glad to learn that the Manchester Branch is fairly prosperous. The committee works very hard, and certainly deserves success.

The London Secular Federation's annual dinner is looked forward to by many who have attended the previous gatherings. It will take place at the Bridge House Hotel, London Bridge, on Monday, January 5. Dinner will be served at half-past seven. The tickets are half-a-crown, and can be obtained at 28 Stonecutter Street, of any Branch secretary, or of the Federation secretary, Mr. E. Pownceby, 9 Finsbury Street, E.C. Mr. Foote will preside, and the list of other speakers includes Messrs. A. B. Moss, G. Standing, S. Standing, J. H. Ellis, J. Hunt, J. M. Wheeler, R. Forder, and Miss Vance. Besides the after-dinner speeches there will be plenty of good music. Altogether the diners may expect a very enjoyable evening.

Mr. Bradlaugh was of course invited to the Federation dinner, but his health is too uncertain to allow of his forming an engagement. Our old President was evidently far from well the other evening when lecturing for the Forder Testimonial Fund. Unfortunately the evening was very foggy, and most of the audience would gladly have spared Mr. Bradlaugh the infliction. It is to be hoped that he will be careful of his health and not run the risk of another breakdown.

The London Secular Federation has arranged a fresh course of Free Lectures. They will be given in the Athenæum, Tottenham Court Road, on Thursday evenings, January 8, 15, 22, and 29. Mr. Foote opens and closes the course. The other lecturers are Messrs. R. Forder and G. Standing.

Freethinkers in the district should, if possible, induce their orthodox friends to attend these meetings.

The *Grimsby News* gives insertion to a long letter on the Four Gospels from Mr. J. W. Wittening, who quotes with effect from the *Crimes of Christianity*.

Mr. A. B. Moss lectures at Grimsby to-day (Dec. 21). We hope our friends in that quarter will give him a good reception.

Mrs. Besant and Mr. F. Millar debated "Socialism v. Individualism" together at Nottingham. A report of the discussion is published (price 2d.) by C. J. Welton, 42 Milton Street, Nottingham, and can also be obtained of Mr. R. Forder. The copy sent us is marked "For review"; but, instead of passing a judgment, we refer our readers to the report, and let them judge for themselves.

A story is related in legal circles concerning the new judge of the Queen's Bench Division, which may now be told (writes the London correspondent of the *Birmingham Post*). When Cardinal Newman was entertained some five or six years ago at Oriel College, Oxford, Mr. R. S. Wright, who is an Oriel Fellow, happened to be his next door neighbor. The Cardinal, with an earnest desire to be friendly, asked Mr. Wright what was the state of religious feeling in the university. It is stated that the new judge, whose theological opinions are understood to be like those of Mr. Justice Stephen, replied, "It is now distinctly against Christianity."

Wit and Wisdom reports a remarkable interview with the Rev. W. A. Momerie, Professor at King's College. Dr. Momerie goes farther than the editor of *Lux Mundi* in regard to Inspiration. Witness the following passage:—"The Bible does not make the ghost of a vestige of claim to inspiration in the orthodox sense. All that is good and great in it is inspired. But the Bible is full of contradictions and inaccuracies which are not inspired, therefore it cannot be inspired as a whole. No educated man can honestly believe it is inspired in history or science. Huxley in science or Freeman in history are far more inspired. The inspiration of the Bible must be restricted to moral and spiritual matters, and even then it is as low at times as any book. I consider that 'In Memoriam' is in advance of St. John's Gospel, but 'In Memoriam' would never have existed if Christ or St. John had not first lived. Its best part, the power of suffering, is taken from St. John. Both the writers of *Lux Mundi* and Gladstone in his *Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, admit the bad science and history of the Bible. Take the Bible at its best in philosophy and then it is only on a level with German criticism. St. Paul at times is quite up to Hegel. It is a mere question of degree and subject. All that is highest and best in us is inspired."

With regard to Hell and Miracles, Dr. Momerie expressed himself thus: "Hell is another word for punishment, which is a matter of experience. I of course do not acknowledge the orthodox hell. As regards miracles, I simply say that the whole trouble is explained thus: Miracles are seen by those who expect to see them. There is no reason to suppose that when a miracle occurred a violation of nature took place. Some of Christ's 'miracles,' such as those with the 'unclean spirits,' may have been akin to the modern hypnotism. The Evangelists were honest but ignorant. Remember, the unscientific mind looks upon the unusual—not the usual—as the special proof of God." The interviewer then asked, "Don't you believe Christ rose again?" Dr. Momerie replied: "Certainly not physically. Why, do you? Come, I shall have to interview you. All great religious teachers have had an immaculate conception, a physical resurrection—Gautama as well as Christ. But Christ did not rise in his body. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom." It must be a spiritual resurrection."

Dr. Momerie's Christianity is thus devoid of every distinctive doctrine of the Christian faith. He falls back on God and Immortality, which are pre-Christian ideas. Indeed, it seems pretty evident that the Churches are being driven back point by point, and are retreating to the immemorial basis of religion. Whether they will be able to defend it, in the long run, is open to a difference of opinion.

The *Athenæum*, noticing the third volume of Renan's *Histoire du Peuple d'Israel*, says, "The strength of the illustrious author lies in recalling to life a history not only dead, but for the majority of us, buried beneath traditional misinterpretation. In his pages the dry bones of the vanished actors live."

Mr. Benjamin R. Tucker, of Boston, has produced a translation of *My Uncle Benjamin*, by Claude Tillier, a French Freethinker little known in this country, but of whom there is a sketch in Mr. Wheeler's *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers*.

Mr. A. C. Swinburne contributes a paper on Victor Hugo to the December number of *The North American Review*.

Helen H. Gardener, authoress of *Men, Women, and Gods*, has issued at Boston a Freethought novel with the curious title, *Is This Your Son, my Lord?*

The *Wolverhampton Express* reports a lecture by Mr. S. Bransby in reply to the Rev. D. A. J. Harrison. Mr. Bransby had a capital meeting, which included many Christians, and we have no doubt he dropped some Freethought seed into promising soil. The *Express* also inserts an outspoken letter, on the Secular side, from Mr. James Davidson.

Any one who wants to see what the average Londoner really thinks of Sabbath observance should go to one of the parks on Sunday during a hard frost. God should be much gratified if his worshippers exhibit half the zest shown by the skaters and sliders in enjoying themselves while the season lasts.

The Countryman writes energetically in favor of the Sunday opening of the Leicester Library Art Gallery and Museum, and cites the following testimony from the Sheriff of Norwich:—"Our Free Library Reading Rooms have been opened on Sundays for about ten months, from three to nine p.m. The conduct of the people is all that can be desired, and the numbers frequenting it are from 200 to 300, and apparently not the same people who use the rooms on weekdays." By a majority of one the Town Council has decided to open on Sunday, as an experiment, for one year.

The opponents of Sunday opening at Leicester, took the ground that it was a Secularist movement advocated by the same persons who wished to place Freethought literature upon the library table. That after this a majority of one was gained for the experiment shows that Leicester is not recreant to her Radical traditions.

Mr. Symes writes very encouragingly in the *Liberator*. He says that despite the strike the sale of the paper has kept up, and that there are signs of the extension of Freethought in Western Australia. All he asks of his friends is, that like himself, they shall "keep pegging away."

"The Freethinkers' Pictorial Text Book" comes to us from the New York *Truthseeker* office. It contains the best of Watson Heston's cartoons which have appeared in that journal, with interesting letterpress on the opposite page. We do not know the price of this bulky volume. Mr. Heston has ideas, though his drawing is rather crude, and his sketches will be prized by many Americans and, perhaps, by some Englishmen.

Having abolished the State Church, and put religion in its proper place, the Brazil Republic has taken Education in hand. Quite ninety per cent. of the population are illiterate, and to remedy this grievous state of things schools are to be erected in all parts of the country and adequately provided with teachers. After this it is idle to expect the restoration of the Monarchy or any serious reaction.

Comprehensive Cookery is the title of an excellent shilling volume published by Pitman. The author is Mrs. E. May, and her remarkably clear directions are based on the rules of Dr. Allinson's hygienic establishment.

Mr. Foote has decided to reprint his articles on Booth's Book in pamphlet form. They will be carefully revised and augmented. Many persons have pressed Mr. Foote to do this, and several friends have promised to take a considerable number of copies for distribution. We hope to have the pamphlet on sale next week.

A SPIRITUALISTIC SEANCE.

CHRISTIANITY renders men susceptible to very undesirable developments of the various false beliefs it inculcates. Even among partially emancipated people who have already rejected the more incredible and inhuman features of Christianity, the liberty thus acquired is apt to be misused in the eager pursuit of some of the primary animistic delusions on which their former orthodoxy was based. It was in some such frame of mind, I suspect, that a friend of mine once commenced "investigating" Spiritualism—or rather, as it seems to me, commenced falling into the spiritualistic trap, in company with some of his religious friends and relatives who were more credulous than himself. A private *séance* was arranged, and among the people he invited to be present were myself and two or three others who contributed a much needed element to the party. I think, indeed, that our friend had the sense to secure our presence for the special reason that our "hard headed" sceptical tendencies would be a valuable corrective to the too ready belief likely to be accorded to spiritualistic phenomena by the rest of the company.

Wishing to see the expected phenomena in full force if possible, and thoroughly appreciating the shy habits of the spirits when confronted by the chilling influence of *evident* unbelief, we of the sceptical element had arranged that no signs of doubt should be displayed by any of us. Repairing to the house where Mr. and Mrs. X., as I call them, were to introduce the spirit world to our notice, we sat down quietly with some twenty others in a double parlor with the folding doors thrown open. Presently a young married couple were introduced and appeared to act as decoy ducks on behalf of the actual medium, who had not yet arrived. They professed to be only unbiassed inquirers, but entertained us with plenty of gushing talk in which they gave artless statements of what they had seen and heard from thoroughly trustworthy friends. After (as it seemed to me) the ground had thus been prepared and tested, Mr. and Mrs. X., arrived. Mr. X. entered the room first. He was a nervous insignificant individual with a sneaking furtive look about his eyes. He did not seem to know where to let his glances rest. I quite pitied him for the anxieties and difficulties attending a life of imposture. He explained that the room would have to be in perfect darkness, and that the fires must be put out at once. The hostess urged that as the weather was so cold and the fires were burnt down to red cinders they might be allowed to remain to keep the room warm, but as Mr. X. was inexorable the glowing ashes were duly raked out and left to extinguish themselves while he talked spiritualistic rubbish sprinkled with misapplied scientific terms and direct misstatement of scientific facts.

When Mrs. X. came in it was at once evident that in this case the grey mare was the better horse. It was she who had the gifts as a medium, and the husband merely played a very weak second fiddle. She was a bold, full-sized woman, who went through her work in a most business-like way. There was no nonsense about her. She seated herself at a corner of the table, the gas was turned out, and she did not keep us waiting long for the "evidences" of the presence of the spirits. Conditions were pronounced favorable, and slight knocks were heard. The lady said she would run through the alphabet to see what the spirits wanted. She did so in a hasty fashion that indicated frequent rehearsal and consequent impatience of the tiresome repetition, till she came to the letter S, to which the spirit replied by knocking. "Oh, *sing*, dear," she said to her husband; "that's what they want. Let us sing something." Then in the pitch-black darkness the company sung a religious song or hymn about the "land beyond the river," which was evidently intended to put the audience in a solemn spiritualistic frame of mind.

After the fitting introduction of religion and darkness, the real business of the evening commenced. Knocking, however, was too slow a method for the enterprise and ability of our lady medium. She would endeavor to bring us into more direct communication with the spirits, as they seemed in a sympathetic humor that night and might be induced to *speak* to us. Presently a peculiar voice was heard, and she said to her husband, "That's Peter, dear." Then she gave us some pretty good specimens of ventriloquism, or rather voice-mimicry, all supposed of course to be the direct utterance of various visitors from the land beyond the river. She had names for the different spirits, who were supposed to speak as they floated about somewhere or other in the room, and in the intervals of the ventriloquism she resumed her natural voice and talked familiarly of them to her husband. One spirit

spoke in a hoarse bass voice, which must have cost the lady considerable effort. Another spoke in a shrill, piping tone. She individualised the voices by broad contrasts, just as a common ventriloquist would do. The language was mostly of a vaguely religious and didactic character, but with nothing decisive on doctrinal points.

I sat next but one to Mrs. X., and the pretended voices of the spirits all came directly from her, and from no other part of the room. I managed to just see the edge of her face against a crack in the folding window-shutter. I fancied I could detect the motion caused by her ventriloquial exertions, but the circumstances were too adverse to allow me to speak positively on the point. A friend who was next the lady told me afterwards that he felt some of those slight particles of saliva which are thrown out in energetic vocal efforts.

After the company had been duly impressed by short sermons and messages from the spirits—and most of the company, I believe, were very seriously impressed thereby—the gas was lit again. A number of questions were then asked concerning the state in which the spirits existed and their occupations. The lady fenced with these questions rather than answered them, and added suggestions or questions of her own, so that curiosity was provoked rather than satisfied. She was most anxious, however, to be told where the voices seemed to come from. There was a general hesitation on this point, and signs of a disposition to assign them to any quarter but the right one.

Who, even if he fancied he had rightly detected the exact direction from which these strange voices proceeded amidst perfect darkness and unusual circumstances, would care to point out that they came from the mouth of the lady herself, and thus directly make her out to be an impostor? Ordinary politeness and ordinary timidity would alike shrink from taking the bull by the horns in this rough manner. As to such observers as myself, it was of course our business simply to see the thing through—which we could not have done if we had discouraged the spirits by manifest hostility. Mrs. X. tried hard to get expressions of opinion as to the voices proceeding from different parts of the room, but was not altogether successful. Friend Z., for one, happened to be challenged by her as to whence *he* thought the voices appeared to come, and he just had the grace to soften his bluntness by pointing about a foot over Mrs. X.'s head, as the source whence all the utterances seemed to come. This may have been a bit of a shock to the performers, but if it were they were quite ready with an explanation. It was only through favored mediums, of course, that the spirits usually cared to manifest their presence. Mrs. X. was a powerful medium. What could be more natural than that the spirits should be attracted to her and that they should materialise a voice out of the emanations from their favorite medium? Hence the voices would naturally appear to be produced just above her head. Q.E.D.

No expressions of doubt or dissent had as yet been heard, and the silence of most and the respectful questions of others encouraged the lady to proceed with a further performance. She produced a large iron ring, which was handed round for inspection, and then placed on the table. By her directions, two gentlemen held her hands and the gas was turned out. After some rather violent struggling and wriggling on the lady's part, on the gas being lit it was seen that the ring had disappeared from the table and was on the lady's arm. The spirits had put it there, we were told.

So successful was this ring trick that the lady was induced to try it again. But the spirits were now obstinate or frolicsome. The ring disappeared from the table, indeed, during the darkness, but when the gas was lit again it was not on the medium's arm. It was finally found under the table, whither it had been spirited away by "Peter"—or by the hands of mischief-loving sceptics who were no longer afraid of spoiling the performance by their interference.

This concluded the *séance*. The spirits were developing ways of their own, and were evidently not to be relied upon.

After a little conversation filled up with anecdotes of the spirits, pretended explanations of their little peculiarities, and plausible but rather evasive replies to further inquiries concerning the condition and happiness of the disembodied spirits in general, the lady took her departure. I ascertained that she charged no fixed fee, but as she left she received a piece of gold from the host by way just of paying her railway fare, which would amount to about 6d. return. My own conclusion was that this little formality was the real key to the whole performance. Given the primitive belief in souls and disembodied spirits, it will be exploited as long as it

remains exploitable. People who are at their wit's end for a living, or who prefer an easy livelihood gained by deception to one of hard work, will naturally adopt such methods of winning both money and influence.

The strangest and most discouraging feature of the whole affair was the amount of credence displayed by the bulk of the company. If we of the sceptical element had not been present I am afraid that the *séance* would have been generally accepted as evidence of the truth of Spiritualism. We counteracted this lazy, kindly, superstitious credulity by contemptuously denouncing the performers as evident impostors. We pointed out that nothing had been done but the commonest feats of ventriloquism and conjuring, and that while honest professionals succeed in defying detection in such feats even in open daylight, Mr. and Mrs. X. had insisted on absolute darkness as indispensable for the success of their inferior performance. The ring trick was nothing to what was done daily by other people without the slightest aid from the spirits. Why should the spirits lend themselves to such absurdly childish trickery? Why did they never manifest themselves or their materialised voices in public matters of importance? Why did they not tell us something new and something worth knowing? Why did they hide in darkness and refuse all tests? Why could they not work in the light? Why did they do just such things as could be most easily imitated by impostors? Why did the spirits speak from the woman's mouth or its immediate neighborhood? Questions and arguments such as these seemed to have some influence in checking the tide of superstition. I believe that our host, for instance, never troubled himself any further about Spiritualism.

W. P. BALL.

NORTH EASTERN SECULAR FEDERATION.

The final arrangements for the Grand Social Gathering to be held under the auspices of the North Eastern Secular Federation, in the Arcade Assembly Rooms, Newcastle-on-Tyne, on December 26th, are as follows: First, sitting down for tea, 5 p.m. Concert to commence at 7 p.m. Dancing and other parlor games commence at 10 p.m., and continue till 4 a.m. Draughts, dominoes, chess, etc. for non-dancers. Friends arriving late are still entitled to their tea. Refreshments, and supper can be had of the proprietor at the rooms. Tickets 1s. 6d each, can be had at Mr. Peter Weston's, newsagent, 77 Newgate Street, Newcastle, or by writing to my address. The Council are also preparing for an active propaganda early next year, and there is every prospect of new Branches being formed in different parts of the two counties. There are now twelve Branches affiliated with the Federation, some of these being in outlying districts it is only by the aid of the Federation that lecturers can visit them; and the Council earnestly hope that every well-to-do Secularist will do his utmost to aid financially and otherwise in the good work we are at present doing. Contributions, however small, are thankfully received, and should be sent to my address, when they can either be acknowledged in this journal, or privately. R. S. W. 5s.; Mr. Bennett, 1s. JOSEPH BROWN.

86 Durham Street, Bentwick, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

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A TRUE TALE.

WHEN God stuck up his man of clay
And set his eyes a'blinking,
I wonder what poor Adam thought?—
If capable of thinking.
Did he essay to chew his toes?
Or suck his little digits?
Or did his teething miseries
Give God the Lord the fidgets?

Nay. Adam was a full-grown man,
With all his wits about him:
For this is what good Moses says—
And who shall dare to doubt him?
God said, "You see this garden ground
Is sadly wanting tilling;
Go catch a' hold of that there spade,
And show that you are willing.

"The garden bears all kinds of fruit,
Sufficient to sustain you:
But if you touch the tree of life,
By Jesus Christ I'll brain you!"
Quoth Adam: "I, your humble slave,
Shall ask but one boon only,
That you provide me with a wife—
I feel so deuced lonely."

"All right," said God; "all beasts and birds
And snakes that I've created
I'll cause to pass you in review—
Just see that you get mated."
Then all the live stock God had made
Filed by with due decorum,
But Adam failed amongst the lot
To find "an helpmeet" for him.

However, he gave each a name,
From platypus to pigeon,
From tall giraffe to humble flea,
From walrus down to widgeon.
And when God saw he'd found no wife,
With chloroform he plied him,
And when he woke, behold, there stood
A charming maid beside him!

What Adam thought, or how he looked,
The "truthful" fails to tell us;
No doubt he seemed as great an ass
As nineteenth century fellows.
But thus he got a wife for life,
And "truthful" Mo has told us
How she, through flirting with a snake,
For evermore has sold us. T. CLARK.

The history of religion is a long attempt to reconcile old custom with new reason; and to find a sound theory for an absurd practice.—*J. G. Frazer, "Golden Bough,"* vol. ii., p. 62.

I would rather give my daughters a set of physiological and obstetric books for their perusal, than allow them to read the Levitical law, or the stories of the two Tamars, of Bathsheba, Lot and others. I know that while the one will give information which may be serviceable, and which can never generate premature passion, the other is calculated to confound the distinctions of right and wrong.—*Emma Martin, "The Bible no Revelation,"* p. 15.

PROFANE JOKES.

Connoisseur: "I tell you what it is, M'Daub; those ostriches are simply superb. You shouldn't paint anything but birds." Artist (disgusted): "Those are not ostriches. They are angels!"

Curate (to old man who is beating his donkey): "Fie, fie, my good man, do you know what happened to Balaam once?" Old Man: "Ees, sure, zur—the same as has just happed to me—a ass spoke to him."

Mother: "Johnny, you said you'd been to Sunday-school." Johnny (with a far-away look): "Yes, mother." Mother: "How does it happen that your hands smell fishy?" Johnny: "I—I carried home the Sunday-school paper,—an'—an' th' outside page is all about Jonah and the whale."

SUNDAY MEETINGS.

[Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on MONDAY, and be marked "Lecture Notice," if not sent on post-card.]

LONDON.

Ball's Pond Secular Hall, 36 Newington Green Road, N., 7, Mrs. Thornton Smith, "The Uselessness of Prayer."
Battersea Secular Hall (back of Battersea Park Station), 7.30, Mr. H. Snell, "Why Fear Death and After?" Monday, at 7.30, dancing class (3d. per lesson); 8.30, social gathering. Tuesday, at 8.30, committee meeting.

Bethnal Green Branch N. S. S. — "The Monarch" Coffee House, 166 Bethnal Green Road, E., 7.30, Mr. R. Rosetti, "What has Christianity Done for the World?"

Camberwell—61 New Church Road, S.E., 7, dramatic recital; 7.30, Mr. B. Hyatt, "With God All Things are Possible."

Finsbury—Loyal United Friends' Hall, Banner Street, St. Luke's, 11.30, Mr. G. Standing, "Has Christ Saved the World?"

Hall of Science, 142 Old Street, E.C., 11.15, Mr. Herbert Burrows, "Objections to Socialism Considered and Answered"; 7, Mr. G. W. Foote, "The Son of a Ghost."

Leyton—Mr. Beadle's, 10 Daisey Villas, Manor Road, 7, Mr. A. Beadle will lecture. A meeting of members after the lecture to transact important business.

Milton Hall, Kentish Town Road, N.W., 7, Orchestral Band; 7.30, Mrs. Annie Besant, "The God of Israel." Tuesday, at 8, singing and dramatic class (practice).

West Ham—Secular Hall, 121 Broadway, Plaistow, 11, Mr. R. Rosetti, "Where and When was Jesus Born and Crucified?"; 7, Mr. W. J. Ramsey, "Mansions in the Sky."

Westminster—Liberal and Radical Club, Chapter Street, 7, Mr. F. Haslam, "My Life—Forty Years of Secularism."

Woolwich—"Sussex Arms," Assembly Room, 60 Plumstead Road (entrance, Maxey Road), 7.30, Mr. Toleman-Garner, "Christmastide."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Battersea Park Gates, 11.15, Mr. Snell, "From Creeds and Priests Good Lord Deliver Us."

Tottenham—Corner of West Green Road, 3.15, Mr. Sam Standing, "A Few Words in Conclusion."

Wood Green—Jolly Butcher's Hill, 11.30, Mr. Sam Standing, "The Protestant Reformation—How it Affected Christianity."

COUNTRY.

Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge Street, 7, Mr. C. C. Cattell, "The Origin of the Universe."

Glasgow—Albion Hall, College Street, 12 noon, debating class, Mr. W. Gilmour, "Monarchy and Republicanism"; 6.30, Mr. Shaw, "The Ancient Astronomers."

Heckmondwike—At Mr. John Rothera's, Bottoms, 2.30, Mr. Rothera, a reading from Joseph Symes.

Hull—Alhambra Music Hall, Porter Street, Mr. W. Heaford, 10.30, "Bruuo, Freethought Martyr"; 2.30, "What is Blasphemy?—a Vindication of Atheism"; 6.30, "The Bible: what it is and what it is not."

Liverpool Branch N. S. S., Camden Hall, Camden Street. — 3, discussion class, Mr. J. Hall, "Christianity Progressive, not Retrogressive"; 7, Mr. Doeg, "Butler's 'Analogy' Considered."

Manchester N. S. S.—Secular Hall, Rusholme Road, Oxford Road, All Saint's, 6.30, debate between Rev. W. E. Collier (of Manchester) and Mr. Stanley Jones (of Liverpool) on "God Revealed in Jesus Christ." Free; collection for charitable institution. Ball on Christmas Eve; gents. 1s. 6d., ladies, 1s.

Nottingham—Secular Hall, Beck Street, 7, debate between Mr. J. Hooper and Mr. W. Shepherd on "Is God All-wise and Beneficent?"

Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington Street, Southsea, 3, debating class; 7, Mr. Martin, "Freethinking."

Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham Street, 7, Mr. W. Houlden, "Edward Carpenter, Poet." Dec. 30, Soiree and ball.

South Shields—Capt. Duncan's Navigation School, King Street, 7, a reading.

Spennymoor—Victoria Hall, Dundas Street, 10.30, general meeting; 7, Mr. Israel Hirst, "The Teachings of Secularism."

Sunderland—Albert Rooms, Coronation Street, 7, Mr. R. Weightman, "The Bible and Common Sense."

LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon Road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.—Dec. 21, Grimsby; 28, Camberwell. Jan. 5 (1891), Annua Dinner; 18, Rushden. Feb. 8, Camberwell; 22, Camberwell.

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