

THE Freethinker

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Militant Freethought.

WAR, war, war; everybody seems to be talking war. All through the "festive season," the special period of "peace and goodwill towards men," the paramount subject of attention has been war. In these pages, however, we are naturally more concerned with the conflict of ideas than of arms. The warfare in which we, as Freethinkers, are engaged is infinitely older and greater than that which is being waged abroad. The issues are far wider and more important in their bearing on the welfare of mankind, not merely in the present century, but for all time to come. The campaign against priestcraft began ages ago; its conclusion is still a long way ahead. We want to insure the widespread recognition of vital truths for which the pioneers of heresy battled in the past; we want to make their acceptance in the present unaccompanied by reproach, legal or social; we want to make them the acknowledged, and even trite, truisms of the future.

Whatever views may be held by some as to the non-necessity of iconoclastic propaganda in the present day, the conclusion must be forced upon most observers that an immense amount of destructive work remains to be done. Theology still blocks the way. Occasionally, as in the recent revival of Sabbatarianism, its obstructiveness seems to be stronger and more irritating than ever. The Ritualistic tendency to mediæval forms of thought and primitive ceremonies is a reaction not to be hastily under-estimated. Though undoubtedly concessions have been made by the more rational section of modern religionists, their importance is seriously diminished when we come to observe how large a proportion of error these same religionists retain. The Christian Churches may be sapped at their foundations, but they remain to all outward seeming very substantial structures. Christian organisations exhibit a vitality and activity hardly to be reconciled with the idea that the form of faith they represent is hopelessly played out. If the partisans of theology have been driven from one stronghold, they have simply retired to entrench themselves behind other embattlements, from which they have again to be dislodged.

Christianity, under whatever phase it presents itself, is too big a thing to be ignored. The great element of idle indifference—as distinguished from intelligent antipathy—is, of course, to be considered; but it does not present an effective barrier to the aggressions of Christian fanaticism and bigotry. That must be supplied by militant Freethought.

In the year upon which we are entering there is nothing so much needed as an active and uncompromising crusade on all the multifarious forms of religious error. If we value the truth that we have found, the light that we have received, it is incumbent upon us to communicate it to others. We have no right to remain quiescent whilst a shred of evil-working and necessarily fraudulent Superstition exists. We owe it as a return for what has been done for us in the past; it is our justification to the future for living in the present. After all our exertions, we cannot hope to die with the satisfaction that the garden of the world has been more than partially cleared of the noxious weeds theology has sown. But we can do a great deal in the way of clearance. And, emphatically, it devolves upon us to do it. To whom, if not to us, are addressed the inspiring words?—

No. 962.

Soon rested those who fought; but thou,
Who minglest in the harder strife
For truths which men receive not now,
Thy warfare only ends with life.

Yea, though thou lie upon the dust,
When they who helped thee fled in fear,
Die full of hope and manly trust
Like those who fell in battle here.

Another hand thy sword shall wield,
Another hand the standard wave,
Till from the trumpet's mouth is pealed
The blast of triumph o'er thy grave.

We have still to banish supernatural fears that darken the mind and paralyze action. We have still to dispel supernatural hopes that are founded on delusion, and lead only to despair. We have still to substitute reason and knowledge in the place of chimeras, and to set forth the true basis of human conduct and the true view of human life. The old notions of divine guidance, of Providence and Prayer, must be swept to the winds. The much-vaunted Christian Scriptures, though very much damaged in their authority even amongst believers, have not yet found their proper level in the eyes of the Christian world. We have still to urge undivided attention to the present life as the only existence of which we have knowledge; and to enforce the doing of the duty which is nearest at hand. Then, amongst the immediate practical objects to be aimed at are the abolition of the absurd and iniquitous Blasphemy Laws; the disestablishment and disendowment of that monstrous anomaly—a State Church; the discontinuance of Bible-reading in State schools; the repeal of obsolete Sabbatarian laws; the entire abolition of the stupid formality of legal swearing; and the accomplishment of many other reforms upon which, as Freethinkers, we are agreed.

The programme of work is large. It would be more inspiring if the number of workers were commensurate. One would like to see at the beginning of the New Year an accession of generous enthusiasm in regard to the objects and organisations of our cause—a desire on the part of every individual sympathiser to assist in the dissemination of principles so essential to progress. The supporters of creeds unworthy of the twentieth century display no lack of zeal. It should not be said that in activity and self-sacrifice they surpass those who, with truth, believe themselves to be the adherents of the philosophy of the future. Some sacrifice is inevitable.

Great truths are dearly bought. The common truth
Such as men give and take from day to day
Comes in the common walk of easy life,
Blown by the careless wind across our way.

In the war which we hope to prosecute in the coming year with renewed vigor we do not wish to slay men, but to save them. Ours will be bloodless victories, free from passion and strife. For, in the words of Horatius Bonar:

All Truth is calm,
Refuge and rock and tower;
The more of Truth, the more of calm,
And calmness is its power.

Truth is not strife,
Nor is to strife allied;
Strife is the error that is bred
Of storm, by rage and pride.

Calmness is Truth,
And Truth is calmness still;
Truth lifts its forehead to the storm
Like some eternal hill.

In this spirit we prepare ourselves for another year of propagandist effort, firm in our antagonism to error; solicitous only for the triumph of truth.

FRANCIS NEALE.

God's Mother.—III.

BEING born by a special miracle without original sin, Mary was a sinless being all her lifetime. Such is the doctrine of the Catholic Church, but it was not the belief of the early Christians. They were satisfied with the idea that Mary conceived as a virgin, and remained a virgin after giving birth to Jesus. This was the first step on the path which terminated at Rome on December 8, 1854, and it sufficed for a considerable time. According to the Gospels, Jesus had four brothers—James, Josés, Simon, and Judas—and an unspecified number of sisters. Every unsophisticated reader of the Gospels would take them to be the children of Mary by Joseph. Mary herself, indeed, speaking on one occasion to Jesus, referred to Joseph as "thy father." But the early Christians got rid of this awkward text by a characteristic explanation. They contended that Mary was not speaking on affidavit, but informally; that the divine origin of her son was a family secret, only known to herself and her accommodating husband; that it would never be betrayed to others by inadvertent speech; and that the Virgin Mother always kept up the fiction of Joseph's paternity. This explanation was fanciful, but it served the turn. In the course of time, however, as Mary became a more venerated figure, it was denied that she ever had marital relations with Joseph. At first it was maintained that the brothers and sisters of Jesus referred to in the Gospels were children of Joseph by a former marriage; subsequently, it was held that Joseph also lived in perpetual virginity; finally, the brothers of Jesus were transformed into his *cousins*, and to affirm otherwise was declared to be a blasphemous impiety.

Thus is religious history written and interpreted! It is not the history that determines the ideas; it is the ideas that determine the history. The natural order of things is reversed. The records contain, not what really happened, but what ought to have happened; and are therefore not actual history, but the fictions of a pious imagination.

Mary's perpetual virginity is a Catholic dogma. It is also accepted by the majority of Protestants. The latter hold it on what may be called a basis of convenience. It is not an article of faith with them, but they think it shows a proper respect to the mother of their Lord. They feel bound to reject the notion that Mary gave birth to her divine baby, and then settled down in connubial bliss with Joseph.

Catholics and Protestants both press into the service of Mary's virginity—whether temporary or perpetual—the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." But anyone who takes the trouble to read the seventh and eighth chapters of Isaiah will see that the prophet is referring to a child who is to be born in the immediate future, not several hundred years afterwards. Moreover, the translation in the generality of Versions is fraudulent. The original word *almah* does not mean a virgin at all. It simply means a young woman, whether single or married; and, unless there was a time when it was wonderful for a young woman to conceive and bear a son, it must be allowed that there was no miracle in the case, and very little prophecy.

The conception of a virgin mother was not borrowed from the Old Testament. It was totally foreign to the mind of the Jews. They had several cases in their Scriptures of marvellous children being born of aged or barren mothers, but the miracle was always operated through human agency. This idea was, however, very common in the East. Most of the Saviors of antiquity were born of women and begotten by gods. There was no necessity for invention on the part of Christians. They had merely to borrow from the common treasury of Oriental superstition. Even the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary was, in Gibbon's opinion, borrowed from the Koran, where it is "darkly hinted," but "more clearly explained by the tradition of the Sunnites." This is, at least, consistent with chronology, for the Koran belongs to the seventh century, while the doctrine in question was, in the twelfth century, branded by the great St. Bernard as a blasphemous novelty.

Far earlier was the doctrine that Mary was the Mother of God. The title began to be used in the first half of

the fifth century. Mary was called *Deipara*. The word means more than mother in the domestic sense. It refers to the process of parturition, and justifies the terrible sneer of Gibbon—"As in zoology we familiarly speak of oviparous and viviparous animals." Instead of the Mother of God, it might almost be translated the Dam of God. The expression was distasteful to many, but they were the minority, and orthodoxy is the opinion of the majority. The patriarch Nestorius preached against it as rash and recent, and savoring of Paganism; but he was condemned and degraded at the Council of Ephesus in June, 431. He was proclaimed a heretic, his opinion on this subject was damned, and everybody was damned who did not damn him. Nestorius was banished, tortured, and pursued by bigotry wherever he fled; when he died it was given out that his tongue had been eaten by worms, and when he was buried the tradition arose that the rain of heaven never fell upon his sepulchre. Such were the advantages he gained by opposing the fashionable superstition of his age. The doctrine of the *Deipara* triumphed, and it became a point of faith to worship the immaculate Mother of God.

Naturally the Mother of God enjoyed her share of the strange honors that were paid to the whole of the Christian pantheon, from God the Father down to the humblest and obscurest saint. Pictures of Christ were multiplied by pious imagination; and, in the masterly language of Gibbon:—

"The fruitful precedent was speedily transferred to the Virgin Mary, and the saints and martyrs. In the church of Diospolis, in Palestine, the features of the Mother of God were deeply inscribed in a marble column: the East and the West have been decorated by the pencil of St. Luke; and the Evangelist, who was perhaps a physician, has been forced to exercise the occupation of a painter, so profane and odious in the eyes of the primitive Christians. The Olympian Jove, created by the muse of Homer, and the chisel of Phidias, might inspire a philosophic mind with momentary devotion; but these Catholic images were faintly and flatly delineated by monkish artists in the last degeneracy of taste and genius."

Even a sepulchre was invented for the Mother of God at Ephesus, and its authenticity was asserted by a synod; but Ephesus was superseded by the holier Jerusalem, and her *empty* sepulchre was shown there to pilgrims from all parts of Christendom. In the course of time, as Gibbon says, it "produced the fable of her resurrection and assumption, in which the Greek and Latin Churches have piously acquiesced."

This fable is one of the most monstrous and fantastic instances of Christian superstition, and is in every way worthy of the Church that celebrated the pious care with which Mary preserved the portion of her son's anatomy that was amputated at his circumcision; together with the blood and water that fell from his hands, feet, and side, upon the cross; and all the nails with which he was fastened up by his executioners.

It is related that the Mother of God survived her son a considerable time. Some say she died at fifty-eight, some at sixty-three, and some a great deal older. At last she prayed for her release, and an angel was sent to tell her that within three days her son would take her to himself. All the Apostles were gathered together to be present at her obsequies. St. John was preaching at Ephesus, and in the middle of his sermon there came a clap of thunder, and he was whisked through the air to her residence. Many wonderful circumstances attended her decease. Jesus himself, with angels, patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, confessors, and virgins, came from heaven and stood by her bed; the whole celestial company singing songs and hymns in her honor. When she gave up the ghost her body became so luminous that the maids could not touch or look upon it. Peter and Paul carried the corpse to the sepulchre, John went before with a palm sent from heaven, and the rest of the Apostles followed in couples. A most sweet odor pervaded the air. The Jewish high-priest tried to stop the funeral, and laid his two hands upon the bier; whereupon both his arms withered and were torn off at the elbows. But, on Peter's advice, he knelt down and kissed the bier, and professed himself a Christian; when his arms were immediately fastened on again. Being laid in the tomb, the body was "waked" for three days and nights; at the expiration of which Mary was raised from the dead by Jesus himself,

who took her with him from the old to the new Jerusalem. St. Thomas, as usual, was absent. He was too late to see the body of Mary, but he had the smaller consolation of seeing her empty sepulchre, which was a proof that she had gone elsewhere. Besides, he found a spring of manna boiling up inside it, which was enough to satisfy [the stoutest incredulity.

Upon this ridiculous fable the Catholic Church bases the Feast of the Assumption. Whether the Mother of God died at Ephesus or Jerusalem, the Church is assured that her body did not see corruption, but that she was raised from the dead and taken bodily to heaven, and welcomed there by the most splendid procession of angels and archangels. It is also taught that, as Jesus sits at the right hand of God the Father, Mary sits at the right hand of God the Son, and reigns eternally as Queen of Heaven. "The Father," says the Month of Mary already quoted, "acknowledges her as his beloved daughter, the Word for his divine mother, and the Holy Spirit for his chaste spouse." No wonder, therefore, that she does as she likes, and is to all intents and purposes omnipotent. The Father fondly gives in to his daughter, the Son obediently yields to his mother, and the Holy Ghost discreetly obeys his wife. Praying to Mary thus saves a lot of time, and produces the most satisfactory results.

Of a piece with this fable is the famous story of the House of Loretto. This contained the chamber in which Mary was born, in which she received the annunciation, in which she conceived the Savior of the world, and in which she bred him up till he was twelve years of age. Nobody took any notice of it for more than three hundred years, but it was "discovered" at Nazareth at the instigation of St. Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great; the same lady whose wealth and position induced the Christian priests to discover the very cross upon which Christ was crucified. A chapel was built round it—or so they say, and it was much frequented by pilgrims until the Holy Land was conquered by the Saracens. For a long time it was in the possession of those wicked enemies of the true faith; but on May 9, 1291, a team of angels carried it through the air to the coast of Dalmatia, where it attracted a multitude of devotees. But in the course of time their ardor cooled, and the Mother of God had it shifted again by the angels into Italy. At first it was located in a wood, which was a resort of robbers who levied blackmail upon the pilgrims; so it was once more removed by the angels to a mountain, and finally to the highway in the Papal state at Loretto, a few miles south of Ancona. Two centuries later, in 1518, Leo the Tenth pledged the Papal infallibility to the truth of the miracle, which was further authenticated in a Bull of Pope Julius the Second. Pilgrimages to the House of Loretto were long fashionable in Europe, and the Church reaped a rich harvest from its credulous visitors.

Catholic tradition swarms with curious stories about the Mother of God, some of which are positively indecent. St. Dominie is said to have been married to her, the three Persons of the Holy Trinity being present at the ceremony. A similar adventure fell to the lot of Joseph Herman. It is also related that she offered herself to a soldier who was in love with a captain's wife, perhaps to save him from the crime of adultery. Another story is that a servant in a convent, being debauched by a priest, fled from the place and lived in a bawdy-house for fifteen years; during the whole of which time the Virgin Mary took her shape and fulfilled her duties, so that nobody was the wiser when she returned to the convent, and her reputation did not suffer the least damage. Readers of good English poetry will recollect that Mr. John Davidson has enshrined the kernel of this strange story in his splendid *Ballad of a Nun*.

Here I must conclude. I do not mean to carry this series of articles forward into the new year. But I have very much more to write upon the subject, and all who wish to read it will find it in a little work I intend to publish shortly.

G. W. FOOTE.

Christian Perversions.

LAST week I pointed out some of the inaccuracies of the Rev. A. Webster in his criticisms of Colonel Ingersoll's mode of advocacy. I now intend to deal with certain other fallacies in the rev. gentleman's attack upon the views held by the late Colonel. I do this the more readily because Mr. Webster was under the delusion that his positions were so strong that it would be "stiff work" for me to destroy them.

On reading the rev. gentleman's pamphlet a second time, I am still more forcibly struck with his misrepresentations and evasions. For instance, his perversion of the term Agnosticism is almost unpardonable. He says: "Agnosticism is as much an impertinence as dogmatism." Here we have the language of the theologian, not the discriminate expression of the philosophic student. The assertion is the very opposite of truth, inasmuch as the dogmatist assumes a knowledge that he does not possess; while the Agnostic frankly admits his inability to know that which is beyond the human ken to fathom. Where are the accuracy and fairness of the following statements? "We are forbidden on one side to say 'we know everything,' and on the other to affirm 'we know nothing.'" "Agnosticism is 'don't-know-ism.'" We could understand an ordinary orthodox preacher uttering such nonsense as this, but for an intelligent Unitarian minister to indulge in these theological platitudes will surprise many who are not aware of the power of theology, in any form, over reason. Who ever affirmed that "we know nothing," and what Agnostic has ever described his "ism" as "don't-know-ism"? Such a perversion of facts upon the part of Mr. Webster is as unjust as it is false. Before a person attempts to "impugn" Colonel Ingersoll, he should learn that Agnosticism refers only to the alleged existence of God, to a future life, and to the why and wherefore of the universe. Upon these subjects the Agnostic knows quite as much as the rev. gentleman, and perhaps more. For, to put it plainly, I, as an Agnostic, *know* that, in reference to the three above questions, there is nothing really *known*; while Mr. Webster, if he is a Christian, has that knowledge yet to acquire. I prefer the modesty of Agnosticism to the dogmatism of Mr. Webster's theology.

If the rev. gentleman's congregation were satisfied that in his lecture, "Ingersoll Impugned," he had really destroyed the Colonel's positions, his hearers must have been as intellectually weak as most orthodox worshippers are. Mr. Webster made an attack upon Colonel Ingersoll's lecture, entitled "What is Religion?" The first eight pages of this lecture contain a series of questions as to the Christian deity which the rev. gentleman, as a defender of Christianity, should have noticed; but he answered none of them. Why this evasion? Simply because the Colonel's indictment is unanswerable. Until what is stated in these eight pages is refuted, the Christian religion stands condemned as the height of folly, inconsistency, and injustice. Mr. Webster accuses the Colonel of confounding theology with religion. But we cannot have any so-called supernatural religion without theology. In fact, Mr. Webster admits "that there has never been natural religion without theology." He further says that the two "are indissolubly linked together." This is an admission that the one cannot be had without the other. Take theology from Mr. Webster's religion, and there is nothing distinctive left.

The rev. gentleman's criticism of Colonel Ingersoll's statements betrays confusion of thought and an inability to grasp the positions which he (Mr. Webster) sought to destroy. I have neither time nor space at my disposal to deal with all of Mr. Webster's "stiff work," but I will take a few of his most important points. He says: "Ingersoll glorifies science and plays it off against religion. But an examination of any of the sciences in the light of history reveals the fact that each was crude at first, and none is perfect yet. Take astronomy, chemistry, geology, any of the natural sciences, and you will find as much childishness in it as you find in the Hebrew cosmogony. Newton, as well as Moses, made mistakes. Ingersoll calls Ernst Haeckel 'the greatest of biologists,' but even Haeckel would not claim

omniscience." To allege that there is "as much childishness" in the sciences as there is in the Hebrew cosmogony, and that Newton made mistakes as well as Moses, is equivalent to saying that the Bible and Moses are childish and mistaken—which, no doubt, is the case. It is true that, historically speaking, what was originally termed science was "crude at first," and that science is not perfect yet. But this only means that in early times man's knowledge was small and imperfect, and that perfect sciences would mean the possession of all knowledge; that, however, is not yet obtained by man. Science is a growth, and it takes time to overcome the crude notions once entertained in reference to scientific questions. Even now there are some well-informed men whose minds are influenced by the teachings ascribed to Moses in regard to a creation and a flood, although both are opposed to known facts.

Colonel Ingersoll, in his lecture on Religion, writes as follows: "Nature has no design, no intelligence. Nature produces without purpose, without intelligence, and destroys without thought." This statement appears to have worried Mr. Webster. But, in my opinion, it is strictly accurate, as probably a little calm reflection will show him. In the first place, design implies reason and experience; and, secondly, all ideas of design, purpose, intention, and thought, in personal nature, are derived from man's consciousness, and the contemplation of his own acts and those of others. In order to affirm the same of the universe, infinite consciousness is necessary. But where is the proof that such a condition obtains? In the absence of proof I object to the notion even as a reasonable hypothesis. Darwin writes: "It is, I can now see, probable that all organic beings, including man, possess peculiarities of structure, which neither are now, nor were formerly, of any service to them." What purpose has nature in her storms at sea, when ships laden with men, women, and children, and also with valuable merchandise, go to the bottom? Where is the intention in the earthquakes, the volcanoes, the epidemics that devastate the very flower of humanity, and in the famine which kills its victims by thousands, by slow and torturing degrees? All these things are either done without purpose, or they are the result of infamous design. Let Mr. Webster take his choice.

Then we are asked: "But if nature has no intelligence, and man was 'naturally produced,' whence came the 'little intelligence' that man has? Is there any other source from which man could have got intelligence? If it is not in nature, how did it get into man? Man has design, purpose, intention: what power endowed him with these non-natural things?" As already shown, we cannot affirm intelligence of the *whole* of matter and force which constitutes nature, so as to form what is called mind. Yet we have evidence of intelligence existing, as we have that matter and force exist. It should, however, be remembered that intelligence is not an entity to be accounted for in the same sense as a granite rock or a man. It is only a quality of his nature, as hardness is of the rock. It is a phase of existence developed through conditions where it appears. It is the result of organised matter. The "whence" of intelligence is admittedly beset with difficulties, but it appears to have arisen gradually from natural causes which may not be at present fully understood. The exact place in nature where intelligence begins I do not pretend to say; but that it does begin in nature there can be no doubt, as we have clear evidence of the fact always before us.

Further, Mr. Webster asks: "If Nature is eternal in her purposelessness and failure, how can we successfully refuse to 'perpetuate disease and pain and to fill the world with failure'?" To this my reply is: Man is not eternal as man, although the materials of which he is composed may be eternal. But man, the individual part of purposeless nature, is the subject of reason and experience, and can therefore devise means to ends. If the same could be said of all nature, that, too, might consequently have purpose. The idea that the avalanche is purposely moved down a Swiss mountain to destroy the inhabitants of the village will not be maintained by any sane person, there being nothing to connect the effect with anything but the unintelligent law called gravitation. But there is nothing in nature or its laws to prevent man endeavoring to rescue the victims of the catastrophe. Nature, in these operations, appears

to be inexorable; but man, as a rule, is sympathetic. It is mainly by guarding man from the injurious results of nature, and by adapting its forces to beneficial purposes, that we become the agents of good to the civilised world. To be successful in doing good does not depend on the totality of nature being eternal or without purpose. It depends upon the capacity and disposition of man. It may be, and sometimes is, the fact that the forces of nature are too strong for him to master; but the scientific man refers the failure to his inability to control the operations of nature, and, to achieve his object, he strives to set in motion forces of greater strength.

I have now replied to what appear to me to be the strongest points in the rev. gentleman's criticism, and I leave my readers to judge of the result.

CHARLES WATTS.

Dean Farrar at Large.

To the just-published "International Library of Famous Literature" Dean Farrar contributes an essay on *The Literature of Religious Criticism*. To those who know the Dean's style, the article answers expectations. There is the usual fearless pronouncement of opinions that are accepted by all, except babes and sucklings and a certain section of the clergy; the usual glossing over of opinions that might be thought dangerous; and the usual untrustworthy references to other writers in support of his own opinions. Not many men of standing would consider it necessary to give quotations from Browning, Tennyson, and George Eliot, as though they were building up a highly complex and disputable proposition in support of the intellectual commonplace, that "No human being, no Pope of Rome, no Lama of Thibet, has the remotest right to claim infallibility." Still, one must be thankful for small mercies; and so we may gratefully picture the Dean squaring his shoulders for the fray, and launching such an "advanced" opinion as the above with all the daring of a Gordon Highlander going for a Boer entrenchment.

The title of Dean Farrar's essay could hardly have been more inappropriate. Of a history of religious criticism there is hardly the shadow of a shade; the real object of the article is to inquire whether "the incessant and unfettered activity of the human mind in all matters of inquiry has resulted in shaking any of the fundamental conceptions in the religion of those millions.....who profess and call themselves Christians." It is admitted that criticism has destroyed the old conceptions of heaven, hell, and the Bible; but concerning the doctrine of a future life, which "transcends proof," and does not depend upon logical demonstration—fortunately for Dean Farrar—this "is instinctive in human nature, and has never been shaken"; whilst, as to the question whether man's sense of the existence of God has been weakened by modern thought, "We are justified in meeting the question with a most decided negative. Judging by all the data open to us, we may safely assert that infidelity has not increased." Here "infidelity" is clearly taken as the equivalent of Atheism, and in support of his belief (or had I better say his statement?) that Atheism has not increased during the last century he appends the following quotation from Bishop Butler, which, with characteristic inaccuracy, he places in the wrong part of Butler's writings, and which I give to illustrate the writer's mental calibre. Butler says:—

"It is come, I know not how, to be taken for granted by many persons that Christianity is not so much as a subject of inquiry, but that it is, now at length, discovered to be fictitious. And, accordingly, they treat it as if, in the present age, *this were an agreed point among all people of discernment*, and nothing remained but to set it up as a principal subject of mirth and ridicule."

Now, as can be seen at a glance, Farrar actually italicises the very part of the quotation that destroys its value as evidence for him. Butler's statement, written sarcastically, and meant to be taken, as all sarcasm should be, with a pinch of salt, applies to "men of discernment," and is an argument against the general prevalence of Atheism rather than the reverse.

Moreover, Dean Farrar should have discernment enough to perceive that Butler is not alluding to the want of belief in the existence of God, but to the want of belief in the specific teachings of Christianity. That there then existed much unbelief in Christianity is true; that it was, in any liberal sense of the term, general is not true. Green says (*Short History*, pp. 717-18) that in the eighteenth century "England, as a whole, remained at heart religious," and "in the middle classes the old piety lived on unchanged." At any rate, there is no doubt that deliberate Atheism was far from common. The general form of "infidelity" was Deism. Free-thought only became Atheistic at a later date, and that thanks much to Butler's own efforts in showing that Deism was just as illogical as the Christianity is assailed.

In order to prove that Atheism is far less common now than a century since, Dean Farrar cites his own experience as rector of a London parish, when, although familiar with the condition of a large number of working men of various grades, I found many who were addicted to drink, and many who rarely, if ever, set foot inside a church; but I cannot recall even one of them who had the smallest leaning towards infidel opinions." Well, if the Dean spent his time in looking for Atheists among those who were "addicted to drink," one can only feel gratified at the result of his researches, that not "even one of them had the smallest leaning towards infidel opinions."

But the delicious absurdity of it all! Here is a man of Dean Farrar's position trying to prove that Atheism was common a hundred years ago because some people laughed at *Christian* beliefs (as a matter of fact, that Dean laughs at many of them himself); and, next, that Atheism is less common to-day because all the drunken men he knew were Christians! One need only say, further, that if Dean Farrar had used his eyes or his ears in anything like a serviceable manner, he would easily have discovered that at no other period of English history was Atheism so common among ordinary classes of people as at present. The growth of the Socialist movement in England would supply him with ample proof of this; for, although in England Socialism is not so frankly anti-Theistic as on the Continent, the number of avowed Atheists is sufficiently numerous to attract the attention of anyone but a clergyman drilled in the habit of seeing only such facts as agree with his theories.

Pursuing his way, it dawns upon Dean Farrar that probably many of his readers may be aware that there are large numbers of Agnostics abroad, and so he hastens to add that, although "infidelity is sometimes confused with Agnosticism, they are wide as the poles asunder." His proof of this is, that Professor Huxley, the coiner of the term, "so far from being an infidel, was a man of a reverent, and even a religious, mind. Never in his life did he, or Darwin or Tyndall, dream of denying the existence of God." I am seriously tempted to ask, Is Dean Farrar speaking as the result of his own ignorance, or is he trading on the ignorance of his Christian readers? Does he know any representative Atheist who ever *denied* the existence of a God? Does he not know that this description of Atheism has been repudiated times out of number in the press, and on the platform, by representative Atheists? Does he not know that any sane definition of Agnosticism, even that given by Huxley himself, completely sets on one side any knowledge of the existence of God, and consequently any belief concerning him? If he does not know these things, what is his word worth concerning unbelief? If he does, what are we to think of him after reading the above?

Just note the confusion of the man. He sets out to prove that modern science has not weakened the belief in God. First he cites, in proof of the statement that Atheism—or, as he is pleased to call it, "infidelity"—was common in the eighteenth century, a wrongly referenced quotation from Butler, which, in the face of it, only proves that unbelief in *Christianity* was common among men of discernment. Proof number two is that, although he knew a number of drunken working men, none of them were Atheists. Proof number three: Professor Huxley, who once declared that the man who said there was no God was only equalled in foolishness by the man who said there was, was a religious man,

because he never denied the existence of something concerning which he knew nothing; and, finally, that neither Darwin nor Tyndall was an infidel—for the same reason that Huxley is called religious—in face of the fact that Darwin went over all the proofs for the existence of God, and dismissed them as inconclusive, and that Tyndall, at one time or another, attacked almost every doctrine of Christianity. Where, out of the Church, could a man with a mind so hopelessly confused as this rise to eminence?

Dean Farrar's statements get more reckless as he proceeds. He says: "The greatest and best Agnostic men of science of modern days, even while with the Psalmist they would say of God that 'clouds and darkness are round about him,' would, nevertheless, have been the first to add that 'righteousness and judgment are the habitation of this throne.' And this gradually became the mental attitude even of J. S. Mill, in spite of the effects of his early training."

Of this statement concerning Mill I can only say with the coster, "Language aint ekal to it." One can hardly find language strong enough to express one's disgust at such an insidious method of misrepresenting a dead man's opinions. There is not a sentence in any of Mill's writings that would give any foundation for any such statement. Mill's opinion at the close of his life concerning the existence of God was what it had been right through his career. Eighteen months before his death, on leaving Westminster Abbey after Grote's funeral, at which a religious service had been performed, he expressed his determination to have a "very different ceremonial performed from that" at his own interment. And Alexander Bain's emphatic testimony, founded on a personal friendship of many years' standing, is that "in everything characteristic of the creed of Christendom he was a thorough-going negationist. He admitted neither its truth nor its utility." After this, I do not know that anything further need be said, except to again call attention to the untrustworthy character of Dean Farrar's reasoning and statements of fact. At some future time I may return to the Dean and deal with his misrepresentations in other directions.

Two weeks ago I had occasion to point out the gross misrepresentations and absurd reasoning of a leading London Nonconformist. I now present my readers with a sample taken from the Established Church. Take which you will, gentlemen; the choice is easy—they are both alike. They may be of different varieties, but they belong to the same species. Tear off their local labels, and they are indistinguishable. I leave all free to take the one they like best. If they are wise, they will take—neither.

C. COHEN.

Emile Zola.

If it be true that no man can be called famous until his name has penetrated beyond the borders of his native country, it must at least be conceded to Emile Zola that this last seal has been set upon his reputation. He is the most potent force in European literature to-day. He has changed the direction and character of the world's fiction. For many years he has been discussed as no other living novelist has been discussed. The Romanticists, the Idealists, the Sentimentalists, and the so-called Moralists have all in turn assailed him. Zola is the leader of a literary revolt, and he has all the courage which is needed in a revolutionary leader. True, he is only the inheritor of the tradition of Naturalism. Balzac was the first and mildest expounder of the new gospel; then arose Gustave Flaubert; and, lastly, comes Zola, improving upon his predecessors so much that he may be said to have started a school of his own.

Let us take a brief survey, with a sympathetic consideration, or the career of this Danton of literature. Emile Zola was born in Paris in April, 1840. His father was an Italian, his mother a Frenchwoman. The father, who was an engineer, seems to have been a man of great strength of character and tenacity of purpose—qualities which he undoubtedly transmitted to his distinguished son. The Zolas removed to Aix some time after Emile's birth, and here, in a quiet country town, he passed his early years. The father died when Emile was but seven years of age; but the

mother managed, by self-denial and steady purpose, to secure her son a liberal education.

How vivid these early impressions were may be gathered from the frequency with which scenes from early recollections are introduced in his novels. They are marked from other descriptions by the greater ease and expansion and noticeable sympathy of treatment. Nothing seems more congenial to him than this beautiful earth, the bounteous beginnings of Spring, the excesses of intoxicating Summer, and the sad glories of Autumn and Winter.

When he was eighteen Emile found himself thrown upon his own resources in Paris, most beautiful and most terrible of cities. His funds were at the lowest ebb; his widowed mother could hardly support herself, to say nothing of helping him. In this extremity Zola took up with literature, and, incredible as it may seem, wrote poetry. Zola, a poet, and faced with the problem of daily bread! It is even said he was put to the invention of snaring sparrows on the roof for food. Not the Johnsons, nor the Savages, nor the most sordid denizens of Grub-street were ever more hardily beset by the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Small wonder that to-day he is a pessimist. Few human beings have been so nearly crushed by the Juggernaut of modern society.

The poems never saw light, Zola not being able to find a publisher; but the beautiful story, *La Rève*, still shows the poetry in his nature. The two years of cold, hunger, and semi-nakedness in gloomy garrets came to an end. He obtained employment at Hachette's, the famous publishing firm. The salary was small, but it kept the future novelist alive. Zola wrote by night after the daily toil was done. In 1863 he made his *début* as a writer of fiction with *Contes à Ninon*. In 1865 he issued *La Confession de Claude*, which attracted both the public—and the police; luckily the Parisian sweeneyes were unable to find the young author. The next book was *Thérèse Raquin*, in which he first displayed a scientific bent. This finally resulted in the *Rougon-Macquart* series, the world-renowned history of a family under the second empire. This series of novels in its entirety is a stupendous piece of work. Zola's idea was to develop and illustrate the law of heredity. Given certain taints in the ancestry, the descendants will certainly reproduce them with variations modified by environment. Throughout one recognises the hand of a master. To the French people of his time he presented a faithful mirror. He is one of the greatest historians, leaving to posterity a legacy of acute analyses of current social life. Listening under the spell of this great magician, we hear the confused hum, and feel the tumult of a whole world. What a subject! The joys and sorrows, the actual life of France, with its complexity of an advanced, and at the same time decadent, civilisation. He exhibits with an entire objectivity the world as it is, showing neither pessimistic nor optimistic bias; purpose nor moral. There is nothing like it in the literature of the world.

L'Assommoir was the book that made Zola's fortune. It was an unqualified, an unexampled success. He had found his public, and his public had found him. In 1880 followed his masterpiece, *Nana*. It is a work of real genius. There are bits of description in it which, perhaps, only Zola himself could surpass; and as a presentation of a certain phase of life there is nothing to equal it. To-day the one-time poor clerk at Hachette's is the acknowledged king in the ranks of literature. The strong, dogged will-power which held him up in his years of fearful struggle has enabled him to conquer a first place in the ranks of literature.

Zola is an Atheist, and in his conduct in the Dreyfus case he proved himself a real hero. The man of letters became the man of action. Like Voltaire, he championed truth and justice in the supreme hour of danger. It was an example of magnificent courage. Honest to his own injury, brave against the enmity of tens of thousands, he has raised our opinion of human nature.

We like to think of him as of a brave helmsman fighting the fury of the seas, while floods sweep wildly over him; whilst, with firm hands grasping the wheel and surveying the waste of swirling waves, he strives with dauntless courage to guide the laboring ship into the safe waters of the harbor.

MIMNERMUS.

Acid Drops.

UNDER the heading of "A Letter Typical of Thousands," the *Daily Mail* printed an epistle from Miss Agnes E. Weston, who rejoices to be known as "the sailor's friend." This lady runs lodging and refreshment houses on strict temperance principles for Jack ashore. She also writes goody-goody tracts and articles for Jack at sea. We have read several of these effusions, and it has been our duty to criticise some of them. Miss Weston may have a soft heart; her religious writings tend to prove that she has also a soft head. And this letter of hers in the *Daily Mail* is of a piece with all the rest. "It is a painful fact," she says, "that no day has been set apart for national humiliation and prayer." We must prove that we are a Christian nation—just as though the Boers couldn't prove themselves to be a Christian nation too! Moreover, we must "ask God to guide and direct our generals, to nerve our forces, and to give victory to our arms." We must put "God first," and then God will put "England first." How pretty! But what if the Boers pray harder than the British? What if the Lord inclines his ears to their petitions? If he does so, he will give us the go-by, for it is impossible to give *both* sides the victory. Miss Weston doesn't see this. She talks without thinking. She takes it for granted that God will answer *our* prayers. It never occurs to her that he may answer the prayers of the other side.

A great many other Christians, including the Rev. Dr. Horton, of Hampstead, are calling for a day of national humiliation and prayer; and the President of the Wesleyan Conference has ventured to name Sunday, January 7, as the fit and proper occasion. It is possible, therefore, that we shall soon see multitudes of English Christians on their knees, begging God to let them be the upper-dog in this fight in South Africa. Some of them will confess that they are dreadful sinners, but they will remind him that all men are sinners, and that they belong to the noble British variety. Some will say that they are in the right, and respectfully suggest that God is bound to recognise the fact. Others will say that they are in the wrong, but will ask God to let them win all the same.

At this rate the South African war will resolve itself into a prayer-fight; and if there be any truth in religion, that is how all wars should be conducted. The men of God on both sides should wrestle (not with each other, but) with the Lord. They should keep it up all day, and if necessary (as Jacob did) all night. Ambulance parties should be in readiness to carry off the sick and exhausted. And when the Lord had decided the matter, all the men of God on the losing side should be strongly, and even pressingly, invited to go home. We do not mean home to their houses, but home to heaven.

This would be a great saving of valuable lives. We should just have to shoot or hang our special detachment of sky-pilots when the Lord decided in favor of the enemy. Plenty of the species would be left for future requirements. The bill of costs would be extremely light, and on the credit side we should be able to reckon all the brave fellows who now get shot in war, all the wives who are made widows, and all the children who are made orphans—to say nothing of the wealth which is so lavishly squandered. We regard this plan of campaign as simply magnificent; and, instead of patenting it, we make it public property, like the war-poems of Messrs. Swinburne and Kipling. It is our free and generous contribution. We ask nothing for it; not even thanks—especially from the dear, devoted, disinterested, self-sacrificing men of God, who ought to be delighted to play the part of Jonah when the ship of state is in a storm.

This subject, by the way, is engaging the attention of many correspondents in the *Daily News*. One of them, Herbert W. Horwill (is he a reverend?), declares that God Almighty has already given his decision. All the British have to do is to recognise the fact, and fall on their knees and beg terms of peace from the Boers. "Whether we send out our troops," he says, "by the thousand or by the million, the result will be the same, for the Boers have on their side the 'Ally to Whom' it is not necessary to send subsidies." This is very consoling. But how did Mr. Horwill find it out? Has he been imitating Moses and spending a few days with Yahveh?

"A Free Church Minister" takes the opposite view, and assures us that the Almighty is on the side of the British. A victory for our arms means a victory for civil and religious liberty, and other good things; and "Thank God," he adds, "such victory is certain." Three cheers for the prophets.

Mr. W. T. Stead, who is always to the front on such occasions, has issued a "solemn remonstrance and appeal," which he entitles "Peace Sunday in War Time." Some years ago this gentleman boasted of receiving tips from heaven, and it was even rumored that the Lord was only keeping the celestial throne warm for him until he arrived and sat upon

it as its rightful occupant. Mr. Stead is still in the same pious frame of mind. He seems to be fully apprised of the beginning and the end of all things. "We went to war," he says, "and from that day to this disaster after disaster has crowded upon us. General after general has appealed to the ordeal of battle, and general after general has recoiled defeated from the stricken field. And if we persist in going farther we shall fare worse." For, as Mr. Stead reminds us, there is a God who judgeth in the earth.

This is Mr. Stead all over. He knows—he knows! But if he knows what is *going* to happen, he either doesn't know, or he forgets, what *has* happened. *We* went to war, did we? Why, it was the Boers who began it. Whether they had provocation or justification is of course arguable. But it is beyond argument that they began the fighting. They invaded Natal, and every battle up to the present has been fought on British territory.

Mr. Stead's appeal is addressed to the clergy and ministers of all denominations. He tells them that they are apathetic servants of the Prince of Peace. That is quite true, but Mr. Stead finds it out, as he finds out so many other things, at the eleventh hour. Religion and war belong to precisely the same stage of human development. All the great religions arose during the military period, and in all probability will end with it.

According to Mr. Stead, the attitude of Christian ministers "has done more to induce Atheism in the minds of the masses than all the discourses of Mr. Bradlaugh." Well, it all depends on how you look at the matter. For our part, we have not noticed any special growth of Atheism during the present war. On the contrary, we notice rather a recrudescence of piety. People are talking more about God than ever. Indeed, if this war only lasts till next summer, it is probable that the people will have developed enough religion to enable them even to take Mr. Stead seriously.

That the Christian ministers are "hireling shepherds" we do not want Mr. Stead to inform us. We, at any rate, have always said so. But how about Mr. Stead himself? Is it not a common opinion that he always combines a passion for "movements" with a keen regard to the main chance?

The Queen has got in front of the day-of-humiliation people by "commanding" the Archbishop of Canterbury to arrange for a "general collection throughout the churches of England and Wales" on Sunday, January 7, in aid of the families of our soldiers engaged in South Africa. This is far more practical than praying to the Lord or any other supernatural bogey. God helps those who help themselves—and nobody else.

The *British Weekly* has ventured to discourse on "Christianity and the War." It feels that it is skating on thin ice. It says that, as regards the war, there is among Christians considerable difference of opinion and much searching of the heart. No doubt. "A considerable number of Christians, both ministers and laymen, are declaring that the Sermon on the Mount forbids war." So it does, and no amount of wriggling will get out of it.

"Many outsiders are rejoicing that Christianity is thus declared impracticable by its own disciples." We, apparently, are the outsiders thus indefinitely alluded to. But we don't rejoice; we are sad that people, otherwise sensible, should pin themselves to glaring inconsistency.

"Some frank words need to be spoken on this subject." Undoubtedly. "Let us put some plain questions to those Christian ministers who are talking about the Sermon on the Mount. It is written there: That ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also. It is also written: Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn thou not; and, further, the commandment runs: Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth."

Having thus stated the case, the *B. W.* comes down a squelcher. Did Christ, it asks, mean his words to be taken in any such way—that is, literally? Well, there we have Christ's words, and the only natural conclusion is that he meant what he said. His meaning is obvious—to the Christian ministers the *B. W.* speaks of, as to others. But the *B. W.* says he often threw his precepts into paradoxical forms. A pretty form in which to present a divine "revelation." And who is to interpret these paradoxical messages? How are we to find out what was hidden behind the words we read? The *B. W.* has no special mission or charter of enlightenment.

As a matter of fact, the *B. W.*, as well as a great number of Christians, have been very much disturbed, not simply by the actual words, but by the *spirit* of Christ's teaching, which

was altogether opposed to war in any form or under whatever aggravation. The *B. W.* had better say at once—what is perfectly clear to outside observers—that Christ is cashiered until the end of the Boer war. Afterwards, we will again consider his message of the non-resistance of evil, and the patient acceptance of a smack in the face.

The Bible is anything but a vegetarian book, but the paper called the *Vegetarian* is conducted on Bible Christian lines—at least, ostensibly. Yet in its issue dated December 23 we note that an article, by a Christian, Mr. J. C. Kenworthy, has to confess that at this Christmas time "armies of men who call themselves Christians are overrunning great territories, dragging behind them hordes of cattle for killing, and pushing forward against hordes of men for killing." But what does the gentleman expect? Human nature will never be tamed by sentimentality. Something rational is necessary, and Christianity cannot supply it.

Evangelist Moody is dead. His malady was the same as Colonel Ingersoll's. Clearly the Lord is no respecter of persons. He sendeth his heart-trouble alike to the just and the unjust. We mean the Freethinker and the Christian.

Moody was a shrewd, clever man, and knew how to work upon the feelings of the average illiterate Christian. He always refused to have anything to do with reason. On one occasion he said that a man who began to argue was hopeless. The only thing to do with him was to get rid of him. Moody pointed out that Job nearly got lost in arguing, although he successfully resisted the attack of boils and other afflictions.

What a great success Moody scored when he first visited England! The up-to-date revival show, scientifically managed and advertised, was a novelty on this side of the Atlantic. Then there was Sankey's singing, which caught on with the ladies, and drew plenty of tears, which was more than half the battle in that business. Moody himself had a clear, strong voice, but it was not melodious, and scarcely pleasant. Still, he was a splendid showman, like Booth, and for a time he had the Christian world at his feet.

Mr. Matthew Arnold went to hear Moody, and made his visit an opportunity to flee at Professor Clifford—for the great St. Matthew could never stand anybody's Freethought but his own. Clifford was advocating flat Atheism, and warning the world against Christianity in every shape and form. He said it was a superstition which had wrecked one civilisation, and nearly succeeded in wrecking another. Now this was very annoying to Arnold, who, while disbelieving every doctrine of Christianity, still called himself a Christian. So he took it out of Clifford, in his genial-malicious way, by saying that Moody was a master of the philosophy of history in comparison with the Professor of Mathematics at London University. Which was surely too absurd to be witty.

Moody was to have visited Scotland some months ago. But his great patron was Lord Overton, and the *Labour Leader* raised a terrible scandal about that benevolent pietist's "sweating" of his employees, and Moody thought it wiser to stop in America, and the great conversion-crusade in Glasgow was, as it turns out, settled for ever and ever. Amen.

Dr. Talmage has been discoursing on the sermon of the future. He says that the coming sermon will be a *reported* sermon. God forbid! Talmage's own sermons in the Christian weeklies are far from exciting any desire to see ordinary journals occupied with similar compositions. He says the "time will come when the newspapers will reproduce the Gospel of Christ." This is a very silly observation, the present tendency, as any news-editor knows, being quite otherwise. Nowadays, in ordinary newspapers, theology is as far as possible most carefully eschewed.

Though the Pope has not yet given his official decision as to whether confession and absolution by telephone are valid, a Passionist Father, the Rev. Arthur Divine, says in a recently-published book on the Sacraments that the telephone may be effectively so used under certain circumstances. The next step, says the *Christian World*, would seem to be confession by telepathy, and there should even be a future for the cinematograph in the economy of the Roman Church. We may add that the phonograph would have been a much better vehicle than the Evangelists for the utterances of Christ, though the latter would have been just as inapplicable to the conditions of modern life.

"A Clergyman" concludes his contributions to the *Church Gazette* on "The Higher Criticism: What we may Teach?" in the following words: "What faith was ever sustained by the belief that the ritual directions of Leviticus came from Moses himself? What heart was ever consoled by the reflection that the whale swallowed Jonah, or that Balaam's

ass held a colloquy with its master? Let us not seek to identify the cause of Christ with a literal acceptance of every Old Testament narrative, or a blind adherence to all our Biblical traditions, lest in the end we injure the very cause that we desire to serve."

Mr. Justice North is about to retire from the Bench. And time, too, is the unanimous opinion in judicial and extra-judicial circles. His absurd decision that a speaker has no copyright in his own speeches was quite enough to damn him everlastingly as a judge or as a man of ordinary common sense. His attitude in the blasphemy trial of Mr. Foote was still worse. Such ornaments of the Bench may be easily dispensed with. Their retirement can hardly evoke even a pretence of regret.

Here is the conclusion of an article on "St. Thomas: The Saint of Christmas" in the *Church Gazette*: "It would appear that the whole evidence, of which I have quoted only a very small part, tends to show that St. Thomas's Day was the Pagan day of Yule and the commencement of the Scandinavian New Year, that the name of the day was only imposed, and the Saint never played any part in the national life, and that Yuletide was for hundreds of years a folk-festival quite distinct from the Christian Christmas, although the two gradually became consolidated."

The London County Council has won its case against "General" Booth. Lord Chief Justice Russell, Mr. Justice Bingham, and Mr. Justice Darling have decided "without hesitation" that the Salvation Army shelters are common lodging-houses, and therefore subject to inspection and regulation. For a long time Booth has defied the authorities. He took the position that he had a right to keep his shelters as overcrowded, dirty, and dangerous as he pleased. But the law has been laid down decisively that he has no such right. Henceforth he will have to carry on the "benevolent" enterprises with some regard to the public health and safety. No doubt he will find this irksome, for the Lord's servants are always prone to turn up their noses at human authority; but he will have to submit all the same, and fall into a line with uninspired mortals.

A quarter of a million sterling is the sum fixed by the authorities of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel as that which they hope to raise by the end of 1901. And very likely they will get it! The diocese of Lincoln has set itself the task of collecting £10,000. The Manchester diocese hopes to exceed that amount, and Ireland is quite sanguine as to a contribution of £10,000. All for the dissemination of a Gospel about the interpretation of which the Churches are hopelessly disagreed, and are always likely to be in violent antagonism. Furthermore, a Gospel which is quite impracticable by those who accept it.

In the Christian Churches, from the Pope who begs for his Peter's Pence down to the humblest little Dissenting Bethel, there is no hesitation in asking for funds. *Truth* mentions that, at a late harvest festival in a suburban church, the vicar, alluding in his sermon to the large attendance of "strangers," asked them what they came for, and told them, on the authority of an estimate furnished by one of the churchwardens, that they were "only worth about 3d. a dozen."

This was an atrocious display of clerical bad taste, but it can be easily equalled by other instances. The *Church Gazette*, commenting on it, says: "The primary object seems to have been to get the money. The grand opportunity of doing good is plainly not valued." But what is the good that might have been expected from such a parson and in such a church?

The commercial instinct seems likely to spoil the future performances of the Passion Play at Oberammergau. There used to be pastoral and picturesque features about this representation. It was so very stupid in its simplicity, and so often verged on the innocently profane. Now we hear that a service of electric motor-cars has been organised to convey spectators from the distant railway-station. Already there is some talk of inviting tenders from contractors for refreshment privileges. It is even suggested that, before long, advertising spaces on the program of the Oberammergau Theatre will be for sale. Thus are we descending. One doesn't know why the *Freethinker* should specially complain. Jesus Christ may like to see himself impersonated by a peasant. Perhaps it was the Devil who, at some previous performances, deluged the spectators with rain.

Mr. A. C. Benson has recently published a biography of his father, the late Archbishop Benson. The biographer must not be confused with that much too-fly member of the family who wrote the suggestive *Dodo*. The good young Benson tells some interesting stories about the late Primate. The Archbishop, speaking of a conceited and arrogant young clergyman, said: "The fact is, these young gentlemen think that the office magnifies the man." The Archbishop added:

"Depend upon it, the doctrine of Apostolical Succession is everything for a man's own encouragement and help in dispirited hours; but it is not a doctrine to *preach* to the world." Assuredly not; the world is much too wise to accept these young clerics at their own estimate. As to the "Apostolical Succession"—well, that is unhistorical nonsense.

A very curious story is told by the late Archbishop. He says: "Count S. told me that he saw in a police-court in Russia a priest brought up, in undress of purple, and the court, magistrates and all, knelt, and a police-sergeant kissed his hand. Then rising, the magistrate said: 'You nasty, drunken beast; so you were drunk again yesterday. I'll make you remember it this time.' The priest was led out to an adjoining yard, his clothes torn off, and fifty lashes given to him; when he was brought back, half fainting, all knelt and received his blessing."

This is rather a tall story. Yet not too much to have been accepted unquestioningly from "Count S." by one to whom the anonymous stories of the Gospels presented no incredibilities.

Why on earth should a trade journal be rabidly religious, or rabidly anything else? Is it possible that there are no bakers and confectioners? Are they all of one way of thinking, and is that way of thinking the one which is indicated by the editor of the *Practical Confectioner and Baker*? This gentleman speaks of Atheists who "shake their puny fists under the nose of the Almighty." He also says he knew one of them who had a bad attack of colic, and his agonising cry, "O Lord, I'm dying," could be heard all over the house. After this imbecile chestnut, it is not surprising to hear the same person say that Ingersoll's "foul tongue," etc., brought him down to "the status of a bar-room loafer." Many hundreds of pages of Ingersoll's lectures are in print, and we defy this libeller to find a single "foul" sentence or expression in any one of them. We believe a study of Ingersoll would improve his own coarse style.

Mr. Morrison Davidson contributes one of his characteristic Jesus Christ articles to the *Clarion*. He is still in love with "the Mighty Innovator of Nazareth," who is going to save the world—some day. Up to the present the said Mighty Innovator has not been a very great success. But no matter, the time *will* come, and then we shall see what we do see. The great difficulty, meanwhile, is that "all the Churches in Christendom have combined to entomb him [J. C., not M. D.] under mountains of Priestcraft and Mammonism." Well, if that is the case, it will take a frightful time to dig him out, and when he is dug out he may not be worth the digging.

We venture to suggest to Mr. Davidson that, if Jesus Christ has allowed the Churches to entomb him, he might just as well have stopped when he was first placed in a much smaller and more accessible sepulchre. To get out of a little tomb only to be shut up in a big one does not seem a great display of wisdom. On the whole, the world is getting weary of this Christ who is always arriving and never arrives.

Mr. Roberts, who is elected to represent Utah in the American Congress, is of course a Mormon, and has three wives; only one of them being now "legal," and the two others "spiritual." Lots of Christian women in the Eastern States—most of them unmarried—call for the expulsion of Polygamist Roberts. They object to his monopolising three of their sex, which is rather odd; but it is odder still that they cry out in the name of the God of the Bible; for there is not a word against polygamy in the whole of that book, from the first mistake in Genesis to the last curse in Revelation.

Salt Lake City contains sixty thousand inhabitants, yet the police force consists of only thirty-three men. The people are industrious, sober, and hospitable. This is admitted by the Rev. Dr. G. H. Hepworth in the *New York Herald*. Nevertheless, he seems to think that the other States should forcibly put Utah right on the polygamy question. But he does not attempt to show that polygamy is condemned by the Christian Scriptures.

Satis Biswas, the Hindu student, who was charged with obtaining money on false pretences, has been formally bound over in recognisances of £5 on condition of his returning to his native country. This young gentleman got baptised in various faiths, and made something out of each performance. Perhaps he will be able to do business in India with the competing missionary firms, who are always looking out for fresh converts.

Parson Curry, of Holy Trinity Church, Newington, decided to have no midnight service on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. Drunken and disorderly people had got into the habit of crowding into the church on those occasions—probably after the "pubs." shut.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, December 31, Athenæum Hall, London, W.; 7.30
 "Praying Against the Boers."
 January 7, Athenæum Hall; 21, Liverpool; 28, Glasgow.
 February 4, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—January 14, Leicester; 21 and 28, Athenæum, London. February 4, Sheffield; 11, Bolton; 18, New Brompton; 25, Glasgow.—All communications for Mr. Charles Watts should be sent to him at 24 Carminia-road, Balham, S.W. If a reply is required, a stamped and addressed envelope must be enclosed.

IN consequence of the holidays, first, and of Mr. Foote's illness, secondly, nearly all the Correspondence stands over till next week. Mr. Foote hopes to be well enough for his lecture at the Athenæum Hall this (Sunday) evening (Dec. 31). If not, he will provide a competent substitute.

W. H. DEAKIN.—Thanks for your pretty card and good wishes.

T. H. DUKE.—Cuttings are always welcome. We have shown the one you send to Mr. McCabe.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks once more, at the end of the year, for your welcome weekly batches of useful cuttings.

RECEIVED.—Two Worlds—Independent Pulpit—Freidenker—Blue Grass Blade—El Libre Pensamiento—Ethical World—Torch of Reason—Secular Thought.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 28 Stonecutter-street, London, E.C.

THE National Secular Society's office is at No. 377 Strand, London, where all letters should be addressed to Miss Vance.

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

FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

ORDERS for literature should be sent to Mr. R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C.

LECTURE NOTICES must reach 28 Stonecutter-street by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS:—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Sugar Plums.

MR. FOOTE re-opens the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, this evening (Dec. 31) with a lecture on "Praying Against the Boers."

We are preparing a special New Year's number of the *Freethinker*. Our ordinary issue for next week (that is to say, dated January 7) will contain special articles by all our leading contributors, and will in other ways be made particularly interesting. Amongst the extra items will be two, if not three, Ingersoll pictures; including a portrait taken after his death, and a very fine one taken during the last months of his life. This special number of the *Freethinker* will be advertised in various ways, and we shall print considerably in excess of the usual supply. May we ask our readers to help us by introducing this special number, at any rate, to the notice of their friends? It would be comparatively easy for a couple of thousand of them, at least, to act as advertising agents for us on this occasion.

London Freethinkers, and provincial Freethinkers too who happen to be visiting London, are once more reminded of the Annual Dinner which takes place at the Holborn Restaurant on Monday evening, January 8. This week's *Freethinker* has to be got ready for the press so early, in consequence of the Christmas holidays, that we are unable to give the full program as we expected. It will, however, appear in our next issue. Meanwhile, we repeat that Mr. Foote will preside at the dinner, and will be supported by Messrs. Watts, Cohen, and other well-known Secularists.

The Statutory Meeting of the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, is fixed for Wednesday evening, January 10, at Anderson's Hotel, Fleet-street. All Shareholders whose calls are paid up are entitled to attend and vote, or to be represented by proxy. Proxy forms are being sent to them with formal notices of the meeting. These forms can be filled up in favor of Mr. Foote. Of course this is not obligatory. Shareholders are free to appoint any Director or Shareholder to represent them. We merely suggest what is advisable.

Maitre Labori, the brave and capable counsel who defended Zola and Dreyfus, was nearly assassinated at Rennes, and, for our part, we have not the slightest doubt that the

affair was deliberately arranged. Fortunately, the would-be assassin's bullet lodged in the muscles of the victim's back, and did not injure the spinal column. In a few days Maitre Labori recovered sufficiently to attend the trial again, much to the dismay of General Mercier and other military ruffians. Most of the Church and Army journals would have rejoiced at his death, but as he got better they started the infamous lie that he was not shot at all, but had told a yarn to hood-wink the public. Naturally the *Libre Parole*, edited by the infamous Drumont, was well to the front in this libelling of Maitre Labori. But the Jew-hater, who is said to be a Jew himself, has had to pay for his share in the business. He has been found guilty of libel—or his journal has—and ordered to pay a fine of £80, besides inserting the judgment against him at advertisement rates in forty Paris and two hundred provincial papers. So there is some justice left in France, after all.

We take it that Mr. Andrew Lang wrote the *Daily News* leading-article notice of the new volume of *Prayers from the Poets*, from which we have pleasure in making the following extract: "Poetry has often been employed in the service of religion, but it would be folly to contend that there was any essential relation between the two. If we take the greatest poets of the world, Homer can hardly be called religious, Goethe certainly was not so, while Shakespeare's religion, whatever it may have been, lies deeper than ever plummet sounded." Dante was religious, and his ideas of hell were probably responsible for some of the "traces of spiritual agony that were written on his face." Cowper's creed was even gloomier, for it curtailed no purgatory. "But," the reviewer grimly adds, "his mind gave way under the strain."

The Paris correspondent of the *Morning Post* has interviewed Zola, who imparted some interesting views on the South African war, on the hatred of England by some continental nations, particularly France, and on militarism generally. Freethinkers will mostly echo the sentiment of the following passage: "France must realise that her future depends on her industries. She must abandon her vague dreams of conquest, and prefer the peaceful glory earned by her men of science, her artists, her men of letters, and her manufacturers. If France relies on war for aggrandisement, she is doomed to disappear. But there is a great social movement preparing that will sweep away all such barbarism. Wars may delay it for a little time, but it is bound to come, and with all the greater force that it will have been the longer delayed." Zola, however, had somewhat sadly to add: "I fear I will not see its dawn."

Mr. Frederic Harrison, lecturing at Newton Hall on "The Centenary of George Washington," said that "the last of the chief creators of nations had a spotless record as a man, a soldier, and a statesman." Unlike Cromwell, he was "evidently by conviction a practical Agnostic, absorbed in the affairs of the world."

Shelley.

"The small clear silver lute of the young spirit
 That sits i' the morning star."

—*Prometheus Unbound*.

It is related of Robert Browning that, as a young man, he one day passed a bookstall and saw, in a box of second-hand volumes, a book advertised as "Mr. Shelley's Atheistical Poems, scarce." Badly printed, shamefully mutilated, these discarded blossoms touched young Browning to new emotions. This contact with the dead singer was the dawn of a new life to the clever lad. From that time Browning's poetic production began. This result was not surprising. Shelley is indisputably the first singer of our century. To him song was natural speech. With a great outlay of labor, special education, and careful selection of circumstances, many have purchased their poetic rights as the chief captain bought the name of Roman; but Shelley was poet born.

So surely as Shakespeare is the first of our dramatic, and Milton of our epic poets, so certainly is Shelley the greatest of our lyric poets. Who that has read them can ever forget his superb songs? In addition he wrote "Adonais," the greatest elegiac poem since "Lycidas," and "The Cenci," the finest tragedy since "King Lear."

In this, the closing year of the present century, we find that Shelley emerges as the supreme figure destined to immortality of fame. Many of his contemporaries who overshadowed him whilst he was living have almost faded into mere names. But Shelley has a message for generations yet unborn.

Long will it be ere the time when men "shall not learn war any more," or "live and move harmonious as

the sacred stars above"; long ere the human face so radiates with intelligence and love that the air around it shall be "bright as the air around a star." But when a poet like Shelley believes in a coming golden age, we, who are only common men and women, may be pardoned for choosing rather to think with him than with the pessimistic prophets of our time.

Shelley was well aware in what faculties he surpassed ordinary men. He knew that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamt of in the pinchbeck philosophy of tenth-rate poets and first-rate theologians, and which he did not dream of, but clearly saw and felt, and to the representation of which he devoted his extraordinary powers. Yet in this his chosen field he gave more of promise than performance. The *Prometheus Unbound* and *Triumph of Life* are by no means the tide-mark of his possible achievements. He died while his genius was yet in the budding, ended by the treachery of that—

Fatal and perfidious bark,
Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark,
That junk so low that sacred head of thine.

Great, noble, and beautiful qualities cohered in this "poet of poets." Magnificent as his life-work was, he, the man, was somehow greater. To the world he presented the rare spectacle of a man passionate for truth, and unreservedly obedient to the right as he discerned it. He might have chosen to live a life of ease and indulgence. The aristocratic circle into which he was born would have honored him for it. But he thought continually of other matters than those which interested his "illustrious obscure" relations. His antagonisms to tyranny, religion, and custom in all their myriad forms seemed almost criminal in the son of a baronet of many acres. And society denounced him accordingly. Society was perfectly agreed that all social reform was a mad delusion. In such a case, indeed,

Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair.

There are valid objections to any attempt to construct opinions out of a poet's songs. It seems like reading a story for its "moral." Poems and novels should be read for their beauty and vitality. Yet it is impossible to leave Shelley without referring to his fundamental philosophy. Literature was not a pastime with him. There was a close connection between his writings and his life. Shelley was ever a pioneer. From the days of *Queen Mab* to his last poem he was fighting for Liberty. Except that the later poems strike deeper chords than those he had used with such exuberant resonance in his youth, there is no change. Shelley's Atheism was never disputed during his unpopular days. But when it was discerned that the star of a great poet had arisen, he was impudently dubbed a Christian. Florence to the living Dante was not more cruelly unjust than England to the living Shelley. Only some thirty years after Shelley's death was his poetic glory truly acknowledged. And even at the Centenary Celebration Farce at Horsham most of the speakers referred unctuously to the poet as if he were a Sunday-school teacher, and discreetly emphasised his claims on the county families.

Out of the charnel-vault of social corruption which preceded the French Revolution, Rousseau saw in vision the ideal society of the future. Of this new world Shelley is the poet. It was precisely because his heart was aflame with human sympathy that his poems have vital and permanent effect. Shelley devoted himself to the idea of the perfectibility of human nature. It is the very mainspring of his poetry. In *Queen Mab*, in the *Revolt of Islam*, in his masterpiece, *Prometheus Unbound*, its expression glows with the solemn and majestic inspiration of prophecy. Shelley is a great magician, dazzling us with glories beyond our reach, making us yearn for that which seems unattainable. We are entranced by the grandeur of his dream-pictures of an emancipated Humanity. We stand spellbound at the sublime audacity of his flaming poems of revolt. May it be our task to hasten the coming of that glorious day when the world will be one country and to do good will be the only religion.

M.

Early English Freethought.

BY THE LATE J. M. WHEELER.

(Continued from page 829.)

THERE is abundant evidence of the extent to which the Lollard heresy took hold of popular thought. It is on record that in the parts where Wiclif had preached you could hardly meet two men without one of them being a Lollard. Consequences from which Wiclif shrank were boldly drawn by his disciples. One Wiltshire gentleman, who had received the sacramental bread from his parish priest, took it home and lunched upon it with wine, oysters, and onions; others put images of the saints in their cellars. "They called," says Knighton, "our Lady of Lincoln and our Lady of Walsingham the Witch of Lincoln and the Witch of Walsingham." "Good Queen Anne of Bohemia," the wife of Richard II., was favorably disposed to the new views, and through the instrumentality of her courtiers the works of Wiclif had great influence in producing the Hussite reformation in Bohemia. In 1394 the Lollards presented a bold petition to Parliament. It set forth that the celibacy of the clergy produced moral disorder, and that the belief in transubstantiation caused idolatry. It protested against exorcisms and the benedictions of lifeless objects, against masses for the dead, pilgrimages, auricular confessions, and against the holding of secular offices by priests. To these points was added a protest against war as contrary to the spirit of the gospel, probably incited by the recent preaching of a crusade against the antipope by Hereford, Bishop of Norwich, who, in 1339, had vowed to burn or behead any heretic who dared to preach in his diocese. The touch of Socialism which always appeared in Lollardry was represented in this notable petition by a protest against needless trades exercised only for the satisfaction of luxury. His spiritual advisers induced Richard II., whose two good qualities, according to the monkish chroniclers, were his love for religion and his regard for the clergy, to consider this petition dangerous. An oath of abjuration was exacted from the chief men of the Lollard party. Not satisfied with this, when Bolingbroke usurped the throne with the assistance of Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Scroop, Archbishop of York, the clergy to whom he was much indebted for his position induced him to pass the infamous statute (2 Henry IV., 15) generally known as *de heretico comburendo*. This statute sets out by declaring that certain false and perverse people, damnably thinking, did preach and teach divers new doctrines and wicked erroneous teaching, contrary to the determination of Holy Church. "And of such sect and wicked doctrine and opinions they make unlawful conventicles and confederacies, they hold and exercise schools, they make and write books, they do wickedly instruct and inform people." Wherefore it orders that all heretical books are to be given up within forty days before the diocesans, who are empowered to arrest all heretics. If they refuse to abjure their errors, or, after abjuration, relapse, then the mayor and sheriffs shall, in some high place, burn them before the people, that such punishment shall strike fear in the minds of others. The Rev. J. H. Blunt, in his *History of the Reformation*, 1882, declares that by this law "the English Parliament, not the English Church, introduced into our country the practice of burning heretics"—an assertion unwarranted by fact. The law, it will be noticed, leaves the determination of heresy to the bishop, but the execution of the heretic to the civil power, thus seeking to divide the responsibility. But it was not grounded upon any petition from Parliament, but on one from Convocation. Both the petition and the statute were in Latin, then beginning to be unusual. It was afterwards styled by the Commons, who petitioned to have it modified, "the statute made in the second year of your Majesty's reign at the instance of the prelates and the clergy of your kingdom," which, says Hallam (*Middle Ages*, chap. viii., pt. 3, p. 89), "affords a presumption that it had no regular assent of Parliament." Several historians are of this opinion. At any rate, the Church cannot be exonerated in the matter since the statute was passed upon the petition of Convocation. The Rev. Dr. John

Cunningham Geikie, in his work on *The English Reformation* (p. 56), says: "The unutterable shame of such a law rests on the clergy of those days, and on Henry, their tool, alone." Burnet, in his often inaccurate *Annals of the Reformation*, calls William Sawtre, who was burnt early in 1401, almost immediately after the passing of the statute, the first English martyr; and the statement has been frequently repeated. This is certainly incorrect. Fitz-herbert, an old law writer, tells us that burning was previously the punishment for heresy by the common law; and Blackstone says it is thought by some to be as ancient as the common law itself. Popes had long before commended the putting to death of heretics. The fourth Lateran Council, 1216, had ordained their being handed over to the secular power to be burnt, and where the Church had full sway these instructions were carried out. There is reason to believe there was burning for heresy in England before the twelfth century. At the beginning of the thirteenth century several Albigenses came into England, and were burnt to death as heretics (see Lechler's *John Wiclif and his English Precursors*, p. 52). Bracton records that in his time apostates from Christianity were burnt to death. Mr. C. H. Pearson, the most competent historian of that period, in his little book on *English History in the Fourteenth Century* (p. 265), mentions a renegade deacon killed with the sword in 1223, and some Franciscans who were burned alive in 1330. Possibly these participated in the heresies of the celebrated *Everlasting Gospel*, a work which declared there were three dispensations—that of the Father, which ended at the coming of Christ; that of the Son, which had now ended; and that of the Spirit, which was to begin, and of which the religious ideal of the Franciscans was the embodiment. We have seen how the Bishop of Norwich had threatened death to any heretic who preached in his diocese; and Fox considers that William Swynderby was probably burnt to death in 1399. William Sawtre had recanted, but repented of his recantation. Of sterner stuff than this was John Badby, blacksmith, brought to the stake in 1409, for declaring in rough English fashion that John Bates (or Jack Raker), of Bristol, had as much power to make the body of Christ as any priest had. The host, he maintained, was in no sense the body of Christ, and, as something inanimate, was less worthy of reverence than a toad or a spider, which had at least the gift of life. If the host on all the altars were God, then would there be twenty thousand gods in England. Such outspoken heresy ensured his condemnation by the Bishop of Worcester, confirmed by Archbishop Arundel. Badby was delivered to the secular power for execution, and met his fate on March 1, 1410, at Smithfield. He was placed in a barrel, and burning fuel was heaped around him. Prince Henry was present, and offered him a pardon if he recanted. Badby remained firm; but a piteous cry, when the fire was lighted again, excited Henry's hopes of conversion. He caused the fuel to be cleared from around him, and again offered the half-dead victim pardon, and even a pension. With unflinching constancy the martyr refused. The fire was rekindled, and he was burnt to ashes as a hopeless heretic. Badby's case seems to have excited sympathy for the Lollards on the part of the Commons. They shortly afterwards prayed that persons arrested under the obnoxious statute might be bailed and make their purgation, and that they might be arrested only by the civil power. The petition did not secure the king's assent. Still less did he approve the attempt to disendow the Church, which, first made in 1404, was fiercely met by Archbishop Arundel. The attempt was renewed in 1410, when the Commons represented that the revenues of the bishops and abbots would maintain, to the king's honor, full fifteen earls and fifteen hundred knights, six thousand and two hundred good esquires, and one hundred hospitals for care of the infirm. The king peremptorily dismissed the bold petition, commanding that from thenceforth they should not presume to move any such matter. The support of the Church would have been lost to the usurper had he listened to the bold wishes of his Commons.

The beginning of Henry V.'s reign was signalled by a new triumph of the Church. The king surrendered his friend, Sir John Oldcastle, the chief protector of the Lollards, to the machination of his persecutors, and a new statute was passed (2 Henry V., 7) ordering all

magistrates, from the chancellor to the sheriffs, mayors, and bailiffs, to take an oath "to put their whole power and diligence to put out, cease, and destroy all manner of heresies and errors, commonly called Lollardries," and declaring the lands and tenements, goods and chattels of all persons convicted forfeit to the king. The terror inspired by these executions and enactments drove many into exile. "They fled," says Fox, "into Germany, France, Spain, Portugal, and into the wilds of Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, working there many marvels against their false kingdom, too long to write." It was, of course, the ablest who had most to fear, and were the first to fly.

Besides the thirty-nine who were put to death after Oldcastle's rising in 1414, twenty-eight suffered death in succeeding years. The great majority of the accused wisely recanted and did penance. Oldcastle himself having been taken by treachery in Wales, the Church had the satisfaction of hanging him in chains over a slow fire till he was roasted to death. These severe proceedings served their purpose of checking the open dissemination of Lollard doctrines. The itinerant priests no longer preached openly, though the tracts of Wiclif continued to be read and passed in manuscript from hand to hand until the invention of printing, when they were amongst the first of heretical books to appear in type. Nine years after the ascent of Henry VI., the Duke of Gloucester was traversing England with men-at-arms for the purpose of repressing the rising of Lollards and hindering the circulation of their invectives against the clergy. The fire of heresy was smothered, but continued to smoulder until the outburst of the Protestant Reformation. During the troubled times of the Wars of the Roses foreign and domestic strife left both the Church and the heretics for the most part undisturbed, the very storm proving their shelter. The decay of feudalism and the development of the parliamentary system were, however, making for the cause of liberty. A striking instance occurs in the case of Reginald Pecock, Bishop of Chichester, who, in defending the Church from the Lollards, declared that the interpretation of Scripture must in all cases be accommodated to "the doom of reason." He criticised the fathers as well as quoted them, and even ventured to doubt the genuineness of the Apostles' Creed, and to question the article of the descent into hell. In 1457 he was himself accused of heresy, forced to recant for fear of martyrdom, and was deprived of his bishopric, and immured in a monastery at Canterbury under circumstances of great humiliation. Whether this in any way modified his opinions seems very questionable from the verses which he used to repeat to those who made him a visit:—

Wit hath wonder, that reason cannot skan,
How a Moder is Mayd, and God is Man.

Pecock was a man of vastly superior intelligence to the age in which he lived; but already Oxford was affected with the new movement which in Italy was reviving the arts, literature, and philosophy of ancient Greece and Rome. The Canary Isles had been discovered, and stimulated the desire for maritime adventure. Paper mills were becoming the means of breaking down the monopoly of knowledge. Above all, the invention of printing opened the way of spreading far and wide the new learning. Everywhere might be discerned the coming of that great movement of the Renaissance of which the religious revolt, shaping itself into the Protestant Reformation, was only the most eruptive symptom.

(To be continued.)

How to Help Us.

- (1) Get your newsagent to take a few copies of the *Freethinker* and try to sell them, guaranteeing to take the copies that remain unsold.
- (2) Take an extra copy (or more), and circulate it among your acquaintances.
- (3) Leave a copy of the *Freethinker* now and then in the train, the car, or the omnibus.
- (4) Display, or get displayed, one or our contents-sheets, which are of a convenient size for the purpose. Mr. Forder will send them on application.
- (5) Get your newsagent to exhibit the *Freethinker* in the window.

Belief and Knowledge.

MANY people make no distinction between knowledge and belief, but the distinction is one which it is important to bear in mind, especially in controversy. Some persons think that they know a great deal because they believe a great deal, and such persons imagine others know less than they do, because such other persons only assert what they know, being reserved in regard to what they do not know.

One may believe much and know but little, and one may know much and have a very short creed. The man of large experience and knowledge is cautious and discriminating in accepting unverified statements. The ignorant man is less capable of calculating probabilities, and is easily imposed upon by false statements. It is easier to assent to an old creed, making the authority of a name or book serve in the place of proof, than it is to examine a subject, weigh evidence, and make that the basis of belief or disbelief. It is men accustomed, more or less, to the authority of creeds, and to the idea of the pre-eminent importance of believing this or that dogma, who pride themselves more on what they know, and more on the amount of the marvellous they can swallow, than on the amount of evidence they can adduce to sustain their views, or on the strength of the reasons they can give for adopting and adhering to them. Belief may exist without any real evidence, and in conflict with truth. But what one knows is always true.

A conviction is not to be treated as or no value simply because it is a belief. Beliefs move men to action, knowledge guides and corrects them. Theological teachers have prepared statements of what should be believed, declare disbelief, and even doubt, sinful in advance, and have then pronounced all who rejected their theological nostrum as deserving and destined to eternal suffering. How absurd! Men may be urged to examine, but to urge them to believe is to treat them like children. If the evidence of any claim is good, it will sooner or later be accepted by all rational minds. The man of science does not plead for converts. He does not demand belief. He invites investigation. He does not threaten men with damnation if they believe not. He assures them that they will be rewarded with possession of the truth if they apply their minds to the study of his teachings.

Theology, by stereotyping old errors and antiquated methods, has become the enemy, not only of intellectual growth and material prosperity, but of social progress and natural morality. Science is radical and progressive. Theology is "the Bourbon of the world of thought." Science is knowledge classified; theology is ignorance petrified. Science is the friend, the benefactor, the "savior" of mankind; its mission is to bless and benefit the race; it hath its "victories no less renowned than war."

Theology has persecuted and murdered reformers, strangled genius, reddened the earth with human blood, and covered it with a mantle of darkness. Science is gaining ground every day; theology is as rapidly losing its influence over the minds of men. The realm of science is the region of natural law; the empire of the theology is the region of the supernatural. The enlargement of the former corresponds with man's progress and enlightenment; the domain of the latter has for centuries, with the decay of superstition, been growing "small by degrees and beautifully less."

Theology claims to be able to give an explanation of this universe. Science, which deals with the observable and calculable, studies the order and sequences of the phenomena. The absolute nature of things is unknown, and the puzzle of existence man cannot solve. A mystery to ourselves, we are in the midst of mysteries we cannot unravel. We are all children in the dark, getting now and then a glimpse of the light.

The widest observation and experience in a lifetime, and the most complete familiarity with the results of all investigation past and present, will not remove the barriers to a solution of the problem of this universe; because no amount of knowledge possible to man can relieve him from the organically imposed limitations of human intelligence.

All our ideas of the external world are and must for

ever be relative. We can know things only as they are related to us, as they are colored by our consciousness, and modified by the conditions of the human organism. So long as there is organism and environment, knowledge is possible only in the form of a relation—a relation between the subject, man, and the object, external nature.

We can know things only as they are related to the mind. By no power of thought, by no ingenuity of reasoning, by no effort of the will, can we scale or destroy the eternal wall which confines us to the region of the relative, and makes for ever impossible knowledge of the absolute, or of "the thing in itself."

—*Torch of Reason.*

B. F. UNDERWOOD.

Salvation Soap.

THERE was a priest, and he was mad;
He told all men, however bad,
That he could make them pure and good
By means of certain human blood,
That formed a soap which, strange to say,
Would wash all faults and crimes away
From guilty men, whilst those who fell
Unsoaped with it went straight to hell.
All who used it would, he said,
Live merrily when they were dead,
And wings would sprout, and they should fly
To sweep the cobwebs off the sky.
And if they tired of this, then they
Should lounge on golden thrones all day,
Or strut about with lyres and crowns
And crimson robes and snow-white gowns.
Thus they should be, however vile,
Prime mashers in the heavenly style.
But they should wake where serpents hiss
If they used any soap but this.
Gulped down in pills, however crude,
'Twould serve as physic or as food.
One cake alone, if swallowed whole,
Cleansed Bill Sikes' coat or Borgias' soul.
For none but his was genuine;
All other soaps but deepened sin.
'Twas guaranteed by king and pope
As far surpassing Pears's soap.
E'en Lily Langtry's puffs were nought
To those that he received unsought.
More foolish was the written stuff
Than Cleaver's silly punning puff.
Use this soap once, and straight, one swore,
On heaven's fair strand you're "washed ashore."
Guiteau deposed that, for his part,
It cleansed the cockles of his heart;
For in its cakes he saw full well
The Oily One of Israel.
Peace, too, proclaimed its virtues oft
Amidst well-lathered saints aloft;
It soaped his conscience reconciled,
Made innocent as any child.
Thus martyrs many blessed that soap
That greased their path from the long rope
To heavenly washhouses where they
With blood-soap washed three times a day
Till made resplendent as the sun
In moral beauty every one.
Never such a boon was known
As this new soap that stood alone.
One trial bleached the blackest skins;
Much more, it cleansed all petty sins.
It washed the tongue of fibs and libel;
'Twas guaranteed so in the Bible.
Its precious cakes were bread and wine,
Its wafers flesh and blood divine;
'Twas Elixir of Life, indeed;
'Twas everything that man could need.
'Twas Heavenly Salve, Salvation Squills,
And Sinner's Soap, and Last Day Pills.
All these in one—'twas patented
To heal the quick and raise the dead.
Without it all would go to pot,
For such was all men's (s)'oapless lot.
Thus impudent old Soapy roams,
And pesters women in their homes,

And works their feelings up to buying
 By threats of swift and awful dying,
 Mingled with dabs of his soft soap,
 As samples of the greater hope.
 'Twas vaunted with so bold an air,
 It sold like wild-fire everywhere.
 And wise men wondered what could be
 This patent blood-soap stamped J. C.,
 With which the priest went up and down
 The streets of that deluded town,
 Till soap and sinners duly sold
 Had filled his pockets full of gold;
 Which made some doubt, 'tis fair to add,
 Whether that priest was really mad,
 Or only artful, like the cheat
 Who swindles clowns in every street.
 W. P. BALL.

Moncure D. Conway sets Governor Roosevelt Right.

(From the *New York Times*.)

To the *New York Times Saturday Review* :—

MR. CYRUS COOLRIDGE, in your *Review* of September 23, quotes from Charles Burr Todd's *Life of Barlow* a misleading statement—namely, that Paine's "qualification to be a member of the (French) Convention required an oath of fidelity to that country." No oath of any kind was taken; no affirmation or declaration of form was required for a membership in an assembly whose function was to frame a Constitution where none existed. To whom or what could they have sworn loyalty? Paine was elected by four departments of France to help frame a Government because he was an American citizen. It happens that Paine had twice sworn fidelity to the United States—once as Secretary of the Congressional Committee of Foreign Affairs, afterward as Clerk of the Pennsylvania Legislature—but, as Monroe pointed out, and President Washington officially confirmed, his citizenship was precisely that of all Americans, who, born under the British flag, took the side of the American flag. Gouverneur Morris knew this perfectly well, and, although he had Paine thrown in prison in Paris, he wrote to Secretary Jefferson the falsehood that he had vainly claimed him as an American citizen. Robespierre, who was a jurist, also knew that Paine was an American citizen, and, but for him, Paine would probably have been executed. When Barrère, and other accomplices of Morris in the Committee of Public Safety, had planned a summary trial of Paine before the Revolutionary Tribunal—certain death—Robespierre demanded an exceptional trial for the American member of the Convention, to which trial the United States must be a party. As the only offence of Paine was that he had arranged to return to his beloved America, where he would undoubtedly report the proceedings of Morris in Paris (frankly revealed in Morris's *Diary and Letters*, and known to every contemporary historian except Governor Roosevelt), that American Minister could not, of course, meet Robespierre's conditions.

In his unique collection of blunders described as a "Life of Gouverneur Morris," Governor Roosevelt says: "So the filthy little Atheist had to stay in prison, 'where he amused himself by publishing a pamphlet against Jesus Christ.'" This sentence, long ago denounced by myself and others without eliciting any retraction, must now remain as a salient survival of the vulgar Paine mythology, and as the most ingenious combination of mistakes ever committed in so small a space in any work professing to be historical.

Instead of being filthy, Paine was scrupulously neat and elegant in his attire, as all of his portraits show. He was a guest in the mansions of English noblemen, and not even Edmund Burke, in his diatribe against Paine, ever hinted that, while his guest, Paine was other than the "gentleman" that Aaron Burr declared him. He was a favorite guest in the houses of the finest people in Paris also—the Lafayettes, the Duchatelets, the Condorcets, and Mme. Helvetius, to whose refined and cultured circle at Passy Franklin introduced him. Instead of being "little," Paine was of good height, and remarkably well formed. Instead of being an "Atheist," Paine wrote his *Age of Reason* for the express purpose of combatting the French Atheists (such as Herbert), and the book (now called Part I.) was printed in French nearly a year before it appeared in English. Instead of being "against Jesus Christ," the book contains a tribute to the human character of Jesus higher than can be found in any orthodox work of the last century. This author, whom Governor Roosevelt calls "Atheist," inaugurated the first Theistic Church in the world (the Church of Theophilanthropy in Paris) with a discourse on the existence of God, which was circulated as a religious tract in London; and he also assisted Elihu Palmer, who was founding in New York the first Theistic Church in the United States.

Paine's Theism is of the pre-Darwinian type, so to say, and

does not satisfy the modern conditions of the question; but the constant circulation of his religious works by associations of so-called "infidels," without any suppression or alteration of statements they disbelieve, has set the Governor an example of fairness which he would have done well to follow. Although his attention has been called to his gross errors, privately as well as publicly, the Governor, with all his good qualities, seems unequal to an admission of his mistakes, and he thus imposes on his literary contemporaries the necessity of arraigning not only the errors, but the competency, or else the honesty, of their author. In a volume just going to press in Paris (*Thomas Paine et la Revolution dans les Deux Mondes*) I have necessarily referred to the Governor's mistakes and his animus, but it would be a great satisfaction if I could be enabled to record his magnanimity and justice in publicly acknowledging the errors and promising their redress in the next edition of his book.

Paris, Oct. 6, 1899.

—*Freethought Magazine*.

MONCURE D. CONWAY.

Correspondence.

"CHRISTIAN CRUELTY."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Under this heading a letter appeared in your issue of December 24 which has surprised me exceedingly. It is by Mr. G. O. Warren, who is, I believe, an Anarchist. Anarchists are very advanced people, but I doubt whether the advocacy of revengeful methods of punishment is consistent with the "higher ideals" which they hold. Says Mr. Warren: "The Rev. S. J. S. Le Maistre.....should have had at least two years' hard labor, with a few floggings thrown in." But why the clergyman should have been so punished Mr. Warren, it seems, does not quite know. In one part of his letter he says he would have had the "consecrated black-guard" flogged in order "to teach him to behave himself"; elsewhere he gives an altogether unjustifiable reason—he "so richly deserved" it. Not so long ago Mr. Warren wrote to the *London Echo* urging less revengeful and more rational ways of treating crime, and his plea was that we should "think kindly of our fellow men." Now he would punish a fellow mortal because he has done something to deserve it. But punishment is not justifiable merely because it is deserved, and it has never yet been proved that flogging criminals is conducive to their reformation. The Rev. S. J. S. Le Maistre is doubtless suffering from a bad attack of flagellomania, and I am not at all sure that Mr. Warren is altogether free from that affliction.

JOSEPH COLLINSON.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, ETC.

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

LONDON.

- THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Praying Against the Boers."
 CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 8, A Ball—for members and friends.
 NORTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Leighton Hall, Leighton-terrace, Kentish Town): No lecture.
 WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Empress Rooms, Royal Palace Hotel, High-street, Kensington, W.): 11, New Year Meeting. Addresses and Music.
 SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, J. M. Robertson, "Tolstoi."
 WESTMINSTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Grosvenor Arms, Page-street): 7.30, A lecture.

COUNTRY.

- BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): C. Cohen—11, "Following Jesus"; 7, "Rome or Reason."
 CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday School; 7, Monthly Entertainment.
 EDINBURGH (Moulders' Hall, 105 High-street): Annual Social Tea, Concert, and Dance.
 GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): No meeting.
 HULL (Friendly Societies' Hall, No. 2 Room): Members' Annual Meeting.
 LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): A lecture. After lecture, Committee Meeting—important.
 LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, F. J. Gould, "Freethought in the Nineteenth Century."
 SOUTH SHIELDS (Boys' Schoolroom, Baring-street): Annual Social—5, Tea; 7, Dancing.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—December 31, Birmingham.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—January 14, Birmingham.

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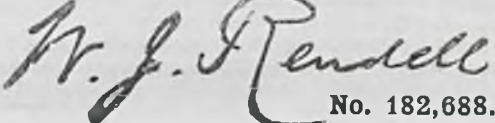
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