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THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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COLONEL R. G. INGERSOLL.

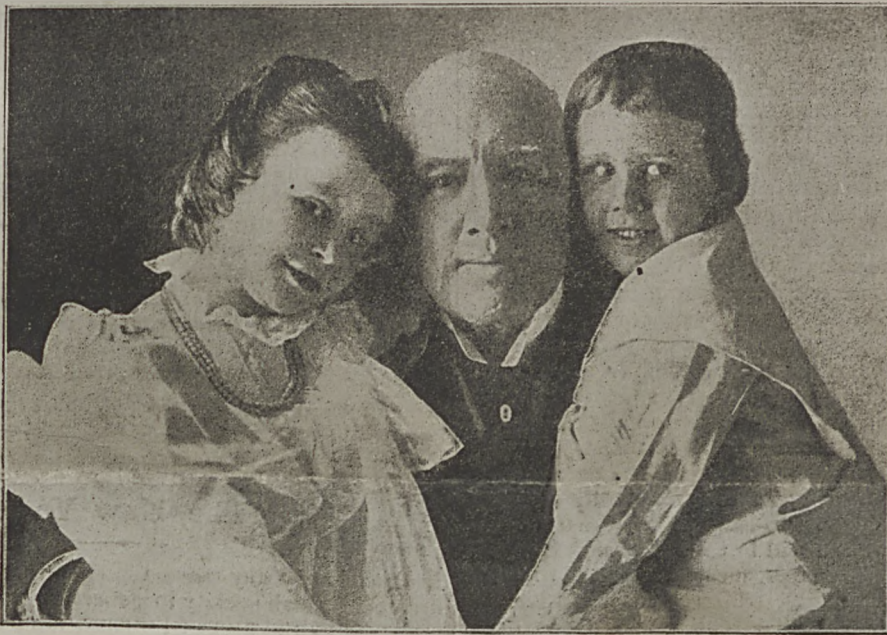
We present our readers this week—the first of the new year, 1900—with three Ingersoll pictures; two on this page, and the other on page eight.

Next week we shall present them with two more Ingersoll pictures, and a beautiful prose-poem entitled "Life," which has not yet been published on this side of the Atlantic.

The two pictures on our front page are very impressive. One represents Colonel Ingersoll, whose domestic feelings were so deep and pure, holding up his two grandchildren—boy and girl. The little ones are smiling and happy, safe in those sheltering arms. Ingersoll's face is not at all sad, but solemn, and almost heroic. The setting sun, confronting the night, gives a tender welcome to the morrow's dawn.

The second picture shows the great Freethinker lying dead. The sun has set, the night has come. All is quiet and peaceful. How grandly that noble head stands out from the death-shroudings! Christians, who talk so much of a future life, may shrink from the sight. To them it will probably appear something morbid, something even repellent. But not so to the Freethinker,

No. 963.



Colonel Ingersoll and His Grandchildren.



Robert G. Ingersoll.

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN AFTER DEATH.

who looks upon death as being as natural as life, and views it without terror or dismay. Serious it is to him, but not affrighting; great and glorious even, when it is the consummation and seal of a splendid career.

Ingersoll himself always looked upon death with serene resignation. He said that he did not know whether death was the dropping of a curtain or the opening of a door, but he was content to wait without the least alarm. He neither be-

lieved nor denied the doctrine of a future life. He simply did not know, and he thought that others knew as little as he did. At any rate, he felt certain that there was

no malicious God waiting to torment his own creatures. He was ignorant of the reality of heaven, but certain as to the unreality of hell.

Birth, as far as we know, is the beginning of life, and death is its ending. Ingersoll has passed through death to judgment—the judgment of those who knew him, the judgment of his fellow men. And already it is agreed that he was a great and gracious man, a real lover of his kind, a true husband, father, and friend, and a splendid citizen not merely of America, but of the world.

Christ and the Twentieth Century.

WHAT an amusing lot of people these Christians are! True, they once were tragic, when they burnt alive their opponents, and even each other, for a difference of opinion. But now they are simply comic, and the comedy is fast sinking into farce, which is all the more side-splitting because of the grave faces they wear during the performance. Is it not, indeed, the very height and perfection of jocularly to convulse others with laughter and keep a straight, and even solemn, face yourself? In this way the Christians are immensely entertaining. They perform their antics with such a sober mien, they are so seriously ridiculous, so devoutly absurd, that they eclipse all the professional entertainments of the theatre, the music-hall, and the circus. One of their chief comicalities is this: they will argue the most fantastic points with the greatest subtlety, but they can seldom, if ever, be induced to talk plainly about a point that is perfectly simple. When they *can* be so induced, they are instantly and hopelessly at variance with each other; and the manner in which they emphasise their mutual disagreement shows what a slender basis of reality underlies their various opinions.

Could anything be more nonsensical than the dispute which is at present raging amongst these Christians as to when the nineteenth century ends and the twentieth century begins? A multitude of pious Christians, including the well-nigh omniscient German Emperor, assert that we are in the twentieth century already. They declare that the nineteenth century ended at the last moment of the last hour of the thirty-first of December. Now, there is a good deal, of course, to be said for this, on the supposition that we are dating from nothing in particular. In that case, and as a mere matter of convenience, we should begin a new century with a new set of figures. It is not pleasant to have, for a whole year, a conflict between reason and imagination. When, therefore, we cease saying *eighteen hundred* and something, and begin saying *nineteen hundred*, it is as well to dismiss the old century with the old figures. But if we are dating from the birth of Christ, and if that event actually occurred at the starting-point of the so-called Christian era, it is perfectly clear that we are still in the nineteenth century. This is a point that Christians, on both sides of the controversy, have entirely neglected. Here is Lord Kelvin, for instance, a distinguished scientist who is so often cited as a supporter of the religion of the poor Carpenter of Nazareth; here is Lord Kelvin, we say, writing as follows:—

“The first century began with the year 0 and ended with December 31, 99. The second century began with January 1, 100, and the twentieth century, therefore, begins with January 1, 1900.”

Why, of course it does—if you were right at the start. But you were wrong, Lord Kelvin; wrong, because you spoke as a mathematician, instead of as a Christian. This is really a matter, not of abstract mathematics, but of historic chronology. A thermometer begins with 0 and goes on to 1. That is all right. But what is 0? Zero. And what is Zero? Nothing. Is this, then, the starting-point of the Christian era? Was the Lord Jesus Christ *nothing*? We rather fancy he was. But you, Lord Kelvin, you, the great *Christian* scientist, you surely ought to know better.

The Zero point, the 0, could not possibly be a period. There could not be a year 0. The 0 is simply the point of division between one era and another, or between B.C. and A.D.; just as the equator stands as 0, and the degrees of latitude are reckoned north and south of it. To talk of the year 0 is as irrational as to talk of the 0 degree of latitude.

Suppose we start with the birth of Jesus Christ. For a day after we are in the first day of the Christian era, for a week after in the first week, for a month after in the first month, and for a year after in the first year. Now the hundredth year must elapse before the century is completed. You cannot get a century out of ninety-nine years. Consequently the first century ended, to use an Hibernicism, when it was a hundred years old; that is to say, on December 31, 100. And thus the nineteenth century ends on December 31, 1900.

This controversy never could have arisen if the first Christians began dating from the birth of Christ. But

they did not. They reckoned according to the Roman era, and for centuries never thought of doing otherwise. “In the West,” as Gibbon says, “the Christian era was first invented in the sixth century, it was propagated in the eighth by the authority and writings of venerable Bede; but it was not till the tenth that the use became legal and popular.” Thus the Christians did not reckon *forward* from the birth of Christ. They never gave it a thought until many hundreds of years afterwards, and then, of course, they reckoned *backward*. Nor was that all. They were in absolute ignorance of the actual date of the birth of Christ. They knew neither the day, the month, nor the year. And the modern Christians are no wiser, on this point, than their predecessors. If the third Gospel is right, Jesus could not have been born before A.D. 6, when Quirinus governed Syria. Professor Ramsey, on the other hand, in *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?* fixes it twelve years earlier, in B.C. 6, and does so with “reasonable confidence.” But it is all guess-work at bottom. Mosheim admits the fact with his customary candor. “But,” he adds, “of what consequence is it, that we know not the year or day when this light first shone, since we fully know that it *has* appeared?” No doubt this is very consoling. But it leaves the birth of Christ in as deep a darkness as that which is said to have enshrouded his crucifixion.

Just as the Christians are divided about the chronology of their own era, so they are divided about the meaning of their Master's teaching. At the present moment, some of them argue that *all* fighting is condemned by it, and the Tolstoians go to the length of declaring that violence, even in self-defence, is anti-Christian; whilst some of them, on the other hand, declare that there is really nothing in the New Testament to condemn fighting if you have a fair ground for going to war. Whenever it is brought to a practical test, the teaching of Jesus Christ is found to be ambiguous or meaningless. It never was, and never can be, a guide for human action.

G. W. FOOTE.

The New Year.

If there is one day more than another on the periodical arrival of which society in general may be congratulated, it should be the first of January, the day on which, from almost time immemorial, each person who meets another never fails to seize the opportunity of wishing him “A Happy New Year.” There is much that is interesting in the day, and much that is interesting in the wish. There is interest in the day, because we know it to be the commencement of another series of equal periods wherein the verdancy of spring, the effulgence of summer, the sombre beauty of autumn, and the dreariness of winter are presented. By that kind of sympathetic analogy which all can recognise, but which no one can thoroughly define or understand, we are reminded that there are periods in the life of each which resemble the different seasons. Spring corresponds with youth, the time when all vigor is the strongest, and when exuberance may run to useless growth, or become the development of useful fruition, according to its training; summer, the period when that fruition is in the ardor of its development, either to minister to the good of all, or to rot upon the branches prematurely, as the case may be; autumn corresponds with that period in our lives when we should be able to say we have done good service in the cause of humanity; and winter, the time when we sink into “the sere and yellow leaf,” and anticipate that decay which, in the course of nature, must come alike to all; but we have the satisfaction of knowing that the elements of which our bodies are composed are not destroyed, but only await the revivification with which the ensuing spring will endow them, to again take part in the formation of some other phases of nature with which the earth is teeming.

Let us consider in what the interest of the wish for “A Happy New Year” really consists. Perfect happiness is at present, as we all know, a myth. It cannot obtain in the existing condition of the human race. The seeds of human error have been so long permitted to vegetate and spread their rank growth over the fertile soil of the

human intellect as to impede all but a slight growth of the rich germs of virtue; they have been so assiduously cultivated, and so perseveringly forced and protected, that they have, to a great extent, overshadowed the modest flower of Truth which is nearly hidden from view, or regarded as valueless in comparison with the gaudy vegetation which towers above it. Perfect happiness, if ever possible, cannot exist until the whole of this rank vegetation is swept away, and the sweet and fragrant growth emerges from the "cold shade" into the full sunshine. But partial happiness is certainly obtainable, and, in our opinion, the best way to achieve such a result is by endeavoring to cultivate the latter and by energetically striving to destroy the former. Dropping metaphor, it is the belief of the Secularist that the happiness of a community depends upon the virtue and well-directed activity of the individuals who compose it; by the recognition of the fact that virtue consists in endeavoring to ascertain and to practise that which truth dictates, both in their conduct to others and in being determined to always war with whatever obstructs the elevation and freedom of mankind.

Contemplating the dawn of a new year with the above reflections, it occurs to us that the present is an appropriate time to remind the young that they are a year nearer the period when the full vigor of health and strength will enable them to render efficient service in life's battle; to suggest to the matured that they should compare the present with the past, and ascertain whether they have performed their share in the work of progress; and to urge the aged to stimulate those who will follow them to more stirring efforts than were possible in the times when they themselves were in their prime. It is a time for all to make comparisons with the past, to contemplate the new weapons and the new ammunition which they may use in the struggle against the powers of error, and the advantages which the changes in the aspect of the battle-ground may afford them in the contest; and a time for all to ask themselves whether they have obeyed those natural laws on which the health, both of body and mind, depends, as sound health in both can alone enable them to become efficient champions of the cause they espouse. This is a point of consideration, be it remembered, which all persons should consider, not merely from a personal aspect, but from one which affects the welfare, the usefulness, and the happiness of posterity. As the years roll round we should learn more and more how to be better and how to do better in the future. We should be more than ever impressed with the fact that there is no arbitrary influence with the course of events from a wrathful God, but that cause and effect pursue their unhindered path, and that it is only a question of man's knowledge or ignorance as to in what degree events shall be benefits or injuries.

Although the present condition of the world—with its wars, its waste of national wealth, its priestly incultations, and its appalling misery—must be a source of regret to every well-wisher of his kind, yet we, as Secularists, have cause for congratulation in our progress in the crusade against theological machinations. We cannot fail to see that there are increased dissensions amongst the ranks of those who have "vested interests" in the propagation of error; that the bonds which have hitherto linked them together, however slightly, are becoming more and more fragile, and giving us promise at no distant date of becoming mere ropes of sand; and that these dissensions and differences will ultimately induce the thoughtful members of the community to examine carefully the common ground on which they all rest, and thereby the hollowness of their foundation will be discovered. Is it not true that the fetters with which ignorance and superstition formerly bound all human aspirations towards liberty are rusting away one by one, and beginning to drop powerless? Thus strong arms are released wherewith to struggle to tear off the remainder. Has not science declared itself upon our side, and refused, with undisguised scorn, to permit itself to be longer allied with creeds and dogmas? Does not every year that passes add something to our facilities, and bring us nearer to the only millennium which it is possible for reason to conceive—the millennium wherein natural law shall be universally triumphant, and the hideous face of moral evil disappear from the earth, in consequence of the recognition of the greater

attraction which the rich and glowing beauty of moral truth will enforce upon the world?

We do not deny that professed Christians are just now putting forth considerable energy to sustain their faith. But what we urge is that Secular agencies are more active than ever in neutralising all that religionists can do. Scepticism is by no means so unfashionable as it was even a decade ago. Its literature has done its work, and no one knows better than the clergy themselves that there exists a large section of the community which has not only ceased to attend church or chapel, but which has distinctly repudiated Christianity and refused to be called by the name of Christian. While this decline in Christian worship is admitted by Christians, it is satisfactory to us to know that an efficient substitute has been found. That substitute is Secularism—a system which has no mysteries, and which only professes to formulate principles to which reason will assent, and which will enable and encourage man to exert himself without reference to any Power or Being, if such there be, outside the range of his own faculties and beyond his cognisance and determination.

In view, therefore, of the advantages which self-reflection and the wise resolve not to "grow weary in well-doing" will confer upon the great human family, we may welcome the dawn of the new year. Let us all do our best before it passes away to add still more to the dissipation of moral and intellectual darkness, and to the diffusion of the sunlight of truth and liberty. Let no one's zeal be cooled by the consideration—of which certain Christians, for want of better weapons, strive to make so much capital—that even among Secularists differences of opinion obtain. Such there must be in every cause upheld by men of marked individuality. But so long as the main fundamental principles are adhered to no real disruption is possible. Our duty, then, is to enter on the new year with exaltation instead of humiliation, with discreet feasting instead of fasting, and with work instead of prayer, remembering the words of Colonel Ingersoll: "The hands that help are holier than the lips that pray." With the hope that 1900 will surpass all its predecessors in promoting the cause of truth, justice, love, and all that makes for personal and general goodness, we wish to one and all "A Prosperous New Year."

CHARLES WATTS.

The Religious Outlook.

"THE Wonderful Century" is rapidly nearing its close. It has been a period replete with new ideas filled with burning enthusiasms, witnessing many drastic and far-reaching reforms, and bids fair to close its career with the promise of still more startling changes in the immediate future. Like a stone gathering momentum in its fall to the earth, the certainty and directness of Progress become greater as the knowledge of man increases with the labors of each passing generation. A child to-day is born the possessor of an intellectual heritage that would have formed the stock-in-trade of a philosopher thirty centuries ago. Slowly but certainly Nature yields her secrets to patient investigation; the miraculous is lost in the wonders daily disclosed by science; the prophet gives place to the professor, the priest to the sociologist, the search for God's will to the study of man's nature and legitimate needs.

Great as the changes have been in all departments of thought, they have been nowhere greater than in the field of religion. Complete freedom of expression has not been quite secured, but the majority are ashamed of being credited with bigotry; and, when people resent as an insult the imputation of being the possessors of a particular frame of mind, they have taken the first step towards getting rid of it altogether. Civil equality and political rights are no longer wholly a question of religious opinion. Christians and Jews, Deists and Atheists, meet on equal terms upon the platform of a common citizenship, and this, again, is a good sign—for Freethought. When it is a working principle of social life that all men, no matter what their religious beliefs may be, are yet entitled to wield the same rights and enjoy the same privileges, there is an implied admission that religious beliefs are matters of subordinate importance, and that

whether a man believes in one god, a dozen gods, or no god at all, really matters very little. The more barbarous doctrines of Christianity, if not quite dead, linger chiefly among the uneducated, and the primitive forms of Christian belief that took their rise amongst the illiterate of the Roman Empire bid fair to soon become the exclusive property of the same class in our own civilisation.

So far as the fundamental ideas of religion are concerned, the changes have been still more sweeping. Here it is not too much to say that the whole current conception of religion has undergone a profound and radical alteration. Quite apart from the development of Biblical criticism, which has completely dissolved views of the Bible that were current when the century opened, the enormous expansion of science, both theoretical and applied, with the growth of sociology, have combined to produce a frame of mind to which fundamental religious ideas are altogether alien. The nature of religious ideas is no longer shrouded in the mystery that formed their chief protection and recommendation. Anthropology has taught us the fashion of their birth, and, in so doing, has quite as certainly indicated the manner of their ultimate death.

Naturally, however, one still hears from religious circles all the old claims made on behalf of Christianity—its purity of teaching, and the benefits it has conferred upon civilisation. Just when and where these benefits were showered on the world is wisely left a matter of uncertainty. The greatest mistake a religious advocate can make is to be definite in his statements. Loud-sounding, glittering generalities—this is the safest rule to work by, and we must do the clergy the credit of saying that they fully appreciate its soundness.

But in this matter we may reasonably expect much from a more diffused and a more exact historical knowledge. For it is the study of Christianity in its historical relations, and the placing of the results within reach of all, that has done most to weaken its influence. The average man cares little, after all, for subtle points of doctrine or ritual or metaphysical discussions concerning the nature of God or the Trinity. His interest is of a far more practical character. He values religion for the beneficial influence he believes it to have exerted, and to still exert, on mankind. And when the real influence Christianity has exerted on the world is shown; when it is seen how the growth of Christianity in Rome weakened the mental and moral fibre of the Empire, that under Christian rule civilisation sank lower and lower, and would have disappeared but for the saving influence of Mohammedan culture; and when, finally, it is fully realised that in the vice and misery all around there is the clearest proof of Christianity's hideous failure, the disillusionment is complete.

A still more important branch of inquiry than the influence of Christianity on civilisation is that of the influence of civilisation on Christianity. A close and careful study of any religion will, I believe, show that it is only under very exceptional conditions that religious beliefs can act as a medium for the introduction of higher views of life; whilst under normal conditions their influence is of an exactly opposite character, if not always on the generation that sees them fully matured, at least on the generations that come after.

How does a religious system come into being? Not by propounding anything new, but simply by utilising conceptions of the supernatural already current. Ideas, like individuals, have their ancestry; and just as each man or woman represents the influence of the past co-operating with the opportunities of the present, so ideas and systems of ideas are the joint products of the experience of our forefathers wedded to the life and knowledge of their descendants. Consequently, all that any religious system can do is to systematise prevailing beliefs on the subject, and present in a more coherent form conceptions that have individually long been commonplaces. No competent student of Christianity would contend for a moment that in either doctrine or ethical teaching primitive Christianity contained aught that was not already well known to the Pagan world. It did here what all other religious systems have done—modified certain teachings, elaborated others, and finally presented the whole as a new religion.

It follows from this simple consideration that a

religious system can never benefit a people amongst whom it originates. By its very nature it gives nothing new; it systematises the more backward tendencies, consecrates much that is old and which would disappear under the ordinary processes of social development, and so seeks to keep the future in rigid line with the past. Whatever improvement takes place in the state of society is due to the play of progressive secular opinion on religious conceptions, and not to the influence of religion on social growth. A single illustration will make this plain. Not so long since the belief in witchcraft was as universal as the belief in God. To-day its survival in out-of-the-way districts is regarded by Christians as a reproach to civilisation. Yet no one has ever demonstrated that witches did not or could not exist. The most that has been done is to show that any alleged case of sorcery was due to ignorance or dementia, or to a mixture of both. The main cause of the decline of the belief in witches, as with the belief in miracles, is that civilisation has by its development produced a type of mind to which such a conception is altogether repugnant. Similarly with the belief in eternal damnation. Nowadays even Christian preachers exhaust their vocabulary in denouncing such a doctrine as an outrage on human reason and decency. What has produced the change? Clearly not man's religious ideas; quite as clearly the change in sentiment is due to the growth of a more kindly humanitarian feeling apart from, and independent of, all religion.

In brief, the supernatural exists only for the man whose mind is not developed beyond it; as he becomes more refined so he refines his religious ideas, and finally discards them. Man is not civilised by his gods; he civilises them. His gods, his religions, are only the lingering ghosts of his uncivilised past, and when faced with the more enlightened present are seen to be faulty, imperfect, uncultured, and in much need of refinement. It is this simple operation of a more enlightened common sense modifying supernatural beliefs that is called by religious preachers, with unconscious sarcasm, growth in religion. The title is a complete misnomer. Man does not grow in his religion; he grows out of it. His gods, his ghosts, his heaven, his hell, become less substantial, more shadowy, with each generation. It is really civilised common sense criticising the beliefs of the past, although without sufficient strength to break from them altogether. The break will come in time; meanwhile we must be content to do what we can to hasten its coming.

And now what of the future? Whatever may be the rate of progress in the immediate future, we may safely reckon upon the continued operation of the same forces as in the past. On the one side, we shall have a set of half-obsolete rules, in which the supernatural will become less and less evident, but upon the acceptance of which the social status of the clergy will depend, and to secure the acceptance of which they will stick at little. Historically, the clergy have never been over-fastidious as to the means adopted to realise their ends; and, allowing for differences of conditions, they are little altered to-day. If their methods are no longer so openly dishonorable and brutal, it is principally because they have a different public to deal with. When circumstances are favorable, as was recently seen in France, in Spain, and in one or two instances in England, they show that time has conquered, without subduing, their ancient and hereditary spirit. They, we may be certain, will seek by every species of special pleading and dishonest interpretation to perpetuate the existence of beliefs upon which their own power and privileges depend.

On the other side we can safely count upon the continued operation of different social and economic forces that will do much to weaken the power of religion, and not a little to destroy it altogether. And these are powers not to be despised. Christianity's deadliest enemies are often not found among logical and scientific proofs of its falsity so much as among different lines of social development, which, by broadening the mind and directing attention to the essential conditions of social welfare, destroys the particular type of intellect on which religion lives. Thousands of people who would never think of listening to a direct attack on religious ideas find their beliefs slipping away from them through causes they are altogether unable to understand.

They know their religion goes; they know not the manner of its going. And beyond these forces there is the great principle of independent religious criticism which it is our chief task to promote. This should certainly not become weaker as time advances. On the contrary, on the mere principle that an opinion gains in public esteem by the number of its supporters, this force should gain considerable strength in the immediate future. We of the Secular Societies exist to bring this about. It is our task to lead the direct attack on the fortress of religion, to point out the bearings of social and scientific developments on religious beliefs and the conclusions to be drawn therefrom, to direct into more useful channels the energy at present squandered on religion, and it is the duty of all who value intellectual uprightness and social well-being to help in the work.

C. COHEN.

Azazel.

A MAN and a goat stood together on the brink of a tall chalk cliff. Behind them lay an undulating country which stretched away to Hebron and Jerusalem. Below and before them could be seen an expanse of broken plain. The sun was setting. Purple shadows hung over the hollows, and gave a mysterious haziness to the clumps of trees and bushes that grew upon knolls, or about pools of salt water. The landscape almost looked like the sky repeated—vague with mist and blotted with strange clouds; only the earth-clouds never moved.

The man had led the goat by a thick cord, which had cut into the creature's flesh during the struggle up the mountain-side. The cord was now slack; the goat began to crop the herbage; and the man paused a few moments to look down into the chasm.

"I almost think I can see Azazel," he said to himself. "Where those huge boulders are gathered in a heap—perhaps his breast lies under their weight. And if he should stir, and rise, and get upon his feet, and look at me, I should die under his glance. But no! the Lord Yahveh would protect me. And, besides, Azazel is not altogether evil. Once, so my father told me when I was a lad, Azazel dwelt with the Lord Yahveh himself in the bright courts on the holy hill of Sinai. But something happened; Azazel and his master quarrelled, perhaps—for Yahveh is a consuming fire, and he has his seasons of anger—and Azazel was cast out from the upper world, and flung into this desert place, and great stones were rolled upon his trunk and limbs so that he may not stir. And yet Yahveh could not kill him outright. Oh, no; Yahveh is strong, but he cannot slay all the other gods. And who knows but Azazel may sometimes heave the burden from his breast and stalk abroad in the wilderness—Great God! I thought I saw him move!"

The man recoiled, though his hand tightened on the cord. Presently he regained his courage, and continued to speak:—

"But Azazel would be pleased at my errand. He loves goats, and the blood of goats; and, above all, the blood of a goat which is laden with the sins of the people. Accursed animal! if it lived, it would rot. Its back bears a weight of damnation. The High Priest laid his two hands on this goat's head to-day, and confessed over him all the wickedness of the twelve tribes of Israel—all the murders, debts, slanders, lecheries, falsehoods, jealousies, trickeries, cruelties. My own share is enough to make a goat stagger. But the iniquities of a nation! What Azazel will do with all these sins I know not. Nor do I know why this poor goat should die in order that sinners may live and sin again. But it is not my business. The sons of Aaron get our tithes, and, in return, find all the necessary explanations. Come, beast."

The man gave a sudden and violent jerk, and hurled the goat headlong over the precipice.

"This gift is for thee, Azazel!"

Having uttered this cry, he fled without looking backwards, and ran breathlessly down the hillside, and along the unfrequented paths that led to Jerusalem.

This scene occurred, according to Jewish tradition, every year at the Feast of Atonement. On that sacred day two male goats were presented at the Tent of

Meeting dedicated to the God Yahveh. The High Priest cast lots (a hint that gambling had a religious origin), and discovered which one was Yahveh's goat and which was Azazel's. Next he slew a bullock, placed some of its blood in a vessel in one hand, and, in the other, swung a pan of incense, which sent up wreathing volumes of smoke. The priest pushed his way through the curtains which divided off the main body of the tent from the little chamber where Yahveh sat upon the Ark. The small, dark enclosure was filled with suffocating incense. In the midst of this stifling atmosphere the priest hurriedly splashed blood seven times upon the lid of the Ark, and then, pale and coughing, stumbled out into the fresh air. Yahveh needed more blood; blood was his darling food, his recreation, his passion. Then the priest slaughtered the goat which was fixed by lot for Yahveh. Again he crept into the close and disagreeable enclosure, and added the tribute from the goat's veins to the reeking blood of the bullock. More blood—bullock's blood and goat's blood—was afterwards sprinkled upon the altar that stood in the court of the Meeting-tent. Yahveh was satisfied for the present. He sat quietly and benevolently on the mercy-seat in his dingy closet. Now, Azazel must have his share. He might be a fallen angel, but he retained some remnants of power. He was prince of many grotesque and ghastly spirits of the wilderness who might afflict travellers, annoy husbandmen, poison wells, and put venom in the very breeze. So Azazel must have his goat, and it might taste all the sweeter if its blood were infected with the sins of the whole Jewish people. Thus, in one stroke of theological genius, the priesthood pacified Yahveh, mollified Azazel, and cleared off a whole year's record of national and individual crime and misdemeanor.

The account of these ceremonies on the Day of Atonement is given in the sixteenth chapter of the Book of Leviticus. It is now acknowledged that, so far from being the work of "Moses," the Book of Leviticus was compiled by Scribes in and after the period of the exile of the Jews in Babylon. The "Tent of Meeting" (Tabernacle) was largely a myth, just as the conversations reported as having been held between Moses and Yahveh are pure imaginations. But no doubt the Book of Leviticus does contain many interesting allusions to the primitive religion of the Israelites. Probably the early Israelites made sacrifices to the demons of dark and waste places. Amongst these was Azazel, a sort of giant-angel, who dwelt in the craggy desert about twelve miles from Jerusalem, and whose uncertain temper made him sometimes malicious, sometimes kind, towards the human race. The Jewish priesthood had to face a problem which all priesthods have to face—viz., how to reconcile a new phase of religion with an old. When the idea of Yahveh was developed, it was found difficult to persuade the common people to relinquish altogether the worship of the spirits of the desert. A compromise was made. Yahveh should have his goat; Azazel, the leader of the wilderness-demons, should also have his. It was possible to rouse the people to a sense of their sin. Sin was a thing to be got rid of. Suppose, then, while sending Azazel his goat, the sins of the people could also be borne away, and a new moral year be commenced? And so the people came to believe that evil-doing could be removed as a porter or beast of burden removes a load from one place to another.

Certainly it was better that people should have even this meagre consciousness of the horror of evil conduct than none at all. But the conception was crude and barbarous. The gross materialism of this atonement doctrine reappeared in the teaching that the blood of Jesus Christ propitiated the offended deity and cleansed the sinner's guilt. Probably not an educated man in the world to-day believes in this savage form of the Atonement. But it is well to remember that the references to the blood of Christ are relics of an unclean and vulgar belief, fit for primitive tribes, but quite alien to the refinement of a later civilisation. In subtle modes there is still too much survival of the Azazel superstition. We are all too ready to shunt the responsibility for social evils on to publicans, stock-jobbers, capitalists, landlords, and the like. But society will never be purified while we lay the blame upon scape-goats.

F. J. GOULD.

Acid Drops.

THE police are going a new way to work in order to suppress publications that do not meet with their approval. The old-fashioned way was, at least, straightforward; the persons who wrote, printed, or published the objectionable book, pamphlet, or paper were prosecuted and put on their defence in a court of justice before a jury of their fellow citizens. But the new-fashioned way is to leave the writers, printers, and publishers alone, and to pursue the inanimate product of their labors. Get hold of the publication, and you stop its sale; and by this means publicity is avoided, as well as the tedious formality of a trial in due course of law.

This is the new police plan with respect to the University Press, at Watford. It will be remembered that Mr. George Bedborough, whose defence opened so boisterously and ended in such a contemptible fiasco, was originally arrested for selling Dr. Havelock Ellis's *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*. Afterwards, of course, and largely, no doubt, to confuse the issue, other charges were added to the indictment. Dr. Ellis attended the police-court in person, and his solicitor informed the magistrate that he was quite ready to defend his book. But no notice was taken of this statement, which was half a challenge. Dr. Ellis was not molested. Nor was the printer molested. His name (Bonner) was on the book, and it is to be presumed that he realised a profit on its production. For some mysterious reason, however, which perhaps he is able to elucidate, if he only would, he was quite studiously ignored. The whole force of the prosecution was directed against Bedborough; who was one of two things—either incapable of standing to his guns when the battle opened in grim earnest, or else treacherously in collusion with the police from the very beginning. At any rate, he pleaded guilty; and the police obtained precisely what they wanted; that is to say, a judgment against Dr. Ellis's book without any real trial or open discussion.

Now, this judgment gave them the right to seize copies of Dr. Ellis's book wherever they could find it. Such is the action of the law of obscenity, and, on the whole, it is just and politic. We are not surprised, therefore, to learn that the police have raided the University Press premises, at Watford, and carried off all the copies in stock. What does surprise us is this—that the police did not make the raid before, and that the University Press people were not prepared for the incursion.

Had this been all, we should have shrugged our shoulders, and exclaimed, "Well, it was to be expected." But this is not all. The police did not confine themselves to seizing Dr. Ellis's book. They seized another book with it—one that has not been condemned, nor even made the subject of legal proceedings. This book was Dr. Féré's *Pathology of Emotions*, a work that was reviewed some weeks ago in our own columns. The gentleman responsible for the English translation is Dr. Robert Park, of Glasgow. Dr. Féré himself is a very distinguished French physician, the author of several important works, and head of the medical staff of the famous Bicêtre Hospital, in Paris. It should be added that the book thus seized is strictly scientific in character, that sexual references form but a small part of the total contents, and that the price of fifteen shillings shows that it is intended for a special and very limited public.

What we have to say, first of all, with regard to this seizure of Dr. Féré's book, is this: that if the police can act in this way unchallenged, we may bid farewell to the liberty of the press in England. Indeed, there is just as much liberty of the press in Constantinople. Henceforth, it seems, there is to be no odious publicity, no advertisement of the publication seized, and no trial of the persons responsible for it. The police are to be the absolute censors of the press, subject only to this miserably feeble restriction, that they must obtain a magistrate's signature for a search warrant.

Fortunately this is not the law of England. The action of the police can be challenged. It can be challenged by an action for the restitution of the seized (or stolen) property. And this is what we look to the University Press people to do. It is not enough to protest and bewail. A sturdier form of self-defence is necessary. The action of the police should be met by counter-action. We beg the University Press people, whoever they are—we haven't the honor of knowing them—to pluck up their courage and begin a fight with the police over Dr. Féré's book. Over Dr. Ellis's book they cannot, but over Dr. Féré's they can. And if they do so they will probably find plenty of support; at least they shall have whatever help we can render them. It is our duty, as we hope it will always be our disposition, to stand up for the liberty of the press wherever it is attacked.

"Fighting the Infidel" is the subject of two pages of editorial paragraphs in the last number of *Sunday Chimes*—one of Cassell's weeklies. It appears that a correspondent has asked the editor to "provide an antidote" to the

periodicals and statements of the Freethinker. "Something honest, straightforward, witty, and sarcastic is wanted." But this, alas, is a very large order. The honest Christian advocate is not apt to be witty, and the straightforward one is not apt to be sarcastic. Besides, it doesn't pay to be honest and straightforward in defending Christianity. That is why Christian Evidence platform work nearly always finds a man a blackguard or leaves him so.

Still, the editor of *Sunday Chimes* has his little say on the matter. He admits that "much havoc is wrought" by the "spokesmen of cheap infidelity," that he sees "freethinking prints in the hands of artisans and others in the railway carriages," and that "good people of the devout sort little suspect how widely these publications circulate." And the worst of it is that the assailant of religion "is often better armed" than its defenders, and that "many reverent people are unable to parry the thrusts of the Secularist." And then so many of the papers and advocates that defend the faith are "narrow and ill-equipped," and apt to use "some old bludgeon of assertion that is out of date." Evidently it is a ticklish business to answer infidelity. You want to be quite up to date, and to have your wits about you. Above all, says the *Sunday Chimes* editor, you must avoid the Old Testament and stick to the Son of Man. Ask the infidel to deal with the person of Christ. Well, the infidel does, and the Christian never answers him. All the Christian apologist really does is to shout that "Christ is this, that, and the other." Point out a few objections, and he replies to you by shouting "Christ is this, that, and the other" still louder. Repeat your objections, and he shouts it again till his voice cracks.

The one piece of practical advice which the *Sunday Chimes* editor gives to his distressed correspondent is this. Play the Good Samaritan argument for all it is worth. Ask the infidel who built hospitals, etc.—including, we suppose, workhouses, prisons, and lunatic asylums. Ay, ask him. But suppose he replies with another question, and asks you, "Who fills them?" What then? Is it not a fact that Christianity never built asylums enough to hold the people it drove insane, or benevolent institutions enough to deal with a tithe of the people it made poor and miserable?

The truth is that hospitals and other social-relief agencies were not built by Christ. They existed before him, and they have existed since his advent in countries where he was never heard of. Christ was not the author of Humanity. And if this editor has no other answer to the infidel than that Christ was its author, he had better cease giving advice on the subject, for it can be absolutely demonstrated that he is wrong.

Hall Caine's novel, the *Christian*, was dramatised and produced in America. The part of the hero, Father John Storm, was played by an actor, who has just been ordered to pay twenty-five dollars a week to his wife. She has also secured a divorce from him on the ground of extreme cruelty.

Two men of God belonging to Cumberland, Md., U.S.A., have quarrelled over marriage fees. The Rev. James E. Moffat, Presbyterian, calls the Rev. Jacob Yingling, Methodist, "a common street walker," and the Rev. Mr. Yingling calls the Rev. Mr. Moffat a "puppy" and a "whelp." Perhaps it would be safe to follow Voltaire's example, when he heard two old viragos blackguarding each other, and believe them both.

The Camp Library of the great Napoleon was pretty extensive and fairly representative. Indeed, it seems to show, like so many other things, what a vast sphere of interests was covered by that wonderful mind—in some respects the most wonderful in the history of this world. The *Daily News* the other day gave a complete catalogue of this Camp Library, which was divided into eight sections. "It is interesting to observe," our contemporary added, "that Napoleon classed the sacred books of various nations under the head of 'Politics.'"—

The Rev. D. Webster, of Kirkwall, preaching in the United Presbyterian Church, said that "a union of the Churches of Christ in special prayer would be to our brave soldiers on the battlefield what the upholding of the hands of Moses on the mount was to the tribes of Israel fighting below." Very likely! And the Rev. D. Webster has chosen the better part, by anticipation. He will pray on the mount, while the soldiers fight below—and have his pay and rations brought up. Surely an excellent division of labor.

Poor old Adam! Once thought to have been the grand progenitor of the whole human race, he is now reduced to the position of a mythological character. It is known that six thousand years ago, when Adam started the population business with Eve, the world was already inhabited by large, powerful, and civilised nations. Here is Dr. Wallis Budge, in his new book on *Egyptian Ideas of the Future Life*, telling the common, kitchen-garden British public that the Egyptians "possessed, some six thousand years ago, a

religion and a system of morality which, when stripped of all corrupt accretions, stand second to none amongst those which have been developed by the greatest nations in the world." They believed in the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the judgment to come. They also had a man-god in Osiris, whose victory over death was a pledge of their own. Four thousand years before Christ!!

A local preacher named Lewis, while preaching in Onchan Wesleyan Chapel, near Douglas, Isle of Man, was seized with a paralytic fit, and collapsed in the pulpit. The doctor prohibited his removal from the building, and he died there the next morning at six o'clock. We read that "the affair created a sensation amongst the congregation." No doubt. But how much greater the "sensation" would be if a Secular lecturer dropped down in that way on the platform! Myriads of pious people would see the hand of God in it, and reckon it a "judgment."

The New York *Truthseeker* does not understand Dr. H. S. Lunn—Mr. Stead's Lunn, Mr. Price Hughes's Lunn—referring to Mr. John Burns as "a well-known Agnostic." Our contemporary supposes that he cannot be an Agnostic because of his attitude on the Sunday question. But it overlooks the fact that he is also a politician, with votes to catch, and a seat to keep. Mr. John Burns has never concealed his Freethought from his personal friends. Indeed, only the other day, he publicly called himself "a respectable Freethinker"—whatever the adjective may mean in this connection. It is impossible, therefore, for him to assist the church and chapel party on direct Sabbatarian grounds; but he serves them just as well, and perhaps better, by speaking and voting on the "No Sunday Labor" ticket. Logically, of course, his position is ridiculous; but the British public was never very hot on logic, and "Honest John" knows he will never be ruined by the lack of that article.

Though Wilson Barrett regards himself as the exponent *par excellence* of the religious drama, and boasts of the wonderful "conversions" effected by the *Sign of the Cross*, his acquaintance with the Bible seems to be of a very limited character. From an interview with him—or rather with his manager—in the *Church Gazette*, we learn that he carries about with his properties a Cruden's "Concordance." This is because he often receives letters containing Biblical texts to which no reference is attached. In order to verify them, he turns to the Concordance, and so discovers in what part of the Bible they are to be found. In this way, his Scriptural knowledge is being slowly, but surely, extended. By-and-bye, he will be able to spot the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount in the pages of the holy volume—all on his own, and without the least assistance from good old Cruden. O happy time, when our premier religious actor shall thus have searched the Scriptures!

The New York *Truthseeker*, having complained that the pigeon-hole in which it places the newspaper records of the ungodly or too godly doings of American exhorters was nearly bursting, proceeded to fill a whole three-column page of its issue for December 23 with selected samples. There are thirty-six in all, from theft and "immorality" up to murder. We have not space to reproduce them. Besides, the same sort of thing goes on in England—yea, even in godly Scotland—and instances are chronicled from time to time in the *Freethinker*, not because we like to print such delinquencies, but because they show how hollow is the claim of the Christian religion to produce a superior type of morality.

The Roman Catholic Church of the Holy Cross, Cardiff, built at a cost of £1,300, has been practically destroyed by fire. Do ultra-Protestants perceive in this event any divine lesson or judgment?

Prosaic newspapers ascribe the outbreak to the "heating apparatus" of the church. Is there not something unconsciously ironical about this? Holy Mother Church, in former centuries, worked the "heating apparatus" for nearly all it was worth in the way of burning heretics. In these latter days the "heating apparatus," in the shape of threatened hell-fire, remains amongst her cherished agencies of conversion. It does not, therefore, seem unfitting that this Cardiff Temple of Catholicism should be added to the other conventicles that have fallen a prey to the "devouring element." But where does the Lord come in?

Apart from the proposed "day of humiliation," the *Spectator* says that the people who ask for it "forget the changes which have come over England during the last fifty years. Half a century ago the Church of England was the national Church in a way which is quite incompatible with present ideas of citizenship. The notion that citizenship and Churchmanship somehow went together was still general. The nation is no longer of one mind upon church-going, and a variety of things which are represented by church-going."

The *Spectator's* comment on the so-called "national Church"

may be read in connection with some recent remarks by the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes. That great man, though not always to be implicitly relied upon, is not far from the truth when he says: "The English Church is either ignorant of or wilfully blind to the gigantic fact of Dissent. Even in England the Free Churches are more numerous than the Episcopalians. But, taking the world at large, there are 20,000,000 adherents of the Anglican Church and 30,000,000 adherents of Methodism. I say nothing about other Dissenting bodies." And, of course, there is the Roman Catholic Church to be taken into account. These figures rather discount the pretensions of the Church of England, which in reality is not the Church of England at all.

The Rev. Dr. Amory Bradford ascribes a great deal of the plague in India to the practice of bathing in the "sacred," but filthy, water of the Ganges. The pious Hindu may now point to the recently-discovered fact that bacilli of diphtheria and consumption have been found in large numbers in the Christian "holy water" fountains at Turin. Dr. Abba, a noted bacteriologist, took specimens from thirty-one churches in that city, and discovered many microbes therein. He has recommended sanitary precautions, but the Roman Catholic organs indignantly reject his proposals, saying that the water, being "holy," requires no treatment.

Lord Wolseley, it seems, has written a preface to the reprint of Cromwell's "Soldier's Pocket Bible." He says: "In my humble opinion, the soldier who carries this Bible in his pack possesses what is of far higher value to him than the proverbial marshal's baton; for, if he carries its teaching in his head and lets it rule his heart and conduct, he will certainly be happy, and most probably eminently successful." It is also stated that 38,000 copies of the Gospels have been distributed amongst regiments sailing for South Africa.

At the same time, the religious weeklies are receiving innumerable letters from Christian ministers and laymen, declaring that the war to which these precious volumes are carried is distinctly opposed to the spirit of the teaching they contain. The *British Weekly* recently endeavored to explain away the obvious meaning of the Sermon on the Mount. It has since been in receipt of a number of letters challenging its dealing with that alleged deliverance of Christ.

The Rev. Silas K. Hocking is more than a little indignant with many of his co-religionists. He reminds us that Lord Rosebery said in his speech, at Bath, that Mr. Gladstone, after Majuba, endeavored to apply the principles of the Gospel to international affairs, and that his attempt proved a failure; furthermore, that, if Mr. Gladstone were alive, he would not attempt so to apply Christianity again. A few days later, Mr. T. W. Russell declared at Dublin that eighteen years ago England suffered from too much Christianity. "I presume," said Mr. Hocking, "from the silence of the Church, that she accepts these pagan utterances. But, if so, why celebrate Christmas any more, and why prate about 'peace and goodwill'?" Why, indeed?

Quite pathetically, Mr. Harper Riley appeals in the *Christian Budget* to his fellow Christians not to drag religion into the mire in connection with this war, and thus "make ourselves the sport of unbelievers." Certainly Christians, in their vain endeavor to follow the teachings of Christ, and, at the same time, to smash the Boers, are presenting a pretty spectacle to the world. But, as we have said before, we do not wish to make sport of them. We are sad to see people otherwise sensible involved in such hopeless inconsistency. Now, are we not truly magnanimous in what might be our hour of triumph?

Many are the devices resorted to for the purpose of inducing attendance at the "public worship of God." The latest novelty in this way is the appointment of "maiden ushers." Of course, the idea originated in America, where, in several rural parishes, the experiment has been tried, with the result, it is said, of a considerable augmentation in the attendance of the male sex.

A great deal naturally depends upon the kind of "maiden ushers" selected. And then the young men who might attend the service in order to be ushered into seats by pretty girls are not likely, after having their curiosity satisfied, to trouble any further about it. It is suggested that the plan would have a decided tendency to check the vanity of the ladies who go to church to show off their new dresses and headgear. If a woman had to choose the seats for women, the newest fashion—unless worn by herself—would hardly get a front pew.

The pious teacher of a Sunday-school class at Middlesbrough—who happened also to be an ex-mayor of that town—has been fined £5 for kissing, and otherwise assaulting, Mabel Marshall, one of his pupils. Of course, he was only actuated by Christian love, but the magistrates regretted that they could not impose a severer penalty.

To indicate the future of individuals under the guise of describing "general tendencies" is, according to the Liverpool Stipendiary, a punishable offence, if undertaken for payment. In accordance with that view, a "palmist" was fined £10 and costs. Yet the well-paid ministers of religion, who are emphatic enough in predicting the fate of people in the alleged hereafter from their "general tendencies" here, continue to enjoy an immunity from prosecution. This is certainly not because their prognostications are any more reliable than those of fortune-tellers and "palmists."

The growing arrogance of "officers" of the Salvation Army has drawn forth a sharp, and very necessary, rebuke from the Lord Mayor of London. A case came before him at the Mansion House in which a "major" was shown to have been insolently obstructive to the police in connection with the Army Shelter in Fetter-lane. Other instances have occurred which indicate that these people, in assuming their absurd bogus titles, imagine that they at once become superior persons, quite above the ordinary compliance exacted from common folks. The Lord Mayor remarked that, if these obstructive tactics were continued, serious notice would have to be taken of the matter.

Those wonderful figures recently given by the Rev. Dr. Edghill, retiring Chaplain-General of the Army, as to religion in the ranks, have not been allowed to pass unchallenged. According to him, only the Church of England section had increased in numbers. He has now been informed on the best authority that his statement is "absolutely inaccurate." He said the Wesleyans had remained stationary, whereas the Rev. R. Maxwell says that in 1895 the declared Wesleyans in the Army (regular) were 12,811. In 1897 their number was 13,252, and now, in 1899, they number 13,552.

The advance has not been great, but the main point is the way in which the Church of England total is arrived at—nearly every recruit who is a "nothingarian"—and we know what a number there are—being at once popped down as belonging to the Establishment. Dr. Edghill's zeal for his Church is quite in excess of his candor or desire for accuracy.

Norman Murray, a bookseller and newsdealer of Montreal, in Canada, has been prosecuted for circulating leaflets on which were quoted inelegant extracts from the Bible. It appears that the case went from the lower courts to the Queen's Bench, and resulted in Mr. Murray being put under bonds for two years not to circulate any more of the leaflets. As it is probable that the suppression of the leaflet is a more important object with the prosecution than the imprisonment of the seller, the defenders of inspired indecency should be satisfied with the verdict. The method chosen by Murray is a legitimate way of attacking Bible superstition, but hardly a safe one. The Bible Society is incorporated as an obscenity trust, with Anthony Comstock at the head of it, and individual dealers are always in danger of getting run out of the business. A fight to be made on the proposition that the Bible is indictable on account of its indecency should be begun by the arrest of a Bible agent. The extracts could then be circulated as proof that the action was begun in good faith. Some verse that Mr. Murray gets out in connection with the scripture lessons is of the sort which would be recognised as falling under the common definition of obscene literature. The versification is extremely crude, and seems to prove the dictum of Pope that "want of decency is want of sense." We know of no plea that could hold in extenuation of the "poetry," except that the writer had caught his inspiration from the scriptures on which it is a commentary.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

Who is Kilbey? Who is he? All the papers puff him. He was reported to be a prisoner at Pretoria, but the War Office people couldn't find that name on the list of English officers. At length it was reported that he was not a prisoner after all. Finally it appeared that he was Commissioner Kilbey—of the Salvation Army! What splendid advertisers these people are!

A missionary was visiting a Boer family, and found that they were daily using, and, therefore, wearing out, a Bible that had been brought over with the family three centuries

or so before from Holland, and containing all the family names from father to son ever since. He pointed out to them that it was a treasure not so to be ruined. They agreed, but did not know where to get another to replace it. He promised to make them a present of one. The old Boer was aghast! "But," he said, "the English do not know anything about the Bible." However, the book, printed in Dutch by the Bible Society, was duly presented. Of course, instead of the Dutch arms, it had the English arms on the front page. The old man pointed this out. "That is not the Bible," he said. A little further examination showed him, however, to his amazement, that this was only a matter of printing, and that otherwise the two were identical. The explanation as to the Arms led to a reference to the translation. "Translation?" said the old man. "This is no translation. The words were originally said in Dutch."—*Daily News*.

This story is amusing enough, but after all the mental attitude of that old Boer used to be quite common in England in the old Puritan days. The Bible was read and even expounded then as though it were originally written in English. Many old sermons draw very subtle distinctions of meaning, grounded on English etymology; all of which are perfectly meaningless when it is remembered that the English Bible is a translation.

Charles Minor, a colored gentleman, hailing from Philadelphia, was brought before Magistrate Plowden, at the Marylebone Police-court, and charged with being disorderly and using obscene language. Prisoner said that he had been to a music-hall, where the people called him Old Kruger, and he didn't like it. If they had not interfered with him, he would not have interfered with them. When left alone, he was like St. John, full of love; but, if offended, he was like St. Peter, very fiery. Mr. Plowden told him that he ought to rise above such petty provocation, and added that "John and Peter would have done so." But the colored gentleman was too smart for him, and exclaimed: "Peter would have cut their ears off." This was one for the darkie. Yet the magistrate had the last word; and it was "10s. or seven days"—which was rather hard.



Robert G. Ingersoll.

TAKEN IN 1862, AS COLONEL OF THE 11TH ILLINOIS CAVALRY.

as great as the prophets of old. They issue commands and thousands obey, but a greater power by far is given to the priest of God. Every day in the sacrifice of the mass he can say to the Son of God, 'Come down from heaven,' and IMMEDIATELY CHRIST OBEYS. At the bidding of a mere creature the great King of heaven and earth, he whose Majesty fills all places, leaves his throne at the right hand of God, and meekly rests on our altars, etc. What earthly power can vie with this, or, might I add, what heavenly power either?.....The angels, indeed, see our Lord face to face, but then they are not permitted to hold him in their hands, or to control his movements. Besides the power which the priest has over the body of our Lord he possesses another, if possible, a greater power still, and one which almost seems to make him Omnipotent.....the priest can OPEN and CLOSE the gates of heaven and hell! The angels may keep away the evil spirits which surround the poor child of Adam; Mary may pray for him; but neither the angels nor Mary can remove one single sin from off his soul. Who can do this for him? *The priest of God!* You will find only ONE created being who CAN forgive the sinner, and that being is THE CATHOLIC PRIEST!"

The greatness of a country depends not on the abundance of its revenues, nor on the strength of its fortifications, nor on the beauty of its public buildings; but it consists in the number of its cultivated citizens, in its men of education, enlightenment, and character. Here are to be found its true interests, its chief strength, its real power.—*Martin Luther*.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 7, The Athenæum Hall, London. W.; 7-30, "Coaxing God Almighty; or, A Day of Prayer and Humiliation." January 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.

ROBERT FORDER, the N. S. S. honorary secretary, and publisher of 28 Stonecutter-street, E.C., has for some time been very unwell. His enemy has been rheumatism, and is now reinforced by bronchitis. We are sure that all Freethinkers will join us in wishing him a speedy restoration to reasonably good health.

WE regret an awful desecration in last week's *Freethinker*. Milton was quoted in "M.'s" article on "Shelley," and the printer committed an act of sacrilege on the quotation—probably because the editor, being ill, was not there to prevent it. Every lover of Milton knows the beautiful passage in *Lycidas*, ending with the line—"That sank so low that sacred head of thine." Well, the printer turned *sank* into "junk." When we saw it we wished him a junk diet for a fortnight.

LARNER SUGDEN.—Thanks for the paper containing your letter. We respect your independent spirit, but you hardly seem to us impartial in your preference of Right to Might. A good many cosmopolitans have got so far away from patriotism that they have reached the other extreme; so that, in relation to other countries, their own country can never be right, and in relation to their own country other countries can never be wrong; which seems to us as vicious and mischievous as any Jingoism. However, there is nothing but benevolence in ministering to the wounded, on either side.

G. DIXON.—They came to hand all right. Accept our thanks.

MRS. WHITTET (Dundee).—We are obliged to you for the Wallace portrait. He was a great and valiant Scot, and no doubt a true patriot.

M. W.—Thanks for your good wishes. The verses are not up to our mark. Your workmanship is faulty.

H. C. LONG.—No doubt you are right.

D. FRANKEL.—February 25 is a long way ahead. Still, we note that the East London Branch's annual tea and concert will take place on that date at the Montagu Hall, 53 Stepney-green, E.

W. SIMONS.—The matter must remain over till our next. Too much pressure on our space this week.

W. B. THOMPSON.—Our new year's number was practically made up when your communication arrived. Sorry it must be delayed till next week, but there is no help for it. We very much regret to hear of Mr. Taylor's death. He was a loyal and gallant soldier of Freethought.

OLD FREETHINKER.—Yes, we saw Mr. Holyoake's letter in the *Daily News*. He is at loggerheads now, apparently, with his "eminent Christian minister, entitled to be believed upon his word." For our part, we could never understand how any sensible man, with any fair degree of information, could expect the smallest good result from the Peace Conference, which we always sarcastically called the Czar's Love-Feast. We do believe in Arbitration, but it is absurd to suppose that nations will begin by settling big things, on which they feel deeply and passionately, in that way. We have said all along that a beginning must necessarily be made—it has been made—with the smaller things, which will lead on to greater things, and finally to the greatest.

EMMA BRADLAUGH.—Very pleased to receive your new year's letter. We reciprocate all your good wishes. Mr. Foote is getting better, but slowly, his cold being very obstinate this time, perhaps owing to the wretched, changeable weather.

W. COX.—Liverpool subjects forwarded. The other matter has been handed over to the N.S.S. secretary, who will see the Benevolent Committee about it. Mr. Foote is too unwell to see to it himself.

J. D. BILLING.—Mr. Foote has written you about a lecture at Birkenhead. No doubt something ought to be done in that populous place.

LOUIS LEVINE.—Thanks for the papers and other things you send us across the Atlantic. We read with much interest the parts you marked in the *Charleston News and Courier*. Depend upon it, in the continental outcry about England's "decadence," the wish is father to the thought. The fact is, the European Powers would much like to divide up the British Empire amongst them; and they try to persuade each other that the job would be an easy one just at present; but they all shrink from beginning it, for they all know they are lying to each other. The resources of this country are immense, in men and money; and her matchless fleets of battleships are ready on every sea. Woe to the Power that strikes at the Naval Colossus! For our part, we hate war, but we hate craven blood too, and if England should be attacked by Powers who do not love liberty, but simply covet her possessions, we have enough of the Englishman in us to hope and believe that the earth would be strewn with corpses, and the seas reddened with blood, before any combination of such Powers succeeded—if they ever could succeed—in pulling her down to her doom.

R. T. LINFORD.—The extract may prove useful. Thanks. Pleased to have your high appreciation of our "Mother of God" articles.

RECEIVED.—Secular Thought—Christian Leader—Truthseeker (New York)—De Vrije Gedachte—Sydney Bulletin—Ethical World—Literary Guide—Isle of Man Times—Public Opinion—Sunday Chimes—Sentinel—People's Newspaper—Liberator—Blue Grass Blade—The People—Echo—Awakener of India—Freidenker—Torch of Reason—Leek Times—Two Worlds—Bridgnorth Journal—Kirkwall Guardian.

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.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

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 being too unwell to lecture at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, his place was kindly occupied by Mr. Charles Watts, who delivered a miscellaneous discourse on events of 1899, including the death of Colonel Ingersoll. Mr. Watts was in good form, as we hear, and his address was much appreciated. Mr. Harry Snell made (of course) a first-rate chairman.

Mr. Foote had to spend his Christmas in bed, being troubled with a nasty bronchial catarrh, which the doctor feared would develop into something worse, though happily it did not. Still, it has been rather obstinate, and Mr. Foote has been practically confined to the house ever since—that is, up to the time of writing, namely Tuesday (Jan. 2). It is pretty certain, however, that he will be able to lecture at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday, January 7. His subject will be "Coaxing God Almighty; or, A Day of Prayer and Humiliation." Freethinkers should try to bring their more orthodox friends along to this lecture.

This is the last announcement of the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, which takes place at the Holborn Restaurant on Monday evening (Jan. 8). Mr. Foote is to occupy the chair, and is to be supported by Messrs. Watts, Cohen, Snell, and other well-known Freethinkers. After the dinner, which is sure to be a good one at the Holborn, there will be a vocal and instrumental entertainment. The toast list will be shortened this year in order to afford an opportunity for more conversation. We may add that the price of the tickets is 4s., as usual, and that they should be secured by Sunday evening (Jan. 7) at the very latest.

Shareholders in the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, will have received formal notice that the Statutory Meeting is fixed to take place at Anderton's Hotel on Wednesday evening, January 10, at 8 o'clock. Those who cannot attend, either through distance or pre-engagements, should fill in their Proxy Forms in favor of Mr. Foote—or, if they prefer, some other Director, or, indeed, any other shareholder—and send the filled-up Forms in immediately.

Mr. Joseph Symes, we see by the last number of the *Liberator* to hand, has resolved to postpone indefinitely his contemplated visit to England. He says he is satisfied that the money could be obtained, but he cannot get a man to take his place as lecturer and editor during his absence. Besides, our gallant old colleague smells a fresh fight in the wind, and he means to be in it. He is of opinion that the enemies of truth and liberty out there are meditating another onslaught. We hope this is not true; but, if Mr. Symes thinks it is, he does right to stay at Melbourne. "To my British friends," he says, "I can but forward my fraternal regards and best wishes, as well as my heartiest thanks for the kindly way in which they have treated my proposed visit to them." Perhaps, after all, we may still look forward to the pleasure of seeing Mr. Symes—later on, when the conditions are more favorable.

Mr. G. L. Mackenzie, the wicked *Brimstone Ballads* author, had the last word in the *Echo* correspondence on "Libraries and Freethought Literature." After his capital letter came the good old editorial—"This correspondence must now cease."

We expect to hear of internal accidents to some heated Christians who were thus deprived of the chance of "going for" this shocking Atheist.

Secular Thought (Toronto) reproduces, of course with due acknowledgment, from our columns "Ess Jay Bee's" parody on Kipling's *Absent-minded Beggar* and Mimnermus's article on "Shakespeare and the Bible."

Members of the Secular Society, Limited, in particular, and Secularists in general, will be pleased to hear that Mr. Foote has just helped to arrange the details of the will of another friendly testator, under which the Society is to receive one-third of the residue of the estate after the payment of legacies. They will also be glad to hear that the settlement of the affairs of the late W. J. Birch, of Liverpool, is now practically completed, and that the Secular Society, Limited, will shortly receive the amount of the residue of the estate, to which it is entitled, amounting to nearly £1,100. This is good news for 1900.

Anticipations.

"Come, bright Improvement! on the car of Time,
And rule the world from clime to clime."

—*Pleasures of Hope.*

THE pagan tradition that, when all the guardian deities of mankind abandoned the world, Hope alone was left behind, is a poetic conception which Campbell unconsciously invested with a particular interest for the present time, when "rampant War" has indeed, as he puts it, "yoked the red dragons of her iron car." But it has another and a special interest to those of us who have identified ourselves with phases of advanced modern thought. For though the old deities who were supposed to guard the destinies of mankind have abandoned their charge, or, rather, have been banished by their worshippers to the limbo of the past, we have still left to us that bright and hopeful Spirit of whom the poet sings. Science, which means progress, is a happy exchange for the whole pantheon of gods, whether of ancient or of modern times. Hope is still with us; her most cheering anticipations bound up in the growth of Improvement.

Who shall say how far in the coming year—still more in the new century—that potent spirit of advancement summoned to the assistance of mankind when the gods are fled or dead may not carry us? Our expectations, of course, may be disappointed. The wrongs of fate, the woes of human kind, the evils of ignorance and superstition, may not disappear, nor the ameliorating influences of enlightenment arrive, as quickly as we desire. We can only—

"Watch the wheels of Nature's mazy plan
And learn the future by the past of man."

Whatsoever events the twentieth century has in store for us, we do not envy the cynical spirit or share the vaticinations of those who—

* expanding Truth invidious view,
And think or wish the song of Hope untrue."

Some of the many hoped-for advances are doubtless elsewhere indicated in these pages. The need and value of none will be diminished by special stress being here laid on one or two. Perhaps, of all the important principles that need to be jealously safeguarded by the community, none is of such vital interest as the religious freedom and equality of the subject. Upon the preservation of that right the peace of society and the self-respect of the individual are based. Yet we find it violated in our own liberty-loving country of Great Britain in such a way that posterity will marvel that the wrong was endured so long, and that the commencement of 1900 found it still without effective remedy. One of the directions in which that right is violated is undoubtedly by the continued maintenance of a State Church. But another phase, and one which comes even nearer home to us, is the continued use of the Bible in the State schools. This latter is an evil, the termination of which we may well hope and work for in coming years. Perhaps it would be too much to anticipate—however earnestly we may desire—its removal at any very early date. Yet it is not that the public mind is unprepared for the change, and would not very willingly welcome it. The continuance of the

Scriptures as a text-book in State schools is due solely to the domination of the sacerdotal caste. They are associated strictly on trades union principles in this matter—however much they may differ upon others, including the very contents of the book itself. They fight for its preservation in the schools as if for their own existence. Probably they are not bad judges either of the personal or professional losses they would sustain if the Bible were, as it should be, excluded. The whole nation is not only taxed, but its influence as a State is thrown into the scales, for the support of schools which are turned from their legitimate uses into nurseries for the creeds.

The injustice of this State concession to theological interests becomes the more glaring when we consider the changed views which every day are becoming more prevalent as to the nature and authority of this book. Modern culture and research have vastly reduced its claims. The old notion of Bible inerrancy has practically disappeared. Nowadays the volume is accepted only in parts even by fairly orthodox believers, though they cannot agree amongst themselves as to what is to be received and what rejected, nor as to the precise authority and bearing of that which is retained. Nevertheless, the book is imported into the State schools, and is there accorded a sanctified importance as a whole which vast numbers of taxpayers who support the schools would not think of conceding to it outside. That this anomaly cannot be tolerated for ever must be quite obvious even to Bible-reading advocates themselves. If we indulge in anticipations as to the exclusion of the book from these State institutions in the not very remote future, we shall not exceed either what we have a right to expect, or what is most likely to happen. The date of the next School Board election in London is not far distant, and the old struggle must be renewed. The School Board elections throughout the country must be fought, if need be, again and again on the claim of the clerical classes to force their book on the nation's children. We anticipate victory in the end, and it is our business to work so as to ensure that ultimate triumph at the earliest period possible.

Another point on which we have strong determination and lively anticipations is the exclusion of this same stumbling-block of a book from all judicial proceedings. The affirmation right is a permissive privilege which is satisfactory as far as it goes, but the oath, and especially the stupid form of kissing the so-called "Sacred Volume," should be abolished altogether. Several sessions ago there was a proposal to introduce in the House of Commons a Bill to make the Scotch form of oath general throughout the kingdom. That change would be, to some extent, an improvement, inasmuch as it would dispense with the distasteful and dangerous practice of kissing the book. But, of course, the rational and most effective change would be to abolish the oath altogether, especially as its inutility is demonstrated day after day. Is it too much to anticipate that in the near future this desirable reform will be effected?

Other anticipations on wider subjects than these, which are mentioned here simply because they present themselves as practical matters susceptible of comparatively early settlement, cannot fail to be entertained by those who look to Freethought as the agency of moral and material improvement. That similar expectations of pioneers in the past have been but partially realised in the present should be no discouragement to continued effort. We still hope on, for if "suasive Hope hath but a syren tongue," one cannot doubt her power to "urge the lingering tide of life."

FRANCIS NEALE.

Obituary.

I MUCH regret to record the death, after a long and painful illness, of Mr. George Theobalds, at the early age of twenty-six. Through both father and mother (old members of the N.S.S.) George Theobalds came of a long line of Freethinkers—an ancestor on the maternal side was put to death for heresy in Norwich—and was an ardent Freethinker himself. The funeral, which took place at Manor Park, was attended by a large number of friends, and the service was rendered by W. J. Ramsey.—R.

Masters of the Lash.

"A religion which has shed more blood than any other religion has no right to quarrel over a few epigrams."—*Rt. Hon. John Morley, M.P.*

RIDICULE has many enemies. Stupid people, who must be literal or nothing, dislike it. Pious old ladies, whose simple, direct instincts and emotions prevent them from piercing below the surface of a statement, do not care for it. And, lastly, those other wearers of petticoats, the priests, whose professional instincts prompt them to reprove it, with the whole vocabulary of theological abhorrence. Without it is based on seriousness, said Heine, wit is only a sneeze of the reason. Every great wit in literature was a man of serious aims, and the greatest writers have been the greatest wits, from the days of Aristophanes to our own. Some of the best masters of the lash have been amongst the most earnest soldiers of progress. Singularly enough, priests have, with their usual stupidity, overlooked the fact that Our Heavenly Pa was the first Ironist, when he said, upon expelling poor Adam from the Garden: "Behold, the man is become as one of us!"

Elsewhere in the Bible we find Elijah imitating the august example of the Trinity-in-Unity, using ridicule in his encounter with the priests of Baal. They had cried in vain to their god, but the fire would not come. Elijah turned upon them, and said, in the language of to-day: "Where is this god? Why does he not answer? Has he gone on a journey, or what is the matter with him?" This is the language of irony and the deadliest sarcasm. If the priests of Baal had been Christians, Elijah would have had still more excellent reasons to remember the occasion. Jehovah, it is worth recording, was so fond of humor that, when his son was executed (a fact for which we are thankful as often as we think of it), he permitted an ironical inscription on the cross. After all, Jehovah was only capable of simple, elementary irony. In this he did not rise much above the level of a 'bus-conductor or street arab. The real masters of irony are much more polished and delicate.

A splendid example of sustained irony is found in Gibbon's immortal fifteenth chapter of the *Decline and Fall*, sketching the rise of Christianity. We all realise Gibbon's position. He was pretending to give an account of the early Christians from the Christian standpoint, so as to hoodwink the owls of orthodoxy. At the same time he contrives to throw doubt and discredit upon the whole story. This is the sort of thing:—

"But how shall we excuse the supine inattention of the pagan and philosophic world to those evidences which were presented by the hand of Omnipotence, not to their reason, but to their senses? During the age of Christ, of his apostles, and of their first disciples, the doctrine which they preached was confirmed by innumerable prodigies. The lame walked, the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, demons were expelled, and the laws of nature were frequently suspended for the benefit of the Church. But the sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and, pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alteration in the moral or physical government of the world. Under the reign of Tiberius, the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman Empire, was involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Even this miraculous event, which ought to have excited the wonder, the curiosity, and the devotion of mankind, passed without notice in an age of science and history."

Gibbon is ostensibly censuring the sages for overlooking the Christian miracles; in reality, he is denying their occurrence by slyly pointing out that there is no contemporary record of them from disinterested sources. This is what old Rabelais would have called *sanglante dérision*.

The most perfect examples of irony are to be found in Voltaire's *Candide*, the wittiest book in the whole world. Voltaire did not lop branches; he laid his axe to the root of the tree. Everybody should read this book. It is the most characteristic of all his writings. All is so good that it is difficult to quote; but here is a sample taken at random. When Candide was to be punished as a deserter from the Bulgarian army, we read:—

"He was asked which he would like the best, to be whipped six-and-thirty times through all the regiment, or to receive at once twelve balls of lead in his brain. He vainly said that human will is free, and that he chose neither the one nor the other. He was forced to make a choice; he determined, in virtue of that gift of God called liberty, to run the gauntlet six-and-thirty times."

Voltaire's wit was like lightning. It flashed upon falsehood and scorched it into perdition. Swift, like Voltaire, was also a master of savage irony. Educated in the house of the Epicurean, Sir William Temple, and the friend of the freethinking St. John, what had he to do with Christianity? Maybe his life-long hypocrisy helped to thicken the driving clouds in the maddened hurricane of his life. The paper left behind him, called *Thoughts on Religion*, is merely a set of excuses for not professing disbelief. His sermons are devoid of Christian characteristic—there is little or no cant. His genius was, in his theological writings, strangled by what Carlyle calls "Hebrew old clothes." Everywhere his discontent with his environment sounds throughout his writings like the "moaning of a midnight sea." We all know the irony of *Gulliver's Travels*, that marvellous book which appeals alike to the fresh imagination of the child and the weary cynicism of the man-of-the-world; but the most terrible example of Swift's peculiar humor is *A Modest Proposal*, which is neither more nor less than a suggestion to use up for food the superfluous babies of the poor.

More subtle and complex forms of irony are to be found in Fielding's *History of Jonathan Wild, the Great*, in the acidulated pages of Flaubert, and under the apparently suave sentences of Renan. Irony lurks in the robust humor of Rabelais and in the fecund pages of Diderot.

Heine's works are full of irony. Matthew Arnold, Swinburne, and Thomas Hardy in the concluding chapter of *Tess*, have used it with deadly effect. But the dictionary definition of irony must be altered. It is not enough to say that it is "a mode of speech expressing a sense contrary to that which the speaker intends to convey." It may be true of the irony of the streets; it does not define the more complex irony of literature. We much prefer George Meredith's definition: "If, instead of falling foul of the ridiculous person with a satiric rod to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him under a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether, indeed, anything has hurt him, you are an engine of irony." This is well said by the greatest living author, who is himself a superb ironist.

MIMNERMUS

Christianity and the Social Outlook.

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that the Christian "revelation" is alleged to be the most important thing in the world for men, it is still scarcely possible to find a hundred people agreed as to what it is, or in what it really consists; whilst its most zealous advocates are the loudest in bewailing the fact, as they state, that the world is further from realising that "revelation" to-day than at any previous period in its history. By some we are told that the "Christian message" was to inaugurate "the kingdom of God on earth." Whether that reign is compatible with a state of affairs in which two nations, both recipients of this "revelation," are engaged in shedding each other's blood, may be left to the Theistic experts to decide; all we can say is that it seems to us a very questionable sort of government, and sorely in need of rather stringent reform.

We are led to these reflections by reading an article in the *New Era*, a Catholic paper, by the Rev. Dr. Barry, in which—reviewing a work by a Scotch clergyman on *The Foundations of Society*—he of course blows the Christian trumpet, and informs us how entirely necessary Christianity is to the future of society. Mr. Wilson Harper, the author of the book which Dr. Barry notices, says that "it can scarcely be maintained that the effort to account for social progress in European countries, or the endeavor to provide a basis for further advance, apart from the principles, ideals, and motives of Christianity, has been crowned with success." Of

course not, echoes Dr. Barry. "To lay new foundations for society," says he, "and build thereon, would be a hopeless task, which even Mr. Spencer, unbounded as is the good man's self-confidence, has not achieved in his unmeasurable synthetic philosophy."

Now what, in sober truth, is the meaning of all this? What *are* the "principles, ideals, and motives of Christianity" which we are always hearing so much of in the vague, and which, the instant they are brought to the least practical test, evaporate into thin air? Is there a single proposal for political or social reform which has not been violently resisted by the official exponents of these same Christian "principles" and "ideals"? Is there any abuse which has not been defended by an appeal to them—any wrong in policy which has not been justified by men who professed these "principles" and held these "ideals" as their guides? If some reformers have professed also at times to look to the same source for inspiration, and to justify progress by the same sanctions by which others justified reaction, it is scarcely an argument for the value of Christianity. At most it merely shows that the Christian "ideals" are so elastic as to be capable of various uses. It is admitted, for instance, by Dr. Barry that opinions are changing on some social issues, and Mr. Harper seems to adopt a line which would be strongly condemned by his ecclesiastical ancestors. Are we, then, to understand that, since the Christian principles presumably remain unchanged, it is only to-day men are really learning how to apply them? Mr. T. W. Russell has just been telling us that Christian principles in foreign policy are out of date, and that the Tory Cabinet will be above the weakness of attempting to apply them. As Mr. T. W. Russell is also a Christian, or claims to be one, it is confessedly difficult to know where we stand. "Society must be run on Christian lines," says the Christian priest. "That is impracticable and impossible," says the Christian politician.*

It is not, however, surprising that the priest should be concerned for the future of priestism. But to those who have no such personal interest at stake it would be difficult to explain how the future of society could be moulded on Christianity; for, after all, we come back to the question, What is Christianity? Historically and etymologically, Christianity surely means that body of doctrine comprising the dogma of the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, the redemption of mankind through belief in this Incarnation and Atonement, the doctrine of a Deity rewarding with heaven those who "believe," or imagine they believe, and punishing in hell those who disbelieve. It means the doctrine of a God demanding, and being pleased with, the worship of his creatures, condemning them as sinful from their birth, and only "forgiving" that sin on account of the death of his own son. These are the essentials of Christianity. Of course, the present writer does not pretend to understand what many of these dogmas mean; indeed, he disputes the proposition with regard to most of them that they have any intelligible meaning at all. And he is, furthermore, aware that stray individuals, calling themselves Christians, repudiate some, or all of them. But the plain fact remains that, for the mass of men, Christianity means a belief, or pseudo-belief, in these dogmas and doctrines; and, at any rate, when Christianity is here spoken of, it is taken in that sense. And then we are face to face with the questions, What connection has all this dogma with the future of society? What relationship have these doctrines to any social problem? In so

* One cannot avoid observing that Freethinkers can take little pleasure from such declarations as those of Mr. T. W. Russell. That people should discard Christianity because they have discovered its falsehood and shortcomings is matter for rejoicing. But Mr. Russell is in different case. To him Christianity still stands for the highest ethic and the loftiest conduct he conceives, and his repudiation of it, therefore, is the open avowal—made also by many journals—that justice, "magnanimity" (specified even by name) are out of place in international relationships. Morality, says the Russell type, is good enough for the quiet days of national prosperity, an amiable weakness which may perhaps be indulged in times of peace; but, in the serious stress of life, it must be thrown aside, and we may fitly revert to the conduct of brutes. Since, however, true morality, alike for the nation as for the individual, is nothing more nor less than the line of highest happiness and well-being, it is surely only necessary for the spirit typified by Mr. Russell to work deep enough into the national character for the descent to be rapid.

far as they are in any way intelligible, they point to the futility of spending any attention whatever on mundane affairs. If there stretches before us an endless life of pleasure or of pain "beyond the grave," clearly the concerns of this world are of infinitesimal importance; indeed, they only claim that minimum of attention necessary to secure the transcendental happiness. Christianity—historical Christianity—is concerned primarily with the affairs of "another life," not with this.

But there are some loose-thinking people (and professional Christians frequently countenance the practice) who argue as though Christianity were merely a system of human morals, a kind of ethical philosophy, and nothing more. Really the conduct, in this respect, of some modern "Christians" is as extraordinary as it is entertaining. They drop the dogmas, they tack on a lot of rationalist ethics—and they go about holding up the product as "pure Christianity," and then, perhaps, tell us that some Atheists are the best Christians alive. All one can say in reply to these people is that at heart they are often very good Secularists, and that their slipshod language and thinking may frequently be forgiven in virtue of their humanist service. But that their thinking is slipshod must all the same be kindly pressed. No system of human relationships or morals has any necessary connection with any events alleged to have happened in Palestine some nineteen hundred years ago. And if the knowledge or the memory of those supposed events disappeared—as they have never yet been acquired by a vast section of the human race—morality, right conduct, and right thinking would still remain. The pretence that we really refrain, say, from murdering one another, or that we feel, to some extent, for one another's welfare, only because we have read or been told of some alleged historical events in Judea, is a proposition fit only for Bedlam.

The truth is that the future welfare of society depends on how far the mass of people throw off the old dogmas, and think sanely and feel humanely; on how far they realise the solidarity of the human family; on how far the different sections of that family, as M. Urbain Gohier has recently said, "cultivate friendship and dwell together in peace, devoting their respective faculties to the struggle with nature." As for the dogmas which, through history, were connoted by Christianity, they are manifestly exerting less and less influence, as time goes on, on the minds of men.

FREDERICK RYAN.

Dr. Farrar, the Bible, and Witchcraft.

THE time came when men outgrew the superstition of witchcraft. Before that time they killed witches on Bible authority. Dr. Farrar himself, had he lived then, would have done the same. Living in a more enlightened age, he says that former Christians acted wrongly, and in fact diabolically. But what of the book which misled them? What of the book which, if it did not mislead them by design, harmonised so completely with their ignorant prejudices, and gave such a pious color to their unspeakable brutalities? Nor is this by any means the last word upon the subject. The witchcraft of the Old Testament has its counterpart in the demoniacal possession of the New Testament. Both are aspects of one and the same superstition.

The Bible is responsible for the cruel slaughter of millions of alleged witches. It is also responsible for the prolonged treatment of lunatics as possessed. The methods of science are now adopted in civilised countries. Hysterical women are no longer tortured as witches. Lunatics are no longer chained and beaten as persons inhabited by devils. Kindness and common sense have taken the place of cruelty and superstition. This change was brought about, not through the Bible, but in spite of it.

Sir Matthew Hale and John Wesley were at least honest. They were too sincere to deny the plain teaching of the Bible. Dr. Farrar represents a more enlightened, but a more hypocritical, form of Christianity. He sneers at "reconcilers" like Mr. Gladstone, who try to bolster up the Creation story as a scientific revelation. But is he not a "reconciler" himself in regard to miracles? And does he not play fast and loose with truth and honesty in his attempt to clear the Bible of its guilty responsibility in connection with that witch mania which is one of the darkest episodes in Christian history?

—From "The Book of God," by G. W. Foote.

Book Chat.

MR. F. J. GOULD sends us a copy of a sixpenny pamphlet of forty-eight nicely-printed pages to which he has put his name. It is an interesting *History of the Leicester Secular Society*, published by the Society itself at the Secular Hall, Humberstone-gate, but obtainable, we presume, from Mr. Forder and other Freethought agents. Amongst the illustrations are two portraits—one of the late Josiah Gimson, the other of the late Michael Wright. These were the Society's principal founders, and really remarkable men. Mr. Gould's practised and facile pen gives us quite a charming account of the work, struggles, and successes of organised Secularism in Leicester. We are glad that he has compiled this little record. It will be a lesson and an inspiration to Secular Societies in other parts of the country.

* * *

Facing page 28 of Mr. Gould's new pamphlet is the *facsimile* of a letter from the late Professor Huxley, dated February 12, 1891. Huxley wrote: "Mr. Huxley encloses a small contribution to the Special Fund of the Leicester Secular Society—in evidence of his full sympathy with the objects of the Society." There's no ambiguity about that.

* * *

By the way, we note that Mr. Gould speaks of the late Mrs. Harriet Law as "silver-tongued." This compound epithet almost proves that he never heard her lecture. Her voice was clear and powerful, but scarcely silvery. Her speciality was robust common sense and invincible courage.

* * *

Another note by the way. Josiah Gimson's *youngest* son was selected by fate, fortune, providence, or whatever it is, to maintain the family's intimate connection with Secularism. Perhaps there is a subtle bit of heredity in this fact. Mr. Sydney Gimson acted as Secretary to the Leicester Secular Society for four years from 1884, the year after his father's death. He was elected President in 1888, and has been re-elected ever since. So much for abstract Democracy and one-man's-as-good-as-another-ism. The truth is that one man *isn't* as good as another, and it is no use pretending he is. People recognise this clearly enough outside politics. When it is a question of real and durable principle, or of obvious self-interest—the two extremes of life-reality—they recognise their leader and stick to him, and find a way of making him stick to them.

* * *

Light Wines for Christmas—and After is the title of a very slender collection of rather slender verses by Dingwall Ross. The publishers are Menzies & Co., Edinburgh, and the price is one shilling.

* * *

The *Literary Guide* for January is up to the usual level in point of ability, if hardly so in point of interest. The most readable portions are the different collections of paragraphs. This number is accompanied by a supplement—a careful summary of Martineau's *Types of Ethical Theory*. The summariser has performed a difficult task. We doubt whether the result is worth all the trouble.

* * *

Miss H. Truelove, 17 Alexandra-road, Hornsey, London, N., has published a Catalogue of Books from the Library of her father, the late Edward Truelove, which she offers for sale. A copy of this Catalogue will be sent by Miss Truelove to anyone who will apply for it. Two penny stamps must be enclosed for Catalogue and postage.

* * *

This Truelove Catalogue is neatly got up, with a vignette of the brave old publisher on the front cover. On the other side are two appreciations—one from the *Daily News*, the other by G. J. Holyoake. The books themselves are a very odd collection. Here and there we note a catch for the hunter of first editions, such as a presentation copy, with the author's autograph, of Swinburne's *Queen-Mother and Rosamond*; or Milton's *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, dated 1649, the year of the execution of Charles I. High literature is very little represented, and a good many of the books were scarcely worth cataloguing. Still, the Catalogue is rich, as might be expected, in volumes and pamphlets, not always of much literary value, but of very great value to the student and the historian of English Radicalism and Freethought during the present century. We almost wish we had the money to spare to buy up all the Trials, in particular, and to keep them together, instead of letting them be dispersed beyond the likelihood of re-collection.

* * *

Humanity (organ of the Humanitarian League) for January is up to its usual level of interest and effectiveness. We see in it the announcement of a new periodical, to be called *The Humanitarian Quarterly*. It will eschew politics and economics, and give fuller treatment to the objects of the present little monthly. We wish it all success.

Correspondence.

"M., SHELLEY, AND "B. V."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I do not know whom your contributor "M." may be, but I welcome him as a fellow admirer, not of Shelley only, but also of "B. V." The whole of "M.'s" paper on Shelley is reminiscent in tone and phrase of "B. V.'s" own eulogies of the *Hermit of Marlow*; and I know myself how difficult it is, once having read "B. V." sympathetically on any subject, to avoid repeating both his arguments and, often, his *ipsissima verba*. On almost every occasion "B. V." seems to say the last and best thing on his subject, and so inevitably and naturally that often we unconsciously express his own views in almost his own words when we talk or write on his theme. Thus, as "Poet of Poets and Purest of Men," does the author of the *City of Dreadful Night* dedicate his "Vane's Story and Other Poems" to the memory of the author of *Prometheus Unbound*. "Poet of poets" is "M.'s" phrase. "Indisputably the first singer of our century," "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;" "Florence to the living Dante was not more cruel than England to the living Shelley"—these three citations are pure echoes of "B. V." on Shelley. The very quotation, "were it not done as others use, etc." is used by "B. V." in one of his most charming and original essays.

I am constantly coming across instances of "B. V.'s" literary influence, and at times in the most unexpected quarters. It is, perhaps, one of the strangest things in the history of our recent literature this deep, and often, I am sure, unconscious, influence exercised by James Thomson's genius over the thought and expressions of not a few writers of to-day. Almost as strange, perhaps, as that our most optimistic poet, Shelley, should have had his first whole-hearted, great-minded, and unreserved recognition from our greatest pessimistic poet, the author of the *City*. Was the attraction of Thomson to Shelley the result of a feeling on Thomson's part of the probable likeness of their literary fate? It may be so; but of this I am certain, that Thomson's fame is as sure as Shelley's, although its maturity may be as long delayed.

SIGVATSON.

CHRISTIAN CRUELTY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. Joseph Collinson has taken upon himself to criticise my comment on the recent case of cruelty to children as proved against the Rev. S. J. S. Le Maistre, rector of Everingham. In so doing he has shown himself to be as ignorant of Anarchism as he is of the contents of the letter which he criticises so glibly. I did not say that the holy scoundrel "should have had at least two years' hard labor, with an occasional flogging thrown in, to teach him to behave himself." What I said was, that this was the honest and unanimous opinion of the better-class English working-men with whom I had discussed the matter. I went on to say that, theoretically, I myself did not believe in such barbarous methods of reforming criminals, but I confessed to a longing to have the cruel ruffian within striking distance of my own right arm. Theory, you see, Mr. Collinson, does not always coincide with practice; the instincts of our simian ancestors sometimes overcome the most profound speculations of the most advanced philosophers, even such as you, Mr. Collinson. And I ask that gentleman now to kindly say what he would do if a "consecrated" ruffian were to seize his own child, tear off her clothes, and proceed to "cobweb" her quivering flesh with a cat-gut whip? Would he leave the child to the villain's mercy (?), and run off to his study to write an article against corporal punishment, or would he wrest the whip from the rascal's hand and thrash him without mercy?

G. O. WARREN.

Not a Christian.

I dreamed I stood upon a hill, and, lo!
The godly multitudes walked to and fro
Beneath, in Sabbath garments fitly clad,
With pious mien, appropriately sad,
While all the church bells made a solemn din—
A fire alarm to those who lived in sin.
Then saw I gazing thoughtfully below
With tranquil face upon that holy show
A tall, spare figure in a robe of white,
Whose eyes diffused a melancholy light.
"God keep you, stranger," I exclaimed. "You are,
No doubt (your habit shows it), from afar;
And yet I entertain the hope that you,
Like these good people, are a Christian too."
He raised his eyes, and, with a look so stern
It made me with a thousand blushes burn,
Replied—his manner with disdain was spiced:
"What! I a Christian? No, indeed! I'm Christ!"

—Ambrose Bierce

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, "Coaxing God Almighty."

BRADLAUGH CLUB AND INSTITUTE (36 Newington Green-road, Ball's Pond): 8.30, A Concert.

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7, Conversazione.

EAST LONDON BRANCH (Swaby's Coffee House, 103 Mile End-road): 8, J. Fagan, "The Apostles' Creed."

KINGSLAND (Ridley-road): 12, A Business Meeting at the Bradlaugh Club.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, Joseph McCabe, "The Catholic Church in France."

WESTMINSTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Grosvenor Arms, Page-street): 7.30, W. Heaford, "France and the Jesuits."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): L. Small, B.Sc.—11, "What Do We Know of God?"; 7, "Science and Religion."

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday School; 7, C. Cohen, "How Christianity Began."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, A Lecture.

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 7, W. Stanley, M.M.S.S., "The Starry Heavens." Lantern views.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, W. Dyson, "Freethought in the Nineteenth Century."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 6.30, "Freethought and War."

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—January 7, New Brompton; 14, Athenæum, Tottenham Court-road; 21, Camberwell; 28, Dundee. February 4, Glasgow.

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

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