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Mr. Holyoake's Backers.

SOME weeks ago—it was in the *Freethinker* of October 21—I wrote an article on Mr. G. J. Holyoake's new attitude towards Atheism and Agnosticism. During the most vigorous part of his life he professed himself an Atheist, but in his old age he prefers to call himself an Agnostic. Now this is a change that might be allowed to pass unchallenged, if it were not made the occasion of an attack on others who elect to remain under the old flag. Old age is entitled to comforts, or at least to shelter from hardships; and if a veteran of over eighty finds any advantage or convenience in adopting a more tolerable designation, without any actual renunciation of principle, it is only a curmudgeon that would deny him the luxury. But when we are practically asked to share it with him we have the right to make an open refusal. When the fox, in the old story, lost his tail, and then tried to persuade his brethren that they would look much handsomer if they dispensed with theirs, it was time to tell him that the appendages were both ornamental and useful. If "Atheist" is in Mr. Holyoake's way, by all means let him get rid of it. But when he advances a reason why others should follow his example, it is permissible to tell him that his reason is insufficient. Mr. Holyoake's reason is this—in brief. Theism says there is a God, Atheism says there is no God, and Agnosticism says it does not know. Agnosticism, therefore, is modest and accurate; it does not dogmatise, and it keeps within the limit of its information. Such is Mr. Holyoake's argument, and his conclusion would be sound enough if his premises were not faulty. But they are faulty. Mr. Holyoake declared that Atheists, like Theists, had "no doubt that they knew the solution" of the "mighty problem of the cause of eternity." "Well," I said in reply, "I beg to tell him that I am acquainted with at least one Atheist who does not affect to know this 'solution.' To him it is—as Hamlet says—words, words, words! I will go further," I added, "and ask Mr. Holyoake to refer me to one Atheist who *denies* the existence of God." Atheists may, just like Agnostics, deny the existence of this or that God. It all depends on definitions. Twenty-three years ago, in criticising a book by Professor Flint, I wrote as follows:—

"There be Gods many and Lords many; which of the long theological list is to be selected as *the* God? A God, like everything else from the heights to the depths, can be known only by his attributes; and what the Atheist does is not to argue against the existence of *any* God, which would be sheer lunacy, but to take the attributes affirmed by Theism as composing its Deity, and to inquire whether they are compatible with each other and with the facts of life. Finding that they are not, the Atheist simply sets Theism aside as not proven, and goes on his way without further afflicting himself with such abstruse questions."

This is precisely the position I took in replying to Mr. Holyoake a few weeks ago, and it is the position of all the Atheists I know or have ever known. Moreover, it was, as far as I understood him, the position of Mr. Holyoake himself while he called himself an Atheist. During his debate with Mr. Bradlaugh, some thirty years ago, it was admitted that both were Atheists; the question in dispute was whether Atheism was involved in Secularism. I do not recollect that there was so much as a suggestion that a difference existed

between them as to the meaning of Atheism. Their difference was over the meaning of Secularism.

I am well aware that persons of a metaphysical turn of mind, and a good knowledge of the dictionary, can argue with each other on all sorts of subjects, and keep it up till death or the day of judgment. But the trouble comes when they have to meet the practical man, the average man, the man in the street. He has his living to get, and lots of things to attend to; so, instead of beating about the bush, he goes straight to what seems to him to be the kernel of the question—the real point at issue. He may be mistaken, of course; but that is his method, and you will never wean him from it. All the "revelations" in the world have been got up for him. It was found that no impression was made upon him by Platonic or other long-winded ratiocinations. So speculation was presented to him as fact, and fancy as history; and in that way he was nobbled, because he did not perceive the cheating—though he is beginning to see it now. Well then, let an Atheist and an Agnostic stand together before this gentleman; and what difference will he discover between them? "Have you got a God?" he asks in his blunt way. The Atheist plainly answers "No." The Agnostic hums and ha's. "Come now, straight," says the questioner, "have you got a God?" The Agnostic says: "Well, I —." "Here, that'll do," says the man in the street, "I see you haven't got one. You're just like the other fellow, only he's straighter." And really that practical man, that average man, that man in the street, is right. He has got hold of the substance. All else is shadow. You have a God, or you have not. There is really no intermediate position. If you have a God, you are a Theist; if you have no God, you are an Atheist. Let your reasons be few or many, plain or subtle, this is what it comes to at the finish. "I am the Lord thy God," cries some Deity or other through the mouth of a priest. "Not mine," says the Atheist. "Not precisely mine," says the Agnostic, "at least at present; these things require a great deal of consideration; but I promise to keep an open mind." Now if the offended Deity were to box the ears of one of them, which do you think it would be? I fancy it would be the Agnostic, for all his "reverence."

Mr. Holyoake's new attitude is likely to procure him fresh friends in the fold of faith—which he will probably not find annoying. One has already announced himself in the *Church Gazette*, and this is what he says:—

"One is glad to see that Mr. Holyoake has renounced the title of 'Atheist' in favor of that of 'Agnostic.' The *Freethinker* deprecates his going so on the ground that the two terms imply exactly the same thing. We cannot admit that they do. An 'Atheist' properly means a person who positively denies the existence of a God, while an 'Agnostic' is simply one who does not know, but who very often is strongly inclined to believe in a Deity. Between these attitudes there lies a vast interval. The first is as dogmatic as that of a Cardinal; the second is philosophical, and of one who adopts it there is always a good deal of hope."

Without inquiring what right the *Church Gazette* has to define "Atheism" for Atheists, we may observe how consoling it must be to Mr. Holyoake to be told by a Christian that he is "philosophical," that there is "a vast interval" between himself and a wicked, dogmatic Atheist, and that there is "a good deal of hope" for him! Our own criticism is nothing to this. The orthodox editor greets Mr. Holyoake's one leg over the fence, and "hopes" for his whole body in time. One

shudders to think of what Mr. Price Hughes may say when he finds an opportunity.

A suggestion has more than once been made that men over eighty should be compelled to "rest and be thankful." Generally speaking, they might be kept from public utterances with advantage to themselves and others. No one can be original at that age—and an effort to be so is sure to end in disaster. At the best there is only a repetition of what has been better said before; at the worst there may be the sad unsaying of former virile utterances, and the frittering away of a brave reputation. This thought was present to the mind of Renan in closing his delightful *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*. "I should be grieved," he wrote, "to go through one of those periods of enfeeblement in which the man who has had strength and virtue is no more than the shadow and ruin of himself, and often, to the great joy of fools, occupies himself in demolishing the life he has laboriously built up. Such an old age is the worst gift the gods could give a man. If such a fate is reserved for me, I protest in advance against the weaknesses that a softened brain may make me say or sign." It is too late for Mr. Holyoake to protest in advance, but we may protest for him. It is the former Mr. Holyoake we shall all care to remember with pride and gratitude; the bold clear thinker, the lucid writer, the publicist who pressed new and valuable ideas upon the attention of the world.

G. W. FOOTE.

What of the New Century?

In my article last week attention was drawn to the condition of the Church at the close of the nineteenth century. It was there shown that, while the secular progress of the people during the last hundred years had been great, the Church had been a decided failure as a reforming agency. It had either remained dormant or had exercised its power against the reforming tendencies of the age, while a healthy activity had been manifested in science, philosophy, and literature, and upon political and social questions. It is now proposed to consider what are the probabilities of the twentieth century, not only in reference to the Church, but also in regard to the secular and general status of society. Have we sufficient reason for believing that the advancement already made will continue? Is it likely that Christianity will be still further modified to meet the improved requirements of the new century? Will the Church once more change its policy so as to retain its existence among our institutions? My answer to these questions is in the affirmative. The great American orator, Patrick Henry, once said: "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, that is the lamp of experience. I know of no better way of judging of the future than by the past." I therefore base my opinion of the future upon the experience of the past. The lesson of all history is that man is a progressive being. His watchword has been, and doubtless will continue to be, "Onward and onward still." With the impetus given by our steady advance, with the growing momentum of our enlarging opportunities and accelerating speed, it is reasonable to suppose that our progress in the future will be yet more rapid and irresistible.

Let us, in the first place, look at the history of Christianity. From its very inception its record has been one of change and re-adaptation. And we have no adequate reason for supposing that it will be different in the future. On the contrary, from the very nature of the faith it is only legitimate to believe that its mutations will go on. The term "Christianity" does not represent one fixed and consistent faith, but rather a system based upon contradictory and incoherent teachings, which are interpreted in various ways according to the notions of its different believers. It is no use urging that Christianity is Christology, for that does not remove the difficulty. The Rev. Peter Dean put this point very clearly when, in his paper read before the London Ministers' Conference, he said:—

"The Christ of everyone, the Christ of every Church, the Christ of every Sect, the Christ of every Man, is a different Christ; how, then, is it possible for any to

know which is the true Christ—what is Christianity? Maybe we are told that by searching the New Testament the true Christology, the true Christianity, is to be found. Well, some of us have done this, and we have found not one, but six or seven, different and irreconcilable Christs or Christologies there. There is the Christology of Christ's contemporaries; the Christology of the First and Third Gospels; the Christology of the Epistles of *Peter, James, and Jude*; the Christology of Paul's Epistles; and the Christology of the Johannic writings—and they are all different. They cannot all be true; which is the true one? I reply that it is utterly impossible for us to know."

This has long been the Secular view as to the diverse character of the Christian religion, and now it is pleasing to find that view corroborated by one of its firm adherents. It requires no great prophetic power to foresee that in the new century, while possibly the name "Christianity" may be retained, the teachings of the New Testament will be found more than ever incompatible with human progress, and thoroughly incapable of furnishing a code of morals by which all succeeding generations would be governed, and to which the great intellects of the world would finally succumb.

As with Christianity, so with the Church, it is not at all probable that either will be entirely destroyed in the twentieth century; there are too many personal interests involved in both to allow us to expect such a consummation. The improvement will be in re-establishing the two upon a broad and secular basis. In the Christian faith the natural will take the place of the supposed supernatural; and the Churches will become institutions for the inculcation of the practical duties of daily life. For the worship of the Christian's God will be substituted the endeavor to improve the condition of man; and, instead of wasting time in vain efforts to prepare for an imaginary future, more attention will be given to consolidate the endeavors to enhance the value of the present. There is much truth in the statement of the Rev. G. F. Terry that—

"The great problem which confronts the religious world of to-day may be briefly stated thus: How shall the Church preserve her own past, and yet, at the same time, meet the wants of the present? How can she hold the faith delivered to the saints of bygone ages, and, at the same time, find room for the faith delivered to the saints of to-day? We feel that the two contrary elements of fixity and change must be harmonised in order to fit the religion of Jesus for future needs. How this is to be done is not yet apparent. Of one thing only can we be certain—that history and not authority, fact and not fiction, will determine the form of Christianity in the future."*

True, it is not "yet apparent" how the progressive spirit of the age can be made to harmonise with a faith that enjoins the regulation of human affairs by rules which were fixed two thousand years ago. Professor Huxley pictured a model Church of the future when he said:—

"I can conceive of the existence of an established Church which should be a blessing to the community; a Church in which, week by week, services should be devoted, not to the iteration of abstract propositions in theology, but to the setting before men's minds of an ideal of true, just, and pure living; a place in which those who are weary of the burden of daily cares should find a moment's rest in the contemplation of the higher life, which is possible for all, though attained by so few; a place in which the man of strife and of business should have time to think how small, after all, are the rewards he covets compared with peace and charity. Depend upon it, if such a Church existed, no one would seek to disestablish it."

In spite of the desperate efforts now being made by the various Churches to extend their propaganda in the twentieth century, there are ample grounds for believing that during the next hundred years Secular Freethought will win many more solid triumphs over the Church. In the first place, there is the unmistakable fact of the secularisation of our modern public life. Orthodox Christians misrepresent the philosophy of the age, because they have been trained from infancy to attribute all things whatever to a being external to themselves. But the present age is more practical than any preceding one; its energies are directed towards its own improvement. Scientific research is unfettered

* *Church Gazette*, November 25.

by theology, and the practical ethics of modern society are utilitarian. Thus, as the result of persistent Free-thought advocacy, we can congratulate ourselves upon having achieved many important triumphs. We have a freedom of speech unknown in Christian times. The press is more liberal than it ever was. Education is becoming more secular every year, and orthodox persecution dare not manifest itself as it did in the past. Hell is shut up, and the devil is practically dead, whilst the Churches have left their old moorings and are seeking to adapt their teachings to the secular requirements of the age.

In the second place, our hopes for a brighter future are based upon the fact that knowledge is to-day diffused over a larger surface in society than it ever has been before, and that science has made more real progress in the last half-century than in all the previous ages. True it is, knowledge is power, and the proper application of it is the foundation of all permanent advancement. Books are brilliant stars in the intellectual hemisphere, and their value must not be underrated nor their advantages neglected. Mind receives its necessary pabulum by communing with mind, and this it can do more easily and more perfectly in books than perhaps anywhere else. Hence they are the most powerful agents in mental development. Someone has curiously described a book as a brain preserved in ink—not a bad description, remembering that the mightiest thoughts of the mightiest brains are there preserved. Almost the entire earth has been converted into a huge observatory and laboratory for man, in almost every part of which he is found working daily in comparing results and communicating knowledge. Could the great men of the past who devoted themselves to physical science—foremost amongst whom was Aristotle—rise from their graves, and catch a glimpse of the present state of things, how, after the first feeling of surprise was over, would their hearts be gladdened by the spectacle they would then behold! Astronomical, geological, physiological, and chemical discoveries, throwing all the science of the past into the shade, form the heritage of the poorest and most insignificant of mankind. True, the great problem of life is yet unsolved, and a score of metaphysical questions still remain unanswered; but in physical science the discoveries that have been made and the improvements that have taken place are startling even to contemplate. In all that concerns the practical, in all that has to do with the subjugation of natural forces and the direction of the laws of the universe to new issues conducing to the happiness of man, modern progress has been rapid almost beyond conception.

In taking leave of the nineteenth century, we must all acknowledge the valuable legacy of thought and practical results for good that it has left us, and we most heartily hail its successor with the belief and the hope that during its reign the seeds which have been sown may yield a prolific and much-desired harvest.

CHARLES WATTS.

The New Birth.

"Every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this grey spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star."—*Ulysses*.

PIETISTS, though they have invented the term, are not the only people who are "born again." The new birth is a human experience which is not necessarily confined to the acquisition or awakening of religious faith. It may as easily represent the adoption of the far nobler principles of Freethought and the unpinioned flight for the fuller knowledge which lies outside the creeds. A man may be "born again" by the final rejection of all distinctively theological teaching.

That has been the experience of most of us. Few have been Freethinkers all their lives. In babyhood we have been mostly believers. Children are credulous. They believe, in their innocence and guilelessness, whatever they are told. Religion in its concrete form presents no difficulties to their minds, because pretty

fairly stories and narratives of the doings of grim goblins and Jack-the-Giant-Killers and Jack-on-the-Beanstalks are usually their relaxation from words of two syllables and the multiplication table. Happy are we if, in maturer years, we do not present ourselves as examples of that inherited slavery which is described in Dryden's couplet:—

The priest continues what the nurse began,
And thus the child imposes on the man.

At some period or other of our existence there comes an awakening. As we have discarded the fairy and goblin stories of infantile life, we are impelled in later years to disavow acceptance of priestly stories which are equally ridiculous. We throw off the thralldom of priest and book, of theological dogma, creed and vain conjecture. We determine to follow knowledge whithersoever it may lead, and without regard to priestly-pictured consequences.

With many the process has been slow and gradual. There may have been much hesitation and some heart-burning. It suits the gaseous "evidential missionary" and others of his tribe to draw terrible pictures of the distracted or despondent condition of the doubter and sceptic when on the point of renouncing his belief in Christianity—which religion, after all, is but one faith amongst many, and is not accepted by the bulk of the inhabitants of the globe. Terrible mental writhings take place, according to their accounts, with tears and goodness knows what. But it will be usually found that the hesitation and heart-burnings have no relation to the rotten creed under consideration, but to the pain that may possibly be given to pious relatives. Why should a man, apart from the natural reluctance to give offence to his kith and kin, trouble himself about following his new knowledge, though it may lead him, as a falling star or a fire in a great city, far beyond the point he feels at first disposed to travel?

To many, in consequence of the gradual process previously spoken of, it is hardly possible to look back and fix the precise period when emancipation actually took place. But there generally remains some recollection of the point at which the last shred of the "old clo'" was cast aside. That, for all biographical or obituary purposes, may be regarded as the date of our "new birth"—the beginning of the brighter and better existence; brighter because we have emerged from the gloomy mists and deadly miasma of Superstition, and better because we are imbued with truer principles and higher and more practicable aims.

The new birth brings with it new responsibilities. In so far as we find it accompanied by increased mental light and greater moral strength for ourselves, it devolves upon us to endeavor to place these advantages within the reach of others. The newly-born Freethinker *must* become, in some way or another, a propagandist of the principles of his Freethought. There can be no shirking of this duty. He owes it to himself and his fellows. As he must have been, to a more or less extent, indebted to others who have preceded him for the light and freedom he has gained, the only means of repayment possible to him consists in communicating his knowledge to those around him, and in doing his best to transmit it to those who may follow him.

All true Freethinkers are actuated to this work not so much by a sense of duty as by a generous impulse, which does not permit of a selfish "storing and hoarding" of the truth. Self-sacrifice, and a solicitude for others, is one of the first great lessons which come with the "new birth" into Freethought.

In what way those who have been "born again," recently or aforetime, may assist in the work of enlightenment is a matter which must be left to individual taste and capability. Every Freethinker has it in his power to do something—in his own personal circle, or in connection with the established organisations of Freethought. No one is so circumstanced as to be unable to assist in the ultimate triumph of his own views. There are many methods which will readily suggest themselves. The literature and lectures of the movement naturally require to be supported. There are numerous ways in which that may be done. Privately, the influence of personal character and advocacy may be made productive of invaluable results.

The central organisations of the party are now placed

upon a firmer and more workable and hopeful basis than ever they were before. The machinery is so far complete that the co-operation of every class of worker willing to assist is fully provided for, and confidently—and, indeed, earnestly—invited.

Now is especially the time when Freethinkers should gird themselves up to redoubled efforts. The new era should be marked by unexampled enthusiasm and activity. The next few months should see the sphere of operations largely extended and an endeavor made to cope still more courageously with the task before us. The Freethought party generally, as well as Freethinkers individually, should rejoice in the "new birth," which may be fittingly celebrated at the commencement of the new century.

Let no one suppose that past achievements and our present position render further exertion less urgently necessary than at the beginning of the century now closing. Much undoubtedly has been done, but much more remains to be done. There is a natural tendency amongst Freethinkers—it may be from constant association with each other, or from the reading of the extensive supply of literature of a Freethought type which has of late years sprung up—to imagine that the world, if not actually converted to their views, is in a fair way of becoming so in time.

Yes, in time—but when? That time, if efforts are suspended or relaxed, may, and no doubt will, be in a very far-off future. The forces of sacerdotalism and superstition have reorganised themselves. With the wisdom of the serpent, they have abandoned much that would have inevitably ensured their destruction if retained. They have adopted new tactics, and have changed their ground. Under these altered conditions they have still to be met. They, too, have undergone the "new birth," though a great deal of the old Adam yet remains in them—quite enough to make things very uncomfortable for Freethinkers if Freethinkers should become indolent and supine.

Let us rejoice in our individual "new births," and commence the new century with "thank-offerings"—to use the phraseology of the churches—which will indicate our *real* interest in Freethought and our desire for the advancement of new and *sane* ideas.

FRANCIS NEALE.

Christianity and Civilisation.—V.

THE POSITION OF WOMAN.

(Continued from page 805.)

THERE were three main causes that contributed to the formation of the patristic view of marriage. First, there was the celibacy of Jesus; second, the explicit teaching of Paul that the celibate state was most desirable, since it left man free to attend to the works of God; and, third, the assumed necessity of mortifying the natural passions by shunning all forms of earthly enjoyment. I may dwell later upon some of the extravagances to which this last cause led, but at present we are concerned only with its influence in determining the Christian treatment of women. The first sign of the feeling against marriage is seen in the ignoring of the element of companionship or idealism, and restricting it to the single function of perpetuating the race. But matters did not rest very long at this stage; and it is not long before the close of the second century when we find even this allowance brushed on one side. "The patriarchs," it was said, "had reason to see to the multiplication of their posterity; the world was young then; now, on the contrary, all things are declining and drawing to their close." Children were burdens to those seeking to lead a devout life, since they drew them back to the world from which they were seeking to cut themselves adrift. Besides, the end of the world was expected, and what was the use of replenishing a world that was soon to come to a close.

If marriage was permitted, it was only because some concession had to be made to human weakness and sinfulness; but it was, said Jerome, their aim to "cut down by the axe of virginity the wood of marriage." Marriage, he goes on to say, "is, at the best, a vice; all that we can do is to excuse and purify it." Tertullian

asserts that celibacy has to be chosen, even though the human race perish in consequence. Augustine said that "celibates will shine in heaven like dazzling stars, while the parents who begot them will resemble stars without light." Saturnius, one of the leaders of the Gnostics, taught that "marriage having been instituted by the powers of darkness, for the purpose of perpetuating the race of their partisans, it was the duty of men, endowed with a ray of divine light, to prevent both the diffusion of this germ of celestial being and the propagation of so imperfect an order of things."* Origen, one of the greatest of the Christian writers, declared that all marriage was unclean; and, taking Matthew xix. 12 as his warranty, mutilated himself in order to avoid all temptation. "An obscene sect, under the name of Valesians, undertook to follow his example, and to procure proselytes by force among those unhappy enough to fall into their hands; while in the canons of the succeeding century the repeated prohibition of the practice of self-mutilation shows how difficult it was to eradicate the belief that self-immolation was an acceptable offering to a beneficent creator.....Pope Sixtus II. did not hesitate to openly advocate the practice."†

The subject is far too unsavory to be pursued at any great length, although it casts a flood of light upon the general conduct of the early Christians, and particularly upon its influence on the position of women. We need only reflect that the views I have indicated above were held by the leaders of Christian society to understand how wide of the truth is the oft-repeated statement that Christianity elevated woman and purified the family. On the contrary, it came near extinguishing the family altogether. The development of asceticism, which took thousands of men and women out of their ordinary walks of life into the deserts, where they spent their time fasting and praying, naturally led to a severance of marital and domestic relationships. The lives of the saints furnish us with numerous instances of husbands forsaking wives, wives leaving husbands, parents leaving children, and children leaving parents, in order to practise the ascetic life. And this not against the teachings of their religious leaders, but as the consequence of their holding up the celibate life as the true Christian ideal.‡ A great many of the "saints" refused to hold converse with women under any condition; and their degree of excellence was estimated by the number of years they had kept aloof from such an abominable creature. So far did the horror of marriage carry believers that Eustathius, bishop of Sebastia, in Cappadocia, announced, as an article of faith, that married people were outside the pale of salvation, and forbade the offering of prayers in houses occupied by them.§ Marriage was so far considered unclean that "married persons were asked to abstain from cohabitation three days before the Communion and forty days after Easter." Later, marriage was forbidden altogether during Lent, and at so many other seasons that one writer remarks: "There were but few days and weeks during which people could get married at all."

Little wonder, then, with these views in the ascendant, that the social position of women rapidly declined under Christian auspices. Throughout all the laws that were called into being under Christian rule the subordination of the female sex is either asserted or assumed. Her right to own property in the married state was taken from her, as well as the right to inherit equally with brothers; the property went, as the Church law phrased it, "to the worthiest of blood"—the male. Blackstone admits that this was a distinction unknown to the old Roman law; while scarce a generation has passed since, after a hard fight, woman, in the respect of holding property in the married state, was recognised by the law of England as a human being. As she was prohibited from preaching, her education was of the scantiest and poorest description. Of the general influence of Canon (*i.e.*, Church) law on the position of women, Lecky says:—

"In the whole feudal legislation women were placed in a much lower legal position than in the Pagan Empire.

* Wake, *Marriage and Kinship*, p. 460.

† Lea, *Sarc. Cel.*, pp. 38-9.

‡ Those who wish for special cases will find numerous instances that have been collected by Lea and Lecky in the works I have already quoted from.

§ Lea, p. 61.

In addition to the personal restrictions which grew necessarily out of the Catholic doctrines concerning divorce, and concerning the subordination of the weaker sex, we find numerous and stringent enactments, which rendered it impossible for women to succeed to any considerable amount of property, and which almost reduced them to the alternative of marriage or a nunnery. The complete inferiority of the sex was continually maintained by the law..... Wherever the Canon law has been made the basis of legislation, we find laws of succession sacrificing the interests of daughters and of wives; and a state of public opinion which has been formed and regulated by these laws; nor was any serious attempt made to abolish them until the close of the last century.*

Under Canon law a woman could not bring an accusation against a man save for a case of personal injury; nor could she appear as witness in any criminal suit, nor attest a will. "As late as the thirteenth century the Church courts in England ruled that a husband could transfer his wife to another man for a period determinable at the recipient's pleasure."† The punishment for a wife who killed her husband was, in feudal England, to be drawn and burned; for a husband who killed a wife, hanging only. Woman was not only treated when married as an article of property; it was even questioned if she were a human being. The Church Council of Macon discussed with extreme gravity the question, "Whether women were human beings?" and only decided in the affirmative after a long debate—a thesis that was revived as late as the sixteenth century by one Simon Geddicus, a doctor in divinity, and which seems to have led to some considerable discussion.‡ When we note, among other results of Christian legislation, that by an Act of Parliament under Henry VIII. women, with day laborers, and others of "low estate," were prohibited from reading the New Testament; that under feudal legislation the Lord of the Manor could compel any boy of fourteen years of age and any girl of twelve to marry; that until the time of Elizabeth women were denied benefit of clergy, and until Charles II.'s reign both civil and common law allowed husbands to beat their wives whenever they thought they deserved it, it is plain what kind of an influence Christian beliefs had exerted on the liberal tendencies that existed in the Pagan Empire.

There are two other results of the Christian treatment of women that I have only time to touch on in the very briefest manner. The first was the almost unbridled immorality that characterises the ages during which ascetic and monastic views predominated. As early as 370 A.D. the Emperor Valentinian was compelled to pass a law prohibiting ecclesiastics from visiting the houses of widows and virgins. Successive writers, as I have pointed out in a previous article, dilate at tedious length on the vices to which both monks and nuns were addicted. These writers, as Lecky says, "are full of accounts of nunneries that were like brothels, of the vast multitude of infanticides within their walls, and of that inveterate prevalence of incest among the clergy which rendered it necessary again and again to issue the most stringent enactments that priests should not be allowed to live with their mothers or sisters." That this statement is not exaggerated, all who have read the records of Church councils, etc., know full well. The Council of Aix-le-Chappel, in 836, said emphatically that the churches were "brothels rather than houses of God," and there is a deadly significance in its direction that nunneries shall be so built as to have no dark corners in which scandals may be perpetrated. The morals of the ninth century may be further imagined by the existence of regulations preventing the entrance of female animals into monasteries. Abelard's picture of the condition of things inside the Church in the eleventh century is too vile to admit of reproduction; but when we read of one abbot possessing seventeen illegitimate children in a single village, of another who kept no less than seventy concubines, of a bishop who was convicted of having sixty-five illegitimate children, and that when, at a much later date, 1563, inquiries as to clerical immorality were made in Spain, the inquiry was hurriedly dropped because of the enormous number of cases brought to light, we are introduced to a condition

of things far worse than even the pictures drawn by Christians of pre-Christian society.*

The second result of the Christian advocacy of celibacy and general treatment of women was of a much more serious nature, since it directly and inevitably made for the brutalising of the race. The Church not only monopolised all intellectual pursuits and all the higher branches of life, and so compelled all who wished to cultivate such pursuits, even in the small measure then permitted, to do so under her patronage, but she chose to preach and exact celibacy. The result was what might have been expected. Matrimony being branded as disguised licentiousness, and celibacy held up as the ideal condition, the thoughtful and sensitive withdrew from the task of procreation, and thus left the perpetuation of the species to its most undesirable specimens. Those who had any noble aspirations at all, died and left no children; those whose ideals were of the lowest and grossest description left behind them a numerous progeny. There was, if not a survival of the unfit, at least a survival of the undesirable; and when the relation of Christianity to civilisation is finally determined by a really scientific inquiry, not the smallest count in the indictment against that creed will be its systematic degradation of the species by the preaching and enforcing of celibacy for so many centuries.

I have no time in the present series of articles to deal with the relation of modern Churches to the question of the equality of the sexes; nor is it necessary that I should do so. The question is one of historical inquiry, not of contemporary life; and as I have tried to show, and I think succeeded in showing, neither in the function of wife, of parent, nor as a member of the State, can Christianity honestly claim to have benefited woman. That the Churches have modified their teachings somewhat of late years does not prove that Christianity is any friend to woman, but only that social developments have gone on in spite of all the Churches could do in the shape of obstruction. The immense wave of liberalism set in motion by the French Revolution, the writings of Freethinkers like Mary Woolstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, to mention only two out of a host that might be named, have been steadily moulding public opinion on this matter; and the Churches, true to their historic policy, are now seeking to make capital out of teachings they have striven in vain to crush out of existence.

C. COHEN.

Churchgoers.

SOME go to church just for a walk;
Some to stare, and laugh, and talk;
Some go there to meet a friend;
Some their idle time to spend;
Some for general observation;
Some for private speculation;
Some to seek or find a lover;
Some a courtship to discover;
Some go there to use their eyes,
And newest fashions criticise;
Some to show their own smart dress;
Some their neighbors to assess;
Some to scan a robe or bonnet;
Some to price the trimming on it;
Some to learn the latest news,
That friends at home they may amuse;
Some to gossip false and true,
Safe hid within the sheltering pew;
Some go there to please the squire;
Some his daughters to admire;
Some the parson go to fawn;
Some to lounge and some to yawn;
Some to claim the parish doles;
Some for bread and some for coals;
Some because it's thought genteel;
Some to vaunt their pious zeal;
Some to show how sweet they sing;
Some how loud their voices ring;
Some the preacher go to hear,
His style and voice to praise or jeer;
Some forgiveness to implore;
Some their sins to varnish o'er;
Some to sit, and dose, and nod;
But few go there to worship God.

* *History of European Morals*, ii., p. 339.

† C. H. Pearson, *National Life and Character*, p. 243.

‡ For a full statement see Bayle's *Dictionary*, art. "Geddicus."

* For proofs of above-quoted cases see Lea, pp. 140, 141, 206-322, 349, first edition; and pp. 109, 264, second edition.

Acid Drops.

CHRISTIANS have been celebrating Christmas in the good old style. It was the anniversary of their God's incarnation for the salvation of the world, and they celebrate it in the most unspiritual way by unlimited eating and drinking. Turkey, sausages, ham, roast beef, plum pudding, etc., were washed down with beer, wine, and whisky. Card-playing, dances, and kissing under the mistletoe filled up the intervals of time. Altogether it was difficult to see where religion and Jesus Christ looked in.

The explanation of these odd proceedings is very simple. Christmas has really nothing to do with Jesus Christ except nominally. The twenty-fifth of December was an old Pagan festival, which Christianity appropriated in the fourth century after the alleged birth of its Founder. It was the birthday of all the Sun Gods of antiquity. The sun itself decisively began its new career on that day. Accordingly, it was an occasion for mirth and festivity. The nature-worshippers—and all religionists are that at bottom—looked forward to a new spring with its fresh green life, to a new summer with its lusty growths, and to a new autumn with its precious harvests.

Every bit of the outward celebration of Christmas pertains to this old nature-worship. Red and white berries and evergreens simply typify the dormant but indestructible life of the world. Down under the snow and the frozen soil there is kindly warmth, the roots cherish the waiting vitality, and the holly and mistletoe that defy the winter's cold are a pledge of the resurrection of the spring.

Grand old Sun! Thou wilt outlast all the gods. Thou art indeed the real god. All others are but shadows, types, and symbols of thee.

It is said that a Persian ambassador to England got as far north as Aberdeen, and an old Presbyterian lady of the granite city took him to task about his heathenism. "Oh, sir," she said, "they tell me you are an idolater." "No, madam," he replied, "I am not as bad as that." "Indeed, sir," she said, "they tell me you worship the sun." "Ah, madam," he replied, "and so would you if you had ever seen him." What they see in Aberdeen is a poor pale edition of what they see in the gorgeous East. There the sun forces himself upon you. You cannot ignore him. He is royal at all times, and terrible when he holds back the rain and parches the crops, and threatens famine and pestilence.

Freethinkers have as good right to a jollification on and about the twenty-fifth of December as the Christians have. Nay, a better right. There is no contradiction between their belief and their practice. They overlook the Christian interregnum and recur to the saner nature-worship of the antique world. They feel with Mr. Holyoake, that the God men seek is the Nature that they know.

When the great Mirabeau was dying, he had his couch wheeled to the open window, and as he looked up at the sun which was shining brightly he exclaimed: "Ah, if that is not God, it is his cousin german."

For our part, we have always shared that feeling of Mirabeau's. We hate the thought of dying within four walls. It would be sweeter to die in the open, with the great sky overhead, and natural sights and sounds about one, and to feel that death was indeed a melting back of the individual into the universe from which he came. One thinks that a great peace must fall even upon the wounded soldier dying out on the South African veldt; the stars looking down like pitiful eyes, and the wind speaking nature's message, "Come to me."

Mr. Horatio Bottomley seems to be a good deal cleverer than the Rev. Dr. Parker; unless they are both very clever, and the little arrangement of editing the *Sun* for a week was skilfully made up between them—to their mutual advantage. The *Westminster Gazette*, in its "City Notes," drew attention to the fact that Mr. Bottomley, who controls the *Sun*, floated three new companies during the week of Dr. Parker's editorship; one on Monday, one on Tuesday, and one on Friday. Our green-colored, but by no means "green," contemporary pointed out that readers of the *Sun* might be "tempted to subscribe by the prominence which that paper is giving to Bottomley companies, not only in its financial articles and its advertisements, but even in its price lists." "In this," our contemporary added, "it stands alone in the London Press, even as it is the only paper edited by an eminent divine." A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse. We don't know much about City finance, but we rather think we understand the *Westminster's* suggestion; and, on the whole, we have a sort of belief that Dr. Parker has earned his—well, whatever he received for editing the *Sun* during that critical period.

One of Cromwell's captains was ordered to stop a certain parson from preaching and to shut up the church. When the officer entered the holy edifice with a few troopers, the parson skipped up into the pulpit and began jabbering. For a minute or two the grim Ironside listened in silence. Then he called out sternly: "Cease your fooling, sir, and come down." The man of God descended at once like the coon in the American story.

The following story is not quite as good, but it has its redeeming features. We cut it from the *Yorkshire Evening Post*: "The Free Church of Lonmore, Skye, has been vacant, and a Sunday or two after the accomplishment of the Union the Presbytery sent over to Lonmore the usual pulpit supply. He was one of the timorous type of preacher, and no sooner had he lifted up his head in the pulpit than this question was fired at him from the front pew by the leading elder of the congregation: 'Before you begin the public worship of God, we want to know are you for Rainy or are you for the Free Church?' The student was completely taken aback. He said he had been sent there by the United Free Church of Scotland. That was enough. He was assailed with cries of 'Come down out of that; come down out of that,' and there were even threats that if he did not 'come down out of that' they would make him come down. He came down."

"May his soul find pardon" is one of the concluding observations in a lengthy review of Professor Huxley's *Life and Letters* in the *Church Times*. It may be a pious wish, and may be sincerely meant. But it strikes the ordinary reader as a piece of clerical insolence. Who is this person who has the insufferable cheek to pen such an observation in regard to Huxley? Evidently he thinks that the dead scientist is in danger of being damned. Well, one would certainly prefer to be damned with Huxley than saved in company with the bigoted fool who writes nearly three columns of wretched drivel in the *C. T.* about a man of whom he knows apparently nothing and could say nothing worth listening to, even if he knew him.

He seems to be aware that Huxley played havoc with the Christian faith. But, of course, the faith has righted itself, and "now calmly, thankfully, we can still believe in God, in Christ, in miracle, and thank God for all those trials to Faith, for those unsparing attacks on the Faith, which have made us study the credentials, examine the Church's creeds, and clear away formulas which were in no sort of way laid down by the Bible, the Church, and the Creed, but which had been allowed to solidify and crystallise and deaden the Church's life."

To say or to imply that the formulas Huxley attacked were in no sort of way laid down by the Church is simply clear and deliberate lying. None but a clerical ass would attempt such a transparent imposition. The *Church Times*, which, after all, has some method in its Ritualistic madness, will probably think it well to dispense with a reviewer who displays not only a cavernous lack of knowledge and decency, but a shocking inability to write the Queen's English.

Continuing a discussion in the *Church Times* on village church life, a correspondent makes some observations on the not infrequent conflicts between squire and parson. He says: "Squires are a factor of country life, in which they have their own proper part to play, and it is quite common to find them gentlemen in the best sense of the word, while, on the other hand, clergy are sometimes not so."

There seems to have been a change in the rural scene since the time when the Church Catechism was quite understood to enforce the lesson:—

God bless the squire and his relations,
And keep us in our proper stations.

Recently Mr. Carvell Williams quoted this couplet in reply to the Bishop of Chester. The *Church Times* says no doubt the Catechism has been so misunderstood and even taught here and there. It is, however, a mistake to suppose that Church people generally have been brought up, through the Catechism, in notions of servility. We accept that statement, the more willingly because it is obvious that any attempt to so bring them up nowadays would end in conspicuous failure.

Rider Haggard, the novelist, says that athletic training is a most desirable preparation in the life of a missionary, "because nothing in a missionary impresses the savage so much as to find himself equalled or surpassed in strength and agility by the stranger." According to this, Sandow would be a champion missionary. He would only have to exhibit his biceps, and the heathen would accept his Bible immediately. An imported football team might induce unlimited religious faith.

The *Christian*, however, does not seem to approve of the novelist's idea. "Whoever heard," it asks, "of St. Paul, the greatest missionary the world has known, practising sprinting,

or the game then most resembling our present-day hurdle-jumping, in order to impress the athletic Greeks with the beauty of Christ? Neither did this pioneer missionary skip round the amphitheatre with a net and trident in order to show the Romans what a Christian could accomplish. To train with the idea of 'showing off' before the savages, and thus impress them with Christianity, is most foreign to the spirit of Christ."

Perhaps an easier method of producing the same effect would be to tell the heathen of the wonderful feats of Samson, though, of course, there is just the possibility that the heathen might receive the narrative with incredulous laughter.

The prayers of the readers of *Tongues of Fire*—Reader Harris's journal—are asked on behalf of "a family of nine who are Scientists or Agnostics." There is something delightfully uncertain about this description. Evidently Scientists and Agnostics are regarded as being pretty much the same sort of people by the person who invites the prayers.

In order to raise funds for building a new church at Beira, a bull-fight was recently arranged. It is satisfactory to know that the pious promoters lost a considerable sum of money over the exhibition.

A *Sunday Sun* reviewer seems to entertain a very poor opinion of the book of sermons entitled *Words from St. Paul's*, published by Dr. Sinclair, Archdeacon of London. "It is filled," he says, "with as many platitudes as can conveniently be held within two covers." For those who are curious to secure examples of pulpit style he culls this garland of "instances." In each case they are the opening words of successive paragraphs:—

Take an instance. St. Augustine's mother
Take another instance. St. Augustine complains
Take another instance. St. Irenæus, speaking
Take another instance. St. Jerome declares
Take another instance. St. Gregory the Great said
Take yet one more instance. The same St. Gregory

One of the little slips to which the bookbinder is liable recently brought about a family complication. A young man, reading a sporting novel, *The Monk Wins*, bought a clean new copy, and sent it to an elderly and rich uncle, whose health compels him to live in the South of France, and renounce all the old delights of Newmarket and Goodwood. Presently the volume came back, with a curt note intimating that the uncle had no intention of dying just yet, and anyhow was not looking for religious instruction from his nephew. The cover of the novel, adorned with horseshoe and whip, proved to enclose "Thirty Plain Sermons," by the Rev. J. B. C. Murphy.

The Rev. W. H. Pierce says that, when he was in Klondyke, a traveller came to the mission-house with his toes very badly frozen, but refused to have anything done for them on the plea that he was a Christian Scientist. Several of the Indians came in and had some conversation with the man, who did his best to explain his creed. It was evident that his learned disquisition had little effect upon their unsophisticated minds, for a young chief tapped the Scientist on the brow, as he said, "Stranger, there is something wrong with your head, your brain is crooked"; and then significantly added, "Tell the missionary what size box you want, and we will bring it over for you." When the young man saw death staring him in the face, he relinquished his Christian Science foolishness, and allowed his toes to be treated.

The Rev. John Kelty, rector of the recently-formed parish of St. Hilda, Old Trafford, has been charged at the Manchester Police-court with misappropriating £400 which he had received as secretary of the Bishop of Manchester's fund for additional curates. There were also charges against him of falsification of accounts and forgery. He was committed for trial.

The Wolverhampton solicitor, Charles Brown Smith, who is in custody on his own confession of having robbed his two sisters of money left them by their father, was not only secretary of the English Church Union. He took a leading position with regard to all Church matters in the diocese, attending the rural-decanal conferences and every important local gathering in connection with the Church. He will be very much missed in pious Midland circles.

To disgust young students with Christianity as a whole, it needs little more than to provide them with a copy, and insist on their reading it every day, of Mr. S. Croft's *Lessons on Church Doctrine*, which, on alternate pages, analyses "The Faith" in mercilessly dogmatic style, and then devotes intermediate lessons to the subject of "Faith in the Faith," whatever that obscure title may convey. As an example of the

style of demonstration, the doctrine of the Trinity is shown to be shadowed forth in Nature as follows:—

- | | | |
|------------|---|-------------------------|
| (1) Plants | { | Root—Shoot—Fruit. |
| | | Trefoil—Mistletoe—Lily. |
| (2) Water. | | Fount—River—Lake. |
| (3) Man. | | Body—Soul—Spirit. |

It is needless to remark that Plants, Water, and Man do not between them make up the entire creation; nor need any of these be subdivided, as is here done; in fact, the number three here selected is purely arbitrary.—*Church Gazette*.

During the last few months three men of color, claiming to be inspired, have caused serious trouble in different parts of the world. In the Equatorial province of the Soudan Mohamed ben Ali organised a crusade against the Christian inhabitants of the more northern part of the country, and collected an army of nearly forty thousand Somalis and Soudanese. It took the whole army of Menelik to subdue this new Mahdi. To come nearer home, a riot was caused in St. Malo recently by a negro from Morocco called Desabard. He predicted the immediate collapse of the British Empire and the revival of the Empire of Charlemagne under a new French Emperor. The crowds that followed him became so excited that the authorities, fearing an anti-English riot, arrested the dusky prophet. In the province of Madras, in India, a whole district went on strike because an ordinary ryot or peasant suddenly gave out that he was a prophet, that on the site of his home were going to appear a city, a temple, and a lake. Hundreds of natives flocked to the place bringing grain to be blessed. The end of it was that the authorities interfered, and a riot ensued, in which two policemen were clubbed to death, eleven natives killed, sixteen badly wounded, and sixty, including the prophet, arrested.

The New York *Outlook* has asked ten men of eminence in literature and education to mention the books published in the nineteenth century which, in their judgment, have most influenced its thoughts and activities. All the contributors regard Darwin's *Origin of Species* as the most influential book of the century. The *Methodist Times* admits that no one could dispute that unanimous vote, the "evolutionary theory having affected theology as well as every branch of science." "Affected" is good, as applied to a theory which has cut away the very ground-work of the Christian faith—all Christian protestations to the contrary notwithstanding.

In all, fourteen books are named, and at the end of the list are Comte's *Social Philosophy*, Herbert Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy*, and Strauss's *Life of Jesus*. Principal Fairbairn and others have voted for the last-named on the ground that that remarkable work, "although long superseded and practically forgotten," was the occasion of learned investigations which, by the application of historical methods and the Higher Criticism, have "led to the rehabilitation of Scriptural and primitive Christianity."

But is Strauss either long superseded or practically forgotten? We think not. There is an admirable brochure called *The Birth of Christ*, from Strauss's famous work, with an introduction by Mr. Foote, included in the list of the Freethought Publishing Company. As to whether Scriptural and primitive Christianity have been "rehabilitated," there is at least a strong negative opinion, which finds its expression in the daily increasing number of unbelievers.

Of the forty-nine missionaries murdered in the recent rising in China no fewer than thirty-three were women, most of them girls. This looks as if the male missionaries took care of themselves. The *Examiner*, following other religious journals, questions the policy of the China Inland Mission in sending unprotected young girls to such distant stations in a country where they are far from European help. Of course, it is an atrocious policy that should be stopped at once. The Chinese are really "child-like and bland" until they are assailed. These women, if they went there as mere visitors, or remained as peaceable residents, would be free from interference. But they go in an aggressive and fanatical spirit, with or without the male missionaries, and absolutely court the martyrdom which sometimes occurs.

When Miss Stevens, one of these Christian intruders, was last in England, she said: "I don't think I have yet finished the work God has for me in China. I must go back. Perhaps—who knows?—I may be among those who will be allowed to give their lives for the people." That's the spirit they go in. They deliberately invite death by assailing the gods of the country where they know they only remain on sufferance. And all they achieve is the nominal adherence—purchased at a most extravagant price—of the veriest native scum.

Miss Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler, the daughter of Sir Henry Fowler, M.P., has published, in a sumptuous form, a volume of her early poems. She is mainly known as the author of *Isabel Carnaby*, afterwards of *The Double Thread*, and later of *The Farringtons*. Her Methodist friends, and others of

the Free Churches, have boomed her novels for much more than they are worth. One looks in vain for the smartness and epigrammatic genius which her quite too kind reviewers affect to discover in her works. *The Double Thread* is, perhaps, the best; but it turns on what any man of sense must know is an utter impossibility.

But, whatever her novels may be, these poems by Miss Fowler, raked up from albums and the litter of schoolgirl days, are a little too much for the acceptance of even her Dissenting friends of the press. One of her Free Church critics says: "Miss Fowler's seat on her Pegasus is not very secure, and she is apt to bump heavily to earth." Which seems to suggest that idiotic music-hall ditty, "What ho! she bumps." The following verse of hers must be something of a knock-back even to her most devoted admirers:—

I viewed it not with such disgust
As wiser heads would feel for it,
But trusted it as I would trust
The words of Holy Writ.

Miss Fowler, in her younger days, may have been led to regard "Holy Writ" as unadulterated and unassailable truth. But we are not expected nowadays, even by High Church dignitaries, to so consider it. Alas, when the coster now avers "It's Gawsel truth," the cabby and the "copper" grin, for then they know he must be a chap of neglected education.

"Faith at the Century's End" is the subject of a leading article in the *Christian World*. Of course, a very hopeful view is taken, but the writer admits "it is impossible to deny that a great revolution has been wrought in average Christian thought about the origin, nature, and authority of the Bible." It adds that "such a change could not but have its effect upon the creeds of the Churches." The *C. W.* points out that most of these changes were the subject of prophetic denunciation in the early part of the century, and even after it had passed its prime; but courage has been found to face these threats, and the remarkable thing is that "nobody seems one penny the worse."

The latter statement is hardly in accordance with the facts. The religious world is, of course, all the better for having divested itself of a great deal of old-time superstition. For this relief its thanks are primarily due to Freethinkers. The changes have not originated in the Churches, but have been forced upon them from without. Priests, parsons, and ministers are considerably the worse, for their authority has undergone a most extensive diminution. The Bible, as an inspired book, is very much the worse, for its claims have been shattered to pieces.

We learn from the *Sunday Companion* that the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes "possesses the gift of smart repartee to a remarkable degree." This is somewhat in the nature of news, but we don't dispute it. How could we, after reading the following instance given by the admiring *S. C.*: "When an indignation meeting was held at City-road Chapel to protest against Publicans' Compensation, as introduced into Parliament, Mr. Hughes was one of the principal speakers. 'If this Government should persist in this iniquitous proposal,' he cried, in tones of wrathful indignation, 'then it must be turned out.' 'You can't turn it out!' yelled a red-faced, publican-kind of a man, springing up in the gallery. 'No!' exclaimed the speaker, in a voice which thrilled the audience, 'but God Almighty can!'"

There should be something very smart and telling about this, or why was the audience thrilled? If we read it again, we don't seem to get any "forrader" in the way of discovering brilliance or point in the retort. Of course, "God Almighty" can do pretty much what he pleases. That goes without saying, amongst religious people. He could turn the Government out, because it could hardly have gone in without his permission. If the "red-faced, publican-kind of man" had asked Mr. Price Hughes, "Why doesn't he?" what would Mr. Price Hughes have said? However, it's something to know that Mr. Hughes has "the gift of smart repartee." That is one little fact to start the new century with.

The stipends of the Dean and Canons of Rochester Cathedral have fallen quite thirty per cent. during the last few years in consequence of agricultural depression. This is the pathetic news communicated to various Church journals. It is really very sad—almost moves one to tears. Yet, after all, the Dean and Canons are a long way off the poverty in which Christ and his disciples rejoiced. When they get down to that, if ever they do, let them complain through the press once more. We don't promise them our sympathy even then, but no doubt there will be some pious folk—male or female, more likely the latter—who will come to their assistance.

A suggestion is made that the "poor clergy" should keep poultry. The vicar of Leonard Stanley, Gloucester, proudly

announces he has paid income tax on three hundred a year, net gains from his poultry. What about his parishioners? To make that profit on poultry, he must devote the best part of his time and attention to their pens and "runs." We have no objection to parsons keeping poultry—or pigs, if the parishioners are agreeable. A great many parsons would be much more usefully employed in that way than in preaching sermons. But when it comes to doing it in this wholesale way, we think the parson should resign his living and stipend and open a shop.

The possibility of infection from the Communion cup is now being discussed by *The Hospital*. It says that the tendency to make the "lowest of the low" full participators in all that the ritual of the Church offers brings the "nicer" members of a congregation into close relationship with many "most undesirable co-religionists." That is to say, the latter may be good enough to approach Christ spiritually, but not the "nicer" class of Christians physically. This is a fine commentary on the precept and example of Christ, who seems to have purposely consorted with the pariahs of Judea.

As a method of avoiding infection, *The Hospital* suggests that, "just as the bread is placed upon the palm of the outstretched hand and swallowed without handling, so there ought to be no difficulty in placing a drop of the wine, and leaving it also to be swallowed in the same way."

Well—what next? So a communicant is to lick a spot of wine from his hand! Why not follow this up by licking the celebrant's boots. All for the love of Jesus.

A doctor in Turin has carefully examined some samples of "holy water" in that city, and has found great quantities not merely of impurities, but also of microbes, including some that are considered deadly. This fact having come to the knowledge of the Bishop of Fano, a circular was sent round among the priests of the diocese enjoining special care in this matter, and urging various sanitary precautions in churches and confessionals.

Fancy being poisoned with "holy water"! One might as well go to Manchester and get poisoned with arsenical beer.

I Sometimes Think.

I SOMETIMES think, when I behold
A pious bigot raving,
That Jesus saves a lot of souls
That are not worth the saving;
I even think (although no doubt
God nothing can arrange ill)
That many a dandy saint will make
A shabby-looking angel.

I sometimes think (although, of course,
It is a wicked rudeness)
That piety is nothing but
A cheaper sort of goodness;
That grace is not the kind of stuff
To feed a hungry sinner,
And people often give a prayer
When they should give a dinner.

I sometimes think—oh, saintly folks,
Forgive me if you can—
That he may be a perfect saint
Who is not half a man;
That if religion meant good deeds
No honest man would doubt it;
If less it means, then honest men
Can get along without it.

I sometimes think, and dare to say,
In spite of pious drivel,
That when man sends the priest away
He'll shake hands with the Devil;
If men would think instead of dream,
And work instead of fret,
Hell would cool for want of fuel,
And heaven would be to let.

I sometimes think that, after all,
God, if his name be hallow'd,
Will judge us by our deeds, not by
The dogmas we have swallowed;
That he alone is truly good,
Though fools and priests may doubt it
Who lives a useful, honest life,
And holds his tongue about it.

WALLACE NELSON.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, December 30, Athenæum Hall, Tottenham Court-road; 7.30, "Faith and Freethought in the Old Century and the New One."

January 6, Birmingham.

To Correspondents.

MR. CHARLES WATTS'S ENGAGEMENTS.—January 20, Sheffield; 27, Leicester.—All communications for Mr. 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.

FAIR-DEALER.—You will find, on proper examination, that we understated, rather than overstated, the inflictions perpetrated by the Christian "avengers" upon the Chinese. The whole truth will not be made known until these operations in the name of "civilisation and humanity" are over. But some of it has leaked out, and it is ghastly enough to give a humane man the nightmare. Mr. George Lynch, a well-known correspondent, after telling of loot, murder, and violation, said:—"There are things that I must not write, and that you [the *Daily Express*] could not print, that would seem to show that this western civilisation of ours is merely a veneer over savagery." Here is another significant passage:—"The victors will have their shares of discomforts, but woe to the vanquished men, women, and children during the next six months."

FREETHOUGHT TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND.—T. T. (Hull), 5s. (second instalment); J. Strachan and R. Reed, 3s.; Barnsbury Branch, 10s.

G. MULLETT.—The special claims of the Bible have to be opposed in many ways. Robert Taylor's astronomical method is valuable, but it does not cover all the ground. You are quite wrong in supposing that the mythical theory has been abandoned by Freethought advocates. A good deal has been written about it at various times in the *Freethinker*, and some valuable essays on the subject are collected together in J. M. Wheeler's *Foot-steps of the Past*.

T. T. (Hull).—Thanks for your good wishes for the new year. We have a harder task before us than ever, and need all the encouragement of our friends.

STUDENT.—There is a very good and fairly full account of Giordano Bruno in the Rev. John Owen's *Skeptics of the Italian Renaissance*. It is wonderfully sympathetic and impartial, considering the author's profession. The section on Vanini is also valuable.

PROVINCIAL.—We shall, of course, be very glad to see any provincial friends who can attend the Annual Dinner on January 14. Some may have business to transact in London, and may be able to arrange to do it just then. There are always a few non-Londoners at the dinner. An opportunity of shaking hands and talking with Mr. Foote and his leading colleagues will be afforded in the reception room before the dinner, and also at a later stage of the proceedings.

RECEIVED.—Midland Daily Telegraph—Two Worlds—Huddersfield Examiner—Free Society—The Yorkshire Evening Post—Freidenker—Blue Grass Blade.

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

THE National Secular Society's office is at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C., where all letters should be addressed to Miss Vance.

LECTURE NOTICES must reach 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 1 Stationers' Hall Court, Ludgate Hill, E.C.

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.

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

Special.

FREETHINKERS all over Great Britain and Ireland are requested to note that the second "Shilling Week" in aid of the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund is fixed for the beginning of January. During the first seven days of that month—the first in the new century—the "rank and file" of the Freethought party are invited to send me at least one shilling each, and as many more as possible. Every subscription will be acknowledged in the *Freethinker*. Some of those who subscribed to the October "Shilling Week" will probably subscribe again. Hundreds who did *not* subscribe will now have another (and last) opportunity. I beg them all to remember that this Fund is a specially important one. Its object is to counteract the immense efforts of the Christian Churches. Vast sums of money are being raised to spread and strengthen the Christian superstition. It is the duty of Freethinkers to oppose that enterprise. This cannot be done by mere wishes, but only by practical means. And the *most* practical means is *giving* something for "the good old cause."

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

THIS evening (Dec. 30) Mr. Foote lectures again at the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road. The date is one day only from the end of the year and the end of the nineteenth century. The subject will, therefore, be suitable to such an occasion—namely, "Faith and Freethought in the Old Century and the New One." This will be a careful centennial address, to which London Freethinkers are earnestly invited, and to which they should try to bring their liberal-minded friends.

Mr. Foote delivers three lectures at Birmingham on Sunday (Jan. 6). Full details will appear in our next issue. We have not yet received a bill of the lectures from Birmingham. Probably the meetings will be held in the Prince of Wales' Assembly Room. The local "saints" will doubtless see announcements in the newspapers and elsewhere.

We had recently one of those rare and agreeable experiences which give a fresh zest to life. An old Baptist minister called at our office and asked if he might venture to leave half-a-guinea as a Christmas box for Mr. G. J. Holyoake, who, he heard, was in a state of poverty bordering on destitution. We assured him that Mr. Holyoake, while by no means wealthy, was certainly not in *that* condition. The reverend gentleman then asked if he might leave a Christmas box of the same amount for Mrs. Wheeler. "Yes," we told him, and he left it. "We don't all believe alike," he said, "but we all share a common humanity." Before we parted he gave us his name and address, which, of course, are not for publication. We do not know whether this paragraph will meet his eyes or not. If it does, he will be aware that we regard his action as a bit of splendid magnanimity. We are at war—hard, relentless war—with Christianity, but we salute *the man* whenever we find it behind the clergyman's cloth.

Metropolitan Freethinkers are requested to note the date of the Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant on Monday evening, January 14. Tickets are on sale at 4s. each, as usual. They can be obtained at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, at the Athenæum Hall, or from any London Branch secretary.

Mr. P. Shaughnessy writes to us from Glasgow:—"During the last few months I have been selling back copies of the *Freethinker* at whatever they would bring. You will know that they are going splendidly when I tell you that I have sold 471 copies since Sunday last. By circulating old numbers of the *Freethinker* at my open-air meetings I am killing two birds with one stone. Your journal is being advertised, and I am getting a little profit, which is necessary to the carrying on of my lectures." Mr. Shaughnessy asks for a further supply, which Miss Vance is attending to. He says that the local "saints" gave him all the *Freethinkers* they had piled up for years, but that source has run dry.

We have always back copies of the *Freethinker* on hand, as this journal is supplied to the trade on sale or return; and we shall be happy to arrange for the disposal of any quantity

at open-air meetings—or other meetings, for that matter—in London or the provinces. Applications for supplies should be sent to Miss E. M. Vance, at the Freethought Publishing Company's office, 1 Stationer's Hall Court, London, E.C.

The present number of the *Freethinker* had to be got out in a great hurry, owing to the Christmas holidays; in fact, two numbers of this journal had to be seen through the press in one week. The task has been a heavy one, and the matter of the Freethought Twentieth Century Fund has to stand over for our New Year's number. There is still time, therefore, for those who have not yet redeemed their promises.

A Warning to Blasphemers.

As a caution to any of our youthful readers who may be tempted to fall into the dreadful and deadly sin of "blasphemy," an offence deemed the more abominable since it is directed not against man, but against God, the following well-known, if not well-authenticated, story is given as illustrating the odious character of the crime and the awful punishment with which it is visited.

J. C. was born of poor but possibly honest parents in the little village of B—. The few records of his infancy show that he was precocious and impudent to his parents and elders. He even displayed his insolence at twelve years of age to the ministers of religion, and gave his sorrowing parents a deal of trouble. On one occasion he said to his mother, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" and he is even said to have cast doubts upon his own paternity by his father, one Joseph—a respectable village carpenter. In an evil hour he assumed to be the son of God. This dreadful blasphemy, followed as it was by a crazy claim to rule over the kingdom, and the stealing of a donkey in order to ride in triumph through the principal city where he created a riot in the Temple, finally led to his arrest by the police, when he was immediately deserted by all the ignorant fisher folk and tag-rag vagabond followers whom he had gathered around him. The president judge, upon hearing him speak, said: "We have heard the blasphemy; what think ye?" And they all condemned him to death as guilty.

He was handed over to the authorities and summarily executed. But this is not the most surprising part of the affair, for it is related that all nature was convulsed as if in horror at his blasphemy, and that he who had boasted that legions of angels were ready to protect him died shrieking that he was forsaken by God.

O dear reader, whenever you are tempted by Satan to commit the horrible sin of blasphemy, may you never forget the sad life and horrible death of the notorious blasphemer J. C.

LUCIANUS.

The New Doxology.

PRAISE cant from which our riches flow!
Praise it ye clerics here below!
Praise it ye "nobs"—a mighty host—
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

Praise God for all the simple fools
Who make for us such ready tools,
Without whose aid throughout the land
Scarcely a day our craft could stand.

Praise God for our old worn-out creed
By which we still the people bleed!
And let us raise our voices higher—
Praise him for brimstone and hell-fire!

Praise him for queens and tyrant kings!
May we all value such dear things!
And teach the people 'tis God's will
Their toil should royal coffers fill.

Praise God for dukes and lords and earls,
All better flesh than common churls;
Praise him for bishops strong in might
To bless the wrong and curse the right.

Praise God for partridge, pheasant, deer,
For brandy, wine, and tithe-got cheer;
And tell the people, lacking bread,
Christ had not where to lay his head.

Praise God above, praise Cant below!
Praise God in haste, and praise Cant slow!
Praise God aloud, but praise Cant most!
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

R. ANDERSON.

Truth, like a gentle shower, soaks through the ears, and moistens the intellect.—*Bergerac.*

Mary's Little Lamb.

A TALE OF THE FIRST CHRISTMAS.

CHRISTMAS comes but once a year, and, considering the gluttony and wine-bibbing which goes on when it *does* come, it is perhaps a very good thing that the season occurs no oftener. Hundreds of Christmases, and therefore hundreds of years, have rolled by since the first one ushered into the world the most surprising baby that ever suckled and squealed. All the babies born since were commonplace in comparison with this astonishing youngster; and never, except when the stars sang together for joy, in a chorus that would have been well worth a shilling ticket, did nature show such uncommon interest in any event as in the appearance of this little lump of human dough. Nature has probably been sorry for her enthusiasm ever since. She is not easily excited, and her pace is steady as a mule. But as Jove nods, nature has an occasional fling. She went into raptures on the first Christmas, and when the chief person born on that day made his exit from this mortal stage she went black in the face with panic fear or hysterical sorrow. From that time she has conducted herself with exemplary decorum, and no doubt she is heartily ashamed of the indiscretions and eccentricities she was guilty of on the occasions referred to.

The story of the first Christmas is partly written in certain old manuscripts, of questionable date and authorship, which are regarded with extreme veneration by millions of people who know next to nothing about them. But there are many lapses and large deficiencies in the narrative, and we are authorised to supply what is wanting. We claim infallibility, of course, yet we do not deny it to others. Those who dissent from our version are free to make up one of their own, and it will doubtless be as infallible as ours. This may sound strange, but it is quite philosophical for all that. Do not all the Churches differ from each other, yet are they not all infallible? Why should one infallible man cut another infallible man's throat or put him in prison? Why cannot two infallible men dwell together in the same street like two greengrocers?

But to our story. It was the first Christmas Eve. A donkey was patiently wending his way to Jerusalem. On his back was seated a lady of some seventeen summers, and by his side walked a sturdy young man. They were husband and wife. The young man evidently belonged to the artisan class, and his better half was in that condition in which ladies love to be who love their lords. Both looked forward with unusual interest to the birth of the expected child. They had settled what name it should be called, so there was no doubt whatever as to its sex.

The day was drawing to an end when they approached Bethlehem. Making their way to an hotel kept by a relative of theirs, they asked for accommodation. Mr. Isaacs shook his head. "I am very sorry, Joe," he said, "but we are full up, and the worst of it is every hotel in the place is in the same state. Over an hour ago I tried desperately hard to oblige an old customer, a gentleman in the bacon trade, with a bed for the night, but I tried every hotel in Bethlehem without success. Fortunately I rigged up a few extra beds in the stable, and he has taken one of them. If you like another you are welcome, and egad, Joe! that's the best I can do for you."

"Thank you, old fellow," said Joe, "but Mary is in a delicate state, as you see, and I would like to fix her up comfortably. Can't you go in and see if there is any gentleman who will go outside to oblige a lady?"

Mr. Isaacs returned in five minutes, and said it was no use. One gentleman had a bad cold, another had the gout, another the lumbago, and so on. Joseph and Mary were therefore obliged to return to the stable.

While Joseph was grooming the donkey Mr. Isaacs came in and started a curious conversation. "Joe," he began, "I don't wish to interfere with your business, but as a relative and an old friend you will pardon me for saying that I am a little puzzled; you have only been married four months, and if Mary is not a mother in a few days my name isn't Isaacs." Joseph did not resent these remarks, his natural meekness being such that no insult could ever disturb it. With a solemn

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face he replied: "My dear Isaacs, there is nothing to pardon. Mary's baby is not mine. Its father lives in heaven. He is an angel, or something very high there. Mary has often told me all about it, but I have such a bad memory for details. The fact is, however, that Jeshua—we've settled his name—was conceived miraculously, as I've heard say some of the great ones among the heathen were. You may smile, but I've Mary's word for it, and she ought to know."

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Isaacs, "if you're satisfied, of course I am. I don't say Mary's story would go down with me if I were in your place, but I've no right to grumble if you are contented."

Thereupon Joseph, with a still more solemn face, replied: "Well, I was a little incredulous myself at first, but all my doubts were dispelled after that dream I had. I saw an angel at my bedside, and he told me that Mary's story was quite correct, and I was to marry her. Some of the neighbors chattered about a Roman soldier, called Pandera, who used to hang about her house while I was away at work in the south; but I regard it as nothing but gossip, and Mary says they are a pack of liars."

Mr. Isaacs returned to his customers in the hotel, winking and putting his finger to his nose directly his back was turned. Meanwhile Joseph and Mary had supper, after which she felt very unwell, and, as luck or providence would have it, she was confined soon after twelve o'clock of a bouncing boy. Mr. Isaacs resolutely refused to turn any customer out of his bed, so the new comer was cradled in a manger filled with the softest hay.

Soon afterwards a fiery, kite-shaped object was seen in the sky, advancing towards Bethlehem, and finally it rested on the chimney stack of Mr. Isaacs' hotel, where it gave such a lovely illumination that half the town turned out to see it. Two enterprising spirits who mounted a ladder to inspect it closely, and if possible bring it down, were struck as if by lightning, and were with great difficulty restored to consciousness by the skill and efforts of a dozen doctors.

While the people were in a state of bewilderment, six old gentlemen appeared on the scene. They were attired like the priests of Persia, and their venerable appearance and long white beards filled the spectators with reverence. Only one of them could speak Hebrew, and he acted as interpreter for the company. "Where," he inquired in a deep majestic voice, "is the wondrous babe who is born to-night? We saw his portent in the east, and have followed it hither nearly six hundred miles." Mr. Isaacs informed them that the wondrous babe was in the stable, at which they were greatly astonished. Four of them said they must have made a mistake, and were for going home again; but the other two pointed to the supernatural light on the hotel chimney, and after they had consumed three bottles of Mr. Isaacs' best Eschol they all made for the object of their search. Directly they entered the stable, little Jeshua stood up in the manger and eyed them, and as they advanced he accosted them in their own language. This removed any doubts they entertained, and they at once knelt down and offered him the presents they had brought with them. One gave him a cake of scented soap, another a pretty smelling-bottle, another an ivory rattle, another a silver fork, another a gold spoon, and another a cedar plate inlaid with pearl. Little Jeshua took the gifts very politely, and made a graceful little bow and a neat little speech in acknowledgment of their kindness. Then handing them over to his mother, to keep till the morning, he sang with great sweetness "Lay me in my little bed."

Soon after daylight some shepherds came in from the hills, saying they had seen a ghost, who had talked to them in enigmatical language; they could not understand exactly what he meant, but they gathered that good times were coming, when poor shepherds would eat mutton instead of watching it. On hearing of what had happened in the town precisely at the same time they were still more astonished. All Bethlehem was in uproar. Everybody was talking about little Jeshua, and the presents that were brought him by the enthusiastic inhabitants filled three large vans when Joseph and Mary set out again.

(Written in 1886.)

G. W. F.

The Dignity of Life.

MAN IS AS GREAT AS HE FEELS.

No man is wise enough to tell what time is. A day is a mystery bounded by two twilights, an unknown ushered in by the dawn and ushered out by the dark. A year is the frolic of the planets on the playground of the infinite, a celestial jest of eternity. We speak of time as if it were a thing; we say it is slow-footed or fleet; that it is past, present, or to come.

The man of the Apocalypse saw an angel with one foot on the land and the other on the sea, and heard him cry, "Time was, time is, but time shall be no more." We cannot think of time as existing in itself and apart from other things, and we cannot think of other things as existing apart from time. It is an essential condition of life and thought and being; without it they cannot be. To one who thinks, all is mystery. At every step we are confronted and confounded by the unknown. Every path we take leads to the inscrutable. We speak of the material universe, but cannot tell what matter is; we measure the distances between revolving planets and stellar worlds, but cannot tell what space is. We think of the infinite and give him a name, but God remains the unknown. We believe in our own spirit and esteem it superior to the body, but the soul hath no man seen. We stretch out the mysterious day and call it eternity; we shorten the mysterious eternity and call it a day. Canopied by the unknown, horized by the unsearchable, baffled equally by the atom and by the infinitude, we spend our years and pass on.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MUTATION.

At this period the thoughts of men show many moods. The habit of the world's thought and the potency of the calendar have their effect upon us all. In multitudes of minds there is the mood of reflection, of introspection and reverie. With others there is the periodic moral spasm. Multitudes once in a year awake to the dim consciousness that they have not been altogether as good and upright as saints, and to-morrow they will begin all over again, and the day after return to the old story. For the most part the period is one of general depression of spirits. There is always sadness in the backward look; then memory, keen and vivid, presents the things that are gone, the loves that are lost. With silent and reverent tread the mournful spirit visits the altars of sadness, of sorrow, and of pain. Perhaps in the retrospect, in the periodic moral spasm, and in brooding in a spirit of sadness there is neither wholesomeness, spiritual health, nor strength. The world for ages has been under the influence of a determined and persistent habit of thought—a habit of thought that has issued in what may be called the philosophy of mutation. The world has been regarded as a vast cemetery, a place where generation follows generation, only to take its appointed place where oblivion broods and memory forgets. The attention of men is directed to monuments that mark where other ages have lived, and toiled, and flourished, and declined, and passed away. We are told with great cheerfulness that the earth has had enough of human beings as its inhabitants to make all the land upon the globe one continuous grave where the bodies of the dead would lie six deep. The habit of looking at the world as a thing of change and mutation has gotten itself into literature and into religion. Omar Khayyam, the astronomer poet of Persia, cries with a sort of defiance and despair:—

Come, fill the cup, and in the fires of Spring
Your Winter-garment of Repentance fling:
The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing.

THE PLAINT OF PIOUS PESSIMISM.

Mrs. Hemans repeats the dolorous strain when she says:—

Leaves have their time to fall,
And flowers to wither at the north wind's breath;
And, stars to set—but all,
Thou hast all seasons for thine own, O Death!

I will confess that the eternal holding up of the symbol of decay and the fact of change and transition is, in my judgment, unwholesome, unphilosophic, and unnecessary. Religion has been the most inordinate sinner in this respect. "We all do fade as a leaf. We spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are three score and ten, and, if by reason of strength they be four score years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we fly away." What right has a man to fling in the face of the divine year the miserable plaint of his own pessimism? Let him stand up and live and be glad for his three score years and ten, and, if by reason of strength he has four score years, let him glory in that many more years of gladness and rejoicing. Religion has never yet struck the victorious tone. It has always cultivated the spirit of gloom and despair. This came from the philosophy of mutation, the habit of looking upon things as swift passing to dissolution and the grave. There was a religious sect who had no other mission, so they thought, than to tell the hour the world should end.

That has been one of the singular infatuations of the religionist. Jesus of Nazareth lost his mental balance once so thoroughly as to believe and to tell his disciples that in a few months or years at the outside, while they were still living, the end of the world would come. Paul was beguiled with the same dream of the pessimist, and he said: "It is at our very doors, near at hand; directly you will hear the bugle in the sky, and in a chariot of clouds will come the final, sovereign judge, and the people will be caught up and changed in the twinkling of an eye, and floated away to a safe elevation from which they may witness the destruction of the earth." It was a pleasant outlook! In 1843, in this country, notably in the Middle States, a great excitement and vast amount of agony were produced by the preacher Miller, who had definitely fixed the time of the great catastrophe. The Lord was about to come to clean house and begin all over again. The women actually made their ascension robes, had their celestial trousseau in readiness, and the day before kept their hair in curling-pins. It takes something more than the end of the world to make women neglect those things.

A GLOOMY HABIT OF THOUGHT.

By this infatuation religion has laid upon the human world its most terrific and intolerable burdens. It will be impossible for mankind, though they give their united effort for generations, to overcome this habit of the world's thought about change and death. We are yet held by the tyrannic grasp of the world's child-thought. We reduce everything to the terms of our own limitations. We think of time, the unending, the unbegun, in terms of the year. We are slaves of the calendar. It is the passing days and the increasing months, and the rapidly fleeting years, that lay a burden upon us all. We think of human life under the influence of race-thought, as a drama of which its opening scene is the birth and the closing scene the grave. A little way from the cradle with its lullaby of love to the falling of the clods in the coffin lid. Let any man examine his own thought, and he will see that his conception of life is held within these limitations. We have dramatised even the divine existence and reduced God to terms of our own limitation. We imagine him with his changing aspects and phases; now he is pleading, then again he is punishing, we have him with his times and seasons; we have reduced him to little things; he is counting hairs and keeping a list of the dead and missing. We have not been great enough to think of God as great. We are yet in the kindergarten amusing ourselves with painted appearances and pleasing our fancies with fictions.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PERMANENT.

There is another way of thinking about these things that we may attain to, a philosophy which, in distinction from the old race-habit of thought, may be called the philosophy of the permanent. Its fundamental postulate is that whatever is is, and always was and always will be; that there is no beginning, and will be no end; that God is not old, and was never young. The supreme fact of the universe is the fact of existence. What we look upon as change and variation, appearance and disappearance, are in no sense the essence of existence, but only incidental to, and not inimical to, existence. The universe by a thousand tongues declares that the supreme fact is the fact of being. To be or not to be is not the question. Not to be is unthinkable. Because we are childlike, because we are blinded and beguiled by the circumstances of being, we lose sight of the fact of being.

By this philosophy of the permanent, what we call mutation and change are but ministers and servants of life, not its destroyers, not its enemy. They are the method of the revelation of being. To be—there is nothing beyond, nothing higher than the fact of existence. Beyond the conception of being the human mind cannot pass; higher than it it cannot rise; lower than it it cannot descend; that is the supreme fact, the infinite fact, the universal fact. If we could once reach the firm conviction that being is the great fact of the universe, why, then, time, change, age, the grave, death—all these things become mere trivialities at which we smile.

By this philosophy, time has no beginning, can have no end. There was no yesterday, there can be no to-morrow. It is but an everlasting, infinite now, and what we call time, the days, the years, are but variations by which the infinite "now" becomes manifest to us. They may come and go, or they may cease coming and going, but that now which they manifest would exist forever as it always has existed. The years are but the fringe of eternity's robe which we touch; they are the strands from which the planets, like shuttles, weave the garment of time out of infinite timelessness. Death has nothing to do with life, unless it be a form of manifestation of it. Life is no part of death. We have imagined that this body was life. By death we know that the body is an incident to life, but we have not been able to think of life as apart from the body, so the grave has infinite sadness, and there is no consolation there. But if we could imagine life as a thing that is and always was, the body the form of its habitation and truly subservient to it, life as transcendent after death as before, death would then be an incident. Give me a flower—I have said life always was,

the body was its manifestation, one of the lowest terms in which it could be made known. Before ever the flower was in its visible form, it was.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE FLOWER.

Nothing was made, nothing created, not an atom added to the universal sum of things; it was somewhere, atom and petal and calyx and crown, hue and tint and perfume, it did exist; night brooded over the earth, and the day came with its light; the falling snowflakes covered and couched the place where it slept; the sun's rays touched the waiting world; the mingled mimicry of dawn and twilight played upon the throbbing soil; stellar worlds and shining suns mingled and blent their rays with the moist, cool earth, and responding to the thrill of passion and of life, the earth manifested the flower. It always was. It was before ever the earth, like a mother, could take in her glad hand and on her ample bosom the flower-child; it was when the star-dust and the fire-mist in the illimitable vast were everywhere and universally diffused. How we may not know, and need not care; but it was; and, having been before, who dare say it will not be after, when it is faded, drooped, and withered—when it is a thing of beauty and joy no longer, and the housemaid throws it away? What has become of the flower? I do not need to know, because I cannot know; but it is not destroyed; no atom has gone from the universal sum; no sense of ours may be able to trace its history further; we must leave it in the mystery; but the mighty genius of life that wombed it in secret and brought it forth in its glory will know its shadowed way, and watch and keep it forever.

I will believe in the immortality of the flower—of force, of matter, there can be no end; but our thought is upon the flower, and we say with Felicia Hemans, "Flowers have their time to wither"—and they do; but do they have their time to die and become extinguished, and become naught? Had we senses fine enough, we might find the flower before there was a trace of the flower; had we sense keen enough, we might find it after it has withered and passed from the sight of human vision.

THE AUGUST FACT OF LIFE.

If we could think of life, then, as a fact, and not as a form, we should think less harshly of death and the grave, care less for fleeting years, and rejoice in life. We take things too seriously; we lay too much emphasis upon the circumstance of life—too little upon the august fact. We are here, not by our own act of choosing; we are here, and here is the world, and here is all the mysterious power that we call God. Now, being here, we are free from any responsibility of having come, or of going out. We are here—that is the main fact; and the universal laws or forces that called us into being, name them as we may, are responsible for us. Between the meanest clod, between the humblest thing that creeps and crawls, and nothing, there is infinite distance. To be a part of the world's fact, an existence among existences, a being in its immeasurable vast, ought to be dignity and glory enough to make every man and woman stand up and rejoice in the fact of being.

But there are inescapable sadnesses, wounds that never heal.

I heard an old, gray-haired man tell the other day about his child, a little boy four years old, taken suddenly ill, and, while in his father's lap, stood up and put his arms around his father's neck, and died that way; and the old man spoke of it with all the agony of a crushed and unhealed heart. When did the child die? Thirty-five years ago, and the agony seemed as keen and unbearable as if it had occurred that very day. Far be it from me to take from the sadness of any life its sanctity, or seem to mock any spirit's grief; but I will hold that the soul that has loved will always love, and there can be no forgetting.

BETTER BE A MAN THAN A GOD.

Do you know I would rather be a man than a god? I would rather have the opportunities this life gives, with its chance of development and growth, with its joy alternating with its pain, with its ineffable glory of loving and being loved, than to be a god and sit on the eternal circle of the universe and not know the possibility of growth and development, or be capable of being touched by the thrill and rapture that this world knows. It is not, after all, a bad proposition, the human world with all its mingled story of laughter and of tears. Our business is to dignify it, to exalt it, and justify our existence to ourselves and incidentally to the world; to make the common deed of the common day worthy of man; to lift up oneself above the ignoble and the mean, and the wisdom of doing it is with everyone.

Emerson is speaking of the great fact of the dignity of life when, in his peculiar phrase, he says: "Hitch your wagon to a star." It may be that a man accustomed to drive four-footed animals along a dusty road would find some difficulty in attaching his wagon to one of the stellar worlds, but he could hitch it at least to his animals and drive his dirt wagon along the street like a king if he only feels like one. I deny the crown, the only crown of real worth or real value this world ever knew, and reach it to every toiler's brow. I would, if I could, make the human thought take change and death

as the servants and ministers of life; I would, if I could, put the glory of being into the gloom of the passing day. In the divine right of existence, in the divine right of being, I would defy what men call death and claim immortality now.

—*Truthseeker* (New York). (DR.) J. E. ROBERTS.

A Significant Statement.

(Extract from Preface to the new (second) edition of "The Golden Bough," by J. G. Frazer.)

THE position of the anthropologist of to-day resembles in some sort the position of classical scholars at the revival of learning. To these men the rediscovery of ancient literature came like a revelation, disclosing to their wondering eyes a splendid vision of the antique world, such as the cloistered student of the Middle Ages never dreamed of under the gloomy shadow of the minster and within the sound of its solemn bells. To us moderns a still wider vista is vouchsafed, a greater panorama is unrolled by the study which aims at bringing home to us the faith and the practice, the hopes and the ideals, not of two highly gifted races only, but of all mankind, and thus enabling us to follow the long march, the slow and toilsome ascent, of humanity from savagery to civilisation. And as the scholar of the Renaissance found not merely food for thought, but a new field of labor, in the dusty and faded manuscripts of Greece and Rome, so in the mass of materials that is steadily pouring in from many sides—from buried cities of remotest antiquity as well as from the rudest savages of the desert and the jungle—we of to-day must recognise a new province of knowledge, which will task the energies of generations of students to master. The study is still in its rudiments, and what we do now will have to be done over again and done better, with fuller knowledge and deeper insight, by those who come after us. To recur to a metaphor which I have already made use of, we of this age are only pioneers hewing lanes and clearings in the forest where others will hereafter sow and reap.

But the comparative study of the beliefs and institutions of mankind is fitted to be much more than a means of satisfying an enlightened curiosity, and of furnishing materials for the researches of the learned. Well handled, it may become a powerful instrument to expedite progress if it lays bare certain weak spots in the foundations on which modern society is built—if it shows that much which we are wont to regard as solid rests on the sands of superstition rather than on the rock of nature. It is, indeed, a melancholy, and in some respects thankless, task to strike at the foundations of beliefs in which, as in a strong tower, the hopes and aspirations of humanity through long ages have sought a refuge from the storm and stress of life. Yet sooner or later it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should breach these venerable walls, mantled over with the ivy and mosses and wild flowers of a thousand tender and sacred associations. At present we are only dragging the guns into position; they have hardly yet begun to speak. The task of building up into fairer and more enduring forms the old structures so rudely shattered is reserved for other hands, perhaps for other and happier ages. We cannot foresee, we can hardly even guess, the new forms into which thought and society will run in the future. Yet this uncertainty ought not to induce us, from any consideration of expediency or regard for antiquity, to spare the ancient moulds, however beautiful, when these are proved to be outworn. Whatever comes of it, wherever it leads us, we must follow truth alone. It is our only guiding star (*hoc signo vinces*).

A Story by General Palmer.

The late General John M. Palmer used to enjoy telling of being mistaken for a person of greater dignity than the President of the United States.

"When I was Military Governor of Kentucky," said he, "a disturbance occurred in some town in the interior. I was at a distance, but was needed at the scene. There was no train, no carriage, no buggy to be got. The only vehicle available was a big gilded circus chariot, left by some stranded show company. I didn't like it; but there was nothing left to do, so I got in. You may imagine I cut a great dash as I drove through a small town. People turned out in droves to see me pass. When I left the town behind me and reached the plantations, the negroes saw me, and stared with open mouths. They followed me at a respectful distance, until presently they were joined by an old, white-haired preacher, who, on seeing me in my magnificent chariot, raised his eyes and his arms on high, and, in a voice that stirred all within hearing, cried:—

"Bress de Lord, de day of judgment am cum, an' dis gemman am de Angel Gabriel hisself. Breden, down on yo' knees an' pray, fo' yo' hour am hyar!"

—*Chicago Chronicle*.

Correspondence.

A NOTE ON THE TWENTIETH CENTURY FUND. TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I beg to forward my tiny mite for the Twentieth Century Fund. Its smallness makes me blush, but still, I suppose, it's better than nothing.

The reluctance of many of your subscribers to "shell out" gives me constant surprise. They cannot, I feel sure, realise the gravity of the issues at stake, or they would make greater efforts to place our organisation on a firmer basis. They cannot, I am convinced, understand what a thin flooring of safety separates us from the hell of religious persecution beneath, nor gauge the stupendous force of public apathy co-ordinated with clerical activity.

I am aware that most of our party are poor, but I don't believe that poverty is responsible for the slow growth of our Twentieth Century Fund. Many cannot "afford" to contribute, I know. Well, I can't afford to, but I'm going to contribute and "afford" the contribution afterwards. I think the real reason why funds don't roll in is the disease fatal to all enterprises attacked by it—apathy.

When one considers that many of us, for prudential reasons, are unable to take an active share in the movement, there is more food for amazement that the passive members are not more willing to assist in the only possible way, financially.

I have not much respect for the man who reads through his *Freethinker*, and then shoves it away and forgets all about Freethought until the following Thursday; who can't tell what last week's *Freethinker* contained, and who probably doesn't care; and whose ideas are so nebulous that he seeks refuge from would-be Christian controversialists in a haze of "don't know."

If a person's convictions are not sufficiently acute to prick him into self-denial for the sake of his cause, they are not worth the proverbial tinker's damn. The half-hearted response to your appeal is a poor compliment to your own splendid efforts and constant abnegation of self for the sake of the movement you adorn and so largely sustain.

C. D. STEPHENS.

"Le Raison" Fund.

OWING to the death of our friend, Mr. Samuel Hartmann, who was the treasurer for this fund, the post has become vacant. Mr. Victor Roger, one of our vice-presidents, has consented to act in that capacity. Subscriptions, etc., intended for that fund should be addressed to him at 114 Kennington-road, S.E.

I should like to add that shares in the new paper are ten francs each = 8s. 4d.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

Education.

Politics is an after-work, a poor patching. We are always a little late. The evil is done, the law is passed, and we begin the uphill agitation for repeal of that of which we ought to have prevented the enacting. We shall one day learn to supersede politics by education. What we call our root-and-branch reforms of slavery, war, gambling, intemperance, is only medicating the symptoms. We must begin higher up—namely, in education.—*Emerson*.

Newspapers.

If a man has not read the newspapers for some months, and then reads them all together, he will find out how much time is wasted upon this class of literature. The world has always been divided into parties, and these divisions are especially marked at the present time; and whenever any doubtful state of things arises, the journalist flatters either the one or the other party to a certain extent, and feeds the inner inclination or antipathy, as the case may be, from day to day, until at length a decision is arrived at, and the outcome is regarded with amazement, as though it were of divine origin.—*Goethe*.

The Folly of Women.

It is always a surprise to me that women will sit year after year and be told that, because of a story as silly and childish as it is unjust, she is responsible for all the ills of life; that because, forsooth, some thousands of years ago a woman was so horribly wicked as to eat an apple, she must, and should, occupy a humble and penitent position, and remain forever subject to the dictates of ecclesiastical pretenders. It is so silly, so childish, that for people of sense to accept it seems almost incredible.—*Helen H. Gardener*.

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, "Faith and Freethought in the Old Century and the New."

CAMBERWELL (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 7.30, C. Cohen, "Missions to the Heathen."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

HYDE PARK (near Marble Arch): 11.30, R. P. Edwards; 7, J. W. Cox.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): 7, H. P. Ward. For particulars see *Birmingham Daily Mail*, December 29.

CHATHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Queen's-road, New Brompton): 2.45, Sunday-school.

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): No meeting.

HULL (2 Room, Friendly Societies' Hall, Albion-street): 7, J. White, "Utopias."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, Mrs. Bruce Glasier, "The Dearth of Joy."

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

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): New Year's Day Annual Soirée—Tea at 5.30, to be followed by entertainment; dancing at 8.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, W. A. Lill, Original Poetical and Prose Readings!

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, A reading.

Lecturers' Engagements.

C. COHEN, 17 Osborne-road, High-road, Leyton.—December 30, Camberwell.

H. PERCY WARD, 2 Leamington-place, George-street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham.—December 30, Birmingham.

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