

THE Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

Horos and Swami.

"HOROS" has to do fifteen years' penal servitude, and "Swami" has to do seven. In this tribulation they are divided. The worst part of their punishment is that they are unable to countenance and sustain each other in humbug. Each will be left to honest self-reflection, and the occasional society of persons who never shared their hypocrisy. Their sentences are terrible. It is doubtful if such sentences ought ever to be inflicted. Judges are not always men of imagination, and some imagination is necessary to realise the meaning of (say) ten years' imprisonment. Death would really be more merciful, if society and the prisoners could only see it. Still, the law is the law—with all its imbecility and brutality; and it can hardly be said that the sentence on these wretches is *relatively* too heavy.

We do not wish to go into the unsavory details of this disgusting case. Some of them are unspeakably filthy. Our object is to draw attention to the cloak of religion under which these adventurers cheated and practised beastliness. "Horos" was even pretended to be a reincarnation of Jesus Christ, with a dispensation to follow his worst inclinations; and "Swami" kept up the pious imposition to the very end, bowing her head in prayer every time she entered the dock. It was by such simple means that this brace of charlatans worked upon the credulity of their dupes; and from the incaution, and even recklessness, they displayed at the finish, it is presumable that they had led a long career of imposture. Certainly their latest dupes were only young girls, but in more than one case there were deceived adults in the background. We may therefore conclude that the fool-crop—as Heine called it—is still plentiful; and that adventurers with sufficient cheek and cunning, if they give themselves religious airs and affect the mysterious, will easily find a crowd of victims. Not that these victims are always deserving of unlimited pity. Some of them may be sheer irredeemable fools, but in most of them there is an element of viciousness which is more highly developed in the leaders of the game. Rogue and fool in many instances are two exhibitions of one and the same nature; only it is active in the one and passive in the other; and when they meet they are like positive and negative in electricity.

Some will regard it as a colossal joke that "Horos" and "Swami" were preachers of "Purity." But this should really not be surprising. It is generally the dirty-minded people who take a deep interest in other people's moral cleanliness. The delicate and sensitive do not volunteer to clear out cesspools. When such a thing *must* be done, they do it with clenched teeth and averted noses. It is those who *affect* to be delicate and sensitive that offer themselves for such tasks. Though they may not exactly want to be wicked, they like to be near wickedness. Just as some philanthropists are the most unpleasant persons in private, so the public advocates of "purity" are often a bit tainted. There is an ancient and fish-like smell about them. Their minds like to dwell on what they dare not act.

Religion, occultism, and mysticism have always been apt to go in company with sensuality. Read some of the Christian hymns, especially those invoking Jesus as the lord and lover, and you see that a slight alteration would put them right into the class of erotic literature. Catholic nuns are invited to sing of his lips, his mouth, his kisses, and his embrace. In eastern countries, of course, the connection between religion and sensuality

is more open and undisguised. In western countries a certain sacrifice has to be made to public decorum. Yet the old connection still obtains. But hide Priapus to the waist, sang Dante Gabriel Rossetti,

And whoso looks on him shall see
An eligible deity.

That is because the oldest and most universal form of religion is nature-worship, which has always consisted very largely in a reverence for the powers of generation. When the religion becomes more or less insincere the reverence becomes perverted, and a half-hearted superstition goes hand in hand with a whole-hearted pursuit of lust. Cagliostro seems to have been a pander as well as an occultist, and it is an open secret that magic and sexual extravagance have gone together in France ever since. Strange stories were told of the late Madame Blavatsky. Parts of her career were veiled in mystery. She might have cut up badly if she had been cross-examined in the witness-box. There was a general resemblance between her and "Swami," both being characterised by largeness of person, sciolism, audacity, and levity. The same curious mixture of qualities is perceptible in each case. According to her own confession, "Swami" had lived with several husbands and paramours. Having arrived at an age when, as Hamlet says, the hey-day in the blood is tame and humble and waits upon the judgment, she probably made a compact with "Horos" that she should have the money and he should have the rest. Hers was evidently the controlling mind throughout. The judge took a commonplace view of the case in giving her half the male prisoner's sentence "because she was a woman." "Horos" was obviously a poor creature at the best. Very likely he drifted into partnership with "Swami," drifted into cheap sensual indulgences, drifted into darker acts of crime, and finally drifted into gaol. It will take him fifteen years—less the reduction he earns by good behavior—to drift out of it. The cleverer and more daring criminal will be the first let loose again upon society. Under another name she will probably be playing the old game again in a good deal less than ten years—unless the prison life proves unbearable to one of her tastes and temperament.

From some of the evidence in this case it may be seen how easily religion and morality part company. It is all very well to talk about deceiving and seducing young girls under the cloak of religion. The judge worked that for all it was worth—and perhaps a little more. But how is it that religion is found so useful in these enterprises? That is the question. "Horos" had only to talk the most transparent nonsense in the name of religion, and the scruples of those girls were overcome in a moment. Why is the "spirit" such an apt servant of the "flesh"? We wish the Christians would consider these things. That would be far better than merely shaking their heads over this scandal, and then forgetting all about it. Reflection might enable them to see that religion is not such a friend to morality as they have been taught to believe. How absurd is the theory that men become Freethinkers in order to gratify their vicious propensities! Those who wish to do that find it more convenient to seek the aid of some form of faith. Almost any form will do as long as it is paraded ostentatiously. If you want to cheat investors you should imitate the piety of Jabez Balfour; and if you want to enact more sinister crimes you may find a pattern in those noble occultists "Horos" and "Swami."

G. W. FOOTE.

Musings on Christmas.

By the time this article is in the hands of its readers the Christmas of 1901 will be a thing of the past. The Christian world will have celebrated the ancient festival, some in spiritual, others in spirituous exercises; the stock sermons will have been preached, and the New Testament story retold by thousands of preachers as though criticism had never breathed a word against its credibility. Theoretically, Christians will have been commemorating the birth of Jesus. Practically, they will only have been adding fresh testimony to the fact of the tenacity of custom, and the immense difficulty of getting people out of old ruts. For it hardly needs pointing out to-day that the twenty-fifth of December has no more connection with the birthday of an historical Jesus than it has to do with the birthday of any other of the world's mythical survivors—no more and no less.

The date of the birth of Jesus—not fixed for some five centuries after the alleged event—was not determined by accident. As a god, Jesus had to follow the prevailing fashion in this matter; and as Bacchus, Hermes, Adonis, Mithru, and dozens of other Pagan deities, were all born on that date, it was only natural that Jesus, who resembled them in so many other particulars, should resemble them in this also. The truth is, of course, that, as is now generally admitted, Christmas is not a Christian festival at all. It is a Pagan festival, and one plainly of astronomical origin. The Church simply took over this with ceremonies and teachings from the non-Christian world, and in the dawn of the twentieth century we are still celebrating the re-birth of the Sun-god, as was done in Egypt, Phoenicia, and Rome centuries before Christianity was heard of.

It is safe to say, however, that the majority of people neither know nor care anything about the origin of Christmas. To them it is a season of merriment and relaxation, and as such I, for one, have no quarrel with it. Almost any excuse for a holiday is admissible; and in a world where hard knocks are so plentiful we can ill afford to lose the opportunity for a spell of ease or a display of good-fellowship. And in keeping Christmas as a season of jollity we are also exhibiting the strength of the healthier Pagan instincts over the Christian ones. For among the Pagans Christmas was always a time of enjoyment. The Church was able by degrees to change the verbal application of the festival, but even Puritanism was unable to crush out the Pagan festivities associated with the season.

But the clergy will not readily admit, although not many now will have the hardihood to deny, that Christmas is a Pagan festival; nor will they agree that its chief significance to-day is that of providing a holiday. To them it is the commemoration of a species of intellectual cataclysm which overtook the world nineteen hundred years ago, whence it happened that something entirely new came into the world—something which had no connection with aught that had gone before, and inaugurated an era of peace on earth and goodwill to all men. Great is the power of words! And we may well believe that people from constantly hearing this phrase, and even the clergy themselves from constantly repeating, have at length come to believe in its truth. It will make little difference to the average preacher that the most superficial reading of history would stamp the Christian era as the era of war rather than of peace; that religion and war have always—always, that is, during the past nineteen centuries—developed quite easily side by side; and that during all that time there never has been "Peace on earth," least of all among Christians. A parson who is a parson is not going to allow an agreeable theory to be spoiled by disagreeable facts; and when, as in the present instances, theory and self-interest are almost synonymous, the parsonic disregard for vulgar facts is likely to be more than usually pronounced.

What a farce this talk of Jesus bringing peace on earth is! Monotheistic creeds have invariably been intolerant and warlike, as even the religious Guizot noted; but in the race for supremacy in the art of human

slaughter Christianity comes out an easy first. It is but a bare statement of historic truth to say that the Christian era has been one of incessant warfare, and warfare characterised by excesses as brutal as any that stain the annals of human kind. There is no hatred so bitter and so vindictive as hatred that is nourished by religious fanaticism; and there have been no wars so brutally vindictive and bestial as the various Christian crusades against heretics and Mohammedans. In non-religious wars the object has been usually conquest, and, to the mass of the people, often meant little more than a change of masters. In religious wars the object has as frequently been extermination, and the conquered given the choice of a quick death on the battlefield, or a death of lingering torture at the hands of their conquerors.

The least warlike of the great nations to-day is not a Christian nation: it is China—China which rejected Jesus and pinned its faith to Buddha and Confucius; which has paid, and is paying dearly, for its rejection of Christian missionaries; and which is plundered and oppressed by those Christian peoples who are so vastly their superior in the art of wholesale murder. The whole of Christian Europe is an armed camp—each nation jealously watching all others to prevent them acquiring by force what they themselves have acquired in the same manner, while the nation that prides itself on being the most Christian of all also plumes itself on being able to, single-handed, beat any other two. There is a rising war-budget in all countries; we ourselves are within decent—or indecent—distance of conscription, and are actually at war with another only too Christian people; we pour out millions gleefully on war, and spend grudgingly a fourth part of the sum on education; and all the time we have thousands of preachers mouthing their stereotyped story of Christ bringing "Peace on earth and goodwill to all men"!

And, as with war, so with the question of general welfare. In none of the arts or sciences or industries that make for peace and orderly development do we owe anything to Christianity. Christianity ran too sharp a line of demarcation between man and nature to be in any real sense a help. Philosophy, under Christian tutelage, sank to a mere parade of meaningless phrases and verbal juggles. Science sank into astrology, necromancy, and crass superstition. Education was neglected, and sane social institutions almost forgotten. Every element that is good in modern civilisation can be traced to non-religious sources, while the line of development of all the sciences shows clear and unmistakable traces of the unrelenting hostility of the Churches.

The sober truth is that essential Christianity is, and always has been, destitute of all that makes up the constituents of national welfare. It has been great on texts and mighty with homilies; but there is more than these needed to make society what it ought to be, and what it easily might be. Individual character, it is true, determines the social structure—although the reverse of that statement is also true—but then character is not quite fundamental. A man's character is not something that exists independent of his environment and antecedents, it is the expression of them; and it is a sad waste of time to preach righteousness to people while perpetuating the very conditions that make them what they are. People herd together under conditions that bestialise body and mind; children are born and reared amid surroundings that require almost a miracle to enable them to grow up into decent men and women; and smug religious respectability thinks it has done its duty when it has established a soup-kitchen, sent round a district visitor, or distributed alms that, after all, are but a small tax paid for the enjoyment of their own wealth. "The poor ye have always with you," said Jesus, and the ideal Christian society has always been a multitude of paupers on the one side, with a handful of rich men and women distributing charity on the other.

Can we hope for any real help from the Churches, established or dissenting, towards removing these evils? Will they conduct a crusade against the existence of slums, of starvation wages, or oppressive land laws? Why, it is from the very class who thrive upon these things that the Churches draw their financial strength. And can we reasonably expect them to

quarrel with their principal supporters? All history and all experience answer in the negative. When all is said and done organised Christianity stands, as it always has stood, the firm friend of the few against the many, of falsehood against truth, and of stagnation against development. The Churches are paid by the few to keep the many "in order," and, to do them justice, earn their support.

How otherwise could we have such evils in our midst as we have to-day? The Christian is quick enough to point to the evils existing in Mohammedan or other non-Christian countries as a proof of the evil or the inadequacy of the prevailing religion. What, then, are we to say of Christianity itself? It has had a long reign, practically unlimited power; it would, and did, burn men for a mere difference of opinion; why, then, is the world not better than it is to-day? People lament the evil of drunkenness, but Mohammedanism kept that evil out of Islam; as Buddhism, with a much older history than Christianity, has never been guilty of a single act of persecution. One never heard of a Mohammedan or Buddhist temperance society, as we hear of a Young Men's Christian Temperance Society, and the reason is that there were not enough drunken Mohammedans or Buddhists to keep one going. Let us, then, measure Christianity with the same measure that Christian preachers mete out to other religions, and say that, if the world is as bad as it is to-day, either it is the result of Christianity, or Christianity is powerless to effect an improvement. And we can see in the decisive manner in which workers and thinkers are turning their backs upon Christian doctrines a growing conviction that the cure for human ills must be sought elsewhere than in the region of religious mysticism.

Of what practical value, after all, are nine-tenths of the questions with which current religion deals? Of what value is it to know or to believe that a man was once born of a virgin, fed a multitude of people with scarcely sufficient food for half-a-dozen, and afterwards rose from the grave and ascended into heaven? Men are not born that way nowadays, the poor are not fed that way nowadays, and people rest in their graves like decent, well-behaved corpses. Of what value is it to ever know or believe that somewhere at the back of everything else exists God? It is certain that natural forces operate on all alike, and that we are either made or marred, not by our speculations, but by our knowledge and by our conduct. All of these things are of small importance compared with other problems that are pressing for solution. We are in the world, and now we are in it we belong to it. If there is another life, it can wait. One life at a time is all that anyone can be reasonably expected to grapple with. If there is a God, he can wait neither our help nor our advice. Meanwhile what is wanted is both a broadening and a concentration of human intelligence and energy—a broadening so that we may take in all that is really essential to human welfare, and a concentration so that we may not fritter away our energies upon useless and unprofitable subjects. After all, the bed-rock of all religions is humanity itself, and so long as we have that as a foundation and an end we can well dispense with gods, ghosts, and other products of a distempered imagination.

C. COHEN.

Celsus and the Birth of Jesus.

CHRISTMAS being the period of the year when Christians remind the world of the prophet's statement that "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," it may be instructive to draw the attention of our readers to the opinion of Celsus, who wrote in the latter part of the second century concerning the alleged birth of Jesus, the reputed founder of the Christian faith. Of course no opinion is here expressed as to the question, Did the Christ of the Gospels ever live? The point is, supposing he did, is the New Testament account of the event credible? Celsus, in his work entitled *The True Word*, dealt with the birth, life, and character of the "Prophet of Nazareth," and with many statements similar to those now to be found in the Four Gospels. About seventy

years after the death of Celsus his book was replied to by Origen of Alexandria, in a work of eight books, known by the title of *Origen against Celsus*. Of course, it is almost impossible after this lapse of time to state whether Origen dealt fairly with his antagonist, and selected his strongest arguments. It is more than probable that Celsus wrote much which Origen failed to notice, since in the books of his opponent we find evidence that Origen was only skimming through *The True Word*, and replying to those portions only which seemed to him to be the weakest.

It appears that Celsus followed the legitimate practice of—at least in some parts of his work—inventing a fictitious opponent of Christianity; just as some modern Christian controversialists—like Leslie, in his *Short and Easy Method with the Deists*—choose to convey their sentiments in dialogue form. The "dummy" selected by Celsus was a Jew, and we find this hypothetical Hebrew arguing in the following manner: "According to Origen, Celsus alludes to the absurd extravagance of the writers of the genealogies of Christ in endeavoring to make him descend from the Hebrew kings, who had not one drop of this royal blood in his veins. It was somewhat extraordinary to find, from the New Testament itself, that 'the carpenter's wife was ignorant of her high original'" (Lardner's *Testimony of Ancient Heathens*, vol. ii., p. 276). Celsus refers to the precepts of Christ about non-resistance of evil, and he quotes a sentence from the *Crito* of Plato to prove that other teachers than Christ had taught the same doctrine before him. Moses and Jesus, both affirming a mission from God, do not agree in their teachings; Moses encouraging his people to acquire riches, and exhorting them to destroy their enemies, while Christ from first to last advises them to do the very opposite, going even so far as to shut the portals of heaven to the rich man, or to the one who affects dominion (*ibid.*, p. 2).

The statements made by Celsus concerning the alleged incarnation, birth, and life of Christ have been frequently condemned by Christians, who have taken it for granted that Celsus had made all his statements without being able to adduce in corroboration the faintest shadow of evidence. But is it not manifestly unfair to accuse a writer whose works are no longer able to speak for themselves? Origen contents himself—no doubt for very wise reasons, best known to himself, but which we think are not very difficult to understand—with stating that "Celsus then said this," or "Celsus makes his Jew say"—in short, we have the statements of the Freethinker without his evidences. The following summary will show the nature of Celsus's allegations, which no doubt were fully substantiated by proper proofs:—

"'After this,' says Origen, 'he brings in his Jew, arguing against Jesus in this manner: First, that he pretended he was born of a virgin; then he reproached him with his birth in a Jewish village, and of a poor woman of that country who subsisted by the labor of her hands. And he says she was put away by her husband, who was a carpenter by trade, he having found that she was guilty of adultery. Then he says that, having been turned out of doors by her husband, she wandered about in a shameful manner, till she had brought forth Jesus in an obscure place, and that he, being in want, served in Egypt for a livelihood; and, having there learned some charms, such as the Egyptians are fond of, he returned home; and then, valuing himself upon those charms (powers), he set himself up for a god.' Farther, Origen says that this fictitious person of a Jew says that the mother of Jesus, being great with child, was put away by the carpenter who had espoused her, he having convicted her of adultery with a soldier named Pantheras. In another place Celsus is made to say: 'But if God would send forth a spirit from himself, what need had he to breathe him into the womb of a woman? For, since he knew how to make men, he might have formed a body for this spirit, and not have cast his own spirit into such filth'" (Lardner, *Testimony of Ancient Heathens*, vol. ii., pp. 287, 288).

Now, here it may be remarked that the story of Celsus respecting the Roman soldier Pantheras has nothing impossible about it. The morality of hiring soldiers has not been of the highest order in any ages and among any peoples. We may well suppose that an author like Celsus would never have risked his reputation by making a statement of which no one, either before him or in his time, had ever heard; and it may

be said that Origen, opposing this statement long after it was written, is content to base his opposition upon the assumed improbability "that a person whose great design was to deliver men from the corruptions of the world, and who had succeeded to a great degree in converting men from their vices, should not have so much as a legitimate birth. It was much more likely that it should be of an extraordinary kind, such as that received by Christians." It is difficult to conceive how such reasoning as this can be accepted by intelligent thinkers. It shows too plainly how theological faith blunts the discriminating powers of its adherents.

Without dogmatically accepting either theory as the correct one, let us consider fairly the case of Celsus and Origen, and then decide which of the two is the more *improbable* theory. On the one hand, we find a man who could not, presumably, after an impartial examination, accept Christianity as true. He advances a not impossible theory—certainly a not unnatural theory—respecting the birth of Christ, a theory which would account for the supposed fact that Christ was born of a woman who had been espoused to a Jew named Joseph, before her marriage with the latter had been consummated, and before—if we take the Gospel account—this Joseph "knew" his wife. On the other hand, we are asked to believe that a child was born without a human father; that, the Holy Ghost having visited Mary, she found herself in a condition to become a mother; and that the birth of Christ is to be accounted for in this most unnatural way. Such a theory would require to be substantiated in a most irrefragable manner, and the assumed miraculous birth of Christ offer no such proof. The story of the incarnation is opposed to all knowledge and experience. We do not say that the story of Pantheras is correct; but we do state that it is not unnatural, which the ordinary Christian belief undoubtedly is.

Celsus appears to have collected all the statements in circulation respecting the life and character of Jesus. Christian apologists have chosen to regard this as a proof that the Gospels existed, *as we have them*, before the time of Celsus. The truth, however, appears to be that he had recourse to the early traditions in reference to Jesus—traditions from which, in all probability, the four Gospels were subsequently compiled. If we make due allowance for the age in which he lived, we shall find in Celsus's criticisms the substratum or groundwork of nearly all the objections to the Gospels which were adduced in after ages. He objects to the story of the Magi, or, as he calls them, the Chaldeans, coming from afar to worship the God-babe; he ridicules the story of the massacre by Herod of the infants of Bethlehem; and he asks why a God had such reason to fear his enemies as to be compelled to fly into Egypt. The same question may be asked to-day. Who will be bold enough to attempt to give the answer?

CHARLES WATTS.

Christmas.

CHRISTMAS again! The other reflections will depend on the person, but possibly will not be very original—bills, presents, expenses, with a dash of sadness thrown in. But there is young England ever with us, and young England joins in the exclamation, but with the second word in brackets.

The Christmas apparition, like the *amœba*, has split in two; there is Civil Christmas and Ecclesiastical Christmas, and the stark form of Civil Christmas fills the picture, while its mythical other half—once the whole—has dwindled to a shadow in the rear.

You can see this on the counterpane of cards in the windows. Babies with halos around their heads, and white-bearded old men kneeling before them in the light of a star like a battle-ship's searchlight, have given place to greetings based on truer thoughts and sincerer feelings.

This is not to be wondered at, nor regretted; for it will not be said that the old Christmas myth has not done its work and had its day. Compared with other religious myths which have lived on from the ancient world into modern times, its career has been one of

average duration, and more than average influence. But the myth-making era began so long ago, has yielded so slowly, and denotes such a childish stage in the growth of man's mind, that the passage out of this penumbra of illusion is most welcome.

A few words may explain. A myth is a legend about heroes or gods—in the widest sense. For myths are of several kinds—nature myths and philosophic myths; myths physical, genealogical, theological; myths to explain the origin of the world, of man, of the gods; the origin and descent of peoples, how tribes became distinct, the cause of evil and trouble, the meaning of death, the secret of the arts, how metals came, how fire was produced, and so on. All these come under the head of gods and heroes for the heathen mind, because inseparable from the superhuman.

We have done with gods, and seem in a fair way to have done with heroes; the men of old had not, but were not a little taken up with both. They had not learnt to repose with confidence on the high thought of one infinite life-source. Whatever they could not explain must be due to some spirit, for even a savage is "a man for a' that," and, if not a philosopher, has his curiosity about the causes of things that interest him.

But these myths—why are they such impossible stories? Why such repulsive tales about the gods that philosophers, even in the sixth century before Christ, protested against such things being introduced into education? What was intended—not merely by a god becoming man, because that notion lingers even yet amongst us—by a god stooping to assume the form of an animal, or by men becoming animals, or being placed among the stars at death? Why no gasp of astonishment, no stopping of the pen?

There has lain the puzzle. And it is only recently that a clearer view has been got into this confusion—"this silly, senseless, savage element," as Professor Max Müller called it; only after years of danger and hardship, in all lands on earth, to explorers, travellers, missionaries, and years of indefatigable labor and research on the part of lovers of truth.

I say "all lands on earth" because here is the key of the method employed. So long as the scientist sat at home poring over some grotesque story, as how the founder of the city of Rome (B.C. 753) was suckled by a wolf, he could make no headway; but when he packed portmanteau and started travelling, picking up what he could among less civilised folk, he gradually became aware that his unique myth was not so unique as he thought, but that, in varying forms, according to character and circumstances of the peoples, the story of Romulus and the she-wolf had its parallel in something like eight other countries besides Italy—Persia, Russia, Germany, India, Turkey, Brazil. An important clue, that.

Myths are not strange occurrences which have happened in a certain place, and been distorted afterwards; not learned stories either, concealing records of astronomical phenomena, the keys of which have been lost. Myths have been universal, the expressions of man's imagination, working everywhere according to a uniform law, but at a childlike stage of his mind.

In the nursery the formation of myths may still be studied. The child will see a resemblance in some object—say that certain stars are like the wolf or the bear, which nurse has been telling of; and, if uncorrected, there will soon be a surprising story forthcoming. The story is started on a gross misunderstanding, to explain something which it cannot grasp. So myths are *survivals*—relics—of a state when uncultured man spun yarns while trying to account for things.

To this instinctive uncorrected habit add two principles of *belief*: firstly, animism—that every object and force in nature is due to a spirit; secondly, magic—that all elements are unstable, transmutable into each other (the *Genii* or *Peri* can emerge from the date-stone); and you have the entire stock-in-trade from which myth and *mährchen* are made. The *Arabian Nights* is full of myths, so is the Bible—of very precious examples, many of them.

The Norfolk laborer is hardly yet out of the myth-making stage; he will make up an impossible story unconsciously, to account for what he does not understand. Civilisation, in fact, is not so far removed from

savage life as is generally supposed; points of contact are both immediate and numerous.

Here is an instance of what causes a myth. All through the Middle Ages there lay before men's minds the imposing fact of the two great rival empires all along the north and south shores of the Mediterranean, which met in antagonism at the extremities (in Syria and Spain)—the Holy Roman Empire and the Caliphate, Catholicism and Islam. This was explained by the favorite old device that two brothers had quarrelled—in this case, of course, Isaac and Ishmael.

Higher, purer, gentler (as time went on) than the myth of the Roman founder, but not less unnatural, by their reflection upon marriage, arose myths of that class of birth which the Christmas of Christianity has made so familiar; and until modern times this myth, too, "stood untold and awful," because others had not been deemed like it—an enigma defying knowledge and reason.

True, in the Greek and Latin classics incarnations are common; and it has too often been said in defence of Christianity that no other religion offers the same consolations, and falsely said. Generations of Greeks lived in a very "enchanted ground," so intimate was the communion between the seen and unseen, so possible at any moment the appearance of a god in human guise at the hero's side or the peasant's door, so certain the answer to proper prayer.

But it was probably the slow disappearance of this warm faith, in the course of centuries, leaving old earth disillusioned once more, that disposed Christians to think lightly of it as a "superstition," especially as they themselves had fallen under the spell of a later creed.

But, besides the classic myths of incarnations, we now know of others. There is Buddha, who, in pity for this sorrowful world, condescended to enter it through mortal woman's virginity. And more; for, confining ourselves to the Bible, we now know how facile was the tendency in the sensuous East, how inevitable for the fleshly birth of some venerated personage to share in that aloofness, that "separation from sinners," which his whole moral life had betokened. Thus the patriarch Isaac, we are told by the eminent Jewish writer, Philo, contemporary of Jesus, "is to be thought, not the result of generation, but the shaping of the unbegotten: the Lord begat Isaac."

"The mother of Moses was pregnant by no mortal." The same of Samuel's mother. Thus, when the words written of Isaiah's son ("the young woman shall conceive and bear a son") came to be taken by the Jewish Christian Church as a prophecy that Messiah was to be a son of the Virgin Mother, the Church, that myth which has reached us through the later Gospels would not be long starting. Still one ecclesiastical writer has left us a treatise in Latin "on the manner in which Christ was born of a Virgin."

The era of the myth is gone; the shell is burst. It is for the future generations not to drop the vital kernel of purity which this Christmas myth contained.

C. G.

The Growth of Roman Catholicism.

SIXTY-ONE years ago Macaulay, in his essay on Ranke's *History of the Popes*, expressed grave apprehensions as to the future power of Roman Catholicism, which had recovered some of its losses during the Reformation, while Protestantism had failed to maintain all its former gains.

The lapse of time has given us facts and figures which may enable us to moderate such fears. Writing in 1840, and probably using figures of a somewhat earlier date, Macaulay estimated the total number of the Roman Catholics as certainly not fewer than 150 millions, while the adherents of all other Christian sects were not more than 120 millions. At the beginning of the present century I find, on reckoning up, that the Roman Catholics have increased from this 150 millions or more to some 245 millions*—an increase

of less than sixty-four per cent.; while the non-Catholic Christians have increased from 120 millions or less to more than 300 millions—an increase of over a hundred and fifty per cent.* From being a decided majority among Christians, the Roman Catholics have thus become a decided minority. Of the non-Catholic Christians, 172 millions, or more than half, are Protestants, the majority of the remainder consisting of Russian adherents of the Greek Church. The increase, it may be observed, is wholly, or almost wholly, due to natural increase of population, and not to conversions of the heathens or of members of rival Christian Churches.

So far as the general result is concerned, the above figures are confirmed, and at the same time explained, by other statistical facts. The yearly returns of births and deaths, where obtainable, show a smaller annual increase of population in Catholic countries, taken as a whole, than in Protestant countries and Russia. The following table, giving in most cases an average of a period of ten years from 1886 to 1895, will illustrate and prove this fact:—

Protestant Countries.	Annual Birth-rate per 1,000.	Annual Death-rate per 1,000.	Annual Increase per 1,000.
England	31	19	12
Scotland	31	19	12
Norway	30	16	14
Sweden	28	16	12
Denmark	31	19	12
Finland	34	21	13
Holland	33	20	13
Prussia	37	23	14
Saxony	41	26	15
Australasia (1895)...	29	12	17
Greek Church.			
Russia (1891)	47	34	13
Catholic Countries.			
Spain (1890-94)	35	31	4
Italy	37	26	11
France	23	22	1
Belgium	29	20	9
Austria	37	28	9
Hungary	42	32	10
Bavaria	36	27	9
Ireland	23	18	5

The average annual increase-rate of Protestant nations appears to be about thirteen per thousand, for the addition of the United States, Canada, and South Africa would probably raise the figures rather than lower them; while the average increase-rate in Catholic countries is little more than half of this, or only seven per thousand, or perhaps less, since it might be reduced, rather than heightened, by the addition of the Catholic states of America, which are so backward that trustworthy information is often unobtainable, but which appear to suffer from heavy death-rates, and are mostly situated in tropical regions unfavorable to the increase of European colonists. In Chili, one of the most progressive and healthy of these Catholic republics, the death-rate is more than double that of our Australasian colonies, and the increase-rate is only about six per thousand. In Mexico the annual mortality appears to be about thrice that of our Australasian colonies.

Spain, a country so backward that in 1889 more than two-thirds of the people could neither read nor write, is pre-eminently representative of Roman Catholicism in the thoroughness and universality of her acceptance of that pernicious form of faith, and in the evil results thereof. The death-rate, as might be expected in so Catholic and unprogressive a country, is an excessively heavy one, the annual mortality being no less than thirty-one per thousand, where that of Protestant England and Scotland, notwithstanding their large and densely-crowded manufacturing towns, is only nineteen per thousand, and that of Protestant Norway and Sweden is only sixteen per thousand. Deducting the annual death-rate of thirty-one per thousand from the annual birth-rate of thirty-five per thousand, there

number of Catholics as 175 millions, and that of all other Christians as 220 millions—an old, and perhaps imperfect, estimate, which, however, serves to indicate that the Catholics had already been outnumbered by other Christians.

* If we go back to preceding centuries, we find that the population of England, little more than four millions in Elizabeth's time, has increased since then by nearly eight hundred per cent., while it is doubtful if the population of Spain has increased in the same period by as much as fifty per cent.

* The latest edition of *Chambers's Encyclopædia* (1901) gives the number of Catholics as nearly 210 millions; but the figures are not up to date. The *Century Atlas and Gazetteer* gives the

remains a natural increase of population of only four per thousand in Spain, while the annual increase in Great Britain is twelve per thousand, and in Norway fourteen per thousand. Every year Spain sacrifices 200,000 human lives over and above what she would lose if she reduced her mortality to the level of that of England and Scotland.

Besides the relative weakening of Catholicism through a slower rate of increase among its adherents, the inferior quality of the Catholic populations, as a whole, renders them less powerful or influential in the world's affairs than the Protestant or Teutonic nations.* Catholicism has long been a dwindling factor in political arrangements. Protestant Germany and non-Catholic Russia have superseded both Catholic France and Catholic Austria as dominant Continental powers. Catholic Spain has entirely lost her former influence in European affairs, and in world-power has sunk as much as Protestant Britain has risen. But this difference in racial quality and its results is seen in a still greater degree in the vast colonies which will in the future become far more populous and far more powerful than the relatively diminutive countries in Europe from which they sprung. In Brazil, Mexico, and the other Catholic republics of America (which occupy twice the area of all Europe), the population is of mixed blood, and is descended more largely from native Indians and imported Negroes than from Spanish and Portuguese colonists. The Protestant populations who are gradually filling North America, Australasia, and South Africa—an area thrice that of all Europe, and with relatively temperate and healthy climates suitable for the increase of white populations—are mostly pure in blood, and of a quality that should fit them for the great parts they may be expected to play in future ages. The sixty-two million Catholics of America are in no sense any match for the seventy million Protestants; the Catholic states of America, though advancing, being distinguished by relative weakness, corruption, and general inefficiency, while the United States, exceptionally progressive and prosperous, and with a population of seventy-six millions ably utilising vast natural resources, is potentially, I think, the most powerful nation in the world, as it is actually the wealthiest.

Independently of the superior quality and increasing quantity of Protestant populations, the Church of Rome is losing its power over its own adherents. Thus in France, although the prevailing religion is still Catholic, the Government is usually anti-clerical, and the power of the priest has been severely curbed. The Italians, too, Catholics as they are, can be patriots first. When French bayonets were withdrawn from Rome, the Italians defied their Pope by taking Rome and by voting almost unanimously for the suppression of his temporal power and the absorption of his territory in a united Italy. The Italian Parliament has abolished clerical privileges, and all religious houses have been suppressed, their property being taken by the State, with the result that the numbers as well as the formerly immense wealth of the Italian clergy have been greatly diminished. Even in Spain, though Protestant worship is only permitted in private, and public announcements of such worship are strictly forbidden, the Cortes in 1835 and 1836 passed laws suppressing all conventual establishments and transferring their property to the nation. The various Catholic States in America are also increasingly tolerant or anti-clerical. In Chili all religions are protected by the State. In Brazil the connection between Church and State is abolished, and

* As compared with the dark races of Southern Europe, the northern blond is less passionate and more practical, besides being physically taller and stronger. Relatively to the number of the population, there are seven times as many murders in Spain as in England, and ten times as many in Italy, the southern Italian in particular being passionate and revengeful as well as small-statured. The moral as well as physical superiority of the northern white (who hence reformed his religion and much else) may have arisen primarily from Natural Selection under the severer conditions of northern climes. The low death-rates which are so marked a feature of modern civilisation are seen more especially in Protestant countries, and are a sign and a proof of the good qualities of the Protestant races. The Catholic countries with low death-rates (Ireland, Belgium, and France) are somewhat northerly in position, and thereby benefit by northerly influences in general, including racial evolution and the influence or example of neighboring Protestant states.

all religions are declared equal before the law. In the Argentine Republic not only are all creeds tolerated, but primary education is free, secular, and compulsory. In Mexico the religious houses were closed in 1863, and the Church property was confiscated. Many ecclesiastical buildings have since been assigned to serve the purposes of libraries, schools, hospitals, etc.; no ecclesiastical body is allowed to acquire landed property; and the law enacting free and compulsory education is now being enforced.

In all civilised countries there are many people who do not accept the current creeds, or who actively or passively oppose all forms of religious belief. The nominal numbers of both Catholics and Protestants must be considerably reduced if due allowance is made for this fact. But this kind of loss or deduction—which must be especially large in the case of France, the most progressive and the most powerful of the Catholic nations—weakens Catholicism without weakening the opposition to Catholicism. Freethinkers are allies of Protestants—nay, are equally vigorous *protestants*—so far as the battle against Rome is concerned. The Secularism of an Ingersoll or a Bradlaugh in Protestant countries is no more favorable to the Papacy than was the Deism of Voltaire and Thomas Paine. The Rationalism or anti-clericalism of heroic leaders of the people like Garibaldi and Gambetta in Catholic countries is a deadly blow at the very heart of Catholicism.

Similarly, the addition of non-Christian powers (such as Japan, and in time possibly China, the hugest nation in the world) to the comity and balance of nations, together with the growing consideration extended to non-Christian religions, such as those whose adherents render the British Empire numerically more Mohammedan than Christian and more Brahministic than both put together, will lessen the relative weight allowed to Catholic pretensions in the world's international arrangements, and, like many other considerations, such as the diffusion of knowledge, the advancement of science, and the general spirit or tendency of the age, will act as a liberalising or anti-Catholic influence in political and social matters generally.

Putting such considerations as the above together—namely, the relative decrease in the number of Catholics, the slower progress of Catholic nations as compared historically with the more rapidly-growing power and prosperity of Protestant nations, the general inferiority of Catholic races as compared with the Teutonic or Protestant races, the poorer prospects of future world-expansion, the lessening influence of the Romish Church over its own members, the strengthening of the anti-papal forces or liberalising tendencies by the spread of Rationalism and social and political reform in Catholic countries, and the growing weight attached to the influence and rights of non-Christian powers and peoples—we may find ground for confident hope that Roman Catholicism will never regain the power which it once used so disastrously, but will rather lose even its present degree of authority. Under the improving influence of the victorious environment of moral and political progress seen more especially in Protestant races, it is losing its former virulence, and is reforming from within, in defiance of a Papacy which appears to be sinking into its dotage.

Nevertheless, there are many signs of persistent activity and insidious danger which call for unceasing vigilance and steadfast opposition. We need not forget that Roman Catholics number nearly 250 millions, as against little more than 170 million Protestants, and that these latter are in a much more decided minority among Christians than are the Catholics. Over-confidence loses many a battle and many a race. The study of human nature and of the broad facts of history may incline us to believe in such old sayings as *Magna est veritas et prevalebit*. The ultimate triumph of truth may very properly be matter of hope, or even of faith, but not of faith without works. An artful and unscrupulous Church that has exercised so pernicious an influence over the minds and actions of its adherents that she nearly succeeded in ruining the best hopes of human progress in the past cannot safely be ignored as a spent force, and is no more to be trusted than a tame tiger, especially when she seeks to get the children and the schools into her hands.

W. P. BALL.

An Appeal.

MR. FRANCIS NEALE has had a relapse. His wife, who attended him devotedly, broke down, and is herself confined to bed, whence it is unlikely that she will be able to move for weeks. I gather that it must be weeks, and perhaps months, before Mr. Neale can possibly resume work. For some time past he has had to abandon his ordinary press work; he kept on with his *Freethinker* work as long as he could; and for several weeks even that has been impossible. Mr. Neale began assisting me as a labor of love; in the course of time I insisted on his receiving a slight acknowledgment; and that is practically all he has had to depend upon for some months. What I could do I have done, but everybody knows now that my resources are *not* unlimited. More than this is necessary, and I ask some of the friends of Freethought to lend a hand.

Mr. Neale has been writing for the Freethought cause for thirty years, and I believe the "acknowledgment" just referred to is the only one he ever took. What he did was done out of devotion to the movement. Once he stood high in the journalistic profession. Even now there are plenty of editors ready to give him employment. But he cannot take it. Six years ago an internal malady sent him to Charing Cross Hospital, where he underwent a terrible operation, from which he had about one chance in ten of recovery. He was there six months. When he was discharged he was told that he could not live long. He has falsified the prediction, having survived those six years; but all the time he has been looking death in the face—and no man ever did it with greater serenity. Often he would have been glad, personally, to hear the bell ring for the drop curtain; yet he preferred living for the sake of others—as he prefers now. And for my part, though I would not have him suffer too greatly, I should be sorry to miss the presence of one so able, so well-informed, so sincere, and so modest.

Mr. Neale refused to have an appeal made for him when I first suggested it; but now, in his utter helplessness, he leaves the matter entirely to my discretion. And why should I hesitate? Mr. Neale has worked publicly for Freethought, and there is something wrong somewhere if the friends of Freethought cannot publicly show their appreciation of his services in this emergency. Whatever is sent to me shall be forwarded to him and acknowledged in the *Freethinker*. Mr. Neale is not in a state to receive and answer communications himself. But I will keep any letters relating to his case, and hand them over to him if, and when, he gets better.

G. W. FOOTE.

Acid Drops.

JOAN OF ARC is to be canonised. Nature made her a heroine, and the Catholic Church is going to make her a saint. But is this an elevation or a descent? And is the Catholic Church considering the honor of that noble woman or its own selfish interest? In other words, is it not simply exploiting a great reputation?

Joan of Arc was indeed a martyr, but the clergy joined in compassing her death; and they were all Catholics, and French as well as English. It was the Bishop of Beauvais who presented a petition against her, on the pretence that she was taken a prisoner within the bounds of his diocese. He desired to have her tried by an ecclesiastical court for sorcery, impiety, idolatry, and magic. The University of Paris joined in this request. Several prelates were appointed her judges, and the only Englishman amongst them was the Bishop of Winchester. She was found guilty of these crimes, and also of heresy. Finally, this heroic woman, who does not seem to have been half as superstitious as the wretches who sentenced her, was burnt to ashes in the market-place of Rouen. She perished amidst the execrations of the people she had tried to deliver, and had nearly succeeded in delivering. Time has brought her vindication, and it was reserved for a great Freethinker to be her first great eulogist. David

Hume wrote of her as "this admirable heroine, to whom the more generous superstition of the ancients would have erected altars."

It is reported that the Pope will be presented with a tiara of gold, which will be inlaid with diamonds to the value of £50,000, the gift of an Italian lady, in celebration of his silver jubilee next year. With that costly bauble on his head, we suppose, the old man of the Vatican will preside over performances at St. Peter's, and fancy himself more than ever the indisputable viceroy of God on earth. If there are angels, as we are told, it is hard to decide whether they would laugh or weep at such a spectacle.

Freethinkers are necessarily interested in the maintenance of the right of public meeting. They will therefore condemn and denounce the forcible breaking-up of the meeting which Mr. Lloyd George was to address in the Birmingham Town Hall. Few more scandalous things have occurred in this generation. The only redeeming feature was the way in which the Mayor and the police stood against the political hooligans. When the authorities join the mob it will be all over with English liberty.

Considering the political color of the riotous mob that broke up Mr. Lloyd George's meeting, it must be admitted that the criticism of the London *Daily Express* took the cake for originality. The headline on its contents-sheet ran: "Pro-Boer Riot at Birmingham." It would be hard to beat that.

A Brescia peasant—so the newspapers say—while eating a pickled eel discovered inside it a large black pearl. He took his find to Milan, and sold it for £1,520. We are afraid that this story is somewhat mythical and smacks of the "Arabian Nights." But things of this sort used to happen really—yes, *really*—in the days of the New Testament. When the Roman tax-collector called upon Jesus for "the usual," that gentleman sent Peter fishing for the cash. Peter caught a fish, opened its mouth, and found inside it the money to pay the taxes for Jesus and himself. That is true—as true as Gospel. Yet the people who believe it rather smile at that wealthy pickled eel.

A Christian gentleman who visited one of the Southern leper settlements gives a very pathetic account of his experiences. He found a number of these horribly afflicted people singing hymns together, and dwelling with fondness on the name of Jesus who "healed lepers" as well as persons suffering from other maladies. Poor creatures! They did not reflect that Jesus doesn't take the trouble to heal lepers now. Nor did they reflect that he promised the same healing power to his true disciples. If one such true disciple exists, he ought to be able to heal all the lepers in the world.

According to the *Chicago American*, our King Edward has found a capital cure for insomnia. He had been troubled with this plague for months, and one night he arose and tried to read Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. In fifteen minutes he found it was impossible to keep his eyes open. Since then he has always kept a copy of that valuable book at his bedside. So runs the Yankee story. But it is rather rough on Carlyle. Are there not some good soporific chapters in the Bible? The genealogies, for instance, where (as the Irish priest said) they go on begetting each other to the end of the chapter.

Mr. Joseph Symes goes for the clericals in a series of Bible extracts at the top of his *Liberator*—or rather right under the title:—

"The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means" (Jeremiah v. 31).

"The prophets commit adultery and walk in lies" (Jeremiah xxiii. 14).

"The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad..... The prophet is a snare and a fowler in all his ways" (Hosea ix. 7, 8).

"The priests teach for hire, and the prophets divine for money" (Micah iii. 11).

"Hearken not unto the words of the prophets" (Jeremiah xxiii. 16).

This is particularly neat. Clericals often cry that they want the Bible and nothing but the Bible. Mr. Symes lets them have it. We hope they like it.

The *Boston Investigator*, the oldest Freethought journal in America, referring to Mr. J. E. Redmond's visit, says that if Ireland is united it is on nothing that concerns the United States. "For any people struggling for liberty," our contemporary says, "we have sympathy and cheers; but the Irish of Ireland have not sense enough to know their enemies. They need to be freed from Rome before they appeal for aid to assist them in getting freedom from England. The Romish priest is now, always was, and always will be, the real enemy of Ireland. It is nonsense to talk about liberty where the Roman Catholic Church dominates the mind. The liberty of Ireland is in the priest's pocket. O'Connell did not liberate Ireland, Parnell did not liberate Ireland, and John E. Redmond, who is a brilliant union of these two famous men, will end just where his predecessors ended, with his unhappy country buried in poverty and superstition. Ireland has been enslaved by the priests and robbed by the landlord. Edward's crown does not weigh as hard upon poor Ireland as does the Pope's tiara.

The Rev. Dr. Downes, of London, preaching recently in a Wesleyan chapel at Keighley, declared that the man or woman who does not believe in God becomes "a withered thing." There never was such a thing as a happy Atheist. Some of them think they are, no doubt; but they are mistaken. Dr. Downes knows better. He understands them better than they understand themselves. When they smile he says, "Ah, they are trying to hide a tear." And as they keep it back he drops one for them. Good Dr. Downes!

"Years ago," said Dr. Downes, "I was at the funeral of the great George Eliot. That funeral was attended by all the leading sceptics in London. I never saw such a company of men who looked to me so sad and melancholy and despairing as those men as they stared into the grave of that woman." Prodigious! Christianity must be true after that—hell and all! Still, the thought occurs to us that a funeral is perhaps not the best function to serve as a test of happiness. You can hardly expect Atheists to dance at a grave and grin over a coffin. Even the Christians, who are so much more cheerful, don't act in that way. We have seen them cry bitterly while the parson was talking of the sure and certain hope of a glorious resurrection. It must be admitted, though, that the traces of these tears are often obliterated at the first public-house outside the cemetery. Christian cheerfulness will assert itself.

Ingratitude to Adam.

MARK TWAIN was asked to contribute to the album of artists' sketches and autograph letters to be raffled for at the Bartholdi Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition, and this is his response, which accompanied his contribution:—

"You know my weakness for Adam, and you know how I have struggled to get him a monument and failed. Now, it seems to me, here is my chance. What do we care for a statue of liberty when we've got the thing itself in its wildest sublimity? What you want of a monument is to keep you in mind of something you haven't got—something you've lost. Very well; we haven't lost liberty, we've lost Adam.

"Another thing: What has liberty done for us? Nothing in particular that I know of. What have we done for her? Everything. We've given her a home, and a good home, too. And if she knows anything, she knows it's the first time she ever struck that novelty. She knows that when we took her in she had been a mere tramp for six thousand years, Biblical measure. Yes, and we not only ended her troubles and made things soft for her permanently, but we made her respectable—and that she hadn't ever been before. And now, after we've poured out these Atlantics of benefits upon this aged outcast, lo! and behold you, we are asked to come forward

and set up a monument to her! Go to. Let her set up a monument to us if she wants to do the clean thing.

"But suppose your statue represented her old, bent, clothed in rags, downcast, shame-faced, with the insults and humiliation of 6,000 years, imploring a crust and an hour's rest for god's sake at our back door?—come, now you're shouting! That's the aspect of her which we need to be reminded of, lest we forget it—not this proposed one, where she's hearty and well fed, and holds up her head and flourishes her hospitable schooner of flame, and appears to be inviting all the rest of the tramps to come over. O, go to—this is the very insolence of prosperity.

"But, on the other hand, look at Adam. What have we done for Adam? Nothing. What has Adam done for us? Everything. He gave us life, he gave us death; he gave us heaven, he gave us hell. These are inestimable privileges—and, remember, not one of them should we have had without Adam. Well, then, he ought to have a monument (for evolution is slowly and surely abolishing him), and we must get up a monument, and be quick about it, or our children's children will grow up ignorant that there ever was an Adam. With trifling alterations, the present statue will answer very well for Adam. You can turn that blanket into an ulster without any trouble; part the hair on one side, or conceal the sex of his head with a fire helmet, and at once he's a man. Put a harp and a halo and a palm branch in the left hand to symbolise a part of what Adam did for us, and leave the fire banked just where it is, to symbolise the rest. My friend, the father of life and death and taxes has been neglected long enough. Shall this infamy be allowed to go on, or shall it stop right here?

"Is it but a question of finance? Behold the enclosed (paid bank) checks. Use them as freely as they are freely contributed. Heaven knows I would there was a ton of them; I would send them all to you, for my heart is in this sublime work!"

"S. L. C."

How Robert Browning Spoilt a Spirit Medium's Trick.

MR. FREDERICK GREENWOOD, in his personal recollections written for the *Realm*, tells the following story:—"Everybody who lives with books has heard that Robert Browning's Sludge the Medium reflected upon Home; and most people have also heard that the celebrated creature succeeded in bringing Mrs. Browning under his influence completely. But the trick that undeceived her we must suppose is not so well known. It may have got into print; but, if so, I for one have never seen it, and tell the story as it was told by Browning himself. Home had been about the Brownings a good deal; knew many people known to them; was, in his tea-party way, an agreeable sort of person; and there were *séances* here and *séances* there, 'and,' said the poet, casting a vague look about the room to express his bewilderment, 'I don't know how it was, I did my best, but little by little he gained her over to believing in him; how much to my distress, imagine!' After a while Home found a yet more excellent way of working on the poor lady's mind. She had lost a little child by death, and, her own wishes running out to embrace the promise, he began to hint that some day he would bring the little one's spirit into her presence. But he was slow in performing this promise—naturally; for otherwise he would have lost the advantage of an excited expectation, often stimulated and as often baffled. At last an evening was named when the mother's yearning should be satisfied. In the customary way light was shut off the room when the three sat down, and the usual rappings, and questionings, and invocations went on for a time, and then—the child's spirit was to appear. And sure enough there did rise above the edge of the table something that was whiter than the dark, that seemed to have a motion of its own and the luminousness of a living thing, and that might veritably be what poor Mrs. Browning fancied it. But, conscious of her trembling state of mind, her husband was in another guess sort of passion. 'I suddenly sprang up, dashed my arm across the table, and took hold of—what do you think? The scoundrel's obscene foot—naked!' The flaming anger in which Browning finished the story—after so many years, too—left no doubt about what happened next to the celebrated medium, Home. He was instantly and literally kicked out of the house, his shoe and stocking after him no doubt."

Yuletide.

All! Gate of gilded air! Yule-tide is come again,
And Time, the filmy curtain, lifts once more;
While he that leaves behind his day well spent
Looks through on visions of most bright intent,
And even he who erst while hoped no more
May view a fair new world where lives no pain.

E. W.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, December 29, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, W.; 7.30, "Hopes and Fears for the Future."

January 5 and 12, Athenæum Hall; 13, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner.

To Correspondents.

CHARLES WATTS'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 24 Carminia-road, Balham, London, S.W.

C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—December 29, Stepney. January 12, Sheffield; 19, Birmingham; 26, Glasgow. February 2, Athenæum Hall, London; 9, Liverpool; 16, Bradford.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.

J. T. EMBLETON.—There has been an adequate reason for the delay. We thought it might have been read between the lines. Our statement has to be supplemented, and we have been waiting for the opportunity to clear away the matter once for all. That opportunity has just presented itself. Counsel's opinion has been taken as to Mr. Anderson's legal liability for those promised Shares. When we write upon that matter—it will be but briefly—we shall say our last word on the Fund for Mrs. Foote. Meanwhile we thank you for your letter.

W. J. MORLEY.—The sentence in our Darwin essay—"This reminds one of Hamlet's 'shadow of a shade'"—was an allusion to both the passages—"shadow of a dream" and a "shadow's shadow." It was a sort of combination of both, and not meant to be a strict quotation. The quotation marks ought not to have been there. Many thanks for your trouble—also for the cuttings.

R. C. N. has left at our office £1 for the Fund for Mrs. Foote.

JOHN ROBINSON.—The French Revolutionists substituted the decade for the week; thus the day of rest came every tenth, instead of every seventh, day. The year was divided into twelve equal months of thirty days. The surplus five days were placed at the end of the year, and the year began on the eleventh of September. The months were called by new poetical names, and the days (in Latin) according to their numerical order.

C. D. STEPHENS.—Thanks for your sympathetic and encouraging letter. Pleased to hear that advancing years but deepen your conviction that Atheism is the only tenable position. Your subscription is handed to Miss Vance. She is better, but a temporarily half-useless left leg is one of the after-effects of her late attack of diphtheria.

E. FARQUHARSON.—Maeterlinck's *Treasury of the Humble, Wisdom and Destiny*, and *The Life of the Bee* are, in our opinion, as beautiful as you find them. He is certainly a master in his way. His subtle ethical perceptions always rest on sanity. He is a thoroughgoing Freethinker, yet he carries the moral ideal beyond the theological ranges. We should enjoy writing upon him, but it must not be done hastily.

"TWO WORLDS."—Glad to see our little joke appreciated in the right spirit. But the name of this journal is the *Freethinker*. You will see that you have misread it; anyhow, you misprint it (p. 841). Accept the compliments of the season. We do not agree with your Spiritualism, any more than you agree with our Atheism; but you are for freedom of thought as we are, and that is a bond of sympathy.

AN article by "Mimnermus" on John Clare the poet stands over till next week for want of space, with some other contributions. Next week's issue will be our new year's number. We shall try to make it specially interesting, and we venture to hope our readers will do their best to put it into circulation among their friends and acquaintances. Some of them, perhaps, will order an extra copy or two for this purpose.

INQUIRER.—No one knows the real date of the birth of Jesus Christ, even if he ever existed. The twenty-fifth of December was the birthday of all the ancient Sun-Gods. The Christians adopted it in the fourth century. By preserving the old festival they found it easier to convert the Pagans.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Book Queries—Liberator—Secular Thought—Keighley News—Boston Investigator.

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.

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

THE *Freethinker* is not as up to date as usual this week. There is a great preponderance of articles over the "broken" matter; which, to many readers, will be like the difference between climbing a rope and walking upstairs. But this has been unavoidable. The last number of the *Freethinker*, dated December 22, was published on the previous Thursday. This number had to be published on the following Monday, in order that the newsagents might have it for distribution *before* Christmas, as *afterwards* would have been too late; for when your Englishman begins Christmasing he doesn't leave off in a hurry. Very little time, therefore, was available for the production of this number; and it must be remembered that, owing to Mr. Neale's illness, Mr. Foote has every bit of the editorial work—including all the paragraphs and answers to correspondents—to do by himself. Moreover, even if there had been more time, most of the "Acid Drops" would have lost their fresh flavor between Monday and Sunday; on the other hand, in the lack of time, there was no opportunity for the "Sugar Plums" to mature. What the reader finds in this line is just what is indispensable, and (besides) just what happened to occur. Next week our New Year's number will resume and sustain our old traditions.

Mr. Foote lectures at the Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court Road, this evening (December 29th). His subject will be "Hopes and Fears for the Future." At the end of the present year, and looking forward to the new one, Mr. Foote proposes to scan the whole horizon of what is called "Progress." Freethinkers should apprise their friends of this lecture. It is likely to be interesting to every section of reformers.

The *Boston Investigator* reproduces "Christianity and Poverty" from Mr. Foote's *Will Christ Save Us? Secular Thought* (Toronto) reproduces one of "Ess Jay Bee's" poems from our columns.

Mr. Horatio Bottomley assures us that the omission of Mr. Foote's name in the *Sun* report of the complimentary dinner to Mr. Holyoake was a sheer accident. By way of amends the *Sun* has printed what it is good enough to call Mr. Foote's "graceful and eloquent letter" in full. As a good many of our readers would like to see it, we reproduce it in the *Freethinker*. It ran as follows: "Dear Sir,—I very much regret to say that I shall be unable to attend the complimentary dinner to Mr. G. J. Holyoake. I am confined to the house at present with one of the common effects of our charming climate, and if I am better by Saturday I must start off to keep an engagement at Liverpool. It would have been a great pleasure to accept your kind invitation, but my absence will not make a noticeable gap at your festive board. There must be so many who are more than ready to do honor to one of the most remarkable men of the nineteenth century. Mr. Holyoake has lived into the twentieth century (one might think) in order to assist in guiding its feet in the right road. That he may still enjoy some years of happy life and faithful service to the cause of light and liberty is the ardent wish of yours truly,—G. W. FOOTE."

London Freethinkers will please note that their Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, takes place at the Holborn Restaurant, on Monday evening, January 13th. The tickets are 4s. each, as usual, and can be obtained at 1 Stationers' Hall Court, E.C., or from any London Branch Secretary. Mr. Foote will preside at the dinner, and will be supported by most of the leading London Freethinkers. After the dinner there will be a few brief speeches and a good musical program. We hope the "saints" will rally in strength on this festive occasion. Some of the more easy-going and indolent ones should see that they buy their tickets in good time. Unless they do this, if the weather on the evening of the dinner is a bit unfavorable, they will never stir out of doors. But they would venture out if they had bought tickets beforehand, and be thankful for it afterwards.

Edgar Allan Poe.

1809-1849.

THE personality of Poe is one that fascinates, even where it fails to please. His portraits remind one of Gautier's *jettatore*; they show us a face of striking beauty, yet not wholly prepossessing—a face comprising potent, but ill-matched, attributes. The forehead is abnormally wide and high; the eyes are large and brilliant; the chin is small; the mouth firm and delicate, like that of a musician. The expression is sad and intensely cynical.

The works of Poe confirm in every detail the impression conveyed by his portrait. The antithesis of Dickens, whom he so greatly admired, he cared little for those genial aspects of life which gave the author of *Pickwick* his happiest inspirations. Poe could be humorous on occasion, but there was no kindness in his wit. He had no appreciation of the jovial and rubicund. There were two themes around which his imagination played continually—Beauty and Death.

The morbid and pathological side of his character found expression in a perverse tendency to "fool" his readers, in a Gallic affection for the horrible, and in a love of what he was pleased to call the *bizarre*. These aspects are indicated in *The Balloon Hoax*, *The Pit and the Pendulum*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. But, whatever his subject, "his genius," as Hannay said, "is always apparent, like the splendor of an Oriental monarch." Poe is known chiefly by his poems, but the grave and measured balance of his prosody is maintained also in his wonderful prose. Read, for example, the final paragraph of *The Masque of the Red Death* :—

"And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all."

Such writing can be compared with nothing in English literature. It is a *genre* by itself. It is like some magnificent Oriental pageant, where one burst of radiance follows another in regular and stately succession. The brilliancy dazzles, while the solemnity appals. . . . Yet the man who could write like that tasted the bitterness of abject poverty, and was never appreciated by the land his genius enriched!

Poe's style is usually pure. But there are rare occasions when he allows the exigencies of the poet to override the rules of syntax. A prominent instance, which I have never seen noticed, occurs in the final verse of *The Raven* :—

And his eyes have all the seeming of a Demon's that is dreaming.

"Demon's" in this case is simply a contraction of "Demon's eyes," and certainly cannot govern a singular verb. But the writer had to choose between committing a solecism and re-writing his most effective verse.

The poetry of Poe is so strangely beautiful that it lingers in the memory like Wagner's chords. To my thinking, there is a quality in his verse that makes him greater than all his contemporaries. For so desperately unconventional an opinion I neither offer nor owe an apology. It is merely another uninvited voice in the always discordant chorus of criticism. Besides, I am writing in the *Freethinker*, where unconventional opinions hold weekly orgy, and only conformity is peculiar.

How far Poe was sincere in his methods cannot be easily decided. In his detective tales, so poorly imitated by Conan Doyle, he offers a possible solution to his own procedure. A pet theory of the hero Dupin is that the best method of hiding a thing is not to hide it at all. A house is ransacked for the purpose of discovering a stolen letter. The police fail completely, and are obliged to consult M. Dupin, who undertakes to succeed. But he does not look under the carpets or take the furniture to pieces; he simply goes to the letter-rack and finds the missing document. In the same way, Poe flaunts what is perhaps an exposure of his own methods in the

readers' eyes. He gives us *Mystification and Diddling Considered as an Exact Science*. And he straightway mystifies us with his *Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar*, and diddles us with the *Balloon Hoax*. He tells us *How to Write a "Blackwood" Article*, showing how easy it is for an ignoramus to interlard his English with foreign phrases; and forthwith he besprinkles his own matter with French, Italian, Spanish, German, Latin, and Greek extracts, nicely distributed.

Many instances might be given wherein Poe wilfully "humbugs" his readers. Was he quite sincere in his displays of erudition? It will be observed that his frequent use of foreign tongues is almost entirely confined to excerpts. There are exceptions in the case of French—a language with which he was obviously well acquainted. But he who knows French half knows Italian, and he who knows French and Italian can read Spanish with a dictionary—just as a knowledge of English and German is a good introduction to Dutch. The amount of knowledge needed for *quoting* purposes is, however, extremely small. It is when the writer attempts to form original phrases, or when he incautiously employs single words that will not accord with the English context,* that he is apt to betray his limitations. Remembering Poe's gratuitous and often inappropriate employment of foreign extracts, we shall take his linguistic pretensions with rather more than a grain of the proverbial salt.

It is extremely doubtful whether Poe had any well-defined views upon religion. He was too vigorous a thinker to be a Christian, and too confirmed a sentimentalist to be an Atheist. If we may take so late a production as *Eureka* as a fair expression of his ideas, we find that Poe has a God—a shadowy conception, it is true, but sufficiently material to serve the purpose of a God. But are we justified in thus considering a work avowedly addressed "to those who feel rather than to those who think—to the dreamers, and those who put faith in dreams as the only realities"?

It will be remembered that his resuscitated mummy had difficulty in understanding the term "creation." "During my time," he said, "I never knew anyone to entertain so singular a fancy as that the universe (or this world, if you will have it so) ever had a beginning at all." As *Some Words with a Mummy* is designed to adumbrate the mental superiority of the ancients, we may take the Mummy's opinions as fairly representing the opinions of the author at the time of writing.

In *The Island of the Fay*, Poe expresses ideas analogous to Pantheism. "We are madly erring through self-esteem," he says, "in believing man, in either his temporal or future destinies, to be of more moment in the universe than that vast 'clod of the valley' which he tills and contemns, and to which he denies a soul for no more profound reason than that he does not behold it in operation."

In *Marginalia lxxvii.*, referring to an "Essay on a Future State," he says: "The pamphlet proves nothing, of course; its theorem is not to be proved." And, again (*lxxvii.*): "On these topics [God and the Soul] the most profound thought is that which can be the least easily distinguished from the most superficial sentiment."

From a general view of his expressed religious ideas, which are always very nebulous and often quite contradictory, I gather that Poe was not a Christian, not a Bibliolater, and not an Atheist. The one thing I fail to discover is what he *was*—or, rather, what definite belief he held. He was a visionary, of course; but whither did his visions tend?

Considered as a stylist, Poe stands among the crowd of American scribblers like an Everest among the Kentish hills. He was the first writer of English to recognise the artistic possibilities of the short story. In poetry he showed the value of the musician's ear. As a critic he was unduly swayed by personality and prejudice; but when these disturbing elements were absent his *dicta* were distinguished by mathematical accuracy and unerring taste. In the contemplation of his marvellous gifts we may well forget his incurable pedantry and his philosophic pose.

* I recently saw the combination, "We lay perdu," in a London monthly.

Amid a life of squalid penury the idealist of Baltimore dreamed gold and crimson dreams. When he died he left many imitators, but no successor. He took his mantle with him. Who, indeed, shall give us another *Assignment*, another *House of Usher*? He squandered the wealth of his glorious imagination while "unmerciful Disaster followed fast and followed faster." When the curtain was falling upon the moving tragedy of his life he refused the wine he had loved too well. "If," said he, "its potency would transport me to the Elysian bowers of the undiscovered spirit world, I would not taste it. Of its horrors who can tell?"

There is contained the key to Poe's failings—and perhaps, also, to his genius. E. R. WOODWARD.

Darwin and Religion.—VIII.

DESIGN.

DARWINISM has killed the Design argument, by explaining adaptation as a result without assuming design as a cause. The argument, indeed, like all "proofs" of God's existence, was based upon ignorance. It was acutely remarked by Spinoza, in his great majestic manner, that man knows that he wills, but knows not the causes which determine his will. Out of this ignorance the theologians manufactured their chaotic doctrine of free-will. Similarly, out of our ignorance of the causes of the obvious adaptations in nature, they manufactured their plausible Design argument. The "fitness of things" was indisputable; and as it could not be explained scientifically, the theologians trotted out their usual dogma of "God did it."

Professor Huxley tells us that physical science has created no fresh difficulties in theology. "Not a solitary problem," he says, "presents itself to the philosophical Theist at the present day which has not existed from the time that philosophers began to think out the logical grounds and theological consequence of Theism."* While in one respect true, the statement is liable to mislead. Adaptation presents no *new* problem—that is undeniable; but the scientific explanation of it cuts away the ground of all teleology. "The teleology," says Huxley, "which supposes that the eye, such as we see it in man, or one of the higher vertebrata, was made with the precise structure it exhibits, for the purpose of enabling the animal which possesses it to see, has undoubtedly received its death-blow." Yet he bids us remember that "there is a wider teleology which is not touched by the doctrine of Evolution, but is actually based upon the fundamental proposition of Evolution. This proposition is that the whole world, living and not living, is the result of the mutual interaction, according to definite laws, of the powers possessed by the molecules of which the primitive nebulousness of the universe was composed."†

Theologians in search of a life-buoy in the scientific storm have grasped at this chimerical support, although the wiser heads amongst them may doubt whether Professor Huxley is serious in tendering it. Surely if eyes were not made to see with the Design argument is dead. What is the use of saying that the materialist is still "at the mercy of the teleologist, who can always defy him to disprove that the primordial molecular arrangement was not intended to evolve the phenomena of the universe"? The very word "arrangement" gives the teleologist all he requires, and the implied assumption that we are "at the mercy" of anyone who makes an assertion which is incapable of proof, simply because he "defies" us to disprove it, is a curious ineptitude on the part of such a vigorous thinker.

When, in 1879, Darwin was consulted by a German student, a member of his family replied for him as follows: "He considers that the theory of Evolution is quite compatible with belief in God; but that you must remember that different persons have different definitions of what they mean by God."‡ Precisely so. You may believe in God if you define him so as not to

contradict facts; in other words, you have a right to a Deity if you choose to construct one. This is perfectly harmless; but what connection has it with the "philosophy" of Theism? There is no definition of God which does *not* contradict facts. Why, indeed, is the theology full of mystery? Simply because it is full of *impasses*, where dogma and experience are in hopeless collision, and where we are exhorted to abnegate our reason and accept the guidance of faith.

Darwin's attitude towards the Design argument is definite enough for such a cautious thinker. In one of his less popular, but highly important works, the first edition of which appeared in 1868, he went out of his way to deal with it. After using the simile of an architect, who should rear a noble and commodious edifice, without the use of cut stone, by selecting stones of various shape from the fragments at the base of a precipice; he goes on to say that "these fragments of stone, though indispensable to the architect, bear to the edifice built by him the same relation which the fluctuating varieties of organic beings bear to the varied and admirable structures ultimately acquired by their modified descendants." The shape of the stones is not accidental, for it depends on geological causes, though it may be said to be accidental with regard to the use they are put to.

"Here we are led to face a great difficulty, in alluding to which I am aware that I am travelling beyond my proper province. An Omniscient Creator must have foreseen every consequence which results from the laws imposed by Him. But can it be reasonably maintained that the Creator intentionally ordered, if we use the words in any ordinary sense, that certain fragments of rock should assume certain shapes so that the builder might erect his edifice? If the various laws which have determined the shape of each fragment were not predetermined for the builder's sake, can it be maintained with any greater probability that He specially ordained for the sake of the breeder each of the innumerable variations in our domestic animals and plants;—many of these variations being of no service to man, and not beneficial, far more often injurious, to the creatures themselves? Did He ordain that the crop and tail-feathers of the pigeon should vary in order that the fancier might make his grotesque pouter and fantail breeds? Did He cause the frame and mental qualities of the dog to vary in order that a breed might be formed of indomitable ferocity, with jaws fitted to pin down the bull for man's brutal sport? But if we give up the principle in one case,—if we do not admit that the variations of the primeval dog were intentionally guided in order that the greyhound, for instance, that perfect image of symmetry and vigor, might be formed,—no shadow of reason can be assigned for the belief that variations, alike in nature and the result of the same general laws, which have been the groundwork through natural selection of the formation of the most perfectly adapted animals in the world, man included, were intentionally and specially guided. However much we may wish it, we can hardly follow Professor Asa Grey in his belief 'that variation has been led along certain beneficial lines, like a stream along definite and useful lines of irrigation.' If we assume that each particular variation was from the beginning of all time preordained, then that plasticity of organisation, which leads to many injurious deviations of structure, as well as the redundant power of reproduction which inevitably leads to a struggle for existence, and, as a consequence, to the natural selection or survival of the fittest, must appear to us superfluous laws of nature. On the other hand, an omnipotent and omniscient Creator ordains everything and foresees everything. Thus we are brought face to face with a difficulty as insoluble as that of free will and predestination."*

Darwin protested that this had met with no reply. What reply, indeed, is possible? Design covers everything or nothing. If the bulldog was not designed, what reason is there for supposing that man was designed? If there is no design in an idiot, how can there be design in a philosopher?

The *Life and Letters* contains many passages less elaborate but more pointed. Here is one:—

"The old argument from Design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered. We can no longer argue that, for instance, the beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell must have been made by an intelligent being like the hinge of a door by man.

* *Life and Letters*, vol. ii., p. 202.

† Vol. ii., p. 201.

‡ Vol. i., p. 307.

* *Variations of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, by Charles Darwin, vol. ii., pp. 427, 428.

There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings, and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows."*

The fit survive, the unfit perish; and the theologian is eloquent on the successes, and silent on the failures. He marks the hits and forgets the misses. Were Nature liable to human penalties, she would have been dished long ago; but she works with infinite time and infinite resources, and therefore cannot become bankrupt.

Here is a passage from a letter to Miss Julia Wedgwood (July 11, 1861) on the occasion of her article in *Macmillan*,

"The mind refuses to look at this universe, being what it is without having been designed; yet where one would most expect design—namely, in the structure of a sentient being—the more I think the less I can see proof design."†

This reminds one of a pregnant utterance of another master-mind. Cardinal Newman says he should be an Atheist if it were not for the voice speaking in his conscience, and exclaims: "If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which comes upon me when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its Creator."‡

Here is another passage from a letter (July, 1860) to Dr. Asa Grey:—

"One word more on 'designed laws' and 'undesigned results.' I see a bird which I want for food, take my gun and kill it. I do this *designedly*. An innocent and good man stands under a tree and is killed by a flash of lightning. Do you believe (and I really should like to hear) that God *designedly* killed this man? Many or most persons do believe this; I can't and don't. If you believe so, do you believe when a swallow snaps up a gnat that God designed that that particular swallow should snap up that particular gnat at that particular instant? I believe that the man and the gnat are in the same predicament. If the death of neither man nor gnat is designed, I see no reason to believe that their *first* birth or production should be necessarily designed."§

Twenty years later, writing to Mr. W. Graham, the author of the *Creed of Science*, Darwin says: "There are some points in your book which I cannot digest. The chief one is that the existence of so-called natural laws implies purpose. I cannot see this."¶

During the last year of his life a very interesting conversation took place between Darwin and the Duke of Argyll. Here is the special part in the Duke's own words:—

"In the course of that conversation I said to Mr. Darwin, with reference to some of his own remarkable words on *Fertilisation of Orchids* and upon *The Earth-worms*, and various other observations he made of the wonderful contrivances for certain purposes in nature, I said it was impossible to look at these without seeing that they were the effect and the expression of mind. He looked at me very hard and said: 'Well, that often comes over me with overwhelming force; but at other times,' and he shook his head vaguely, adding, 'it seems to go away.'"

This is a remarkable story, and the point of it is in the words, "it seems to go away." There is nothing extraordinary in the fact that Darwin, who was a Christian till thirty and a Theist till fifty, should sometimes feel a billow of superstition sweep over his mind. The memorable thing is that at other times his free intellect could not harbor the idea of a God of Nature. The indications of mind in the constitution of the universe were not obvious to the one man living who had studied it most profoundly. Belief in the supernatural could not harmonise in Darwin's mind with the facts and conclusions of science. The truth of Evolution entered it and gradually took possession. Theology was obliged to leave, and although it returned occasionally, and roamed through its old dwelling, it only came as a visitor, and was never more a resident.

G. W. F.

A woman whose husband was blind was asked: "Gin her husband widna feel it dull, no' bein' able to read?" "Na, na," she answered; "he disna feel that. I read the Scriptures to him every day, an' mony's the bit I put in for his guid."

* Vol. i., p. 309.

† Vol. i., pp. 313, 314.

‡ *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, p. 241.

§ Vol. i., pp. 314, 315.

¶ Vol. i., p. 315.

|| Vol. i., p. 316.

Book Chat.

Moral Nerve is the title of a little volume by Dr. Furneaux Jordan, published through Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., Limited. (Gods, what a mouthful!) It is not a book of homilies on honour and courage, but an effort to bring science into the sphere of ethics. Dr. Jordan holds that the theologians, the metaphysicians, and the literary men (yea, and women) have had this sphere too much to themselves; that, in many respects, they have made a sad mess of it; and that it is high time for science to step forward in the name of knowledge—without which reason itself is barren—and put an end to the chaos of the "magicians." Perhaps the book is not as methodical as it might be, but we like it all the better for that. We have had so much of the systematic exposition, beginning at firstly (where we are awake) and ending at seventeenthly (where we are asleep), that we welcome as a most agreeable change the work of a writer like Dr. Jordan, who does not drench us with a deluge of mental milk (so to speak), but skims off the cream and presents it to us in a neat and attractive dish. For there is no denying the fact that this writer, though he sneers at the unscientific verdicts of literary people, has a fine literary taste of his own, wields an admirably terse and effective style, and draws a plethora of illustrations from a wide range of choice reading. He is vivid, epigrammatic, and stimulating. No one who is fit to read him can read him without pleasure. Even when you differ from him you feel it is a live difference. His opposition is a kind of challenge. And this is one of the best signs of a writer's force and sincerity.

* * *

"Brain or nerve," Dr. Jordan says, "is man: all else is merely convenient appendage." This nerve-organisation explains man's intelligence, just as it explains that of the lower animals. Upon those who assert the contrary lies the burden of proof. If matter does not think, then toads and pigs have souls. The average human brain is some forty-nine or fifty ounces. The fifty-ounce brain has few doubts and many credulities, and deals out eternal bliss and eternal misery to all who agree with it or differ from it. The sixty-ounce brain would live, perforce, in a different world—"a world of larger capabilities, wider knowledge, of higher ideals, kindlier conduct, and we may be sure of less confident verdicts." But the growth of brain is a very slow business. That is why man crawls along the path of progress, in spite of religious and political systems. They cannot make him go faster, for speed is a matter of brains, and brains cannot be put into his skull from outside. It has to develop slowly within. To some extent it is mutable; to a larger extent it is stable.

"If the influence of environment were predominant, if the nerve masses which have been found, whether in peoples or in individuals, to be fittest to survive the evolutionary change of twenty million years could be radically changed by the circumstance of twenty years, the reign of chaos and dissolution would certainly begin. The stability of society—nay, the stability of life itself—is based on the very limited mutability of nerve structure and action."

We may add, for our own part, that those who wish may find this great truth worked out in the profound writings of Gustave Le Bon.

* * *

Twenty million years! This goes back to the beginning. And as far back as that Dr. Jordan carries moral nerve. Moral nerve began when society began, and that began before the advent of the *genus homo*. "Broadly speaking," Dr. Jordan says, "society began when two jelly specks existed in place of one, and each speck refrained from injuring the other speck." Morality is nothing more than the action of moral grey-matter (in the brain). It exists everywhere in some degree—even amongst tigers.

"Vital function is the secret of moral obligation. If nerve-action was the only morality of Marcus Aurelius, let us think not less of Marcus Aurelius, but more of nerve and nerve-action. Man should have many reverences—reverences for truth, nature, poetry, art; but his chief reverence should be for the mystic wonderful moral

stuff of our greatest moral characters; for its observance no cathedral is impressive enough, no reverence too instinct with awe."

This is materialism, naturalism—or what you will. By any other name it would be just as sane and noble. The materialist in science can be an idealist in morality; yes, and soar higher than the doctors of the creeds. Dr. Jordan is always ready to "take the cheek" out of these gentlemen.

"The origins of morality and religion are different; even eminent divines have admitted that there is no necessary connection between the two. Morality was from the first essential to the well-being of the living; religion came later, and sprang from fear of the dead or spirits of the dead. Morality is primary, enduring, and fundamental. Supernatural religions are parasitic and transitory—transitory in relation to evolutionary time. They arise in the early stages of civilisation, and, in evolving peoples at least, decline in the more advanced stage."

"One massive truth," Dr. Jordan says in his Preface, "is the uninterrupted decay of supernatural beliefs. Evil spirits, witches, miracles, and even 'immaterial entities,' call for no disproof; they simply, one after another, cease to be credible." And this decay goes on side by side with the growth of morality. Those who talk about the value of supernaturalism in ethics never face the facts. Murderers, thieves, drunkards, as well as paupers and lunatics, are mostly unhesitating believers in supernaturalism. Science is the elevator as well as the illuminator.

"For many centuries men were skilled in the arts; they sang, and painted, and carved, and built cathedrals; for many centuries men were devout, they prayed, and fasted, and wept, and worshipped—but they remained cruel: then Science came and opened their eyes, and they saw that the chief evil of the past had been Cruelty, and that the brightest promise of the future was Kindness."

"Supernatural revelations," as Dr. Jordan elsewhere observes, "embitter, divide, and foster persecution; natural or scientific revelations soften, unite, tolerate."

* * *

Dr. Jordan scoffs at the notion that there is any real hostility between science and idealism. He admits that if he had to choose between telescopes, crucibles, geological spades, and dissecting knives, on the one side; and, on the other side, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Burns, and Tennyson; he would probably elect the latter. "But why," he asks, "may we not enjoy with Wordsworth, and understand with Darwin?" Ay, why not? Astronomy does not destroy the majesty of the heavens, nor geology the glory of the hills; a rainbow, or a sunset, is not less beautiful to a scientist than to a clodhopper; anatomy does not impair our admiration for the bodily perfections of a Diane de Fontenoy or a Sandow; nor, to take what would commonly be called a lower illustration, does physiology damp the vigor of a good appetite, or chemistry the relish of a splendid wine.

* * *

We venture to say that Dr. Jordan understands poetry far better than most of the supernaturalists who foolishly sneer at naturalism as "unpoetical"—just as though there were no poetry but fairy-tales! Here is a passage which shows that he has gone to the heart of the matter. "It is because it contains emotional elements," he says, "that poetry cannot be completely defined; the feelings would cease to be feelings if they could be expressed in terms of intellect."

* * *

Poetry leads naturally to Shakespeare. Dr. Jordan has two or three incidental passages on the greatest of poets. "All dramatists wish," he says, "or struggle, in a sense, but struggle in vain, to be Shakespeares: only one dramatist had Shakespeare's marvellous brain—and he did *not* struggle—greatly to Thomas Carlyle's surprise." Not being bitten with the craze for literary mare's-nests, Dr. Jordan does not seek about for some Baconian theory of Shakespeare. Holding that the brain is the man, he looks at Shakespeare's head—and also at his heredity. "Perhaps no portrait in existence," he says, "reveals to us a healthy head so large above the eyes and ears as Shakespeare's, and therefore we

are not surprised that he did what he did." Indeed, he might have done even better (Dr. Jordan thinks) in more favorable conditions. "His brain," it is remarked, "was so large that probably many portions of it were never brought into use." It was no doubt "inherited from many generations of the cultured and capable Arden line of ancestors—his mother's line." Dr. Jordan dwells very justly on the extraordinary blindness of biographers. When they do not see that their hero's qualities were inherited from his father, they give the problem up as one of God's or nature's mysteries. They forget that everybody has two parents, and that a man's intellect is as often as not inherited from his mother. We might say that Shakespeare's mother was the greatest woman in the world. Mrs. Browning is the first of our poetesses; but producing Shakespeare was a far greater thing than writing *Aurora Leigh*.

* * *

We are tempted to give a few specimens of Dr. Jordan's own "literary verdicts." He says of John Stuart Mill—truly enough, as we think—that it was his "misfortune that he did his work before the significance of the evolutionary principle was clearly recognised." "Carlyle," he says, "was in fact a scold by nerve-organisation, though a scold on a magnificent scale." No surroundings could have kept Emerson from "wandering into cloudland." Turning to a non-literary character, it is said of Napoleon that he was "the victim of abnormal nerve-organisation," probably the result of a nerve ailment in infantile life, which left "intellectual nerve in enormous excess and normal nerve in very dwarfed proportion." But is not this, to a large extent, guesswork? And is it quite accurate to say of Napoleon that he had "no single ideal, no desire, no aversion, no reverence, which did not relate to his own personality"? We think this is at least very debateable.

* * *

Dr. Jordan closes with a most interesting and suggestive chapter on "The Evolution of the Direct Man." The average brain (he says) is indirect; a brain of indirect methods, hazy ideas, and timid conclusions. The direct brain—critical, testing, inquiring, discriminative, and firm—is gradually coming into existence. And it leads to calmness instead of feverish life. Health is better now than it used to be; life is longer, bodily stature is greater. Science, under the appearance of complexity, tends to the simplification of existence. "The future," as Dr. Jordan reads it, "gives ample promise of a still simpler life, a life too—though much will depend on individual nerve-organisation—of slighter labor, longer repose, and quieter meditation." Dr. Jordan is a real thinker; we hope he is also a true prophet.

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The tendency of most doctrines is to be very narrow, and the loyalty for a particular church is "bred in the bone," as a certain little Memphis boy bears witness. His mother was telling him of the childhood of Christ, and in the course of her story said that Christ was a Jew. The little fellow looked up at her in wide-eyed astonishment, and said, in an awed voice: "Why, mother, I always thought that the Lord was a Presbyterian."—*Memphis Scimeter*.

"Did you ever get religion?" asked the revivalist. "Well, I should say so—138 pounds of it," replied the man. "A hundred and thirty-eight pounds of religion?" cried the revivalist. "How did you get that?" "The only way that a good many men ever get religion," was the reply. "I married it."—*Chicago Post*.

Mamma: "Once upon a time there was a goose that laid golden eggs—" Little Eddie (interrupting): "Is we to believe this story, mamma?" Mamma (amused): "Just as you please, dear." Little Eddie (with a sigh of relief): "Oh! I thought perhaps it was a Bible story."

"I tell you," exclaimed the slim individual, "that water is God's greatest gift to man." "Are you a Prohibitionist?" asked a bystander, taking him cordially by the hand. "No, sir," was the contemptuous reply; "I sell milk."

Johnnie—"Say, pop, can I go fishing?" Father—"No, Johnnie; it's Sunday." Johnnie—"Can I go to-morrow?" Father—"Yes, and I guess I'll go with you. I feel just like taking a day off. You start right to work digging the worms."

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

LONDON.

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

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Hopes and Fears for the Future."
NORTH CAMBERWELL HALL (61 New Church-road): 7.30, A lecture.

EAST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Stanley Temperance Bar, 7 High-street, Stepney, E.): 7, C. Cohen, Christ, Christians, and Christmas."

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (78 Libra-road, Old Ford, E.): 7, No lecture.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Surrey Masonic Hall): 7, Children's Christmas Festival.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Hyde Park): Lectures every Thursday at 7.30 p.m.; Sundays at 11.30 a.m.

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, W. J. Ramsey.

COUNTRY.

BELFAST ETHICAL SOCIETY (York-street Lecture Hall): 3.45, J. H. Gilliland, "Christ and Modern Criticism."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms): 7, A lecture.

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

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class—Business meeting; 6.30, Annual Children's Party.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Humberstone-gate): 6.30, Mrs. K. Bruce Glasier, "A Peep at the Inner Life of Japan."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, S. Reeves, "Trusts and the State."

MANCHESTER (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road): 6.30, A lecture.

HULL (No. 2 Room, Friendly Societies' Hall, Albion-street): 7, Recreative evening.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Capt. Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, "Religion and Labor."

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