

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXII.—No. 52.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 28, 1902.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

*Let truth and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth
put to the worse in a free and open encounter?*

—MILTON.

The Great Christmas Fairy Tale.

CHRISTMAS is the time when pointed attention is drawn to "the incarnation of the Son of God." Men, women, and children are all asked to let their minds dwell reverently upon one of the strangest stories in the world. Even to men and women its central feature is necessarily more or less "suggestive." How awkward and perplexing must it be, then, to children. But this does not disturb the serenity of orthodox teachers. They have lost, if they ever had, a proper sensibility in such matters; and they have no feeling of humor left in them. How else could they insist on every boy being taught the ten commandments, in which he is warned against committing adultery, and told not to covet his neighbor's wife?

What, in brief, is this strangest story in the world? It relates the birth of a boy, who had a mother but no father—which some think is only half a miracle at the best. His reputed father had nothing whatever to do with his introduction to the human family. He was begotten of the Holy Ghost—to use the language of the creeds—and his mother was a virgin to the end of the chapter. Catholics say she was a virgin to the end of her life; although, according to the Gospels, she appears to have had a numerous offspring. But what does that matter? One miracle is as hard as a dozen, and a dozen are as easy as one.

There are Christians who try to minimise this particular miracle, and affect to believe that the birth of Jesus was no violation of the laws of nature. This has been asserted by Dr. Fremantle, the Dean of Ripon, and we are looking forward to his promised explanation. It has been suggested by Bishop Gore, of Worcester, who quotes Huxley's reference to "virgin procreation" as an "ordinary phenomenon for the naturalist." So it is, but very far down in the organic scale. One hardly knows whether the Bishop is ignorant or impudent. Perhaps he is a mixture of both. Besides, there is no such thing as "virgin procreation" about the birth of Jesus. It is not pretended that Mary brought him into existence by a process of self-fecundation; on the contrary, it is distinctly stated that a supernatural operation was performed upon her. What it was is like the peace of God—it passes all understanding; but the co-operation of the Holy Ghost is not merely hinted, it is positively affirmed; and it is quite inconsistent with all this slippery talk about "virgin procreation."

The great Christmas fairy tale is not to be explained by playing fast and loose with biology. Its real explanation is that it was a commonplace of ancient mythology. Christianity borrowed it, and to a large extent we are able to see how the borrowing was accomplished.

Outside the opening of the first and third Gospels there is no reference in the New Testament to the miraculous birth of Jesus; and there is no trace of

the existence of these Gospels until more than a hundred years after the events related in them are said to have happened. The probability is that every book in the New Testament was made up from pre-existing material which has been lost, or perhaps was deliberately destroyed. But the "make up" was not so skilful as to hide all traces of earlier beliefs and impressions. Hence it is that the Gospels themselves give the lie to the Gospel story of the virgin birth of Christ.

First of all, it is clear that neither the family of Jesus, nor his fellow citizens, had the slightest notion that he came into the world in an extraordinary manner. The Jews ask "Is not this the carpenter's son?" They do not appear to have heard of *any* of the wonderful circumstances which were afterwards told of his birth. They thought him a man like other men; and they would not have put him to death if they had thought he was a supernatural being.

In the second place, the first Apostles did not preach the virgin birth of Christ. Why? Because they were ignorant of it. Bishop Gore admits that, although they were commissioned by Jesus to preach the gospel and found the Church, they "had no knowledge given them to start with of his miraculous origin." But why did not Jesus tell them such an important fact? Because he did not know it himself.

In the third place, there is a curious sentence, put into the mouth of Mary, and indiscreetly left there in the official edition of the Life of Christ, which settles the whole matter, and disposes of the Christmas fairy tale by an act of supreme and incontestable authority. Joseph and Mary missed Jesus on their way home from Jerusalem when he was twelve years old. Returning to the Holy City, they found him in the Temple, precociously disputing with the doctors of divinity. And what did Mary say? "I and thy father," she said, "have sought thee sorrowing." In the presence of Joseph, therefore, she told Jesus that he was his father. Surely this is conclusive. On such a point she was certainly the best authority. And her word comes on the top of all the other evidence. It crowns the demonstration of the falsity of the Christmas fairy tale. Joseph never said it was true; the rest of the family lent it no countenance; the Jews never heard of it; the Apostles, who had lived with Jesus for three years, started on their mission to convert the world without the slightest knowledge of it; and Mary in effect denied it. Here then is the most extraordinary concurrence of all the persons who could, would, or should have known the facts of the case. There is not a single note of contrariety. All agree that Jesus was a natural man as far as his birth was concerned. And the person who runs counter to their united testimony is either a fool who can swallow any wonder, or an impostor who wants to practise upon the credulity of his fellow men.

Christians are quite unable to *realise* the truth of this fairy tale. They declare that God is a spirit, and they celebrate his incarnation by drinking whiskey. Christ came into the world to save sinners—from hell, you know; and Polly, who teaches in a Sunday-school, commemorates the fact with "a small port." And they call this religion, and beg Freethinkers to respect it.

G. W. FOOTE.

A New "Religio Medici."

It is a little over two centuries and a half since Sir Thomas Browne enriched English literature with his *Religio Medici*. A storehouse of curious ideas, quaint observations, and here and there a shrewd analysis of some aspects of human nature, the work captivates all real readers by the beautiful balance of its sentences and scholarly charm of its diction. But there was another reason why, in the seventeenth century, the expressed opinions of a medical man on religion were of importance. "In every three doctors there are two Atheists" was then a generally accepted belief; and, as the profession of medicine and surgery had long been connected with open or veiled hostility to the Church, there was probably much to justify the adage. For the association of the Church with medical science had been pretty nearly all of a kind—and a bad kind. To pry into the secrets of the human body by means of dissection had been denounced by the early Christians and anathematised by the Church. Disease should be supernaturally cured, as it was supernaturally caused. Besides, seeking health from doctors meant diverting gifts from the Church for prayers and relics; and so both ignorance and credulity combined to throw a suspicion of heresy upon the practice of medicine.

A few months ago a new *Religio Medici* appeared in the pages of the *Fortnightly Review* by that eminent surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson. This has now been revised, and makes its appearance in book form, as the confession of faith of a scientific veteran.* That it will give satisfaction to the Christian world is not very likely, although there are certain parts of it which, in default of getting something better, will be seized upon to prove that the writer, at all events, believed in a kind-of-a-sort-of-a-something. For both these reasons the booklet is worthy of more than a passing notice—especially as the author tells us the subject has engaged his attention for over twenty years.

Sir Henry divides his little treatise into two parts. The first is devoted to answering the question, "What has man acquired during his long career by the so-called supernatural revelations?" the second contains certain inferences which he draws from the phenomena around. The first question is answered by a review of man's progress from the semi-animal stage onwards, a survey which has the inevitable result of showing that "man has, throughout a long and very gradual course of development from his prehistoric origin, acquired all his stores of natural knowledge—in its widest sense—solely by his own unaided efforts"; and, further, that the accounts contained in "divine" revelations "respecting the origin of the entire universe, especially that of the earth, including man himself and his duties to an alleged creator, and asserting the existence of a future endless state of rewards and punishments for every individual after death, has never been substantiated, and is, in fact, unsupported by evidence."

For all practical purposes this disposes of religion altogether. If man never has received any help from his religious beliefs—Sir Henry Thompson might with truth go further, and say that he *has* suffered much injury by them—if all his arts and sciences and inventions have been elaborated by unaided human effort, what, then is the value of religion? Its value is a minus quantity. And, as the case stands, the mere fact of it *not* having been of assistance at once constitutes it a source of injury. For religious belief has been operative at all periods of human history; it has utilised man's efforts and usurped his energies; and that it has done this is enough to substantiate the charges brought against religion by its enemies. For the natural difficulties fronting man in his attempts to frame order out of the chaos around were intensified by the pseudo-explanations offered by religion, and their existence long prevented, and does prevent still, his arriving at more accurate ideas on himself and the world.

But Sir Henry Thompson's studies, while they have had the effect of "conferring emancipation from the fetters of all the creeds," has also brought "unshakable confidence in the Power, the Wisdom, and the Beneficence which pervade and rule the Universe." He believes in a "source of Infinite and Eternal Energy from which all things proceed." Abstract words printed with capital letters have a fatal attraction for some people; but what exactly does such a phrase mean? Does "things" mean the universe as it appears in relation to an organism, and energy as it is out of such relation? If so, then we have only the old distinctions between phenomenon and noumenon, between the absolute and the relative. But, then, what about the "source" of this "Infinite and Eternal Energy"? Clearly "things" cannot be one thing and infinite energy another. The universe of sound, color, form, cold and heat, *is* this infinite and eternal energy, and things do not "proceed" from it—they are it. And then, how can we have a "source"? Is it not remarkable that any educated man can write down such a phrase as "the source of Infinite and Eternal Energy" without seeing that it is a suicidal expression? If the energy is infinite and eternal, any "source" is out of the question. If there is a source, then the energy is not infinite and eternal; if it is infinite and eternal, you cannot have a source for it. Unquestionably the habit of writing of infinite and eternal from which all things proceed sets up a conception of dualism where none should exist. Two aspects of the same thing are converted into two independent existences, and the foundations laid for much of the hazy Theism current in educated circles.

I have pointed out that Sir Henry believes that man's progress from savagery to civilisation is due entirely to his own unaided efforts. The obvious conclusion from this would be either that there is no supernatural, or that it is not concerned with man's welfare. The writer, however, sees in this "a signal illustration not only of the wisdom, but especially of the beneficence of the great source we are studying." He admits that this is not the first thought suggested by a study of the universe, but we change our opinion when we reflect that through a constant struggle man has received the best of all possible education—he has been self-taught. This point is emphasised in several parts of the essay, and the writer seems quite oblivious to the fallacy contained in such a statement.

First of all, it may be pointed out, that to say man is self-educated is only true in a very qualified sense. It is true that the *race* has acquired its education by a constant conflict with nature, but Sir Henry's statement clearly applies to the *individual*, and the same statement is not true here in the same degree. For the greater part of any present individuals' education is not acquired, but inherited. We do not discover the qualities of foods or minerals, the configuration of land and water, the nature of steam or other forces by personal experience; these are discovered for us, and the measure of inherited knowledge becomes greater with each generation. Now if knowledge gained independent of experience is a good thing for individuals now living—and no one doubts this, why would not the same thing hold true of man in his earliest stages? The great thing is to acquire the information; whether we do this by painful experience on our own part, or by listening to some better informed person matters very little. Besides, on a wider issue, if a revelation were given by some deity to man, the reception of the revelation does become part of one's experience, and thus the plea that revelation would not have educated man falls to the ground.

Again, in what sense is it true that experience is the best teacher? Only in the sense that this enables one to realise with greater certainty and clearness the essential meaning of things. But if one could get the same clearness of vision minus the experience, there would be time and trouble saved, and everyone would be pleased at this discovery of a royal road to learning. Now the essence of the

* *The Unknown God*. F. Warne & Co. 1s. net.

Atheistic argument on this subject is, not that experience does not teach, or that *under existing circumstances* it is not a good thing, but that, with "Power, Wisdom, and Beneficence" at work, this long roundabout method of instruction might have been avoided; and, as a matter of fact, man does, as I have pointed out, curtail the process considerably. Experience is no good in itself, but only in relation to a certain end, and where that end can be realised without experience, so much the better.

Sir Henry Thompson himself remarks on the agonising tortures that would have been spared people had some revelation given to man an earlier knowledge of anæsthetics. Here is an instance where no useful end could possibly be subserved by withholding information. No one will pretend that any sort of good was done by thousands of people undergoing painful operations without any kind of effective anodyne to their sufferings. Here is at least a case where "divine" interference could have taken place without at all demoralising man's general education. For this is an instance where the issue is perfectly plain and unmistakable. If man's education is bettered by suffering under a surgical operation, then the discovery of anæsthetics by man must be treated as a frustration of the "divine" purpose. And if man's education is not promoted by it, then there is here a clear case of gratuitous suffering, even on Sir Henry Thompson's own hypothesis. It is true that he does put in a half-hearted kind of an apology that some believe that acute and long-continued suffering has a beneficial effect upon the sufferer, leading him to exercise sympathy towards others. If this defence is sound, one can only reply that the use of anæsthetics spells loss of sympathy; and, secondly, that it is too much to ask us to see benevolence in an arrangement that *invents* suffering as a means of exciting sympathy.

There is a final word to be said on the theory that this "Unknown God" is manifesting beneficence in letting man educate himself. If this conduct is wise and beneficent in God, why should it not be the same in man? Now, Sir Henry Thompson is a distinguished member of a profession in which, I believe, it is the rule that a discovery of any method of diminishing pain or curing disease shall be made public for the benefit of fellow-practitioners, and, through them, the community at large. What would Sir Henry think of a brother medico who, after long study and observation, discovered a means of curing cancer, but who kept the method to himself on the grounds that each doctor should "overcome every obstacle himself," and thus pass through "an educational course of the most perfect kind"? If such conduct is admirable on the part of God, why should we consider it unadmirable on the part of man?

The plain truth is, I imagine, that Sir Henry Thompson's "Unknown God" is, to use Mr. Frederic Harrison's excellent phrase, the ghost of his former religion. He may have become "emancipated from the fetters of all the creeds," but their influence clings around him still. All this talking and writing of an "Infinite and Eternal Energy"—with capital letters—is as clearly a remnant of Christian theology as Christian theology is a remnant of savagism. Sir Henry Thompson is to be congratulated on having given up so much, and still more is to be praised for having published the fact of his surrender. His doing so will help others to give up even the little religion that is contained in his essay.

C. COHEN.

Ananias wiped the burning brimstone from his beard, and turned to the latest arrival.

"Strange," he said, "very strange. You state that you lied all through, and, instead of being struck dead for it, you were presented with £500 to set up a laundry.

"It is a fact," remarked the lady. "You see, I was housemaid to a wealthy lady whose husband wished to divorce her."

Overhearing the conversation, and feeling that both Ananias and his wife had lived too soon, Satan reduced the allowance of brimstone-broth doled out to Ananias and his frau daily by ninety-nine per cent.

E. J. M.

Christ's Birthday.

"Not only do we date our time from the exact year in which Christ is said to have been born, but our ecclesiastical calendar has determined with scrupulous minuteness the day, and almost the hour, at which every particular of Christ's wonderful life is stated to have happened. All this, is implicitly believed by millions; yet all these things are among the most uncertain and shadowy that history has recorded. We have no clue to either the day or the time of year, or even the year itself, in which Christ was born."—REV. DR. GILES, *Christian Records* (p. 194).

"There are more than one hundred and thirty opinions concerning the year of his nativity, and the day of it has been placed by men of equal learning in every month of the year. There is a like variety of opinions concerning the time of his crucifixion."—REV. R. ROBINSON, *History and Mystery of Good Friday*.

IN a former article* it has been shown how the Gospels contradicted themselves as to the time of the birth of Christ, Matthew placing it "in the days of Herod the king," who died 4 B.C., and Luke "when Cyrenius was Governor of Syria" (6 A.D.)—a discrepancy of ten years. Many learned men have wasted much valuable time and loaded many shelves in the attempt to reconcile these conflicting statements and bring the result into agreement with the still more stubborn facts of historical chronology. The net result has been that the best authorities have given it up as utterly insoluble. The learned Mosheim admits that—

"The year in which it happened has not hitherto been fixed with certainty, notwithstanding the deep and laborious researches of the learned on that matter."†

The best and most impartial ecclesiastical historian, Gieseler, declares that "the day of birth cannot be determined."‡ Hadyn observes of Christmas: it is "a festival in commemoration of the nativity of Christ, the exact time of which is quite unknown."§ We append a list of the results arrived at by the best authorities on the subject, which reaches from nineteen years before our era to three years after. According to the learned German, W. D. Block, who devoted a treatise to the subject, Christ was born B.C. 19; Munter, Ideler, Winer, and *L'Art de Vérifier les Dates*, B.C. 7; Kepler, Pagi, Dodwell, B.C. 6; Chrysostom, Hales, Blair, Clinton, B.C. 5; Sulpicius, Usher, Lempriere, Wieseler, Renan, B.C. 4; Clement of Alexandria, Irenæus, Cassiodorus, B.C. 3; Eusebius, Jerome, Epiphanius, Orosius, Scaliger, B.C. 2; Chronicle Alexandria, Tertullian, Dionysius, Luther, 1; Norisius and Herwart, A.D. 1; Paul of Middelburg, A.D. 2; Lydiat, A.D. 3. This list, of course, does not pretend to be exhaustive; but it will serve to show what inextricable confusion the whole subject is involved in, even to the learned world.

Perhaps the believer, after relinquishing the year of the Nativity, thinks he can still retain the festival of Christmas as the authentic time of the year when Christ was born. He is mistaken, as there is more diversity of opinion—if that is possible—upon this point than upon the other. We take the liberty of citing a Christian journal upon the point. After stating that it is certain the event did not happen on the 25th of December, it goes on:—

"Matthew begins to say, 'Now when Jesus was born'; but when was that? Lightfoot says it was in September, Newcombe in October, Paulus in March, Wieseler in February, Lichtenstein in June, Greswell in April, Clinton in spring, Lardner and Robinson in autumn, Strong in August. Those who have studied the matter have lost themselves all over the almanac for their pains; but, at any rate, not a student amongst them imagines it possible that the shepherds and their flocks were freezing by night out of doors in December. As to the date, certainly the popular date is incorrect by at least four years."||

It is a popular—but quite erroneous—idea that there is no winter in Palestine. The same journal dealing with the same subject in December, 1887, a correspondent wrote to the editor, confirming his views from personal experience. He says:—

"An experience of several winters in Jerusalem con-

* "The Gospels Tested by History," *Freethinker*, June 22, 1902.

† *Ecclesiastical History*, chap. iii.

‡ *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. i., p. 54.

§ *Dictionary of Dates*. Article "Christmas." Edition 1892.

|| *Christian Commonwealth*, December 10, 1891.

vinced me that shepherds 1,800 years ago would not expose themselves and their flocks in the open at night at this season, any more than shepherds do now; for, instead of this, they are careful to herd their flocks in walled and sheltered enclosures. At one time we had a fall of ten inches of snow, and within a week another of six inches; and there was more or less every winter."

It is known that there has been no change in the climate in Palestine within historical times. Professor Socin, in his description of the country, says: "Of course, it was the same in antiquity; climate, rainfall, fertility, and productiveness cannot have seriously altered."*

As a matter of fact, the Gospels give no clue as to the time of the year of the Nativity; and the early Christians having no birthday for their new God, they appropriated the birthday of the gods of antiquity. Christmas Day was the birthday of the sun-gods, and most appropriately so, for after that date the days begin to lengthen, the light increases, the darkness decreases; the sun of life, gathering strength from day to day, goes forth conquering and to conquer, symbolising to the ancients the triumph of the powers of light over the powers of darkness, the eternal warfare of Ormuz and Ahriman. The very name the worshippers of Mithra gave the day, "*Natalis Solis Invicta*," or "Birthday of the Victorious Sun," reveals the symbolism by which the processes of nature are turned to the uses of religion. Gibbon says:—

"The Romans, as ignorant as their brethren of the real date of his birth, fixed the solemn festival to the 25th of December, the Brumalia, or winter solstice, when the Pagans annually celebrated the birth of the sun."†

As the evidence of the great Gibbon may be objected to on the score of his not being a believer, we may cite the testimony of that learned son of the Church, the Roman Catholic Professor François Lenormant, who says:—

"The rites of the festival in honor of the new birth of the young sun, as celebrated by the Sarraceni, according to St. Epiphanius, when at midnight they entered the subterranean sanctuary, whence the priest presently came forth, crying: 'The Virgin hath brought forth; the light is about to begin to grow again.' This ceremony took place each year on the 25th of December, the day of the *Natalis Solis Invicta*, in the Oriental worship of the sun, engrafted at Rome in the third century; the day of the festival of the Awakening of Melkarth, at Tyre; the day, likewise, for celebrating the great Persian festival of Mithra, when he was born of a stone in the depth of a dark grotto. We know that it was felt to be expedient to uproot these essentially popular festivals by substituting for them a festival applicable to the new religion; and therefore the heads of the Church in the West fixed upon the 25th day of December, in the beginning of the fourth century, for the celebration of the birth of Christ, the exact anniversary being unknown."‡

Mr. C. W. King, an acknowledged authority on Mithraism and Gnosticism, says:—

"The old festival held on the 25th day of December in honor of the 'Birthday of the Invincible One' [Mithra], and celebrated by the Great Games of the Circus, was afterwards transferred to the commemoration of the birth of Christ, of which the real day was, as the Fathers confess, totally unknown."§

He also cites St. Chrysostom, who, writing on the subject in the year A.D. 390, says:—

"On this day also the birth of Christ was lately fixed at Rome, in order that, whilst the heathens were busy with their profane ceremonies, the Christians might perform their holy rites undisturbed."||

It was also the birthday of Horus, Bacchus, and Buddha, and was observed as a festival in the Osirian and Adonisian Mysteries.

Christians are apt to ask us why we enjoy ourselves on the day of their Lord's birth; but, as we have

seen, they have no patent rights to the day. They stole it from the ancients; and we ask them, with Shelley, to "Leave *Mammon* and *Jehovah* to those who delight in wickedness and slavery—their altars are stained with blood or polluted with gold, the price of blood. But the shrines of the *penates* are good wood fires, or window-frames intertwined with creeping plants; their hymns are the purring of kittens, the hissing of kettles, the long talks over the past and dead, the laugh of children, the warm wind of summer filling the quiet house, and the pelting storm of winter struggling in vain for entrance."**

WALTER MANN.

Mr. Dooley on Explosive Christianity.

"THEY'RE beginnin' doynamoitin' agin in London (England)," said Mr. Dooley.

"Hurroo!" shouted Mr. Hennessey. "Oi knew that the Oirish wud niver sit quiet undher Saxon insult an' provocation. Iviry day av me loife Oi see mesilf nayer the toime whin the scripture shall be fulfilled an' opprission shall cease enthoirely; an' the opprissor shall squirm undher the foot av the oppressed."

"Whisht awhoile, Hinnissey," said Mr. Dooley. "It isn't the Oirish that's doin' the doynamoitin', it's the British."

"The murtherin' spalpeens;" cried Mr. Hennessey. "An' are they so lost to shame an' decency, an' marcy, an' humanity that they'd hurrul the innocint chold an' the unborn babe aloive into itarnity, with niver a momint's grace to confiss their loiflong sins to the priesht, an' receive comfort an' absolution on their dithbids. Och; Whirra! whirra! An' what's the wurruld a-comin' to, at all, at all!"

"An' it's the clargy that's doin' the blowin' up," continued Mr. Dooley.

"Hivins above!" ejaculated the horrified Mr. Hennessey. "Is it iver possible that the same man that ilivates the Howst in the mornin', shud ilivate London in the afternoon."

"Ye're wrang there, Hinnissy," corrected Mr. Dooley; "it's the *Prothistint* clargy that Oi'm afther spakin' av. It's a *Prothistint* parson that's explodin' the country."

"Is that it?" remarked Mr. Hennessey, draining his glass. "An' who is the murtherin' vagabond?"

"It's the Riverind Gearge Marthin," explained Mr. Dooley. "Ye see it's jist loike this. The King av England, that wud be a rale foine broth av a bhoy if he wuz'nt a king an' a *Sassnach*, he sid he'd make a progriss round London with the Queen, an' the Knave, an' the Ace, an' the howl pack av thim. An' he spicially wantid to visit the South av London an' see the Iliphint with the Castle an his back, an' the obilisk, an' obsarve the loife av the locality, an' the way they knocked thim in the Owld Kint Rowd. An' they invoited him to go through loyal Batthersea; but he siz, siz he, Oi'll see John Burruns in Thra-falgar Square, an' Lorrud Batthersea (bicause Batthersea wuz so attached to the House av Lorruds, that they insisted an namin' a rale loive Lorrud afther it), an' if Oi go through any sthreet in Batthersea, siz he, they're so ixthravagintly loyal that they'll be for diggin' the sthreet up an' puttin' it undher glass, so Oi shan't go, siz he; because thin they won't have any sthreet to walk an thimsilves, siz he. An' so they laid out the root av the King's procession, an' omitted Batthersea."

"Oi see," interrupted Mr. Hennessey. "They troid to blow up the King bicause he wuddn't go through Batthersea."

"Are yez explainin' this thing, or am Oi?" said Mr. Dooley, fiercely. "Ye go askin' quistions loike the impty-hidded, ignorint *omadhaun* that ye are; an' thin whin Oi throy to till ye, ye keep intherruptin', an' exhibitin' shtill more av yer natural foolishness, that ye're always increasin' with whiskey."

* *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Article "Palestine."

† *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, chap. xxii.

‡ *Beginnings of History*, p. 263.

§ *The Gnostics and their Remains*, p. 119.

|| *Ibid.*, p. 109.

* *Shelley's Letters*.

"It's yer own whiskey, Mister Dooley," replied Mr. Hennessey. "An' ye dhrink it yerself; an' it doesn't bring out any foolishness in yer father's son, be jabbers. Begorra! Oi dhrink yer whiskey, Misther Dooley, in the howp av buildin' up as foine an intillict as yer own, Mister Dooley."

"Ye can't build without a foundation," growled Mr. Dooley, very little mollified by this flattery. "But as Oi wuz a-tellin ye, they marked out the line av the King's percission, and they put flags to rowpe the course, an' they threw down gravel to hurrt anyone that fill down an it. An' in the streets there were saloons an' there were churches; an' they lift the saloons alowne bicause people wint inside for refreshment, but nobody iver wantid to go into the churches if they could help it; and so they built barricades av lumber outside thim, an' put up sates to see the King's procission; an' advertoid: 'SATES TO LIT. ALL CONVAYNIENCIS. PROIVATE BAR AT THE BACK. PING PONG WHOILE YE'RE WAITIN'. IF NO PROCISSION, MONEY RETURNED.' An' all wuz mirry as a marriage bill. But ye moind, Hinnissy, whin the Lorr'd God made Paradoise there wuz the Divil waitin' outside, and wurritin' himsilf at seein' so much enj'ymint, an' schemin' out a plan to make mankind misirable for iver an' iver. An' in South London, too, there wuz a clargyman, the Riverind Marthin, marruchin' up an' down an' throyin' how he could prothist agin it all."

"If he wuz a Prothistint, it wuz his business to prothist," remarked Mr. Hennessey.

"Thru for ye, Mr. Hinnissy," cried Mr. Dooley, approvingly. "Ye're a borrun logician, ye are. If Oi didn't know ye for an Amurrican, Oi should have labelled ye a Scotchman for yer logic. But as Oi wuz a-saying', the Riverind Marthin prothisten it wuz disicration to irict shtands an the consicratid ground around a church. So he wint to the nayrist churruch-yarrud, an' what should he see there but a man a-diggin'. An' he siz to him, he siz, Moi sinful bruther, are ye aware that ye're shtandin' on howly ground. Rather! siz the wurrukman, siz he, an' Oi'm diggin' more howls in it to make it howlier. An' the parson, he turrned up the whoites av his eyes loike a nigger minstrel in the Bowery, an' he siz, siz he, It's distrissed Oi am at yer makin' a mock av sin; siz he, an' Oi implore ye to take aff they boots from aff they feet, for the place where thou shtandist is howly ground. Not if Oi know it, owld stick-in-the-mud, siz the wurrukman, siz he. If Oi took me boots aff Oi'd git rheumatics, siz he. Oi'm not such a fool as Oi look, siz he."

"Ye don't say that the hiritics talk to the clergy loike that," said Mr. Hennessey.

"Perhaps he didn't know that the Rivirind Marthin wuz a clargyman," replied Mr. Dooley, "bicause he wuzn't drissed loike wan. Oi should till ye that the Riverind Marthin wuz a curate in Corrunwall, but he got toired av that, an' came to London an' shtarted to worruk in the Borough Marrkit as a porther."

"Phwat the devil did he do that for?"

"To take a job away from some poor wurrukin' man with a woife an' family that moight want it," returned Mr. Dooley. "Ye see it's always been the policy av the churruch to keep wurrukin' people poor and destitute, so that they can git thim to atfind mass in the summer an' receive cowl an' soup tickits in the winther; an' the clergy are afraid if the wurrukin' classis git indipindint they'll pay no attintion to religion. So the Riverind Marthin carried prathies an' turmut's an' bananas an his hid all the marnin', an' shtood an the street in the afternoon radin' the Boible out loud. An' whin the people hurrud him recoitin' the jayniologies they thought the harrud wurds were the names av race-horsis, an' they brought their quarters to put a bit an, an' asked him if he'd got a good tip for the Cambridge-shire; an' they were tirribly disgustid whin they found he wuz ownly prachin'. An' so whin they put up shtands to see the procission he sint round a circular to the porthers av the Borough Marrkit to call thim together an' pull thim down agin, an' he ixhorred thim, an' he siz, siz he, Fallow sinners, siz

he, they's a-disicratin the consicratid placis, an' instid av makin' the poppilace go into the churruches to larn about the hivinly king, they're a-littin' thim sit outside an' see an airthly king. It is the most disthrissful toime that iver yit wuz seen, siz he, for they're sillin' the burruthroight av Cain for a miss of pottage. Phwat Oi siz, siz he, is that the ground round the churruches has been consicratid, an' land that's wunst howly is always howly—

Not all the wather in the rough, rude say
Can wash the balm fram an anointid clay.

An' ye're wrang in puttin' lumber ower the churruch-yards, siz he, bicause ye're privintin' the corrupses that's buried there fram seein' the King, siz he. An' ye're wrang in takin' money for sates, siz he. An' ye're wrang in havin' sates, siz he. In fact, ye're wrang all round, siz he. An' its ownly me that's roight, siz he. Oi can't undershtand, siz he, that any man, that's an Englishman, an' a Kirristyun, an' a marrkit-porther, can sit shtill an' not pull down the shtands that have been iricted by blowtid capitalists an' churruchwardhens, siz he. It shows there's a lague between the Churruch an' the influent classes, siz he, an' a *lague* is three moiles, siz he. But the porthers av the Borough Marrkit did not aroise in their millions to pull down the sates; so the Riverind Marthin took a box av matches an' a pound av gunpowdher to blow up the shtands himsilf."

"Took phwat?" asked Mr. Hennessey, in amazement. "A pound av gunpowdher! Phwat could the ijiot do with a pound av gunpowdher? Whoy, whin Oi was takin' lissons in iexplowsives from O'Donovan Rossa, Oi—"

"Whisht, Hinnissy! whisht!" said Mr. Dooley, warningly. "Aftther the Madison-square iexplowsions, an' the Undherground Railway disasthers, it doesn't do to be wise about iexplowsives in this city. If ye've any expart knowldge an the subject, keep it to yerself, me honey."

"There's wisdom in yer father's son," rejoined Mr. Hennessey. "And phwat did the Riverind Marthin do with his pound av gunpowdher? Did he sit his whiskers afoire?"

"He got arristid boy the police," explained Mr. Dooley; "an' whin he was brought up before the magistrate, he sid the churruch he troied to blow up was called Saint Gearge the Marthyr, an' Gearge the Marthyr got his cilibrity boy pullin' down the bills stuck up boy the Imperors that they have in iffete Europe; an', as he was Gearge the Marthin, he imitated the other fillow by blowin' up the shtands put down boy the churruchwardins. An' Marthin's friends promised that they would put him in a Howm av Rist; but he wudd'nt go, but sang that beautiful hymn comminein'—

Oi won't go to a Howm this mornin'.

An' so they remandid him for a month, an' they kipt him in jail for a month; an' thin they lit him go, an' towld him not to do it agin."

"Howly saints an' marthyr's presarve us!" cried Mr. Hennessey, striking the counter with his black-thorn, an' narrowly missing smashing a dishful of crackers. "It's another injustice to Oireland! It's a howlin' injustice that whin a hoigh-sowled Oirish pathriot middles with iexplowsives he gits twinty years' pinnel sarvitude, but whin a snakin' hiritic priesht does the same thing he gits lit aff with a month. It's a wickid shame, be jabbers, an' agin iviry principil av sense an' morrility." C. E.

Carlyle's Creed.

"God does nothing."—THOMAS CARLYLE.

"Speedy end to superstition, a gentle one if you can contrive it, but an end."—*Ibid.*

THE student of Carlyle who would thoroughly understand his life-work must keep in mind one pregnant fact regarding him. Carlyle had Calvinism in his blood. The practice of the literary art in intellectual society, influences which act with such deadly effect as solvents on the prejudices, innate or acquired, of most men, never affected in any

appreciable degree Carlyle's philosophy of life. Loathing Christian theology, he remained a Calvinist moralist to the end of the chapter. That morality impregnates every serious utterance on life and its mysteries that ever fell from his pen. A man is never a Puritan upon one point alone, and Carlyle's Puritanism pervaded and colored his whole view. Except as a mere literary personality, Carlyle has ceased to exist as a mental force altogether. His anthropomorphism, his reiterated insistence on the "great man" dogma, were belated when he preached them. Even the central position of Carlyle's creed was abandoned by Carlyle himself; not publicly, it is true, but in privately-spoken words, which leave no doubt of their sincerity. When Froude began to speak of what God might do if he willed to do it, Carlyle cut him short with the three simple and tremendous words, "God does nothing"—an utterance which swept away the foundation on which the imposing edifice of Carlyle's lifework was built. Moreover, Carlyle got steadily worse as he got older, degenerating, as Lowell said of him, "from a prophet to a bad-tempered old gentleman, who called down God's lightning from heaven every time he couldn't lay his hand on his match-box."

Carlyle was all his life a Theist. His creed was funny without being vulgar. He preferred to speak of the Immensities, the Eternities, and the Veracities, to using the customary theological terms. Indeed, his conception of deity was that of a meddling celestial drill sergeant, thinly disguised by an unwonted vocabulary. Although Carlyle rejected the claims of Christianity, his prejudices were always those of a Puritan. He uniformly treats militant Freethinkers with scant respect. He considered Shelley's life "a ghastly failure," and Heine, to him, was but "a blackguard." He jibed and jeered at Buckle, and belittled his monumental *History of Civilisation*. To Burns, indeed, he is surprisingly fair; but then the author of *Tam O'Shanter* was a brother Scot. Of Harriet Martineau, though she did him substantial service, he always speaks with derision. Carlyle's own Confession of Faith was peculiar and personal. He never swerved from his Theism. In his old age he wrote in his journal:—

"I wish I had strength to elucidate and write down intelligibly to my fellow-creatures what my outline of belief about God essentially is."

In his *Life of Sterling*, in which he lays bare so much of his own Freethought, he says:—

"One angry glance I remember in him, and it was but a glance, and gone in a moment, 'Flat Pantheism!' urged he once, as if triumphantly, of something or other, in the fire of a debate, in my hearing: 'It is mere Pantheism, that —' 'And suppose it were Pottheism,' cried the other, 'if the thing is true?'"

The vocabulary sufficiently shows that the other was Carlyle himself. On another occasion he breaks out:—

"Pantheism, Pottheism, Mydoxy, Thydoxy, are nothing at all to me; a weariness the whole jargon, which I avoid speaking of, decline listening to."

Again, he says:—

"A man's religion consists, not of the many things he is in doubt of and tries to believe, but of the few he is assured of and has no need of effort for believing."

On the subject of immortality he was certainly heterodox. His most explicit declaration is in a letter to a lady, in 1848, who asked his views as to a future state. In his reply he admitted that the question was "insoluble to human creatures."

He disbelieved in eternal torments. Tyndall records that when he said "It is something to have abolished hell-fire," "Yes," he replied, "that is a distinct and enormous gain." Moncreu Conway records: "I was present one evening when someone asked: 'Mr. Carlyle, can you believe that all these ignorant and brutal millions of people are destined to live for ever?' 'Let us hope not,' was the emphatic reply." In Christmas week he said to his friend, William Allingham, that he had observed an unusual number of drunken men in the street, and "then,"

he quietly added, "I remembered that it was the birthday of their Redeemer."

Once he was persuaded to enter a Nonconformist chapel. "It was," says Mr. Conway, "I believe, for the first time in many years that he had entered either church or chapel, and was destined to be the last. 'The preacher's prayer,' he said, 'filled me with consternation. "O Lord, thou hast plenty of treacle up there; send a stream of it down to us." That was about the amount of it. He did not seem in the least to know that what such as he needed was rather a stream of brimstone. Of another religious service, a Methodist one, he said, 'The sum and end of all the fluency and vehemence of the sermon and of all the fervor of the prayer was "Lord, save us from hell," and I went away musing, sick at heart, saying to myself, "My good fellows, why all this bother and noise. If it be God's will, why not go and be damned in quiet, and say never a word about it? And I, for one, would think far better of you."'"

With the "Hebrew Old Clothes" and gibbeted God he had little patience. So in *Past and Present* he bursts out:—

"'Revelations, inspirations.' Yes; and thy God-created soul; dost thou not call that a 'revelation?'"

And in *Sartor Resartus*:—

"Art thou a grown baby, then, to fancy that the miracle lies in miles of distance, or in pounds of avoirdupois; and not to see that the true, inexplicable, God-revealing miracle lies in this, that I can stretch forth my hand at all; that I have free force to clutch aught therewith."

This "Natural Supernaturalism" may be said to be his transcendental theology.

"Do you know why the age of miracles is past? Because you are become an enchanted human ass (I grieve to say it), and merely bray parliamentary eloquence; rejoice in chewed gorse, scrip coupons, or the like; and have no discernible 'religion' except a degraded species of Phallus-worship, whose liturgy is in the circulating libraries."

Professor Tyndall says: "The miracles of orthodoxy were to him, as to his friend Emerson, 'Monsters.' To both of them the blowing clover and the falling rain were the true miracles."

His antagonism to the Church showed itself mainly in his gibes at Ritualism:—

"The Church of England stood long on her tithes and her decencies; but now she takes to shouting in the market place, 'My tithes are nothing, my decencies are nothing; I am either miraculous, celestial, or else nothing.' It is to me the fatalest symptom of speedy change she ever exhibited. What an alternative. Men will soon see whether you are miraculous, celestial, or not. Were a pair of breeches ever known to beget a son?"

Yet, after all, one cannot help thinking that the Prophet had not the courage of his convictions. He abandoned the Christian superstition. He raged at it in private, and occasionally he impugned it in his books, but he did not speak out plainly and fully. It is said that he would not attempt to dethrone the dying Christianity, because he feared to open a way for Atheism, which he disliked worse. He blustered privately of an "Exodus from Houndsditch," and never lost the opportunity of publicly insulting men who were fighting valiantly in the Army of Human Liberation. He blamed Voltaire, unreasonably and unjustly, for mere iconoclasm, and the bulk of his own life-work was destructive criticism.

In all that he wrote and said there is little evidence that he knew what the ordinary Englishman is made of. His transcendental philosophy, made in Germany, was simply borrowed and stamped with Thomas Carlyle's image and superscription. Of course there must be theories, if only for pegs to hang facts upon. Of course there must be an abundance of words for people to find out what they mean. Of course there must be gifted men who can talk the jargon of transcendental philosophy, and point the finger of scorn to every divergence of opinion. Of course there must be such men as

Carlyle, even if only one or two in an age. But when we ask their value as leaders of thought, what answer can we give except that they lead no whither?

Men like Spencer, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, whatever their limitations, give clear pronouncements on the things of which they write. But what clarity can you find in Carlyle? Before a man can teach others to see, he must himself see. What with Carlyle's Calvinism, his dyspepsia, and his hatred of Democracy, his intellectual sight was like that of a half-blind Polyphemus groping in his cave, eager for murder.

MIMNERMUS.

The Inner Heritage of Secularism.

BY MONCURE D. CONWAY.

[Mr. Conway never spoke more bravely, or more opportunely, than in this address to the recent Congress of the American Secular Union. We have great pleasure in reproducing it for our readers from the pages of the *New York Truthseeker*.]

(Continued from page 811.)

THE great instruction of this country lies in the fact that while the mere military emancipation of the slave; not for his advantage but our own, is daily proved to have thrown on him evils worse than slavery, hatred, and outlawry, the legal chains of woman have melted under the strong enforcement of gentleness—that of a sex without vote or sword, but inspired by the moral genius that steadily humanises man. In the eloquence of Elizabeth Cady Stanton I used to recognise a feminine side of the eloquence of Wendell Phillips and of Henry Ward Beecher, without the least imitation of them—even of Cobden and John Bright, whom she never saw—and that she at the same time used the logic and reason, which man is supposed to monopolise, against the sentimentalities of men about women—sentiment being supposed to be woman's sole province.

I am sometimes called a pessimist; but pessimism believes that all is for the worst, as optimism believes all is for the best: both are fatalistic; I believe in neither. The needs of a period produced the great brain and heart of Robert Ingersoll, and in another direction a woman who was his only peer, Elizabeth Stanton; and I shall still hope that our great needs will create and inspire great heads and hearts.

Great is our heritage from the forerunners! And all the greater because we can supplement their teaching by their personal history. We know more about partisanship than Ingersoll did when we remember the outrageous insults that defeated his appointment to a foreign mission by President Hayes. Moral: Put not your faith in parties.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton wondered at the later indifference of some of us to Woman Suffrage, but she could not see as we did her own career, and those of the grand female orators and writers in America, England, France. What created them, inspired them? Disfranchisement. What else made so many of those ladies Freethinkers? If they had been born with suffrage where would have been those grand souls who by denial of their equality were made the main expounders of great principles? Probably at the back of some party boss.

On the afternoon before the late election I stepped into a cheap theatre and saw a small travesty of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. A very meek Uncle Tom hesitated to obey some cruel order of a ferocious Legree, who cried, "You dare to say that to me? Do you not belong to me, body and soul?" "Yes, Mars' Legree," said Uncle Tom, "this poor black body belongs to you, but"—lifting his hand towards heaven—"but my soul, Mars' Legree, my soul belongs to Bird S. Coler!"

What would it profit us to gain a whole world of votes for Coler or Odell and lose our soul, the only free and unpossessed political thought, potent by its discontent, heard amid the party machines?

Of course that is only my way of looking at it. I regard independent thought and expression as the only valuable voting in our present condition. For I believe most of us now recognise a fallacy in the

trite adage, "Truth is mighty and will prevail." It isn't. It won't. Confucius—and all the Christian brains in China put together would not make one Confucius—said, "If a lie once gets loose all the royal postillions cannot overtake it." It requires all our vigilance and toil to keep truth from being crushed to earth, from which it too often never rises again. Does any Freethinker or Secularist anticipate for Truth such visible victories as those, for instance, of Christian scientism? Why, your organisation is limited to the people who think for themselves, and courageous enough to say what they think. How many are they? Your universal tolerance attracts all faddists, who can get no hearing elsewhere, and you are credited with all of the fads, which frighten many off. The cave of Adullam, asylum for all discontented minds, must long be your old family homestead.

Yes, long—long; for the evolution of Freethought on one side, and of Christian dogma on the other, must inevitably bring the two front to front on the field of ethical science, where moral freedom is to be won or lost.

Mrs. Grundy lays a high impost on heresy. In England, last century, famous defenders of the faith against Paine, like the younger Pitt and Burke, could be carried to bed drunk nightly without reproach; but Paine couldn't take a glass without being published as a sot. The prosecutors of the *Age of Reason* were not the clergy, but the London Vice Society, and chiefly the Unitarians, who paid for their theological heresy by sacrificing Paine, contending that, however moral his book, to disparage the authority of the Bible damaged morality.

About that time a Society was started in Germany to suppress immoral literature, and the great Goethe was invited to speak. He did so, and said: "By all means let us suppress immoral literature, beginning with the Bible." That broke up the Society.

I do not suppose that any prosecutor of Ida Craddock would contend that she ever wrote anything so shocking as certain stories of incest, adultery, and things more repulsive, in the Bible. If they are sincere let them suppress these very detailed narratives, or have the courage to attempt it.

I am opposed to all such oppressions. It would require an omniscient intellect to be censor of the literature and art for the millions of mankind. Nor are the young corrupted by such literature. The Hindoo proverb says, "He who has no wound may touch poison." With Wilhelm von Humboldt, Herbert Spencer, and John Stuart Mill, I would restrict laws rigidly to the sphere of visible and actual damage by one to another in person or property, and repeal all laws against so-called immorality, which is only the other man's morality, to which he is as much entitled as I to mine. It is criminal to force my creed on another, and in a true civilisation it will be as criminal as it now is immoral to force the morality of one or many on any individual who does no violence to any man nor breaks the peace.

That this philosophy does not prevail is largely due to the fact that when a man departs from orthodoxy he at once begins to conciliate his friends by an excessive show of morality. In this way the advance of Freethought is not accompanied by an equal advance of the ethics related to Freethought.

Some years ago I troubled some esteemed gentlemen in this hall with my belief that the animus of Freethinkers against Catholicism is an inheritance from Calvinism, which I regard as far worse than Catholicism; but I think that the time has arrived when we are discovering that the threatening evil is no longer in dogmas that few can understand, or in ancient superstitions that, as the Christian Scientists are finding, cannot be taken seriously. The dangerous man is he who believes that his moral notions are the laws of an Almighty God, and manages to acquire authority to impose those notions on others by violence or threats of violence—that is, by physical penalties.

Acid Drops.

MR. HALL CAINE is back from America. He has brought with him his Shakespeare brow and Jesus Christ mouth. But it is a pity they do not enable him to think and talk better. Responding to the toast of "The Drama" at the recent annual dinner of the Actors' Benevolent Fund, he remarked that it was only "moral" plays (like his own, we suppose) that paid in the long run; and thus commercialism justified itself even on the ethical side. As for those who "sneered at popular successes," they were "merely wallowing in the backwater of their own incompetence." This is good. Very good. And if we apply it to Jesus Christ we shall see what an inferior person he was to Mr. Hall Caine. The Prophet of Nazareth railed at the "successful" Pharisees, who might have told him that he was "merely wallowing in the backwater of his own incompetence," if this exquisite and accurate phrase had then been invented. Certainly he was no "popular success." He was indeed a terrible failure. Just before giving up the ghost, he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Such was the "popular success" of Jesus Christ. And it was just as bad on the financial side. Judas Iscariot, the cashier of the company, ratted for thirty pieces of silver, estimated to be worth about £3 15s. of English money. Imagine, then, what was the state of the exchequer! Mr. Hall Caine could have pensioned the whole thirteen.

According to a story in the *Birmingham Mail*, Eliot's well-known translation into the Indian language of "The mother of Sisera looked out from the window and cried through the lattice" was rather peculiar. He did not know what Indian word to use for "lattice," so he described to the Indians a wicker framework; and, thinking that they understood him, they gave him the word. Subsequently he found that he had made the mother of Sisera cry through the eel-basket.

A correspondent who drew our attention to this story asks whether the original Bible, in Hebrew and Greek, and especially in Hebrew, may not "often mean something very different from what our Authorised Version says." No doubt it does. Hebrew, in particular, is an extremely difficult language as it was originally written. No one who read it could be quite sure of the writer's meaning, and the writer himself could not be quite sure of it after a sufficient lapse of time. Colenso said there were not half-a-dozen competent Hebrew scholars in England, and Sir William Drummond said that no two Hebrew scholars ever translated any three verses like each other. This is one of the reasons why committees are always employed in turning out Versions of the Bible. Other books are never translated by committees, but by individuals.

Paddington follows Hampstead, Kensington, and Battersea in the *Daily News'* religious census of London. The total population of the borough is 143,976, including 61,626 males and 82,350 females. The number of men, women, and children at places of worship on Sunday, December 7, was 15,177 in the morning and 13,468 in the evening—a total of 28,645. Considering that many of these must have been counted twice over, it is doubtful if a seventh part of the inhabitants of Paddington attend church or chapel. The men present represented one in ten of the population, and the women one in six. The total number of men at all places of worship was only 3,280 in the morning and 3,783 in the evening. The women were 8,014 in the morning and 7,192 in the evening. The children were 3,883 in the morning and 2,493 in the evening.

Of the total Paddington attendance, morning and evening, namely 28,645, the Church of England claims 16,756. This is more than half, so that the Church of England wins an easy victory over all the other Churches combined. This triumph of the State Church is the most striking feature of the census hitherto.

The *Daily News* prints an "omission" from its Hampstead census. It is the Hampstead Ethical Society, with an attendance of 32 men and 23 women—a total of 55. Is the Ethical Society, then, a religious body, as Churchmen, Catholics, Baptists, and Methodists are? As the ancient orator said, we pause for a reply.

We regret to see our excellent contemporary, the *Boston Investigator*, rejoicing over the "magnificent licking" inflicted on "William McQueen, an English Anarchist," at New York for "abusing our Government." It is very far from certain that "thumping his head" is the wisest way of arguing with any speaker. "McQueen's mouth," our contemporary says, "is now closed for repairs, and when it is open again there will doubtless be a more civil tongue in it." Perhaps so;

and perhaps not so. But what if the Christians should act on this policy of debate, and deal in the same way with the mouth of a Freethinker for "abusing" Christianity? Our contemporary should reflect that no rule of action is proper unless it can be carried out all round; and that it is particularly dangerous for the advocates of an unpopular cause to countenance personal assault as a permissible form of argument.

Salute one another with a holy kiss, the Bible says. Nothing of the sort, on peril of your life! says an American doctor. His name is Brown, and he is a member of the Virginia Legislature, where he has introduced a Bill to prevent kissing, which he says is the means of breeding all kinds of diseases. A fine of about £1 is provided for the first offence, with increasing penalties for repeated convictions. So that a man might suffer a good deal financially while courting, and be positively ruined during the honeymoon. We fancy this sort of legislation won't catch on. Besides, Dr. Brown ought to go a good deal further logically. Diseases are bred by people living together. Why not bring in a Bill to stop that?

Mr. James Swinburne, presiding at the annual dinner of the Institution of Electrical Engineers, said that "in Egypt, thousands of years ago, there was an outbreak of engineers who invented the pump and other things, but unfortunately the engineers were priests, and the priest half of them prevented the engineer half from going on any further. If the Egyptian engineers had not been priests, they might have done all that had been now done, he did not know how many thousands of years ago." This observation, we dare say, attracted very little attention in the eighty columns or so of small type in the newspaper from which we extract it. But it was vastly more important than anything else in all the other columns. It throws a flood of light on the influence of organised religion in the world. Priestcraft arrested the progress of science in ancient Egypt, and kept back mechanical invention for thousands of years. The same priestcraft is now arresting the progress of education in England, and keeping back English children from the best possible development of their faculties.

England is a Christian country, and Christianity is boasted as the religion of love. But the laws of England, and their administration, require a strong infusion of humanity. Take, for instance, an incident in the Bootle murder case. Two young women were sentenced to be hung—"and may God have mercy upon their souls." It was suggested, however, that one of them was pregnant, and a jury of matrons was summoned to decide upon the fact, in accordance with ancient legality. But the suggestion had been found not to have come from the prisoner herself, and the jury of matrons was therefore dismissed. Still, the judge—Mr. Justice Jeff— in addressing them, thought it necessary to lay down the law, and he did so in the following terms. "If a female prisoner," he said, "was sentenced to death and was found in that condition (that is, eniente), that person was respited until the time had passed when the child was born, and under these circumstances the Home Secretary decided whether any further respite or commutation of the sentence should take place." What a horrible state of things! Fancy keeping a woman perhaps a whole year waiting to be hung! Think what sort of nervous organisation a child is likely to inherit who is introduced to the world under such conditions! It is enough to shock any person of decent feelings. But it takes a great deal to shock some people—including judges and other administrators of the law.

"Merlin" of the *Referee* seems to be "a literary gent" with a fluent pen, who is ready to write on any and every subject outside party politics, and with an assurance which is only equalled by a plentiful lack of information. We don't mean that he is exactly an ignoramus. We only mean that he cannot possibly be any sort of authority on all the subjects he chooses to write upon. Last week, for instance, he went maudlin over Christmas. Tears dropped upon the paper as he referred to the large sums of money spent on "charity" at this time of the year. There was nothing to be seen like it, he said, outside Christian lands. He might have added that there was nothing in non-Christian lands to equal the destitution and wretchedness which this "charity" is meant to alleviate. But he was wrong, too, as to the matter of fact. Charities are common enough in India. Some of the most benevolent rich men in the world are to be found amongst the Parsees. Amongst the Mohammedans it is a rule of their religion that one tenth of their income, at least, must be devoted to acts of benevolence, and principally to the relief of the poor. Surely "Merlin" will not pretend that one tenth of the incomes of the well-to-do people in England is spent in this way. The man who would say that, would say anything.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, December 28, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road, 73.0.: "The Dying Year: its Losses and Gains."

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.
- G. W. B.—A tax on bachelors is hardly a subject we can discuss in the *Freethinker*. Thanks for cuttings.
- AVON (Bristol).—A pretty little laughable sketch. Thanks. We reciprocate your good wishes.
- E. SIMPSON.—Pamphlets and papers have been sent you. You will find particulars of N. S. S. Branches and newsagents who supply Freethought publications in the new *Secular Annual*. Pleased to hear you have so enjoyed reading *Flowers of Freethought*, and are lending it to your friends. Yes, the audiences addressed by Mr. Foote in the Birmingham Town Hall were, as you say, very gratifying, and the evening one quite "splendid." It is not surprising that you "never enjoyed anything better in your life," as occasions of that kind are, alas, uncommon.
- H. A. HILL.—We are obliged for cuttings. No doubt you could sometimes find bits in the paper you mention on which we could base a paragraph. We are always glad to receive anything of that kind. It is impossible for us to glance at all the papers published in this country, and much interesting matter must escape our personal attention.
- H. W.—Your order has been handed to the shop manager, and doubtless executed. With regard to your questions: (1) We were quite right in saying that it is uncommon for the "heathen" to lack bread as it is lacked by multitudes of the poor in Christian cities. Our reference was obviously to general social conditions. When the Hindus are afflicted with famine, it is in consequence of the failure of the crops through drought; and such a cause has no relation to our argument. People die of starvation in England—open or disguised—even when the crops are plentiful. (2) What Disraeli said was that the Queen (Victoria) was physically and morally incapable of fulfilling her duties. It was an unhappy expression. What he meant to say was that her duties were too heavy for the strongest person to fulfil.
- J. W. C. S.—Not so good as the previous verses, and the rhymes are rather uncertain.
- W. L. JONES.—In our next. Glad to hear you welcome the idea of the *Pioneer*.
- G. JACOB.—We share your preference for the word "Atheist." It is straightforward and unmistakable. Still, if other people prefer "Agnostic," that is their business. Our objection arises when they indulge in sneers, pretences, and misrepresentations.
- F. HELLIER.—The matter must go before the N. S. S. Executive first.
- R. SLACK.—The judge you refer to—if you state the facts correctly—was an impudent bigot. He had no right whatever to insult a witness who did not want to swear. There is an Oaths Act providing that persons who object to swearing may make affirmation. Practically ordering the witness from the box was a piece of gross insolence. What despicable beings men often become under the influence of religion!
- PAPERS RECEIVED.—Two Worlds—Torch of Reason—Boston Investigator—Huddersfield Examiner.
- THE National Secular Society's office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, 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.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- 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.

Special.

MAY I personally appeal to all my friends, besides asking Freethinkers generally, to do their best to circulate the *Pioneer*—a new monthly paper which is to make its first appearance on New Year's Day. As it is to be published at the price of one penny, it could be pushed round more easily than the *Freethinker*. Six or a dozen copies might be purchased for a small

outlay and distributed judiciously in the course of the month; and, if a considerable number of my readers did this, the new venture would reach a wide circle of persons who might otherwise never see a Freethought journal at all.

The *Pioneer* is intended to be an auxiliary to the *Freethinker*. Its unaggressive title, and its low price, should ensure it an easier access to the general public. By this means it would serve to advertise the larger weekly organ, and indirectly to promote the spread of Freethought views among the masses of the people.

My desire is to make the *Pioneer* bright and interesting, and also to give it a fairly wide scope. Without entering the thorny paths of party politics, there are many avenues to thought and information on a variety of important subjects. Science, art, ethics, and literature, can all be treated in the light of reason; and that light will be none the worse for passing through a warm atmosphere of humanity.

Better than reading columns of what I might say about the *Pioneer* will be obtaining it and letting it speak for itself. This is what I ask Freethinkers to do. And if they like it as a cheap propagandist organ, and feel that it would do good to the cause if it were placed in the largest possible number of hands, they will of course act accordingly.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

THIS week's *Freethinker* goes to press very early, and therefore hurriedly, in consequence of the holidays. Any shortcomings will therefore (we hope) be overlooked—especially the small supply of "Acid Drops."

Mr. Foote lectures at the Athenæum Hall this evening (Dec. 28). His subject will be "The Dying Year: its Losses and Gains." It should attract a good meeting.

Mr. Foote had a good audience at the Camberwell Secular Hall on Sunday evening, when he lectured on "The Virgin Birth of Christ." His discourse was much applauded. Mr. Victor Roger, who occupied the chair, congratulated the Branch on its improved prospects.

The National Secular Society's Executive, at the President's suggestion, resolved to organise a Public Demonstration in favor of "Secular Education," and the large Holborn Town Hall was engaged at considerable expense for the purpose. What the Society proposed to do was to find the money and the work, but to keep in the background, in order that no prejudice might prevent the friends of "Secular Education" in all the various progressive bodies in London from rallying for once around a common standard. Unfortunately this good intention did not meet with the respect it deserved. Of all the progressive men and women whose presence was invited only two attended—Mr. Quelch, the Social Democratic editor of *Justice*, and the Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, who, by the way, was always a man of courage. The result was that the N. S. S. speakers, who were held in reserve, had to be placed upon the platform; Mr. Foote taking the chair, and Messrs. Cohen and Davies supporting the resolution. For the sake of accuracy in detail we may add that the Demonstration took place on Wednesday evening, December 17.

Some supposed friends of "Secular Education" who were written to did not deign to reply; amongst them being Mrs. Bridges Adams, Mr. H. Labouchere, M.P., Mr. Will Crooks, and Mr. Sidney Webb. Mr. John Burns replied, dating his letter from nowhere, that he was engaged. Mr. Joseph McCabe could not come for the same reason. Mr. E. H. Pickersgill simply regretted he was unable to attend. Miss Honor Morten thought the public was "sick of 'Education' just now," but she would be glad to help (say) next year. "It would be much easier to secularise London schools," she added, shrewdly, "because all sects have their footing in this big city." Mr. J. M. Robertson wrote that he was already engaged elsewhere. Mr. J. Page Hopps wished he could attend, but it was well-nigh impossible. "I am entirely with you," he added, "as to the ideal school for the nation. If we got it, no one's religion would suffer."

Mr. George Bernard Shaw, vegetarian, Socialist, Atheist, journalist, playwright, humorist, and occasional *farceur*, sent one of his characteristic letters. "I am sorry," he wrote, "but after my support of the Education Bill and my letters to the *Daily News* pitching into that imaginary thing Secular Education, how can I decently take part in your Demonstration? The time has come, in my opinion, for all Secularists to give up the idea that they or anybody else can educate children without metaphysical conceptions. What right have we to call our particular set of assumptions any more 'secular' than Archbishop Laud's or Lord Hugh Cecil's?"

This is very clever—Mr. Shaw is *always* clever—but it is not very convincing. We daresay Mr. Shaw sees through his own fallacy. Gentlemen like Archbishop Laud and Lord Hugh Cecil are only "secular" with regard to their assumptions in the sense that this world is at present the scene of their activities. But they have the next world in view all the time. Besides, the policy of "Secular Education" has nothing to do with mental subtleties. It is a plain, straightforward policy. It proposes to exclude all "metaphysical assumptions," whether Mr. Shaw's or Lord Hugh Cecil's, from the public elementary schools. It does not propose to stamp them out by Act of Parliament, but to leave them to be taught outside the nation's schools, and by other persons than the nation's schoolmasters.

Unfortunately, though not unnaturally, the newspapers did their best to burke the Demonstration. Being partisan organs all round, they try to maintain the fiction that there are only two Educational policies—that of the Church of England and that of the Nonconformists. The modest little press paragraph that was sent round by the N. S. S. secretary was only inserted, we believe, in the *Star*. A place could not be found for it even in *Reynolds'*. And to add to the drawbacks, and crown them, the English climate was dreadfully ill-conditioned. Rain came on about an hour before the Demonstration was timed to begin, and continued, growing worse and worse, for the rest of the evening.

In these circumstances it would have been foolish to expect to see the Holborn Town Hall crowded. Some seven hundred people were present, and the overwhelming majority of them, of course, were Secularists. Mr. Foote opened as chairman with an all-round speech, which was much applauded. Mr. Quelch moved the resolution in a pointed and vigorous address. It was seconded by the Rev. Stewart Headlam, who had a most enthusiastic reception. Mr. Cohen supported it in a speech of great ability, and Mr. Davies drove home some sharp points of criticism in the limited time left at his command. When the resolution was put it was carried with but one dissentient; the chairman remarking that the minority had courage, and that the majority would part with it in a good temper.

"This public meeting of London citizens," the resolution ran, "hereby affirms its opinion that the backward state of education in England, and the present bitter contest over a partisan Education Bill, are almost entirely due to the evil principle of admitting a controversial subject like religion into the curriculum of the nation's schools; and this meeting further affirms its opinion that what is commonly known as 'Secular Education' is the only wise, just, and peaceable policy in this matter, and the only way out of the existing difficulty."

We appeal once more to English Freethinkers to circulate the National Secular Society's manifesto on "The Education Difficulty: and the Way Out." Copies for gratuitous distribution can be obtained, free of charge, on application to Miss E. M. Vance, the N. S. S. Secretary, at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, London, E.C., either personally or by letter or postcard.

Mr. Joseph Symes's paper, the *Liberator*, is always very welcome; but it reaches us very irregularly. After a lapse of several weeks, during which we wondered if Mr. Symes and Melbourne had parted company, or if some misfortune had happened, the *Liberator* dated November 8 has reached us. We are delighted to see from it that our old friend and colleague is as lively and vigorous as ever.

The *Searchlight* (Waco, Texas) refers to Mr. Foote's recent article on Burns and Ingersoll as "splendid." Editor Shaw, though, need not have put on the cap with reference to some remarks of ours on the somewhat grudging attitude of American Freethought journals towards their English contemporaries. It did not fit him. We cheerfully admit that he has always displayed a better spirit.

London Freethinkers should note the date of their Annual Dinner—Monday, January 12, at the Holborn Restaurant.

Shivers Spends a Nervous Evening.

THE all-swallowing credulity of the majority of mankind is proverbial. Even men, who might justly be termed *savants*, have been deceived by pretentiously solemn cheats. This being so, it is little to be wondered at that Mr. Ebenezer Shivers, of No. 72 Longwood Villas, should fall a victim to delusion.

It came about in this way. Mr. Shivers was much inclined to mysticism. Accordingly, he bought all and any literature that dealt with, or referred to, the occult. His mystical leanings had caused him to acquire quite a large number of books, among which were some of really solid worth. The fact that he had books which exposed the pretensions of supernaturalism, and traced it to the rude condition of primitive man, mattered not to him in the least. These told of his favorite subject, which was sufficient; the criticisms on that subject were to him of less than secondary importance—indeed, one might say that they held a *tertiary* position in his estimation.

I may say, before going any further, that Mr. Shivers was possessed of a belated frame of mind—that is to say, his mental condition was such that he would have proved an admirable member of the society of this country of three hundred years ago. Being thus qualified, it is no matter for surprise that he firmly believed in witchcraft. This belief of his he regarded rather as a secret. Nevertheless, he was always on the look-out for uncanny influences.

Strangely enough, in view of his lurking fear of witches, he had as housekeeper an ill-favored, garrulous old woman, who was full of folk-lore, and who advised him what charms to use against the practices of the evilly-endowed. However, to ensure that she herself was not a witch, he had surreptitiously sprinkled her with holy water purloined from a neighboring Catholic church.

Horseshoes were in plentiful evidence at Mr. Shivers's residence. He had an ornamental one fitted on the front door as a knocker. He had one fixed over every room-entrance in his house, but over the door of his bed-room was placed a trinity of horseshoes, on and around which were arranged a veritable medley of amulets and charms. Among these—which certainly must have been an oversight on the part of Mr. Shivers—was the Lord's Prayer written backwards in red silk on a piece of glossy black cloth.

Mr. Shivers had been formerly a devout church-goer; but, considering present-day Christianity to be a very lukewarm affair, he ceased to attend church; instead, he conducted service at home, his congregation consisting of the aforesaid old woman and his English bull-dog, Jasper. But Jasper was not altogether a satisfactory listener. To give him his due, he certainly heard with commendable resignation: the prayers, recitals, and the fearfully lengthy sermons of his master; but no amount of coaxing or thrashing would induce him to suppress his whining and howling when Mr. Shivers performed on the harmonium. As a consequence, he was always put outside when the singing commenced. As for the old housekeeper, she invariably fell asleep; but as now and then she uttered "Alleluia" or "Praise be to the Lord," her heinousness passed unnoticed.

However, trouble began for Mr. Shivers when he bought a book entitled *Magical Practices and Communication with Departed Spirits*.

It was one cold, wintry evening when Mr. Shivers picked up this book from amongst a number of recent purchases on his library-table. He was seated in front of a nice glowing fire, his feet snugly encased in warm slippers and resting on a comfortable footstool, and he was smoking a long-stemmed, old-fashioned, wooden pipe.

He looked admiringly at the cover of his new treasure, which was fantastically decorated with Egyptian hieroglyphics and Assyrian cuneiform writing. In the midst of this jumble of ancient signs was the representation of a bald-headed, white-bearded wizard, having in one hand a globe of crystal, while he held aloft a multi-colored wand in the other.

Having feasted his eyes on the cover, Mr. Shivers, after settling himself more comfortably in his easy chair, proceeded to investigate the interior of this book which seemed so congenially in accord with his opinions. He skipped the preface—he generally skipped prefaces, considering them to be quite unnecessary—and passed on to the first chapter. This dealt with the earliest known magicians, and gave numerous instances of their wonderful doings, also the formulae they used when invoking the aid of the supernatural powers.

He was deeply interested in the story of a magician who, by some omission in the formula he used for invoking the king of the demons, placed himself in the power of that dread being, when suddenly blazing coals and glowing cinders flew out of the fireplace, causing Jasper to run with terror, terrifying Mr. Shivers to an alarming degree, and

nearly setting the room on fire. Happily, the old house-keeper, hearing the commotion, hobbled in as fast as she could, stamped out the smouldering spots in the hearth-rug and composed the fire again, removing the clump of snow which had fallen down the chimney and caused all the bother.

Seeing what had caused his fright, Mr. Shivers reassured himself, and resumed his book. He read: "If you draw with charcoal three triangles, taking care that they intersect, and that the apex of one be directed eastward while the apexes of the others be directed westward, then that you repeat the Lord's Prayer backward when you have completed the triangles, you will summon the most powerful of the genii. But beware how you avail yourself of the power of invoking the aid of the mighty spirits of outer space."

Mr. Shivers paused after reading this effusion. Could it be true? If it were, what possibilities lay within his reach! He would at least test the efficacy of the formula, summon the chief of the genii, secure his submission, then dismiss him until required. Seizing a stick of charred wood that was lying in the fender, he turned up the cover and scratched the triangles on the top of his table, recited the Lord's Prayer backward, and awaited the result.

Outside the wind was shrieking around the chimney-tops, rushing at the windows and rattling them, booming through the streets with a hollow roar. An extra-strong gust of wind suddenly shook his windows, a door below slammed violently, then came a crash of breaking glass.

When the noise of smashing glass struck his ears, Mr. Shivers closed his eyes and stood immovable with fear. "He had done it this time, and no mistake," was his mental ejaculation. However, nothing further happening, he opened his eyes and looked wildly about him. The blind was streaming inwards, driven by the wind through a broken pane, and on the floor was a snowball, out of which protruded a pebble. Dratting the imp of a boy who had done this, Mr. Shivers stopped the hole in the glass as best he could, then went back to his book.

He had had enough of magical formulæ, so he turned to the part of the book dealing with "Communication with Departed Spirits." He now alighted in the midst of as fine a collection of blood-curdling ghost-stories as one would ever wish to meet with. The writer mentioned every apparition ever heard of. There were banshees, headless horsemen, white ladies, goblins, hobgoblins, trolls, jinn, effreets, skeletons in chains, long-haired, weeping maidens whose love had been unrequited, murderers and murderesses who nightly re-enacted their crimes, men and women who had sold themselves to Satan, suicides who continued to commit suicide, and last, but not least, mahatmas.

The first of these ghost-stories was about a banshee seen in a field in a district some miles out of Dublin. It was vouched for by several young Irish laborers, who were on their way to attend the wake of a deceased friend when they beheld the apparition. They admitted having partaken somewhat freely of whisky before setting out for the wake. They had climbed over the stile, and had entered the field which immediately adjoined the house of the departed person, when one of them exclaimed, "D'ye see that?"

"What?" said the others, quite naturally.

Then they all saw the figure of a woman, clad in long, flowing, white garments, who skummed along the surface of the ground, passing them at scarcely six paces away, and who looked at them so sorrowfully as she went by. Frightened almost out of their wits, they remained stock-still while the banshee circled round them three times, finally disappearing with a dreadful shriek of woe.

As he reached the conclusion of this banshee yarn, Mr. Shivers made to stand up to turn on the gas a little more, when he trod on Jasper's paw. Jasper howled and growled together, Mr. Shivers lost his balance, yelled, and tumbled headlong. He got up, trembling from head to foot, but, recovering himself, he heartily kicked Jasper out of the room, stirred up the fire, and again resumed his book.

The next story was of a "white lady," who would suddenly appear to the beholder with dishevelled hair, holding her hands aloft in despairing supplication, and look straight at him in the ghastliest manner imaginable.

Mr. Shivers had arrived at this point in the story when a loud scream on the landing, followed by the falling of something heavy against the door, almost petrified him. Then he heard the shrill tones of his housekeeper saying hard things about animals in general and of Jasper in particular.

For a few seconds he listened apprehensively, then carefully closed the book.

"I think it is about time I went down to supper," he muttered, as he followed his aggrieved and mumbling house-keeper to the dining-room.

JAMES H. WATERS.

A Chinaman's Second Letter.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

DEAR SIR,—

I thank you very much indeed for publishing my letter in the *Freethinker*. I have thought that my experiences might not be uninteresting to some of your thoughtful readers.

When I had passed my examination in China, I took up the study of the English language, and when I had obtained a grasp of what appeared to me at that time a most difficult tongue, I made a study of English literature, making myself fairly well acquainted with the writings of Darwin, Spencer, Huxley, and many others.

I was delighted with the great learning of your wise men. It appeared to me that if one understood the English language a totally new field of thought was open. I was surprised at the great skill of your leading scientific men; I was charmed with their system of reasoning. Quite true, nearly everything that I found in the writings of these men had been foreshadowed by Confucius and some of our great Chinese sages. But the completeness of the English system of reasoning and thought delighted me. However, as I progressed in English learning, I was constantly running across questions that greatly puzzled me.

There were at that time in China a considerable number of English and American missionaries, representing a great variety of different kinds of religion.

In order to get practice in speaking English I used to seek out these gentlemen and converse with them. Just imagine my surprise at their foolish twaddle, after having read Huxley, Darwin, and Spencer! Evidently there must be two totally different kinds of men in England—the scientific, who thinks and writes the works which I had so much admired—and the foolish, who never thinks and who seems to be completely without the power of reasoning. To say the least, I was greatly puzzled.

I then went to America, and finally came to England and made a study of English literature and laws, and I flatter myself that after about six years of study, I was fairly proficient in the subjects I had taken up. The more I studied your literature, your laws and your religion, the more I became convinced that the people of Europe and America were divided into two distinct classes—the logical and the illogical—those who could think, and those who seemed absolutely bereft of all power of reasoning—the extremes in both directions.

I was greatly amused on meeting and conversing with your priests and parsons—euphoniously dubbed "Devil-Dodgers" by many. I found that these gentlemen were quite unable to give any logical reasons why they believed such impossible doctrines and absurd superstitions. For instance, I was at a complete loss to understand how it was possible for intelligent men to believe in the remarkable fish, snake, and devil stories in the Bible. It then occurred to me that these gentlemen connected with the Church only pretended to believe because their living depended upon doing so. In speaking to non-clerical people on the subject I found that only a very small number of the intelligent men I met believed anything at all; they generally said in an off-hand sort of way: "Oh, it does well enough for the wife and the kids." Then again, I found that in good society it was considered very indelicate indeed to even refer to religious subjects. I very soon learnt that the so-called believers regarded their religion as a species of very delicate theological fungus, growing in a dark and dismal cavern, so delicate indeed that the least ray of the sunlight of reason would at once prove fatal to it. In some cases, I attempted to discuss the relative merits of the Chinese and English systems of religion, and was met with the knock-down argument: "You can reason on anything, on any mortal thing, in this world, except Christianity. Christianity is above reason, one is not permitted to reason on anything that relates to the Christian Faith." This was said by people who pretended to believe in Christian mythology.

It never occurred to these gentlemen for one moment that any religion could be made unassailable if its adherents assumed the same position. Suppose, for instance that the religious beliefs of the Fiji Islanders as they originally existed should be above reason, then of course it would be quite impossible for anyone to show the absurdity of their system of belief.

In England, I often see articles in the papers ridiculing Chinese superstitions and religion, and I have often attempted to reply to these articles. However, upon taking my attempt to the editor, I generally received this stereotyped reply: "Oh! yes, this is very good indeed. I like it immensely. It is very witty, and at the same time very logical, but we publish a newspaper to sell, and people would not take it into their families if we should publish your letters." The

fact is your people wish to hear but one side of the story. They cannot stand having the truth told to them by the other side.

I think that I have made myself fairly familiar with all the leading superstitions of China and England, and I am quite willing to admit the truth, that in China we have a very large class who are extremely ignorant and unreasoning. They have ancient superstitions which have come down through countless ages, and unfortunately they believe implicitly in them. These ignorant people fancy that there are certain powers in the air and in the earth, that have to be dealt with through the agency of necromancers and geomancers, and they pay these charlatans a considerable amount of money to act as intermediaries between themselves and these imaginary air and earth dragons. This kind of superstition, which, however, only exists among our ignorant classes, is generally known as the Fung Shui. Certainly it is a bothersome and expensive form of superstition, and my countrymen would be much better off without it. Of this there can be no question. There is not a learned man in China to-day, or, in fact, a high official of any kind who would not be pleased to have our ignorant people relieved of all their superstitious fears and of all their belief in supernatural agencies. I have no hesitation in saying that if the very best men that one could find in Europe and America should go to China, and take with them a fair amount of physical apparatus, and deliver scientific lectures, that they would be very well received. If some clever European could thoroughly master our language and come to China and lecture on the system of Darwin and the theory of Herbert Spencer, it would do away with much of our superstition, and would do our people an immense amount of good. I am sure the Government and the wealthy and intelligent classes would do all in their power to help the matter on. But unfortunately these are not the kind of men that Europe and America send out to China. They do not send their best men, and they do not go to our country to ask us to do away with superstitions altogether, but rather to swap off our present Fung Shui and take on one which is still mere expensive and bothersome.

China is a very thickly populated country. The people, according to French philosophers, are able to get about twice as much out of the soil as the French are able to do, and the French are the cleverest agriculturists outside of China. The art of getting the most out of the land which will enable the greatest possible number to live off a given territory, has been greatly intensified in China, and even with this intensification of production, the population is so vast that it is necessary for the agriculturist to work unceasingly, or starve.

Suppose now that our people should exchange their Fung Shui for the English system, suppose that they should take over the English Sunday Fung Shui, it would then require one entire day in every week to propitiate and make peace with these dragons and devils. It would also be necessary for them to say over certain formula several times in the day to pacify other imaginary phantoms of the air. All this would take time. They would simply starve. It would therefore be evident that our people could not possibly exchange their present Fung Shui for one which would require at least ten times as much to propitiate. It would take too much time. Then, again, the English geomancers and necromancers demand much more to act as intermediaries between the people and the air phantoms than the Chinese necromancers, who perform the same imaginary service for the ignorant Chinese.

All this might be considered very interesting from a purely philosophical standpoint, providing that it did not do any harm, but unfortunately there is a tragic side also. Your necromancers insist upon forcing their particular Fung Shui upon us, while our ignorant classes are equally determined to stick to their old Fung Shui and to reject the new one, which, according to our way of thinking, is at least a hundred-fold as foolish and impossible as our own. We have learnt to till the soil to a greater degree of perfection than any other people that have ever lived in the world. Consequently more of us are able to live in comfort off the land than is possible in any other country. But although we are very proficient in supporting human life off the products of the earth, we are extremely deficient in all systems and machinery intended for the purpose of destroying human life.

In Europe and America, however, clever scientific men having long made a study of destroying human life have reduced their machinery and their system to a very high degree of perfection. In fact, incredible as it may seem, I have seen in England an automatic man-killer which works by itself by simply touching a button. This is truly marvellous. It is also horrible. It therefore follows that with your trained fighting man and your automatic man-killers you are able to invade our country and attempt to thrust your Fung Shui upon us, and this has resulted in the death of many millions of Chinese during the last sixty years.

We do not want your Fung Shui, we do not wish for any system of religion in which devils and miracles have any place whatsoever. We do not like supernaturalism. To every thinking man in the world supernaturalism is simply superstition, and we do not like superstition; we have too much of it already. We therefore pray you to treat us as you would like to be treated yourselves, and withdraw your Devil-Dodgers, necromancers, geomancers, and your foolish and degrading superstitions from our country, and allow us to work out our own salvation, and to gradually do away with our own Fung Shui as best we can. Both are bothersome and foolish. If, however, you will attend to your own Fung Shui, we will attend to ours.

I have never yet seen an Englishman, or, in fact, any Christian who is able to hold an argument on religious subjects with a Chinese. I never have found the man that can show what advantage would accrue to us by abandoning our own superstitions and taking over the superstitions of the English. If there is such a man, I hereby challenge him to a fair discussion in his own language,—Yours sincerely,
AH SIN.

Miracles at Home.

"Distance lends enchantment to the view." That is why the phlegmatic Englishman dotes upon miracles not perpetrated upon British soil, nor within the range of concise modern history.

He will sit in a building paved with the spare cash of millionaires, with a vaulted roof shutting out the inclemency of the heavens above him, while the organ (with the poor devil sweating at the bellows in the rear) prepares his soul for the melodrama of the miracles of far-off countries and of ages long gone by.

'Tis then that he feelingly warbles of "Cool Siloam's shady rill," or "Blest Bethesda's pool," for are not the miracles of those places depicted in the stained-glass windows, together with Jesuses in waxed moustachios and cherry-blossom complexions, with the ineffable gloss of the band-box, and the laundryman's art still evident on their most correct apparel?

Let him read, if he will, the following extract, taken from our Roman contemporary, *L'Asino*, and shudder at a mere recital of miracles as they exist at the present time amongst the descendants of those primitive Christians whom he admires so much. The lapse of time has brought to them no change of character, and no improvement from the low educational status of Bible days.

This is an account of the (to them) great Sardinian miracle. It is a literal translation from the Italian:—

At Uta, a village in the vicinity of Cagliari, on November 19, 1900, the sexton of the cemetery, whilst digging a grave late in the afternoon, was hailed by a horseman who drew up at the railings. This strange visitor proceeded to inform him that the water from the cemetery well was miraculous; and, adjuring him furthermore to make the fact known to the country folk, immediately disappeared.

The gravedigger desired to know no more, but spread the tale in such a manner that soon all Sardinia knew of it. Then nothing was seen but an outgoing from far and near to wash in the wonderful water.

For two years the fable has grown. The priests of the church attached to the cemetery have smelt a chance to unburden the purses of the poor Sardinians. Malaria, small-pox, and a thousand ills that always accompany the hunger and misery of Sardinia, would ensure a good income to the holy shop.

In the various Sardinian churches the preachers shouted of the miraculous water which gave health to those who had none, and now the whole of the inhabitants of the island have commenced a pilgrimage to the Utan church, where several parsons from neighboring villages mount continual guard. These shameless mystificators move among the groups of peasantry commenting and explaining the accounts of miraculous cures accomplished by the water of Santa Maria, giving counsel, too, as to the prayers that are best calculated to hurry up the miracle.

Here is what happens at Uta, according to the editor of the *Unione Sardi*:—

"Along the road leading to the little church goes a continuous procession from all countries. People come with bottles, jugs, and mugs of all sizes.

In the cemetery around the well is a spectacle both piteous and revolting.

Those who do not possess the half-pence necessary for a bathe within the sheds, stretch themselves in drawers and shirt in large tubs and basins of stone that somebody has brought there from the country.

First one, then another and another; and the water, already thick when extracted from the well, becomes more

and more dirty, until it is black, slimy, and stinking; but this is no reason for throwing it away.

After some ten or twenty have bathed, and left their filth with the scum of their disease in it, a woman laves her eyes there, and then someone else dips his head right into it.

I myself have seen three individuals fix their lower limbs in the same bath simultaneously, while one of them picked the black scab from a large spreading sore which disfigured his leg, attempting with the water to staunch the blood that issued abundantly.

Later on, passing by the same place, I saw a countryman sitting with his legs in the grimy water of the same bath, a long towel hanging around him to the ground.

Just then he got up; and, after putting on his boots, took his bread from his knapsack, soaked it in the fetid black water, and devoured it ravenously. I turned away, for my stomach revolted at the sight. It seems, in fact, after the ratiocination of those unhappy creatures, that when one drinks of the water, the dirtier it is the more miraculous its efficacy becomes.

Around each bath, where some poor creature shivering with the cold, hopes for health from that muck-plunge (continues the editor of *L'Unione*), is a circle of the faithful and curious awaiting the miracle.

The poor wretch makes an effort to move the paralysed limb, thus to aid the virtue of the water, while from the spectators comes a constant interchange of question and reply: "Well, doesn't it seem as if you can move your leg a bit more easily?" "A little," replies the bather, afraid to doubt the efficacy of the water, with a sigh that gives the lie to his words.

"See here," observes another, "the water has made a difference already. It really is miraculous."

"When he got into the water," comes the remark from another neighbor, "he couldn't move at all; and now he can walk all by himself!"

After an hour it is already put about that a man with a paralysed leg, who has been refused by three hospitals, etc., is now perfectly cured. The miracle has come."

Now, it will be asked, are not the Count Cioia, the Prefect, and the rest of the authorities, including the inspectors, aware of what happens in Uta? A few priests exercise trickery and swindling with impunity, and the tutelage of the public hygiene disappears.

A crowd is rushing from all parts of Sardinia to the burial-ground of the little country church of Uta, to the torpid spring of miraculous water. It is attracted by new superstitions that perpetuate moral and economical misery, by germs even more contagious than those of malaria.

How, then, can the indifference of the authorities be explained? Only in one way. In Sardinia the priest is still feared. He is the lever upon which are resting the various cliques that enslave the authorities. And so the miracle of Uta, besides being a crime of the clergy and of malefactors associated with views to delinquency, may make the fortune, at the next election, of the Prefect of Cagliari.

G. GUARDIABOSCO.

Religion in the Future.

WITH the large number of curious religious communities which have been unearthed at different times, it appears a very interesting question as to where and what we are coming to. What shall we believe? To an ordinary observer the present method and ambition of most Biblical Christians seems the creation of discord and disunion between their fellow-workers, which is shown by the multitude of sects in the so-called Christian Church. Their thousand and one objects of virtuous belief give us apparently, by its adopted mode of explanation and teaching, no visual, genuine, or sound principle of practical Christianity, but they persist in a wilfulness in setting up dogmas and endeavoring to ban all those who may not agree to their doctrines. To all things of the naked truth the majority of self-styled religious people take elaborate pains to the avoidance of practical truths; and we appear in a world of perpetual antagonism against each other; Church against Church, "You are wrong, I am right," sort of feeling," instead of promoting a quieter Christian atmosphere: the cry is for more mystery, more excitement, more elaborate surroundings and grandeur in the stead of carrying out the works of our plain duty to mankind.

Signs are not wanting which point to the abolition of, at no distant date, the mythological foundations of Biblical teachings. It does not appeal to those who think, the pious without an altar or the worshippers of truth without a Bible, that they should have thrust upon them a guide to heaven characterised by obsolete and antiquated phraseology, made

up to order by assemblies of bishops, leaving their authority as sufficient to make up for the lack of real grounds for belief, and imposed upon us compulsorily *en bloc*; therefore tending to drive religion out of common life into a jungle of mystery through which one cannot start to enter without a guide.

Anyone who attempts to tamper with the printed routine of obligations and observances is a traitor to the selfish, who look upon this world of people as mere tools to minister to their worldly thoughts and ambitions, under the cloak of godly feeling.

One can be rigidly economical and profess adherence to all the creeds of a Church at about one penny a service. You are then avowedly a true believer, join in confession with a few hundred others, giving your assent to a number of untruths which the ingenuity of an elastic conscience of a priest has been able to devise, and never costing the slightest feeling of passing irritation to his honest mind.

To-day the Churches often prevent us from knowing one another, or we should probably flourish less feebly in our endeavors for a common religious friendship. The Anglican wraps himself up in the cloak of his Thirty-nine Articles, and holds himself away from the Agnostic, the disbeliever in the cosmogony of Genesis.

Surely we can still value a man, not by his theological dress, but by his life, and not the profession of his lips or the burning of incense to tradition and mythology. The kindness of heart is better than the signing of a name in a church register, for there are many who say "Lord, Lord," and live in their own thoughts, never realising that there is a kingdom of goodness during our life on earth. We live in a practical age, when simplicity is perfection, and doing to others as you would they should do unto you would produce a better, more healthy feeling between the different denominations and to mankind in their various endeavors, which, after all, is only a matter of faith, to reach their desired heaven.

GILBERT ROSS.

A Matter of Doubt.

A doctor who was attending a dangerous case where a Scotch butler was engaged, on calling in the forenoon, said to Donald: "I hope your master's temperature is much lower to-day than it was last night." "I'm no sae very sure about that," replied the butler, "for he dee'd this mornin'."

Even in the Depths.

THE Devil paused in the act of grilling five plump Christian Scientists.

"Why don't you shut up?" he asked irritably. "You are disturbing unlimited curates, forty bishops and many Non-conformist ministers. You might be discussing the Education Bill by the row you make. I thought you considered pain a myth. It can't hurt."

"It does hurt," yelled the Christian Scientists.

An Atheist standing neck-deep in burning brimstone was observed to smile.

"Why do you smile?" inquired the Devil, anxious to receive information, coals, or anything else that was cheap.

"I was thinking," said the Atheist, "what a trade you'd do down here if red-hot stuff didn't hurt. You'd be crowded out within a month."

Struck by the truth of this remark, Satan punched him an exit ticket and told him to go to Lazarus and quench his thirst.

E. J. M.

There is an old story, old enough to be retold, of an Irishman who did not believe in a future life. So sure was he of his position that he used to make it a point to attend spiritualistic circles to convince the people there how seriously mistaken they were. One day the Irishman died and a circle was held to find out what he thought about his error now. The Irishman soon got control and announced triumphantly: "I've ben there an' I've coom back to tell yez that I was right. I've found no future life here. So yez might as well quit an' go home."

There once was a person named Hughes
Wrote *An Atheist Maker of Shoes*.

In 't he mangled the truth

Without scruple or ruth;

Then "explained"—but, *qui s'excuse, s'accuse!*

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