

THE

Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

One cannot change English ideas so much as, if I live, I hope to change them, without saying imperturbably what one thinks and making a good many people uncomfortable. The great thing is to speak without a particle of vice, malice, or rancour.

—MATTHEW ARNOLD (Letter to his Mother, May 19, 1863).

The New Year.

THE year is a more or less arbitrary division of time, though it is not as arbitrary as a century. It might begin anywhere else than on the first of January, and end anywhere else than on the thirty-first of December. But it does cover a definite astronomical occurrence; namely, the earth's completion of its orbit round the sun. The real turning-point, of course, is the twenty-fifth of December; which was celebrated by the ancients as the birthday of their Sun-Saviors, and was simply borrowed by the Christians and called the birthday of their Sun of Righteousness. Why then, it may be asked, was not this day the beginning of the new year in the Julian Calendar? For a very simple reason. Moon-worship had to be conciliated as well as sun-worship. Now the moon's total phases cover a period of twenty-eight days. Halve that, and you get a fortnight. Halve that, and you get a week. Halve that you cannot. So the indivisible number seven became sacred. And thus the new year in the Julian Calendar began seven days (moon-worship) after the twenty-fifth of December (sun-worship).

The ancient religionists were not exactly silly. They had very good reasons (of a kind) for what they did. In the same way savages have very good reasons (of a kind) for believing in ghosts. They trust what they think the evidence of their own senses. It was reserved for Christians to act and believe without any reason at all. They are simply parrot-like superstitionists. They go on repeating what they were told; and they tell it to others, who go on repeating it in the same fashion.

But let us return to our sheep, as the French say. This does not mean the Christians, though their Savior called them by that name. It means the real matter in hand. And that, in the present case, is the new year; which, of course, means *our* new year.

Fortunately the new year opens better than might have been expected for the whole civilised world. It was very odd that the Christian governments of Great Britain and Germany could not wait and get Christmas over before falling upon poor miserable little Venezuela; which, by the way—and this is the cream of the joke—is a Christian country too. Christmas carols and Naval guns sounded together; and indeed, for our part, we were never able to see any practical opposition between them. Happily it suited the self-interest of the United States government to put an end to this situation. We say self-interest advisedly, because the Americans did not ask for arbitration in Cuba, and do not ask for it in the Philippines. Still, self-interest is quite good enough, if it leads in the right direction; and it is a matter for rejoicing with all really civilised men and women that Great Britain and Germany have been diplomatically jockeyed into accepting Arbitration.

So, in the words of Shakespeare, for this relief much thanks!

Mr. Joseph Chamberlain (lucky man!) is in South Africa, dressed in a light-colored suit, and laughing at the English climate he left behind him. Mr. Balfour stays at home to struggle with the influenza and the Nonconformists. Let us hope the Colonial Secretary will do more good where he is than he seems likely to do when he returns home. For, to tell the plain truth, we were never worse off in this country for useful domestic legislation. Some of us curse the fatality that took the great Charles Bradlaugh from the political life of England. "England hath need of thee," said Wordsworth of Milton; and the same words may be said of Bradlaugh now.

There will be a good deal of ecclesiastical preferment going in the new year. Death has been calling pretty freely on the Bishops; hurrying them off to heaven prematurely. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury went there too soon, though he had a long way passed the Psalmist's three score years and ten. It is naturally hard to leave a palace and fifteen thousand a year. "These are the things that make death bitter," as Dr. Johnson said when he passed through David Garrick's house and saw all the fine pictures, carpets, and furniture. One must admit, however, that Death has been impartial. Nonconformity has also suffered from his visitations. The Rev. Hugh Price Hughes has gone, and the Rev. Dr. Parker has gone; and both of them, perhaps, are sitting down with the right reverend Dr. Temple in the kingdom of heaven, unless they are all crushed up together in Abraham's bosom.

A far greater and nobler man than either of them, or all of them, passed away in the same old year; one who risked his hard-earned fortune, his hard-won reputation, his liberty, and almost his life, in doing an heroic act of justice to a man he had never seen. In any sane calculation men like Mr. Price Hughes, and Dr. Parker, and Dr. Temple, are but as dust in the balance beside a man like Emile Zola. And it may as well be observed that Zola was an Atheist. No doubt, as orthodoxy teaches, that heroic champion of light, liberty, and justice has gone to "the wrong place." But that has at least one advantage. It saves him from a lot of despicable company.

The most conspicuous feature of the new year in England is the triumph of the Church of England in the passing of the Education Act, and its easy victory in the *Daily News* religious census of London. What no one suspected turns out to be a solid fact; namely, that the Church of England, at least in the metropolis, boasts more worshippers than all the other denominations put together. This is bound to produce an effect in the political world, though we are not called upon to discuss it. In the intellectual world it does not promise much injury. There is more mental hospitality in the State Church than there is in Dissenting bodies. The so-called Higher Critics mostly belong to the Establishment. It is there, and not in the Nonconformist Bethels, that the intellectual dissolution of Christianity is going on. This is a fact that Freethinkers should particularly notice. Free-thought has been bombarding Christianity for generations, and the most able and accomplished clergy are now blowing it up from inside.

G. W. FOOTE.

Stocktaking.

HITHERTO the new century has not been as favorable as one could wish for the growth of Freethought and other advanced "notions." It opened, in this country, with the South African War in full swing, it has been accompanied by a period of commercial decline, and at present we have both this and the after-effects of the war to fight against. How far the arts of peace are promoted by the arts of war may be an open question; but it is certain that, when the latter are to the front, the former are in abeyance. Militarism and Conservatism fit in but badly with scientific thinking on social subjects, and, while they are in the air, one must expect reform to be at a discount. A mere political party may find its interests promoted by distress. Hard times may drive people to work for the downfall of a ministry for no better reason than that things are not with them as well as might be. But a propaganda which relies for its success upon the strength of its appeal to the intellect does not profit by such conditions. A certain degree of leisure, some little relief from the bare struggle for existence, has always been necessary to the higher development of thought, and, in seasons of economic distress and social upheaval, intellectual movements are the first to suffer.

It would be rash, then, to expect that during the year that has just closed, Freethought should have made any dazzling or brilliant advance. But it would be equally unwise to conclude that the general development of thought, of which it is an expression, should have been at a standstill. Mental evolution is, of course, hindered or helped by the circumstances of the moment, but it is not absolutely dependent upon them; and, unfavorable as the conditions have been, the general growth of liberalism in religious matters may be observed. I have used the word "general" advisedly, because it is only by taking a comprehensive survey that the prospects of Freethought may be accurately calculated. A very marked growth in one direction may, or may not, be a favorable symptom; a far pleasanter sight is that of witnessing a *general* development, which, while not striking or picturesque, is yet far better evidence of victory in the future.

To many, the most noteworthy event of 1902 will be the Government Education Bill. A certain fictitious importance has been given to this measure owing to the outcry raised by the Nonconformists, whose opposition to the measure was really based upon its favoring their rivals more than themselves. Had the majority of the Voluntary schools been in the hands of Nonconformists, there is little doubt that the measure would have been hailed by them with acclamation, and the public would have been spared all the verbiage concerning the rights of citizenship, destruction of education, etc., etc. Personally, I do not believe that the general education of the country will suffer by the measure. The Bill has many bad features, as all educational measures will have so long as religion is retained in the schools, but it has also some good ones; and, while it may affect for the worse certain classes, education, as a whole, I think, stands to gain by the new arrangements. True, it gives the clergy a larger sum of public money, and this is bad enough in all conscience, but the objection to this must lie with the granting of *any* money, or the teaching of *any* religion, rather than with the amount of either.

Certainly, so far as distinctive Freethought—in the shape of Secular Education is concerned—the action of the Government may be viewed with approval. The agitation has fixed the attention of the country, for a time, on the subject, a number of prominent people, political and religious, have declared themselves in favor of Secular Education as the only wise and equitable plan, and, so far, we have to thank both the Government and the Nonconformists for so effectually, if unconsciously, forcing people to see the justice of the policy preached by the N. S. S. throughout the whole of its existence. One thing

seems to me pretty certain. The English people are not much given to a fight for bare principle. Some immediate necessity must force them to see the expediency of a proposal before it will command any large measure of support; and, if Secular Education is ever to become an accomplished fact, it will be because a combination of political circumstances forces the public at large—religious and non-religious—to promote that policy. Events are fast shaping themselves in that direction, and it would be well if it were possible to form some sort of a committee to watch over the public conscience in this matter. As things stand at present, I believe it would be possible to put quite a number of members on the various councils definitely pledged to Secular Education, if only the funds for such a purpose were forthcoming. The question is, Who will provide the sinews of war?

In another direction a strong testimony to the decline of religious belief is found in the recent church census at Liverpool, Croydon, Portsmouth, and—now going on—London. This census will probably be carried out all over the country before it is concluded; but so far as it has gone there are three features that stand clearly out. One is the very small proportion of people who attend church; the second the fact that an overwhelming majority of those who do go are women; and the third the general uniformity of the figures. If we delete from the number who were actually at church on the days of the census those who were there as casual visitors, one sees at a glance how hopelessly out of touch with the mass of the people are both Church and Chapel. The attempt to disguise the significance of this phenomenon by attributing it to the non-attractive character of preacher or building may be dismissed as a mere subterfuge. A good preacher will always attract more people than a bad one, under any circumstances; but its essential significance is the simple one that religious doctrines no longer have the attraction they once had, nor is even social prestige so much on the side of church-going as of old. Nor must it be lost sight of that even the most popular preacher does not fill his church or chapel with people drawn from the otherwise non-worshipping population. A popular preacher lives at the expense of others in the same profession. If Mr. Blank goes to hear Mr. A. preach, he stays away from Mr. B. for the purpose of doing so. The general population meanwhile drifts further away from both.

That no special factor such as dislike to a particular service, building, or preacher, will explain the facts is shown by the uniformity of the returns. In each case the church-going population bears, roughly, the same proportion to the absentees. So general a result argues a very general and deep-seated cause—one that cannot be removed by any tinkering at the service or any brightening-up of the preacher. And this cause is simply that both the educated and uneducated mind is ceasing to be attracted to religion. The mass of the people—the vulgarly called "lower classes"—feel, in a dumb, uncertain kind of way, that their best hopes lie outside all religious organisations. The purely secular efforts of the last sixty or seventy years—the trades unions, Socialistic propaganda, popular education, and Freethought advocacy—has had at least this result. "Why won't working men come to church?" is a question often propounded at Church gatherings, and it is one that the working man answers in a way that is final—he stops away.

And as to the educated mind of the country, where there is not open Freethought, there is a large amount of discreet and respectable heresy. As a species of policeman religion has always been patronised by those who regard themselves as the leaders of society, for the purpose of "keeping the lower classes in order," and it will continue to receive support so long as it is believed to be able to perform this function. Still religion sits uneasily on the shoulders of educated men, and the heresy of the Dean of Ripon—toned down though it has been by a number of more or less ingenious "explanations" is an apt indication of the fact. How can a man of average reading and experience, who thinks about the subject, continue

to believe in stories that he would laugh at, and does laugh at, if met with outside of the Christian creed? In old Rome it was impossible, we are told, for two Augurs to meet without laughing in each other's face. If educated people to-day meet each other, as professed believers, without laughing, it must certainly be because we have more command over our risible muscles, not because there is less cause.

A feature of much significance in these returns is, as I have said, the large preponderance of women—generally about three to one. Custom and social opinion unquestionably play a larger part here than with the male attendants. And it is equally certain that in proportion as the social boycott of Freethought is relaxed, the number of women at our meetings, and among our avowed adherents, will increase. Already it is pleasant to observe that all over the country the number of women at our meetings is distinctly on the increase. This is, however, the weak side of our movement—how to interest and attach the women, and through the women the next generation. It is only by doing this that we can consolidate our work instead of having to do it over again with each generation. It is a hard problem to master, but it is one that must be mastered somehow.

Once more, however, the economic factor comes into play. Freethought is socially boycotted because it is Freethought; but it, so to speak, sets the seal on its own ostracism, by being compelled, owing to want of funds, and often the existent bigotry, to meet in inferior halls, and in out-of-the-way places. This cannot at present be helped, but it has its inevitable effect in keeping the movement in a backward condition. A large, centrally situated, and "respectable" meeting place is in itself a certain introduction to outsiders, and it is the outsiders that we specially need to reach. It is true that a teaching is in itself as good in a cottage as in a palace, the only thing is that people have a liking for the latter as against the former.

When we look further afield the indications of the growth of Freethought are tolerably clear. The number of books dealing with the origin and development of religious ideas that are either tinged with or strongly teaching Freethought are as numerous as ever. The *Encyclopædia Biblica*, a work which, although necessarily of unequal merit, is yet on the whole the boldest expression of heresy that has come from religious circles, steadily nears its completion, and bids fair to take its place as a guide-book for students of the younger generation. The row over the appearance of the first three volumes will in all probability break out again with the publication of the fourth and last; but that will hardly hinder some of the results being accepted. The fact is that the machinery of textual criticism is now so elaborate and so thorough that the clergy find it a wiser policy to accept it without open hostility than to carry on an active campaign against its teachings. It is even profitable for them to in some measure popularise its study. For it serves to direct attention from a far more dangerous enemy that is now to the front. The importance of textual criticism after all, in the opinion of the writer, is secondary to that of anthropology applied to religion. In the last edition of his monumental work, *The Golden Bough*, Mr. J. G. Fraser writes that—

"Sooner or later it is inevitable that the battery of the comparative method should break these venerable walls, mantled over with ivy and mosses and wild flowers of a thousand tender and sacred associations. At present we are only dragging the guns into position; they have hardly yet begun to speak."

"Hardly," but their speech has been eloquent to all who listened. If the results hitherto are to be depended on they have relegated all purely textual criticism to a subordinate position by demonstrating once for all that *all* religious ideas, without exception, are nothing more nor less than the guesses of primitive man at problems that he had not the knowledge to deal with adequately. The clergy may well spend their time in diverting attention from this

study by calling attention to the criticism of ancient anonymous records, which are, when rightly read, themselves confirmation of the anthropologist's speculations.

On the whole the present position of Freethought, while it might be better, is such as need cause no alarm. The world moves but slowly, and one need not expect to overturn in a lifetime beliefs that it has taken centuries to establish. It is enough if we can see that our work is bearing *some* fruit, and that even while we are reviled as agitators, or dismissed as dreamers, that the trend of the best thought is on our side. It has taken a hundred years of hard work to force upon the religious world a conception of the Bible that is now admitted on all hands. On this subject the religious world is now where we were, but awhile longer and it will be where we are.

C. COHEN.

Archæology and the Bible.

DEVOUT readers of the Old and New Testaments, convinced of the truth of the narratives contained therein, very naturally expect to find in the East some traces of the heroes and localities with which they have become familiar. In the early ages of faith these traces were found without difficulty. The Empress Helena, desiring to recover the true cross, set excavators to work at Jerusalem, and, of course, the authorities took care that a lady and an empress should not be disappointed. Not only was the cross of Christ duly turned up, but the crosses of the two malefactors and all the apparatus of the passion. We are further assured that the skull of Adam was disinterred at the same spot, and if any sceptical person inquires how that skull was identified, the answer is easy. The skull was of *terra cotta*! Adam being made of clay to start with, it is obvious that his bones could not have been constructed of lime and gelatine like those of his descendants; therefore the discovery of his skull in *terra cotta* was an obvious confirmation of the unfailing truth of the Bible; and a demonstration of the nature of the original owner of that remarkable piece of anatomy. At the Reformation, however, the value of all these archæological relics was seriously discounted. The Reformers denounced as frauds all the bones, garments, tools, utensils, and edifices, which were revered by the faithful as relics of religious antiquity.

In modern times, however, enthusiastic tourists and travellers still expect to find traces of Bible history and nomenclature in the East; and it is not at all remarkable that they find them. The Old Testament was written by residents in Palestine, who naturally understood the features of their own country. Before the Jewish population of that country had ceased to be a considerable one, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. The early Christian writers took an interest in tracing out the localities mentioned in the Old Testament—a comparatively easy task under the guidance of the native population—and the custom of pilgrimages among the Christians; and the superstition of Jews resident in foreign parts, who desired to have their bones buried in the holy soil of Palestine, made it profitable to keep alive the memory of the ancient places. At the end of the seventh century, the Arabs, taking advantage of the weakness of the Byzantine Government, broke into the country; but they had come under the influence of the teaching of Muhammad, and exhibited great interest in tracing out the localities mentioned in the Koran, or remembered in Christian and Jewish tradition. The Crusades were religious wars undertaken on behalf of the "holy places," and the Crusaders naturally gave great attention to the Biblical localities. Considering all these things, therefore, it is not surprising that modern travellers can trace out the sites of the majority of the places mentioned in the Old Testament, for the names have had every chance of being remembered and of coming down through the

ages unmodified except by minor changes of pronunciation. The wonder is that any of these localities have been lost or forgotten; and the tourists who grow enthusiastic over the fact that the map of Palestine is covered with Old Testament names, never pause to think that these names have never been given a fair chance to disappear. As to minor places, the local showmen take care of these. At Damascus they show "the street called Straight;" at Joppa they exhibit the "house of Simon, a tanner;" and as there are two rival Canas of Galilee, both places preserve the "waterpots of stone" in which water became wine. But the modern Protestant tripper turns up his nose at these as Popish superstitions. He is content to believe that Damascus and Joppa occupy the same sites as of yore, but he refuses to credit that houses and waterpots still preserve their personal identity. At Jerusalem this attitude of mind has led to a schism. Upon the establishment of Christianity by Constantine there was a temple of Venus at Jerusalem, which was conveniently turned into a church, and announced to be the site of the Holy Sepulchre. Within recent years, however, a rival sepulchre has been set up by the Protestants, who do not care to see the Greeks and Roman Catholics in possession of so important a site. A small hillock, which in a touched-up photograph may be made to look something like a skull, has been proclaimed as the only genuine Golgotha. The late General Gordon enthusiastically embraced the idea, and the hillock is therefore generally referred to as "Gordon's Tomb." Considering that Jerusalem has been rebuilt and destroyed and many times altered during the last two thousand years, it ought to be obvious to all, except crack-brained persons like General Gordon, that it would be absolutely impossible for "a place of a skull" to preserve its shape for a couple of millenniums. The tomb, however, has its believers; the hillock has been purchased at a fancy price, and enclosed by a wall; and in due time it will no doubt have its Protestant shrine erected upon it.

Besides Palestinian geography, great enthusiasm has been exhibited for many years past in explorations conducted in Egypt and Babylonia. Other monuments of antiquity which are somewhat adverse to Biblical claims are quietly ignored. For instance, it is asserted in Luke that "there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled." Now, we happen to have an indisputable record of the reign of Augustus. At Ancyra, in Asia Minor, a temple was erected to this emperor during his life, and completed shortly after his death; and it is mentioned by Josephus (*Antiq.*, XVI., vi., 2). This temple, the greater portion of which is still standing, contains long inscriptions in Greek and Latin, relating the events of the reign of Augustus. If, therefore, any enrolment of the Roman Empire took place, such an important and difficult task would certainly have been recorded at Ancyra. But the Ancyra marbles are quite silent upon such a thing. They only chronicle the enrolment of Roman citizens, which is quite a different matter; because no one has ever suggested that Jesus Christ was a Roman citizen. The inference, therefore, is that no world-wide "enrolment" took place outside the imagination of Luke; and by consequence there was no necessity for Mary to remove from Galilee to Bethlehem.

A religious person looks upon every Egyptian mummy as a decisive proof of the bondage of Israel in Egypt, though he cannot exactly prove the connection by the rules of Aristotelian logic. The religious feeling for ancient Egypt has had one good—it has fostered Egyptology. The Egyptologist looks upon Israelitish history as a nuisance, and it leads to his being pestered with a lot of foolish questions by old women and clergymen; but it is these old women who find the money for exploration and excavation. The Egyptologist has the continual interest of tracing out the history, customs, arts, and literature of a peculiar and fascinating civilisation; and he does this largely at the expense of benighted Europeans who have a dim hope of seeing the dis-

interment of Abraham's sandals or Joseph's divining-cup. The older Egyptologists made a pretence of discovering illustrations of Bible texts upon the monuments; the modern school, fortunately, disdains such frauds.

A late London clergyman was in the habit of going about with an Assyrian brick in his pocket, which he imagined would prove to sceptics the truth of the Babylonian captivity—though history does not record that he made any conversions. Assyriology is making great strides, and it will soon be like Egyptology, capable of being pursued quite independently of any supposed references to Jewish history. The Assyrian records differ from the Egyptian in giving some light upon the Old Testament; but the light is not at all favorable to religious claims. The historical references put quite a different face upon Kings and Chronicles, and take away the little credit that is left to the latter work by modern criticism. The chronology of the Old Testament has been proved perfectly unreliable. The succession of the Jewish kings may be correct; but the quasi-historical books have been proved quite untrustworthy upon comparison with the cuneiform records. The cosmogony of Genesis, however, has suffered most from Assyriological research; for both the accounts of Genesis in relation to "the Creation" have been demonstrated to be of Babylonian origin. No more can they be asserted to have been a divine revelation to Moses; they have clearly been copied from the heathen of Babylon. Floods of ink have flowed in the defence of the historicity of the Biblical Deluge; all of which could have been spared if the writers had only realised that the story was a late adaptation of a Babylonian heroic poem. The Jews knew no more of the origin and early history of the world than other people; and the Christian clergy have been wasting their time in defending Babylonian polytheistic legends from the assaults of astronomers, geologists, and biologists. The religious rituals of Babylonia are so like those of the Hebrews, that the latter are relieved of any necessity for deriving theirs from Mount Sinai; while the religious poetry of Babylonian heathendom proves, upon study, to be as deeply heartfelt and pietistic as the Psalms erroneously attributed to David. If sceptics had gone round, endeavoring to overthrow the authority of the Bible by archæological research, they could not have succeeded better than has been done by the religious persons who imagined they could manufacture evidences for themselves by supplementing the Bible with archæology.

CHILPERIC.

The Fight for Free Discussion.

PAST PROSECUTIONS FOR BLASPHEMY AND HERESY.

[By the late J. M. Wheeler: with Conclusion by Another Hand.]

EPHRAIM PAGITT, in his *Heresiography*, 4th edition, London, 1647, p. 132, says of the Anti-Trinitarians or New Arrians:—"These heretics have been heretofore burnt among us, as Anno 1611, March 18, *Bartholomew Legate*, an obstinat Arrian, was burnt at Smithfield; he refused all favor, contemned Ecclesiastical government. And in the month of April following, one Edward Wightman was burnt at Lichfield for the same heresie. Queene Elizabeth of blessed memory, hearing of them, said she was very sorrowfull to heare that shee had such Monsters in her Kingdome; and truly it grieveth me very much to relate their blasphemous and divellish opinions." Lamy, in his *Histoire du Socinianisme*, adds the name of Paul Casaubon as punished with death in England about the same time. Fuller informs us that this Bartholomew Legate was a person of unblameable life. But "the poyson of Hereticall Doctrine is never more dangerous than when served up in clean cups and washed dishes." For publishing his opinion Legate had long been in prison in Newgate; and Fuller tells us "King James caused this Legate often to be brought to him and seriously dealt with him to endeavor his conversion." This he tried to do by a

trap, asking him if he never prayed to Christ. Upon Legate replying, "Indeed he had prayed to Christ in the days of his ignorance, but not for these last seven years." The king in choler spurned at him with his foot: "Away base Fellow" (said He), "it shall never be said, that one stayeth in My presence, that hath never prayed to our Savior for seven years together" (*Church History*, book x., section iv., 6, 7). The quaint and honest historian further informs us of "a Spanish Arrian, who, condemned to die, was notwithstanding suffered to linger out his life in Newgate, where he ended the same. Indeed such burning of Hereticks much startled common people, pitying all in pain, and prone to asperse justice itself with cruelty, because of the novelty and hideousness of the punishment..... Wherefore King James politickly preferred that Hereticks hereafter, though condemned, should silently and privately waste themselves away in Prison, rather than to grace them and amaze others with the solemnity of a *publick Execution*, which, in popular judgments, usurped the honor of a *persecution*." A judgment worthy of this modern Solomon, "that sanctified person," as he is called in the Bible Dedication, who, when he could not overcome by argument a celebrated professor of divinity and disciple of Arminius, named Vorstuis, remonstrated with the Dutch State, had the professor deprived of his gown, and hinted, "that as to the burning of Vorstuis, for his blasphemies and atheism, he left them to their own Christian wisdom; but surely never heretic better deserved the flames."

There is no doubt that before the statute 29 Charles II., cap. 9, at the common law anyone convicted of heresy, and refusing to abjure it, or falling into it again after he had abjured it, might be burned by force of the writ *de hæretico comburendo*, which was granted out of chancery upon certificate of such conviction by the ecclesiastical courts. In that Act of repeal it is, however, especially provided (section 2) that nothing in the Act shall be construed to take away the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts in cases of "athisme, blasphemy, heresie, or schisme, and other damnable doctrines and opinions," but that they may proceed to punish, the same punishments not extending to death as they might have done before the making of this Act.

During the Long Parliament under Charles I., a certain Paul Best was, after fifteen months' imprisonment, brought before Parliament for having applied profane epithets to the doctrine of the Trinity. All that is known of the case is an order to burn the pamphlet. What became of Best is uncertain, though it is suspected he shared his pamphlet's fate.

The case of John Biddle, who has been called "the father of English Unitarianism," is better known. Biddle was born at Wootton, Gloucester, in 1615, and educated at Oxford, where he took his M.A. degree. When he settled down in Gloucester he published his views on the Trinity. He was brought before a Parliamentary Commission, who sentenced him to gaol (December 2, 1645), there to be detained until his case could be brought before Parliament. From this time until his banishment to the Scilly islands in 1658, he was repeatedly imprisoned and fined for Anti-Trinitarian heresy.

Far worse was the treatment of the Quaker, James Naylor, who had been an officer of the Parliamentary army, and was converted in 1651 by the preaching of George Fox. It was a time of great religious excitement, and Naylor seems to have been led into some extravagances. His features, we are told, bore a near resemblance to the common pictures of Christ, and he declared he had the spirit of Christ in him. He entered Bristol mounted on a horse. [Hume sneeringly remarks, "I suppose from the difficulty in that place of finding an ass."] His disciples spread their garments before him, singing, "Holy, holy!" For this and for permitting himself to be addressed by such titles as the "Prince of Peace," the "Hope of Israel," etc., he was tried by Parliament for blasphemy (December 5, 1656), and after a lengthy examination by a Committee, declared "guilty of horrid blasphemy and a grand imposture and seducer

of the people." He was sentenced to be put in the pillory, New Palace Yard, for two hours, then whipped by the hangman from Westminster to the Exchange, there reset in the pillory and have his tongue bored through with a red-hot iron, and also be branded on the forehead to the skull with the letter B; then taken to Bristol, made to ride on horseback bare-ridged and face backward, there publicly whipped; then to be committed to prison in Bridewell, London, and there be restrained from the society of all people with hard labor during the pleasure of Parliament, and during that time to be debarred the use of pen, ink, and paper, and with no relief but what he earned by his daily labors. All of this, said his followers, was done, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

This monstrous sentence was put into execution. He received 310 lashes at the cart's-tail, and the woman who washed his wounds testified there was not a nail's breadth of flesh that was not raw. He bore all, even the branding to the skull, with the most exemplary patience, one of his followers, Robert Rich, petitioning Parliament "in case these be yet behinde of the sufferings of James Nayler to be filed up, that it may be acted in my body." Nayler was imprisoned for about two years, when, having first given satisfactory evidence of his contrition, he was released and received into the communion of the Friends. He died shortly afterwards, 1660. Some sentences which he uttered two hours before his death, show how superior he was to the bigots who had tortured him, probably for the purpose of terrifying the Quakers, with whom he was a great favorite. He said: "There is a spirit which I feel, that delights to do no evil, nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things, in hope to enjoy its own in the end. Its hope is to outlive all wrath and contention, and to weary out all exaltation and cruelty, or whatever is of a nature contrary to itself. It sees to the end of all temptations. As it bears no evil in itself, so it conceives none in thoughts to any other."

In 1678 the practice of burning heretics was formally abolished, retaining all other penalties, and in 1689 the much-needed Act of Toleration was passed. It, however, made no change in the position of Jews, Catholics, Unitarians, or Deists. In 1693 William Freeke was sentenced to pay a fine of five hundred pounds, to find security for good behavior during three years, and to make a public recantation for having published *A Brief but Clear Confutation of the Trinity*. For a similar offence Edward Ewall was tried at Stafford in 1726, but being known to the jury as an honest man they refused to convict. This was a great triumph to the Unitarians. In 1696, Thomas Aikenhead, a young surgeon of Edinburgh, was tried and hanged under the Scotch law for "railing against God and cursing Christ." These facts were not proved at the trial, which is reported among the State trials of that date, but only that he had been heard to call the Old Testament "Ezra's fables." He was also suspected to have "practised magick and conversed with devils."

(To be continued.)

Monkey Religion.

PROFESSOR GARNER, the monkey's friend and champion, says in the *New York Press* :—

"Yes, you may have asked the question about monkey religion satirically, but there is more in it than you have thought, for you really can credit them with some of the elements of religion. They certainly have some sense of right and wrong. I never saw a big monkey take anything away from a little one that was of the same species. If a little monkey and a big monkey each hold in their hands a desirable-looking nut, and a third monkey comes along with an eye on one of those nuts, I have observed repeatedly that he will try to get it away from the big one rather than from the little one. Furthermore, they show a sign of superstition. They are afraid of their own shadows. The monkey who will growl most ferociously at the approach of a member of another tribe will tremble and creep away as much terrified at the glimpse of his own shadow as if he had seen a spook."

Acid Drops.

When that extinct volcano, *Essays and Reviews*, was in its eruptive youth, and Dr. Temple's mildly unorthodox contribution was talked of in religious circles as if the end of the world were approaching, the book was dragged before Convocation by Archdeacon Denison. He begged the House to take some sort of action "for the sake of the young who are tainted and corrupted and thrust almost to hell by the action of this book." What a fuss it was about a trifle! It reminds one of Earl Shaftesbury's attack on that somewhat sentimental book, *Ecce Homo*. He called it "the worst book ever vomited from the jaws of hell." Alack and alas! who reads *Ecce Homo* now?

Archdeacon Denison had another go at *Essays and Reviews*. "In my judgment," he said on the second occasion, "of all the books in any language which I ever laid my hands on, it is incomparably the worst. It contains all the poison which is to be found in Tom Paine's *Age of Reason*, while it has the additional disadvantage of having been written by clergymen." Such is the extravagant language of religious excitement! The "poison" has lost all its efficacy, and has become quite harmless. Children may handle it with impunity. But the "poison" of the *Age of Reason* is still efficacious—and still in request. Though written more than a hundred years ago, ten thousand copies of the new Twentieth Century Edition have been sold already, and a similar issue will soon be placed upon the market.

Dr. Temple is said to have had a tolerable gift of repartee. We hope the following is not a fair sample. A certain clergyman who had been offered a suffragan bishopric went to consult the Archbishop upon the subject, and modestly admitted that one reason against his accepting the dignity was that he was aware he was not a good speaker. "I know you're not," snapped the Archbishop, "I've heard you." This may be wit in a Christian, but men of the world would give it a harder name.

"We have, in these times, moved far," the *Catholic Times* says, "from the battle-ground of mere Protestant controversy; we are in the thick of a fight for the very essentials of the Christian religion." This is perfectly true, but it has been true any time for the last fifty years, though the *Catholic Times* is only just realising the fact. Perhaps we ought to say, is only just admitting it. For there is often a great difference between what Christian advocates really see and what they confess to seeing.

When an English religious journal admits that we are in the thick of a fight for the very essentials of the Christian religion, we may rely upon it that the fight is very far advanced. The intellectual ostrich is a well-known bird, and the English variety is the finest of the species. With what solemnity the Catholic and Protestant press affect not to know of the existence of a paper like the *Freethinker*! With what gravity they pretend to be ignorant of Freethought lecturers and Freethought audiences! The way they keep it up is really wonderful. It looks like a common conspiracy of silence. But, bless you, it is nothing of the sort. It is simply the inherited constitutional tactic of the stupid old ostrich. Nobody is more astonished than himself when what he closes his eyes to, by burying his head, attacks him vigorously in the rear.

The *Daily News* religious census of London has rather upset "J. B." of the *Christian World* (the Rev. J. Brierly). Preaching the other day at Lyndhurst-road Chapel, Hampstead, he said: "The results of the religious census now being taken are not only serious, but are appalling, for they spell the doom of our Christian institutions unless we adapt them to the needs of to-day." Unless we adapt them! There is no longer any talk of divine guidance. But "J. B." need not be frightened. The religious business will last *his* time.

Another instalment of the *Daily News* religious census of London has been made public. The enumerators went to work in St. Pancras on Sunday, December 14. The day was warm, and a little rain fell in certain districts; conditions which were not unfavorable to church attendance. The total population of St. Pancras is 235,317; including 114,305 males and 121,012 females. The combined morning and evening attendances were:—Church of England, 17,275; Nonconformist, 16,230; Roman Catholic, 3,608; and Other Services, 2,737; making a grand total of 39,850. One person in twelve went to church in the morning, and one person in eleven in the evening. The proportion of men was less than one in eleven, and the proportion of women less than one in seven.

The principal feature of the St. Pancras census is (once more) the easy triumph of the Church of England. It overtops all the Nonconformist bodies put together. As far as London is concerned, Nonconformity may consider itself soundly beaten. Political Nonconformity, too, is a waning factor in the public life of England—as Matthew Arnold prophesied it would be.

The Wesleyan Methodists, who make noise enough for the whole parish, worked out rather badly. Their places of worship in St. Pancras only had 3,050 attendants altogether—including men, women, and children. The morning and evening attendances of men were 378 and 566—a total of less than a thousand.

The late Rev. Hugh Price Hughes and the West London Mission used to boast of having gained Cleveland Hall from the Secularists, though it never belonged to them and had not been used by them for many years when it was acquired by the Wesleyan Methodists. But the *Daily News* figures don't give the Wesleyans much to boast about. Cleveland Hall appears to have been open in the evening only, and the attendance was 49 men, 144 women, and 39 children. It is to be presumed that the children were there because they were sent, and some of the women to look after the children, and some of the men to look after both. But suppose we assume that all the men at the Cleveland Hall evening service attended simply to hear the Wesleyan variety of the Gospel preached. Still, there were only forty-nine of them. What a ridiculously small number after all those years of Missionising and all those chortles over the discomfited Secularists!

Some other total morning and evening attendances in St. Pancras were as follows:—Baptist, 4,149; Congregational, 3,680; Roman Catholic, 3,608; Presbyterian, 1,743; Salvation Army, 1,041; Primitive Methodist, 571; Unitarian, 296. A "fancy" sect called the Disciples of Christ had 103. But there are not as many real disciples of Christ in the whole of St. Pancras—unless you count them in the workhouse and the asylum.

Mr. Lewis Morris, the Welsh-English or English-Welsh poet, burst out with a Christmas Day screed on "The Day of Peace." It appeared in the *Daily News* and was stupidly or maliciously printed under the heading of "Table Talk." The last verse was as good, or bad, as any of the others. Here it is:—

Haste, haste, oh, blessed hour,
Which bids all sorrow cease;
Come with triumphant power;
Oh Prince of Peace!

The note of admiration after the "Prince of Peace" is in the original, and is most appropriate. It is really wonderful that anybody should write such nonsense nowadays. This Prince of Peace doesn't come like the Irishman's mother-in-law, twice a year, and stay six months each time; he comes once a year and stays twenty-four hours—on Christmas Day. Which little period is worked by the Christians for all it is worth. They cram more lies, cant, and hypocrisy into that twenty-four hours than all the other people on this globe put into the rest of the year.

Mr. Lewis Morris could not be expected to turn out decent poetry on such a subject at this time of day. A great poet could not do it, and Mr. Lewis Morris is not a great poet. His eleven verses might as well have been eleven hundred, only that everything must end somewhere. After reading them, one is inclined to say, with Touchstone, "I'll rhyme you so eight years together, dinners and suppers and sleeping-hours excepted."

The "Boxing Day" edition of the *Daily News* had an article on "Christmas Day," by Mr. G. K. Chesterton—the paradoxical gentleman who occasionally illuminates with his playful fireworks the staid sobriety of that great organ of the Nonconformist Conscience. Mr. Chesterton hit upon a serious truth, however, in his last sentences. It might have been by mere accident; it might have been half by design. "For this season," he said, "is created by worship and play, not merely allied, but mingled. The world is at once a temple and a playground; all the idols are our dolls, and all the dolls are our idols." This truth was long ago stated in a tentative way by Bacon, and in a more assured way by Hobbes. It was the latter who said that superstition was religion out of fashion, and religion was superstition in fashion. Which is the alpha and omega of the subject.

Mr. Chesterton will perhaps tell us whether the two football teams, and the 25,000 spectators, at Tottenham on Christmas morning were playing or worshipping; or was it a

case of both exercises being "allied" or "mingled"? We ask this question in no spirit of sarcasm, but for the sake of information.

The "cheek" of present-day Christians, particularly of the Dissenting variety, is simply colossal. Once upon a time the believers used to *hope* for heaven; now they are *cocksure* of it. The Brighton preacher who filled the City Temple pulpit on Christmas morning said that "Nonconformists in that church had just suffered a great bereavement with the promotion of their beloved pastor, Dr. Parker, to spend his Christmas in heaven." Of course there is not the slightest evidence that Dr. Parker has arrived at that establishment yet.

Charles Lamb, in his younger days, had to take down the self-assurance of Coleridge by sending him eight pertinent questions, of which the last was this: "Whether an 'immortal and amenable soul' may not come to be damned at last, and the man never suspect it beforehand?" Something like this seems necessary to be posted up in Dissenting Bethels.

What a joke, too, is the City Temple congregation's "bereavement" through Dr. Parker's "promotion." Probably these people don't read Shakespeare; otherwise they might have recollected a certain passage in *Twelfth-Night*. The Clown asks Olivia why she is mourning; she says it is for her brother's death; and then comes the following:—

Clown—I think his soul is in hell, madonna.

Olivia—I know his soul is in heaven, fool.

Clown—The more fool you, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul being in heaven.

God is no respecter of persons, the Bible says. The clergy are, though; and when it comes to a King, and a King who firmly supports their order, they will bow till their foreheads touch the floor. This was proved at Sandringham on Christmas morning. King Edward, with the Queen and other members of the royal family, drove to the Church and took part in "divine service." Hymns, prayers, etc., were sung and said, but, although Canon Hervey officiated, the sermon was dispensed with. Hitherto the King has insisted on short sermons, even to the brevity of five minutes; but it looks as if the rule in future will be no sermons at all.

Madame Humbert, the amazing French adventuress, is a not unusual mixture of piety and artfulness. We see by the French papers, and particularly by an article from the pen of M. Gohier in *La Raison*, that she showed great devotion in the prison in Madrid, prostrating herself very effusively at the altar. It is curious, too, how she arranged to meet Emile Daurignac, who did not leave Paris with the rest of this remarkable family. She told him to come on to Madrid, and, as communication was dangerous, to visit one of the churches there a few minutes after sunset, until he found them. Other persons might have arranged to meet at a theatre; this precious gang preferred a church. It was more in their line.

We noticed an announcement that the Salvation Army had received a donation of £100 from the London City Council. Naturally we wondered what right the London City Council had to subvention religious denominations. On looking into the matter more closely, however, we found that the £100 was voted to the Salvation Army "to provide soup for distribution in the poorer parts of London." We don't suggest that the poor of London will not get that hundred pounds' worth of soup. What we do suggest is that the Salvation Army knows how to make the most of a good advertisement. We might further suggest that it is high time that the relief of utter destitution were taken out of the hands of sectarian bodies. It is all very well to say that these bodies do not act in a sectarian manner. They *do*, and from the very nature of the case they *must*.

The clergy are more scrupulous than they used to be about reading parts of certain "lessons" from the Bible, but some men of God have still a robust piety which sticks at nothing. We hear that a Rev. Dr. Harris had recently to read the twenty-sixth chapter of Isaiah in an Anglican church at Dartmouth. He did not jump over the seventeenth and eighteenth verses. Perhaps he had not rehearsed the reading and was caught napping. We wonder what the ladies thought of it all?

The Feltham School Board has been plunged into a theological discussion. Complaint was made of a teacher who had stated in the "religious teaching" (1) that after death the spirit goes to Hades until judgment, (2) that the correct form of baptism is by sprinkling, and (3) that only children or adults who have been baptised go to heaven. The teacher in question replied that she had never taught the second and

third points; as regarded the first, she had simply tried to explain the words of the Creed, "He descended into Hades," or "Hell," as the New Testament had it—as the place to which departed spirits went. This was construed as "teaching Purgatory." But what was the teacher to do? If a child asked the meaning of "He descended into Hades," she was bound to give some sort of answer; and if her answer sounds like "teaching Purgatory," that is the fault of the Board in allowing the Apostles' Creed in the schools. Some day or other people will be sensible enough to banish religious teaching from the schools altogether. Then we shall have peace and harmony in public education.

"What is the Bible?" is the title of a sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral recently by the Rev. B. W. Randolph, D.D., Principal of Ely Theological College, and reported in the *Church Times*. It is not a novel or brilliant sermon; indeed, it would not be worth mentioning if it had not been preached in a place like St. Paul's. Once upon a time it was taught that the Bible is a divine book. Sceptics, however, said it was a human book, "All right," says the Church nowadays, "have it both ways." "The Bible," says Dr. Randolph, "is both human and divine." How much of it is either depends on your own taste and judgment. You pay your money and take your choice. Which is surely a very accommodating theory! The little word "and" does it all. The Bible is not human or divine; it is human and divine. A happy way of ending the dispute! That is to say, as far as the Church is concerned. For, if the Bible is divine at all, the clergy have all they need. A tremendous apparatus is not necessary for thimble-rigging or the three-card trick.

The *Boston Traveller*, which doesn't travel but stops at Boston, must have been very short of copy when it printed an "anti-infidel" letter from Eugene B. Willard. "I am now advocating the stake," he wrote, "as the only sure remedy for infidelity. Our Lord commands us to execute his law upon infidels and upon all individuals worthy of death. Putting to death the followers of the monster wretch Ingersoll would exalt the law of God. This doctrine is promulgated by the Mormons. I am also a firm believer in it." We don't know that it matters a great deal to the world at large what Eugene B. Willard firmly believes. But it seems to matter in Boston. And we wonder for what reason. Perhaps, after all, the *Traveller* inserted this letter as a joke, and thought it would look funniest on the serious side of the paper.

Supposing that this Eugene B. Willard is serious, we beg to offer him an idea—and we charge him nothing for it. He is evidently a brave man. Why, then, should he not challenge Ingersoll's followers to mortal combat? We don't mean on the platform—for he would probably cut a very sorry figure there. We mean with swords, daggers, and pistols. The Christian champion ought to slay all the Ingersollites and come out safe himself at the finish. Because the Lord is on his side to "execute" the infidels.

Catholics seem to be in a great majority over Protestants in New York. A recent census of church attendance on Manhattan island, taken on three successive Sundays, showed an average attendance of 134,177 Protestants and 317,454 Catholics. The total membership of all bodies, according to official figures, is 173,812 Protestants and 522,130 Roman Catholics. These figures, we believe, beat those of London, which has a much larger population. Altogether, it is evident that our Freethought comrades across the Atlantic have a big job before them in the way of conversion.

Topeka is the place that the Rev. Mr. Seddon, of "What Would Jesus Do?" fame, hails from. Naturally there is a good deal of piety knocking about the town. In November the Christians there prayed hard for the defeat of the Republican candidates for county attorney and sheriff. Both candidates were remarkably successful. It is to be presumed, therefore, that the Lord turns a deaf ear to prayers from Topeka.

"Prayer," said the *Atchinson Globe*, in reference to this Topeka fizzle, "will not fill a ballot-box." "Does the *Globe*," asks the New York *Truthseeker*, "know of anything it will fill?"

The Rev. Henry C. Brown, of the Congregational Church of Bethel, Ohio, has brought trouble upon himself by announcing that there must be no more love-making in his church. Services, he said, had time after time been interrupted by smacks of kisses, and for the last six months he had known that it was the habit of young men and women to attend church, which is lighted by kerosene lamps, simply that they might sit together in the semi-darkness and make love. During the week of prayer, he declared, he was

annoyed nightly by loud smacks heard at frequent intervals from various parts of the church. He asked the trustees to furnish more lamps, but the request was ignored, and he was determined to check the practice or resign.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

We have just been reading an address by Mr. W. M. Salter at a late Ingersoll Memorial Meeting in Chicago. It is meant to be laudatory and it is so; but there are some priggish touches in it, which display a certain littleness of mind. Or is it that Mr. Salter, being (we believe) an Ethical Culturist, is bound to keep up an air of superiority to mere Free-thinkers? Anyhow, he thinks it necessary to say, even in the last sentence of his panegyric, that Ingersoll "had his limitations and weaknesses." Of course he had. The fact might have been taken for granted. It is not given to any man to be perfect—not even to Mr. Salter. Ingersoll was only so high, so big, so well-informed, so wise, so good, and so powerful. Precisely. And the same might be said of every great man who ever lived. Perhaps the next fastidious eulogist of Ingersoll will be good enough to remind us that he was mortal.

It is a scientific fact that the Sun has spots. But we don't want to be reminded of it every time we look up to him and exclaim, "What a glorious day!"

Mr. Salter also says that Ingersoll "had a reformer's narrowness, but he had his splendid effectiveness." The grammar of this statement is not of the best, and its sense is no better. A mere truism is put as though it had a special reference to Ingersoll. Every man who undertakes a definite work in the world has to be "narrow" in a certain sense of the word. He must concentrate his energies if he is to operate effectively. This is a universal law of practice. It applies to every form of human activity—from governing an empire to blacking boots. And in this sense Ingersoll was "narrow." But we say—and we say it unhesitatingly—that he was not narrow in any other sense. The catholicity of his mind equalled the toleration of his temper. He had one of the widest of outlooks. We would undertake to compile a collection of wise, witty, poetical, humorous, flashing sentences from his works, that would be hard to equal from the works of any of his contemporaries. Ingersoll "narrow," forsooth! Why, the world is narrow; our solar system is narrow; the human mind itself—including Aristotle, Plato, Darwin, and Shakespeare—is narrow. Mr. Salter is narrow.

According to a newspaper report there is a highly accomplished priest at Naples. Preaching in a church in that city, he drew a terrible picture of the torments of hell; and, in order to heighten the effect, he had stationed a number of men behind the altar and in the confessionals, who howled, wailed, gnashed their teeth, and rattled chains. But the sermon and the accompaniment were too much for the terrified congregation. They rushed in terror from the building, and many were injured in the crush. It is said that the police have taken steps to prevent a recurrence of this realism.

An appalling collision occurred on the Grand Trunk Railroad of Canada near London, Ontario. Two trains, running at the rate of forty miles an hour, met on the same track. Twenty-seven passengers were killed on the spot, and many more were seriously injured. The screams, moans, and prayers of the sufferers were heartrending. Some of the women were hysterically pious. One died singing "Nearer, my God, to thee," while another expired in her husband's arms singing "Jesu, lover of my soul."

The unveiling of the unspeakable condition of the hospitals and lunatic asylums in the province of Veneta (Venice), and the discovery of mediæval instruments of torture of revolting character, still kept in everyday use by the monks and even more by the nuns who run these institutions to the Church's glory in Italy, has been effected by a committee under Professor Belmondo, of the Padova University. All the press of Venice is full of the wretched details. Says *L'Asino*: "In the days when the clerics ruled all, they could torture the wisest; but now they cannot even torture lunatics unmolested! Bad times!"

Horsley Hall Baptist Mission, Camberwell, tempts poor devils in to the service with hot coffee and currant cakes. There is said to be quite a run on the provender. It is not stated whether there is any particular run on the salvation.

Dr. Clifford more than turns a cold shoulder to Canon Hensley Henson's appeal to Nonconformists which is referred to in our this week's "Sugar Plums." In a long letter to the *Daily News*—Dr. Clifford suffers from a painful flux of words—he indignantly declines to have anything to do with

Churchmen in the working of the new Education Act. Amidst all his verbiage we perceive his objection to the Act. It actually allows religion which Dr. Clifford disapproves to be taught in State schools at the public expense. Religion which Dr. Clifford does approve may be taught in State schools at the public expense with perfect propriety. What a spectacle is this man mouthing about justice, fair play, common sense, and equal citizenship! He understands such words as a parrot understands human speech.

Archdeacon Sinclair is on the track of the cyclists. He begs them, for their own sakes, and for the sake of others, to get off their machines and worship God at least once on Sunday. "If they neglect the day altogether," he says, "they will soon lose all sense of religion." Which will be a bad thing for the Church.

The clergy blow hot and cold on this last point. In reply to the Atheist, they declare that the sense of religion is natural to man, though here and there a person may be without it, as you meet with some who are color-blind. Yet they also declare that a cyclist who doesn't go to church on Sunday will soon—yes, *soon*—lose his sense of religion!

A Pretty Good World.

PRETTY good world if you take it all around—
 Pretty good world, good people!
 Better be on it than under the ground—
 Pretty good world, good people!
 Better be here where the skies are as blue
 As the eyes of your sweetheart a-smilin' at you—
 Better than lyin' 'neath daisies and dew—
 Pretty good world, good people!
 Pretty good world with its hopes and its fears—
 Pretty good world, good people!
 Sun twinkles through the rain of its tears—
 Pretty good world, good people!
 Better be here, in the pathway you know,
 Where the thorn's in the garden where sweet roses grow,
 Than to rest where you feel not the fall o' the snow—
 Pretty good world, good people!
 Pretty good world? Let us sing it that way—
 Pretty good world, good people!
 Make up your mind that you're in it to stay—
 At least for a season, good people!
 Pretty good world, with its dark and its bright—
 Pretty good world, with its love and its light;
 Sing it that way till you whisper "Good-night!"
 Pretty good world, good people!

—FRANK L. STANTON.

Even So.

The two latest arrivals from the Vale of Tears laid down their harps with a groan and sucked their sore thumbs and fingers. They were not musical. Suddenly a figure approached. At once they recognised him. They had seen his highly-colored portrait in an illustrated Bible, sold in 250 fortnightly parts. Selah! It was Elijah.

"You come from the earth?" he questioned.

"We do," they assented, wishing they had remained there.

"So did I," said the prophet. "How long did it take you?"

"Months, sir; we found it a long way."

The prophet uttered a contemptuous snort.

"I," he cried, "came in the twinkling of an eye, borne aloft in my fiery chariot."

He strode away. They gazed at each other sadly.

"I thought we'd get out of that here," said the elder spook, with a sob.

"He's a liar anyway," said the younger, "but I suppose we must make allowances. I saw at once that he had the motor-car face."

E. J. M.

Light and Darkness.

No one has a stronger and more abiding sense than I of the "daemonic" element—as Goethe called it—which underlies and encompasses our life; but I think, as Goethe thought, that the right thing is, while conscious of this element, and of all that there is inexplicable around one, to keep pushing on one's posts into the darkness, and to establish no post that is not perfectly in light and firm.

—Matthew Arnold, "Letters," Vol. I., p. 249.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, January 4, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road: "Judas Iscariot and Iago; Two (Inspired and Uninspired) Studies in Treachery; with some Reference to the Performance of *Othello* by Mr. Forbes Robertson's Company."

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.

A. WEBBER.—We hear from another Dartmouth correspondent that the Rev. Mr. Paynter says he was misrepresented. We have offered to print any letter of correction he may send us. Are you quite sure about the Ingersoll-Beecher story? Send us further particulars if you can.

THOMAS EDWARDS.—Pleased to know you were so interested by the article on "Ingersoll's Agnosticism"—a chapter from Mr. Foote's new pamphlet *What is Agnosticism?* You are not quite correct about the clergy not having replied to Paine's *Age of Reason*. Some of them did so at first, but they were more abusive than argumentative. The only clergyman who kept his temper—or nearly kept it—in answering Paine was Bishop Watson. His *Apology* still meets one occasionally on old book-stalls, but it cannot be said to be living now. Paine put genius into his book; and it is only the salt of genius that preserves books for after generations.

F. J. VOISEY.—Thanks for the card. We reciprocate your good wishes. Dartmouth Bay is noble, and the river Dart is beautiful. We went up the latter once, in 1867; and anchored for a short time in the former, on board a passenger steamer, in 1868. Neither of them have we seen since. Were they nearer London, to which we are too much tied, we should see them more frequently by taking advantage of your kind invitation. But we hope to visit you some day in the not far distant future; for we think of trying to stir up the Freethought cause once more still further south, in our native Plymouth.

J. B.—Not exactly in our way, and are they not a little far-fetched? Your note is rather mysterious. We don't quite see how your jokes would affect the trade boycott of this journal.

JAMES REID.—Pleased to see your letter in the *Newcastle Leader*, and glad that the N. S. S. Manifesto was of so much use to you. Freethinkers do a great service to the cause by taking part in the correspondence in their local newspapers. Glad to know you enjoyed our lectures at South Shields.

OTTO ZOBLINSKY.—Thanks for the portrait-card and inscription. We reciprocate your good wishes.

A. DYSON.—(1) Mrs. Besant left the Secular party soon after Mr. Bradlaugh's death. She had already become a Theosophist, and we told her at the outset that she had ceased to be a Secularist. She denied this, but she found she was mistaken. We knew what Theosophy meant better than she did. (2) Theosophy is not Spiritualism; there are great and grave differences between them; that is, if such differences can be taken seriously. (3) What are called "scientific men"—Crookes, for instance—are sometimes as easily imposed upon as errand-boys; sometimes a good deal easier. We have noticed that Spiritualists are generally very matter-of-fact people; and they are the victims of a pretended matter-of-fact delusion. A little philosophy might have saved them. It is less difficult to delude a "scientist" like Wallace or Crookes than to delude a philosopher like David Hume. (4) Mr. Foote did not read a Burial Service at the funeral you refer to; he delivered a brief extemporary address. We agree with you that a Secular Burial Service is needed, and we hope before very long to prepare one.

W. ALLARDIES.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

J. COLLINS.—Sorry we cannot use it.

BRITISH FARMER.—We shall be happy to look through the manuscript. You have certainly done much service to Freethought in a quiet way. Pleased to have your high appreciation of the *Freethinker*.

M. E. PEGG (Manchester).—Date booked. Yours and several other Notices could not be inserted last week, as they arrived after we had gone to press (early) on account of the holidays.

N. D.—Manifestoes are being sent as desired. Pleased to hear you are taking a dozen copies of the *Pioneer* for distribution.

M. CHRISTOPHER.—We have handed your order and remittance to the proper quarter. Thanks for your generous intention to distribute four shillingsworth of the *Pioneer*.

AN SIN.—Your third and fourth Letters are received and shall appear.

H. PERCY WARD.—Sorry to hear of your indisposition and hope it will soon pass away. We trust the Branches will be able to offer you plenty of engagements during the early months of the new year.

H. E. DODSON.—We shall be much pleased to meet the Camberwell "saints" in strong force at the Annual Dinner. Miss Vance has forwarded the tickets. We hope to make use of the story. Thanks.

PERPLEXED.—Don't be imposed upon by malicious chatter. The changes on the *Freethinker* have not added a single farthing to Mr. Foote's income. He still takes the small salary with which he started under the Company, though he is doing more work than ever. He is responsible this week for all the "Acid Drops," "Sugar Plums," and Answers to Correspondents in the *Freethinker*, in addition to his leading article. And the remuneration works out at a figure which a penny-a-lining reporter would positively despise.

PAPERS RECEIVED:—Two Worlds—Blue Grass Blade—Newcastle Daily Leader—Church Times—Truthseeker (New York)—Boston Investigator—Public Opinion (New York)—La Raison—Torch of Reason—Freidenker—Truth Seeker (Bradford)—Newtownards Chronicle—Brotherhood—Progressive Thinker.

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 makes its first appearance on New Year's Day. As it is published at the price of one penny, it can 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 will 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.

CONSIDERING the holiday time, there was a capital audience at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "The Dying Year: its Losses and Gains." The address obviously proved very interesting to all who heard it. It was a very live meeting from beginning to end. The proceedings were further brightened by the presence of Mr. Harry Snell in the chair. Mr. Snell had only been in London a few days, having spent some weeks in the country recuperating after a bad attack of illness he suffered in Italy. He was warmly cheered on rising to introduce the lecturer; and Mr. Foote's hope that the chairman might be spared for many years of work and usefulness was endorsed by all present.

Mr. Foote lectures at the Athenæum Hall on the first three Sunday evenings in the new year. His subject this evening (January 4) will be "Judas Iscariot and Iago: Two (Inspired and Uninspired) Studies in Treachery; with some Reference to the Performance of *Othello* by Mr. Forbes Robertson's Company." This will be a novel lecture for the Athenæum Hall, and Freethinkers would do well to give it the widest publicity. It will be advertised in theatrical and literary circles through the regular channels.

Mr. Foote's recent lecture at Leicester on "Freethought in English Literature from Shakespeare to Meredith," was reported in the *Midland Free Press*, which describes it as "eloquent," and says it was "listened to with the greatest appreciation." The *Leicester Pioneer* referred to the "big crowd." The *Leicester Reformer* says: "The chief event of December (at the Secular Hall) was Mr. G. W. Foote's eloquent lecture. Its apt quotations from poetry and prose, and its splendid illustrations of the elocutionary art, should make those who heard it experience a deeper love of our national literature. Mr. Foote generously gave us some more examples of his skill in recitation at the Smoking Social in the club-room on Monday."

The gallant little *Leicester Reformer* for January announces (we regret to say) that it will make its farewell bow to the public in the February number. With the completion of the second volume it finds it must disappear. "The one and only reason for its death," we are told, "is lack of funds." Ay, there's the rub! It is that same impecuniosity that plays the deuce with all really progressive movements. By which we mean movements that concern themselves with the fundamental ideas of progress.

But as the funeral of our Leicester contemporary has not yet taken place, and nobody knows what *may* happen—for instance, Andrew Carnegie might get tired of the monotony of Free Libraries—it should be mentioned that Mr. Gould has another interesting paper "For the Children." It is "About Animals," and enforces the lesson of mutual aid. There is also an interesting reply by T. H. Clay to Mr. Gould on the subject of "Secular Societies and Peace."

The Leicester Secular Society gave its nineteenth annual dinner to Old Folks on Christmas Day, the guests numbering 123. After a substantial hot meal, followed dessert, concert, tea, and mince pies.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner takes place at the Holborn Restaurant (as usual) on Monday, January 12. Mr. Foote will preside, and will be supported by Mr. Cohen and other well-known Freethinkers. There will be a good dinner. That is certain. There will also be a little speech-making, perhaps good too; and some good songs and good instrumental music. There should also be a good company of diners. There are special reasons why those who profess and call themselves Freethinkers should make a strong rally on this occasion.

The National Secular Society's manifesto on "The Education Difficulty" has already been circulated to the extent of 10,000 copies. A similar issue is being printed, and is nearly ready for circulation. We invite the friends of "Secular Education" to distribute this manifesto (judiciously, of course) as widely as possible in all directions.

The old *Secular Almanack* has been merged in the new *Secular Annual* (for 1903), which is now on sale. The official and technical matter has been compressed into eight pages, and forty pages are thus left for more generally interesting items. Mr. Foote opens with an article on "The Oracles of God." "Chilperic" follows with an enthusiastic, but by no means sentimental, article on "Shakespeare the Sempiternal." It is an admirable article with an admirable title. Mr. Cohen tries his hand on a new vein of writing—new, that is, for him—and with much success. His subject is "Richard Jeffries," with special reference to that fine writer's masterpiece, *The Story of My Heart*. "Mimnermus" comes next with an excellent article, in a style known to our readers, on "Matthew Arnold"—with telling quotations. "Abracadabra" writes vigorously and conclusively on "Christ's Promise of Eternal Life." Mary Lovell's article on "The Aim of Education" draws useful attention to the neglected sides of the training of the young. It is pleasant, moreover, to see a lady writer in the list. We wish there were more. Mr. G. L. Mackenzie contributes a characteristic poem on "Godly Guile." Mr. F. J. Gould's article on "Humboldt's Chameleon" is, of course, bright and suggestive. Last comes a very eloquent article by "N. B." on "A New Heaven and a New Earth." Such a list of contents ought to secure the *Secular Annual* a good circulation. We

should add that the cover is decorated with a special design, which gives the publication a most attractive appearance.

The *Secular Annual*, like the old *Almanack*, is issued in the name of the National Secular Society, whose exchequer will be enriched by any profits that may be realised. This should be a further incentive to its purchase.

The *Newcastle Daily Leader* prints a long and able letter by Mr. James Reid on "The Education Difficulty," in which he advocates "Secular Education." Such a letter should do good. We congratulate Mr. Reid on having written it, and the *Leader* on having the impartiality to give it publicity.

Mr. Foote's *Christianity and Progress*, written in reply to Mr. Gladstone in 1888, has long been out of print. It is now being republished as a penny pamphlet. The original price was twopence. It was very carefully written, and it contains facts and figures likely to be of considerable use to Freethinkers in their discussions with Christians.

The *Boston Investigator*, the oldest Freethought paper in America, reprints W. B.'s article on "Darwin's Country" from the *Freethinker*.

"The Improved Man" is the title of an Ingersoll piece that has never been printed in England till now. It appears in the new monthly, the *Pioneer*. Freethinkers should all read it and pass it round to their friends.

The French are a good deal ahead of us in the wise conduct of their public schools. They trouble themselves less about religion and more about morality. This is shown by the following circular from M. Payot, Inspector of Public Instruction of the Marne, to the schoolmasters and schoolmistresses under his supervision:—"I request the teachers to see to the removal from the walls of the school of all pictures representing scenes of violence. In one school I counted in fifteen engravings fourteen that gave beheadings, tortures, massacres, and treacherous murders. These engravings are generally hung up to illustrate history, but are historically false and ridiculous. But were they even in every respect true, they should none the less be removed from school-rooms. We should be careful not to familiarize children with sights of violence and ferocity. The brutal instincts of the human race are not yet sufficiently weakened or crowded out by higher ones to admit of our placing before the eyes of the young scenes of murder and other atrocities. Our moral law is based on the intangible law of absolute respect for human life. How can a child help being shocked by the inconsistency of the lesson to this effect with the pictures before his eyes? He may not pay attention to the lesson, but he will scan the engraving and remember it. We should teach children that unjust war is a horrible inheritance of ancestral brutality, and that a nation which takes up arms without having first tried every means of conciliation, without having made strenuous efforts to settle differences by arbitration, commits an abuse of force. That nation dishonors itself. It places itself beyond the pale of reason and humanity, and its conduct is bestial. Instil into the consciences of the children, which be assured will receive it, this truth, in which the safety of civilisation lies—namely, that a nation has an inviolable soul, and that all abuse of force committed against a nation is an act of brigandage."

A good many years ago, when Mr. Foote was lecturing on "Christianity and Slavery" at the Hall of Science, in Old-street, he was opposed by several Christians, and amongst them was one who was a gentleman. This fact was sufficiently uncommon to attract a good deal of attention; and the chairman expressed a wish, which the lecturer cordially echoed, that they might have the pleasure of hearing the stranger again. Some time afterwards the courteous stranger sent Mr. Foote a pamphlet entitled *Christianity and Slavery*. It contained an address delivered in reply to the one heard at the Hall of Science; and the speaker was the Rev. H. Hensley Henson, Head of the Oxford House, in Bethnal Green; who admitted, by the way, that when he opposed Mr. Foote at the Hall of Science, he had been treated "with a courtesy which relieves controversy of its worst aspects."

That friendly opponent of Mr. Foote has got on in the Church since then. He is now well-known as Canon Hensley Henson. From what we hear of him, we believe he is an improvement on the general run of Church dignitaries. This at least seems certain, that he has not forgotten his old experiences; and he knows what nonsense his clerical brethren talk when they boast of "the decay of Secularism."

Canon Hensley Henson preached at Westminster Abbey on Sunday afternoon, and passionately appealed to the Nonconformists to co-operate with Churchmen in the endeavor to give effect to the proposals of the new Education Act towards the realisation of the ideal of a Christian training for the children in the State Schools. "Upon them," he said, "now mainly depends the issue whether the new Act is to be the beginning of the work of the reorganisation of education on a basis of definite Christian teaching; and to them we must look for assistance *in combating the wave of secularism.*" The words we have italicised are significant of much. Canon Henson sees very clearly that "definite Christian teaching" and "secular education" are the only two possible policies in the future. He also sees that whether it is the one or the other depends upon the attitude of the Nonconformists. "Without their aid," Canon Henson declared, "we of the Church of England are not strong enough to resist the advance of secularism." We agree with him. But we venture to add that, in the long run, not even the Church and Dissent together will be able to offer a victorious resistance.

Jack Jones, the Freethinking Socialist, gives the Rev. Mr. Lees another "doing" in the *Stratford Express*. Once again he shows himself a more well-informed and capable controversialist than his opponent.

The Camberwell Branch holds a *Conversazione* this evening (Jan. 4), the first Sunday in the new year. The time of starting is seven o'clock. No doubt there will be a good muster. We are glad to hear that the Camberwell friends are coming in strong force to the Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant on January 12.

The Glasgow Branch has held a very successful Annual Children's Party, the hall being packed with happy youngsters, and all going merry as a marriage bell. Besides the generous feeding and the capital entertainment, there was a nice present for every boy and girl on leaving. Mr. Robertson, the secretary, says it would have done our heart good to witness the scene. We quite believe him.

Will our readers try to send us addresses of newsagents who would be likely to sell the *Pioneer* if we sent them a specimen copy? A little help in this way will not cost our readers much, and will do us a considerable service.

Readers of the *Freethinker* in all parts of the country, and, indeed, in all parts of the world, are requested to prepare for another "Shilling Month." We promised the National Secular Society's Executive that we would make an appeal for funds in January. The way was blocked, however, at the outset by the *Secular Annual*, the *Pioneer*, and other important business. The new "Shilling Month" will therefore begin on Sunday, January 11 (Mr. Foote's birthday), and continue until February 11. During that time Freethinkers are asked to send us one shilling at least for the cause, and as many more than one as they can spare. Every subscription will be acknowledged in our columns. A "Special" will appear on this subject next week.

Christian Evidence Literature.

NOT long ago, a somewhat pretentious work dealing with Bible fictions and contradictions came into my hands, which, perhaps, it may not be out of place to notice. This recent addition to apologetic literature is from the pen of the editor of an antiquated Christian Evidence journal, who professes in its pages to smooth away all Bible difficulties, and to "answer" what he is pleased to call "infidel objections." As it is not my intention to advertise either the book or its compiler, I withhold both the title of the work and the name of the writer; but all the members of the Christian Evidence fraternity will know perfectly well the book to which I refer. There is only one man who has made a speciality of replying to "infidel objections."

After carefully reading all these wonderful replies, I find the work to be a conglomeration of ridiculous assumptions, false reasoning, and ingenious perversions of Scripture texts, with a good sprinkling of manufactured "objections," set up to be knocked down again. As a sample of the trashy stuff with which this book is filled, I select for comment the article which appears on the first page, and which is entitled "Is there a God?" In this, as in every subject dealt with, the writer first states the

"objection," and then gives what he considers the proper "answer" to the objection, in which reply he attempts to prove the Bible statement, or the traditional view of the matter under discussion, to be correct. Here is the first, and probably the most important, Atheistic "objection"—in this case, to the alleged existence of God:—

"OBJECTION.—As it is impossible for man to believe what he cannot think, and as the existence of a Being without beginning or end cannot by any possibility be conceived of, why should the Atheist be condemned for his unbelief when he perceives no evidence wheroby to affirm or deny the existence of God."

Before giving the "answer" I should like to ask the writer of the foregoing, Who formulated the objection? Was it an "infidel," or was it the Christian Evidence man himself? My reason for asking the question is perfectly simple. The writer ought to know that the scepticism of "the Atheist" does not result from the alleged fact that "the existence of a Being without beginning or end cannot by any possibility be conceived." The Atheist rejects the traditional view respecting this Being simply upon the ground that he can find no evidence of that so-called Creator's existence. And, believing, as he does, in the eternity and indestructibility of Matter, he regards such a Being as unnecessary.

Let us look, now, at the grand reply to this bogus "objection." Here it is:—

"ANSWER.—Either there *is* or there *is not* a God..... Now, it is an indisputable fact that this world exists, and it must therefore have been either created, or it is eternal.....But as the Atheist affirms that Matter is eternal, it stands to reason that inasmuch as eternity is infinite duration, in consequence of its infinity, it can be no more a concept of thought with him than a Being without beginning or end. Therefore from the very position the Atheist occupies, it is impossible for him to have any conception of the eternity of Matter. And for this reason, if it is impossible to conceive of an Eternal Being, as he alleges, must it not be even more difficult still to conceive of an *eternal thing*? Hence, as the Atheist will not believe anything which he cannot think, he is logically bound to admit that this earth has been caused or created, because that *is* a concept of thought.....But if this earth has been caused or created, there must have been a First Cause or Creator, and with that admission his Atheism is scattered to the four winds of heaven." (Italics his own).

Thus, in a few brief sentences the unreasoning Atheist is shown to be illogical and irrational, if not something worse. When he affirms his inability to conceive that all the world-stuff composing the universe could ever have been non-existent, or can ever be annihilated, he is dogmatically told by this Christian Evidencer that he can have "no conception of the eternity of matter." If, says this reasoner, matter be eternal, then, since "eternity is infinite duration," it follows that the Atheist can have no power to conceive infinity, and therefore cannot conceive matter to be eternal. And so the matter is settled. But, if I may be permitted to ask, what in the world has "infinity" to do with the question? The word "infinite" signifies "without end" or "without limit," and has reference chiefly to time, space, or number. What has this to do with the eternity of matter? To say that matter is eternal is merely to say that it is "without beginning or end of existence"—in other words, that it was not created out of nothing, but was always existent somewhere, though not necessarily in its present form. Anyone, even a child, can form this conception. The mere fact that we find it impossible to render non-existent a single particle of existing matter leads to the natural inference that it must always have been existent, and so gives rise to the conception that matter is eternal.

Next, we are told by this Christian Evidencer that it is easier "to conceive of an Eternal Being" than of "an eternal thing." Indeed! Now, as this Evidencer says, "it is an indisputable fact that this world exists," and this being the case, there can be no difficulty in conceiving that the elements of which it is composed were always existent. To suppose

otherwise would be to assume that these materials were produced out of nothing—which is absolutely unthinkable. It is not, however, “an indisputable fact” that an “Eternal Being,” a Creator of the universe, exists. How, then, can it be “more difficult to conceive of an eternal thing”—that is, of this world or the whole system of suns and worlds—than of an imaginary “Eternal Being,” to whom without rhyme or reason the creation of every form of matter is attributed? Clearly, the writer of this “answer” has found his way into unfamiliar waters, and is floundering about beyond his depth.

But, says this Christian reasoner, “as the Atheist will not believe anything which he cannot think, he is logically bound to admit that this earth has been caused or created, because that *is* a concept of thought.” Here I would ask the writer, Who told him that the creation of the earth “*is* a concept of thought”? for it is clearly evident that he never did any thinking himself. Assuming, however, that the statement represents the writer’s own opinion, I would ask him to name a single object now existing (apart from the Bible fiction of the Creation in Genesis) that has been “created” or called into being without the matter of which it is constituted having been pre-existent. Is it “a concept of thought” that a chair or table or a pair of boots can be made without material? If not, how can anyone with a grain of sense seriously assert that the creation of “this earth” without material “*is* a concept of thought.”

On the next page, when dealing with the atheistic theory that the universe is self-existent, this writer says:—

“Has matter existed from all eternity? It is impossible to conceive of an existence without a beginning, while the whole of the parts of which it is composed are characterised by continual change.”

From this statement there can be no doubt as to what the writer means by the words “has been caused or created.” According to this great reasoner, all the matter now contained in the universe was once non-existent, and a few thousand or a few million years ago it was called into being by an Almighty Creator, who before that time had dwelt alone, there being nothing in existence save the Creator himself. Whence, then, did all the material for the making of the universe come? To this question no answer is vouchsafed. Yet we are asked to believe that “the Almighty,” dwelling in solitary state from eternity, caused in some past time the innumerable celestial bodies scattered throughout space to spring suddenly into existence; that is, if the Creator did not fill all space himself; for he is said to be “infinite.” And it is this impossible process which our great Christian Evidencer tells us “*is* a concept of thought.”

I will assume, for the sake of argument, that everything now existing *was* created. In this case, since, prior to the work of creation, nothing was in being save God himself, the universe must either have been made out of “nothing” or out of a portion of the Deity—one or the other. Now, as regards the first alternative, we have it as an axiom that “Out of nothing nothing can come, because in nothing nothing is.” The truth of this proposition is self-evident. To contend that “with God all things are possible” is a mere begging of the question; for we have no evidence of the existence of a Deity possessed of such inconceivable power. We are thus thrown back upon the second alternative—that the universe was constructed out of God himself. In the latter case it was always existent, and so we arrive at the Atheistic theory of the eternity of matter. This view, however, is rejected by all Christians who uphold the cosmogony of Genesis; they are consequently logically bound to admit the only other alternative—that God made everything now in being out of nothing by simply commanding the empty space to be filled. Those who assert “creation” can take their choice of these two alternatives; there is no other.

I turn now to another “infidel objection” (page 28) which throws some light upon this subject.

—“OBJECTION.—The writer of the Pentateuch begins by telling us that God made the universe out of nothing; how can such a thing be conceived?”

“ANSWER.—Neither Moses nor any other inspired writer has ever stated that God made the universe out of nothing.....The Apostle Paul says: ‘By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God, so that what is seen hath not been made of things which do appear’ (Heb. xi. 3). This is in strict accordance with the most advanced teaching of the age, as we are informed by evolutionists that originally the material universe was in a nebulous or gaseous state, but that by gradual stages it has in process of time been evolved into its present existence.Moses simply states the *fact* of creation. He does not explain the *how*.”

Setting aside the antiquated notion that the Pentateuch was written by Moses and the Epistle to the Hebrews by Paul, the only meaning that can be extracted from this luminous elucidation is that God “framed” the universe by his “word,” but he did not *create* it; for the material was originally there, ready to his hand, “in a nebulous or gaseous state.” Thus, after contending that the Atheist “is logically bound to admit that this earth has been caused or created,” our great Christian Evidence reasoner at last himself admits (though without perceiving that he does so) that it was not created at all. The Atheistic position thus remains untouched.

In replying to this second “infidel objection” our ingenious Bible reconciler evidently thought that he had cleverly evaded a difficulty—that of asserting the production of the universe out of nothing. Instead of this he has affirmed the Atheistic theory of the eternity of matter, while the difficulty he tried to escape remains. When he says that “the *fact* of creation is stated, but not the *how*,” he obviously means that we are not to ask where all the material for such a stupendous work came from. This problem Christians find it convenient to ignore.

In conclusion I may say that, were it worth while, it would be easy to show that none of this Christian Evidencer’s replies to genuine objections will bear close examination. He has not in a single instance succeeded in rendering any of the Bible fictions which he has attempted to prop up one whit more credible. Yet such a high opinion has he of his precious production that he advertises it as a work that would be “the most acceptable gift to any minister or Christian worker.”

ABRACADABRA.

The Religion of Richard Wagner.

ACCORDING to Dinger’s tabulation of Wagner’s views as a Neo-Hegelian, his philosophy was evolutionary materialism and sensualism, his religion Atheism, his ethics optimism and eudemonism, and his politics anarchism: a summary of isms sufficient to chill the marrow and curdle the blood of many a devout Wagnerite of to-day. The works, which derived their inspiration and took a more or less distinct tinge from these tenets, are the projected musical dramas, to which the text was written, but the music never composed: “Siegfried’s Death” (afterwards embodied in the third part of the tetralogy), “Wieland the Smith,” “Jesus of Nazareth,” and the subsequently completed “Ring of the Nibelungen,” although in this last mentioned tragedy of the gods he has thrown a veil of symbolism over his ideas and presented them in a more artistic and therefore less aggressive form. His strong and cheerful optimism as to the glorious prospects of mankind here prevented him from looking beyond and seeking consolation in the magnified looming of human hopes on the bright sky of the hereafter. The expression of this feeling comes out very forcibly in his essays and especially in his personal correspondence. “The future generation,” he writes, “will have no longer any need of God and immortality, since this life will satisfy all our hopes, so that we shall not have to direct our thoughts beyond the earth to an imaginary

heaven.' He characterises all such "religious presumptions" as "anthropomorphic speculations, which are injurious and immoral, because they place the final purpose of man outside of himself," whereas he is only the supreme and crowning product of cosmic evolution and can "serve no other purposes than those of nature, which has produced him conformable to certain conditions of necessity." His spiritual superiority does not exempt him from the operations of the laws of development and dissolution which govern all other organisms.

In a volume entitled *The Destiny of Man* Mr. John Fiske endeavors to show the unreasonableness of supposing that "Man as the goal of Nature's creative work" should be only one of the many perishable forms of matter and destined to disappear with the rest, and asks: "Has all this work been done for nothing? Is it all ephemeral, all a bubble that bursts, a vision that fades?" To these indignant interrogatories Wagner would have replied: "No, indeed; man's immortality and eternal beatitude consists in the persistence and perfection of the spiritual element, not in the individual, but in the race; and there is no reason why the contemplation of this slow but unceasing process of evolution and its glorious consummation in the highest possible elevation of humanity, even though it be completed with the present life upon the earth, should put any logical thinker to intellectual confusion." It is interesting to note how easily, in regions of speculation lying out of the range of scientific demonstration, diametrically opposite conclusions may be deduced from precisely the same premises. Liszt was greatly exercised at his friend's utter lack of faith and in his letters seeks to show him the error of his ways, quoting with a slight and suitable variation the exhortation in Elsa's song:

"Lass zu dem Glauben Dich neu bekehren:
Es giebt ein Glück,"

and beseeching him not to turn away contemptuously from this "only true and eternal bliss."

Wagner, however, was too much of a eudemonist, too thoroughly given up to the gratification of what he called his *Glückseligkeitstrieb*, to be greatly influenced by such admonitions. Ethically his philosophy of life might be summed up in Pope's exclamation,

O happiness, our being's end and aim."

His bitter hostility to Christianity arose chiefly from its ascetic teachings, which put a barrier between man and the full exercise and enjoyment of the powers and passions with which nature has so lavishly endowed him and which are essential to his welfare and conservation. In "Jesus of Nazareth" he infers from the statement that "God is love," that love is supreme and absolute and knows no limitations. Indeed, the whole didactic purpose of the drama is to glorify love as the primal and universal law of the race in opposition to the restrictions imposed upon its manifestations by human enactments. In the crucible of this consuming and refining passion individual egotism is transformed into the altruism of domestic and social relations, thus fulfilling in the province of the emotions the alchemist's dream of transmuted base metals into gold. It endues Siegfried's sword with a magic power that shatters Wotan's spear, "the shaft of sovereignty" and symbol of conventional moral order, and urges the youthful hero onward through a sea of fire to the rescue and redemption of Brünnhilde.

Highly significant, too, is Wagner's enthusiasm for Hafiz and Shelley. The former he declares to be not only "the most gifted poet," but also "the greatest and sublimest philosopher that ever lived." What attracted him so strongly to the Divan (known to him only in Daumer's fragmentary and rather imperfect translation) was the glowing sensuality that pervades all the ghazals, the warm erotic hues that color even the religious poems, and the unceasing denunciation of priestcraft and pietism. The motto of Hafiz: "Strive always after ready bliss," and his expressed preference of the tulip-checked beauties of Shiraz to the promised houris of Paradise would

commend themselves to Wagner as the quintessence of wisdom. As for Shelley, his admiration and also his knowledge of the English poet appear to have been confined to "Queen Mab," which charmed him by reason of its radically revolutionary spirit and atheistic tendencies.

—Professor E. P. Evans, Munich, in the
"Open Court," Chicago.

Obituary.

By the death of Captain Treneman (late of Plymouth) at Forest Gate, the Freethought cause has lost an old and ardent advocate. Captain Treneman's association with militant Freethought dated back into the middle of the last century, when he formed one of the party at Plymouth who paved the way for Charles Bradlaugh's eventful visit to the town. Readers of Bradlaugh's Life will remember the incident that then occurred. Prohibited from holding a meeting in the Park or in an open public place, Bradlaugh addressed a huge gathering from a boat stationed a little way off the beach. This method of outwitting the authorities was actually suggested by the late Captain, who, moreover, lent his own boat for the occasion, manned by his own crew, thus rendering the attempt of the police to intimidate licensed watermen futile. During the latter portion of his life Captain Treneman has resided in the East-end of London, and has been a frequent visitor at the Victoria Park and Stratford meetings. He died within a few days of his eightieth birthday, and it is interesting to know that one of the things he persisted in until the last was the reading of the *Freethinker*. The end came peacefully and quietly on December 16, the interment taking place at Woodgrange Park Cemetery four days later. Mr. C. Cohen was requested by the family to deliver an address over the grave, and gladly consented to be of whatever service he could. A few brief references to the long identification of the deceased with Freethought, with a few reflections upon the lessons to be drawn from so strenuous a career, gave general satisfaction to those present. Not the least affecting feature of the proceeding was that of the funeral being a double one. The youngest member of the Treneman family—a child of one month old—died within a few hours of its eldest representative, and was buried in the same grave. Death strikes at all alike, and it is well if, when the blow falls, we can meet the stroke with the same unanimity of mind that characterised Captain Treneman.

We have to record the death of one of our old members, Mr. W. J. Morley, who died on Sunday, December 14. He was an active member of the Birmingham and Midland Institute and a life member of the Birmingham Branch of the National Secular Society. His wishes in respect to his burial were carried out, and he was accorded a Secular funeral at Witton Cemetery on December 18. Mr. Charles Watts read the Service at the graveside. As well as members of the Birmingham Branch N. S. S., there were present representatives from the various scientific and literary societies of which Mr. Morley was a member, and in which he always displayed great interest.—J. PARTRIDGE, Sec.

Correspondence.

CHRIST'S BIRTHDAY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. Walter Mann, in his able article on "Christ's Birthday," makes too much of the point that Christ could not have been born in December, the season being too inclement to enable the shepherds and sheep to be out by night. In view of the fact that it is the custom in the Midland counties of England to leave sheep in the open fields night and day through the winter, and that this country is at least twenty degrees north of Palestine, Mr. Mann's argument seems faulty.

Mr. Thomas Hardy, in his fine novel, *Far from the Madding Crowd* (chap. ii.), relates how this custom obtains in Devonshire. He speaks of the 20th December, between twelve and one o'clock in the morning. He tells how the shepherd was protected by a small hut on wheels from the weather, and how the sheep roamed at will over "the wild slope," and how detached hurdles, thatched with straw, were placed here and there as shelters for the ewes and young lambs. Only the newly-born and weakly lambs were carried by Gabriel Oat, the shepherd, to the hut for an hour, to revive.

Mr. Mann's arguments were otherwise so convincing that it is a pity to let this careless statement pass, and for this reason—that a farmer or other person, seeing its fallacy, might refuse credence to the other really unanswerable portions of the article.

E. T. HOLLAND,

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.**LONDON.**

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

THE ATHENÆUM HALL (73 Tottenham Court-road, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Judas Iscariot and Iago: Two (Inspired and Un-inspired) Studies in Treachery; with some Reference to the Performance of *Othello* by Mr. Forbes Robertson's Company."

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

CAMBERWELL SECULAR HALL (61 New Church Road, Camberwell): 7, Conversazione.

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Bromley Vestry Hall, Bow-road, E.): 7, George Jackson, Essex C. C., "Thomas Carlyle."

HYDE PARK, near Marble Arch (New West London Branch N.S.S.): 11.30, Debate between Captain Fleetwood and R. P. Edwards, "Has Christianity Aided the Secular Advancement of Humanity." N.B.—Members' meeting at Secretary's address on Thursday, January 8, at 8.30.

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, New Year's Address by Mr. W. Sanders.

COUNTRY.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, A reading; 7.30, Lecture course arrangements.

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