

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE.

*Fear not the tyrants will rule for ever,
Or the priests of the evil faith;
They stand on the brink of that raging river,
Whose waves they have tainted with death.
It is fed from the depths of a thousand dells,
Around them it foams and rages and swells;
And their swords and their sceptres I floating see,
Like wrecks on the surge of eternity.*

—SHELLEY.

“Reynolds’” and Shelley.

Reynolds's Newspaper has its merits. It speaks out boldly against many a sham, and it steadily opposes the monarchical superstition. Mr. W. M. Thompson has his occasional lapses, as when he procure a telegram from the Prince of Wales to the annual dinner of sandwichmen. But it is given to no man to be perfect. The very sun has spots, and little blemishes must be expected even in a Republican editor.

Mr. Thompson himself writes pretty straightly on many religious topics. We never noticed him denouncing the Catholic Church, but he makes up for it by thundering his loudest against the Church of England. He often tells the men of God of all denominations that they know just nothing at all about the future life of which they preach so glibly. Now and then he puts in a word for pronounced Freethought, though he manifests no particular love for Freethought organisations. Yes, we have much to thank him for. But why does he allow so much chatter about “Christ”? Occasionally he indulges in it himself; more frequently he leaves the pastime to his subordinates. One of these, signing himself “A. E. F.,” is the principal offender. We have noticed his pious sentimentalities before, and may have to do so again. For the present we mean to deal with his “Yuletide Reflections.” We are a little behindhand, it is true; but better late than never.

This writer begins by a reference to the “fascination” of the “Gospel story of the birth of Christ” whether it be taken “as legend or as history.” But is not this a light and airy way of dismissing so tremendous a difference? And why is it said that “art and song have caught their noblest inspiration” from this story? Is it necessary to use the clap-trap of the pulpit in a Radical newspaper? This sort of thing, however, is trivial in comparison with claiming Shelley and William Morris as two of “Christ’s modern apostles.” Morris was well-known to be a thorough-going Freethinker. He had no theological belief whatever, and Christ was no more to him than any other figure in the world’s Pantheon. Shelley was “an avowed Atheist,” as this writer admits. But we are told that he “was no Atheist in the vulgar meaning of the term.” Of

course he was not. Shelley was not vulgar in anything. It is certain, however, that he was an Atheist; and he would probably have smiled at such an expression as “the vulgar meaning of the term.” What is its vulgar meaning? We should really like to know. We ask the question for the sake of information.

The statement that Shelley “loved and lived the religion of Jesus” is positively grotesque. The “*Essay on Christianity*,” published some fifty years after his death in a fragmentary condition, lends no countenance whatever to this assertion. Shelley expressed a certain admiration for Jesus as a man, on the supposition that he was an actual personage. But the same may be said of the late Colonel Ingersoll. As for the “religion” of Jesus, Shelley rejected it entirely. Only a few months before his death, writing to Horatio Smith, he said: “I differ from Moore in thinking Christianity useful to the world; no man of sense can think it true.” This may be placed beside the reference to “the Galilean serpent” in the great *Ode to Liberty*. Which is a very strange expression for one of “Christ’s modern apostles.”

“A. E. F.” makes an amazing reference to a certain “prophecy” of Shelley’s. He quotes it from *Hellas*, a lyrical drama written under the inspiration of the Greek struggle for independence. The words occur in a “Chorus of Greek Captive Women.”

The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set;
While blazoned as on heaven’s immortal noon
The cross leads generations on.

This is cited as Shelley’s own prophecy, without a word of qualification. But if “A. E. F.” had read *Hellas* carefully he would have been spared this blunder. It is one, indeed, against which the poet expressly guarded himself. In a note to this very chorus he said: “The popular notions of Christianity are represented in this chorus as true in relation to the worship they superseded, and that which in all probability they will supersede, without considering their merits in a relation more universal.” Surely this is clear enough. And it may be observed, in passing, that Shelley’s own belief that Christianity would supersede Mohammedanism in the east has not been verified by the course of events. The reverse seems far nearer the truth.

We now ask “A. E. F.’s” attention to the final chorus in *Hellas*—one of the most beautiful and passionate things that even Shelley ever wrote. Take the following stanza:—

Saturn and Love their long repose
Shall burst, more bright and good
Than all who fell, than One who rose,
Than many unsubdued:
Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers,
But votive tears, and symbol flowers.

The "One who rose" is of course Jesus Christ. Shelley plainly says so in a last note to the poem. The stanza is, therefore, an affirmation of Shelley's own faith in the regeneration of mankind by Knowledge and Love, or Science and Brotherhood, as against the pretensions of all the supernatural religions, including Christianity.

Nothing could more plainly show the desperate straits to which Christianity is reduced when it would fain appropriate to itself the name and fame of men who spent their best strength in attacking it. Shelley was turned out of Oxford, disowned by his family, deprived of his children, and tabooed by all "respectable" society. He was generally regarded as "a fiend." But when, in spite of orthodox sneers and prophecies, he took his place as a bright fixed star in the literary firmament of England, it became obviously advisable to adopt another method of treatment. He was then a dear good man gone wrong; one who broke away from the Christian religion, and various other conventional superstitions, through his natural impetuosity; and who would have come all right in the end if he had only lived long enough. But now we see a more impudent form of treatment. It is no longer said that he would have *become* a Christian in time, but that he *was* a Christian all through his career. This species of theft is on a level with the body-snatching of the Dean who had Darwin buried in Westminster Abbey. And let it be noted that this same Darwin has actually been included in a series of "Christian Leaders" by the great Dr. Clifford. After that we understand the Christianising of Shelley. There is even a chance of an annual sermon at St. Paul's in memory of that noble and distinguished Christian, Charles Bradlaugh.

G. W. FOOTE.

Unbelief.

It would be fairly accurate to assert that, in general, the more commonly a word of any importance is used, the more it is misused and misunderstood. Everybody talks about religion, without there being anything like a common understanding as to its meaning. To one it is identified with a belief in God, to another it means the culture of the ideal, and to another what ordinary folk understand by the term morality. It is the same with two such words as "doubt" and "unbelief." Most people use them as being always of an equal value, and, in the religious world, they are used, if not in the old sense of springing from moral depravity, at least as *suggesting* a certain want of balance deeply to be deplored. The doubter, we are told, adds no force to the world's progress; the unbeliever offers us a mere string of empty negations. Men of strong earnest convictions are the only ones who count in the world's development, and if we must all pass through these periods of doubt and unbelief, let us treat them as seasons of sickness and get out of them as speedily as possible.

This position would be sound enough if a person did nothing but doubt, or if one's belief had only a negative side to it. But the truth is that doubt nearly always, and belief invariably, has a positive aspect which the clergy find it profitable to ignore. This will be seen if one analyses the meanings of the expressions. Doubt may imply indecision, or it may imply an opinion of a negative character. If I go carefully through the evidence for the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's works, I may find the arguments for and against so balanced that I am unable to come to any decision. In this case my doubt as to who wrote the plays would represent a state of suspense. Or I might find the evidence for the

Baconian origin so worthless that my doubt represents not indecision, but a fairly strong presumption against the claims of Mr. Donnelly and Mrs. Potts. With unbelief, however, there is no such indecision, it being simply the reverse side of belief. If I say that I believe 2 plus 2 equals 4, I am also saying that I disbelieve in 2 plus 2 equalling any other sum. If I assert the belief that the earth is an oblate spheroid, I announce myself a disbeliever in its flatness. And so with every one of our beliefs on any and every subject. Belief and disbelief are two sides of the same thing. The strong disbeliever is also a sturdy believer; and when we are told that the world's benefactors have been strong believers, we may agree with the statement, merely adding that they were therefore, of necessity, strong disbelievers.

This plain and simple meaning of these two religiously-obnoxious words has been obscured by professional religionists for obvious reasons. To have taught it would have been to emphasise the lesson that all opinions, as opinions, were of equal value, and to speak of an opinion as being either moral or immoral was as sensible as speaking of the color of a sound or the size of a smell. What the clergy have preferred to do is first of all identify the holding of an opinion with a particular moral disposition; and, second, to treat all disbelief—disbelief in Christianity, that is—as being a negation, and nothing but a negation.

Canon Hensley Henson, one of the more liberal kind of clerics, had occasion the other day to deal with the question of doubt—"honest doubt" he called it, although, for reasons above given, "honest" or dishonest is altogether out of place in such a connection. He pointed out that neither in the Bible nor the New Testament is it admitted that a perfectly honest and upright individual can have any doubt concerning religion—a significant admission as to the unfitness of the Bible as a guide in one of the most important of questions. The Canon does not, of course, believe in the necessary association of religious doubt with immorality; indeed, he asserts that "doubt is now common among right-living men, and that it often reveals a moral sensitiveness beyond that of average believers." But he seeks to "save the face" of the "inspired" writers with the observation that "the doubters of the Apostolic Age were commonly, if not invariably, the advocates of moral licence. They drew the inspiration of their unbelief from their own disordered lives; they doubted in the interest, not of their own intellectual rectitude, but in that of their own base lusts."

The straits to which educated men in the Church are driven are really pitiable. If Canon Henson believed in the association of doubt and vice, one could understand him justifying the ignorant bigotry of the "Apostolic Age" in this manner. But what earthly reason is there for assuming that human nature was fundamentally any different seventeen or eighteen centuries ago than it is now? As a matter of fact, the general body of doubters of Christianity during the Apostolic Age were as religious, as bigoted, and as ignorant as the Christian preachers themselves. And the select few of the educated world who condescended to notice Christianity, and to express their disbelief, were no more open to the charge of disbelieving in the interest of "their own base lust" than is Herbert Spencer to-day. Besides, it is sheer nonsense to write of anyone disbelieving because they wish to act immorally. Belief or disbelief are not voluntary acts at all. A man does not believe what he will; he believes what he can. Anyone may *pretend* to believe or disbelieve a particular teaching, and this may deceive other people; but he, at least, is aware of the pretence. He cannot deceive himself. And to call this man a believer or a disbeliever is downright absurd.

The real cause of the apostolic and Biblical identification of religious doubt with immorality was exactly that which has led preachers of small mental calibre, during modern times, to the same conclusion—ignorance. And the root of this belief

lies much further than the New Testament. Its origin is the primitive belief that the man who offends the gods of the tribe is a danger to the community. The gods are no respecters of persons; they may cut off a whole harvest, or blot out an entire tribe for the offence of a single individual. It was this sense of corporate responsibility that led early generations to punish the disbeliever. He was a social danger, and, as such, *had* to be suppressed. And, as every passion grows by what it feeds on, so this hatred of the unbeliever, for the reason above given, developed into a blind antipathy to unbelief merely because it was unbelief. The connection of disrespect towards the tribal deities, with the possibility of a racial punishment, developed into the identification of unbelief with individual immorality. Most of our likings and antipathies have some such origin as this if we care to search into the matter. But I suppose it is too much to expect clergymen to know this—or, at least, to tell their congregation that they do know this, even when they happen to possess the information.

So, too, must the constant identification of religious unbelief with "pure negation" be set down to deliberate misrepresentation or downright ignorance. I have pointed out that men of strong belief may, with truth, be described as strong unbelievers. The only question of any social importance is whether our unbelief has for its object anything of real social value. Looked at from this standpoint, it soon becomes apparent that, while in the nature of the case we are all both believers and unbelievers, yet the non-Christians' unbelief implies a set of positive beliefs of no small social value. A brief glance at some of the *beliefs* of the "unbeliever" will make this clear.

What is the first important point in relation to Christianity on which we are unbelievers? Clearly that of the supernatural and the miraculous. On this we are not doubters, we are positive unbelievers. We see no reason for believing that at any time in human history any supernatural power intervened either on behalf or against man. But our unbelief in the supernatural and the miraculous is only the reverse of our believing in the universality of causation. Remove this, and the very foundation of our unbelief is gone. So that here, instead of a "bare negation," our unbelief is in reality the expression of a belief, without which all science is an impossibility; while the believer, so-called, is *ipso facto*, committed to a strong doubt concerning a generalisation which has stood every test that can be applied to it, and in the absence of which no sane ordering of life is even conceivable.

It is this *belief* which lies also at the root of the unbeliever's rejection of such teachings as the incarnation of Jesus or the inspiration of the Bible. We believe that the rule which holds good for the manner in which any ordinary John Smith is brought into the world, holds with equal strength of the greatest person that ever moved upon the surface of the planet. We do not admit that any supposed degree of human excellence can lift one out of the ranks of humanity altogether. The Christian in believing otherwise, tacitly asserts that natural causation is not universal, that there are certain exceptions, of which the life of Jesus furnishes an example; and thus, while we are unbelievers in relation to an alleged event of which there exists no proof, he is an unbeliever in the sanity of scientific procedure, and the trustworthiness of human experience.

It is the same again, with the belief in the Bible. The non-Christian rejects the Christian's view of the Bible; true, but he does so because he has a very decided *belief* concerning it. He sees that these inspired literatures, or traditions, or oracles, crop up all over the world; that they always flourish among people relatively low down in the scale of civilisation, and that the claim for special inspiration weakens as civilisation develops. Seeing this, he believes that the Bible has the same origin and the same inspiration that all other books have, and that its veracity

and trustworthiness must be tested not by what people have believed concerning it, but by what we know to-day of natural law, human nature, and social evolution. The unbeliever in rejecting the Christian belief is *affirming* a principle, not uttering a negation. Or, if it is a negation it is the one that every truth makes when confronted with a falsehood.

The two positions are seen with greater clearness still in matters of morals. The Christian asserts that a belief in a God, in heaven and hell, are essential to right living. The man who lets go the belief in deity and a future life lets go the sheet-anchor of morality. That is, he asserts that human nature is so constituted that minus a bribe or a threat man is a beast—worse than a beast, for even the lower animals do care for their young and for each other, without religious belief. The religious conception involves the denial of the possibility of any degree of excellence in the absence of a coercive external force. The Atheist in denying this may be with justice accused of uttering a negation, but he is at the same time affirming that human nature, poor as it is, has at least enough inherent nobility to carry out its proper social and family functions in a legitimate manner without being bribed by a heaven or terrified by a hell. The Christian is fond of speaking of the pessimism inherent in unbelief, but, right or wrong, there is at least greater nobility in a teaching that takes man at his highest and appeals to all that is noblest in him, than one that treats him as a compound of fool and felon incapable of recognising where his duty lies or of carrying it out.

So it will be found in other directions when the two positions are contrasted. Unbelievers we all are, and are bound to be so long as we have any beliefs to talk about; but if it is ever right to talk of a mental state as immoral, it must surely be of that which, turning its back on all human experience and sane science, reduces reason to a mere delusion, and morality to the repression of criminal instincts under fear of punishment or hope of reward.

C. COHEN.

The Fight for Free Discussion.

PAST PROSECUTIONS FOR BLASPHEMY AND HERESY.

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

(Continued from page 5.)

The Rev. Thomas Woolston was another heretic, vastly superior to his persecutors. Born at Northampton in 1669, he became fellow at Sydney College, Cambridge, and took orders. An assiduous reader, a study of Origen led to his adopting allegorical interpretations of the Scripture. Further study led to the rejection of the Christian miracles. Upon engaging in the controversy between Anthony Collins and his opponents, a prosecution was instituted against him by the Attorney-General, which Whiston and other friends to toleration had the interest to get stayed. But he was not silenced. In 1727, and the three following years, he published his *Six Discourses on the Miracles*, in which he examines the alleged miracles of Jesus with the utmost freedom. His finest sarcasm and ridicule he, however, took the precaution to put into the mouth of a Jewish Rabbi. He was tried for five blasphemous libels before the Guildhall, March 4th, 1729. The King's Attorney-General, who said the prisoner had been "esteemed as a learned man and a clergyman," declared his work "the most blasphemous book that was ever published in any age whatever." The defence made for Woolston by counsel was that he had no blasphemous intent to bring religion into contempt, but to put it on a better footing and to show that the miracles were to be understood in a metaphorical sense, and not as literally written. He was found guilty on all the counts, and Chief Justice Raymond declared that the Court would not suffer it to be debated whether writing against Christianity in general was a temporal offence, but said "we interpose only where the

very root of Christianity itself is struck at, as it plainly is by this allegorical scheme, the New Testament and the whole relation of the Life and Miracles of Christ being denied." Woolston's counsel contended the prosecution should have been under the statute 9 and 10 William III., cap. 35, but the Chief Justice ruled that blasphemy was also punishable at common law in addition to the statutory penalties. As a matter of fact, all prosecutions, subsequent to that statute, have been under the old law, having its basis on the dictum of judges who believed in witchcraft and that heresy was worse than murder. Woolston was sentenced to a year's imprisonment and a fine of £100. At the expiry of his time, being unable to pay his fine, he remained in the King's Bench Debtors' Prison. Solicitations were made for his release by Dr. Samuel Clarke, but he declined giving security not to offend again in a similar way. Death brought release in 1733. His moral character seems to have been unimpeachable, and in his discourses he has, in a rough but vigorous style, anticipated much of modern Freethought criticism.

In 1756 Jacob Olive, master printer, and author of several peculiar religious works, among others a pretended translation of the book of Jasher, was confined in Clerkenwell House of Correction for two years for publishing *Modest Remarks on the late Bishop Sherlock's Sermons*. During his confinement he published some pamphlets exposing the dreadful condition of that prison and suggesting improvements.

A more important case was that of Peter Annet, a schoolmaster, and one of the first inventors of a system of shorthand. He was a native of Liverpool, and had been educated for the Dissenting ministry, but his studies led to his rejection of Christianity. In 1789 he published an anonymous pamphlet on Freethinking, and followed this up by *The Resurrection of Jesus Demonstrated to have no Proof* in 1744, and from this time he entered into controversies on that subject with Sherlock and others under the title of a *Moral Philosopher*. He got much noticed by his *History of a Man after God's own Heart*, occasioned by a comparison made by Dr. S. Chandler, between George II. and David. On October 17th, 1761, he published the first number of the *Free Enquirer*. This was the first Freethought journal in England, and it only lasted nine numbers, during which Annet had conducted an examination of the Pentateuch; less learned, but not more pronounced, than that of Bishop Colenso. For this, he was in November, 1762, condemned to suffer one month's imprisonment in Newgate, to stand twice in the pillory with a paper affixed over his head with these words, "For Blasphemy," and then to be confined to hard labor in Bridewell for one year, at the expiration of the year to be remanded to Newgate until he found security for his good behavior during the remainder of his life. At this time he was seventy years of age. He died January 18, 1769.

The next important trial for Blasphemy was that of Thomas Williams, tried before Lord Kenyon in the Court of King's Bench, Westminster, June 24, 1797, for the publication of Paine's *Age of Reason*. This prosecution was the first one instituted by a society calling itself the "Society for Carrying into Effect his Majesty's Proclamation against Vice and Immorality." This society had at least four bishops among its promoters. Despite the most able defence that had then been offered, his counsel being Mr. Steward Kyd, who had himself been accused of high treason and acquitted with Hardy and Horne Tooke, he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment by Justice Ashurst, who described the indicted parts of the *Age of Reason* as "blasphemies against the Almighty God himself, which the most impious and diabolical mind could imagine it was in the heart of man could write." This sapient judge declared that "If the name of our Redeemer was suffered to be traduced, and his holy religion treated with contempt, the solemnity of an oath, on which the due administration of justice depended, would be destroyed, and the law would be stripped of one of its principal sanctions—the dread of future punishment." The

sentence provoked a stinging letter from Paine to Erskine, the counsel for the prosecution, who had defended Paine when charged with seditious libel. It is due to the memory of Erskine to state that in the interval, before Williams was brought up for judgment, Erskine strongly advised his clients to show mercy. This advice the bishops and their colleagues rejected. In a letter written upon the subject by Erskine, when Lord Chancellor, he declared his belief that had his counsel been acted upon, the *Age of Reason*, instead of obtaining its great popularity would have remained but little known.

The next trial, which took place in March, 1812, was also for publishing the *Age of Reason*, Daniel Isaac Eaton, a Deist, brought up in France, being the victim. He defended himself, but had hardly uttered a sentence before he was prohibited by Lord Ellenborough from entering into his reasons for his unbelief, as Kyd had contrived to do for Williams. He was sentenced to two years' imprisonment, and to stand in the pillory for two hours. This brutality called forth an indignant protest from sweet-souled Shelley, who could truly apply to himself the words from his Julian and Maddalo:—

*Me, who am as a nerve o'er which do creep,
The else unfelt oppressions of this earth.*

The "Letter to Lord Ellenborough" gave the first indications of Shelley's genius. It was suppressed by his publisher, but it has been reprinted (Shelley's Works, edited by H. B. Forman, vol. v.; p. 407), and it is a safe prediction that the defence of the heretic will be treasured when the memory of the judge has sunk into oblivion. "By what right," asked Shelley, "do you punish Mr. Eaton? What but antiquated precedents gathered from times of priestly and tyrannical domination can be adduced in palliation of an outrage so insulting to humanity and justice. Whom has he injured? What crime has he committed?" Shelley makes the answer: "It is because he is a Deist and you a Christian. You copy the persecutors of Christianity in your actions, and are an additional proof that your religion is as bloody, barbarous, and intolerant as theirs."

On the 16th of January, 1819, began a series of prosecutions, instituted by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, against Richard Carlile, and his associates, shopmen and shopwomen. The first trial, that of Carlile himself, began on October 12 of that year, and after a nine days' defence, ended by his being sentenced to pay a fine of £1,500; to be imprisoned for three years, and to find sureties for his good behavior for the term of his life. In consequence of his non-compliance with the law, this intrepid man, to whom, more than to any other, we owe such freedom of expression as we to-day enjoy, endured no less than nine and a half years' imprisonment. The sale of Paine's *Age of Reason*, for publishing which he was sentenced, was not suppressed for a single day, though various expedients were in time adopted to evade the law. For the same and similar offences, his wife, Jane Carlile, suffered two years' imprisonment. His sister, Mary Anne, also two years. William Holmes, John Barkley, Humphrey Boyle, Joseph Rhodes, Mrs. Susannah Wright, William Tunbridge, James Watson, (who afterwards so ably fought in the battle for a free press, together with his friend Henry Hetherington), William Campion (editor of the *Newgate Magazine*), Richard Hassell, Thomas Jefferies, John Clarke (author of the *Critical Review*), William Cochrane, William Haley, and Thomas Riley Perry, all of whom carried on Carlile's business, had also sentences varying from three years to twelve months' imprisonment. Various other trials took place in Edinburgh and elsewhere, several who were arrested not being brought to trial. The last of the Carlile trials, that of Perry, took place in July, 1824, and in prefacing the report of the trials of these persons, Carlile, writing from Dorchester gaol in the sixth year of his imprisonment, was able to say, "All the publications that have been prosecuted have been and are continued in open sale."

The next important trial was on October 24, 1827, when the Rev. Robert Taylor, B.A., of St. John's College, Cambridge, known as the Devil's chaplain, was brought up for preaching in public that Christianity was a wicked and mischievous fable. He made an able rhetorical defence. Justice Bayley, in sentencing Taylor on February 7, 1828, to one year's imprisonment in Oakham gaol and to find securities in £1,000 for good behavior for five years, declared that in destroying Christianity "you destroyed all the bonds of society," "It is with that view and that view only that punishment is inflicted." To give Taylor an opportunity of communicating with the outside world, Carlile started the *Lion*, which contained many of his brightest effusions. His important work, the "Diegesis," was also composed in Oakham gaol. After his release from prison in 1829, he, together with Carlile, made a tour through England on an infidel mission, commencing with a challenge to the Cambridge University. In 1830 and 1831, Taylor delivered a series of discourses at the Rotunda, Blackfriars, known under the title of "The Devil's Pulpit." These discourses were extremely popular, and their author was on July 4, 1831, tried before the Surrey Court of Sessions and sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

(To be concluded.)

Our Mutual Improvement Society.

SUCH a thing as a Mutual Improvement Society was for us in the region of the unknown until the arrival of our now curate, the Rev. Mr. Calob Grubly.

Indeed, the reverend gentleman was of really remarkable appearance. He was somewhat above the average height, unusually thin, possessing large, awkward-looking feet, but having a face in which an angelic simplicity was curiously blended with a striking seemingness of very worldly wisdom. But, bless you, he could talk. Indeed, I have never heard anyone to equal him. He would just sit down right in front of you, his delicate, tapering, aristocratic fingers touching lightly at the tips, and he would talk, talk, talk, on every imaginable subject, but in so airy a manner, yet with such convincingness, that you really couldn't help feeling flattered that such a man should condescend to favor you with his conversation.

Now, the Rev. Mr. Grubly was not as other men. I don't mean to suggest that you would mistake him for anything but a man. Certainly not. I wish to convey that he did not view life simply as a continued round of eating, drinking, and sleeping. "The spiritual side of one's nature," he said, "should be given the fullest scope for developing itself." Exactly what he meant by the "spiritual side" I was never able to discover. However, he did once describe it as "the transcendental blending of the essence of intellectuality with the most refined state of the emotions." I know that none of us understood what he meant, but I remember particularly that we all applauded him long and loudly.

Well, he hadn't been more than three weeks in our parish when he proposed forming the Mutual Improvement Society. His proposal required a lot of explanation; nevertheless it "caught on" all right. In fact, we got quite enthusiastic over it.

I recollect that my next-door neighbor, despite most explicit explanation on the part of the Rev. Grubly, still retained rather hazy notions as to the nature of a Mutual Improvement Society. His wife was inclined to be rather sarcastic about it. "Some new-fangled rot, I know," she interpolated, while I and her husband were discussing the Society across the backyard fence; "I think as how working men has quite enough to do with their ha'pence already."

"But there ain't anything to pay," remonstrated her husband.

"What's it for, then?" she queried.

"Oh, it's something to do with eddication. Howsomer, I reckon the curate knows what he's about."

"That's more than you do," was her final retort, as she re-entered the house.

Time brings most things along with it, and at length it brought the Mutual Improvement Society. The inaugurating ceremony was quite a grand affair, and was performed in a corrugated iron building locally known as the "Mission Hall." A brass band was engaged for the occasion. On the platform were the vicar and his wife, the curate, and several of the local celebrities. Of course, the proceedings opened with prayer. After that the band played a selection. Then

the curate, in a falsetto voice, sang "Lead, kindly Light." It fell rather flat, though, and my next-door neighbor's wife considered that he was "taking a quiet rise out of some of the lady members of the choir."

The vicar, who was in the chair, made a lengthy speech about the newly-arisen Society, and hoped that it would lead the parishioners to a fuller and livelier comprehension of their duties towards the Church, towards themselves, and towards others. He sat down amidst a thunder of applause. The band now played another selection. Then arose the curate. He seemed a bit nervous, but, assuming what he no doubt intended to be a commanding attitude, he proceeded to deliver an address with all the eloquence of which he was capable.

"Knowledge," he said, "but especially *spiritual* knowledge, was the guiding star of the human race." With much emphasis he declared that we must learn before we could know. And he felt sure that this Mutual Improvement Society would not only increase their mental efficiency, but widen their intellectual horizon as well.

There was a tremendous outburst of cheering as the curate resumed his seat. Then, when some of the local celebrities had spoken, we elected the curate as president, the leading local grocer as secretary, and the local undertaker as librarian. It was then agreed that we should meet twice weekly—on Mondays and Thursdays.

The inauguration took place on the Friday, and, naturally enough, the first meeting of our Society on the coming Monday was looked forward to almost with excitement.

My next-door neighbor's wife casually remarked that "that blessed Mewchural Sassiety was driving her blessed old man fairly awff his blessed chump." I, being a member, thought it better not to reply to her observation. However, Monday evening came at last.

We went together, I and my next-door neighbor, to the place of meeting, a large room in the aforesaid Mission Hall. As we approached the Hall I noticed, with some trepidation, that a number of hobbledchoys and children had collected outside it. As we entered I heard a very audible whisper of "There's two of 'em. *Don't* they look balmy!"

We found several members inside already, and, after exchanging salutations with these, we followed their example by sitting down at the great table in the centre of the room.

One by one our members dropped in until twelve of us were assembled. Some time elapsed, then the curate came and made *thirteen*.

Now I believe this would have passed unnoticed by us had not old Mr. Grimy called our attention to the fact. He expressed himself strongly of opinion that thirteen was a most unlucky number, and that if we thirteen persisted in sitting down together, something very bad would be sure to happen. He supported his opinion by enumerating some personal experiences. "As you all know, I used to live at No. 13 in the High-street," he said, "and do you think I could ever get comfortable there? No, gentlemen, I could not. Something wrong was always taking place there. First the water-pipes would start leaking, then a window would be broken, or I would fall downstairs. No, I wasn't drunk, Jack Briggs, so you needn't hint it. And if you've anything to say don't mutter it, speak out like a man. (To the curate) It's alright, Mr. Grubly, but I don't like a man to *suppose* things about me. Well, I set a hen on thirteen eggs. She sat on 'em for a fortnight, then died. After all that, do you mean to tell me that thirteen *aint* an unlucky number?"

"But, Mr. Grimy," interposed the curate, "if thirteen pounds were owing you for work done, would you object to the amount on the score of unluckiness?"

"Well, sir," answered Grimy, "that seems a different matter. Still, I think I should ask 'em to give me a penny over for fear of accident."

"Would not a penny *under* suit you?" queried the curate.

"No, sir, that it wouldn't. What I've worked for, I've earned. No, sir, no docking for me."

Further remarks, on the part of Mr. Grimy, concerning the number thirteen, were prevented by the appearance of another member, whose entry evidently afforded much relief to the superstitious old gentleman.

When the latest arrival had seated himself, the curate solemnly scanned our faces. "I will offer up a short prayer," he said. At the conclusion of this short prayer, he got to business by announcing the subject for the evening. It was "The Unseen."

After making the announcement the curate, having arranged some manuscript for about the twentieth time, coughed slightly to clear his throat, then began as follows:—

"It has been said of the great poet Milton that he intensely realised the presence of the Unseen. Now this was a wonderful faculty for him to possess. Where most people saw empty air, Milton realised the presence of spiritual beings. Happy would it be for us could we realise as he did the presence of the Unseen."

The curate paused to see the effect his words had upon us.

"I think, Mr. Grubly," said the quiet voice of old Finchley, the shoemaker, "that many of us don't realise the things we do see, let alone the things that are invisible to us."

"Ah, Mr. Finchley," replied the curate, "you are no doubt thinking of those things perceived by the bodily senses. I am referring to those things perceivable only by the soul."

"I don't follow you, Mr. Grubly," said the old shoemaker. "I am an old man, I have thought a great deal, and it seems to me that we depend on our senses for all our information. If we have a soul we can only know of it through our senses, so whatever the soul knows or learns remains unknown to us until our senses tell our bodies all about it."

The curate pondered for a moment. Suddenly he said: "Do you, Mr. Finchley, believe that man has a soul?"

"Well, now," answered the old shoemaker, "that's a question I've often put to myself. Sometimes I'm inclined to think no, sometimes yes; I hardly know how to answer. At any rate, it appears to me that a good many people don't deserve to have souls."

Old Grimy half-rose to his feet. "Where are you going to when you die, Jim Finchley?" he ejaculated, looking severely over his glasses at the old shoemaker.

"To the cemetery, Bob Grimy, to the cemetery. How's that for you?"

Grimy was at the point of giving utterance to some wrathful exclamation, when the curate, whose face had assumed a most shocked expression, raised a silencing hand. "Gentlemen," he protested, "we are not here for the purpose of practising irreverence."

At this moment my next-door neighbor, who had been itching to say something for the last ten minutes or more, now exploded into speech. "I wouldn't take much notice of that there Finchley, Mr. Grubly," he said, "I've awfen seed him a-listening to them Atheist chaps in the park on Sunday alternoons. He's very thick with them Atheist chaps, he is, Mr. Grubly."

"Thank ye for nothing," retorted the old shoemaker, a suspicion of anger in his voice; I didn't think you could use your eyes so well. 'Pon my word, you're not half so wooden as you look."

"Mr. Finchley, Mr. Finchley," exclaimed the curate, "for goodness sake guard your tongue. Now, gentlemen, we really must not have these personalities. Let us resume our subject. As an example of what is meant by the unseen, let us take the air. We cannot see it, yet we are always influenced by it; it is absolutely necessary to our existence. As wind, we feel it like some great hand pushing against us. Yet it is ever invisible to our eyes. No man has seen it."

"You're mistaken, Mr. Grubly; I have seen it. I've seen air poured out of one vessel into another like so much water." It was the old shoemaker who had again interrupted, and all eyes were turned in his direction.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Finchley, you have seen air in an artificial condition, but you have not, neither has any man, seen it in its natural state." And the curate smiled condescendingly. However, the shoemaker smiled in return.

"If that's so, Mr. Grubly," he replied, "then you have never seen water, nor has any man. You put some water in a bottle, heat it until it boils, but keep the bottle corked. You can't see the steam in that bottle, but it's there. And if liquid air is artificial, so's steam."

The curate looked annoyed, but he affected pleasantness, as he replied, "I am afraid, Mr. Finchley," he said, "that we are losing ourselves in side issues."

"You're a hinfdel, Jim Finchley," exclaimed my next-door neighbor, glaring at the shoemaker.

"You're nothing," was the retort. "I'd as soon be a moke as you."

"You're a hagitator, Jim Finchley, a hagitator," shouted Grimy.

"You're an idiot, Bob Grimy, an idiot," shouted back the shoemaker.

Then ensued an uproar. Some were shouting at each other, others were shouting at these, telling them to stop shouting. The curate stood up in alarm.

At length order was restored, whereupon the curate promptly declared the meeting closed. I may mention that Grimy and the old shoemaker had to be separated.

The vicar was greatly put out on hearing of the conduct of the members of the Mutual Improvement Society. He at once decided that it's name should be changed. It is now "The Working Men's Bible Class." JAMES H. WATERS.

The Cynical Codger.

"It's remarkable in these days of 'getting your money's worth,'" said the cynical codger, "but I've noticed that preachers who deliver the shortest sermons generally get the largest salaries."—*Baltimore Morning Herald.*

A Chinaman's Third Letter.

WHO MADE THE WORLD?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

DEAR SIR,—I thank you very much for publishing my two letters. With your leave I shall translate some of your publications and send them to my friends in China.

A few weeks ago I heard some English gentlemen discussing the merits of Sir Robert Ball's late work, entitled "The World's Beginning." They all seemed to agree that it was a remarkable work, "so simple and direct that anyone could understand it."

I was told that Sir Robert was the leading astronomer in England, and that his late work had been written expressly for beginners. Evidently it was just what I wanted, and I lost no time in purchasing a copy and reading it. I was pleased—I was more than pleased—I was delighted. The language was simple and easy to understand, the reasoning good, and the logic sound. It appears to me that there cannot be the least doubt about the absolute truth of the theory laid down and reasoned out. It must be so, and what is more, everyone that I have spoken to on the subject agrees with me. Nobody seems to question it. It appears to be accepted by everyone as a matter of course. This being so, let us see now what Sir Robert Ball teaches, and what is admitted to be quite true in England and America.

He says that this world came into its present form by being condensed from a white hot cloud of gas, or matter so very hot and attenuated that it appeared in space as a nebula, or disorganised cloud of white hot earthy substances such as lime, clay, sand, iron, etc. He says that this hot cloud very slowly condensed and formed our sun and all the planets including this earth. He says that other worlds than ours are being formed at the present moment, and that we can actually see them with a large telescope in the process of forming in the great spiral nebula, all of which appears very wonderful indeed. I have read this remarkable work with great interest, and strange as it may seem, I find that Sir Robert Ball does not once mention the name of the Jewish Jehovah or the Christian God as having had anything to do with the making of the world. Why is this? It is either true or false that Jehovah made the world in six days and rested on the seventh. If it is true, why did Sir Robert write this book, and why does everyone accept his theory as being true? If neither the Jehovah of the Jews nor the Christian God made this world, why do you spend good money to teach such a foolish falsehood to our people? Why do you in England accept Sir Robert Ball's account of the Creation, and teach the old Jewish account to us in China? The Chinese philosophers have always taught us that the world has always existed, and therefore it was not created. They say, "It has always been so" and "will always remain so," that "everything came about in an ordinary manner and according to natural law, that there never was a special creation or a miracle, and never can be one." This is not far off what Sir Robert tells us now, it is certainly very near the truth as it is understood by all the learned men of to-day.

Let us see now what the missionaries are attempting to teach in China. They tell us that this world, including the sun, moon, and stars, was snapped into existence out of nothing by the Jewish Jehovah in a few hours. That is something like taking a snapshot photograph. Then another snap, and all the animals and plants were made. Then a third snap, and man and woman made their appearance, full-grown, and able to walk and talk and eat. All was done inside of six days, and about 6,000 years ago. Then the God that did all this rested on the seventh day. This is certainly why Sunday is observed, there is no question about it; and this is what your missionaries are attempting to make our people believe to-day. This is what you are paying hundreds of thousands of pounds a year to teach to my countrymen. True, it is not good enough for grown-up people in England, so you attempt to force it upon us. I wish it to be distinctly understood that this account of the so-called Creation appears to us to be foolish and absurd in the extreme. We could not believe such a grotesque fable if we tried to. Many of our people resent the attempt to force such stupid falsehoods upon us, and trouble and bloodshed result. I have no hesitation in saying that if you should send Sir Robert Ball to us, to teach the theories that he teaches so successfully in England, that he would be well received, his doctrines would be accepted as they have been here, and there would be no trouble or bloodshed.

You would find our people sensible enough to understand and accept his theory. There could be no trouble or opposition, because Sir Robert's theory is true, and he has the reasoning power to make others see that it is true. I would even say more—he leaves no door open to enable one to escape conviction. His theory is true, and in China we love

and admire the truth. Once more allow me to contrast this with what the paid missionaries are now attempting to teach in China. The story they tell is foolish in the extreme, and has every appearance of being a fable; and the more they attempt to prove it the worse they make it appear. It is even too absurd for our children; really we are not such fools as you take us to be. We therefore pray you to withdraw your ignorant and misguided missionaries, and their stupid falsehoods from our country, and send us your best scientific men; then all will go well. Peace and missionaries cannot both abide in China, and we prefer peace.

AM SIN.

Acid Drops.

VERY little has been heard about the children in the late Education controversy. It has simply been a question of who should control their education; in other words, whether Church or Chapel should have the first pull in manufacturing young Christians. Education, in the proper sense of the word, has been entirely overlooked. And what education really comes to in subordination to this religious squabble may be judged from the fact that the *Westminster Gazette* printed the following arithmetical conundrum for the holiday season:—"If a fish weighs seven pounds plus half its own weight, how much does it weigh?" Nobody seems to have solved it yet!

Dr. Clifford and other Nonconformist leaders declare that they are opposed to all religious tests. This is not true. They uphold religious tests in the elementary schools of this country. True, they do not impose a test on the teachers on entering the schools, but they quickly impose one if a teacher displays a sensitive conscience. The London School Board did not impose religious tests, but when Mr. F. J. Gould asked as a Freethinker to be relieved from teaching what he did not believe, he soon found that he could never expect promotion, and he was obliged to throw up his appointment. A somewhat similar case has arisen in the district under the Wombwell School Board, the official action being still more peremptory. Mr. Moses Sanger, assistant master of the Barnsley-road school, objected on conscientious grounds to reading prayers. The Board resolved that he should be informed that if he could not comply with the rules conscientiously he must send in his resignation. Those who say that this is not imposing a religious test are capable of anything in the way of tergiversation.

Dr. Clifford, in his Sunday morning sermon at Westbourne Park Chapel, referred to the *Daily News* religious census of London. He admitted that there had been a decline in both Anglican and Nonconformist church attendance since 1886. "The result," he said, "saddens me very much." We are sorry we cannot mourn with him. One man's meat is sometimes another man's poison. What makes Dr. Clifford sad makes us rejoice. We are even unsympathetic enough to hope that the next religious census, whenever it is taken, will make him still sadder.

The *Morning Leader*, a little while ago, reproduced a cartoon from a French journal, representing a clerical harpy clinging with tremendous claws to the roof of a church dominating a vast stretch of country. It was intended to suggest "the position of the clergy in France," but our contemporary thought "the ingenious might find a parallel on this side of the Channel." Unfortunately the *Morning Leader* has helped the game of Clericalism in England by championing the cause of religious education in State schools, and suppressing all reference to the policy of "Secular Education." Our contemporary must surely have wit enough to perceive that the game of Clericalism in public education would be impossible if religious instruction were totally excluded from the schools, and that it will never cease while religious instruction is included.

"How to Get Men to Church" is being discussed in the *Referee*. Nobody suggests smoking paws and free drinks.

Christian England has some very questionable laws, and some very questionable judges. Considering the meekness which we are so often told is the most distinctive virtue of a true Christian, it is astonishing how some of these judges—and especially the most pious ones—indulge in a fondness for excessive sentences and corporal punishment. At Liverpool the other day Mr. Justice Jelf gave an old convict named Michael Wash seven years' penal servitude and twelve strokes of the cat for robbery with violence. The prisoner had previously served seven years for a similar offence, and had only just concluded a sentence of fourteen years. Such was the effect of mere punishment upon him! But, it is

said, the word "cat" made him turn pale. Very likely. He might have turned still paler if he had heard that all his nails were to be pulled out with pincers. Making a man turn pale is a very easy business. Doing him, and society too, some good is a much harder matter. That wants brains. Any hasty fool on the bench can deal out cruel sentences.

Mr. Montague Crackanorpe, K.C., fell foul of the secretary of the Humanitarian League on the question of whether it was flogging that really put down garrotting. Having got the worst of the encounter, he sneers at the League as "an irresponsible body." It sounds very withering, but what does it mean? If it means that the League is not an incorporated society it is a ridiculous triviality. If it means that the League has not contracted to forfeit £1,000 for every mistake it makes, it is quite true, but nothing at all to the purpose; for, in that sense of the word, Mr. Crackanorpe is equally irresponsible. The learned gentleman should explain himself.

"Heathenism" on the part of the Punjab people is complained of in the *Durham County Advertiser*. It appears that these misguided people are "very religious," that they "fast and worship, and feed the poor, and even go on pilgrimage." But they will not adopt "common-sense precautions" against disease, and they "think the missionaries very materialistic and irreligious to urge them to use human means." Evidently these poor heathen are simple and honest. They also form a very just idea of the missionaries. What has a Christian missionary to do with "human means"? Nothing could be more absurd and hypocritical than one of these gentry with his mouth full of prayer and his hands full of medicine bottles. No wonder the mild Hindus wonder what business he is really in.

We drew attention recently to the bigoted lucubrations of Eugene M. Willard in the *Boston Traveller*. Since then we have seen a longer extract than the one we had before us, and it satisfies us that the writer is a religious lunatic. Hasten, he exclaims, the United States of God! And he proposes to do it in this way. The Christian Church must take possession of all power, make all the laws, and execute them. The glories of this millennium are set forth as follows:—"Now, you ask, what would be the benefit to be derived from the Christian control of this government? More churches of God would be established. This would be made necessary by the enactment of a compulsory church attendance law, involving every man, woman, and child in America. Such a law would work a thousand changes in our people, morally, physically, socially, intellectually. It would take considerable time to accustom the under masses to such a change, but when once accustomed to it they would readily comply with the demands of the clergy. Another benefit would be the Christian control of our common schools. The children of the laboring masses would receive more beneficial instruction. They would wonderfully increase in Christian citizenship. Infidelity and unbelief would be doomed; it would die a violent death. Infidels and scoffers would be given an opportunity to renounce their infidelity and foolishness. If they refused they would be put to death at the stake. There would be no other course to adopt. Such degenerates could not be tolerated in a government under God. Intoxicating liquors would be unknown. The Church would not tolerate such a damnable curse. Tobacco, cigarettes, and perfumery would be banished from this land forever. Profanity and all social evil would become extinct. Profane men would be imprisoned and harlots stoned to death."

Willard's millennium would end in general suicide. After the Christians had burnt all the infidels at the stake, and stoned all the harlots to death—which would be rough on a good many professed followers of Jesus—they would soon begin to work on each other. Those who were not quite orthodox enough would be killed first; another weeding-out would follow, and then another, and another, until at last only a couple of true Willardite Christians would be left; and these would split into two factions and shoot each other. America would then be free of Christians, and there would be a chance for some honest race of heathens to fill the vacancy. So three cheers for the United States of God.

Many stories of the late Mr. S. D. Waddy, K.C., are circulating. Amongst them is the following:—Some few years ago Mr. Waddy lived at Gloucester Gate, Regent's Park, and on Sunday afternoons he commonly walked in the Park and listened to the speakers of all descriptions who were then allowed to put up their tubs there. Amongst them was one amusing and impudent agnostic or unbeliever, or whatever he called himself. With a view to a crowd and pence in his hat, this man once challenged the eminent Q.C., who was standing on the outside of the ring, at first generally as a

"well-known M.P. and Q.C., who is listening to me and can refute what I say if he dare," etc., etc.—and then by name as "The gentleman I mean is Mr. Samuel Danks Waddy, Queen's Counsel, Member of Parliament, and Methodist local preacher. I invite him to occupy 'my platform' and dispose of my arguments." By this time there was a very large crowd, some of whom knew Mr. Waddy well by sight. He stepped quietly into the inner ring, pointed to the hat with the pennies, and said, "I presume if I take part in this entertainment I shall be allowed to share in the collection." That, it need not be said, was the end of the challenge and the challenger.

We regard this story as purely apocryphal. The incidents could hardly have occurred without being reported at least in "unbelieving" circles at the time. And it was only a few years ago! We invite the Freethought speaker in question, if he has any existence outside the story, to give us *his* version of "the Waddy affair."

M. de Blowitz ceases to represent the *Times* at Paris. He has held the post long enough; moreover, he has nearly lost his sight. We mean his bodily sight. But his mental sight seems also a little affected. Referring to the "relaxed morality" brought about by "the new French literary school"—as if literature moulded life instead of representing it!—M. de Blowitz delivers himself as follows:—"Without indulging in hypocritical lamentations, it may be said that the advance of the new morality, governed only by pleasure, foreshadows a moment when family ties will become a simple fiction, and when, unless a radical change intervenes, society will have atheism as a basis and voluptuousness as a summit." Evidently the great M. de Blowitz has forgotten that the most voluptuous period of French history was some time before the Revolution, and that atheism was not its basis then. Piety and profligacy went hand in hand, and the most corrupt sinners were the priests of the Church. Atheism, indeed, has no very obvious connection with voluptuousness. Men like Bradlaugh and Ingersoll were denounced and hated, but it was never suggested that their private lives were "improper." On the side of domestic morality they have generally been considered as irreproachable.

The resignation of the Bishop of Reading places the Archdeaconry of Oxford "at the disposal of Bishop Paget." The post is worth about £1,300 a year, with free residence in addition. "Blessed be ye poor!"

Mr. Watts presented his picture, "Love and Life," to the American nation. It was hung up at the White House, Washington, the official residence of the Presidents; but it soon offended the uneasy delicacy of the "free and independent citizens" over there, who are in some respects the least free and independent citizens in the world. It had therefore to be removed to a museum, and there it remained till recently, when President Roosevelt had it brought back to the White House. This caused a fresh uproar, in which the Christian Temperance women were most conspicuous. The one thing lacking to complete the comedy was the presence of Mrs. Carrie Nation. If she had only turned up with her hatchet and chopped the wicked picture to bits, millions of goody-goody folk would have settled down to worshipping the Lord with fresh composure. Perhaps it is in order to avert such a catastrophe that President Roosevelt has had "Love and Life" carried upstairs to his private apartments.

The objection to "Love and Life" is that the figures are nude. But is Christ upon the cross embarrassed with a superfluity of raiment? After all, a beautiful naked woman is less objectionable than an emaciated naked scarecrow of a man. A stripped Sandow is worth seeing, but a stripped Jesus is simply a figure to be sent round to the nearest second-hand clothes shop.

A London magistrate the other day had the almost incredible stupidity or effrontery to say to an applicant for exemption under the Vaccination Act, "Well, you may have satisfied *your* conscience, but you have not satisfied *mine*." Is it safe to trust the administration of the law to such hands?

It is only Atheists, of course, who would ever think of committing suicide. We mean theoretically—according to orthodox teaching on this point. As a matter of fact, it is the orthodox themselves who do most in the way of hurrying out of the world. We have noted hundreds of such cases from time to time, and these are only a fraction of the number that must have occurred in all the various parts of the country.

An American minister is at loggerheads with his Church because the lighting is so insufficient that "familiarities" are indulged in between the younger members of the congregation. This should be a warning to the Rev. C. J. Parker, vicar of Clerkenwell, who announces that he will hold a series of services in the dark, beginning on January 22. The church, we read, will be absolutely unlighted from the beginning to the end of the service. The psalms, hymns, and prayers will be thrown on a large screen by a magic-lantern. Mr. Parker's idea seems to be to spare the blushes of his poor female parishioners who cannot "dress well enough" for the house of God. But we fancy he hasn't thought the matter out fully. He may yet find that second thoughts are best. It might even be better if he announced a "smoking service" instead of the "dark service." We give him the hint gratis and carriage paid.

Poor Irish Protestant Bishops! They are not knee-deep in clover as they used to be. Before the Irish Church was disestablished the Bishopric of Clogher was worth some £9,000 a year. It is now worth only £1,273. Oh what a fall was there! Think of it! How lamentable that a leading representative of the "poor Carpenter of Nazareth" should have an income of but £22 odd per week. How is a man to preach "Blessed be ye poor" on such a paltry salary?

Rockefeller, the Yankee multi-millionaire, has given another million dollars to the University of Chicago. At the same time the price of kerosine was advanced four cents per gallon. This will mean fifty million dollars extra profit to the Standard Oil Company. What a noble trade is professional benevolence.

General Booth says that New York is the wickedest city in the world. What price London? Both cities, however, are Christian, with lots of churches and swarms of soul-savers. Perhaps that's the explanation.

The new Tombs Prison in New York is provided with a handsome Catholic chapel. No provision was found necessary for "unbelievers." Protestants and Catholics, between them, pretty well monopolise the gaols.

Rev. A. B. Hintz was "revivaling" at Odessa, Mo., in the United States. His object was to bring the whole town to Christ. He was specially strong on "purity." But he heard from Kansas City that an officer was on the way to arrest him for having more wives than the law allows in America. So he went off in the morning early. No doubt he will play the Christian purity game elsewhere.

Courage!

'Tis hard for ye who love the light,
And struggle hard against the night
Of priestly guile and craft, to see
Thy path strewn still with misery.

Thou who art faced with error's host
From thy brave heart declare,
That over thou wilt keep the right
And strive not to despair.

And thine ambition be to love the good
In all things great and small,
To rest the eye upon the beautiful
For ever answering duty's call.

Yet not unmindful of the baser parts
Weeds which threaten to molest;
Help thou to pluck lest idleness
Snatch from thy grasp the best.

Low in thy heart fair seeds of love
Which in good time shall grow,
And issue forth a fragrance sweet
That finds no man thy foe.

For in thy journey through this life
Some deeds of good intent,
Making thy passage ever bright
With sunlight and content.

FRANK HALL.

A Missouri editor is responsible for the assertion that at a recent church entertainment in his town the master of ceremonies made the announcement that Miss Bates will sing, "Oh That I Had an Angel's Wings That I Might Rise and Fly," accompanied by the minister."—*Brenham Banner*.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, January 11, Athenæum Hall, 73 Tottenham Court-road: 7.30, "The Blood of Christ: or Savage Salvation."

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton.
- GEORGE JACOB.—(1) You are strictly right, but you would never be able to work a language so precisely. Do you never say "good health?" But health is simply health. Would you not say "a bad shilling?" But what is called a *bad* shilling is really *not* a shilling. (2) Glad you are pleased with Ah Sin's second letter.
- E. A. W.—Specimen copy of the *Pioneer* sent to your newsagent with a contents bill. Thanks for your trouble in the matter. We noted the brief biography of Mr. Foote (in the *Leicester Reasoner*) in "Sugar Plums."
- E. PARKER (Plaistow) says that the late Captain Treneman, whose funeral we reported last week, was a member of the West Ham Branch. His fellow members did not know of his illness, or they would have visited him; nor of his death, otherwise they would have paid their last tribute of respect at his graveside. This correspondent speaks highly of Captain Treneman, not only as a staunch Freethinker, but also as a warm-hearted man.
- J. THACKRAY.—Thanks for cuttings, etc., though they are too late to be dealt with this week. We are obliged to you for ordering six copies of the *Pioneer* through your newsagent, allowing him to sell five if he can.
- F. ARNOLD.—Cuttings are always welcome. Glad to hear that, by lending the *Freethinker* round, you have obtained three new readers. Hope you will also be successful with the *Pioneer*.
- B. FOSTER.—Pleased to read your encouraging letter. "Intelligence given to us" is a form of words to which we can attach no clear meaning. Can you? Pray think the matter over. The words taken separately are intelligible enough; taken together they correspond to nothing within our experience.
- T. EDWARDS.—The "stronger things to come" refers to the subsequent quotations from Ingersoll. Pamphlet and Manifesto are being forwarded. Mr. Foote has been very well of late, but has just caught a cold in this treacherous weather.
- N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges T. J. Thomas, 5s.
- PAPERS RECEIVED.—Torch of Reason—Truthseeker (New York)—Freidenker—Newtownards Chronicle—Blue Grass Blade.
- 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.

A New Shilling Month.

JANUARY the eleventh is my birthday. Of course it is no better or worse for that. I merely mention the fact in passing. The real point is that the day begins a new Shilling Month. The readers of this journal are requested to send me during that period at least one shilling, and as many more shillings as they can spare, for "the good old cause." Every subscription will be publicly acknowledged in these columns, so that subscribers who do not wish to have their names published should indicate some other form of acknowledgment.

All the money I receive in this way will be divided into two equal portions. One half will be handed over to the National Secular Society—whose funds I never touch, not even to the extent of the cost of

postage stamps. The other half will be devoted to the maintenance of the Sunday evening Freethought platform at the Athenæum Hall.

First, as to the National Secular Society. This Society is much in need of funds at the present moment. A dead set has been made at one or two of its wealthier supporters, in the interest of other enterprises; with results, in one case, that have already had sufficient publicity. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the "rank and file" of the party will do their best to make good such losses. There is a power in numbers. The poor men's twenty shillings are equal to the rich man's pound. Besides, the work of the N.S.S. has always been a popular work, and it is fitting that the "rank and file" should rally to its support. Preparations, for instance, will soon have to be made for the outdoor propaganda during the summer, which, for this purpose, begins the first Sunday in May. This propaganda is chiefly carried on in London, but if funds permit it will be extended to the provinces. Everything, of course, depends ultimately upon financial resources. And I beg to remark, in reference to certain dishonest and malicious criticisms, that the N.S.S. has always relied very greatly upon *special* funds. Owing to its peculiar constitution it has never been able to trust to members' subscriptions as a serious source of income; for the Branches up and down the country have too much of a struggle to find funds for their own local work to be in a position to contribute any important sums to the Central Executive.

Next, as to the Athenæum Hall. Since the autumn of 1896—that is, for nearly six years and a half—I have borne the whole responsibility of the lectures there; and, with the exception of the Camberwell Secular Hall, for which I lately raised the sum of £50, this Athenæum Hall is the only one in London regularly open for Sunday Freethought meetings. It has always been my practice to pay the lecturers who occupy the platform in my absence a reasonable fee for their services; in fact, they have nearly all done better there than elsewhere in London. Generally this has entailed a loss, and sometimes a considerable loss—that is to say, I have had to supplement the takings at the door out of my own pocket—in other words, out of my own earnings. Miss Vance and one or two others know that this has been no joke to me. Still, I have never solicited assistance until now. The Secular Society, Limited, once voted me £10 towards this enterprise, but that was unasked, and it was all I ever received. I am of opinion, however, that the Athenæum Hall platform does not deserve support the less because I have assumed its full responsibility. I did so because a platform was necessary, and no one else was ready to undertake it.

Owing to certain circumstances, only too well known to my readers, I have had to ask my wife to take charge of the Athenæum Hall part of the fund, and she has consented to do so. It must be distinctly understood, therefore, that every subscription for this half of the new Shilling Month fund will go to her *absolutely*.

I do not mean, however, to do anything arbitrarily. The Shilling Month fund will be divided as aforesaid unless I receive other instructions. Subscribers who wish their shillings to go preferentially to either the National Secular Society or the Athenæum Hall enterprise (per Mrs. Foote) will please say so, and their wishes shall be respected.

I now leave the matter with my readers. I do not

know whether they will yield a generous response to this appeal, but I am sure they should. Comparatively few calls are made upon their purses. There must be a crowd of them who have given nothing in the shape of money to Freethought for a good while; and this is their golden—I beg pardon, their silver—opportunity.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

THIS is the last time we shall be able to announce the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, which takes place at the Holborn Restaurant next Monday evening, January 12. Dinner will be served at 7.30 sharp. The tickets are 4s. each. Mr. Foote will preside, and he hopes to meet a numerous assembly of "saints." After the dinner there will be vocal and instrumental music, a little speech-making, and some opportunity for general conversation.

Mr. Foote occupies the Athenæum Hall platform again this evening (January 11). His subject will be "The Blood of Christ: or Savage Salvation." This lecture should be both interesting and instructive, as the subject will be treated largely from the point of view of ethnology.

There was a very good audience at the Athenæum Hall on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "Judas Iscariot and Iago." Had it not been for the spiteful rain, there would probably have been a crush. The Athenæum Hall audience depends far more than Church congregations upon the weather, as most of its members have to travel considerable distances. Mr. Foote's lecture appeared to be thoroughly enjoyed.

Mr. Foote has been repeatedly urged to devote an evening at the Athenæum Hall to a course of Shakespearean readings. Perhaps he may do so shortly. It would certainly be a variation in the Sunday evening program, and no one could complain of the "quality" of an "entertainment" drawn from the greatest genius in the world.

The first number of the *Pioneer* is now on sale, and we believe it will be considered a good pennyworth. It is impossible, of course, to give as much reading matter as is offered by journals that appeal to a wide general public, and are able to find a source of revenue in business advertisements. Judging, however, by the standard of "advanced" literature, which appeals to a more limited public and gets few if any paying advertisements, the *Pioneer* need not fear a close examination. Its object, as we have explained, is to provide a penny paper, with an unaggressive title, to be pushed into wider circulation than is possible in the case of a twopenny paper with such a "wicked" reputation as that of the *Freethinker*. New readers of advanced literature may be obtained in this way, and in the course of time the circle of the *Freethinker's* readers may thus be extended.

A good many "saints" have bought a half a dozen or more copies of the first number of the *Pioneer* for distribution among their friends and acquaintances. This is a method of advertising which we should like to see developed. We therefore offer to send six copies post free for 8d., or twelve copies post free for 5d., or twenty-four copies post free for 9d., to any "saint" in any part of the kingdom for free distribution. A great many copies of the first number of the *Pioneer* could be circulated in this way if the "saints" would only bestir themselves a little. We earnestly invite them to lend a hand.

Mr. G. J. Holyoake has ordered six copies of the *Pioneer* for himself and his son-in-law, Mr. A. Marsh. We hope this will act as an incentive to other Secularists.

Our friends would do well to keep on asking their newsagents for the *Pioneer* until they get it. A lot of pressure is necessary to overcome the indifference of "the trade" when there is no great profit to be realised. Should a retail newsagent complain of a difficulty in obtaining the *Pioneer* from his wholesale agent, we should be glad to be furnished with particulars. We could then try to deal with the trouble at its source.

Dr. J. E. Roberts, whose oration on Ingersoll we reproduce from the New York *Truthseeker*, is a man of great ability and eloquence. He addresses large audiences in connection with the Church of This World in Kansas City. We regret to say, however, that his name as one of the editors did

not keep alive a sixteen-page monthly published there, called the *Philosopher*. Keeping alive a Freethought periodical is a very difficult task. We know it from long experience.

The *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* prints a very outspoken letter by "Microbe" on "The Sunday Question." It should do much good in such a widely-circulated publication.

The Newcastle Branch held its Annual Social on New Year's Day at Lockhart's *Café*, Grainger-street. There was a good attendance, friends being present from Blaydon, Backworth, Whitley, North and South Shields, &c. The whole of the proceedings passed off successfully and proved an auspicious introduction to the work of another year. The Debating Society, under whose auspices over fifty lectures and papers have now been delivered, has again a large and attractive syllabus, and it is hoped that this notice may induce some of our Tyneside readers to look in at the meeting place any Thursday night, when every opportunity will be afforded them of exercising their debating talent, should they feel so disposed. For those who get their *Freethinker* in good time, it may be noted that Mr. A. W. Hildreth leads off the session on January 8 with a lecture on "Social Evolution," and next week Mr. M. J. Charter reads a paper on "Monarchical Fallacies." Time, 8 o'clock; place, Lockhart's *Café*, near General Post Office.

Humanity, the little monthly organ of the Humanitarian League, now appears as the *Humanitarian*. The January number is up to the usual good level of interest and practicality.

Mr. Frederic Harrison delivered the usual New Year's address to the section of London Positivists who assemble at Clifford's Inn. We reproduce one passage which is likely to interest our readers. It refers to the Education struggle:—"Positivists had taken no active part in the education controversy, for they could feel as little enthusiasm for what was called 'School Board religion' as for Church endowment and State supervision of education. True, education was to Positivists essentially a religious duty, a spiritual function, a sacred trust, and by no means an affair of administrative routine. They could feel quite as keenly as any Non-conformist the arrogance of any sect claiming, by virtue of its wealth and power, a social and legal ascendancy, a kind of patented monopoly in the teaching of the poor at the cost of the nation. Those who looked on the fierce battles of the last Session with the detachment of *mon frere* both from ecclesiastical and Biblical prejudices, while believing in religious but non-Biblical education, could not doubt that the arrogant pretensions of an establishment must ere long result in freeing this nation from the degrading incubus of a State Church. (Cheers.) They had looked with scorn on the squalid manœuvring to seize the opportunity given by military intoxication in the nation in order to settle the education question against the Dissenters—who, by the way, had themselves drunk deeply of the same poisoned cup. (Cheers.) Had all the passion on the one side or the other been evoked by a bona fide anxiety to give little boys and girls the elements of useful knowledge? No; it was rivalry to enlist recruits to swell the power of this or that institution, and he feared that on the part of a large section of lay politicians it was a desire to keep the education of the masses within limits, so that those who labored should be taught from childhood "to order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters." (Laughter and cheers.)

Ingersoll and His Times.

THE CRY CAME, "LET THERE BE LIGHT," AND THERE WAS
—INGERSOLL.

BY DR. J. E. ROBERTS
(Of the Church of This World, Kansas).

I.

THE advent of the thinker changes the world. Every geography became obsolete when Magellan furled his sails. Columbus with a compass extended the horizon. Galileo with a telescope expanded the heavens.

Copernicus, like a god, led forth Arcturus and his sons. These men made a new heaven and a new earth. The intrepid Humboldt, from intellectual heights no feet but his had dared to tread, saw wide and afar, and ordered change of season, climate, animal, vegetable, men and things, and sublimely said, "The universe is governed by law." Thenceforth prayer became the function of hirelings, and

special providence the subterfuge of hypocrisy or the delusion of ignorance.

Voltaire looked and laughed at the absurd, ridiculed the stupid, denounced the unjust, and hurled lightnings at the sanguinary and atrocious. He is still unforgiven by the faithful.

Darwin pondered over the phenomena of life, growth, variation, change and decay, and above the mists of metaphysics and the fogs of revelation there rose the postulate of evolution. Straightway the foundations of every religion trembled and all the Bibles began to hedge.

Thought is a force sleepless as gravity, resistless as the dawn, pitiless as the sea, imperturbable as the tomb.

The brain is the sun. Civilisation is its light. Thought is the mother of progress. The mother must be free in order that the child may be well-born.

The few think. The many believe. The less one thinks, the more he believes. When thought abdicates, faith ascends the throne.

Thought is inseparable from doubt. The beginning of knowledge is to know one does not know. The beginning of morality is to be honest with one's own thought. No man can keep faith with gods or men who lies to himself.

The cherished attitude of faith is upon its knees; that is, abject; with eyes closed; that is, with light shut out. Reason neither bends the knee nor blinds the eyes.

Religion is the substitution of the candle for the sun, the priest for the teacher, the consecrated wafer for the bread of industry, the guesses of the dead for the discoveries of the living, the follies of the foolish for the wisdom of the wise, the badge and brand of slavery for freedom, fear and trembling for mental poise and intellectual selfhood.

From all the past there has come no saying more true than this, "Ignorance is the mother of devotion."

The age of the cathedral is the age of night.

The schoolhouse is the mother of the dawn:

II.

Progress is accomplished by alternating periods of delay and advance. The long night and their the startling renaissance are the habit of history. Humanity is a paradox of the reflective and the radical, of the cautious and the bold, the indolent and the energetic. There is no inertia so appalling and monstrous as that of intellect, and there is no power so resistless and august as that of intellect aroused.

The great collective energies of mankind, lying dormant, gather force. Like a volcanic sleep the inaction presages the eruption. So slowly does the tide of circumstance rise that generations of men live and die becalmed, waiting for the tide that comes not. Meanwhile within the vast mysterious deeps unslumbering forces brood.

III.

The nineteenth century was one-third upon its way when Mr. Ingersoll was born. It was rounding to its close when he died. From 1833 to 1899 were the years—years of hesitancy, doubt, caution, cowardice, compromise, and infamy.

The new world had grown from colonies to a nation; from suppliants and dependents to sovereignty. The nation had grown rich, and with wealth had come the timidity of conservatism and the adoration of tradition and precedent. The children of the patriots had become money-changers.

Our constitution made freedom depend upon the color of the skin. The flag of the free floated above the slave pen and the auction block. We had achieved success at the cost of conscience. Statesmen and clergymen alike were poisoned with prosperity. The utmost hope of the most advanced was to prevent slavery from spreading. Kansas must be kept uncontaminated. No one dreamed that Alabama could be redeemed. No great inspirations swayed the heart or directed the intellect in those halting times. It

was a period of cold calculation, of commercial prudence, of the wisdom of the counting-house and the stock exchange. Every argument that reason could concoct—every argument that ingenuity could devise—every alternative that fear and selfishness could invent came from the fevered brain and servile conscience of a depraved and apostate people. Here and there a Quaker, whom the Church had outlawed, protested against the crime of slavery. The mob answered with insult and outrage. Whom did the mob represent? The men of position and power—the men of wealth and renown—the judge on the bench and the priest before the altar. Of the disease that destroys the moral life of nations, the fatal stage has been reached when the teachings of religion, the interests of wealth, and the authority of courts of justice enter upon an alliance with the frenzy of the mob.

Frightful and menacing as may be a hypocritical priesthood and a corrupt magistracy, they are yet minor evils when compared with the hypocrisy and corruption of the people. The mob, as the instrument of hypocrisy in high places and justice debauched, becomes itself debauched. But when it scorns robed hypocrites and defies depraved authority the mob becomes glorified. Stone by stone, with unclean hands, the Bastille was built by magistrate, noble, and priest. It fell by the hands of the mob. The mob was the conscience of France.

The Bastille of the new world, more enduring than battlements of stone, was built with tradition, precedent, statutory law, federal guarantees, buttressed by wealth, arrogance, respectability, sentinelled and defended by the priest at every altar and the Bible of every creed, while within its hopeless depths toiled and despaired three million human beings. Our God was the white man's God, and Mammon was his prophet.

The mob of Paris fought and destroyed their Bastille. The mob of Boston, Philadelphia, and New York fought that theirs might be preserved. They no doubt thought if they destroyed the divine institution they would offend God, to say nothing about reducing the collections.

But men arose—men—whose altitude, seen in the perspective of history, is as the mountain—calm, inclusive, aggregate, inviting, formidable, and kind—men who were great enough and good enough to despise a religion and defy a God that defended slavery.

The people were aroused as from a stupor—miserable compromises were swept aside—swift indignation drove the money-changers from the Temple of Justice—ignored the altars in whose fires chains had been forged for the limbs of men—rescued slave and master from their mutual degradation, and once more the flag, battle-torn and stained with blood, thrilled the happy air.

IV.

A moral condition, exactly parallel, prevailed in religion.

Seventeenth century creeds had crossed the seas. Geneva was transplanted to New England. John Calvin was succeeded by Jonathan Edwards.

The new world was terrorised by the old God. The promise of liberty was kept to the ear and broken to the heart.

The right to worship God according to the dictates of one's own conscience meant simply that you must worship God and worship him according to the creed.

It never occurred to these defenders of liberty that the principle implied the right to worship any other God or none.

An ecclesiastical tyranny grew up more searching than the spies of the Inquisition, as relentless as the rack, and fierce as the fagot's flame.

Because he exercised the right of freedom of thought and speech, Thomas Paine, despite his unparalleled labor and sacrifice for liberty, was outraged living and slandered dead.

A meaner slander was circulated about Abraham Lincoln. The Church said he was a Christian.

The reputation of no man was safe if he spoke his honest thoughts.

The pulpit was supreme, the press subservient. If a man were known to disbelieve the Bible, to deny the existence of a hell, to doubt the miracles, or to think that baptism was not essential to salvation, he was pointed at, isolated, and shunned. If he was in business, his patronage fell away. If a professional man, his clients deserted him. He was pursued across the threshold of his home. His family was looked upon as polluted. His wife and children were denied social recognition and courtesies. On the lips of the Church the word "Infidel" was a synonym for the monstrous.

The church was absolute and relentless. In other lands and times it had grown ferocious shedding blood. It had listened with rapture to the groans of victims on the rack, and seen with joy the flames enwrap the martyr at the stake. It was the same church still. There could be no doubt about hell. If hell means hatred, malignity, vindictiveness, if it means to be blind to justice, deaf to suffering, brutal and pitiless, then the church was hell.

The church had now become rich and powerful. It controlled the colleges, academies, all of the universities, and most of the public and private schools. The preacher was ubiquitous, and where he could not go he sent a colporteur or dispatched a missionary.

Then in the new world was night. Hideous visions came and went. The darkness was filled with terrors. The fiends of fear haunted the cradle and hovered about the grave. Children waking in the night shuddered lest they had died and waked up in hell, and fell back to sleep again and fitful dreams. Within the church insanity bred, hope despaired, the heart of pity turned to stone, reason lay prostrate in the dust, and above the darkness God grasping a sword athirst for slaughter.

Sermons measured by the hour depicted the fate of sinners in the hands of angry God. Hymns in doleful cadence detailed the work of the worm that dieth not.

Men and women were regarded as firewood. The earth was a vast drying kiln in which they were being seasoned for hell. Every cradle was rocked on the edge of the abyss.

All nature was vile, everything was impure. The tear of pity, the beauty of love, the holiness of sacrifice, devotion, honor, loyalty of friendship, all were cursed with the curse.

The smoke of the fire that is not quenched ascended. Nearer and nearer in the gloom crept the horizon. One by one in the darkness the stars faded from the sky, and in that ineffable night the shuddering people wept and prayed.

Religion with the dagger of superstition had assassinated reason.

V.

Let us be just to the past. Human thought is a strange thing. We cannot tell its origin, explain its processes, nor account for its conclusions. Not until the mystery of man is a mystery no longer shall we know how the orthodox dogmas could have originated, much less how they could have been believed.

It passes understanding that men could compile a book—of the earth earthy—equal, and no more, to the genius of the times that produced it; written through and through with the barbarities of the ages from which it came, soiled with their uncleanness, stained with their cruelties, faithfully reflecting their ignorance, their superstitions, and their savagery—their hopes, their ideals, and their dreams; a truly human book, at times as good as the best and often as bad as the worst, and say God wrote it and damned be he who says he did not.

It passes understanding that men could say God had given the keys of the eternal destinies of the race to an agent who resides in Italy, and keeps every country on the map under tribute.

It passes understanding that men could believe God calls preachers, and that their business is more

sacred than that of men upon whose industry, like parasites, they fatten and thrive.

It passes understanding that men could imagine an Infinite Being filling an eternal torture-chamber with human souls, and yet call that Being good.

It cannot be explained how the mind of man ever imagined the Infinite swaddled as a babe or hanging dead upon a gibbet.

Reason has no answer, analysis gives no clue, conjecture no guess; imagination is baffled, and love despairs in the presence of one who can worship such a God, or who aspires to take up a homestead in the country where his kingdom is said to have no end.

Yet these things were all believed, and believed by multitudes of the noblest and best.

Let us be just to the past. It may be that religion is a disease. We may sometime discover that faith and insanity are alike mental disorders. Prayer may be allied to locomotor ataxia, conversion be a kind of fever, usually intermittent; Presbyterianism may be due to a germ; the Baptist germ, like typhoid, may be found in water.

It is certain that in the olden times the saints were sickly, as a rule filthy, and that preachers as a general thing were pale and thin. Health and spirituality were not on speaking terms. Piety and consumption slept in the same bed.

No artist has represented Christ as in any sense strong or robust. The canvas shows him emaciated, wan, and with an air of weariness and exhaustion. He does not look as though he could save anyone.

We know that Jonathan Edwards was of a frail, weak body. We know that Pascal was partially paralysed and at times insane. We know that John Calvin was a life-long sufferer from asthma, dyspepsia, gall-stone, and the gout, and that Saint Paul was squint-eyed, bow-legged, and averse to the society of women.

Let us be just to the past. Religion may be a disease. Creeds and dogmas may be only the pock-marks; or it may be that in evolution is to be found the explanation of orthodoxy.

We know that the present is the child of all the past, that wings were once fins, feathers were scales. Things that soar and sing once crawled in yeasting bog and fen. Nature struggles to improve. Two forces matched preserve the past and lead forth the future. The old, ever-reluctant, yields to the new, and what has been struggles eternally to re-utter itself in what is becoming and is to be. The human species evolved from the brute.

The physical outstripped the mental growth. When man in body stood erect, his mind still went on all-fours. The jungle gloomed around him. The instincts of a distant past were yet strong upon him. Vague recollections, fitful hints, half-remembered things, hovered on the horizon of consciousness. Out of the abyss rose muffled memories of the den, the lair, the stealthy search for prey. Within the curious "walls and bastions of his brain," faint and dim as echo's echo, came again the hyena's howl, the fanged serpent's hiss, the fierce joy of the tiger when the "crooked daggers of his claws" were sheathed in quivering flesh. Once more he prowled in the forest depths, haunting the track of the defenceless, or, crouching, lay in wait. The past, that which he had been, was over him, like a spell. The wilderness was arrayed against progress. The beast was grappling with the man, and of that conflict, sinister and terrible, savagery for the time triumphant, orthodoxy was born. Let us be just to the past.

It may be that man's ancestry in the lairs of wild beasts pre-supposed the Five Points of Calvinism; that the iron boot was a lineal descendant of the boa-constrictor; that the sword in the hands of the Church was the reversion to the teeth in the tiger's jaw; that many of the ceremonies supposed to be solemn and essential were in reality reminiscences of the monkey's artless pranks; and that all the savagery of beasts that thirst for blood; all the fierceness and ferocity of claw and venomous fang;

all that was cruel, heartless, reptilian, from the first throb of life upon the globe until the dawn of reason's day, found complete and perfect expression in the dogma of endless hell. Let us be just to the past.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

CHRIST'S BIRTHDAY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I wish to thank Mr. Holland for his courteous criticism of my article on "Christ's Birthday." Such criticism is always helpful, if it is only to keep on the bed-rock, as I am of the opinion of Voltaire that "one fact is of more value than a hundred antithesis."

Mr. Holland thinks I have made "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," and cites Mr. Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* as to the fact of shepherds and sheep being out at night in December in the Midland Counties of England. Mr. Hardy is a great writer—personally, I think he is our greatest novelist—and what is more, he is an acute observer of country life, and his statement may be taken for granted.

I wish to point out that it is not I who has made too much of the point. Lardner, in his *Credibility of the Gospel History*, notices the unlikelihood of shepherds being out at night in Palestine in December, and says that "this circumstance is not very favorable to the supposition that Jesus was born the 25th December, and we are at liberty to place it in autumn, a more likely season."* The learned Lightfoot was of the same opinion, although I cannot find this citation at the moment. I cited the *Christian Commonwealth* to a similar effect, and the statement of a Christian who corroborates this view of the case from "an experience of several winters in Jerusalem convinced me that shepherds 1,800 years ago would not expose themselves and their flocks in the open at night, at this season, any more than shepherds do now; for instead of this, they are careful to herd their flocks in walled and sheltered enclosures. At one time we had a fall of ten inches of snow, and within a week another of six inches, and there was more or less every winter." This Christian satisfied himself from actual observation that shepherds do not mind their flocks by night in December in Palestine, and his evidence is equally valid with Mr. Hardy's that they do so in this country, especially as he is testifying against his own religious prejudices.

Now I will point out a fact which Mr. Holland makes too much of—namely, "that this country is at least twenty degrees north of Palestine," inferring that our winter is a great deal more severe than winter in Palestine; but degrees of latitude do not always govern degrees of heat or cold, else we should share the same climate with Siberia, the coldest country in the world, seeing we share the same latitude. We live in a temperate climate, owing to certain causes which we need not enter into here; we do not suffer the extremes of either heat or cold; and I make bold to say that, in proportion to the extreme heat of summer in Palestine, the people must suffer more in their winter than we do in ours from the cold.

For my part, I believe the shepherds are quite mythical. As Mr. Robertson puts it: "The shepherds came from the same prehistoric source as the rest. They belong to the myths of Cyrus and Krishna" (*Christianity and Mythology*, p. 31). And Professor Franz Cumont notices the "Mithraic worship of the shepherds," and, in a footnote, he adds that M. A. Dieterich "admits that the worship of the shepherds was introduced into Christian tradition from Mazdaism" (see *Open Court*, December, 1902; p. 725).

I will conclude by thanking Mr. Holland for his compliment to the other portions of my article. W. MANN.

"HELPING FORWARD."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I was pleased with the letter from "Villager" in a recent issue. Living as I have been the greater part of my thirty-two years in a country village I am in a position to judge of the difficulties of Freethought propaganda. I have been a Freethinker since I paid a visit to the United States twelve years ago. I can well remember the remarks made by the minister of the Baptist Church I joined at Pittsburg. "Our young friend," he said, "though thousands of miles from home has brought his God with him." Thanks to the

* Lardner's *Works*, vol. i., p. 192.

influence of the late Colonel Ingersoll's writings, I returned without God, but with a larger conception of life and hope. During my twelve years' residence in this village as a Freethinker I have influenced the religious opinion of many. Perhaps it would interest your readers to know my methods.

I never lose an opportunity to "rush into print" via the local press, and, as a rule, append my name and address. I have made the acquaintance of many Freethought friends by this means. Whenever I go out (unless it be to work) I take some Freethought matter. One never knows what may turn up. For instance, last week I attended a public meeting held here in support of the Education Bill. My pockets were filled with copies of the N. S. S. Manifesto on the Education Difficulty. During his address one of the speakers stated that Atheists if in possession of the schools would teach Atheism to the children. At the first opportunity I arose in my place and protested against the statement, and mentioned that, as an Atheist, I believed in teaching the children only known and proved truths. I afterwards distributed the Manifesto to the audience, also to the local squire (chairman) the rector and to the Conservative agent. In the course of his reply the rector said he grieved to hear the questioner state he was an Atheist, although he preferred a man to say he was an Atheist publicly than to pretend to believe things which he disbelieved. However, he would pray for me. I retorted that I preferred reason to prayer, but the retort was ignored.

Lately I have filled my bandolier, so to speak, with *Facts Worth Knowing*, and hand one to anyone who I think will read. I welcome your new publication, the *Pioneer* as being more suitable to hand to orthodox Christians than the more aggressive, though necessary, *Freethinker*.

Hoping I have not trespassed too much on your space,

WILLIAM LL. JONES.

Death of Pierre Laffitte.

THE death is announced of Pierre Laffitte, the leader of the Positivists in Paris, and Professor in the College de France. He was born February 21, 1828, at Beguey, Gironde. He became a disciple of Auguste Comte and one of his executors. He was a man of learning and eloquence. His discourses on *The General History of Humanity* and *The Great Types of Humanity* are highly valued by Positivists. Pierre Laffitte was, so to speak, in the direct line of apostolic succession from Comte in the Church of Humanity. He maintained a connection with the more "orthodox" Positivists in England under the direction of the late Dr. Congreve.

Gospel Demons.

THE belief in a demonic world is inculcated throughout the Gospels and the rest of the books of the New Testament; it pervades the whole patristic literature; it colors the theory and practice of every Christian church down to modern times. Indeed, I doubt, if even now, there is any church which, officially, departs from such a fundamental doctrine of primitive Christianity as the existence, in addition to the Cosmos with which natural knowledge is conversant, of a world of spirits; that is to say, of intelligent agents not subject to the physical or mental limitations of humanity, but nevertheless competent to interfere, to an undefined extent, with the ordinary course of both physical and mental phenomena.

More especially is this conception fundamental for the authors of the Gospels. Without the belief that the present world, and particularly that part of it which is constituted by human society, has been given over, since the Fall, to the influence of wicked and malignant spiritual beings, governed and directed by a supreme devil—the moral antithesis and enemy of the supreme God—then theory of salvation by the Messiah falls to pieces. "To this end was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

The half-hearted religiosity of latter-day Christianity may choose to ignore the fact; but it remains none the less true, that he who refuses to accept the demonology of the Gospels rejects the revelation of a spiritual world, made in them, as much as if he denied the existence of such a person as Jesus of Nazareth; and deserves, as much as any one can do, to be ear-marked "infidel" by our gentle shepherds.

—Huxley.

Shakespeare and His Commentators.

If we wish to know the force of human genius we should read Shakespeare. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning we may study his commentators.—*Harlitt*.

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, "The Blood of Christ: or Savage Salvation."

BATTERSEA PARK GATES: 11.30, Mr. Schaller.

CAMBERWELL SECULAR HALL (61 New Church Road, Camberwell): 7.30, R. P. Edwards, Lantern Lecture. Subject, "Religions of the World." 7, Instrumental music.

EAST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Bromley Vestry Hall, Bow-road, E.): 7, Dr. Stanton Coit, "President Roosevelt."

SOUTH LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Masonic Hall, Camberwell New-road): 7, J. M. Robertson, "The Garden City."

WEST LONDON ETHICAL SOCIETY (Kensington Town Hall, High-street): 11.15, Miss M. McMillan.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): 11 (in the Bull Ring), H. Percy Ward, "Secularism Superior to Christianity;" 3, "Ghosts: An Exposure of Spiritualism;" 7, "How Christians have Loved their Enemies."

GLASGOW (110 Brunswick-street): 12, Discussion Class. Open Discussion. 6.30, Mr. Howat, "The Bible and Science."

LIVERPOOL (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 3, L. Bergmann, B.Sc., A Lecture.

MANCHESTER SECULAR HALL (Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, M. Morrell, "Garden Cities: The only Real Solution of the Housing Problem."

NEWCASTLE DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Café): Thursday, January 15, at 8, M. J. Charter, "Monarchical Fallacies."

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): Charles Watts. 3, "Ethics of Unbelief;" 7, "The Religion of the Future." Tea at 5.

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7, Arrangements for Lecture course.

LECTURER'S ENGAGEMENTS.

H. PERCY WARD, 15 George-street, Great Driffield.—January 11, Birmingham; 18 and 25, South Shields. February 1, Sheffield.

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