

THE

Freethinker

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*The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.*

—SHELLEY.

Two Graves at Rome.

I HAVE never cared much about graves. It has always seemed to me that those who take a kind of morbid pleasure in visiting the spots where those they have loved and lost lie buried are rather prosaic persons whose imaginations require a very strong stimulus. The very apparatus of death, so to speak, is necessary to revive within them the feelings which they experienced at the time of their bereavement. And it may be that they do well to take the requisite means, in their case, to connect themselves actively in thought again with the dead, and thus, perhaps, to keep alive that sympathy which is the vital root of all ethics and idealism. But this particular method of kindling the sympathetic emotions is superfluous, and therefore harmful, to other temperaments. When a chance word, a recurring odor, the glance of an eye, the sudden sound of a name, or even an untraceable suggestion, is enough to flash lightning into the abysses of memory, there is no need to renew acquaintance with tombstones and all the "dishonors of death." What, after all, rests beneath the sod? What is it that the worms are feasting on? Has it any real connection with the being we loved? Surely it has not, if there be a personal life beyond the grave; and just as surely it has not if the only life after death is in the memory of those who knew us. Is it not better, then, to let the poor corrupting remains of once living men, women, and children, be reduced as swiftly as possible to ashes; and to cherish the recollection of them solely in "the sessions of sweet silent thought"?

Yet when I was in the "Eternal City" I took occasion to visit the old Protestant Cemetery where two graves bear the names of John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley. They were not there, I knew; but the feet of Shelley had wandered by the grave of Keats, and the feet of many notable men and women—including Mary Shelley, and Trelawny, and Leigh Hunt, and perhaps Byron—had wandered by the grave of Shelley; and so much of romance clung to the very spot, where the epitaphs of two great modern English poets were shadowed by the relics of ancient Rome—that I could not resist the temptation to steal away from the babble of an abortive Congress, and take a pure draught from the imperishable springs of holy beauty.

II.

I was not alone. Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd went with me. We took a carriage to save time. And the morning was soft and calm, and the sky was a great dome of loveliness, and as we left modern Rome behind us the very genius of the old Pagan nature-worship seemed to be brooding over the scene.

No. 1,223

The janitor, sexton, or whatever he should be called, at the little Cemetery we were visiting, was in perfect harmony with this feeling of reminiscence. He was an Italian peasant—one of the sons of the soil, who had carried on the great common traditions of work and life under every wave of conquest. His manner was courteous and deferential, without the slightest tinge of servility. His voice was very sweet and gentle, he moved with slow and quiet steps, and there was a mild, tender look in his eyes, as though long conversance with death had given him something of its pathos and repose. And with the most considerate kindness, and an inborn grace of manner, he retired after conducting us to Shelley's grave, and stood at some distance, with his back towards us, attending to some probably pretended duty, so that we might not feel that we were overseen or overheard.

We had to retrace our steps in order to visit the grave of Keats. Our conductor took us outside the Cemetery again, locking the door carefully behind him, and led us lower down to another door, opening into what I believe is the older half of the burying-ground. Keats died first; Shelley sang his younger friend's deathsong, and died himself soon afterwards; having in that immortal deathsong coupled the name of Keats with his own for ever, and linked in one sublime association the memory of the two great poets of that age who must have been the best beloved by the gods, for they died so young—the one under twenty-six and the other under thirty.

III.

Shelley's grave was the one I saw first, but Keats's grave is the older, and I will give it the priority in this article.

John Keats lay dying at Rome from the tenth of December, 1820 to the twenty-third of February, 1821. Even on the last day in November, in writing to his close friend, Charles Brown, he had said: "I have an habitual feeling of my real life having passed, and that I am leading a posthumous existence." He had passed through the worst bitterness of death by then. Oblivion was stealing over him. The revolt against destiny was fading away. He had even reconciled himself, or nearly so, to losing the woman he passionately loved, and who was to have been his wife. "I can bear to die," he had written a month before—"I cannot bear to leave her." Yet the great anodyne gradually produced its effect. He became calmer and more resigned. And it was not love, but friendship, that was to cheer and illuminate his final hours. Severn—what sacred sweetness there is in that name!—nursed him day by day, and night by night, with more than the strength, and all the tenderness and patience, of a woman. "Poor Keats," he wrote "has me ever by him, and shadows out the form of one solitary friend: he opens his eyes in great doubt and horror, but when they fall on me they close gently, open quietly and close again, till he sinks to sleep." It is almost too tragic and touching for words. One can only shudder, and draw one's breath deeply, and feel amidst it all that this pure affection, shining through the mists of death, is the divinest thing in the world—diviner than beauty, or greatness, or genius, making Helen look common, and Napoleon mean, and even Shakespeare secondary.

Keats's death came as a great deliverance. "Severn," he said—"I—lift me up—I am dying—I shall die easy; don't be frightened—be firm, and thank God it has come." It was the true Keats speaking; not Carlyle's travesty, nor the sentimental figure of tradition, but the brave, manly fellow, the soul of honor and generosity, and solicitous about others, rather than himself, to the very last.

For seven hours Severn held his dying friend in his arms. It was a painful spectacle. The phlegm seemed boiling in his throat. But at last he gradually sank into death, so quietly that Severn thought he slept.

Severn was a young and promising artist, and Shelley wished him a great future. "May the unextinguished Spirit of his illustrious friend," he exclaimed, "animate the creations of his pencil, and plead against Oblivion for his name!" I do not know that this noble prayer was answered. But the name of Severn is nevertheless safe from oblivion. He outlived Keats by fifty-eight years, dying at Rome in 1879; and in 1882 his remains were removed from their original resting-place and buried beside those of Keats. The two graves are side by side, in a corner by themselves, close to the pyramid of Caius Cestius. The two men loved each other when living, and even in death they are not divided. And I confess that, as I stood there and looked down upon those two graves, I forgot for a moment even the superb poetry of Keats, and dreamed of two loyal hands clasping each other under the grass and the flowers.

IV.

There are terrible words on Keats's tombstone. To accept them is to make tragedy more tragic. But they are not true, although they might have seemed so to the lacerated heart of Severn. Keats did *not* die "in the power of his enemies." This is as false as the fable, perpetuated by Byron, and half adopted by Shelley, that Keats was killed by hostile Quarterly Reviewers. No less false are the words on Keats's tombstone that came from his own lips—"Here lies one whose name was writ in water." His name is written in bronze. Poetry will cease to be valued when Keats's great Odes, and the magnificent if fragmentary *Hyperion*, are forgotten. It was no name "writ in water" that inspired the finest threnody in the English language. "He wakes or sleeps with the enduring dead" is the verdict of Shelley in *Adonais*. Yes, the position of Keats is perfectly secure.

The splendors of the firmament of time
May be eclipsed, but are extinguished not;
Like stars to their appointed height they climb,
And death is a low mist which cannot blot
The brightness it may veil.

Thus sang Shelley, who understood poetry, and knew what Keats had done, and could prophesy without perpetrating gratuitous error. Nor was this a strained panegyric under the influence of personal emotion. For when, in the following year, the storm smote Shelley's boat in the bay of Spezzia, and sent the "poet of poets and purest of men" to his doom, he was reading a volume of poems, which he hastily thrust into his pocket after doubling back the page—and it was the last poems of Keats.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

The Emigration.

If the Pope, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Dr. John Clifford—representatives of Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Nonconformity—were closeted together for a few hours in order to compare notes as to the fortunes of their respective forms of Christianity, I wonder how much cause they would find for congratulation? A good deal would depend upon the criterion they adopted. If they judged the progress of Christianity by the number

of new churches, they might possibly feel justified in their joy. But if they had any faculty of statesmanship, they would not be led away by such specious tokens. A church is now being erected opposite my house. I look upon its growing walls with complete equanimity. Piety may raise such structures by the thousand, and the spirit of Freethought need take no alarm. The triumph of a faith is not decided by bricks and mortar. By a terrible irony, the Christian system is obliged to build churches, though its message has become a mere asthma, and its heart is dying with fatty degeneration. Young men are bred for the clerical profession; they need curacies and incumbencies; the priesthood, under the slow but imperious pressure of economic necessity, plant new churches in new districts; and alas! they have no prophecy to kindle the souls of the people. There is often more of the thrill of enthusiasm in one meeting of the Independent Labor Party than in a score of orthodox religious services.

Probably our three apostles of Rome, Canterbury, and Westbourne Park are quite capable of gauging new churches at their true value. They know that, while the Gospel is gaining bricks, it is losing men. If I could penetrate to the recesses of these three gentlemen's minds, I should like to discover what they think of the great emigration of souls which is depleting the churches of their most virile elements. Do they ever ask themselves such questions as these:—Why do so many intelligent persons leave the Christian fold? Why do so many intelligent persons decline to join it? What likelihood is there that the majority of these persons will ever obey the call of the representatives of God? Will the emigration from the orthodox ranks continue?

It is open to our three friends to derive some comfort from conversions among Africans and Asiatics; somewhat, perhaps, on the principle that the P. and O. Company find it convenient to man their boats with Lascars. But this peculiar process of profit and loss will become a farce. How can any self-respecting Church, bankrupt in Europe, establish branches in Nigeria or Assam? Or our three brethren may form a theory that an intellectual influenza is running through Christendom, ravaging by preference the constitutions of the best educated and most highly gifted, and that it will, in the course of a few years, disappear and leave no trace except in the files of the *Church Times* and other leading journals, and in the apologetic literature of, say, the period 1705 to 1905. But I imagine they are too shrewd to believe that a movement that has gone on for some centuries with increasing rapidity and volume will yield to such feeble resistance as the Christian advocates are now offering.

Can it, indeed, be termed "resistance" in any valid sense? What scholar of the first rank now pretends to stake his reputation on the truth of the Christian religion as understood by Loyola, Hooker, or Wesley? Examine the books and articles produced by the Christian press in defence of the old creed, and judge for yourself how little remains of the ancient conviction, the ancient zeal, the ancient fire. So contemptible is the ordinary quality of apologetic publications, that I have over and over again given these pamphlets free display and advertisement in the town where I live. Freethought has nothing to fear from their circulation. The Spartans taught their sons to look on drunken Helots and abhor drunkenness; and we may spread before our young men the modern evidences of Christianity, and safely reckon on recruits to our side.

What is to become of this vast stream of emigrants from orthodoxy is another question. I have many thoughts on that subject, which would be out of place in the present reflections. That they will eventually settle in an orderly and stable commonwealth, far superior to the Churches of the past, I entertain no doubt whatever. My only object now is to emphasise the hopelessness of expecting the exodus to reverse itself, and the wanderers to return

to the threshold of God. That will never happen. Legend tells how, not long before the fall of Jerusalem, there was a sound of hurrying feet and wings in the Temple, and voices were heard saying, "Let us go hence!" And so, to-day, the genius of civilisation is abandoning the house of a faith that once was mighty. The people are issuing in continuous crowds from the gates. Priests may beckon, but in vain; and the choirs, chanting with ever such sweetness and plaintiveness, will not allure the deserters back to the altar.

F. J. GOULD.

A New Year's Sermon.

1905! A mere stroke of the pen. A marking of time as artificial and as purely human as our division of things into high and low, pleasant and unpleasant. It is a mere convention, albeit a necessary one. Just as we, in order to analyse, separate in thought that which is inseparable in reality, so we mark off a portion of an indivisible process and label it with a distinctive date. Our new year marks one of these arbitrary divisions, a time when by custom we overhaul our past year's record, and map out plans or attempt to anticipate the coming twelve months. In this matter Freethinkers offer no departure from the general rule. One must indulge in a form of mental stocktaking at some time or other, and the opening of a new year is as convenient as any. What, then, of Freethought during 1904? And what, too, are the prospects of Freethought during 1905?

So far as 1904 is concerned, the past year has been anything but a dull or disquieting one in the annals of Freethought. Reverses here and there are inevitable to a cause that has against it the combined forces of heredity, wealth, social position, and general ignorance. But the success of Freethought cannot be determined by fixing attention upon isolated actions or single individuals. This can only be properly done when we take a survey of the whole field, and so estimate the extent to which the ideas we represent have gained ground. Judged from this point of view, the present position of Freethought is stronger and its ideals are more widely entertained than ever before. Attendances at meetings have been more numerous than of late years, and all over the country there has been a quickened interest in the discussion of religious subjects. And for us discussion always spells converts, recruits, success. Our greatest obstacle is not the man with definite religious convictions, but those who treat religion with complete indifference, and so help—unconsciously perhaps—to perpetuate Christianity as an institution.

From a general point of view, the International Congress of Freethinkers held at Rome in September last was the most striking feature of the year. With representatives—some of them of world-wide reputation—present from all parts of the Continent, in addition to some from South America and the United States, the spectacle was a striking and a memorable one. For once the British press was shaken out of its customary policy of silence. With the presence of several thousand delegates in the capital of the old-world empire of the Cæsars and the capital of the only Christian Church that can with any justice be called universal, silence could no longer be maintained. Reports, inadequate of course, appeared in all the daily and weekly papers, and readers were enabled to learn that, often as they had been told Freethought was dead or dying, it was yet able to carry out a demonstration that, for strength and picturesque effect, was without precedent in the history of Freethought.

Another feature of the past year has, of course, been the continuance of the *Clarion* controversy, with the numerous religious replies to which it has given rise. The *Clarion* crusade possessed more than one curious aspect, not the least interesting of which was the way it was received by the religious world. To

them, its force lay in its unexpectedness. The *Clarion* was a Socialist journal; it had kept clear of religion; its editor, while known to his friends as a Freethinker, had made no pronounced confession of his religious, or non-religious, opinions. Moreover, a great many of the clergy—especially among the Nonconformists—had been coquetting with Socialism. And suddenly the most widely-circulated Socialist journal in England began to publish columns of anti-Christian writing, and to teach that the immediate task before real reformers is to clear away Christianity! It was not that what was said in the *Clarion* was in any sense new. All of it had been said times out of number in the columns of the *Freethinker*, and from N. S. S. platforms; but it was unexpected. And the unlooked-for nature of the attack forced the religious world to abate somewhat its ostrich-like policy, and to attempt some sort of a reply.

And a second pleasing feature of this controversy was the proof it gave of the value of the persistent propaganda of the National Secular Society. For years, in season and out of season, in the press and on the platform, the attack on Christianity has been carried on. For a century and a half it has been the Freethought teaching that the condition for securing the Rights of Man is the Age of Reason. An ill-educated democracy, the prey of a Christian priesthood, is by no means an advance upon autocracy. It may even be worse, multiplying the number of tyrants, and so making greater the difficulty of improvement. It is true that our propaganda had not built up powerful organisations; nor was this, indeed, the chief object of our work. But it had made Freethinkers by the thousand, and unsettled the beliefs of tens of thousands of others. And the interest aroused by the *Clarion* would simply have been impossible, even if the crusade itself could ever have existed, in the absence of the distinctive anti-Christian work of the last half century.

I have mentioned above the replies offered to the world by Christian apologists. The chief feature of these has been their extreme weakness—a weakness often drifting into sheer imbecility. In all the Christian "replies" published during the last twelve months not one has evidenced any marked degree of ability—although it is significant to note that the best of them were published by laymen. And this, again, is evidence of the steady development of Freethought. For the growing mental poverty of Christian apologetics is a sure sign of the intellectual decay of Christianity. It no longer attracts the best intellects of the nation. All that is strongest and best in our life is outside its borders. And the rapid growth of the lower forms of Christian faith, the evangelistic orgies of Torrey and Alexander, or the revivalistic eccentricities of South Wales, are proofs of the same thing. The absence of any strong governing intellectual force leaves all the lower elements free to express themselves.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the undoubted spread of Freethought relieves the position of all drawbacks, or does away with the necessity for continued effort. In some respects the very increase in numbers develops new dangers. While Freethought ideas were held by a few only, a certain selective force operated, and if the numbers were small, the quality was excellent. The conditions were such that only men and women of far more than the average strength of mind and character were ready to announce themselves as unbelievers. But growth in numbers while it makes for strength in one direction threatens weakness in another. The more advanced and uncompromising thinker runs the risk of being swamped by others of a more accommodating turn of mind. Moreover, the growth of a "respectable" class of Freethinkers makes the boycott of advanced and militant heretics somewhat easier. Under the cloak of toleration of compromising heresy, it is easier for bigotry to work its will with the more dangerous enemy. And the fact of certain mild heresies being tolerated is apt

to blind many Freethinkers to the fact that the boycott against advanced unbelief, at least so far as its advocacy through the press is concerned, is maintained as bitterly as ever. It is one thing for news-agents to display works by Huxley, Spencer, Tyndall, Darwin, or Haeckel. It is quite another to get them to show pronounced and definite heretical writings, which drive home the moral of the teachings of these men. Freethought is not really safe until *all* opinion is sure of the same opportunity for a fair hearing; so long as this is not secured the necessity for strenuous work remains.

It is too often overlooked that it is Christianity as an institution that we are, or should be, fighting. Christianity merely as a number of speculative ideas, as something in the air, need not concern us. It is Christianity as organised in church or chapel, or crystallised in institutions and systems, all of which exert an influence, open or surreptitious, that is the great danger. And a form of Freethought that fraternises with Church and Chapel, and limits its activities to a mild protest against the purely speculative side of Christianity, is certainly not adequate to accomplish the work that *must* be done before permanent advance can be achieved. The clergy as a body have really no attachment to ideas as such. Their accommodating apologetics prove this. Their anxiety is for institutions, and so long as these are maintained, they care little. It is because advanced Freethought admits of no compromise, that religious hostility in this direction is as bitter as ever.

Moreover, the greatest danger to advanced opinions, when they become widespread, and are, apparently, at the point of success, comes from its compromising friends rather than from its avowed enemies. And the great historic instance of this appears in the Protestant Reformation, which, with its parrot-like echo of liberal phrases, led, and still leads, many to regard it as an ally; while it had the effect of checking the more intellectual movement then on foot, putting back genuine progress for nearly two hundred years, and giving irrationalism a new lease of life. To some extent, the same thing is in operation to-day. Inside the churches various attempts are being made to gild the religious pill, to give it a coating of rationalism, and so get the dose swallowed. And outside the churches there are only too many who are ready to recognise every expression of liberal opinion as signs of an approach towards the Freethought position.

The belief is a baseless and a dangerous one. The leopard does not change his spots, nor the Ethiopian his skin. What Christianity was, Christianity is. It is as ready as ever to obstruct progress, although, fortunately, without the strength to do so as effectually as of old. And the need for vigilance on our part is, therefore, as great as ever. Neither liberal thinking nor Freethinking is uncommon to-day; but what still remains comparatively rare is the clearness of view and sanity of expression which, having once seen the true course, admits of no compromise, is daunted by no difficulties, but takes its course, happy if victory crowns its efforts, and, if not, is content with having made the road easier for those that follow.

C. COHEN.

The Prospects of Freethought.

IT is usual, at this season of the year, to enumerate our gains and our losses in order to ascertain on which side the balance lies. The fact that the balance may be on the wrong side, of itself furnishes no justification of the inference that the business or the cause should be abandoned as worthless or lost. Apparent failure often spells real success. It is eminently worth while making sacrifices in the service of great principles or of deep-seated convictions. The mission of this journal is to advocate the rights and privileges of Freethought, to discrown superstition and enthrone natural knowledge, to sever the artificial

connection between ethics and religion by making it clear that morality is an evolved and still evolving law of society, and not a revelation from above. It is a highly commendable mission, and deserves to be rewarded with complete success; but it is also, from many points of view, a very thankless mission. Innumerable difficulties and discouragements confront it at every turn, while vile opprobrium is ruthlessly heaped upon the heads of those engaged in it. But the question is, Have any signal triumphs been achieved under its banner? Is superstition any less dominant now than it used to be? Is theological dogmatism as blatant as it was a hundred years ago? What are the prospects of Freethought just now?

It will be freely conceded by all unprejudiced persons that the old orthodoxy is now dead, that the divines of to-day are notorious trimmers, whose main object is to give their doctrines a pseudo-scientific tinge, and that the Church has lost much of its ancient dignity and power, and is, indeed, but the veriest shadow of its former self. These are obvious, incontrovertible facts, the significance of which is most suggestive. We know that a drowning man will clutch at any brittle straw within his reach; and at present we see theologians, metaphorically speaking, doing precisely the same thing. Their supreme desire is to convince their wavering supporters that theology is the queen of the sciences, and, as such, ought to occupy the premier position. They preach sermons and publish books the burden of which is that between religion and science there is the sweetest harmony. If any prominent scientist, such as Lord Kelvin, Dr. Russel Wallace, or Sir Oliver Lodge, evinces any sympathetic leaning towards Christianity, he is at once enthusiastically hailed as a God-sent defender of the Faith, and his praises are loudly sung in all pulpits and religious journals. Just now it is Sir Oliver Lodge, the Spiritualist, who is the recipient of the warm plaudits of the Churches. But everyone who has read his articles in the *Contemporary Review*, and *Hibbert Journal*, is aware how uncertain, vague, and unsubstantial Sir Oliver's theology is, and how flatly it contradicts the teaching of all the great Creeds and Confessions. And yet it is undeniable that without definite dogmas, authoritatively delivered, the Church cannot possibly prosper.

Now, this decline of theology is accompanied by a corresponding decay of the religious life. Is it not the sad complaint of Christian leaders that spirituality is a thing of the past? The spirit of the world, we are mournfully told, has crept even into the tabernacle of the Lord and set its blight upon everything therein. The fire of piety soon dies down unless it is artificially stimulated every now and then. Religious experience, of the old-fashioned type, is no more. Churches flourish now, not by virtue of the inborn, spontaneous fervor of their members, but as the direct result of some exceptional personal magnetism or eloquence possessed and practised by their ministers. The societies presided over by weak and inefficient pastors are always in a languishing, half-dying condition, and must be periodically revived by professional missionaries. The need for technical Revivals testifies to the fact that religion has lost its hold upon the hearts of the people. But this constantly recurring spiritual deadness is the fruit of ever-growing unbelief. A writer in the *Hibbert Journal* maintains that the present indifference to religion is attributable to the loss of the belief "that Christianity has a secret worth an earnest endeavor to obtain."

"The most largely accredited form of the Christian secret," that writer tells us, "is the belief that the risen Christ is always accessible, has always access to, the spirits of men who seek him. The experience of the overwhelming majority of the faithful attests that he has been, or is, for them no vague intermittent oracle, but a person who with every seeking and candid soul takes a different way of love, and bestows upon each what he receives from the Source of all life and strength and joy..... Thus, to the mass of the faithful

the one vindication, the one attraction, of every form of real Christian worship is that in the midst is Jesus Christ, saying still, 'Where two or three of you are gathered together in my name, there am I—with you.'"

I fully agree. Once Christian belief loses its intensity Christian worship becomes dead and dull. Unless Christ is divine and risen from the tomb, unless he is believed to be universally present and in command of all power, he cannot be the centre of irresistible attraction, kindling the zeal, firing the enthusiasm, and dominating the wills of his followers.

The fact is that Freethought has succeeded, not only in winning converts out of the Church, but in penetrating into the innermost recesses of the Church itself and undermining its faith in its divine Redeemer. The Higher Criticism of the Bible, liberalism in theology, the appeal to reason—these are the indirect products of Freethought. In one sense, Freethought has accomplished much more within than without the Christian Church. The number of avowed Freethinkers in any community may be comparatively small; but the number of unavowed but most real ones in the House of God is enormously large, and increasing at a most encouraging rate. Why, the believers of to-day would have been persecuted as Infidels fifty years ago, and the brightest saints of the present would then have been accounted blasphemers. In spite of priestly tyranny and clerical uncharitableness Christians are being rapidly emancipated. They are discarding superstition after superstition, and dogma after dogma, and already there are many among them who do not even believe in immortality.

The prospects of Freethought were never brighter than they are at this moment. The bitter educational controversy now going on between Nonconformity and the Established Church has been a wonderful eye-opener to many people. Nothing is more evident than that each side is fighting for its own hand. It is a life-and-death struggle. The Nonconformists know well enough that, unless the children are carefully trained in their distinctive doctrines, the days of Dissent in England and Wales are numbered; and Church people are influenced by the same conviction with regard to their own children. But the truth that has dawned upon many for the first time in connection with this controversy is, that the adoption by the Government of a purely secular system of education would be a fatal blow to religion itself. Nothing is more certain than that Christianity would utterly cease to be in about two hundred years were it not for the assiduity with which it is being instilled into the minds of the children before they are able to judge for themselves. Faith is a child of ignorance, and it grows and comes to maturity while the intellect lies dormant. As soon as the reason awakes and is allowed to exercise itself, faith begins to shrink and shrivel. Is it not a fact that the illiterate believe much more than the educated? Do not one's beliefs grow beautifully fewer in proportion as one's intellect expands? Hence, banish religion from education, and you will raise a generation of Secularists. It is because they are aware of this that neither Church nor Dissent can tolerate the idea of secular education.

We have already heard the death-knell of the present winter. The sun has turned the corner, and is coming back to us with healing life in its wings. Christmas is behind us, and a new year, big with precious promises, greets us. Even now we can see summer dancing merrily on every hill-top, beaming benignantly in every valley, clothing itself with beauty in every busy forest, and preparing a glorious feast for man and beast. No wonder that almost every religion chose the 25th of December as the birthday of its Savior—God. Well, have you not also heard the death-knell of ignorance and superstition, and are you not aware that the sun of truth and knowledge has passed its winter solstice, and is bringing with it the fair spring and golden summer

of sweet reason and fruitful intelligence? I repeat, the prospects of Freethought were never more promising than they are at this moment. Everywhere are discernible unmistakable signs that a glorious victory is at hand. The other day a well-known Christian apologist graciously admitted that even Freethinkers may be morally noble and good, though he afterwards sarcastically hinted that the elevation of their character is probably due to the fact that Christianity is still unconsciously in their blood. Only a little while ago a highly-respected minister of the gospel assured a Freethought lecturer that he agreed with almost every utterance in the discourse to which he had just listened.

Let us be of good courage. Let us consecrate the new year to the service of reason and society. Let us confirm ourselves in the belief that man is the highest and divinest being known to us. As the eccentric but true seer, Walt Whitman, says:—

Nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is.

And with the same poet, in that wild rhythm peculiar to himself, we can ask,

What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways,

But that man or woman is as good as God,

And that there is no God any more divine than yourself?

I do not know whether Walter Savage Landor was a Freethinker or not; but it is indisputable that he hated theological controversies and priestly pretensions with his whole heart, and sought peace of mind and a restful soul in sweet communion with Nature. This is how he sang:—

I strove with none, for none was worth my strife;

Nature I loved; and next to Nature, Art;

I warmed both hands before the fire of life;

It sinks, and I am ready to depart.

Some of us may not be able to adopt the words of poor James Thomson, in his *City of Dreadful Night*, and say:—

And now at last authentic word I bring,

Witnessed by every dead and living thing:

There is no God; no fiend Divine

Made us and tortures us;

but we can all say, with one accord: We seek for truth, and are determined to be loyal to it at whatever apparent risk; and in its glad service may we all have a truly

HAPPY NEW YEAR.

J. T. LLOYD.

Bible Morality.

NOBODY looks in the Bible for information about the Interstellar Ether or the Fourth Dimension of Space; and it is equally absurd to refer to that volume for instruction in Ethics. Moral Philosophy was as far removed from the ideas of the ancient Hebrews as was Physical Science; and the remarks upon life and conduct which they have transmitted to us can only be regarded as an awful example of the wrong way of looking at things.

It is clear to the uninstructed reader that the moral ideas of the ancient Hebrews must have been quite different to ours. The narratives of the Bible scarcely ever revolve round a creditable action. On the contrary, lying, treachery, murder, and slander form the kernel of the greater part of the stories; and when we seek for anecdotes of nobility or virtue we have to turn elsewhere. The indelicacy of some parts of the sacred volume is repugnant even to believers, and the savage and inequitable mandates that form the bulk of the so-called "legislative" enactments have been the constant theme for the denunciation of unbelievers. The Hebrew literature was either the product of a set of rascals or else its authors were *indifferent* to those ideas and principles which we class under the head of morality.

But perhaps we shall be told that the Bible is full of allusions to righteousness, truth, justice, and mercy; and we shall be referred to dozens of texts in which those words occur. *That*, however, is

rather a method of begging the question. It is not sufficient to find the words "righteousness" and "truth" and "mercy" in the English Authorised Translation of 1611; we ought first to know whether they give an adequate notion of the ideas in the minds of the original writers of the Bible.

Let us take the word "Mercy," for example. It is a word continually on the lips of professors of religion. It crops up in prayers, in hymns, and in sermons; and is one of the most hard-worked nouns in the religious vocabulary. And yet one is often puzzled to know what meaning the religious person intends to convey by it. As an ordinary English word, there is not much doubt about it; the lexicographers define it as—

"That benevolence, or kindness of heart or disposition, which induces a person to overlook injuries, or to treat an offender with greater forbearance and clemency than he deserves."

Bearing this definition in mind, however, we shall remark that the word occurs in Bible texts in passages that do not bear this interpretation at all. Take the well-known 136th Psalm:—

To him that smote Egypt in their first-born :
For his *mercy* endureth for ever.
To him which smote great kings :
For his *mercy* endureth for ever.
And slew famous kings :
For his *mercy* endureth for ever.

There is evidently no idea of benevolence, or compassion, or clemency here. But we shall, perhaps, be told that the English word "mercy" in these passages must be an adequate translation of the Hebrew, because the Greek Septuagint in these identical places employs the word *eleos*, which undoubtedly means the same thing as the English "mercy." There is, however, another edge to this argument; for the real fact of the matter is that the English Version has *mercy* because the Greek has *eleos*. The Greek Septuagint was the first translation of the Hebrew Bible into a European tongue; and, as usually happens, this first translation has governed all the others. The way in which the Septuagint prepared the Hebrew Bible for Greek consumption will be better understood if we note the style in which Josephus has paraphrased the same volume for his readers. Thus it will be necessary for us to ignore the Greek, and go straight to the original.

The word translated "mercy" in the 136th Psalm is *chesed** in the original Hebrew. Now, Dr. Gesenius tells us that *chesed* meant, primarily, eager or ardent desire. This desire might take the form of zeal or ardor *against* anyone, or of zeal or affection *towards* anyone. If we remember this, the 136th Psalm will appear more intelligible.

To him that smote Egypt in their first-born :
For his *ardor* endureth for ever.

But, in order to adequately grasp the idea, or circle of ideas, which *chesed* conveyed to the Hebrew mind, it will be best for us to consider a series of typical passages in which the word occurs. Take first the *bad* senses of the word; that is to say, where it expresses ardor *against* anyone.

Prov. xiv. 34: "Righteousness exalted a nation; but sin is a reproach (*chesed*) to any people."

Levit. xx. 17: "It is a shameful thing (*chesed*)."
The context shows that there is no reference to *mercy* in these two passages; and the English Version has to render the Hebrew by the words "reproach" and "shameful thing."

Now to take the other significances of *chesed*.

Gen. xxi. 23: "Thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son; but according to the kindness (*chesed*) that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned." Here we see *chesed* used in the sense of reciprocal good-will.

1 Kings xx. 31: "The kings of the House of Israel are merciful (*chesed*) kings." Bearing the last

* This word *חסד* is not to be pronounced "cheese ed," as I have heard it rendered. The *ch* is the Scotch, or German, guttural; and *chesed* is best pronounced as *hay sedd*, with a strong *h*.

instance in mind, we may see that this verse can hardly have meant to convey an idea of the *clemency* of the kings of Israel. They were, rather, good-natured, well-disposed people.

Psalm cix. 12:—

Let there be none to extend mercy (*chesed*) unto him ;
Neither let there be any to have pity on his fatherless children.

In this case, again, the shade of meaning is hardly to be expressed by "mercy"; it is rather favor, or charity.

All the preceding passages refer to *chesed* as between man and man; but the primitive mind made little or no distinction in the relations between man and man, and between man and the deity. In the latter connection we may cite the following:—

Psalm lxxxvi. 2:—

Preserve my soul ; for I am godly (*chesed*) :
O thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee.

Here the ardor is from man to God; or what we call godliness or piety.

The ardor of God to man may be gauged by—

Deut. vii. 12: "The Lord thy God shall keep with thee the covenant and the mercy (*chesed*) which he swore unto thy fathers," etc., etc. In the next twelve verses we see that the Jews are promised fertility, health, and victory, as the *chesed* of Yahveh. Thus, here, the word will signify the grace, or favor, of God to man.

Our study of this important word *chesed* will therefore illustrate the poverty of the Hebrew language, as well as the undifferentiated state of Hebrew notions upon conduct. The Jew was conscious of a certain exaltation, or excitement of mind; and he called it *chesed*. When it concerned man and man this warmth of feeling might range from contempt to compassion. Between man and God, the man's ardor was piety; while the deity was supposed to have similar feelings, and therefore inclined to confer benefits upon his worshippers. To render this word *chesed* into any copious language would obviously require several distinct words to express the shades of meaning implied by the original. The frequent English rendering "mercy" often gives an entirely wrong impression of the Hebrew passage. Take, for instance, Hosea vi. 6:—

I desire mercy (*chesed*) and not sacrifice.

Sermons have been preached, and volumes have been written upon this verse to enlarge upon the idea that the deity requires men to be merciful. But, if the reader has carefully considered the instances given of the various senses of *chesed*, it will be clear that "mercy" was not in the mind of the original writer. The context obviously refers to the *chesed* from man to God; in other words, "piety," so that it should read:—

I desire *piety* and not sacrifice.

As a consequence, it will be understood that we cannot accept allusions in the *English Version* of the Bible to such things as righteousness, truth, or mercy, as any evidence that the volume inculcates moral ideas. The morality has been conveyed into it by the translation, and was not intended by the Hebrew writer, who had quite different objects in view.

As a further illustration of the meaning of *chesed* we may refer to the Books of the Maccabees, from which we learn that the Jewish zealots called themselves Hasideans—i.e., *Chasidim*, or "pietists."

1 Macc. i. 42: "Then were gathered together unto them a company of Hasideans.....and they mustered a host, and smote sinners in their anger, and lawless men in their wrath."

It is unnecessary to add that these *chesed* Hebrews would have been startled to find themselves styled "merciful."

The reader's mind may have called up a passage in the New Testament—and quite legitimately. The first followers of Christ were most probably persons ignorant of Greek, and speaking, and thinking in, a Jewish dialect of Aramaic, if not in pure Hebrew; so that, to them, Matthew v. 7 would read "Blessed are

those that show *chesed*, for they shall obtain *chesed*." In other words, "Blessed are the pious, for they shall receive divine favor."

The rest of the beatitudes, when studied in the light of the Hebrew Old Testament, similarly express a different shade of meaning to that conveyed in their present rendering; and it would be an interesting task to show how much of the alleged moral teaching of the New Testament was really a misunderstanding of the vocabulary of the Old Testament. However, the present writer will be satisfied if he has indicated with sufficient clearness the uncertainty that overhangs the most familiar biblical expressions, and the futility of attempting to found ethical teaching upon a literature that had no distinct ideas of morality.

CHILPERIC.

Acid Drops.

Christmas hysterics again! Depression and want obtain in all parts of the country, including London; but the *Daily News* and the *Daily Mail* have been running a race with each other to find funds for a little Christmas benevolence at West Ham. Maudlin tears are shed over the delight of thousands of poor people in obtaining a meal on a single day. And it is all put down to the credit of Christianity! Truly it is enough to make an intelligent person sick. Christianity has ruled the roost for ever so many centuries; it has burnt and imprisoned and ostracised Freethinkers; and when an open Atheist (Charles Bradlaugh) won a seat in an English constituency the Christians swore like thunder that he should never enter the House of Commons, and "by Christ" they kept him out for years—and killed him in the struggle. Yet these Christians, having it all their own way, bring about and maintain a state of society in which one third of the population are always in the slough of poverty, while another third are always falling into it or scrambling out of it. And now and then, when strong men begin to swear that they will *take bread* for their starving wives and children, these Christians get up a fund, and dole out soap and coals, and pay a little rent (to the landlords), and then cry out to each other "How good we are! And yet it is not us, but Christ that worketh in us!" Christ!

"If a man were called upon," Gibbon says, "to fix a period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would without hesitation name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus." That is, from the year 96 to the year 180. During that period the Roman world was governed by a wonderful succession of great and noble emperors: Nerva, Trajan, Adrian, Antoninus Pius, and Marcus Aurelius. Those splendid and beneficent rulers were, of course, all Pagans. They regarded their "subjects" as human beings whose welfare was entrusted to their charge; their supremacy was one of public service, not of personal indulgence; and under their benign sway mankind was "happy and prosperous." Nearly two thousand years have rolled by. Christianity has succeeded Paganism. The only true religion has banished the false ones. And what is the result? Look, for instance, at Holy Russia. What is it that the masses of her people want? "They only ask," says Dr. Soskice, "for such government as will enable them to get a little bread and not be flogged." That is all—after the lapse of nearly two thousand years! How much happier and more prosperous they would be if, instead of being Christians under Nicholas, they were Pagans under Nerva, Trajan, Adrian, Antoninus Pius, or Marcus Aurelius? And in saying this we are only following the rule laid down (we are told) by Jesus Christ himself. We are judging the tree by its fruits.

The usual pulpit gush was poured out on Christmas Day. Dean Gregory, at St. Paul's, said that "true happiness was not to be found in the accumulation of wealth, or in toiling for success in life." Of course not. True happiness is found in paying Deans a thousand or two per annum for preaching "Blessed be ye poor." It may also be true (we will not discuss it at the moment) that happiness is found in "following the commands and examples of Christ." But we are quite sure that Dean Gregory has never sought happiness in *that* direction. We defy him to show a single "command" of Christ that he has ever "followed" with any hope of overtaking it.

That consummate charlatan, the Bishop of London, talked a lot about the "working men," as if he habitually lived with

them. He said he was "convinced that ninety-nine out of every one hundred believed in the existence of God." Well, what does that prove? Is it wonderful that ninety-nine out of every hundred should believe what they were taught in their childhood? Is not the scepticism of the hundredth person the really significant fact? If there be a God, is it credible that *anyone* could disbelieve? Who doubts the existence of the sun? What is universal and eternal should be perfectly obvious.

Bishop Ingram's charlatanism is simply flagrant. He told his Christmas congregation that "even Huxley had said that virgin procreation was known to naturalists." Of course it is! Do the Christians really want Huxley's testimony to that? Virgin procreation exists low down in the scale of biology—where the word "virgin" can only be used as a metaphor. But to talk about virgin procreation as a scientific fact in connection with the alleged *virgin birth of a human being* is simply contemptible ignorance or disgusting humbug; and we believe the latter alternative is the real one in this case. Besides, the Bishop of London ought to know that the New Testament story is *not* one of virgin procreation. It is not said that Mary fertilised herself. It is said that she was "overshadowed" and fertilised by the Holy Ghost—possibly with the assistance of the Archangel Gabriel.

Perhaps the Rev. F. B. Meyer took the cake for Christmas gush. Amongst other things he said that Christ had "raised woman from the dust to be queen of the home, and abolished the yoke of slavery." Has this man taken the trouble to learn the facts? If he has, what a liar he must be! And how much less honorable is his profession than that of a burglar! Telling lies for a living is worse than breaking into houses for a living. It requires less brains and courage.

Jesus Christ came, if he came at all, in the year one. Sixteen hundred years afterwards slavery still existed in Europe, and slaves were even held by the Church. Eighteen hundred years afterwards slavery existed in British dependencies. Eighteen hundred and sixty years afterwards slavery still existed in Christian America. Yet Christianity abolished slavery! Pah!

Some "Christmas Thoughts" appeared in the *Daily News* on Christmas Eve. Greater twaddle was never printed. One of the contributors was the Rev. Dr. R. F. Horton, of Hampstead; the gentleman who claims that God Almighty inspired him to write his last book. Dr. Horton declares that there is a better time coming for "the people." And he mentions four heralds of it—Lamennais, Whitman, Tolstoy, and Edward Carpenter. Had he stopped to think, which we admit is unusual in his case, he would have seen that not one of the four names was that of a Christian, in any proper sense of the word. Lamennais was an unfrocked priest; Whitman was either a Theist or an Agnostic; Tolstoy rejects every supernatural story in the New Testament, and says that Jesus was a bastard; and Edward Carpenter is, if anything, a Pantheist.

Of course the *Daily News* had to have an article on Christmas, and of course it opened in the regulation style:—"Once more the Christmas message which angels sang to shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem rings out to mankind." Angels did not sing it, shepherds did not hear it, we believe there are no plains of Bethlehem, and the alleged message is all fudge. All which is as well-known at the *Daily News* office as it is at our own.

Mr. Hall Caine says that he once started a novel on the subject of Mary Magdalen. He did not finish it. We should think not. It was more likely to finish him.

Mr. Hall Caine and Miss Mary Magdalen would make a fine pair. They have a good deal in common. Both belong to the hysterical type—with a rather cool eye all the time to the main chance. Only the lady is decidedly the better looking—in spite of his Christ-like mouth and Shakespeare brow.

Miss Marie Corelli will have a job to go one better than Mr. Hall Caine's *Prodigal Son*. The *Prodigal Daughter* is not exactly Scriptural. The only thing we can suggest is the *Foolish Virgins*. But that seems more in Victoria Cross's line. What do you think?

Edmund Hall, who was executed at Leeds recently for the extremely brutal murder of his father-in-law, made a most edifying appearance on the scaffold. Having passed a good night, and eaten a hearty breakfast, he felt very fit for emigrating to glory. It is said that he had been attentive

to the ministrations of a Wesleyan minister, and exhibited signs of penitence. We are not told what the "signs" were, and whether his last dying speech is to be reckoned one of them. As the cap was being drawn over his face, he turned to the Sheriff, and said, "Please give my New Testament to my cousin. I hope he will be a good lad, not only as a soldier of the King, but of Jesus Christ, as I have been." We hope the Christians are proud of this "soldier of Jesus Christ."

According to the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, one who had come much into contact with Hall after his conviction (was it the man of God who gave him his ticket for glory?) spoke of him in very hopeful terms. "I am perfectly satisfied," he said, "that the man was fully prepared to meet his doom. He was a bright spirit." *Very bright!* How else could he have murdered an old man of seventy-eight for a little money? And no doubt he was fully prepared to emigrate. But how much did he trouble himself about the readiness of the old man he sent to the next world as a destitute alien? These conversions in front of the scaffolding are enough to make an ostrich vomit.

The Congregational church at Birstall is without a pastor, the Rev. J. Jefferson having resigned, in consequence of the "lack of genuine vigorous life" amongst his congregation. The reverend gentleman seems too good for his profession; or else his late congregation want a visit from Evan Roberts and his "sisters," with a few God-drunken colliers thrown in.

God-drunken, dear reader, is not swearing. It is the epithet that Novalis applied to Spinoza—and was meant as a compliment.

A batch of Passive Resisters from Gillingham appeared the other day before the county justices at Chatham. There were four Nonconformist ministers—one Baptist, one Congregationalist, one United Methodist, and one Bible Christian—besides Nonconformist laymen and laywomen. They were all allowed to state their objections to paying the educational portion of the poor rate; but, of course, the usual orders were made. Now we have a special word for these Gillingham Passive Resisters. Several years ago, under the old School Board system, there was the much-talked-of case of Miss Hill at Gillingham. Her father was president of the local Branch of the National Secular Society, and that fact stood in the way of her advancement in the Gillingham School Board's service. On a certain occasion another young lady was preferred to her for an appointment, and when the matter came up for discussion the Christians—including the Nonconformists—admitted that Miss Hill was in all *secular* ways the best qualified candidate for the post, but they urged against her that, as a Freethinker, she was incompetent to give *religious instruction*. In other words, they enforced a pure and simple religious test against Miss Hill, and practically penalised her on account of her Freethought. Yet it is these very people who now cry out so bitterly against "priestcraft and persecution," and pretend to be the sworn friends of religious freedom and equality! Humbugs, ladies and gentlemen, humbugs—that is what you are. You practised bigotry yourselves, and now you are its victims; and you howl—and we laugh.

Mr. Lloyd George, M.P., has given his blessing to the Welsh revival. What else could he do? If he opened his mouth at all on the matter, he was bound to bless it rather than curse it—like our old friend Balaam.

"Personally," Mr. Lloyd-George says, "I believe it is destined to leave a permanent mark on the history of our country." But what is Mr. Lloyd-George's personal opinion worth with respect to futurity? How long has he been on confidential terms with Destiny? The fact is, the honorable gentleman is talking *blague*, to please his countrymen—like a good politician.

"Cries and moans of agony" were emitted by one of Evan Roberts's female penitents at Clydach Vale. Like Jehovah after creating sharks, vultures, tigers, and fleas—the *Daily News* "special correspondent" pronounces it all very "good."

A collier named Davies, one of the Welsh revival "brands," rushed through the workings of Ocean Colliery, Nantymoel, shouting "Fire, fire!" There was something like a panic for a few minutes, but the pious crowd quieted down when they found it was only a rehearsal instead of a performance.

Those who want to know all the religious meaning of that word "Fire!" should read the second article, bearing that

title, in the first volume of Mr. Foote's *Flowers of Freethought*.

One result of the Welsh revival is the refusal of the saints to buy or drink milk on Sunday. It is expected that the cows will soon refuse to be milked on the Lord's Day.

Evan Roberts had thirteen "visions" before he went revivaling. Twelve of them he has confided to Dr. Phillips, of Tylorstown. The thirteenth he "dare not reveal." It is between himself and God. Perhaps he hasn't made up his mind yet what it was. Meanwhile it may be noted as a mark of his swelled-head condition that he believes God has given the world another twelve-months' opportunity to get saved at the special request of Evan Roberts.

"Mr. Roberts," according to the *Daily News*, "is confident of another 40,000 conversions during the next fortnight." Evidently he has plenty of *confidence*—though some would give it another name.

Smith's Weekly has lately printed an article by Sir Wyke Bayliss, President of the Society of British artists, trying to make out that the traditional portrait of Jesus is authentic. But as he admits that "the evidence of the likeness of Christ is precisely the evidence on which we believe in the resurrection of Christ," our readers will easily be able to judge of its value. We may add that "same" in the passage just quoted from Sir Wyke Bayliss can only mean "similar." It is a small point, but "distinguished" people should try to write accurately.

Even the dear *Daily News* can make mistakes. Having printed a letter by Colonel Dutton, casting calumny on Mr. Horatio Bottomley, it deems it advisable, after printing Colonel Dutton's apology, to send Mr. Bottomley a cheque for one hundred guineas "to be applied to such charitable purposes as he may determine."

M. Anatole France, one of the greatest living French writers, speaking recently at the great hall of the Trocadero, Paris, in favor of the absolute separation of Church and State, referred to the Concordat as "Cette Convention detestable." "The Concordat," he said, "is not, and never was, a treaty. It is a passport. It is a document which gives the Pope and his agents rights of free movement within the Republic. Rome wants to keep up the Concordat because it preserves for her the last shreds of her inquisitorial power. Were she strong enough, she would burn heretics, as of old."

General Jehu, one of the Bible worthies, drove furiously. So did the Bishop of Winchester the other day. His lordship started off from his fine old palace at Farnham to attend Lord Northbrook's funeral. He did not ride on a donkey, like his Lord and Master, but on a motor-car, with his chauffeur, Norman Littlejohn, and his chaplain, the Rev. H. M. Fitzgerald. Dashing through High-street, Alton, the motor-car smashed up a cart, and the result was an appearance before the "beak." Independent witnesses swore that the Bishop's motor-car travelled at a great pace. The Bishop and his chaplain swore the contrary. The Bench did not believe these godly witnesses. A fine of £2 was imposed on the Bishop's chauffeur.

Owen Russell, a farm laborer at Tunbridge Wells, was taken to the hospital with his right hand missing. He had chopped it off at the wrist. His object was to obey Jesus Christ. After reading "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off" (Matthew v. 30), he asked for a chopper, went outside, and performed the pious operation. Christians who don't like losing their hands will say that he is mad. We think so too. But we add that he is a Christian. Are they?

Mr. Raymond Blathwayt invited "a well-known minister of religion" to be his guest at Mr. Tree's performance of Shakespeare's *Tempest*. To his "astonishment" he received the following reply:—

"SIR,—The awful sight of leprosy, with which you have been familiar in the tropics, has doubtless appalled you again and again. Pardon me if I ask you solemnly to reflect before God as to how the only too apparent leprosy of your heart must appear in His holy sight. Not content with indulging in the pleasures of this present evil world yourself, must you needs seek to draw another, who has by infinite mercy and grace escaped its corruption, back into perdition? And that other a minister of Christ! How aggravated is your sin!—Yours in unfeigned sorrow." Fancy the "leprosy" of seeing one of the most beautiful of Shakespeare's plays! This is what a full dose of Christianity reduces a man to.

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

January 22, Glasgow; 29, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

J. LLOYD'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—January 8, Birmingham; 22, Birmingham; 29, West Ham; February 12, Leicester; March 12, Glasgow; 19, Liverpool; May 7, Merthyr Tydfil.

JAY BEE (Glasgow).—*Freethinker* sent as requested. We venture to make the following extract from your letter: "I have been trying to do a little missionary work among my fellow workmen, and am lending round your *Bible Romances*. It has 'opened the eyes of the blind' in more than one case, and I consider it a marvel of cheapness, both as regards quantity and quality. It is the best sixpennyworth I ever bought, and I hope you will soon have sufficient encouragement, from its sales, to warrant you in issuing your *Bible Heroes* in a cheap form. I have found your pamphlet on *The Bible God* very effective in one or two cases among professing Christians who had never read their 'Holy Scriptures,' and were ignorant that the God they worshipped was a monster, on his own showing."

T. D.—Thanks for the copy of Cheyne's *Bible Problems*, which we shall doubtless find something to say about in the *Freethinker*. We are extremely glad to know that this journal has "helped you to freer and saner views in matters in which you are deeply interested."

AYLMER MAUDE, Great Baddow, Chelmsford, writes: "In the *Freethinker* of December 4 I notice that you favor me with the title of 'reverend.' It is the first time that I have been honored in that way, having spent many years of my life in business, and the last six or seven in various forms of literary work. As I do not happen to be enrolled in the ranks of any one of the sects, you will perhaps allow me to disclaim the unexpected honor you have done me." We had no intention of doing Mr. Maude an injustice; we regret that we innocently calumniated him; and we tender him our earnest apology.

C. D. STYRING.—Thanks for cuttings.

W. JONES.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

HAROLD ELLIOT.—Mr. Foote is writing you on the subject.

M. E. PEGG.—Date booked; subject in due course.

"EMANCIPATION BARRY" advises the friends of the *Freethinker* to do as he has been doing for some time. He orders from three to six copies weekly, and undertakes to pay for them even in advance, but instructs his newsagent to sell them to other customers if possible, and to keep what he receives for them as a reward for his efforts to place the paper in fresh hands. By-and-bye an increase of regular customers is secured, more people read the paper, and the newsagent has a larger number of buyers.

H. LOCKHART FIELD.—Thanks for your good wishes.

CHARLES BAKER.—Glad to hear you are delighted with Mr. Lloyd's reply, and that you "are 'awfully' pleased with Mr. Foote's *Bible Romances*."

W. W. C.—Shall be sent as requested.

E. DYMOND.—Thanks for the cuttings, also for your letter. Yes, it is best to get the *Freethinker* through a newsagent, when possible.

R. H. ROSETTI.—We are not surprised to hear that your letter in the "Do We Believe?" controversy in the *Eastern Mercury* was edited out of all recognition, and that the editor allows Christians to reply at greater length to what is really not what you said. *Freethinkers* must expect such courtesies in dealing with Christians.

J. SUMNER.—We hope to deal with your kind suggestion very shortly.

S. HOLMES.—Accept our good wishes in return.

MR. AND MRS. FORRER.—Pleased to receive your handsome card, and to see that you have found use for the couplet we recently printed from Crabbe.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street Farringdon-street, E.C.

THE National Secular Society's office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 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.

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

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Special.

SOME weeks ago I mentioned the forthcoming "Torrey Mission" in London. It is to begin early in February, and is to last a month. All the Churches are going to coöperate. Even the Bishop of London has blessed the enterprise. After what is happening in Wales we may be sure it will be a big affair. Revivalism will be worked for all it is worth. Huge crowds of people will be gathered together. And it seems to me that we shall have a splendid field for a special line of *Freethought* propaganda.

When I mentioned this "Torrey Mission" I suggested that my readers might help me to do what I then foreshadowed. I propose to print two pamphlets, the size of which will depend upon circumstances. One to expose Dr. Torrey's vile slanders on the characters of Thomas Paine and Colonel Ingersoll; the other to show that Dr. Torrey's teaching, especially in relation to the Bible, is old-fashioned, and disowned by the leading men in the very Churches that are coöperating in his Mission. This will open the eyes of some of the people Dr. Torrey addresses.

Some people think that it does not matter what men like Dr. Torrey say about Paine and Ingersoll. I do not agree with them. Libelling great *Freethinkers* is a calculated policy. Its object is to keep decent people from hearing what they have to say. And I urge that this dishonest barrier to the spread of *Freethought* should be broken down.

Funds will be necessary for this object, and I invite my readers to supply them. If I am properly supported in this work I will give Dr. Torrey a new experience, and deluge his audiences with publications that will do them good.

I also beg to ask London *Freethinkers* who are willing to assist in distributing these publications at Dr. Torrey's meetings (outside, of course) to communicate with me as early as possible.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

We venture to think that the new year's number of the *Freethinker* (this week's is dated January 1) is an excellent one for its readers to pass round amongst their friends and acquaintances or any liberal-minded people they happen to come across. It contains a number of special articles by most of the leading writers in the *Freethought* party, and the editor gives it an extra spice of variety by including the first part of his promised article on his visit to the graves of Keats and Shelley at Rome. We don't mind saying—for, putting the editor's own contribution aside, it is quite true—that this number of the *Freethinker* is the finest two-pennyworth of honest "fundamental brain work" obtainable in Great Britain. Will its friends and admirers, then, begin the new year by trying to place it in fresh hands? We want a larger circle of readers, and they can help us to obtain them.

London *Freethinkers* should be reserving Tuesday evening, January 10, for the Annual Dinner, which is to take place, as usual, at the Holborn Restaurant. There ought to be a strong rally on this occasion. Mr. Foote will preside, and will be supported by Mr. C. Cohen, Mr. John Lloyd, Mr. Victor Roger, "Chilperic," and other well-known *Freethinkers*. After the dinner there will be vocal and instrumental music, brief speeches to appropriate toasts, and opportunities for conversation. Everything is included in the price (4s.) of the ticket.

The January number of the *Humanitarian* gives a good report of the debate on Non-Resistance which took place at Essex Hall on Wednesday evening, November 23, under the auspices of the *Humanitarian League*. Lucid summaries are included of the speeches by Mr. Aylmer Maude, Captain St. John and Mr. G. Bernard Shaw, who was as brilliant and paradoxical as ever. The *Humanitarian's* "special correspondent" then introduces another speaker, and what

he says will probably interest the majority of our own readers. "Thus far," he writes, "the debate, if lively, had been somewhat disjointed and inconsequent. But the best, because most pertinent, speech of the evening was, I thought, that of Mr. G. W. Foote, the President of the National Secular Society, who has in a high degree the gift of going to the heart of a matter in a few appropriate words."

Mr. F. J. Gould, secretary and organiser of the Leicester Secular Society, and known to our readers as a brilliant Freethought writer, gained a seat on the Leicester Town Council by a very gratifying majority. While a genuine reformer in various directions, Mr. Gould is particularly zealous in regard to Education, and we are glad to know that he has been appointed a member of the Education Committee. We see by the local papers that he has promptly begun business. By a majority of nine votes to seven, he carried the following resolution, after deleting the words "Town Council":—"That the authorities of the denominational schools be communicated with in order to secure for members of the Education Committee and the Town Council admission to the non-provided schools in the same manner as has been customary in the case of provided schools." The object of Mr. Gould's resolution is to ascertain at first-hand how these denominational schools, all maintained by public money, are really carried on.

The *Journal de Charlevoi* devotes a page to the "International Movement of Freethought." Some extracts have appeared recently, translated into French, from one of Mr. Lloyd's articles. The last number to hand contains an extract from Mr. Foote's Open Letter to a Bishop on Creation.

The Glasgow Branch's Children's Party on Christmas Day was a grand success. It was a matter of the greatest difficulty to provide accommodation for all who came. Thanks are due to the working committee and to the friends who supplied the funds and other necessaries. They contributed towards a veritable triumph, which was a splendid finish for the year.

The Newcastle Branch holds its Annual Conversazione on Monday, January 2, in the Cordwainers' Hall, Nelson-street. Tea will be served at 6 p.m., and will be followed by a miscellaneous musical program. Tickets 1s. each for adults—6d. for children.

The *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* gave a long report of the funeral of the late Mr. Ralph Young, secretary of the Northumberland Miners' Association, an obituary notice of whom appears in another page of this week's *Freethinker*. Mention is made of the Secular Burial Service, held prior to the interment, in the Burt Hall; which was conducted by Mr. Martin Weatherburn and was "most impressive and numerously attended." A large concourse of representative persons was present at the graveside, including the Mayor of Newcastle, several members of parliament, and miners' delegates from other parts of the country as well as Northumberland. Mr. Charles Fenwick, M.P., paid a glowing tribute to the deceased, and ended by saying that "he passionately loved his fellow men." Yet he was hard-headed and practical in all matters of business. The good heart and the good head went well together.

ORDER AND GOD.

When we consider the movements of the starry heavens to-day, instead of feeling it to be wonderful that these are absolutely regular, we should feel it to be wonderful if they were anything else. We realise that the stars are not bodies which, unless they were made to move uniformly, would be floating in space motionless, or moving across it in random courses. We realise that they are bodies which, unless they moved uniformly, would not be bodies at all, and would exist neither in movement nor in rest. We realise that order, instead of being the marvel of the universe, is the indispensable condition of its existence—that it is a physical platitude, not a divine paradox. In a word, we realise that the spectacle of the starry heavens affords the intellect no better grounds for believing that God has created the universe for some sublime end, and exhibits his perfect wisdom in the means he has devised for attaining it, than is afforded us by any one of the most homely facts of experience—the orderly swinging of a pendulum, the orderly boiling of a kettle, or the orderly death of a child when it tumbles out of the nursery window.—*W. H. Mallock, "Religion as a Credible Doctrine,"* pp. 162, 163.

The Vice of Christianity.

THE term "Christianity" is an extremely elastic and indefinite one. No one has yet found a definition which all persons calling themselves Christians would be disposed to accept. I am therefore obliged to employ the word in a general, rather than in a particular, sense, in order that it may apply to all the great divisions of the Christian Church, and include alike the Catholics, the Churchmen, and the members of the more prominent dissenting bodies. I trust that this will be sufficiently comprehensive.

Freethinkers often attack this religion on the ground of its inutility, of its fruitlessness in well-doing, of its inaccuracy as a scientific system. But we are less often reminded of its essential viciousness in relation to conduct. I propose to make this my thesis in the present article. I shall attempt to demonstrate that, considered as a whole and considered in detail, Christianity is subversive of that social attribute which we term morality, that it is malignant in its effects, as it is untrue in its affirmations.

Christianity is vicious because, in striving to create artificial virtues and artificial crimes, it tends to discount the importance of real ones. The man who is criminally inclined may give full vent to his evil tendencies while rigidly conforming to the requirements of the Church. And these observances, while themselves perfectly impotent for good, are set off against actual and active offences against the social body, and thus serve to palliate them. At the time when Venice was at the zenith of its power, the banditti who infested the town, like most of our own criminals, were extremely religious. It was a common occurrence at this period for some desperado to visit his father confessor before the committal of robbery or assassination. He would state precisely what he intended to do, pay the sum duly appointed by the Holy Office in extenuation of the offence, and proceed to his evil work with a clean conscience, confident that, whatever the issue might be on earth, the divine pardon awaited him in the realms above. It may be said that this was a long time ago, and a long way off. But it serves, as an extreme and palpable instance, to illustrate the argument. The same thing occurs to-day, but in a less direct and more elusive fashion. I can recall a scene that occurred some years ago on Deptford Broadway. A Freethought meeting was in progress, and one of the most persistent interrupters was a villainous-looking coalheaver, who declared, with many highly-colored epithets, that though he had done some pretty thick things in his time, he could thank God he wasn't an Atheist. Now, this man, who had probably committed at least some of the misdeeds he charged himself with—his appearance lent weight to his assertions—felt high-minded and virtuous when he compared himself with the godless individual on the platform. And his attitude of mind was in strict logical sequence to the teachings of his creed.

Christianity, in effect, makes factitious virtues and factitious vices. The man who finds it uncomfortably hard to be honest will seldom experience the same difficulty in taking the sacrament. So we find the Church vending a facile virtue to the vicious, and even (in its relations with the magnates of finance) taking a share of the products of infamy as the price of its silence. The famous gift of communion-plate to St. Paul's Cathedral by a certain financier of umbrageous memory is fresh in the public mind. Less prominent instances of the same sort of ethical turpitude abound everywhere. There is probably not a church in London which has not received its quota of similar blackmail. And I submit that this aspect of the current faith is in itself ample justification for its impeachment from the ethical standpoint.

In no respect is Christianity more culpable than in its relation to economic problems. A system that preaches contentment to the poor and charity to the

affluent is particularly well adapted to perpetuate the evils it proposes to cure. The natural result of its teaching is obsequious poverty on the one hand and smug self-satisfaction on the other. "The poor," said Jesus, "ye have always with you." This "great democratic reformer and Socialist," as some of our invertebrate demagogues think fit to call him, expounded in that phrase the be-all and end-all of his social philosophy. No solution of the problem existed for him, and no solution exists for his followers. Poverty has become a prime necessity of that grotesque form of ethics styled Christian virtue. The poor constitute an abiding balm for the rich man's conscience. He makes them the happy recipients of his charity, and their pathetically illogical gratitude causes him to forget that he is anything but a benefactor. The firm of Rothschild makes a financial deal, and thousands of half-starving wretches are compelled to economise their already attenuated *menu*. But Mr. Lionel Rothschild presides at a Jewish soup kitchen, and the firm sends twenty guineas to *Reynolds'* Sandwichmen's Fund, thereby effectually muzzling its democratic organiser, who, in his pre-charitable days, has said hard things of such business benefactors. "The poor ye have always with you," and "to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand."

Proceeding a step further, I affirm that Christianity is vicious because it is logically committed to persecution. To avoid possible misunderstanding, I may say that the word "persecution" is here used in a very definite sense. I mean by it the imposition of pains and penalties for the expression of opinion. It is not necessary to recapitulate the horrible list of crimes committed by Christians for this purpose, nor do I wish to burden this article with lengthy extracts from sources easily accessible to all.

It is of course true that the worst forms of persecution have gone out of fashion with the fading away of belief. But so long as the Church is really possessed by the spirit of Christian faith she is honestly obliged to persecute. The sceptic who has it in his power to bring the souls of the faithful to perdition is regarded, and properly so, as the most dangerous of men. But the times are out of joint in the perspective of piety, and it is no longer possible to say this in so many words. Yet the Church is true to its traditions, and acts quite consistently in making things as uncomfortable as possible for the Freethinker on earth, by way of preparation for the incandescent time in store for him in the world to come. The spirit of the ancient persecutor will never die while a believer remains, and only those of us who have taken part in a definite anti-Christian propaganda know how bitter and how active that spirit is.

Christianity is vicious, again, because of its ideal of unquestioning belief. Without scepticism there can be no progress. And history shows that he who begins by detesting criticism when directed against his faith will end by distrusting it in the affairs of earth. Thus we find that the Church has continually opposed itself to political innovations, has always been the sturdy defender of vested interest, and the constant enemy of democratic reform. This is not a mere historical accident, it is grounded in the very elementals of the faith. Apart from the specific teaching of the New Testament, which certainly favors submission to the established powers, the entire tendency of Christianity is to support the past as against the future. Its ideal is in the past; it looks backward for its inspiration; its life depends upon the maintenance of old levels of culture and ethics, and a corresponding denunciation of the new.

While condemning the Christian attitude in its unreasoning support of convention, I am far from applauding the opposite spirit in all its manifestations. There are some kinds of unconventionality which it is difficult to excuse or justify. I have

known persons so anxious to dissociate themselves from Carlyle's majority that they developed a passionate detestation for such harmless adjuncts of civilisation as soap, and heroically refused to attire themselves in the prevailing mode. But public opinion, with all its limitations, is generally shrewd enough at bottom. It is not without reason that the man who strives to attract notice to his otherwise insignificant person by wearing his hair or his hat in an eccentric fashion is voted a bore or a crank. The instinct of all communities is to eliminate the inharmonious. It recognises that a certain uniformity of thought and conduct is a necessity of social coherence. And while any departure from such uniformity may be tolerated, and even applauded, when it is the expression of a reasoned dissent, there is still no quarter for gratuitous peculiarities which have no meaning and no motive apart from the most futile egotism. But the fact that the spirit of criticism is liable to perversion does not destroy its essential usefulness, and the steady opposition of Christianity to new ideas, which it rightly regards as a challenge to the old, constitutes, therefore, an important count in my indictment.

Another bad aspect of current Christianity is its appeal to egotism. We are, of course, all egotists—or egoists—in the nature of our being. But I distinguish between that kind of egotism which seeks personal gratification without reference to the good of others and that which finds pleasure in the general happiness. The burglar is selfish in the first sense, the philanthropist in the second. Now, I maintain that the Christian must take his place with the burglar in this division. His creed appeals in the most crude and direct manner to individual vanity. Your Christian is the most self-centred being in the universe. The sun exists to give him light by day, as a convenient substitute to the nocturnal gas. All the delights of nature, the splendor of the evening sky, the beauty of the changing seasons, the plains, the woods, the rolling seas, are specially provided by the Almighty for his particular enjoyment. And the Almighty himself, in the Christian concept, has no office or function apart from ministration to human wants. He is man's universal provider, whose duty it is to see that his customers have food to eat, clothes to wear, and material wherewith to delight themselves. No wonder the Christian is apt, with all his humble professions, to carry his head a shade higher than his fellows, and to import a spirit of inflation into his worldly affairs which make him dictatorial, domineering, and bigoted.

No criticism of Christianity would be complete which did not include its association with militarism. The priests of the religion of peace have ever been ready to bless the banners of departing troops, without regard to the justice of the cause in which they were to fight. Itself an unexampled cause of warfare, the Church has always fomented the warlike instincts of the people. This continual association of religion with militarism seems to indicate that the two aspects of human nature arose at the same stage of evolution. In the study of primitive man we find the rites of superstition constantly intermingled with the panoplies of battle. It is true that the sword existed before the cross. But their present-day alliance is sufficient reason for questioning the latter as an instrument of good. I hardly anticipate that the fact of this alliance will be questioned. Instances are too numerous and too recent to allow of disagreement in the matter.

I have attempted to enumerate some of the more flagrant examples of the vice of Christianity. The subject might be greatly elaborated. But sufficient has been said to indicate the malignant side of a creed whose civilising and humanising virtues have been alleged so long and so continuously that the priests themselves have come to regard them as having a real existence.

E. R. WOODWARD.

The Savior.

AT Christmas time there is always much apparent rejoicing over the birth of Jesus the Savior. I say apparent, because it seems doubtful whether feasting has not as much to do with the hilarity of the season as the supposed birth of Jesus. Throughout the year, in thousands of churches and chapels, the birth of the Savior is proclaimed and his praises sung. But at Christmas the proclamation is louder and the singing more fervent. And all the celebrations are natural and obligatory if it is true that a Savior, who was God, was born on the twenty-fifth of December, year one, for the purpose of saving a lost world.

And if the Bible is the Word of God, and contains a true history, there is no room to doubt the truth of the news, from a Christian point of view. The history of the miraculous event is precise and positive, as the following verses, and many others, show: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior which is Christ the Lord" (Luke ii. 10, 11); "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts iv. 12). The name in the last verse is Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and it would be difficult to use stronger language to notify that he is the only Savior.

Around the astounding tidings there are many things that will challenge the attention of any average intelligent man, and I think it is best to notice a few of them before tackling the more serious aspects.

Gods born of virgins as men were common enough amongst ancient nations. But Christians tell us those gods were only myths. The virgins were myths, the men were myths, the gods were myths. But Jesus was a real man and a real God, and Mary, his mother, was a real virgin. In the case of Jesus Christ it was the infinite Creator of the universe made manifest in the flesh as mortal man. Accepting that view as a common ground for discussion, several things strike one very forcibly.

An infinite God becoming a finite, mortal man is a miracle so stupendous in magnitude and significance that the intelligence of man fails to comprehend it. We are prompted to ask, Is the thing possible? Can an infinite shrink itself to a finite? Can immortality become mortal? Can an infinite Creator become his own creature? Would it not be as possible for a finite to become infinite as for an infinite to become finite? Would it not be as rational to believe a creature could be his own creator as to believe the Creator could become his own creature? Or, to change the simile, is it possible for an ocean to shrink itself in a drop, or for a universe to become an atom? That seems to human reason quite as possible as for an infinite God to become a finite, mortal man. Let Christian apologists explain the enigmas and remove the difficulties if they can.

And even if the thing was possible, was there any need for it? Was it necessary for the Almighty Creator of the universe and of man to become a mortal man to save his own creatures? Was there no other way to save the world? Could not Infinite Wisdom find means to remedy the imperfection of his own work without dying as a criminal on the cross? If he could create a perfect man by merely willing it, could he not re-create him and save him in the same way? If God is almighty, all-wise, and all-good, could he not make all men perfect if he wished? If God created the universe without making himself into man, why was it necessary for him to be born a baby, live a wandering beggar, and die as a criminal on a cross, to make a few only of his own sinful creatures into new men? Let Christians answer the questions if they can.

And if it was possible and necessary for God to become man in order to save, was it not possible for

him to make his appearance in a more dignified way? If he could become a man without a father, why not without a mother as well? Why was it necessary for him to be born a baby, and in a stable? If he could make a first man without being born, why could he not make himself a man in the same way?

If it was necessary for God to become a man, why did he wait four thousand years before he came? Would it not have been wiser to have come directly after the Fall, to prevent the untold millions being lost without a Savior? And why did he make himself a Jew more than a Roman, Grecian, Egyptian, Chinese, or Indian? Palestine was a small, obscure corner of the world, and the Jews were an insignificant nation, without any very particular claim to the notice of mankind, let alone a God. Many other nations were far more numerous, and far in advance of the Jews in civilisation and power. Were they not the children of God as well as the Jews? Were they not in need of a Savior? Could God not become a man and a Savior amongst every nation as well as the Hebrews? If not, would it not have been more effective for the salvation of the world to be born a Roman? If the good tidings of great joy were intended to be made known to all the world as quickly as possible, the medium of the mighty Roman Empire would have been far more effective than Palestine.

If the object of God in becoming a man was to manifest his love, it is difficult to understand why he could not do that without being born to suffer and die. A God that could create a universe out of nothing could surely convert a sinner and save the lost without punishing himself for the sin of others. And why could he not make the good tidings known, not only to a few Jewish shepherds, but to all the world, without sending angels to deliver the news? Surely an infinite God could convey a message to his own children, if he desired it, without an intermediary. The idea of a Mediator or a Savior between God and his own children is a clumsily-devised tale, such as ignorant monks might invent. But to attribute such a tangle of absurdities to an all-wise God is a libel on his wisdom.

When such a stupendous miracle was going to happen as the birth of a God as man from a virgin mother, to be the only Savior of all the world, one would have expected that an all-wise God would have provided a cloud of reliable witnesses of the great event. One would also think it was necessary to preserve an exact account of all circumstances connected with the miracle. This appears reasonable when we consider that God, as an all-wise God, knew of the many gods said by the priests to be born as men, but were only myths invented by men. As he was to be a real man-God, he ought to have provided trustworthy witnesses and evidence of the important event, lest the people should conclude that his birth was also a myth, like all the others. But there is not a single witness of the birth that can be produced. None of the writers of the Gospels pretend that they were present at the birth, or that they had no direct information from Joseph and Mary or anyone else who had personal knowledge of the event. The author of Mark, which is said to be the oldest, knew nothing about the story of the birth; neither did John, or whoever wrote the Gospel bearing his name; for it is incredible, if they knew the story, that they would have left it out of their Gospels. Matthew and Luke only give the story, and neither of them wrote with a personal knowledge.

From the accounts given of the birth in Matthew and Luke, it is impossible to say on what day, season, or year Jesus was born. It is true we celebrate his birthday on the twenty-fifth of December, but we do that, like many other things, in ignorance and defiance of the truth. Whichever day of the year was his birthday, it could not have been in the winter, and certainly not on the twenty-fifth of December, if the narrative in Luke is true, for he tells us that shepherds were abiding in the fields, keeping watch

over their flocks by night, when Jesus was born. As the seasons in Palestine correspond nearly to our own, it is clear the birth of Jesus did not take place in the winter season, and certainly not on the twenty-fifth of December. The fact seems to be that nobody knows when he was born, or indeed the certainty that he ever was born, as told in the Gospels. Christmas Day is an old Pagan festival to celebrate the birth of the sun to run his course for another twelve months, and has nothing to do with the birth of Christ.

Another consideration is of some importance. An Omniscient God would have known how important it was to have exact account of all things connected with his birth and life. He could foresee all the doubts, disputes, riots, persecutions, and bloodshed that would result from inaccuracy, discrepancies, omissions, interpolations, and false interpretations. As the object of his coming was to save, one would expect that he would give, or inspire someone else to give, an account of his life, so exact and true, that no people could misunderstand it, and fight and murder each other in consequence. But no exact account has been given. The scrappy biographies are as remarkable for omissions as for commissions of all faults that could be crowded in the same compass.

R. J. DERFEL.

(To be continued.)

Correspondence.

CHRISTIANS' TACTICS IN HYDE PARK.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—May I ask you either to call attention yourself, or allow me to do so through your columns, to the treatment which has been meted out to Secularists in Hyde Park for some time past, and a typical example of which I witnessed on Sunday, Dec. 18, last?

As I was up there from about 4.30 to 8.30 p.m., I arrived in time to note that that fair-argument, free-speech-loving Mr. Allen refused to allow any opposition at all. At the evening meeting Mr. McInnes occupied the platform, and dealt with a book of Dumas, touching largely, in the course of his remarks, upon the relative moral value of Christianity and Secularism. As I made notes, with the intention of offering opposition, I am able to give the gist of his lecture. Here it is:—

"Christianity had given us our hospitals, orphanages, and asylums. What had Atheists given us? Nothing but our prostitutes, drunkards, and swindlers. Look at the *Great National Secular Society*! They had opened near a lunatic asylum, torn the Bible to pieces, got drunk on whiskey, and removed to Newgate. He was speaking the truth, and before he left the park that evening, he intended to defy the shoals of Atheists who surrounded the platform to do their worst. Atheists did not like to hear the truth, and therefore he suggested that they had better go and release their brothers at the Zoo, the monkeys. As for Charles Bradlaugh, he was not worthy so much as to unloose the shoe latchet of the Quaker, Fox. And where was Bradlaugh's monument? (Shouts: 'At Northampton.') He stood corrected. So Bradlaugh did have a monument! Well, he was pleased that one had been erected to his memory. Although sufficient money had been raised to erect many more monuments, it was gratifying to know that all had not been dropped—in beer, prostitution, and whiskey."

Upon the conclusion of this admirable piece of humor, which had lasted for exactly one hour, Mr. Allen, the chairman, mounted the rostrum (which had been subscribed to by the public generally), asked for questions, and announced that no opposition would be allowed. Meanwhile Messrs. Green, Bailey & Co., which included a clean-shaven parson besides themselves, had arrived. The Secularists would therefore, said brotherly-feeling Allen, have to take his tonic from Mr. Green for thirty minutes. During the time thus taken the Secularists raised their voices very powerfully, and very rightly, against such lack of fair play, fear of honest discussion, and pious bigotry. Accordingly, Brother Bray, another Christian, went for two policemen; so that Secularists, who had wives and children at home, should be forced to silently submit to this public insulting and dragging of their characters through the mire in silence.

Well, the worthy Green, who feeds upon Holyoake for his jokes, proceeded to administer his tonic. Here is a sample, as offered without one bit of proof:—

"Atheism was unmanly, cowardly, brutish, immoral, beery, and not respectable; it was a barrier to scientific, in-

tellectual, and moral progress. From the asylum, the Secularists had gone to Newgate. So far as he could see, they were still not far removed from their ancestors, the monkeys."

Nor is this the *most* scandalous of the treatment meted out to Secularists in the public forum by these evidence quacks. Having removed, while Green was speaking, to some distance, we were surprised to find Mr. Bray, the man who sent for the police, advancing towards us, and stop dead within a few yards of where we were standing. The object was obvious; it was to invite banter. And while some was being indulged in, we observed the two policemen approaching, ready to "run us in" should we make a slip. Such is the freedom of speech enjoyed in the public forum in the year of grace 1904.

In conclusion, may I add that, if necessary, I am able to produce a dozen or more witnesses, although I only know two by name—to wit, Mr. Vickars, a suburbanite, and Mr. Kellard, of Cyrus-street, Goswell-road, E C.

GUY A. ALDRED.

Obituary.

THE death of Mr. Ralph Young, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, the Secretary of the Northumberland Miners' Association, which occurred with tragic suddenness on Saturday, the 17th ult., removes one of the most conspicuous figures in the North of England. Mr. Young was the life-long friend of many worthy movements, and formed one of the "old guard" of militant Secularism which gathered round Charles Bradlaugh both in his Secular and political campaigning. With Mr. Bradlaugh, indeed, he was on terms of great intimacy, and his memory was held in the greatest esteem by him. An Atheist by conviction, he was always ready to avow it when the occasion arose. On every occasion (and they were many) on which he had to give evidence, either in Law Courts or on Royal or other Commissions, he always exercised the right of affirmation, which he knew had only been attained by the severe struggles of many great men. He would not even conform to the custom of "saying grace," considering any appearance of assenting to such usages to show a lack of principle. He took a great interest to the last in the work of the local Branch, being almost a regular figure at their social gatherings and attending their meetings as far as his numerous business engagements would allow. He actively assisted many small and struggling organisations which he believed were doing useful social work. Throughout his life he did strenuous work for the cause of Peace—international and industrial—and helped on the work of the local Peace and Arbitration Society. He was a Vice-President of the Tyneside Sunday Lecture Society, which has just reached its twenty-first year in a healthy condition; but Mr. Young rendered his services in its infancy, when the obstacles to be encountered were much more real and severe. He was a Governor of the Newcastle Royal Infirmary, and also a member of the Northumberland County Council Education Committee. It is not so long ago since, on that body, that he administered a wholesome corrective to the Duke of Northumberland, who had been indulging in the usual platitudes on the necessity of "religious education" in elementary schools.

All those who had the privilege of knowing Mr. Young can testify to his many exceptional qualities. Experience in dealing with intricate questions between employers and employees had given him a practical wisdom which was reflected in all his public work. Thoughtful and sympathetic, he commanded the respect of all. He had a strong liking for any one of "character," and the many diverse but interesting personalities he had gathered round him, paid a high tribute to his discrimination. Many of these friends will feel his loss in a manner more than common.

Austin Holyoake's Secular Burial Service was read over his remains at the Burt Hall by Mr. Martin Weatherburn, there being a large number of personal friends present. Mr. Weatherburn was one of those whose admiration for Mr. Young could hardly find bounds, and the service was read with marked emotion, which perhaps increased its impressiveness. At the graveside Mr. Charles Fenwick, M.P., delivered a touching personal appreciation of the deceased which was listened to by a very large crowd of mourners, to the large majority of whom the absence of any religious ceremony was an entirely novel experience.

T. H. ELSTOB.

We regard all the systems of philosophy hitherto received or imagined, as so many plays brought out and performed, creating fictitious and theatrical worlds.—*Bacon*,

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

LONDON.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 3.15, Religious Freethought Parliament; 7.30, Conversazione for Members and Friends.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): 7.30, Concert.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Bull Ring Coffee House): Thursday, Jan. 5, at 8, a Paper by one of the Members.

FAIRSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): Home Service.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street): No meeting.

GLASGOW RATIONALIST AND ETHICAL ASSOCIATION (319 Sauchiehall-street): 3, Social meeting in connection with inauguration of Children's Sunday School.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 3, W. C. Schweizer, "Fundamental Objections to Socialism"; 7, "The Saracens—the Saviors of Science." Monday, at 8, Social.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): New Year's Day, Annual Soiree for Members and Friends; tea 5.30; tickets 1s. each.

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