

THE Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE

Man, as the minister and interpreter of nature, does and understands as much as his observations on the order of nature, either with regard to things or the mind, permit him, and neither knows nor is capable of more.—BACON.

The Land of Starvation.

THE above title forms the heading of a full-page article in the *Daily Telegraph* of Dec. 30. It is not a description of a country governed by barbarians, or non-Christians; nor is it a description of a pre-Christian city that has just been unearthed by some industrious explorer. It refers to the now, unfortunately, notorious West Ham; a portion—despite technicalities—of the richest city of the world, and of the capital of a professedly Christian country. It is a cheerful kind of title to meet before one's breakfast, especially when one lives next door to the district in question, and the reflections it gives rise to are apt to make one ask whether, after all, civilisation is not a huge mistake so far as the mass of humanity is concerned.

West Ham has a population of, roughly, 300,000 persons. It is almost a purely working-class district—although *out* of working-class would be the more accurate description at present. Mr. Rowntree fixed the "poverty line" at four shillings and fourpence income per head, per week, for a family of four persons, an estimate which certainly does not err on the side of extravagance. Yet, on this basis, no less than 120,000 are below the "poverty line," there are whole streets in which not a single adult is at work, and distress of the severest kind is to be met with in all directions. There is no need to dwell upon details; those whose imaginations cannot conjure up a representation of the continuous physical, mental, and moral pain and degradation that must go on in a community where thirty per cent. of the families possess, in their gross income, nine shillings per week less than the miserable amount of 4s. 4d. per head, are hardly likely to succeed even with the aid of the most vivid of pen pictures. In Christian England poverty is not so rare a thing that many may be found who have not some acquaintance, direct or indirect, with it.

"The poor ye have always with you," and this, at least, of the reputed sayings of Jesus has not yet been proven false by fact, nor is it likely to be so while Christianity rules. And the poor are with us this winter to a far greater extent than usual. Statistics are given to show the increasing wealth of the country, and while these are doubtless accurate so far as the community as a whole is concerned, the amount of poverty abroad, with the apparently increasing number of those who are at all times hovering on the verge of starvation, would lead one to believe that the wealth of the country is being concentrated in fewer hands, and with greater national prosperity there is increasing individual destitution.

But this destitution is met—in a way. There have been all the usual collections for the poor, and in addition several of the daily papers have been running a race to see which could collect the largest amount for distribution among the poor of West Ham and elsewhere. One has no desire to question the motives of those who have subscribed to these

funds, or the motives of even the originators although it is not at all ungenerous to suggest that the avowed determination of thousands of working men not to permit their families to starve slowly to death without some attempt to redress by force the evils from which they suffer has had its influence in stirring activities in certain quarters. For poverty is here all the year round; and no single family suffers more or less by being surrounded by fewer or more families in a similar condition. It is the fact of such conditions existing, and that people imagine that all is right so long as the stream of charity is kept open, that appals one. To commiserate with poverty and suffering is easy; to help out of one's superfluities is easy also; but it is neither of these things that will solve the problem. Nothing will do this but the task of social organisation, the development of a type of mind that will give to this work the same concentration of thought and labor that is now given to the organising of huge armies for mutual slaughter, and so secure to each the social right to a cleanly, decent livelihood. We have not secured this with 1,500 years of official Christianity. We have multiplied our charitable institutions, which are as much an index of the growth of poverty as of the development of sympathy; but the solution of the problem is not yet in sight.

What is responsible for this condition of things? We blame financial speculators—and rightly; we blame our land laws, our housing laws, the growth of the money-making mania—all rightly, again; but outside a Freethought journal, who thinks of calling to the bar Christianity itself? Here is a religion that has enjoyed a lengthy spell of office, that has wielded enormous power—and does still, that has taken control of the minds and lives of people from the cradle to the grave. Can this be acquitted of responsibility? Far from this being so, I believe it to be one of the chief causes in the perpetuation of those conditions that give us a "land of starvation" in the heart of a "civilised" country.

On the negative side it is obvious that, so far as the evils above mentioned are concerned, the best that can be said for Christianity is that it has not been able to prevent them. The last two hundred and fifty years has seen a gradual shifting of the obligations of the landed classes on to the back of the nation at large; it has seen the development of a commercial system that has gone far to destroy all human connection between employer and dependent, and of a financial system that recognises no obligations save those of keeping on the right side of the law. It has seen the growth of innumerable social and economic evils, and in not a single instance has Christianity been a hindrance to their development, nor can it be said that a single potential evil has ever been crushed by its influence. Manufacturers and financiers at home and abroad have never found an exaction of all that commercial and financial rules permitted inconsistent with a most fervent profession and promotion of Christianity. They have spent freely enough on "the Lord," but they have wrung all they could from the laborer. Nor is there any need to accuse these men of conscious dissimulation. The vague generalities of the New Testament leave ample scope for saint and sinner to find therein a warranty for their personal inclinations.

Well, but there are all our charities, says the Christian. See what has been, and is being, done

by these for the helping of the poor. Of course there are charities enough, but what do these do to remove the evil from our midst? Simply nothing. It is the easiest of all ways of shelving a difficulty, and the simplest of plans to suggest. At its best, it is but a fine paid by society for the perpetuation of a fault, and, at its worst, a fresh cause of the evil it hopes to redress. Nor must it be overlooked how very largely the numerous religious charities are maintained because of their usefulness to the churches and chapels. Readers of Mr. Charles Booth's books will remember the picture drawn of the fierce competition of the churches and chapels for patronage, and how in this competition the charities act as so many baits to the poorer people. The fact that so many of those who subscribe to these charities, and who are engaged in their distribution, are animated by none but the best of feelings, does not detract from this statement. They are simply portions of the machinery, or so many cases of individual exploitation.

And, in fact, the wholesale inculcation of charity has been a great obstacle to the improvement of social conditions. To the poor it has preached submission, humility of mind and speech. And to the rich it has preached the duty of almsgiving; so breeding servility on the one side and superciliousness on the other. Had it taught that it was *not* the duty of the rich to care for the poor, but that it was the duty of society to so organise itself that widespread chronic poverty would be a practical impossibility, such a state of things as now exists, where thousands upon thousands only exist upon the suffrance or casual charity of others, could not obtain. Fifteen hundred years of humane effort in *this* direction surely might have devised something better than this. But Christianity's ideal society has always been that of a handful of rich and a multitude of poor. It never did and never will take any real interest in social reorganisation. Special circumstances may induce the leaders of the churches to feign an interest in such matters, but if one compares the zeal with which they work for the building of new places of worship, or the raising of funds for missionary work, with that exerted in agitating for much-needed social reforms it will soon be realised how hollow is their interest in such matters.

How much improvement has all the religious organisations and revivals made in social affairs? As religious organisations their influence has been almost wholly retrogressive. Such movements as the Salvation Army, with its hundreds of thousands of members; such religious orgies as those now proceeding in South Wales, add nothing whatever to the political sanity and wisdom of the nation. In the mass, those who take part therein pride themselves upon taking no interest in "worldly affairs." They work for Christ only; they are interested in saving souls alone, and this in actual practice means the withdrawal of energy and intellect from the social and political field, and so handing affairs over to those who are vitally interested in preventing improvement.

In sober truth, Christianity has all along lived by physical, mental, and political pauperisation. Independence of mind and character it neither desired nor permitted, save under protest. To suffer in silence was one of the highest virtues; to revolt against established authority a sin against God and man. The civic independence of old Rome died out under its control; the intellectual fertility of Greece withered under the shadow of the cross. While it taught the spiritual equality of men before God, it emphasised the social inequality of man on earth. And habits engendered by generations of growth, and customs sanctified by centuries of rule, are not thrown off in a day. It is truly a wonderful sight that so many are content with existing conditions; but it would, perhaps, be more wonderful still if, with a religion like Christianity in power, social conditions were any better than they are.

C. COHEN.

What is it to be a Christian?

THE Venerable Archdeacon Wilson has figured a second time, on the Manchester Wesleyan Platform, as one of the professional defenders of the Christian Faith. On the first occasion he discoursed upon the inspiration of the Bible, adopting the conclusions of the Higher Criticism, and yet clinging, in vague terms, to the moral and spiritual infallibility of the Book. In his second lecture he undertakes to tell us what it really means to be a Christian. It must be granted that the Archdeacon is an exceptionally clever man, and is an adept in the art of putting things. But, with all his smartness, he cannot accomplish impossibilities; nor can he conceal the inherent weaknesses and inconsistencies of his position. He frankly admits that the Bible may be unreliable and misleading as to matters of fact, and claims that to believe in Christ does not mean to believe in the historical and scientific accuracy of any documents whatever. Of course the admission necessitates the claim; but the claim is virtually destructive of Christianity as a historical religion. To be a Christian is to be a follower of Christ; but who can follow Christ if he is not a historical character, or who can tell whether he is historical or not, if the Four Gospels are not to be accepted as reliable pictures of him? Archdeacon Wilson is by no means blind to the difficulties to which his critical position gives rise; but as a believer he acts as if they did not exist, or in bold defiance of them.

Let us examine the lecture itself. The first thing that impresses the reader is that the lecturer *assumes* the historicity of the Four Gospels, which, he admits, is critically incapable of proof, or which, according to some Christian scholars, is susceptible of disproof. The Archdeacon assures us that the key to the question, What is it to be a Christian? is to be found in Christ's answer to a similar question asked by a lawyer, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" He maintains that in that answer we have "the authoritative interpretation by Christ of the meaning of the great divine evolutionary drama of history and of revelation up to his own time," and that "whatever else is added by Christ to this revelation, whatever else is implied by being a Christian, this, at any rate, must be the foundation." But to accept Christ as an authoritative commentator on the Old Testament is to admit the historicity of the Gospels, and a man must do both in order to be a Christian. This is totally inconsistent with the Archdeacon's own teaching. Theoretically, he regards Christianity as wholly independent of all documents alike; and yet in his definition of a Christian he is making free use of documents that may be proved to be full of mistakes. All that he advances is derived from the documents; and yet at the same time he teaches that a man may be a genuine Christian without believing in the accuracy of those documents. Can anything be more utterly absurd? The Archdeacon admits that he is illogical in many of his statements, but asserts that he has not abandoned reason. But can an illogical statement be reasonable?

The Archdeacon says:—

"On the great underlying question whether faith in Christ, as the Savior from Sin and the Revealer of God and of eternal life, is compatible with historical doubts as to the supernatural nature of the events of his recorded life, I do not here enter. That is too large a question. Experience will show, and we cannot anticipate the teachings of experience as it unfolds God's designs."

Now, if Christ was God, as all the Creeds declare, he must have been a miraculous, supernatural person. If he was only a man, he was as powerless to show God's nature to the world as any other mere man. A mere man cannot possibly transcend humanity. He must live and move and have his being within the limits of his own nature. Not to believe in a supernatural Christ is equivalent to not believing in a Christian revelation of God. "A

Christian," the Archdeacon observes, "must believe in Jesus Christ as showing us God's nature." But only God can show us God's nature; and if Jesus Christ was not God the natural inference is that he possessed no knowledge of God's nature. Hence a Christian must believe in a miraculous or supernatural Christ; and if he believes in a miraculous or supernatural Christ he must also believe in the historical inerrancy of the Gospels.

Dr. Wilson actually revels in inconsistencies. "We must never consent," he says, "to identify the being a Christian with the holding any purely intellectual beliefs as to matters of fact 'about Christ.'" But surely the belief in Jesus Christ "as showing us God's nature" is an "intellectual belief," and yet the Archdeacon asserts that without this belief no one can be a Christian. Again, "We 'begin in the middle,' by being Christians in heart and soul and temper." Here is illogicality with a vengeance. How on earth can people be Christians "in heart and soul and temper" unless they are acquainted with numerous "matters of fact about Christ?" Unless Christ's history is well known there is no possibility of intelligently cultivating his "heart and soul and temper." Does the Archdeacon believe in the existence of a spiritual Christ, distinct from, and greater than, any historical one? If he does he must admit that the "Savior from sin and the Revealer of God and of eternal life" is, after all, a purely imaginary being, of whose reality the faith in him is no proof whatever. That I am not misrepresenting the lecturer is evident from the following paragraph:—

"I am not prepared to say that there is any consciously held minimum of intellectual beliefs to be required of any individual before he can be, and can be rightly called, a Christian. I say 'intellectual beliefs,' not faith, because the love and trust in God, and the will to live in a Christ-like spirit which is truly called faith, does not of itself involve belief in any facts at all, historical or physical, in the phenomenal world, or any theories as to the being of God, and as to the supernatural, which could be rightly called 'intellectual' beliefs."

If Christ was not a fact in the phenomenal world, how is the Archdeacon able to say so much about the "Christ-like spirit"? To pronounce any temper or conduct Christ-like implies some definite knowledge of the temper and conduct of Christ himself, because, in order to be objects of knowledge, temper and conduct must be expressed in some concrete forms. It is easy to say, "We begin, or ought to begin, religion 'in the middle,' in conscience, obedience, duty; the habits of reverence, piety, love, kindness; and in the knowledge of Christ's words and life"; but if all this constitutes the "middle" of religion, one would like to know what, and where, the two ends are. Children do not begin religion "in the middle," but by swallowing the complete mass at the bidding of their parents and teachers. Most people become religious and accept the dogmas of the Church long before they begin to think for themselves. All religions belong to the childhood of the world, and ninety-nine individuals out of every hundred accept religion to-day in their childhood, and not after they have developed and disciplined their thinking faculties.

What the Christian temper is no one can tell. To the readers of this lecture it seems a most ridiculous, laughable thing. "It is not the act," we are told, "but the temper that is Christian or unchristian"; and the question we ought always to ask ourselves is, not, What are our actions? but "In what *spirit* do we act?" It matters not what we do as long as our temper is Christ-like. "Christ is everywhere teaching the ethics of temper; not laying down rules of conduct, immediately and universally applicable. If we mechanically applied as rules of conduct Christ's ideals of temper, we are certain, from common sense, that universal pauperism, lawlessness, and national extinction would follow." What a compliment to the Sermon on the Mount! What a shrewd compromise with the powers of darkness! What a cunningly-devised apology for all the evils rampant

in the Christian world! "Wars, competition, prisons, luxuries, poverty, amusements, gin-palaces, and work-houses" are not to be condemned as unchristian—it all depends upon the temper that underlies them. If your neighbor stands in your way, murder him, only see to it that you remove him in the proper spirit. Kill him without any anger in your heart. Ah me, is it not an indisputable fact that a man's acts issue from his temper, and that it is from his conduct alone you can learn what spirit is in him? An unloving temper embodies itself in hateful actions, and a selfish spirit becomes tangible in a mean conduct.

Christianity is to be judged by its fruits. What are its fruits? Read ecclesiastical history, with open eyes, and you will soon be disillusioned. The ages of faith have been ages of moral degradation and social oppression. Natural knowledge was condemned as devilish, and priestly authority settled every question. It was when faith in God and his Christ was most intense that Christendom lay in the grossest darkness; and it was when that faith was already on the wane that social progress began. The triumph of Christianity meant the arrest of the spirit of human growth and development. As a religion Christianity does not concern itself in the least with the affairs of the present world, but supremely with those of the world to come. A Christian who really follows the Christ of the Gospels is a dreamer, whose home is far away. Ethics is in reality foreign to religion, an artificial addition to it from Secularism; and in Christianity the religious element is out of harmony with and flatly contradicts the ethical. That is why the New Testament contains two conflicting standards of the Last Judgment. According to the religious element men will be judged at the last on the basis of their attitude to Christ. If in this world they accept the Savior and put their entire trust in him, though they do it in their dying moment, they will stand on the right of the Judge and be gloriously acquitted at the Final Assize; but if they die in unbelief, they will be sentenced to everlasting damnation. This is the gospel preached at all the great revivals, and in the majority of Christian pulpits. But according to the ethical element God will judge all mankind according to the deeds done in the flesh. These two elements will never coalesce. Each is in its very nature destructive of the other. The Venerable Archdeacon Wilson will never succeed in harmonising them. Now, the policy of Freethought is to drop the religious element altogether, and concentrate all its energy on the ethical. We have no knowledge whatever of God, and angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect, nor have we ever seen the Great White Throne around which the heavenly hosts are said to be arrayed in endless groups of adoring choristers; but we do know one another in this present world, and we do discern the bond in which we are joined in truest friendship to all living things, and we are convinced that our highest and noblest duty is to serve one another in the spirit of true brotherhood while we can. This is the whole duty of man. Our ideal ought to be the prosperity and happiness of the race to which we belong, in the only life and world of which we have any knowledge.

J. T. LLOYD.

Two Graves at Rome.—II.

V.

KEATS, in one of his cooler moments, before distraction fell upon him at the thought of losing Fanny Brawne, expressed the belief that he would be amongst the English poets after his death. That was the only immortality he expected. When he saw how vain was his hope of marriage with the woman he loved, he did not cheat himself with vainer fancies of union in "a better world." "Land and sea, weakness and decline, are separators," he said in one of his last letters to Brown, "but death is the great divorcer for ever." Nor did Shelley refer to

any other immortality than the one that Keats expected. Christians laid heavy hands on Shelley during his lifetime; they have laid heavier hands on him since his death. First they persecuted him, then they libelled him, then they patronised him, and now they adopt him. The last state of their misrepresentation is worse than the first. How idle it is to talk of *Adonais* as the hymn of immortality—in the Christian sense of the word! When will pious people learn that poets do not speak like theologians, and that the language of passion and imagination must not be confounded with the language of dogma? The sublime last stanza of *Adonais* is poetry, and not religious devotion. To conceive of it otherwise is to do it a gross injustice. Even the thirty-eighth stanza, in which Shelley apostrophises the Northern critic whom he quite mistakenly thought to have been one of the prime causes of the death of Keats, has no real reference to a future life.

Nor let us weep that our delight is fled
Far from these carrion-kites that scream below;
He wakes or sleeps with the enduring dead;
Thou canst not soar where he is sitting now.
Dust to the dust! but the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A portion of the Eternal, which must glow
Through time and change unquestionably the same,
Whilst thy cold embers choke the sordid hearth of shame.

It is not enough to read Shelley's finest poems half awake; it is too much to read them under the influence of prepossessions. The golden mean is to be alert and open-minded. In that way we shall catch the true significance of his song. But how seldom is this method pursued! One might almost regret that Shelley did not occasionally imitate the practice of stout old George Chapman, who would sometimes write an address to his Patron, and another to the Reader, and a third to the Understanding Reader—"and ye be few indeed." But in the absence of such explications we must exercise our own intelligence. And the first thing the reader has to do, in relation to the stanza just quoted, is to pay strict attention to the antithesis. Immortality, except on grounds of revelation, is always represented as a natural fact, and therefore universal. But a sharp distinction is drawn between the fate of Keats and that of his malignant critic. One sinks in *shame*, while the other soars to—What? The only answer is *Fame*. All the rest is poetical personification, which is so apt to deceive prosaic readers, who, as Lamb said, expect everybody to speak on affidavit. But even the most prosaic reader, who will take the trouble to read the forty-fifth stanza with the least possible sleepiness, will see that Shelley is not talking like a man in a witness-box when he represents "the inheritors of unfulfilled renown"—such as Chatterton, Sidney, and Lucan—as rising from their thrones to welcome and acclaim Keats as "the Vesper of their throng"; and that when he says that they "Rose, robed in dazzling immortality" he does not mean that immortality is a garment which can be obtained at some establishment or other, at a certain price, with a reasonable discount for cash.

The long and the short of it is that those who do not understand what Shakespeare says about the "imagination" which "gives to airy nothings a local habitation and a name" should leave all poetry, and especially Shelley's poetry, severely alone. They might even come to grief over Æsop's Fables. They are safe with Ready Reckoners and daily newspapers, and if they ever feel sentimental they can fly to hymns, which are the poetry of unpoetical minds.

VI.

Shelley wrote the magical and melodious death song of Keats before he heard the particulars of his young friend's death. He laments in the Preface that he had not known of Severn's devotion to Keats. "Had I known these circumstances before the completion of my poem," he says, "I should have been tempted to add my feeble tribute of applause to the more solid recompense which the

virtuous man finds in the recollection of his own motives." For Shelley knew as well as James Thomson that

Pictures and statues and books may be grand,
But they are not the life for which they stand.

None knew better than he that an act of heroism or kindness is finer than the finest word that can be said about it.

Shelley blunders over the very date of Keats's death. He represents it as the twenty-seventh of December, 1820, instead of the twenty-third of February, 1821; and Keats died at Rome while Shelley was residing in Italy! But it must be remembered that those were not the days of railways and telegraph messages, that news travelled slowly, and that the correction of false news was still more slow and difficult.

The point I wish to emphasise, however, in the Preface to *Adonais* is the curious nature of Shelley's reference to Keats's burial place:—

"John Keats.....was buried in the romantic and lonely cemetery of the protestants in that city [Rome], under the pyramid which is the tomb of Cestius, and the massy walls and towers, now mouldering and desolate, which formed the circuit of ancient Rome. The cemetery is an open space among the ruins, covered in winter with violets and daisies. It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place."

What strange coincidences there are in life! How natural it is that superstitious people should be deceived by them! Shelley's first visit to Rome, in November 1818, brought him into acquaintance with the very cemetery in which Keats was buried in little more than two years, and in which his own ashes were buried less than two years afterwards. That he should visit that cemetery so early was natural, for he was then under the dominion of the past. "Rome," he wrote, "is a city, as it were, of the dead, or rather of those who cannot die, and who survive the puny generations which inhabit and pass over the spot which they have made sacred to eternity." In his description of the Protestant cemetery, written at the time, there occurs the very thought which he expressed more beautifully in the Preface to *Adonais*.

"The English burying-place is a green slope near the walls, under the pyramidal tomb of Cestius, and is, I think, the most beautiful and solemn cemetery I ever beheld. To see the sun shining on its bright grass, fresh, when we first visited it, with the autumnal dews, and hear the whispering of the wind among the leaves of the trees which have overgrown the tomb of Cestius, and the soil which is stirring in the sun-warm earth, and to mark the tombs, mostly of women and young people, who were buried there, one might, if one were to die, desire the sleep they seem to sleep. Such is the human mind, and so it peoples with its wishes vacancy and oblivion."

That cemetery was soon to receive the remains of one very dear to Shelley. He had fled from England, when the Court of Chancery, through the mouth of Lord Eldon, deprived him of the custody of his children by his first wife, Harriet, taking with him his boy by his second wife, Mary, in the fear that he might be robbed still further by the Christian laws of his native country. To that boy, William, he addressed those passionate verses beginning:—

Think not the tyrant shall rule for ever
Or the priests of the bloody faith.

But a more inevitable hand than that of Lord Eldon deprived him of his son. William Shelley contracted fever at Rome, and died there after sixty hours of agony, which the poet watched with sleepless eyes. It was on June 7, 1819, the very day after the day fixed for their departure from the Eternal City. The next day, apparently, the body of that beloved child was laid in the cemetery which had so affected Shelley's imagination.

Thus was Shelley's own child buried in the cemetery which afterwards received the body of Keats and his own ashes. But there is nothing to mark the spot where the child of so much love, and so many tears, was buried. Shelley and Mary were unable to superintend the erection of the tombstone;

it was wrongly placed over the body of an adult; and when it was desired to place the child's ashes beside those of his father they could not be found.

I may, in this connection, mention the fact that to the right of the graves of Keats and Severn there nestles a little tombstone, which I nearly overlooked. It appears to be quietly waiting its time. "There is no hurry," it seems to be saying, "I do not wish to intrude, but perhaps you will notice me presently. I am only an insignificant thing. I was but a small boy when death took me. But I loved my father, and you might know that my father loved me. And here I am, as you see, in my modest corner. For I was a Severn, too, and they gave me this place to rest in, beside my father and the friend he was always talking about—but nearest father, of course."

I felt womanish at the graves of Keats and Severn, but it was over the *little* grave that I dropped a tear. Perhaps it was the paternal instinct in one that gave the last stroke.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

The Savior.—II.

(Continued from p. 13.)

DEFECTS of omission are almost as bad as faults of commission. In the case of Jesus the omission of information that rational beings might have expected and looked for is very conspicuous. When such a stupendous event as the birth of a God as mortal man was to happen, it is natural to suppose that means would have been taken to call attention to it. Surely the world ought to have been prepared for it. Some intimation—a prophecy or a declaration—ought to have been given, not to a few in Palestine, but to all the world. If he was coming to be a Savior for all, all had a right to know and to hear the good tidings. But not a word or a whisper came to man beforehand. There is not a prophecy or a promise that anyone could apply to Jesus, without twisting the words and putting meanings in them which they do not contain. The bulk of the population of the world knew nothing of his coming, and never knew or felt the need for his salvation.

There is another very important matter that ought to be considered. In an event involving the salvation or damnation of trillions of human beings through countless ages to come the world had a right to ask for a clear and full message. It would not have been unreasonable on the part of man to expect from the Supreme Actor in the drama—or was it a tragedy?—some explanation about the fate of all who had died without a Savior and an atonement for their sins before he was born. The senseless prattle of priests and the vain imaginations of philosophers are no good. They know nothing about it. The only one that could explain it from personal, direct knowledge was God; and he came and went back without uttering a word on the subject. Had a mere man acted in the same way, I fancy all the world would have blamed him for such an omission.

But whether men had a right to know or not, from the only one who knew, what became of all who died before the only Savior was born, they certainly had a right to a clear, full, and positive explanation of the salvation they were called upon to accept. The salvation was of no consequence to God, but it was of eternal importance to man. The only one that understood it thoroughly, and could explain it without a mistake or error, was God himself. The matter was too momentous to be trusted to fallible, ignorant, erring, and often dishonest, untruthful, and deceitful men. As the Author of the salvation, it was the duty of God to explain it in words that no sinner could mistake the meaning. It should have been made known why it was needed, what were the sins to be saved from, and what to do to be saved. As God had before, with his own fingers,

written the Ten Commandments on tables of stone, he could in the same way write his scheme of salvation in a way that would be permanent for all ages to come. But he did not do so. He left the world without leaving a clear testimony behind. There is no direct testimony or information from God on the matter. What is attributed to the Savior is only hearsay by fallible men, written ages after his death; not a scrap of evidence from the spot by the principal actors, or by anyone who witnessed the events and heard the discourses, is available. And there is no positive evidence that the writers had received even the traditions from reliable sources, or that they had made any inquiry as to their truth, or that they were qualified for such an undertaking. The whole thing is in a hopeless muddle. No two writers agree. According to the Gospels, there must have been two Jesus Christs, or the one was an incarnation of all inconsistencies, as it is impossible to believe that any sane man, let alone a God, could have delivered all the sayings put in the mouth of Jesus. Hence the religious world have been quarrelling ever since as to what he taught, or has been fanatically following his supposed commands by deluging the earth with persecution and bloodshed. Is it credible that God could have left so momentous a matter in such a muddle? Reason answers, No; it is all the work of fallible, erring man.

According to Matthew, the mission of Jesus was to save his people from their sins. Who were his people? Were they the Jews only, or the elect from all nations? Whichever is meant, Matthew seems to contradict Luke; for in Luke the angel says that the good tidings of great joy was for all people. But unless all people were to be saved, it is difficult to understand what joy could there be in the message to the lost, who are the great majority of the people.

What were, and are, the sins men are to be saved from? We have no Biblical catalogue of the sins, and no clear definition of their nature. Sins might roughly be defined as sins against God, sins against man himself, and sins against fellow-men. Sin against God by the creature he made is impossible. If anyone has a right to complain, it is the creature, for being made imperfect and placed in circumstances where sin was inevitable. If the machine is imperfect and works wrong, blame the maker, and not the machine. Even if it was possible for man to sin against God, there would be no danger from them to God; they could do God no harm; and surely there was no need for a divine Savior to save himself from them, or to enable him to forgive them.

If a man sins against himself, as many do, and perhaps all, at times, how is it possible to save him from them? A sin once committed is committed for ever. It cannot be undone or blotted out. There is no recalling or forgiveness possible. Man may see the error of his ways, may feel sorry for his conduct, may resolve not to sin again—and his repentance may help him to live a changed life; but all this has to do with the man himself, and not with God. Besides, to save a man from sins already committed is not possible, even to God. What a good God could, and would, do is to improve man's nature and environment, strengthen him physically and morally, guide him with counsel and wisdom, save him from temptations and foes; but that is a different thing to saving from sin. Prevention is better than cure, and a gospel of prevention is the salvation man requires.

Sins against other men have also to do with men, and not with God; and it is the business of men to deal with them by exhortations, examples, censures, fines, and punishments. Individuals sin against society, and society sins against individuals; and men have to deal with them, and not God. Had Jesus come to save the people from sinning against one another, to save the poor from the exploiter, to emancipate woman from her degraded position, to free the slave, to change the heart of the tyrant and oppressor, to promote education and encourage invention, and to establish universal peace and good-

will among all men, there would have been some sense and beauty in his salvation. But his kingdom was not of this world, but of heaven. His salvation had to do with another world. It was sins against God—mostly imaginary sins invented by priests to uphold priestcraft—that he came to save the people from. And even from those he never saved the people. To this day the world is full of ecclesiastical sins, priestly errors, and superstitions, waiting for some real Savior to save the people from. There was room and need, not for one Savior, but for hundreds and thousands—not to prepare the people for another world, but to make them prosperous, good, and happy in this. And there is room and need for many thousands of saviors still, to make this world a heaven for the people—as might and ought to be done.

As a Savior Jesus has been a complete failure. He came to his own chosen people, and his own would not have him. From his coming till now, the Jews have consistently refused to accept him. Even his own family, including his mother, did not believe in him as a Savior, for they thought and said that he was beside himself, which means that he was insane. As far as we know, he never uttered a word in favor of education, or against popular errors and credulity. He never preached against slavery, or advocated the emancipation of woman. There is not a word to show that he desired to improve the social condition of the poor. The idea that the masses needed better food, better clothing, better houses, and better conditions of life does not seem to have entered into his head. He lived in cloudland, talking about his father and his kingdom. This world he despised and neglected, and taught his followers to do the same. No wonder his salvation has been such a failure. It is a huge failure still in all essential things for the social welfare of the people. For two thousand years the salvation has existed side by side with ignorance, superstition, poverty, slavery, and war, without trying to do anything seriously to remove them. What has been done, has been done outside the Church, and always at first against its bitterest opposition.

The only institution that has benefited by the supposed coming of a Savior is the Priesthood. To the priests throughout the ages it has been a very godsend of inexhaustible source of power, position, and wealth. It is so still. When that is said, about all is contained in it. Any benefit supposed to be received through the Gospel is more than counter-balanced by the ills it has wrought. As a spiritual system, if the word can be applied to it, it is little more than a tangle of absurdities and impotency. As a social message to uplift the masses, it is utterly inefficient. The good tidings and great joy is for the priests only. Its root and branches are priestly. It is absurd to suppose that God came to be a Savior in the manner related in the Gospel. It is nothing more than a priestly tale. The story is not true, and the sooner the people recognise this fact the sooner will they get rid of priestcraft, which is their greatest curse.

R. J. DERFEL.

Acid Drops.

The Bible says that the Lord slumbereth not nor sleepeth. Even if he had any inclination that way the Christians would not grant him a moment's indulgence. Just now they are committing assault and battery wholesale upon his holy ears. The Council of the Evangelical Alliance have organised the fifty-ninth annual week of prayer from the first to the seventh of January. Branches of the Christian Church all over the world are joining in "daily intercession at the Throne of Grace." And as the world keeps rolling into the daylight every minute will be occupied in the business, and the Lord will not be able to enjoy a single minute's peace. Amongst the things to be prayed against we noted "indifferentism and infidelity" and "erroneous views of some of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity." Of course they couldn't leave out "infidelity." It is the greatest crime they recognise—the sin against the Holy

Ghost. But we guess that the Lord will not sweep it back. All previous attempts have been such failures.

One of the things asked of the Lord during this week of prayer is a downright absurdity—or, if you please, an utter impossibility. God himself could not bring about "Christian unity," and as for "brotherly love" it has never been heard of amongst Christians for sixteen or seventeen hundred years. Once upon a time a Pagan cried, "How these Christians love one another." That was when they were being persecuted. Adversity made them cling together. When they became prosperous they persecuted their opponents, and hated each other.

The *Referee* is a pretentious paper which is often extremely silly. In its last number it gave prominence to "A New Year's Message" from the Rev. J. Stephen Barrass, of St. Lawrence Jewry, London, E.C. This wonderful message is very brief, so we reproduce it in full—hoping that we are not violating copyright:—

"My Message for the New Year shall be brief, but it shall appeal to imagination, fortitude, and faith. It is this: Look Out! Look In! Look Up! and Grace, Mercy, and Peace be with us all."

Probably there are some papers besides the *Referee* that would print such twaddle, but there cannot be many. Probably, too, the reverend messenger means something, if one could only find it out. We have "faith" enough to believe as much, but we have not "fortitude" enough to dig it out, nor "imagination" enough to conceive it without hard labor. It seems to us that another "Look" should be added to Mr. Barrass's list. The gospel of "Look Round!" is needed when a "message" like his can be taken so seriously.

Dr. Clifford has told a correspondent what he wishes for most that is practicable in 1905. First of all, he wishes for the immediate expulsion of the Tories from office; to which he might have added, although he was too discreet to do so, the return to office of a Liberal government pledged to give Nonconformists the control of State education. Dr. Clifford then gives the following list of desiderata:—

- "1—Principle in place of expediency.
- "2—Fair play instead of favoritism.
- "3—Liberty instead of the despotism of the Church and the beer-barrel.
- "4—Manly straightforwardness in place of trickery and deceit; and
- "5—Transparent honesty and righteousness instead of blatant Mammonism and hydra-headed wrong."

Dr. Clifford could write this sort of stuff by the hour—or the mile. It is all platitude except where it is equivocation. Suppose we asked him to do something himself for the first item in his catalogue. All who are outside his own party can see clearly enough that there is not an atom of "principle" in his attitude towards the Education Act, and that he is simply fighting for one kind of religious tyranny instead of another. Freethinkers, too, may smile at his coupling of the Church and the beer-barrel. When they couple Christianity with various social evils they can plead that they are following Dr. Clifford's example.

Miss Margarita Eager, the Englishwoman who has been in attendance on the Czarina and her children, has been interviewed by the *Daily News*. The following passage will interest our readers:—

"Their religion, you say, is a great influence?"
 "Yes, far greater than I have found anywhere else. It is part of their lives. For instance, the whole nation fasts the entire seven weeks of Lent, not to speak of several other times in the year."

With regard to the refusal of a measure of self-government, Miss Eager says: "The Czar has said 'No.' The people will say, 'It is the will of God.'" Holy Russia! No wonder the Japs are giving her a bad beating.

Outsiders are able to judge of the sincerity of the good pious Czar of Holy Russia. His wily oracular promise of greater religious liberty, in his recent Manifesto to the Senate, was followed by a special act of Czar-like toleration at Sevastopol. Eight leaders of the harmless Stundists were ordered to leave the town, as their presence was regarded as dangerous for the adherents of the Orthodox faith. Fancy! The sheep outlawed as dangerous to the wolves!

Many a true word is spoken in jest. Also the deepest truths are sometimes stammered out by children. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, a lower school boy in a recent grammar school examination wrote as follows in an essay on the Japanese: "Until recently the Japanese used to fight with bows and arrows, but now they are equipped with complete arms of a Christian."

We have been favored with a cutting from the *Northern Daily Telegraph* containing a most hysterical Christmas article. In the midst of his own lies or delusions (it doesn't matter which) the writer quotes some bombastic lines from Mr. Stephen Phillips's *Herod*, about what would happen when a certain "child" (Jesus) sat upon his throne:—

The roaring of war shall cease upon the air,
Falling of tears and all the voices of sorrow,
And he shall take the terror from the grave.

What buncombe, to be sure! The roaring of war has ceased with a vengeance! And who says there are any tears and sorrow left in the world? And where is a single Christian who is afraid of death?

Let us be just, however, to the *Northern Daily Telegraph*. It inserted an excellent letter from a "Seeker After Truth," criticising some of the arguments in its article. This is something to the good, anyhow.

Rev. J. W. Thompson, of Darwen, has been preaching on "Living and Dying Nations." He attributes the downfall of Spain to the want of moral ideals. But this is great nonsense, for the downfall of Spain was brought about by the Inquisition, which weeded out all her best and most original minds for three hundred years. As a matter of fact, the people of Spain are quite as moral as the people of England; those who know them best say they are more so. Mr. Thompson was just as accurate with regard to France. He admits that France had a fine ideal in her watchword of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," but he says that she "left out thought of God, and her ideal did not save her." Does the reverend gentleman mean that France is not as much "saved" as England? Does he mean that there is more crime, vice, poverty, and misery in France than there is in England? If he does, we can only say that he is ignorant of the facts. We beg to suggest to him that, even as a Christian apologist, he is a good deal behind the time. The French bogey is pretty well played out now.

Mr. Arthur Davenport, judging from a letter of his in a recent issue of the *Publishers' Circular*, has published an interesting volume entitled *China from Within*. The *Circular* refers to Mr. Davenport's "long residence in the Far East," so that the book is evidently written by one who knows. In the letter above mentioned the writer asserts that, instead of overstating the case against missionaries in China, he "grievously underrated" it "through a weak fear of hurting the feelings of the people." He then proceeds to summarise a portion of the case against the missionaries, and charges them with being immediately or remotely responsible for nearly all the troubles in the Far East. It was, he points out, Germany's seizure of Kiaou-Chow in consequence of the murder of "the intrusive missionaries, who had made themselves particularly offensive to the Chinese authorities and people," that led to the Russian occupation of Port Arthur, and so led to the present war. Upper Manchuria, again, was opened by the Boxer outbreak, and this, in turn, was caused by the "plundering of Pagan natives in Shantung Province by Christian converts, screened by their foreign teachers from Chinese officials." In Tibet, also, missionaries have for many years been sitting down before the frontiers waiting for an opportunity to enter, and "the Lamas resisted our expedition because they knew perfectly well that they would effect an entrance under the guise of 'traders,' and endeavor to convert their peaceful subjects into rampant Passive Resisters, looking solely to their foreign teachers as their natural leaders." The many thousands of lives lost in the "convert-raised Taiping Rebellion, the outbreak of 1870, the Boxer outbreak, may all," concludes Mr. Davenport, "be put down to the presence of missionaries in China."

Since Mr. Davenport's letter was published there has been ample time for a reply from some of the Missionary Society's highly-paid officials. Needless to say none has been forthcoming. When Mr. Cohen's pamphlet on *Foreign Missions* appeared, a leading London daily paper observed that so drastic an onslaught called for an official reply. The missionaries, however, remained dumb. It is one thing retailing their carefully-cooked figures and flowery speeches to prepared audiences; it is quite another to deal with those who have taken the trouble to become acquainted with the facts. Silence in their case is indeed golden.

The *Daily Mail* is shocked. Some people may have thought this impossible, but it has occurred. In the Drury Lane pantomime Mr. Harry Randall, in the character of a widow, refers to her fourth husband, a fireman, who has "gone to a fire he will never put out." This is terrible; and the *Daily Mail* calls for its immediate excision. It asks, in horrified tones, whether parents can safely take children to a theatre where such things may be heard. The Harms-

worth Socialist-Conservative-Liberal-pro-war-anti-military conscience has been outraged, and it has our sincere sympathy.

Dr. Stanton Coit favors us with copies of two essays of his on "England as an Organic Unit of Religious Life" and "State Ethical Society or Ethical Free Churches?" Dr. Coit is evidently a very sanguine gentleman. He sees in his mind's eye the Church of England made as broad as the nation and governed by Ethicists. Feeling that he and his friends are coming into their own, he is opposed to Dis-establishment. "The present Established Church," he says, "needs only to be nationalised, democratised, and thereby ethicised, in order to become identical with the nation." Yes, and if the sky falls we shall have larks for dinner without catching them. That "therefore" of Dr. Coit's is perfectly delicious. It does not occur to him that the multitude may stick to their supernaturalism, instead of voting for Dr. Coit's system. He is willing to put everything to the vote. So are not we. Voting is not a method of ascertaining truth. If you doubt it, consult any manual of Logic, or any book of scientific first principles. Voting is simply the popular way of deciding what shall be *done* next—when something *must* be done. It may be right, but it is just as likely to be wrong. Time alone can tell. But the law of gravitation (Newton's) or the law of natural selection (Darwin's) is true all the time, and owes none of its certainty to the number of its believers. It rests on *evidence*, which is the only basis of *truth*.

Dr. Coit does not agree with Comte as to the separation of the spiritual and temporal powers. Perhaps not; but Comte was a great thinker, and Dr. Coit is hardly in the same street.

Comte knew too much to share Dr. Coit's delusion that a Church has anything in common with a Town Council. Churches, whether established or otherwise, really rest upon certain ideas. Broad Church, High Church, and Low Church may all exist together in the Church of England; but that is no reason why the number of varieties could be increased by the addition of Ethical Church and Atheistic Church. The present parties within the Church share a few fundamental beliefs. This is an aspect of the case which Dr. Coit seems to have entirely overlooked.

There is something positively funny in Dr. Coit's reference to Secularism. "If Mr. George Jacob Holyoake and Mr. Charles Bradlaugh," he says, "instead of limiting themselves to a few minor wrongs like the blasphemy laws, had turned the forces of the Secular Society to a recognition of the Secularists as a party in the Church of England, already the Established Church would have become a National Church. There would have been no occasion for the starting of Ethical Societies outside of the Church. Ethical Societies, if there had been occasion for them, would have sprung up, as the Broad Church party has, within the bosom of the Establishment itself." We will not spoil this by any comment.

We have heard that there is not a single Christian in the *Morning Leader* editorial office. Possibly we are wrongly informed. We ought to be anyhow; for the *Morning Leader* is turning all the honest halfpennies it can over the Welsh revival business. Some of its news paragraphs are really wonderful, but we think the following takes the cake. "At Porth," we are told, "they were in a badly ventilated chapel, with no means of getting fresh air, until somebody prayed for it, when the place was purified." Evidently the *War Cry* is getting a serious rival in Stonecutter-street.

There must be a tremendous lot of Atheists in Wales. Crowds of them have been converted during the present revival, and the supply seems as good as ever. "A band of professed Atheists," the *Echo* says, "entered a revival prayer meeting at Aberkenfig with the object of protesting. Most of them remained to pray, and burnt their atheistical books when they went home." The illuminating part of this story (we mean no pun) is the burning of the atheistical books. It shows that Christians still regard the burning of books as the proper way of answering them. From that to the burning of the authors is only a step. And how soon it would be taken if these bigots had the power!

A Glamorgan correspondent tells us that the Revival game goes on merrily in his neighborhood. One chapel meeting broke up at 11.15 p.m., but the more ardent spirits were still unsatisfied, and got up an open-air meeting in one of the local squares. "The result locally," our correspondent adds, "of these late hours and neglect of feeding is an increase of the death-rate, and a tremendous increase of the sick roll; the local surgeon and his staff are worked almost

to death, owing to the current wave of insanity." Such facts as these are covered up by the ordinary press.

"Religion in 1904" was written in the *Daily News* by the Rev. H. Mann, who, of course, deals with the subject quite disinterestedly. He puffs the Welsh revival for all it is worth, and has "no hesitation in declaring emphatically that it is the work of the Divine Spirit." Right in the middle of that declaration there was a portrait of Evan Roberts with a music-hall-artist smile upon his face. The declaration and the portrait together were really rich.

"The outlook for the coming year," Mr. Mann said, "is full of promise and hope. The hard, materialistic spirit is passing away, giving place to spiritual perceptions. The attack of Blatchfordism has failed, and the consciousness of the people recognises that there is 'a God behind all, after all.' Professor Lodge, Dean Robinson, Canon Henson, Professor Fairbairn, Gipsy Smith, and Evan Roberts are all working towards the same goal." What a scratch team! But why were Torrey and Old Dowie omitted? And what price William Booth?

We referred the other day to the fact that American Spiritualists were doing business with the ghost of Colonel Ingersoll. We see from a later number of the *Progressive Thinker* that the Colonel's ghost has been on the stump again. But the old wit, wisdom, vivacity, and eloquence are gone. He now talks sheer drivel. We are bound to say, however, that this is the character of most "messages from the spirit world." And the reason of it is pretty obvious. A novelist can call any of his characters a genius; the difficulty is to make him speak like one. In the same way, any "medium" can say that he is with Ingersoll's ghost in the dark; the difficulty is to make him speak like Ingersoll. It would take another Ingersoll to do that. Of course it is the "medium" who is really responsible for the messages. Hence the drivel.

Perhaps the oddest trafficker in the utterances of Ingersoll's ghost is a ghost himself. His name is Carlyle Petersilia, and he seems to have "pal'd" on to Ingersoll in the spirit world. But as far as this world is concerned he works the spirit message business through his wife, who is a "medium" in fair practice. Two columns of this lady's talk in the name of Ingersoll, while her dead husband "manipulates the keyboard of her brain," appear in the *Progressive Thinker*, which announces more to follow. After the Ingersoll message comes a separate bit from Carlyle Petersilia. Both deliverances are in precisely the same style, and we guess the author is on this side of Jordan.

A regrettable affair took place in the colored Baptist church at Asbury Park the other Sunday. Pastor Bolen had been dismissed from the pulpit and a successor, the Rev. Dr. Bell, appointed. When Mr. Bell appeared at the sacred desk, Mr. Bolen advanced on him with a broomstick, and warned him to get out. Here a stout sister interfered, and having learned from the Rev. Mr. Bolen that he proposed to break up the meeting, smashed him on the head with a chair, bringing him to the floor. Then the other sisters piled on, and nearly divested the reverend gentleman of his clothing. Arrests for assault and battery followed, Pastor Bolen alleging that the women tried to make mincemeat of him.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

According to the *Mid-Cumberland Herald*, the Rev. Gresford Jones, of St. John's, Keswick, has been preaching a sort of Christmas sermon on the question of Who is Jesus Christ? We can answer that question in a few words. Jesus Christ is a sleeping partner in the worst business in the world. Thousands of charlatans trade under his name, and get a handsome living in this world by telling lies about the next. When we say *lies* we mean that they tell what suits their own interests without having the slightest evidence of its truth. And they do this in the name of Christ.

Father Ignatius, whose "Life" has been written by a lady admirer, ought to challenge the Chinese conjurers who are just now challenging each other. He has raised a girl from the dead; also a workman who fell from the scaffolding at Llanthony and was crushed in shapeless masses. Persons who cursed him have been stricken with idiocy or loathsome sores, or the hair has dropped out of their heads; but when they repented they were restored to their former condition. Surely a repetition of these performances, especially during the pantomime season, would bring all London at the "Father's" feet, and the Welsh revival would shrink into insignificance.

Father Ignatius sees visions. Here is the picture he gives of a demon who paid him a visit:—

"His back was three parts turned upon me, but his face was thrown over his shoulder, and I can recall its features vividly. The impression I received was instantaneous and appalling. I knew I was in presence of a demon, and I felt that he had come to torment me in my last hour. The appearance of this creature was peculiar in the extreme. In point of stature he could not have measured over four feet, and his whole frame was grotesquely square, but powerfully built. I can only describe his head as being similar to a turnip; it was over-sized, hairless, and unnatural in shape, and the face it accompanied seemed cast in the same mould. Pallid and ill-shapen it was revolting to look upon, but it was the cold malignity that it embodied which gave the real note of horror to the apparition. The hatred and triumph written on that face are impossible to express. Every second that passed, I expected the creature to leap upon me, or blast me with his breath."

That turnip-headed demon would also be a great draw.

A young woman decided that she must do something toward the spiritual and worldly welfare of her fellow-beings. So she left home and joined an order of deaconesses, and she is now engaged in impressing her acquaintances with her heroic self sacrifice. She left behind her at home; Item—An old father who has only such care and attention as servants can give him. Item—An old mother who sits lonely and bored. Item—A houseful of servants, who, through lack of guidance and direction, are learning to be dishonest, shiftless, incompetent, worthless. There are several other items.—*Saturday Evening Post* (Philadelphia).

There is an harmonium on board the Nore Lightship. It was presented by a missionary, with a view to hymns. The "hands" use it for playing jolly tunes, to which they can dance and jig. We congratulate them on their good taste. Their job is solemn enough without the aid of "sacred" music.

Mr. Samuel Lloyd, one of the lite Governors of the British and Foreign Bible Society, is getting ready "The Corrected English New Testament." This does not mean that he is going to correct all the mistakes in the New Testament: so little of it would be left. His aim is to produce a work "which shall be essentially English, and not only everywhere intelligible and unequivocal in meaning, but also in literary form as attractive as possible to the mass of readers." Why not say at once that he wants to bring out a *Daily Mail* New Testament? And how on earth is he going to make the New Testament "essentially English"? As a matter of fact, it is essentially Oriental. Fasting, miracle-working, and ghost-generated babies never were "essentially English," and never will be.

John Rogers was a Primitive Methodist local preacher in the Wem circuit. He was also a ganger, working on the line between Welshampton and Ellesmere. While he was at his job a train dashed into him, hurled him down the embankment, and killed him instantaneously. It is thought that the high wind prevented him from hearing the approaching train, and "Providence" took no more care of him than if he had been a Secular lecturer.

Labor members appear to be delivering Pleasant Sunday Afternoon addresses in the old Trade Hall, Melbourne. Mr. H. Scott-Bennett delivered one of them on the Significance of Evolution. When he hinted that the ancestral form from which the monkey sprang was also that of man, a storm of dissent arose. One old lady vehemently cried out "No, no!" as though she had a special personal interest in the matter, and a stalwart working man got up and stalked out of the hall. Later on, when the lecturer said something disrespectful of revealed religion, and advised his auditors to study the subject, the old lady shouted, "Then we should all be freethinkers." We believe she was right. That old lady was no fool.

Old Dowie is proud of his patriarchal beard—which is probably one of the principal causes of his success. He thinks that other men should be similarly adorned, and has been preaching on the subject at Zion City. He seems to believe that God gave men beards to protect their throats from the cold. But, in that case, why was woman denied the hirsute appendage? There seems a weakness in Dowie's argument somewhere.

Music is another of Old Dowie's bugbears. Above all, he hates Wagner, whose music is "the music of hell." Is this because Wagner was an Atheist? Or is it because Dowie hates what he does not understand—and mortally abominates opposition?

Mr. Foote's Lecturing Engagements.

Sunday, January 8, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W., 7.30 p.m., "What Japan's Victory Means."
January 15, Queen's Hall; 22, Glasgow; 29, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road Leyton.—January 8, Camberwell; 15, Forest Gate; 22, Queen's Hall.
- 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.
- WORKING MINER.—We regret that we are unable to answer your question as to whether Mr. Deifel is a Welshman or has ever lived in Wales. There is not a word of truth in the Roman Catholic denial of the martyrdom of Bruno and the imprisonment of Galileo. The champions of that Church will say anything. Why did they wait three hundred years before denying these infamies? They are simply lying in order to escape the condemnation of the world's conscience.
- N. D.—Thanks for cuttings and good wishes. Yes, it would be well if the *Freethinker* could command the resources so easily obtained by the pious editor you refer to.
- THOMAS KEIRLE.—We see no reason for criticising Mr. Gould's articles in other journals. If you object to anything that appears over his name in our own columns, we may find room for what you have to say. What you tell us of South Wales agrees with what we have heard from other sources. A good many Freethinkers live there, in spite of the present revival; and we wish, with you, that they were better organised. Accept our thanks for your personal good wishes.
- L. CONDON.—Your order is passed over to the proper hands. Kindly send future orders direct to the Freethought Publishing Company.
- S. G. RUDLER (Liverpool).—Your type-written letter is rather out of our line. We feel about the Catholics and Protestants very much as Iago felt about Cassio and Roderigo.
- X. Y. Z.—Thanks for the reference.
- T. FOUNDALL.—Copies shall be posted as desired. Thanks. We hope your good wishes on behalf of the *Freethinker* will be realised.
- JOHN HOLNESS.—Pleased to receive your letter. We note your suggestion that every reader of the *Freethinker* should commemorate the editor's birthday (Jan. 11) by taking two copies (or more) and giving them away to persons likely to wish to see the paper again; by which means, you believe, our circulation might be considerably increased. But the difficulty is that we have to print a definite number of copies, and we cannot foresee how many readers would follow your advice. Still, we dare say there will be enough to meet the actual demand.
- G. L. MACKINNON.—Thanks for cuttings. Paper sent as desired.
- F. BONTE writes: "Herewith is cheque to help on the mission against the Yankee revivalist. May you extinguish him at the same time. I am happy to wish you a prosperous new year with fifty more to follow. With deep admiration for your work, your writings, and your character, I remain yours very sincerely." We would not have printed the last sentence, but when malicious tongues wag against us it is just as well to let them see now and then that "there are others"—of the opposite sort.
- A. HURCUM sends cheque "to add to the fund for fighting a degrading superstition," and says it is the first of many he hopes to contribute.
- G. A. ALDRED.—Thanks for your offer to assist in distributing our intended publications at Dr. Torrey's meetings.
- F. S. writes: "I have pleasure in forwarding herewith cheque for £5 towards the Fund you are seeking to raise in your laudable effort to expose the slanders of that mountebank (Torrey) against our illustrious dead. It is to be hoped that the friends of our movement will respond readily and liberally to the appeal made by you, as it is of the utmost importance that the 'enemy' should not be allowed to have everything their own way, if we can possibly, in some degree, however slight, prevent them."
- W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always very welcome.
- A. HEMSLEY.—Sent as requested. Thanks for good wishes.
- H. EAGERS.—Mr. Blatchford is dealing with some of his critics himself, so we leave him to answer (if he will) the Rev. T. W. Holmes, of Sheffield. Glad to hear you admire the *Freethinker* articles and so much enjoy reading "Acid Drops"; also that you think *Bible Romances* and *Bible Heroes* "splendid." It is pleasant to find that our writings have been as helpful as you represent them in your case.
- A. DWIGHT.—Your suggestion is a good one, but we could not undertake to carry it out at present. We hope you will often have "the great pleasure" of hearing us lecture again, and that you may long be a reader of the *Freethinker*.
- W. JONES.—Thanks. See paragraph.
- A SCOTCH FRIEND writes: "It affords me pleasure to send you £10 on behalf of your Torrey Mission. I hope your ideas regarding it may meet with success."

- H. LUPTON, subscribing to our Anti-Torrey Mission Fund, says: "I think the idea excellent and hope the 'saints' will shell out handsomely."
- T. J. THURLOW.—We appreciate your good wishes.
- C. PAINE.—Thanks for the cuttings, though we cannot use them in the present issue.
- H. FERGUSON.—We cannot say exactly when; you must look out for it.
- THE LADY (as we judge by the writing) who sends us a letter on "Friendship and Freethinkers," but does not give her name and address, is reminded that both should be given—not necessarily for publication, but as a pledge of good faith.
- G. J. WHITE.—If you are "neither saint nor sinner" you are like most people. Of course we only use "saints" jocularly in relation to Freethinkers. We were not born to go through the world with an everlasting long face.
- W. P. PEARSON hopes our plan of campaign against the Torrey Mission will be as successful as that of the Japs. "I was delighted," this correspondent writes, "with your article on the Graves of Keats and Shelley, and am looking forward to the concluding instalment with great eagerness. I had been waiting almost impatiently for it to appear since you mentioned it in your articles on the Rome Congress."
- J. SHIPP.—You may rely on our "giving him a good trouncing."
- WELL-WISHER (Leicester).—Glad to have your encouraging letter.
- PITMAN.—Pleased to hear that you regard the *Freethinker* as your "weekly treat." Thanks for addresses. We will think over the other matter.
- EDITH M. VANCE, secretary of the National Secular Society, desires to state that her letter in last week's *Reynolds's Newspaper* was very badly "edited." On comparing the copy of her letter in its original form with what appeared over her signature in our contemporary, we are bound to say that she appears to have good ground for complaint. We cannot see why editors should omit what correspondents do write and make them responsible for what they do not write. The letter to which Miss Vance replied was a gratuitous attack upon the N. S. S. and a gross personal insult to herself; and a woman's answer to a man's insults (and such a man!) ought not to be "edited" into sheer silliness.
- 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.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

A Mission Against a Mission.

I AM appealing to Freethinkers to make the most, from their own point of view, of the approaching "Torrey Mission" in London. It will be a unique opportunity. The *Daily Mail* describes it as "the most important mission of modern times." The Albert Hall has been engaged for two months; we are told that "support is forthcoming from all sects," that "we are on the brink of a great religious movement," that the cost of this Mission will be £17,000, and that £12,000 has been raised already.

Freethinkers are not asked to find £17,000 for a counter-mission. I invite them to subscribe a modest sum to defray the cost of printing two pamphlets which I am preparing, and which I propose to distribute, as numerous as my resources permit, amongst the crowds who will be drawn to the Albert Hall.

One of these pamphlets—the one I really care most about—will expose Dr. Torrey's vile slanders on the characters of Thomas Paine and Colonel Ingersoll. The other will show that Dr. Torrey's teaching as to the Bible is contradicted by the leading men in the Churches that are promoting or countenancing his Mission.

If we can get a lot of the people who hear Dr. Torrey to see that he is a foul libeller; that he

sticks at nothing to defame the opponents of his faith; and that, in addition, he is preaching doctrines which the better-informed and more intelligent clergy have abandoned, we shall do something to open the eyes of these people and set them thinking.

I believe in the policy of striking the iron when it is hot. We cannot create great opportunities; we can only seize them when they present themselves. And that is what I propose to do in this instance.

I want to get these pamphlets printed in good time; and, as the size of them must depend upon the resources I see that I can command, I have to ask those who mean to subscribe to do so as early as possible. The principal part of the expense will be the cost of the paper and the machining; the setting up of the type is the same whatever number of copies may be printed. Consequently I have to calculate how much I can devote to the former, as against how much I can devote to the latter; and this calculation is nothing but guess-work in the absence of actual figures.

Now, as always, however, I shall do my best; and, if necessary, I shall trust to later subscriptions making it possible to continue the distribution of these pamphlets to the very end of the Mission.

Freethinkers, especially young ones, who can and will assist voluntarily in this distribution, are invited to communicate with me. Probably there will have to be some paid service as well, but I am anxious to keep down the cost as far as I can.

Naturally there will be attempts to stop our distributors. But they need not feel any anxiety on that account. I am not quite ignorant of the law, I will advise them how to act, and I will support them properly against any interference.

G. W. FOOTE.

Subscriptions Received by Tuesday, January 3, 1905:—

A Scotch Friend £10, F. S. £5, R. Tarlton 2s., D. Gillespie 5d., A. Richter 5s. 9d., H. Lupton 5s., W. P. Pearson 1s., Dr. R. T. Nicholls 10s., G. Lunn 2s. 6d., J. Shipp 2s., F. Bonte £2 5s. 7d.

Sugar Plums.

The Queen's (Minor) Hall has been engaged for three Sunday evening lectures in January; Mr. Foote taking the first and second, and Mr. Cohen the third. Mr. Foote's subject this evening (Jan. 8) is "What Japan's Victory Means." He will deal with it chiefly, though not wholly, from a Freethought point of view. What he has to say should be of especial interest to Freethinkers, and not without interest to the general public. It is hoped that the hall will be crowded on this occasion. Admission will be free, as usual, with reserved front seats at one shilling. Miss Vance will be in attendance with tickets for the Annual Dinner, which she will be happy to supply to the "saints" who are not already provided.

Neither posters nor handbills of this course of Queen's Hall lectures will be issued. There will be no announcement of them except in the *Freethinker* and other weekly papers. But our London friends are requested to advertise the meetings amongst their personal acquaintances, or in other judicious ways that experience may suggest. We rely upon them to do their best in this direction.

On Tuesday evening (Jan. 10) takes place the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the National Secular Society's Executive. It is timed for 7.30 p.m. at the Holborn Restaurant. The repast is sure to be a good one at that establishment, and we think we may promise that the brief speeches and vocal and instrumental music to follow will be of the same description. Mr. G. W. Foote will preside, and will be supported by Mr. C. Cohen, Mr. John Lloyd, Mr. Victor Roger, and other well-known Freethinkers. The details, of course, are in the capable hands of Miss E. M. Vance, the N. S. S. secretary. We hope there will be a strong rally of London "saints," with any provincial ones that happen to be in town, so that the new year may open in a thoroughly encouraging manner.

The West Ham Branch of the N.S.S. interluded its winter course of indoor lectures by well-known Freethought lecturers at the Radical Hall, Forest Gate, with a vocal, dramatic, and instrumental entertainment on New Year's night, the local Secularists supplying all the necessary talent to enable the "saints" to spend a most delightful evening. The Misses Pankhursts and Miss Chapman, Mr. Quinton of the N.S.S. Executive, and Masters Quinton and Thurlow as instrumentalists, Mr. Marshall and friends in a most interesting dramatic sketch, Mr. Rosseti and friends as vocalists, one and all received the well-deserved applause of a full house.

Another convert from the Church of Rome! Mr. Ignatius McNulty is a Freethought convert of some two years' standing. He has devoted himself with considerable skill and energy to the outdoor propaganda of Freethought in Glasgow. This evening (Jan. 8) he is to step upon the indoor platform. He is going to address the local "saints," and as many of the general public as attend, on "Why I Left the Church of Rome." The history of his mental change should be interesting and attractive. We hope the Secular Hall will be full.

It is not exactly a "Sugar Plum" but it is connected with one, and we have to bring it in here. We much regret to learn that Mr. H. Percy Ward is laid up and will be unable to lecture for a week or two. Mr. Schweizer kindly took Mr. Ward's place at Liverpool on Sunday evening. This afternoon and evening (Jan. 8) the platform will be occupied by Mr. Harold Elliot, of Manchester, who will deliver his first lecture to a Branch of the N. S. S. Admission will be free, and there should be a good audience to give the new-comer a welcome.

Mr. Edward Clodd got one of the last letters into the *Daily Telegraph* "Do We Believe?" controversy. He opened by saying that "the knell of Christianity as a revealed religion" is struck whenever Jowett's counsel is acted upon to "interpret the Scriptures like any other book." He then goes on to show that all the special claims have been refuted, and declares that the question "Do We Believe?" must be met by another question, "What is there left to believe?" Finally, he says that the only solution of the problem left to man "will be found in the transfer of ethical creeds from a theological to a social base, so that all conduct is resolved into the duty which each man owes to his fellow, and all to the society of which they are units." Good! This is what the poor despised Secularists have been preaching for fifty years.

All active "advanced" people should possess a copy of that wonderful shillingworth *The Reformers' Year-Book*, which is edited by F. W. Pethick Lawrence and Joseph Edwards, and is now published by the London *Echo*. It is crammed with all sorts of useful information. To say what it contains would be an endless task; the difficulty is to say what it does not contain. We are lost in amazement at its completeness, and staggered at the amount of careful labor it has involved. Under the heading of "Books of the Year" we find the following:—"Bible Romances. G. W. Foote. Examines the stories and incidents in a readable, reasonable way; useful and well-written. Revised and enlarged edition. 144 pp. 6d. net. Secular Society, Ltd." This is simply one of thousands of items in this valuable publication. The 1905 edition ought to circulate in myriads.

We are glad to see our protest against the "editing" of a certain sixpennyworth of Ingersoll backed up in the New York *Truthseeker*. "This 'pirated' edition of Ingersoll," our American contemporary says, "is published with a patronising, not to say apologetic, preface by Charles T. Gorham, who having sat in judgment on the propriety of placing Ingersoll's writings before the British public, informs the reader that a few passages have been omitted 'as being unduly vehement in expression.' There is no measuring the self-possession of some persons elevated to the tripod."

The following excellent letter appeared in the *Daily Mirror*: we reproduce it as a good model for Freethinkers who may feel moved to write to the newspapers on religious questions:—

"WHY DECEMBER THE 25TH?"

"May I be allowed to answer Alfred Pearce, who asks, why December 25 is recognised as the birthday of Jesus?"

"Before the advent of Christianity December 25 was the day of universal Pagan celebration of the new birth of the sun.

"When Constantine embraced Christianity he would not forego this annual date of rejoicing, and the Church seeing

the futility of trying to abolish the institution, succumbed, and, making a virtue of necessity, audaciously transformed it into a Christian festival. "HERBERT P. HUNTER."

The gist of the whole matter is there.

We are still sending free copies of the *Freethinker* to likely persons whose addresses are supplied to us by our readers, and in many cases we have secured fresh subscribers. We shall be glad to receive further lists of such addresses, if our friends will kindly send them along. They can help us in this way at next to no expense to themselves: just a little thought and the cost of a letter.

May we also ask our readers to send us the names and addresses of the local newsagents from whom they obtain the *Freethinker*? More particularly our provincial readers. We are making a special effort in the new year to get at "the trade."

Religion and Morality.

WHEN the apologist or defender of Christianity and religion generally is out-argued on every other point he usually falls back upon the contention that religious belief is necessary, because if we remove the supernatural motive as an incentive to virtue and morality it would be merely a question of time when our civilisation would ignominiously collapse, and the entire human race subside into primitive barbarism and anarchy.

The maintenance of this position involves the assumption—as we think, the entirely gratuitous and unwarrantable assumption—that ordinary men and women would be unable, or would decline, to keep their passions and their animal appetites in subjection if they were not cowed by the vague terrors of a future life, with its concomitant rewards and punishments.

Are we wrong in supposing that the very people who thus advance what they consider is an overwhelming argument in favour of upholding the religious bogey or supernatural scarecrow would vehemently repel the suggestion that *they themselves* could not do without it, and must incontinently lapse into vice and crime if their belief in a future life be destroyed?

We hardly think that even the most confirmed believer in the necessity of Christian faith as a prop for morality would admit that nothing but his love for God or his fear of eternal punishment prevented him from committing adultery, or murder, or theft, or highway robbery, or any other of the various acts that civilised society agrees in recognising as inimical to its well-being. Every educated and intelligent individual would keenly resent any such aspersion on the stability of his virtue. Such being the case, we must infer that the man of this type, who is nervous regarding the ultimate result of the spread of the gospel of Secularism, is not anxious for himself but for others. Which is very good and thoughtful of him—if a trifle Pharisaical. It is, forsooth, the poor, ignorant, and naturally vicious common people whose welfare he is solicitous about. They are at present kept in hand with immense difficulty by the clerical brigade, backed up by the terrors of hell; and they would immediately proceed to discard all the restraints of decency and order, or, in vulgar parlance, "play old Harry" all round, if the supernatural stimulus to moral rectitude were withdrawn.

Before considering what likelihood there is of any such state of affairs arising out of the triumph of Rationalism over Supernaturalism, it may be advisable to point out that our conception of morality may not coincide with that cherished by the adherents of the Churches. Much of what Church Christianity stigmatizes as sinful does not concern the Rationalist in the slightest degree. We do not include under the term immorality offences against an abstract entity called God. Sin, as understood by the theologian, is outwith our mental purview. Morals are relative, not positive. Man, considered as an isolated unit, can be neither moral nor immoral. He can

only be *unmoral*. It is when a species of relationship is set up as between man and man that the question of morality arises, and it is quite conceivable that what would be regarded as a moral action in a certain state of society would not be so looked upon under other conditions. Morality may be defined as a system or practice of the duties of life, and amongst these duties of life the Secularist has no room for any supposed obligations towards a putative supernatural being, with whom it is impossible for man to enter into an intelligible relationship.

As Edward Clodd puts it, "The bases of right and wrong lie in conduct towards one's fellows; the moral sense or conscience is the outcome of social relations, themselves the outcome of the need of living." Holding these views, and believing that "the moral code advances with the progress of the race"; holding also that "conscience is a growth" and has not been implanted in man by some external supernatural agency, we are forced to smile incredulously when well-meaning people tell us that if you demolish belief in the supernatural a recrudescence of crime and immorality is a necessary consequence.

Are these people so foolish as to imagine that law and order, and civilisation generally, are dependent in this country on the maintenance of belief in the divine origin of the ten commandments, or the doctrine of eternal hell-fire? That undoubtedly is what their contention implies. Yet it should seem that those who advance such an argument are unable to properly discriminate between cause and effect.

What, in the last analysis, is the reason we agree to regard murder, for instance, as a crime punishable by law? We know very well that it is not because the so-called Mosaic decalogue tells us we must not kill. Apart from religious considerations altogether, what we call wilful murder is—and must remain—an illegal and immoral act because it constitutes an offence against society. And this that we call a crime against society resolves itself, when we examine it closely, into an amplification of the fundamental natural law—the law of self-preservation. In plain language, we, as individuals, set our faces against homicide, and maintain the inviolable sanctity of human life, because if we did not we could not hold our own lives secure. If we allowed another man to be assassinated without our attempting to bring the perpetrator of the deed to account, there would be no guarantee whatever for our own immunity from a similar bloody and sudden end.

Here we have, put baldly and crudely, the true genesis of the modern antipathy to murder. It is not an ethical idea that has been dumped down in some strange way from the skies. It arose out of the necessities of the case. Man, by slow and painful degrees, grew into a conception of the truth that his life and liberty as an individual could only be adequately and permanently conserved by enforcing a due consideration for the lives and liberties of others. Our present-day repugnance to taking the life of another has developed in a simple and natural manner from its primary conception till it reached the level of a moral sentiment. It was equally natural that when a systematic theology began to take shape, when the idea of a place of future reward and punishment began to take root in the minds of men—it was equally natural that any deed (such as murder) which was subversive of the well-being of humanity would be accorded the doubtful distinction of being considered deserving of hell-fire.

The average man, unfortunately, very seldom thinks of studying the evolution of ethics, or inquiring into the origin of the laws, customs, and conventions of civilised society. He has heard repeatedly from priests and their followers that Christianity and civilisation are practically convertible terms. He has been assured by the same disinterested parties that morality would be non-existent were it not for God Almighty popping out from behind the clouds every now and again in the world's history in order to keep man on the rails. As a consequence he is slow to recognise the fact

that what we have achieved in the way of elevating our moral standard—deficient though it may yet be—has originated from within and not from without; that it has been achieved by man himself at the cost of thousands of years of pain and suffering. We have still a long row to hoe; but for what we have achieved let us give praise where it is due—not beyond the skies, but down here below.

What has been written regarding murder applies also to every other immoral act—using the word immoral in its rational, not its theological, sense—condemned by all right-thinking members of society. In the ultimate resort, and quite irrespective of any love for your neighbor, you object to robbery in general because you have no wish to be robbed yourself. It is not a question of altruistic feeling, or reverence for God, or desire of heaven, or fear of hell: the instinct of the rights of property had evolved itself long before these ideas had any influence on human thought and action, and it will survive the overthrow of the supernatural order. Similarly you are constrained to acquiesce in the punishment by law of anyone who sets fire to your neighbor's house, not because you detest the incendiary, or have any warm affection for your neighbor, but simply because, if such things could be done with impunity, you could not rest in your own bed at night with any confidence that you would see the morning.

From the primitive germ of instinctive individualism the higher social instinct has emerged, purely as a logical and natural sequence. Our existing code of law and ethics is the result of unceasing efforts on the part of man to adjust, on a reasonable basis, the mutual relations that subsist between the man as a unit and the great bulk of his fellow-creatures. No one will pretend that perfection has been reached in this process of adjustment; but, in spite of occasional retrograde motions, the course is ever onward and upward. Priests and preachers would have us believe that morality dates from the melodramatic promulgation of the law in thunder and lightning on Mount Sinai; and, to judge from the vehemence with which they insist that religion is essential to the maintenance of the moral standard, they would have us infer that nothing but the power of the religious ideal prevents us from reverting to the methods of our cave ancestors. So effectually does the religious bias blind men to the fact that the principles of evolution are applicable in the mental and moral sphere no less than in the organic world.

Though all the churches, chapels, and mission-halls in Europe were to be closed to-morrow, should we not hold to what we have won? Will the discarding of our belief in God, in heaven, and in hell, bring down the entire fabric of established law, order, and morality? Are we likely to make shipwreck of our humanitarian ideals, our ethical aspirations, and our zeal for the truth and the right, merely because we have lost faith in the existence of some mysterious entity who will some day reward us if we are good or punish us if we are bad? These suggestions are so absurd as to carry with them their own refutation. The religious motive is only one of the incentives to moral conduct; and the fundamental necessity for upholding a high moral standard would remain untouched by the entire elimination of the religious idea. The aspiration towards a loftier ethical standpoint has been engendered in the mind and consciousness of man in response to the "felt need of human beings living in society," and man may be safely trusted to cherish and develop that aspiration. Whatever may happen to the churches, we will not go back, either physically or morally, to the level of the Stone Age.

But—and here the supporter of religion interjects—it is all very well for the philosopher and the scientific moralist to talk in this strain. They have developed what may be called an intellectual virtue, and can walk soberly, cleanly, and justly, without the aid of religious crutches. You have forgotten the degraded, innately vicious lower classes. What is to become of them and their morality if you

restrain us from holding before their eyes the terror of what lies beyond the tomb? To such we would reply that we do not think you are going the right way about elevating the masses of the people when you appeal to their craven fear of the supernatural. Christianity has been playing that game for a considerable time now, and what has she made by it?

But—again urges the believer in the fire and brimstone argument—it is of no use appealing to the lower strata of the population on high ethical grounds. Their minds are simply incapable of appreciating the beauty of the practice of morality for its own sake. You can only attain immediate practical results by frightening them into reforming their lives.

We need not pause here to consider whether "conversions" brought about by methods of terrorism have any real or permanent value. Admitting for the moment that there is no other practicable way of raising the souls of the unfortunate "masses" from their slothful and perilous state than by working on their ignorant dread of the unknown—do Christians realise where such an admission unavoidably leads to? It really means a surrender of the whole case to Rationalism. For this is just what many Freethinkers have been contending all along with regard to supernatural religion—that it may be admirably suited to a certain type of intellect, and may have its uses at a certain stage of human progress, but that the spread of true education and enlightenment and an altered environment, will ultimately render the supernatural motive totally unnecessary as an incentive to real morality. Even the proletariat is learning to stand erect without theological crutches.

G. SCOTT.

Book Chat.

Now that Mr. George Meredith has taken his proper place in English literature, it is perhaps natural that critics should quarrel as to which of them "discovered" him and "lifted him into popularity." We say it is perhaps natural, but we cannot say it is edifying. For, after all, the sun rises with or without his trumpeters, and Mr. Meredith would have come to his own with or without the aid of his critics in the public journals. Many of these gentlemen are but parasites of literature who live by discussing the merits of their betters; but one may be found here and there who has brains and conscience, and is really concerned to introduce his readers to good things that they might otherwise miss. It is an excellent thing to promote the perusal of neglected genius, or to protest against an exaggerated reputation which has become harmful. But the value of such work is, at the best, only temporary. Sooner or later all reputations get settled by the law of gravitation.

* * *

We saw an amusing passage in the *Athenæum* of December 24, in a review of Mr. James Douglas's book on *Theodore Watts-Dunton*. Mr. Douglas claims that it was Mr. Watts-Dunton who first prominently praised George Meredith, in an *Athenæum* article on *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*, under date of July 28, 1883. "After this," Mr. Douglas says, "appeared articles appreciative of Mr. Meredith's prose fiction by W. E. Henley and others. But it was Mr. Watts-Dunton who led the way." But this is not correct, even in relation to the *Athenæum*; for it is pointed out by that journal that Mr. Henley's article on *The Egoist* appeared as the first article in its columns on November 1, 1879; and it is said that "this, much more than Mr. Watts-Dunton's, was a challenge to public indifference on behalf of a new or not recognised force."

* * *

This is a very pretty quarrel as it stands, and we are loth to spoil it—but we must. We beg to point out, first of all, that Mr. Swinburne's brilliant eulogy on George Meredith appeared in the *Spectator* as far back as June 7, 1862. And to talk of either Mr. Henley or Mr. Watts-Dunton as the first to "prominently praise" George Meredith, as far forward as 1879 or 1883, is ineffably absurd. These mutual idolators of criticism should really try to scratch each others' backs in public a little less ridiculously.

* * *

Nothing so fine as Mr. Swinburne's eulogy on George Meredith as a poet has appeared since. But it may be said

that Mr. Henley, in 1879, praised George Meredith as a prose writer. Yes, but that was done by others before him; notably by James Thomson ("B. V.") in 1876.

Thomson was an Atheist, and his splendid criticism of George Meredith appeared in a journal which, considering its principles and the orthodox traditions as to such organs, should have been a brutal, illiterate production. Its name was the *Secularist*; it was edited by the present writer, and James Thomson was one of its regular contributors. While the general Christian world was treating a man of magnificent genius with consummate neglect, the Freethought world was acclaiming the brilliant apparition. Two superb passages from *Vittoria* (now *Sandra Belloni*) were printed in the *Secularist* of March 4, 1876, under the headings of "Portrait of Mazzini" and "Mazzini and Italy." There was an editorial note to the former. "This splendid portrait of Mazzini," it said, "in all the highest qualities of imaginative prose absolutely unexcelled, is the work of a great though comparatively unknown genius, like Shelley's poet 'hidden in the light of thought.' It shows the great patriot's spirit through fleshly lineaments, like a painted portrait by some master-hand in the glorious zenith of Italian art." Three months later, on June 3, appeared James Thomson's review, extending to more than seven columns, of *Beauchamp's Career*. The introductory part of it, being a careful criticism of the novelist's genius, style, and general characteristics, was included by Thomson as "A Note on George Meredith" in the prose collection called *Essays and Phantasies*, published in 1881—which was still two years before the publication of Mr. Watts-Dunton's article in the *Athenæum*.

Thomson's criticism of George Meredith will hardly bear piecemeal quotation. But the opening sentence is significant and may be reproduced by itself. "Mr. Meredith," he wrote, "stands among our living novelists much as Robert Browning until of late years stood among our living poets, quite unappreciated by the general public, ranked with the very highest by a select few." And it is enough to say that the rest of the article gave reasons for ranking George Meredith "with the very highest."

Four years later, on June 29, 1880, Thomson met George Meredith for the first time, spending the day with him at Dorking. Writing to a friend, Thomson called it "a real red-letter day in all respects," and spoke of his host as "one of those personalities who need fear no comparisons with their best writings."

Very likely we have given the question raised by Mr. Douglas and the *Athenæum* more attention than it was worth. But it is always pleasant to say anything (in reason) about George Meredith; and it is always well to say a word on behalf of an unpopular writer like James Thomson. Men of his uncompromising sincerity are easily kept under a cloud, while smaller men practise the noble art of log-rolling, and keep the public eye upon them by judicious inter-advertising.

Correspondence.

FREETHINKERS AND MARRIAGE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—There may be some truth in the explanation which your correspondent "Juverna" offers as to the non-success of "X" in his love adventure. She counsels pluck and determination. "X" will have to try again. I sometimes think that the words of the Apostle Paul, if slightly amended, would form a good text in the Gospel of Getting-on. It might read—"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and have not 'cheek,' I am nothing." Or as another text might be parodied, "And above all things put on 'cheek.'" "Cheek" is needed in every department of life.

It may be that "X" is, as "Juverna" supposes him, a diffident and retiring sort of individual; but he is quite right in saying that the matrimonial chances of the average Christian are very much better than those of the average Freethinker, and that it is desirable that the Freethinker's chances should be improved. At ordinary Freethought lectures the men invariably outnumber the women in the proportion of at least ten to one, while at church and chapel services the women largely outnumber the men. However highly Freethinking women may be esteemed, it is perfectly clear that there are not enough of them to go round, if each Freethinking man is to get one. If Freethinkers are to get wives, they must perforce get some of them among the religionists.

That being the state of matters and the Freethinkers being at a disadvantage, what would you say to having a column, or a page of matrimonial advertisements? If Freethinkers cannot get Freethinking wives, the next best thing would be to get other women, intelligent, amiable, good-looking, healthy, and wealthy; and if Freethinkers got these, the Freethought movement would be strengthened. If the women were amiable, the Freethinkers would have a chance of domestic happiness; if the women were intelligent, it is not unlikely they might become Freethinkers; and if they were also wealthy, it is very likely that the Freethought movement would eventually benefit. A column of matrimonial advertisements might be an interesting feature of your journal.

At one time there was, and there may still be, a *Matrimonial Herald*, the organ of an agency established to promote marriages. From a copy of that journal fully fifteen years old, I find that the proprietors claimed to have successfully negotiated a large number of marriages among the aristocracy. They say "Many gentlemen may be so situated that, although their circle of friends may be extensive, they do not know one lady who exactly answers their requirements. An application to this agency may confidently be relied on to obviate this difficulty, for we have all the world to choose from." "The community labours under many restrictions which debar a large proportion of its components from coming into contact, and the only reasonable solution of the difficulty is that afforded by an agency of this kind. It is our business to adjust the requirements of those whose opportunities do not reach the level of their desires." This business the proprietor of this matrimonial agency offered to do on terms which were fairly stiff. They charged for advertisements at so much per word, for introductions at so much each, with an addition of so much per cent. on the fortunes of those who were married through those introductions.

The copy of this matrimonial journal from which I quote contains several hundred advertisements, which, if they were genuine, must have paid the proprietors very well; while, if marriages resulted, it must have paid them still better, and been indeed a highly profitable business.

As to whether marriage by advertisement is likely to turn out well or ill, I can only say that my experience is limited to one case in which the parties were said to have been introduced through an advertisement. In that case both parties were very superior persons, had a happy married life, and are now both dead. They were not Freethinkers.

On the whole, I incline to think that a Matrimonial Bureau in connection with the Freethinking movement might be beneficial both to the Freethinkers and the movement.

ONE WHO HAS MISSED THE POST.

AN OBSTRUCTION.

A book seems but a slight thing to bar the way; but multiplied by millions and millions, and desperately defended as divine and infallible by legions of zealots, it constitutes a far more formidable barricade than the stoutest church of stone. The various sects of Nonconformists, who all join with us in attacking the State Church, will all join the Churchmen to maintain against us their common fetish, the Bible. Regarding this as a human production, there is much of it which we highly esteem; but regarded as the Word of God, it works far more evil than good, and the evil is ever increasing while the good decreases; for the revelations of science grow ever more clear, and men must more and more strain their consciences and sophisticate their intellects in order to believe that they believe in the super-human character of the book which reason and science show to be thoroughly human.—James Thomson ("B. V.")

Substance and Spirit.

Two worlds there are, the seen and the unseen,

And yet these two in seeming are but one;

Spirit and substance there's no bar between;

Save such as thought sophistical has spun:

Substance is spirit made manifest to sight,

The secret truth symbolically shown,

The finite bodying forth the infinite,

The known by which we apprehend th' unknown:

Without the other each of them were naught,

Since neither can be known without the other:

How without substance could thought think of thought,

Or substance know himself without his brother?

Twin brethren they, born at a single birth,

Alike in greatness and alike in worth.

B. D.

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.

QUEEN'S (Minor) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "What Japan's Victory Means."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, 61 New Church-road): 3.15, Religious Freethought Parliament: D. Howell Smith, B.A., "Matter and Spirit"; 6, Business Meeting; 7.30, C. Cohen, "Some Old Problems with Modern Answers."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): 7.30, W. Gregory, "Babylon and Genesis."

FULHAM ETHICAL SOCIETY (Fulham Palace-road Council School): 7, Dennis Hird (Principal of Ruskin College, Oxford), "Evolution: What It Is, and What It Means to Progress."

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): 5, Tea and Social Party. Thursday, Jan. 12, at the Bull Ring Coffee House, at 8, a Paper by a Member.

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

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Discussion Class. Open discussion; 6.30, Ignatius McNulty, "Why I Left the Church of Rome." Musical Selections from 6 to 6.30.

GLASGOW RATIONALIST AND ETHICAL ASSOCIATION (319 Sauchiehall-street): 3.30, Children's Sunday School.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): Harold Elliott, 3, "Christianity Reconsidered; or, How I Became a Secularist"; 7, "Thomas Paine." Monday, at 8, Rationalist Debating Society: J. Arnold Sharpley, "Walt Whitman: A Singer to Comrades and Lovers."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): 6.30, Percy Redfern, "The Real Soul and the Real God."

OLDHAM SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Institute, Bankside-street): 7, J. Lester, "Divinity of Jesus" (negative). Saturday, Jan. 7, at 7, Social and Dance.

SHEFFIELD SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall of Science, Rockingham-street): 7, Willie Dyson, "Mr. T. W. Holmes and R. Blatchford: A Sidelight on Critical Malpractices."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation School-room, Market-place): 7.30, "1904-5: Past and Future."

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