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*Where lies the final harbor, whence we unmoor no more? In what rapt ether sails the world, of which the weariest will never weary? Where is the foundling's father hidden? Our souls are like those orphans whose unwedded mothers die in bearing them; the secret of our paternity lies in the grave, and we must there to learn it.*

—HERMAN MELVILLE.

## An Apologetic Bogey.

MR. MALLOCK'S just issued *Reconstruction of Belief* will not be likely to enhance his reputation among any class of readers, save such as are ready to accept any apologetic so long as it is offered in defence of religious beliefs. His criticism of current religious beliefs is concerned with very obvious faults; while the discussion of non-religious scientific views turns far too much upon the mere verbal representation of these views by certain well-known writers. So much so, that a mere change of language by these men, involving no change whatever in their fundamental position, would render nugatory a great deal of Mr. Mallock's criticism. It is true that these expressions have a certain psychological value, but this is individual in character, and does not touch the value of those ideas of which the greatest can be only representative.

It is not my purpose to write a review of the *Reconstruction of Belief*; I have already commented on Mr. Mallock's principal arguments as they appeared from time to time in the magazines or in his books. My purpose is to note a sentence of Mr. Mallock's—repeated more than once—one on which he evidently places some value, and which is, moreover, more or less of a shibboleth with all apologists. This sentence is that "Modern civilisation and Theism have grown up together." And it may be noted that by Theism Mr. Mallock means *Christian Theism*. Under some circumstances this remark would be only a commonplace. For a number of things have grown up with civilisation besides Theism. Various forms of vice, ignorance, slums, etc., etc., have all accompanied civilisation, and seem likely to remain with us for some considerable time. Mr. Mallock must, therefore, mean more than is implied in the bare statement of concurrent growth. And what he obviously means is that in some way—certainly not made clear in the course of a big book—civilisation and Theism have grown up together in such a way that the latter has acted beneficially upon the former, and that civilisation would suffer if this were withdrawn.

To meet commonplace with commonplace, it may be pointed out that modern civilisation is a very complex thing; and when we allow for the influence of all the various factors that go to make up civilisation, to declare, in the absence of adequate proof, that one of these factors exerts a predominant influence is really drawing largely on the credulity of one's readers. And the extravagance of the assertion is the more marked when we remember, again on the face of it, what an elusive and indefinite thing is this Christian Theism. Beyond the bare, bald belief in a God there is not

and never has been, anything like a common agreement as to what constitutes Theism. Ideas on this subject have not only differed with each generation, but with almost every two individuals who have thought much about the matter. Any conception of Deity that has become general, has become so only to be discarded; and a man of Mr. Mallock's calibre should be able to realise that a belief that changes its character with the character of each generation, or the culture of each individual, may serve very well as a social or psychological barometer, but can have little value as a cause of social changes.

Civilisations are not made, but grow; and this makes it impossible to fix with any definiteness a date when modern civilisation began. But if we accept the customary starting point, the Renaissance, there seems little credit to be given to Christian Theism, for the beginning at all events. For the beginnings here were frankly Pagan and non-Christian. Mohammedan science, Greek philosophy, Latin literature, the breaking down of barriers between East and West, were the obvious causes of the new birth that blossomed in the Renaissance. The part played by Christian Theism was that of obstruction, as the part played by it for centuries had been to bury the ancient culture beneath mountains of superstition and ignorance. Left alone, it is hard to see how there ever could have been a revival with only Christianity in the field. Under its influence the civilisation of antiquity had withered and disappeared; and against its influence the civilisation of modern times developed.

It would indeed puzzle anyone to make clear two points, both of which are necessary to make good the Christian claim. First, what has been the precise influence for good of Theism on civilisation; and, second, what of value would be lost if Theism disappeared. I need not lay stress upon the number of prominent workers in science, literature and the state, who have rejected Theism, although this is a point that should not be lost sight of. For it means much more than is apparent at first sight. The man who believes is following established precedent, falling into accustomed ruts, and consulting the easiest method of getting through life. But the man who rejects Theism does it in virtue of the possession of no ordinary strength of character, and runs innumerable risks in so doing. Nor should it be ignored that the number of prominent persons who reject Theism has increased, fairly constantly, with the development of civilisation. And this argues, if anything, against the thesis that modern civilisation is bound up with Theism. For, in this case, the principle makers of modern culture have deliberately cut themselves adrift from its influence.

The question may be tested in yet another way. One can conceive the disappearance of Christian Theism, without it carrying with it all, or anything, that is involved in the phrase "modern civilisation." Japan has offered an example to the world of how great a people may become in the absence of definite Theistic beliefs, and not a few are inclined to believe that their greatness is partly due to this absence. Men could still devote themselves to science, to literature, to art, to politics, and to a thousand and one other things without Theism, and its absence might conceivably make their devotion to these

things the more intense and the more profitable. But eliminate these other things, and in their absence, civilisation becomes an impossibility. Prosaic as the steam engine may look to some, it is a far greater agent of civilisation than all the religions in the world. Well lighted streets are a far greater preventative of robbery, and well built cities a far greater agent in the creation of a healthy morality.

The truth of the whole matter is that, instead of civilisation being indebted to Theism for any of its good features, Theism owes all its "improvements" to the reaction upon it of civilisation. Never yet has there existed a people with a god more civilised than themselves. How, then, could their gods have acted as a civilising force. Where the people are brutal or ignorant, the gods are brutal and ignorant likewise. But while the gods are never *better* than their worshipers, they are often much worse. And for this reason, while belief in them never operates for improvement, it often does work for stagnation or retrogression. The gods lag behind, and because man persists in regulating a portion of his life by their supposed desires, his belief in them acts as a drag upon the present. All the struggle between science and religion is, at bottom, nothing more than this. Instinctively the fervent believer feels that the future, with its greater knowledge and strength, threatens his beliefs, and his fight against the growth of knowledge is positively a struggle to maintain the conditions essential to religious belief.

Finally, to have done with metaphors, the antithesis between God and man is a false one. The true antithesis is between two stages of culture. The gods of the past represent man as he was. The best ideals of to-day represent man as he is, or as he may become. And the struggle is between these two culture stages. Which will triumph finally does not admit of doubt, but meanwhile, there is all the power of the past, all the weight of the dead hand, to fight against. And this incubus is sufficiently great, even under the best conditions, without our adding to its influence by our conscious endeavors.

C. COHEN.

### Commandments and Ideals.

THERE are those who assure us that Christianity is "not a doctrine, not a set of rules, not even mainly a philosophy, but a Life, and an effect on the life of the world." It supplies the world with an absolutely perfect ideal of character and conduct, and it imparts the strength and inspiration requisite to translate that ideal into actuality. Such is the teaching of the majority of the liberal theologians of the present day. Indeed, some of them are sufficiently advanced not to believe that Christ bestows upon his disciples any special grace or gift. What He gave to the world was this faultless ideal of life. The only inspiration necessary is that which naturally springs from the sense of possessing so exalted an ideal. "Humanity progresses," we are told, "by a series of anticipatory projections of its highest self, which it then sets itself laboriously to realise. It sees its mountain summit in one glance of the eye. How many thousand thousand movements of its weary limbs will it take to reach it? Man has ever been flinging out his great ideals; it is the law of his nature to do so." What is the ideal? "The ideal is but the deepest sense, and the anticipation of future reality." Christ flung out his great ideal into the world. Consequently, "that the New Testament life is still floating as a vision above the world's practice is one of its best credentials." That the Sermon on the Mount is not "practical politics" is the strongest proof of its divinity.

Now, on the assumption that Jesus was only a moral teacher, like Confucius or Buddha, the above definition of Christianity would be perfectly correct. But, coming from firm believers in the divinity of

Christ and in the saving power of his cross, it is nothing but an ingenious attempt to account, on reasonable grounds, for the practical failure of the Christian religion, and we are bound to pronounce it a totally false definition. Christianity and the theory of evolution are essentially irreconcilable. In evolution heredity and environment are all-powerful: Christianity offers deliverance from both. Christ removes the curse of original sin, which is heredity, and destroys the works of the Devil, which constitute our environment. According to the New Testament Jesus came, not to present mankind with a beautiful ideal, but "to save his people from their sins," not to fling out a moral standard which it would take his followers thousand upon thousands of years to reach, but to be "delivered up for our trespasses," and to be "raised for our justification." Christians are released from the law of Nature, which is evolution, and made subjects of the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," which is faith. No attempt to harmonise such a religion with evolutionary science can possibly succeed; and it is well known that those who indulge in such an attempt systematically ignore, or explain away, as much as possible, such terms as *salvation, redemption, forgiveness, and faith*, and lay their chief stress upon the ethical teaching of Jesus.

Let us, therefore, consider the ethical teaching of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels. The first thing that impresses us is the tone of unqualified authority that characterises it. Every utterance is oracular. Each deliverance is final. This teacher deals, not with abstract principles, but with rules of conduct. He merely tells his hearers what they are to do under given circumstances. He gives them a set of precepts which they are to observe. He does not say, "Make non-resistance to evil your aim," but "Resist not evil." The Sermon on the Mount is a series of commandments which all disciples are solemnly called upon to obey or forfeit their right to be so called. "These things I command you," Jesus says. "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love." "Ye are my friends, if ye do the things I command you." The Sermon on the Mount closes with this declaration: "Every one which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock; and every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them *not*, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand." What this teacher demands from disciples is unquestioning, instantaneous, complete obedience; and those who do not render such obedience are not recognised by him as his friends. Nothing could be plainer than this. So far as the moral teaching of Jesus is concerned, Christianity is undeniably a set of rules, and conformity to these rules is the sole condition of acceptance with God. In other words, only people who live up to the moral precepts of their Master have a right to call themselves Christians.

It is the contention of progressive divines that, Christ having flung out his great ideal of life and conduct, the world has been ever since laboriously endeavoring to realise it. Even on the supposition that what Christ's teaching contains is a flawless ideal, that statement must be condemned as untrue. As a matter of fact, Christendom seems to take delight in deliberately breaking many of the commandments of its Lord. Jesus said: "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." That is a great ideal, we are told, which Christ flung out, and Christians everywhere are pressing on towards the realisation of it. Nothing of the kind. Not only we do not give to him that asketh us, we clap him into gaol for daring to ask and pay the State for keeping him there. Another Christian ideal is, "Resist not evil." Is the world nearer to that ideal now than it was two thousand years ago? It never was so far away from it. We resist evil at every turn, and never even dream of doing anything else. There is not a Christian on earth who tries to obey that commandment. Another ideal is, "Swear not at all." How much progress has been made in the observance of that rule? None

whatever. Christendom is perpetually swearing by heaven and earth and hell. Indeed there are many Christians who assert openly that these are utterly absurd ideals. No wonder then that "it has been one of the constant reproaches urged against the New Testament," by non-Christians, "that it offers a rule of life which is impossible and unreal."

It is quite possible to find keen enjoyment in Christianity without obeying its ethical commandments. One can easily recall instances in verification of that statement. The writer distinctly remembers a man whose religious experiences afforded him indescribable comfort and delight. But he was one of the worst men in the whole community. He was a lying, drunken, cruel scoundrel. He was known among his neighbors as the old hypocrite. He was not a hypocrite, however, for he never professed to be what he was not. His religious experiences were thoroughly genuine. He believed with all his heart that Christ had died for his salvation, and that through the merits of the Atonement he was a redeemed sinner, with a clear title to the heavenly mansions. His communion with the Savior filled his heart with seraphic rapture, and he often had such luminous visions of the beautiful land above as made his coarse old countenance to shine. Why, history teems with such examples. Benvenuto Cellini lived two distinct lives at one and the same time. In his autobiography he tells us of the pious rapture afforded him by the contemplation of a successfully accomplished homicide; "of the legion of devils which he and a conjuror evoked in the Colosseum, after one of his not innumerable mistresses had been spirited away from him by her mother; and of the marvellous halo of light which he found surrounding his head at dawn and twilight after his Roman imprisonment, and his supernatural visions and angelic protection during that adversity." He experienced soul-intoxicating religious ecstasies both before and after his assassinations and debaucheries, and his enjoyment of the former did not lessen his enjoyment of the latter. Indeed, many of the most notorious crimes in history were committed by profoundly pious people. There are men who make a show of piety the mask under which to ensnare the victims of their dishonesty, and it is accurate to describe them as hypocrites; but my present point is that genuine piety may coexist with the most shameless immorality and crime.

On the other hand, it is an indisputable fact that the noblest type of morality may be developed apart from religion. Some of the best people living to-day believe in nothing beyond and above Nature. They are truthful, honest, honorable, benevolent, sympathetic, and loving in the highest degree, though they have no knowledge of God and a future state. What account can we give of this fact? An orthodox Christian is unable to offer any intelligible explanation of it. To claim that such people are Christians without knowing it is to beg the whole question. It is nothing but ignorant dogmatism to say that all goodness flows from Christ. Goodness is always of human origin. All thoroughly healthy and well-trained people are naturally good and love to do good. Goodness is a concomitant of perfect organic health. When this organic health is absent no amount of religion can produce the virtues of morality, and when it is present the lack of religion is no disadvantage to it. Organic disease is more powerful than the strongest religious convictions, and vitiates the whole life of the most fervent believers, while organic health impels all alike to revel in good thoughts and deeds. What is wanted in order to secure health is, not faith in God, not surrender to Christ, but a thoroughly practical knowledge of the organism. At present the bulk of the people do not possess this knowledge, and consequently the bulk of the people are not good. But how can this all-essential knowledge be acquired? By the scientific study of human nature. The laws of Nature cannot be broken. If we disregard the law of heredity we shall be duly punished, and no forgiveness is possible. If we defy the law of

environment we shall be crushed by it, and here also there can be no forgiveness. Religion has done infinite harm by diverting people's attention from the study of their own nature. A man may be a very devout Christian; but if he is in consumption his devoutness will not prevent him from marrying and bringing children into the world whose lives will be brief and full of misery. Natural knowledge alone can do that. It is Science which tells us that only perfectly healthy people should ever assume the responsibilities of parentage. One of the most pious men I ever knew was the father of ten children, not one of whom had the slightest chance of living a long and healthy life. Most of the ills from which humanity suffers are the outcome of ignorance, and knowledge would soon heal them.

Formulas are of little service, and ethical rules are impotent, as long as the organism is out of health; and the organism cannot recover its balance, as long as we remain ignorant of its nature and requirements. Knowledge is power because it is the sole guide to health; and health is essential to prosperity and happiness. Therefore, instead of wrangling over the relative merits of different religions, instead of disputing about God and the nature and extent of the Atonement, instead of making theological assertions which are insusceptible of proof, let us betake ourselves to the study of the constitution of man, and to the teaching of morals as things which arise from and accompany social life, or, in other words, to the learning of the fine art of complete living. Our first and most urgent need is health, perfect health. All else will follow in due course.

J. T. LLOYD.

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### The Exploitation of Superstition.

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THE clergy are not the only members of the community who seek to keep alive popular superstitions and to give renewed body and strength to fading myths and customs of Pagan origin. Vast as is the debt we owe to a (comparatively) free press and cheap literature, there is a considerable entry on the other side of the ledger which cannot be ignored in any just balancing of accounts. However much journalism and literature generally may have done for the liberation of the race from its mental shackles—that they have done much will be freely admitted—we are constrained to remark that both journalism and literature are at the present day extensively pandering to the superstition of the masses. The writers and publishers of popular periodical literature are largely responsible for assisting the clergy in playing upon the cruder emotions of human nature; and by fostering beliefs that are but more or less modified survivals of barbarism, they are doing a great deal to retard the natural and happy decay of such remains of primitive thought and speculation.

The Christmas publishing season is when we see most of the sort of thing to which we refer, although all the year round there is never an entire absence of it. About the Christmas period the outflow of superstitious literature is in full spate. Presently the bookstalls will be flooded with the Christmas numbers of magazines and periodicals of all kinds. A credulous public will be regaled with the usual pabulum of ghost stories, which are thought to be seasonable about this time. Writers and publishers who have no belief whatever in ghosts have no scruple in filling the minds of ignorant people with lying legends, and fables of haunted houses, with a view to the fitting celebration of Christmas, and possibly with some recollection of the important part a Ghost is supposed to have played in connection with the first Christmas. So also with the central and biggest fable of Christmastide—the virgin birth of Christ. Authors and publishers everywhere are quite willing to make money out of something they do not themselves believe in. As a result the news-agents' windows will groan under the weight of tons

of the sickly sentimentality and cheap transitory benevolence considered appropriate to Christmas and the holy infant Jesus. We will be furnished with highly colored pictures and eloquent descriptions of an event that never happened, and people will stuff themselves with turkey and plum-pudding under the pretence of honoring the birth of the Son of God nineteen hundred years ago in a Bethlehem stable.

Christmas is the time for the ancestral ghost to walk, and supply its descendants with warning or with counsel, but with no information of the other world. It is astonishing how interested the family ghost continues to be in earthly affairs, and how little its intellect has expanded or improved in Spirit-land. Hundreds of stories will be told this Christmas about the family spectre. And thousands of people will believe them. Christmas Eve is also the favorite date for the prodigal son or daughter (in the story) to come crawling home to be wept and drivelled over; just in time for the goose and the dumpling, and to take part with the *Waits* in the Christmas hymn. What oceans of cant, and bathos, and hypocrisy will be poured forth during the next few weeks! What a farce it all is, and what a world of make-believe we live in!

The serious part of it is that the purveyors of the literary fare which encourages the common people in these and kindred delusions, must in the main know that they are teaching falsehood, and inculcating erroneous ideas of life. The culpability attaching to those who persist in attempting to vitalize obsolete supernatural ideas and exploded superstitions, is not lessened when we consider that in a great many cases they must be thoroughly well aware that the views regarding the Christmas festival which they contribute to popularise are untrue. Every educated man or woman to-day ought to know that the entire sentimental, ghostly, sham-philanthropic, eleemosynary, Christmassy edifice connected with the 25th of December is, so far as Christianity is concerned, based upon a lie.

Those who do the writing for our great publishing firms; those who have under their control the process of manufacture and distribution of books, magazines, and journals of various kinds; those, in short, who have to a large extent the mind of the nation in their power to make or mar, are by no means the least-intelligent or the worst-educated in our midst. They know full well that the stories of ghosts and goblins they help to foist upon our people and—most unfortunate of all—upon our children, are lying phantasies. They know also that the legend of the Incarnation of God is false; they know that with whatever of good faith it may once have been accepted and retailed, it is impossible of belief in the light of modern knowledge. Comparative mythology and comparative theology have reduced the Christian version of the miraculous birth to a common level with similar legends found in the religions and cosmogonies of antiquity. The Christmas legend of the Christian Church is but an old acquaintance in a new dress. Yet we will have in a week or two the customary annual outburst of rhetoric and claptrap *apropos* of Christmas, as if the Pagan origin of the festival were not irrefragably established, and as if the Christian story of the Man-God Savior were unique in the annals of mankind.

What a revolution there might be very speedily in popular thought and feeling if our publicists would only display a spirit of candor and outspokenness; if they would tell the people what they really think and know; if they would say in public what they say in private. If our clergymen, if our doctors, if our statesmen, but above all, if our journalists and literary men would mutually agree to be honest and speak the whole truth for twelve months, what a dispelling of ignorance and superstition might result! If, for instance, all who *know* that Christianity is a gigantic imposture would fearlessly say so, we might be immeasurably nearer its final overthrow. But in all walks of life there is the immediate and pressing necessity of making a living, of keeping up appearances, of getting through the world as comfortably as

possible. This end is made so much more easy of achievement by acting the hypocrite that the majority of our pastors, masters, and so-called leaders prefer to recognise truth in the most distant of possible manners. Each man is compelled to be a hypocrite because his neighbor is a hypocrite. And each strongly suspects the other to be guilty of hypocrisy, and only dreads that his own hypocrisy may be as readily fathomed.

A further exemplification of the literary exploitation of superstition (if we may profane the word literature in this connection) is afforded by the issue of *Dream Books*, which are always on sale up and down the country and evidently find a steady market. As a rule *Dream Books* are printed and published by those obscure firms with whom we associate the production of literature of the catchpenny variety. We regret to notice that a well-known firm of Scotch publishers, to whom we usually look for something better, has recently issued a *Dream Book* and thereby contributed its quota to the encouragement of superstition. They have effectively advertised it by means of a poster depicting a young lady sleeping in a rather uneasy position with the *Dream Book* clasped to her bosom, and a vision of the marriage ceremony in the background. We know not if the poster is intended to convey the suggestion that matrimony forms the nightly contemplation of the feminine mind as it so largely constitutes its daily centre of interest, but we have no doubt the aforesaid *Dream Book* will be circulated in thousands amongst servant girls, factory girls, and women of the peasant class, to the further clogging of their intellects. And we are not living in the days of Pharaoh and Joseph, but more than three thousand years later. Though what else could one expect from a race that has been brought up on that colossal dream-book—the Bible? From the moment it is able to be taught anything the little child is told about Daniel's interpretation of dreams, and about Joseph's advancement in the King of Egypt's favor through his skill in the same direction, etc., and thus the accumulated results of human knowledge and the demonstrable absurdity of putting any credit in the phantasies of sleep, are of little avail in preventing the common people from falling a prey to the superstition monger in one shape or another.

But though the Christmas season is the great harvest time of the exploiters of superstition, their energies are by no means confined to that particular period. Their activities range from the first of January to the thirty-first of December in every year, both days inclusive. Popular fiction is full of superstition. Even novels with some claim to be ranked as literature make considerable play with the supernatural, while the cheaper variety of fiction that circulates amongst the common people teems with omens, and gypsy warnings, and old beldam's curses that are invariably (in the story) attended by calamitous results. This is the sort of mental pabulum thousands of our population assimilate with avidity, and we see the natural consequences in the increased vogue of palmists, and crystal-gazers, and other charlatans who live upon the unsophisticated multitude. Popular literature is also largely responsible for the survival of many other superstitions. It helps to keep alive the belief that thirteen is an unlucky number; that Friday is an unlucky day; that to spill the salt is an evil omen; that to meet a black cat or a cross-eyed person is a sure presage of misfortune.

Then there are the superstitious practices associated in country districts with St. John's Eve, and the eve of All Saints, and with other festivals reminiscent and redolent of Paganism. The popular delusions regarding these are sedulously encouraged by the periodicals that circulate weekly amongst the people. Such periodicals constitute practically the sole literary fare of a large section of the nation, and we cannot but regret that their educative value is vitiated to so great an extent by the inclusion of the pernicious matter referred to. Of course the demand is undoubtedly there, and both authors and publishers must get a living. Some people seem to think the necessity of getting a living excuses anything.

"Necessity knows no law," and it would seem sets scant store by conscience or truth; though when we hear moral turpitude or commercial chicanery palliated with the plea that one must live, we recall the famous reflection that the inference is not obvious. There are a great many people in the world whose conscious existence is not quite so essential to the cosmic process as they imagine. And we could conceivably get along without the gentry whose principal mission in life seems to be to furbish and keep fresh the moribund and morbid beliefs of earlier generations.

G. SCOTT.

### Thomson's Leopardi.

"The weary poet, thy sad son,  
Upon thy soil, under thy skies,  
Saw all Italian things save one—  
Italia; this thing missed his eyes;  
The old mother-might, the breast, the face,  
That reared, that lit the Roman race;  
This not Leopardi saw."

—SWINBURNE, "Siena," *Songs Before Sunrise*.

MR. BERTRAM DOBELL has laid the admirers of the late James Thomson ("B.V.") under a fresh obligation by superintending the publication of his translations from Leopardi, which now appear, under the title of *Essays, Dialogues, and Thoughts*, in Routledge's "Universal Library." And the price of this volume of four hundred pages, packed full of good things, is only a shilling. Never were books so cheap before. Even the poorest, who are not exactly destitute, have easy access in this age to literary treasures which only the wealthy could purchase a hundred years ago. Let us hope that the thirst of knowledge is keeping pace with the lavish supply; that the books which are bought by the million are also read by the million.

Thomson's translations of Leopardi's prose were written between thirty and forty years ago. Several of them appeared in the *National Reformer*. Many of them are now printed for the first time. There is also in this volume a "Memoir of Leopardi." The greater part of it was published in the *National Reformer*. About a third of it now first sees the light of day.

These translations, or such of them as appeared in Bradlaugh's journal, have been highly praised by good judges. Mr. Dobell found, however, that they were rather rough drafts than perfected renderings. "I could come to no other conclusion," he says, "than that they required to be largely, if not entirely, rewritten." This was a task which he would not have undertaken if he could have avoided it; but having accepted the editorship of the volume, he felt bound to go on with the work; and whether he was wise or unwise in doing so he leaves others to judge. No doubt there will be a difference of opinion on this point. Much may be said on both sides. But all must credit Mr. Dobell with the best intentions, and recognise the enormous labor of love that he has bestowed upon this beautiful production.

Mr. Dobell adds that he did not feel at liberty to deal as freely with the printed as with the unprinted part of this volume. In the former he has made "few and slight alterations." The latter he has liberally revised. I have not had time to make an examination into the matter, with the original Italian beside me; but I am bound to say that the more liberally revised sections read far more fluently than the others. They are more elegant and melodious. But these were not the common characteristics of Thomson's prose. It was rather marked by a certain austere strength. Only when moved by deep feeling, as in *A Lady of Sorrow*, did he sweep along musically. Mr. Bernard Shaw has divided his plays into "Pleasant" and "Unpleasant." If a similar division were made of Thomson's work, I think it would be found that his "Pleasant" productions are apt to move slowly (although I admit the rare exceptions), while his "Unpleasant" productions are apt to kindle

into a sombre heat, and move forward with the deep music of a great funeral march. It was not for nothing that he was our Poet of Pessimism.

But I have not yet done with Mr. Dobell. I want to say something about his admirable Introduction. And I will note, first of all, his touching loyalty to the genius, as well as to the personality, of his dead friend. In spite of the public attitude towards Thomson, and its idea that none of his writings are worth reading or purchasing except the *City of Dreadful Night*, Mr. Dobell insists not only that he is "one of the most significant and representative poets of the nineteenth century" but also that he "will soon occupy a not less exalted place in English literature than Leopardi now holds in Italian." This may be true, but time alone can prove it, and the discussion of a prophecy is not a wise investment of effort. My own opinion of Thomson's work has been a little modified by time, but I still hold that he had a powerful and lofty genius, and that the best of his work is difficult to beat. It cannot be maintained, however, that he had anything like Leopardi's culture; and as little, I think, can it be maintained that he had anything like Leopardi's perfection as an artist. Leopardi was almost impeccable; Thomson was not; although in this he shared a common defect of his compeers, and even his superiors, in English literature. Matthew Arnold, in his essay on Byron, giving Leopardi the preference generally over Wordsworth, on account of his far wider culture, greater mental lucidity, and freedom from illusions, can only give the final preference to Wordsworth on account of his "criticisms of life" being "in certain matters of profound importance, healthful and true, whereas Leopardi's pessimism is not"—which, of course, is entirely a matter of opinion. Less open to controversy is Arnold's statement that Leopardi, rather than Wordsworth, has "the sense for form and style, the passion for just expression, the sure and firm touch of the true artist." And at this point it does not seem to me that Thomson quite holds his ground. The artist in him was less potent, and far less sure, than the thinker. But at times the artist and the thinker in him went hand in hand with equal step, and then the result was really superb.

Mr. Dobell conjectures that a desire to study Leopardi's works was "one of the reasons" which led Thomson to learn Italian. In this I think he is mistaken—although the point is not one of great importance. Thomson's first and greatest love in Italian was Dante. I remember his telling me how he thought Ruskin's tribute to Dante, as "the central intellect of all this world," a little exaggerated, and how he afterwards came to the opinion that it was not.

Neither do I think, with Mr. Dobell, that it was from Mr. Gladstone's *Quarterly Review* article, in 1850, that Thomson gained his first knowledge of Leopardi. But this again is not a point of much importance. He certainly knew of the *Quarterly Review* article when writing the "Memoir." It was one of Mr. Gladstone's best pieces of writing, and valuable as an introduction to a genius whose scepticism might easily have frightened the average English reader. One passage of it may be quoted even now as an excellent tribute to the versatility of Leopardi's genius:—

"We cannot hesitate to say that, in almost every branch of mental exertion, this extraordinary man seems to have had the capacity for attaining, and generally at a single bound, the very highest excellence. Whatever he does, he does in a manner that makes it his own; not with a forced or affected but a true originality, stamping upon his work, like other masters, a type that defies all counterfeit. He recalls others as we read him, but always the most remarkable and accomplished in their kind; always by conformity, not by imitation. In the Dorian march of his *terza rima* the image of Dante comes before us; in his blank verse we think of Milton (whom possibly he never read); in his lighter letters, and in the extreme elegance of touch with which he describes mental gloom and oppression, we are reminded of the grace of Cowper; when he

touches learned research or criticism, he is copious as Warburton, sagacious and acute as Bentley: the impassioned melancholy of his poems largely recalls his less, though scarcely less, deeply unhappy contemporary Shelley: to translation (we speak here of his prose translations) he brings the lofty conception of his work, which enabled Coleridge to produce *his* Wallenstein; among his 'Thoughts' there are some worthy of a place beside the *Pensées* of Pascal, or the Moral Essays of Bacon; and with the style of his philosophic Dialogues neither Hume nor Berkeley need resent a comparison."

Now as Hume and Berkeley were our greatest philosophical stylists, the reader will know what to expect in Leopardi's Dialogues.

Another point in Mr. Dobell's Introduction is this. After referring to the marred and blighted life of both Leopardi and Thomson, he ventures to write:—

"It is hardly too much to say that if they had been as fortunate as they were unfortunate in love, their whole lives, as well as the character of their writings, might have been altogether different."

Nothing could be more unprofitable than a discussion of "ifs." And the wonder is that Mr. Dobell did not see how he answered himself on the very same page. Here are his own words:—

"It is what a man is in himself, and not the events of his outward life, that determine his fate."

And I beg, further, to draw his attention to the fact that both Leopardi and Thomson strenuously repudiated the idea that their Pessimism was merely an expression of their personal experience. That a man should be a Pessimist because *he* has been unfortunate is egotism and not philosophy.

Mr. Dobell makes his own confession. He is neither an Optimist nor a Pessimist. He does not say whether he is a Meliorist. He declares that he does not know "whether pleasures or pains predominate in human life," and, in a very interesting and well-written passage, he crosses swords with those who deny the reality of happiness. But his last sentence, after all, plays right into the Pessimist's hands. Since life must be endured, he says, it is "better that men should cherish their belief in the possibility of being happy even if they never attain to that condition." Precisely so, the Pessimist would reply; you have to base life upon an illusion at the finish; and it is only illusion that makes it tolerable; the naked truth is absolutely appalling.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

### The Seed Folly.

There are three vices, God-like, never dying;  
Three world-wide curses, murder, theft, and lying.  
Three criminals there are. The vampire-stomached beasts  
Are soldiers, earthlords, and above all, priests.  
For he that murders in the trade of war,  
Is not so vile as earthlords; whom the law  
Of priests, mean skunks, protects, nay, doth compel  
Soldiers for lords to make our heaven a hell.

O! man has "loved his enemies" too long,  
He *fêtes* the golden murd'rer with a song.  
Homeless and crushed, yet with a song most sweet  
Pours all his hope before the earthlord's feet,  
And then, O horror! lifts the name of Truth  
To him who lives by lying.

Aye! For sooth

"Man ever kills the thing he most should love,"  
If you be meek your shortened life shall prove  
Yet far too long. Poor and unloved, alas!  
Forgot, downtrodden, hopeless you shall pass.  
Your life an open book, forth you may send  
The truth in heart-beats, till you have no friend,  
Do good to him that persecutes! Yield him your strength,  
Unheard he shall condemn you, fool, at length.

G. E. W.

I mortally hate cruelty, both by nature and judgment, as the very extreme of all vices.—*Montaigne*.

### Acid Drops.

General Booth did not have it all his own way in Kaiserland. A largely attended demonstration was held at Berlin on Friday night, November 24, for the purpose of criticising the work of the Salvation Army in Germany. Herr Roeder, ex-Financial Secretary at the Army's headquarters in Berlin, and Frau Willich, an ex-Lieutenant in the Army, strongly attacked the German branch of the Booth business. The friends of the Salvation did not like criticism. They frequently interrupted, and the six-hours' meeting culminated in scenes of riotous disorder, so that the police had to clear the hall of both parties.

When the "Social Scheme" of General Booth was placed before the public, who were asked to provide a big fund for carrying it out, we said that he reminded us of the Irishman who lengthened his shirt by cutting a piece off one end and sewing it on the other. For instance, if he went making matches, unless he could increase the demand for them, which did not seem possible, he would operate at the expense of the existing factories, and for every person he employed another person would be thrown out of work. This position is now supported by the Firewood Merchants at Deptford, who complain of the "continual encroachment" of the Salvation Army. "For years," they say, "we have seen our business dwindle, and some thousands of workpeople have been thrown out of employment through this unfair competition." Three cheers for the Grand Old Showman!

Lord Rosebery is the most engaging of our political speakers, but he is not infallible, and we think he made a considerable mistake in his recent speech at Penzance. Referring to the grave question of the unemployed, he said:

"I must emphasise that word 'system.' If I were dictator in this country I confess I should be disposed to try a daring experiment. I should be disposed to take 'General' Booth into council. He has the knowledge, he has the machinery for dealing especially with this particular residuum which we are unable on the whole to deal with—the residuum who would not work. I am not at all sure that it will not shock the minds of political purists, but I hope they will not read what I am saying, that money might be worse spent even by the incoming Government than by giving some contribution or some funds in order to assist 'General' Booth to work out this problem, and to deal with the population which you are confessedly unable to deal with yourselves."

We repeat that this seems to us a mistake. Public work, and the expenditure of public money, should be in the hands of public servants. General Booth is his own master, and the master of everybody else around him. Moreover, it is a principle of sane civilisation that ministers of religion shall not be entrusted with the organisation of secular affairs. Now the salvation army is a religious body, and General Booth is a reverend gentleman. Moreover, it is ignominious for the State to say to any religious leader: "You can do what we cannot do; and here is a million to do it with." If this were true, General Booth should be made Dictator of England, and the representative government—and Lord Rosebery too, for that matter—should retire into private life.

Lord Rosebery makes us stare with astonishment when he speaks of the Salvation Army as dealing with "the residuum who would not work." The Salvation Army does nothing of the kind. It soon gets rid of persons in its shelters, &c., who do not earn their own keep—and something over, for the Army.

Reviewing a new book of Interviews by the pious and fervid Mr. Harold Begbie, the *Daily News* represents him as making Mr. John Morley say that "he would rather have passed Gladstone's Irish Land Act than written Lock's 'Human Understandings.'" We can hardly believe that Mr. Morley ever said anything so foolish. For the rest, the great English philosopher's name was Locke, and the greatest of his works in an "Essay on the Human Understanding."

Mr. Begbie appears to have got quite rapturous over the Rev. R. J. Campbell, of the City Temple—the gentleman who gets photographed this way and that way, like a popular actress. Mr. Campbell is described as "being made a saint" through the kindness of "rich and liberal people" in his congregation, who provide for his being "able to live in a comfortable house, able to dream away his days in a fine garden, able to enjoy immunity from all the petty anxieties of ways and means." Christianity is evidently a far better paying game than it was 1873 years ago at Jerusalem, when the cashier of the first Salvation Army is said to have ratted for thirty half-crowns.

There was a "scene" at the City Temple on Sunday evening. Mr. Campbell was preaching on "The Pre-existence of Jesus," and a man jumped up and denounced him as an abominable liar and deceiver. Of course the disturber was soon shifted outside by the police, who seem to be on regular duty there, in readiness for trouble. Mr. Campbell went on with his sermon, but at the close of the service his feelings overcame him, and he held his bowed head in his hands for some time. The reverend gentleman's nerves are so delicate, you know.

The Birmingham Young Men's Christian Association is extensively advertising its "magnificent new building" as "the finest club-house for young men" in the city. Being in urgent want of patrons, apparently, it invites young men, and even boys from thirteen to seventeen, to join "without any religious test." We presume this means that those who join need not be Christians at all. By-and-bye, perhaps, if business does not improve, special terms may be offered to Atheists.

More destitute followers of the poor Carpenter of Nazareth! Among the recent wills proved are those of the Rev. Thomas Henry Wilkinson, of Coatham, Redcar, formerly vicar of Stainton-in-Cleveland, £18,693,—and the Rev. Charles Henry Lowry, of Kew-road, Richmond, £18,007. We wonder how they got through the needle's eye.

At a Central Hall meeting, Plumstead, conducted by the Rev. Stanley Parker, a "convert" was trotted out who said (we quote from the local *Pioneer*): "Up to a few weeks ago he believed religion to be a lot of rubbish, of use only to parsons, who make a good thing out of it. One day in Beresford-square, he heard Will Crooks, and what he said changed his whole life. It sent him home to pray, and he was now trying to follow his Master." What was Will Crooks doing to let that interesting "convert" slip into the hands of Stanley Parker?

"Methodism," according to the *Academy*, "is a form of religion which only produces good results in the case of persons of coarse fibre, with sluggish and muddy minds." This makes the *Methodist Recorder* angry. Naturally. Perhaps because it is so true.

The Liberation Society would never have anything to do with Charles Bradlaugh. The late Dr. Parker absolutely declined to attend a Disestablishment meeting if Bradlaugh were on the platform. Yet we now see the announcement that M. Yves Guyot is to address the Liberation Society in London—and at the Memorial Hall too—on "Clericalism in Relation to National Education." M. Guyot's opinions on religious questions are identical with those of Bradlaugh; indeed, he once contributed letters from Paris to Bradlaugh's journal, the *National Reformer*. These facts, of course, are not included in the *Daily News* paragraph-sketch of this "distinguished French statesman."

The Bishop of Liverpool demands that children should be instructed in the religion of their parents. "We ask for the Nonconformists," he says, "for the Roman Catholics, for the Jews, all that we ask for ourselves." But there are others. Where do Secularists, Theists, Atheists, Agnostics, and Rationalists look in? Perhaps the Bishop of Liverpool thinks they can be ignored. Well, in that case, we think he is mistaken.

Canon Denton Thompson, rector of Birmingham, made some startling assertions at the annual meeting of the Girls' Night Shelter. He said that he knew girls who had been ruined and then set to work to ruin others. "I might perhaps startle some of you," he continued, "if I said I knew a club consisting of young men, and one of the terms of membership is that each must ruin a pure girl." Some of the places of amusement in Birmingham were "nothing more nor less than the high road to hell." Supposing that all this is true, what are we to think of the Birmingham Christians spending their time in trying to drive the Secularists out of all the public buildings in the city—including the Town Hall? Would they not be better occupied in fighting immorality than in fighting justice and liberty?

We might also point out that the Birmingham Christians, in silencing the Secularists, take upon themselves the full responsibility for the moral condition of the city. This is a fact which the Secularists should not cease to drive home upon them.

The Bishop of London is at it again. After advertising that trashy book, *When it was Dark*, and sending it into

several editions, he is now giving a puff to another pious book on "The Childhood of Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ." He says he thinks it will help many mothers who are desirous of instructing their children in Gospel history. Does he mean *apocryphal* Gospel history? There is really no history of the childhood of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

There is really no end to the Bishop of London's rubbish. Addressing a meeting of Cambridge undergraduates, he talked about "the thousands of poor girls on the streets of London" and the "ten thousand men who lived entirely on their earnings"—and then he spoke of the drink and gambling that beset young men, and "the perils of infidelity which hung over them." Evidently the Bishop classes drunkards, gamblers, prostitutes, *souteneurs*, and "infidels" together. Well, in return for this piece of Christian charity, we will present him with a bit of plain truth. He himself, the Lord Bishop of London, is worse than any drunkard, gambler, prostitute, or *souteneur* in his diocese. They take the odium of their vices. He is a walking hypocrite. What defence is possible for a man who takes £10,000 a year for preaching the glorious gospel of "Blessed be ye poor," and has the effrontery to offer the public a balance-sheet showing how he loses on the job?

We offer the Bishop of London a text for an early sermon—not from the Bible, but from a better book—Shakespeare. It occurs in "Hamlet," Act III, Scene 2.

"What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves, all; believe none of us."

What a text for what a sermon! And if Bishop Ingram cannot write it himself, we will undertake to write it for him, on condition that he preaches it from the pulpit of St. Paul's.

The Bishop of Stepney, another shining light of the Church, is responsible for a volume on *The Miracles of Jesus*. We hear that he does not throw any light on the wine-and-water trick. But there is a greater miracle than that. The greatest of all the miracles of Jesus is finding splendid salaries for men like the Bishops of Stepney and London. What these gentlemen would earn without Jesus is fairly obvious.

Another man of God, the Rev. Russell Wakefield, has been elected chairman of the London Committee under the Unemployed Workmen Act. Another good stroke for the Church—considering what a large amount of money will be distributed.

A boycotting case occupied the attention of the Dublin Court of Appeal recently. Miss Rose Sweeney, a Roman Catholic, manual instructress in a national school in county Tyrone, brought an action against William Coote, an auctioneer of Kilmaddy, a Presbyterian, for combining with other residents of the district to injure her, by inducing parents and guardians to withdraw children from the school, and inducing the manager by threats and menaces to dismiss her. In the course of the pleadings, the Solicitor-General, who appeared for the defendant, is reported to have spoken as follows:

"It was an unfortunate thing that such a feeling as was evidenced by this case should exist, but it was not confined to one sect. They all knew that Catholics would no more allow a Protestant teacher to be appointed to a similar position than they would allow an Atheist. Suppose the plaintiff had been an avowed Atheist or a notorious bad character, how could it be denied that Coote was acting within his rights in discussing the matter with his friends and persuading them to withdraw their children, fearing that they might suffer in their morals."

Now it is not our object to go into the merits of this particular case. What we are concerned with is the Irish Solicitor-General's argument that Christians, as a matter of course, have a right to boycott an Atheist; in other words that an action, illegal in itself, becomes perfectly legal if Atheists are the only sufferers. There seems to be no reason why this argument should not be pushed to the bitter end. If one illegal action may be done on such grounds, why not another? In that case, boycotting might be followed up by robbery and murder. An unbeliever's throat might be cut from ear to ear, and the man who did it would get off by pleading, "He was only an Atheist."

Note the way in which the Irish Solicitor-General brackets avowed Atheists and notorious bad characters. This bigotry is common to both Catholics and Protestants. They spit at each other, and spit severally and jointly at all who cry, "A plague o' both your houses!" Spitting at somebody seems to be their normal occupation.

Our readers will be pleased to read the following. It is a communication to the *Daily Telegraph* from its Berlin correspondent, dated Wednesday, November 23 :—

"To-day is the Prussian 'Busstag,' the day appointed by law for national humiliation throughout the kingdom. Some years ago the Busstag was celebrated in spring, but as the populace seized the occasion of the general holiday for picnics and other out-of-doors festivities, the ecclesiastical authorities had the day changed to the rawest season of the year, when church-going would be pleasanter. Throughout Prussia to-day theatres, music-halls, and concert-rooms are closed, unless the proprietors of these establishments have received a special police permit to give an oratorio or some equally solemn entertainment. For this reason the restaurants and cafes are filled to overflowing, and there universal jollity prevails. For the morning services the churches were pretty well filled, but mainly with women and children. Both from the pulpits and from most editorial chairs admonitory sermons are being preached to-day, warning the German people against their continuance in evil courses. Serious newspapers point to the threatening labor troubles in various parts of the Empire as evidence of the growing ungodliness. In the good old times, when the churches were filled to the doors, no one thought of strikes or revolutions. The *Reichsbote* complains that impiety is making ever greater headway among the masses of the people, and compares the alleged corruption of present times with the state of affairs in ancient Rome before the beginning of the Christian era. Pantheism and monism, according to this authority, have usurped the place of Christianity, and ungodly professors of heterodox theology fill the once famous chairs of divinity in German universities."

Christians, of course, wouldn't call this good news. We do.

Here is another good bit from the *Daily Telegraph's* Berlin correspondent :—

"The trial at Munich of Herr Richter, editor of the *Süddeutsches Montagszeitung*, for libelling institutions of the Roman Catholic Church, has attracted wide attention. Herr Richter criticised severely the Corpus Christi procession which parades through the streets, interfering with the traffic. He called it a nuisance, which the Government should suppress. He denounced the cult of relics, including the Holy Coat of Treves and several other famous articles held in high veneration by Catholics. It was the duty of the State to discountenance these excrescences of religion, which were hurtful to faith.

During the trial there was much reading of ancient Latin ecclesiastical decrees about sacred relics, with the object of showing that many of these objects were admitted by churchmen of authority to be apocryphal. Professor Ritzer, of the University of Munich, an eminent authority on Catholic archaeology, was called as an expert. He admitted that the Holy Coat and several other famous relics called in question by the defendant were false, or, at any rate, of dubious origin. Counsel for the prosecution contended that a libel had been uttered, that the genuineness or the reverse of the relics had nothing to do with the matter.

For the defendant the Court was treated to a very fine piece of forensic oratory, counsel concluding with Kant's famous words, 'The death of dogma is the birth of morals.' The jury acquitted Herr Richter, the verdict being received by loud applause in court. The significance of the trial was additional in that the majority of the judges, counsel, and jurymen belonged to the Catholic faith."

The Catholic Church won't go to law on this subject again in a hurry.

The Mayor of Oxford complains of the irreverence of little boys towards the City Fathers when they go to church in state on Sundays. This sort of thing was sternly repressed in the days of Elisha. Little boys called him "baldhead" which he was; but the greater the truth the greater the libel; so he had forty-two of them killed and devoured by bears. Perhaps the Mayor of Oxford would like to keep a pack, and hunt down those irreverent little scoundrels.

Dr. Torrey's entertainment did fairly well in the Oxford Town Hall, but the five o'clock meetings for University men had to be abandoned in consequence of the meagre attendance. Educated men soon take his measure.

Reuter's agent at Monaster wrote on November 18 the particulars of a "terrible affair at Nevoljani, near Florina," in Macedonia. A wedding party was going on, when a Greek band, one hundred strong, put in an appearance and massacred the lot. "In a leisurely way," we are told, "the Greeks shot down their victims, continuing to fire for about an hour, and afterwards setting fire to the house, in the ruins of which were found the charred remains of a young woman of twenty, one of the guests. The other victims killed were a Turk, four Greek Patriarchists, and eight Bulgarian Exarchists; while four women, three girls, and a child eight years of age were severely wounded." These Greek bands,

of course, are Christians; so are the Bulgarian bands who likewise rove about murdering in Macedonia. For these "disturbances" by alien Christians the Sultan is called to account, and the Christian Powers have got their battleships ready to coerce him into a "settlement." Reuter's correspondent lets the cat out of the bag by saying that: "If Macedonia could be swept clear of the invading bands from Greece and Bulgaria, so as to leave its inhabitants free to manage their own affairs, a very important step would have been taken towards the complete pacification of the country."

Was it accident or satire? The *Daily Chronicle*, in a recent list of "To-Day's Books," put Sir Oliver Lodge's *Life and Matter* among the "Belles Lettres."

Rev. John Haslam, D.D., Principal of the New College, Harrogate, reports the following conversation between Gladstone and Mr. Alfred Illingworth at a dinner party. Gladstone said to him:

"Illingworth, I want you to tell me exactly what are the grounds of the Nonconformists' objection to Forster's bill."

Mr. Illingworth replied:

'Before doing that, let me explain my own position. I contend that the State, as such, has nothing to do with religious education, its province is the secular.'

Mr. Gladstone answered:

'I quite agree with you. That is my position.'

This is corroborated by Mr. John Morley's account of Gladstone's attitude. The truth is that this was also the attitude of the older and more logical Nonconformists, like Dr. Dale, of Birmingham, who opposed the Education Act of 1870 on the ground that it set up a new kind of State Religion by providing for religious teaching in State-supported schools. The bulk of the Nonconformists, however, preferred a compromise. They sold their principles for it—and got it, and much good it has done them. In the end they will be driven back upon the very Secular Education from which they ratted thirty-five years ago.

The Evangelical Alliance has been holding its annual Conference at Newcastle. The attendance was small, and it will probably grow smaller. The Rev. Dr. Hanson, who delivered the annual address, said that the Scriptures were the most wonderful literature in the world; and in one sense we agree with him, for the stories of talking serpents and jackasses, and whales carrying prophets on submarine trips, fairly take the cake. But we must dissent from the reverend gentleman's statement that study of the Bible is the best antidote against "infidelity." Study of the Bible has made myriads of "infidels," and it is still the best receipt for making them. Secular propagandists have always tried to induce Christians to take the Bible out from under the parlor flower-pot and read it for themselves. How often the Christian who does that exclaims: "Good God, is this what I have believed all my life!"

Emily Carson, found guilty of murdering an infant at a Brighton hospital, and ordered to be detained during his Majesty's pleasure, was apparently suffering from religious mania. It was stated in evidence that the derangement of her mind commenced after a visit to the Torrey-Alexander Mission. Torrey won't boast of this case.

According to the *Academy*, the millions of elegant little reprints of our great classics now issued are purchased to give away, not to read. We are afraid that there is too much truth in this. You very seldom see anybody pull one of those little reprints out of his pocket and proceed to read it. Even the pocket Bibles appear to be neglected. We have always said that the Bible Society's statistics of its output and circulation are almost worthless. Books can be got into circulation with a sufficient expenditure of money. Getting them read is a different matter altogether.

The *Methodist Recorder* has an article on "An Australian Apologetic," in which it highly praises a pious book by the Rev. John Blakely—who is apparently (to use Shelley's fine phrase) one of the illustrious obscure. Our contemporary winds up by congratulating Australian Methodism on having in its ranks a minister who is "not afraid to do battle with the champions of Agnosticism and Anti-Christian Rationalism." Now we have two questions to ask. Why should a minister, whether Methodist or otherwise, who is supposed to be filled with the Holy Ghost, be afraid of anybody? And how does the reverend gentleman "do battle" with the champions of unbelief by simply writing a book for his own side? Had he not better debate publicly with them before his friends boast of his valor?



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, December 3, Royal Assembly Hall, Mile End-road, South Shields; at 3, "The Gospel of Sir Oliver Lodge"; at 7, "What has Christianity done for Russia?"

December 10 and 17, Stanley Hall; 31, Leicester.

### To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—Address, 241 High-road, Leyton, Essex.—December 3, Birmingham; 17, Forest Gate.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURING ENGAGEMENTS.—December 3, Forest Gate; 10, Coventry.

ANTI-TORREY MISSION FUND.—Frank Smith £1 ls., Harry Organ 1s.

W. J. LIVINGSTONE ANDERSON.—Thanks for cuttings. See "Acid Drops." The matter is, as you say, sufficiently grave.

W. ATRINSON.—What has the length of time to do with the quality of a moral action? If all the people around you were doomed to die within a month, it would still be moral to promote their happiness, or at least to refrain from increasing their misery, during that period. Morality bears no relation to the "universe"—about which you are so extraordinarily concerned. Morality is a question between man and society. Had there been no society there would have been no morality. Morality is not an astronomical, a physical, or a metaphysical product; being, in brief, the reaction of society upon the individual. If you look at the problem from this standpoint all your difficulties will disappear.

G. J.—Well, suppose "progress" is as you say "to the grave"? Is it not still better to be sensible, clean, kind, and honest, until one reaches the destination? You might as well tell a starving man that, as there will come a day when he can no longer eat food, it doesn't matter whether he has any or not in the meanwhile.

E. H.—Thanks for the reference, but we are too busy at present to follow up the writer you mention. Besides, to get rid of the suffering of animals by pretending that they are unconscious of it is contemptible special-pleading, which every man of common sense, and commonly decent feeling, is easily able to see through for himself.

W. MANN, our valued contributor, asks us to correct a printer's error in his last article. The author of *Paganism and Christianity*—an able and important book, by the way—is J. A. Farrer (not Farrar).

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

JAMES DUNN.—Yes, the extract did interest us, although the allegory is rather too long-drawn for a short, striking quotation. We suppose the matter has to be put in that roundabout way to the readers of the *Scotsman*.

J. G. SHEPHERD.—Glad you derive so much pleasure and profit from reading the *Freethinker*. Thanks for address.

J. BROUGHT.—See "Acid Drops."

H. STOKES.—You would find most of the words in Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* in Chambers' cheap Etymological Dictionary, but some technical words would only be found in scientific manuals. Glad to hear from you as one who came across the *Freethinker* two months ago and has been reading it with pleasure ever since.

A. R. BRD.—Thanks for the paper. All we will say is that we are sorry that Mr. Ward was drawn into a debate with a brainless hooligan.

A. NOTLEY.—By answering your letter here we may enlighten other Branches as well as yours. (1) You should not worry about the Christians taunting you because you charged for admission to your lectures. It is better to pay your way than to attend to their whims and prejudices. (2) Registered places of worship cannot legally be used for any commercial purpose, such as lectures and concerts with a charge for admission. (3) Mission halls may, or may not, be places of religious worship; it depends on whether they are registered as such; merely using them for religious purposes does not make them so legally. (4) The police and the rates-committee are the parties to be first approached, if it is desired to bring pressure to bear upon the religious bodies concerned.

HARRY ORGAN.—Yes, bring your friend along to our next Glasgow lectures, and come up and shake hands at the close of the meeting. Perhaps the space you are reserving on the wall for our "photo" may be filled presently. Thanks for good wishes.

F. W. AIREY.—Sent as desired. Glad to hear from you as "one of the rapidly growing army of young Freethinkers."

J. W. E. BENNETT.—Much pleased to receive cuttings from your wife—you yourself being too busy. It is good to see women interested in Freethought.

J. S. CLARKE.—Too late for this week: see next.

W. BRADBURN.—The young man's father, who says he heard the Logan-Foote debate at Bristol, and saw Mr. Foote take out his

watch and give God five minutes to strike him dead, has a fine romantic imagination. The existence of God was not in question in that debate. The question discussed was the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

E. EASTHAM.—Miss Vance has shown us your letter, which will be laid before the N. S. S. Executive. With regard to the debate, see our answer to another correspondent. We are glad to hear that the Christians generally are ashamed of their representative; but his character was known, and all the rest should have been foreseen.

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*.

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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.

### Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote lectures twice to-day (Dec. 3), afternoon and evening, in the Royal Assembly Hall, South Shields. This handsome and commodious hall, in the very centre of the town, takes some filling, of course; and it is to be hoped that the Tyneside "saints" will do their best to bring together two audiences at least as good as the fine ones that assembled on the occasion of Mr. Foote's last visit. The subjects of the lectures are fresh and attractive, and there will be some good music before each of them.

The stormy weather told somewhat on Mr. Foote's audience at Stanley Hall on Sunday evening. The attendance, however, was larger than might have been expected in such unfavorable conditions. Mr. Foote's lecture on "What has Christianity done for Russia?" was followed with profound attention and very warmly applauded at the finish. Some questions were asked and answered, but there was no discussion.

We are glad to announce that the Stanley Hall lectures will be continued until the Sunday before Christmas Eve. The lecturer this evening (Dec. 3) will be Mr. F. A. Davies, who will speak on "Jesus Christ and the Labor Party." Mr. Davies is well-known as a lecturer in South London, and we hope North Londoners will give him a hearty welcome on this occasion. Mr. Foote will take Dec. 10 and 17, and deliver two seasonable discourses.

Mr. S. G. Poole, who contested the Harnall Ward of Coventry, at the recent by-election, as the Labor candidate, is a member of the local N. S. S. Branch, and had Secular Education on his program. He was opposed by an "official" Liberal candidate. Mr. Poole won by the substantial majority of 92—the voting being 453 to 361.

Mr. Evan Jones, the independent-of-creed-and-party candidate, of Plasbet East Ward, East Ham, has been elected on a large poll by the fine majority of 127 votes. Mr. ex-Councillor Wilkinson, who made a great point of the Bible-in-the-schools policy, and for whom the religious voters polled to a man, may now devote himself exclusively to his chapel. The note in this column three weeks ago opened the eyes of the true progressive voters to the real point at issue, and we congratulate ourselves and East Ham generally.

Mr. E. Anderson is endeavoring to organise the Freethinkers about East Ham in support of the West Ham Branch. A room for meetings has been engaged at 365 High-street, North, where all local "saints" and friends will be welcome.

We have not had time yet to do justice to some important circulars that reached us from the Leicester Secular Society, but we hope to deal with them in our next issue.

Sir E. J. Poynter's picture "Faithful unto Death," in the Walker Gallery, at Liverpool, has been reproduced on a picture postcard, by permission of the Liverpool Corporation. Mr. W. Mann, in sending us a copy, says, "It would make a good text for a Freethought sermon." Yes, and it has been preached, curiously enough, by Mark Twain. We fancy it occurs in the *Innocents Abroad*, but we are not quite sure, and Mark Twain's works are not at hand as we are writing. We are certain, however, about the sermon itself. It is on the Roman soldier who stood like a rock at his sentinel's post in Pompeii, while the doomed city was being destroyed, and streets and houses were cumbered with the dead, or echoing the sounds of the vain flight of the still living.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, will take place at the Holborn Restaurant (as usual) on Tuesday, January 9. Metropolitan "saints" will please note.

The Liverpool Branch had a good supply of our *Dr. Torrey and the Infidels* pamphlet for distribution at the "great revivalist's monster farewell meeting"—before his embarkation for America. Thus the libeller of Paine and Ingersoll has been followed up to the very last. He will probably be more chary in future of lying about great "infidels."

For many months the *Liberal Review* (Chicago) has not reached us. The November number has just arrived. Mr. Mangasarian's name is still on the front as editor, but we see nothing about him inside. We hope there is nothing wrong—and particularly that Mr. Mangasarian is not ill; or, as the Americans say, in good old English, "sick."

#### HUMANITY'S PAST.

They tell us of the beauty of the southern night, when the din and glare of the day being over, the earth lies in the profoundest quiet, in the repose of midnight. The night there is not more than the absence of day; darkness but not gloom; not blackness, but a darkness which leaves the objects we know by daylight, city and field, traceable in softer outline. We can still discern the scene of ancient industry on which man for centuries has lived and labored, and above the labors of man there is the face of heaven, with its full magnificence of stars in their southern clearness and brightness. Some such impression is that which the Past should have constantly for us. It bears in its bosom the effort and the cultivation of man, it has received and accepted his ceaseless continuous labors, it is overspread with an atmosphere of calm. There has been toil and conflict, but they are over, and their results only remain. Above all that lies buried in its folds there is seen the host of its great spirits, the stars in the firmament of history, shedding light and glory on the solemn stillness.—*Richard Congreve.*

#### ROBERT BURNS.

He felt scant need  
Of church or creed,  
He took small share  
In saintly prayer,  
His eyes found food for his love;  
He could pity poor devils condemned to hell,  
But sadly neglected endeavors to dwell  
With the angels in luck above:  
To save one's precious peculiar soul  
He never could understand is the whole  
Of a mortal's business in life,  
While all about him his human kin  
With loving and hating and virtue and sin  
Reel overmatched in the strife.  
"The Heavens for the Heavens, and the  
earth for the earth!  
I am a man—I'll be true to my birth—  
Man in my joys, in my pains."  
So fearless, stalwart, erect and free,  
He gave to his fellows right royally  
His strength, his heart, his brains;  
For proud and fiery and swift and bold—  
Wine of life from heart of gold,  
The blood of his heathen manhood rolled  
Full-billowed through his veins.

—*James Thomson* ("B.V.")

## The Book of the Acts.—I.

### ITS ALLEGED AUTHENTICITY AND CREDIBILITY.

To the student of Christian origins the most important of the New Testament writings is the book called the "Acts of the Apostles." This remarkable work professes to be a record of the origin and growth of the primitive Christian Church from the time of the alleged crucifixion of Jesus to the procuratorship of Festus (A.D. 30-62). But, unfortunately for those who desire to trace the rise of Christianity, the so-called "history" in this book is nothing but silly fiction, which serves only to block the way to any real investigation in this direction.

The only New Testament writings which may with any show of reason be received as historical are some of the Pauline Epistles and a portion of the Book of Revelation; but, with the exception of three or four doubtful passages, these documents contain no indication of the time when they were written. There is nothing in the epistles of Paul, for instance, to denote when that apostle lived, and it is probably for this reason that nearly all critics accept the "history" in the Acts as something to work upon. Some scholars, indeed, are sufficiently advanced to reject the miraculous element in that ancient romance; but even these appear to regard the majority of the events therein recorded as more or less historic. Yet, I have no hesitation in saying that anyone free from theological bias, who examines the book critically and rationally, can arrive at but one conclusion as to the character of its contents—namely, that this so-called history is a mass of legend, committed to writing in the second century, and destitute of any historical foundation whatever.

If we accept the traditional view, the book of the Acts was written by Luke, a companion and fellow laborer of Paul, who accompanied that apostle on some of the missionary journeys recorded in the book. The presence of this colleague is said to be indicated by the employment of the pronouns "we" and "us," which occur in the following portions of the work: Acts xvi. 10-18; xx. 5—xxi. 18; xxvii. 1—xxviii. 16.

Amongst the apologetic literature which has in recent years appeared in support of this traditional view, the most plausible and convincing is perhaps a small book of about 150 pages by Lord A. C. Hervey, D.D., Bishop of Bath and Wells, in which the writer endeavors to demonstrate the absolute correctness of that view. This work, which is entitled *The Authenticity of the Gospel of St. Luke*, has been written, the author tells us, "with the view of bringing within reach of those who have not easy access to many books, both the results of learned research into the history of the Gospels, and also some of the evidences of the truth of Christianity." This is just what every Rationalist will be glad to hear. And, as this little book says all that can be said on the orthodox side, I propose to take and examine first the evidence which it offers, and afterwards to look at the "history" in the Acts from a more rational point of view: we shall thus see the evidence for, as well as against, the credibility of the book.

"An enormous mass of learning and ingenuity," says our Lord Bishop, "has been expended in endeavoring to prove that the Gospels were not written or compiled by the persons whose names they bear—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—but are the production of unknown writers in the second century." Here I may remark, in passing, that there is no reason why anyone should attempt to prove that the Gospels were not written by "the persons whose names they bear." It is, on the contrary, in the highest degree probable that the compilers of these books were named Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—though not the individuals to whom the compilations have been ascribed. While rejecting the theory of the second century origin of the Gospels as ridiculous and preposterous, Bishop Hervey admits that, were such the case, "in the course of a hundred

years there would be plenty of time for a whole crop of myths to gather round the name of Jesus Christ, just as later they gathered round the name of King Arthur or the Emperor Charlemagne, or famous saints in the legendary history of the Church." Just so; this is what rationalistic critics have all along asserted. We have a full century, and more, subsequent to the traditional date of the Crucifixion before any of the four Gospels can be shown to have been in existence; but this matter I am not now discussing.

After drawing attention to the fact, now admitted by all critics, that the author of the Acts of the Apostles was also the compiler of the Gospel of Luke, Dr. Hervey elects to prove first the authenticity of the Acts, and, this feat accomplished, to demonstrate the genuineness of the Third Gospel. Furthermore, we are told, "If St. Luke's Gospel can be proved to be authentic, it carries with it the truth of the whole Gospel story—the birth, the life, the miracles, the teaching, the death, and the resurrection of our Lord—and confirms the authority of the other synoptic Gospels." Thus is the Acts of the Apostles the key to the twofold question of the authenticity and credibility of the four Gospels. Of course, if the Acts can be shown to have been written in apostolic times, so undoubtedly were the Gospels; and if the accounts of the early church in the Acts can be shown to be trustworthy, there will be a strong presumption in favor of the genuineness of the "history" contained in the Gospels—of which history the Acts profess to be a continuation. Hence, to achieve this most desirable result, our Bishop devotes the first half of his book to evidence proving the authenticity and credibility of the Acts. It is this portion of his book I am about to examine.

In commencing his somewhat formidable task Bishop Hervey invites his readers to consider, in the first place, the external or historical evidence for the early date of the Acts. The ecclesiastical historian Eusebius (A.D. 325) quoted and referred to many of the narratives contained in the book, besides expressly stating that it was written by Luke, a physician, a fellow laborer of Paul, and names it as one of the New Testament books which were "acknowledged and received by all." Secondly, the authorship of the book is ascribed to Luke in the undated Muratorian Fragment, which our Bishop assigns to A.D. 170—a decade or two earlier than most critics. Thirdly, the Acts is one of the books found in the Syriac and Old Latin versions of the New Testament, whose translation from the Greek Dr. Hervey places "before the year A.D. 150." He then says: "Thus.....the Acts of the Apostles were considered a part of the Holy Scriptures certainly as early as the middle of the second century, probably much earlier." Here I would beg to remind our very confident apologist that since the Syriac, the Old Latin, and all the other versions of the New Testament were derived from the Greek, he has first to prove the existence of the Acts in Greek; for it was not until the book had become widely known in the latter tongue that translations came to be made into other languages. As a simple matter of fact, we have no evidence as to the exact time when the first translation into Syriac or Old Latin was made. This may have been as early as the end of the second century, or it may have been later. It certainly was not "before the year A.D. 150."

Returning to Dr. Hervey's external evidence, we are next informed that there are quotations from the Acts, or references to matters contained in the book, found in the works of early Christian writers. Amongst these are named Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Irenæus, and Justin Martyr. As regards the first three of these writers the statement is, of course, correct, for they all wrote later than A.D. 180. No one denies that the Acts of the Apostles, as well as the Gospels, existed in the Greek in the last quarter of the second century. With regard to Justin, however, the case is different. The writings of this ancient apologist (A.D. 156) show no acquaintance with the Acts. The examples from Justin's

works which our Bishop adduces in proof of this knowledge do not bear out his contention. The following is the only one deserving of any notice:—

ACTS XXVI. 21-23.

JUSTIN.

".....saying nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that *Christ must suffer*, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and the Gentiles."

"It has been obscurely declared by the prophets that *Christ should suffer*, and after that be Lord of all."

Here it should be borne in mind that Justin has not named the Acts of the Apostles, nor even once referred to any person or event narrated in that book. All through his writings he quotes passages from "the prophets," which he says were predictions relative to Christ; but these he selected himself. According to this ancient commentator, every rod, staff, stick, or piece of wood mentioned in the Old Testament predicted or prefigured the cross of Christ. The passage cited by Dr. Hervey is merely one of Justin's many statements on the subject.

Our reverend apologist next cites Papias, Ignatius, Polycarp, and Clement of Rome—whose writings he places at A.D. 116, A.D. 107, A.D. 108, and A.D. 96 respectively—as quoting or referring to matters mentioned in the Acts. With regard to these alleged witnesses it is necessary to say (1) that the dates which Dr. Hervey assigns to the documents attributed to them should be several decades later, and (2) that assuming the writings to be authentic, they display no knowledge of anything narrated in the Acts. The epistles attributed to Ignatius and Polycarp are generally admitted to be interpolated, if not wholly spurious; they are therefore worthless as evidence—even if they contained any, which they do not. There remain, then, to be considered but the fragments of Papias and the Epistle of Clement. As regards the first of these Bishop Hervey says:—

"Papias refers to Barsabas, surnamed Justus (Acts i.), and to the daughters of Philip the Evangelist (Acts xxi.)."

Now Eusebius, after reading Papias's book, says of the writer:—

"He records certain wonderful events that he seems to have received by tradition.....he relates that he had heard a marvellous account from the daughters of Philip, how that in his time one was raised from the dead. And again, he gives another wonderful story about Justus who was surnamed Barsabas, how that he drank a deadly poison, and yet by the grace of the Lord sustained no harm. This same Justus is mentioned in the book of the Acts" (Ecc. Hist., iii., 39).

It will here be seen that it was Eusebius, not Papias, who referred to the Acts of the Apostles. Papias, we know, had stated plainly in his book how he gained his information. He button-holed every elderly Christian who came his way, and whatever they told him he entered in his notebook. It is true that in the Acts we find mention made of "Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus" and of the "four daughters" of Philip the Evangelist; but the stories related by Papias must be set down as legends current in his time—about A.D. 140-150. We have no evidence that this credulous bishop ever saw a copy of the Acts; but from some of the statements in his book—that Peter required the aid of an interpreter, and that Judas Iscariot, swollen to an immense size, was knocked down by a chariot and killed—it seems pretty certain that he knew nothing of the story of the gift of tongues or the narrative of the death of Judas, now recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

### Christ's Influence on Human Life.

FOR many years I have held and taught that the New Testament Christ and his disciples are sheer myths, not historical beings. All the same they

have exercised an influence upon human life quite as deep and lasting as they could have done had they actually lived. Indeed, in this case, as in so many others, fictions have been immensely more powerful than realities could have been; for sober matter of fact can never sway people as do poetry, romance, and works of imagination generally. This needs no illustration, for most people are more or less aware of it.

Be Christ, then, historic or mythical, we have to deal with him as a reality, for the clergy and their abettors trade upon him incessantly and are advertising him in every way they can think of for the purpose of gain. It is our duty to oppose them; and I know of no better way of doing them damage than by taking their Christ as he appears in the New Testament and exposing the horrid teaching they say fell from his lips. It is all the more necessary for us to do this, because the clergy of to-day are continually cracking up their Christ as the paragon of all perfections. In fact they openly defy us—they impudently say, "You may prove Christ to be unhistorical, the New Testament to be a forgery, but here is one perfect man Christ, perfect fiction if you will, but still perfect. And we challenge you to point out a single fault or flaw in his surpassing example and doctrines." This, in brief, is what we are ceaselessly challenged to do; and as Freethinkers we never shrink from the task, for we know their defiance to be a sham and their Christ the most mischievous fiction ever set before mankind.

In this paper I will show what Christ taught with regard to domestic life—the most important department of our existence. If his influence upon this has been "evil and only evil, and that continually," then he must be considered the worst of all possible teachers—as I for one think him to be.

Of course, Christ himself never knew what home life meant, for home is quite unknown to the Bible. His "parents" could not have been a happy couple, seeing that Mary's husband was not her son's father. True, a dream is said to have mollified Joseph, but we may well question if it ever made the poor imbecile content. Mary's infidelity must have poisoned all domestic happiness, and the child may have owed his life-long hatred of home to the scenes he witnessed in his early days. That vile home, if historical, is still cursing Christendom by its effects upon Christ and his teaching. Be it how it may, it is a fact that nowhere in the New Testament does Christ speak with the least respect of his mother or his brothers, except that on the cross he hands his mother over to a disciple. In fact, he openly and brutally repudiated her and his brothers, and put his disciples into their place, his disciples having been bribed by empty promises to forsake their own wives and families for his pleasure.

If this had been the worst, we should have had much to complain of in the character of this most perfect man, but the worst is yet to be mentioned. What did this "divine teacher" say about domestic life and duties? I must quote a few passages from the New Testament:—"But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. . . . That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matt. v. 28-32).—"All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matt. xix. 11-12).—"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26).

I need quote no more at present, and no long comment will be required to set the subject in its true light. Dealing with the questions seriatim, I may

briefly note the essence of each. Nothing more absolutely damnable has ever been uttered on sex matters than the first of the above quotations. The Jewish Bible encourages people to increase and multiply even to the filling of the earth; and therein the sex elements are treated as perhaps the very best elements of life, as in truth they are. But Christ makes it one of the worst of crimes for a man to feel the natural and necessary desire to multiply; nay, so ghastly is this crime that he bids all who have the nerve to do so to make themselves eunuchs, insinuating very plainly that there is no other road to salvation for them. It cannot be said that all asceticism and anti-domestic horrors originated with Christ, for eastern lands swarmed with nasty monks, nuns, and most filthy "holiness" many ages before. And that fact leads to the obvious caution that we must expound what Christ says in the light (I mean the darkness) of his own time and place, for those who heard him must have understood him to be preaching the doctrines then so rife and common. No doubt Christ was the product of the asceticism of the times, the embodiment of the anti-domestic, anti-human notions of Syrian and Egyptian piety. Circumcision and much more, castration and entire excision were widespread practices, not confined to darkness or to corners, but openly flaunted before the face of day. Fully imbued with the nastiness of his surroundings, this horrid Yahoo stigmatises as adultery the natural and inevitable impulses of every healthy man. This unspeakable being thinks the very *fons et origo* of offspring, the flame and passion that produce the most innocent and charming members of the human race, to be unclean, impure and even damnable! If not insane, he must have been as loathsome a creature as ever breathed. No one ever went farther than Christ in this most evil direction; and if we wish to know the origin of the sex horrors in Popery, the nasty celibate priests and nuns, we have but to read what the New Testament relates of Christ.

Sexual aberrations and evils have existed everywhere, but I have yet to learn that any savage or barbarian race was ever disgraced by or noted for such horrors as priestly celibacy, conventual virginity and general prostitution as they exist in Christian lands; and all these horrors are the natural and necessary fruits of the teachings of Christ. If natural impulse be so criminal and hell-deserving as Christ says, the only safety lies in crushing it, or in such surgical operation as will render it impossible. And if a woman should dare to be a mother without a priestly license, why, cast her out as utterly unclean, as a social leper; drive her to the stews and subject her contraband child to a life-sentence of penal servitude and social ostracism. All women who follow the course of nature, all victims of heartless males—make them pariahs, treat them worse than dogs, and learn to shudder at them when you come in sight of them.

Such are some of the fruits of Christ's teaching upon matters he never understood in any rational sense. If the fetish book of the churches had never alluded to sex matters at all; nay, if Christ had rushed to the opposite extreme and by precept and example enjoined upon his dupes unlimited indulgence and unrestrained licentiousness, the "Christian world" would have been immeasurably less disgusting than it ever has been. Courtship, marriage, divorce, home can never become healthy and rational until Christ, Christianity and priestcraft have been utterly swept out of human life and their odors and effluvia destroyed by plentiful fumigation. When that has been thoroughly done common sense and experience can take charge of domestic life and so regulate its elements and forces as to realise therefrom the utmost possible good and the least possible evil.

The clergy have the impudence to say that the verb (*miseo*), in Luke xiv. 26, does not mean to hate, but something much milder—to "love less." Even that would stamp Christ an unmitigated barbarian, to demand of his disciple greater love than he bestowed

or ought to bestow upon parents, wife, and children. Only the worst selfishness could demand anything of the kind, or even ask for it. Here the demand is a fee to be paid for discipleship and for a hundred-fold more, parents, wives, children, and chattels, in the present life (Mark x. 28-30), and in some imaginary state, endless life. That was all poor Jesus could offer to induce his dupes to hate and forsake all they had; and anything more windy than his promises could not be imagined.

But the verb *niseo* signifies *to hate*, and never means anything else. No scholar can name a passage wherein it has a milder meaning; and the sole reason existing for trying to soften it is to redeem Christ from the charge of teaching so atrocious and fiendish a duty. Even the Revised Version of the Bible retains the old reading, merely printing the verb *hateth* instead of *hate*. So Christ must stand charged with enjoining upon his dupes the most outrageous duty of hating all things they are bound most especially to love.

In face of this, there are many thousands of stupid people and dishonest ones engaged in imposing upon innocent children the grim and ghastly fiction of "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," while crowds of innocents are astonished that we should expose and denounce their superstitions. If any plea for reform, if any denunciation of error, has ever been justifiable, we ought to be honored as the best friends of humanity for battling as we do with man's worst gods and his worst superstitions. In my opinion, the very worst teacher, leader, exemplar and god, man ever had, is the Christ of the New Testament. If you wish to estimate the evil he has done, look first at his teachings, and then at their fruits in thousands of "homes" where married couples endure a hopeless and unnecessary bondage; look at the armies of priests vowed to an impossible continence and at their thousands of prison-harems crowded with their female dupes and paramours; and then survey the prostitution so rife in every Christian country. Remember that all those horrors would be immeasurably worse than they are if better influences than those of Christ & Co. had not in great part redeemed and mollified them.

JOS. SYMES.

Cheltenham, Victoria, Australia, Oct. 1, 1905.

## Correspondence.

### CHRISTIANITY AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I observe in the *Freethinker* your remarks *re* John Hodge, and also in a previous issue of Mr. A. Henderson, M.P., *re* the support they are giving to Christianity. I have a great respect for both men; but they no more represent the attitude of Labor towards Christianity than the remarks of Dr. Clifford represent Secularism. I have had ten years' experience as a Labor agitator for the seamen in all parts of the United Kingdom, and during that time have spoken with hundreds of men in the Labor movement; and the majority are thoroughgoing Freethinkers.

All Labor men who have had to deal with Christian employers (so-called) have found that Christianity was only used as a cloak, and generally that the larger the said Christian employer gave of his wealth to church or chapel, hospital, etc., the worse his workmen were paid.

Mr. John Hodge knows this.

I could give you scores of instances to prove same.

I was glad to hear you again at Glasgow one month ago, and hope that the words I dropped there as to your visiting Cardiff will bear fruit, and that we shall soon have your presence in Wales, conducting a "revival" of Freethought.

J. HENSON, *Sec. Seamen's Union.*

85 Castleisland-street, Barry Dock, S. Wales.

Your hearts are, if you leave them unstirred, as tombs in which a god lies buried. Vow yourselves crusaders to redeem that sacred sepulchre.—*John Ruskin.*

## "The Priests of the Bloody Faith."

—SHELLEY.

O priest, on the shore of the Past,  
I hear, as I look on your face,  
A voice on the wings of the blast  
That whispers the doom of your race.

O ominous bird with a beak,  
Black-hooded, black-visaged, unclean,  
You stand on the nethermost peak  
And croak to the fat and the lean.

In the fathomless cavern of Night  
You were cradled and reared, in the wake  
Of the damp and the mildew and blight,  
And the toad, and the venomous snake.

Thus bred, in the slime and the gloom,  
The poisonous, pestilent stink  
Of vapors that rise from the tomb,  
And slops of the clerical sink;

Part-human, part-bird and part-beast,  
You preyed on the weak from the first;  
Now, that which was greatest is least,  
To-day you are banned and accurst.

You fostered a faith that was bloody,  
And nurtured an exquisite pain,  
Your mean soul grew turgid and muddy  
And swollen, and black with the rain—

The deluge of red rain which fell, [sheath.  
When the sword was withdrawn from its  
And the flames and the hot fumes of hell  
Were blown by the wind in your teeth.

For a dark thousand years and a day,  
At the portals of birth and of death,  
You stood, while the fair world grew gray  
At your presence and blast of your breath.

And yours was the shame and the crime,  
A turbulent, terrible flood!  
Your altars are foul with the rime  
Of centuries written in blood.

Yet, the harvest so barren and sere,  
The Curse, and the flesh-searing brand  
Of the devils with horns, disappear,  
As waters are swallowed in sand.

Like a tree that is riven and stark,  
You stand with your arms in the air,  
And stumble alone in the dark,  
Engulfed in the slough of Despair.

No more shall the thunders of Rome  
Be heard, as a sign from the gods,  
As driven from harbor and home  
You flee, and are smitten with rods.

With the hall-mark of Cain on your face,  
Pursued by the ghosts of the past,  
You fall in a desolate place—  
The doom is upon you at last!

WILLIAM EMSLEY.

### JAPANESE ANCESTOR WORSHIP.

When the father of a Japanese family begins a journey of any length, the raised part of his room will be made sacred to his memory during his temporary absence; his family will gather in front of it and think of him, expressing their devotion of love in words and gifts in kind. In the hundreds of thousands of families that have some one or other of their members fighting for the nation in this dreadful war with Russia, there will not be even one solitary house where the mother, wife, or sister is not practising this simple rite of endearment for the beloved and absent member of the family. And if he die on the field, the mental attitude of the poor bereaved towards the never-returning does not show any substantial difference. The temporarily departed will now be regarded as the forever departed, but not as lost or passed away. His essential self is ever present, only not visible. Daily offerings and salutations continue in exactly the same way as when he was absent for a time. Even in the mind of the modern Japanese with its extremely agnostic tendencies, there is still one corner sacred to this inherited feeling. —Prof. Okakura, "The Japanese Spirit," pp. 92-93.

## 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.

STANLEY HALL (near the "Boston," Junction-road, N.): 7.30. F. A. Davies, "Jesus Christ and the Labor Party."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, New Church-road): 3, F. Vicars, "What Christianity Owes to the Bible."

EAST HAM (Club Room, 365 High-street North, opposite "Ruskin Arms"): Monday, Dec. 4, at 8; discussion, "Land Nationalisation as a Cure for Unemployment."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Liberal Hall, Broadway, Forest Gate, E.): 7.30, J. T. Lloyd, "What think ye of Christ?"

### COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Prince of Wales Assembly Rooms, Broad-street): Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, 3, "Alien Immigration"; 7, "Morality Without Religion."

FALSWORTH SECULAR SUNDAY SCHOOL (Pole-lane): 6.30, Oldham Friends Adult School Hand-Bell Ringers."

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Discussion Class: J. Glen, "An Hour with the Microscope"; 6.30, Vocal and Instrumental Concert.

GLASGOW RATIONALIST AND ETHICAL ASSOCIATION (319 Sauchiehall-street): Monday, Dec. 4, at 8, Stephen Downie, "Individualism."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Joseph McCabe, "The Evolution of Man." With Lantern Illustrations.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): H. Percy Ward, 3, "Christianity Before Christ"; 7, "The New Woman and the Old Man." Monday, 8, Rationalist Debating Society.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints): 6.30, W. A. Rogerson, "Heredity, Education, and Environment."

NEWCASTLE RATIONALIST LITERARY AND DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Cafe): Thursday, Dec. 7, at 8, F. Drummond, "Historical and Administrative Aspects of Education."

PORTRH BRANCH N. S. S. (Room, Town Hall, Porth): 6.30, Jas. B. Grant, "Secular Substitutes for the Bible and Religion."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Royal Assembly Hall, Mile End-road): G. W. Foote, 3, "The Gospel of Sir Oliver Lodge"; 7, "What Has Christianity Done for Russia?" Music. 2.40 and 6.40.

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