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*Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That, if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.*
—SHAKESPEARE.

Birmingham Bigots.

BIRMINGHAM used to be a great centre of light and liberty. Never during the whole of the Bradlaugh struggle did the voice of John Bright, the noblest representative the city ever had, falter in denouncing the action of the bigoted majority in the House of Commons, or in defending the right of the "hateful Atheist" to take the seat to which Northampton had again and again elected him. Birmingham then, not to go back further, stood boldly for freedom and justice. But those two precious things are under a heavy cloud in the Birmingham of to-day. Brute force is triumphant there. It was Mr. Birrell's statement that minorities must always suffer; Birmingham goes a step further and declares that minorities have no rights.

The handing over of one human interest after another to the rule of majorities may be political wisdom. That is a point which is not discussable in these columns. But this policy does not appear to work out to the advantage of pioneer movements and unpopular opinions. Town Councils are easily persuaded to be partial and despotic when the victims are only apostles of principle who are not organised for political action. Free Libraries, controlled by representatives of the ratepayers, notoriously exclude outspoken Freethought publications from their book-shelves and reading-tables. Even in a democratic borough like West Ham the bigots had little difficulty in excluding the *Freethinker* in that way. Going with a multitude to do evil seems as popular a practice now as it was three thousand years ago.

Down at Birmingham a dead set was made against the Secularists when the great wave of reaction swept over England in 1899. They were becoming prosperous, and the bigots felt it was time they were annihilated. They were at that time holding highly successful meetings at the Bristol-street Board School. This had to be stopped. But a frontal attack on the Secularists was impolitic. Some of the old spirit still lingered in Birmingham. Many of its inhabitants might not like the naked assertion that non-Christians were not entitled to any of the privileges of citizenship. Accordingly a flank attack was organised. A trumped-up charge was made against the local Branch of the National Secular Society. It was accused of selling "immoral literature" at its meetings. Had the accusation been true it would have been a case for the police. But it was not true—and the accusers knew it. They used the word "immoral" loosely, so as to cover everything inimical to Christianity. Their religion was the ground and guarantee of morality; Secularists opposed their religion; therefore Secularists opposed morality—and consequently Secular literature was immoral. That is how the bigots argued. And it would be a very ill compliment to their intelligence to suppose that they were not deliberately dishonest.

Under the cover of this odious and ambiguous accusation, and in defiance of the natural request of the Secularists for specific evidence, the majority on the School Board committee dealing with such matters—who were at once accusers, witnesses, judges, and executioners—resolved that the N. S. S. Branch should only be allowed to use the School for lectures on condition that it should neither sell nor distribute literature. This insulting condition was declined, and the Branch went out into the wilderness. After some time it made a fresh application; and then the bigots, flushed with success, passed a resolution that no School should be let to the Secularists on any condition whatever.

One advantage, however, was still left the N. S. S. Branch. By courtesy of the Mayor it was occasionally granted the use of the Town Hall for special meetings. After the battle of 1899 these Town Hall meetings were taken in hand by the President of the National Secular Society. Every year his audiences increased, in spite of the press conspiracy of silence. At length the bigots regarded them as really dangerous. They also were to be stopped. But how to do it? Again the old tactics were employed. Complaint was made as to the literature sold at the Town Hall meetings. This time the complaint was more specific—and our readers shall see what the Birmingham bigots regard as "immoral literature." Of course the *Freethinker* was objected to, and *Bible Romances*; objection was also raised to Paine's *Age of Reason*, Ingersoll's *Lectures*, and Blatchford's *God and My Neighbor*. Mr. Blatchford was informed of the fact that selling his book was part of the Branch's offence, and he promised to render some assistance when the psychological moment arrived, but he never did. Neither did the local Socialists render any assistance. Nobody gave the Secularists any real help when their rights were attacked. But that is by the way. Our point is that there is nothing "immoral" in the aforesaid literature, except so far as all literature is "immoral" which Christian bigots may object to.

Secular literature was once more placed under an embargo, and the Branch's communications were treated with disdain. The "authorities" felt all that delightful glow which runs through the frame of a big bully when he seizes a small victim whose cries are certain to bring no assistance. All they had to do was to hit and kick; they did it, and they enjoyed it.

Recently the Branch renewed its application for the use of a school for Sunday meetings, and the matter came before the Education Committee on Friday, December 14. The Sites and Buildings Sub-Committee recommended that the vote of absolute exclusion should be rescinded, and that the Branch should be permitted to hire the schools, like other bodies, provided that no literature of any kind should be allowed to be sold or distributed on the school premises. Alderman Martineau (hats off to him!) proposed as an amendment which allowed the sale and distribution of literature. But there was no seconder. Then a first-class bigot, Mr. J. A. Lacy, moved that the Secularists should not be permitted to hire the schools for any purpose; and this was ultimately carried by twelve votes to seven.

We are glad that Mr. Lacy spoke. He let the cat out of the bag. He said that the object of the

N. S. S. Branch was to "make war on Christianity," and to "inculcate into the minds of the great mass of the people of the city the theories of infidelity, materialism, and atheism." Mr. Lacy is obviously not a philosophical speaker, but he serves a useful purpose. He shows Birmingham what bigotry is with the mask off. Criticism of Christianity is not to be permitted in public buildings which Free-thinkers are rated to build and maintain. Ninety per cent. of the people of Birmingham (a very liberal estimate!) are Christians, and the other ten per cent. should be thankful that they are allowed to live. This was Mr. Lacy's argument. And we ask the Birmingham people to make a note of it.

Mr. Howard Lloyd talked about "improper literature"—but we know what that means. Councillor Pentland hinted at what he "dared not say in the presence of ladies," and said "it was a question of the moral life of the city." But in an unguarded moment he declared that "free speech had done a lot of injury"—so it is easy to understand *him*.

Another point worthy of notice is this. The N. S. S. Branch passed a dignified resolution against the decision and the insults of the Education Committee. That resolution was printed in the local *Daily Mail*, but the local *Daily Post* and *Gazette* would not insert it. We believe both papers pride themselves on their liberality.

We shall have something to say next week as to the action that should be taken at Birmingham in the immediate future.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sir Oliver Lodge and His Catechism.

SOME time ago Sir Oliver Lodge prepared a religious catechism, which was intended as a twentieth-century scientific religion. It was propounded by a man of science, and so the religious world, ready to grasp at anything that the unthinking might mistake for scientific support, pronounced it to be the testimony of science to the truth of fundamental Christianity. It was, of course, nothing of the kind. For all the science in it, it might as well have been propounded by any local preacher in Great Britain. Sir Oliver's work in science is one thing; his opinion on matters that lie outside his province is quite another and a far different thing. And it cannot be too often said that when Sir Oliver leaves his laboratory and comes out into the open street to deal with religious topics, his statements carry no more weight than if they were made by any ordinary individual. They may even be of less value, for as a rule a specialist pays for his pre-eminence in one department by a subordinate position in others.

The other day Sir Oliver gave an address on his catechism before a specially-invited gathering of parsons at the Memorial Hall, London. Although special invitations had been sent out, the attendance, says the *Christian World*, was disappointing. Probably the parsons are only interested in Sir Oliver as an advertisement for their wares, and in the absence of prospective customers they may not have been specially anxious to hear Sir Oliver repeat his now familiar story. The speaker was introduced to the spiritual conclave by the Rev. R. J. Campbell, and Dr. Clifford came in at the end with a vote of thanks. He said that Sir Oliver was telling them what people would be thinking of forty years hence. It is far more likely that, if people think at all of his apologies forty years hence, they will treat them as we now do the Bridgewater Treatises of the early nineteenth century. Dr. Clifford also said it was a comfort to find that evolution contained a gospel of faith and of hope. One need not discuss "faith," which is a rather ambiguous word; but if Dr. Clifford has only just discovered that evolution holds out a hopeful message to mankind, it says very little for his previous understanding of the subject. Evolution, in pointing out the real conditions of animal and human development, has always been a hopeful

teaching to such as grasped its full import. It showed that human life was subject to the operation of natural forces, but it also made plain the fact that human intelligence could so manipulate these forces that progress might become more and more a matter of our own creating. It placed the conditions of improvement within our reach; and this gave more real hope than had ever been held out by any or all of the world's religions.

Sir Oliver Lodge's lecture consisted of a repetition of his catechism with comments. The first question was, "What are you?" and the answer is curiously illustrative of the want of scientific thinking of Sir Oliver when dealing with religion. The answer runs:—

"I am a being alive and conscious upon this earth, my ancestors having ascended by gradual processes from lower forms of animal life, and with struggle and suffering become man."

Now it certainly did not require profound thinking to evolve the first clause in this sentence. That man is alive is self-evident, although, as Sir Oliver expresses it, it is not descriptive of man. It would fit any animal, and therefore tells the inquirer nothing. Nor did Sir Oliver's ancestors ascend through struggle and suffering from low forms of life, any more than he did himself. Struggle and suffering is an individual matter, and it would be interesting to learn how or in what way Sir Oliver thinks the struggles and suffering of individuals has contributed to the development from an animal to a human form. It is only fair to Sir Oliver Lodge to explain that this catechism first occurred to him while taking a holiday for the recovery of his health in Italy. He then tried the catechism on his children. And, as it suited them, he elaborated it before a special assemblage of parsons.

The third article in the catechism deals with the distinctive character of man. This is that—

"he has responsibility for his acts, having acquired the power of choosing between good and evil, with freedom to obey one motive rather than another."

A philosophically cruder sentence was never penned by an eminent man. The whole dignity and character of man is made to depend upon the truth of a proposition that some of the clearest and greatest thinkers in the world have scouted as absurd, and which is destitute of the slightest shred of scientific proof. Not only is the implied statement that the weaker motive can express itself in action inconceivable—specially so, one would think, to a physicist and a metaphysician—but many opponents of determinism would shrink from expressing themselves in this manner. Not only does rational responsibility *not* depend upon "free will," but, given Sir Oliver's conception of the function of "motive," and responsibility becomes a mere empty word. But doubtless Sir Oliver's audience of children in the first case, and parsons in the second, were well satisfied with his presentment of a philosophical problem.

Answer number four describes the duty of man as consisting in self-development, to do good to others, to know the laws of nature, and to "obey the will of God." What on earth "God" has to do with the question is difficult to discover. He, or it, appears quite suddenly, with no connection whatever with anything that has gone before, and no very clear connection with anything that comes after. But this is probably characteristic of gods. At any rate, "God" was bound to come in somewhere, and his appearance is quite as reasonable in this place as elsewhere.

How does man know good from evil? asks question number six. And the answer is:—

"His own nature, when uncorrupted, is sufficiently in tune with the universe to enable him to be well aware in general of what is pleasing and displeasing to the guiding spirit, of which he himself should be a real and effective portion."

Now whatever else this sentence may be, it is certainly not science. Nor is it philosophy. It is simply City Temple theology out of place. If any

definite meaning at all is to be given to Sir Oliver's words, then the more "uncorrupted" man is the worse, from the point of view of civilised humanity, he is. And as to being "in tune with the universe," perhaps someone will explain in what way a man who commits a murder is less in tune with the universe than one who performs a good action. Again, from the human point of view, human development consists in getting decidedly out of tune with the universe and the "guiding spirit" that Sir Oliver places in control of its operations. The universe punishes the weak because of their weakness; man protects them because of their lack of strength. The universe visits the sins of the parent upon the child, and punishes the innocent for the guilty; man strives to limit the consequences of actions to such as perform them. Nature's punishments are absolutely irrespective of moral considerations. A poorly-clad man, going through rain or cold to help a fellow-creature in distress, will contract a deadly cold as easily as a professional burglar waiting to "crack a crib." Sir Oliver's catechism may contain very good theology—although I question even that—but such productions go far towards making scientific men ridiculous.

One of Sir Oliver's questions is, "What caused, and what maintains, existence?" The question is absurd enough as put, but, if possible, it is bettered in absurdity by the answer. Here it is:—

"Of our own knowledge we are unable to realise the meaning of origination or of maintenance; all that we ourselves can accomplish in the physical world is to move things about by means of our bodily organisms, and then leave them to act on each other; but we conceive that there must be some Intelligence supreme over the whole process of evolution, else things could not be as organised and as beautiful as they are."

And he adds that the idea that man arose by a chance aggregation of atoms is now unacceptable to science.

In one direction Sir Oliver is certainly making progress—theologically. This is in the art of stating as true that which is false. He has a perfect right to dissent from those who eliminate the supernatural from evolution, but he has no right to put forward as genuine a caricature of their position. Who was it who said that man "arose by a chance aggregation of fortuitous atoms"? One would really like a name and a date for such a statement. "Chance" never meant more to a scientist than what Darwin described it—happened by unknown causes; while the idea of atoms suddenly coming together and forming is, as Spencer said, a theological, not a scientific, conception. Sir Oliver Lodge would never dream of using such language before a scientific audience. Why should he use it before a gathering notorious for confusion of thought and indefiniteness of speech?

Sir Oliver is quite correct in saying that we cannot properly realise the meaning of origination; by which, I take it, he means the beginning of existence. But then it is an absurd question to ask. Existence is, and it must be taken as an indispensable datum for all thinking; and the fact that we cannot conceive origination is proof positive that Sir Oliver cannot properly conceive the nature of his own question or answer. The statement that there "must" be some Intelligence ruling the process of evolution may safely be dismissed as a meaningless piece of dogmatism. I do not see that there "must" be anything of the kind. If Sir Oliver Lodge can show that any other arrangement of the universe could have resulted than the one actually existing, he will have made out a case in favor of his Supreme Intelligence. Until he does that one may be excused declining to take him seriously when he steps outside his proper department. His children may have listened to his catechism with attention. His Memorial Hall gathering of dissenting parsons doubtless received it gladly. But outside these Sir Oliver's reputation as a thinker will hardly be increased thereby.

C. COHEN.

The Historicity of Jesus.—I.

ANOTHER anniversary of the birth of the supposed founder of Christianity is about to be celebrated throughout Christendom; and the coming celebration, like all its predecessors, will be characterised by astounding unintelligence and shallow sentimentalism. In prayer and sermon and song the dominant note will be this:—

"Thee with full heart the Virgin-born we greet,
Let every age with rapt amazement hear
That wondrous birth which for our God is meet."

Christians generally pay no heed whatever to the voice of reason and of sound judgment, but are carried away by misdirected emotion. There can be no doubt whatever but that scholars know quite well that the story of the Virgin Birth is a pure myth that has grown up round about the founders of most of the great religions of the world; and scholars know further that the story is no more true of one God-man than of all the others. All the Divine Saviors of the Pagan world of antiquity were Virgin-born; and so were most of its great men, such as Plato, Alexander the Great, and Augustus. And yet many of the scholars who tell us all this join, with apparent acquiescence, in the Christ-mas-tide devotions of uninstructed disciples, who betray their ignorance by dogmatically asserting that what is utterly false, as attributed to Perseus, Buddha, or Horus, is literally true when ascribed to Jesus.

At first, this impresses us as a highly anomalous state of things, but a moment's reflection will convince us that it is by no means unnatural one. The distance between *otherworldism* and *thisworldism* is so great that it cannot be covered at one leap. It must be remembered that the progressives of to-day were conservatives yesterday, and will be radicals to-morrow; and these three parties are to be found in the Church at this moment. The conservatives are still in the majority. They believe and teach the Virgin Birth, and regard Jesus as a Divine Being incarnate; and for believers in the inspiration and infallibility of the New Testament no other creed is logically possible. They are, therefore, the only thoroughly consistent Christians living. The progressives, recognising the legendary character of much in the Gospels, eliminate all supernaturalist elements from their estimate of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, the Miracles, and the Resurrection being looked upon as late additions to the original narrative. Between these two parties a fierce conflict is being waged, but both are ardent worshipers of the Galilean. Signs are not wanting that the progressives are steadily gaining ground, and may eventually supplant their conservative opponents altogether. Finding their iconoclastic arguments unanswerable, the conservatives resort to dogmatic denunciation; and this, of course, must, in the long run, seriously injure the orthodox cause. Now, naturally, the progressives slide on to radicalism. The conservatives say: "Jesus lived on earth as the God-man, being supernaturally born and supernaturally raised from the dead." The progressives speak thus: "Yes, Jesus doubtless did live, but only as a man specially endowed for a special work; and, as such, we give him our worship." At this point the radicals step in and "deny all historicity to Jesus," regarding "him simply as an ideal embodiment of the religion of Christianity which only gradually, and quite erroneously, came to be taken as a real person who had once actually lived." The active existence of this party within the Church is a proof positive that Christianity, as a religion founded upon supernatural events, is in the process of disintegration.

The radical party, in so far as it is found within the Church, is composed of scientific thinkers who still cling to the belief in the existence of God and the supernatural world. Pastor Kalthoff, of Bremen, one of the latest advocates of the non-historicity of Jesus, is still a Christian minister. Generally speaking, however, the members of this party are either

simple Deists or avowed Agnostics. Dupuis and Volney were Deists, and so, probably, were those disciples of Bolingbroke who maintained the thesis of unhistoricity. But whether Deists, Christians, or Atheists, Dr. Arno Neumann assures us that, "however surprising it may be to many, it is a fact that ever since Napoleon's time there has been a succession of writers in Germany, Holland, England, and America, who" have given their full support to the same thesis.

It is thus evident that even in the Christian Church itself, the trend of thought for a hundred years has been towards Naturalism or Secularism. To-day's most vital question is not "After what manner was Jesus born?" or "Had he one or two human parents?" but "Was he ever born at all?" In framing our answer, the following interesting points must be taken into account:—

1. Jesus himself left no documents behind him. He never wrote anything. Like Buddha, he was the oral teacher of a few disciples. Not only he committed nothing to writing himself, he gave no instruction to his followers to write anything. Whether or not he had any prevision of the great fame that would one day be his, it is clear that he attached no importance to writings as such. This is self-evident from the four Gospels as they stand.

2. We possess no notices of Jesus written during the time in which he is supposed to have lived, or soon thereafter, by men who were not his disciples. The references to him in the works of Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny, Lucian and Celsus, date from sixty to a hundred years after his death; and according to Dr. Schmiedel's own admission, even if these "are accepted in their entirety, they hardly establish more than that Christ was the founder of the sect of the Christians, and suffered the penalty of death at the hands of Pontius Pilate." Critically speaking, these notices are historically valueless. All scholars are agreed that "the oldest of them all, that of Josephus, is (at best) of only doubtful genuineness." Indeed, we are told that book xviii. in Josephus's *Antiquities*, in which the passage constantly trotted out by Christian apologists occurs, is omitted from the best MS. The fact is, as pointed out by Harnack, that the information about Jesus, supplied by both Jewish and Pagan writers, "in so far as it has successfully stood the test of criticism, could easily be brought within the compass of one quarto page"; and, for evidential purposes, this one quarto page might as well be blotted out and forgotten.

3. We now come to the four Gospels and the Epistles. The latter, being philosophical and doctrinal and not in the least historical, may be dismissed at once as evidentially of no value; and the former, once the belief in their Divine inspiration and inerrancy is given up, must be judged, like all other documents, on their merits. But have the Gospels any merits as biographical records? In a book recently published, entitled *Jesus*, to which Professor Schmiedel contributes a valuable Preface, Dr. Arno Neumann admits that fully two-thirds of the contents of the Gospels must be rejected as entirely mythical. All passages in which Jesus is represented as a Divine Being are rigidly set aside as non-historical. No miracles are accepted as actual occurrences. "Everywhere," Dr. Neumann says, "we find it necessary to distinguish all sorts of superimpositions and displacements; or to change the figure, when we come to investigate the life of Jesus we have to proceed somewhat like Schliemann when he undertook to rediscover ancient Troy: we have to work back as he did (to the city of Priam), through deposits of different ages."

So far, we are in hearty agreement with Dr. Neumann. All who wish to be rational are bound to repudiate the supernatural Jesus; but when the supernatural Jesus is gone, what is it that remains? Is anything left of which we can be historically certain? Dr. Neumann is here essentially illogical. He asserts that "none but a quite extraordinary person could have made so abiding an impression upon men" as Jesus is claimed to have made; but

is he not aware that it was the Gospel Jesus, the supernatural miracle-worker, who made so remarkable an impression upon men, the very Jesus whom he declares to have never lived at all? Apart from the Gospels, there are absolutely no records of the life of Jesus to which we can refer; and everybody knows that in the Gospels he is delineated as something more than man. Well, in the complete absence of other biographical documents, how can we possibly get at the mere man called Jesus, even on the assumption that such a person ever lived? Schmiedel and Neumann pretend to find him by means of seven or nine Gospel passages which are pronounced "absolutely credible," or "foundation-pillars," because they could not have been invented by believers in the Deity of the Nazarene; and they assure us that the absolute credibility of these texts gives validity to a large amount of other matter which otherwise would have to be looked upon as doubtful, or indeterminate. The most significant fact, however, is that, on examination, these "foundation-pillars" fall to the ground with a tremendous crash; and with them must go all the stuff they are said to validate.

Now the fact that a saying is in itself "absolutely credible" does not certify that it was ever actually uttered. There are thousands of entirely credible passages in works of fiction, but their credibility does not carry with it their historicity. Granting that Schmiedel's nine "absolutely credible passages" are such in reality, that does by no means establish their historicity. The writers or compilers of the Gospels in which they occur may not have noticed their lack of harmony with the central dogma of Christ's divinity, or the passages themselves as contained in our present Gospels may not have retained their original form or appropriate context. In any case, even their entire credibility would not be a sufficient guarantee for their entire historicity. Let us see.

J. T. LLOYD.

(To be concluded.)

They Are Coming Round!—IV.

(Continued from p. 790.)

NOT to extend these extracts and notes to an inordinate length, I must select mere fragments and append the briefest of comments. There is enough in the Gifford Lectures for a volume, but for my purposes such is not required. "The history of religion," says Dr. Sayce, "is a history of spiritual and intellectual" (?) "development; it deals with ideas and dogmas which shift and change with the process of the ages, and take, as it were, the color of each succeeding century." True. And how mad a God must be to give a revelation to a given generation for all subsequent ones! Dr. Sayce would have been far too wise to do that, though he thinks his God was fool enough to do it; nay, and fool enough to give that revelation to a tribe of barbarians and to uncivilised apostles, to be handed on by them to the cultured nations of modern times! Is it any wonder that a revelation so imparted and launched upon the world should have produced such confusion, bewilderment and madness, as we see in its votaries?

He fully admits and asserts that Babylonian religion and theology covered the whole of Western Asia before the Jewish patriarchs were born and that Genesis and the "laws of Moses" exhibit the clearest evidence of Babylonian influence. Babylonia was "the holy land" from time immemorial, and childish Christians and Jews, in calling Palestine by that name, merely imitate and pervert Babylonian Pagan sentiment.

The professor says of Babylonian religious texts, "They offer us magic and not religion, the wizard or witch and not the priest." This looks learned; but up to date no one has been able to draw the line between magic and religion, between witch and priest. Magic is a set of practices designed to

secure benefits for people from hidden and mysterious powers; and religion is exactly the same. The witch or wizard is one who knows how to perform the magic rites effectually; the priest is ditto. When all wizards and witches go no priest will remain; when magic ceases religion will be equally dead. Magic or witchcraft was always credited with power to inflict evil upon foes and benefits upon friends; and those are the essential characteristics of religion. All sacrifice is magical; and the death and blood and cross of Christ are beneficial in a magical sense, if at all. So of the stupid pantomimes called divine worship. The hymns and chants are intended to enchant, mesmerise, or hypnotise the God, the readings are intended to weave a spell upon him. The spell, the enchantment, the incense leave the God no choice but to "bless" the operator or his clients. Hence Jacob got the upper hand of God; and God was in an awful fright lest the spells of Balaam should compel him to curse Israel. "Let me alone," he exclaims to Moses when he wanted to murder the Israelites, "let me alone that I may destroy them." There is much more in the Bible to like effect. And are not wizards and witches gradually becoming once more respectable? Our modern ghost-raisers are in the "apostolic succession" of those of ancient times, the wizards and witches whom the Romish and Protestant priests so bitterly persecuted as rivals in trade. Sir William Crookes, one of the greatest of chemists and physicists, and Dr. Wallace, one of the foremost of biologists, have far more faith in the spook-mediums than in the Holy Ghost bladders of the Churches. And some future historian of religion, say a coming Sayce, may as likely as not set the wizards and witches above the priests, and magic above religion. Custom and taste are omnipotent in these matters—reason scorns them all alike.

"If the Hebrew Sheol [abode of dead ghosts] resembles the Hades of Babylon, or the Hebrew conception of rewards and punishments is like that of the Assyrians and Babylonians, it is because the Hebrew beliefs were derived from the civilisation of the Euphrates. Historically we know that the Israelites traced their origin from Ur of the Chaldees, and that in days long before Abraham (!), Canaan formed part of a Babylonian empire, and was permeated by Babylonian culture; on the theological side the derivation of the Hebrew doctrines is equally clear.....It is to Babylonia, therefore, that we must look for the origin of those views of the future world and of the punishment of sin in this life which have left so deep an impression on the pages of the Old Testament" (pp. 295-6).

Not bad for a Christian advocate! If Dr. Sayce does not figure as a Secularist lecturer, he is engaged in proclaiming our doctrines. Yet we are still outcasts for openly proclaiming the very truths the best Eastern scholars are also proclaiming. To be treated as honest men, we must transform ourselves into rogues. Honesty may be the best policy, but it is roguery that secures the prizes and the applause of the world. Fortunately, some of us are not eager to win them, or we might feel unhappy.

Referring to one of the very early gods of Babylonia, Dr. Sayce remarks, "As yet there was no god in the proper sense of the term. The superhuman powers that were dreaded and propitiated were ghosts only, like the ghosts of dead men; and, like the latter, they were denizens of the grave and the underground world." Of course, he does not say what is the proper sense of the term "god," nor can he distinguish gods from ghosts. God, ghost, bogey, bugbear, ghou, spirit, Jinn, fairy, goblin, etc., etc., are all of one genus; their differences are only matters of detail. A "proper" god for one person would be a monster to another. Taste and early training must decide questions of that sort. To us they are all alike, mere illusions; and vampires and goblins are quite as real as any god worshiped in the churches.

"The ghosts of the night," says he, "are accordingly objects of terror, harmful beings from whom all forms of sickness and insanity are derived. But even these ghosts can be controlled by those who

know the magic words or the mystic rites which they are compelled to obey. Between the ghost and his victim the sorcerer or medicine-man can interpose, and by means of his spells force the spirit to quit the body of the sufferer or enter the body of an enemy." Dr. Sayce seems to have no suspicion that he is here exposing and flinging ridicule upon Christ, who, according to the gospels (good-spells or effective enchantments) was a sorcerer or medicine-man, who could expel devils, demons, or ghosts who occupied men and women, and could compel them to enter pigs. Ay, and he intended his disciples to follow his own trade, and the magic rites he recommended for difficult cases, for the eviction of stubborn devils, were fasting and prayer. If Dr. Sayce were a real Jesus Christ Christian he would be able to cure diseases, physical and mental, by expelling the ghosts or demons that cause those evils. The Christ was but a slave to Babylonian superstitions, as deeply ignorant of the nature of disease as any of his contemporaries. Yet the worst of quacks are setting up this paltry devil-dodger as the model man, and abusing and enslaving children into believing him to have been divine. Their conduct is horrible.

Dr. Sayce thinks, or tries to believe, that there is an essential difference between Shamanism and religion, between the sorcerer and the priest; but that is one of his remaining superstitions; and no doubt he would feel uncomfortable in a Christian temple he attends if once satisfied that his religion were essentially sorcery and its operating quack. If performing senseless prayers, baptising, consecrating buildings, places and things, imparting Holy Ghost to chosen candidate, benedictions, and turning bread and wine into something else—if these be not magic, shams and sorcery, then nothing worthy of those names has ever been practised. When the professor can find or furnish a rational basis for belief in an intelligent God and a sound reason for what is called Christian worship I shall be ready to give it due consideration and to act as the new knowledge may dictate. In truth, Dr. Sayce destroys his own argument, and his Lectures furnish abundant proof that sorcery and religion, priest and magician, are inseparable. That foreign influences operated upon the more ancient superstitions of Babylonia and tended to develop them into the ripened religion of the country will not be questioned. Oannes or Ea was a god who came from the Persian gulf and civilised the ancient dwellers in the land afterwards known as Babylonia. In other words, a people from a distance came over the sea and brought with them a vastly superior civilisation, and those new comers worshiped this god just mentioned. The Australian Blacks, too, had plenty of gods, ghosts, spirits, and an abundance of religion before the Whites visited them. The latter introduced their European civilisation, and worshiped a God called Jehovah, etc., and performed ceremonies and rites the Blacks had never known. For all that, the God of the Whites and their pious performances had nothing to do with their civilisation, except to check its development. So was it in ancient Babylonia—a new set of superstitions arrived and modified and absorbed the older set. As Dr. Sayce says, one of the more ancient or indigenous ghosts became transformed into the Divine "Lord." There is nothing to prevent such transformation. Gods or ghosts may rise, fall, change their character, expand, contract, be born, die, etc., etc., just as their conditions may decide. There have been as many ghosts and gods as men and women, and our fate has been their fate; countless millions of them are for ever dead, and all the rest are dying. Dr. Sayce's God will not be the last to die, for the minor gods and goddesses will continue to eke out a miserable and degraded existence long after the big ones are forgotten. They were all small to begin with. The big ones became inflated and "magnified" by their flatterers until their unweildy size proved their destruction; the expansive gases pumped in burst the balloons.

In Babylonia the younger gods ousted the older. Merodach, their ancient and better Christ, over-

shadowed his father and monopolised all the worship. The Christian Christ did exactly the same in the Middle Ages, as Didron (*Christian Iconography*) sadly complains. The Father and Holy Ghost almost entirely disappeared from the pictorial Christianity of the times, and Christ flourished at their expense. No doubt "there was war in heaven" as a result, though the papers did not report it.

The professor expends a few pregnant words upon the grammar of the Semites and their predecessors, the Sumerians. The Semitic languages, including Hebrew, make their feminine nouns out of the masculine by a change in the termination; for example, *Adam* is masculine, *adamah* feminine; *sus*, a horse, *susah*, a mare. The feminine ending is a sort of shadow, a mere appanage, of the masculine. Hence, the woman became degraded into a mere shadow of the man, as she is wherever Bible and Christian influence prevails. It is the same in Mohammedanism, and so was it amongst the Semites of Babylon. Amongst their predecessors, the Sumerians, the woman occupied a high social position, possibly the highest in most respects. But the Semites degraded her to the lowest condition, and retained her merely as a necessary and indispensable evil. It was grammar that produced Eve from a bone (one rabbi said the tail) of Adam, a sort of a makeshift, not so much as thought of in the original plan of creation. Hence too the Semitic gods, though a few of them had shadow-wives, so to speak, had no consorts or female equals or companions. To this sort of grammar we owe it that the Jewish God, who passed over to the Christian Churches, has no wife, or had none during his prime, nor until Mary became his concubine at a late stage in his history. Certainly Jewish influence would never have married Jehovah; all that was done to give him a partner and a son was the result of Egyptian, Greek and Roman ideas. Had the grammar of Egyptian, Greek and Latin tongues degraded the feminine gender, as does the Hebrew, the entire scheme of Christian salvation—what an appalling thought!—would have been wanting, and human Mary and her divine and infinite Son would never have been a mint of money to the Popish and Protestant priests.

Of course, Dr. Sayce does not say all this; but I am only developing slightly the logic of his position. My next paper must dispose of this book of his. After that I hope to deal briefly with one or two other works of a more or less similar character.

JOS. SYMES.

(To be concluded.)

Acid Drops.

Nearly all the English newspapers write silliness about the "Religious War in France," and the Liberal papers are the silliest of all, for the simple reason that they maintain the Nonconformist policy, and Nonconformists see red wherever the Catholic Church is concerned. Both the *Daily News* and the *Westminster Gazette* had the incredible folly to speak of the Pope as "the foreign power who controls the Church" in France. Have they never heard that the Church in France is part of the Catholic Church, of which the Pope is the acknowledged supreme head? To lecture him in this high-and-mighty fashion for exercising his "spiritual" authority—for he has no other—seems to us downright imbecility.

The *Westminster* wound up its pretentious article with some arrant nonsense about French Freethought. Referring to the "estrangement between the Church and the laity" in France, it delivered the following sapient opinion:—

"It is not that *Jacques Bonhomme* is irreligious or that he holds the views of the few intellectual atheists who make a noise in Paris; it is simply that he is in revolt against an ecclesiasticism which has entirely lost touch with his simple needs and aspirations."

This is utter nonsense from beginning to end as a reading of the present situation. And what shall one say of the "few intellectual atheists who make a noise in Paris"? There are myriads of them all over France, and thousands and thousands of them in Paris. And their propaganda is not exactly

"noise." For the "intellectual atheists" include Clemenceau, Briand, Picquart, Viviani, and all the most powerful men in the present Cabinet; to say nothing of great masters of literature like Anatole France, and supreme scientists like M. Berthelot.

Nothing could be meaner than the attitude of the Paris correspondent of the *Daily News*. The Pope commanded the French clergy not to make public notifications under the Act of 1881. The Government treats that Act as applicable to religious assemblies, but Governments are not always right in their interpretation of the law, and there is serious doubt in legal circles in Paris as to the Government's being right in the present instance. It will be for the magistrates first, and finally for the Court of Cassation, to decide. Meanwhile the Church is not obviously violating the law by going on with its religious services—which are no novelty—exactly as though nothing had happened, and leaving the next move to the Government, which is virtually waging war against it. We will even go farther. We venture to say that the Catholic Church's action is morally defensible, whatever the strict interpretation of the law may be. Law is not exactly Ethics. Freethinkers break the law every day of their lives. No doubt a prosecution for "blasphemy" could lie against nearly every number of the *Freethinker*. But are we going to cave in on that account? Perish the thought! We go on doing what we consider our duty, and acting upon what we consider our moral right; leaving all the rest to those who choose to make it their concern. And just in the same way we can conceive it possible that even a Catholic priest may be acting justifiably in disregard of the law, or at least of other people's irresponsible interpretation of it. It even appears that the Church has rendered a service to freedom by pursuing this course. Here in England we should scorn the idea of Believers or Unbelievers having to go cap in hand to the police before they could hold their assemblies. That would not be freedom in England; and it is not freedom in France either. Indeed, the more thoughtful Republicans have begun to see this; and the Paris correspondent of the *Daily News*, telegraphing on Thursday night, December 13, announced that M. Flandin would move in the Chamber of Deputies on the morrow that "public reunions of all descriptions shall henceforth be free," and that "they may be held without preliminary authorisation, or notification, or legal formality of any kind, on the sole condition that they do not disturb the public peace." This is sense, this is freedom, this is justice. The *Daily News* correspondent sees it. But what is his comment?

"Should this be the end—and doubtless it will be—the French Democracy will, for once, owe a debt of gratitude to the obstinate, narrow-minded Pope and his Jesuitical clique."

Could anything be meaner? This is the Protestant spirit all over. The Pope can do nothing right—a Catholic priest can do nothing right. That is the alpha and omega of the Protestant faith. For our part, we should say that if the Catholic Church succeeds, without violence, in breaking down an odious law, in face of a French Government which is vehemently trying to enforce it to the bitter end, the honors will lie with the Catholic Church and not with the French Government. And as we have friends—mistaken friends—on the wrong side of the dispute, and enemies—often savage enemies—on the right side of it, everyone should see that this admission is wrung from us by the power of truth.

Frenchmen of all shades of opinion are used to leaving too much power in the hands of the central government. What should we say in England if the Government, in carrying out a law which affected Catholics (to say nothing of others), could act without regard to the courts of justice—in short, be a law unto itself, without recognising any rights in those who stood in its way? We should call it gross tyranny. We should not stand it for an hour. Yet this is what the Paris correspondent of the *Daily News* tells us is the practice in France:—

"In the eye of the law, all the priests who may in the course of this day celebrate mass, or hold any religious service in the churches, without the legal notification, are 'in revolt' against the State, are the servants, not of France, but of a 'foreign Prince'—are, therefore, liable to immediate deprivation of their rights as French citizens, and to expulsion from the country."

There you are! There's freedom for you! Forty thousand Frenchmen might be expelled from France as undesirable. Why, this is sheer, vulgar despotism. It does not matter to us who exercises the power. It is the power itself that we protest against. And let Freethinkers mark this—and mark it well. If Catholics may be expelled to-day, why not Freethinkers to-morrow? There have been several re-actions in France before; why may there not be again?

Who can be sure there will not? We should like to see that infallible prophet.

We have no sympathy either with the policy of pretending that the Catholic priests are in a "state of rebellion." It might as well be held that the Passive Resisters in England are in a state of rebellion. The word "rebellion" ought not to be used in this way. Men are only in a state of rebellion when they are seeking to overturn an existing government by force of arms. To apply the terms to citizens who disobey a police regulation and take the consequences, is worthy of comic opera or pantomime.

The pretence that the French priests are under the orders of a "foreign Prince," is another farcical abuse of a serious phrase. Everybody knows that the temporal power of the Pope is nothing but a fiction. The Papal Nuncio did not reside in Paris under that theory at all. He represented the Pope there as the head of the Catholic Church which was established in France under the Concordat. When disestablishment takes place, when the Concordat is abolished, when the Papal Nuncio leaves Paris, when separation between Religion and the State becomes an accomplished fact, the Pope necessarily becomes the head of a purely "spiritual" organisation. If his orders are obeyed in ecclesiastical matters, they are obeyed voluntarily and not because he has the power of enforcing them. And this kind of obedience should be beyond the purview of the State. Catholics, like Freethinkers, have the right to give their "spiritual" allegiance to whom they please. When it comes to moral, as distinct from political action, an Englishman may easily find himself a disciple of some great foreigner, and the same may be true of a Frenchman.

If the Pope is a "foreign Prince," in the proper sense of the words, so is General Booth. Now suppose the Salvationists in France got into a row over the right of public meeting, as they have frequently done in this country, would it be right for the French Government to have the power to expel every one of them from France on the ground that they were all in a "state of rebellion" in the obedience to the order of a "foreign Prince"? Those who say "no" to that question, have no right to approve the expulsion of French priests merely because they have refused to comply with a police regulation. For that is all they have done. They have carried on religious services without consulting the police. This is the head and front of their offending. And to expel them wholesale from their native land on that account, seems to us worthy of the brutal and bloody Autocracy of Russia rather than the civilised Republic of France.

They keep saying that the foundations of St. Paul's Cathedral are insecure, and the report is constantly contradicted. We believe it is the foundations of the religion preached in the Cathedral that are insecure. That report is also frequently contradicted, but it is getting widely believed all the same.

Ellen Terry says that she once arrived at Pittsburg on Christmas Day, and Irving said to her, "Do you know what this place reminds me of?" "Hell with the lid off."—It was in that hell with the lid off that Andrew Carnegie made his money—that English pauper towns are taking to pay for their Free Libraries; in which, by the way, religious books swarm, while Freethought books are nearly unobtainable.

There can be no doubt that the idea that every idiot has a "soul" has seriously stood in the way of stopping the multiplication of the unfit. Dr. Trotter, medical officer of the Bedlington urban district, feels compelled to utter a protest against the present practice of sacrificing so much of the means of the sound to keep carefully alive the patently unsound. "One is inclined to wonder," he says, "whether we are not a nation of fools; whether we would not benefit more if we followed the custom of the ancient Spartans and stamped such types out altogether." If he means, not murder, but sterilisation, we are with him.

When the Education Bill comes back from the House of Lords, it will be remembered that Mr. Birrell re-affirmed his conviction that the only Conscience Clause which was worth anything was the one which allowed children to be withdrawn from school altogether while the religious instruction was being given. This was provided for in Clause VII. Yet the *Daily Chronicle*, which looks behind the Liberal scenes, states in a leading article (December 14) that "Mr. Birrell is prepared to see the Clause deleted." Well, if this be true, we have only to close the book of hope, say that Mr. Birrell

is a—politician, and that one politician is remarkably like another.

Dr. Clifford declares that there must be "no more concessions to denominationalists." If he included Nonconformists in that category it would be an honest declaration. As it stands, it is a bit of backneyed *blague* from one of the cunningest hypocrites in England.

The *Daily News* believes in Secular Education, but it "lets I dare not wait upon I would." On the eve of the last general election it declared in favor of "the secular solution." But when the Liberals got their thumping majority, and Dr. Clifford and his Nonconformist gang ruled the roost, our contemporary caved in like the shell of a sucked egg under the foot of an elephant. It went the whole hog for "Simple Bible Teaching," and wouldn't hear a word about Secular Education. Now the wheel has come full circle again. Immediately on the publication of the full text of the Education Bill as the Lords had transmogrified it, our contemporary came out (Monday, December 10) with a strong leading article, calling upon Nonconformists to assert the true principle of Nonconformity and place themselves in a line with the Labor Party. Nothing could be clearer or more satisfactory than our contemporary's language. But we daresay it will "rat" again as soon as it sees the necessity.

Sir Oliver Lodge appears to have mistaken his vocation. It seems that he ought to have been a clergyman—for he is gravitating fast to the pulpit. His latest sermon—for it cannot be called anything else—was preached at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon-street, to a special audience—or rather congregation—of Congregational, Baptist, and Presbyterian ministers. It was on "The First Principles of Faith." This subject had engaged his attention last winter when he was in Italy. Secular institutions, like Birmingham University, did not provide any religious education—not even for the teachers. Yet he felt that if the teachers were to be efficient instructors they ought to be taught the essence of religion. He had therefore drawn up a sort of catechism for this purpose, of which he proceeded to give his congregation samples. The first question in it was "What are you?" And the reply was: "I am a being alive and conscious upon this earth, my ancestors having ascended by gradual processes from lower forms of animal life, and with struggle and suffering become man." This is not much of an answer to the question, but, such as it is, it is not likely to be very acceptable to the mob of Nonconformist exhorters. These gentlemen don't want to say too much, or even to hear too much, about the animal origin of man. It is so obviously in conflict with the Bible story of creation. Not that they believe that story. They don't. But they are not anxious for its falsehood to be published in too great a hurry. You see, they have to arrange for carrying on their business, and repairs must be done without causing a serious interruption.

With regard to the subject of evil, the question was put, "How comes it that evil exists?" On this point Sir Oliver Lodge confessed to having received help from the Rev. R. J. Campbell. The answer he had excogitated, with that gentleman's assistance, was as follows:—

"Acts and thoughts are evil when they are below the normal standard attained by humanity. The possibility of evil is the necessary consequence of a rise in the scale of moral existence; just as an organism whose normal temperature is far above 'absolute zero' is necessarily liable to damaging and deadly cold. But cold is not in itself a positive or created thing."

In the second sentence the word "consequence" should obviously read "condition." But even with that alteration it is all hocus-pocus. Suppose evil *is* the necessary condition of a rise in the moral scale of existence; should we not then ask why God did not *start* man higher in the scale, instead of leaving him to worry and muddle up at such a terrific cost of suffering and misery? And how trivial is the talk about cold not being *positive*. Scientifically speaking, it is negative—that is to say, it is the absence of heat. But practically it is positive enough. How can that be denied of what will make little children cry more bitterly than ever for bread, or freeze a starving man into a stiff corpse? To stand over such tragedies and mouth about the cause of them not being positive, is to invite being told to "shut up" as a foolish or hard-hearted person.

Going on to deal with sin, Sir Oliver Lodge said that "the root of sin is selfishness." There he was only following in the footsteps of a far greater man than himself, and a Freethinker—the late Colonel Ingersoll. It was one of that brilliant orator's epigrams that "selfishness is the only sin."

And selfishness has no relation whatever to God ; it can only apply to man's attitude towards his fellow men.

Sir Oliver Lodge finally summed up his religious creed in the following declaration :—

"I believe in one Infinite and Eternal Being, a guiding and loving Father, in whom all things consist.

I believe that the Divine Nature is specially revealed to man through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lived and taught and suffered in Palestine 1,900 years ago, and has since been worshipped by the Christian Church as the immortal Son of God, the Savior of the world.

I believe that the Holy Spirit is ever ready to help us along the way towards goodness and truth, that prayer is a means of communion between man and God, and that it is our privilege by faithful service to enter into the Life Eternal, the Communion of Saints, and the Peace of God."

Now at the risk of being considered impolite, we must venture to tell Sir Oliver Lodge that what he *believes*—especially on questions that transcend experience—is really not of the slightest importance to any person on this planet. What he *knows* is the only important thing. And on these matters he knows no more than the dullest and most illiterate yokel in the Midland counties. Thus we return to the point from which we started. Sir Oliver Lodge, as a professor of practical science, is a man of authority ; Sir Oliver Lodge, as an "I believer" in the unknowable, simply belongs to the vain and futile crowd.

Dr. Clifford was called upon to propose a vote of thanks to Sir Oliver Lodge. In doing so, according to the *Christian World* report, he "spoke of Sir Oliver as a mediator between the past and the present, and also as a pioneer who is telling us what the men of forty years hence will think." Now the logical inference from this is that Dr. Clifford agrees with Sir Oliver Lodge in rejecting all the miracles and mythology of the Bible, including the "legends of serpents and apples"; in accepting the paternity of Joseph as well as the maternity of Mary for "the Savior"; and in denying the deity of Christ.

Rev. Dr. C. F. Aked is back in Liverpool. He expresses great satisfaction at his cordial reception by President Roosevelt. How one great man recognises another!

Mr. Aked declines to talk with interviewers about his American offer. He wants to talk with "his own people" first. But how long will they be "his own people"? Ay, there's the rub.

A New York man of God added a lady whistler to his church's attractions, and found a notable increase in his congregation. This policy may develop until a professional boxing-match figures on the program. One pugilist might "knock spots off" another, and then the minister might go into the pulpit and knock spots off the Devil.

Rev. Dr. Sage Mackay, pastor of one of the most fashionable churches in New York, of which President Roosevelt, Mrs. Russell Sage, the Goulds, and other rich Christians are members, has hit upon the plan of "slum revivals." He says that while rich people give large sums to religious work they have no real interest in Christianity; so he is bringing up converted thieves and drunkards from the slums to "show their more fashionable brothers and sisters of Fifth Avenue the way to salvation." This game is to begin the first week in January. We wonder how many millionaires it will lead to heaven. Probably not one, if Jesus Christ told the truth about "the needle's eye."

Mr. H. G. Wells, interviewed by the *Christian Commonwealth*, made loud complaint of the indifference of the people to grave social and political issues. "For instance," he said, "nobody seems to be very much concerned that all our educational progress is hung up year after year by these wretched religious squabbles." We agree with this in substance, and thank Mr. Wells for saying it; but "nobody" is a very large order. The *Freethinker* has been pointing out for any number of years what Mr. Wells is pointing out now; namely, that the squabble over religion in the schools has thrown England educationally behind every great civilised nation in the world. But it has always been a foible of Mr. Wells' not to know of our existence or of the existence of the Secular party.

Standard-Oil Rockefeller has just presented the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions with £20,000, earmarking it specially for Egypt and the Soudan. The money will be spent, of course, in converting Egyptians and Soudanese to the religion of Rockefeller. It seems to us to be a case for

the intervention of one of the Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty.

Rev. Stewart D. Headlam, in a letter to the *Times*, while declining responsibility for Mr. Bernard Shaw's recent lecture before the Guild of St. Matthew, declares that the lecture had value in two respects. First, it was "a repudiation by Mr. Shaw of a lot of rubbish—and worse—which has been allowed to accumulate round the Catholic Faith. Secondly, Mr. Shaw made "a most valuable positive profession of faith," for which he "deserves our thanks, our encouragement, and our prayers." "On a few matters of tremendous importance," Mr. Headlam kindly continues, "he is still wrong; but his face is set in the right direction, and we may believe that the kindly Light will lead him on." Let us pray!

Rev. Stewart D. Headlam says that Mr. Bernard Shaw has now "a profound belief in God." No doubt God is duly grateful.

In the *Book of Tea*, by Okakura-Kakuzo, he gets home a shrewd thrust at the "average Westerner." "He was wont," this charming writer says, "to regard Japan as barbarous while she indulged in the gentle arts of peace; he calls her civilised since she began to commit wholesale slaughter on Manchurian battlefields." A hit, a hit, a palpable hit! Yes, and it goes to the very heart of Christian civilisation. After nearly two thousand years of the religion of "the Prince of Peace," Europe admires and respects Japan simply because she has sprung into the position of a world-power by means of armies and battleships.

In the current number of his Parish Magazine the vicar of St. John's, Truro, says: "The string band concert was a great success. This is written four days before it comes off, but it is a safe thing to say." We wonder if the history of the Resurrection was written in that way.

Clerical accuracy is a great thing. One of our readers sends us a copy of a pamphlet which has been circulated by the Rev. Hugh Sutherland from the parish church of Cranston, Dalkeith. It is entitled *From Unbelief to Faith*, and is written by the Rev. Professor Orr, D.D., one of the big-wigs of theology in Scotland. On page 7 we note the following passage:—

"I was reading just the other day that when Jonathan Edwards was at Yale University in America there were two Thomas Paine Societies, and there were only three or four Christian believers in the whole place; and these conditions were not unusual. Is there anything like that now?"

Jonathan Edwards was born in 1703. He was educated at Yale and was a tutor there from 1722 to 1724. He died in 1758. Thomas Paine was not born till 1737—thirteen years after Jonathan Edwards left Yale. He did not go to America till 1774—sixteen years after Jonathan Edwards was dead. Thomas Paine was not known as a Freethinker till 1793, when he wrote the first part of the *Age of Reason*. Professor Orr is a—Christian.

Henry Norton was sentenced to a "month's hard" at Birkenhead for being, as the bench said, a "professional beggar who made clergymen his prey." How could he do better? Jesus Christ said "Give to every one that asketh." Henry Norton, therefore, was giving the clergy a chance of obeying their Savior. It is rough to get a month for promoting true Christianity.

Sydney Temple McLaglen, formerly in the Imperial Yeomanry, and now a collector for missionary societies, appeared recently in the Divorce Court, where his wife applied for a judicial separation. An arrangement was come to between the parties after the case opened, but not before a number of shocking allegations had been made against the defendant. He told his wife that he had a vision from Jesus Christ that she would be a divorced woman; he systematically insulted and ill-used her; he drew her money out of the Savings Bank and spent it; he packed up his bag and left her two days before the birth of her child; and he visited her subsequently and stole the child, driving away with it in a hansom cab. Such were the allegations made in court. Fancy them being made against a non-Christian!

Lord Methuen, unveiling a tablet made out of gun-metal in Wigan parish church, said that "godliness and patriotism must go together." We dare say Lord Methuen is godly enough. What we doubt is his generalship. He was not a signal success in South Africa, where he was captured by the Boers.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

January 6, Stratford; 8, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner; 13, Camberwell.

To Correspondents.

DARWEN FRIEND.—Thanks for copy of the *Darwen News*, but the Prison Creed figures have already been dealt with in our columns. Of course we are glad to see them in other journals.

P. W. M.—Glad to hear you intend to be present at the Annual Dinner. Pray introduce yourself then. Thanks for cuttings.

R. J. HENDERSON.—What you were told about Secular Education at Birmingham is not true. We note your view that a writer who says, "My mind came from something that had it to give," might as reasonably say, "My stomach came from something that had it to give." Mr. Foote lectured to good audiences in Bristol in past years, but the N. S. S. Branch there was ruined by bad management, and nothing has been done in the way of platform propaganda since. There may, however, be a fresh attack made upon the West of England before very long. Glad to see your useful letter in the *Evening Times*.

G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for batch of cuttings.

W. P. BALL.—Your well-selected cuttings are always very welcome.

J. BATES.—Certainly there ought to be an active N. S. S. Branch at Nottingham, and something ought to be done there if the local "saints" would, on their part, bestir themselves a little.

S. DAWSON.—Glad to hear that, having just seen for the first time a copy of the *Freethinker*, you have "thoroughly enjoyed" it, and found it to be just what you have "been wanting for some time."

J. BROADFOOT.—See "Acid Drops" for something on your enclosure. Glad you were so delighted with our article on Mr. Smith's pamphlet.

F. THEARSTONE.—In our next.

WODEN.—"Mass" is the Catholic term for the celebration of the Eucharist.

L. G. (Liverpool)—Sorry you don't understand us, or we don't understand you.

E. MOORCROFT.—We regret to hear that Mrs. Bradlaugh-Bonner could not fulfil her engagement at Liverpool through illness. Thanks for cuttings.

J. HENDERSON (Paisley)—We dare say you mean well, but your letter is foolish and untruthful. As you are a prayerful man, why not ask the Lord to give you more wisdom and accuracy? You want it.

H. J. WHIPP.—Thanks, but Sir Oliver Lodge has attention enough in our columns this week.

W. H. FLETCHER.—Both forwarded as desired.

THE COHEN "SALVATION ARMY" TRACT FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £9 5s. 6d. Since received: The Turnbull Family, 8s.; H. Jones, 1s.; H. C. Shackleton, 2s. 6d.; W. H. Fletcher, 2s.; J. Bowings, 10s. 6d.; T. Sand, 2s. 6d.; G. E. Frisby, 1s.

WATCHFUL.—The story is not true of Voltaire. It is one of those good jokes which are fathered on all sorts of men, in order to impart a matter-of-fact air. We have heard it told of "an infidel" who was visited by a Protestant clergyman and a Catholic priest when dying, and taking a hand of each on either side of the bed he exclaimed, "Now I die, like Christ, between two thieves."

T. H. ELSTON.—It will hardly be necessary to return to the subject, except as part of a general local record; as the essence of it all, for our readers throughout the country, has been given in several "Sugar Plums." We quite understand that the work of the last few weeks has been a heavy tax upon you personally, and we hope the holiday season will give you a good breathing time.

M. E. PEGG.—Have done what you seemed to wish, but the post-card is none too clear.

A. J. HOPKINS.—In our next.

G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for cuttings. Mr. Aked, like other men, is open for a better job; but, like all his profession, he dignifies it with fine names, and assigns all sorts of high-flown motives. Men of the world smile.

W. J. S.—Pleased to know that you have found the *Freethinker* so helpful during the two years you have been reading it. Thanks for all your good wishes.

H. CATNER writes: "Some months ago a friend of mine sent me a few copies of the *Freethinker*. The tone of the paper and its literary excellence impressed me greatly, and I am glad to say I have become a regular subscriber. I have also got a number of your pamphlets, but the book which I found to be of the greatest service in arguments with Christians is your *Bible Handbook*. The way this has silenced most of my opponents is really astonishing." This correspondent is advised, with respect to the parallels between Christ and Krishna, to read Mr. Robertson's *Pagan Christs*. With regard to "the eye of a needle," Christians say it meant the "Needle Gate" at Jerusalem, through which a camel could not go, but they do not offer positive proof of the assertion. Besides, if a camel couldn't get through, the actual size of the aperture doesn't matter a straw.

J. BOWING, sending a further sub. to the "Salvation Army" Tract Fund, suggests that a sandwich-man might do good business with the Tract outside the Salvation Army's headquarters. We will see what can be done.

R. H. ROSETH.—We have repeatedly said that we cannot undertake to find room for such things when they reach us on Tuesday. Tuesday morning is the latest time even for lecture notices.

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

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.

LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

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

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

PERSONS remitting for literature by stamps are specially requested to send *halfpenny stamps*.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Sugar Plums.

Provincial Freethinkers who happen to be visiting London early in the new year should recollect the Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, which is to be held at the Holborn Restaurant on Tuesday evening, January 8. Mr. Foote, who presides, will be supported by a number of well-known Freethinkers, including Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Symes, Davies, Heaford, and Roger. There is always a first-rate repast served at the Holborn Restaurant; many said that last year's dinner beat the record, and perhaps this year's dinner will go one better still. When the festive boards are cleared away there will be opportunities for conversation, as well as a good musical program. The price of the tickets (inclusive) is only four shillings. This is precisely the figure paid per head to the Restaurant. The incidental expenses are borne by the N. S. S. Executive.

Several friends are coming to this dinner who have never been to one before. This is welcome news. But we don't want to miss any of the old faces on that account. We hope there will be an unprecedented rally of the "saints" on this occasion.

The abominable weather in London on Sunday made a difference to Mr. Foote's audience at Queen's Hall—an audience which is not drawn from the immediate neighborhood, but from all parts of the metropolis. In the circumstances it was gratifying to find so many present, and they were certainly appreciative and enthusiastic during the whole lecture, which lasted nearly an hour and a half, thus showing that the depression of the atmospheric and other conditions had not got into Mr. Foote's brains or tongue. There will be further Queen's Hall lectures in the new year. We hope to be able to make a more definite announcement shortly.

It is a long while since Mr. Foote lectured in South London—a vast and populous part of the metropolis which certainly ought not to be neglected. He has promised to lecture for the Camberwell N. S. S. Branch on Sunday evening, January 13. South London "saints" will please note.

Mr. Cohen has just returned from a visit to Belfast, where he delivered two lectures to good audiences for the Ethical Society, which seems really to consist of Freethinkers with a name intended to suit the tropical religious climate of the capital of Ulster.

Mr. Joseph Symes's reception and meetings at Newcastle-on-Tyne on Sunday went off very satisfactorily. A number of old friends came in from the district to shake hands with him again, and he was visibly affected by the warmth of their greeting. There were good audiences in the Palace Music Hall, and the collections were gratifying; but, with free admission all round, there was naturally a deficit, which was made good by a local guarantee. There was also

a good sale of literature; indeed, the Branch has been doing particularly well in this direction lately.

The Liverpool Branch has felt itself handicapped by the want of a resident lecturer, capable of holding the movement together, and attracting good audiences on ordinary Sundays between the visits of special lecturers from London. Approaches were made to Mr. Joseph Symes, who, after consultation with Mr. Foote, has gallantly resolved to throw himself into the breach. He is committed, at any rate, to a three months' trial, and will begin operations on the second Sunday in January. Of course the Branch will need all the financial as well as moral support it can obtain for this experiment. We appeal, therefore, to all the "saints" in Liverpool to rally round Mr. Symes and the Branch standard. Subscriptions in aid of the effort should be sent to the Branch secretary, Mrs. Schweizer, at the Milton Hall, Daulby-street, Liverpool.

Mr. Foote will pay Liverpool a visit shortly and deliver two lectures in a large public hall which is being negotiated for; and a further announcement will be made shortly. Mr. Symes will probably remain in Liverpool that Sunday and take the chair. This will introduce him to many people who might not be so easily attracted to the Milton Hall.

The West Ham Branch, having to shift from its old quarters, which are being pulled down on the expiration of the lease, has fortunately found better quarters elsewhere—at the Workman's Hall, 27 Romford road, Stratford, not far from the Town Hall. The new meeting-place is much larger than the old one, and the Branch has made up its mind to fill it every Sunday evening during the rest of the winter by getting the best possible supply of lecturers to occupy the platform. Mr. Foote has promised to give the Branch a gratuitous lecture, as his special contribution to a special effort, on the first Sunday in the new year. He will be followed by Mr. Cohen and Mr. Lloyd. And after that send-off the Branch hopes to run along successfully till the end of the present lecturing season. Of course this will not interfere with the special big meetings which it is now quite the custom for the Secular Society, Ltd., to organise in the big Town Hall in the fall and in the spring of the year.

The Manchester Branch is arranging for its usual New Year's Day "social." There will be tea at 5.30, followed by an entertainment and a dance. Tickets 1s.; after-*tea* ticket 6d.; obtainable from the secretary, Mrs. M. E. Pegg, 15 Mytton-street, Hulme.

Freethinkers who receive begging letters from a person falsely describing himself as R. P. Edwards, late secretary of the West London N. S. S. Branch, are requested to forward them at once to the N. S. S. general secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, 2 Newcastle-street, E.C. Freethinkers should be on their guard against giving money without reasonable investigation.

THE LOUDEST CALL.

"Beloved flock," the parson said, then paused and wiped his eyes,

"As pastor and as people we must sever tender ties;
I've a call to go to Richmond to be their chosen pastor,
A call so loud to disobey, I fear, would grieve the Master."

Replied the spokesman of the flock, "Though loud the call may be

We'll call you louder to remain, an X for every V.
Whatever Richmond offers you we'll give to keep you here,

We trust you'll hear a voice divine, our call's so loud and clear."

With sobbing voice the parson said, "My duty's clearer now;

I'll stay with you, beloved ones; to heaven's will I bow.
So let us sing 'Blest Be the Tie,' and sing it clear and strong;

To leave you when you call so loud would be exceeding wrong."

SUBTLETY OF JOSHUA.

Joshua had just made the sun stand still.

"So my wife could be ready in a minute the same day," he explained.

Thus we see the fair sex was over the same.

The Transfiguration of God.

By DANIEL K. TENNEY.

(In the New York "Truthseeker.")

THE Liberal churches, notably the Unitarian, have long since reached the conclusion that the God of the Bible—both Father and Son—are simply creatures of barbarian fancy; yet we continually find the clergy of those churches talking about God, telling what he likes and dislikes, and praying to him just as orthodox Christians do, and just as if they expected his special intervention in human affairs. To my mind, there is nothing more offensive. In a recent discourse one of them remarked: "After all the investigations of science, to say 'God made the world' is the simplest, most natural, and most satisfactory account we can give of its origin and nature." In his view, life represents the omnipresence of God, force his omnipotence, and the wisdom which seems to prevail throughout the universe his omniscience. And he asks: "How can God produce a world whose supreme need is morality, and whose natural development is toward morality, unless he had a moral purpose?" "God designs, plans, acts, thinks, feels, and loves. What more do we want in our conception of personality?"

Having been for many years a lawyer accustomed to advising the way out of complications and difficulties, and perceiving the hard luck which the Liberal churches have in acquiring and holding their congregations and making themselves felt in the world, I ask leave to extend to them some friendly counsel. It is upon the churches that we must mainly rely for the advancement of honest thought. Education of the masses will, before long, demand that truth be substituted in the pulpit for delusion.

When, anywhere in Christendom, a person speaks or writes of God, he is commonly understood to refer to the God of the Old Testament—Jehovah—that personal, individual divinity, who is said to have constructed the universe, and whose character for love, wrath, jealousy, and a myriad other good and bad qualities, is so vividly set forth in the ancient pages. That personage, be he good, bad, or indifferent, is the only one who craves our worship, adoration, and our prayers. The Liberal churches reject that God altogether. They will have none of him. In that I joyfully join them. By doing so, they necessarily reject, also, the stories of his deeds, and the infinity of nonsense specially pertaining to him in our sacred books, thus leaving in them little of importance, save a fund of impractical ethical instruction and some highly rhapsodical poetry. But still it is insisted that behind all things known there is the immanent energy of the universe, which is, in fact, the true God, because there clearly appears an intelligence pervading that energy in its control of universal affairs.

That intelligence is manifest in natural law, that there is design in nature, is very plain. To call this God, however, is misleading to common minds, descendant of so many centuries during which, and in our own times as well, that word has possessed a totally different meaning. Liberal minds concede that the Biblical God is no other than a creature of crude imagination—in short, that he is an impossibility. Why should not the name die also? Its former significance renders it wholly inapt to modern conceptions of divinity. It seems to me not just right to say "God made the world," for he did not. Everything pertaining to the universe is concurrently eternal.

The truth is that the eternal and unchangeable laws of nature are themselves the embodiment and standard of intelligence. They are the all in all. To the extent that they have become discernible to us, the intelligence of all things is measured and determined by them in our minds. There appears no indication of personality, either in their origin or in their execution. Nothing of the kind is think-

able. There is no need of such thought. That the evolutionary trend in human affairs seems to be toward a higher morality affords no indication that a specific divinity holds the reins. That tendency is a concomitant of the general scheme, "God designs, plans, acts, thinks, feels, and loves," and has "produced a world whose supreme need is morality, and whose natural development is toward morality," said the preacher, who asks, "What more do we want in our conception of personality?"

Now it is probable that mankind are increasing in their morality, but the improvement is wonderfully slow. If this new universal God, said to be revealed by science, "designs, plans, acts, thinks, feels, and loves," why does he not hurry up the moralising process? Manifestly, because he does not "design, act, plan, think, feel, and love." For, if he does any of these things, it is himself that is responsible for the prevalent immorality and slow improvement of mankind, and not ourselves. But it is said God acts only through immutable laws. This does not help the matter, for thus it appears that law is supreme, and not the personality who is supposed to be its author. His creature, the law, is thus greater than its creator.

To predicate in nature a pre-eminent God, bound hand and foot by, and therefore subservient to, his own laws, seems supremely ridiculous. Why speculate on 'such a thing? We are not in need of a personal God, unless he can do each one of us some specific service, as they used to say Jehovah, if devoutly solicited, could and would do. Experience shows that no power not ourselves can do that. The wisdom and purpose "which lie behind all phenomena" are handicapped to help us. The phenomena seem to have got beyond control of the "wisdom and purpose" which inaugurated them. But if, by acquaintance with Nature's high laws, and veneration for them, we can uplift ourselves to become more in harmony with them, then, indeed, may our inmost desires and our hearts' needs be in a measure alleviated. As commonly indulged in, prayer is the veriest nonsense, and known to be such. Liberal churches ought to say so, and have done with it. Pious meditation, humiliation, and high resolve would in no way be disturbed. If the contemplation of truth, to the extent that we know it, has no saving or improving tendency, then surely Nature uncontrolled must take its course. Delusion should no longer be cherished. It is neither honest nor useful longer to advocate it. Has not weird and strange fantasy reigned quite long enough? But there is scarcely a Liberal clergyman in the world who dares to tell his congregation the truth. That is why the congregations are so small.

We know that universal law exists, and that it is unalterable. Should it command our religious awe and reverence less because we do not know its origin? Do we not know, in fact, that it is eternal, and has no origin? Why suspect that, maybe, there was a remote period when this law had no existence, but that some personal and pre-existing divinity enacted it, and that to him, and not to the law, our reverence is due? This is going much too far into the realms of the unknown. Nor is there any point gained by it, save, perhaps, a sort of deference to ancient error, and to the senseless imaginings of some of our neighbors. It exhibits a weakness where strength only should appear. It seems to me that "Nature," and not "God," is the word to use in dealing with those powers which lie behind all phenomena. It is the wonderful developments of Nature which inspire the true religious rapture of the soul. They are real, perceptible to reason, inconsistent with no logic, devoid of all superstition. It is nature, about which we have some knowledge, and hope to know more, that should inspire our reverence and excite our religious emotions, and not theology, about which we are supremely ignorant. If the word "theology" means God-wisdom, as I suppose it does, it should be eliminated from our language; for no such knowledge exists, or ever will.

In discarding Jehovah, must we evolve a new God more suitable to our times, as has been the custom in the past? If a doctor removes a cancer, must he put something else in its place? Is there not sufficient certainty as well as mystery revealed in nature, by science, to inspire the loftiest thought, and most effectual pulpit utterance? Are not the inevitable penalties of bad deeds prescribed by natural law, and the reward of good ones an ample and much better foundation for moral instruction? Is it not plain, if the soul be immortal, that the influence of earthly conduct will be felt beyond the grave? If I were in the pulpit, I could make this idea an incentive to good behavior, it seems to me, infinitely more efficacious than the fear of all the brimstonic fires that were ever foreboded. One is common sense, easily discernible. The other, in these latter days, is idle vamping. The scare has largely passed out of it. Something better, more plausible and certain, is needed to arouse the consciences of men. The golden streets of the New Jerusalem are alike delusive and ineffectual.

The Liberal churches have gone a long distance in the right direction, for which they are entitled to all praise and commendation. But still they all the time talk about God, in the ancient sense, tell us what is pleasing to him and what is not, what he has done and will do, and send forth to him their prayers, just as if he were the same old Jehovah who has been ineffectually praised and prayed to these thousands of years. If this ancient Jehovah exists in any form, no objection appears to a continuous worship of him in the old-fashioned way. If he does not exist, as all Liberal people admit, why try to evolve out of our imagination and erect a new God, of special prayer-answering and praise-loving functions, when we have the Great Universe before us to inspire our thought and adoration, and which we know neither glories in our praise nor regards our invocation?

Conduct is all that counts in this world. Why cannot our Liberal friends say so without circumlocution? They would have a hundred followers where they now have one. Half truths have never won a worthy battle, and never will. They are scarcely more attractive to the true Liberal thinker than to minds still clinging to the ancient dogmas. The whole truth, plainly told, is the need of the times. The Liberal clergy are about the only ones from whom we have a right to expect it. Thousands who now stand aloof from their churches would be glad to join in a crusade for truth, and cheerfully fill the pews and pay the expenses.

Eighty per cent of the people of this country do not attend any church, so the statistics show. Why? Simply because they are tired of theological nonsense. They refuse to listen to tautological talk about a God of love by men who know no more about it than themselves, and fail to discover any feature of love in that immanent power, whatever it is, which has brought into existence a race one quarter of which dies in childhood, whose generations survive only about thirty years, and most of whom are surrounded by trials, tribulations, and anguish from cradle to grave. Give Nature a chance, for that is all we have to wrestle with. Relegate all the gods to the museum of ancient curiosities.

Hell.

OF all the dogmas of the Christian superstition, that of hell-fire is surely the most damnable. This ferocious doctrine, inherited from a savage past, has caused untold misery, driven thousands mad, and more thousands to suicide. It caused about nine millions of innocent women and children in Europe to suffer excruciating agony and death for the imaginary crime of witchcraft in the Middle Ages—the Christian "Dark Ages"—at the hands of superstitious and ignorant Christian barbarians. For, without hell, there would have been no Devil, no

Beelzebub, no necromancy, no witchcraft. It was also the doctrine of hell-fire which lighted the fires of Smithfield. It was the father of the Inquisition; for, undoubtedly, the persecutors argued that by terrorising the heretics they could prevent the people from being taught those principles which would, if believed in, send them to hell; and thus they held that they were doing good work by saving people's souls, even though a few lives were sacrificed.

I have a personal grievance against this doctrine. As a little child I was taught it. I especially remember one occasion, when my teacher spent a whole hour in telling us of the coming day of judgment, altering his voice to a low tone of awful solemnity. He told us of how the goats would be separated from the sheep, and how the dread words would issue forth to the wicked: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." "And then," he said, "it depends upon whether some of us will be thought worthy of being received into eternal bliss, or to be cast out into outer darkness, where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth"; not even holding out as much as a single hope to us youngsters.

I went home that night heavy at heart, pondering over those weighty words. I lay for hours awake in my little bed that night, thinking of the last day, and when I did go to sleep I dreamt of it. I thought I heard the great blast and saw the sinners being called to account, and I amongst them, to answer for every wicked thing we had said or done. I heard a great tumult, the earth being burnt up, and the wicked being sent into fire everlasting. And I groaned and moaned in my sleep, until I began to realise that my father was calling me, demanding what ailed me, and intimating that if I continued my lamentation he would have to visit me with a stick.

Now, as it has been said, can a creed which is capable of tormenting a child be any good?

I am glad that some Christians are finding out that the doctrine of hell-fire is a delusion and a snare, belying the omni-benevolence of God; but I am not glad that some of them have the shameless effrontery to say that it is not taught by the Bible. That it is a biblical doctrine there can be no doubt, and so much the worse for the Bible. The central figure of the Christian superstition taught it hot and strong.

Here are a few texts:—

"Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. v. 22).

"For it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body should be cast into hell" (Matt. v. 29, 30).

"Where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. xxv. 41).

"The smoke of their torment shall ascend for ever and ever."

"They shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels," etc., etc.

We have also the story told us of the rich man and Lazarus, in which the former opened his eyes in hell, "being in torments," and finally the lake of fire in Revelation. Yes, there can be no doubt this horrid doctrine is thoroughly biblical. J. K. MAAGAARD.

A CLEAR MIDNIGHT.

This is thy hour O Soul, thy free flight into the wordless,
Away from books, away from art, the day erased, the lesson
done,
Thee fully forth emerging, silent, gazing, pondering the
themes thou lovest best,
Night, sleep, death, and the stars. —Walt Whitman.

On earth discord! A gloomy Heaven above opening its
jealous gates to the nineteen-thousandth part of the tithe of
mankind! And below an inexorable Hell expanding its
leviathan jaws for the vast residue of mortals! O doctrine
comfortable and healing to the weary wounded soul of man.
—Robert Burns.

Correspondence.

"A SILLY PAMPHLET" AND THE LATE SIR GEORGE STOKES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—With reference to your destructive article in the *Freethinker* of December 16, the late Sir George Stokes, President of the Royal Society, was the chairman when the late Rev. Lloyd Engstrom gave his last "Christian Evidence" lecture in the old Hall of Science. At the end of the discussion which followed the lecture, Sir George Stokes said: "I have nothing to say about the debate, as I am not competent to discuss the subject."

This shows that the *scientist's* "Christianity" had no scientific basis.

Mr. J. M. Robertson may recollect this curious admission of Sir George Stokes.

Mr. Robertson, Mr. Haslam and I, were Mr. Engstrom's only opponents on the occasion; and, I think, Mr. Robertson gave an account of the lecture and debate in the *National Reformer*.

G. L. MACKENZIE.

WHAT IS ATHEISM?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The excellent letter of "Huw Menai," in your issue of the 16th, gives food for thought; the moment is an opportune one, owing to the death of the great Agnostic leader, to overhaul our principles and see where we really stand on this momentous question. I believe a sympathetic word from you would do much to reconcile many outsiders to the Secular movement, especially if you would keep the young bloods in check and give them a fatherly rap over the head for their extreme views at times.

My case illustrates the point. Years back we had a thriving Branch here where the great Bradlaugh lived, but it died out because I always insisted that the principles of Secularism and the N. S. S. rules, if fairly interpreted, were not *solely* Atheism; and as a Deist pure and simple, I protested long against the twist and warp of meaning given to those rules, the upshot was, I had to resign and the Branch soon died out.

Atheism to me is a double or compound word, and because a person is without God it does not follow that there is no God. A man may be without a nightshirt, or without a house, but there are nightshirts, and there are houses, and being without or outside does not preclude the idea of there being someone inside or within a building.

I hope at the Dinner you will say a good word in this direction, and throw out sympathy and a hint that those people who believe in Secularism but can't stand Atheism at any price, are just those people that will be welcomed as members.

THOMAS MAY.

JOURNALISTIC "GOOD TASTE; A DISCLAIMER.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Ament the funeral speeches delivered at Woking over the grave of W. Stewart Ross (Saladin), on the 6th inst., and the report of the same that appeared in the third edition of *Reynolds'* for the 9th inst., I should be obliged if you will allow me to state, through your columns, that I am *not* the author of that report nor did I have anything to do with its compilation, not knowing the source from which it emanated. Further, it seems to me to be a sorry breach of good taste, and says very little for the intelligence of the sub-editor who allowed it to pass; whilst the redundancy in the phrase "Mr. Guy A. Aldred spoke remarkably well and to the point" is the equivalent in good English of the courtesy that allows to follow, "after which, Mr. Foote spoke." I will make no further comment, but knowing the indebtedness of Freethinkers to yourself, I but leave it to the good sense of those of your readers who may have been present, to compare my juvenile oration with the excellent and sound philosophical speech you made; and then to reflect upon the absurdity of some Press reports. I wonder who was the reporter?

GUY A. ALDRED.

A STATUE FOR THOMAS PAINE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—A few lines from far-off Australia may possibly be of interest, especially as our tried and trusty champion has recently returned to old England's shores. The movement in which we are all interested seems to be about to make

substantial progress now, in spite of the combined efforts of the press, parson, and respectability to throttle and bludgeon it. Our cause is more world-wide than ever, and it behoves us to secure every point of advantage which will serve to carry us on to the final victory.

My first object in addressing you is to wish all Freethinkers and friends of intellectual progress a prosperous and happy new year. May 1907 be the best that "the cause" has ever experienced, is my most sincere wish. And let us hope that in another twelve months' time we shall be able to report "good news" from all parts.

My second object is—with your kind permission—to make a suggestion in regard to that great soldier of Freethought, Thomas Paine. It may seem sentimental, but sentiment plays a very great part in human affairs. The orthodox priests and parsons and mountebanks have played on it successfully for years and years. Knowing the powerful influence exerted by it, let us also benefit by it. As you well remember, Thomas Paine died on June 13, 1809; so that the centenary of that event will take place in 1909. It is still a good way off—so is Australia; but I want to suggest that Freethinkers all over the world be invited to subscribe to a fund to erect a statue to that "dirty little Atheist." Surely the time is ripe for such a move, and certainly Paine's name should be rescued for all time from the slimy, malignant, loathsome touch of the dear, kind, good Christians, who now seem afraid to hear his name mentioned—it makes them feel sick. Bruno's statue in Rome was a step in the right direction. My proposal is that, from January 26, 1907 (anniversary of Paine's birth), steps be taken to raise funds everywhere for such a work—a few pence at a time in many places would amount to a fair sum in eighteen months. Such a statue need not cost a large sum—nothing like the cost of an Indian Empress's image. A copy of the American sculptor, David Richards' statue of Paine, would be very suitable, I think.

Probably—certainly—there would be an indignant outburst of "popular" feeling against the erection of such a monument, say in Paine's native village; but such an outburst might be advantageously utilised by Freethinkers, Agnostics, and Rationalists. A statue to Tom Paine!!! Why, what would the dear old Bishops, Archbishops, sanctified Salvationists, and wily Methodists say to such an *un-Christian* proposal, especially if the world-wide of "Infidelity" was concerned in it? It is not so much the statue itself that will be an instrument in a great cause as the feeling that will be aroused. I hope that this suggestion may be considered practicable. Moreover, I think that President Roosevelt might be invited to contribute to this laudable object, seeing that Thomas Paine did so much to make Mr. Roosevelt's fine billet a possibility.

Sydney, Australia.

KANGAROO.

TOLSTOY AND SHAKESPEARE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I have a bone to pick with you with regard to Tolstoy. You say in the issue of the *Freethinker* of last week: "This may be an exaggeration of the truth, but one must think of it in reading Tolstoy's ineffable criticism of Shakespeare, which is little more than an expression of the pious Russian moujik's hatred of the bold and triumphant Elizabethan genius."

Do you really think your words are fair, or true? Why should a reader be prejudiced by "thinking of it," against Tolstoy before reading his criticism on Shakespeare? Is not this a one-sided, bigoted way of "sticking by Shakespeare," thick and thin, like the Christians stick to their dogma, without listening to an impartial view of the matter? Now, Tolstoy is not a "pious" Russian, nor has he any "hatred" about him whatsoever. Anyone who has read his works cannot help but acquiesce to these two facts. His attacks on Christianity, as a supernatural teaching and as floated by the Churches, are anything but "pious"; in fact, he has denounced the falseness of this dogma as staunchly as Bradlaugh has ever done. He is not an *Atheist*, that is true; but neither is he a Christian, as the term "Christian" is generally understood. He is simply a plain reasoner and plain speaker. I have always found him, in his writings, to be just as fair in dealing with Governments and Churches as with Anarchists and Socialists; because he seems to strive his utmost to deal impartially and truthfully with every subject he writes on. I don't know that he has ever yet said a word against Atheists, because I don't think he has cared to trouble himself to deal with the question of "God" publicly. But, privately, I know that he rejects the idea of a personal Deity and the dogma of our personal immortality. Is he entitled to be dubbed "pious" in the face of these facts, or, in fair dealing, would you not call him a Freethinker? I must say, dear Sir, that it strikes me as very probable that

you have not read Tolstoy; if you have, in my opinion you are not dealing with this particular man with that open spirit of fairness which has made your writings so dear to me. I am led partly to this conclusion by your spiteful words "moujik's hatred."

Have you ever found in Tolstoy's writings anything that would lead an impartial reader to believe Tolstoy to be a man capable of nursing hatred? I never have. And in that respect Professor York Powell, at least, gave Tolstoy his due when he said "humane enough," and that "he has gifts, sympathies, intuitions." As to the rest of the Professor's censure of Tolstoy, I put it down to a good bit of snobbish conceit on the part of the "learned" gentleman. Not all professors have "brains," though, unfortunately, they too often make fools of themselves by being priggish enough to think they have. I suppose they are led away by the illusion that that nice-sounding prefix, "professor" means "authority." If we come down to hard facts, I am afraid that Professor York Powell will be forgotten when Tolstoy will be hailed as a benefactor of mankind.

But possibly your tiff against Tolstoy arises from the fact that he is pulling down your idol—Shakespeare. Surely you must admit that Shakespeare was not infallible? He had his faults like all of us, and many of them. Please do not think by this that I am an anti-Shakespearian; quite the contrary, I admire Shakespeare. But I admire him only as a great dramatist and poet. He was not a teacher, and I believe Tolstoy attacks his popular *praise* on this account. None of his leading plays are his original in the plotting. Much of his philosophy is faulty, and much that is not faulty is not his proper. And one of his chief drawbacks is, that he was such a snob. But we can almost make allowances for this last defect when we remember that he was greatly handicapped by his environment.

Now, Sir, in the name of "fair play" I, as a recognised Freethinker, ask you to make amendments in your most unjust attack on Tolstoy, or at least to give this letter publicity—which would, I daresay in a way, serve as an apology for the great wrong done to such a public man as Tolstoy, through the columns of the *Freethinker*—a wrong which, no doubt, has arisen from some misconception.

GERALD CHRISTIAN.

[This correspondent misunderstands the "must" in the sentence he quotes from us. "One must think of it" merely meant "one cannot help thinking of it." For the rest, as our correspondent says what he thinks about Shakespeare, he should not expect us to apologise for saying what we think about Tolstoy. We cannot say more at present.—EDITOR.]

THE CHRISTIAN BLIGHT.

The "mighty Julius," the first Cæsar, the greatest of earth's rulers, who swayed the destinies of the civilised world before Christ was born, was far above the superstitious of his age—above the superstition of all ages. Could he "revisit the glimpses of the moon," and behold a great English statesman [Gladstone] gravely discussing a story of devils being turned out of men and sent into swine, he would wonder what blight had fallen upon the human intellect in two thousand years. And were he to learn that such stories are contained in a book which is regarded as divine, which is placed as such in the hands of our children, which is paraded in all our courts of justice, and is deemed the very basis and security of our civilisation, he would be at no loss to understand why the greatest rulers and statesmen of modern Europe look small and effeminate beside the best emperors of pagan Rome.—G. W. Foote, "The Grand Old Book," p. 76.

Whoever degrades another degrades me,
And whatever is said or done returns at last to me.

—Walt Whitman.

I have ever looked on mankind in the lump to be nothing better than a foolish, headstrong, credulous, unthinking mob; and their universal belief has ever had extremely little weight with me.—Robert Burns.

Vivas to those who have failed!
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!
And to all generals that lost engagements, and all overcome heroes!
And the numberless unknown heroes equal to the greatest heroes known.
—Walt Whitman.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

LONDON.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, New Church-road): 7.30, Conversazione for Members and Friends.

COUNTRY.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Masonic Hall, 11 Melbourne-road): 6.30, a Lecture.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Discussion Class; 6.30, G. Scott, "Truth and Falsehood in Religion."

GLASGOW RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (319 Sauchiehall-street): Wednesday, Dec. 26, at 8, Social Meeting.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Milton Hall, Daulby-street): 7, A. E. Killip, "Mutual Aid."

PLYMOUTH RATIONALIST SOCIETY (Foresters' Hall, Octagon): 7, W. H. Baron, "Why I am an Agnostic."

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