

# THE Freethinker

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*There is not a more singular character in the world than that of a thinking man.*—FITZOSEORNE.

## Thomas Hardy's Offence.

THOMAS HARDY shares with George Meredith the distinction of leading the ranks of living English novelists. Some dull people and some pious people will think this is no great merit. The latter class have a deadly hatred of all recreation; the former class speak sneeringly of what they call "light literature." But recreation is essential to mental and moral as well as bodily health; and light literature, as Meredith has said, is the garden of the soul.

Thomas Hardy is also a poet, though not as great a poet as George Meredith. Competent readers of his novels must have discerned the poetry in them; particularly in those fine passages of description in which he places his characters in vital relation to their environment. Competent readers of his volumes of verse must have recognised the power and subtlety of his conceptions, although he has nothing like George Meredith's mastery of versification.

Thomas Hardy's high place in English literature cannot be denied him. It rests on an ample achievement. But it is fortunate, in a way, that he won this high place before he took to expressing his intimate personal opinions in some of his most striking verses. Had this not been the case, he would have been branded as an "Atheist" and a "blasphemer," and the public would have been solemnly warned against his pernicious influence.

We do not mean that Hardy's ideas on many topics which are the peculiar preserve of Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Grundy were not obvious through his prose writings to readers of passable penetration. After the splendid Preface to the second edition of *Tess* it was impossible even for the densest minds not to see where he stood. The closing reference in the novel itself to the plaguing of *Tess* by the President of the Immortals was mordant enough, especially for those who remembered Aristophanes and Heine; but the Preface in reply to the critics dotted all the i's and made everything as clear as daylight. The allusion to Mr. Lang as having turned Christian for once in order to castigate an unbeliever, and the reference to the tremendous outburst in *Lear*,

"As flies to wanton boys are we t' the gods,  
They kill us for their sport—"

showed that the creator of that dear, adorable, fated heroine was by no means disinclined to accept the orthodox challenge; and we have always regretted that he was not provoked into further defence and justification; but perhaps it was not surprising that those who felt his arrows sought no fresh encounter.

Hardy's view of the world is frankly pessimistic. Now it may be said of pessimism that some are above it and some are below it. Meredith is above it, in the sense that he places his foot upon it after an effort of reason. Whether he is right or wrong is not the point. We are only concerned with his attitude. But most men, including most journalists, and all the champions of "faith," are below pessi-

mism. They are incapable of confronting it. They shrink from it with a mere cowardly repulsion. It hurts the thoughtless and the selfish to be told that

"God's in his heaven,  
All's right with the world—"

is simply the complacent optimism of comfort and success; that this is not the best of all possible worlds, and that in many respects it would be difficult to conceive a worse one, without assuming what would be incompatible with prolonged existence.

As a pessimistic poet Hardy, like the late James Thomson ("B.V."), will always be cavaire to the general. And he will always be liable to the severe rebuke of the professional and amateur guardians of the public religion. For while an optimist may be a Theist, a pessimist is pretty sure to be an Atheist; unless, indeed, he is in a worse plight, believing in a God and regarding him as a Devil. Hardy almost seems to be in that stage. But we believe it is only seems. Instead of pointedly challenging the God idea, he seeks to fill people with moral dissatisfaction, and this may often be best done by assuming the attitude of theoretical belief.

This appears to be—we do not speak with certitude—the policy of several of Hardy's poems; presumably, also, of the poem entitled "New Year's Eve" which he has written for the January number of the *Fortnightly Review*. At the time of writing we have not seen this poem, but we can guess its character from the two verses which the *Daily News* has been able to quote in anticipation. The poet asks God why he created this earth at all, and is suitably rebuked for his impertinence. God then resumes his old silence:—

"He sank to raptness as of yore,  
And opening New Year's Day  
Wove it by rote as theretofore,  
And went on working evermore  
In His unweeing way."

Of course the dear *Daily News* does not relish the poet's "grim pleasantry." It wishes him more "cheerful thoughts" and "wholesome laughter"—such as George Cadbury and his "kept" journalists feel called upon to enjoy at Christmas. At the time which commemorates the birth of Christ people who can do so should eat, drink, and be merry. Millions of other people want meat and drink and are in misery; but it is a poor heart, for all that, which does not rejoice at this blessed season. Thank the Lord for what he has sent you, even if he has left your neighbors empty. By this means you may find that godliness is great gain.

It was inevitable that Hardy's principles should receive the last crushing refutation. At the bottom of the theologian's bag of tricks there always lies the frightful warning against self-destruction. Hardy is told that his New Year's message is "calculated not to make men happier, but to make them commit suicide." Perhaps so, if nothing were left when the optimistic God idea is gone. But something remains. If we lose a Deity we still have Humanity. And if the world can never be quite the paradise of dreams; if a certain measure of evil and misery is indestructible; we may console and support each other, and apply to the worst wounds the anti-septic of sympathy.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Peace on Earth.

WHAT a huge and elaborate joke is Christianity! Historical Christian literature is full of lengthy diatribes on the incurable vileness of human nature, which proves—say its modern defenders—that it has always upheld the dignity and the nobility of human nature. It poses as the champion of the home—with one third of its godhead unmarried, another third a celibate, and some of its greatest advocates upholders of celibacy. Holding material possessions as mere perishable dross, some of the richest and most unscrupulous of the money-kings of the world are among its most zealous supporters. It is the patron of the family and the friend of woman; yet it is based upon the essential uncleanness of parentage, its principal reason for sanctioning marriage is an indecent one; it divested women of every possible shred of freedom, and has always consigned her to a subordinate position. A friend of the hungry, it promises them food in the next world, when the appetite is not likely to be over-mastering, and the opportunities for holding food not of the most substantial description. As a champion of the oppressed, it delivers damnation to such as rise against their oppressors. Holding the only genuine revelation from God to man, nearly two thousand years of discussion finds them as far off as ever from any agreement as to what on earth it means. Unquestionably it is a joke. One of the longest drawn out, bitterest and most expensive jokes in existence.

The supreme aspect of the Christian joke is its much advertised "Peace on Earth." Nineteen hundred and six years ago, or thereabout (for no one is quite sure as to the date of the performance, this not being fixed for some centuries after it had taken place) the angels sang their song of "Peace on earth, good will towards men," in the clouds—which is the place to which Christians have usually confined it. The joke commenced in the air but it has been kept up on earth. The earliest records we have of the preachers of peace shows them fighting. Whenever and wherever two were gathered together, there was the material for a row. And the rows were never so fierce as when it was over a disputed interpretation of the doctrine of brotherhood, unless it was when some one had to be elected to the post of principal peace preacher. In the election of one Pope, one hundred and thirty seven Christian corpses were left behind as a kind of commentary of the angels' message. Our own patron saint, St. George, flogged the women of the opposite faction on the soles of their feet, or stripped them naked, preparatory to beating them with prickly branches. "Bloodshed, murder and assassination," to quote Dean Milman, were the means by which each Christian sect strove to overcome the other. The old Roman empire did not preach about "Peace on Earth," but it went far towards producing it. The Christians did preach it, and this was the nearest approach they made.

When Queen Victoria died, yards upon yards of the customary rubbish was written about "Victoria's Reign of Peace." There had hardly been six months during her entire reign that we had not a war—big or little—on hand somewhere or other, but presumably, it would have been a pity to spoil a pretty story for the sake of a vulgar fact. Anyway, both aspects of the case were typical of the whole history of Christianity. It has always preached peace and made for war. The purely Christian ages present a picture of a constant series of petty internal wars, accompanied by every circumstance of cruelty and barbarity. During Pagan times, the *Pax Romana* was a real thing, and a Roman citizen might travel over any portion of the vast empire, relying upon the power and protection of the imperial government. Under Christian rule it was the strong arm that governed, and few were safe from the lawless raiding of armed bishop or robber lord.

The greatest religious movement of the first twelve Christian centuries was the Crusades, and no

wars that the world has seen have ever been accompanied by greater ferocity. The wars of the sixteenth century, again, were largely dominated by religious considerations, and in every case, the sole influence of Christianity has been to inflame passions already brutal and sanctify cruelty that might otherwise have been subjected to restraining influences. Before the advent of "Peace on Earth," according to a calculation of Gibbon, the Roman empire maintained a peace with an army of 375,000 men. After the establishment of Christian rule, we see the war spirit gradually gaining in strength, until to day, Christian Europe needs about *five million* soldiers to guard the same territory—all of them professedly followers of, and believers in, the angels' message. The most peaceful people in the world to-day are non-Christian; the followers of the cross exult in their military supremacy. And when a non-Christian people like the Japanese wish to become experts in the art of war, it is the Christian people they turn to for the lesson.

Not only have Christians not been at peace with outsiders; they have been unable to live at peace with themselves. Even while they perfunctorily sing their praise of "Peace on Earth," their real energies are given to that sectarian warfare which has always been the characteristic feature of historic Christianity. Only the other day, the Rev. Dr. Horton declared that the Pope is still the head of a secret inquisition that murders, quietly imprisons, or immures in lunatic asylums for religious offences. I do not know whether Dr. Horton is correct or not. Personally, I should not like to place great reliance on anything of the kind this gentleman says. But if the statement correctly represents the conduct of leading Roman Catholics, it is a striking instance of the effect of their religion on them. And if it is not true, it is an equally strong instance of the influence of Dr. Horton's religion on him.

"Peace on earth, good will towards men," was proclaimed at the advent of Christianity. Where does it exist in any marked extent to-day? Certainly not in Christian countries. No other countries have ever shown, or show now, the same extremes of wealth and poverty, senseless luxury and degrading misery, that Christian countries exhibit. In spite of all juggling with figures concerning the general wealth of the country, the plain fact remains that the rich grow steadily richer and the poor steadily poorer. In London itself, the richest city in the world, the capital of a Christian country, according to Mr. Charles Booth, over a million people are either on the verge of or below the hunger line. The report of the Medical Officer for Liverpool, that the slums of that city are probably the worst in the world, and that the type of human beings developed there are characteristic of their surroundings. And Liverpool is only a sample of most of our large cities. Children are born with the sure and certain prospect of the prison or the asylum or the workhouse, or to pass their lives in a career of labor that often does little but deaden and degrade; part of a system that has no higher aim than the making of money, and which treats flesh and blood as so many pieces of machinery. What non-Christian has ever brought less of peace and good will than Christianity has done?

Of course, there are charities. And these are really themselves part of the evil. When they are not mere business ventures, run for either the emoluments of office or as an advertisement for church or chapel, they pauperise instead of elevate, and help to develop a class of chronic paupers, who from being unemployed become unemployable, and so serve to perpetuate their type in all its degradation and squalor. A genuine effort on the part of a religion with all the power, time, money and influence Christianity has possessed, to make peace and good will a fact on earth, might ere now have made poverty and vice almost a negligible quantity. As it is, the work is yet to be done, and whenever it is done it will be by forces and influences that are quite outside the Christian churches.

Yes, Christianity has played a huge joke on the world, and one that has been marvellously successful hitherto. But the best joke palls with age. The brightest flash of wit ceases to dazzle when it is too often repeated. Heine begged to remind the Aristophanes of the sky that in tormenting the Aristophanes of Germany, the joke was rather too long drawn out and was becoming monstrous. So too, the world is becoming weary of this Christian joke about "Peace on earth good will towards men." It is a joke that has cost millions of lives, centuries of degradation, and has helped to bury more than one civilisation. But it is beginning to pall. And when the joke of the gods is ended, humanity may get in some real gaiety on its own account.

C. COHEN.

## The Historicity of Jesus.—II.

(Concluded from p. 804.)

BY the conservatives Professor Schmiedel is denounced as a reckless iconoclast, while Freethinkers have reason to complain of his excessive conservatism. When he announced that there are only "nine absolutely credible passages" in the Gospels, the orthodox were thrown into a state of wild confusion; but the Rationalists were amazed at the shaky methods by which he endeavored to fortify his position. In his Preface to Dr. Neumann's *Jesus*, he separates the Gospel passages about Jesus into three classes: "first, those that are plainly incredible; secondly, those which are plainly credible; and in the third category those which occupy an intermediate position as bearing on the face of them no certain mark either of incredibility or of credibility." This article is concerned only with the passages which are characterised as "plainly credible," because it is by means of these alone that Professor Schmiedel attempts to establish the historicity of Jesus. He frankly admits that if the Gospels contained no such passages, "it would be impossible to prove to a Sceptic that any historical value whatever was to be assigned to them: he would be in a position to declare the picture of Jesus contained in them to be purely a work of phantasy, and could remove the person of Jesus from the field of history." But since there are such passages, they "prove that he [Jesus] really did exist, and that the Gospels contain at least some absolutely trustworthy facts concerning him." Now, according to Professor Schmiedel, these nine passages are "plainly credible" because, while wholly inconsistent with the belief in the deity of Jesus, they were yet inserted in the Gospels by men who held it. Clearly, he argues, had Jesus never lived, they would have been rigidly excluded.

That, in brief, is Dr. Schmiedel's whole argument. He claims that the "nine absolutely credible passages" are not "consistent with the worship in which Jesus had come to be held." Now that claim it is the purpose of this article to overthrow. We maintain that not one of the nine passages can be shown to be inconsistent with the most fervent belief in the deity of Jesus; and if we do this successfully, Dr. Schmiedel will be bound to agree with us in the statement that the person of Jesus has been "removed from the field of history." Let us examine the passages one by one.

1. In Mark x. 18, Jesus is represented as saying to an anxious inquirer, who had addressed him as "Good Master," "Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God." Dr. Schmiedel triumphantly asks: "Could worshipers of Jesus, such as by universal consent the writers of the Gospels were, possibly have invented for him such words?" We answer by asking another question: *Did the writers invent such words?* In Matthew xix. 17, we find an entirely different version. Here we read: "Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why askest thou me concerning that which is good? One there is who is good." If Matthew's version is correct, the text

is no longer inconsistent with the worship of Jesus as God, and it ceases to be "plainly credible." Now, when there are two versions of the same incident, is it not critically wicked to base an important thesis on the one while totally ignoring the other? Dr. Schmiedel may retort that Mark embodies the older tradition; but that is only a matter of opinion. Other equally competent scholars hold that Mark, in its final form, is later than both Matthew and Luke. Furthermore, there is at present no possibility of ascertaining what the original version was. The text as found in Matthew, we are informed, has been altered; but so has the one in Mark. It is a most significant fact that such eminent scholars as Tischendorf, Tregelles, Weiss and Westcott and Hort, pronounce in favor of the reading in Matthew, and declare the one in Mark and Luke to be a corruption of the original. How is it that neither Schmiedel nor Neumann mentions this important fact? The outstanding and undeniable conclusion, however, is that Dr. Schmiedel's first "foundation-pillar" has been knocked down.

2. The second "foundation-stone" is equally insecure. It is made to rest on Matthew xii. 31. Dr. Schmiedel's contention is that blasphemy against Jesus was forgivable, whilst blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was unforgivable, and that such an utterance would not have been attributed to Jesus by believers in his Godhood had he never actually uttered it. "In their worship of Jesus," he says, "it must have appeared to them in itself the greatest possible blasphemy to say that blasphemy against Jesus could be forgiven." Now two curious things must be noted; the first, that the word "blasphemy" does not occur in the text in Matthew, and the second, that in the text in Mark, Jesus is made to identify himself with the Holy Spirit. According to Mark, the people blasphemed against the Holy Spirit in that they said of Jesus, "He hath an unclean spirit"; and this is the blasphemy that was pronounced unforgivable. The fact that in Matthew and Luke, Jesus distinguishes between himself and the Holy Spirit proves nothing, because even by John and Paul the same distinction is made, as well as a similar distinction between Jesus and the Father, which distinctions are the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity. The only rational conclusion, therefore, is that the text in Matthew could have been invented quite as easily as texts containing similar distinctions in John.

3. The third "pillar" is ominously top-heavy. It is found in Mark iii. 21, where the friends of Jesus are represented as saying "He is beside himself." Now, what is there to show that this text could not have been invented? No doubt Dr. Schmiedel himself regards John i. 1-18 as a pure invention; and yet in that famous Prologue occur these words: "He came unto his own, and they that were his own received him not." Who was he whom his own people thus rejected? He by whom all things were made, and without whom was not anything made that hath been made. If the one passage was invented, why not the other? If elsewhere men are represented as resisting, quenching, and grieving the Holy Spirit, why should not some of the kinsmen of Jesus be represented in Mark as saying of him, "He is beside himself"? Their saying such a thing would only be a demonstration of their own spiritual perversity. What we contend is that Mark iii. 21 is not one whit more credible than John i. 11.

4. In this text (Mark xiii. 32) Jesus, while distinguishing himself from the Father, distinguishes himself from men just as much. Indeed, he puts himself in a special category. If less than the Father, he is here something more than man. Therefore, such a saying is no more credible than the passage in John in which he raises Lazarus from the dead.

5. Surely Dr. Schmiedel cannot be ignorant of the fact that the cry from the Cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. xxvii. 48) is in perfect harmony with Paul's conception of the atoning work of the God-man; and by the time

the Gospels were written that form of Christology must have been fairly well-known in the Church.

6-7. These two passages (Mark viii. 12; vi. 5) convey essentially the same idea. In both there are explanatory or qualifying clauses to which Dr. Schmiedel does not give their due weight. In number 6, Jesus declined to give a sign, not because he was unable, but because the motive of the Pharisees in asking for it was of an ignoble character; and in number 7, he was unable to do many mighty works through lack of faith on the people's part, not through lack of power on his own.

8-9. These two passages (Mark vii. 14-21; Matt. xi. 5), taken in their plain and unmistakable signification, tell mightily against Dr. Schmiedel's case. But he puts a forced and fanciful interpretation upon them, and then claims them as "absolutely credible." Most ingeniously he manipulates miracles into parables, turns the literal into the metaphorical, and adds the two texts to his list of "absolutely credible passages." This is a most clever bit of special pleading, but it can scarcely be described as fair and honest criticism.

Thus the nine "plainly credible" passages have all gone over to the majority of "plainly incredible" ones. In other words, it irresistibly follows that the only intelligent choice lies between the complete historicity and the complete non-historicity of the Gospel Jesus. No position anywhere between these extremes can be consistently held. The Gospels must be swallowed whole, or not at all. The moment you admit the presence of myth or legend in them, in however small a quantity, you utterly discredit them as historical documents. The moment you reject the Christ of theology you entirely lose touch with the historical Jesus, for they are both one and the same. Even Dr. Schmiedel cannot find nine "absolutely credible passages" in the Gospels without ignoring unfavorable facts and inventing unnatural interpretations. This is self-evident to all readers of his "Gospels" article and the Preface to Dr. Neumann's book. He impresses one as a special pleader on behalf of a pet theory. He denies this charge with warmth, but even in denying it he implies its truth. He says:—

"In reality, my foundation-texts were in no sense sought out by me for any purpose whatever; they thrust themselves upon me in virtue of one feature, and one feature only: the impossibility of their having been invented, and their consequent credibility. They will thrust themselves equally, whether he will or no, upon every other investigator who, amid the greatly-questioned mass of Gospel tradition, is looking out for something to start with which is absolutely certain, and is accepted even by the 'gainsayer.'"

He was "looking out for something," and found it; but there are many investigators in whom Dr. Schmiedel's prophecy finds no fulfilment. His nine passages do not thrust themselves upon them in virtue of the impossibility of their having been invented. What thrusts itself upon them is the impossibility of finding anything about Jesus, either in or out of the Gospels, that may be accepted as historically trustworthy. They are "gainsayers" who do *not* accept Dr. Schmiedel's "foundation-pillars," and who discover nothing in the Gospels "to start with which is absolutely certain"—except their entire untrustworthiness.

J. T. LLOYD.

## They Are Coming Round!—V.

(Concluded from p. 806.)

PROFESSOR SAYCE, while stating frankly many of the points of absolute identity in the religions of Babylon and Israel, omits a few, and moreover, never misses an opportunity of showing what he conceives to be an essential difference between the two. In most of these cases he is hopelessly astray. The Babylonians, he alleges, believed the gods themselves to have been created. "The words with which the book of Genesis begins," says he, "are a conscious

contradiction of the statement of the Babylonian cosmologists. But the contradiction illustrates the difference between the Hebrew and the Babylonian points of view. The Hebrew was not only a monotheist; he believed also that everything, even from the beginning, had been made by the one supreme God; the Babylonian, on the contrary, started with a materialistic philosophy. There are no gods at the outset; the gods themselves have been created, like other things.....the Babylonian cosmology is that of Genesis without the first verse" (p. 388).

### THE BIBLE GODS TOO ARE CREATED.

In the above quotation Dr. Sayce commits an orthodoxy and a blunder. The first verse of Genesis is really most heterodox, as I will now show, and as polytheistic as anything Babylonian. I must retranslate it to prove what I say. "In the beginning" means nothing in particular. It is exactly equivalent to what we so often find in fairy-tales—"Once on a time." Besides, the word *Bereshith*, with which the Bible opens, is of very doubtful meaning. It may possibly mean "in the beginning," though it evidently *does not*. The popular orthodox opinion is that the word is *reshith*, an abstract noun, with the preposition *be* (meaning *in*) prefixed. But it may be a noun merely. It never occurs again in the Bible, I think, and therefore no other text can be quoted to illustrate or confirm the common translation. The structure of the sentence would suggest quite a different rendering, and I think it ought to be Englished thus: "*Bereshith made [or created or beget] Elohim [Gods], the Heavens and the Earth.*"

The verb *bara* (to make, create, beget) is here in the singular, and so agrees with its nominative *Bereshith*; while *Elohim* (Gods) is a plural noun following the verb, and not agreeing with it. The only reason for trying to make the singular verb here agree with the plural noun is a theological reason; grammar and common sense both condemn it. I have translated the text in the only rational and honest way open to a translator; and Jews and Christians would have so rendered it all along if their creeds had not forbidden them to do so.

Of course, I shall be scornfully informed that, if we take *Bereshith* as a simple noun, and so render the passage as to make him (her or it) create the Gods (or God), we know absolutely nothing of this new creator, besides being guilty of blasphemy. Well, there is nothing but fright and spite in that objection. I know as much of the creator *Bereshith* as the rabbis or the Christian clergy know of *Elohim*; and I undertake to show that *Bereshith* was as likely, as able, and as ready to create (or make or beget) Gods (or God), as Gods (or God) were (or was) to create the heavens and the earth. Let the clergy take up that challenge as soon as they please. There is nothing in grammar or lexicography that can be honestly urged against my translation; any objection arising merely from orthodox prejudice will have no weight with honest students.

Here, then, we have another proof that the cosmology of Genesis is identical with that of Pagan Babylon. The first verse of the Bible declares that one *Bereshith* made Gods, the heavens and the earth; the rest of the chapter tells what the Gods did in the way of arranging and finishing what *Bereshith* made, his being evidently the crude article, theirs the finished one. The creator *Bereshith* dropped out of the Jewish consciousness, and the *Elohim* usurped their father's or creator's place. They in turn were displaced by jealous Jehovah, who reigned supreme after murdering his family connections or otherwise disposing of them. A precisely similar course was taken by "God and Savior" and Mediator Merodach in Babylon. He became God, gradually ousted all his rivals, and claimed godship all alone. So was it in Greece, where Zeus ousted all the other gods and became supreme. No doubt all the other great religions passed through a similar process of development, as we see those of Babylon and the Bible did.

No doubt a world of prejudice and stupid pre-conception will have to be swept away ere people generally adopt these new and true views of the Bible, but I cannot despair. It is over thirty years since I first saw that the Hebrew Bible was saturated with polytheism, and all the fresh light that has reached me on the subject confirms and illustrates my opinion. Dr. Sayce's lectures unintentionally come to my assistance; and when the clergy have had time to assimilate the new truths recovered from Babylon, Egypt and elsewhere, they—even they—will open their eyes to the fact that their religion is but one amongst many and as destitute of truth as any creed of ancient or modern times.

Dr. Sayce sadly misrepresents the Bible in saying "the breath of the one God broodeth over" the deep. It was not so; it was the breath of the gods (Elohim), whom Bereshith had made—their breath it was that "moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. i. 2). Monotheism is quite absent from the first chapter of Genesis, unless Bereshith be the only real God there; and only the worst perversity can pretend to find it there. To say or imply that Elohim means one sole God is a monstrous perversion of truth, a gross imposture palmed off upon weak and credulous people by men who have taken up Semitic folk-lore and fairy tales, and led the masses to believe them to be revelations from one only God. The Jews were manifest Polytheists till they went into captivity. They learnt all the monotheism they ever had in Babylon, Persia, etc., and were as monotheistic on their return to Palestine as they have ever been. The Jewish and Christian monotheism is about as complete as that of Babylon, from whence it was imported. The old Jewish polytheism is still found in the Bible, and the Christians would cry blasphemy if you tried to tear it out. Their own Father, Son, Ghost (pigeon), Mary, and their swarm of saints are gods and goddesses all.

It appears that the Babylonians never persecuted for religion's sake, notwithstanding the "Book of the Prophet Daniel," the "Book of Esther" (or Istar), etc. Evidently they had perfect faith in the ability of their gods to take care of themselves, a faith the Christians could never develop. The Christian God has been compelled to rely upon police protection ever since he undertook to run the world; and like the Czar, he must be protected by massacre, or die, poor fellow. It is a sorry figure he cuts; but, however I may pity, I cannot help him. He should retire into obscurity, as he will when once he understands that the world could do immensely better without him.

Our professor speaks of the "grotesque and embarrassing medley of exalted spiritual thought and stupid superstition which so often meets us in the religious literature of Babylonia." He might have said with equal truth, "in the Old and New Testaments"; for no religion can exceed Christianity and Judaism in these particulars. I should dearly like to see and hear Dr. Sayce confronted by a resurrected Babylonian divine of four or five thousand years ago, and to listen to his indictment of the Christian holy books.

The Jewish temple and temple worship were mere reflections and echoes of the Babylonian temples, etc., with nothing original about them. The lamp, Solomon's "sea" or laver on the backs of oxen, the tables and loaves of "shew bread," the "holy of holies" with no image in it, the twin pillars in front, and the cherubs, were all Babylonian. The Lord could not make Solomon "wise" enough to build his temple; Pagan foreigners had to be hired for that; and poor Jehovah had to take a Pagan temple or none, for his "chosen people" could not erect one for him. Even the serpent of brass which the Israelites worshiped was but a Babylonian idol—and a "type" of Christ! The Babylonian temples all had their book of the law too, and it may be almost surmised that Aaron the high priest lived in Babylon. The Jewish *Yom Kippur*, or Day of Atonement, is from the same country and people; but the Jews will keep up the senseless mummery for some time

yet, merely because their fathers did. Ay, and even the pascal lamb, with its blood smeared over the lintels and door-posts of the houses, was Babylonian. Christ did not know that, nor do the childish Christians who now talk so glibly about *their* passover.

As Dr. Sayce says, "The Sabbath-rest was essentially Babylonian," the very name being borrowed from the same quarter. The Jewish priests borrowed the Sabbath, and then spread silly lies to induce their dupes to observe it.

We now know a little of the history of the God Yahveh, the Lord of the Christians. Professor Sayce admits much of what I am now going to say. The Babylonians called the Moon, Sin (no connection with our English word *sin*, remember). The Moon was the Male God, the Sun the female. The Hebrews originally took the Moon as their chief God. At Haran the Moon was named Ai, Ya, or Sin. The Ancient Babylonian God of Earth and Sea was called Ya. Hadad or Hodad, the Syrian Moon-God, had a mate named El (the singular of Elohim). Yo-chebed or Jochebed was the Moon-God. The mountain called Sin-ai was the mountain of the Moon. And Ya and Ea or Oames were all one. These names are still worshiped in Southern Arabia (*Explorations in Bible Lands During the Nineteenth Century*, by Professor Hilprecht; 1903; pp. 733 *et seq.*). Hallelu-Yah, by the way, means the New Moon! though it seems almost cruel to say so, considering how many precious souls have been saved by shouting it, and what wealth it has brought to the clergy.

"The Moon-God," says Dr. Sayce, "was emphatically 'the Lord of hosts.'" The Moon-God had a father, as he says (p. 261; but he does not add that the Bible contains traces of him. Abi Yah (Abijah) means "father of Jah or Jehovah," though orthodox lexicographers shamelessly deny it or pervert it from its real meaning.

I must now close. How a man can say all that Professor Sayce does and yet remain a Christian is a trifle too much for me to understand. One-tenth of the heterodox statements in these Lectures is enough to logically dethrone the Bible; but their author does not seem to see that. Notwithstanding his learning and ability, his faith is just that of an ignorant peasant. But we must push on and compel all foremost Christians to feel ashamed of their "holy book" and their impossible religion.

JOS. SYMES.

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### The First Christmas.

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CHRISTMAS comes but once a year, and considering the gluttony and wine-bibbing which goes on when it *does* come, it is perhaps a very good thing that the season occurs no oftener. Hundreds of Christmases, and therefore hundreds of years, have rolled by since the first one ushered into the world the most surprising baby that ever suckled and squealed. All the babies born since were commonplace in comparison with this astonishing youngster; and never, except when the stars sang together for joy, in a chorus that would have been well worth a shilling ticket, did nature show such uncommon interest in any event as in the appearance of this little lump of human dough. Nature has probably been sorry for her enthusiasm ever since. She is not easily excited, and her pace is steadier than a mule's. But as Jove nods, nature has an occasional fling. She went into raptures on the first Christmas, and when the chief person born on that day made his exit from this mortal stage she went black in the face with panic fear or hysterical sorrow. From that time she has conducted herself with exemplary decorum, and no doubt she is heartily ashamed of the indiscretions and eccentricities she was guilty of on the occasions referred to.

The story of the first Christmas is partly written in certain old manuscripts, of questionable date and

authorship, which are regarded with extreme veneration by millions of people who know next to nothing about them. But there are many lapses and large deficiencies in the narrative, and we are authorised to supply what is wanting. We claim infallibility, of course, yet we do not deny it to others. Those who dissent from our version are free to make up one of their own, and it will doubtless be as infallible as ours. This may sound strange, but it is quite philosophical for all that. Do not all the Churches differ from each other, yet are they not all infallible? Why should one infallible man cut another infallible man's throat or put him in prison? Why cannot two infallible men dwell together in the same street like two greengrocers?

But to our story. It was the first Christmas Eve. A donkey was patiently wending his way to Jerusalem. On his back was seated a lady of some seventeen summers, and by his side walked a sturdy young man. They were husband and wife. The young man evidently belonged to the artisan class, and his better half was in that condition in which ladies love to be who love their lords. Both looked forward with unusual interest to the birth of the expected child. They had settled what name it should be called, so there was no doubt whatever as to its sex.

The day was drawing to an end when they approached Bethlehem. Making their way to an hotel kept by a relative of theirs, they asked for accommodation. Mr. Isaacs shook his head. "I am very sorry, Joe," he said, "but we are full up, and the worst of it is every hotel in the place is in the same state. Over an hour ago I tried desperately hard to oblige an old customer, a gentleman in the bacon trade, with a bed for the night, but I tried every hotel in Bethlehem without success. Fortunately I rigged up a few extra beds in the stable, and he has taken one of them. If you like another you are welcome, and cgd Joe! that's the best I can do for you."

"Thank you, old fellow," said Joe, "but Mary is in a delicate state, as you see, and I would like to fix her up comfortably. Can't you go in and see if there is any gentleman who will go outside to oblige a lady?"

Mr. Isaacs returned in five minutes, and said it was no use. One gentleman had a bad cold, another had the gout, another the lumbago, and so on. Joseph and Mary were therefore obliged to return to the stable.

While Joseph was grooming the donkey Mr. Isaacs came in and started a curious conversation. "Joe," he began, "I don't wish to interfere with your business, but as a relative and an old friend you will pardon me for saying that I am a little puzzled; you have only been married four months, and if Mary is not a mother in a few days my name isn't Isaacs." Joseph did not resent these remarks, his natural meekness being such that no insult could ever disturb it. With a solemn face he replied, "My dear Isaacs, there is nothing to pardon. Mary's baby is not mine. Its father lives in heaven. He is an angel, or something very high there. Mary has often told me all about it, but I have such a bad memory for details. The fact is, however, that Jeshua—we've settled his name—was conceived miraculously, as I've heard say some of the great ones among the heathen were. You may smile, but I've Mary's word for it, and she ought to know."

"My dear fellow," said Mr. Isaacs, "if you're satisfied, of course I am. I don't say Mary's story would go down with me if I were in your place, but I've no right to grumble if you are contented."

Thereupon Joseph, with a still more solemn face, replied, "Well, I was a little incredulous myself at first, but all my doubts were dispelled after that dream I had. I saw an angel at my bedside, and he told me that Mary's story was quite correct, and I was to marry her. Some of the neighbors chattered about a Roman soldier, called Pandera, who used to hang about her house while I was away at work in the south; but I regard it as nothing but gossip, and Mary says they are a pack of liars."

Mr. Isaacs returned to his customers in the hotel, winking and putting his finger to his nose directly his back was turned. Meanwhile Joseph and Mary had supper, after which she felt very unwell; and, as luck or providence would have it, she was confined soon after twelve o'clock of a bouncing boy. Mr. Isaacs resolutely refused to turn any customer out of his bed, so the new comer was cradled in a manger filled with the softest hay.

Soon afterwards a fiery kite-shaped object was seen in the sky, advancing towards Bethlehem, and finally it rested on the chimney stack of Mr. Isaacs' hotel, where it gave such a lovely illumination that half the town turned out to see it. Two enterprising spirits, who mounted a ladder to inspect it closely, and if possible bring it down, were struck as if by lightning, and were with great difficulty restored to consciousness by the skill and efforts of a dozen doctors.

While the people were in a state of bewilderment, six old gentlemen appeared on the scene. They were attired like the priests of Persia, and their venerable appearance and long white beards filled the spectators with reverence. Only one of them could speak Hebrew, and he acted as interpreter for the company. "Where," he inquired, in a deep majestic voice, "is the wondrous babe who is born to-night? We saw his portent in the east and have followed it hither nearly six hundred miles." Mr. Isaacs informed them that the wondrous babe was in the stable, at which they were greatly astonished. Four of them said they must have made a mistake, and were for going home again; but the other two pointed to the supernatural light on the hotel chimney, and after they had consumed three bottles of Mr. Isaacs' best Eschol they all made for the object of their search. Directly they entered the stable, little Jeshua stood up in the manger and eyed them; and, as they advanced, he accosted them in their own language. This removed any doubts they entertained, and they at once knelt down and offered him the presents they had brought with them. One gave him a cake of scented soap, another a pretty smelling-bottle, another an ivory rattle, another a silver fork, another a gold spoon, and another a cedar plate inlaid with pearl. Little Jeshua took the gifts very politely, made a graceful little bow, and a neat little speech in acknowledgment of their kindness. Then, handing them all over to his mother, to keep till the morning, he sang with great sweetness "Lay me in my little bed."

Soon after daylight some shepherds came in from the hills, saying they had seen a ghost, who had talked to them in enigmatical language; they could not understand exactly what he meant, but they gathered that good times were coming, when poor shepherds would eat mutton instead of watching it. On hearing of what happened in the town precisely at the same time they were still more astonished. All Bethlehem was in uproar. Everybody was talking about little Jeshua, and the presents that were brought him by the enthusiastic inhabitants filled three large vans when Joseph and Mary set out again.

—G. W. Foote, "Comic Sermons and Other Fantasias."

#### "THE PARAGON OF ANIMALS."

Like the Roman emperors, who, intoxicated by their power, at length regarded themselves as demigods, so the ruler of the earth believes that the animals subjected to his will have nothing in common with his own nature. Man is not content to be the king of animals. He insists on having it that an impassable gulf separates him from his subjects. The affinity of the ape disturbs and humbles him. And, turning his back upon the earth, he flies, with his threatened majesty, into the cloudy sphere of a special "human kingdom." But Anatomy, like those slaves who followed the conqueror's car crying, "Thou art a man," disturbs him in his self-admiration, and reminds him of those plain and tangible realities which unite him with the animal world.

—Broca.

## Acid Drops.

The Education Bill is dead. There were few mourners at the funeral. Many people throw rice on the hearse, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Before the deceased expired he lost nearly all his friends. If he rises from the dead it will be with a "glorified body"—as much like the old one as they say the new body of Jesus was, which was not recognised even by the devoted Mary. And the "glorified body" will be Secular Education.

We tender our condolence to Archbishop Davidson, who saw the Education Bill leave the House of Lords a Church Bill. We also tender our condolence to Archbishop Clifford, who saw it leave the House of Commons a Nonconformist Bill. Both have lost a good thing.

Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, in his funeral oration on the Education Bill, plainly confessed that its object was "to secure a national and not a denominational system, public and not sectarian, on the general basis of a common Christianity, instead of a sectional Christianity." In other words, to find the least measure of Christianity—the measure that is common to all sects—and establish that, at the nation's expense, in the public schools. This is a purely Nonconformist ideal. Nothing but madness could expect it to be welcomed by other Christians and non-Christians.

This also is to be observed. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman proceeds on the assumption that he and his Christian friends, being as he thinks in a majority—though that is doubtful—have a perfect right to use other citizens' money, even in spite of their protests, for the promotion of their own religious views in the nation's schools. Well now, we want to ask him this. Suppose it should happen that Freethinkers got the upper hand in England, as they have in France, would they not have just the same right to use the money of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and his Christian friends to teach Freethought in the nation's schools? We suggest to the Premier that this question may be worth his attention.

"Was It For This?" was the heading of a recent letter in the *Daily News* from the pen of the Rev. C. Silvester Horne. This energetic gentleman, who passes as a genius in the general dearth of clerical brains, sees that the Nonconformist Education Bill is a Nonconformist Bill no longer. "Our hopes," he says, "are in the dust." We are glad to hear it.

"There is nothing left to us," Mr. Horne continues, "but to lift our eyes to the courageous example of France, and imitate a bolder and fiercer war against the dominance of the priest in politics." The reverend gentleman doesn't appear to know that the policy of France is purely *secular*; a policy which Mr. Horne indignantly repudiates.

Mr. G. L. Courthorpe, the Conservative member for Sussex (Rye), inquired of the Education Minister whether the syllabus of religious instruction issued by the Board of Education provided for the daily use of the Lord's Prayer. Mr. Birrell replied that the duties of the Board did not include any duty or any power to issue any syllabus of religious instruction, this being left to the Local Education Authority in provided schools and to the foundation managers acting under trust in the Voluntary schools. He imagined the Lord's Prayer was usually said daily in provided schools.

The Lord's Prayer is said daily in Council schools. Dr. Clifford knows this, and approves it; yet he has the impudence to talk about "using the Bible ethically." What *ethics* is there in the Lord's Prayer? The very name of it is theological. The question naturally arises "Who is the Lord?" And the answer to that question involves the whole body of Christian theology.

"Our Father which art in heaven," is the beginning of this Lord's Prayer. This is not literature—it is not ethics—it is theology naked and unashamed. The "Father" is a dogma, and the "heaven" is an imagination. Nobody in this world knows anything about either.

Then comes a rigmarole about the Father's name being hallowed, his kingdom coming, and his will being done on earth as it is in heaven. All this is sound signifying nothing to the child's mind. It is followed by the first really intelligible utterance—"Give us this day our daily bread." But

the "Father" never sends it. Many a child has said that prayer on an empty stomach—having had no breakfast, and seeing little chance of a dinner.

"And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us"—or, as it appears in another form, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." Many a child has said that after seeing his father handling a county-court summons served upon him by a Church-going or Chapel-going grocer. The humbug of it all is too gross for words.

"Lead us not into temptation." There's a thing for a child to ask its "Father." No child of ours ever had to offer us such a petition. And what is to be said of "Deliver us from evil"? Every child of decent parents knows that they don't want to be told to shield it from evil. Fancy a child saying, "Please, dad, don't let me fall out of the top-floor window—and oh, please, don't shove me out"! Petitions of this kind are addressed, not to fathers, but to ogres.

The Lord's Prayer winds up with more rigmarole about "Father's" being the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen. It is like the flourish of trumpets and the prostrations before an oriental despot. We defy anybody to show us anything in this belauded document which is of the least real interest or value to any man, woman, or child on this planet. Yet this is the stuff they addle children's brains with during the brightest hour of the school day.

In his last eloquent speech on Robert Burns, Lord Rosebery made a tickling quotation from the eighteenth-century Diary of Lord Grange. "I have religion enough," his lordship wrote in 1718, "to spoil my relish and prosecution of this world, but not enough to get me to the next." Unfortunate man! To parody the title of a once-famous book by a Bible-expounder called Binney, Lord Grange made the worst of both worlds.

A pious morning contemporary had the following headlines recently in the same succession:—

GIPSY SMITH IN AMERICA.

SUDDEN DEATH OF AN AMERICAN BISHOP.

It was prophesied that Gipsy Smith would shake America when he went over.

"If he goes to America," the *Daily News* says of the Rev. Mr. Aked, "the main factor in his decision will be the question of health. The question of stipend does not enter." Of course not. How could a paltry £2,000 a year attract such a lofty soul?

Cardinal Gibbons, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Baltimore, defends King Congo-Leopold as "a wise and humane ruler." We suppose it is equally true that Cardinal Gibbons is a wise and humane priest.

Mr. Jones, the turned-out parish clerk and sexton of Algarkirk, near Boston, tells an interviewer that the rector, the Rev. William Yorick Smythies, used to say, "Ring the bell, Jones, and I'll preach hell and damnation to them." Well, that is what, being a Christian clergyman, he ought to preach. Christianity is simply the way to escape hell, and hell is damnation. If you don't believe it, try for yourself.

"The feast of St. Thomas," the *Daily News* says, "which falls on December 21, is said to have been fixed for the shortest day, as a punishment for his disbelief." Such is Christian criticism! The real explanation is astronomical. The shortest day in the year was the day of the Sun's humiliation, and it might be doubted if he would ever rise again—just as Thomas doubted the resurrection of Christ; and St. Thomas's day is December 21 because Christian mythology is derived from Sun Worship. In the same way John the Baptist's day is the longest day in the year, suiting the words, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

General Booth boasts that his Self-Denial Week this year realised £72,726. This would be something to boast of if Salvationist self-denial produced all that money for the Army's objects. But it did nothing of the kind. The great bulk of the money was cadged from outsiders. Salvation collectors rattled their boxes at railway-stations, on tram-cars and omnibuses, and in the public streets. In many places they went from house to house. One of them called at our own residence. To call it *their* self-denial is decidedly rich.

The *British Weekly* boasts that it is "a journal which goes to all the ends of the earth, and which is at once the largest and the most largely circulated religious newspaper in the world"; and the editor warns his readers that without a supernatural Christ "the battles for right and truth would become infinitely harder than they are." Is it not notoriously true that the treatment of conquered savage races by Christian nations has always been and still is shockingly bad? Dr. Nicoll refers to the Chinese horrors in South Africa and the Congo atrocities; but is he not aware that the most Christian country under the sun is responsible for the former and an eminently devout Christian king for the latter? Supernaturalism and the best accredited Trinitarianism have not prevented such awful evils from springing up and flourishing, and there is everything to show that the Humanism which is already displacing both of them will so educate and train mankind in the art of social life as to abolish those conditions under which such horrors and atrocities are possible.

We are told that "many stay away from the Church because they fear to hear the righteous judgments of God upon them"; but most do so because their "gorge rises at the nonsense and stuff" dealt out to them whenever they do attend. In the pulpit is always to be found a mere man airing his own opinions, prejudices, and antipathies, his own likes and dislikes, and coolly throwing the responsibility for them on the broad shoulders of the Lord. That is the real reason why intelligent people have ceased to attend church.

The Bishop of Ripon says it is impossible to uphold the theory that one religion is as good as another. Some people think it possible to uphold the theory that one religion is pretty nearly as bad as another. Every believer gives his own religion the preference. Such is the force of habit, and sometimes of personal advantage.

We expressed a considerable doubt, last week, whether the French law of 1881, with respect to public meetings, could apply to religious assemblies in connection with the Separation Law of 1906. The Government assumed that it did, and without waiting for a judicial decision, started dragooning the Catholic Church into obedience to what M. Briand called "the law of France." Well, it now appears that our doubt on this matter rested on a good foundation. The farcical side of it tickled the quick-witted French of all parties when two priests were summoned, one for holding a funeral and the other a baptism, without having first announced that these functions were public meetings. Comic papers took the matter up, and M. Clémenceau, at any rate, recognised the ludicrousness of the situation. Accordingly instructions were sent round to all the Prefects in France to stop the prosecutions which M. Briand inaugurated with such a flourish. The Government saw that a new law was necessary, after all, and decided to prepare one to lay before parliament. So the Catholic Church was not as wrong as the Liberal (Nonconformist) papers of this country tried to make out in resisting the application of the law of 1881 to a situation which was never contemplated at that time.

There are clerical fanatics, and we are sorry to say there are anti-clerical fanatics. By giving way to these the French Government placed itself in what turns out to be a ridiculous position. Even the Paris correspondent of the *Daily Chronicle*, who had hitherto been just as partial and prejudiced as the Paris correspondent of the *Daily News*, began to veer round, and wired the following over to London:—

"This is more or less a confession of blundering on the part of the Government, which in consequence has contrived to make itself look ridiculous even in the eyes of its supporters. The Government appears to have discovered what several French lawyers asserted weeks ago—that M. Briand, in holding that the law of 1881 was applicable to religious celebrations, placed an interpretation upon the law utterly foreign to it, and one which very probably the superior courts would not endorse."

We are glad that the French Government has received this check. Many of its members are Freethinkers. M. Briand himself is a militant Freethinker. M. Viviani, another member, delivered a Freethought oration the other day in the Chamber of Deputies; one which we should have been glad to applaud elsewhere, but which was quite out of place in a political assembly open to men of all varieties of religious opinion. Yes, so many members of the French Government are Freethinkers that it pains us to criticise them adversely. But Freethought is more important than Freethinkers; and Freethought teaches that absolute respect for the mental, moral, and (if you will) "spiritual" freedom of all citizens is the duty of every government, and the only

attitude which can possibly secure the triumph of truth. The short cuts of partisans in a hurry for the victory of their own ideas only lead to disaster. Those who would reform the world need patience as well as enthusiasm; and there is sometimes more courage in waiting than there is in action.

We recognise the wisdom and courage of recent French Governments in accepting and promoting the great principle of separation between Religion and the State. We only wish they had just a little more wisdom and courage. Separation should be absolute. There ought to be no points of contact, and therefore no points of friction, afterwards. We are ready to cry "Hands off!" when Religion seeks to control the State. But we are equally ready to cry "Hands off!" when the State seeks to control Religion. We are *real* Separatists.

England ought to feel very proud. We read that the Rev. Dr. C. M. Sheldon, author of that extinct volcano, *In His Steps*, has "consented to visit England in the coming spring." *Consented!* Fancy!

"Signor Luzzati, Deputy and ex-Minister," wired the Rome correspondent of the *Daily News* on December 18, "delivered a lecture at the University yesterday on the superiority of Asia and Japan over the white races in the matter of religious toleration." We fancy some Asiatic or Japanese missionaries would do good in Birmingham; and readers of our last week's article will probably agree with us.

The Bishop of Uganda has been boasting of the spread of Christianity in the country where he gets his living by preaching it. He says there are 60,000 Christians there now. Well, we will admit it, just for the sake of argument. And then we will mention another fact. The Bishop of London, preaching before the Lord Mayor of London at All Hallow's, Lombard-street, regretted that so many business men had forgotten their prayers altogether. According to one Bishop, Christianity is losing ground in England; according to another Bishop, it is making headway in Uganda. How far is this a matter for congratulation?

Mark Twain, in the *North American Review*, tells a story of the seven-year-old son of the Rev. Charley Stowe and Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe. The family were attending a Congregational Convention in Chicago, and were to be the guests of a minister. The father impressed upon his son that "You must be careful to let those people see by your walk and conversation that you are of a godly household. Be very careful about this." The admonition bore fruit. At the first breakfast which they ate in the clergyman's house Mr. Stowe heard his little son say in the meekest and most reverent way to the lady opposite him, "Please, won't you, for Christ's sake, pass the butter."

#### MAN.

Kinship is universal. The orders, families, species, and races of the animal kingdom are the branches of a gigantic arbor. Every individual is a cell, every species is a tissue, and every order is an organ in this great surging, suffering, palpitating process. Man is simply one portion of the immense enterprise. He is as veritably an animal as the insect that drinks its little fill from his veins, the ox he goads, or the wild-fox that flees before his bellowings. Man is not a god, nor in any imminent danger of becoming one. He is not a celestial star-babe dropped down among mundane matters for a time and endowed with wing possibilities and the anatomy of a deity. He is a mammal of the order of primates, not so lamentable when we think of the hyena and serpent, but an exceedingly discouraging vertebrate compared with what he ought to be. He has come up from the worm and the quadruped. His relatives dwell on the prairies and in the fields, forests, and waves. He shares the honors and partakes of the infirmities of all his kindred. He walks on his hind limbs like an ape; he eats herbage and suckles his young like the ox; he slays his fellows and fills himself with their blood like the crocodile and the tiger; he grows old and dies and turns to banqueting worms, like all that come from the elemental loins.—*J. Howard Moore*, "The Universal Kinship."

I remember in my plough-boy days, I could not conceive it possible that a noble lord could be a fool, or a godly man could be a knave. How ignorant are plough-boys!—Nay, I have since discovered that a *godly woman* may be a—  
—*Robert Burns*.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

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

### To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 13, Leicester; 20 and 27, Romford-road, Forest Gate.

J. HOLNESS.—We can quite understand that you would rather have heard Mr. Cohen at Belfast on definitely Freethought subjects. You may easily imagine, from his articles in our columns, which way his inclinations lie. Thanks for your good wishes.

S. JACKSON.—Glad you are so delighted with the *Freethinker*, which, three weeks ago, you did not know existed. The questions you refer to are sensible enough. You do not annoy us by writing; quite the contrary.

R. J. HENDERSON.—It shows the danger of trusting to hearsay. The "Torrey" story you enclose has been told of several revivalists. You might have seen it was too good to be true. Thanks for cuttings. Bristol is a long way from London; but, if can't come to the dinner, you can be there "in spirit"—though it isn't quite the same thing.

W. P. BALL.—Accept our best thanks for the valuable batches of cuttings you have sent us during 1906.

J. PARTRIDGE.—As the present number of the *Freethinker* had to be hurried along, right on the heels of the previous number, we must postpone till the next number what remains to be said on the Birmingham battle.

THE COHEN "SALVATION ARMY" TRACT FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £10 13s. Since received: A Few Belfast Insurance Agents 7s. 6d.; A. Cayford 1s.; R. Lancaster 2s. 6d.; P. W. M. 2s. 6d.; E. Richmond 1s. 6d.; Walker 1s.

F. G. P.—There is no need to answer your question. The Education Bill is dead. You may depend upon it that no Education Bill will ever be passed without a Conscience Clause. Freethinkers are not compelled to send their children to religious instruction. The present policy is perhaps next door to it—but still it is next door.

ALSMIS.—Sorry we cannot find room for your voluminous manuscript. With regard to Mr. Lobb's style, it is you who don't see the point. We only referred to it in connection with the spirit-messages he says he got from Shakespeare, Dickens, etc. We said that they all talked like each other, and all like Mr. Lobb; which is a very pertinent criticism—though you can't see it.

DISCIPLE (Sheffield).—Your good wishes are reciprocated.

GERALD CHRISTIAN.—We printed your long letter, in reply to a few lines of our own—a thing which few journals would have done—yet you are not satisfied; in fact, you are furious. But why, in the circumstances, accuse us of want of liberality? You have had liberal treatment, anyhow. If you had read the *Freethinker* for any length of time you would know that we have printed many good extracts from Tolstoy's writings. Is keeping on saying that we have not read him the kind of politeness you want us to imitate? Have you read his amazing commentary on the Four Gospels? To liken our reference to the pious Russian peasant element in Tolstoy to Roosevelt's personal slander of Paine as "a dirty little Atheist" is—well, we leave you to supply the adjective yourself when you are cooler.

G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks.

W. DEY.—Certainly you can speak of "voluntary action" under the philosophy of determinism, but the phrase ought to be used with scientific exactitude, not with popular looseness. With regard to your postscript, you will not have to wait long now.

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

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

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

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

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

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### Sugar Plums.

Next week's *Freethinker*, the first in the new year, will be a special one in every way. It will contain special articles written by the editor and the regular contributors, and other features that will render it of special value for wide distribution. We shall print a special supply for what should be a special demand. And our friends will doubtless make a special effort to place copies of this special number into the hands of special persons whom they think it might attract. We could give more special hints, but these must suffice.

This number of the *Freethinker* had to be got ready last week, before the holidays began, or we should not have been able to get it printed in time. This will explain all the difference between the present number and what our readers are accustomed to. We offer no apology. It is enough to state the fact. "What must be must be," as the proverb says.

London Freethinkers should rally in strong force at their Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant on Tuesday evening, January 8. There are special reasons why 1907 should be a bright year from a propagandist point of view, and Mr. Foote hopes to make a gratifying announcement from his chair at the head of the dinner-table. Besides his own speech as chairman, there will be brief speeches to toasts by Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Symes, and others. There will also be a good musical program. The tickets are 4s. as usual. The President hopes to shake hands with a crowd of "saints" on this festive occasion.

West Ham friends will note that Mr. Foote opens next Sunday (Jan. 6) the new effort of the local N. S. S. Branch at the Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, not far from the Town Hall. The subject of his lecture will be "Do the Dead Live?" Those who want to secure seats should be early, as the accommodation is limited, and the admission is free.

Our friend, Mr. F. J. Gould, whose new books we had lately the pleasure of praising, is liable to the common infirmity of those who take to prophecy—which, as George Eliot said, is the most gratuitous form of error. His interesting article in a contemporary contains the following vaticination. "In my opinion," he says, "the Secular Societies, the Ethical Societies, and the Positivist Societies, as now constituted, are all destined to a not very distant extinction." As the Secular Societies are only to share in a general dissolution there is no need for any personal complaint. What we wish to do is to ask Mr. Gould what he means by "not very distant." A witness was once asked the size of an object mentioned in his evidence, and he said it was the size of a lump of chalk. No doubt he had a certain idea of his own, but the expression he used was not calculated to convey it to others. The word "distant" is about as precise as "a lump of chalk." Mr. Gould's residence at Leicester is distant from the Secular Hall; Leicester itself is distant from London; and London is distant from San Francisco. "Distant" is a relative term, that may mean either a few feet or a few thousand miles, according to circumstances. In a certain sense, therefore, Mr. Gould's apocalyptic vision may be perfectly accurate. Every Society on earth will be extinguished in time. So much may be cheerfully granted. But we doubt whether Mr. Gould will live to see the fulfilment of this particular prediction.

Certainly the Branches of the National Secular Society were more numerous in Bradlaugh's time than they are now. But few of them were Secular Societies pure and simple. In many towns they consisted of a little band of devoted Bradlaughites, who did all they could to help him in his political battles, and above all in his long parliamentary struggle. Bradlaugh never made any secret of the fact that he would, if he could, be a politician first and a Freethinker afterwards; and many of his followers were animated by the same spirit without knowing it. It would be inaccurate, therefore, to reckon all the N. S. S. Branches that were formed at that time as *bona fide* Secular Societies. They did admirable work, they were passionately loyal to their great leader, but they did not exactly live up to their titles; and, for that matter, it was impossible for them to do so. On the other hand, the strongest and best of them, that could and did live up to their titles, were not quite as powerful as is often represented and believed. Not one of them was as strong, for instance, as the present Glasgow Branch. And it must also be remembered that Bradlaugh's paper depended largely on its political and social readers.

It had a threefold policy—"Atheistic, Republican, and Malthusian"—and this meant a multiplication of readers. But when Bradlaugh died the paper soon had to die too; which shows it was not the organ of a definite, well-built party.

Turning from Mr. Gould's negative, and consequently not very inspiring, prophecy, we welcome his suggestion that there should be more active co-operation between the various advanced bodies "for specific purposes, more particularly on questions affecting education, the relations of science and religion, and the separation of the Church and State." Something ought to be done "for the sake of impressing the outer world," and "We have arrived at a stage when we can well afford to display our numerical strength to the orthodox public." Mr. Gould mentions some "personalities which represent sections of the Humanist army"—amongst them "Mr. G. W. Foote, of the National Secular Society"—and "perceives no serious bar" to their combining, at least occasionally, for common ends. We do not think any bar would be presented by those he mentions; it is more likely to be presented by some he does not mention—and this is an aspect of the case which he appears to have overlooked.

Mr. Symes appears to have had a good time on the Tyne-side. The following is an extract from a letter of his which we have just received: "I was, and am, vastly more gratified than words can express by the treatment I met with amongst my Tyneside friends on my recent visit there. The number of friends, old and new, who turned up on Sunday afternoon, and the hearty reception they gave, quite unmanned me. That visit was, in itself, ample compensation for the thirty years of storm and stress through which I have passed. I wish to thank our friends for the pains they took to make the anniversary a success. I would mention names, but I should be sure to forget some, and that would appear invidious. At Bedlington, Hetton, and Spennymoor the hearty welcome was repeated. The entire visit was one I cannot possibly forget as long as memory continues."

Secular Education is gaining many friends—or rather supporters. The *Manchester Guardian* sadly admits that the killing of the Education Bill "may mark the beginning of an irresistible drift towards the 'secular solution.'" The *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* goes farther and more straightforwardly. "It is now clear," our Tyneside contemporary says, "that the secular solution is the only settlement possible. Nonconformists, by refusing to carry their principles to a logical conclusion, are largely responsible for the pass which has arisen. By insisting upon what is called simple Bible teaching they gave their case away." We have said this ourselves a hundred times, and it is really unanswerable. At any rate, no Nonconformist has attempted to answer it.

#### MY COUNTRY.

My Country is the world! I count  
 No son of man my foe,  
 Whether the warm life-currents mount  
 And mantle brows like snow,  
 Or whether yellow, brown, or black,  
 The face that into mine looks back.  
 My Native Land is Mother Earth,  
 And all men are my kin,  
 Whether of rude or gentle birth,  
 However steeped in sin;  
 Or rich or poor, or great or small,  
 I count them brothers one and all.  
 My Flag is the star-spangled sky,  
 Woven without a seam,  
 Where dawn and sunset colors lie,  
 Fair as an angel's dream,  
 The Flag that still unstained, untorn,  
 Floats over all of mortal born.  
 My Party is all humankind,  
 My Platform, brotherhood;  
 I count all men of honest mind  
 Who work for human good,  
 And for the hope that gleams afar,  
 My comrades in the holy war.  
 My Country is the world! I scorn  
 No lesser love than mine,  
 But calmly wait that happy morn  
 When all shall own this sign,  
 And love of country, as of clan,  
 Shall yield to love of Man.

—Robert Whitaker.

#### The Triumph of Scepticism.

MR. GLADSTONE, in vindicating the Christian religion, drew attention "with deep regret" to the fact that in the French census of 1881 no less than 7,684,906 persons "declined to make any declaration of religious belief." It would, perhaps, be inaccurate to allege that all these are pronounced unbelievers. Some of them may merely hold that the state has no concern with their religious opinions. But a very considerable proportion must remain, who stand outside every form of Christianity. Many are Voltairians, rejecting revealed religion, while retaining a vague Deism. Others are Atheists or Agnostics, who have discarded all kinds of supernaturalism and largely regard religion as a mixture of mental disease and priestly imposture.

Such is the state of France, the radiating centre of European ideas. England is proverbially slow though tenacious. Our people are more open to practical appeals than to appeals of principle. Their wits and imaginations are less active than those of the French. But they are daily becoming more accessible to ideas. Their passion for truth is increasing. More and more they ask whether principles and statements are true, not whether they are old and venerable, or useful on some ground of compromise where falsehood is reconciled with beneficence. Logic, in short, is gaining a firmer hold on the English mind; and as our people begin to think, without respect to the ill consequences that are always prophesied by the upholders of existing institutions, they will investigate foundations as the French are doing. Woe betide, then, the hoariest superstitions! Everything will disappear that cannot stand the test of what Cardinal Newman dreaded—"the restless intellect of man." Electric search-lights will play upon every corner of the present under the rule of the past. There will be a flight of a monstrous brood of tyrannous lies to the realm of Chaos and old Night; and man, with clarified intellect and purified heart, having freed himself from the yoke of imposture and learnt the manly lesson of self-reliance and self-control, will recognise the pinnacled truth which all religions have obscured—that virtue is the offspring of wisdom and happiness the child of both.

But this process will necessarily be gradual. Revolutions in human affairs are only believed in by those who have read history on the surface and never penetrated to the great causes of intellectual and moral movements. The advance of Humanity is an evolution. This is the reason why "no one ever sees a religion die."\* It required centuries to dethrone the gods of Olympus. During the first three hundred years of its propaganda, Christianity only succeeded in converting a twentieth part of the inhabitants of the Roman empire. And Christianity underwent a change in triumphing; it stooped to conquer; in overcoming Paganism it became Paganised itself. Nor is it even now free from the law it then obeyed. Success has its conditions. Life itself is a constant adjustment. "To live," said Cardinal Newman, "is to change." And Christianity changes in order to exist. Except in the periodical manifestoes of the Papacy, couched in the pompous Latin of a bygone age, where shall we find the note of sovereign authority in its deliverances? It explains, apologises, heightens, softens and even beseeches. More and more it assumes the tone of a supplicant. And the changed tone is accompanied by an altered teaching. Awkward doctrines may not be absolutely abandoned, but they are minimised, while emphasis is laid on more plausible tenets. In the schools called "liberal," or "advanced," or "forward," the harsher features of the old faith are softened and sometimes explained away. A new theory of the inspiration of scripture is taught. To use a phrase of Coleridge's, we are to accept as inspired what

\* A pregnant remark by the late Charles Bradlaugh in a public debate with a Newcastle clergyman.

"finds" us. Some go to the length of dismissing three-fourths of the miraculous element of the Bible. Nor are the concessions confined to reason. Conscience is accommodated by various admissions. Religion, instead of being the basis of morality, is declared to be its crown. A good life is allowed to be possible without "faith." Future rewards and punishments are given a new meaning. Heaven is widening and Hell is contracting. Every doctrine of Christianity is receiving a fresh explanation. And this is the real victory of scepticism. It cannot suddenly destroy Christianity, but it abolishes it slowly by a process of dilution. The *name* remains, but the *substance* changes. Christianity is like a sack of salt in running water. Little by little the contents are washed away although the brand looks as brave as ever. By and bye, the sack itself will collapse and join the flotsam and jetsam of the ocean of time.

Mr. Bradlaugh's aphorism that "no man ever sees a religion die," is literally true, but it has its limitations. No man, except the great general, sees the whole of a single battle; and who can see, in the span of a life-time, the whole of a battle which rages through generations and perhaps through centuries? Yet history, and imagination working upon its revelations, come to our aid and enable us to see, "in the mind's eye," what is invisible to the organ of sense. Thus the long death of a religion may be witnessed, every phase of its dissolution followed, and the point discerned when its epitaph may be written.

The student of history knows that the Christian religion has been breaking up ever since the revival of learning. Just as Christianity arose in the twilight of Pagan civilisation and flourished in the succeeding night, so it began to wane in the young light of a new day. Centuries have since rolled by and Christianity is still here; and sustained by this knowledge, the Christian may wreath his lip with scorn. But did not Paganism survive for centuries the knell of its doom, outliving the bribes and proscriptions of Constantine and his successors, and lurking in the very magic and witchcraft of the Middle Ages? Smitten as it was before the star of Bethlehem appeared, Paganism *seemed* little affected for centuries. Its temples continued to lift their columns in proud beauty, its priests were still numerous and powerful, and everything went on as though the old system were as secure as the everlasting hills. Sacrifices were performed, the victims' entrails were inspected, the oracles gave forth their dubious prophecies, and wealth was poured into the hands of a multitude of priests.

One need not be surprised, therefore, at the present condition of Christianity. It is enormously rich and its power is apparently tremendous; but the sphere of its influence is in reality ever contracting. The Papacy is shorn of half its power. Freethought is rampant in France and Germany and spreading like wildfire even in the cities and universities of Spain. In England, the State Church feels that its life is threatened. The Nonconformist bodies have crowds of ministers and large incomes, but they are always sounding notes of alarm. They hear the approach of the strong man who is to take their possessions. It is the *mind* of man the creeds have now to face—the Spirit of the Age, whose presence is obvious in a thousand directions. A sermon cannot be read, nor a religious paper scanned, without seeing that all the Churches are aware of the terrible foe who is winding about them like an invisible serpent.

There is but one method of temporary salvation. That method is *adjustment*. Under the stern law of Natural Selection, which governs all—animals, men, gods and creeds—everything must adjust itself to live. A species may not vary for millenniums and a creed may change but little for centuries. But when the environment alters, the species or the creed must adjust itself—or die.

Mr. Gladstone himself, though stiffly orthodox in comparison with many Christian writers, was obliged to practise this adjustment. Catholics like the late

Professor Mivart pursued it with amazing diligence. The Romish Church, indeed, has a great advantage over the Protestant sects, for it infallibly interprets the infallible Bible and is able to make it suit the exigencies of the moment. Professor Mivart was ready to find Darwinism in the Bible. He was also ready to find that all the absolute Word of God it contains might be written in a waistcoat pocket-book.

This clever trick of Catholic exegesis will not succeed with strong-minded people, who know that infallible Churches are as absurd as infallible Books. Nor will it succeed with those who are familiar with ecclesiastical history, and who know that the infallible Church has often blundered, often contradicted itself, often been torn with internecine strife, and has sometimes put in the papal chair, as God's viceregent on earth, a very monster of lust, avarice and cruelty. But the majority of men are not strong-minded and have little acquaintance with history. They are without that knowledge of the past which Mr. Morley says "saves us from imposture and surprise." It will not, therefore, be astonishing if many of them who are too ignorant, weak and timid to think for themselves, should accept the Catholic adjustment to the conditions of modern thought, letting the Church decide for them how the Bible is to be read and understood, reposing their faithful heads on the bosom of their Holy Mother, and heeding her dogmatic voice as the perennial oracle of God.

But the Protestant sects are doomed, and their members will ultimately choose between Rome and Reason. Minds of ordinary calibre cannot be satisfied with merely dexterous apologetics which bring the Bible into harmony with modern thought by a perpetual torture of its language. The reflection *must* arise, that if the Bible does not mean what it says, no one can tell what it *does* mean. And no one can tell, exclaims the Catholic, except the Church, the living voice of God.

Here, then, is safety for timid and superstitious souls. But the Protestant quits this land of Egypt, with its proud Pharaoh, and its pyramid churches, and its swarming priests, and all the leeks, the onions, the garlic and the cucumber. He dares the desert in search of a better land. Yet he wanders eternally, subsisting on droppings from heaven and chance streams in the thirsty soil. Courage fails him at sight of the Promised Land, though tempted by the verdant soil and the rich dark clusters of the glorious vines. Back he hies to the desert, until the old dread of Egypt returns and once more he approaches the Promised Land, only to be driven back again by his craven fears. But this will not go on for ever. Many are already returning to Egypt, others are crossing the Jordan and a clear field will ultimately be left for the mighty struggle between Catholicism and Freethought, in which more will be decided than the fate of the Protestant fetish; for the conflict is between Reason and Faith, the natural and the supernatural, reality and fable, truth and falsehood, day and night, the living present and the dead past, the rights of man and the claims of gods, the priest's dogma and the child's freedom, the tomb of yesterday and "the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come."

G. W. FOOTE.

[An Article written many years ago and slightly revised for present-day readers.]

I have every possible reverence for the much talked-of world beyond the grave, and I wish that which piety believes, and virtue deserves, may be all matter of fact. But in things belonging to, and terminating in this present scene of existence, man has serious and interesting business on hand.

—Robert Burns.

So many gods, so many creeds,  
So many paths that wind and wind,  
While just the art of being kind  
Is all the sad world needs.

## Correspondence.

## WHAT IS ATHEISM?

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I have read "Huw Menai's" interesting letter in your issue of the 16th, and though it would appear to be as plausible a representation of the Theistic position as one is accustomed to meet with, yet his incursion into the realm of Atheism displays a decided lack of appreciation of his opponent's real attitude. On the whole, however, your correspondent's pronouncements are a striking piece of evidence to set against the constantly reiterated formula that "Atheists are too dogmatic." The whole tone of his disquisition is a distinct affirmation of the contrary.

Irksome as it is to many minds, it is nevertheless a truism that definition is one of the most important factors in controversy. Did not the master, Socrates, maintain that to know the essence of a thing, you must consider it as distinct from everything else, you must *define* it; by defining it you demarcate it from what it is *not*, and so present the thing before you in its essence?

"In common parlance," says your correspondent, "Atheism symbolises a positive denial of the existence of God; and, egregiously enough, even scientists, philosophers and metaphysicians have been guilty of giving the same interpretation"; and the most effective answer to this is furnished by "Huw Menai" himself when he asserts that "nearly all the greatest thinkers this planet [why exclude other planets?] ever produced were *Theists*." Apart from the great advance of modern science, and the accumulated evidence in support of the truth of the evolutionary hypothesis—a dispensation quite distinct from that in which the "greatest thinkers" named existed—one might well find much to controvert in this sweeping declaration. Suffice it to direct your readers attention to the admission that the "scientists, philosophers and metaphysicians," who "have been guilty of giving the same interpretation," were the antagonists of Atheists. Now in this method of procedure, there is the taint of irregularity. "Huw Menai" is most anxious at the outset to impress us with the precise definition of the word "Theist," and, indeed, to whom should we go for an authoritative pronouncement but to the Theist himself? In other words, why should we proceed to a lawyer for the advice of a doctor? But what reason can be adduced for your correspondent's disinclination to accept the *Atheist's* definition of *his* mental attitude, instead of that of "common parlance," no matter by how long a string of names it may be supported:—

"The longest sword, the strongest lungs, and the most voices, are *false* measures of truth."

And let us not forget that we are, primarily, Freethinkers.

The "stultification of the term [Atheism].....prompts me to suggest the qualification of the word, for instance, 'Atheistic Nescience.' This philosophy.....would then assume a definite form." But *is* Atheism a philosophy? Is it not rather a logical attitude of mind *privative* (not negative) to Theism? "Huw Menai" is surely confusing Secularism with Atheism. The philosophy of Secularism must be differentiated from Atheism, a mental state anent the God-idea.

"What God is it that they [the Atheists] are without?" Your correspondent has already told us that *Atheos* is derived from the Greek. Why, therefore, does he hesitate to refer to the ancient Greeks for their connotation of the term "Theos." The most probable derivation of the word, Parkhurst informs us, is that which deduces it from the verb *theo*: to place; placer or regulator. The term, in any case, was clearly used for a *personification* of the supposed forces sufficient for any uncomprehended phenomenon or phenomena. It is the belief in the personification of these unknown forces of nature that the Atheist rejects.

Again, "God can never enter into relations." Now what have we here but a flagrant self-contradiction, for is not "Huw Menai," in the act of predicating something of God himself assuming relations with God? In postulating what God can, or can not do, your correspondent refutes himself. He is, in a word, guilty of *defining* God, which, as Spinoza declared, was tantamount to *denying* him.

Finally, continues "Huw Menai," "Agnosticism means Universal Nescience; an entirely different thing is signified by Atheism. Agnosticism deals, not only with God, but with the soul.....etc." But is it in its essence "entirely different"? The only distinction, if indeed it is not a misuse of the word, is in the sense that Agnosticism is permissible of a wider application—universal scepticism—which is not the point at issue. The root question is: Does the Agnostic believe in God? If the reply is in the affirmative, then he is a Theist and not an Agnostic; otherwise, under the definition advanced by "Huw Menai" ("Universal Nescience"), the answer of the person addressed would be an affirmation of

his ignorance—nescience (Nuttall). In what respect, then, are they "entirely different," when on this subject of the existence of God they are both without belief or knowledge?

F. R. THEAKSTONE.

## GAMBLING.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It is, of course, not to be expected that gambling, in all its many ramifications, could be adequately treated in any one short article. Nevertheless, I venture to say that Mr. Bryce, in his treatment of the subject, was disappointing to a degree. What is the use of contending for exact definitions and "intellectual consistency" in the face of painful objective realities? Let us welcome the recognition of an admitted evil from whatever source, and assist, where possible, in the matter of reform. The correct labelling of causes and effects, together with the insistence of philosophical exactitude, might well be left to a later period.

Take the question of street betting. Personally I have been a daily witness for years past, of the acute misery, during the racing season, caused by this particular form of gambling. When the racing season is in full swing, women, often the wives of respectable working men, may be seen in my own neighborhood, constantly making bets; and for that matter, children as well. This, I have observed, goes on while the husbands are at work. Further, the pursuit of this particular form of gambling seems to be the occasion of much public-house tipping among women, who do not scruple to run into debt and into the local pawn shops to find the necessary money. I doubt if such a state of affairs would be tolerated in an oriental country. If ethics are worth anything at all they should be made manifest beyond the mere verbiage of academic discussion.

Street betting is decidedly on the increase among women. This means that children are neglected; they are under-fed and under-clothed by unscrupulous mothers who have taken up the craze. The state of the law with regard to street betting and its method of administration, calls for the strongest condemnation from all right thinking men.

ALFRED J. HOPKINS.

## More Emotions—And a Moral.

THE following is culled from a publication which purports to have something to do with self-education. A paragraph headed "The Value of Sympathy in Reporting," in the course on journalism, begins and concludes thus:—

"The reporter's life brings him into contact with that side of things which is not always the best, but he will, if he is wise, take care that his experiences make him not a worse but a better man. He need not be ashamed of having emotions even as other men.....It is inevitable that the reporter should find himself in the company of people he dislikes, in an environment that is intolerable to him, doing work that he detests; but it is a good thing to bear in mind that the man who would describe a movement best is the man who feels the spirit of it, who knows the aim of it. There was a wonderful article describing a Salvation Army meeting in a London paper not long ago. It was written by a reporter who calls himself a Freethinker, but who had the greatest difficulty to keep away from the penitent form as he listened to Miss Eva Booth. It is not astonishing that he wrote a wonderful article. The reporter who puts his soul into his work will carry everything before him."

The above twaddle has a decided Harmsworth flavor, and it is perhaps superfluous to mention that the publication referred to is the *Harmsworth Self-Educator*. But the harm's worth something, and if people would only realise the fact, the harm's worth might place the Harmsworths' at a disadvantage. Mr. Arthur Mee, the writer of the journalistic course from which we quote, is also advertised on the front cover of this precious compilation, as the editor. How this gentleman managed to write such clap-trap gibberish on "The Value of Sympathy in Reporting," after editing the admirable work of Doctors C. W. Saleeby and Gerald Leighton, Professor Ainsworth Davis, and other eminent scientific contributors to his compendium, is food for imaginations other than our own. Mr. Mee, if interrogated on this point, might say that he was not writing professedly for Freethinkers, but for the multitude; *i.e.*, those who professed Christianity. Then he has done Freethought a gross injustice. This fabrication about the penitent Freethinker we would not even have allowed to pass unchallenged in the columns of the *Sunday Companion*, *Good Words*, or any other of the innumerable weekly papers which comprise the Harmsworth constellation. This misstatement is bound up in a work that has found its way into the homes of 1,000,000 people. (Publishers advertisement).

And ninety per cent. of the readers of this publication will believe all that is written in its pages unhesitatingly. It was advertised extensively in the Harmsworth newspapers.

Mr. Mee writes in one of his letters to his readers what appears to us to be a defence of the journalism with which he is associated. He says:—

"There is far too much talk in the world about consistency ..... We are not, we confess, necessarily consistent with any rule or with any set of rules. We are consistent rather with the desire to do the best we can."

After this confession, we—Freethinkers—can but pale into insignificance, puny evanescent beings that we are. Truth, perish the name! is still at the bottom of the well and the *Harmsworth Self-Educator* is consistent at its expense.

J. H.

### Clerical Advertising.

OUR New York Correspondent sent us yesterday a diverting account of the latest religious novelty in that city—the introduction of music-hall turns into the services of the Central Baptist Church. Finding himself without a congregation—apparently the population has left the neighborhood of the chapel and gone further afield to live—the worthy pastor cast about for a new and compelling attraction. He found it in a whistling lady, well known to the halls. So he billed the celebrated siffleuse to appear at his services last Sunday, and the consequence was a crowded congregation. For once his chapel was as popular as the music-halls by which it is surrounded, or it was even more popular, for there was no charge for admission, and not even the threat of "a silver collection." The lady's turn came on between the second lesson and the sermon, and then she whistled away merrily, with a pianoforte accompaniment, from a rostrum under the choir loft. One piece in her repertoire was the intermezzo from "Cavalleria Rusticana," but all were most refined. Afterwards the preacher preached his hardest and made the best evangelical use he could of his opportunity. It is not pretended that the whistling formed part of the ordinary service of praise, as it might have been, perhaps, if the preacher himself, or one of his deacons, had whistled a hymn, though in that case there would have been no attraction. The siffleuse was merely meant to draw the congregation, and then the preacher, in the language of advertisement, "did the rest." Even in England it is not an uncommon practice for well-known singers to be pressed into a choir, or paid to take a solo, and the main idea is not so much to improve the music as to increase the congregation. But it is a long step from this to placarding chapel walls with the photograph of a music-hall artist, and setting her on to do a turn, merely stipulating that the entertainment shall not be of too aggressively secular a tone. Many of our Nonconformist ministers are prepared to go considerable lengths in the development of their Pleasant Sunday Afternoon programs, while in their sermons they have even been known to introduce all the ordinary week-day vituperation of party politics and the choicest flowers of Radical argument. Not long ago, moreover, a West-end cleric invited the inhabitants of the neighboring squares to come to his church in evening of dress, so that their worship might not interfere with their dinner or bridge engagements, but the invitation was not accepted, and the silly sensation fell flat. At the same time, an East-end clergyman, seeking to reach a very poor population, took to giving a cinematograph service on Sunday evenings, which had a certain vogue and brought the people in. There is, perhaps, a good deal to be said for the latter scheme, as for certain garish devices of the Salvation Army, though their want of dignity and reverence offends many worthy people. But the trick of drawing on the music-halls in order to tickle the religious groundlings is a sorry business. Musical glasses are announced for next Sunday. For the one after we might suggest trick bicyclists up and down the aisles, while the pulpit-stairs and cushions might inspire a tramp acrobat with some pleasant conceits. Stump oratory and juggling (with words) would, we suppose, be too hackneyed to attract, but a dancer would be a sure success. She might even set the whole congregation capering with her like Jump-to-Glory Jane, who "jumped in silence; she was thought a corpse to resurrection caught." She jumped, if we remember aright, so effectually and persistently that she nearly converted a bishop.—*Daily Telegraph*, Nov. 16.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.—*Robert Burns*.

### A Ghost Story.

A FRENCH newspaper (*Le Gaulois*) recently related a ghost story which is more consistent with facts, and therefore more interesting, than such narratives usually are. The incidents occurred more than a hundred years ago, and the principal character concerned was the celebrated musical composer, Mehul.

Mehul had a dear friend named Bouverat, a wealthy young merchant, who in 1797 left his home in France for a tour in Germany. But he did not reach the place he intended to visit, and did not return home, and all subsequent researches seemed to confirm the suspicion that he was murdered on the way. Mehul took his loss so much to heart that he fell into a severe illness, from which he never fully recovered. Ten years afterwards, during a sleepless night, a ghost, with a dreadful wound in his breast, rose slowly out of the floor beside his bed, and, fixing his eyes upon Mehul, cried out: "Vengeance, Vengeance!" Mehul screamed for help, and the people of the house found him lying insensible on the floor. The same apparition returned several times. On one occasion, his eyes were directed towards the window; and Mehul, following the gaze, saw a deformed and dwarfish figure which was trying to hide within the folds of the moon-lighted curtain. In the morning Mehul discovered that he had been robbed of several valuables by someone who had broken into his room. The excitement caused a renewal of his illness. After his recovery he was one day in a crowd in Paris, at a festival in the Champs Elysees, when he suddenly felt a hand in his coat pocket. He held the hand fast, and, on turning round, he was horrified to see the same deformed dwarf that the ghost had pointed out to him in his bedroom. He cried out "Help!" "Murder!" and policemen at once arrested the thief, and took him to the guard-house. The Prefect was at first disposed to laugh at the charge; but Mehul insisted upon a thorough investigation, and the result was that the thief confessed to having, ten years before, with an accomplice, robbed and murdered the young merchant in the forest of Bondy. Probably the law took its course on this occasion; but the chief point of interest is the proof which the story serves to furnish of continued existence after death. Such knowledge is what human beings everywhere and always are trying to find out, and any well-authenticated incident which upholds the theory that departed spirits communicate with the living is sure to be listened to by all and believed by many.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

ELIZABETH E. EVANS.

### COULDN'T HELP IT.

A well-known Allegheny clergyman recently spoke at a religious service in the penitentiary at Woods Run. He noticed that one of the convicts seemed extraordinarily impressed. After the service he sought him out and continued the good work by remarking:—

"My friend, I hope you will profit by my remarks just now and become a new man."

"Indeed I will," was the cheerful reply. "In fact, I promise to you that I will never commit another crime, but will lead an exemplary life to my dying day."

"I am very glad to hear you say that," said the clergyman, "but are you certain you will be able to keep the promise?"

"Oh, yes," said the convict. "I'm in gaol for life."

### WHEN ADAM AND EVE KEPT COWS.

That Adam and Eve were not strict vegetarians as some have supposed, and that, incidentally, they separately managed their farming establishments, seems to be implied from the letter of a Michigan man who, a few days ago, wrote the Harpers asking them to send him: "One copy Adam's Dairy. One copy Eve's Dairy."

### ABOUT HIS FATHER'S BUSINESS.

"Your crop seems to be considerably in the grass," said a passer-by to a negro who sat on a fence.

"Yes, sah; General Green's dun got it."

"Did you overplant yourself?"

"No, sah; planted 'bout 'nuff."

"Why didn't you plough it?"

"Wife tuck sick. She does de plowin' fur dis place."

"What do you do?"

"I preaches; dat what I does. Ef Providence comes along an' makes de 'omen sick, I kan't help it. I'se been called, I has."

**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.

**COUNTRY.**

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S. (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 5, Annual Children's Party.

PLYMOUTH RATIONALIST SOCIETY (Foresters' Hall, Octagon): 7, Social Meeting.

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