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The truth is, that evil can grow fast and that good cannot.—GARTH WILKINSON.

The Dead Year.

FROM a Freethought point of view 1906 has been both eventful and uneventful. No great agitation has roused the Freethought world itself as the anti-Torrey agitation roused it in 1905. Nevertheless a steady, progressive work has been going on. The *Freethinker* has more than held its own, and I believe it will do still better in the new year. At any rate, I mean to make a great effort both internally and externally; an effort to sustain and heighten the interest of the paper to its readers, and an effort to bring it more effectually before the attention of the liberal-minded public. I can also say with as much truth as pleasure that my own audiences have not deteriorated, but improved, in point of numbers. I look back especially upon the large meetings I addressed in the Secular Halls at Glasgow and Manchester; the splendid meeting in the great Picton Hall at Liverpool; the crowded meeting in the fine Stratford Town Hall; the grand meetings in the magnificent Birmingham Town Hall; and the very successful meeting quite recently at Queen's Hall. Altogether I, for one, am ready to face the new year's work with a good deal of hope. I trust I should face it anyhow; but hope is a bright and cheerful thing, like the sun shining on a landscape; it stimulates and encourages.

There is one thing that 1906 left to 1907 which the Freethought party will be glad to hear of. I am not free to state particulars at the moment, but I may say in general language that the Secular Society, Limited, will shortly receive a considerable sum of money under a certain will. It will be my duty, when the time arrives, to ask the Freethought party to subscribe liberally towards our current propaganda, so that the bequest I allude to may be kept, to a large extent if not entirely, as a reserve for special occasions and unforeseeable contingencies.

Arrangements had been made for a very interesting experiment at Liverpool. Mr. Joseph Symes had agreed to make the city his headquarters. For a three months' trial, at any rate, and probably for much longer, he had undertaken to act as resident lecturer for the Liverpool Branch of the National Secular Society. Unfortunately this project cannot be carried through. The reason of this may be seen on another page. I know that the Branch had been looking forward to the experiment with great expectations; indeed, the Committee were building their hopes upon it; and I am sorry that all those high hopes are dashed to the ground.

Freethinkers have been specially interested during 1906 in the great Education controversy. The

public stage has been held by Mr. Birrell's Education Bill. The one good thing it contained was the Seventh Clause, which provided for real liberty of conscience by allowing parents to withhold their children from school while the religious instruction was being given. This really liberal Clause, for which Mr. Birrell is entitled to the greatest credit, just succeeded in passing the House of Commons—the Government have left it optional, perhaps because it embodied the only principle in the Bill; but it was killed, as might have been expected, by the Bishops and their friends in the House of Lords. Finally, the Peers killed the Bill altogether; and few people actually grieve over the result. When it was introduced it was a Chapel Bill. Certain concessions were made in Committee which alienated a good deal of Nonconformist affection. But these concessions did not, and could not, satisfy the Bishops, who turned it into a Church Bill. In that shape it went back to the House of Commons. It was sent back to the Lords in its original form, but they returned it in *their* shape again, and the Government dug a grave for it and buried it—with very little hope of a glorious resurrection.

This does not mean peace. It does not even mean a truce. The fight between the various Christian Churches for the control of education—that is, for the capture of the children—will go on more bitterly than ever. Nonconformists will probably egg on the Government to harass the Church of England and Catholic school authorities. The priests of both Churches will naturally fight for the overthrow of the Government, with a view to reprisals upon the Nonconformists. There is talk of a compromise amongst "rational" men of all the Churches. But how on earth is compromise possible? How can several parties be satisfied who all want the same thing—when the thing itself cannot be divided? I believe this war of the Churches is bound to continue, and I see in it the best hope for Secular Education.

A letter from Mr. Harry Snell, which is printed in another column, shows that an effort is being made to bring together all the friends of Secular Education. I hope this effort will succeed, and I shall give it my support, as I believe it will have the support of the National Secular Society. But I see grave difficulties in the way. The Labor Party has Secular Education on its program, and regards it with an air of exclusive possession. The Socialist organisations show no disposition to talk about Secular Education except in connection with other questions with which it is not necessarily associated. The Ethical Societies have a tendency to complicate the essential question with collateral ones. Of course, I shall be glad if these difficulties can be surmounted; but I cannot conceal my opinion that, after all, we may gain Secular Education rather from the quarrels of its enemies than from the efforts of its

friends. Still, I am open to conviction, and I shall be delighted to be undeceived.

It is curious that the Nonconformists who applaud Passive Resisters for positively refusing to obey the law in England are so ready to denounce the Catholic Church for negatively refusing to obey the law in France. I venture to warn my readers once more against being misled by Liberal newspapers with regard to the Separation strife across the Channel. Nearly all the Liberal newspapers are edited by Nonconformists for Nonconformists, and these people have "Rome" on the brain. It is the burden of all Dr. Clifford's speeches. The Catholic Church has been unjust to them—therefore they must be unjust to the Catholic Church; that is the be-all and the end-all of their policy. They simply want to "get their own back," though they are always boasting that their Master teaches them to return good for evil. For my part, I am a friend of Separation; but I want a Separation which separates. The new French law keeps open relationships between the Church and the State. That is the cause of all the trouble. I hold that the State should leave all citizens to go about their own affairs in their own way, subject to the one condition of the preservation of public peace and order. Were this the case in France, as it ought to be, the Catholic Church would be left to its own action and its own responsibility. It would enjoy liberty then—and it could not sustain a grievance on a basis like that. This is proved by the experience of Great Britain and her Colonies, and of the United States of America. I am not capitulating to Rome in demanding perfect freedom. They are capitulating to Rome who fight her with her own weapons. In doing so they accept her principles, and in the long run it is she, and not they, who will gain by this blunder. Catholics may persecute Freethought when they have the power; it is according to their principles. Freethinkers must not persecute Catholicism when they have the power—for it is against their principles. On that rock I stand.

Because there is no bloody civil war as yet in France, some are saying that there is no danger of reaction. I cannot agree with them. People who don't believe in ghosts are still afraid of them. Why? Because their inherited feelings are stronger than their personal intelligence. Now there is an inherited religiosity even amongst the millions of indifferentists—for it is absurd to suppose that the majority of Frenchmen are convinced Atheists. And what I fear is that this inherited religiosity will be worked upon by the spectacle of a suffering priesthood. It was a profound saying of Gibbon's that to a philosophic eye the virtues of the clergy are more dangerous than their vices. Those who understand this pregnant epigram will understand why I dread a Catholic reaction in France.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Work of Freethought.

It is inevitable to a movement concerned with the dissemination of ideas that there should be an absence of that sensationalism which usually commands an attention out of all proportion to its worth. The historian of politics has most often to record a series of rapid advances or equally rapid retrogressions; of scenes of passion and enthusiasm which appeal to the sporting instinct of average humanity. The historian of Freethought usually has, on the other hand, to note the gradual growth of ideas that appear to be independent of local circumstance, and which, in any case, appeal to a type of mind that can scarcely be classed as normal. Freethought is not, of course, quite independent of the circumstances of the moment; but it makes no appeal to passion or prejudice, and in the main rests for support upon the wider and more permanent

features of human development. But this is an aspect of things that does not appeal to men and women in the mass. The promise of an object that may be immediately obtained—shorter hours of labor, better wages, even an extension of the franchise—bulks larger in their estimation. It is only the few who are able to recognise that orderly and sustained progress is not to be maintained by a system of hand-to-mouth legislation, but by the firm grasp of principles clearly conceived and intelligently applied.

Church, chapel, or political party may be judged to a considerable extent by mere numbers. But this will not do when dealing with Freethought. While conditions remain as they are it would be foolish to expect that more than a mere fraction of those who have outgrown the traditional belief will publicly avow the fact. If the Freethought type of mind ought to be regarded as abnormal, the type of mind that can brave social ostracism is still more so. A few—in relation to the whole—say plainly what they are; a larger number agree with them, but keep their opinions to themselves; and a larger number still have surrendered all their old beliefs without being quite conscious of the fact, and continue to delude themselves with vague phrases that mean nothing. It is certain that at no time have Freethinkers been more numerous, nor have religious beliefs ever had less hold on people than at present. Religious defences nowadays concede almost as much as they conserve, and seldom fail to awaken doubt as to the value of the retained residuum. Religions become liberal as money-grubbers become generous—when they are on their death-beds. Other forces beside that of open Freethought propaganda have, of course, been active in bringing about this condition of affairs; but it is surely entitled to considerable credit for what it has done in this direction. It is idle, too, to test Freethought by strength of organisation. Personally, I have never been able to agree with those who aimed at creating what was essentially a new Church, but with a different order of service. It is not difficult to establish a new sect. Sectarian feelings are ready to hand, and are deeply planted in existing human nature. Only I have been unable to see in what way sectarian feelings, that are bad when associated with religion, become good when associated with Freethought. Nay, I have been unable to see how they could become associated with Freethought. If Freethought means anything worth striving for, it is something much wider than can ever be contained in any sect, however large it may be. And the advantage is certainly slight if we are to convert a man from being a sectarian on one side to being a sectarian on the other. Even mere organisation is a poor test of the strength of Freethought. For a strong organisation depends, in the main, upon two things—upon pressure from without or the development of sectarian feelings. The latter, as I have said, we do not want, and the former, Christians no longer supply us with. Persecution, it is true, is not dead; but it is no longer of that open kind that drives people together for self-protection. It effects its purpose by circuitous and underhand methods, and so does its work with the least possible injury to those for whom it operates.

The only satisfactory test by which to estimate the growth of Freethought is to note the extent to which it influences life. Here the evidence is clear and decisive. The numerous attempts of the Christian world to so re-mould religious beliefs as to make them more palatable to the modern taste are all indications of the influence of Freethought advocacy. Christian preachers are usually content with their teaching so long as the congregation are satisfied. It is only when these begin to grow restive that concessions are made, and one may be sure that ultimately a powerful cause of this restiveness is the work of those who have always striven to keep the results of modern criticism well before the people.

Quite as important is the influence of Freethought on social matters. Short-sighted critics of Freethought,

who pride themselves on possessing a "practical" mind—usually the most unpractical of people—often express the desire that militant Freethinkers would devote themselves to more useful social work than that in which they are engaged. Deeper study would show that the influence of Freethought on social and political life is enormous. In the first place, it is only stating a simple truth to say that not only have really most important social movements taken their rise among Freethinkers, but also that some of the most strenuous workers in the advanced social and political field are still of that class. As Freethinkers, our share of the work is very largely of a liberative character. Thousands of people pass through our hands, or come under our influence, year after year, and who are thereby handed over as recruits to various social and political organisations. They come to us with their minds full of religious beliefs, and their energies absorbed in its study or propaganda. By and by their minds are rid of their load of useless lumber, their attention is fixed on the fact that this world and its problems constitute the only legitimate scene of study and work, and they leave us ready to play their part as social or political workers, not perhaps, as avowed Freethinkers, but at least as men and women who have been made what they are by Freethought influence. One need only consider what the liberation of the energy locked up in religion would mean if it were applied to the social and political field, to form some idea of what Freethought has done for national life during the past century. The relative interest taken by the people in general in social and religious subjects in 1806 and 1906 may be taken as a rough measure of the growth of Freethought.

The Freethinker who has the proper sense of historic proportion will not look to either large membership or powerful organisations as a test of success. Instead, he will look for evidence, when he requires it, to that steady broadening of thought and deepening of human interests that, in spite of many drawbacks, steadily proceeds. And, from this point of view, he will gain the conviction that Freethought is one of the formative forces of the age. And this gives to it its chief strength. If Freethought depended upon any one man, or even upon a combination of men, if it depended upon temporary political conditions, or passing social circumstances, its destruction would be a comparatively easy matter. But it is above and beyond all of these, and is, in a sense, independent of them. It is because Freethought is in line with the deeper and more permanent forces of development that, in spite of it having been represented by a handful of men without social or financial power, it has been able to force powerful religious corporations to modify or relinquish some of their most cherished teachings. And also because of this, everything that makes for a fuller, freer life, all that is true in art, science, and literature, makes also for Freethought. The Roman Catholic Church has conquered an opponent because it has known how to fight; but, in fighting Freethought, the churches are struggling with an enemy whose great ally is time itself.

The advance of Freethought is therefore certain, its ultimate triumph secure. And this very conviction ought to nerve us to renewed action. Whether an individual Freethinker here or there does his share of the fighting or not, the work will go on; but it will go on the better for the hearty co-operation of each. Individual abstention does not stop the work—it only throws a heavier burden on each. And let us make no mistake about this—every Freethinker who does not fight is playing the part of a friend to the churches. He has benefited them by withdrawing a soldier from the opposing army. Moreover, a more general and a more conscious co-operation among Freethinkers would break down, as nothing else could, the social ostracism that presses heavily on so many. For the game of ostracism can only be practised by an overwhelming majority against a numerically feeble minority. It cannot be practised against a large minority, for the nearer it approaches the

majority the easier does protection, or even retaliation, become. Now I do not believe that Freethinkers in this country are a feeble minority. They are certainly more numerous than Christians think, and probably more so than even Freethinkers believe. But they are *apparently* small because of the way in which people go on, year after year, keeping their opinions to themselves, as though the only people with a right to express themselves openly are those who mistake a prejudice for an opinion, and an ancient superstition for knowledge. If anything like a genuine census of opinions in this country could be taken, the result might be a great surprise all round.

And, therefore, our immediate need is not so much *more* Freethinkers, as Freethinkers, who shall adequately realise that opinions are only of value so long as they find expression, and are thus able to play their part as determining agencies in the progress of the race. An opinion unexpressed is only so much mental lumber; expressed, it becomes a dynamic force that multiplies itself indefinitely. One cannot always be certain that one's opinions are sound; but one may always rest assured that to act as though they were something to be hidden or ashamed of, is to be guilty of disloyalty to all concerned.

C. COHEN.

The Birth of the New Year.

It is a well-known fact that Christmas Day was never to the taste of Puritans. The institution savored too much of Pagan light-heartedness and frivolity to suit their sombre mood. Christmas feasts and sports were an abomination in the sight of their righteous souls. It is computed that the Long Parliament, which had a small Puritan majority, held twelve sittings on Christmas Day itself. Indeed, the Puritans were opposed to all festivals, and did their utmost to abolish them. The observance of "holy days" was contrary to the will of God, and it was a sin even to tolerate it. In Scotland and in parts of the United States, even now, Christmas is very little observed, while New Year's Day is made an occasion of great rejoicing. Here we have an example of the rigid distinction drawn between *sacred* and *secular* in the puritanical mind. The birth of the Savior was a sacred event, for which mankind should be devoutly and solemnly thankful every day of the year, while the birth of the year was a secular event, which could be celebrated on a particular day and in a secular fashion. There was no such thing as *Christian* mirth; mirth, cheerfulness, hilarity, being of this world, and not to be indulged in by spiritually minded people. Hence God's own people were not supposed to take part in worldly rejoicings of any kind. They were to dwell apart, and even their deepest joys were to be tempered with fear and trembling.

The Puritan objection to the celebration of Christmas was well founded, being thoroughly biblical. There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate the exact date of Christ's nativity. The documents do not enable us to fix upon even the year of his birth, much less the month and the day. Furthermore, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews informs us that, like Melchizedek, Christ is to be known not after the flesh, but after the spirit, and that, in this sense, he is "without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life," being the Son of God; and in this estimate of him Paul fully concurs. Be this as it may, it is a certainty that whether Jesus was ever born or not, the date of his nativity is absolutely unknown. Now the strange thing is, that in spite of this complete uncertainty as to date, the Church should eventually have chosen the 25th of December as the birthday of its Lord, which was also observed as the birthday of its Dionysus, Mithra, Adonis, Horus, and other Pagan deities. This was an astounding coincidence, to say the very least. But was it not more? Does it not

suggest the idea that the Savior of Christendom falls into line with all the great Saviors of heathen mythologies? Does it not also suggest the further idea that if Mithra, Dionysus, Adonis, and Horus were purely mythical, Jesus must be regarded as partaking of the same element? But we are assured that all myths have been woven round about historical facts, and that there is no getting away from such facts; and we readily admit that such is the case. Now what is the great fact that underlies all these stories concerning the birth of so many Savior-Gods on the 25th of December? The actual birth of the year, or the regeneration of the earth. What is really born on the 25th of December in our hemisphere is Summer. It is then that the king of day, our Savior, turns his face towards us and makes us glad with the precious promise of his coming. It is then that death receives notice to quit, and life begins to stir and stretch on its sleepy couch preparatory to rising with healing in its wings.

Such is the eternal fact behind all Divine nativities. It was the winter solstice that served as the womb in which were conceived and out of which issued all the spiritual Saviors of the world. Multitudes of people succeed in believing in the latter; it is impossible not to believe in the former. The Savior-Gods are imaginary, and nobody knows whether they exist or not; the winter solstice is actual, and nobody can deny it. The truth, indeed, is that the number of people who believe in and worship a Divine Being is steadily decreasing, while the number of those who understand and appreciate the beneficent power of the sun is constantly growing. We know that the sun is our life-giver, life-renewer, and life-comforter; and we can honestly say to it:—

"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness;
And thy paths drop fatness.
They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness:
And the hills are girded with joy.
The pastures are clothed with flocks;
The valleys are also covered with corn;
They shout for joy, they also sing."

In reality, then, Christmas means the dividing line between winter and summer, between the old and the new. Astronomically speaking, it is at Christmas that the old year dies and the new is born. Yes, already "the year's at the spring," and we can see the yellow corn "fluttering and dancing in the breeze." Though the darkest and gloomiest of all seasons, the turn of the year carries with it the promise and potency of all the splendor and wealth and satisfaction of June and July. And because of this, we make merry in our hearts with music and dancing. The moment the sun turns the corner, the earth presents a new aspect and we look at things from a more cheerful view-point. Spring is once more acting like tonic on our blood, and we feel, after all, as if life were worth living.

There are some people with spring in their hearts all the year round. They are never sensible of the dark side of things and despair has no meaning to them. They are always buoyant and hopeful, the sun of their life having never set nor gone south. Sometimes one is tempted to envy them, regarding them as pre-eminently fortunate. And yet it is quite possible that they are not as high up in the scale of character and of happiness as some others whose life is patterned on the changing seasons of the year. These have their springs and summers; but they have also their autumns and winters. When in the cold, bleak winter of their discontent and depression, when in the midst of life's storm and stress and struggle, they seem as if all their joys were behind them, or as if death itself had claimed them. But one day there comes a change, their sun is seen to be returning from the south, their days begin to brighten and to lengthen, their firmament becomes suffused with a clear, soft light, and they break forth into joyous laughter and inspiring song, exclaiming every now and then, "How sweet is life and how like feathers are its burdens!" In the spring, they throw themselves with rapture into their allotted work, and when summer arrives they have the joy of reaping golden harvests. Then they

are cheered by the consciousness that they are not living quite in vain. Of course, another winter is bound to follow, but they are upheld by the memory of the good times experienced in the past and by the anticipation of brighter springs and more fruitful summers yet to come. Life, in the majority of instances, is made up of such never ceasing alternations; it is ever chequered with light and shade, with victory and defeat, with gain and loss, with winter and summer. And yet this is the life which, in the long run, yields the richest crop of achievements and the truest happiness.

We are living in a world in which unbroken optimism is not possible. Only shallow minds can be always jubilant. They who think deeply often sink to the verge of pessimism. Life's actualities are not heart-lifting and joy-giving; but life's possibilities fire the soul with courage, and in courage there is an undertone of dauntless optimism. Therefore, well-balanced thinkers are neither blindly optimistic nor inveterately pessimistic. Hazlitt tells us of a sun-dial near Venice, the motto of which is, "I count only the hours that are serene," and exclaims: "What a bland and care-dispelling feeling! How the shadows seem to fade on the dial-plate as the sky lours, and time presents only a blank unless as its progress is marked by what is joyous, and all that is not happy sinks into oblivion." That may be quite true as regards the sun-dial and the chastened memory, but it is not true of experience. There are many calm, placid, unruffled, serene hours in our life, and we rejoice in them; but there are also dark, dreary, dismal hours through which we must pass, and the experience is not sweet, but dishearteningly bitter. Now while it is delightfully possible to obliterate the latter from the memory and treasure therein only the former, there is no escape from the fact that in forming our estimate of life as a whole we must be guided by the testimony of experience rather than by that of memory. This is not the best of all possible worlds. Indeed, it is a world of which a perfectly just, good and loving God would be profoundly ashamed. But it is a world capable of improvement. Most of the evils that afflict it are removable and ought to be cleared away. The right attitude to life, therefore, is one of active helpfulness and unflinching courage. You may tell me that Nature is blind and has always worked in the dark. True; but in us she has become intelligent and purposeful. In us she has travelled through flesh to mind, through mind to soul, and so, as Meredith puts it, this is—

"The lesson writ in red since first Time ran,
A hunter hunting down the beast in man:
That till the chasing out of its last vice
The flesh was fashioned but for sacrifice."

Such are a few of the thoughts suggested by the advent of a new year. Of one thing we may be absolutely certain, namely, that Secularism is a greater force at the commencement of 1907 than it ever was before. Even Christian Churches are being rapidly converted into Secular Societies. The belief in a personal God is obsolete even in many theological schools. The teaching of Voltaire and Thomas Paine is now doled out to approving hearers from hundreds of pulpits. Reason is at last mounting her throne. Even Christendom is losing faith in its Divine Savior, and beginning to apply itself to the sublime task of saving itself. This is a most hopeful sign of the times. In the Churches the Deism of the eighteenth century is known as the Higher Criticism, while in the world it has developed into unadulterated Secularism. Such has been the direct and indirect progress of our Cause; and we are confident that during the year upon which we have just entered it is sure to succeed on a grander scale than ever. Let us be of good cheer, buckle on the armor, and resolve to fight for Right and Truth with all our might. Society will never be reorganised from without; its salvation, its deliverance from ignorance and superstition, must come from within itself; and we must take our part in bringing it about.

J. T. LLOYD.

Acid Drops.

Mr. Raymond Blathwayt, the well-known pious interviewer, contributed an article to Boxing-Day's *Morning Leader* on "Pretoria at a Glance." This is how he dropped half a tear over poor old Kruger's grave:—

"For here lies Kruger; 'Life's fitful fever spent, he sleeps well.' Then for a moment I stood by the grave of Prince Victor Christian, and I realised that prince and president—the victor and the vanquished—had each in his own way lived his own gallant life. And so God rest them both!"

God or no God, we daresay the occupants of those two graves will rest all right; and even Mr. Raymond Blathwayt won't have much to do with the result. But fancy the flunkeyism of this pious journalist in setting this particular prince against that particular president, and posing Prince Christian as the "victor" and President Kruger as the "vanquished." And why the deuce does a paper like the *Morning Leader* let a person like Mr. Raymond Blathwayt commit such an atrocious libel on Shakespeare. Mr. Shaw himself has to allow that Shakespeare could write. The great dramatist never wrote such three-legged-jackass stuff as is thus fathered upon him. What he did write was, "After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well."

London preachers—no doubt like the country ones—took the opportunity of Christmas Day to blow their professional trumpets loudly. Brief reports of many of their sermons appeared in the next morning's *Daily Chronicle*. Of course a few lines cannot convey an idea of a whole discourse, but we suppose the reporters picked out what they regarded as plums, and to that extent were fairly accurate.

Canon Duckworth, at Westminster Abbey, is said to have "showed how the memory of the Incarnation bound our hearts together and made us taste one common joy." This is probably a subtle allusion to the good temper and unanimity with which the Christian Churches have co-operated over the Education Bill.

Canon Newbolt, at St. Paul's, seems to have had a slap at Mr. Bernard Shaw, whose God is not omnipotent, and thus escapes responsibility for all the ills of life on this planet. Canon Newbolt referred to "thoughtless persons"—Bernard Shaw and Co.—who "said that this world was not a good world, and asked why God should have made it." Canon Newbolt, who has a first-rate job, with a fine salary, paid regularly, begs to assure all and sundry, including carping sceptics, that this is a very good world, and that God did well in making it. As for Christmas, it "made the old Book speak anew to the people." Well, we don't dispute that. The Bible is getting played out so fast that the clergy have to make it mean something different every twelve months.

Monsignor Howlett, the administrator of the Westminster (Catholic) Cathedral, said that there were "two great practical lessons to be learnt from the Nativity; love of suffering, and love of the poor." He might have added that the Christian Churches have always taken care that there should be plenty of both to love.

Christ, said the Catholic preacher, came into the world to suffer, and to die upon the cross. He might have added that this was done in order that a lot of other gentlemen might live upon the cross.

Rev. R. J. Campbell, at the City Temple, threw overboard all the Nativity cargo of the good Christian ships called "Matthew" and "Luke." "It can plainly be seen," he said, "how the thought of this wonderful work of Christ in the world should lead men to weave beautiful stories about his very cradle." All the lot went at one fell swoop—virgin birth, angels and shepherds, peripatetic wise men, the excursion star, Herod's massacre, and the flight into Egypt. Not one of them true; all of them false. "Beautiful" perhaps, but "stories" for certain. We have Mr. Campbell's word for it. Yet the business will be carried on as before. For the congregations are there, and the preachers are there, and the salaries are there—and what more is wanted?

Mr. Campbell declared that "the spirit of Christ working in the hearts of his people was already accomplishing the desired end slowly, but surely." We will not quarrel with the *slowly*. It reminds us of a certain reply of Voltaire's. He was a great coffee drinker, and when he was a very old man somebody said in his presence that coffee was a slow poison. "Yes," said Voltaire, "very slow."

Dr. Horton, of Hampstead, the gentleman who once, we believe, expressed a kind of hope that Atheists might be wiped off this planet, went in for prophecy. He said that Christianity was travelling on to China and Japan, and "our grandchildren will read Christmas poems in those languages of the yellow man." Horton knows; *he* knows. But he forgot to say *how many* yellow men would write or read Christmas poems. There won't be many unless the missionaries are far more successful than they have been hitherto. For the rest, as John Morley said, the best way to answer a prophet is to prophesy the opposite.

Rev. F. B. Meyer appears to have gone in for prophecy too. This is how the oracle spoke:—

"We are advancing towards an age when needless tears, caused by the inhumanity of man, by the inequalities of our social state, by vested selfishness, shall be wiped away; when mourning, crying, and pain, so far as they arise from preventible causes, such as war, the slave trade, and the sweater's den shall have passed away; and when death itself shall be denuded of the horrors of cancer and consumption. Better still, God Himself shall be recognised, known, and loved universally."

What a grand tribute to Christianity! After nearly two thousand years of it we are just "advancing" to a really better state of society. Just as though, after all that lapse of time, we might not have done as much "advancing" without any Christianity at all. And then the question arises, What has Christianity, or God either, got to do with the war against cancer and consumption. It is Man who is battling against those dreadful diseases. All that God does—if he does anything—is to *send them*. That is *his* share of the business.

Rev. Silvester Horne was as edifying as Mr. Meyer. "The insolence of birth," he said, "the encroachments of power, the monopolies of wealth, are doomed by the reign of Christ, which is the reign of Right, the reign of Freedom."—This is the usual bounce of the Christian pulpit. Christ does all the good that happens. A short and sweet and most commodious theory! Its only defect is that it is utterly false. In this particular case, the fine things that Mr. Horne celebrates are not due to something that happened nineteen hundred years ago; they are due, as might be expected, to something far more recent—namely, to the French Revolution. And when that great revolt of humanity against lies and wrongs and miseries occurred, what did Christian England do? It spent about two thousand millions of money in fighting against "infidel France." It failed in the end, but it did its best—or rather its worst—while the game lasted. And we may add that the Silvester Hornes of a hundred years ago were all beating the war-drum in their pulpits, and inciting the slaves of England against the freemen of France.

The last preacher in the *Daily Chronicle* list was the Rev. T. B. Castle, of Clerkenwell. We suppose he is a great man, but we never heard of him before. This gentleman spoke of the twenty-fifth of December as "the greatest birthday in the world's history." But the truth is that it is not a birthday at all. It was an astronomical celebration of Pagan antiquity, hundreds—and probably thousands—of years before the fictitious hero of the four Gospels was heard of. The early Christians celebrated various days as the birthday of Christ, scattered over a period of several months; and it was not until after Christianity had been made the State religion of the Roman Empire, in the fourth century, that the twenty-fifth of December was finally fixed up by the Church, which simply borrowed it from the ancient Sun-Worship. Why, the Gospels themselves are irreconcilable with the Christian chronology. They state that, on the night of Christ's birth, shepherds were watching their flocks in the open country. But this could not occur even in Palestine in mid-winter, as the nights are far too cold for sheep to be out at that time of the year.

"Whether we are Christians or even Atheists," Mr. Castle said, "we openly acknowledge Christ's birth and sovereignty, for all our dating is Anno Domini (in the year of our Lord) 1906." At the end of that statement the reporter put a note of admiration; and, whatever his reason was, the sign was very appropriate. It is wonderful that such silliness can survive in the twentieth century even in a Christian pulpit. Mr. Castle himself calls every day of the week after the name of a Pagan divinity; the first day after the Sun, the second day after the Moon, and so on to the last, which is Saturn's day. According to his own argument, therefore, the reverend gentleman openly acknowledges the sovereignty of Pagan divinities every day of the week. He will deny this, of course; but, in doing so, he kills his own argument—if we can dignify it with such a title.

It was said that Mr. Robert Davies, who gave £150,000 to the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Missionary Society, had made provision for a nice annuity of £250 for Evan Roberts; but it turns out that he did not even make a will, and his fortune of £400,000 will be divided between his nephews and nieces. Poor Evan! He seems to be sinking into his natural obscurity.

Richard White, a Cardiff man, killed himself by jumping off Clifton Suspension Bridge. On an envelope he had written: "May God help you to bear the trouble.—Your broken-hearted Brother." How these Atheists, as Dr. Torrey says, do commit suicide!

More good men gone wrong. Rev. Henry Edward Beech, of Broadlands, Maldon, Surrey, has left £65,112. Rev. Henry Barnes Byrne, of Milford House, Winchester, has left £50,509. Freethought would flourish amazingly on the mere "leavings" of these preachers of "Blessed be ye poor."

The following significant paragraph appeared in "The Churches" column of the *Daily News* :—

"As a consequence of a divergence of opinion on certain theological subjects three of the deacons of one of the largest and most influential Congregational churches in London have placed their resignations in the hands of their minister, and two others, whose terms of office are expiring, have intimated their intention not to seek re-election. For some time past the minister has steadily preached a liberal theology, and at last matters have been brought to a crisis. The controversy has been characterised by the utmost good feeling on both sides, but the five deacons feel their official position in the church to be no longer tenable. It would be inadvisable to say more, as a meeting of church members is being called shortly to discuss the whole situation."

Campbell or the Devil! We thought there would be "ructions" at the City Temple.

The "suffragettes" get an inordinate share of attention in the newspapers. The reason of this is twofold. In the first place, the newspapers live on excitement. Health does not lend itself to reporting; a fever does. There is no copy in a sane man on the top of a house; a lunatic in the same position is good for columns. In the second place, newspaper reporters are mostly men, and men like dangling after women. It is pretty safe to say that if the newspaper reporting were done by women the "suffragettes" would get cold lines instead of racy paragraphs. Such is the influence of sex, even in public affairs; and we commend it to the careful attention of sociologists and political reformers. What it means, in the long run, is for *them* to work out; not for the editor or anybody else in the *Freethinker*.

Woman Suffrage, of course, is a question that has no necessary connection with the "suffragettes," although they seem to have appropriated it just at present. It is a very big question—bigger than its friends or its enemies generally think. But we must leave them battling over it. We have merely been making a few remarks by way of preparation for something else. We see that the "suffragettes" are burning with enthusiasm, and that they are going to reform a lot of things. They are going to take prisons in hand, just by the way; and, of course, they will soon turn them into model establishments. This is what they seem to think. But, alas, they will learn in time how slow-footed real reform is. It would do them good, perhaps, to consult (say) the honorary secretary of the Humanitarian League—not to mention the Howard Society and similar bodies. The prison question does not really become acute, and will not become acute, because a few "suffragettes" spent Christmas in gaol and missed their roast turkey and plum pudding. It was well-known before that such luxuries were not on the prison menu. The fact is that criminology has had the attention of some of the best heads and hearts in Europe and America before these enthusiastic ladies were born; and whatever progress is made in the treatment of criminals will be due to *their* sober and patient efforts, and not to anything that has recently happened at Holloway Gaol.

The latest batch of "suffragettes" know very little of actual imprisonment. They were treated as first-class misdemeanants; they slept on spring mattresses, wore their own clothes, could spend as much time as they pleased in reading and writing, and even have their own food brought in from outside if they had chosen to do so. All they really suffered was detention. And this seems to us a pantomime martyrdom. If these ladies lived in Russia, joined the revolutionary movement, and fell into the hands of the authorities, they would know what martyrdom meant. As it was, they had to make a grievance of receiving "Christmas

letters" from "Mrs. Meredith's Mission." In these letters they were addressed as sinners and Satan's captives. They were also asked to give up strong drink—and some of them were total abstainers. These letters they "resented exceedingly." Of course! But they might have learnt what female prisoners have to put up with, in the way of pious exhortation, without going to prison themselves. That miserable way of "getting at" prisoners is ancient. And the "suffragettes" might have known all about it if they had taken any interest in the fate of thousands of unhappy women in English prisons.

Of all nonsense, as Robert Burns said, religious nonsense is the most nonsensical. And, of the two sorts, we think Protestant nonsense is more nonsensical than Catholic nonsense. Perhaps the greatest division between Protestant and Catholic is over the doctrine of the Mass; and the dear good Protestants, who are always mouthing about liberty, when they got the upper hand in England, made it a capital crime—that is, a crime punishable with death—to perform Mass in this country. Catholics believe that the bread and wine in the eucharist become the actual body and blood of Christ. Protestants call this doctrine blasphemous idolatry, and they still make the King of England take a bitter oath against it at his coronation. Yet the dear good Protestants who spit at the idea of the miracle of the Mass have any number of miracles of their own. They deride and execrate the turning of a little baked flour and water into the body of Christ, and therefore of God; yet they believe that the Deity of this infinite universe was once a mewling and puling baby in long clothes, sucking mother's milk, and increasing the family washing bill. They also believe that this baby was born of a human mother without the assistance of a human father; and that after his birth, as well as before it, his mother continued to be a virgin. They also believe that this baby was the third person of an incomprehensible Trinity—the Father being incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost incomprehensible; although there are not three incomprehensibles but one incomprehensible. And it is after all this brain-addling nonsense that they quarrel with the utmost fury over the Catholic's miraculous little wafer. First they swallow camels, and then they strain at gnats.

It is necessary to remember all this in contemplating the attitude of the Protestant press in England towards the misfortunes of the Catholics in France. Even the *Daily Chronicle*, in its leading article on "Worship and Public Meeting" on December 27, looks down upon the French Catholics as if they were a quite inferior species of animal to the English Protestants. It talks about the French Government resenting "foreign interference." But the New Testament (Acts v. 29) plainly declares that "We ought to obey God rather than men"—and to a Catholic the Church is the living voice of God. Of course the Protestants laugh at this. But they find the voice of God in the Bible, and they admit that they must obey *that*. And when it comes to Passive Resistance, as it is called, these Bibliolators declare that their consciences come before the law; they refuse to pay their legal rates, and they suffer restraint or even imprisonment "for Christ's sake." What right, then, have *they* to deliver moral lectures to the French Catholics? We beg to tell them that Christ is as much "a foreigner" as the Pope.

The *Daily Chronicle* says that the French Bishops are obeying the orders of the Vatican, and calls this "the usurpation of the Pope." Is our contemporary ignorant of the meaning of the word "usurpation"? If it be, let it consult a dictionary; if it be not, let it use the word properly. Whatever else there may be, there is no "usurpation" in the Pope's policy. He is the duly appointed head of the Catholic Church, his orders are only obeyed voluntarily, and every Frenchman who is in the Catholic Church to-day can walk out of it to-morrow. Johnson defines "usurpation" as "forcible, unjust, illegal seizure or possession"—and how on earth can this apply to the Pope's authority in the Catholic Church? The fact is, our contemporary is talking Protestant nonsense; and very ill-conditioned nonsense, too.

William Denis Wilson, a farmer on the outskirts of Ipswich, being wild because his home was broken up by three of his daughters and two of his sons joining a new Christian sect called the "Tramps," borrowed an iron bar from a blacksmith and did his best to wreck the mission hall of this interesting body. He appears to have smashed every window in the hall, and everything else that could be broken. For this performance the magistrates fined him £1 and costs. We dare say he paid the money cheerfully. He had let himself go—and that was something. After all, the luxury was not very expensive.

Farmer Wilson had no right, however, to be astonished at his children's leaving him in that fashion—if he had read the Gospels. The first of the "Tramps" expressly stated that he came to bring about that sort of division. And he certainly succeeded.

Oliver Cromwell Clifford goes through all his old tricks with the clockwork regularity of a trained animal in a circus. He tells the representative of a Liberal paper that he and his friends "cannot endure" public money going "into the hands of Roman Catholics." Apparently it should all go into the hands of the "Simple Bible Teaching" people. "I stand by the secular system," he says; and then he proves that he doesn't. He holds the fantastic and fatuous idea—or perhaps he only professes to—that "a system of secular education does not involve the expulsion of the Bible from the schools." Oh yes it does. And he will find it out if he lives long enough—as he is likely to when he gets that £500 annuity.

Dr. Clifford must have drawn up the new manifesto of the National Passive Resistance Committee. It bears his mark in every line. Nonconformity must go on resisting, he declares, and this is how he calls upon its adherents to be up and doing:—

"Suffer any indignity or losses rather than submit. Fight for the most sacred of causes, for the children and the people, for real religion and justice, for God and the Fatherland."

Good old comedian! It is all bunkum—and we believe he knows it. What he really means is, "Fight against the Church of England, fight against the Roman Catholic Church; fight against Clericalism—that is, *their* control of Education; fight for freedom—that is, *our* control of Education. Ours is the 'real religion'—theirs is a wretched imitation. So up with ours, and down with theirs. Hosanna! Hallelujah! Amen!" Good old comedian!

We said it would be so. Dr. Aked has not let his golden opportunity slip. He has sought the Lord in prayer and has found that it is the Divine Will that he should accept the "call" of the Fifth Avenue Church, New York. Of course he loves his old Pembroke Church congregation; but, to parody the grand old Jacobite song,

"He gave his bridle reins a shake
Upon the Mersey shore,
With 'Adieu for evermore, my love,
Adieu for evermore.'"

According to the *Christian World*, the Standard-Oil King, Mr. John Rockefeller, who worships in the New York church to which Mr. Aked, of Liverpool, has been invited, heard the reverend gentleman preach, during the summer, in a church near London. "The building," our contemporary says, "was crowded when the multi-millionaire arrived, and he was shown into a remote seat in the gallery—much to the dismay of the deacons who subsequently discovered his identity." The "dismay" of the deacons is delicious. Read the first three verses of the second chapter of "the General Epistle of St. James"—think of that "dismay" of the church officers—and then reflect on how much real influence Christianity has exercised upon the world.

"Name it not ye chaste stars." But it must be. The Rev. J. C. Wilton complained to the Watch Committee of the Westminster Borough Council with respect to the pictorial posters of "an apparently nude woman" engaged at the Palace Theatre. Was it the "apparently" he objected to? Would he have preferred the "altogether"?

Mr. Baker, the hero of the Tooting Slate Club affair, was an active man in religious circles. Of course.

Jesus Christ said "If one take from thee thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." But if one take from thee thy bicycle, says the Vicar of Ormskirk (Rev. J. E. Woodrow), let him have hard labor. He prosecuted Edmund Arthur Robbins, who rode off with the man of God's world-skimmer. Jesus Christ would have offered him a motor car. But there was always a difference between the Master and his disciples.

Mr. Keir Hardie is a particular friend of Jesus Christ's, and is always putting in a good word for him. In his recent slap at the Bishops—for wrecking the Education Bill, which he himself voted against as regards its first vital clause—he said that they had long since lost the men, and were rapidly losing the women, and now little children will spit upon them as betrayers of the truths laid down by the Divine Master. Mr. Hardie might tell us when the children will begin spitting. Meanwhile he might explain "the Divine Master." Does he now believe that Jesus Christ was God?

Mr. Stuart Cumberland, who knows what he is talking about, pours cold water on the enthusiasm of the "telepathy" people who see something mysterious in the performance of the Zancigs. He also ridicules the pretence of the performers themselves to mysterious powers. Mr. Cumberland says that they give a good show, but it is far from being a perfect one, and it is all done by a code of signals. They have no more of a "sixth sense" about them than has a Dutch oyster. He invites them to perform under test conditions; conditions that would be quite favorable to telepathy though "fatal to the code they employ at their public exhibitions." But of course the Zancigs won't snap at this offer. They trade, to a large extent, on the bump of wonder.

Mr. Cumberland winds up by declaring that his extensive experience in all parts of the world of alleged "occult" phenomena has convinced him that "there is really nothing inexplicable in this direction, and that no man is in possession of powers which cannot be rationally dealt with."

Professor Giaccio is taking a lot of gratuitous trouble over the "miracle" of the annual liquefaction of the blood of Saint Januarius. By chemical means he has performed a trick like it, to the huge satisfaction of a crowd of unbelievers. "Challenges" are now flying about; but what can they lead to? Unbelievers do not require proof that the Catholic "miracle" is a trick; they are perfectly satisfied that it must be so. Believers, on the other hand, will go on regarding it as supernatural after all "exposures." "Yes," they will say, "*your* 'miracle' was done by chemistry, but *our* 'miracle' was done differently—for how could our priests know the secrets of chemistry before chemistry really existed?" The only effective exposure of "miracles" is the gradual production of an intellectual attitude which is unfavorable to them.

This world *does* move, as Galileo said. And the town of Guildford moves with it. At a meeting of the Board of Guardians a recommendation came up from the Children's Committee that a Bible be provided for each child in the Scattered Homes, the child's name to be entered therein, and the Bibles to become the property of the children. Mr. Strudwick suggested that some other book should be given the children. His own children often won prizes, but when they were given Bibles they came home very dissatisfied. The Chairman pointed out that the Bibles were not intended as prizes, but what they *were* intended for he did not say; and Mr. Strudwick objected that, in any case, the ratepayers would have to pay for them. "Surely they will not mind that," said the Chairman; but Mr. Strudwick *did* object, and let the cat right out of the bag by saying that the Bible was not a suitable book to give to children; they would much prefer the *Pilgrims' Progress*. "Give them *Robinson Crusoe*," cried another Guardian, amidst laughter. But the resolute Mr. Strudwick was not to be done. He fired a parting shot. "The Bible," he said, "is a dream, and so is the *Pilgrims' Progress*."

We guessed that Mr. G. B. Shaw's recent lectures on religion were kite-flying preparatory to the publication of a book on the subject. The book is now announced through the *Tribune*. We shall look forward to it. We guess it will add to the gaiety of nations. "G. B. S." is most amusing when he is most intensely serious. It is often the way with Irishmen.

Pious old Sam Smith, formerly M.P. for Flintshire, died at Calcutta two days before the end of last year. He was a great advocate of what is called "social purity," which generally means minding other people's morals—sometimes instead of your own. His weak mouth and long leg-of-mutton whiskers were characteristic. He was also a great opponent of what is called "infidelity." He wrote foolishly in support of the Christian religion, and we understand that he subsidised some half-educated, ill-educated, or non-educated persons at Liverpool, who support it as foolishly as he did. His friends, and especially those who handled his money, believe he is in heaven. But this is a point on which it is easily possible to be mistaken.

Here is a sample of Nonconformist wit; it was printed in large type in the editorial part of the *Daily News*:—

"A Bishop, who was travelling through the wilds of Canada, stopped at a log-cabin to have a rest. 'Are there any Episcopalians about here?' he asked the woman who lived in the cabin. 'Well, sir, I hardly know,' she said with hesitation. 'The men did kill something yesterday in the barn, but whether it was one of them things or not I cannot say!'"

Exquisite! So subtle, yet so pointed, and so urbane! Voltaire himself must look to his laurels.

A New Year's Calamity.

DEATH has been very busy amongst distinguished Freethinkers during the past year. First it carried off the veteran George Jacob Holyoake; then it took Charles Watts; in the autumn I heard from America that the end had come at last to Dr. E. B. Foote; only a few weeks ago I chronicled the decease of "Saladin" (W. Stewart Ross); and now, alas, I have to report the death of Joseph Symes.

It seems but yesterday that I had my last chat with him at the *Freethinker* office; indeed, it was only a few days before the Christmastide. He seemed well enough then. He was almost proud of the way in which he was standing the English winter. He told me how he suffered for years from bronchitis, until a clever doctor took him in hand and completely cured him. "Now," he said, "I'm as sound and safe as I ever was in my life."

A few days afterwards he was very ill, but he refused to have a doctor until Christmas night. Proper medical attention and trained nursing might have saved his life. I do not know; I only say it might. When a doctor was brought in it was apparently too late to prevent the mischief from running its full course in a fight to a finish with the patient's vitality. On Saturday evening, December 29, at half-past eight o'clock, he expired. The doctor's certificate ascribed his death to bronchitis and pneumonia—and heart trouble of some years' standing.

He appears to have had no idea that he was dying, and only talked of the trouble he was giving—which was so like him.

I had written to ask him to write something special for my new year's number, and he directed his wife to reply that he could not do so, but I might use a piece he wrote some months ago if I saw fit. It appears in this week's *Freethinker* concurrently with the announcement of his death.

Two days after Christmas day—the Thursday—I received a postcard from Mrs. Symes, stating that he was ill and that the doctor was attending him. I could not go to see him, for I had to take great care of myself during the cold snap. But I wrote the letter which the Freethought party would expect me to write in such circumstances. I could not be there, but I proffered any sort of assistance that might be necessary. No further news reached me till Sunday morning, when the post-office messenger brought me Mrs. Symes's telegram of the previous night stating that Joseph Symes had "passed away at 8.30." I communicated with the bereaved lady as soon as the post-office would let me. I also wired and wrote to Miss Vance—the trustiest person I know, or have ever known, in such cases—and she hurried down to the house of mourning, where her presence was very welcome and extremely useful; for the poor widow was in a state of collapse, and was half the circumference of the globe away from all her own friends. I also wrote to Mr. Cohen, who lives within managable distance, asking him to call and see what could be done.

Time was when I should have been at Mrs. Symes's side as soon as trains and cabs could carry me. But I have to be more careful now. The cold snap killed my dear old friend and colleague. I am sure the Freethought party would not like it to kill me too.

Ever since I received that terrible telegram I have been filled with a sense of the tragedy in mortal things. It was so *very* tragic to journey all those thousands of miles only to die. If one believed in portents, one might fancy that he was impelled towards his native land by the same instinct which, it is said, drives birds, and even fishes, to make for their native air and waters when their "call" comes. Mrs. Symes was opposed to his coming, I understand, and only consented after much importunity. I wish now that she had never consented. And I am glad that I had no share in inducing him to leave Australia, at his time of life, after twenty-three years of acclimatation.

Miss Vance informs me that the doctor meant to tell Mrs. Symes, if her husband recovered, that he should never be allowed to go round lecturing alone, as he might be seized with a fatal illness at any moment of great excitement. Had I known of his heart trouble I should have tried to dissuade him from rushing about and lecturing three days in succession at that time of the year. He caught a chill at Newcastle, and made it worse at two other places. His nature was always, I fear, too enthusiastic for caution.

Strange, was it not? Thirty years ago he delivered his first Freethought lectures on a Sunday. It was at Newcastle-on-Tyne. Thirty years afterwards, almost to a day, he delivered his last Freethought lectures on a Sunday. And it was at Newcastle-on-Tyne again.

Twenty-three of those thirty years he spent fighting gallantly for Freethought—often against great odds—at the Antipodes. The Philistines were too many for him in the end, but they never beat down his sword. He kept it intact, bright, sharp, and pointed to the last.

He returned to the land of his birth, and was with us just long enough to tell us the story of his hardest campaigns. Then the hand of death touched him, and he sank down to his eternal sleep. It was sudden, and it was tragic; and yet I think he would have preferred for his own part to die as it were in harness. He might have been happy in his closing years on his Australian farm if he did not pine, like an old war-horse, for the scenes of combat. He travelled half round the world to where the fight was raging. Once more he drank delight of battle with his peers. And it cannot be said that his life was not rounded into a certain completeness.

Of this I am sure. He had a stainless record. I do not think he possessed all the tact and prudence which is requisite in the management of men. But he had the strong and positive virtues of the primitive and heroic type. I have sometimes said that his heart was as big as his body. He was bold and brave and fearless; he went straight to his aim; he was a staunch fighter and a staunch comrade; he was incapable of treachery, and he could not understand it in others; and he hated lies and superstition with every drop of blood in his veins.

The funeral is being undertaken, with Mrs. Symes's consent, by the President on behalf of the National Secular Society; Miss Vance, as Secretary, making all the necessary arrangements. The funeral ceremony will take place on Friday (Jan. 4) at 2.30 p.m. in the Chapel of the Golder's Green Crematorium. The President will officiate, with the support of Mr. C. Cohen and Mr. J. T. Lloyd. Mourners are specially requested to be punctual.

Golder's Green can be reached by omnibus or motor bus from Oxford-circus to Hoop-lane, which is within sight of the Crematorium. Any of the Finchley-road stations on the London and North Western, Midland, or Metropolitan railways, will serve; thence by omnibus or motor bus to the Crematorium.

A few words in conclusion. I knew my dear old friend and colleague was poor, but he turns out to have been even poorer than I thought. His prostrate widow and stricken daughter will be guarded from want for the present. Next week I shall have to make a pointed appeal on their behalf to the Freethought party. I had made up my mind to raise a testimonial for Joseph Symes through the *Freethinker* and was only awaiting the psychological moment. It will be useful now to those he loved better than himself, and for whom he could make no provision. And no one need wait a moment if he or she feels prompted to subscribe forthwith.

G. W. FOOTE.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 6, The Workman's Hall, 27 Romford-road, Stratford: 7.30, "Do the Dead Live?"

Tuesday, January 8, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, Holborn Restaurant.

January 13, Camberwell.

To Correspondents.

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

J. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 6, Leicester; 13, Forest Gate. February 3 and 10, Forest Gate. March 10, Birmingham.

MR. AND MRS. HARRY STEVENS.—Thanks for the handsome Christmas and New Year's card. But you have got the quotation wrong. Pope wrote—"A little learning is a dangerous thing"—not "a little knowledge."

C. McL.—Your letter is very sensible and just, but we have already referred objectors to one of our pamphlets. We add cheerfully, at your suggestion, Charles Bradlaugh's *Plea for Atheism*.

F. S. BARBER.—Glad you consider the *Freethinker* "splendid"—also that you know that it has at least a few readers even in your benighted locality. We agree with you that the *Christian Herald* is a very funny paper, though it is not meant to be so. With regard to the Annual Dinner, we have repeatedly said that provincial friends would be very welcome. Thanks for all your good wishes.

The unknown correspondent who sent us some cuttings from the *Christian World* is thanked for his trouble, but advised that such things are more useful if up-to-date.

R. DE L. G.—Thanks for remembrance and good wishes.

G. SCOTT.—Your New Year's good wishes are most cordially reciprocated.

P. C.—We said that the Christians had advanced no proof of their convenient interpretation of the text about the camel going through—or rather not going through—the eye of a needle.

E. MOORCROFT.—Pleased to hear you say that the *Freethinker* is "always good." Probably your idea of "cottage lectures" in small towns and villages is a good one, if volunteers could be found (as they might) to do the necessary work. Thanks for your efforts to promote our circulation. With regard to the certificate you enquire about, suitable for framing, the N. S. S. used to issue such an one to every new member; but there was so little demand for it, when the subscription was reduced and the charge fell upon the members, that it fell out of use.

T. O'NEILL (Stalybridge) is delighted with our Australian correspondent's proposal of a statue to Thomas Paine, and hopes a subscription for that purpose will be started.

W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for useful cuttings.

J. J. HARRINGTON (Calcutta), sending to our publishing office for ten shillings' worth of literature, says of a friend to whom he had this journal sent, "He is delighted with the *Freethinker*. He never knew of the existence of such a paper, and is most grateful to me for introducing it to him." "When I have finished perusing the *Freethinker*," this correspondent adds, "I send it out for free circulation, so that in a quiet way I am trying to assist you in your most noble work." Other friends might take a hint from this one.

H. G. CHURCH (New Jersey).—Thanks for your message of good will. We should like to see all your hearty wishes realised.

J. SUMNER.—Thanks for compliments and good wishes. Prosperity or no prosperity, we shall always do our best.

T. ROGERS.—Pleased to hear you have found the *Freethinker* so helpful. When a reader says "it has made a man of me" we are naturally encouraged. And we sometimes want encouragement, for our task is very hard, and very unprofitable.

C. SALDHANA (Cuddalore, India), sending some names and addresses to receive six consecutive *Freethinkers*, says:—"Certainly every part of this our earth which does not know the *Freethinker* can be truly said to be still benighted and wrapt in superstition, that curse of the human race."

G. CHRISTIAN.—Really!

H. W. MATTHEWS.—See paragraph. Shall be pleased to see you at the Dinner.

F. J. GOULD.—Shall be happy to insert your comments on our paragraphs.

LOGIA.—Sorry we can't see anything worth our attention in the Rev. W. J. Fox's "correspondence column" in the *Hendon Advertiser*. Let us know when he does something better. Nobody can fight a cloud.

R. STEVENSON.—We are not sure that we have your name correctly. You write a very good hand; but, like many more good writers, you reserve your obscurity for your signature—which may be "R" or "P." Your letter is welcome and encouraging. We are pleased to hear that you value the *Freethinker* more than any other paper you read, and "would not miss it for a lot"—also that you read our Hardy article with "keenest delight."

HARRY ALLEN.—"Acid Drops" space all occupied this week before your cuttings arrived. Something next week, perhaps. Pleased you read this journal "with a relish every week."

W. J. LIVINGSTONE ANDERSON wishes for some information as to the identity of the G. W. Foote, mentioned by Mr. Allanson Picton in a current article as having suffered six months' imprisonment for "blasphemy." We are unable to oblige him. The only G. W. Foote we know of as a prisoner for "blasphemy" suffered twelve months. That is a good deal more than twice as long as six months. Anybody who disbelieves it can try for himself.

W. GREGORY.—We have tried several times to make up a really good list of newsagents who supply the *Freethinker*, and we shall make a fresh effort this winter. Perhaps our readers will send us the names and addresses of the newsagents they get this journal from. When we have a decent list we shall print it. Thanks for your three addresses.

THE COHEN "SALVATION ARMY" TRACT FUND.—Previously acknowledged, £11 9s. Since received: J. S. Lawson, 1s. 6d.; J. W. Taylor, 2s. 6d.; W. Dodd, 5s.; H. Thomson (per D. Baxter), 1s.

W. B. COLUMBINE.—It is no good wasting space. Your letter is founded upon a misconception. We never meant that Bradlaugh put his Freethought convictions behind any other convictions. That would have been ridiculously false. We referred to him as a man of action. His greatest ambition as a man of action was political. We believe he never made a secret of it. And when broken health compelled him to choose between Freethought leadership and political work, he made a perfectly natural, and a perfectly honorable choice. That he still remained a Freethinker, and a Freethought advocate, is as consistent with our "afterwards" as it was with his own noble nature: We know this well enough. As a matter of fact, we took the chair at the last lecture he ever delivered—and it was a Freethought lecture. Moreover, he was a member of the National Secular Society to the last moment of his life.

RIDGWAY FUND.—J. Partridge acknowledges: A Friend (Scotland), 5s.

OLD READER.—We have never kept bound volumes of the *Freethinker* for sale, and the preparation of a good Index would be a colossal work.

J. PARTRIDGE.—You see that another matter claims our pen this week. We have said before, and we repeat, that the best policy of the Birmingham Branch, in our opinion, is to get a careful statement of its grievance printed and circulated as widely as possible throughout the city. Thousands of copies could be delivered at as many houses; others could be distributed at public meetings; and the statement might be got into the newspapers, if even as an advertisement. On these lines we shall be glad to assist.

J. R. (Hawes).—Sorry no room left this week.

W. WALLACE.—The verses have merit, but you will have to acquire greater technical skill. Don't be disheartened by our criticism.

T. L. D.—Thanks for the greeting.

JAMES GIBBS AND EDITH J. HALL.—Good wishes reciprocated.

J. JONES.—In our next.

W. H. NASH.—Will try to find room next week.

C. W. STYRING.—Pleased to have your encouraging letter.

GERALD GREY.—We cordially reciprocate your good wishes for the new year. The lines are too late for this number.

FRANK BREWE.—Shall be pleased to see you at the Dinner.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote opens the ball this evening (January 6) for the West Ham Branch in its new Sunday home at the Workman's Hall, 27 Romford-road, Stratford, not far from the Town Hall. His subject is "Do the Dead Live?"—which is of universal interest; and as the admission is free it would be well for those who want to secure a seat to be early. Of course there will be the usual opportunity for questions and discussion. And another point. Mr. Foote is giving this lecture quite gratuitously—that is to say, without payment

and without charge for expenses. He feels, therefore, that he may justly call upon the "saints" who attend his lecture to come provided for a liberal contribution to the collection, so that the Branch may begin the New Year and this new effort with a good balance in hand as the result of the first meeting.

This is the last time we shall be able to announce the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner which takes place at the Holborn Restaurant next Tuesday evening (January 8). We hope to see a strong rally of old friends on that occasion, with many new ones. Mr. Foote, who is to occupy the chair, as President of the National Secular Society, will be in the ante-room to the dining hall for half an hour before dinner is served, and will be very happy to shake hands with lady and gentleman "saints." There will be no saluting each other with a holy kiss, according to the New Testament plan, but there will be handshaking and conversation. "Saints" who have no one to introduce them will be perfectly free to introduce themselves. We may add that "evening dress" is entirely optional.

Mr. Foote will be supported, as the saying is, by many well-known Freethinkers, including Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Hearford, Davies and Roger, and, we hope, Mr. Snell of the Ethical Society, who remains a good friend of the N. S. S. Brief speeches to toasts, after the chairman's address, will be interspersed with vocal and instrumental music. And the price of the tickets, inclusive, is only four shillings.

The following letter appeared in a conspicuous position in the *Morning Leader* of December 26, and we reproduce it here partly as excellent in itself, and partly as a model of what Freethinkers' letters to the press on such subjects should be:—

"DR. CLIFFORD'S 'ROCK.'

TO THE EDITOR OF 'THE MORNING LEADER.'

SIR,—Dr. Clifford has so frequently stated that Nonconformists are not fighting for themselves, but for the common rights of citizenship for all, that possibly he has got to believe it; but surely your leader of the 22nd is in error, when it says: 'Dr. Clifford founds his case on a rock when,' etc.

Non-Christians of all kinds who pay rates and taxes are legally citizens as much as Christians are.

Will Dr. Clifford's educational policy enable non-Christian teachers, otherwise duly qualified, to secure posts in the nation's schools? Will it protect the children of non-Christians from the stigma of having to be withdrawn from religious instruction?

How can a conscientious and upright Freethinker teach Christian hymns and prayers for the opening and closing of the schools, to say nothing of Bible lessons, however 'simple'?

Non-Christians object as much to rates and taxes being taken out of their pockets to pay for a Cowper-Temple kind of religion as for Anglicanism, and a sensitive child is as much injured by being withdrawn on account of the one as of the other.

The attempt of Nonconformists to get their Cowper-Temple kind of religion established in all the nation's schools, instead of Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism in some, under the cry of a citizenship common to all, is an impudent one.

There is no rock for a national system to rest on save the secular one! The State should confine itself to secular education, leaving the Christianity of all the sects to be taught and paid for by those who believe in it.

This policy alone protects all children from stigma, and sometimes insult; all teachers from inquisitions as to their religious beliefs; and all citizens from paying for the teaching of any kind of a religion they believe to be false.—Yours, etc.,

Belvedere, Newark, 24 Dec."

W. MUMBY.

Of course Dr. Clifford did not reply. He never does. His one policy is perpetual reassertion.

We have printed and put into distribution two impressions of 10 000 copies each of Mr. Cohen's "Salvation Army" pamphlet, and are now printing a fresh supply. We hope our readers will go on circulating this pamphlet, and subscribing for the cost of its production. We are glad to hear that several insurance agents are circulating copies, as they find the Salvation Army a most unfair competitor in their business.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd pays his annual visit to Leicester to-day (Jan. 6), and lectures in the evening at the Secular Hall, Humberstone-gate.

The Birmingham *Daily Mail* prints another resolution against the bigoted action of the Education Committee of the Birmingham City Council—one from the Coventry Branch of the National Secular Society. The local papers that make a greater boast of their liberality maintain a "dignified silence,"

Cynicus and God.

CYNICUS.—Good morning, God. I am come to put a few questions to you.

GOD.—And who are you? and how dare you approach me without being summoned? What is it you want to know?

CYNICUS.—I am surprised at your questions, God. They told me you know all things, past, present, and to be; and that you knew every person and everything much more intimately than any man ever knew himself. Now tell me candidly, do you really know all things, as your flatterers report?

GOD.—Of course I do. There is nothing actual or possible that I do not know perfectly well.

CYNICUS.—Then why do you waste time in asking foolish or unnecessary questions of and about me? If your flatterers do not misrepresent you, you must have known from all eternity that I, Cynicus, would call on you to-day. So, of course, you are fully prepared to answer any questions I feel inclined to put. Then why did you ask me those childish questions? My case is different from yours. I have no foreknowledge; indeed, I know very little about anything. But you! why should you pretend not to know me and also why I am here? Really, God, I begin already to perceive that your character and perfections must be very different from what your flatterers dec—

GOD.—I must warn you against trifling with me, or I shall strike you dead and fling you into that huge fire yonder. I am not accustomed, I assure you, to be addressed in so insolent a manner as yours. So I caution you to behave yourself "reverently and lowly before the face of Almighty God."

CYNICUS.—Tut, tut, God! You ought to know that your empty threats do not frighten me. And why should I fear you or tremble before you as your flatterers say they do when they call upon you?

GOD.—What! I can fling you into hell in a moment. I can annihilate you by a look or a word.

CYNICUS.—Well, do your worst, tyrant! I came to have a rational chat with you, and there you are in a towering fury already. In the most cowardly manner you are doing your best to brow-beat and terrorise me. And I bid you do your worst.

GOD.—You are the most insolent wretch I ever knew and I will certainly punish you most condignly for your unparalleled impudence. I'll make an example of you.

CYNICUS.—Gently, gently; you know that I am not the least afraid of you; you have been aware of that from eternity, have you not? You knew when you made me that I should defy you and laugh your worst threats to scorn. I am come to put you to the test. Ah, ah! I see you lifting your thunderbolt to strike me, while your flashing eyes declare that you would like to annihilate me. Your fury is becoming ungovernable. You are an awfully amusing God; and I wish all your worshipers could see you just now. What an object lesson it would be for them.

GOD.—But tell me, thou monster of insolence, why thou are not afraid?

CYNICUS.—Really, I expected you to know that. But I will explain. You foreknew from all eternity everything that would or could happen, you say. Very well, God; then I and my character and my fate, in every minutest particular, was quite as well known to you millions of years ago as they can ever be. If you always foresaw that you would make me just as I am, with all my coolness and insolence, as you call it, you never had the power to refrain from making me so. If you have always foreseen that you would not get furious to-day over my most innocent questions, why, you cannot help it; and if you also foresaw that you would to-day strike me dead, you are certain to do it; while if you have always foreseen that you would not strike me, why, of course, you cannot do it. If you foresaw from eternity that you would now play the ridiculous part you are playing, you cannot do otherwise, however much

you may try. So, you see, I can well afford to be cool, for what can you do? You can do nothing that you are not fated by your foreknowledge to do. My person, character and fate, have ever been distinctly before you, so why should I fear? You will do what you must do, nothing more, nothing less, though your worshippers assure me you are All-mighty.

GOD.—And so I am. Omnipotence is my attribute.

CYNICUS.—Bah! Tell me, could you have been different from what you are, even in the minutest particular? Tell me, are you a necessary or a contingent being? Is there anything in yourself, your thoughts, words, actions, or in your history, that *could possibly* have been different? Could you unmake and then reconstruct yourself? Could you make yourself any larger or smaller, any older or younger? Could you die or commit suicide?

GOD.—I will not answer your insolent queries.

CYNICUS.—That is because, notwithstanding your pretended omnipotence, you *cannot* answer them, or else you are afraid to. If now you had foreseen that you *would* answer them, you would do it. As that you *would* answer them, you are not able. There you are, God, in a logical vice, from which your bogus omnipotence can never free you. You, like me, are "a creature of circumstance." We are brother bondsmen, absolute prisoners of fate. We cannot deviate a hairsbreadth from what I will call our life's program or agenda.

GOD.—You are insufferably insolent. Go!

CYNICUS.—You are ridiculous. Do you find it in your program that I must now go? Did you foresee from all eternity that I should now go, and let you alone, that our very interesting interview would terminate just here?

GOD.—I did not foresee that.

CYNICUS.—I am really pleased to see that you are becoming a trifle calm, candid, and rational, God. I verily believe that, were it not for the adamant fate that binds and drives you, I should soon improve your manners, morals, character, and government; but what must be will be. You and I cannot help ourselves.

GOD.—But I am All-mighty.

CYNICUS.—How can you keep up so hollow a pretence, God? Tell me, is there so much as one thing you can do which you did not foresee from eternity? Are you able to refuse to do a single item which you did foresee from eternity, however much you might wish to? For instance, you evidently foresaw this interview and torture to which I am reluctantly subjecting you, and know you would do anything to stop my tongue. But you cannot. You are as powerless to stop me as I am to stop; and the torture must proceed. You cannot stop me, can you, God?

GOD.—I shall not say.

CYNICUS.—No matter. I know the fix you are in as well as if you told me. Your all-foreseen program must be executed to the letter, and it can never be altered in its minutest item. You are as helpless as a planet or a comet circulating round the sun. Nothing can rescue them from their fate, or you from yours. All your power, as well as your person, is under the absolute dominance of your fate—a power which made, makes, compelled or compels you to be, to think, to will, to do exactly what you know to be the case, and which rigidly forbids you to depart a hairsbreadth from your agenda-paper. Your omnipotence is absolute weakness as against your fate. Why do you encourage or permit your creatures to worship you, considering how powerless you really are?

GOD.—Worship is my due.

CYNICUS.—Due for what? for being and doing just what necessity compels! You are compelled by your fate to create beings who are compelled to worship you, merely because neither they nor you can escape from your fate. Besides, we know from other facts and reflections that you are not omnipotent.

GOD.—But I *am*, I tell you!

CYNICUS.—I am now going to explode that antiquated fallacy. The only possible measure of power or force or might, is the work it does, or its product. Infinite power must of necessity do infinite work, or turn out infinite products; and must do so INCES-SANTLY. It is certain that infinite work is not done in the universe; for infinite space would be infinitely crowded and crammed with the infinite products of infinite power. So you see, God, your bogus all-mightiness will not bear examination; and you must listen to me a little longer yet—unless, of course, you have always foreseen that this interview must now close.

GOD.—I heartily wish I had foreseen a speedy end to your matchless insolence and blasphemy!

CYNICUS.—Just so, just so. I believe I shall pity you, God, before this interview closes; but, as I do not want the trouble of coming hither again, I must exhaust my budget while I am here. I have no grudge against you, God, none whatever. Your fate makes you God, and mine makes me your tormentor. Who is to blame? You cannot help being God, I cannot help being Cynicus. I cannot help quizzing you, you cannot help listening to my hated talk, can you? I must ask, Do you really mean to say that you are infinite? Your flatterers say so; but it is quite impossible for them to know anything about it; quite. But what do you say?

GOD.—I *am* really infinite. I fill all space.

CYNICUS.—Now, how can you possibly know that you are infinite? that there is no space which you do not occupy?

GOD.—I do know it for a certainty.

CYNICUS.—Really? I feel equally certain that you cannot possibly know anything of the kind. In order to know that you fill all space you must have carefully measured yourself, and in measuring your infinite self you must have measured infinite space. When did you perform that infinite survey, pray? How did you know when you had reached your own limit, back or sides, or front, top or bottom? And how long did the investigation take?

GOD.—I shall not gratify your impertinence.

CYNICUS.—Then you confess that you, the pretended infinite, are cornered again, "cribbed, cabined, and confined" in a very small part of that infinite space, the entire of which you pretend to fill. I know, and you know, that you never did perform any self-measurement, or ever explored infinite space.

GOD.—How is it possible for your insolence to know that!

CYNICUS.—Gently, gently. You are growing ridiculously abusive again. But I will tell you how I know. An infinite thing could never be measured; no one can ever perform so much as one journey through infinite space, no matter at what rate he might travel. To put an infinite tape round your infinite self would require nothing short of infinite time. When did you begin? When did you finish?

GOD.—I shall not say.

CYNICUS.—Infinite time has not yet passed, nor will it ever run out. So I prove that you cannot have measured yourself—unless you are finite. If you really have performed self-measurement, if you really do know your own extent and dimensions, you must be infinitely less than infinite—a mere atom compared with the capacity of infinite space. Why, you could never send a thought through your substance if you were infinite; you could never know yourself, could form no conception of what you are like. If you really do know yourself, you must be extremely limited, and no nearer to being infinite than I am.

GOD.—I know that you are the most outrageously insolent wretch that ever lived! Begone, I say! Begone!

CYNICUS.—Why did you make me as I am? It is your own fault, if anybody's, if I do not agree with you. But I have a few more queries. Is there anything outside of you? Anything inside?

GOD.—I shall not reply.

CYNICUS.—Just as you please. If you were infinite, as your flatterers say, there could be nothing

outside of you ; all things must be in your interior ; and you could never succeed in expelling an atom of them. You may thank your stars that you are *not* infinite ; for, if you were, you could never turn, or twist, or move, or be moved, to the smallest extent. If you were infinite in being, you would be infinitely helpless, and I might pity you. You don't pity me, do you ?

GOD.—No. You are too cynically sarcastic to deserve pity. Begone !

CYNICUS.—I pass over your ungentlemanly remarks, God, and your rudeness too, for you cannot help yourself. By the way, what *are* you ? Do tell me.

GOD.—I am a spirit.

CYNICUS.—A spirit ! Do you mean wind ?—gas ?—Are you like a nebula, all gas ?—or are you alcohol ? Can you describe your substance, the stuff you are made of ? Has it any weight ? any consistency ? Are you like jelly, or what ? Have you anything material in your make up ? If so, what is it ?

GOD.—I have no body or parts, but am pure spirit.

CYNICUS.—How do you know ? Have you ever analysed yourself ? Ever tested or been tested for impurities ? Is your gas inflammable ? If I struck a match here to light my pipe, would you explode or burn ?

GOD.—Don't light a match here !

CYNICUS.—Have you always foreseen that I should or should not light a match ? It does not depend upon me. All depends upon whether it is scheduled in our program.

GOD.—It is not there.

CYNICUS.—Then you are safe so far. Is there any part of your person that sees, hears, feels, thinks, Can you see yourself, or feel yourself ? How ? You have no eyes, ears, hands, feet, bones, muscles, blood and blood-vessels' have you ? No face, no anything, so far as I can learn. I verily believe you are a perfect vacuum ! and in that sense infinite, infinitely vacuous and without bound or limit in any direction.

GOD.—You are getting worse and worse. I refuse to speak to you.

CYNICUS.—You never did nor ever do speak when you ought to. When people in danger and distress call to you, you never speak to them, never do anything for them. Of course, you cannot. You Almighty ! But, I say ! what's the matter, God ? Are you ill ? Can I do anything to help you in any way ? I should be sorry to see even a God suffer.

GOD.—Oh ! it's only a spasm.

CYNICUS.—Ah ! I remember the Bible says something about your being upset once. You were inordinately fond, at one time, you may remember, of smelling and eating flesh, of drink offerings, whole burnt offerings, the fat and the blood being your choice portions. But once they gave you too much and you complained bitterly, "I am full of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts ; I delight not in [I am heartily sick of] the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats." You had got a bad surfeit that time, God ; and yet you went one better a long time after, if you remember, when you demanded the blood of your only-begotten Son, and pursued the poor young God to death. That was a bad business, God, quite shocking ; but I fear you have never repented of it.

GOD.—The last word I shall say to you is, I am dreadfully sick of this interview and of your insolence ; besides, I now see the end of it.

CYNICUS.—Are you sick all over, God, or only in places ?—By Hercules ! he is going ! My logic has poisoned him ! God is gone !

"Eruptit, evasit, as Tully would phrase it ;
And no one can tell where to find his hic jacit."

—INGOLDSBY.

JOS. SYMES.

The Necessity of Faith.

IT is frequently made matter for reproach against Atheists and Secularists, by religious folks, that they are desirous of destroying faith. And faith, the Christian alleges, is the most necessary as well as the most inspiring of all the virtues that stimulate men and women to noble and strenuous action. Let me say before going any further, that I believe in the necessity of faith. If I were to yield so far to the conventions of the season as to choose a peg whereon to hang a New Year homily, I might do worse than select the title which appears at the head of this short article. For faith—in the sense of believing in *something*—is highly essential to every individual. Neither man nor woman can afford to allow himself or herself to drift aimlessly through life. Faith is indispensable to a full and useful life. But faith in what ? There, indeed, we may differ from our religious friends.

The three sister virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity, are among the most beautiful emanations of human nature, and bearing in mind the strongly acquisitive propensities of Christianity, one need not be surprised to find it claiming to be solely responsible for their origin and vitally interested in their perpetuation. The cool impudence with which Christianity arrogates to itself the honor of being the source and fountain of all the finer traits in the human character, is astounding. The other day, in the columns of a popular weekly, a well-known journalist who has religious leanings, quoted with approval Mr. Chesterton's assertion that Christianity, while it adopted the Pagan virtues of justice and temperance, did not adopt, but invented, the mystical virtues of faith, hope and charity. In the passage quoted, brief as it is, there is more than one invitation to hostile criticism. For one thing, strong objection may be taken to the word invented. The qualities indicated by faith, hope and charity, were not invented by Christianity, nor for that matter, by anything or anybody else. Only a loose or superficial thinker would speak of qualities that are assuredly an evolutionary growth as having been "invented." They are no more an invention than the sun is.

In the second place, I object to the application of the qualitative word "mystic" to such human feelings as faith, hope and charity. What is there mystical about faith in its natural sense ? What is there mystical in the faith of a mother in her son, the faith of a sister in her brother, the faith of husband and wife in each other ? What of the mystical attaches to the grand faith that men and women have in themselves and in humanity, which faith (and not the religious variety) has been the mainspring of all human progress ? Is there anything mystical about the unquenchable hope that sustains humanity under the most oppressive and depressing conditions, and enables them to see with prophetic eye the dawn of an era when life shall be a joyous thing for all the human race and not a burden and a mockery as it is for so many to-day ? What is there mystical in connection with the only charity that is worth anything, the charity that is the outcome of a real sense of human brotherhood and prompted by tender sympathy for the fallen and unfortunate amongst us ? There is no mystery whatever about the origin and development of faith, hope and charity. Whatever of the mystic is associated with these virtues in the popular mind, has been imparted to them by religion, which has always twisted to its own purposes the best aspirations and impulses of which human nature is capable, and then claimed credit for their birth, or at least for their continued existence.

It is something to find it admitted that Christianity did not "invent" the virtues justice and temperance, but merely adopted them from the Pagan code of ethics. Christians seldom have the grace or the honesty to acknowledge their indebtedness to Paganism for anything good or useful. And it must be said in this connection, as indeed it can

I speak the pass-word primeval, I give the sign of democracy,
By God ! I will accept nothing which all cannot have their
counterpart of on the same terms. —Walt Whitman.

be said of many other things that Christianity borrowed from Paganism, that Christianity has not much improved upon the ideals of justice and temperance it adopted from Pagan philosophy. Nor has it done so very much in the way of realising these ideals in practice. We are still waiting for justice to prevail, and still waiting for the people to become temperate. And though it may appear incredible or unaccountable to some people, the civilised portion of mankind is steadily losing all faith and hope in religion as being likely to materially aid in the attainment of these or any other desirable ideals.

Secularism does not seek to destroy the virtue of faith, but rather to humanise it and adapt it to practical uses. We seek, it is true, to destroy the foolish faith in, and reverence for, the unseen and the unknown; and we endeavor, of course, to demolish the absurd doctrines and creeds of ecclesiasticism. We hold that to retain or encourage faith in something manifestly untrue is absurd, if not something worse. For misplaced faith in the nightmare creeds of superstition we wish to substitute faith in something of more visible importance and more immediate benefit to the world's inhabitants. It is only faith of the erroneous and mischievous variety we are anxious to annihilate. A much broader and deeper and grander faith is necessary than any of the sects have dreamt of. So far are we from wishing to destroy faith that we consider it one of the most valuable assets any movement can possess. Faith in a cause creates enthusiasm for that cause, and faith does something of even greater importance than infuse an enthusiasm that may possibly be evanescent enough. Faith in the justice and the ultimate triumphant recognition of one's cause enables one to preserve an indomitable front in the face of all reverses and in defiance of all opposition. Faith enables one to carry on a given work with patient persistence even when progress is so slow as to be almost imperceptible. And the highly useful function of faith and hope in connection with the propaganda work of Freethought and Secularism, becomes apparent when we remember how gradual, in the nature of the case, our progress must be, and how disappointing at times the results must seem.

Our duty and our policy alike urge that we should cherish such extremely serviceable virtues as faith. But for the old orthodox faiths, the old creedal impossibilities, their day is done. The charge is made against Atheists that they don't want to believe. This charge is hurled at us as being in the nature of an aspersion. But so far as the old obsolescent dogmas and superstitions are concerned, we might frankly acquiesce in the charge. Because, why should we *want* to believe? Why should we want to believe in hell, for instance, or in the Trinity, until we have irrefragable proof of the truth of such doctrines? It will be quite time enough to accept disagreeable and absurd beliefs when we know them to be true.

GEO. SCOTT.

Correspondence.

WHAT IS ATHEISM?

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Should the correspondence upon the above subject, appearing in the *Freethinker*, result in the abandonment of the name "Atheist," self-applied by those who have no knowledge of, or belief in, any deity, it will have amply repaid for the space devoted to it. If Freethinkers generally refrained from so describing themselves, no surrender of any position would be involved. It neither offers a centre for attack nor a rallying point for defence. It is too vague—all things to all men. Every man defines it differently. Each different user has a different meaning. To some it means a devout believer in God—as instance its application to Bolingbroke, Paine and Voltaire. Others, again, dub all non-Christians Atheist. Sir Thomas Browne, in *Religio Medici*, almost convinces me that it is rightly applied to such as deny the existence or power of witches! And he means by

witches the ordinary British variety, such as used to be burned or drowned at the orders of British judges. If you deny the existence of witches, in whom he always believed, and whom he, at the time of writing, knew to exist, you are an Atheist, because witchcraft involved spiritual powers, and the denial of spiritual power is a denial of God. Sir Thomas had not the Biblical witches in mind. He had no need for the later discrimination between witches such as are to be found in "Holy Writ" and the vulgar or common variety such as are now found in country places—such as the pixies, who loved to play pranks upon travellers, men with the lucky and women with the unlucky eyes, of my native shire.

Is it wise to retain a name so confusing? Would not some word suggesting something of the nature of the bearer be more advantageous?

SOUTH DEVON.

TOLSTOI'S PHILOSOPHY.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In regard to Mr. Gerald Christian's letter in the *Freethinker* of December 23, referring to Professor York Powell's estimate of Tolstoi and your comment on it, I would rather like to say that, so far as I have read, Professor York Powell's opinion of Tolstoi seems to me to be just. I have before me *Life* by the Russian "philosopher," and a more incoherent book I have never read. Tolstoi, judging from this, appears to be a mystifying mystic—worse than Sir Oliver Lodge, which is saying much. Here is a specimen: "Man recognises the fact that he will only die when he has recognised the fact that he has never been born, that he always has existed, does exist, and will always exist." Shakespeare may not be impeccable, but I am certain he never wrote drivel like that. There are nearly three hundred pages of similar stuff. It is about time that such incoherencies were displaced by something intelligible, and bubble reputations pricked. I am thankful that we possess Freethinkers who, if less pretentious, can write sense. I thought your comment very much to the point and quite deserved.

J. A. REID.

FOR SECULAR EDUCATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The Union of Ethical Societies has decided to take the initiative in getting together a strong and quite representative committee to organise and conduct a systematic campaign in favor of Secular Education. A meeting will shortly be called to elect such a committee and to decide upon the plan of campaign to be followed. Meanwhile will all those who are willing to help in this work, either by voice, pen, or money, communicate with me without delay? It is very important that no time should be lost, and it is hoped to start work early in the New Year. The idea is to make the Committee as large as possible without endangering the principle of Secular Education for which it will stand. Notices of the preliminary meeting will be sent to those who inform me of their desire to attend.

HARRY SNELL, Union of Ethical Societies,
19 Buckingham-street, W.C.

Ye venerable Sages and holy Flamens, is there probability in your conjectures, truth in your stories, of another world beyond death, or are they all alike baseless visions and fabricated fables?—*Robert Burns*.

Whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to his own funeral drest in his shroud.—*Walt Whitman*.

I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool and composed before a million universes.—*Walt Whitman*.

Obituary.

IN MEMORY OF A GOOD WOMAN.—On Thursday morning, December 27, died Mrs. Sarah Jane Perkins, who was for many years one of the most devoted and useful members of the Leicester Secular Society. At one period or another, she had sung in the choir, served on the Committee, taught in the Sunday-school, assisted in the Sewing-circle, cooperated at social functions; and in innumerable ways and in a most unassuming, sincere and common-sense manner, she testified her faith in the Secular view of life. I gave the address at her funeral last Monday afternoon.—F. J. GOULD.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

LONDON.

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

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, 27 Romford-road, Stratford): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Do the Dead Live?"

COUNTRY.

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

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Milton Hall, Daulby-street): 7, H. Buxton, "The Year that is Past."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road): 6.30, W. Price Heywood, "Vivisection." With lantern illustrations.

PLYMOUTH RATIONALIST SOCIETY (Foresters' Hall, Octagon): 7, G. McCluskey, "Agnosticism."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7.30, Lecture Arrangements.

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