

# THE Freethinker

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*Everywhere, O Truth, dost thou give audience to all who ask counsel of thee, and at once answerest all, though on manifold matters they ask thy counsel. Clearly dost thou answer, though all do not clearly hear. All consult thee on what they will, though they hear not always what they will. He is thy best servant who looks not so much to hear that from thee which himself willeth, as rather to will that which from thee he heareth.*—ST. AUGUSTINE.

## Jesus in London.

A GOOD many years ago the London Secular Federation, of which I was president, found the means to run Mr. Hubert Bland as a Secular Education candidate in Finsbury. Of course the means were raised through the *Freethinker*. I do not know that Mr. Bland has stood for anything since. He made a tolerable fight then, and had the assistance of Mr. Bernard Shaw and other Fabians; but he was a long way off winning a seat, and I believe (at that time) he was rather hindered than helped by his Socialist opinions. Mrs. Bland appeared more than once in public on her husband's behalf. She used to write democratic verses then, with a freethought tinge, in the *Weekly Dispatch*—one of the best weekly papers of those days, under the able editorship of Dr. Hunter. I remember one election meeting in particular. It was at Claremont Hall. Mrs. Bland recited some of her own verses, and some who listened to her must have fancied that the end of most of the evils in the world ought to come in a few years. The lady was very fervid, and her progressive ideas were very thorough-going. Since then, however, she has kept her husband company in illustrating Newman's saying (at the end of that most wonderful passage in the *Essay on Development*) that "here below to live is to change, and to live much is to change often." Mr. Bland writes, for the usual consideration, the sort of stuff we had to criticise so severely a few weeks ago; and Mrs. Bland (as E. Nesbit) has been responsible for Jingo verses, and Empire verses, and Loyal verses, and Society verses; and now she is trying her hand at what we may call Christian Socialist verses. Mr. Hall Caine and Miss Marie Corelli have proved that there is money in the Christian legend for enterprising fictionists, and Miss E. Nesbit (Mrs. Bland) is apparently trying her own luck in the same direction this Christmas-tide.

We have received from Mr. Fifield, the publisher, a copy of *Jesus in London*, by E. Nesbit, with seven pictures by Spencer Pryse. Of the pictures we may say that they show a certain power, although they are mostly sentimental and meretricious. Certainly they help to give size to the publication. Thirteen verses of eight lines each, even with the title and

signature thrown in, make up a poor display for the price of sevenpence nett. Perhaps the figure is calculated in this way: sixpence for the pictures, and a penny for the verses. But even at "two bawbees" they are not cheap.

The thirteen verses are not cheap at a penny because there is nothing in them. They run along smoothly enough, for Miss Nesbit has been practising the art of versification for more years than I care to count in the case of a lady, and must have acquired some technical skill. But whoever looks for anything more, in the present instance, will be disappointed.

How cheap is the very title! Ever since that original enthusiast, Mr. W. T. Stead, wrote *If Christ Came to Chicago* (which I never heard of his doing), we have been pestered with Jesus here, and Jesus there, and Jesus "all over the shop." Why on earth cannot they leave the poor young man alone? He was buried—so they say—nearly two thousand years ago; why is he not allowed to rest in peace? Why is he made to serve the turn of professional writers at this time of day? It is sad—really *sad*—to be buried like Mr. Druce, and be trotted round, after the lapse of sixty generations, like the Duke of Portland. The Royal Humane Society ought to interfere.

Of course Jesus is not coming to London any more than he came to Chicago. He was expected when Paul wrote, he has been expected a hundred times since, and he is no nearer arriving. "How long, O Lord, how long?" And the answer is, "For ever and ever. Amen."

But let me keep the lady poet no longer waiting. Here is her first verse:—

"If Jesus came to London,  
Came to London to-day,  
He would not go to the West End,  
He would come down our way;  
He'd talk with the children dancing  
To the organ out in the street,  
And say He was their big Brother—  
And give them something to eat."

Judicious readers will see that the poetry isn't up to much. One is reminded of Touchstone's criticism of Orlando's verses:—"I'll rime you so, eight years together, dinners and suppers and sleeping hours excepted." I do not mean that the lady is incapable of doing better. I take it that she thinks she is writing down, like a good upper-middle class Socialist, to the pathetic intellectual level of the working classes and "the poor."

But all that is by the way. Let us look at what the verse says. Jesus would not go to the West-end. Why not? When he came before he came to save sinners, and if he came on the same mission again the West-end would keep his hands full. Father Vaughan understands this point better than Miss Nesbit does. He thunders at the West-end sinners. Why? Because it is good business for a

popular preacher. Even in a democratic age the vices of lords and ladies are so interesting. Who cares for the vices of rowdy Bill and drunken Sal? The very servant-girl in her attic, reading her penny novelette, demands a hero at least six feet high, and an undoubted aristocrat; and even the villain must be distinguished and called nothing less than Reginald or Algernon. Better still, if he is a designing duke. That is the acme of rapture.

Nor is it always children who dance to the organ in the street. Often it is young ladies of the "lower orders," as they used to say; and the portentous gravity with which they go through their performance is, to the evolutionist, an illustration of the truth that dancing was originally a religious exercise. Now if Jesus talked with *them*, especially while they were busy, he would learn something in the way of "language." And if he were the gawky figure depicted in Spencer Pryse's second illustration, it would be a high old time for the young ladies—what they would call "a dye aght."

Why should Jesus give the children, or the East End ladies, or the poor generally, something to eat? I do not read of his doing that sort of thing habitually in the Gospels. He fed the multitude once, but that was at a religious picnic in the country, not in the mean streets of a big town. Moreover, it cost him very little. He produced the provisions by a miracle. He had merely to say "Be!" and they were. And surely if he can feed the hungry as cheaply as that it is a great pity that he does not come to London in reality instead of in Miss Nesbit's verse.

Here is the second stanza:—

"He wouldn't go to the mansions  
Where the charitable live,  
He'd come to the tenement houses  
Where we ain't got nothing to give.  
He'd come so kind and so homely,  
And feed us with love and bread,  
And He'd tell us how to behave,  
And then we'd mind what He said."

How the lady patronises these poor people! They lack the Vere de Vere manners of Miss Nesbit's social circle—and I don't suppose for a moment that *she* goes near their tenement houses, or attempts the terrible task of teaching them how to behave. All that is to be left to Jesus—when he comes. In the meantime I may be allowed to smile at the lady's condescension. It might do her good to reflect that when it comes to "behavior" the classes are sometimes abominably worse than the masses. The veneration of social etiquette is one thing; the substantial attitude towards other people is quite another.

One may add that Miss Nesbit's ideal treat for the poor is peculiarly English. First a feed, and then a sermon. All the rest of her poem is simply preaching; a descant on the old text of "Woe unto you rich!" A strong text, yet a weak text; it sounds so grand, and it means so little. For more than eighteen hundred years it has been supposed to have dropped from the lips of God. Yet the rich and the poor are still here—precisely as they were, and some say worse than they were, all that time ago. "Blessed be ye poor!" amused the multitude. "Woe unto you rich!" never made the wealthy turn pale. Certainly it never made them unload. On that point Ingersoll was exactly right. Just as he was right in saying that, in Christian countries, people ride to heaven in carriages, while those who travel to hell go on foot.

I can hardly think that Miss Nesbit means this poem seriously. I fancy she is writing for the market. She has too much intelligence, after all, to imagine that the problem of poverty is to be settled, or human society in any way improved, by unlimited cackle about Christ. The world has had any quantity of it—and what good has it done? Those who indulge in it—mainly for a living—don't mean it; and it wouldn't be of any use if they did. Good intentions are well; nothing can be done without them; but they are not enough; hard thinking is necessary; and that, in turn, must be based upon profound investigation.

G. W. FOOTE.

## The Socialist Attitude Towards Religion.

A NUMBER of letters have reached me concerning my article in the *Freethinker* for November 17. It has evidently roused the interest of some Socialists, as was intended. One marked feature of the letters received is that none of them challenge the accuracy of the position taken up. Even Mr. Germany, in his letter to last week's paper, agrees with them in this; but all put in the plea that it would be unwise for Socialists to add to their difficulties by carrying on an Atheistic propaganda. But I never suggested that they should. My article was written solely in view of the too great readiness of some Socialists to disown any connection with Atheism. I hardly think that, had someone accused Socialists of being religious, there would have been the same haste to repudiate the association. Nay, the statement is made, and I have not yet met with any official declaration that Socialism has nothing to do with religion. I quite agree with Mr. Germany that my reasoning would prove Tariff Reform or Free Trade to be Atheistic. It was my aim to prove this, and I may congratulate myself on the matter so far. It is, indeed, my position that the real work and worth of life is independent of religion, and therefore Atheistic.

The publication of a little book on *Socialism*, by Mr. J. Ramsay Macdonald, M.P., will help me to drive this lesson still further home, if possible. With Mr. Macdonald's treatment of the economic side of Socialism I have, in this place, no concern. It is, as the *Athenæum* said, of an eminently British and respectable kind, and may therefore suit the mass of the electorate, for whose benefit it is doubtless written. But there is one section of the book entitled "Socialism and Religion," that may be fitly dealt with in these columns.

Mr. Macdonald opens with the curious statement that the "occasional" association of Socialist and anti-Christian propaganda is due to several causes, one being that minorities herd together, although were they in the majority they would have nothing in common. The Socialist, he says, finds in the Gospels a marvellous support for his economic and political proposals, while much of what is regarded as anti-Christian Socialist doctrine is only an attack upon the Churches, and is inspired by the ethics of Christ's teaching.

Now, bearing in mind the number of the creators of modern Socialism who have been professed Freethinkers, the proportion of Socialist leaders in this country who, until yesterday, were also Freethinkers, with the general association of Freethought and Socialism on the Continent, "occasional" is a word that has a distinct, even though unconscious, humor about it. After that one is not surprised to learn that the Socialist finds "marvellous support" in documents that ignore the family, have no theory whatever of the State, while dilating on the blessings of poverty and the beauties of non-resistance. To gain support from such a quarter is more than marvellous—it is miraculous.

The statement that the "occasional" association of Freethought with Socialism would, under other conditions, disappear, is one that admits of an easy retort. Were Socialists in the majority it is tolerably certain that the association between Christians and Socialists would soon be non-existent. It is because they are in a minority that thousands of Socialists suppress their Freethought and form an alliance with Church or Chapel. Mr. Macdonald does admit that "some leading Socialists" have attacked religion as one of the weapons in the hands of the rich used for keeping the poor quiet, but explains that as due to Parliament voting money for the support of the Church, to the fact that the parson was the friend of the squire, and to the conduct of the Episcopacy. Truly a *political* way of putting the matter. The Church! the parson! the bishop! As though the Nonconformist has been in truth any better than the

others! But it happens to be the Chapel, not the Church, vote that Mr. Macdonald has his eye on.

One wonders whether Mr. Macdonald really believes that the opposition of the great Socialists of the past to religion was based only on parliamentary grants of money? If so, he is doing them a sad injustice, and labelling them "Fool" quite unnecessarily. That the State supported the Church and received support in turn was obvious. But this only led the way to the perception of the deeper truth that by their very nature religious beliefs act most powerfully to keep things as they are, as against what they might become. They saw that from the savage up to civilised times religious fears had been utilised by ruling classes to keep others in subjection; they saw that, by a concentration of attention on another world, the affairs of this world were conveniently neglected; above all they realised that superstition developed and perpetuated a type of mind that was fatal to a social order that should be at once stable and progressive. Mr. Macdonald must really not do these men the injustice of imagining that they saw no deeper into matters than his description would lead one to believe.

The identification of Socialism and Atheism, we are told, is futile:—

"Socialism has no more to do with a man's religion than it has to do with the color of his hair. Socialism deals with secular things, not with ultimate beliefs. There are Christian Socialists and there are Secularist Socialists. There are Christian organisations which exist to prove that all Christians ought to be Socialists. ....And there are and have been Secularist leaders like Mr. Bradlaugh and Mr. Herbert Spencer who have preached the incompatibility of Secularism and Socialism. As a political and economic theory Socialism has just as much and no more to do with religion as any other theory of the relationship between the State and the individual; whilst as a moral theory it is neither religious nor anti-religious."

To use the writer's own words, this is futile—and some of it is not true. It is not true that either Mr. Bradlaugh or Mr. Spencer ever argued that Secularism was incompatible with Socialism. Both of them argued against Socialism, but that is a very different matter. It certainly never entered the heads of either of them to argue that Socialism was wrong because it was incompatible with certain other beliefs. It is futile because the question of whether particular Socialists are Christians, Atheists, Jews, or Mohammedans does not arise, but whether Socialism in itself is essentially religious or essentially Atheistic. This question is certainly not disposed of by saying certain Socialists are either one or the other. Nor is it answered by the further remark that "Nonconformity has trained our speakers in its pulpits, and has fashioned our devoted workers in its Sunday-schools." Again, I may observe in passing, here is an obvious appeal to the Nonconformist vote, otherwise something in this direction might be said of the Church. Still, in a professedly Christian community the majority of workers in any movement must have come out of Christian circles, and by the same reasoning one might argue that the Secular party is profoundly religious because so many of its workers were reared in Christian circles. Religion, at all events, seems to have played the very deuce with Mr. Macdonald's logic.

I need not again state my reasons for believing that Socialism is essentially an Atheistic conception of life. All I need add is, that Mr. Macdonald says nothing that could lead to a change of opinion. And I venture to add that neither thoughtful Socialists nor intelligent Christians really believe that Socialism can leave a man's religion untouched, or that it has no more connection with it than has the color of his hair. For Socialism is not a mere parliamentary measure like a Notification of Diseases Act. It is a theory of social reconstruction. If it is ever to exist as a completed thing, it involves a far-reaching modification—if not a revolution—in the general conception of our rights, duties, and responsibilities. It aims at basing social life upon a conception of social service, and must, therefore, modify consider-

ably our notions as to the general nature of morality. And does any reasonable human being imagine that all this can be brought about without it having a very profound influence upon people's religious beliefs, and also upon the place and function of religion in social life? Does Mr. Macdonald believe it can? Does he, or anyone else, believe that Christians are stupid enough to believe that the Socialist program can be realised without seriously affecting religion? Christians know that it will, Socialists know that it will; what many of them lack is the courage to say that it will, as was said by their braver and clearer-sighted predecessors.

The argument might easily be carried further. Socialists believe that the state of morals and religion is always more or less—generally more than less—a reflection of the prevailing social and economic conditions. They argue that any attempt to modify morals and religion must be preceded by an alteration in the economic conditions. Nay, Secularist speakers have been attacked, over and over again, on the distinct grounds that they were wasting time; and, if they would only work so as to modify economic conditions (of course, in the direction of Socialism), the religious question would settle itself. Now, we are informed that Socialism really has nothing to do with religion—with the implication that it is favorable to religion rather than the reverse.

Why is this? Whence this sudden friendliness for religious beliefs? I believe the reason to be that Socialism is now playing a hand in the political game. So long as it was a teaching only, so long as it confined its efforts to propaganda, it was content to deliver its message and leave it to experience and reflection to confirm it or otherwise. But with political aims, and in pious, hypocritical England, it judges it to be expedient to play to prejudice to secure votes; and, as the majority of voters are professedly religious, to assure these that it is quite a mistake to suppose that, either directly or indirectly, it is inimical to religious beliefs. And, further, as a political accident makes it more expedient to soothe the Nonconformists—the most hypocritical and most bigoted section of Christians—while slaps at Churchmen may be permitted, compliments must be paid to their opponents.

It is a great mistake. Church and Chapel may use Socialism for their own purposes. Socialists will never be able to return the compliment with permanent profit. Honesty really is the best policy—even for political Socialism. And it would be a really greater gain for Socialism to be defeated at the polls, backed by an intelligent minority that fully understood the all-round bearing of the principles they were advocating, than carried to a temporary victory by an unintelligent, and therefore an ineffective, majority.

C. COHEN.

### Truth and Dogma.

TRUTH is a word with which clever people may conjure at will and befool the unthinking mob. The world is crowded at this moment with the miserable dupes of shrewd charlatans, each of whom offers his own nostrums as eternal truths, but characterises those of all the others as damnable heresies. The multitudes are always ignorant and curious and gullible, and, as a consequence, able quackery never lacks popularity. In whatever sphere knowledge is scarce, there pretentious imposture abounds. This is the reason why mountebanks are more numerous and more successful in the religious world than anywhere else. Religion concerns itself with so many subjects on which the light of knowledge has never shone, that ambitious persons are tempted to set up as heaven-appointed teachers and guides therein. You will find them at almost every street corner, and our public parks resound with their discordant notes; and every one of them pretends to be in possession of the very truth of God, and Divinely

commissioned to proclaim it to his benighted fellow-beings. These unofficial religious instructors are commonly condemned as quacks. Now, in medicine, quacks are those practitioners who are not duly qualified, but who pretend to a knowledge and skill they do not possess. But is it possible in theology also to draw a line of demarcation between qualified and unqualified practitioners? Or are we bound to declare that all theological teachers are either conscious or unconscious charlatans? Are not all the so-called truths of religion blind dogmas, insusceptible of any sort of verification or proof?

This line of thought is suggested by a leading article in one of the religious weeklies under this title: "Doom of Dogma; Dawn of Truth." We hold that the title itself is fundamentally misleading, because, of necessity, theology always has dealt, and always must deal, exclusively in unproven dogmas. In this respect, all theologies are alike; and it is their universal characteristic that they do not hesitate to present their respective dogmas as truths. It may be readily granted that many theologians are genuine seekers after truth; but, at the end of the search, all they have to show is a collection of manufactured theories, conjectures, speculations, not so many discovered truths. The writer of the article in question very truly observes that "the histories of all religious systems which have arisen, are marked by series of departures from the faith, and gradual or rapid, but sure, degeneration"; but he does not seem to be aware that the explanation of the fact is to be found in the consideration that almost every religion is a *faith* rather than a *truth*. He also states that "Christianity did not conquer the world, but that the world seems to have conquered Christianity"; but the real significance of this phenomenon does not seem to have occurred to him. Christianity failed to subdue the world because it had nothing to recommend itself save a mass of beliefs. "Doctrine," the writer continues, "has always been regarded of first importance, notwithstanding the clear, unmistakable teaching of the Redeemer, that conformity with the will of God should be man's first aim." Here, again, we are face to face with a hopeless confusion of thought. Why, the phrase, "conformity with the will of God," implies a whole body of divinity. The existence of God is only a dogmatic assertion, not by any means an established truth. It is all very well to speak of the "pure and simple worship of the one true God," in which Mohammed as well as Jesus believed; but the "one true God" is only a creation of dogmatic theology, as is also his will.

The article referred to teaches that "at the base of all religions, however varied the superstructures may be, there is found the same root idea, the same recognition of a Supreme Being, and the same Divine Person is meant, whether he is known by the name of Divine Architect, Truth, Light, Allah, God, or Yavoh." That sounds plausible enough; but, in reality, it is sheer theological dogmatism or philosophical speculation. After all said and done, God is still undiscovered, still remains merely an object of belief and academical discussion. We are still in the night of dogma, and have discerned not a single sight of the dawn of truth.

Our writer scorns the idea that full knowledge of the truth is attainable only by the priestly cult; but we venture to affirm that the knowledge of the truth of theology is not attainable by anybody. It is the essential unknowableness of God that accounts for the multiplicity of deities. The gods of different religions and of different periods of history vary not simply in name, but in nature, disposition, will, and character. All historical gods have been pure metaphysical inventions. Whether behind them all there be the "one true God," or a "Supreme Being," no man can tell.

It may be true that orthodoxy is on the down grade as regards numerical strength, and is making frantic efforts to regain its position by the incorporation of "cinematograph entertainments," "animated pictures," "smoking concerts," "diabolo exhibitions,"

and even "dramatic performances"; but the article's expression of this truth is vitiated by a fatal fallacy. *The New Theology, as such, is not one whit more popular than the Old.* It is boasted that the City Temple, in all its history, was never so thronged as it is just now under the New Theology; but the same thing is true of the Westminster Chapel under the Old. It is immaterial what brand of theology is offered for acceptance; it is the man in the pulpit who draws or repels a congregation. No preacher, ancient or modern, has ever attracted such vast audiences as the late Dr. Dowie did for years in his huge Tabernacle in Chicago.

But where is the "dawn of truth" to be seen? Certainly not in the Churches, orthodox or heterodox. Orthodoxy is pursuing a policy of *adoption*, and the New Theology is resorting to *adaptation*; but in neither case is theology itself any more believable and popular than it was before. The Old Theology defies science, despises worldly knowledge, but adopts various accessories in order to win the masses, while the New vainly endeavors to adapt itself to science by suggesting various compromises, and graciously takes modern social movements under its wings, also in order to curry favor with the so-called democracy; but the New is theologically no less dogmatic than the Old, while both alike swear by the supernatural. Where, then, we ask again, is the dawn of truth?

Dogmatism, when it concerns itself about ascertained facts, is a plain duty. The man who knows cannot help being cocksure. The scientist is nothing if not dogmatic when describing his own discoveries, and we would severely condemn him were he otherwise. It is not dogmatism, nor dogma, that we oppose, but the indulging in dogmatism, and the canonisation of dogmas, concerning a region where all knowledge is impossible. Neither God immanent nor God transcendent, neither the God within nor the God beyond the universe, is in any sense or degree an object of knowledge; and we claim that to speak of him as if he were, as all theologians do, is not only an abuse of language, but an unforgivable insult to our own reasoning faculties. All knowledge is natural and all truths known to us are secular. Listen to this:—

"The New must bring with it from the Old the sense of dependence upon the Divine for inspiration, guidance, and sustenance upon this almost trackless human ocean. The human travels upon a plane which is parallel with the Divine, and yet, as man acknowledging the fact walks humbly with his God, he is gradually drawn upward, his ideal rises higher, his character becomes more ennobled, until finally, he is merged into the full glory of the Divine, and his destiny is accomplished."

That extract shows clearly to what contradictions and follies the theological habit of speaking of the unknown and unknowable in terms of the known inevitably leads. The writer describes the human ocean as "almost trackless," and then, in the next breath, states that the "human travels upon a plane parallel with the Divine." If the first statement is true the second must be false. As a matter of fact, neither is true in the sense intended. We do not, we cannot, know that we are travelling upon a plane parallel with the Divine; but if we did, our path would be no longer trackless, nor would we need any further guidance than that knowledge alone would supply. We do not, we cannot, know that it is our destiny to be finally "merged into the full glory of the Divine." All we know is that we shall die and cease to be active members of the human race. Death is the limit beyond which knowledge cannot go. We know absolutely nothing of any other world and life than the present ones. The other-worldism recommended by theology is unnatural, abnormal, harmful.

The lesson which we should learn from all this is, that both dogma and truth, to be of any genuine use, must be of this world alone; that truth is gained only as the reward of diligent search; and that nothing is more foolish than to dogmatise on matters that lie beyond the scope of knowledge.

J. T. LLOYD.

### Some of Moncure D. Conway's Thoughts.

[As many papers are hiding the late Moncure D. Conway's freethought, and some are even pretending that he was a sort of true believer, we have determined to print a selection of strong passages from a volume of *Lessons for the Day*, published only a week or two before his rather sudden death. His Preface to the volume is dated September, 1907.]

THE god of the Established Church ranks highest because he is golden; the Dissenters' god, the Unitarian god, the Jewish god, find respect in the order of the wealth of their worshippers. No argument to prove their existence is ever used newer than those which were used, and broken down, sixteen centuries ago. And, finally, we have reached the period when the conventionalised deities and dogmas excite ridicule.

The Rev. Mr. Shoobred lately related his visit to a temple of Kali, in India, and how he pulled the goddess's nose, saying to the amazed natives: "Now, if she is a deity, why does she not strike me dead for such an indignity?" Possibly the Rev. Mr. Shoobred is at this moment horrifying his Baptist congregation with the immortal myth of the English infidel taking out his watch and giving Jehovah five minutes to strike him dead.

Who are those that a nation must propitiate before it can take any forward step? The gods. They are the opposition that is never vanquished.

A Christianity whose deity does not interfere with the laws of nature or with the government of the world is only a kind of deism.

Of all men the most needy invalid is the man who has caught orthodoxy so badly that he is possessed with a desire to injure everybody who has not the same disease. The great mission of Freethought is to save that man, to restore him to health; and Freethought can afford to be patient with him.

The revival of intolerance has brought out the ugly fact that Freethinkers themselves are not quite beyond giving up somebody as a scapegoat to the conventional Azael. There are plenty of Freethinkers in Parliament, but not one remonstrates against any slander or curse poured upon the outlawed member for Northampton [Bradlaugh]. The University College is the most godless college in the world; its professors are mainly Freethinkers; but with three exceptions they quietly give up two ladies [Mrs. Besant and Miss Bradlaugh] connected with the freethinking organisation, to the fury of the gods who deny them the educational advantages of that institution. The eminent Freethinkers of the country have, indeed, been somewhat moved by the exceptionally cruel treatment of scapegoats sent into the stony desert of Holloway Gaol [the *Freethinker* prosecution] but not enough to demand their release in such tones as the Government would have to obey. And we often hear people who hold the same principles eager to disclaim all connection with these more radical assailants of popular errors.

We have advanced to a period of the world when an idea without a people is as powerless as a general without an army. Where in the past it required many centuries to incarnate the idea, henceforth we must look to the quickened hearts of the million to realise it by their million eyes and hands.....Cultivated thinkers are sometimes alarmed at the signs of intellectual and moral movement among the masses. Such signs are sometimes rude. The rebellion of a populace against ancient errors is apt to show itself in ridicule that seems irreverent when not in a scorn that is bitter and biting. But, in truth, the fountain of tears is close to the fountain of laughter. There is nothing more healthy in the radicalism and scepticism of the people than their humor and laughter.

The chief power of established error lies in its hereditary control of the great social ceremonies of life. It presides at the baptismal font, at the marriage altar, at the grave; when its hold upon these epochs of family life is loosened it will fail. And that time will come when all liberal men and women are perfectly consistent in life and in death, resolutely refusing to have their children subjected to an ancient exorcism, to pronounce the false formulas of a sacramental marriage, or to permit over their dead bodies the rites and conjurations of superstition.

The weakness of the orthodox position is that the old vision has gone down, and that what it defends so furiously is a

fading afterglow. Who believes in personal immortality? In words, many; in reality, few. How do these believers weep and wail when their dear ones go to the bosom of Jesus! How hard they try to escape that speculative bliss!

So let us live heart-whole in our thought, our work, child-like in our freedom from anxiety for the future, maternal in our devotion to every cause of truth, manly in our toil for man; and be sure death will be swallowed up in the victory we shall forsee for our race by having already won it in our lives.

The freethinker has also a Lord in the imperishable life of his species. In that Lord he lives, and his body yields up the spirit of its life to Humanity. His works do follow him. His thought, which appealed to a sure future, is caught up in the great woof of human aspiration, woven into the tissues which shall feed and clothe humanity, developed with growing reason, and made into something far higher than his brain or hand could achieve. He need not dread death.

The only paradise of man is happiness. A thousand heavens could do no more than make people happy. The happiness is attained by the satisfaction of all human aspirations—all the hungers and thirsts of body, heart, and mind. The rounds of the ladder are all the definite conditions of external nature, corresponding to the definite powers of human nature, by fulfilling which man arrives at the goal of happiness. And the angels that assist him in this ascent are the angels of art, science, taste, culture, and human love.

### Acid Drops.

No doubt the Visiting Justices at Parkhurst Prison are all good Christians; and, considering the character of their holy book, the Bible, we are not exactly astonished at their sentence on Horace Rayner for attempting to commit suicide. We desire to register our protest against it, however, as absolutely monstrous. They ordered him fourteen days' solitary confinement with bread and water diet. The young man's original crime—as to which opinion is a good deal divided—has nothing whatever to do with the present case. He is helpless in gaol, and entirely at the mercy of the prison authorities, who are at once his accusers, judges, and executioners. That very fact should make them doubly considerate. But what consideration is there in this treatment of Horace Rayner? He tried to kill himself after shooting William Whiteley; he is known to have a strong suicidal tendency, and has to be carefully watched; he is in the midst of miserable conditions that might prompt any man to put an end to his existence; and is it any wonder that he made a serious attempt upon his life? The doctors patched him up to stand his trial and take his sentence; now, after nearly bleeding to death, the poor wretch is patched up again; and all that the Visiting Justices can think of doing for the desolate creature is to shut him up in solitude like a wild beast, with nothing but bread to eat and water to drink, for a whole fortnight. Is this the way to make him in love with his life? Or what is its object? Have these Visiting Justices any idea at all except that horrible one that "the prison regulations must be enforced"? Presently the unhappy young man will succeed in attempting suicide, and then they will find that the prison regulations cannot be enforced.

What would a gentleman do in such circumstances? Some people will ask, What is a gentleman? Well, some people will ask what is an elephant; and if one cannot accurately define an elephant, one may say with John Morley "I know one when I see it." We have all got a fair idea of what a gentleman is. Now a gentleman has always a certain pride about him—some call it self-respect. Beating a child, for instance, is a thing no gentleman would do; not merely because it is wrong in itself, or because it hurts and degrades the child, but chiefly because it degrades him, and he does not choose to assist deliberately at his own degradation. Those Visiting Justices at Parkhurst Prison degraded themselves by their inhuman treatment of a person who was absolutely in their power. They may think themselves gentlemen, but they are mistaken—they are only Christians.

What is the chaplain doing in Parkhurst Prison? Does he recollect those noble words in the Prayer Book about "prisoners and captives, and all who are desolate and oppressed"? The chaplain asks God to have mercy upon them. Has he no mercy himself? His is a "spiritual"

function. Could he not wave off the Visiting Justices, with their solitary confinement and their bread and water, and take that suffering soul in hand himself, and pour the balm of sympathy into its awful wounds? The man's crime is nothing to the purpose; it was the crime that placed him in the chaplain's way. We verily believe that any Free-thinker, taken at hazard from any part of the country, would have done better than this man of God.

American clergymen have been denouncing President Roosevelt for allowing "In God we trust" to be knocked off the new gold coins. They never wincd when he called Thomas Paine a "filthy little Atheist."

Right Rev. Arthur Grange Riddell, D.D., third Roman Catholic Bishop of Northampton, left £13,647. We wonder if Peter let him in.

England is the happy hunting-ground of religious cranks and adventurers. Every now and then we hear of a child preacher starting up on the soul-saving business. For a time they do well, but they peg out in time; for the boy preacher becomes an unmistakable man at last, and the girl preacher an unmistakable woman, and then they cease to interest the peculiar public they attracted. A girl preacher, named Frances Bradley Storr, only thirteen years of age, is carrying on a three weeks' mission in London, after doing famously in Scotland, Yorkshire, and Lancashire. "On the platform," a newspaper says, "her delivery and gestures are somewhat stilted and studied, and show evident traces of preparation under instruction from older and more experienced speakers." We know what *that* means. Yet she "aroused great enthusiasm amongst the people in the crowded (Holloway) Hall." Obviously that part of London was included in Carlyle's "mostly fools."

The *Daily Chronicle* concludes that there is something wrong that can turn a child of tender years into a prodigy. We venture to say there is something criminal about such a performance. What on earth can such a child know of gambling, drinking, sweating, or social evils? Consider the impertinence of a child, that ought to be amusing herself with her dolls, exhorting mothers to guard the footsteps of their children. We do not believe for a moment that such language could come from a child's lips apart from careful preparation. She is obviously being exploited in the interests of a creed to which nothing is sacred so long as its interests are to be served. At the side of such a prostitution of child-life, infanticide is a respectable practice; and there should be enough decent people in London churches to set their faces against such ghastly exhibitions as these.

Mr. Rattenbury and Mr. Campbell are both believers in Socialism because it, in their opinion, embodies the teaching of Jesus. Mr. R. W. Perks, on the contrary, is quite assured that Socialism can "find no foundation in the teaching of Christ." What a delightful thing Christianity is! Everybody finds therein exactly what he wants. All Christians agree in basing their beliefs upon Jesus—until they begin to give reasons; and then the fur begins to fly.

Mr. Rattenbury calls on "all Christian believers in Socialism to dissociate themselves from any system of social reform which would rob the world of religion." We cannot say we are sorry to hear this, since it may have the effect of causing those Socialists who are not Christians to realise what it is the Chapel patronage of Socialism means. Mr. Rattenbury also says: "Both the Bible and man's experience declare it is the fool which says there is no God." Mr. Rattenbury alone is enough to prove that the Bible and human experience does not exhaust the various kinds of fool by such a description.

Quite a large muster of religionists were present in Westminster Abbey the other day to consider the question of Sunday observance. Nonconformists, Roman Catholics, and Episcopalians met in perfect amity and exchanged congratulations that so many Christians would meet without a fight. It was a nice, happy, family party, and was not without its moral. The only occasion on which Christians show real unanimity is when they are met to devise ways and means for coercing other people.

The Rev. Dr. Fairbairn is of opinion that there is no freer place in the world than the pulpit. Well, it all depends upon circumstances. If a man is once in the pulpit, and he is strong enough to *command*, it is doubtless difficult to remove him—that is, without creating a publicity which the religious world has learned to dread. On the other hand,

the man of average ability unquestionably finds himself bound to please his congregation in his presentation of doctrines, and so refrain from giving what many of them know to be the truth. Dr. Fairbairn must have forgotten the many cases in which preachers have suffered for plain speaking in the pulpit; and even in connection with the New Theology there have been reports of ministers suffering because of their connection with it. We fancy Mr. Campbell could give Dr. Fairbairn some information on this point.

Is it not a little curious, if the pulpit is so free, that the Christian public is not more liberal? Now, it is a simple fact that the practice of boycotting is with Christians, taking into consideration altered circumstances, as active as ever. Heresy is excluded from public halls, its literature banned, and its representatives misrepresented. The *Freethinker*, to take a special case, is kept out of hundreds of rate supported libraries because its views are objectionable to Christians. Every now and again we get reports of news-agents who are threatened with loss of custom because they display it for sale. Are we to imagine that the people who thus work against the free expression of opinion would hesitate to suppress it altogether if they had the chance? No less a person than Dr. R. F. Horton stated publicly that unbelievers ought to be ostracised from human society. And are we to believe that the congregations who are bigoted enough to act thus, or the pulpit intolerant enough to preach in this manner, together maintain an institution where thought is freer than it is anywhere else in the world? Besides, how comes it that the pulpit is the last place from which one hears the truth about religious beliefs? If Dr. Fairbairn is right only one of two theories will fit the faiths. Either the clergy are all fools and cannot see the truth, or they are all incurably dishonest, and will not preach it when they do.

The Rev. David Smith, conductor of the *British Weekly* Correspondence Column, tells an inquirer that the teachings of modern science are in full harmony with those of the Bible. "The Law of Evolution," he says, "to which science has at last attained, is a tardy recognition of God's providential method, and it was formulated by our Lord." But that statement is absolutely false. Christianity is not an evolutionary scheme, but a special provision for the restoration of a fallen race. What it offers to do for man is, not to evolve him, but to bring him back to where he used to be long ago. Scientists see neither providence nor method in evolution, but the blind operation of unconscious forces. In point of fact, Christianity and the theory of evolution are inherently irreconcilable.

Mr. Smith virtually admits that in his reply to another correspondent when he says that, on the evolutionary hypothesis, Christ cannot be accounted for. Affirming the sinlessness and absolute perfection of Christ's character, he says: "His unchallenged supremacy is an incontrovertible demonstration that his life is no natural outgrowth of humanity, but an intrusion from a higher sphere." Here we have theology in its true character, or in all its silliness; but nothing is clearer than that it stands in direct antagonism to the central doctrine of modern science. Mr. Smith had better stick to the absurdities of theology, and leave science alone.

Dr. Robertson Nicoll has just visited the great Jewish school near Petticoat-lane, and has to concede that the Jewish children are in many respects vastly superior to Christian children. What price Christianity now?

We mentioned last week that the *Daily News* obituary notice of Mr. Moncuro D. Conway never alluded to the fact that he was a Free-thinker. We were not surprised, therefore, to see a letter in our contemporary, two days afterwards, praising its "highly interesting memoir" and adding some fresh nonsense. The writer of this letter was Martin R. Rouse, who dated from Beckenham. This gentleman related "an incident of Divine intervention" in Conway's career, and we will give the incident in the writer's own words:—

"The late Dr. Frederick Tomkins, author of books upon Roman law, who had himself travelled on a special mission of benevolence during the progress of the American Civil War, once passed on to the writer of these lines a story told by Dr. Conway himself which gives the cause of an event that you record. While on his journey to his father's home at Falmouth, Virginia, and within the Confederate lines, he one night had a dream that his father's slaves, having escaped, were in the near neighborhood on the road that led right into the lines, where they would have got short shrift from the Confederate soldiers. He arose, jumped on to his horse, and rode down the road in the direction of Falmouth; and, sure enough, he found them, forty in number, sheltering

in a barn only twenty miles away. He then, as you tell, led them many miles out of danger into a region where the Union flag waved undisputed, and all men had their liberty."

Now this story is quite apocryphal, and we should have written to the *Daily News* to that effect if we were not satisfied, from personal experience, that our time and labor would have been wasted—or worse.

Note the fact, first of all, that Conway told Tompkins, and Tompkins told Rouse, who tells the world. Note also that Conway and Tompkins are both dead, so that everything hangs on Rouse. And what the value of such evidence would be in a court of law, everyone can decide for himself.

Fortunately, there is positive evidence that Mr. Rouse's story is apocryphal. The whole story of Conway and the slaves is told in Chapter XXII. of the first volume of his *Autobiography*. There is not a word in it about that "dream." And we may add that nobody had a greater contempt for such things than Conway. His writings show how he despised Spiritism and Occultism of every variety. What really happened was this. Conway had no "dream" about his father's slaves. He was at Yellow Springs playing a game of chess with Dr. Meredith, and in the middle of the game he was sent for by his wife. "A note had arrived from my mother," he says, "saying that two of my father's slaves had reached Washington, but most of them were wandering helplessly in Stafford within the lines of the Northern army." Thus it was a letter from his mother, and not a dream, that sent Conway off to look after the slaves. He "started the same evening," found the two slaves who had reached Washington, and then went in search of the rest. How he found them in a perfectly natural way, and how he managed to get them all out of the slave States into the free States, is related in the rest of the chapter.

So much for that "incident of Divine intervention" in Conway's career. But apocryphal as it is, it will very likely cut a figure in the religious world, and be devoutly believed by thousands of good Christians.

The *Methodist Times* refers to the fact that the late Moncure D. Conway was born of Methodist parents. For two years in very early manhood he filled a Methodist pulpit, but he went out of it owing to his "leanings towards Unitarianism." Beyond that our pious contemporary fears to follow him. It still calls him "the famous Unitarian minister"—which he hadn't been for nearly fifty years!

The *Christian World* spits out a bit of truth about Conway. It says that his *Autobiography* was "remarkable for the unbounded catholicity of feeling with which Dr. Conway commended every form of religion except Christianity, of every manifestation of which he spoke with rasping ridicule." The bit of truth in this sentence is mixed up with some error. Conway did not commend every form of religion; and if he had a special antipathy to Christianity, it was because that religion was peculiarly intolerant and persecuting.

The *Christian Commonwealth* is somewhat kinder than the *World*. "Whatever we may think," it says, "of the religious views which he [Conway] developed in course of time, we cannot help admiring him as an earnest seeker of the truth, and a real and active lover of humanity." This, of course, admits that his "religious views" went far beyond the New Theology.

The *British Weekly* frankly admits that "Conway became a complete unbeliever, rejecting theism in every form, and casting away along with it all belief in progress." The first half of this statement is true and honest; the second half is false and foolish. The statement that "Conway managed to get into the society of the most notable men in his period" is (we regret to say) not unworthy of the *British Weekly*. "Managed!" It is a malicious sneer. Conway's friendships were formed in the natural way.

"Help for the Paralyzed" was a heading we saw in a newspaper. We thought it referred to the clergy, but we found it referred to a meeting of the National Hospital for the Paralyzed, in Queen-square.

The "Suffragettes" have made an art and a policy of the disturbance of Liberal meetings, and they justify it as their "only way" of winning their battle. Yet they are immensely indignant when their own game is turned against them, and played better than they can play it themselves.

We are not concerned to defend the action of the students who broke up the "Suffragette" meeting in the Birmingham Town Hall. It was a hooligan performance—but, alas, it was only too natural. Violence begets violence, and a challenge to disorder is sure to be responded to. The indignation of the "Suffragettes" was, therefore, perfectly ridiculous. And their talk about shedding blood if necessary was mere hysterics. Nothing can justify a deliberate interference with the right of public meeting, which, with the freedom of the press, is far more important than the vote itself. And we add, very deliberately, that every woman who appeals to violence is a traitress to her own sex. It is only in orderly society that women can have any public life at all. This should be obvious to the commonest intelligence.

A very remarkable speech was made at the seventh annual missionary meeting of the United Free Church of Scotland, held at St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow. Rev. Dr. Ross, who appears to be a missionary working in Manchuria, spoke as follows, according to the report in the *Glasgow Herald*:—

"He felt called upon to lay down as a message of urgency a little bit of politics to the meeting. They had heard a great deal about the yellow peril. There was a yellow peril, but it had not its abode in Japan. It remained gaping at present in China. If they punished a Chinaman for some fault he recognised the justice and he submitted quietly. If they treated him unjustly they raised in him a wild beast. The Chinese saw Japan honored and esteemed and her alliance sought by European nations. Why? Not because she had higher ideals than China or was better morally or intellectually, but because she had proved herself to have a sharper sword and stronger arms. China had learned that if she had not the sharp sword and the strong arms, the right was not taken into account by Western nations. They heard at present of reforms springing up in all directions over China. Did they know what the secret of all this was? It was because China had been thus humiliated year after year, and had now come to the determination that she would not take further humiliation from Europe. The people had seen that not the possession of right, but the possession of might impelled Europe, and they were thus following the example of Japan, steadily and universally. There lay the yellow peril. The dragon's eyes had opened to a certain extent. The country felt that the constant humiliation at the hands of Europe must come to an end, and there was only one method by which it could be brought about. If China gained the use of all the resources and power within the four corners of the Empire, no force in the world would be able to withstand her. If they wished to avoid the yellow peril they must take action justly, and if they acted justly then the Chinese love of peace was so great that there never would be a yellow peril."

We have said this for years in the *Freethinker*, and we are glad to have the complete corroboration of a Christian missionary.

Dr. Ross had to talk up to his trade, and down to his audience, before concluding. He said that the only way to prevent the yellow peril was by Christianity; China must become a Christian country. In other words, China is to embrace the religion of the nations that have robbed and humiliated her; then she will act with fairness and humanity. Did anyone ever hear such a curious argument? It is to be explained, of course, by the exigency of Dr. Ross's position.

The Mayor of Nelson went in state to the Northfield-road Primitive Methodist Church and heard a sermon by the Rev. J. W. Chappell. This gentleman's knowledge and opinions are both peculiar. He made several romantic statements about Voltaire and Thomas Paine. Some were silly, and one was malicious. It is a pious libel to say that Thomas Paine "crawled into a drunkard's grave." After this it is not surprising to hear the preacher say that "the Labor movement was born in the hearts of Christian men." Mr. Chappell seems bent on beating Dr. Torrey.

The Lord Mayor of Manchester has been singing the praises of missionary enterprise. "Missionary effort," he said, "was the forerunner of emigration, and following that emigration came trade. If it were not for the trade that had been created and opened up in foreign lands, what would be the position of cities such as Manchester? Manchester ought specially to support missionary work." Missionary work is not intended to fill heaven, but to fill the pockets of Manchester merchants. We understand now.

Most false hair in England comes from abroad, and a large quantity of it has been obtained from convents. The *Daily Chronicle* wonders, therefore, whether "secularism in France will send up the price of wigs here." We never thought of that.

Some time ago we drew attention to the "gift of tongues" lunacy at Sunderland. It is still going on, but a rival movement has started up, led by a Cornishman described as the "Prophet of the Welsh Revival." He is addressing packed meetings in the Miners' Hall, Monkwearmouth, and he denounces the other party and its leader, the Rev. Mr. Boddy, vicar of All Saints. He declares that men and women attending All Saints Mission come away with demons inside them, who afterwards get into the bodies of the people and render them temporarily insane. This rubbish is devoutly believed by thousands of Sunderland folk, including the members of the Bible Class conducted by the Mayor. Altogether, Sunderland is in a pretty state, which reflects great credit on our national system of education.

Mrs. Rogers, of Belle-vue, Shrewsbury, went into Mr. Wesley Baker's revival tent, where the cloven-tongue business is going on merrily, and the Holy Spirit descended upon her in less than ten minutes. She received a divine message on the spot. Then she "began to laugh, and continued in a laughing fit for four hours." We could laugh for the same length of time—if we had it to spare.

Electric lighting is to be established in the sanctuary of the Prophet at Medina. Mohammedans are getting on. Some day there will be electric light in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem. Christians won't be left behind for ever.

Charles Wood, churchwarden and organist at St. James's Church, Colchester, caused his wife to present a petition against him in the Divorce Court, and the jury returned a verdict in her favor without leaving the box. Had he been a Secularist the religious papers would have made a great ado about it, but as he is a Christian they say nothing. Perhaps it is too common for notice.

Some unpublished letters of Lafcadio Hearn, written to Mr. Osman Edwards, are printed in the *Albany*. The following passage shows what he thought of the work of Christian missionaries in Japan, and its chances of success:—

"No Japanese beyond the age of reason can become a convert unless he be a scoundrel, a hypocrite, or a miserable wretch without sentiment of any sort. What would you think of a man whom you saw spitting upon a crucifix in order to prove himself a freethinker? Or what would you think of a man whom you saw mutilating and befouling photographs of his father and mother? Now, a convert to Christianity must do what is incomparably worse than either of the actions above imagined."

We presume the last sentence refers to the ancestor worship which the Christian missionaries find a mighty barrier to their propaganda, both in Japan and in China.

"People seem to be tiring of religion." So says General Booth, and the statement contains more truth than is usual in Salvation William's deliverances. He went on to add that while in Japan nothing surprised him more than the want of religion in that country. We have no doubt the Japanese face this want with their usual equanimity, although it is naturally distressing to those who are in business as export agents for spiritual shoddy, and are thus threatened with having their consignments thrown back upon their hands.

William Booth is clearly suffering from megalomania. Very soon this planet will not be big enough for him. He has taken Great Britain, Canada, the United States, Germany, and Japan under his wing. He has had Great Britain under his wing for a long while, but the millennium seems as far off as ever. We note that he flatters himself that Java—of all places in the world—offers him all its criminals and derelicts. Very likely! Many other places would make him the same offer if there were any chance of his accepting it. But the fact is that William Booth (to take our own country as an instance) does not rid us of our criminals and derelicts at all. He simply makes a profit by exporting our good self-maintaining citizens to other parts of the world. Instead of enriching us, he impoverishes us; he causes no improvement, but rather deterioration. He is one of the causes of our national decadence.

"But one wild, wet night—a night in which a humane Pagan wouldn't turn a homeless dog from his door—there came to the Salvation Army's People's Palace, in Pitt-street, Sydney, a decrepit old man. He had been staying at this den of thieves for the best part of the week, paying his way each night (he wouldn't have stayed had he not!) but on

this particular night he was a half-penny short of the price of his bed. He tendered what money he had, but was told to clear out, unless he could find the other half-penny. The old man expostulated; surely they could let him off one half-penny. But the 'Officer' was obdurate, and when the old man, face to face with that tempestuous night, begged for mercy and shelter in the name of the Redeemer, the ruffian took hold of him and violently hustled him down the steps into the pouring rain and bitter wind. He died of exposure on the steps of the 'People's Palace,' and lay there undiscovered through that bitter night of wind and driven rain. This is the charity and mercy of the Salvation Army!"—*Sydney Bulletin*.

Yorkshire Methodists are getting alarmed. The spread of "materialism and secularism" is so rapid that a conference of ministers and Christian workers is to be held in Bradford to consider ways and means. We are far from displeased at the news; and as it would be just as well for the "ministers and Christian workers" to know what it is they have to fight, we would suggest that a representative Secularist be asked to address the meeting. Those present will then know exactly what opinions they are combating.

Rev. Stanley Parker, who converted so many imaginary infidels at Woolwich, has carried his romantic memory with him to Brighton, where he is assistant preacher at Norfolk-road Wesleyan Church. He has been making the most sensational charges against the morals of Brighton—including both the public and the publicans. Being asked by the Chief Constable (whose action was endorsed by the Watch Committee) for particulars, the reverend gentleman wrote a long rigmarole letter to the *Sussex Daily News* explaining why he could not give them. He was afraid of the libel laws; besides, he did not collect his evidence in a way that would make it of any use in a law-court. Of course! Instead of giving his information, like a good citizen, to the Chief Constable, he dishes it up before a public assembly. And when the Chief Constable tells him that such a state of things, if it exists, is "a very serious thing for Brighton, requiring immediate action," and asks him confidentially for details, the reverend gentleman is sorry he cannot oblige. Nobody who knows him would suppose he could.

M. A. P. gravely tells the following "prayer" story. Rev. Dr. Horton, of Hampstead, was in the Tube railway carriage the other day. Suddenly the train stopped and the passengers were left in darkness. After a while they began to be alarmed, and Dr. Horton suggested that they should pray. "Lord," he led off, "wilt thou bring us out of this darkness into the light of safety?" Immediately the carriage was flooded with light, and the train went on its way. Wonderful! But a very little enquiry might have satisfied the reverend gentleman that his little talk with God was a personal incident, and had nothing whatever to do with either the stopping or the starting of the train. The electric current which supplies the motive power also supplies the illumination.

#### THE GOOD "BLASPHEMER."

I was told by a painter at Carbis Bay yesterday that in a visit of his to the United States he came across the following incident. He was a poor man then, the weather was very bitter, and he felt somewhat bitter himself and resentful against God on account of the hard destiny that had been meted out to him. So, as he says, he was in anything but a religious frame of mind when the following event took place. He was passing along the street one day, and heard some men coming towards him, using foul language—language which, if they meant it, amounted to blasphemy; and for the moment, in spite of his own despondent condition, he shuddered at the words which they were so glibly uttering without any apparent sense of responsibility for their meaning. Then his eye fell on a poor little child walking by the side of a young mother. Every now and then the latter lifted the child up in her arms and carried it as long as her feeble strength would permit; and the poor little thing was blue and numbed with cold. The onlooker's heart went out to them in a wave of pity, but he had nothing to give them. Forthwith, to his surprise, one of these very men whom he had heard blaspheming picked up that little mortal, put her under his buckskin coat, and warmed her by the heat of his own body. At the same time, thrusting his hand into his pocket, he pulled out all the money he had and gave it to the mother, telling her to go and get a good meal for herself and the child.—*Rev. R. J. Campbell, "New Theology Sermons,"* pp. 119-120.



**Mr. Foote's Engagements.**

Sunday, December 1, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W.; at 7.30, "Socialism, Christianity, and Atheism: and Blatchford *versus* Campbell."

December 8, 15, Queen's Hall.

**To Correspondents.**

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 1, Birmingham; 8, Manchester; 15 and 16, Edinburgh.—Address: 241 High-road, Leyton.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 8, Aberdare; 15, South Shields; 22, Holloway.

R. IRVING.—The texts quoted in the article on "The Church and Socialism" by Eugene Macdonald, editor of the *New York Truthseeker*, may all be found in the eighth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Glad to hear you are glad that our "popularity is distressing the Holy Willies," and thanks for your good wishes. Amongst these we do not reckon your desire to see us an M.P. We have long held that the worst use you can put any man to, who is good for anything outside the House of Commons, is to give him a seat inside. Besides, the real seat of power nowadays is not parliament, as it once was, but the press and the platform. Our work, at any rate, must be done outside. Few men in England could do it. There are nearly seven hundred men in the House of Commons, and probably seven hundred thousand outside who would do the job just as well. For the other matter, see "Acid Drops."

J. BRADFIELD.—Pleased to see your excellent letter in the *Gloucestershire Echo*. We wish Freethinkers would make more frequent use of their local newspapers in that way. Glad to hear that your friend, to whom we sent the *Freethinker* for six weeks, has become a regular weekly subscriber; also that this journal is your "weekly intellectual treat" and that "there would be a great blank without it." You would probably find it very difficult to carry on a Branch of the National Secular Society in a place like Cheltenham. At any rate, it would be best to push round the *Freethinker* and other literature first.

W. ATKINSON.—We had written on the *Christian World* extract. The others are dealt with this week.

COHEN "SALVATION ARMY" TRACT FUND.—G. ERHMANN, 5s.

F. KEARD.—The best edition of Fitzgerald's *Omar Khayyam* is published by Macmillan & Co. in the "Golden Treasury Series" at 2s. 6d.

ENQUIRER.—Shall be pleased to see you at Queen's Hall. By all means stop and shake hands after the lecture. We note your change of opinion on a certain subject. Mr. Foote is keeping tolerably well. He certainly stands the strain of his work better than he did three years ago. Will look through the enclosure in a few days. The correction is duly made.

W. P. BALL.—Thanks for your ever welcome cuttings.

G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for cuttings.

BESSIE BROUGH.—Pleased to receive the weekly batch of cuttings from you, and hope your husband's being too busy means extra grist to the mill.

G. A. MOSS says he made an exchange in one of his weekly papers seven weeks ago, substituting the *Freethinker* for the *Christian World*. He now wonders he ever had the patience to read the latter.

N. LEVY.—Mr. Foote has not forgotten; he will do his best to pay Edinburgh a visit in the new year.

J. MAGNESS.—We have no further interest in Bibbings. Thanks, all the same. Glad you think the *Freethinker* "better now than ever."

JESSIE GARRATT.—A new edition of *Bible and Beer* is in the press. It will be ready shortly.

A. RAWLING and L. B. GALLAGHER.—Mr. Germany's letter was in reply to Mr. Cohen, and Mr. Cohen has dealt with it. We think the matter may be left there, for the present.

W. C. SCHWEIZER.—Hope to find room next week.

A. G.—We read it at the time of publication, but shall be glad to look at it again, if you send it on.

P. W. MADDEN.—Too late for this week; shall have attention in our next.

HAROLD ELLIOT.—We would gladly resume the issue of a weekly contents-sheet if we thought it would get a decent display by newsagents. We dropped it, after many years' issue, because we were bound to conclude that the outlay was greater than the advantage.

J. THOMAS.—Pleased you are so glad to have met with the *Freethinker*.

GREGORY SCOTT.—That Catholic priest is all at sea. Biologists do not differ about evolution; that is not affected by Mendel or anyone else. The questions in debate are the parts played in evolution by heredity, variation, and natural selection. Evolution is now accepted by a good many Catholics.

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**Sugar Plums.**

Mr. Foote is delivering three special Sunday evening lectures in the Queen's (Minor) Hall this month. The opening lecture will be this evening (Dec. 1) on "Socialism, Christianity, and Atheism," with special reference to Mr. Robert Blatchford and the Rev. R. J. Campbell. Of course there will be the usual opportunity for questions and discussion. And in view of the present importance of the subject, we ask the London "saints" to advertise the lecture amongst their friends and acquaintances. There ought to be no difficulty in filling the Hall. We may add that the whole course of lectures is under the auspices of the Secular Society, Limited.

Mr. Foote closed the special course of lectures at Stanley Hall on Sunday evening, his subject being "The Growth of God." The bitter cold made a slight difference in the attendance, but it was a very good audience all the same, and the lecture was very warmly applauded. Mr. F. A. Davies again occupied the chair, and his pleasant invitation brought up several questioners and one opponent. This part of the program was much appreciated.

We spoke of the press boycott in connection with Mr. Foote's recent lectures in the Birmingham Town Hall. This had been going on for so long a time that we did not expect it to be broken. But it has been. Perhaps the change was owing to the extraordinary success of Mr. Foote's meetings. When audiences run well into four figures, it becomes rather too foolish to overlook them altogether, for the expectation of readers has then to be reckoned with. The *Birmingham Evening Despatch* gave a thirty-two lines report under the heading of "Mr. G. W. Foote in Birmingham." This was honestly done, although, of course, it could not give much idea of over an hour's lecture. Still it was something to get in such sentences as "If life and health could be bought in the market no rich Christian would ever go to Heaven and all the bishops would live here for ever." There was a longer report in the *Birmingham Weekly Post*. That paper turned on its "Impressionist Contributor" and Mr. Foote figured under the standing heading of "Pulpit Sketch"—which was something of a novelty.

The man who does Pulpit Sketches for the *Weekly Post* was not likely to be fair to a notorious Freethinker. He says he doesn't want to hear Mr. Foote again, or read a line he writes—which is the sort of thing he was expected to say in the *Weekly Post*; and whether he meant it or not doesn't much matter. Of far more importance are some of his admissions. He admits that the great Town Hall "was full—full of men with a sprinkling of women"—though "sprinkling" is an under-statement. There was something that "gave one abundant cause for thought" in "the size and composition of the meetings, the numbers of men, so many by no means young; the ease with which they were swayed to applause and laughter." The reporter was grieved at the lectures and grieved at the audiences, but he had to make a frank confession of hard facts. He described Mr. Foote as "a quiet-looking, elderly man with a strong, pleasant, level voice that carried easily to his most distant hearer." Again at the finish he "cannot refrain from a feeling of wonder that so pleasant a voice from so peaceful appearing a man should speak as he does." The gentleman seems to wonder that a peaceful-looking man should be a fighter. That is his mistake. It isn't bullies who fight for convictions. It is men of principle. Generally speaking, they had much rather be at peace; and when they fight it is not for the fighting sake, but for the good peace that comes after. There was nothing of the fighting-man in Richard Carlile, the most stubborn of English Freethinkers, who spent nine years and seven months of his life in various prisons for the right of free publication. He was a handsome and "pleasant-looking" man, but anyone who could peer beneath the surface might have caught a glimpse of his invincible fortitude. Even amongst dogs, we understand, it is not the ferocious barker you have to dread, but rather the quiet one who keeps his mouth for business, gets his teeth in at the psychological moment, and holds on. So never imagine a man won't fight (if need be) because he looks "pleasant." Dread the quiet man when the row begins. Tom Sayers was one of the most good-humored men in England.

On one point the *Weekly Post* writer is guilty of downright nonsense. He refers to the "vulgarity" of some of Mr. Foote's remarks, especially on "the paternity of Jesus." Would he have thought them vulgar if he had not been a

Christian? As a matter of fact, Mr. Foote said very little on that topic, except quoting from the Rev. R. J. Campbell, and adding that Mary herself, in the Gospel story, speaks to Jesus of Joseph as "thy father." All that Mr. Foote said was, "I will take her word for it." The "vulgarity" is due to the Christian's old prejudice that *his* beliefs should be treated with special deference. No non-Christian would have perceived any "vulgarity" in Mr. Foote's remarks.

However, we don't owe the *Weekly Post* reporter any grudge. He had a difficult task to perform, and he did it with a good deal of dexterity. Perhaps, after all, he will listen to the "pleasant voice" again.

One of the very few papers that said the plain truth about Dr. Moncure D. Conway, without making any faces, was the *Athenæum*, which spoke of him as "our old and valued contributor," and stated that "He ended his career as an enlightened free-thinker, having previously been in the Wesleyan and Unitarian ministries."

There is to be a Memorial Service to the late Moncure D. Conway at South-place Chapel this morning (Dec. 1), commencing at 11.15. The address will be delivered by Mr. J. M. Robertson for the Ethical Society.

Mr. Wishart, who is "missioning" for the N. S. S. Executive, is now working Liverpool, and will be there for some time. He began by lecturing in the Milton Hall, Daulby-street; and his evening lecture, delivered to a good audience, was much appreciated. The Branch is looking forward to great success through Mr. Wishart's mission in the immediate future. To-day (Dec. 1) he goes over to Birkenhead, and lectures there, afternoon and evening, in the Queen's Hall, Cloughton-road. Local "saints" will please note, and notify the "heathen."

We have received the Glasgow Branch's Report and Balance-Sheet for the autumn, winter, and spring of 1906-7. It is a thoroughly healthy document, showing a record of good work and successful propaganda. The Committee rightly state that their special work is still highly necessary, in spite of the fact that many advanced bodies are now teaching and preaching on Sunday in Glasgow, whereas at one time the Secularists were the only body that held non-religious meetings on the Sabbath. "It is necessary to emphasise," the report says, "that the diffusion of Free-thought principles is of much more importance than the inculcation of any positive specific line of thought, however admirable the latter may seem to be." Consequently, the Glasgow Branch appeals for continued support—and is likely to receive it. We may add that the Branch has an Endowment Fund of £422. A copy of its report could be obtained, we presume, by writing to the secretary, Mr. T. Robertson, Battlefield-crescent, Langside, Glasgow.

The Edinburgh Branch has got Mr. Cohen to pay it a visit. Local "saints" will please note that the lectures on Sunday and Monday, Dec. 15 and 16, are in the Free Gardeners' Institute, Picardy-place. Those who can circulate printed announcements of these meetings can obtain them of the Branch secretary, Mr. N. Levey, 3E Richmond-street, Edinburgh.

Mr. Cohen delivers two lectures to-day (Dec. 1), afternoon and evening, in the Birmingham Town Hall. We hope the district "saints" will do their utmost to secure large meetings.

"The death of Mr. Touzeau Parris breaks one of the few remaining links between the Freethought Movement of 1907 and the Secularism of thirty years ago. Lying before us as we write is a volume of the *National Reformer* for 1879-1880, and, as we turn its pages, memories of the old campaigns come flooding thickly on the mind. In those far-off years there stood on the British Freethought platform, along with its two most prominent figures (Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant), G. J. Holyoake, Charles Watts, G. W. Foote, Touzeau Parris, Joseph Symes, Dr. E. B. Aveling, and Thomas Slater. Of these all save two have been mowed down by the sharp scythe of Time. Mrs. Besant has put off the familiar armor of Freethought, and has gone into a strange camp. Mr. Foote, alone of that brave old Guard, remains on the historic field of battle, fighting, perhaps, more strenuously than he fought a generation ago, and still devoting his great ability, without reserve, to the Freethought cause."—W. B. Columbine, in the *Literary Guide*.

## The Actual Jesus.—I.

THE *supernatural* Jesus of the Gospels, who rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, being clearly a mythical person, and the Gospels which record his miraculous history being obviously untrustworthy and certainly including examples of deliberate invention or pious fraud, such as the conflicting genealogies and birth stories in Matthew and Luke, one is tempted to conclude that the Gospels are wholly works of fiction, and that the supposed *real* Jesus, around whose personality the Gospel anecdotes and sayings accumulated, is as absolutely mythical or imaginary as the incredible stories related of him. The natural reaction against belief in the Christian traditions may, however, be carried too far. For my own part, after a long suspension of judgment on the matter, I have settled down to the conclusion that a real Jesus existed, who by his death more than by any other circumstance became unintentionally the originator or basis of a religion which in its subsequently-developed form he as a devout Jew would probably have repudiated with horror.

Reasons being of greater importance than mere personal opinions, I had better set forth the grounds from which my conclusions arise.

During the first and second centuries we find in the eastern portions of the Roman empire various obscure religious associations or churches which were offshoots from Judaism but which were founded more particularly on the belief in a crucified Christ named Jesus, who was supposed by most of these churches to have died on the cross in order to save people from their sins, and to have been, either figuratively or literally, a Son of God. The most natural explanation of this belief is, of course, that there had really been a crucified Jesus, whose followers evolved the myths concerning him by natural psychological processes, such as have been exemplified in many religions besides Christianity. Religious organisations commonly derive their originating and unifying impulse from some suitable personality, as in the case of Mohammedanism and Buddhism. On the face of it this seems in the highest degree probable in the case of Christianity also. Of course the simplest or most plausible explanation is not necessarily the truest. But we ought not to reject the natural explanation unless we find sufficient reasons for so doing. In many cases—such as the ancient myth of Moses and the comparatively modern myth of William Tell, the alleged hero of Swiss independence—there are good grounds for concluding that such persons never existed. But I cannot say that I have come across any adequate reasons for disbelief in the existence of an actual Jesus. The natural explanation seems to me much more feasible than the alternative supposition that the worship of this deified Christ arose entirely from myths without the originating basis afforded by the life and death of a religious enthusiast named Jesus.

Some of the particulars of the story of Jesus seem to me to be such as would hardly be invented. That he was a carpenter (Mark vi. 3), or at least the son of a carpenter (Matt. xiii. 55), may well have been the fact. Such a fact would be kept alive by the disdainful taunts of adversaries, though his followers would probably be disposed to forget it.\* Such a detail is not manufactured in order to fulfil any prophecy. It lacks adequate motive as a myth. It would hardly have been permitted to remain in Christian documents, and to remain uncontradicted, if it had been regarded as false. The readiest explanation is that it was literally true.

Mr. J. M. Robertson, in his bold and incisive work on *Christianity and Mythology* (pages 315, 316), rejects

\* The taunt that he was the son of a carpenter might the more readily give birth and insistency to the reply, Nay, a son of God—the phrase being at first used merely in the customary figurative sense, as when righteous people are called sons of God, and the wicked are termed children of their father the Devil, or sons of Belial, etc.

this item of the Gospel story. He urges that it is not included in the "Primitive Gospel" as reconstructed by critics; that Origen treats it as uncanonical; and that Joseph is mythical, so that his occupation must be mythical also. But the detail occurs in the shortest and *most primitive* of our four Gospels. Being unwelcome, as is shown by the fact that it is preserved only as a jeering remark by enemies, there would be a tendency to suppress it. This would be quite sufficient to explain why "the carpenter" of Mark is softened into "the son of a carpenter" in Matthew, and is omitted in the two more artistically-written Gospels, which still, however, by refraining from mentioning the occupation or social position of Jesus and his father, give at least some negative support to the idea that they belonged to the working classes. I do not think that the modification in Matthew and the omission in Luke afford any proof that "Mark" did not derive his information from the "Primitive Gospel" on which the synoptical Gospels are mainly based. The detail was certainly current in canonical and uncanonical Gospels long before the time of Origen (A.D. 205-249). Justin Martyr, who is said to have been martyred about A.D. 166, speaks of Jesus as making "carpenter's works, ploughs and yokes."\* That the matter is not mentioned by *all* the Gospels is of no consequence whatever. The early existence of the statement is indisputable, and the only question is whether it originated as a myth or was based on fact. Seeing that it did not exalt Jesus, I think the latter explanation the more probable of the two. As to Joseph's occupation being dismissed on the ground that Joseph himself was mythical, I may observe that Mr. Robertson admits the existence of a Jesus whose death formed the basis of Christian mythology, and this Jesus must have had a father, who, whether he was named Joseph or not, probably followed some occupation, which may have been that of a carpenter.

The humble origin and occupation assigned to Jesus are in accordance with the fairly obvious fact that he must have been an obscure and comparatively unimportant personage, or we should know more of him from the pages of contemporary historians. His personal followers or companions, and the primitive Christians in general, appear also to have been obscure and unimportant persons. It was in obscurity and among comparatively ignorant and uncritical adherents that the evolution of the Gospel legends took place more freely and readily than would have been possible among more cultured classes. Jesus himself was apparently an uneducated man. He left no writings behind him, not even a dictated epistle.† Such negative evidence confirms the idea that Jesus belonged to the humbler classes as represented in the Gospels. At the same time, of

course, it equally agrees with the theory of the non-existence of any actual Jesus.

We can now turn to a far more important matter—the central or decisive point in Christian history.

That Jesus was executed upon the gallows of his time along with criminals, seems more like a hideous fact that had to be faced and accounted for by his friends than a fiction which would be invented or evolved.\* Ultimately, indeed, the awful, if not ignominious, fact drove some of his adherents to the daring but alluring explanation that he must have died on their behalf and as a sacrifice for their sins—a comforting and emotion-rousing doctrine, which found some support in the Jewish custom of offering sacrifices for sin, and became a fundamental feature of the new religion thus practically created and launched into the world as a distinctive creed. This literal Crucifixion is so persistently insisted on in the earlier as well as the later Christian documents and traditions, and is so essential and prominent a feature both in the Christian narrative and in the rational explanation of the evolution of Christianity, and is so unlikely to have been invented, that I find myself practically compelled to accept it as an historical fact, in spite of the difficulty presented by the silence of Josephus on the matter. This difficulty seems, indeed, at first sight, to be very serious, if not insuperable. If Jesus had been put to death as a leader of sedition or rebellion, such as would be involved in the claim to be the Messiah or to be "King of the Jews," the Jewish historian should have recorded the fact. If Jesus had merely been guilty of blasphemy the Romans would not have executed him. How, then, can his crucifixion have been possible? If it really occurred, how are we to explain the silence of Josephus? Could he have given an account of Jesus of so unfavorable a nature that it was suppressed by Christian zeal? I do not, however, think that this is the true explanation. Photius "expressly states" that Josephus, "being a Jew, has not taken the least notice of Christ."† If so, there would, of course, be nothing for Christian zeal to suppress.

Assuming, then, that we have Josephus's works in an un mutilated condition, another hypothesis may reasonably be suggested—namely, that Jesus may have suffered for some personal act not accompanied by any such armed rebellion or seditious tumult on the part of his associates or disciples as Josephus would deem worthy of notice. A young and enthusiastic reformer or pietist might put his fanatical or communistic ideals into practice in a way that might be regarded by the authorities as mere criminality. Jesus may have been condemned as an ordinary criminal on false evidence, or he may have been actually guilty of some serious crime through an accidental outburst of zeal, or infirmity of temper, or otherwise. If he had been condemned as a criminal, the most favorable interpretation would be placed on his acts by his friends or followers. Any reference to ignominious reasons for his execution would be scouted, and would certainly not be allowed to appear in Christian documents.

The Gospel accounts (Matt. xxi. 12; Mark xi. 15) represent Jesus as overturning the tables of money-changers, as pouring out their money (John ii. 15),‡ and as driving the money-changers and others from

\* The widespread sympathy for the sufferings of King Antigonus and other patriotic or religious leaders who were crucified by the Roman conquerors, might cause the crucifixion to be regarded as an honored martyrdom, but I do not see that it would bring about the creation of a purely mythical Jesus, though it would help the development of the mythical Jesus from the actual Jesus.

† *Freethinker's Text-Book*, Part II., by Annie Besant, p. 196. Photius (A.D. 820-891) was Patriarch of Constantinople, and wrote many books. He would have access to information and documents not at our command, including probably a correct copy of Josephus.

‡ The author of the latest of the four Gospels, that of John, as if seeing that this might furnish an unfavorable reason for the execution of Jesus, removes the attack on the money-changers from the period immediately preceding the crucifixion to the beginning of Jesus's ministry, some three years earlier.

\* See *Supernatural Religion* (ed. 1905, p. 199), which observes: "The idea that the Son of God should do carpenter's work on earth was displeasing to many Christians, and attempts to get rid of the phrase are evident in Mark. Apparently the copy which Origen used omitted even the modified phrase, for he declares that Jesus is never called a carpenter in the Gospels current in the Church. A few MS. are still extant without it, although it is found in all the more ancient Codices." Strauss, in his *Life of Jesus*, says: "The Christians must have had an interest in denying, rather than inventing, this opinion of their Messiah's youthful occupation, since it often drew down upon them the ridicule of their opponents. Thus Celsus.....could not abstain from a reflection on this subject, for which reason Origen will know nothing of any designation of Jesus as a carpenter in the New Testament."

† The forged letter to Agbarus is not worth mentioning, except as an example of the innumerable frauds which flourished in an atmosphere of credulity and ignorance. The Gospels and Epistles never represent Jesus as writing, except in John viii. 1-11, which incidentally says that he wrote with his finger on the ground when the woman taken in adultery was brought before him. But this story is an unusually late addition to the Gospel. The Revised Version candidly confesses in a marginal note that "Most of the ancient authorities omit it" and that "Those which contain it vary much from each other"—statements which throw light on the methods by which the Gospels were built up. John vii. 15 practically admits that Jesus never learned letters. This assumption of his opponents is at least never contradicted. Luke iv. 16, however, represents him as reading in the synagogue—a circumstance much more likely to be invented than the tacitly-admitted reproach of illiteracy.

the precincts of the Temple with a scourge.\* Money thus scattered on the ground would probably fall into the hands of thieves or rioters, who would not be slow to take advantage of an opportunity of plunder afforded them under the apparent leadership of an excited or overwrought enthusiast.† His friends might admire, or at least condone, proceedings which the Roman authorities would feel bound to visit with the severest penalties of the law. Such admiration or condonation can alone explain the fact that the Gospels have been permitted to record actions on the part of Jesus which were distinctly of a criminal nature, easily involving the execution of the offender. There is no need to resort to the hypothesis that somebody may have been killed during the riotous assault on the money-changers, seeing that the Romans crucified robbers or thieves or fanatical disturbers of the peace as readily as we used to hang them. If the young rioter or thief was also charged with setting himself up as "King of the Jews" or as Messiah or Christ, which would be rebellion against the Roman rulers, and if the accused thief or rioter admitted the truth of this charge of sedition and obstinately refused to make any defence against it (as the Gospels depict in the case of Jesus), his claim to royal power might be regarded as so ridiculous as to be worthy only of derision. The charges alleged in the Gospels, however, may well be mere Christian inventions to dignify the humiliating position of Jesus. On the other hand, the Gospel statement that he was crucified with two thieves may well be a traditional survival of fact, and not an invention of Christians, seeing that it does no honor to their misguided leader. The natural meaning of such a fact would be that Jesus was executed as simply one of three thieves or malefactors, who shared a common doom after a common or similar crime. Jesus might be put in the middle as in some respect the worst or most responsible offender of the three.

Of course, I do not say that the Gospel accounts are trustworthy evidence against Jesus. I merely make suggestions founded directly or indirectly on these narratives, and therefore not to be contemptuously dismissed as purely gratuitous or insulting guesswork on the part of a disbeliever in Christianity. I know that the name of Jesus has been enshrined in such reverence that not merely Christians, but even many Freethinkers, shrink from any imputation against that ideal representative of Goodness and Virtue. In spite of such misleading tendencies, I venture to think that some slight amount of truth or indication or vestige of truth still remains embodied in the Gospel traditions and that Jesus may

\* Mr. J. M. Robertson dismisses this Gospel episode as "wildly improbable" (*Christianity and Mythology*, p. 358). It never struck me so. The excesses of fanaticism are notorious, and fanaticism was particularly prevalent in Palestine during the first century of the Christian era. An enthusiastic young devotee, coming perhaps from rural parts to the ineffably holy Temple of his dreams, and finding its precincts desecrated by open and shameful Mammon-worship, might be filled with fierce indignation, which might be still further increased by the text in which Jehovah reproaches his people for making his house a den of thieves (*Jer. vii. 11*). Under such conditions a young zealot might act as described in the Gospels. Of course I do not commit myself to the "historicity" or actuality of the incident, or of its details. It may be myth, or it may be fact, or an approximation to fact. I see no means of deciding the matter with certainty.

† The peculiar significance of the name Barabbas (= Son of the Father), and the further fact that in the time of Origen the criminal Barabbas "figured in most MSS. as being named *Jesus Barabbas*" (*Christianity and Mythology*, p. 399), suggest the possibility that the name really refers to Jesus. If so, the truth, or the disguised vestige of the truth, would, of course, only be allowed to survive in a form acceptable to Christian story-tellers and their Christian hearers. The extremely awkward accusations and taunts of enemies in later times concerning the vaunted Son of the Father might be met by making Jesus Barabbas a separate person, and by releasing him as a still further means of distinction. According to Luke xiii. 19, Barabbas was cast into prison for "a certain sedition made in the city" and for murder, which latter crime (see Mark xv. 7, Revised Version) was committed during that sedition or "insurrection," but not by Barabbas himself. This "insurrection" in the city and the attack on the money-changers might be two versions of the same incident. Both versions may be exaggerated. John xviii. 40 ignores the alleged "insurrection" and the murder, and substitutes the statement that Barabbas was a robber.

have been guilty of offences against law and order such as are alleged by the Evangelists, or of some other offence which they do not mention. The religious and patriotic excitement prevalent among the Jews about this time would easily lead to such excesses. Josephus describes how robbers and religious impostors filled Jerusalem with violence.\* If he knew that Jesus was crucified, he may have regarded him as merely one of the turbulent zealots or more or less patriotic or religious "robbers," and may have seen nothing exceptional or special in his actions and fate. Large numbers of robbers and religious pretenders were crucified at various times. Why should Josephus be expected to distinguish one of these in particular? Even if he knew that the young thief or rioter or impostor was mocked with the title of "King of the Jews," Josephus might purposely refrain from mentioning such a fact. Josephus was "in the main honest and veracious," but we also hear of his "well-known suppression of offensive truths." He naturally did his best to soften disagreeable or ignominious features in Jewish history. Thus he represents King Antigonus as being beheaded by the Romans, whereas he was really crucified by them in order to strike terror into the rebellious Jews by the infliction of a cruel and shameful punishment usually reserved for slaves and the lowest criminals. In a similar spirit, Josephus might prefer to ignore the crucifixion of a mock King of the Jews, whose pretended title would be a mere insult to Jewish feelings, and whose deserved fate as a vulgar lawbreaker or malefactor might rightly be passed over in silence, since Josephus was writing a history of his nation, and not a Newgate Calendar. There is, however, no trustworthy evidence—for anonymous Gospels written long afterwards certainly cannot rank as such—that Jesus ever claimed to be either King or Messiah. We only know that sooner or later *after his death* he was regarded as Messiah and as Son of God by the advocates of a new religion based upon his crucifixion.

We may also bear in mind that Josephus can hardly be credited with personal knowledge of Jesus, or his execution, since he was not born till A.D. 87—some four years after the date usually assigned to the Crucifixion. Writing his works at a much later period (from A.D. 75 to the end of the first century—the *Antiquities* being written about sixty years after the Crucifixion) and residing at Rome during the latter portion of his life, Josephus would collect his information from others, especially orthodox and priestly Jews (for Josephus was a Pharisee, and was of royal and sacerdotal descent) and from Gentiles who were learned or in authority in Palestine. To

\* "The nation was infected with this doctrine [the theocratic anti-Roman teachings of Judas of Galilee] to an incredible degree; one violent war came upon us after another.....there were also very great robberies and murders of our principal men" (*Antiquities*, bk. xiii., ch. i., § 1). "The country was again filled with robbers and impostors, who deluded the multitude. Yet did Felix catch and put to death many of these impostors every day, together with robbers" (*Antiquities*, xx., viii., 5, 6, 10). "As to the number of robbers whom he caused to be crucified, and of those who were caught among them, and whom he brought to punishment, there were a multitude not to be enumerated" (*Wars*, ii., xiii., 2). "The robbers stirred up the people to make war with the Romans.....and when any persons would not comply with them, they set fire to their villages and plundered them" (*Antiquities*, xx., viii., 6, 10). The Sicarii "slew men in the day-time, and in the midst of the city: this they did chiefly at festivals, when they mingled themselves among the multitude, and concealed daggers under their garments, with which they stabbed those that were their enemies: and when they fell down dead, the murderers became a part of those that had indignation against them: by which means they appeared persons of such reputation that they could not be discovered. The first man slain by them was Jonathan the high priest, after whose death many were slain every day, while the fear men were in of being so served, was more afflicting than the calamity itself" (*Wars*, ii., xiii., 2; *Antiquities*, xx., viii., 5, 10). "There was also another body of wicked men.....who laid waste the happy state of the city no less than did these murderers. They were such men as deceived and deluded the people under pretence of divine inspiration, but were for procuring innovations and changes in the government; and they prevailed with the multitude to act like madmen, and went before them into the wilderness.....Felix.....destroyed a great number of them" (*Wars*, ii., xiii., 4).

these, Jesus, if remembered at all, was probably one among thousands who had been crucified by the Romans. The name Jesus was so common that many Jesuses are mentioned by Josephus in the course of his works. Probably scores of obscure Jesuses suffered on the cross, and the name and identity of any particular one of them might be merged indistinguishably in the "multitudes" of robbers and "false Christs" or religious impostors who had suffered a similar death. Josephus had no magic test by which he could distinguish a "true" Christ from the many "false" ones.

It is possible, however, after all that Josephus has incidentally mentioned Jesus by name. Independently of the palpable forgery in which the Jewish historian is made to declare that Jesus was Christ, he elsewhere refers to James "the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ" (*Antiquities*, xx., ix., 1). I am not at all sure that this is a forgery. A Jew might write it, and I see no indications of fraud in the context. Josephus's informant might thus distinguish James from innumerable other Jameses or Jacobs without Josephus knowing anything further of the personal history of Jesus, who would be to him only one out of many reputed Christs who had appeared among the Jews.

W. P. BALL.

(To be continued)

## Correspondence.

### CHRISTIAN SCIENCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—The human mind is inherently dogmatic. Convinced of its innate wisdom, it would strain its neighbor's opinions through meshes of its own dimensions. In even the less serious matters of daily life this habit is productive of tragic episodes, and the tragic note deepens as the issues at stake become more momentous. It is unfortunately true that the history of religion has been only too often the record of the evolution of the persecuted into persecutors. That, however, is scarcely a reason why the *odium theologium* should be perpetuated in the assaults of the rationalist on Christianity, yet the article in your issue of Oct. 27, on Mrs. Eddy, gives evidence of it.

This, perhaps, is the more regrettable as it is the custom of the Christian Science Church never to attack its neighbor's opinions. Actuated by a supreme faith in the ultimate triumph of Truth, the Christian Scientist prays, not that his conception of Truth, but that Truth itself shall prevail. He puts, in short, into practice the great maxim of Gamaliel, the wisdom of which, for almost two thousand years, Christendom has proclaimed almost as persistently as it has ignored it.

Mrs. Eddy is a venerable lady who lives, in great seclusion, "in a simple cottage home, amidst a few acres of low-fenced ground," on the brow of the hill which rises over the town of Concord, in New Hampshire. Here, surrounded by a few devoted friends, she passes her time in directing the great movement of which she is the founder, and in doing so laboring for the benefit of humanity. Her income is derived entirely from the proceeds of her work as a writer and a teacher. Her charities, though unostentatious, are very considerable.

The accuracy of these facts should at all times secure for her a courteous hearing; and when it is remembered that Christian Science is no mushroom growth, but has for forty years been slowly but irresistibly twining itself around the globe; that its foundations have been sunk, not in the emotions, but in the reason of hundreds of thousands of intelligent men and women of all conditions, and in every land; and that the truth of its premises is being hourly demonstrated, not in mere theories of a world to come, but in the destruction of disease and sickness, in the conquest of suffering and sin, in the maintenance of joy and peace—in the realisation, in a word, that "the kingdom of God is within you"—that hearing should surely be no less respectful than courteous.

It is, of course, always a matter of peculiar difficulty to give verbal expression to an unfamiliar phase of truth. Words are the expression of our thoughts, and almost before the eye has taken in the letters the mind has invested them with a preconceived meaning. To thousands of the readers of *Science and Health*, the text-book in which Mrs. Eddy has given her teaching to the world, the word "Christian" stands for the dogmas of a particular sect, just as the word

"God" conveys the image of a magnified mortal. This is perhaps even more true of the word "science." "We have been accustomed," is the admission of one of the most thoughtful critics of Christian Science, "to regard science as dealing with secondary causes or physical facts," and on this is based the objection to applying it to primary causes, which are declared to be "in the realm of unprovable assumptions."

The orthodox churchman rails at Mrs. Eddy because she will not make God manlike; the scientific materialist condemns her because she denies the reality of matter, and the scientific idealist because she denies the reality of energy. Yet the churchman is forced to admit that prayers to a personal God have never enabled him to restore the healing of the seamless dress, while the materialist and the idealist account for what they term the thaumaturgy of Jesus by the simple process of relegating it to the scrap-heap of exploded superstitions.

It is this last issue which seems to me to constitute the gravamen of your criticism of Mrs. Eddy. Jesus of Nazareth, she has written in *Science and Health*, was not only the best man, but the most scientific man that ever trod the globe (pp. 364 and 313); and again, on p. 286, "Physical causation was put aside from first to last by this original man, Jesus." The question resolves itself into this: Can this be demonstrated? Christian Science declares that it can, and that the method by which it can be done is explained in the Christian Science text-book, *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures*, which, so far from taking the place of the Bible, is merely the Christian Science commentary on the Bible. Before, however, you can apply the method, you must be prepared to admit that scientific demonstration is not confined to secondary causes; for if you are going to assert that nothing can be known of primary causes, it is obvious that, to you, nothing ever will be.

So far as historical evidence goes for anything, it is certain that the method of healing taught by Jesus lingered on, though in a more or less moribund condition, during the greater part of the first three centuries of the Christian era; and that it was reliance on this method, and not on that of the medical schools of the first century, that made Luke "the beloved physician" Professor Harnack implies. Christian Science insists that there was nothing supernatural about the miracles, but that they were simply the object-lessons in proof of the science of the theology of Jesus. As the science of this theology was lost, the object-lessons naturally vanished with it. "A faith without works," a theoretical theology incapable of demonstration, took the place of faith shown by works, a scientific theology capable of demonstration.

Faith, wrote Philo, is the perception of true Being, and Abraham "is said to have trusted God because he was the first to have an unaltering and stable conception, how there exists one Cause, the Highest, providing for the world and all things therein." Mrs. Eddy defines the word "Abraham," in *Science and Health*, as "Fidelity; faith in the divine Life, and in the eternal Principle of Being. This patriarch illustrated the purpose of Love to create trust in good, and showed the life-preserving power of spiritual understanding." According to man's faith, Jesus said, would be his reward. Is it any wonder that Paul placed faith first amongst the weapons of Christian warfare?

Finally, may I say that Christian Science outrages no man's intelligence? It asks him to accept no theory he has not tested and found sound. The examination of it is based on that great Pauline maxim, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good."

FREDERICK DIXON.

### THEOLOGY AND NATURE WORSHIP.

When the history of the last two centuries is written, one of its most striking features will be brought into stronger prominence. In the direct ratio of the decline of theological faith grew up the worship of nature. The love of flowers that shows itself in every cottage window in town or country; the craving for open spaces where grass can be lit by sunshine; the concentration of the painter's art on landscape; the endowment of air, mountain, and sea with human emotion; above all, the intangible influence of music piercing to depths beyond the reaches of our souls—all these things have been slowly transforming modern life, and counteracting the destructive and sterilising forces of revolution, of disorganised industry, of the rabid craving for luxury and pleasure. Wordsworth's lines on revisiting Tintern Abbey, Byron's Manfred in the Alps, Shelley's lyrics of the Cloud and the West Wind—these things will remain when the wasted energy and futile struggles of the nineteenth century shall have become a bad dream half-forgotten.—J. H. Bridges.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

### LONDON.

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Socialism, Christianity, and Atheism: and Blatchford versus Campbell."

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, New Church-road): 3.15, Freethought Parliament—R. de L. Galvaner, "Morality Without God."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford): 7.30, W. J. Ramsey, "The Exodus." Selections by the Band before Lecture.

### COUNTRY.

APERDARE BRANCH N. S. S. (Pugsley's Restaurant): 6, J. L. Williams, "Principles of Atheism."

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Town Hall): C. Cohen, 3, "The Salvation Army: a Study in Religious Failure and Social Imposture"; 7, "A Search for the Soul: Science and a Future Life; or, Is Christianity Worth Preserving?" Orchestral Selections at 6.15. Tea in the Hall at 5.

COVENTRY BRANCH N. S. S. (Baker's Coffee Tavern, Fleet-street): Thursday, Nov. 28, at 8, Mr. Smith, Reading from Ingersoll.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Hall, 84 Leith-street): 6.30, A. Paul, "Scripture Limericks; or, The Bible Up to Date."

FAIRFORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, Fred Morgan, Recital.

GLASGOW: Secular Hall, Brunswick-street—12 (noon), Discussion Class; 6.30, G. Scott, "Science and Religion."

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Clarion Club, 125 Albion-street): Friday, Nov. 29, at 8, Tom Taylor, "Some Peculiarities of Eighteenth-Century Freethought."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Queen's Hall, Claughton-road, Birkenhead): H. S. Wishart, 3, "The Salvation Army, a Public Fraud"; 7, "Jesus Christ a Blind Guide."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road): 6.30, Mr. and Mrs. White, Recitals. Lantern illustrations; musical selections.

NEWCASTLE DEBATING SOCIETY (Lockhart's Cathedral Café): Thursday, Dec. 5, at 8, M. J. Charter, "Newcastle Forty Years Ago."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7.30, Important business—Lecture arrangements.

### OUTDOOR.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S.: Foot of Leith Walk, at 2.30, meets for Discussion. Weather permitting.

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