

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXVII.—No. 51

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1907

PRICE TWOPENCE

The great tendency of the human mind is to repeat itself—to go round and round. It is the Law of Association. This tendency grows stronger and stronger, and more hopeless and fatal, as the months and years of our too-brief lives pass away. The sceptic, therefore, is the flower of the universe.—J. HOWARD MOORE.

Robert Blatchford's Disavowal of Atheism.

WE are neither for nor against Socialism in the *Freethinker*. Our attitude is one of absolute neutrality. We have nothing to do with politics at all in these columns. Our first and last object is to destroy religious superstition in general, and the Christian superstition in particular. We champion reason against faith, realities against dreams, and humanity against theology. And this is work enough for one journal, one editor, and one staff of contributors.

We do not depart from this policy in dealing with the present outcry against Socialism as "Atheistic." It has been pointed out in our articles and paragraphs that Socialism and Atheism have nothing to do with each other. Not essentially, that is to say; incidentally, of course, it may be very much otherwise. Atheists are not necessarily Socialists, and Socialists are not necessarily Atheists; although there are Socialists, like Mr. Blatchford, who argue that Christianity must be fought because it stands in the way of Socialism—and Socialists, like the Rev. R. J. Campbell, who argue that Christianity (*true* Christianity, *their* Christianity) is just the spiritual side of Socialism, and related to it as the soul is related to the body. This is a very pretty quarrel, and we suppose it will have to be fought to a finish—and the fur will fly when Mr. Blatchford and Mr. Campbell fall foul of each other, like two lions after the same sheep, or two stars in the same orbit, or two Messiahs after the same elevation. In the meanwhile, we deal from our own point of view with the cry of "Atheism!" raised by the banded enemies of Socialism. It is a good cry in its way; for, while it will not turn Socialists from their course, it will summon up against them all the dormant religious bigotry of the British public. We are not surprised, therefore, to see men like Mr. Ramsey Macdonald carefully explaining that Socialism has no sympathy with Atheism, and really owes a great deal to Christianity. But we are somewhat astonished to see Mr. Blatchford joining, to a certain extent, in this rather ignominious helter-skelter.

Let us do Mr. Blatchford justice. He sticks to his guns as far as opposition to Christianity is concerned. He says that the Socialists who still believe in it must be converted. But he draws the line at that point. He shrinks from too great a reputation for wickedness. He realises, perhaps unconsciously, how convenient it is to have somebody handy to take the first bite of the mad dog of superstition. That handy person is the Atheist. "I have no connection with him," Mr. Blatchford says; indeed, he adds that he has a religion of his own. He is not a tailless fox, calling upon other foxes to shed their caudal appendages; all he asks them to do is to

trim their brushes like his—which is so clean and handsome.

Mr. Blatchford disavowed Atheism a few weeks ago in the *Clarion*. This is what he said:—

"When you condemn with such severity the 'atheism' of Robert Blatchford, are you speaking from knowledge, or from prejudice and hearsay? Because Robert Blatchford is not an atheist, and does not mean what you think he means."

One would imagine that he was defending his character instead of explaining his opinions.

Subsequently the following appeared in answer to a correspondent:—

"HAROLD ELLIOT.—An atheist, according to common dictionary definition, is a 'disbeliever in the existence of God.' 'Nunquam' does not disbelieve. He simply does not know or understand."

Mr. Blatchford is a bright and interesting, and sometimes a charming, writer; but would even his best friends call him a profound and accurate thinker? On this point, at any rate, he is neither the one nor the other. Perhaps he blunders the more readily because he does not know enough. He does not appear to be well acquainted with the literature of any subject he writes upon. His crucial mistake in the philosophy of Determinism would have been avoided if he had only read Mill and Bain—to say nothing of their predecessors. He is evidently just as much in want of information on the subject of Atheism. And we are afraid that he does not quite understand the meaning of the word "disbelieve."

Bradlaugh and Ingersoll were both Atheists. The Atheism of Bradlaugh was notorious; neither was the Atheism of Ingersoll concealed. Mr. Blatchford himself has written that—

"Ingersoll, the Atheist, is a nobler moralist and a better man than Moscs."

"Nunquam" was not so afraid of the word "Atheist" four years ago. But it may be objected that he used the word a little loosely in that sentence. Well, then, let us see what Ingersoll himself said. The following passage is from an "Interview" headed "My Belief" in the fifth volume of the Dresden Edition of his collected works:—

"Question.—Don't you think that the belief of the Agnostic is more satisfactory to the believer than that of the Atheist?"

Answer.—There is no difference. The Agnostic is an Atheist. The Atheist is an Agnostic. The Agnostic says: 'I do not know, but I do not believe there is any God.' The Atheist says the same. The orthodox Christian says he knows there is a God; but we know that he does not know. He simply believes. He cannot know. The Atheist cannot know that God does not exist."

Ingersoll called himself an Agnostic, but he was not foolish or timid enough to deny that he was an Atheist. Mr. Blatchford calls himself an Agnostic, but denies that he is an Atheist. This simply shows that he does not understand.

In that same "Interview" Ingersoll said:—

"I do not believe in any Supreme personality or in any Supreme Being who made the universe and governs nature. I do not say there is no such Being—all I say is that I do not believe that such a Being exists."

Which is exactly Mr. Blatchford's own position.

Bradlaugh stated his Atheistic position as follows:—

"The Atheist does not say 'there is no God,' but he says, 'I know not what you mean by God; I am without idea of God; the word *God* is, to me, a sound conveying no clear or distinct affirmation. I do not deny God, because I cannot deny that of which I have no conception, and the conception of which, by its affirmer, is so imperfect that he is unable to define it to me.'"

When that passage came from Bradlaugh's pen the present writer was a very young man, but he had studied in a good school, and this is what he wrote of Atheism nearly thirty years ago in criticising a book of Professor Flint's:—

"There be Gods many and Lords many; which of the long theological list is to be selected as *the* God? A God, like everything else from the heights to the depths, can be known only by his attributes; and what the Atheist does is not to argue against the existence of *any* God, which would be sheer lunacy, but to take the attributes affirmed by Theism as composing its Deity, and to inquire whether they are compatible with each other and with the facts of life. Finding that they are not, the Atheist simply sets Theism aside as not proven, and goes on his way without further afflicting himself with such abstruse questions."

This has always been the Atheist's position. The word "Atheist" is explained by its etymology. Richardson, in his great and splendid etymological Dictionary, says:—"Atheist.—Greek *Atheos*—from *a*, privative, and *theos*, God." A Theist believes in God; an Atheist does not believe in God. A Theist has a God; the Atheist has no God. Atheism means "without God." Simply this and nothing more. The Bible itself states the Atheistic position quite accurately as being "without God in the world." And this is Mr. Blatchford's position—though he is so anxious to get rid of its logical label.

Here are extracts from *God and My Neighbor*:—

"The rationalist denies all miracles alike."

"What are the phantom gods to us? They are no more than the waterspouts on the ocean, or the fleeting shadows on the hills."

"I claim that this Heavenly Father is a myth..... There is no Heavenly Father watching tenderly over us, His children. He is the baseless shadow of a wistful human dream."

"You have been told that I deny God and a future life. I deny nothing. I know nothing about God, nor about a future life."

Mr. Blatchford does not know, and he does not deny. Bradlaugh and Ingersoll did not know, and did not deny. Mr. Blatchford does not differ from them one iota. They were Atheists, and so is he, whether he likes the word or not.

Some people say—but they are not Atheists, so it does not really matter—that Atheism is a denial of God. Towards the end of his very long life, the late George Jacob Holyoake took to repudiating the word "Atheist," and naturally he misrepresented it. "To disbelieve," he said, "is to deny." Which is a fatuous defiance of the dictionary. Belief, unbelief, and disbelief are states of opinion. Denial presupposes knowledge. It is the opposite of affirmation. To affirm or deny you must know. To believe or disbelieve you go by the balance of evidence. It is the difference between inference and information.

What then, it may be asked, is unbelief? It is a milder form of the same state of mind as disbelief. It may be called suspensive rather than positive. But from the lowest to the highest degree, it is always a question of opinion. When knowledge comes, opinion goes; certitude takes the place of belief, unbelief, and disbelief; we then affirm or deny.

Modern etymologists, such as Richardson, Skeat, and Annandale, agree that Atheism is unbelief or disbelief in God. But they do not confuse disbelief with denial. They would all tell Mr. Blatchford, after reading his writings, that he does disbelieve in God. He denies the God of miracles, he declares the Heavenly Father to be a myth, and he calls all the gods phantoms. How much more does he think is necessary to make him an unbeliever?

G. W. FOOTE.

Christianity as it Was.

Father and Son; a Study of Two Temperaments. Heineman.

THERE will probably be a great difference of opinion as to whether Mr. Edmund Gosse acted wisely or unwisely in writing this book. Some will probably blame the indiscretion displayed in laying bare his father's character, others will be equally emphatic in praising the courage that has resulted in so remarkable a piece of characterisation. However this may be, the book is of considerable value, if only because it gives a picture of a deeply religious household of a generation ago—of a type that, while probably common enough then, is now becoming increasingly rare. It is true that the work is published anonymously, but as the father's profession is mentioned, and many of his published works mentioned by name, there can be no discourtesy in saying who the author is. Moreover, Mr. Gosse, while apparently telling the plain, unvarnished truth, does so with all regard to the many admirable qualities in the characters of his parents, and to the relations between them and himself. The great interest of the work lies in its giving us an inner view of a thoroughly Christian household of fifty years ago. The author describes his book as "a genuine slice of life," and there is nothing in the work to belie the description.

One can hardly call the environment into which the son was born an attractive one. Under other circumstances, with such parents, it might easily have been so. For father and mother were both above the average. The mother gained some distinction, in a limited circle, by the productions of her pen; and the father, in a much wider circle, by his writings on natural science. Both were naturally kindly, sensitive, upright characters. Better, perhaps, had they been otherwise; for it is one of the consequences of Christian Puritanism that while it converts lower natures into hypocrites, it sadly mars the proportions of higher ones. In that house the Bible was the one constant study, and it was accepted with a literalness surprising to-day to even professed Christians. Any teaching, scientific or otherwise, that contradicted the Bible was condemned. Readers of Philip Henry Gosse's books—of whom, many years ago, the present writer was one—will recall passages in which the explicit statement is made, that no matter what the evidence might be in support of a theory, the writer would not accept it if it were in conflict with the Bible. The son gives several illustrations to prove this is no idle statement. The first impulse of the father was to accept the Darwinian hypothesis. But there was the first chapter of Genesis, and in defiance of the better prompting, the father published a book, *Omphalos*, the logical conclusion of which, as Charles Kingsley said, was that "God had written on the rocks an enormous and stupendous lie," or as another critic put it, "God hid the fossils in the rocks in order to tempt geologists into infidelity."

The outlook was almost inconceivably narrow. "The will of God" appears to have been a constant phrase in the house—not used as a phrase merely, but as the expression of an intense conviction. Imaginative literature, in the shape of poetry and romance, were almost excluded from the house. The boy was well on in years before he heard the name of Shakespeare. He was fifteen before he managed to read (surreptitiously) one of the plays. He tells, also, how he accompanied his father to Exeter Hall, and heard an orator storming indignantly because "At this very moment there is proceeding, unreprieved, a blasphemous celebration of the birth of Shakespeare, a lost soul now suffering for his sins in hell." It is due to the father to record that he afterwards dissented from this view, on the ground that we did not know enough of Shakespeare to be sure that he did not accept Christ before he died. So there was hope—even for Shakespeare.

Sickness and trouble were, of course, due to God. When the wife of a cobbler—both belonging to their Church—broke her leg, the elder Gosse, at a loss to

account for an accident to an exemplary couple, pounded the theory that it was a punishment inflicted on her for making an idol of her husband. If the son burned his finger, the father would solemnly pray, "May these afflictions be much sanctified to him," before attending to the burn. Here, again, is a curious picture:—

"Mother's attention was drawn to the fact that I was looking delicate. The notice nowadays universally given to hygienic rules of life was rare fifty years ago, and among deeply religious people fatalistic views of disease prevailed. If anyone were ill, it showed that 'the Lord's hand was extended in chastisement.'.....People would.....go on living over a cesspool, working themselves up into an agony to discover how they had incurred the displeasure of the Lord, but never moving away. As I became very pale and nervous, and slept badly at night, with visions and loud screams in my sleep, I was taken to a physician.....He recommended—whatever physicians in such cases always recommend but nothing was done. If I was feeble, it was the Lord's will, and we must acquiesce."

All the customary Christian festivals were excluded from the Gosse household. Of Christmas the father had a positive horror. Even plum-pudding was banned as "flesh offered to idols." The correct path was very straight, very narrow, and extremely uncomfortable. Those outside the father's Church had little or no chance of salvation. He would not admit that a single Unitarian could be saved. The inhabitants of Catholic countries were all destined for hell, save here and there one who had read his Bible diligently. Even in the Church of England few would be saved. These people might be sincere, but they were wrong in theory, and that was enough. Yet P. H. Gosse was not of a brutal, callous nature. The son says:—

"He who was so tender-hearted that he could not bear to witness the pain or distress of any person, however disagreeable or undeserving, was quite acquiescent in believing that God would punish human beings, in millions, for ever, for a purely intellectual error of comprehension.....Taking for granted, as he did, the absolute integrity of the scriptures, and applying to them his trained scientific spirit, he contrived to stifle with a deplorable success alike the function of the imagination, the sense of moral justice, and his own deep and instinctive tenderness of heart."

One may commend this passage to those who are fond of dilating on the excellencies of the Bible and its influence in developing a noble type of character. Noble characteristics may coexist with an orthodox belief in the Bible, but not because of its influence. Where the belief is sincere and intense, and the intelligence keen, the usual result is a narrowing of sympathy and a hardening of character. Where the belief is not intense, nor the intelligence bright, the result is to develop hypocrisy until it becomes second nature. Indeed, when one gets such glimpses as these of what the orthodox world was like, one feels warranted in saying that the world owes far more to the "bad" characters than to the conventionally good ones for its sweetness and cleanliness. For one must bear in mind that the Gosses were above the average by nature and by education. Change the circumstances, reflect upon the consequences of such views when held by uneducated, coarse-grained people, and it needs little penetration to see what a demoralising force orthodox puritanism must have been. A slight difference of temperament, given the dominance of such a conception of life, would be enough to convert a tolerably bearable human being into an insufferable hypocrite or a social pest. Truly the Nonconformist Conscience may boast of a glorious ancestry.

The son was "devoted to the Lord" at his birth. Both mother and father desired only that he should grow up a preacher of the word. Luckily for himself, the boy's temperament early declared against such a career. There are several amusing stories related concerning the son's early heresies, to which space forbids anything more than the merest reference. He experimented with prayers, and found no result. To test his father's teaching concerning the punishment meted out to idol-worshippers, he solemnly

addressed prayers to chairs—and awaited the consequences. All childish enough in themselves, and yet suggestive. The truth is that the child's tastes were not in accordance with the regimen of the household—and in this he seems to have inherited much of his mother's temperament, but minus her religion. After the death of the mother, father and son drifted further and further apart, until the departure of the latter for London, as a very young man, presented the occasion for complete intellectual separation. At this stage the son's mental condition is probably accurately described by the father. We had, he writes, "no common ground. The Holy Scriptures had no longer any authority; you had taught yourself to evade their inspiration. Any particular oracle of God which pressed upon you, you could easily explain away; even the very character of God you weighted in your balance of fallen reason, and fashioned accordingly. You were then sailing down the rapid tide of time towards eternity, without a single authoritative guide except what you might fashion and forge on your own anvil." The son, apparently, accepts the description, and describes himself as having thrown off the yoke, and taking "a human being's privilege to fashion his inner life for himself."

One can at least congratulate the son on having thrown off the influence of so depressing a theology although one would wish for a more explicit statement as to how far the liberation extended. And the son is not alone deserving of sympathy. Father and mother—particularly the former—deserve their share. For both were people of a naturally good character, and a more enlightened environment would have surely furnished a record of family life that might have been held up as a pattern to all. Those partly-liberated minds which retain some lingering suspicion that perhaps, after all, the orthodox view of the Bible and the old-fashioned Puritanism had some good influence upon life, would do well to read *Father and Son*. They will see then what both really meant in operation, when accepted by men and women who were sincere enough to really believe all they professed, and honest enough to put it into practice so far as their circumstances permitted.

C. COHEN.

Christmas Meditations.

ACCORDING to the traditional testimony, the founder of Christianity was born on December 25, nineteen hundred and seven years ago; and that alleged event Christendom is getting ready to celebrate once more. Already Christmas Carols are being sung from door to door by little children, and clergymen and their choirs are rehearsing the various exercises which will distinguish the great day of rejoicing. And yet Christianity is still only on trial and Jesus little more than a name to the majority of his professed disciples. We are told, again and again, that "the coming of Christ is the greatest of all events in the history of the race"; but wherein does its greatness consist? In the world at large we see no sign of it nor yet in Christendom. The importance of Christmas is apparent only in the songs and sermons and devotions of the Church, not in the actualities of everyday life. The greatest of all events in the history of the race, we are told, was the birth of the Savior of the world; but we declare that the Savior of the world is still unborn. The chief distinction of Jesus is that he has completely belied his name. He has signally failed to fulfil the mission entrusted to him by his creators.

From whatever Christian point of view we look at Christmas, we are doomed to utter disappointment. One writer speaks of it as the Festival of Childhood. And yet of the child Jesus we know absolutely nothing. On this point all the records are dumb. It may be that, by common consent, Christmas is *par excellence* the children's season; but that is not in consequence of our possessing any knowledge whatever of the childhood of Jesus. Indeed, we are not absolutely certain that Jesus ever lived at all.

Whether "every babe, in cottage or palace, is a holy gift, a holy trust from God" or not, it is undeniable that its being such or not is entirely independent of the question of the historicity of the Gospel Jesus. Childhood is practically the same thing all over the world. The coming of Jesus has made no difference whatever to the lot of the child. The slum child in London is much worse off than the savage child in the wilds of Africa. Cruelty to children is even more common in Christendom than in Heathendom. We have heard and read a great deal lately about the "Cry of the children" and the "Black Stain," and there is doubtless a vast amount of truth in what is retailed to us; but most of us do not seem to realise the significance of the fact that the deplorable state of things so luridly described obtains close upon two thousand years after the reputed birth of Jesus.

Christmas is nominally observed in commemoration of the birth of an *unnatural* child—a child who had the misfortune to enter the world without a human father. The birth was so abnormal as to be impossible. The abnormal birth was followed by an equally eccentric career. In the non-canonical Gospels we read of the strange doings of this preternatural child. According to their testimony, Jesus was bad-tempered, spiteful, passionate, ready at any moment to wreak his vengeance in the most destructive fashion on all who displeased or offended him. The exemplary qualities were absent from his character. How could the birth of such a child be a boon to the world? How could the advent of such a freak prove a blessing to children? The Canonical Gospels skip the first thirty years of their hero's life; but the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke prepare us for the strong dash of supernaturalism that marked his public ministry.

And this leads us to another thought involved in the message of Christmas. The birth of Jesus, we are assured, was the advent of a Divine Being into the limited and restricted life of humanity in order to purge it of all its degradation and pollution. It was the voluntary self-subjection of God to all the frailties and imperfections of human nature with the object of delivering it from crippling bondage to them. It was the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God that he might offer himself up for the salvation of the race. Now, in orthodox theology this teaching, though by no means believable, is at any rate intelligible; but when expressed in terms of the New Theology it becomes utterly absurd as well as impossible. Mr. R. J. Campbell says that "wherever you see love accepting limitations, you see the eternal Son of God incarnate." To declare that every man is a son of God, or an incarnation of the Deity, is to divest the doctrine of the incarnation of God in Christ of all its specific meaning, and to render the offer of salvation through faith in the crucified one a colossal mockery. If Jesus was not a Divine Being dwelling in a frail tabernacle of flesh, how does Mr. Campbell know anything about the eternal Son of God? By what authority does he affirm his existence and undertake to delineate his character? Or, on the other hand, if Jesus was born of two human parents, like ordinary men, on what ground does Mr. Campbell assert that he existed consciously, and knew what was about to happen, before he was born. Thus Mr. Campbell's teaching is both unbelievable and ridiculous. He wants to make Jesus at once complete man and something more than man, which would be a perfect anachronism. But these two doctrines of the Incarnation are alike discredited by the facts of history. That no Divine Being became incarnate when Jesus was born, and remains in close, saving touch with mankind as the eternal Christ, is proved to demonstration by the existing condition of the world. An actual Savior-God, born supernaturally into humanity, would have made earth a paradise long ago. But earth is not a paradise, mankind has not been drawn upward by a power other than its own, and salvation by faith in God has never been more than a dream, for society is even now only groping its way, often

blindly, always blunderingly towards happier conditions and sublimer achievements. Of the existence of a higher than man there is absolutely no evidence.

But, after all, even in Christendom, Christmas is more Pagan than Christian. It is an opportunity for family re-unions and social jollifications. The Christmastide, as witnessed in England, and so vividly described by Washington Irving, could scarcely be called a religious institution. The majority of the customs observed were exclusively Pagan in their origin, and purely secular in character. And what was true in Irving's time is truer still in ours. The lighting of the Yule log on Christmas Eve, at one time a well-nigh universal custom in Europe, the revels carried on under the superintendence of the Lord of Misrule, known in Scotland as the Abbot of Unreason, the favorite pastimes over which he presided being gaming, music, conjuring, dipping for nuts and apples, dancing, fool-plough, hot cockles, blindman's buff, etc.—these, and other diversions indulged in by our forefathers, were more secular than sacred. The present tendency is to minimise the religious aspect of Christmas, and magnify the festive and social. Anyone looking at Maclise's "Merry Christmas in the Baron's Hall" would be forcibly reminded of the Pagan Saturnalia. Indeed already, to the majority of the people, Christmastide is a season devoted to banqueting and merry-making rather than to church-going and religious exercises. As in olden time,

"Ever at Yuletide, when the great log flamed,
In chimney-corner, laugh and jest went round,"

so now, again, there is occurring a significant return of the people to a more rational and wholesome use of this mid-winter holiday, this winter festival of the solstice, which was originally observed in honor of the sun, which at this time turns its face towards spring and summer. The shortest day is past, night's reign is over, the corner is turned, and in front of us is glorious sunshine, smiling life, genial warmth, golden harvest. Therefore we rejoice, and are exceeding glad.

J. T. LLOYD.

THE FAILURE OF CHRISTIANITY.

The capitalist who makes millions by the manufacture of rifled cannon, sees no inconsistency in murmuring in his seat at Catholic mass or Protestant service, "Return good for evil," "If one cheek be smitten turn the other," and all the rest of the evangelical injunctions to peace and forbearance: were any to suggest to him the inconsistency of his conduct, such an one would speak to deaf ears; that his whole life was a violation of the precepts he professed would be an unintelligible reproach to him; his soul would take refuge, snug and safe, in his formulas. Yet who can deny that, if the commands of Christianity had in the least penetrated beneath the surface of human life, to make weapons of destruction would be viewed as a crime so frightful that none would dare attempt it? Some writer has said that "singing psalms never yet prevented a grocer from sanding his sugar." This rough joko expresses in a grotesque form what may be said in all seriousness of the impotency of Christianity to affect modern national life.

Christianity is a formula: it is nothing more. The nations in which daily services in its honor are said in thousands and tens of thousands of cathedrals and churches, sell opium to the Chinese, cheat and slay Red Indians, slaughter with every brutality the peaceful natives of Tonquin and Anam, carry fire and sword into Central Asia, kill Africans like ants on expeditions, and keep a whole populace in the grip of military service from the Spree to the Elbe, from the Zuider Zee to the Tiber, from the Seine to the Neva. Whether the nation be England, America, France, Russia, Italy, or Germany, the fact is the same; with the gospels on its reading-desks and their shibboleth on its lips, every nation practically follows the lusts and passions of its human greed for possession of territory and increase of treasure. Not one amongst them is better in this matter than another. Krupp guns, shrapnell shells, nitro-glycerine, and submarine torpedoes are the practical issues of evangelicalism and catholicism all over the civilised world. And the nations are so sublimely unconscious of their own hypocrisy that they have blessings on their warfare pronounced by their ecclesiastics, and implore the Lord of Hosts for his sympathy before sending out armed cruisers.

This is inevitable, is the reply: in the present state of hostility between all nations, the first one to renounce the arts of war would be swallowed up by the others. So it would be, no doubt; but if this be the chief fruit of Christianity, may not this religion justly be said to have failed conspicuously in impressing itself upon mankind? It has impressed its formulas; not its spirit. It has sewn a phylactery on the hem of humanity's robe; it has never touched the soul of humanity beneath the robe. It has produced the iniquities of the Inquisition, the egotism and celibacy of the monasteries, the fury of religious wars, the ferocity of the Hussite, of the Catholic, of the Puritan, of the Spaniard, of the Irish Orangeman, and of the Irish Papists; it has divided families, alienated friends, lighted the torch of civil war, and borne the virgin and the grey-beard to the burning pile, broken delicate limbs upon the wheel and wrung the souls of innocent creatures on the rack: all this it has done, and done in the name of God.

But of mercy, of pity, of forbearance, of true self-sacrifice, what has it ever taught the world?—"Ouida."

Correspondence.

MISSIONS IN JAPAN.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—According to the Directory for 1907, published by the Hongkong Daily Press, there are 3,599 Protestant missionaries working (4) in China, Japan, and Korea. Statistics for Roman Catholics are not before me, but I estimate there are nearly 1,000 of them. These misguided men and women represent over ninety sects of the Christian religion, so that the heathen Chinaman may pay his money and take his choice—1d. plain, 2d. colored.

I enclose a separate sheet giving the names of ninety sects. They all profess to teach from the same Bible, yet the existence of these sects conclusively proves that no one of them believes the others to be teaching the game as it ought to be played. They virtually say one to another, "You're wrong there. Christ meant so-and-so." Of course, they cannot very well retort, "You're a liar"; so they wink one eye and send home glowing accounts of progress, and incidentally ask for more funds with which to carry on the good work.

Outsiders see most of the game, and we residents of the non-missionary class see a great deal, and remark one to another, "What asses the home people are to subscribe to such a palpable swindle!"

I remember asking a Japanese young man why he had seceded from the Church of England (he was a convert duly reported to the Home Board), and he replied, with a smile: "I attended the Rev. —'s classes merely to learn English, as he taught free to converts. I became converted, and when I had mastered all the English I required I joined the Roman Catholics, and again became converted, as I wished to learn French from the priests. Now that I have a knowledge of English and French (taught free) I have no need to attend the missionaries' classes." Decidedly ingenious, don't you think? It is not an isolated instance. Amongst the rising generation in Japan I should say that the majority of them are "diddling" the missionary in precisely the same manner.

A former cook of mine once told me that she was an "American Christian." Evidently there are other varieties; but in order to make quite sure that you get the right brand you must, in "Worcester Sauce" parlance, "see that our name is written across over label" thus—"American Brand," "English Brand," "German Brand," etc. None genuine unless bearing our signature! What a rummy thing the Christian religion is. Like the tailor in Petticoat-lane trying on a coat. He takes hold of a yard of superfluous stuff in the small of the back and pulls it tight across the front, remarking, "Poutiful fit, mein freund." That's the Christian religion, it can be made to fit. A pull-in there and a slack-out somewhere else.

Confucianism dates 551-479 B.C. Is it likely that the Chinese will relinquish the teachings of the philosopher Confucius for those of a carpenter like Jesus Christ? The idea is preposterous and presumptuous.

Long life to the *Freethinker*.

KIKU.

Japan, November 19, 1907.

LIST OF CHRISTIAN BODIES MISSIONISING IN CHINA, KOREA, AND JAPAN.

Allgemeiner Evangelisch Protestantischer—American Advent Christian Mission—American Baptist Missionary Union—American Bible Society—American Free Methodist Mis-

sion—American Friends' Mission—American Lutheran Mission—American Presbyterian Mission—American Protestant Episcopal Church Mission—American Reformed Presbyterian Mission—American Southern Baptist Mission—Augustana Synod Mission—Basel Missionary Society—Berlin Foundling House—Berlin Missionary Society—Bible Christian Methodist Mission—Bible Missionary Society—British and Foreign Bible Society—Broadcast Tract Press—Canadian Methodist Mission—Canadian Presbyterian Mission—Central China Religious Tract Society—China Baptist Publication Society—China Inland Mission—China Missionary Alliance—Christian and Missionary Alliance—Chinese Tract Society—Church of England Mission—Church of England Zenana Mission—Church of Scotland Mission—Danish Lutheran Mission—Educational Association of China—English Baptist Mission—English Methodist Mission—English Presbyterian Mission—English United Methodist Free Church—Finland Missionary Society—Finnish Free Church Mission—Foreign Christian Missionary Society—Friends' Foreign Mission—German China Alliance Mission—Gospel Mission—Grace Mission—Hauge's Synodes Mission—Hildesheim Mission for the Blind—Independent—Irish Presbyterian Church Mission—Kieler China Mission—Liebenzell Mission—London Missionary Society—Lutheran Brethren Mission—Medical Missionary Society—Methodist Episcopal Church South, U. S. A.—Methodist Episcopal Mission—Methodist Publishing House in China—Metropolitan Presbyterian Mission—Mission for the Chinese Blind—Missionary Home and Agency—National Bible Society of Scotland—North China Tract Society—Norwegian Lutheran Mission—Norwegian Mission in China—Norwegian Missionary Society—Presbyterian Church of New Zealand—Reformed Church in America—Reformed Church in the United States—Rhenish Missionary Society—Scandinavian Alliance Mission—Scandinavian American Christian Free Mission—Scandinavian China Alliance Mission—Seamen's Church and Mission Society—Seamen's Mission—Seventh Day Adventist Mission—South Chili Mission—Swedish American Mission Covenant—Swedish Baptist Mission—Swedish Holiness Union—Swedish Mission in China—Swedish Missionary Society—Swedish Mongol Mission—United Brethren in Christ—United Evangelical Church Mission—United Free Church of Scotland—United Society of Christian Endeavor for China—Wesleyan Missionary Society—Women's Union Mission—Yale University Mission—Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A.

IN TIME OF CHANGE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In regard to Mr. Lloyd's article in last week's *Freethinker*, in which he quotes Mr. C. F. G. Masterman, M.P., as saying that no thoughtful and honest person could deny that "organised" Christianity had signally failed to solve the vexed problems of life—which is, of course, true—I thought you might like to print another remark from Mr. Masterman's notable book, *In Peril of Change*. He says: "If there is one thing manifest in the world of thought to-day in England, it is the steady, if silent, collapse of the foundations of the ancient national faith. The intellectual position once changed, it is but a matter of time for the actions and limitations to collapse also." Mr. Masterman, it will be remembered, spoke out boldly in favor of Secular Education when Mr. Birrell's Bill was being discussed. He is, I think, a Churchman, though he might sometimes be mistaken for a cultured Freethinker. His book, *In Peril of Change*, should be read by all politicians. He is, in many respects, a very able man, and an acute observer. He should go far.

J. A. REID.

Obituary.

WE regret to have to report the sudden death of Mr. Harry Hunt, a London Freethinker, whose face was so familiar at N. S. S. lectures. Mr. Foote shook hands with him as usual after the Queen's Hall lecture on Sunday evening. Mr. Hunt suffered from heart trouble, and long knew that he might die at any minute, but he always kept a cheerful face to the world, and lived in the daily presence of death without the slightest misgiving—except for the wife to whom he was very devoted. The funeral takes place at Golder's Green Crematorium on Saturday afternoon (Dec. 21) at 4 o'clock. Mr. Foote will make an effort to attend.

Acid Drops.

Now that the idea of Peace is in the air the clergy are patronising it. They are even appropriating it—as usual. To-day (Dec. 22) is what they call Peace Sunday. All the pulpits are pouring forth floods of eloquence on Peace, and the very idea (of course!) will be attributed to the "Prince of Peace." Students of history know how false this is. Christianity has caused or sanctioned more wars, and shed more blood, than any other religion in the world.

The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel acknowledges an "anonymous" donation of £500. Is it a brewer, a stockbroker, or a bookmaker? Or a gentleman in the rifle and gunpowder business?

How the Christians love one another! Especially at Sittingbourne. The Wesleyan Day Schools there are being closed, and the Kent Education Authority have decided to provide additional accommodation for 260 children at the Milton-next-Sittingbourne Council Schools. This decision has raised a protest from the Rev. T. T. L. Morgan, vicar of Milton, who points out that the other elementary school at Milton has sixty-two vacant places. Now this school is a Roman Catholic institution, and the Protestants are up in arms against the vicar who "would force Protestant children into the Roman Catholic school." But is there not a Conscience Clause in *all* State-aided elementary schools? And how is it worse for Protestant children to go to a Catholic school than for Catholic children to go to a Protestant school? As the famous orator said, we pause for a reply.

More love lost! Judge Emden gets up a small "Lambeth County Court Charitable Committee" to receive and administer a fund for the relief of poor and wretched debtors. All the members are Church clergymen. Which draws a protest from the Rev. C. W. Screech (excellent name!) of Peckham Rye Tabernacle, who wants to know why Nonconformists are overlooked. He says nothing about Catholics, Jews, and Freethinkers. Naturally.

Rev. J. W. Horsley replies to the Rev. Mr. Screech. He says there is no need for alarm. There will be no partiality. Of course not. Parsons were never guilty of *that*. It is the last thing you would expect of them.

Dr. Wilkinson, Bishop of St. Andrew's and Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, died suddenly at Edinburgh. After addressing a meeting of the Church Council he fell back in his chair and died—of heart failure. These things will happen, and they have no significance—unless they happen in "infidel" meeting places; then they are divine judgments.

The dear, good Nonconformists will have to be brayed in the mortar before their folly will depart from them—if it does then! The Metropolitan Free Church Federation has just resolved again that it cannot be satisfied with "any settlement of the education question which provides preferential treatment for any Church creed." In other words, Nonconformists must stand in with other Christian bodies. It is only the non-Christians who have no rights at all. After that the Federation went on to warn the Government that it was expected to bring in a Bill abolishing all sectarian tests, and giving "permission to have the Bible read in the schools." Imbecility! Perfect imbecility! We sometimes wonder what these gentlemen have done with their brains. We can hardly think they never had any.

At the evening meeting of the Federation the Rev. Dr. Horton, according to the *Daily News* report, "deplored the fact that there were men who had actually been members of congregations, but had gradually grown indifferent to their church, preferring to spend Sundays yachting at the seaside." Terrible! The reverend gentleman has our sympathy.

Mr. Allen Baker, another speaker, gave some "surprising figures." Out of London's six millions of people, he said, no more than 15 per cent., or about 938,705 attended places of worship. Evidently the business is declining. Mr. Baker also said that there were 4,000 places of worship in the metropolitan area, and 14,000 public-houses. This shows which "spirit" is most popular.

George Stills, who was hanged at Cardiff for the murder of his mother, wrote a nice letter of exhortation to his old

comrades. It is a way these murderers have; they are so fond of reading moral lessons to other people. Stills advised them to "look for something more real than the pleasures of this life." We suppose this is an allusion to the pleasures he expected in Kingdom-Come. He does not appear to have been much concerned about the fate of his poor old mother. That also is the usual way of these gentry.

St. Michael's Brotherhood, Coventry, is conducted on "popular lines." They had a boxing exhibition the other day between Bert Lamb, a local favorite, and Trumpeter Berry, of the 42nd Battery Royal Field Artillery. The vicar acted as timekeeper. How Jesus would have enjoyed himself if he had looked in!

Mr. J. E. Rattenbury is one of the Nonconformist preachers who came into prominence as Christian Socialists after the General Election. It is astonishing how many preachers found Socialism in the New Testament when thirty Labor members were returned to Parliament. We imagine, however, that Mr. Rattenbury has been going a little too strong for his congregation, for in a recent sermon he is at some pains to tone down his position a bit. He explains that Socialism can only be attributed to Jesus in a "metaphorical sense." He also adds that "in the modern sense in which we use the word 'Socialism'.....it is obviously absurd to speak of Jesus Christ as belonging to this class of people. There is no theory of economics in the teaching of Jesus. Jesus Christ was not a mere political reformer." Probably he was only a reformer in a metaphorical sense also. And we suspect that Mr. Rattenbury is likewise a Socialist in a "metaphorical sense"; and if at the next election, by some stroke of fortune there should be very few Socialists returned to Parliament, he will most likely discover that the time for metaphorical language has passed.

What Mr. Rattenbury really means (he says), when he talks about the Socialism of Jesus, is, that there is a great deal in his teaching that is the same as the teaching of Socialists. But the important thing is to know what are the points of difference and what are the points of agreement. There is a part of the Socialist teaching that everybody and every party agrees with. When Socialists teach that men and women should be well fed, well clothed, well housed, and well educated, they are saying that which everybody else says. But this does not make everybody a Socialist. The difference between Socialists and non-Socialists is not that the former believe in human happiness and well-being while the latter do not, but in the methods advocated as a means of realising these aspirations. This is not the place for discussing whether the proposals of Socialists are wise or unwise; all we wish to point out is, that preachers like Mr. Rattenbury are either ignorant or dishonest in preaching Jesus as a Socialist merely because there are points of agreement between them and the New Testament. If there is a Socialism connected with the New Testament Jesus, it must agree with what people now understand to constitute the essence of Socialism. If there be no such agreement, to talk about the "Socialism of Jesus" and then cry out that it does not mean what Socialists mean by the word, but that it is only metaphorical, is to deliberately mislead one's hearers or readers.

Of course, we do not believe there is any genuine agreement between Socialism and the New Testament. Jesus Christ was not thinking of a social revolution, nor did he lay down the lines of a social reorganisation. All of his teaching rested upon a belief in heaven and hell, and upon the need for making men fit for one so that they might avoid the other. Eliminate the supernatural from the New Testament, and the whole thing becomes meaningless. Socialism, on the contrary, fixes its attention upon human welfare here, quite independent of any possible existence elsewhere. The connection between them is on all-fours with the connection between chestnut horses and horse chestnuts.

Christian Sanity is the title of a work announced by Dr. T. A. Schofield, the nerve specialist. What an out of the way subject! Dr. Schofield is decidedly original.

Lady Warwick is a Christian Socialist. Jesus said, "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor." Lady Warwick is taking the first step. She is selling off. When will she take the second?

Mr. Campbell's book on *Christianity and the Social Order* was to have been published in December. It is now announced for January. We shall review it at some length when it appears.

Mr. R. J. Campbell is of opinion that Jesus Christ was "probably" the greatest personality that has ever lived. "Probably"! Now we wonder why on earth Mr. Campbell continues calling himself a Christian after reaching this length?

When the Rev. R. J. Campbell gave out his text the other Thursday morning, a man in the congregation said, "Kindly quote the next verse, sir." That was all. But the man received a serious admonition on the spot from the preacher, with a hint that there was a limit to his patience; and the papers made a lot of the "City Temple Incident." And the cream of the joke is that Mr. Campbell was preaching on "The Religion of Humanity."

The *Christian Commonwealth* for December 11 contains an illustrated article on the good work of the Salvation Army. Among the other "good" things accomplished is the supplying of over five million cheap meals and over one million cheap shelters in the course of a single year. We wonder whether the C. C. is aware that this branch of General Booth's philanthropy—like many others—yields a profit? The value for money is not so good as that dispensed at the Rowton houses, which are run on a business basis, and yield a profit. Moreover, during a single year, the profit, after paying wages and general expenses, reached the sum of £1,250. Yet this is one of the institutions for the support of which the Army asks people to contribute. The *Christian Commonwealth* professes to be deeply interested in social problems. We regret it is not more discriminating in its patronage, and so avoid countenancing such a gigantic imposture as the Salvation Army.

The Rev. J. Conrad Noel is a gentleman who is either ignorant, or pretends to be, of the contents of the book he is paid to expound. Lecturing the other day at Manchester, this gentleman paraded Jesus Christ as a Socialist. Whereupon an old and esteemed reader of this journal pointed out that Christ's teachings were based upon conceptions with which Socialism had nothing to do. He also referred to the teaching of Jesus as to the approaching end of the world ere "this generation shall pass away." Mr. Noel's reply was that Jesus never said so, nor was it so written in the New Testament. Our correspondent sends us a list of references—well known, of course—as proof that the rev. gentleman either did or would not know his "sacred" book. The only course we would suggest would be to wait for Mr. Noel's next appearance in the same place, and provide him, *in public*, with a list of texts. He was probably trading on the ignorance and credulity of his audience.

A clergyman, reported by the *Methodist Times*, declares that if the Government were to introduce a disestablishment measure, "the Almighty would remove them from power." We imagine a solid church vote would be much more effective.

The dear *Daily News* prints every morning a "to-day's story." Nearly every one of them is a venerable chestnut. But this is perhaps natural. Our pious contemporary has only lately taken to jocularity, and it will want some time to catch other people up.

A Christian weekly, reviewing a certain book, says that the author ascribes "the root origin" of the city slum, not to the depravity of the poor, but to "the selfishness and atheism of the rich." Atheism! No insolence is equal to Christian insolence.

The Rev. H. Bissoker warns people against treating the unbeliever as necessarily as evil-disposed person—a warning which we welcome for what it is worth. But the necessity for the warning shows what a fine healthy influence on life Christianity has had. For the belief that unbelievers must be persons of a low type of character is one that could never have had the remotest connection with actual experience. It is in the very nature of things that minorities should be, on the whole, better behaved than majorities. The fact that they are a minority, and that the myriad eyes of the majority are on the look out for flaws, makes them more circumspect than they would perhaps otherwise be. And when we add to this the further considerations that unbelief is the result of either an increased moral sensitiveness, which discerns the faults of orthodox morality, or to a keener intelligence that perceives the intellectual weaknesses of current religious beliefs, the probability that the unbeliever will be rather better than others becomes strengthened. No, the belief is not sincere, but a piece of strenuous Christian lying. And now it is found that the unbelievers are not "necessarily" worse than others. We note that word "necessarily." Evidently Mr. Bisseker thinks—or wishes

to convey the impression that he thinks—that they often are. He has evidently much to learn on the matter. Perhaps his caution was due to the perception that unbelievers are now so numerous, and consequently so well known, that telling this ancient falsehood is no longer profitable. One runs too great a risk of being found out.

The students who broke up the Anti-Vivisectionist meeting at Acton ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves, and the College authorities ought to take steps to bring them to their senses. Making animal noises, and perfuming the place with kippers and chemicals, is disgusting rowdyism. What the object of the rowdies was we shall not discuss; the object, whatever it was, is no excuse for rowdyism. The right of public meeting should be sacred in a free country. Whoever interferes with it strikes at the very heart of social and political progress.

The *Academy* is gradually turning into a weekly budget of politics and religion. Last week it dealt with the students and the "Brown Dog" affair. Our contemporary gravely asks why the students were "forbidden to hold a meeting in Trafalgar Square." But why talk in this ignorant fashion? Anybody with a grain of sense might see that Trafalgar Square is not a place where casual public meetings could be held at any hour of the day or the night. Casual meetings are not allowed there, but it is easy enough to hold formal meetings by giving proper notice to the authorities, who, in the interest of peace and order, see that two or more meetings are not called for the same day. This is a just and sensible arrangement; and the *Academy* writer should have ascertained the facts of the case before censuring the police and accusing them of "great violence and brutality." There was bound to be something like that if the police did their duty; for a crowd of excited male students, bent on having their own way, could not be repulsed from Trafalgar Square with a wave of the hand and an affable smile.

"If the demonstrators," the *Academy* says, "had been a band of atheists who had assembled together to pollute the ears of passers-by with idiotic and disgusting blasphemies" they "would have been protected by the police, and anyone interfering with them would have been arrested and fined." But why should not Atheists be protected by the police as well as Christians? They also are citizens, and are entitled to what they pay for. They would not be protected, any more than the students were, if they acted in spite of the law—which in this instance is so reasonable. Had the students gone the right way to work, they would have been protected too. As for the "idiotic and disgusting blasphemies," one may smile at the expression as a fair specimen of the *Academy's* present-day style.

Quarterback Jones, of the Yale football team, prayed fervently before a great game. This is all very well, of course, while the praying is confined to one side. When both sides pray, what is the Lord to do? If he helps one side, it isn't a fair match; and if he helps both, it leaves things just as they were.

Father Bernard Vaughan compares Modernism to appendicitis; it should be treated surgically before it corrupts the blood. Yes, and the Church was always good at wielding the knife; though it cannot *cut as deep* as it used to.

A Sabbatarian war is raging in New York. The Sabbatarians stole a march on the other citizens and got all the theatres, music-halls, and other places of assembly closed on "the Lord's Day." This drove myriads of people (as might be expected) to the drinking saloons. The next attempt of the Sabbatarians will be to close the saloons too. But the Anti-Sabbatarians are up in arms, and the Sunday bigots seem likely to be defeated. They want "a Sabbath unmarred by music and theatricals." That is to say, they want their own Sabbath forced upon other people. That is the essence of Sabbatarianism everywhere. "We do what we like—and you do what we like, too." Hallelujah! Three cheers for the Bird o' Freedom!

Lombroso, who worked for all it was worth the brilliant idea that genius is a form of madness, now in his old age is trying to prove himself a genius on his own principles. He has turned Spiritualist.

Sir George Clarke, the new Governor of Bombay, has issued a proclamation stating that 7,000 men, women, and children are dying every week of the plague in the Presidency. Good old "Providence"! "For his tender mercies are over all his works."

More "Providence." The St. Petersburg correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* gives awful details of the earthquake in Karatag and other parts of Bokhara. "People," he says, were buried alive, burnt alive, immured, starved to death, or left to die in nameless agonies. It was a scene of almost preternatural horror." Karatag had about 1,200 houses; it is now a vast churchyard, in which 4,000 people lie buried; and from ten to eleven thousand perished in other towns and villages. "He doeth all things well."

Religious journals like the *Christian Commonwealth* are gradually letting the cat out of the bag. In the name of the New Theology they are telling their readers some of the things that we have been expounding for the last twenty-six years in the *Freethinker*. The paper just mentioned, for instance, had an article last week by Dudley Wright on "Christmas Before Christ," in which it is not only admitted, but demonstrated, that Christmas is not of Christian origin. Here is the opening paragraph:—

"Many people are apt to think that the celebration of Christmas has arisen during the last two thousand years, or since the establishment of what is known as the Christian Era. The festival, however, is much more ancient than that; so ancient, indeed, that we find details of the celebration of Christmas in all historical records of every nation, and always on December 25."

The writer goes on to show that Christmas is really the old Pagan festival of the birth of the Sun. "How comes it, then," he asks, "that Christians keep the birthday of Jesus on the same day as all these heathen festivals? Because in order to win the Pagans over to Christianity, many of the features of those festivals were adopted, altered somewhat in ritual, and some feature of the Christian religion substituted for the Pagan." This is true enough in substance, though not quite accurately expressed. But an extremely important point remains, which this writer does not tackle—and perhaps it has not occurred to him. Why had the Church to *invent* a birthday for Jesus? The only possible answer is that his real birthday was unknown. And that fact is a strong corroboration of the theory that Jesus—at least the Jesus of the four gospels—is not an historical character.

The one thing that Ingersoll set himself to destroy was the doctrine of hell. And he did his work so well that the doctrine is now practically dropped by all except hooligan preachers like Torrey. Some day or other, Ingersoll's passionate denunciations of that doctrine—exhausting the resources of imagery and language—will be accounted one of the glories of human achievement.

The New Theology quietly accepts the results of Ingersoll's crusade, and never mentions his name, because it wants the world to believe that it produced those results itself. Here is the Rev. Dr. Warschauer, in his weekly "Friends in Council," answering a correspondent who asks, "Ought believers in eternal punishment to refrain from marriage?" The answer is Yes. Dr. Warschauer says:—

"The man or woman who believes in this dogma, and who deliberately incurs the responsibility of parenthood, thereby certainly dooming, if not his own descendants, yet some portion of unborn posterity, to hideous and unceasing anguish, ought never to know one single moment's happiness; his life on earth ought to be simply a prelude to that hell in which he believes. For any reflective being with a spark of decent feeling the corollary to belief in eternal punishment ought to be celibacy."

This is but an echo of Ingersoll's eloquence. And much worse than that is Dr. Warschauer's conclusion. He says that "the evil dream of hell will have ceased to afflict their minds" when "men will have really seen Jesus, and so beheld the *Father*." Surely this is very dishonest or very childish. The evil dream of hell has *already* ceased to afflict most men's minds, not *because* of Jesus, but *in spite* of Jesus. For if Jesus did not teach hell—whether everlasting or otherwise—it is idle to talk at all about what he taught. Which is perhaps the soundest conclusion.

Christians have often very strange ideas of liberty. A certain G. Edmunds Long, of 116 Ferme Park-road, Hornsey, wrote to the *Hornsey Journal* the other day against Freethought lectures in public open spaces. Christian lectures were all right, the gentleman being himself of that ilk, but Freethought lectures were abominable. "We pride ourselves," he remarked, "on the right of free speech, and this is a splendid privilege, but surely to sow the seeds of Atheism and contempt of God and his Word is a kind of speech that should not be allowed." Surely! This gentleman allows free speech to all who agree with him; when they differ he would put a stop to it. But free speech simply means the right to differ. There is nothing else in

it. Mr. Long should consult a dictionary—and use his brains—if he has any. We perceive it is an open question.

Rev. Canon the Hon. Henry Douglas, of Foregate-street, Worcester, left £10,773. The other night, when we had a beastly cold, we almost wished we were with him.

We frequently call attention to large fortunes left by men of God, and the cases we refer to are only samples from bulk. There is plenty of money in the clerical business, if it were only shared round a little better. But when a £10,000 a year man of God sees another man of God struggling to keep out of heaven on a small income, he doesn't shell out himself, but gets up a public meeting and calls upon the laymen to "part."

"A Living Wage Wanted for the Clergy." This lovely headline arrested our attention in a morning newspaper. These gentlemen want a living wage, when they ought to want a dying wage. It would bring them so much nearer heaven.

Johnnie Kensit's son is the leading spirit in the Protestant Truth Society. We believe there is also a Catholic Truth Society. The middle word in both cases is a terrible joke.

Pilate asked, "What is truth?" and Jesus couldn't answer him. The Protestant Truth Society says, "We've got it." The Catholic Truth Society says, "We've got it." And the Freethinker smiles like the knowing old bird he is.

Dr. Clifford is still a Passive Resister. We don't know what presentation treasure or family heirloom will be seized this time. The important point is the dexterity with which he keeps out of prison. The reverend gentleman has a profound belief in the policy of minimising his own martyrdom.

The *Lyttleton Times* (New Zealand) reports a speech by Bishop Nelligan at Auckland, instancing the number of "fallen women" as the "failure of Christianity." Of thirty-five "first falls" the Bishop declared that married men, professing Christians, had helped to pull them down. Very likely.

Cornelius E. Porter is doing fourteen days' imprisonment for causing an obstruction at Gillingham by street preaching. He said his mission was to convert Gillingham, and the police were standing in the way of the Lord. The magistrate, however, seems to have thought it was the other way about. Still, we are sorry for the poor enthusiast; and we are glad to hear that an egg thrown at him by someone in the crowd missed its mark. That it struck a gentleman's silk hat was a sarcastic accident.

The *Daily Chronicle* notes the continued popularity of Hall Caine's trashy play, *The Christian*, and hopes the Lyceum management will have "as good a fortune with the pantomime." Oh!

Hall Caine has just been replying to a critic. He modestly speaks of his own play as moving four thousand spectators to "genuine laughter, generous tears, and spontaneous applause"—and refers to his detractors as "bitter-hearted blatherskites" and "mean-souled nincompoops." How these little insects buzz and sting when aroused!

Dying in church ought to secure a through ticket for heaven. But this did not occur to the pious people assembled in the Congregational Church, Newcastle-under-Lyme, the other day. The cry of "Fire!" was raised, and hundreds of worshipers sprang to their feet and rushed towards the doors. Several ladies fainted, and others became hysterical. It was a wild scene while it lasted. Of course it is only Christianity that enables people to meet death calmly; but could a meeting of Freethinkers have acted worse—or as badly?

A pile of money is being raised for the new Bishopric of Essex, and seven Essex towns are competing for the cathedral and the bishop. Many clergymen are pressing the claims of Barking. This is the place where speculative builders run up rows of ugly cottages, and persuade the working man who rents them that he is living at the seaside. But will it be the cathedral city of Essex? We doubt it. The bishop is likely to have a say on that matter. The episcopal nose may object to hang over Barking Creek.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

January 5, Kennington.

To Correspondents.

- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—December 22, Holloway.
- J. BROUGH.—Your good wishes for the new year are reciprocated. Thanks for cuttings.
- R. CHAPMAN.—Glad to hear that Mr. Lloyd's "fine" lectures at South Shields gave so much satisfaction. We regret to hear of Captain Duncan's death, but we have not time to prepare an obituary notice from the Shields paper you send us. Cannot some member of the Branch send us the proper matter for our columns?
- F. J. GOULD.—Glad to have the Tract, and will notice it next week.
- G. R. BALLARD.—"Answers to Correspondents" in the *National Reformer*, 1872, were obviously not all written by Bradlaugh himself. We prefer to go by what appeared over his own signature. You will find the rest of your letter answered by our leading article this week.
- E. NORWOOD.—Mr. Foote intends to publish before long a new edition of the story of his imprisonment. It has been out of print for twenty years, and Freethinkers (like yourself) of the new generation are constantly asking for it. Mr. Foote is not at present contemplating an Autobiography.
- A. WEBBER.—Dr. Clifford is a perfect humbug on the Education question. We don't wonder that you were disgusted with him at Plymouth.
- MOTHERWELL ATHEIST.—Pleased to hear from a Socialist who enjoys our criticism of Mr. Ramsey Macdonald and other Socialist leaders who tread in "the Christian quagmire."
- ENNSON.—We don't give biological lessons in this column. There are many good handbooks of the subject. Get one.
- E. GWINNELL.—Pencil letters are painful reading; and how can we help, anyhow?
- G. ROLEFFS.—Thanks for cuttings.
- W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always very welcome.
- W. ADAMSON.—Surely your friend is not simple enough to imagine that Mr. Bottomley writes the whole of *John Bull* with his own hand, or would be personally responsible for every statement and opinion it contains. The cutting is based upon a misconception. The population of France does not diminish; it increases, though not as rapidly as the population of some other countries. The birth-rate has long been diminishing in England and Germany also; and, unless the process stops for some unforeseeable reason, both countries will by-and-by reach the level of France. Meanwhile, the talk about the degeneration of France is purely absurd.
- R. J. HENDERSON.—Mr. Foote has had a bit of a cold in the nasty weather, but, although troublesome, it has not incapacitated him from work. Thanks for cutting. Glad you think we "summed up H. G. Wells pretty accurately" last week.
- W. CROMACK.—Very good of you, but we won't carry the matter further.
- E. D. BERRINGTON.—Glad you were so interested in the Shakespeare part of our lecture, and so struck with the curious character (as pointed out by us) of that striking passage in *Julius Caesar*. You ask us to write on Shakespeare. We hope to find time in the new year to complete a book we began a good while ago on that subject.
- D. BAXTER.—Thanks for cutting; but you are probably mistaken in attributing the paragraphs to John Davidson. We don't detect his style, and it is quite off his line of work.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Freethought Publishing Company, Limited, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.
- SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS: Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 4s. 6d.; half column, £1 2s. 6d.; column, £2 5s. Special terms for repetitions.

Sugar Plums.

The third and last of Mr. Foote's latest course of Queen's (Minor) Hall lectures was delivered on Sunday evening. The audience followed his address on "Two Birthplaces: Bethelchem and Stratford-on-Avon" with the keenest attention from beginning to end—that is to say, for over an hour and a half. There was plenty of laughter while he criticised the childish story of the birth of Jesus, and analysed the recent sermon of the Rev. R. J. Campbell's on "The Incarnation." The larger portion of the lecture on Shakespeare,

as the great Humanist, was heard with that rapt silence which is the highest tribute a speaker can receive. Great applause burst forth at the end, and the meeting broke up without any discussion, everybody appearing to be perfectly satisfied. Mr. F. A. Davies again occupied the chair.

A special course of Sunday evening Freethought lectures, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., with the co-operation of the Camberwell N. S. S. Branch, has been arranged to take place at the "Horns" Assembly Room, Kennington Park, during January. Mr. Foote will lead off and wind up the course, and the intermediate lectures will be delivered by Messrs. Cohen and Lloyd. The "Horns" Assembly Room is easily accessible. Buses and trams pass the doors from all the bridges, and the "Kennington Oval" Tube Station is within a minute's walk. The doors will be open at 7, and the chair taken at 7.30. Admission will be entirely free, with a collection towards expenses.

Another course of Sunday evening lectures is being organised at the Woolwich Town Hall during February.

London Freethinkers will please note that their Annual Dinner takes place at the Holborn Restaurant on Tuesday evening, January 14. Mr. G. W. Foote, who will preside, and be supported by Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, and other leading "saints," hopes to meet a strong rally of old and new friends on this occasion.

The Secular Education League is issuing a little monthly *Secular Education Chronicle*. The first number is now in circulation. Copies can be had by applying to the League secretary, Mr. Harry Snell, 19 Buckingham-street, Strand, London, W.C.

The West Ham Branch is organising a social party to be held at the Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, on January 8. There will be a concert and a dance, and the tickets are only sixpence each—obtainable from any Branch member or from R. H. Rosetti, 87 Harrow-road, Leytonstone. The proceeds will go towards the heavy expenses of the winter propaganda.

On Sunday morning Mr. Lloyd performed the interesting ceremony of "naming" the infant son of Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Dixon, of Gateshead, who are zealous members of the Newcastle Branch of the National Secular Society. Norman Francis Dixon was "dedicated" to the service of humanity.

Mr. Hubert Bland ("Hubert" of the *Sunday Chronicle*), writing on Fathom Benson's six shilling shocker, makes a belated confession of his own faith. "Now I am a Christian," he says, "and in some respects a bigoted Christian." We are glad to hear it. We have often felt uncomfortable at the thought that he might be a Freethinker. His confession affords us real relief.

Mr. H. S. Wishart is still lecturing at Milton Hall, Daulby-street, on Sundays for the Liverpool Branch. He is getting good meetings, and the prospect has improved for the new year. Mr. Wishart will also devote some time on week-days to South Lancashire and Yorkshire—especially in the Leeds district, where the new Branch wants nursing.

During 1907 we have had printed and put into circulation 60,000 copies of Mr. Cohen's "Salvation Army" Tract. We have paid £25 6s. for the production of these, as is shown by the Freethought Publishing Company's books and vouchers, duly audited by a professional accountant. Against this we have received and acknowledged subscriptions to the amount of £22 9s. It will thus be seen that we are nearly £3 out of pocket. That deficiency ought to be made up to us forthwith. With regard to the future, we are quite willing to keep the Tract in circulation, but we cannot print more unless we are supplied with the necessary funds. It has been suggested that we should henceforth make a small charge per hundred copies, but we incline to think, from former experiences, that this would seriously hinder the circulation.

The New Year's number of the *Freethinker* will be a special one, containing matter of exceptional interest. We shall advertise it to a certain extent in various ways, and we hope our readers will do something in the same direction, by taking extra copies and placing them judiciously in the hands of friends, acquaintances, or persons they happen to meet casually in business or pleasure. We shall print an extra supply to meet the increased demand.

Mr. Bertram Dobell, the bookseller who loves books (and writes them), has sent us a beautifully printed catalogue of "Rare and Valuable Books." We have marked several things we *should have* ordered, if we had the Archbishop of Canterbury's income—the whole amounting to several hundred pounds; but, having only our own small income, we have ordered nothing. Still, the marking was a pleasant dream-exercise; and it cost us nothing, which we can very well afford.

Mr. Dobell publishes books as well as sells them. He is now seeing through the press a volume containing forty-seven letters written by Shelley to Elizabeth Kitchener. Shelley was then only nineteen, and an inexperienced enthusiast; and as he let himself go in the correspondence with this lady (who was not all his fancy painted her) the letters are sure to be very interesting. "They exhibit in the liveliest colors," Mr. Dobell says, "the character of this rash, chivalrous, frank, and generous youthful poet." The letters belong to that prince of Shelley collectors, Mr. Thomas J. Wise, who privately printed an edition of thirty copies of them seven years ago. Mr. Dobell is now able to publish them in the full sense of the word; and he "accounts it to be a singular piece of good fortune" on his part "to be the first to make known to the world at large these most interesting and important Letters." Mr. Dobell promises us one of the earliest copies, and we shall doubtless be able to write one or two interesting articles upon it in the *Freethinker*.

We supplied Mr. Mangasarian, when he was in London, with a set of our Torrey pamphlets, and we are glad to see he has made good use of them. He forwards us a copy of a pamphlet he has just issued called *Revivalist Torrey*. It appears that the soul-saver has lately been at work in Chicago, and pursuing his usual tactics. He put an advertisement in the newspapers inviting all honest sceptics to call upon him, and he would convince them of the truth of the Christian religion. "If you do not accept this invitation," he said, "never again call yourself a sceptic—you are a humbug." Mr. Mangasarian wrote accepting the invitation, and hoped that Torrey would "have the public present to hear what you have to say to a sceptic, and what a sceptic might say in reply." But the all-conquering soul-saver was not going to wrestle with a sceptic in public; all he wanted was "a heart to heart talk" in *private*. Mr. Mangasarian, just as naturally, wasn't having any of that—and so the meeting never took place. Torrey doesn't believe "that discussion is the way to arrive at truth." Perhaps not. But it is a rare way of settling lies—and Torrey could give Ananias heavy points in a handicap. Mr. Mangasarian proves this by means of our pamphlet and Mr. Stead's articles. Retribution has thus followed the pious libeller to his own home, and we hope it will follow him everywhere he goes.

The Actual Jesus.—IV.

(Continued from p. 796.)

WE may fairly consider the actual Jesus to have been a devout Jew, who was probably young, enthusiastic, and uneducated. The general lack of information concerning him, together with other circumstances, will lead us to conclude that he did not spring from or belong to the richer or upper classes of his nation.* I imagine that the Gospels may be perfectly correct in representing him as of humble parentage and as working with his father as a carpenter. He is often spoken of as a "Jewish peasant," but a carpenter is not a cultivator of the fields and might be a town dweller, so that Jesus might have lived in or near Jerusalem (as his brother James apparently continued to do after the death of Jesus) and might have conversed there as an unusually intelligent and interesting child with the learned Rabbis at the Temple, as in one of the Gospel anecdotes, which, however, is more probably only an example of a common myth concerning the childhood of demi-gods. There seems, however, at first sight, to be more probability in the story of his coming from Galilee, where he might have been affected by the teachings of the dispersed disciples

* Paul's statement that the Lord Jesus Christ was rich, but became poor that his followers through his poverty might be rich (2 Cor. viii. 9) evidently refers only to heavenly or ideal riches, though the poverty may have been literal.

of Judas of Galilee. This idea of a Galilean origin is supported by the fact that, as Gibbon points out, one of the earliest designations by which the Christians were known was that of "Galileans." This, however, might be a mere case of confusion between two distinct sects—the term being industriously applied perhaps to the new sect by their enemies as a term of reproach, and to excite Roman prejudice against them as sedition-mongers. Similarly the statements that he and his father dwelt at Nazareth, a village (or "city" according to Matthew and Luke) in Galilee, are explained away by the fact that "Jesus of Nazareth" and "Jesus the Nazarene," are mere anti-ascetic modifications of "Jesus the Nazarite"—an appellation which may have arisen from actual fact,† or from confusion with another Jesus who may have been a Nazarite, or from the assumed fulfilment of a curiously misapplied prophecy (Isaiah xi. 1) that Jehovah would raise up a Branch (*nazar* or *netzer*).

Whether an ascetic or not, Jesus was apparently a bachelor. All writers, Paul included, tacitly regard him as a celibate. If he had been a husband and father, the fact, I think, would have left some trace behind in the records and traditions—though, of course, the Christian ideas of later times would revolt against such facts and might possibly succeed in suppressing them. A husband and father would have been less likely to be led astray into the religious or other excesses which proved the ruin of the young unmarried zealot, as I imagine him to have been.

The real Jesus must have gained some influence or respect among his companions, and perhaps with the common people. But whether he won their hearts by "sweet reasonableness" as a popular teacher or persuasive speaker, or whether he was distinguished by sour crabbedness as a silent ascetic, or Nazarite, or celibate saint, full of Judaic bigotry and narrowness, we have no means of deciding. For the Gospels which depict him in both aspects—making him fast forty days and nights on one clearly mythical occasion and making him curse a fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season—are certainly unworthy of the slightest confidence, while Paul, whom we might trust, but whose Jesus was in heaven, says almost nothing concerning him on earth.‡ The genuine Jesus may have spoken of Gentiles with respect, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, or adopting the contemptuous language and mental attitude of his countrymen, he may have compared all foreigners to dogs. He *may* have uttered one of the most beautiful and touching sayings on record—"Suffer little children to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"—or on the other hand, the cold-blooded saint may have chilled a loving mother to the heart by addressing to her the unfeeling reproach, "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" He may have said, "Love your enemies," or he may have declared that unless a man hated his own parents and his own children he could not be his disciple. And he may possibly have disgraced himself by reviling the Pharisees, who were nearly the whole of his nation, in the most opprobrious terms his tongue could find, calling

* Mr. J. M. Robertson in his *Christianity and Mythology* (pp. 335-342) points out that the translators of the New Testament have obscured the evidence on the matter by deliberately substituting the words "of Nazareth" or "Nazarene" for the word "Nazarite" in a number of instances.

† That Hegeppus, an early Christian writer, makes James the brother of Jesus a Nazarite, may give some support to the idea that Jesus may also have been regarded as a Nazarite, or may have actually been a Nazarite, either for a time or for life. Nazarites were persons vowed to special austerities. They gave up wine and strong drink, and allowed their hair to grow at full length. In the case of Samson, who was a Nazarite for life, we see that miraculous powers were associated with the due observance of the vow—this miraculous power departing, according to the Old Testament legend, as soon as Samson's hair was shorn off by the Philistines (Judges xvi. 17-30).

‡ Paul's reference to "the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. x. 1) might indicate personal characteristics of Jesus while on earth. If so, there must have been conflicting elements in the character of Jesus, for the Romans would never have crucified a man for his meekness and gentleness.

them vipers, hypocrites, whited sepulchres, liars, thieves, adulterers, children of their father the devil who was a murderer from the beginning, and so forth—thus indulging like so many of his "meek and lowly" followers in religious controversy of the most vulgar and virulent type. Probably, of course, all these utterances of the Gospel Jesus, good and bad alike, are equally mythical—almost nothing of the original Jesus having been permitted to survive in the books which profess to narrate his career.

He might teach, or at least would probably accept, various doctrines then in vogue, such as the belief in immortality and heaven and hell, and some, if not most, of the moralities and hyper-moralities attributed to him in the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables—many of these ideas being "current coin in the synagogues" of the period, or among the Essenes. If he adopted the usual career of an Eastern prophet, whether as a religious teacher or exemplary ascetic, or as both combined, he might be credited with some miracles during his lifetime,* and might be wholly or partially supported by the hospitality and gifts of admirers. Possibly, however, he was only one of a little fraternity or pious brotherhood residing quietly at Jerusalem as ordinary citizens. In either case his more ardent admirers or friends might eagerly hope that he was the expected Messiah or deliverer from the Roman yoke—a hope or belief which might, indeed, be suggested and confirmed by the fact that his very name Jesus meant Savior. Carried away, perhaps, by the subtle flattery of such private or public adulation, as well as by patriotic piety and personal ambition, he may as possibly, but not, I think, probably, have called himself the "Son of Man," thus claiming Messiahship. But that he ever called himself "Son of God"—unless, indeed, he fell a victim to religious mania†—seems incredible. In the figurative sense, the phrase would be offensive as the self-praise which proverbially is no recommendation. In the literal sense, so arrogant and blasphemous an assumption would too deeply shock the religious feelings of Jewish hearers, to whom alone his mission, if he had one, would be addressed—for his reported declaration that he was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. xv. 24) is apparently a survival of the fact of the Judaic limitation of his ideals. That he must have been a strict Jew who upheld the Mosaic Law (as in Matt. v. 17-19) and that he did not profess or enjoin the all-important Universalism introduced or adopted by Paul, is evident from the strong and persistent opposition which his brother James and the other Apostles at Jerusalem offered to the new doctrine of the great Apostle to the Gentiles. There is no evidence in the Gospels that he ever during his lifetime taught the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man as applicable to all nations alike. It was not the uneducated Jesus, who apparently never quitted the narrow bounds of Palestine and the Mosaic Law and knew no language or learning but those of his fellow Hebrews, but the cosmopolitan

* Amidst the many "signs and wonders" alleged in the Gospels, a remnant of the sober truth may still be seen in the statement of the most primitive of the four Gospels that Jesus, when asked for a sign, sighed deeply and said, "There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark viii. 12). To this a more expanded and "improved" Gospel adds, "but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matt. xii. 39). Similarly the statement in Mark vi. 5, that "he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk and healed them," seems to embody a fact plus a later addition. Matt. xiii. 58, improving this somewhat too candid statement, and adding a lame excuse or explanation, says, "he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." The still further improved Gospels omit all mention of the matter, just as they also ignore the failure of the disciples to cast out devils noted in Mark ix. 18, 28, 29, and Matt. xvii. 19-21, and as they omit the unwelcome fact that Jesus was a carpenter and the son of a carpenter. If we could recover the more ancient and primitive Gospels or other documents on which our present Gospels were based, we might probably discover a number of facts which were carefully suppressed or modified in the more acceptable Gospels adopted by the Church as canonical.

† The statement in Mark iii. 21, that his friends went out to lay hold on him because they said he was beside himself, might possibly be a survival of a fact.

Paul, who is represented as saying distinctly that all men are of one blood and are the offspring of God; and Paul only expresses this view of the Pagan poets because he is addressing a Pagan audience of comparatively cultured and liberal Athenians, to whom the ideas of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man are already familiar (Acts xvii. 28, 29).

I think the Gospels are not far wrong in representing Jesus as a comparatively young man and his career as a short one.* An elderly or even a middle-aged man would be less likely to rush into such physical excess or rash violence as would bring about execution as a criminal, and the brevity of a young man's career helps to account for its obscurity.

We need not further discuss the mere possibilities or vague probabilities of the incidents or features of a career, which, judging by the silence of contemporary history, could have made no great mark at the time, and the actions or details of which were probably of so trivial or commonplace a character that his biographers had to fill up the yawning deficiency by the help of miraculous prodigies and obviously mythical legends and sayings collected from all manner of sources, apparently without the slightest attempt at verification. The one thing evident is that the young enthusiast or devotee ended his apparently brief and obscure career by being publicly crucified as a common criminal, which might easily happen through some "blazing indiscretion" in the shape of a fanatical outburst, of which the alleged assault on the money-changers might be at least typically representative, if not the actual exploit for which he suffered. Whatever the offence may have been it was evidently one that did not forfeit the respect or sympathy of his friends, and we may therefore conclude that it was probably of a religious or patriotic or popular character.

The offence for which Jesus was condemned must apparently have been a purely personal one, not involving his brothers and the other Apostles, who lived peaceably at Jerusalem for years afterwards, as is shown by Paul's evidence. The Apostles therefore could not have been engaged in publicly preaching the Messiahship of Jesus during his lifetime. If they had thus stirred up revolt against the Romans they would have been executed for sedition. And if the Apostles did not put forward Jesus as the Messiah in his lifetime, the probability is that Jesus did not publicly or openly urge such claims himself, and therefore was not put to death as a Christ or false prophet or as "King of the Jews," but only as a comparatively commonplace malefactor.

If, indeed, we could accept the Christian plea that Josephus was silent from "perplexity or policy," we might increase the importance of Jesus and the scope of his career to an indefinite extent. But I do not think that the silence of Josephus and others† is to be thus accounted for. I think that the legitimate effect of their silence is rather to compel us to reduce the proportions of the Gospel hero to such insignificance as is sufficient to explain a unanimous silence, which is not broken even by Paul so far as biographical details are concerned. We should therefore regard Jesus as having been of less importance at the time than the Samaritan false prophet who is mentioned by Josephus, and whose armed followers were slain or put to flight by Pontius Pilate, the more important of those who escaped being afterwards sought out and executed.

W. P. BALL.

(To be concluded.)

* Luke iii. 23 makes him "about thirty years of age." According to the accounts in Synoptical Gospels his public life or ministry must have been limited to a single year, though John extends this to three years. There is of course no certainty that the actual Jesus can be credited with any public actions or speeches beyond such as brought about his crucifixion.

† Judge Strange points to the similar silence of Justus of Tiberias, the contemporary and rival of Josephus in Galilee, and he notes that Philo-Judæus, who was deeply engaged in working out the theory of the Logos, had heard nothing of the being who, according to later Christian accounts, was "realising at Jerusalem the image his fancy was creating."

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

An Open Letter

TO THE

Principal Persons in that Performance.

DEAR SIR, DEAR GHOST, OR DEAR GOD,—

You are reputed to be everywhere, and therefore I presume you will see this letter, although I am unable to send it through the post. I would have ventured on that method of conveyance, but I was deterred by the failure of a pious gentleman in Germany, who posted a letter to "God, in Heaven," and had it returned as "insufficiently addressed." A similar difficulty occurred to me many years ago, when I was prosecuted by your zealous admirers for doubting your absolute perfection. I wished to call you as a witness in the case, but I found no one to serve the subpoena.

When you were on earth, more than eighteen centuries ago, you advised people to "search the Scriptures." Following your recommendation, I have searched them, and I have paid the penalty which is generally exacted from those who are in any respect wiser than their neighbors, or their neighbors' priests. Yet my zeal for knowledge is unabated; and as my study of the Bible has opened up an endless vista of curious problems, which none of the commentators are able to solve, I take the liberty of communicating with you personally, and seeking the assistance of the only being who can help me in my perplexity.

Judging from many passages in the Gospels, I should say that, in the opinion of your contemporaries, you were born like other babies. They called you "the carpenter's son," referred to Mary as your natural mother, recited the names of your four brothers, and alluded to your sisters, who completed the family circle. Nor does it appear, from the report of the trial which preceded your execution, that your friends or your enemies breathed a whisper of your miraculous birth. What is still more surprising, two of your four biographers fail to mention the circumstance. Had the gospels of Matthew and Luke been lost in the stream of time, we should never have learnt from Mark and John that your entrance into the world was at all uncommon.

Will you kindly explain their silence? At present it puzzles me. Did they think your being born without a father was too trivial a fact to record? Did they disbelieve the story, and treat it with quiet contempt? Or had they never heard of it, and is their silence due to their ignorance? I cannot conceive of another alternative, and, whichever I accept, the mystery remains unsolved. Yet truth is so simple and perspicuous, that when you disclose it on this subject I shall doubtless comprehend it at a glance, and wonder I had not understood it before.

At present, however, I am in a dilemma. If Mark and John disbelieved the story of your miraculous birth, they neutralise the testimony of Matthew and Luke. It is two against two, and the Lord (that is, yourself) only knows whom to believe. If Mark and John never heard of the story, it could not have been widely prevalent, and this militates against its truth, for so tremendous a fact could hardly have been concealed, or confined to the notice of a few. There remains the supposition that they regarded the fact itself as trivial. If they did, it could only be for one reason. You were born without a father, but other boys have been in the same plight. Illegitimacy has in all ages been too frequent to be wonderful, and it is a topic on which those immediately concerned are discreetly reticent. Yet it is no one's fault if his parents anticipated or neglected the rites of matrimony; and if, as Celsus declared in the second century, there was a bar sinister in your escutcheon, you cannot be blamed for a transaction in which you were involved without being consulted.

Considering this, therefore, you may deign to tell me how the matter stands. Still, if the theme is painful, I refrain from pressing you for an answer.

Personally, I have long thought that being born without a father is no miracle. Had you been of divine origin, you or your progenitor might have demonstrated the fact by dispensing with the assistance of a mother. Such a miracle would have been too obvious for disbelief, and the greatest sceptic would have been convinced. But when there is a mother in the case, common sense will always conclude that there is a father somewhere.

Matthew and Luke, I find, differ from each other, as well as from Mark and John. One makes Joseph discover Mary's premature pregnancy, while the other says it was revealed to him in a dream. One relates the Annunciation, while the other omits it. One affirms that your birth was heralded by angels who appeared to some shepherds, while the other declares that it was heralded by a star which the Magi followed from the east, presumably from Persia. One records the massacre of the innocents, while the other ignores it. Two such witnesses would damn any case, when they both appear on the same side.

Supposing Matthew is right, will you inform me how the Magi followed a star, the nearest being millions of miles distant? And how did the star "stand over" the place where your mother was literally in the straw? Was it a meteor, expressly provided for the occasion, or an angel with an electric light or a dark lantern?

You might also inform me (for it is a point of some interest) whether there is any truth in the legend that your parents were too poor to pay for decent accommodation; or whether, as Luke intimates, they were obliged to occupy a stable because the hotel was "full up," and no gentleman would go outside to oblige a lady?

I should also be obliged by your telling me when you were born. Luke says it was when Cyrenius was governor of Syria, but that was ten years after the beginning of our era. Some scholars maintain that you were born two, and others four, years before the orthodox date; while the Jews place the event nearly a century earlier. Nor is the day of your birth settled to my satisfaction. Your worshipers say it was the 25th of December, but that is not a season when sheep pasture out at night. Neither your brethren, your apostles, your biographers, nor the Fathers of the early Church, knew that you were born on that day. It was not recognised until the second half of the fourth century, and that very date was the birthday of all the sun-gods of antiquity. I am not apprising you of these facts, for of course you know them. I am simply stating the grounds of my dubiety. Probably you know when you were born; I do not. You certainly were present; I was not. I am, therefore, justified in asking you to settle the question for me, and for other inquiring spirits. Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord.

With regard to your godhead, I am dying for news. Your biographers are very unsatisfactory on this point. They evidently wrote for a credulous age, when every fable and legend was swallowed without a question. But this age is more critical, and you will pardon my curiosity, which is shared by millions.

Other children begin their existence when they enter this world, but your career began millenniums before you were born. According to your own statement, you lived before Abraham. What were you doing all that time, and where did you reside? Were you really the hero of the Song of Songs which is Solomon's? Was it you and your prospective Church, as the headings of the chapters indicate, who exchanged all those amorous greetings, and indulged in all that voluptuous imagery? Did you liken your mystical bride, still unborn, and hidden in the womb of time, to a lily among thorns? Did you compare her neck to the tower of David, her breasts to twin roses, her eyes to the fishpools of Heshbon, and her nose to the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus? Did you expatiate still more lasciviously on her hidden charms, in the manner of

Ovid or Catullus? And did she, the unborn beauty, reciprocate the strain, and chant a poetical inventory of your manly graces? If she was not blinded by passion, but speaking the simple truth, you must have been a regular lady-killer. Perhaps this explains the number of your female devotees in Palestine, including pretty Mary Magdalen, and the rich women who ministered unto you of their substance.

When you write, if you vouchsafe me a reply, you might answer these questions. You might also inform me whether such glowing strains are fit to be read by children as part of the Word of God. The children of this age, at least, are precocious enough. There is no necessity for the Bible to teach the young idea how to shoot. Still, the Canticles are splendid poetry, and if you wrote or inspired them you are entitled to a place in the hierarchy of genius. How miserably you had degenerated when you took to preaching! The passion was left, but the poetry was gone.

According to Matthew, your father and mother were espoused, but before the knot was tied Mary astonished her husband with an unexpected rotundity. Not liking the aspect of affairs, he "was minded to put her away privily." I suppose the poor fellow was going to emigrate, and sing "The girl I left behind me." But one night an angel visited him in a dream, told him it was all correct, warned him not to decamp, and bade him marry the girl. When he awoke he believed it. He had a right to, yet he could hardly expect his friends to show the same simplicity. I confess I am not so satisfied as he was, and I doubt whether the most pious carpenter in Christendom would believe such a story about his own sweetheart on similar evidence. But that was the age of faith, and, judging from the tales of old mythology, Joseph was not the first husband who fathered the offspring of a ghost.

Luke's narrative, however, seems inconsistent with Matthew's. According to his story, there was no such *contratempus*. Joseph's felicity was not marred by any doubt of his bride's chastity. He appears (I beg pardon for speaking so of your father, but it was long ago) to have been an easy wittol. Perhaps, after all, as a friend of mine once heard a Jesuit preacher say in Italy, he was not deceived, for Joseph was your carnal father, and the miracle of your incarnation, like all other miracles, was operated by natural agency. This, however, is quite incompatible with Matthew's express statement (i. 25) that Joseph was merely a nominal husband until after your birth.

Your actual father, or, if I may so express it, your ultimate father, was not an ordinary ghost, but the Holy Ghost. Like the peace of God, this mystery passes all understanding. How could a ghost, however holy, become the father of a bouncing boy? Catholic divines have discussed this point elaborately, but their speculations are too obscene for repetition. I will not imitate their filth or their blasphemy. Yet I may remark, that when they speak of the holy pigeon or dove, they suggest the Pagan pictures of Leda and Jove. Between a paternal dove and a paternal swan, the difference is only one of ornithology. Correggio's magnificent picture of Jupiter and Io may be an adumbration of the truth, but I leave the mystery for your solution. When you illuminate my natural darkness on this sacrosanct wonder, I shall, with your permission, enlighten my fellows, and close the most bestial chapter of religious controversy.

At present I cannot understand a baby God. Did God mewl and puke in his nurse's arms? Did God kick and squeal in his bath? Did God stare foolishly at his little toes? Did God howl when he was pricked by a nasty pin? Was God suckled by his mother, or brought up on the bottle? Did God increase the family washing bill? Was God put in a cradle and rocked to sleep? Did God have the measles? Did God have a bad time in teething? Did God learn to walk by the domestic furniture? Did God tumble down on his nose, or on the broader part he once

displayed to Moses? Did God learn his A B C? Was God spanked when he misbehaved? Did God play at marbles and make mud-pies? Did God fight other boys in the street, sometimes thrashing, and sometimes being thrashed? Did God run home to his mother with a sanguinary nose? Did God, as he grew up, enter a carpenter's shop to learn the trade? Did God cut his almighty fingers with the chisel, and shave his celestial skin with a jack-plane?

These are pertinent questions. No one but a bigot would call them blasphemous. If those things really happened, I am ready to believe them; if they did not, the world should be disabused. I put my queries in the interest of truth. Your priests may howl, but that is their profession.

Your incarnation is nothing unique. We find its parallels in Oriental avatars, and in the heroes of Pagan mythology. The sons of God have always seen the daughters of men that they were fair, and on reading the reports of the Divorce Court we find they still exhibit the same old taste.

Centuries before you were born the Egyptian goddess Isis was depicted holding the divine child Horus in her arms. Christian paintings of the madonna and bambino are merely copies of ancient iconography. The type varies like the artist's genius, but the subject is the same. Nay, the whole story of the Annunciation related by Luke was chiselled on the walls of the sanctuary in the Temple of Luxor before the Jewish scriptures were written, before Rome arose on her seven hills, before Athens "gleamed on its crest of columns," a beacon of civilisation to a barbarous world. Your holy nativity seems a legend borrowed from "the motherland of superstitions." I can come to no other conclusion, and if I am to be damned for my unbelief I protest against the injustice of my fate. If you were only a man, I have nothing to fear; if you are a god, you should satisfy my scruples before censuring my scepticism. Belief does not depend on will, but on evidence. A word from you would make the dark path of faith luminous. If you leave it in obscurity you cannot wonder if I stray. Surely the being who said "Let there be light, and there was light, could easily dispel my darkness; nor can I believe he will, at the end of my journey, flash on me the illumination of hell.

G. W. FOOTE.

CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS, AND TOLERATION.

Protestantism, with its open Bible, has everywhere maintained laws against blasphemy and heresy. The laws against heresy have fallen into disuse in England, but while they lasted they were simply ferocious. We heard the late Lord Coleridge say from his seat as Lord Chief Justice that the Protestant laws against Roman Catholics, particularly in Ireland, where they were executed with remorseless ferocity, are without a parallel in the history of the world. Catholicism, however, is no longer under a ban. Even the Jews have been admitted to equal rights with their fellow citizens. But laws still remain in existence, and are occasionally put into operation, against "blasphemers." According to the language of common law indictments, it is a crime to bring the Holy Scripture or the Christian Religion into disbelief and contempt. It is true that many Christians are ready to profess a certain aversion to such laws, but they make no effort to repeal them. Many others contend that "blasphemy" is a question of manner, that the feelings of Christians should be protected, and that while men should not be punished for being Freethinkers, they should be punished for wounding orthodox susceptibilities. It is not proposed, however, that any limitations of taste or temper should be imposed upon Christian controversialists; and this contention may therefore be regarded as a subterfuge of bigotry. On the whole, it may be said that Catholics without the Bible, and Protestants with the Bible, persecute unbelief to the full extent of their opportunities; and it is only as toleration grows from other roots, and is nourished by other causes, that the Bibliolators find out subtle interpretations of simple texts in favor of the prevailing tendency.—G. W. Foote, "The Book of God."

Universal toleration is the very soul of happiness to a populous and enlightened nation.—Napoleon.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.

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

LONDON.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (North Camberwell Hall, New Church-road): 3.15, F. Vicars, "Why a Christian can be a Socialist."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford): 7.30, J. W. Marshall, "Was Jesus Insane?" Selections by the Band before Lecture.

OUTDOOR.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Marble Arch, Hyde Park): Christmas Day Meeting, Dec. 25. at 11.30; speakers—G. Rowney, E. Pack, T. Martin, H. Boulter, G. King, and H. B. Samuels; on "Christ, Christianity, and Christians."

COUNTRY.

ABERDARE BRANCH N. S. S. (Pugsley's Restaurant): 6, R. F. Jones, "Campbell and God."

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Hall, 84 Leith-street): 6.30, A. Paul, "A Merry Christmas."

GLASGOW: Secular Hall, Brunswick-street—12 (noon), Discussion Class; 6.30, J. O'Connor Kessack, "Robert Burns."

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Clarion Club, 125 Albion-street): Friday, Dec. 20, at 8, Frank Hines (Spiritualist), "Free Will and Determinism."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Milton Hall, Daulby-street): H. S. Wishart, 3, "Better Morality Without God"; 7, "Atheism and Social Progress: III. Rev. Stitt Wilson and the Useless God of the New Theology."

SOUTH SHIELDS (Navigation Schools, Market-place): 7.30, Important Business Meeting.

OUTDOOR.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (The Mound): 2.30, Meets for Discussion.

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