

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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PRICE TWOPENCE

*Not for delectations sweet,
Not the cushion and the slipper, not the peaceful and the
studious,
Not the riches safe and palling, not for us the tame
enjoyment,*

Pioneers! O pioneers!

*Till with sound of trumpet,
Far, far off the daybreak call—hark, how loud and clear
I bear it wind,
Swift! to the head of the army!—swift! spring to
your places,*

Pioneers! O pioneers! —WALT WHITMAN.

Mr. H. G. Wells's Religion.—II.

BUT if Mr. Wells is alternately firm and wobbly on the question of God—now smiling at the absurdity of an infinite personality, and then admitting that the universe sometimes suggests it, say in the moonlight—he is perfectly straightforward and steadfast on the question of Immortality. Now this question of Immortality is far more important than the question of God. God or no God, the question of Immortality remains; and if it be concluded that man has no future life, the bottom is knocked out of all supernatural religion; for the average man—and you cannot keep up religions without him, or at least without the average woman—will be quite indifferent about the “soul of the universe” except in relation to his own “soul.” On the theory that there is no “hereafter” the average man will not care twopence about all the gods that ever were, that are now, or that ever may be. If they can get nothing out of him, and he can get nothing out of them, he will dismiss the whole lot of them as an unprofitable nuisance. He will not take the trouble to affirm or deny their existence; he will just let them attend to their own business, if they have any, while he attends to his own; and he will leave the academic discussion of their existence and character to the fantastically-minded persons who have nothing better to do.

On this question of a future life Mr. Wells is obliged to talk like a man of sense and science. It does not admit of the intellectual hide-and-seek which is so common in speech and writing about “the Deity.” You must say that you believe, or that you see good reason for holding your judgment entirely in suspense, which comes to the same thing practically as not believing. Mr. Wells could not beat round the bush very much on this question, even if he wished to. He is compelled to speak with tolerable plainness. But it must be confessed that he speaks more plainly than he is constrained to—which is something in his favor. This is what he says:—

“I do not believe I have any personal immortality. I am part of an immortality perhaps; but that is different. I am not the continuing thing. I personally am experimental, incidental. I feel I have to do something, a number of things no one else could do, and then I am finished, and finished altogether. Then my substance returns to the common lot. I am a temporary enclosure for a temporary purpose; that served, and my skull and teeth, my idiosyncrasy and desire, will disperse, I believe, like the timbers of a booth after a fair.”

This would be perfectly satisfactory if it stood alone. But it does not stand alone. Mr. Wells feels called upon to fence off his belief from the

intrusions of those “downright Atheists.” So he says that this is simply *his* belief. It is what he chooses to believe. He says “it is not a matter of fact,” for there is really “no evidence that I am immortal and none that I am not.” Now we are sorry to appear rude, but we are bound to call this sheer nonsense. It will gratify the religionists, whom it justifies in feeling that what they choose to believe is as valid as what Mr. Wells chooses to believe. That is one objection to it. But there is a graver objection behind. Mr. Wells must know as well as we do that, while there is no scientific evidence in favor of a future life, there is plenty of scientific evidence against it. Science knows nothing of “soul” apart from body—nothing of mental phenomena apart from a nervous system with a central brain. On the other hand, the argument from analogy, based upon man's being but a part of the general life of the world, is dead against the idea of his personal immortality. There is no more scientific reason for his future existence than there is for the future existence of dogs and cats, or bugs and fleas. Nothing but his own vanity, countenanced by his own ignorance, could ever have persuaded him to the contrary. But whether that view be right or wrong, we submit that all belief should rest upon “a matter of fact.” To talk about what you “choose to believe” is to let belief rest upon inclination instead of evidence. You may call this Pragmatism, or give it any other fine designation, but it is illogical and illicit all the same.

Mr. Wells is in a better mood when he says that he cannot conceive the universal “scheme” as “encumbered by his egotism perpetually.” Not personal cessation, but immortality, would “distress and perplex” him. “If I may put this,” he says, “in a mixture of theological and social language, I cannot respect, I cannot believe in a God who is always going about with me.” By which he probably means “a God who has always to carry me about.” We regard this as creditable to Mr. Wells. But it is not original—although he writes with the air of one who has dropped this disinterested thought upon a selfish world. Mr. Shaw was distinctly before him in the Preface to *Major Barbara*, where he remarks that “there is still too much otherworldliness” about the Salvation Army, that “the Salvationist wants to live for ever,” which is “the most monstrous way of crying for the moon,” and that the Salvationist is not “really saved until he is ready to lie down cheerfully on the scrap heap, having paid scot and lot and something over, and let his eternal life pass on to renew its youth in the battalions of the future.” George Meredith, of course, has expressed the same idea scores of times and in scores of illuminating ways. Swinburne, as far back as 1871 (not, of course, that it was original then) gave it noble expression in the “*Mater Triumphalis*” of *Songs Before Sunrise*:—

“I shall burn up before thee, pass and perish,
As haze in sunrise on the red sea-line;
But thou from dawn to sunsett shalt cherish
The thoughts that led and souls that lighted mine.

Birds shall wake with thee voiced and feathered fairer,
To see in summer what I see in spring;
I have eyes and heart to endure thee, O thunder-bearer,
And they shall be who shall have tongues to sing.”

We repeat that the attitude is creditable to Mr.

Wells, but he is not to be credited with it. He must have met with it in his reading. He might have seen it, if he had looked that way, any time during the last twenty-seven years in the *Freethinker*. Nor can he suppose that the following confession of faith, which is also creditable to him, will appear of striking novelty to anyone who knows a little more than the name of (say) Auguste Comte:—

"I believe in the great and growing Being of the Species from which I rise, to which I return, and which, it may be, will ultimately even transcend the limitation of the Species and grow into the Conscious Being, the eternally conscious Being of all things."

Mr. Wells carries the confession of faith farther than was possible to Comte's greater accuracy of mind. Comte never imagined that Humanity would conquer time and space, boss the universe, and, as Winwood Reade said, invent immortality. This sort of thing belongs to the scientific romances for which Mr. Wells is famous. What we may accept as actual is the belief in the great and growing Humanity, from which he rose and to which he returns.

And now let us see how Mr. Wells stands towards Christianity. He accepts "conviction of sin" and "salvation" after "sorrow and atonement," without apparently perceiving that these things are far more ancient than the Christian faith. He repudiates the theory of "the Atheist and Deist" that "Christianity is a sort of disease that came upon civilisation." He says that "a religious system so many-faceted and so enduring as Christianity, must necessarily be saturated with truth even if it be not wholly true." He does not pause to consider *why* Christianity has been so "enduring." Had he done so, he might have found himself face to face with the historic truth that Christianity leapt into power under Constantine and his successors, and perpetuated itself by the absolute control of education on the one hand, and the absolute suppression of criticism on the other hand. A religion which maintains itself in that way for fifteen hundred years, and then begins to fail through the growth of knowledge which it can no longer prevent and the spread of criticism which it can no longer silence, is far more entitled to be called "an unprofitable and wasting disease" than Mr. Wells recognises. Of course there are elements in Christianity that are good in themselves, or have good mixed with them; but these ethical and "spiritual" elements are all really pre-Christian. What the Christian faith did was to associate these elements with a vast network of superstition, compared with which Mohammedanism, for instance, is quite a scientific religion. When an Atheist or a Deist speaks of Christianity as a "disease that came upon civilisation," he is not referring to such maxims as "blessed are the merciful" and "love one another," but to the vast array of miracles and supernatural doctrines which were an incubus to the mind of Europe for the better part of two thousand years. Now the centre of all this mischief was the doctrine of the deity of Christ, which began in miracle, continued in miracle, and was completed in miracle. This doctrine Mr. Wells utterly disbelieves. He is not even sure that Christ "actually existed as a finite individual person in the opening of the Christian era." He does not, indeed, regard the question as of any particular importance. The Christ we know is an ideal figure—"a synthesis of emotions, experiences, and inspirations, sustained by and sustaining millions of human souls." But even as an ideal Mr. Wells will have none of him:—

"I hope I shall offend no susceptibilities when I assert that this great and very definite personality in the hearts and imaginations of mankind does not and never has attracted me. It is a fact I record about myself without aggression or regret. I do not find myself able to associate Him in any way with the emotion of Salvation."

"To me the Christian Christ," Mr. Wells says, "seems not so much a humanised God as an incomprehensibly sinless being neither God nor man." If he is to have a personal ideal it must be "someone

quite other than this image of virtue, this terrible and incomprehensible Galilean with his crown of thorns, his blood-stained hands and feet. I cannot love him any more than I can love a man upon the rack. Even in the face of torments I do not think I should feel a need for him." Besides, there is the insuperable difficulty of "the wanton and indecent purity of the Immaculate Conception." As for the Resurrection, it was only "a postscript to his own tragedy," a sort of "happy ending." Mr. Wells ventures to doubt the professed "love of Christians for their Savior." He says he has watched them, and they are so prone to "fall back upon more humanised figures"—upon Mary and the patron saints—for the sympathy they need. Mr. Wells cannot, therefore, call himself a Christian. Christianity is not true for him, and "for most people it is true only with modifications."

It is perfectly clear, then, that Mr. Wells has broken away from distinctive Christianity as much, if not as decisively, as any of the "downright Atheists" to whom he has such an unreasoning and almost hysterical objection. People with any brains at all will see this in spite of his flattering reference to the Rev. R. J. Campbell, and his plea that his new faith does not break with the old one except on the "metaphysical" side. It breaks in everything essential, in everything that differentiates Christianity from the other world-religions. Mr. Wells's new "act of Faith," as he likes to call it, is a belief in Humanity, although he is so curiously reluctant to use that word. The old "act of Faith" is belief in Christ, and Mr. Wells has no belief whatever in Christ, either as a living person or as a pictured ideal.

We have thus seen that Mr. Wells is most definite in his attitude towards Immortality and Christianity—that is, at the points where it is not easy to avoid a more or less definite attitude. His wobbling takes place at points where the greater uncertainty of the outlook, and the greater complexity of the phenomena, make it easy for average men to hesitate and feel undecided, and for Mr. Wells to join them in a spirit of brotherhood. For it seems that he is very fond of being in the company of the majority. Their worst superstitions do not alienate his sympathy; indeed, he yearns over them a little more pathetically on that account. He begins to sheer off from them when they threaten to become reasonable, and he shakes the dust of his feet off against them when they become "downright Atheists."

Now one of these points of wobbling is in front of the question of God, and another is in front of the question of Free Will. This question is the "warmest" in the whole arena of theological controversy at present, and it is terribly darkened by ignorance and sophistry. Mr. Wells is clever and well-informed enough to see that "the whole trend of Science" is towards Determinism; but he also "chooses to believe" in Free Will; for both, he argues, are "true in their several planes." "I incline," he says, "to believe in predestination, and do quite completely believe in free will. The important belief is free will." So the answer to the question, Which is true, Free Will or Determinism? is "Both." Which reminds us of Carlyle's word about people who cannot say Yes or No, but always want to say Yes and No.

We are sorry to say it, but we suspect Mr. Wells of saying Yes and No in this instance for two different reasons. The "Yes" appears to be dictated by his intellect; the "No" by his desire to please—the people worth pleasing. We can scarcely believe that his own mind is involved in the muddle which he serves up to his readers. We may be mistaken on this point; but, in that case, Mr. Wells's treatment of this question is a proof that he is *not* a "thinker."

We have often called attention to the fact that, however the Malthusian law of population be disputed in relation to the future, it cannot possibly be disputed in relation to the past. The number of our ancestors does inevitably increase in geometrical ratio as we go backwards, and in time—and no very

long time either—the “family blood” of every one of us is lost in the common blood of humanity. Mr. Wells puts this great and pregnant idea forward in his new book—and with a Christopher Columbus air as usual:—

“From this point of view—which is for me the vividly true and dominating point of view—our individualities, our nations and states and races are but bubbles and clusters of foam upon the great stream of the blood of the species, incidental experiments in the growing knowledge and consciousness of the race.”

This is not a metaphor that will bear examination; nevertheless, it shows, what the context proves, that the writer has a real hold on a tremendous principle. Yet this same writer is capable of denying it on certain “planes” of evolution,—as though any plane of evolution could falsify the fundamental laws of existence! Why, at this rate, it was not an ineptitude but a scientific statement when the late Canon Liddon declared from the pulpit of St. Paul’s Cathedral that the law of gravitation was suspended every time he lifted his hand to his head.

We would not do Mr. Wells an injustice; he shall therefore speak for himself on this matter. After saying that nobody really knows how any man will act in the future—which, by the way, is a great exaggeration—he proceeds as follows:—

“I hesitate, I choose just as though the thing was unknowable. For me and my conduct there is that much wide practical margin of freedom. I am free and freely and responsibly making the future—so far as I am concerned. You others are equally free. On that theory I find my life work, and on a theory of mechanical predestination nothing works. I take the former theory therefore for my everyday purposes, and as a matter of fact so does everybody else. I regard myself as a free responsible person among free responsible persons.”

If this is mental muddle, and not self-misrepresentation, Mr. Wells imagines that Determinism is inconsistent with moral responsibility; in which case, he does not understand the problem. Nor has the word “free” in the last sentence any necessary connection with Free Will. We cheerfully admit that Mr. Wells, like most other people in this country, is free and responsible; but we fail to understand how he fancies for a single moment that this fact has any bearing whatever on the question in dispute between the champions of Free Will and the champions of Determinism. We cheerfully admit, too, that Mr. Wells, like all other people who are not mad or imprisoned, hesitates and chooses; in other words, that he has as many choices as he has motives, either active or potential. The real crux of the problem is whether his motives are subject to the general law of causation, or are decided in some mysterious way by the spontaneous and incalculable action of an occult “spiritual” entity. Mr. Wells has got to make up his mind on this point—unless he has already made it up and keeps the result to himself. He appears to think that his free will exercises a control over his actions,—or, as he puts it, “over the impulses that teem from the internal world and tend to express themselves in act.” But there are no internal impulses without external stimulants; faculty can only act in relation to environment. Neither does Mr. Wells control his motives; his motives control him. What he calls his free will is simply the predominance of his most powerful or most persistent motives; for a persistent motive, if overcome in a hot struggle, will assert itself again when the more powerful or more highly stimulated motive which overcame it has sunk into comparative quiescence.

We incline to think, after all, that Mr. Wells is really in a mental muddle over this question of Free Will and Determinism—that he has not thought it right out—that he has been caught in verbal meshes which he has not had the sagacity or determination to break through. But what then becomes of the “great thinker”?

In a later part of this book Mr. Wells discusses the relations of a person of his way of thinking to Church and religious institutions generally. He makes a

number of statements about the growing toleration of the age, which show that he has not himself been within “the whiff and wind” of bigotry and persecution. He thinks it is the business of heretics to stay within the Church they belong to. Schism is a dreadful offence; starting new organisations of any kind is terribly anti-social. The greatest work of the future, the true Reformation, is “the Reconstruction of the Catholic Church.” This is to be done, apparently, by emptying it—gradually, of course—of all its old theological contents. Well, the Modernists are trying that game, and they get excommunicated for their pains. Mr. Wells is indulging in an idle dream. He says we ought not “to confuse a church with its creed”—which is like saying that we ought not to confuse an organisation with its ideas, or an organism with its life. The Catholic Church is simply the practical expression, the realisation in history, of the essential ideas of Christianity. Mr. Wells will find this demonstrated with the power of genius in Newman’s great book on the *Development of Christian Doctrine*. When the essential ideas of Christianity are dead the Catholic Church will die too. The Catholic Church of the future, if there is to be such a thing, will not be the old Catholic Church transmogrified; it will be a new Catholic Church developed through experiments and trials as the expression of new ideas of life and conduct and destiny. Comte may have been mistaken in some of his anticipative conceptions of the Church of Humanity, but he was incapable of making the blunder into which Mr. Wells falls by his love of temporising. “Conforming” is doubtless a good thing in its way, but Mr. Wells regards it as one of the most eminent virtues. For he has a taste for taking things easy; of serving new ideas without losing the advantages arising from friendliness towards the old ones; of fighting battles which are already nearly over; of sharing in victories that were rendered inevitable, and therefore really won, by the ardent courage of the pioneers. Superior persons like Mr. Wells have never been wanting when the worst dangers are over. Their function is to rebuke the vulgar zeal of the real fighters, to find a multitude of concealed virtues in superstition and its leaders, and to enjoy the social, political, and financial profits of this ingenious policy.

We do not know if Mr. Wells has read *Richard Feverel*. There is a suggestion about him of the “wise youth” in that golden book of George Meredith’s adolescent genius. We conceive that if Adrian Harley had tried to be serious, and had written a book on First and Last Things, it would have been a good deal like Mr. Wells’s—only it would have been wittier.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Hearts of Men.—I.

SOME time ago I wrote a notice of a very charming book by Mr. H. Fielding Hall, *The Soul of a People*. The work consisted of an attractive and sympathetic study of the Burmese people, giving special attention to the influence of Buddhism on their lives. Since the publication of that book Mr. Hall has issued two others—*A People at School*, dealing with the Burmese under British rule, and *The Hearts of Men*, dealing with religion in general. Both are written in the same easy and graceful style as their predecessor, and present a rare combination of graceful writing, clear thinking, and direct, simple expression. Whether one agrees with Mr. Hall or not, one cannot avoid grasping his meaning, nor can one avoid a sense of gratitude for the fare provided.

The Hearts of Men has an additional attraction, inasmuch as it is autobiographical. His book is, as he says, the story of a boy who was born into a faith and who lost it, and who explains how he came to lose it. One gathers from the account of his early life that Mr. Hall was a weakly child, unable to join always in the sports of other boys—a fact that may

have resulted in an unusual thoughtfulness for his age. At the age of twelve he was sent to a large public school, and his religious beliefs were then, for a boy, clearly defined. I would call the attention of those who account for the growth of unbelief to the association of the Old Testament with the New, and who believe that special attention to Jesus Christ is enough to induce religious belief, to Mr. Hall's statement of his beliefs at the age of twelve. The Old Testament he simply did not think about. "Religion, to him, meant the teaching of Christ, that very simple teaching that is in the gospel. Conduct, to him, meant the imitation of Christ and the observance of the Sermon on the Mount..... Wealth, and the pursuit of wealth, were bad, wicked, even though there were exceptions. Learning was apt to be a snare..... The ideal life was that of a very poor curate in the East-end of London, hard working and unhappy."

This is what many liberal theologians would call an excellent start, and ought, on their theory, to provide a sure safeguard against unbelief. He was not overburdened with doctrines, and was quite careless of the things that brotherly Christians are always quarrelling about in a most unbrotherly manner. How did it work out in Mr. Hall's case? Well, it was the absence of doctrine, the comparative excellence of the teaching that provided the occasion for the rejection of Christianity. Other boys poached trout and fought each other, and were proud of their successes. So, too, did this boy. But in his case his teaching warned him that he was doing wrong, and he felt unhappy. He was perfectly sure he did not live at all like Christ, and he had a strong, but never then acknowledged, certainty that he didn't want to. What he did get was the feeling of being wicked. This, the evangelical Christian will say, is what he ought to have felt. Mr. Hall would call this teaching nonsense, and he would most probably agree with the statement that the Christian "conviction of sin" is an altogether unmoralising or demoralising force. Nothing is worse for a boy, he says, than this conviction of wickedness.

"Tell a boy he is bad, lead him to believe he is bad, make much of his little sins, reprove him, mourn over him as one of wicked tendencies, and you will make him wicked. Perpetual struggle to attain an impossible and unnatural ideal is destructive to any moral fibre."

Which, when examined, contains a most important and undeniable truth. And, bearing in mind that Christian training has been almost entirely along these lines, the immense evil inflicted upon morals by Christianity becomes manifest.

The school the boy went to was a good school, but it was, of necessity, hopelessly at variance with religion as he had been taught it and as he understood it. The school code was the code of the world—not that compound of meanness, greed, and rascality which is summed up in the modern religious sense of "the world"—but that which aims at developing a strong, earnest, honest character in relation to the facts of life. Yet all the time this school code was being taught and acted on thrice every Sunday, he heard the other code taught in the school chapel. The masters taught it, and the boys were supposed to accept and believe it—during chapel hours. Once chapel was over, once Monday morning came, and the other code ruled. The school was an epitome of the world, and in a semi-conscious way the boy asked—as others ask outside school—Which code is the right one?

On top of his observation of life came his reading. He read the *Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man*, and they "surprised him." Not being a theologian, and therefore not being versed in the art of proving two contradictory statements to be in perfect agreement, it seemed to him that if Darwin was right the Christian creed was wrong. The wonderful thing was that, in spite of Darwin's writings, people still went to church. "How could it be that this disapproved Jewish fable still held together? Could

there still be a justification for religion? There were people who called themselves scientific theologians; perhaps they could answer his questions?" So the boy collected together his difficulties and consulted the scientific theologians. He took all the answers of apologetic theologians—the world is too drearily familiar with them for me to detail them here—and found them utterly worthless. One or two of his observations, though, must be noticed.

Theologians had told him not to be guided by his impressions of God's character. He retorts:—

"How, then, am I to judge which are wrong and which are right impressions? If God's anger and partiality and changeableness are merely impressions of my mind, are not all his attributes merely impressions also, and do not exist? In fact, is not God himself merely an impression, and he does not exist? Where are you going to stop?"

I do not believe the theologian is born who can honestly answer this question.

The question of prayer was more serious still. The scientific theologian asserts the subjective efficacy of prayer. God does not alter things because of prayer. The effect of prayer is not on him, but on you. Mr. Hall asks us to note the consequences of this position.

"Prayer will purify a man. To ask God for what he wants won't make the slightest difference to God's acts, but will to your own feelings. Nevertheless, as of course no one could or would pray unless he hoped to be answered, man must be told that God does listen. But this is not true. Therefore, according to theological science, the Bible directly tells us a falsehood in order to lead us into a good action. Is there any escape from this? There is none. The whole meaning and reason of prayer is that God *does* listen, that He *does* forgive if asked, that He does help us and save us. Unless a man held this belief firmly he would not pray. Try and you will see. Imagine to yourself, as the theologian declares, that God is quite unmoved by prayer, and that the action of prayer is subjective, and see if you can get up any prayer at all. It is impossible. How much fervency will there be in a request you know will not be granted or attended to? How much subjective answer will follow that prayer?"

Excellently put; and the real answer is that the practice of prayer is only perpetuated by making the mass of people sleeping partners in an organised conspiracy of humbug. Deliberate humbug counts for much in modern religious life; the power of habit also counts for something; but perhaps greater than either is the power of self-delusion. Mr. Hall's picture of the scientific theologian "uttering supplication to a God whom he knows he cannot affect or influence, and pausing now and then to see how the subjective effect on himself is getting on," is an amusing one, and his castigation of this type of teacher is well deserved. "If," he says, "I wanted to make a man an atheist and a scoffer, a railer at all religion, at all religious emotions, at all that is best in our natures, I would take him to a scientific theologian and have him taught the scientific theological theory of prayer."

Others have said the same thing in various ways; and the statement, however made, always expresses a truth. A God whose existence needs constant assertion and proof leaves that existence a matter of doubt. A Deity whose actions need continuous justification leaves his righteousness a question open to the gravest suspicion. To really intelligent minds religious defences open up far more doubts than they can ever hope to remove. In everything but religion there is a constantly growing body of truth that is being placed beyond the region of controversy, and can be used as a starting-point for further investigation. In religion alone the whole question is in the melting-pot. Every question is open to the same doubt to each new generation. And instead of there accruing a larger body of accepted and unquestionable truth, there is accumulated a growing body of accepted and unquestionable error. In other matters we discover truth and reject error by the way. In religion we discover error, and there is no solid truth ever reached. Mr. Hall's mental growth and struggles is only a repetition of a process that thousands of

others are passing through; in a sense it is the story of the mental growth of the race. In the end, like all honest minds that fearlessly follow truth, he gave up Christianity, and ceased to call himself a Christian. But much larger questions remained. What is the real meaning of religion? Why does it exist? What part has it played in the history of man? Why does it still remain, in spite of its apparent falsity? These are the questions that take up the rest of Mr. Hall's deeply interesting volume.

C. COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

The Christian Religion.—IV.

BY COL. ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

(Continued from p. 733.)

In countless ways the Christian world has endeavored, for nearly two thousand years, to explain the atonement, and every effort has ended in an admission that it cannot be understood, and a declaration that it must be believed. Is it not immoral to teach that man can sin, that he can harden his heart and pollute his soul, and that, by repenting and believing something that he does not comprehend, he can avoid the consequences of his crimes? Has the promise and hope of forgiveness ever prevented the commission of a sin? Should men be taught that sin gives happiness here; that they ought to bear the evils of a virtuous life in this world for the sake of joy in the next; that they can repent between the last sin and the last breath; that after repentance every stain of the soul is washed away by the innocent blood of another; that the serpent of regret will not hiss in the ear of memory; that the saved will not even pity the victims of their own crimes; that the goodness of another can be transferred to them; and that sins forgiven cease to affect the unhappy wretches sinned against?

Another objection is that a certain belief is necessary to save the soul. It is often asserted that to believe is the only safe way. If you wish to be safe, be honest. Nothing can be safer than that. No matter what his belief may be, no man, even in the hour of death, can regret having been honest. It can never be necessary to throw away your reason to save your soul. A soul without reason is scarcely worth saving. There is no more degrading doctrine than that of mental non-resistance. The soul has a right to defend its castle—the brain, and he who waives that right becomes a serf and slave. Neither can I admit that a man, by doing me an injury, can place me under obligation to do him a service. To render benefits for injuries is to ignore all distinctions between actions. He who treats his friends and enemies alike has neither love nor justice. The idea of non-resistance never occurred to a man with power to protect himself. This doctrine was a child of weakness, born when resistance was impossible. To allow a crime to be committed when you can prevent it, is next to committing the crime yourself. And yet, under the banner of non-resistance, the Church has shed the blood of millions, and in the folds of her sacred vestments have gleamed the daggers of assassination. With her cunning hands she wove the purple for hypocrisy, and placed the crown upon the brow of crime. For a thousand years larceny held the scales of justice, while beggars scorned the princely sons of toil, and ignorant fear denounced the liberty of thought.

If Christ was in fact God, he knew all the future. Before him, like a panorama, moved the history yet to be. He knew exactly how his words would be interpreted. He knew what crimes, what horrors, what infamies, would be committed in his name. He knew that the fires of persecution would climb around the limbs of countless martyrs. He knew that brave men would languish in dungeons, in darkness, filled with pain; that the Church would use instruments of torture, that his followers would appeal to whip and chain. He must have seen the horizon of the future red with the flames of the *auto da fe*. He knew all the creeds that would spring like poison fungi from every text. He saw the sects waging war against each other. He saw thousands of men, under the orders of priests, building dungeons for their fellow-men. He saw them using instruments of pain. He heard the groans, saw the faces white with agony, the tears, the blood—heard the shrieks and sobs of all the moaning, martyred multitudes. He knew that commentaries would be written on his words with swords, to be read by the light of fagots. He knew that the Inquisition would be born of teachings attributed to him. He saw all the interpolations and falsehoods that hypocrisy would write and tell. He knew that above these fields of death, these dungeons, these burnings, for a thousand years

would float the dripping banner of the cross. He knew that in his name his followers would trade in human flesh, that cradles would be robbed, and women's breasts unbared for gold, and yet he died with voiceless lips. Why did he fail to speak? Why did he not tell his disciples, and through them the world, that man should not persecute, for opinion's sake, his fellow-man? Why did he not cry, You shall not persecute in my name; you shall not burn and torment those who differ from you in creed? Why did he not plainly say, I am the Son of God? Why did he not explain the doctrine of the trinity? Why did he not tell the manner of baptism that was pleasing to him? Why did he not say something positive, definite, and satisfactory about another world? Why did he not turn the tear-stained hope of heaven to the glad knowledge of another life? Why did he go dumbly to his death, leaving the world to misery and to doubt?

He came, they tell us, to make a revelation, and what did he reveal? "Love thy neighbor as thyself"? That was in the Old Testament. "Love God with all thy heart"? That was in the Old Testament. "Return good for evil"? That was said by Buddha seven hundred years before he was born. "Do unto others as ye would that they should do unto you"? This was the doctrine of Laotse. Did he come to give a rule of action? Zoroaster had done this long before: "Whenever thou art in doubt as to whether an action is good or bad, abstain from it." Did he come to teach us of another world? The immortality of the soul had been taught by Hindus, Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans hundreds of years before he was born. Long before, the world had been told by Socrates that: "One who is injured ought not to return the injury, for on no account can it be right to do an injustice; and it is not right to return an injury, or to do evil to any man, however much we may have suffered from him." And Cicero had said: "Let us not listen to those who think that we ought to be angry with our enemies, and who believe this to be great and manly: nothing is more praiseworthy, nothing so clearly shows a great and noble soul, as clemency and readiness to forgive."

Is there anything nearer perfect than this from Confucius: "For benefits return benefits; for injuries return justice without any admixture of revenge"?

The dogma of eternal punishment rests upon passages in the New Testament. This infamous belief subverts every idea of justice. Around the angel of immortality the Church has coiled this serpent. A finite being can neither commit an infinite sin, nor a sin against the infinite. A being of infinite goodness and wisdom has no right, according to the human standard of justice, to create any being destined to suffer eternal pain. A being of infinite wisdom would not create a failure, and surely a man destined to everlasting agony is not a success.

How long, according to the universal benevolence of the New Testament, can a man be reasonably punished in the next world for failing to believe something unreasonable in this? Can it be possible that any punishment can endure forever? Suppose that every flake of snow that ever fell was a figure nine, and that the first flake was multiplied by the second, and that product by the third, and so on to the last flake. And then suppose that this total should be multiplied by every drop of rain that ever fell, calling each drop a figure nine; and that total by each blade of grass that ever helped to weave a carpet for the earth, calling each blade a figure nine; and that again by every grain of sand on every shore, so that the grand total would make a line of nines so long that it would require millions upon millions of years for light, travelling at the rate of one hundred and eighty-five thousand miles per second, to reach the end. And suppose, further, that each unit in this almost infinite total stood for billions of ages—still that vast and almost endless time, measured by all the years beyond, is as one flake, one drop, one leaf, one grain, compared with all the flakes, and drops, and leaves, and blades, and grains.

Upon love's breast the Church has placed the eternal asp. And yet, in the same book in which is taught this most infamous of doctrines, we are assured that "The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

(To be concluded.)

THE HOTTEST PLACE ON EARTH.

Fort Yuma is probably the hottest place on earth. The thermometer stays at one hundred and twenty in the shade there all the time—except when it varies and goes higher. It is a U.S. military post, and its occupants get so used to the terrific heat that they suffer without it. There is a tradition that a very, very wicked soldier died there, once, and, of course, went straight to the hottest corner of perdition,—and the next day he telegraphed back for his blankets. There is no doubt about the truth of this statement. I have seen the place where the soldier used to board.—Mark Twain.

Acid Drops.

The verbatim report of Mr. Campbell's sermon on "The Present Relations of Religion and the Social Movement" is amusing reading. It was not intended to be funny, but it is so all the same. "At street-corners and in the Press," we are told, "there are advocates of economic Socialism who do not hesitate to say that one means towards attaining their end is the destruction of Christianity." These men are declared to be a hindrance to Socialism. Many people hesitate to join the movement because of a "not unreasonable fear that it may fall into the hands of the hard-shell materialists whose régime, if they could obtain power, would be a worse tyranny than anything from which we suffer now." But is this true? Let us see. Men whom Mr. Campbell would call hard-shell materialists are already in power in France, and where is the tyranny under their régime? Is not France by far the freest country in Europe? There was plenty of tyranny in France when Christianity ruled the roost. All the world saw, by means of the Dreyfus case, what the Church would do again if it had the upper hand. And who were the men that fought that splendid battle against the forces of reaction and saved France from cardinals and generals, priests and soldiers? They were the "hard-shell materialists" of Mr. Campbell's elegant description.

Christians are wonderfully fond of the word "blatant." They fling it at everybody who criticises their creed in an open and honest fashion. And we note that Mr. Campbell is just like the rest of his fraternity in this respect. He talks of "blatant materialism." Well now, there is another adjective beginning with "b" and it is extremely applicable to Christianity. No other religion in the world has ever shed so much blood as this faith. History shows that it has always had words of peace in its mouth and murder in both its hands.

We are sorry to say that Mr. Campbell is not straightforward. After declaring that the men who seek to destroy Christianity in the interest of Socialism are misguided and a hindrance to the movement; after calling them blatant materialists and warning the world against the tyranny they would bring about; the reverend gentleman praises "the editor of the *Clarion*" as one who has "more of genuine moral force than perhaps the majority of us religious teachers who occupy the pulpit and dare to speak in the name of Christ." But this Mr. Blatchford is one of those who want to destroy Christianity in the interest of Socialism. He is as much a "blatant materialist" as any other non-Christian Socialist in England. Why, then, does Mr. Campbell go back on his own "blatant" bigotry in this manner? The answer is twofold. First, he had to name Mr. Blatchford; secondly, he remembered the circulation of Mr. Blatchford's paper. There are things that pay to do, and things that don't pay to do—and Mr. Campbell knows the difference.

One of the speakers at the first general meeting of Mr. Campbell's new "Progressive League" was the Rev. Donald Fraser, of Bristol. This gentleman declared, and he said they all knew it, that "the only alternative to Christianity was anarchy and animalism." Fancy a poor little pulpiteer talking like that in the face of George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, and John Morley!

Mr. Jerome K. Jerome, who spoke at the same meeting, said two things that we may note. He said that "God is within us, not without"—that "God has always been the reflection of man's slowly-growing intellect." This is true—and it is Atheism. Mr. Jerome also said that it was Renan's *Life of Christ* that converted him to Christianity. Well, it did not convert Renan to Christianity. Moreover, there is no such book as Renan's *Life of Christ*. The title of Renan's book is *Vie de Jésus*. New Theologians may not see the difference, but it is immense.

One of the Government organs had two flaring headlines the other morning; one was "Towards Peace on Education"—the other was "Extremists Busy." The extremists are the people who have a principle. People of that sort are always "extremists" in England.

The same Government organ revelled in praise of the "moderate" men. These are generally men who were never within measurable distance of a principle in the whole course of their lives. We know that they often talk about principles. But thieves can talk about honesty, and rakes and harlots about virtue.

Several Bishops have signed a round-robin against the use of churches and pulpits to oppose the Government's new settlement of the Education question. The explanation is that these prelates are in favor of the said settlement. It is wrong for people who don't agree with *them* to use the house of God for political purposes.

It is humiliating enough for a British Prime Minister going cap in hand to a crowd of parsons asking their permission to pass a New Education measure, and he deserves some reward for his complaisance. The line of compromise seems to be taking that of "right of entry" and permission to the teachers to give religious instruction; so that, once again, Nonconformists are showing that they stand for no principle in this matter. We note that the Union of Teachers has protested against right of entry, although we expect the teachers will submit if this policy is agreed upon. The *Christian World* observes, in dealing with the action of the Teachers Union, that teachers wish the Bible to be retained on account of its moralising and historic value. We question this very much. Teachers would, we are convinced, for the most part welcome a system of complete secular instruction. Of course, as matters go, they dare not openly champion secular education, but it is at least significant that in elementary schools the religious instruction is given in a very perfunctory manner, and is often cut down as much as possible. The teachers are quite right in pointing out that right of entry will break down so far as the clergy are concerned. It is not the right of clergy to enter and teach that is really wanted; what they desire is the teachers to do the work, while the clergy enter to see that it is done to their satisfaction.

It is only along the lines of the expected that in all discussion as to settlement Christians are the only ones whose opinions have been consulted. Those who are not Christian are simply not bothered about. The Churchmen and the Nonconformists act as though the settlement of the whole affair rested with them, and naturally impose upon a considerable section of the public. Well, we beg to answer both bodies of clerical kidnappers that even though they reach a perfect understanding they will not have secured peace in the educational world. Peace will only be reached when we have a Government that is strong enough and honest enough to act with justice to all; and there is only one way of doing this. The *Methodist Times* remarks that the resources of the State can only be applied to national as distinct from sectarian objects. Quite so, but Christianity itself is sectarian; and when it adds that Cowper-Templeism does not attack any denomination, but "affords a general foundation upon which distinctive denominational instruction may easily be built," it admits that the State is using its resources to advance definite Christian teaching, even though it is done indirectly.

The above may be taken as a good illustration of the truth that do-day Nonconformity does not stand for a single principle worth bothering about. All the time it complains of the State patronage of religion it is accepting State patronage in a variety of forms, and asking for more. If the State only shared its patronage equally between Nonconformists and Episcopalians, the outcry from the former would disappear. In England Nonconformists go to prison rather than pay for a form of religion in which they do not believe. In India they clamor for the Government to attach theology to State Universities, thus seeking to make the Hindoo pay for a religion that is aggressively active against his belief. Protesting at one moment against the State teaching of religion, it strives to place the State-supported teacher in the school giving a religious instruction upon which the most sectarian doctrines may be "easily built." In 1870 it sold the people, and thus secured the obstruction of education for the next forty years. And in 1908 it is prepared to play the same game, all the while protesting that it is the one party in the State that is above suspicion, and which possesses conscientious convictions worth troubling about.

Mr. John Redmond asked Mr. Asquith whether the Roman Catholic Church had been consulted as well as the Anglican Church and the Free Churches in the matter of the Education compromise. Mr. Asquith gave a halting answer, and when Lord Cecil bluntly inquired, "Is the House to understand that there is or is not an agreement with the Roman Catholics?" the Prime Minister had to shuffle out of it by saying that he must have notice of the question.

Mr. Arthur Henderson, the pious chairman of the Parliamentary Party, says there is "little or no tendency on the part of the masses to accept the doctrines of either scientific

or philosophic unbelief. Deep down in the hearts of the working-classes there is a greater admiration for the life and teaching of Jesus Christ than is to be found in any other section of the community." As a local preacher, Mr. Henderson's opinion is, of course, quite unprejudiced; otherwise we might point out that the "masses" do not show an overpowering tendency towards scientific and philosophic thought in any direction. Still, looked at from a general point of view, Mr. Henderson's confidence in the strength of Christianity does not appear to have much in its favor. Church and chapel attendance is not an absolutely accurate gauge of the extent of religious feeling, but as a rough and ready one it will serve. And the plain truth is that masses of the people do not attend religious worship, and among those who do the reasons are very mixed. Moreover, if Mr. Henderson were given to any serious thinking he would recognise that the "masses" will eventually follow the intellectual course marked out by the pioneers. And that the tendency of the times is markedly in the direction of Freethought is admitted even by Christians. It is, too, surely one of the strangest delusions that anyone can labor under, that by passing certain Acts of Parliament Christians can check a movement that has been steadily gaining strength for at least three hundred years, and which has now permeated society from top to bottom.

Mr. Horatio Bottomley's general views on the Licensing Bill and the public-house interest are no concern of ours, one way or the other; but we agree with the view that he expressed in the House of Commons on the subject of Sunday Closing. It is pure Sabbatarianism—an attempt to regulate the morals of the "masses," and to force them into "the house of God," where the "classes" think they ought to go. Drinking beer cannot be right on Saturday and Monday and wrong on Sunday. The idea is simply absurd. We have always said this, and we thank Mr. Bottomley for saying it plainly to the Church and Chapel people in parliament. But we are not surprised that his speech on Sunday Closing displeased the Chapel press very greatly. The *Chronicle*, for instance, burst into what we dare say it thinks "poetic prose" in denouncing it. Contrasting it with the speech of Mr. John Hodge, who does mission work in South London, our contemporary says: "The transition from Mr. Bottomley's speech to that of Mr. John Hodge was like passing from the mephitic vapors of a swamp out on to broad uplands, where the sun shone and the air was sweet." Fancy all that difference between public-houses being opened for six or for three hours on Sunday. Who would have thought it?

We believe that Mr. Bottomley is right about the *bona fide* traveller. To stop his beer altogether would certainly be a temperance proceeding. But to make him walk six miles for it is to develop a thirst that would pretty nearly keep a public-house going.

Mr. Bonar Law, who made the final speech against the Licensing Bill on the third reading, remarked that the closing of public-houses meant the multiplication of clubs. "There were many clubs," he said, "which were not only Sunday public-houses, they were Sunday music-halls as well." This remark was greeted with loud Opposition cheers. But what is the objection of these cheering gentlemen to clubs that open on Sunday? They nearly all belong to such clubs themselves. But the clubs of the "classes" are one thing and the clubs of the "masses" quite another. As for Sunday music-halls, why should not working men and their wives, as is often the case, listen to vocal and instrumental music on Sundays? This is common on the Continent. The music in English clubs may not be of the highest class, but any music is better than sheer boozing.

Christ is becoming more portentous every day. The Rev. Donald Fraser, of Bristol, informs us that "he was indeed born of the Holy Spirit, for he is the Holy Spirit." Furthermore, "we can discern the Divine in Christ because he is the Divine in us." Here is a more amazing statement still: "We cannot see in Christ what is non-existent in ourselves. The discovery of Christ in Jesus of Nazareth is the discovery of Christ in us. It is God in us seeing God in Christ, not man seeing God in Christ." What ineffable rubbish! Yet such sheer nonsense, because unctuously uttered, passes, in religious circles, for highest wisdom, or the revelation of God to modern man. And it is by means of such theological tomfoolery that the New Theologians are doing their utmost to capture the Labor Party and Socialism for the Church.

"The religion of Christ flourishes in East and West," says a professional soldier of the cross. Does it? We

understood that it had died out of the East, without ever having taken possession of the West. Does the reverend gentleman really think that the religion of Christ flourishes in London to-day? Or, to adopt the language of Mr. Stead, if Christ came to London before the end of the year, would he be satisfied with the existing state of things in it?

The same man of God delighted his receptive congregation by assuring them that Christ is "controller of the uncontrollable," that "winds and seas and demons hearken and obey." A man who can say that can say anything. No depths of folly are beyond him.

The Rev. Kenneth Macleay, of Craigrownie, tells us that "Follow me" was Jesus' "very last word." It is also the very last word to be fulfilled. A follower of Jesus there has never been. If it followed him society would be a heap of black ruins to-morrow.

"Half the trouble of life would be gone if people described things properly," said Judge Willis at the Southwark County Court. We agree with him. If people described things properly we should have missed one of the biggest troubles in the world—Christianity.

At last a religious journal has ventured to find fault with Sir Oliver Lodge's theology. The *British Weekly* declares that, by making light of sin, he incapacitates himself "somewhat (how gently he is let down!) for appreciating the only form of the supernatural which the New Testament represents." Until the eminent scientist abases himself, covering his nakedness with sackcloth and sitting in ashes, and cries out, "O what a miserable sinner I am," there will be scales on his eyes and he cannot see. The supernatural must be supernaturally revealed in every case; but it is revealed only "to those who are in despair about their sins." We tender Sir Oliver our sincere condolences.

Sir Oliver Lodge has generally been thought to deny the literal truth of the resurrection of Christ, but he writes to the *Christian Commonwealth* correcting this misconception. "The record may be taken as exact," he says, "without any need for assuming identity of material particles in the Resurrection body." So it was not, after all, the *same* body that rose from the dead. Well, we leave it to every candid reader to decide whether this is an honest interpretation of either the letter or the spirit of the New Testament narrative.

The Regiment, whose name indicates its object and character, tackles the question, "Should soldiers' wives be marched to church?" The writer, whoever he is, does not mince matters. He calls a spade a spade: none of your sanguinary agricultural implements. Here is a strong passage:—

"Shades of Charles Bradlaugh! The sturdily independent spirit who marries in the Army is likely to be sorely exasperated by the petty regulations, inspections and other annoyances to which, under a meddlesome martinet, his wife will be subject; it is a knowledge of this intolerable state of affairs that drives many a good soldier to leave the Army prematurely in order to get married; and the action of some C.O.'s in exerting illegitimate pressure on soldiers' wives through their husbands cannot be too strongly condemned. The system of stuffing religion down the soldier's throat *notens volens* is logically and morally ill-advised and indefensible; but to attempt to do the same in regard to individuals only tortuously associated with the Army and under no sort of military compact is iniquitous, and savors of archaic absolutism; it is from this point of view quite irrelevant that the practice lacks even the support of the so solicitous, grandmotherly Regulations."

This strikes the right note. We hope it means that the tyranny of religion in the Army is going to be resisted and broken. The article ends by declaring that soldiers' wives ought not to be forced to leave their cooking and children "to listen (where the preacher is uninspiring and incompetent) to the droning, parrot-like repetition of a lot of fossilised platitudes." We are getting on! We shan't be long now.

Christianity, in its decay, is bound to become more and more fantastic. All decaying religions have done that through the whole course of history. It does not surprise us, therefore, to see that a Council of Healing for the Diocese of London has been started by Church of England clergymen, apparently with the blessing of the Bishop—who is capable of anything. "Faith" is to be worked for all it is worth in cases of sickness. The doctor is not to be opposed in any fashion. Oh dear no! He is to be assisted in his work of healing. The clergyman is to chip in with his spiritual nostrum which is to aid the doctor's medicine. It

is to be a case of Doctor, Parson and Co. Some of the medicos may smile; some may even think the men of God a nuisance. But the parson means to hang on to the job. He feels that he must get a look in somewhere. As the Secretary of the new Council of Healing says: "Our psychic powers touch their highest point under the influence of religion." No doubt! No doubt! We have seen the psychic force of a religious maniac give employment to six strong men—to hold him down.

Dr. Campbell Morgan, the distinguished Free Church preacher, is heart and soul in faith-healing, and wishes that "the new Society formed by the Anglicans had been made broad enough in its basis so as to include Nonconformists." Evidently the motto of the new Society should be "Let 'em all come." Dr. Morgan, for his part, declares that "the co-operation of religion with medical science in cases of sickness has my heartiest approval." He even believes in some of the "miracles" at Lourdes, but like a good Protestant he is not going to give any unnecessary credit to the Catholic Church, which he probably regards as the Scarlet Whore of Babylon, mentioned in Holy Writ; so he traces the effect of the Lourdes "miracles" to "mental suggestion, not to any virtue in the relics." Dr. Morgan believes in faith-healing on Cowper-Temple principles.

Canon Barnett has been telling a London audience that the working classes are "aliens to the Church." "They were not antagonistic," he said, "but what was perhaps worse, they were indifferent." They were "scornful of the Church's teaching, and sceptical as to its sympathy with them." This is true, but not new.

"Friend, go up higher." Rev. G. E. Ford, vicar of Holy Trinity, is leaving the rectory of St. George's, Birmingham. He had a "call" to a nice living at Bilston, worth £900 a year.

Rev. Mr. Collier, superintendent of the Manchester Wesleyan Mission, has just made a significant admission to a sympathetic interviewer. He said: "Our interest chiefly lies in the non-worshipping classes, but so far little has been accomplished in this part of the work either by the Churches or the Missions." Converts from the camp of unbelievers are so few and far between. It is on backsliders, who have never ceased to believe, that evangelists and missionaries and revivalists bring all their converting energies to bear. Though the Savior is all-powerful as well as all-loving, he can make no impression upon Atheists. The Holy Ghost is powerless in the presence of active unbelief.

An exceedingly novel excuse for the slow progress of Christianity was offered the other day by one of its official champions. "The higher the form of life," he said, "the longer it is in coming to maturity." But Christianity is not a form of life at all, but, presumably, a Divine contrivance for saving individual souls from the guilt and power of what is called sin, and giving them a sure title to mansions in the skies, or, in other words, the infallible agency employed by the Holy Ghost for the winning of all mankind to Christ. We say that if Christianity is what it claims to be, its slow progress, or its present retrogression, is wholly inexplicable. Had it been a Divine force it would have accomplished its work many centuries ago. Its failure proves it to be the most stupendous fraud ever brought into the world.

"There is a serious danger," says Bishop Oluwole, "lest Africa should become Mohammedan instead of Christian." This danger has existed for years, and is becoming more and more acute. Bosworth Smith drew attention to it more than twenty years ago. The Mohammedan missionaries were making a hundred converts to every one made by the Christian missionaries. They are still doing so. And Mohammedanism makes the negro a man, while Christianity too often makes him a drunkard.

Canon Lambert, at Barmouth, has been committed for trial on the charge of wilfully ill-treating and neglecting a ten-year-old girl named Mary Elizabeth Inman. Mrs. Lambert had already been committed for trial on the same charge. We say no more until the trial is over—except that the people who get into such troubles are nearly always, if not absolutely always, Christians.

The Rev. Mr. Frere, of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, preaching at St. Paul's, told his hearers that they ought to be quite independent of the world and able to say to it, "If necessary I can do without you." Why do

congregations tolerate such utter trash? Nobody can do without the world. Were it not for the world there would be no Community of the Resurrection. What is the use of urging people to attempt ludicrous impossibilities?

The Churches have uttered their prophetic voice. They have issued due warning to the House of Lords that if it "reject or fatally mutilate the Licensing Bill, while it will deal a blow at temperance, it will inflict a mortal wound upon itself." And the Holy Ghost is being earnestly asked, at innumerable prayer-meetings all over the country, to take special charge of the Bill during its sojourn in that august chamber. Surely, the Lord of lords ought to carry the day.

England boasts of being the most Christian nation in the world—and Jesus Christ is called the Prince of Peace. Well, this most Christian nation in the world, with so many millions of worshipers of the said Prince of Peace, has spent £318,647,127 on its Navy alone during the last ten years. This single fact is enough to make every sensible person a Freethinker.

There have been 1,781 death sentences and 581 executions during the past year in Holy Russia. What a blessing Christianity is to the world!

According to the Hon. Lionel A. Tollemache, whose *Old and Odd Memories* is just published, the late Mr. Gladstone sometimes spoke disparagingly of the ancient Hebrews. On one occasion he maintained that they had produced no great general. The friend to whom he said this asked him whether Joshua had not shown military genius. "Not to be compared with Buller," was the G. O. M.'s startling reply. Perhaps not. But there was one Jewish general that Gladstone overlooked. What price Jehovah?

Jowett was once asked by a gushing young lady "what he thought of God." He replied that he was more concerned about what God thought of him. But perhaps God thought nothing of him at all. Believers are so apt to fancy that they are special objects of study to the Almighty.

We omitted to refer to the sentence of six months' imprisonment passed at the Leeds Assizes on Napoleon Hirschfield, alias Charles Montague, the "rheumatic specialist," of Brighton, for obtaining money by false pretences. This man was well-known as a preacher on Brighton beach. He was a great denouncer of Secularism, and almost had "Foote" on the brain. We daresay he will continue his pious exhortations, with the old acceptance, when he has finished enjoying the State's hospitality.

Rev. Harry Smith, of Bay View, Par, Cornwall, had been conducting a series of evangelistic services in the neighborhood of Redcar. On Sunday evening he was found at the house he was staying at in the village of Lazenby with his throat cut and a laudanum bottle by his side. There is no moral—of course. There would have been a very large and fine one if he had been conducting a Freethought mission.

What a consummate old humbug is the Rev. Dr. Clifford, the hero of the Passive Resistance movement, who has sent other Nonconformists to prison and carefully kept outside himself. For years he has been saying "We will never submit" to a number of things, including the "right of entry." Now he is accepting that arrangement; not cheerfully, of course, but as preferable to Secular Education, which he naturally regards, from a professional point of view, as the abomination of desolation.

Mr. J. R. Mott, a young American evangelist, has been telling ten thousand people at the Albert Hall that "liberty, equality, and fraternity" are "Christian watchwords." We always thought they were the watchwords of the French Revolutionists.

Bishop Thornton, of Blackburn, doesn't seem satisfied with having brought down the Rev. A. J. Waldron to oppose the Atheist lecturer in the Market-square. He now says it is time that "something were done to prevent mischief" arising from Atheist talk in public places. He declares himself to be "a passionate lover of liberty in everything but wickedness." This looks like a threat to supplement debate with physical persuasion.

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, November 29, St. Martin's Hall, Scotland Road, Liverpool; at 3, "Jesus Christ: Who and What?" at 7, "The Present Position of God."

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—November 29, Birmingham.

THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Previously acknowledged. Annual Subscriptions, £282 5s. 2d. Received since.—J. G. Dobson, 2s. 6d.

H. B. DODDS.—It is no use crying stinking-fish, is it? The Newcastle Branch would probably get more workers if more work were done. The cause cannot very well be kept alive and vigorous anywhere without fairly frequent lectures by special speakers who can draw audiences and make an impression upon them. We are glad to hear that Mr. Cohen's lecture was well attended, and that his answers to questions gave particular satisfaction. Mr. Foote will be happy to visit Newcastle in the new year. Is a really central hall likely to be available?

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

G. CHRISTIAN.—We have passed your letter on to Mr. Heaford, who is the proper person to say what is necessary in reply.

"KENT" writes: "Some time ago an old friend sent me a few numbers of the *Freethinker*. I was surprised at the style of writing I found in its pages. It is really intellectual food, and I have ordered it regularly. I find that many educated people in this part of the country are beginning to desert church and chapel. The working men I come in touch with are mainly indifferent to Christianity."

W. W. (Rhyl).—Ingersoll's verses on Robert Burns are published in the costly collected (Dresden) edition of his works. We may find room to reprint them shortly.

W. H. MORRISH, the Bristol veteran, says: "I feel personally obliged for the castigation you gave Reader Harris, K.C. The miserable sneak had not the courage to stand to his guns."

J. SCOTT (Bolton).—We are going to take the advertisement matter up for the new year, and will keep yours till then.

W. GILES.—The pansy is the emblem of the French Freethinkers too. It is necessary to have something that suits all, if it is to be adopted by all.

J. ORAN.—We have a very faint recollection of the late William Buster, of Bristol, one of the founders of the Sunday Society, a Socialist, and for some years a member of the Town Council. You say he formed the first N. S. S. Branch at Bath a great many years ago. That side of his career was not referred to in the local press. Of course!

W. WAINWRIGHT.—Pleased to hear from you, a convert who was formerly a Christian preacher, and glad you have found our writings so helpful.

D. MCCONNELL.—Pleased to read your interesting and encouraging letter.

F. H. CHANDLER.—Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night* is a long poem. It is included in the Thomson volume at 3s. 6d. published by B. Dobell, Charing Cross-road, London, W.C. Sorry to hear you tried in vain to get the *Freethinker* at twenty-four different newsagents' during a week-end visit to London. This sort of thing is one of our greatest troubles.

J. P. BROWNE.—We saw *London Opinion* with the quotation from G. W. Foote under "Maxims and Moralising." Thanks, all the same. The answer to your kind enquiry is "All well."

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

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

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

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

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

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote delivers two lectures to-day (Nov. 29) at Liverpool, in a hall which has not hitherto been used for such meetings—St. Martin's Hall, Scotland-road. The afternoon lecture on "Jesus Christ: Who and What?" starts at 3; the evening lecture on "The Present Position of God" at 7. Admission is free on both occasions, but the "saints" should come provided with the wherewithal for a liberal contribution to the collection.

Mr. Foote had a grand meeting at the Stratford Town Hall on Sunday evening. It was a live meeting from beginning to end, and very enthusiastic. A goodly number of ladies brightened up the audience. Several mothers had their babies with them, and they were all remarkably well-behaved—as if they knew where they were and what was expected of them. Mr. Victor Roger, who occupied the chair, pleasantly invited discussion, and several Christians embraced the offer. But the less said about their efforts the better. It was a miserable display. The only consolation was that it enabled Mr. Foote to bring down the house with a reply to what one of them said about "Christ's offer."

Mr. Foote's lecture ended the course of lectures under the auspices of the Secular Society, Limited. We are informed that the local N. S. S. Branch has engaged the Stratford Town Hall to-night (Nov. 29) on its own account for a "lantern" lecture by Mr. E. C. Saphin.

Mr. Cohen lectures twice, afternoon and evening, to-day (Nov. 29) in the Birmingham Town Hall. This is the second of the four courses of Sunday lectures organised by the local N. S. S. Branch under the auspices of the Secular Society, Limited. Midland Freethinkers should do their utmost to secure big meetings. The way to do this is not only to attend themselves, but to bring as many Christians as possible with them. All seats are free, with a collection towards the expenses. A fine band will render good music for half an hour before each lecture.

Tea will be provided in one of the Town Hall ante-rooms between the afternoon and evening lectures. It would be a convenience if Freethinkers intending to participate would notify the secretary, J. Partridge, 183 Vauxhall-road, Birmingham.

The *Journal des Charleroi* translates into French for its readers Mr. Foote's recent remarks on the revolution in Turkey as a striking disproof of the old statement that Mohammedanism is reactionary while Christianity is progressive. The bright and rapid French prose seems to give an added point to Mr. Foote's sarcasm.

London "saints" will please note that another social gathering, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, takes place at Anderton's Hotel, Fleet-street, on Thursday evening, December 3. The notice is a brief one, but that was unavoidable. We hope there will be a strong rally on this occasion. It will be the last gathering of the kind before the Annual Dinner, which takes place at the Holborn Restaurant on January 12. The President hopes that "saints" at this social gathering will not hesitate to come up and speak to him, and introduce themselves instead of waiting for an introduction. One of the objects of these gatherings is to enable Freethinkers to get better acquainted with each other.

We have almost lost count of the Government's "Education Bills." It has just introduced a new one. We are told that it is the result of an agreement between Church leaders and Chapel leaders—a sort of Pilate and Herod arrangement for the defeat of common honesty. Fortunately there are signs of hostility to it in all parts of the country, and it is very unlikely that the new Bill can be hurried through as its sponsors desire. The Executive Committee of the Secular Education League is holding a meeting (on Tuesday, Nov. 24) to consider the present situation and to decide what action should be taken to support the League's principles and objects at this juncture. We hope the League will act decisively, and that we may be able to make a welcome announcement in our next issue.

We have already referred to the election of Mr. R. Green, an open Freethinker, as Mayor of King's Lynn, Norfolk. We

have now to add that there was no church parade on the Sunday following the new mayor's election. This is the first time the custom has been broken since 1215.

We have been advertising the *Freethinker* a little lately, but the expense of doing so continuously is beyond our resources. It would be worth continuing if we could afford it. It has brought us into contact with some fresh readers. One of them, who is an LL.D., says: "The *Freethinker* is delightful reading." He forwards a subscription for the paper to be posted to him regularly.

Not being able to advertise as we could wish, we make a further appeal to our friends in all parts of the country to do a little missionary work for us, and indirectly for the Free-thought cause, which profits by the increased circulation of this journal. We shall be glad to receive more names and addresses of persons who might become regular readers of the *Freethinker* if it were only brought to their attention. We shall be happy to post a gratuitous copy to every such address for six consecutive weeks. Some of our friends might try to get "respectable" newsagents to give this journal a chance. They may be sure it will find purchasers if it only has an opportunity of obtaining their notice. Copies of the current issue might also be judiciously placed in the hands of likely people who are met with in the intercourse of business or pleasure, or in railway or other travelling.

We do not wish that any of our readers should order the *Freethinker* through anyone but their regular newsagent; but we often hear from persons who have the greatest difficulty in obtaining it, and in such cases we strongly advise that the order should be placed at one of W. H. Smith and Son's railway bookstalls, or one of the shops that firm has opened in places where their old bookstalls have passed into other hands. Wymans' people are still too prejudiced to treat this paper with any show of justice, but the managers of some of their bookstalls will, we understand, order a weekly copy on their own responsibility. Should any of Smith's manager's raise an objection, we shall be glad to be informed of it, with full particulars in writing, immediately.

The Atheistic Attitude to Life.

AN anxious inquirer who fails to discern any signs of the active presence of a loving heavenly Father in human life is told by an eminent divine that he is at the cross-roads, where he must determine which way he is going to take. "There are two ways which you must choose between. There is the obvious and easy way of Atheistic materialism." "The other way is that of faith." We will consider the way of faith first. The inquirer's difficulty is how to reconcile the sufferings and sorrows of life with any theory of Divine providence. He says: "I wonder why and how we are even temporarily happy, conscious as we are, in growing degree and numbers, of the tragic undertone of life." The divine frankly admits that the way of faith is difficult and demands continual courage. With George MacDonald he recognises the "God-denying look of things" which must be fought. The question is why things wear this "God-denying look" which man is urged to fight so bravely. This problem the Lord's servant discreetly ignores, and proceeds to observe that it is no argument against the way of faith "that it is difficult, for, according to the Greek proverb, 'all noble things are difficult.'" Then he asserts that, though full of difficulties, "it is the only reasonable way," because "it makes life not merely endurable, but splendidly worth while." Now, the admission of difficulty and the assertion of reasonableness in the way of faith are alike worthless unless both are boldly faced. Does the theologian face them? Not only he does not face them, he actually turns his back to them and indulges in the usual theological dogmatism. He assures us that "the New Testament is the most reasonable book in the world." Unbelievers deny that statement in the name of literary and historical

criticism, while the theologian can only defend it in the name of faith.

The way of faith is difficult, but it is not the way of reason, and on that account it cannot be pronounced reasonable. Were it reasonable it could justify itself at the bar of the intellect. To call it the way of faith is to disclose its whole character. It cannot be explained and defended in intellectual terms; it must be accepted on trust. The theologian flies off at a tangent, to speak of the enormity of sin, the wonder and greatness of the atonement, the mystery of forgiveness, and the value of vicarious suffering, of which the sacrifice of Calvary is the supreme example. Then comes another general assertion which is as unverifiable as the others: "History is nothing else than the long struggle between goodness and evil, the imputed blessing and the imputed curse. At the long last the stronger force must prevail, and the stronger force is goodness." The curious thing is that this statement, though made in the name of faith, is, if true, subversive of the truth of that faith. The struggle between goodness and evil has been going on for at least ten thousand years, and at present there is no sign of an end to it. Had goodness been the stronger force, would the conflict have lasted so long? Even the theologian can only promise it the victory "at the long last." Therefore, on his own showing, no benefit is to be derived from taking the way of faith. What then? The divine takes refuge in a mysterious region called "Behind the Veil," into which he cannot be followed. To a mind tormented by the many puzzling problems of the present life this is the only crumb of comfort he can offer:—

"For me the supreme evidence of the Divinity of our Lord is his attitude to the abiding mysteries. He never offered a demonstration, for there is no possible demonstration of the things which lie beyond the compass of experience. He took his stand among the weary and bewildered children of men, and said: 'I have come from that realm about which you are wondering and guessing. I know what lies behind the Veil, and I tell you there is nothing there but good. There is a Father's Heart and a Father's House.'"

Thus the way of faith turns out to be the way of cowardice. Its appeal is from the known to the unknown and unknowable, from a real present to a hypothetical future, from an existing world to an imaginary one. Having thus tested the way of faith and found that it leads to nowhere, let us examine the way of Atheism which the divine describes as the way of despair. Well, there is a sense in which that description is correct. What is despair? The absence of hope; and, most assuredly, the Atheist does not cherish the least hope of seeing earth's dark enigmas solved "behind the Veil." In this respect, despair is much preferable to cowardice. As Dryden says, "A fool is nauseous, but a coward worse." Of course, it is not in this sense that the theologian despises Atheism as "an attitude of despair." Admitting that the way of Atheism is "obvious and easy," he declares that it is a terrible and disastrous way. If there "be no God with a heart of love and a hand of power, no eternal goodness behind the sorrow and suffering of humanity, thinking of us and planning for us and working out its own beneficent purposes amid all the 'Sturm and Drang,'" then let us eat and drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die:—

"It seems to me that, on the Atheistic theory, the best, the only reasonable resource for the vast majority of mankind is suicide. Their life is a horrid nightmare, and the sooner it is ended the better."

That is what the divine means by calling Atheism "an attitude of despair." But he is entirely mistaken. It is acknowledged that the way of faith does not alter the lot of the children of men in this world. Even in Great Britain, a country in which Christ has triumphed, the life of the vast majority of people is a horrid nightmare, and the sooner it is ended the better, and surely "the best, the only reasonable resource" for them "is suicide." The Father's House and the Father's Heart and the eternal goodness are all behind the Veil, not here, and the sooner

the sorrowing, suffering millions get there the better. But the theologian meets this argument thus: "The present life is indeed an intolerable incubus, a burden too heavy to bear; but we know that the longer and more patiently we endure it the richer and more enjoyable our reward will be when we go behind the Veil. We learn to reckon our affliction here light and short-lived because we are convinced that it is working for us 'more and more abundantly an eternal weight of glory.' Were it not for this beautiful faith, this glorious hope, suicide would be our best, our only reasonable resource."

In view of such an utterance is it not passing strange that, generally speaking, the people who commit suicide are professing Christians? As a rule, Atheists do not tremble and cower in the presence of life's adversities and calamities, but show a bold front, convinced that courage is its own reward. Instead of relying on an imaginary Divine goodness behind their troubles and trials, thinking of them, planning for them, and working out its own beneficent purposes, they practise self-reliance and employ all their faculties in the attempt to lessen this world's wrongs and miseries. The theologian asks, with the scorn of incredulity on his lips,—

"How can they live, how will they die,
How bear the cross of grief,
Who have not got the light of faith,
The courage of belief?"

A sufficient answer is to be found in the bare fact that they do live and bear, and that, on the whole, they are stronger and happier without "the light of faith," which they regard as an illusory and dangerous will-o'-the-wisp.

We have no hesitation, therefore, in characterising the Atheistic attitude to human life as the only attitude that is sane and wholesome, the only attitude that conduces to a right understanding and an intelligent utilisation of our existence here.

When the preacher affirms, in the oracular style peculiar to him, that without faith in God society would speedily become a fearful wreck, we should call upon him to verify his words from history. We should also turn the tables on him by addressing him thus: "You prophesy that without faith in God mankind would soon sink into the deepest moral degradation and woe; but are you proud of society as it is to-day, the product of thousands of years of faith in God? For fifteen centuries Christianity has been predominant in the West, and yet to-day, on your own confession, the life of the vast majority of the population is 'a horrid nightmare.' Only the other day a believer stated confidently that the world was never so wicked and wretched as it is at this moment. How do you reconcile this state of things with your pretended belief in the regenerating, transforming, and joy-giving power of the Christian religion? With these facts staring you in the face, how can you, what right have you to predict that the loss of this morally impotent religion would plunge the West into a still more confused and chaotic condition?" We maintain, on the contrary, that an intelligent adoption of the Atheistic position would result in the awakening of mankind to a fruitful sense of the tremendous powers and magnificent possibilities that lie latent within themselves. The pulpit used to say that God was prepared to do for men what men could never do for themselves. The consequence was that they waited on the Lord, every now and then crying out, "Come, O Lord, come quickly to our help." But he never came. Individuals *believed* that their souls would enter heaven at death; but with the conditions of social life on earth there was never any supernatural interference. And now at last we are slowly making the discovery that the exaltation and ennoblement of society must be effected by its own members acting together. This is the only attitude that has in it the potent promise of any substantial betterment of human conditions. Atheism throws humanity upon its own resources which under Theism have never had fair play.

J. T. LLOYD.

When Did Jesus Live?—II.

(Continued from p. 749.)

7. COMING now to a more crucial question, Mr. Ball says that though "Luke's Gospel and 'the Acts' are untrustworthy as historical records, they nevertheless afford perfectly good evidence in some respects." This is, of course, true, and I have several times referred to the fact. But in what respects, and to what extent, may we reasonably look for evidence in these books? Mr. Ball seems disposed to regard them as containing a great deal more than, in my humble opinion, they actually possess. He says:—

"They certainly indicate the dates which were actually assigned to Jesus and Paul at an early period in Christian history, when the approximate dates would probably be known to many people. Luke would ascertain the dates to the best of his ability, and would hardly care to invite contradiction by glaring errors in his chronology."

Now, of the kind of evidence which we may legitimately deduce from the Gospels and the Acts I gave, not very long ago, two examples, drawn from the last-named book. These were (1) that the primitive Christians were known by the names of "Nazarenes" (Acts xxiv. 5); (2) that they lived together in one society and enjoyed community of goods, the rich helping to support the poor (Acts iv. 32—v. 11). The evidence, in each case, was not dependent upon the veracity of the writer; they were matters which all Christians of his time believed to be matters of fact. Reverting to the first of these examples, it is narrated in the Acts that the high priest and "certain elders" went down to Cæsarea to lay accusations against Paul before the procurator Felix. An orator, Tertullus, whom they took with them is made to say in his speech:—

"For we found this man a pestilent fellow.....and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

This, I stated, was evidence that in the time of the compiler of the Acts it was believed that the apostles and primitive Jewish Christians were known by the name of Nazarenes—the reason being that the writer, if he intended his compilation to be received as history (as, no doubt, he did), would, when placing his own words in the mouth of a fictitious character (Tertullian), be obliged, upon some points, to make him say what he and his fellow-Christians believed to have been a fact. The whole narrative might be pure fiction—the high priest, elders, orator, and the speech before Felix. This mattered nothing, for the story could not be verified in Luke's day; but the tradition that had come down to the compiler's time as to the name of the primitive Christians was common knowledge, and could not be ignored. The same reasoning holds good as regards the statement that the name "Christian" was first used at Antioch (Acts xi. 26)—though this must have been after Paul's time—as to the community of goods amongst the primitive Christians, and other small matters; but such can scarcely be asserted of names of persons and dates.

The theory which I think most likely to be correct is something like the following: In the first primitive Gospel Jesus was said to have appeared "in those days," there being in Judæa at that time a "high priest" and a "governor." Later on, it was ascertained that Pilate and Caiaphas had held office during the same period (A.D. 26-36): these were then said to have been the governor and the high priest referred to. Luke compiled a new Gospel from pre-existing documents, taking Mark's Gospel as his groundwork, and selecting and adding as he thought fit from other existing Gospels. Investigation was simply impossible in his days, and he never attempted any. He re-wrote and revised all his selections from other Gospels, and having some acquaintance with Jewish history prior to the siege of Jerusalem (probably from Josephus), he inserted matter which he thought would make his Gospel and the Acts appear more historical. In this, as might be expected, he

made many mistakes; but no one in his day noticed them. In later times his errors were accepted as correct, and all who differed from him were declared to be wrong.

In addition to the errors in the Third Gospel already noticed, it is clearly implied by Luke (i. 5, 24, 26, 36, 57) that the Baptist—who is stated to have been six months older than Jesus—was born "in the days of Herod, king of Judæa"; that is to say, not later than B.C. 3. Next, Luke says that Jesus was born during an enrolment or taxing made by Quirinius in Palestine (Luke ii. 2, 7): this was in A.D. 7. Lastly, the same evangelist says that in A.D. 28 Jesus "was beginning to be about thirty years" of age (Luke iii. 23); that is, he was born in B.C. 2 when Archelaus reigned over Judæa.

Luke's method of "investigation" was to copy anything which in his judgment appeared historical from the mass of legendary matter he found narrated in various apocryphal Gospels. In the *Gospel of Nicodemus* "Annas and Caiaphas," speaking to Pilate, say of themselves, "We the chief priests," etc.; whence Luke concluded that both were high priests at the same time, and named them as such in his Gospel. In the *Protevangelium of James* mention is made of an enrolment "by an order from the emperor Augustus," to which Luke added (probably from Josephus) that it took place "when Quirinius was governor of Syria." In the same apocryphal Gospel Luke found the angel Gabriel's address to Mary, and an account of the holy man Simeon who was filled with the Holy Ghost (Luke ii. 25-26). From the *Gospel of Thomas* he took the fictitious story of little Jesus in the temple at the age of twelve (Luke ii. 41-52); his accounts of the ascension of Jesus in his Gospel and in the Acts flatly contradict each other, and were, no doubt, derived from different documents.

8. Of all the New Testament writings the Book of the Acts is the most misleading. This book, more than any other, has been the means of blocking the way to all rational investigation of Christian origins. Nearly all Biblical critics accept the accounts in this book as to some extent historical; that is to say, as to the time and localities of the preaching of Paul and the apostles, the persecution suffered by these preachers, and many other matters. Renan, for instance, regards all the miracles as fiction, the apostles receiving the Holy Ghost and speaking with "tongues" as nonsense, and the long speeches put in the mouths of Peter, Stephen, and Paul as fabrications composed for the several occasions by Luke himself; after which he takes all the rest of the book as more or less historical. This easy method of criticism is likewise followed by other and more rational critics, and for a very simple reason.

The writer of the Pauline Epistles never once names the reigning emperor, the Roman procurator, the Jewish high priest, or any event in Roman or Jewish history, by which the period when he wrote might be approximately fixed. This being the case, Biblical critics, almost without exception, take the Acts account as in a great measure correct, and accept as historical the narratives not in conflict with the earlier and more reliable statements in the Pauline Epistles. Had we three versions of the Acts, with all three contradicting one or more of the others upon many points, as is the case of the Gospels, the result would no doubt be different. As it is, the persons and places mentioned in the Acts (which give approximate dates) are accepted because no reliable information on the subject is to be had. There is, indeed, a passage in one of the Pauline Epistles which gives a date for the conversion of the apostle of the Gentiles; but this passage (2 Cor. xi. 32-33) is an interpolation, besides indicating a period about a century before the time of the Gospel Jesus.

Some two or three years ago I wrote a series of papers on the Acts of the Apostles, in which I endeavored to show that the narratives in that book are from beginning to end fictitious. I also suggested that they were probably derived from pre-existing apocryphal writings, since "lost." We know

from early Christian writers that there were in circulation the Acts of Peter, the Acts of Paul, the Travels of Peter, the Travels of Paul, the Travels of Peter and Paul, and many others. According to my theory (which I still think to be correct) Luke first combined and dovetailed together these apocryphal "histories," then re-wrote the whole (including the composition of speeches for his heroes), and finally fitted them into a historical framework which he made up from his reading of Josephus or Justus of Tiberius. Holding this theory, I am precluded from making use of the names recorded in the Acts for the purpose of fixing dates.

9. Mr. Ball says:—

"The fact that Paul's Epistles do not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem is practically a proof that Paul wrote before A.D. 70.....If Jerusalem had been captured and destroyed by the time Paul wrote, he could hardly have avoided referring to a subject which would affect him so deeply as an ardently pious and patriotic Jew."

This reasoning certainly seems plausible; but it depends, I think, upon how soon Paul wrote after the destruction of the holy city. After a few months the event would be so widely known that the writer would have no need to refer to it, save perhaps as an illustration or warning. But there are two passages which I think *do* refer to this disastrous event. These are the following:—

1 Thess. ii. 15-16. "—the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus, and the prophets, and drove out us, and please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved; to fill up their sins alway; but the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."

Gal. iv. 25-26. "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother."

Both these passages I take as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem and the carrying away into captivity of its inhabitants. The "wrath" of God had at length overtaken the Jews, who for their manifold sins had been punished "to the uttermost." The holy city was in the hands of the Romans, its inhabitants were slain or "in bondage." The last word I take to have reference, not to a figurative or spiritual enslavement, but to an actual bondage. Furthermore, neither of these passages can be shown to be an interpolation.

10. In the Epistle to the Galatians the writer says that three years after his conversion, and again fourteen years later, he visited Jerusalem and saw James, Cephas, and some other apostles. The question arises, Would Paul, after the destruction of the holy city, find the primitive Christian Church located there? The answer is that most probably he would. The tradition handed down is to the effect that shortly before the Roman legions surrounded the city the disciples and their followers crossed the Jordan and took up their residence at Pella, where they remained until after its capture by the Romans; then, after the pacification of Judæa, the Nazarene Church returned to Jerusalem, and found refuge in some of the few houses that had escaped destruction. The Nazarenes, being a branch of the Essenes, existed as a sect before the outbreak of war with the Romans; their rules of conduct were the Sermon on the Mount. After the destruction of Jerusalem one of the sect, Jesus, was regarded as a prophet and a "faithful witness," who "overcame" the world and "sat down" with his heavenly Father on his throne. All the other members of the sect who remained faithful and "overcame" should also "sit down" with him on his throne (Rev. i. 5-6; iii. 21).

ABRACADABRA.

(To be continued.)

Science is the great instrument of social changes, all the greater because its object is not change but knowledge.
—A. J. Balfour.

Correspondence.

THE CONVERSION OF ROMANES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your issue of November 8 contains an article by "Veritas" on "The Conversion of Romanes." Some of the statements therein are more than interesting, and the writer of this would like to ask:—

1. If Romanes' position respecting "the existence of a disposing mind" was "pure Agnosticism," and this was "maintained until almost the end of his life," how is it that in the "Rede Lecture" of 1885, nine years before the "end," this "pure Agnosticism" had become impure? And how (some years before the "end") can such be reconciled with "a vivid recognition of the spiritual necessity of faith and of the legitimacy and value of its intuitions"?

2. On what grounds is it maintained—that when Dr. Sagot administered Holy Communion Romanes was, "in all human probability, scarcely conscious"?

3. If Romanes was "scarcely conscious"—and it "seems difficult to suppose that he could have been in a condition to proffer any rational request (that of Holy Communion) at all"—how is it that between the seizure and the Celebration he had "listened to Dr. Bright's hymn," and said: "It is wonderful; it is a poem, and yet it conveys the deepest teaching"—or words to that effect?

4. At this painful period "he was certainly an avowed sceptic." If so, is the desire to have the Psalms read, and at the finish to exclaim, "I can hardly bear that Psalm; I have longed so much," compatible with the above unmodified phrase?

5. Does "Veritas" help the above "scepticism" when he adduces—"C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas science"? Does he really think the answer to the child's question, "Because God made it so," is scientific?

6. "Veritas" refers to "Darwin, and after Darwin," and its "strongly rationalistic" tone. Why has he suppressed the concluding note of Mrs. Romanes and a "rationalistic" summary of the author himself, both of which, once again, modify his terms?

7. Romanes "never succeeds in answering his own arguments in *A Candid Examination of Theism*. Is "Veritas" aware of the nature of his so-called "answers" and the character of his "Notes"?

8. Either Mrs. Romanes or Dr. Gore is in "error" respecting her husband's "final attitude" to Christianity. Wherein lies this "error"? If in the statement, "I as yet have not that real inward assurance," will "Veritas" show how such is in conflict with either Dr. Gore's or Mrs. Romanes' statement?

9. What does "Veritas" mean by Romanes' "wrecked condition"? If it implies that his mental powers were shattered, how is such reconcilable with Mrs. Romanes' account—his "keen" and "vigorous intellect," and also Dr. Burdon Sanderson's and Dr. Gore's statement—"up to the end he preserved his mental vigor"?

10. Why has "Veritas" suppressed the above evidence, and so misled the readers of the *Freethinker*?

W. H. HOWARD NASH.

"Nonconformist Conscience" Morality.

[A Letter which was not inserted in the *Daily News*.]

EDITOR, "DAILY NEWS."

SIR,—Is it any use to appeal to the *Daily News* for fair play?

Is it not almost time the *Daily News* gave up the stupid ostrich policy of refusing to admit the existence of everything they refuse to see?

On p. 3 of the *News* to-day are two short pars. adjoining, and it seems to me that the first of the two should convey something in the way of a moral to the directors of the paper in which the items appear.

We are told in the first that November 16 is the festival of a farmer's boy who became "democratic Archbishop of Canterbury." He was, however, so much before his time that the obscurantists—the *Daily News* editors of the supreme party drove him into retirement.

To-day festivals are held in his honor.

In the next paragraph we are told that for the first time in 700 years there has been no mayoral church parade at King's Lynn.

I have a very firm notion that the usual obscurantism of the *Daily News* deliberately suppressed what is a vital and striking detail of the King's Lynn item—that the new mayor

is a working man (a plasterer), and that he is, and has for many years been, a member of the National Secular Society, i.e., a well-known and progressive Freethinker.

The *Daily News* phrasing—convinced opinions on subjects—is just as unfair and dishonest as it would be for a Freethought journal to call Dr. Clifford or the Rev. Campbell "Freethinkers" because they think freely.

Is it not more than time that the *Daily News* changed its tactics in all its dealings with Secularism and Secularists?

Does it stand for nothing that at the last Trades Union Congress 1,433,000 voted for Secular Education and 131,000 against? And yet the Nonconformist Conscience is capable of supporting another compromise, while fighting Freethinkers are showing their power in breaking a tradition of 700 years.

This game is played out. Bring yourself to realise that in much less than 700 (probably) years the party to which Richard Green, the democratic Mayor of Lynn, belongs will be the power commanding and admitted.

November 16, 1908.

T. SHORE.

Life of Charles Bradlaugh.

MANY of our readers are familiar with the *Life of Charles Bradlaugh*, written by his daughter (Mrs. Bradlaugh-Bonner), and published by Mr. Fisher Unwin at a guinea. It is a very interesting work, and a worthy record of a great man. Mr. Unwin has just issued a people's edition at half-a-crown, which will doubtless have a large sale. Mr. Morrish, bookseller, 24 Cromwell-road, Bristol, will be pleased to send a copy, *post free* to any address, to those who will send him half-a-crown.

From Mr. R. J. Campbell we learn that if there is a social gospel anywhere in the New Testament, its fullest and clearest expression is to be found in St. Luke. He then quotes: "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep"—which means that, in the modern sense of the phrase, the New Testament does not contain a social gospel at all. If Luke meant that the rich should become poor, the full become hungry, the happy become miserable, merely because they were what they were, and if all this was to take place in this world, he was preaching a gospel of revenge pure and simple. If, on the other hand, the changes were to take place in the next world, we quite fail to see the value of its application to social problems. A sane social policy involves organisation that promises benefit to all. A mere shifting the poor, the hungry, the miserable, from one side of the scale to the other is really not worth working for.

The truth is, that a "social gospel" is the last thing that the New Testament is concerned with, and the last thing that the early Christians troubled about. They expected the world to come to an end in the very near future, and believed, with Paul, that if there were no future life there would be every reason for plunging into sensual enjoyment. Like every small body of people, they clung together and helped one another, but it is absurd to transform this into a passion for social righteousness. Later, when Christianity was patronised by the State, it then began to talk about social duties, but it was the duty of good Christians to yield passive obedience to the established authorities. Luther's counsel that the revolting peasants were to be stabbed, shot, or poisoned, like mad dogs, was only an extreme expression of historic Christian teaching. Other times, other manners, and the breakdown of belief has forced preachers to preach a more human and more reasonable—though, in the circumstances, a less honest doctrine—than once obtained. But it is absurd for a handful of preachers—of the catch-all-you-can variety—representing only a small minority of their own order or of lay believers, to pretend that their teachings represent genuine Christianity. So far as their attitude is rational or socially helpful, it registers the triumph of Freethought, not a renaissance of faith.

A man had been a backslider for seventeen years when Christ came and restored him. This case is quoted as a living sample of the converting power of the all-loving Savior. To us it is a striking instance of the dismal incompetence of Christ to fulfil the functions of his alleged office? Why did he allow the man to fall from grace, and then to remain in that unprofitable state for so long a period? If an omnipotent and all-loving Redeemer existed, there would be no unsaved sinners, and certainly no backsliders.

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.

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Stratford Town Hall) : 7.30, E. C. Saphin, "Christianity an Astronomical Myth." Illustrated with lantern slides.

WOOD GREEN (Alma Hall, 335 High-road, N., three doors from Commerce-road) : 7, W. Heaford, "Continental Freethought."

OUTDOOR.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. : Hyde Park (near Marble Arch), 11.30, a Lecture.

WOOLWICH BRANCH N. S. S. : Beresford-square, 11.30, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Town Hall) : C. Cohen, 3, "Man and the Universe; Science, Faith, and God"; 7, "What is Man's Chance of a Future Life?"

BOSTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Corn Exchange, Market-place) : 7.30, Joseph Bates, "The Church and its Relations to Love, Marriage, and Divorce. Soloist, Miss A. Stow.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Rationalists' Club, 12 Hill-square) : 6.30, Mr. Stewart, a Lecture.

FALLSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane) : 6.30, Ernest Evans, "Hereditv and Environment, and their Influence on the Human Race."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street) : Joseph McCabe, 12 noon, "Free Will and Free Progress"; 6.30, "The Evolution of Mind."—II. With over 100 limelight views.

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Tate's Dining Hall, Vicar-lane (next door to Lee's Hall) : Mr. Wishart, "Will Christianity accept Spiritualism?"

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (St. Martin's Hall, Scotland-road) : G. W. Foote, 3, "Jesus Christ: Who and What?" 7, "The Present Position of God."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints) : 6.30, C. Willis, "Spiritualism Gifts." With demonstrations.

NEWCASTLE (Rationalist Literary and Debating Society, Lockhart's Cathedral Café) : Thursday, December 3, at 8, W. L. Armstrong, "Orators and Oratory."

STANLEY BRANCH N. S. S. (I. L. P. Hall) : 3.30, Important business meeting. All members earnestly requested to attend.

OUTDOOR.

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. : The Meadows, 3, a Lecture; The Mound, 7, a Lecture.

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