

# THE Freethinker

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*You may depend upon it, the more oath-taking, the more lying, generally, among the people.*—COLERIDGE.

## Why Christ Was Born.

If a visitor from a distant planet, knowing nothing of this world's religions, were to walk about in Christian England on the day of that ancient Pagan festival which is now called Christmas; if he were to observe the eating and drinking, the dancing and card-playing and general jollification which mark this "holy season"; he would never suspect that the people around him were celebrating the birthday of their God. He would rather fancy that they were celebrating the memory of a publican or hotel manager or other person in the catering line of business.

Thomas Carlyle told Mr. Moncure Conway that he took a walk one evening in the neighborhood of Chelsea, where he resided, and was astonished at the unusual number of "drunks" he encountered, until he suddenly recollected that they were celebrating the birthday of their Redeemer.

Jesus Christ, if he ever lived, was *not* born on the twenty-fifth of December. That idea was set up in the fourth century, and has held the field ever since. The twenty-fifth of December was, as we have said, an ancient Pagan festival—the celebration of the new birth of the sun. The twenty-first of December is the shortest day of the year, and is assigned in the Catholic Calendar to St. Thomas, who doubted his Master's resurrection. For three days the orb of light appears to be stagnant; the fourth day begins to lengthen, the sun decisively commences another progression through the heavens, and the Pagans, who were all sun-worshippers at bottom, expressed their joy at the auspicious occurrence. More than three hundred years after the alleged birth of Jesus, the Christian Church seized upon this festival; the SUN was turned into the SON; and the Pagans, who were lured or forced into Christianity under Constantine and his successors, were gratified to learn that the new religion, while it altered their shibboleths, made very little difference to their rites and customs and, above all, to their enjoyments.

All this would be discovered by our imaginary visitor from a distant planet. He would also find that the deity of Christ was never suspected during his lifetime; that the doctrine grew gradually, with many fluctuations of fortune, in the Christian Church; and that it was only imposed on the whole Christian world after generations of fierce controversy and cruel bloodshed.

Supposing, however, that Jesus Christ *was* God, or a *part* of God, or a *messenger* from God; we may still ask—Why did he come? Why was he sent? What was his object? And how has he carried it out?

Jesus Christ was certainly not born to teach the world anything new in religion, philosophy, or ethics. Every good (or bad) text in the Gospels is a repetition of what had been uttered already. Even the assertion that he brought immortality to light is false in the light of Jewish doctrine before his birth, and ridiculous in the light of the ancient systems of Egypt and India.

Christ did not come as a man to illuminate the world, but as a god to redeem it. Such is the teaching of orthodox Christianity. But if Christ's object was the world's redemption, his failure is "gross as a mountain, open, palpable."

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," was the command of Christ to his apostles. He also said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end." This can only mean that they, or their successors, were to convert the world to Christianity. But what is the fact? After the lapse of nearly two thousand years, more than half the world's inhabitants have never heard the gospel preached. Only a quarter of the human race are professed Christians, and the real ones are a very small fraction of that number. Buddhism, which was founded by a man, includes a larger proportion of mankind. Nor is there the slightest prospect of improvement. The races that stood outside Christianity at first are outside it still. Missionary effort makes no considerable impression on the vast populations of Asia and Africa; and the heathen who *are* converted in distant lands do not equal the number of persons in Christian countries who are either sceptical or indifferent.

Christ is called the Prince of Peace. Angels sang at his birth of "peace on earth and goodwill among men." But this was surely ironical, for more blood has been shed in the name of Christ than in that of any other deity. Besides, it is an historical fact that all other differences—racial, political, or social—are aggravated by difference in religion. It is false to say that Christ brought peace. He was born at a time of peace, during the reign of the mild and wise Augustus, when less than half a million soldiers sufficed to maintain peace within the vast Roman Empire, and to secure its frontiers against the outer barbarians. Europe has now some ten million soldiers, grasping arms in readiness for mutual slaughter. After all those centuries of the reign of Christ the European (Christian) nations are being crushed by their military systems. All the able-bodied young men, in countries where the conscription obtains, spend a large part of their best time of life in barracks; more than two hundred millions are wrung from the people to support armies and navies, and more than another two hundred millions to pay the interest on war-debts contracted during the last hundred and fifty years. Peace on earth! The brotherhood of man! Yes, the peace of assassins—the brotherhood of Cain and Abel.

Christ has not befriended the poor. Poverty is the standing curse of Christian societies. It is said that he will redeem us in the next world; but if he cannot help us *here*, how will he help us *there*? Let us tell the truth. He is a failure. As a god he is contemptible. He was born once, but it was a mistake; all he has to do now is to die.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Taking Chances.

THERE is an old-fashioned, and therefore a favorite, treatment for measles. It consists in dosing the young sufferer with saffron-tea. Putting on one side the probable benefits derived from the warm water, quite as much good might be done by stroking the child's back with a brick, or performing a dance round his cot. But the decoction has its place as the traditional remedy for measles, and, as it happens to be harmless, it retains its place. One mother hands it on to another, and when a child is seized by this complaint it requires no little strength of mind to turn one's back on so long standing a medicine. Those who give it probably feel that not to do so *might* be risking a child's life for the sake of some new-fangled opinion, and they decline the venture. Everyone will appreciate the motive, though some would like to see the parental affection more intelligently displayed. And as—in spite of the common saying—one does not keep one's mind in so many watertight compartments, for the simple reason that one cannot, it happens that this simple illustration will serve to open for inspection a very wide area of our mental life.

For in this particular the mother, with her saffron-tea, is a representative of a common type of mind. In every direction one can see numerous customs, beliefs, and institutions, all perpetuated for no better reason than that they already exist. People find them existing, and they support them on that sole consideration. They are afraid of the risk of breaking away from the established practice. The one great support of the House of Lords, for instance, is just this fear of running risks. Leading articles in the press deal far more with the evils that *may* result from the removal of the House of Lords than from any benefits derived from its presence. The groundwork of conservatism, of the stupid kind, is mental timidity. People feel safer in the old ruts, even though they complain of the discomforts of the road. Love of the old order is, in perhaps the majority of cases, only another name for fear of the new. The unknown may have its charm for some minds, but to the average man or woman it seems to give rise to the gravest apprehensions. They confront the unknown seeing only the dangers and disasters that threatened self-interest has depicted for their instruction. The future is only tolerable so long as it resembles the past and the present.

One may see this fear of running risks working itself out in the most grotesque manner. Men without food, clothing, or shelter may be found expressing their fears of how deplorable their position would become did a foreign army land on British soil. The granting of a vote to women will suddenly result in the loss of their "womanly" character, and the few minutes spent at the polling-booth once every four or five years will disorganise the whole of their domestic duties. The prison chaplain, looking over his conscript congregation—among whom a Freethinker is but rarely seen—will solemnly assure the world that, in the absence of religion, people would inevitably take to evil living. Every reformer has to face the opposition of this fear of the future, and every vested interest in the country finds in it its best friend.

As usual, the richest crop of illustrations may be found in the sphere of religion. Modern religion rests almost wholly upon it. Like the mother with the saffron-tea, it is upheld chiefly for the reason that it already exists. People always have had religious beliefs, therefore they must continue to entertain them. No one is able to conclusively indicate a single important function in life that it performs, yet an appeal is confidently made to the evils that will result from its disappearance. People are implored not to chance it, and they respond to the appeal. Thousands of men who have no religious beliefs themselves seem to have a lingering belief that probably their womenfolk may be the better for a slight dose of superstition. Thousands of others

persuade themselves that in some unknown way religion may accomplish a deal of good, and that to put it on one side altogether will expose society to a more or less serious loss. They cloak their fear under various disguises, but it is there, and at bottom it is sheer cowardice in facing a set of conditions not quite like those furnished by their experience.

Consider the fears expressed as to the dangers of dispensing with religion in connection with morals. People will assure one another that, for some people, the "fear of religion" is absolutely essential to keep some people straight. The humor of the situation is that each religious moralist seems to think that religion is necessary for someone else. A will privately assure you that *he* is all right; whether religion lives or dies, it would not greatly affect *his* conduct; but for B, poor devil, a religious belief of some kind is an absolute necessity. And B will be equally careful and considerate towards A's welfare, and equally convinced of his own impeccability. Each half of the world is, as a matter of fact, playing the hypocrite in this manner for the moral benefit of the other half. Their own personal experience cannot but assure them, if ever they reflect upon it, that religious beliefs do not make any material difference as to conduct. People may lie and cheat and play the rascal generally as readily with religious belief as without it, yet the story is repeated as though it rested upon a basis of the most enduring experience.

It is the same if we take morality apart from religion. Any innovation in moral theory is reproached, merely because it is an innovation. Ignoring the fact that the real obligation to morality comes not from theory, but from life, and that theory is positively unable to affect morality to any serious extent, professional moralists solemnly warn unprejudiced inquirers as to the dangerous influence this or that conclusion may have upon their weaker brethren. They are implored not to disturb things, while all the time not to disturb things—as far as conscious disturbance is possible—is often the very means of producing evil that intelligence might avert. In such cases it is not moral strength that speaks, but moral weakness. Moral strength acts upon the intellectual perception of the fact that the adjustment of the human organism to its environment proceeds more surely and more rapidly when the power of the intellect in modifying and adapting is appreciated and exercised. It is moral cowardice that is afraid to take chances, and sees not the possibilities of a fuller and freer life held in solution in the future, but only its dangers and disasters.

To recur to our opening illustration. Saffron tea as a cure for measles is a survival, resting probably upon a basis of sympathetic magic. The color of the rash of measles and of saffron are about the same; therefore one might be used to cure the other. And because it has been used it is still used, even though the reason for it is forgotten. That religion also is a survival, and rests upon much the same basis as the saffron tea cure is fairly clear. Religious practice is based upon magic, more or less, and is perpetuated in a spirit of sheer conservatism. Originally man does not run the risks of offending the gods because these are to him very real existences, and the danger is as certain as their existence. And by the time the belief in the gods has grown faint custom has began to play its part, strengthened with a sense of uneasiness that after all there *may* be something in religion, and it is just as well to keep out of danger. In this matter, therefore, those who wish to keep things as they are have the reformer at a considerable disadvantage. The former can appeal to custom, to traditional sentiment, of the risks run by launching out in a new direction, by appealing to the general cowardice. The reformer has none of these tactical advantages. He is inviting people to think in a new direction, to speak in a strange language; he has to create the material for his work. The religionist finds his to hand, ready shapen to his desires.

Intellectually the issue is between mental clarity and mental confusion. But the moral issue—that between moral strength and moral cowardice—is perhaps deeper still. Anyone who has studied public affairs cannot but remark the lack of moral strength in average humanity. The unwillingness to face—the unreadiness to face—a clear, straight issue of principle, the desire to rest on the apparently safe basis of custom, are all too obvious to be overlooked. Faith, in the religious sense of the word, the Free-thinker has not. But faith in the best sense of the word he does possess. He has faith in the future; faith in the undeveloped possibilities of human nature—in its power for accomplishment and its possibilities for good. He, at least, is not afraid to leave the saffron tea culture stage behind him. To him human experience is a school in which the lessons of the past are only properly appreciated and utilised when they result in an orderly and progressive change in the life of the present and the future.

C. COHEN.

### The Farce of Christmas.

It is a truism that "Christmas comes but once a year," for which many people are devoutly thankful; but it is also a truism that it does come once in every twelvemonth, a fact from which we cannot get away. Like everything else in Christianity, Christmas is a borrowed article. For three hundred years the Church had no such institution. St. Chrysostom, writing late in the fourth century, speaks of it as of recent origin, and as having been fixed at Rome in order that the Christians might be able to celebrate their "holy rites" unmolested. Not only there was no Christmas in the early Church, there was also no unanimity of opinion as to the exact date of Jesus' birth. The theologians had been casting about for a suitable birthday for their Savior-God, some preferring this date and some that, but every suggested date had been objected to on one ground or another; and when at last the choice was made all possibility of ascertaining the actual birthday had passed away. The choice was therefore wholly arbitrary, with nothing to commend it except the borrowing, or, rather, grabbing policy which was becoming more and more profitable to the growing Church. At Rome they found that the 25th of December was already, and had been for many generations, the greatest day of the year; and nothing was more natural than that they also should select the same day for similar but clearly rival celebrations. The Pagans "call this day the 'birthday of the Invincible One.' Who is so invincible as the Lord that overthrew and vanquished death?" Those words of St. Chrysostom disclose the policy which the Church had adopted. To a large section of the Roman community the God Mithra was the Invincible One, while to others that high distinction belonged to the material sun. To the Christians, on the contrary, the only absolutely Unconquerable One was Jesus whom they worshiped as God; and consequently they said: "We will appropriate this date and these ceremonies, and sanctify them for our own use. We will suck this Paganism and this Mithraism as a thirsty man sucks an orange, and when we have succeeded in getting all the juices out of them we will thrust them away to be trampled under foot, and then claim and glory in what we have thus purloined as our very own. Why, the material sun sinks into insignificance in comparison with our beloved Jesus, who is the Sun of Righteousness, of whom Malachi saith, 'Upon you fearful ones, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings.'"

Thus was Christianity brought into line with older religions that she might rob them of their most characteristic qualities and utilise the same in the pursuit of her own ends. Thus did the "profane ceremonies" of Heathenism become the "holy rites" of the Christian religion. It is, however, highly probable that, by itself, this borrowing and assimilating

policy of Christianity would not have resulted in its final triumph over Paganism. What really assured the final victory of the Cross over all opponents was the conversion of Constantine. Had it not been for that strange event, it is quite conceivable that the fierce competition between the different faiths might have ended in the overthrow of Christianity within the Roman Empire. But the present object is to emphasise the shrewdness and sagacity which the early Christian propagandists exhibited when they resolved to borrow on the largest possible scale from rival cults while holding fast to the claim that their religion alone had the stamp of divinity upon it, and was destined to endure. They brought Jesus into line with Mithra, Dionysus, Adonis, Horos, and other Divine Saviors, by declaring that, like them, he too was born of a virgin on the 25th of December; but this outward parallelism was established solely for the purpose of making emphatic the far more important declaration that of all the Divine Saviors born of virgins on the 25th of December Jesus alone really existed and answered to his name.

According to that doctrine God's dealings had always been with the Jews, and with others only indirectly through them. It was the Jewish nation alone to whom a revelation of God had been vouchsafed and who had been Divinely trained to welcome the world's Redeemer in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. And now at length the Jewish Messiah, Jehovah's only begotten Son, was offered to the Roman world as its only possible Savior. All the Saviors in whom the Pagans had hitherto believed were authoritatively pronounced not only feeble and inefficient, but false and of no avail whatever, Jesus having come to supersede them all. Such was the Gospel preached by Christ's ambassadors through the length and breadth of the Roman world in the early centuries, and it is the Gospel still delivered by the majority of to-day's men of God. But it is perfectly safe to affirm that it is by no means a true Gospel. It is indeed the very opposite of true.

In the first place, Jesus was not born on December 25. As this is admitted by all the divines, it is not necessary to dwell upon it. It is also admitted by a large number of theological scholars that Jesus was not virgin-born any more than the Pagan Christs. So far, Jesus and Mithra and Dionysus are in the same category of unreality, and alike suggest the sun-worship of ancient times. Firmicus, a Christian writer of the fourth century, was terribly annoyed when he discovered how very much alike were the Pagan God-men and Christ; and in the fierceness of his wrath he exclaimed one day, "So the Devil has his Christs too." But we venture to assert that all Christs, without a single exception, are neither God's nor the Devil's, neither heaven's nor hell's, but man's only. In point of objective reality they are all on precisely the same level, the differences between them being intellectual and literary. The only reality is the natural phenomenon of the winter solstice to which they owe their existence. It was the birth of the new year in the depth of winter that suggested the birth of a Divine Redeemer to remake humanity. But there is a right and a wrong way of stating this undoubted truth; and in the following extract Mr. R. J. Campbell has surely adopted the wrong way:—

"The Christians found that (solar) festival there, and let it stand, and said to the world: Well, God did come to all humanity in one Christ-child, one Human Babe, and his birthday is a far greater birthday of life and beauty and joy than the one you celebrate; but we wont split hairs about it, we will take this birthday of yours and show you how much grander is that birthday of the world when we celebrate it in the name of Christ. Do you see? So they actually took that old Pagan festival of December 25, and told the world not to stop thinking their spiritual truth, but to see it realised in One whom we are glad to love as Jesus."

The above is what Mr. Campbell calls the language of poetry or the soul—the language which he declares to be so much truer than that of prose. It is but mere prose we express when we speak of the sun as

the source of life and beauty and fruitfulness on the earth; but it may be profitable to remind the reverend gentleman that the gifts of the natural sun are in no sense prosaic, though they are all exceedingly real and precious. Mr. Campbell is certainly wrong when he says that only physical, as distinguished from mental and moral life, owes its origin to the sun. Is it not a fact that all life is one, that mental and moral life is a development of the physical, and that without the sun there could be no life at all? That there is anything, or anyone, behind the sun acting through and independently of it, is the purest surmise or fanciful inference or poetic flight. Has Mr. Campbell ever come across mental and moral life apart from the physical? Comparatively speaking, the life of thought and moral relations is a thing of yesterday, while life, in Mr. Campbell's physical sense, is of an incalculable age. If the former be from God otherwise than through the sun, how are we to account for its tardy advent? If, like everything else on earth, it owes its existence and beautiful activity to the sun, is it not in accordance with the law of evolution that it should have been of a much later origin than the so-called physical life?

If that is so, does it not follow of necessity that all this fine talk about the birthday of Jesus being a far greater birthday of life and beauty and joy than the birthday of each new year under the gentle yet forceful sway of the sun is mere moonshine? To say that "God did come to all humanity in one Christ-child, one Human Babe," is to state what is insusceptible of any proof, or of being verified in any tangible manner. A mystic, whose emotion admittedly contradicts his intellect, and whose religion has lost step with his logic, may have wonderfully thrilling and ecstatic experiences; but it is incontrovertible that his utterances as a teacher are bound to lack intellectual coherence and logical solidity. Facing the full light of history, we have no hesitation in averring that the Pagan carols sung in ancient times in honor of the sun were much truer than the Christian carols sung in praise of the Babe of Bethlehem. For example, the herald angels are described as singing:—

"Glory to the new-born King,  
Peace on earth and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled."

Whether God and sinners are reconciled or not—and there is no way of ascertaining—there is nothing more certain than that peace and mercy mild are still to seek even in Christendom. Whatever measure of peace Europe enjoys is the gift of the sword, not of Christ. Our most Christian cities are kept in order by the police, not by a supernatural Savior. How much peace is there in our social life? Society is a volcano in a state of more or less constant eruption. Even the different denominations of Christians are perpetually at war with one another, each fighting for its own hand, as in the matter of Government education. Christmas is a farce, because its message is a lie and its influence injurious. Christmas is a farce, because those who celebrate it religiously cannot mean what they say and do, while the bulk of those who observe it secularly have lost all conscious touch with it as a solar festival.

J. T. LLOYD.

### The Milton Tercentenary.—II.

MILTON'S prose writings cannot be too highly praised, neither can they be too severely condemned; yet the praise must be more lasting than the condemnation. It cannot be denied that he condescended to all the bad controversial manners of his age. The fashion of the time allowed disputants to insult each other in the most abominable fashion. To call your adversary's mother a female dog, his father something worse, and his brothers, sisters, and even cousins by unspeakable names, was well within the limits of an allowable freedom. Milton acted like others, and his natural vehemence and command of

language sometimes led him to "better the instruction." "He was not nice in his choice of missiles," as Lowell says, "and often borrows a dirty lump from the dunghill of Luther; but now and then the gnarled sticks of controversy turn to golden arrows of Phœbus in his trembling hands, singing as they fly and carrying their messages of doom in music." There are, indeed, passages—sometimes long passages—of wonderful eloquence in Milton's prose, and these must always be dear to the lovers of good literature. But they are purple patches that have little relation to the subject in hand or the arguments with which they are associated. It was shrewdly observed by Lowell that "the only passages from his prose that may said to have survived are emotional, not argumentative, or they have lived in virtue of their figurative beauty, not their weight of thought." Milton was not a political thinker in the sense in which Burke was. He was more of a rhetorician. His love of the sonorous phrase, which is one of the orator's characteristics, is conspicuous in his finest prose writings as it is in *Paradise Lost*. For the rest, it must be said that Milton took his side in the great struggle of his time between King and Parliament, and defended it with his pen before the eyes of Europe; but the writings in which he did so are of no political importance at this time of day; they have a certain historic value, but their intrinsic value lies entirely in the noble outbursts of eloquence which his poetical genius threw off when his mind was in a state of white heat.

This is equally true, though not so obvious, in regard to the famous *Areopagitica*, which is the most direct, powerful, and sustained of Milton's prose writings. I am afraid that this tractate is more praised than read, for it is very commonly misrepresented. It is not a plea for general freedom of thought and speech. No doubt it contains passages which, taken by themselves, might be considered as pleas for the broadest liberty; but they must be read, after all, in the light of his deliberate reservations. Milton was really pleading for the abolition of the licence of publication. He wanted books to appear without the permission of a censor. But he never agreed that they should not be amenable to prosecution, trial, and sentence afterwards. Books and men had certain similarities and common responsibilities. This idea is worked out at some length, and in the midst of the exposition the poet in the politician strikes out the following noble metaphor:—

"Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the earth; but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."

A little later on the poet pamphleteer bursts forth in this style:—

"And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and falsehood grapple; who ever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?"

Finally, he exclaims:—

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."

Milton meant every word of this fine utterance, but he did not mean it as we should in the twentieth century. There were qualifications in his own mind, and in the mind of his readers. The only "conscience" he referred to, the only conscience he respected, was the conscience of his fellow Protestants. He pleaded for mutual toleration within those limits. Not an inch farther. He drew the line at Papists and Atheists—at Catholics and Unbelievers. Listen to his own words:—

"I mean not tolerated popery, and open superstition, which as it extirpates all religions and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpate, provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and regain the weak and the misled: that also which is

impious or evil absolutely either against faith or manners, no law can possibly permit, that intends not to unlaw itself."

This shows us where Milton really stood. It is where the Puritan party has stood ever since. They want insult and ostracism for Catholics, and Blasphemy Laws for Freethinkers—and as much toleration as is consistent with mutual hatred between themselves and all other Protestant parties. Milton prayed for "the bond of peace" that would unite them at least in Christian goodwill, but his prayer has not been answered in two hundred and fifty years.

From the deficiency of Milton's conception of freedom, it is pleasant to turn to the efficiency of his eloquence. Here is one of the great passages in the *Areopagitica* :—

"Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself as a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks: methinks I see her as an eagle muing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance; while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms."

Other writers then living could have produced as good a plea for such freedom as Milton sought; some writers might have done even better, and Sir Harry Vane might have gone further in the direction of liberality; but it was only John Milton who could float that magnificent image on the stream of that splendid eloquence.

I recollect once talking on the subject of Milton with James Thomson ("B. V.")—not the James Thomson of the eighteenth century and *The Seasons*, but the James Thomson of the nineteenth century and *The City of Dreadful Night*. Thomson agreed with a good deal that I said in criticism of Milton, but he replied that Milton rose through it all by reason of his grand fight for Republicanism and his lofty attitude towards its enemies at the Restoration. There is something in that. Many reasons have been assigned for Milton's escaping death when a second Charles Stuart ascended the long vacant throne of the deposed Charles the First. He was not one of the Regicides, but he justified their deed in the sight of the world, and his name was known all over Europe. It is said that this or that member of the King's party befriended him. I believe he walked secure in his own greatness. The world has always recognised something sacred in a poet; there was also something lofty, if not amiable, in the character of John Milton. His austere purity bred reverence if it did not kindle love. For good or ill, he was not as other men:—His "soul was like a star and dwelt apart." The voice of that soul spoke in the last solemn lines of *Comus*—the work of his youth; and it spoke in the last page of *Samson Agonistes*—the work of his old age. He was an eagle amidst the "tame villatic fowl." Samson was himself; blind, solitary, oppressed, but with divine power within, able to make him triumph over thousands of his mocking enemies and win "eternal fame."

G. W. FOOTE.

#### THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

Can I be calm, beholding everywhere  
Disease and anguish busy, early and late?  
Can I be silent, nor compassionate  
The evils that both soul and body bear?  
Oh, what have sickly children done, to share  
Thy cup of sorrows? yet their dull, sad pain  
Makes the earth awful; on the tomb's dark stair,  
Moan idiots, with no glimmer in the brain,  
No shrill priest with his hangman's cord can beat  
Thy mercy into these—ah nay, ah nay!  
The angels Thou hast sent to haunt the street  
Are hunger and distortion and decay. [fleet,  
Lord! that mad'st man, and send'st him foes so  
Who shall judge Thee upon thy judgment day?

—Robert Buchanan.

#### A Monk on the Miracles of Lourdes.

[This is a page from a recent book on Lourdes by J. K. Huysmans, a French writer of renown who became a monk some time ago. It is a description of the crowd during an open-air procession of the sacrament.]

Oh! the faces distracted with anguish and with hope; some are weeping silently with head bent down; others raise their eyes swimming in tears; voices weak and exhausted are choking, voices extinct and dead try to repeat the loud invocation which a priest, standing alone on the terrace, launches forth with all the force of his lungs:—

"Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick! Lord, if thou wilt thou canst heal him!"

And arms are stretched towards the monstrance; lips quiver and mutter; hands are clasped and fall back again helpless.

The Blessed Sacrament passes.

A woman, resting her head on her hands wet with tears, struggles to raise herself. But no one rises, the bed-ridden remain unmoved.

There! I observe among them my poor friends of the hospital.....

And the Blessed Sacrament passes.

Three times they sing the verse, *Monstra te esse matrem*, which the crowd repeats in an immense echo which rolls and resounds, taken up yonder by the pilgrims stationed on the mount of the Way of the Cross.

And still nothing moves.

This field of patients, this harvest beaten down by the torrent of diseases, seems, alas, a dismal waste.

We have reached the middle of the course, the steps of the Rosary, and not one sufferer has been, by a divine breath, raised to his feet.

The priest hastens the invocations, the crowd repeats them in a long roar.

And they intone the *Adoremus in aeternum*, and still no result is produced.

With raucous voice, betraying exasperation, the *Implorer* cries out: "On your knees all, arms extended crosswise."

And the vast multitude obeys; prayers come rolling and rushing, but not one sufferer rises.

Hideous diseases pass before us. The hospital is being emptied; it is a museum of sufferers.

The *Parce Domine* is sung three times, and with a desperate cry, the priest lifting his arms to heaven, vociferates:—

"Lord! save us, we perish!"

And the cry, repeated by thousands of voices, reverberates in the valley.

The Blessed Sacrament passes, and still no results are seen.

They are inclined to yield to temptation; reproaches are coming to the lips: What is the Virgin doing—when it would be so easy for her to heal all these sufferers? There is here, despite what might displease her, so much faith, so many prayers, so much charity, such heroic efforts. What is she waiting for?

This glade, where the *exhorter* roars forth his appeals, is, nevertheless, not empty. Jesus has formally promised: "where two or three are foregathered in my name, there I am among them." And here we are thousands imploring her. Why does she not respond?

And still no patient receives relief. Here a desolate lady rises and lifts a child whose eyes roll in a sickly face, but she falls back to her knees, sobbing; there a blind man is kneeling, and seems to ask an alms of God. But his God passes by, and gives nothing.

It is really awful!

The *Implorer* exhausts himself in pouring forth his last and great appeal, which sometimes brings miracles. "Hosannah to the son of David." The crowd, with arms uplifted, launches forth furiously this triumphant appeal to heaven; it feels that this is its last throw.

And the Blessed Sacrament continues its march, indifferent, insensible.

I am discouraged; I have no more desire to pray.

The procession has returned to the church. The bishop from the Golden Canopy presents the monstrance, whose metal glitters, to the people.

It is finished. They fetch conveyances and biers and gather these wrecks of humanity to take them back to the hospital.

Ah! All the same, I cannot help thinking of these unfortunate sufferers who have come such long and weary journeys and are not healed. They return to their sick-rooms and their sick-beds with heavy hearts and unrealised hopes.

—Translated from "La Pensée" by F. Bonte.

## Acid Drops.

Rev. John McNeill, the late Lord Overtoun's kept evangelist, has been preaching to "a crowded congregation" at Cheltenham on the good old story of "the Axe that Swam"—the iron one that miraculously floated on the top of the water to oblige Elisha. The preacher declared that he believed the story—"in spite of all your so-called advance and learning and science." We have no doubt of it. John McNeill is capable of believing almost anything—especially if it brings in a thousand a year. His early training was that of a railway porter, so nobody expects him to take much stock in "learning and science." What puzzles us is how people who have had the advantage of a Board or Council school education can sit and listen to this man's ignorant "confession of faith." John McNeill actually believes that the walls of Jericho fell flat, and that Jonah was swallowed by a whale. But the real wonder is that people are flat enough to listen to such rubbish, and are able to swallow Jonah and the whale too, and John McNeill in the bargain.

Enoch was another of John McNeill's references. Enoch was the old patriarch who "walked with God" (the first handicap on record) and "was not for God took him." The preacher pictured Enoch walking with God, and "many a 'crack' they had together," he said, "as they went through the stubble." Good old Enoch! Good old "God"! Good old John McNeill! And good old twentieth century congregation listening to such weighty wisdom!

John McNeill said a few words about "evolution" before he sat down, but our readers will excuse us from troubling about his remarks. The only evolution that Evangelist Johnny knows anything about is his own evolution from carrying Gladstone bags for twopence to carrying the Gospel for pounds a night.

Rev. W. H. Donovan, of Maidstone, has been preaching on the Second Coming of Christ, and a report of his sermon appears in the *Kent Messenger*. We gather from it that railway travelling, motor carriages, and Council schools are all signs that Christ will soon put in an appearance; and the reverend gentleman advises everyone to be ready for the Master's advent. He sneered at the Unitarian preacher who was discoursing that night on "The Bible a Human Book." He called such teaching "poison," yet he knows that the disseminator of this fatal mixture is the only one who gets a packed audience in Maidstone every Sunday. Alas, this is only another sign that the end is at hand! From which it appears that the Rev. W. H. Donovan "has 'em" badly. We hope he will obtain speedy relief. Has he tried Beccham's?

There was a Church Extension meeting in Leicester, presided over by the Bishop of Peterborough, and addressed by the Bishop of St. Albans. The chairman was heckled by Mr. H. Elliott, who wanted to know why his lordship had voted in the House of Peers against the Old Age Pensions Bill. Did he wish to drive thousands of poor old people into workhouses and pauper graves? Was that part of the Church Extension scheme? His lordship did not reckon on being taken to task in that way, but we daresay it did him good, unless he is too far gone for curative treatment.

Mr. R. J. Campbell has at last found his mission. He declares that he is going to remain in the Socialist movement and is bent on driving all the Atheists and Materialists out of it. Of course, the City Temple oracle totally misrepresents Atheism when he ignorantly or wickedly confuses it with "the spirit of greed and grab"; but that doesn't matter. Rather, such wilful caricature of what is falsely called Materialism adds sentimental impressiveness to the resolution to "storm the camp of Materialism and plant the banner of faith on the highest pinnacle of the coming social order." Such mock heroics may go down with emotional audiences, but they will never win battles. We advise Mr. Campbell to desist from his bad habit of putting up men of straw for the selfish purpose of knocking them down again to amuse the gaping crowd. Atheism itself, of course, he never even touches at all.

Mr. R. J. Campbell is very anxious that prayer should become the rule at the opening of Progressive League meetings, because, he says, "it will help to keep the tone right." Well, the recent disestablishment meeting in the City Temple was duly opened with prayer. It was a very eloquent little prayer, too, in which the Holy Ghost was not only earnestly invited to be present, but passionately besought to take the conduct of the meeting into his own

hands. Whether the Holy Ghost accepted the invitation or not, we do not undertake to determine. If he did, he signally failed to keep the people in order, for more brutal and disgraceful scenes were never witnessed at any public assembly. Furthermore, if God exists, and is the Father of mankind, he should require no special invitation to come and preside over any gatherings of his children. Rather, it is he who should convene, as well as rule, all public meetings.

Entering a house, a man of God asked a poor old lady, "Have you found Christ yet?" She answered humbly, "No; I haven't even looked for him, for I never heard he was lost." Has anybody ever found him? Can anybody tell where exactly he is?

Rev. Conrad Noel, of the Church Socialist League, has been lecturing for the Independent Labor Party at Blackburn on "Present Day Problems," and according to the report sent to us from a local paper he seems to have had a good deal to say about religion. "If people would obey the law of God," he said, "and labor—not labor too much, but all do their fair share of work, and receive a fair reward—then, and not until then, would they be happy and virtuous." We are sorry to see that this clap-trap was greeted with "applause." But what is a "fair" share of labor and what is a "fair" reward? And where shall we find that "law of God"? Mr. Noel also made much capital out of the fact that three hundred clergymen (he did not say how many of them were properly baked) were out-and-out Socialists. Of course, he didn't remind the audience that some thirty thousand clergymen were *not* Socialists. Referring to the allegation that "the early leaders of Socialism were atheists," he observed that the religion they wanted to sweep away was "rubbish." Mr. Noel's religion, we suppose, is *not* rubbish. But no man's religion is rubbish to himself. It is other people who look at it in that light. Mr. Noel may laugh at the "Torrey-Alexander minstrels touring the country with their show," but they draw bigger audiences than he ever did. On the whole, we advise the reverend gentleman to stick to Socialism on the platform and stick to religion (if he must) in the pulpit, and to refrain from mixing them up in both places.

The *Glasgow Herald* published a Press Association telegram from Johannesburg respecting the arrival of Lieutenant Graetz, who is motoring across Africa. He was in the best of health and spoke highly of the great friendliness of the natives in "uncivilised" districts. In one instance, they brought food and water twenty miles when he was in dire need of both, his own native attendants having searched for water in vain. Now comes the tit-bit:—

"The lieutenant tersely remarked that the raw natives did everything possible to help him, but directly he approached civilisation and mission stations the natives 'were no good.' They walked away when asked for help, and the closest watch had to be kept on the motorist's kit."

What price Christian converts now? It reminds us of what happened in New Guinea. Before the missionaries appeared the natives never shut up their huts, and if one of them was short of anything he went to a neighbor's hut and helped himself; but the first thing the missionaries' converts did was to put their things under lock and key. They knew each other.

The Rev. Hugh C. Wallace, of Anerley, says that the God of Jonathan Edwards "was not civilised" because he could hold "an unregenerate child over the flames of hell until the poor thing turned round, spider-like, and spat at him"; and we venture to allege that Mr. Wallace's God also is a fine old savage. He has the heart to allow the majority of his children to spend the whole of their lifetime in as hot a hell as was ever kindled. A Deity who is responsible for the deplorable state of things on this earth cannot boast of much civilisation. So odious is his conduct that the mere thought of him is intolerable. Perhaps the Deity is incapable of being civilised.

God's need of defence is an irrefutable argument for Atheism. A minister's chief work is to vindicate his Master, which is a proof that his Master is not worthy of his service. Indeed, Mr. Wallace admits this as regards all Gods except the one in whom he happens to believe. He enumerates ever so many Deities, every one of whom he denounces as arbitrary, partial, cruel, vindictive, or jealous; but we pronounce his own God, the God of love, equally impossible and absurd, because the world he made and governs is itself a flat denial of his existence.

Preaching in Westminster Abbey on behalf of the British and Foreign Bible Society, Canon Henson said that "in our time considerable importance attaches to the distinction

between the statement that the Bible *contains* the Word of God, which is true, and the statement that the Bible *is* the Word of God, which is false." Surely, this is a distinction without a difference. If the Bible *is* not the Word of God beyond all doubt, how on earth can it be proved to *contain* it? There are no data on which to differentiate between Divine and human words; not even Canon Henson, clever though he is, is able to adduce a single one.

In an article on "Theology and Religion," which appeared in the *Christian Commonwealth* for December 16, Mr. Rhondda Williams falls into the common error of assuming that religion is older than theology, although everybody knows quite well that Atheism and religion never go together. Nobody ever heard of a religious Atheist. Yet Mr. Williams says that "theology is an attempt to make the religious life thinkable." Theology is that, no doubt; but the religion it vainly endeavors to make thinkable is the religion which it itself has produced. Theology does make religion possible and actual, but it never succeeds in rendering it thinkable. We have no hesitation in predicting that when theology dies all forms of supernatural religion will surely vanish.

It has become the custom of the New Theologians to decry the creeds; but it is not creeds, as such, but the creeds of other people that they so vehemently condemn, and even these they denounce merely in defence of their own, which, however vague and crude and formless, are still veritable creeds. If we got rid of *all* creeds we would be delivered from the tyranny of *all* religions. We attack all creeds alike because we are convinced that every religion narrows and cramps and demoralises the minds of men.

The *Sunday Circle* is not a professionally comic paper, but it is capable of provoking a smile. It has recently been referring to the "monument over the grave of an atheist at Ohio." Mr. Chester Bedell died as he had lived, an enemy of Christianity, and over his grave is a life-size statue of himself in bronze. In the right hand he holds aloft a scroll on which is inscribed "Universal Mental Liberty," and one foot treads upon a book labelled "Superstition." All this is serious enough, and the reader will ask where the joke comes in. Well, it is coming. Our pious contemporary regards this "remarkable gravestone" as "another example of how the efforts of the Christian's enemy are often turned to good account on the side of religion." But where's the joke in that? the reader will say. The answer is that the joke lies in the *S. C.*'s explanation that "Universal Mental Liberty" is the aim of Christianity, while the stamping out of "Superstition" is one of its tenets. See now?

The Pope claims to be God's viceregent on earth, and God has been called the Great Detective. It is appropriate, therefore, that the Pope should confer the order of Knight of St. Sylvester on Mr. John Melville, ex-superintendent at Scotland Yard, in recognition of his services "in protecting the lives of kings and other rulers" during his long professional career. These are the really important lives. Of course. Ask the Prisoner of the Vatican.

Canon Jephson has "gone higher," having left St. John's, Walworth, for a better living in Northamptonshire. His old parishioners gave him a good send-off and £300. We are glad to hear it, in one way, for he is not at all a bad sort. But it is rather an odd commentary on such texts as "Blessed be ye poor."

Rev. Thomas Phillips, of Bloomsbury Chapel, advocates the practice of hypocrisy all round. He wants Christians to "pray as if nothing depended upon their own efforts, and yet to help their fellow-men as if everything depended upon their practical sympathy." If they follow his advice in the one hypocrisy they will be grossly unfair to themselves, and in the other shockingly uncomplimentary to God. In point of fact, the Christian life bristles with hypocrisy at every point. It is a continuous series of self-contradictions and self-advertisements.

Rev. F. B. Meyer has spent a whole year at least "At the Gates of the Dawn"; but the dawn itself is no nearer now than it was twelve months ago. It is coming, coming, coming, but never arrives. It has been coming for two thousand years. Jesus himself believed the gates were opened, and that she was passing through. The Apostles cherished the same vain dream. The dawn of the Kingdom of Christ has never broken yet, and at present the event seems farther off than ever. The reverend Mr. Meyer may quite safely adopt the same title for his coming year's

articles in the *Baptist Times*, or a better title would be, 'Tis Eventide, and the night is drawing nigh.

Jesus came once and accomplished but little. He promised to come again and fulfil all things. The Apostles were disappointed at his delayed second advent. He hasn't come yet. A lady writer is still hopeful: "But perhaps he is coming. It has come into the hearts of men that these things (the evils of life) need not be, that they can change them. Is not that the sound of his feet very far off?" *Very far off indeed!* Perhaps his first coming was a myth, and perhaps his second advent is as likely as that of King Arthur.

What a lot of sentimental nonsense is talked in the name of religion. The Rev. Dr. David Smith says that "Heaven is where Jesus is." As Jesus, being God, is everywhere, it follows that heaven is on earth. As we cannot be where Jesus is not, we are of necessity always in heaven. "To be near him, and see his blessed and gracious face—that is all we need," says Dr. Smith. But if Jesus is anywhere, he is here, and here is heaven. The wonder of wonders is that there are people simple enough to be bamboozled by such undisguised balderdash.

The Rev. Dr. S. D. Gordon says that the spell of Christmas has annihilated the commonplace from human life. Unfortunately, this is not the case. We have never seen the man to whom there is nothing common. To "live under the spell of Jesus' touch," this divine informs us, is to dwell in a region where everything shines with equal splendor, where "stable mangers and all farm buildings are touched with the soft glow of his glory." Fudge! Of course, mawkish sentimentalism is the order of the day at Christmas-time. The floodgates of folly are then wide open, and the whole of Christendom is under a perfect deluge of morbid emotionalism.

Jesus chose to be born of a woman, and ever since motherhood has been an unspeakably sacred reality; but the curse of the commonplace rests upon fatherhood, because Jesus chose to dispense with the services of a father. By being born of a virgin he put a serious slight upon his own sex. And yet Christianity has always treated woman far worse than did the Paganism of ancient Greece and Rome. The mother of God has been exalted and worshiped, while the mothers of men have been kept in a state of degraded slavery all through the ages.

"When you see the Lamb in his own country," says an eminent divine, "you will think you never saw him before." How interesting! Is the Lamb a chameleon, then? The curious thing is that nobody has ever seen him at all, either in his own country or in any other. And yet there are thousands of men who get a handsome living for supplying credulous followers with conflicting descriptions of him. What boundless gullibility still prevails in the world!

Canon Newbolt says that Christ "is the representative of the world as it ought to be, because he is the Son of God," and "of the world as it is, because he is the Son of Man." Then Christ was two different beings, and stood on two entirely different levels at one and the same time; he was perfect and imperfect, holy and sinful, at the same moment. A strange, unnatural, incredible, impossible mixture is the Christ of theology.

"Jewish humor is not dead, in Seattle, at all events. The other day, a well-to-do Jewish lawyer, I. E. Moses by name, wrote a cheque in payment of his synagogue seat-rental—pardon, we should have said his annual pew-dues. This astute, humorous man of the law, instead of making the cheque payable to the secretary, wrote upon it: 'For two seats, Celestial Transportation Route.' The uncalled-for ebullition of levity was resented by the object at which it was aimed—the Hirsch Temple authorities—who promptly returned the cheque to Moses with an appropriate covering letter. The matter, of course, did not end here. The lawyer resented this slur upon his action, and re-wrote the cheque, making it payable, this time, to the 'Infernal Transportation Route.' Matters then waxed somewhat warm. The secretary returned the cheque a second time, and the story runs, 'notified him that he was suspended from membership until he apologised to the Trustees. Moses appealed to the Superior Court for an injunction. Judge George E. Morris denied his petition.' The sequel to this unusual combat is, unfortunately, yet to be learned. By what route I. E. Moses is to be transported to his ultimate destination is, as yet, veiled in the mists of futurity."—*Jewish Chronicle*.

Dr. Clifford keeps safe himself, as usual, but he eggs on the Passive Resisters to fresh efforts. "The immediate task

of the Passive Resister," he says, "is that of fighting on with increased determination, so that we may achieve the removal of Romanism and Anglicanism and ecclesiasticism of every kind off the rates." Thus the Polonius of the Education strife wags his old noddle. We beg to assure him that he does not foresee the end of the battle. Just as he and his friends are fighting to put Romanism and Anglicanism off the rates, there are others who will fight on to put Free-Churchism off the rates. And they are as likely to win as he is.

Lord Morley isn't much of a Freethinker nowadays. He has gone up to the House of Peers, he is an old man, and it is a pity he doesn't retire from active service. At any rate, he might accept something less onerous than the Indian secretaryship. It is a great pity to see a man of his past professions countenancing the arbitrary imprisonment of some of the best natives in India, simply because they prefer their own countrymen to Britishers. He may be opposed to all this in his heart, but that does not relieve him of moral responsibility. He accepts the situation—and his salary.

"Great Export of Bibles" was a headline in a newspaper the other morning. It appears that between Easter and Michaelmas—between hot-cross buns and roast goose—the Bible Society had sent out for shipment abroad 1,436 cases packed with "Scriptures," weighing altogether 154 tons. We always thought it was heavy literature. What the "heathen" will do with it remains to be seen. Bibles, minus the covers, have been put to all sorts of uses in China. The leaves have even been used as boot-socks. Sometimes they are put to still lower purposes.

According to a gentleman who lectured recently at the Eustace Miles Restaurant on "Haunted Houses," ghosts are sometimes smelt instead of seen, and what you take for defective drainage may be high-flavored spirits. This opens up a new problem in sanitation. The lecturer might say how it should be dealt with. Meanwhile, we see that curious cases may arise. A guest in a house might say to his host, "My dear fellow, I noticed an abominable smell in the night; isn't there something wrong with your drainage?" And the host might reply "Oh dear no! It's the old fellow in the cellar, as Hamlet says. There's a ghost that haunts our basement. To quote Hamlet again, you 'nose him as you go.' We understand he was a cheesemonger—and he seems to carry some ancient samples."

What wonderful stuff appears in the religious newspapers! Every little man of God nowadays considers himself fit to pronounce a judgment on all human problems. As for literature, he just takes it up by the way. Mr. A. G. Gardiner, editor of the *Daily News*, is not exactly a man of God, but he is next door to it. He has published a collection of articles on eminent men of to-day under the fantastic title of *Prophets, Priests, and Kings*. One of these articles is on George Meredith, and it is referred to by a brother Christian scribe in the last *British Weekly*. The said scribe asks "What could be better than this about Meredith?"—

"He has written tragedies, but he has not the spirit of tragedy.....Meredith never touches the source of tears; he is the spirit of high comedy. He looks at life with a certain spacious calm, a serene tranquility."

Instead of asking what could be better than this, we feel inclined to ask what could be worse. How a man could write tragedies without having the spirit of tragedy passes our comprehension, as we believe it must pass most other people's. Meredith's power of pathos may be such that it never touches Mr. Gardiner's source of tears. We admit that Meredith never wields the common novelist's patent tear-extractor. But he touches the source of tears in persons who are not exactly used to the melting mood. There are scenes in *Richard Feverel* and *Rhoda Fleming* of the most poignant tragedy. Even in a book which is not essentially tragic, *Diana of the Crossways*, there is a chapter, the thirty-sixth, containing simply an interview between two women, one stricken in heart, the other come to console and save, which the present writer has never been able to read through without a break. Every time the book drops, and the deep breath bursts in a sob. But we must not make too much of this. We only wish to say that there are tears and tears—as Mr. Gardiner will please note.

"Cape Colonist" writes to the *Daily Telegraph* that "the majority of Colonists know that the influence of the mission station is not to the material betterment of the native. Farmers, traders, or miners will not hire a mission boy if they can get raw Kaffirs, and mistresses fight shy of mission girls as domestic servants." This correspondent says that

"the Kaffir in his native state lives a far better life from an ethical standpoint than the bulk of professing Christians."

Rev. J. C. Rendell, vicar of Charing, in Kent, has electrified the district by refusing to administer the holy communion to Major and Mrs. Pitt. It appears that the lady obtained a divorce from her first husband, and her marrying again is such a mortal sin that the reverend gentleman feels called upon to express God Almighty's displeasure. We suppose that is what he means. It would be better, though, if he left God Almighty to speak for himself.

The *Ilford Recorder* prints the following pious story, which is no doubt as true as gospel: "In gay Paris an infidel, noted for his eloquence, was asked to deliver an address in defence of his opinions. Among other things he said, 'We are told by the clergy and the canting hypocrites that all infidels are harassed by fears of an approaching future. Sirs, I stand before you to-night a witness to the falsity of the assertion; for even I, although a leader among those who espouse infidel doctrines, can proudly exclaim, "I fear no evil."' At this point, a little boy, sitting in one of the front seats, said in a timid voice, and yet so distinct as to be heard throughout the hall, 'But, sir, you have never been in the valley of the shadow of death.' The effect produced was electric. The flowery orator was nonplussed, and was hissed from the stage, while the little defender of God's Word was borne triumphantly from the building on the shoulders of the enthusiastic people." This is as precise as such stories usually are. We may add that the story of the infidel orator nonplussed by the exclamation of an old woman or a child has been told for generations and located in pretty nearly every town in England. It is now removed to Paris, and we suppose it will finally reach Pekin.

Mrs. Carrie Nation, the saloon smasher, is carrying on (this is not a pun) a new campaign in Scotland. It seems a great pity that she was not sent to this world nineteen hundred years ago. She could then have turned her attention to a certain carpenter evangelist who went up and down the country consorting with "lushingtons" and would even turn water into wine, by some patent hocus-pocus, rather than see a good spree come to an untimely end. Carrie says that "God is the first politician," but we fancy he made a mistake in her date, anyhow.

"Scotland is nearer Hell than Kansas is." This is one of Carrie's latest dicta. And perhaps she is right. Hell is supposed to be in the very centre of the earth, and the world bulges bigger at Kansas than it does at Scotland.

General Booth has undergone a successful operation for cataract. God gave him the cataract and the doctors removed it. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." And praise the medical men for frustrating the divine benevolence.

The Czar reigns by the grace of God, and one understands what the grace of God is worth to a nation when one ponders the fact that the number of death sentences (mostly political) in Russia during the past eleven months was 1,691, and the number of actual executions 633. God save the Czar! And if some people could get at him it would take God all his time.

Jokes used to be cracked on threepenny bits in collection plates, but the Bishop of Salisbury says that he "wishes the coin were still with us." Some subscribers to the Lord's cash-box will drop from the smallest silver coin to the smallest bronze coin, if you only give them a chance.

It must have been out of something better than threepenny collections that the late Rev. Henry George Bolt, of Harbledown, Canterbury, amassed the £39,625 which he has just left behind him. Where he has gone, if the Gospel be true, the money would soon melt.

#### AFTER THE ASSAULT.

A theological student was sent one Sunday to supply a pulpit in a Connecticut valley town. A few days after he received a copy of the weekly paper of that place with the following item marked: "Rev. —, of the senior class at Yale Seminary, supplied the pulpit at the Congregational Church last Sunday, and the church will now be closed three weeks for repairs."



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

January 3 and 17, Shoreditch Town Hall; 31, Manchester.  
February 21, Glasgow; 28, Birmingham.

### To Correspondents.

- C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—241 High-road, Leyton.—January 17, Belfast.
- J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 3, Leicester; 10, Failsworth; 17, Greenwich; 24, Shoreditch Town Hall; 31, Birmingham Town Hall. February 14, West Ham; 28, Glasgow.
- THE PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND: Previously acknowledged. Annual Subscriptions, £284 10s. 8d. Received since.—Henry Molyneux, 5s.; J. Capon, Jr., £1 1s.
- J. B. C. B.—Pleased to hear from you as a recent convert. The Ingersoll pamphlet you refer to is published at the Pioneer Press office. We agree with you about "Milk for babes, meat for men." There are plenty who supply the former: why shouldn't we supply the latter? Somebody must do it. For the rest, the matter is largely one of temperament. You say you have had some "side-splitting laughs" over our *Bible Romances*. Be thankful for that. Always respect a writer who keeps his readers awake. But you will find, when you get over the laughter, that the book is crammed with the most important information about the Bible and religion generally—information that you will not find in any other single volume in the world.
- G. BRADFIELD.—See "Acid Drops" for note on cutting. We cannot open an agency at Cheltenham, but shall be pleased to hear from and do business with any local shopkeeper or other person who will make arrangements to sell our publications. Orders could be placed through Smith and Son's local agent if they have a bookstall or shop there. If any difficulty is experienced in this direction it would be well to advise us promptly. With regard to M. Foote's lecturing at Cheltenham, do you mean a week-night or a Sunday, and what good hall would be available? If on Sunday, could seats be charged for?
- G. DAVEY.—Your suggestion shall be borne in mind.
- W. FAGG.—See "Acid Drops." Thanks.
- P. LOKLEY.—Glad to hear your orthodox friend was impressed by Mr. Foote's lecture at Stratford Town Hall. You did well to bring him there. We wish every Freethinker would try to do a little missionary work in this way.
- A. HINDLEY.—Ours is such a busy life, and so many things have to wait.
- W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.
- R. H. ROSETTI.—We wish the West Ham Branch all success in the new hall.
- R. J. HENDERSON.—Compliments of the season reciprocated. Thanks for cuttings.
- H. DEBENHAM.—Thanks for remembrance.
- S. L. PACE.—Order passed to shop manager. Pleased to have your appreciative letter, and glad you so enjoy reading the *Freethinker*.
- J. H. MINETT.—Glad you pass on your copy of this journal to a poor acquaintance who cannot afford to buy it. England's civilisation is very imperfect while a hard-working man is unable to pay twopenny for his favorite weekly.
- H. MOLYNEUX (S. Africa).—(1) Under the late Charles Bradlaugh's Oaths Act, an Atheist can claim to affirm, instead of taking the oath, in any court of justice, whether as witness or juror, on the ground that he has no religious belief. No other statement is necessary, and the claimant should refuse to be drawn into making any. (2) An Atheist acts as he pleases when the National Anthem is being played. It is a purely personal matter, on which we offer no advice. (3) The N. S. S. secretary is writing you on the other matter.
- H. S.—Glad you "know them" and that we "say truly."
- 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.

Next week's *Freethinker* will begin a new year and a new volume—the Twenty-Ninth. Heigho! How the time flies! We shall try to make this new year's number a specially good one, and we hope our friends will do their best to place copies of it in promising hands. The only fruitful way of advertising the *Freethinker* is this kind of effort on the part of its friends. We solicit their kind help during 1909.

Mr. Foote's subject, in opening the new course of Sunday Evening Freethought Lectures at the Shoreditch Town Hall, will be the seasonable one of "Christ and Christmas." He will endeavor to deal with it from an informing as well as an interesting point of view, so as to make the lecture instructive to Freethinkers as well as an "eye-opener" to the Christians who attend.

There will be real "free admission" at the Shoreditch Town Hall meetings. Most of the seats will be absolutely free to the first comers, whose contribution towards the expenses will be purely voluntary—in the collection bags. But there will be some special reserved seats for persons who want to be sure of one without hurrying. Admission to these seats will be by ticket (price one shilling) obtainable beforehand.

There are still some old Hall of Science frequenters who live within a half-mile radius of the spot on which it stood. Several of them must still be readers of the *Freethinker*. We appeal to them to put themselves in communication with Miss Vance, at 2 Newcastle-street, E.C., with a view to displaying a bill of the Shoreditch Town Hall lectures and circulating the small printed announcements. If any of them call at the Society's office she will be delighted to renew acquaintance with them.

Tickets (4s.) are now in circulation for the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner at the Holborn Restaurant on Tuesday evening, January 12. We hope there will be a record rally of London "saints" on this occasion. We also hope some provincial "saints" will be able to time their visit to London so as to be able to attend this very enjoyable function. Mr. Foote will preside, and many well-known Freethinkers will be present, including Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Davies, Roger, Heaford, and Moss. There will be speeches and vocal and instrumental music after the dinner, which is to take place in the large and handsome Venetian Room.

The West Ham Branch starts indoor lecturing on the first Sunday in January at the Forest Gate Public Hall, Woodgrange-road, Mr. W. J. Ramsey being the lecturer. We understand that this is a larger and more comfortable hall than the one the Branch occupied previously. Lectures will be delivered every Sunday evening, and the names of Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, and Davies are on the program.

The Newcastle Branch holds its annual social party at the Hedley Café, Clayton-street, on New Year's Day. Tea will be on the tables at 5.30. Tickets (1s.) can be had from Mr. Charter, bookseller, in the Market, or from any member of the Committee.

Mr. Herbert Burrows writes us: "I was very sorry not to be able to attend the meeting at St. James's Hall, but my name ought not to have been on the printed list of speakers, as at the outset I informed the secretary that I could not possibly be there. On that evening I was delivering the last of a course of lectures at Hackney. It is almost heart-breaking to find this Secular Education question dragging on, as it does, generation after generation. I have long held, and still hold, that a considerable majority of the nation would be in favor of the Secular solution if the case could be fairly and squarely put before them."

The *British Weekly* is the one religious paper that stands by the "secular solution." In an article on the defunct Education Bill, it declares that "many Anglicans and many Nonconformists have not the smallest idea of what religious equality really means." It winds up by saying that "the State teaching of religion in any form must be abandoned." If we were inclined to be critical we might point out that even the *British Weekly* does not recognise any sections of the community except the "religious" ones—Nonconformists, Anglicans, and Catholics. The rest of the nation look in simply by the way.

A discussion on the Catholic Church and human liberty has been going on in the *Express and Star* of Wolverhampton. Some excellent letters have appeared on the Freethought side from the pen of Mr. F. Bonte.

The *Catholic Times* draws attention to "a most inspiring article" in the *Month*. This "inspiring" article contains the following lamentation:—

"Our fellow Catholics, who have the first claim upon our services, are perishing soul and body by the thousand. The terrible leakage, which in spite of our steady stream of converts, keeps the total number of Catholics in this country from increasing, cannot be met by the priests alone."

This is "inspiring" enough to Freethinkers. We may also note in this connection that the Rev. F. B. Meyer has just been telling the National Council of the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon that—"Just now the Church of God was standing still; wherever he went he met with the same story of dwindling congregations and great heart-searching as to how the churches were to be maintained as leaders of the movements of the world." We quote this Nonconformist confession from the *British Weekly*.

#### CHRISTIANITY, PAGANISM, AND THE FAMILY.

Many writers seem to imply that family affection of any sort was as foreign to pre-Christian life as a knowledge of modern astronomy; whereas the evidence of all classical literature and of monumental inscriptions suffices to show that in this respect human nature was precisely the same two thousand years ago as it is to-day. The same evidence may be appealed to in disproof of the common assertion of a wide difference between the two periods in the relationship of husband and wife. Let it be granted that divorces became easy, and, in spite of legislative efforts to the contrary, common; let it be admitted that Juvenal reveals some black features in the Pagan society of the time of Trajan; but let the brighter side be also kept in view, if we have any concern for a truthful judgment.

Against the society depicted in the *Satires* of Juvenal must be set the society, or state of society, depicted in the letters of his contemporary Pliny. The two seem to live in and to see two wholly different worlds. It is about as reasonable to judge of the age of the Antonines by the sole evidence of a satirist as it would be to judge of our modern life solely by the light of our society journals or the chronicles of our divorce court. The Romans at all events looked back at a period of six hundred years during which there was no recorded case of divorce. In the worst times it was never more than the exception. Plutarch speaks of thousands of men and women who observed an inviolable community of affection and fidelity to their lives ends. His short work on *Conjugal Precepts* proves not only the mutual affection on which the matrimonial tie was based, but reveals the close similarity both in theory and practice between the marriages of pre-Christian and Christian times. The monumental inscriptions of every period of Paganism, couched in terms of the tenderest affection, and often recording not merely the number of years, but also the number of months, days, or minutes during which the union of life and love lasted, thoroughly endorse the impression conveyed by Plutarch.

—J. A. Farrer, "*Paganism and Christianity*," pp. 196, 197.

Why should a good man hate sinners when it is error that drives them into wrong? It is not the part of a wise man to hate those that err, else will he be an object of hatred himself. Let him think how many things he does himself contrary to good conduct, how many of his actions need pardon, then will he be angry with himself. For a just judge passes the same sentence in his own case as in that of others. No one will be found who can acquit himself, and whoever calls himself innocent regards external testimony, not his own conscience. How much more humane it is to show a gentle and paternal mind towards sinners, not to persecute but to recall them. If you meet a man astray in the fields from ignorance of his road, it is better to direct him aright than to drive him away.—*Seneca*.

Calvinism was one and the same thing in Geneva, in Scotland, in Old and New England. If there was a wedding, they had a sermon; if a war, or small pox, or a comet, or cankerworms, or a deacon died,—still a sermon. Nature was a pulpit; the churchwarden or tithing-man was a petty persecutor; the presbytery, a tyrant; and in many a house in country places the poor children found seven sabbaths in a week.—*Emerson*.

#### The Vindication of Servetus.

AT the International Freethought Congress of Geneva in 1902 I well remember the enthusiasm amongst the delegates of all nations created by the presence in our midst of some fifty Spanish representatives of Freethought. As we listened to the burning speeches of the Spanish orators our minds harked back to the gloomy days when the city whose splendid University then gave us hospitality was ruled by Calvin with a rod of iron and its heretics rooted out with fire and sword, the gloomy bigot tearing out their tongues, lopping off their hands, or slowly roasting them alive. We thought of Servetus, the noble Spanish scientist and sceptic, and acclaimed the proposal of International Freethought to erect a monument in Geneva in honor of the greatest amongst the many victims of the mean and cruel Calvin.

The proposal was distasteful to the modern descendants of the Protestant Torquemada. A nice little plot was accordingly hatched to confound the politics of the Freethinkers. The Protestants dished the unbelievers by collecting monies for a mean monument in expiation of Calvin's crime. They then chose an out-of-the-way place in an unfrequented path in Champel, near Geneva, and hid away the light of their hypocritical monument under a bushel of obscurity. They thus achieved two things: they forestalled the hated Freethinkers, and they smoothed the way for their own shameless project to spend half a million of francs, in 1909, in celebrating the four hundredth anniversary of Calvin's birth by a splendid monument in Geneva representing Calvin, the chief murderer of Servetus, flanked by the Reformer, Farel, one of the martyr's tormentors, and the sainted Beza, who insulted his memory after the flames had consumed their victim.

The difficulty was, to frame a suitable inscription. Several suggestions were made, but rejected. A zealous and notorious Protestant, M. Seippel, proposed this:—

"Calvin burned Servetus. He did well."

At length, there was evolved, adopted and inscribed, the following tablet:—

"On the 27th October, 1553, Michael Servetus died at the stake at Champel. He was born at Villanueva in Aragon on the 29th September, 1511. As respectful and grateful sons of our great reformer Calvin,—though condemning an error which was that of his time, and firmly attached to the liberty of conscience, according to the principles of the Reformation and the Gospel,—we have erected this expiatory monument, this 27th October, 1903."

The monument lies like an epitaph. Calvin's crime was condemned by the men of his own age; though it was extolled or attenuated by his admirers, and was imitated, in spirit and in deed, by whole generations of Calvin's "respectful and grateful sons." Of the *farceurs* who perpetrated this odious expiation, a Swiss journal wittily remarked: "They erected a monument to Servetus, in honor of Calvin!"

Calvin reigned for twenty-four years as Supreme Pontiff and absolute despot of Geneva. During his lifetime, Geneva was a town of scarcely 10,000 inhabitants, and the decimating influence of this monster may be imagined from the fact that he was instrumental in procuring 300 executions for heresy and casting more than 4,000 of his fellow-citizens into prison; not to mention the continuous flow of banishments which issued from the Draconian severity of his administration. One of the most odious achievements of his reign was the sentence whereby the executioner, Jean Granjat, was ordered to execute *his own mother*, on account of sorcery. The wretch was ordained to cut off his mother's hand and to burn her body at the stake at Champel, which was the sacred ground of execution at Geneva. If we are to feast and commemorate a ghoul of Calvin's type, why not erect a monument to Jean Granjat, the executioner of his own mother?

Calvin was, indeed, worse than a murderer; he was a spy and a sneak. He caused a letter to be written to the Catholic Inquisition in France by one of his creatures, de Trie, accompanied by various documents, all incriminating Servetus with the fatal charge of heresy; and so procured his arrest at Vienne, in France, at the hands of the Holy Office. This odious action of the arch-Protestant—the embodiment of Biblical orthodoxy in its most severely logical form—an act whereby he sought to feed the flames of the Catholic Inquisition with the body of his opponent—is, perhaps, one of the most treacherous crimes in the long and shady history of religious persecution.

The documents furnished by Calvin to the Inquisitor-General of France—Cardinal Tournon, the ruthless exterminator of the Waldensians—consisted of a few sheets of *The Restitution of Christianity*, only then recently privately printed by Servetus, wherein the martyr attacked the doctrine of the Trinity. Servetus had already described the orthodox God as “a Cerberus with three heads.” Calvin afterwards supplemented this evidence by forwarding certain sheets of his own *Institutes of Christianity*, with marginal notes of an heretical character written by the hand of Servetus and confidentially addressed by the latter to Calvin in the course of his friendly polemic with his future murderer. The evidence thus treacherously tendered by Calvin was the sole ground of the arrest of Servetus. The Inquisitors produced these marginal notes at the trial, and Servetus, dumbfounded and defeated, was obliged to admit his authorship of the heretical writings. Servetus was accordingly detained in prison, where however he was guarded with laxity, and from which he managed to escape. He had influential friends outside, and received singular consideration from his gaolers. As Servetus himself said: “The prison was watched as though they wished me to escape.” In his absence he was found guilty of heresy, fined a thousand pounds, and condemned to be burnt alive by a slow fire till his body should be reduced to ashes. In default he was duly burnt in effigy at Vienne on the 17th of June, 1553.

Seven years before, on the 13th February, 1546, Calvin wrote thus to Farel: “If Servetus should come to Geneva, and if I have any credit at all in the city, I will not allow him to escape from it alive.” Led by an unlucky star Servetus, uncertain where to seek safety from the pursuit of the Catholic Inquisition, came secretly to Geneva, where he alighted in the hope of reaching the upper portion of Lake Lemman and of thence putting himself in security at Zurich. But the hunted heretic was unfortunately run to earth by the creatures of Calvin, and after trial and condemnation was burnt to death by a slow fire, and amidst excruciating torments from flame and smoke, on the 27th of October, 1553.

The crime was not only Calvin's. It was the acknowledged act of official Protestantism, and received the plaudits of the chiefs and ringleaders of the reformed movement. Zwinglius declared that “not a breath of air should be allowed the Spanish blasphemer.” (Ecolampadus averred that “the impious Servetus is such a proud and presumptuous controversialist that no death could be too cruel for him.” Bucer, of Strasbourg, would have desired that “the shameful innovator, who rejected all the Fathers of the Church who believed in the Trinity,” were publicly hacked to pieces. Melancthon, the sweet Melancthon, congratulated Calvin on having given to future generations, by means of this execution, “a religious and memorable example.” Halesius declared that “the Genevans have won the esteem of the Church for having suppressed the new Mohammed.” Calvin's friend, Farel, accompanied the martyr to his worse than Calvary, and cruelly taunted and insulted him in his dying agonies. Bullinger, of Zurich, and Theodore de Beza (who translated the Bible into Latin for the Protestants), and hosts of other pious and Protestant worthies, joined the sacred chorus of jubilation over the cruel

murder of Servetus, and saw in the flames that slowly roasted the body of their victim a nimbus of glory around the sacred head of Calvin. It is well that these facts should be known; they help us to appreciate the essentially persecuting character of the Christian religion, and the odious hypocrisy of Protestantism in attempting to fasten solely upon Catholicism the crime of intolerance.

The slow-footed processes of Time have at length brought along some slight reparation to the memory of Servetus, the man who first discovered the circulation of the blood, and thereby conferred more benefit to mankind than if he had invented a new god. The initiative at Geneva, 1902, of the enthusiastic countrymen and admirers of the great Spaniard have resulted in the erection, only this year, of two or three magnificent monuments to his heroic memory.

The first of these was that erected at Vienne, in France. Servetus practiced in that town as a physician from 1541 to April 4, 1553, the date of his arrest by the Inquisition. During his sojourn at Vienne he published his second and most noteworthy edition of the Geography of Ptolemy—a work which, written by one whom Réclus calls “one of the founders of comparative geography”—figures amongst the greatest productions of erudition, art, and typography in the sixteenth century. There, too, he wrote his *Christianismi Restitutio*, the fateful book which furnished Calvin with the long-coveted opportunity of bringing his antagonist to the flames. The Servetus Committee, in whose name the arrangements for the inauguration of the monument were carried out, consisted of the Presidents of the Senate and of the Chamber of Deputies, M. Leon Bourgeois, the President of the Municipal Council of Paris, the Mayors of Lyons and Toulouse, the Deans of all the French Faculties of Medicine, two great Freethinkers, recently dead, Berthelot and Salmeron; Haeckel, Lombroso, and hosts of others, all proud to associate themselves with the vindication of the name of a great Physician and Thinker, whose memory will always be treasured as one of the noblest legacies of heroic example ever offered to mankind. The homage of such men will outweigh the inhospitable bigotry of Calvin's Geneva.

The second monument was that erected on October 25 last at Annemasse (Haute Savoie), not far from Champel, though actually in France. It was originally intended that the monument should be erected at Geneva, but the spirit of Calvin still survives in the city which he made the abode of bigotry and brutality. The municipality, in refusing a site, stated that the erection of a monument to Servetus would be dishonoring to the memory of Calvin. How well and truly Geneva honors the memory of Calvin may be seen by the fact that a Genevan review\* has recently declared “that there would be many advantages if we could burn M. Auguste Dide himself.” M. Auguste Dide is the President of the Servetus Committee, a former Senator of France, a distinguished man of Letters of the highest integrity, author of *La Fin des Religions* and of the monumental *Michel Servet et Calvin*. *La Nouvelle Gazette de Zurich* actually demanded Dide's expulsion from Switzerland, and two of the principal members on the staff of *Le Journal de Genève*—MM. Wagnière and Seippel—Seippel of the odious inscription above referred to—joined openly in this ignominious proposal. And yet, in presence of such facts, there are certain Zimris in the Freethought camp who cry “Peace! Peace!” when there is no peace, and can be none, whilst the hateful, cruel ideas, that formerly burnt the heretic, are still fierce enough to imprison, boycott, or abuse him.

At the unveiling of the statue at Annemasse, addresses were delivered in honor of Servetus by M. Dujardin-Beaumetz, Deputy and, since 1905, French Under-Secretary of State for the Fine Arts, by M. Pommeray, the Prefect of La Haute Savoie,

\* *La Voile Latine*, p. 138.

M. Herriot, Mayor of Lyons, and by representatives from various municipalities, including that of Paris. The enthusiastic representatives of French Free-thought were glad to receive at Annemasse the statue proscribed by "the respectful and grateful sons of Calvin."

I must not detain the reader by referring to a third monument to Servetus, recently erected at Paris. I should, however, like to add that perhaps the greatest and most enduring monument to the memory of the great Spaniard is the book which M. Auguste Dide has recently dedicated to his memory. I have not seen the original French of this magnificent work: my only version is a Spanish translation.\* In the glowing pages of this book the restless heroic scholar takes flesh and blood and lives visibly before our eyes. The story of his entrapping by the treachery of Calvin, the damning documentary proofs of the reformer's guilty correspondence with the Inquisition with the intent of procuring the murder of an opponent, and the terrible details of his trial at Geneva, of the exulting ferocity of his captor and his pious associates, and the painful details of the final scene, all this is told with studied moderation and masterly power. Dide's work is a great study of a truly great man, and its publication is a permanent enrichment of the literature of historic Free-thought. I am glad to know that more than two thousand copies of the Spanish translation were sold in a few days, and that the Spanish Freethinkers who so stirred our hearts at Geneva in September, 1902, have been the source of so many fruitful activities in honor of the name and fame of their immortal countryman.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

Frederic Courtland Penfield contributes an article to the November number of the *North American Review* entitled "France and Her Vanishing Population." Mr. Penfield gives some figures in relation to the decline of French population. In 1902 the excess of births over deaths was 84,000; in 1903, 73,000; in 1904, 57,000; in 1905, 37,000; in 1906, 27,000; and in 1907 it not only reached zero, but passed it, for there were 20,000 more deaths than births. The main cause to which Mr. Penfield attributes this alarming decline in the number of the French people is the thrift for which the French are famed, but which Mr. Penfield regards as synonymous with greed. He says:—

"When obliged to divide his property equally among his children, and when he knows that the same restriction will be applied to their children when their turn comes, the citizen of France usually elects to have a limited family. The dowry system, again, operates in the same direction. Everywhere an additional child means additional expense; in France it means an extra dowry as well, and that is an added reason why the French have few children. So long as the present property law exists, and the dowry custom obtains, there can be no 'solution' of French depopulation. France is manifestly deriving from her inheritance policy an immense diffusion of prosperity, and certain publicists are applauding the national policy, and boldly asserting that it is more than wise to promote greater equality in the distribution of wealth."

So it is not infidelity that has depopulated France after all! But if Mr. Penfield is right, if mere prudence has suggested the restriction of families, what becomes of the reams of homily written to prove, using France as an illustration, that unbelief is the handmaid of race suicide?

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

#### ON THE OTHER SIDE.

"So you cling to that childish superstition about thirteen being unlucky?" said the traveller.

"Yes," answered the other. "Can't get away from it."

"But see how completely it is disproved. This glorious country started with thirteen colonies."

"Very true. But I am an Englishman."

#### EUPHEMISM NEEDED.

"Papa, what does hades mean?"

"It's the polite word for hell, my son."

"And, papa, is there any polite word for heaven?"

\* *Miguel Servet y Calvino*, F. Sampere, y Cia, 1908; Valencia. 260 pp.; 10d.

## Correspondence.

### THE CONVERSION OF ROMANES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your issue of November 29 appeared a letter over the signature of "W. H. Howard Nash," which questioned the accuracy of an article of mine bearing the above title.

The vulgar impertinence which constituted the concluding paragraph of your correspondent's communication would, in ordinary circumstances, have precluded any notice of his letter. But in the light of the fact that some of your readers may have forgotten the gentleman's former appearance in the columns of the *Freethinker*, on which occasion he was so remorselessly trodden underfoot, and consequently may conceivably have been inclined to regard him seriously, the succeeding notice is penned.

In the article under discussion, the view was expressed that the mind of Romanes had two compartments—the one rationalistic and the other religious, the latter gaining an ascendancy over the former as his state of health declined.

Your correspondent is anxious to know what reasons exist for the conclusion that "Romanes was, in all human probability, scarcely conscious when Dr. Paget administered the Communion." If your correspondent had informed himself concerning the nature of the disease with which Romanes was stricken, he would have discovered that hemiplegia is brain and body paralysis. In cases of this nature the shock to the system is so great that the patient "rarely recovers his mental stability." So says that great expert, Dr. I. O. Affleck, in his article on "Paralysis" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. In these circumstances, one has some justification for supposing that two days after his stroke Romanes was, to quote his own words, "a mere wreck."

It appears, however, that between the seizure and the ceremony Romanes listened to, and commented upon, a hymn. This highly-important fact was not mentioned in my article, for the very good reason that it was "suppressed" by Mrs. Romanes in the earlier edition of her husband's "Life," and it was upon that undeveloped edition that I relied.

In passing, the fact may as well be recalled that when the Communion was administered Romanes was an avowed unbeliever; and, in the words of Mrs. Romanes, "death seemed very near that day." The Roman Catholic Church manages these things very much better.

If your correspondent doubts the unbelief of Romanes at this and at much later periods, he had better re-read the letter addressed to Francis Darwin, and endeavor to understand the letter to Professor Henslow in the sense in which that eminent botanist doubtless understood it. The ineptitude displayed by your correspondent in connection with this last letter must be due either to constitutional incapacity or to the darkest and densest ignorance of biological doctrines and deductions. Professor Henslow's theory of "self-adaptation" was regarded by Romanes as a near relative of the design "argument," and on that account he rejected it.

*Darwin and After Darwin*, written long after the impure Agnostic period of the "Rede Lecture," is rationalistic throughout. This work is so rationalistic that it would shock some rationalists. Romanes actually employs "supernatural" and "superstition" as interchangeable terms. This seems to indicate that the impure Agnosticism was barely distinguishable from pure Atheism.

Your correspondent, with his hearsay information, refers to the "summary" of *Darwin and After Darwin*. Had he any first-hand knowledge of this work, he would know that the "summary" consists of a review of the bearings of biological science on theology which winds up the *first* volume. The two succeeding volumes were left in manuscript and type, and were edited and published after Romanes' death by Professor Lloyd Morgan. This "summary" commences in the following uncompromising manner:—

"Thus, whether we look to the facts of adaptation or to those of beauty, everywhere throughout organic nature we meet with abundant evidence of natural causation, while nowhere do we meet with any evidence of supernatural causation."

Romanes then says that the state of the argument remains unchanged, although faith may reply to reason, as she has always replied, "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself." How this in any way modifies the naturalistic tone of the book I am quite unable to imagine.

That Romanes, in his posthumous *Thoughts on Religion*, as edited by Bishop Gore, never succeeds in answering the really unanswerable arguments of his earlier production, *A Candid Examination of Theism*, is obvious to anyone possessing the merest modicum of judgment. I charitably assume that your correspondent has never read the work at all.

The final attitude of Romanes towards the Christian faith was contained, according to Mrs. Romanes, in his words, "I as yet have not that real inward assurance." In the Gospel according to Gore, however, we read: "George Romanes came to recognise, as in these written notes so also in conversation, that it was 'reasonable to be a Christian believer' before the activity or habit of faith had been recovered. His life was cut short very soon after this point was reached; but it will surprise no one to learn that the writer of these *Thoughts* returned before his death to that full, deliberate communion with the Church of Jesus Christ which he had for so many years been conscientiously compelled to forego."\* I am still wondering whether Bishop Gore or Mrs. Romanes is mistaken concerning the much-trying Romanes' final attitude to the faith.

By Romanes' "wrecked condition" I mean precisely what Romanes himself meant in his letters to Professor Huxley and Professor Thistleton Dyer. In the *developed* editions of the *Life* only, Mrs. Romanes refers to the preservation of her husband's mental balance; an opinion adopted by Romanes' old teacher, and friend of the family, Professor Burdon Sanderson. But those who are not swayed by emotional considerations are entitled to remember that Romanes suffered, during the weary months which preceded his premature death, from an agonising form of paralysis which almost invariably results in degenerative changes of tissue. If we bear in mind the susceptibility to environmental conditions such a weakened state produces, and if we reflect that Romanes' last days were passed in a morbidly religious atmosphere, darkened and benumbed by the presence of ecclesiastics, it is easy to interpret the phenomena of the alleged conversion.

One of my motives for writing the original article was to re-awaken a dying interest in Romanes' scientific work. Many students refuse to examine Romanes' writings, as they take the view that his ultimate opinions are not incorporated therein. That this is largely untrue has been amply demonstrated; that it is wholly untrue there are many reasons for suspecting. Knowing, as I did, that the obscurantist party generally, from Bishop Gore at its apex, down to the merest Christian Evidence hack at its base, had suppressed all reference to Romanes' wrecked condition, while claiming his conversion on every possible occasion as a triumph for the faith, I was anxious to vindicate his memory, while at the same time exposing the misrepresentations made by the enemies of science, progress, and humanity.

VERITAS.

## A CORRECTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—My attention has been drawn to a paragraph in your issue dated December 20, on page 808, in which you state that "a Jewish member of the London County Council brought an action for libel against the *Jewish Chronicle* for saying" (in Yiddish), etc.

As a matter of fact, no such action was brought against this paper, nor is our paper printed in Yiddish; and I need scarcely point out to you that the whole paragraph, referring as it does to this paper, is harmful in the extreme. I have no doubt that the writer of the paragraph, knowing that such action had been brought against a Jewish paper, assumed that it was this journal, as probably he had heard of no other Jewish paper in this country. I have seen it stated in a number of papers that this action was brought against "a leading Jewish paper," and probably the writer of the paragraph may have himself thought that the *Jewish Chronicle* must have been meant.

I am sure you will take the earliest opportunity of correcting the statement, and of giving the correction as much prominence as you have the original paragraph. I leave it entirely to your sense of fairness to place the matter right with your readers.

THE EDITOR.

## The Fruits of the Philosophy of Gentle Jesus.

"Ye are of more value than many sparrows."

CHRIST'S contemptuous allusion to a species of one of the most harmless and beautiful of nature's forms of life is responsible for horrible cruelties to them practised in Southern Italy, and not altogether unreasonably condoned by his priests there. Again, females are always most perverted by "true religion," and Christ's female "little lambs" cause to be destroyed annually, to glut their cruelty and execrable taste, no fewer than 300 million of the most beau-

tiful and innocent beings in what they are taught to regard as "God's divine creation." If some husband, less brutal than his "gentil donna," mildly remonstrate, he is silenced by a flood of tears and a sob that he cares more for a few nasty little sparrows than his own true and wedded wife. I prefer the Lesbia's of Pagan Rome, which, even in its cruelty, seems to have respected and spared our wonderful and lovely winged fellow-creature, to these female Christian ghouls.

There must be some 300 million Hindoo and Buddhist women in the world, sneered at by the bulk of the brutal and ignorant Christians of the West as poor 'eathen savages; but, although they live in regions where the most exquisite forms of bird life abound, at the very outside only a mere handful, depraved by contact with Western brutality, would sink to the bad taste and bad hearts of the West, and have them killed to glut their own perverted vanity. During five or six years in the East I cannot remember to have seen a single case among the women of Asia.

"Verily I came not to bring peace, but a sword"; "Do good unto all men, but especially to them that are of the household of faith." These texts are the foundation of the whole system of Western war and patriotism. Coupled with a belief in a paternal God that has to be propitiated by the sacrifice of his Son, what logical outcome could have been expected different from what has resulted, namely, the Inquisition, and compulsion by the State of the whole of Western humanity to be murderers in thought if not in deed, potentially or by proxy if not in act? It is only because Christians are so inured to their own brutality, by two thousand years of pretending to be cannibals and eating their Man-God, that they fail to be conscious of their own barbarism.

In the face of these maxims of "Gentle Jesus," his followers have the impudence to entitle him the "Prince of Peace" and themselves the salt of the earth and the champions of goodwill and righteousness, and a reign of "justice and mercy" upon earth.

On the other hand, some 500 years before Christ, who condemned neither war nor capital punishment, Confucius, to whose maxims Christ added little or nothing of any real value, had demonstrated the wickedness and folly of both.

W. W. STRICKLAND, B.A.

## THE DEPARTED.

"I suppose you carry a memento of some sort in that locket of yours?"

"Yes; it is a lock of my husband's hair."

"But your husband is still alive!"

"Yes, but his hair is all gone."

## A KIPLING STORY.

"Rudyard Kipling, when he dined with me," said a literary Chicagoan, "told me about Simla. It seems that Simla is up in the mountains—the hills, as they say in India—and the ladies go there in the hot weather to escape the heat of the low country. Well, Kipling said that one lovely, cool morning at Simla he was presented to a 'grass-widow.' They call those ladies 'grass-widows' whose husbands are detained by work in the hot cities of the plains. She was awfully pretty and charming, and, as they talked together in the pleasant coolness, Kipling said: 'I suppose you can't help thinking of your poor husband grilling down below?' The lady gave him a strange look, and he learned afterwards that she was a real widow."—*Canadian Courier*.

## WHY?

A certain spinster was being consoled with because she had no husband. "Why," she said, "I don't want a husband. I'm just as well off. You see, I have a dog, and he growls; I have a parrot, and he swears; I have a cat, and she stays out nights. Now, why should I get married?"

## NO LEGISLATION NEEDED.

Foreign Visitor: "Mrs. Vidders, can a woman marry her deceased husband's brother in this country?"

Mrs. Vidders: "Yes, she can if she chooses, but she seldom does. She generally knows him too well."

## THE CRITICAL SPIRIT.

Gabriel: "Wasn't that spirit satisfied with her halo?"

St. Peter: "No; she said it wasn't nearly as large as her winter hat."

\* *Thoughts on Religion*. Note by Ed.; p. 184.

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, etc.**

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

**COUNTRY.**

EDINBURGH BRANCH N. S. S. (Rationalists' Club, 12 Hill-square): 6.30, John Pryde, a Lecture. Thursdays at 8, Discussion Classes. The Mound, 6.30, a Lecture.

FAIRSWORTH (Secular Sunday School, Pole-lane): 6.30, Recital, "The Christmas Carol," by Fred Morgan.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 5, Annual Children's Party.

LEEDS BRANCH N. S. S. (Tate's Dining Hall, Vicar-lane): 8, Mr. Kitchen, "The Bubble Burst."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Central Buildings, 113 Islington): 7, Members' meeting.

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