

# THE Freethinker

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*It is from personal experience of strong love that we rise by degrees to a sincere affection for all mankind.*

—AUGUSTE COMTE.

## The Son of a Ghost.

"Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary."—*The Apostles' Creed.*

If a revival preacher were to go about in this age, pretending to be the Messiah, he would in all probability end his days in a lunatic asylum. We are aware that Piggott pretends to be the Messiah, but he does not go about preaching; he secludes himself in the Agapemone, and devotes himself with a number of ladies to obeying the commandment of "love one another." It is very unlikely that a pathetic Messiah would found a powerful sect, that a vast literature would accumulate around his memory, or that his devotees would gradually repudiate his human parentage and assert his entrance into the world by a supernatural process of generation. Great changes have taken place since the beginning of the Christian era. Superstition still exists, but it is less gross and active. Sporadic miracles still occur in the most benighted parts of Catholic countries, but to the majority of Catholics, and nearly the whole of Protestants, a miracle is a thing of the past. The order of nature, once so frequently broken, is now invariable. Faith turns its face to antiquity, and reads its charter in the dubious records of ignorant and credulous ages.

No man in his senses would believe that a child was born last week, or last year, without a father; but many men, who in other respects are rational, believe that such a prodigy once existed, and are perfectly ready to regard those who are sceptical on this point as heretics and blasphemers, deserving of punishment in this world and everlasting torture in the next. At this time of the year they are accustomed to think of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Ghost. They hear sermons on the Nativity. They stimulate a faith which is possibly waning. They do not re-examine the grounds of their faith; they simply hear the old story retold, and go away convinced that what is related with such confidence must be true. For the moment they have no doubt about it. Jesus Christ *was* born of the Virgin Mary, and his other parent *was* the Holy Ghost.

Now the Holy Ghost is only a ghost, and that such a shadowy personage should beget a lusty boy is enough to stagger the stoutest credulity. "If God had not said it," wrote old Donne, "I would never have believed it." And if God *did* say it we have something to go upon. Jesus Christ himself, in the whole of the gospels, never so much as alludes to his supernatural birth. Nor was it suspected by his countrymen, who regarded him as an ordinary carpenter, with several brothers and sisters. Even the Apostles were ignorant of it, if we are to rely upon the Acts. Joseph and Mary give us no first-hand testimony. Everything is related in the third person by the evangelists. And who were *they*? Not a man on the face of the earth is able to answer this question. God only knows (at least no one else does) where, when, and by whom the four gospels were written. This much is certain, and admitted by every scholar, that the gospels, as we have them, did

not come from the pens of Jesus Christ's apostles. Earlier documents may have existed, and probably did, but we know not their actual contents; yet, judging from St. Paul's epistles, they could hardly have contained a tithe of the miraculous stuff which the Church preserved as the "Life of Christ."

Orthodox Christians are fond of declaring that the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ was predicted by the prophet Isaiah. "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son," the prophet says, according to the Authorised Version. The word *Almah*, however, does not mean a virgin, but a young woman; and thus it cannot have the slightest reference to the "Virgin Birth of Christ." Besides, it is evident that Isaiah saw personally to the fulfilment of his own prophecy. He did not leave it to other men or future ages.

What is the real evidence that Jesus Christ was born without a human father? The presumption is in favor of any baby having two earthly parents, and evidence to the contrary must be as strong as the alleged fact is extraordinary.

Mark and John—that is, the second and fourth gospels—say nothing whatever about the miraculous conception and birth of Christ, and their silence seems to balance the loquacity of Matthew and Luke, who do not pretend to be giving first-hand testimony. Luke, indeed, avows in his preamble that he is only putting into a literary form what had been "handed down," and Matthew might have made exactly the same confession.

From the very nature of the case, all who first promulgated the story of Jesus Christ's father being a ghost, if they did not invent it themselves, must have taken it on trust from Jesus, or Joseph, or Mary. Jesus never uttered a word on the subject. It may be argued that he told his apostles privately, but how, on this theory, can we account for the silence of John?

Joseph is said to have been engaged to Mary, and to have been shocked by her premature maternal appearance; indeed, he resolved to break the engagement. Supposing this to be true, it may prove that Joseph was *not* the prospective baby's father, but it cannot prove who *was* its father. It is said that Joseph was subsequently satisfied. But *how* was he satisfied? An angel appeared to him in a dream, and told him that the baby was the offspring of the Holy Ghost; a personage, by the way, with whom Joseph, like every other Jew of that time, was totally unacquainted; so that, instead of allaying his apprehensions, it would only have increased his perplexity. In any case, the celestial visitor appeared to Joseph in a dream; consequently the story itself is but a dream.

A man finds his sweetheart in the state in which "ladies love to be who love their lords"—before she has a lord. He knows he is not the cause of the phenomenon; he is puzzled and grieved; and he resolves to leave her to the other gentleman. But he goes to bed and dreams that her condition is miraculous; he wakes up satisfied and marries her. All this is very interesting and proves him to be a very good-natured man. But it proves nothing else. His evidence would be absolutely worthless in any court of law.

Mary, of course, knew the father of the child. But she did not tell Joseph; she let him find it out in a dream. Neither, to our knowledge, did she tell

anyone else. On one occasion, when Mary, Jesus, and Joseph were all three together, she spoke to Jesus of Joseph as "thy father." Now this should be sufficient for a person of common intelligence and common decency. Mary's authority is quite good enough. Her word ought to settle the question.

Luke tells us, without telling us who informed *him*, that the angel Gabriel, who visited Mary as the herald of the third person of the Trinity, said to her: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee." Now these "overshadowings" are familiar to the students of ancient history and mythology. A priest sometimes induced a pretty woman to spend the night in a temple, on the pretence that the god was in love with her; and it is conceivable, of course, though we should be sorry to assert it, that Mary was the victim of a similar imposition. In other cases, the deity actually took a physical form; witness the multitudinous amours of the gods of the ancient pantheon. One wonders, therefore, whether the incarnation of the Holy Ghost was a preliminary to the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

The story of the son of a ghost will stand no chance in the world to-day. It is an inheritance from ignorant and superstitious times. Mary's "misfortune" was a posthumous libel. According to the gospels themselves, the Jews believed that Jesus Christ (if he ever existed) was born in lawful wedlock. When the dogma of his divinity was established, the story of his being the son of a ghost was devised to support it; and as *avatars* or incarnations of deity in the form of men were universally credited, both the story and the dogma gained a ready acceptance, and ministered to the success of the Christian faith. The time was bound to come, however, when men would be sensible enough to see that the birth of Jesus Christ without a human father was only half a miracle. To complete the miracle he should have been born without a mother.

G. W. FOOTE.

### Mr. Campbell on the Future of Religion.—III.

(Concluded from p. 803.)

NEXT to Mr. Campbell's use of the word "materialism" comes that of the phrase "spiritual atrophy." In the use of both expressions he is only following orthodox example; but when one sets out to correct the loose thinking and verbal errors of other people, one ought to exercise some watchfulness over oneself. There is a characteristically modern type of mind, he tells us, that "lacks the religious faculty," people who are "spiritually atrophied." Now this is, of course, very consoling to the religious person. It enables him to congratulate himself upon being either better endowed or better developed than his unbelieving fellow-creature, and between "spiritual" humility and common conceit the line is so fine that I am quite unable to say where one ends and the other begins. Yet if one were to ask Mr. Campbell for proof that the unbeliever is undeveloped or is lacking in certain qualities, the only proof possible must lie in the fact of his not agreeing with Mr. Campbell. This is not only flattering to the religionist; it really puts controversy out of the question. The Atheist is prohibited by nature from reaching the level of thought and insight attained by that superior person the Christian.

Still, one ventures to ask for proof that the Atheist is either an undeveloped human or that he has allowed some important quality to disappear by disuse. And asking that, one ventures on the assertion—still with all possible timidity—that it is really the religionist who is clinging to a lower and inaccurate interpretation of things while a higher and more accurate one is possible. For the Atheist really does understand the religionist; it is the religionist that does not and will not understand the Atheist. All these vaporings about religion, all these feelings and "yearnings" and beliefs we know about and

understand, because most of us have experienced them. Mr. Campbell is not talking to the Atheist in a language he does not understand, but in one that he has deliberately discarded in favor of a more expressive tongue. When he treats us to a disquisition about God in a manner he believes to be mystical, but which is more often mysterious, we know all that he is talking about; but we have a better interpretation of it. We know there is no such thing as a "religious faculty" any more than there is a City Temple faculty. There are certain qualities of mind that may be used in the interests of the City Temple at one time, and which at another time may be used in the interests of a drapery business or a political election. And there are qualities of mind that may be expended at one time in a religious guise and at another in a saner and more serviceable non-religious manner. The only distinction between the religious and the non-religious person is that the latter interprets the world and his subjective states in terms of an historic but unscientific supernaturalism, while the former interprets both in terms more in harmony with contemporary knowledge.

Mr. Campbell is very kind, almost gracious, in dealing with certain select unbelievers. The unbelieving mind "is not necessarily a bad type; in many respects it is quite superior to the average mind of the so-called ages of faith, when religious zeal and inhuman cruelty often went hand in hand." One is almost overpowered with so much graciousness. He probably feels towards the Atheists as Artemus Ward's London landlord did towards Americans—astonished that they can be trusted with a knife and fork. And one must be thankful for small mercies; so that it is gratifying to learn that this type of mind is superior to the mind filled with religious zeal and inhuman cruelty, although not up to the calibre of the City Temple. Better still remains. Mr. Campbell frequently meets—

"and ever reckon among my closest friends, persons whom one can trust and respect, but who confess themselves to be without religious susceptibilities of any kind; they tell me that their minds are set in another direction; they are living intense and useful lives without any consciousness of dependence upon a super-human power.....They are high-minded, kind-hearted, and enthusiastic over all kinds of schemes for the betterment of the race. Measured by their services to mankind, they are quite as good as any other sort of people; some of the most earnest and unselfish individuals one has ever met belong to this category. Here, then, is another portentous fact; some of the very best life of our time is without religion, and content to remain so."

I pass over without comment the illustration of the humanising influence of religion contained in the necessity for reminding Christians that such people exist. It does, however, sound curious that so profound a thinker (according to the estimate of his admirers) as Mr. Campbell should be full of fear as to what will result from the rejection of Christian belief. He asks, assuming the increase of the type described, "Is there no danger to our future advancement in this?" Well, what danger can there be? How on earth can danger accrue from the multiplication of individuals who are filled with enthusiasm for all schemes of betterment, who are earnest and unselfish, who can be trusted and respected, are high-minded, kind-hearted, and measured by their services to mankind, are as good as any other sort of people? What better, or what higher, standard could we have than to measure the worth of people by their services to mankind? Why, one would imagine that such people were almost good enough to be believers in the New Theology. And higher praise than that can no man give.

Mr. Campbell's fears turn out to be purely professional—which shows that even the mantle of the New Theology may cover a parson. There would be, he admits, material, intellectual, and moral progress, but if it is to end at the tomb there would be "a foreshortening of the spiritual perspective" (happy Mesopotamian phrase!), which would "diminish incalculably the sum of human joy." And, with

random statements and inconsistencies coming in a thickening shower, although "we do not allow considerations concerning a future life to influence our conduct much day by day," yet, if people were convinced that there were no future life, "the world would be a smaller, meaner place immediately if you could cut that hope out of the human heart."

Was ever man in a more hopeless confusion? People with no religious beliefs whatever are leading an ideal social life. They are good, earnest, loyal, unselfish, yet they are in a position that diminishes "incalculably" the sum of human joy. We do not allow the thought of a future life to influence our conduct, and yet without it the world becomes a smaller, meaner place, despite the fact that there is, all the time, material, intellectual, and moral progress. And then, to crown all, he asks, Could the civilisation of the future survive without religion? But if we have material, intellectual, and social progress, civilisation has survived, and the question is already answered. Really, if any of Mr. Campbell's friends know where he is, I fancy it is rather more knowledge than he possesses himself.

Mr. Campbell's concern for the future is very touching, it doubtless does him honor, but it is quite unnecessary. Society has not developed because of the presence of religious belief, and therefore it is not likely to disintegrate or retrograde in its absence. The man must have small confidence in human nature who believes it to be so ill-balanced that it will only maintain an equilibrium so long as it is buttressed by metaphysical speculations and supernatural beliefs. Those who really understand the nature of the evolutionary process realise that such fears are idle. Nature places a growing emphasis upon right conduct, because really right conduct and life promoting conduct are fundamentally one. And bearing in mind Mr. Campbell's emphasis of a Christian social gospel, and the solemn way in which, apparently, many take him as a shining guide in social matters, his ignoring the real social forces, and placing all the emphasis on a belief in a future life, is highly instructive. One wonders how long, under such guidance, it will be before people attain a sane conception of social evolution, or a rational belief in the nature of the social forces.

Mr. Campbell's "deep and firmly held conviction about the future" is that "the spirituality and eternity of man will be re-affirmed." Now, conviction for conviction, one is as good as another, and one need only meet this one by its opposite. Science, he says, is already finding that matter "more and more tends to disappear into a mode of mind." Well, I can assure Mr. Campbell that science is doing nothing of the kind, and that save in the sense that our knowledge is ultimately a knowledge of mental states, shows no tendency to arrive at such a stupid conclusion. Mind as we know it, and matter as we know it, may conceivably be modes of something that includes both, but science has not yet stultified itself by any conclusion such as that indicated by Mr. Campbell. And then with an exhibition of a chronic inability to steer clear of contradiction for half a dozen sentences, we are told that the next step of science will be to show that the universe "is not less than what we commonly term self-conscious." "Less" and "More" are both useless—not to say stupid—words in such a connection. The question at issue between Theism and Atheism is not whether the universe is less or more than self-conscious, but simply is it self-conscious? Whether it be "less" or not, either alternative is fatal to Theism, since in either case it is not self-conscious. A stone is not less self-conscious than a man, it is simply not self-conscious, and there is an end of the question. Mr. Campbell's language in this connection is on all fours with his statement that the men of the future will recognise God as the "Mysterious Somewhat" that animates our life. Religion must be in desperate straits when it is content to take for a God a metaphysical What-you-may-call-it of this kind.

Mr. Campbell's forecast of the religion of the future is exactly like that all other religionists provide us with. All other forms of religion are ruled out as being condemned by modern thought, and their own particular superstition projected as the triumphant survivor. Really the religion condemned by modern thought is not one, or even some, but all. Modern thought strikes at the very roots of all religion by showing the impossibility of a personal deity, and by discrediting the evidence for a future life. All that is left for religious advocates is to delude themselves and their followers with a number of meaningless phrases, and so continue to drag on a little longer. Of this possibility Mr. Campbell has availed himself to the full. With what success readers of the above criticism may judge.

C. COHEN.

### The Magi and the Star.

TO-DAY the chief subject discussed throughout Christendom is the birth of Jesus Christ. In the International Scheme of Sunday School Lessons the portion of Scripture selected for study is Matt. ii. 1-12, which relates the legend of the Magi and their star. As is well-known we possess only two accounts of the nativity of Jesus, and these two are as contradictory as it is possible for them to be. Luke states that the event occurred at the time of the enrolment or census of Quirinius, which did not take place till the year 6 A. D. He also regards Joseph and Mary as belonging to Nazareth, and as having to go to Bethlehem merely to be enrolled. Matthew, on the contrary, treats Joseph and Mary as inhabitants of Bethlehem, makes no mention of the enrolment, and places the nativity under Herod, who died in the spring of 4 B. C. Thus as to the date of the birth there is a discrepancy of at least ten years between the two Gospels. It is noteworthy also that the one ignores all the incidents which the other records as following the birth. Luke knows nothing of the visit of the Magi, the slaughter of the children, and the flight into Egypt, while Matthew does not seem to have heard of the adoration of the shepherds, the angels' song, and the presentation in the Temple. According to Luke, Jesus was born in a stable because there was no accommodation available at the inn, but according to Matthew the event happened in a house, apparently the house in which Joseph and Mary lived. Now, it is perfectly evident that both narratives cannot be true. If Luke's account is accepted, that by Matthew must be thrown overboard, and not a few will be compelled to reject both.

The visit of the Magi is variously treated in the religious journals. In some a symbolical interpretation is put upon it. The "wise men from the east" are represented as "the first anxious inquirers" who found in Christ "the solution of all questions." "They searched for the Child until they found him, and having found him they fell down and worshiped him." Jesus is the Savior of this lost world, but in order to be saved by him the world must seek him with diligence and passion. Usually the Savior seeks the lost; but in the Christian case the lost must search for the Savior, or remain lost for ever. The Magi's search was successful. "They came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and worshiped him." We are here in the midst of a supernatural atmosphere. It was a supernatural star that directed the pilgrims to the right spot; and it was a supernatural dream that warned them against Herod. The narrative is not a perfect work of art. When they reached Jerusalem the Magi asked for human guidance. "Where is he that is born king of the Jews?" they said, "for we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship him." "And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." In his anxiety he inquired of the chief priest and scribes where the Christ should be born. "And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa," quoting

an Old Testament passage as their authority. Then Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search out carefully concerning the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him." If they were supernaturally guided by a special star, why did they thus uselessly parley at Jerusalem? Why did they break their journey at all? Did "his star" desert them when they entered the famous metropolis and got into converse with their fellow-beings? For after they left the city they perceived how unnecessary it had been to make inquiries of men, inasmuch as "the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." What a marvellously accommodating star! How delightful it would be to be directed in all our earthly pilgrimages by such a heavenly luminary. No thanks to the Magi that they found the Divine Child when so led.

But, after all, the Heavens provide no such stars to pilot ignorant and blundering human beings to their proper destinations. The story strikes us at once as belonging to the realm of pure fable. There is not one touch of reality about it. But the moment we enter the Pagan world its true character is made manifest to us. The Magi were astrologers who were accustomed to wander from country to country, selling horoscopes and performing feats that were pronounced miraculous. They were reported to have foretold his death to Socrates, to have visited the tomb of Plato and offered incense to him as to a Divine Being, and to have divined the advent of many mighty ones by means of the stars. They taught that a new star appears at the birth of every man. Even as lately as the third century of our era this belief was cherished, especially with respect to prominent people. It was asserted that the future world-empire of Alexander Severus was predicted by the sudden appearance of a star of the first magnitude. Shining phenomena were supposed to be seen at the time of the birth of great emperors and military commanders, such as Alexander the Great, Mithridates, Cæsar, and Augustus. In the case of the latter it was alleged that the interpreters of signs claimed that the wonderful manifestations witnessed at the time of his birth announced the advent of the lord of the world. We know to-day that all these legends arose in ignorant and superstitious ages, and that, however beautiful many of them are, it is quite impossible to treat them as literally true; and, surely, if they are not literally true as related of Pagan demi-gods and distinguished men, neither can they be accepted as historical when applied to the Christian God-man. And yet it is safe to affirm that in ninety-nine out of every hundred Sunday-schools in Christendom, the scholars are instructed to take the visit of the star-led Magi to the child Jesus as a wholly historical incident; and as most of the scholars are young and ignorant the instruction will bear the desired fruit.

But where did the author or redactor of Matthew's Gospel find the exact form which he gives to the legend? Dr. Usener, Professor of Classical Philology in the University of Bonn, is of opinion that the idea—

"That the Magi should have come in person to do homage to the new-born lord may perhaps, as has been pointed out to the present writer by A. Dieterich, have originated in the journey of homage made by the Parthian king Tiridates to Nero in Rome, an expedition which attracted very great attention (see Cassius Dio, 632), especially in the provinces, such as Asia, which actually witnessed the progress of the king with his royal train, and had to entertain him in a manner suitable to his rank. Pliny, who alludes to this event, actually calls Tiridates a *magus*, and mentions that he had Magi in his suit, from whom the emperor hoped to learn the secrets of magic. The reign of Nero may have been exactly the period at which the legends of the divine birth of Jesus began to take shape in the Christian world, and it is very possible that the tidings of the Neronian persecutions spread from Rome may have had their share in bringing about the introduction of the picture of a bloodthirsty tyrant into the story of the childhood" (*Encyclopædia Biblica*, vol. iii., col. 3,351).

In full agreement with Professor Usener is Dr. F. C. Conybeare, a critic of the very first rank. Referring to Balaam's prophecy, recorded in Numbers xxiv. 17, concerning the coming forth of a star out of Jacob, this scholar says:—

"In the targums of the Jewish rabbis the passage from Numbers is construed as a prediction of the future Messiah. The legend seems to have been redacted in a Greek text in Rome about the year 119 under Pope Xystus, and about that time it probably made its way into the Gospel text. The story of the Magi going with presents to worship Jesus may be an echo of the mission brought in A. D. 66 by the Parthian king, Tiridates, to Nero in Rome. With his train of three Magi, laden with presents, Tiridates came before the Roman emperor. They 'fell down and worshiped him,' and hailed him as 'Lord and God, even as Mithras.' Now Nero was the antichrist of early Christian legend; and so enduring was that legend that the Armenians have never had any other name for the devilish counterfeit of Christ but *Nern—i. e., Neron*. If the antichrist received such homage from three Magi, the real Christ could not have received less. Hence the legend of Matthew" (*Myth, Magic, and Morals*, pp. 193-4).

The only possible conclusion from the foregoing undeniable facts is that no star-guided Magi ever visited the baby Jesus, and fell down and worshiped him. He was born in an obscure village in a despised part of a small and obscure country, and outside the circle of relations and friends the event was utterly unknown. His parents were peasants living in a community of peasants unheard of by the great, throbbing world outside. There is no evidence that Jesus differed in any special sense or degree from all the other Nazarene children, or gave promise of any future greatness. Not a whisper of a virgin birth was heard by anybody during his lifetime. The singing angels, the wondering shepherds, the adoring Magi, the ecstatic Simeon, and the exulting Anna, are either adaptations of existing legends or the pure inventions of the founders of the Christian cult. The curious thing is, that while the world at large, including Christendom, has long ago outlived the legends of Pagan mythologies, Christians—the overwhelming majority of them, at any rate, still persist in regarding their own legends as real incidents, and are doing so as zealously as ever this Christmastide. In Sunday-schools, children of tender years are carefully trained to accept them as literally true, and from innumerable pulpits adult believers are earnestly exhorted to cherish the faith, once for all delivered to the saints, more tenaciously than ever. Our only hope lies in the fact that literary criticism is gradually undermining all superstitious beliefs, and that the spread of scientific knowledge is causing those who still hold them to look more and more ridiculous. All we are anxious to bring about is the placing of Jesus in his rightful place as one of the latest of the great mythological creations of the religious imagination.

J. T. LLOYD.

### With the Compliments of the Season.

"DAMASCUS.—The street called Straight is straighter than a corkscrew, but not so straight as a rainbow. St. Luke is careful not to commit himself; he does not say it is the street which is straight, but the 'street which is called Straight.' It is a fine piece of irony; it is the only facetious remark in the Bible, I believe."—MARK TWAIN, *New Pilgrim's Progress*.

DOD GRILE'S CREDO.

"We believe the doctrine of election without understanding it, and revere the doctrine of redemption without believing it. We believe the world was created out of nothing, but don't know how the nothing was held together, and don't think it could be done again. We believe in baptism, for we have seen it done. We believe in divine mercy, without wishing to take any of it. We admire the wisdom of Solomon, and wish he had chosen to display it; and are amazed at the miracles of the prophets, so little inferior to the corresponding ones of our own *prestidigitateurs*, and in some respects superior to the corresponding ones of their heathen predecessors and contemporaries."—DOD GRILE (AMBROSE BIERCE), *Nuggets and Dust*.

"LET us be merry," as Mr. Pecksniff remarked when he took a captain's biscuit. Draw the curtain and

make a circle round the fire, and if we do not draw a snigger from the most black-browed, lantern-jawed, sanctimonious chapel-goer who ever thanked the Lord he was not as other men, then, like Luther, we will throw our inkstand to the Devil.

Away with all the firks and fardels, the conventions and restrictions of a straight-laced and stiff-necked world. Even the slaves of the ancient world claimed one day in the year when they made merry, unrestrained and regardless of their masters, and why should we deny ourselves a privilege accorded to slaves?

Many years ago, while we were still in the bonds of piety, we read that tale of Max Adeler's about the worshiper who placed his tall hat outside the pew, where it was swept up by the voluminous skirts of a lady coming down the aisle; as it came in contact with her, the lady gave a little scream, and her husband—a short-sighted man—seeing the hat roll from under her skirt, thought it was a dog, and gave it such a vigorous kick that it flew up and stuck on one of the organ pipes.

I read it with a "fearful joy," for this was making fun of holy things; and there was no disguising that I was delighted, and no doubt God had made a note of the fact, of which I should hear again hereafter. We sat right in front of the organ at our chapel, and we could always imagine that we could see that hat sticking on one of the pipes.

Oh! that chapel; what a feeling of oppression we always experienced there. We felt in our mind what the prisoner in the Middle Ages felt in his body under the torture known as *peine forte et dure*, which consisted of piling heavy weights on the victim until he gave in or was crushed to death.

We used to gaze on the organ, and, closing our senses as far as possible to the preacher's droning, we would build castles in the air. And while we mused the old men slept, that the words of the prophet might be fulfilled, "Your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams."

But alas! this castle-building was my undoing on one occasion. We were singing Heber's hymn, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains," and the lines—

"What though the spicy breezes  
Blow soft on Ceylon's isle,  
Though every prospect pleases  
And only man is vile,"

occupied—to use a psychological expression—the field of consciousness, to the exclusion of all else. Gazing with lack-lustre eyes full of musing speculation as to the joyous possibilities latent in this happy isle, I was aroused, by a touch on the arm, to the horrifying fact that I was standing alone, hymn-book in hand, while the congregation had resumed their seats. I quickly resumed mine, with the feeling that several million eyes were boring holes in my back; the boys in the gallery, however, were under the impression that it was a planned job, and grinned approval at such a piece of audacity.

By the way, the late Moncure Conway tells us that when he was in Ceylon a Cingalese told him that Bishop Heber bought a large emerald from a Moslem at Colombo, which turned out to be glass; hence the line, "And only man is vile." Such is the depravity of human nature that even a holy Bishop is not safe. Job understood these afflictions, and an American paper brings him up to date as follows:—

"Man that is born of woman is small potatoes and few in a hill. He riseth up to-day and flourisheth like a ragweed, and to-morrow or next day the undertaker hath him. He goeth forth in the morning warbling like a lark and is knocked out in one round and two seconds. In the midst of life he is in debt, and the tax collector pursues him wherever he goeth. The banister of life is full of splinters, and he slideth down with rapidity. He cometh home at eventide and meeteth the wheelbarrow in his path. It riseth up and smiteth him to the earth and falleth upon him, and runneth one of its legs into his car.

In the gentle springtime he putteth on his summer clothes, and a blizzard striketh him far from home and filleth him with cuss words and rheumatism. He buyeth a watch-dog, and when he cometh home from the lodge the watch-dog breatheth him, and sitteth near him until rosy morn. He goeth to the horse trot and betteth his money on the brown mare, and the bay gelding with a blaze face winneth. He marrieth a red-headed heiress with a wart on her nose, and the next day the parent ancestor goeth under with a crash and great liabilities, and cometh home to live with his beloved son-in-law."

It is related of Professor Mahaffy that once, while on a railway journey, a melancholy gentleman dressed in black inquired of the Professor if his soul was saved. "Yes," was the answer; but it was a very narrow squeak, and I don't like talking about it."

One day a pious old lady asked a member of the staff of the *Boston Investigator* if he did not think he ought to make his peace with God? He replied: "We have never had a bit of trouble with God. We have got along with him tip top. He has never shown that it was at all necessary for us to make peace with him. We have never quarrelled. If we are not at peace with God, we did not know it. We have no wish to have a row with anyone; and if God has the idea that we are mad with him, or want to injure him in any way, we wish to disabuse his mind of such a notion.

Up to this time God has made no complaint to us that we have wronged him, or that we need to make our peace with him; and until we hear from his own lips that we owe him an apology we do not intend to make one. God is just as good to us as though he was dead. He does not cross our path, stand in our light, dog our steps, or interfere with what we are doing. He does not get in our way any more than if he lived in the planet Jupiter. So we do not see that we need to make our peace with him. We do not comprehend how there can be any collision between us." There is certainly no ambiguity about this statement.

Charles Lamb was once persuaded to attend a Methodist "Experience" meeting in company with a friend. The friend spoke with great fervor and self-abasement, and finally Lamb himself was called upon to address the meeting. He rose, and stammered out: "I have nothing to say as to myself, but I can quite c-c-confirm what my friend has said as to his being a m-m miserable sinner."

Matthew Wilks, a noted preacher of the early part of the nineteenth century, was once on the way to a meeting of clergymen, and took refuge from a shower in a shed at Billingsgate. The fish-women were using the most filthy language, and Wilks felt it his duty to reprove them. "Don't you think," said he, "that I shall appear as a swift witness against you at the Judgment?" "I presume so," replied one of the women, "for the greatest rogue always turns king's evidence." Wilks went to the meeting and related the incident. "And what did you say, Mr. Wilks, in reply?" demanded one of them. "What *could* I say?" said Wilks.

As we shall soon be in the throes of a general election, the following trans-atlantic parody of the twenty-third Psalm, dealing with the subject, may be of interest:—

"The politician is my shepherd, I shall not want anything good during the campaign. He leadeth me into the saloon for my vote's sake. He filleth my pockets with Giersa's-Cubanas (custom-house cigars), and my beer-glass runneth over with Anheuser-Busch's foaming lager. He inquireth particularly concerning the health of my family, even to the fourth generation. Yea, though I walk through the mud and rain to vote for him, and shout myself hoarse, when he is elected he straightway forgetteth me and mine. Yea, though I meet him in his own office, he knoweth me not. Surely the wool has been pulled over my eyes all the days of my life."

With which we dismiss you with our benediction.

W. MANN.

## Acid Drops.

Some time ago Tolstoy's secretary and friend, V. Tchertkoff, was arrested and deported to Siberia for circulating the great man's writings. Tolstoy was present at the arrest, and begged to be arrested too; but the Czar's minions knew a trick worth two of that. News comes now from St. Petersburg that the publisher of Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You* has just been sentenced to a year's imprisonment in a fortress. Tolstoy once more protests and demands to be arrested, as the principal offender, but the Czar's minions still leave him unmolested. Not because they love him, but because they fear him—or the public opinion of the civilised world which holds him in such high respect. They dare not touch him. That is the simple truth. Thus they admit, though not in words, that there is something stronger than armies and cannon, something sharper than bayonets and swords; and that something is the free spirit of man. Let the lovers of liberty, then, never despair. The most powerful Czar, in his guarded palace, shrinks from the hiss of the elect in all the nations. He comforts the maw of his cruelty with victims who do not attract so much attention. But the hiss, even on their account, will be too much for him in the end.

Mr. Thomas Hardy writes to the *Daily News* challenging its reviewer's statement that his new volume of verse shows throughout an "outlook of disillusion and despair." "Even if this were true," Mr. Hardy says, "it might be no bad antidote to the grinning optimism nowadays affected in some quarters." But it is not true. Half-baked religionists call Mr. Hardy a pessimist out of sheer funk or deliberate perversion. The old plan was to call men of his way of thinking "wicked." The new plan is to call them "pessimists." In the former case, the idea sought to be conveyed was that if you got near them you would be contaminated; in the latter case, that they will make you miserable. The object in each case is play the ostrich towards unorthodox truths, and to induce other people to do likewise.

God had better mend his ways. Lord Rosebery is not sure of him. His lordship—we mean the Scotch one—was speaking at the anniversary dinner of the Royal College of Surgeons in Edinburgh, and in a political reference he said: "I join with the Lord Justice Clerk in his aspiration that in the great contest, and, I fear, the bitter contest, on which this country is about to enter, God may defend the right." Lord Rosebery only *hopes* that God will defend the right; he is not at all sure about it. Neither are we. What we are sure of is that, however the elections go, while there may be grave doubts on one side, the other side will cheerfully congratulate God on having done his duty.

Mr. Haldane cannot possibly believe in the New Testament, neither can the people who listened to him at Tranent. Look at this passage from his speech:—

"The Budget had been thrown out by the Lords, and several matters had been dislocated, but things were being soothed by the people continuing to pay their taxes in the hope of a joyful resurrection for the Budget on the day of judgment, when the sheep would be separated from the goats."

The audience laughed at this. Consequently they were as bad as the speaker. Neither he nor they would have made a joke of the day of judgment if they had any faith in it. If you laugh at a solemn thing it is because you do not believe in it seriously. That is why we say that Mr. Haldane and his Tranent auditors are no longer New Testament Christians. Of course we are glad of it. But we wish they would be a little more straightforward and sincere.

The Lord Mayor of London and Father Bernard Vaughan understand each other in the matter of religion, and they were well associated at the distribution of prizes to the scholars of St. Ignatius' College, Stamford-hill. Father Vaughan took the opportunity to denounce all knowledge not "guided by the influence of religion." If you are not guided by religion—that is to say, by priests—the less knowledge you have the better. "Knowledge is a terrible weapon," this loquacious priest says. Look at France! Having banished religion from her schools, she is "trying to get along amidst suicides and murders." Of course there are no suicides and murders in dear old England, where priests, parsons, and preachers control public education. Our police have next to nothing to do. It is well-known that they only work one day a week, and that merely for the look of the thing. Such is the inestimable moral value of religion in education.

"The only hope for the working man here and hereafter," Father Vaughan says, "lies in the Catholic Church."—"Will you walk into my parlor? said the spider to the fly."

Mr. Keir Hardie poses as a religious man. Yet he says that "Science will stop disease; Socialism will end poverty." Where does Religion look in?

May we suggest to Mr. Keir Hardie that he should read the Bible? He refers to "Christ's new Commandment, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.'" It wasn't new at all. If Christ ever said it, he found it where Mr. Keir Hardie may find it, in the eighteenth verse of the nineteenth chapter of Leviticus.

We see a sermon announced by Dr. Stopford Brooke on "The Ultimate Joy of Christmas Day." We wonder what Mr. Brooke's ultimate joy is. Different people have different A 1 joys at Christmas. To one it is turkey, to another it is plum-pudding, to another it is brandy sauce, to another it is port wine, to another it is kissing under the mistletoe, to another it is seeing dear old faces again. And the ultimate joy of Christmas Day to some is getting it over.

Rev. Rhondda Williams preaches self-denial as the very essence of the true life. But when he is confronted with "the naturalistic view of evolution" he flings his pet doctrine down the winds and develops into the most selfish Individualist imaginable. According to the Atheistic theory, he argues, the individual does not count, except as a member of the race. The Atheist "can only speak of the race, while every individual member of this glorious race falls into ignominious dust at the end of a few years. None of us will see the glorious future, though we may work for it." Working for a glorious future is not good enough for the reverend gentleman unless he is assured of being there to see it, and to share in it. If this is not selfishness, what on earth is it? Put to any real test, Christian self-denial miserably fails. It is nothing but an empty sentiment.

Furthermore, Mr. Williams deliberately misrepresents the Atheist. "He sweeps God out of existence," he avers, "and asks us to take quite frankly the naturalistic view of evolution." The Atheist does nothing of the sort. He merely asserts that the God portrayed by Mr. Williams is a purely imaginary being, and we beg to remind this modern divine that he himself makes the same assertion concerning the God manufactured by John Calvin. The Atheist does not "sweep God out of existence," but simply declares that of the existence of God there is absolutely no evidence. Mr. Williams's Deity is only a projection of himself.

Once more, why does Mr. Williams insult the dust by calling it "ignominious"? All we know is dust, organic or inorganic. Inorganic dust is always a servant of organic. Death may not be beautiful; but, surely, there is nothing disgraceful or shameful about it. When self-conscious life comes to a natural end, is not death as welcome as sleep is at the close of a hard day's work? The earth itself is dust, and is she not the mother of all living things? Mr. Williams has no right to say that when we die we fall into "ignominious dust."

We have often had occasion to point out what a hollow farce our British "free press" is. Here is a further illustration. Quite recently there was published by the British Medical Association a little volume called *Secret Remedies*. The book contained an analysis of a number of quack medicines, giving also their cost, and leaving the reader to draw his or her conclusions. In the ordinary way an advertisement was sent to the papers, and from the *British Medical Journal* for December 11 we learn that a number of papers refused to insert it. Among those who so refused were the *Express*, *Star*, *Chronicle*, *News of the World*, *Christian Herald*, and—oh, shades of the Nonconformist Conscience!—the *Daily News*. The solicitude of the last named to prevent people losing their money, and its apparent unconcern about what they swallow, may be taken as its understanding of the New Testament teaching that it is not that which goes into a man, but that which comes out, that is important. There was, of course, nothing improper about the book advertised; the explanation lies in the lavish sums spent in advertising the value of the nostrums analysed. No wonder the *Freethinker* and *Freethought* are boycotted by the press! The real wonder is that the fiction of an independent press imposes upon so many. It is the advertiser who determines the matter that shall go in a newspaper, while Mrs. Grundy and the ardent and ignorant pietist determine its manner. Proprietors, editors, and writers have to keep

an eye in either direction, and the result is—our "free press"!

All the religious papers are now offering their readers advice how to vote during the general election. The *Methodist Times* advises its readers that the duty of every Christian is "to use his political relations so as to advance the interests of the kingdom of God in the world." Well, is not that what they have always been doing? And is not that the cause of a large part of the trouble Christians have caused in the world? This was, and is, the aim of the Roman Catholic Church, at whose evil machinations Protestants are always exclaiming. Calvinists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians have also followed the same rule, and always with disastrous consequences. Every country in the world bears witness to the evil caused by following this rule. It is idle to reply that these evils were caused by Christians not acting up to the principle. This is to take the ground that the only genuine Christian is the one who is condemning all the others. The truth of the matter is that the advice is quite valueless for good, and only serves to cover bigotry and intolerance with the disguise of a liberal-sounding set of words.

*Apropos* of the religious world and the general election, we may note that not the least disquieting of recent political developments has been the prominent part played by preachers in political affairs. The last election was simply a carnival of Nonconformist cant, and in the coming one parsons are looking forward to another innings. We are far from saying that because a man is a minister of religion he should not play the part he ought to play as a citizen. But these do not interfere as citizens. They pose all the time as Christians, and as Christian ministers. Their appeal is to the "Christian Conscience"—whatever that may happen to be. Things are supported or denounced because they are Christian or unchristian, instead of on the ground of their justice or injustice. Really they are in politics as professional Christians first and as citizens afterwards. And this means bringing into the political arena feelings and considerations that had much better be left outside. Politics is none too savory a game at the best; but when it is mixed up with religion it encourages the really better type of mind to keep it at a distance.

Mr. Lloyd George, who, as Chancellor of the Exchequer and author of the Budget, should keep religion as far as possible out of his politics, appears to laugh at the very idea of doing anything of the kind. Yet he would probably be one of the first to cry out against an Atheist member of a Liberal Government, especially in such a prominent position, who talked Atheism for all he was worth at a political meeting. That, however, although in the opposite direction, is precisely what Mr. Lloyd George did at the Queen's Hall meeting on December 16. He went as a Nonconformist to a meeting of Nonconformists, organised by Nonconformists, as part of the political agitation against the House of Lords. And of course he laid himself out to flatter his audience. "Supposing," he said, "five million people had to be expatriated from this country, no real statesman would begin with the Nonconformists." Could anything be sillier? Are we to conclude that the expatriated five millions should be Churchmen? And if the passage doesn't mean that, what on earth (or what in Wales) does it mean?

Replying to Lord Curzon, Mr. Lloyd George dealt with his lordship's quotation from Renan to the effect that the greatest strides in civilisation have been made by aristocracies. Now we beg to tell the Conservative peer and his Liberal opponent that they both abuse the name of Renan in this quarrel. The great Frenchman really said, and meant, that all civilisation has been the work of mental and moral aristocracies—not hereditary Houses of Lords; and this position of his is, of course, absolutely unassailable. Mr. Lloyd George, being what he is, and addressing such an audience, had to talk on this point like a pious, half educated Sunday-school teacher. "We humbly believe," he said, "that the carpenter's son of Nazareth had more to do with it; and that the Galilean fishermen far more to do with what is best and highest in our Society." The bit of preaching was enthusiastically cheered. Naturally! But what the Hades has it to do with the Budget or the House of Lords. One would think that Nonconformists were the only Christians in England, and that all the Catholics and Churchmen belonged to some other religion. This is just as courteous as the reference to Jesus and his first apostles is true. Modern civilisation is not due to those ancient personages. It is due to the conquest of modern science. But for those conquests the dear Christians would still be murdering each other in the name of Christ.

Rev. C. W. Abel finds, in his travels up and down the country, that missionary zeal is not nearly so intense as it was years ago. This is good news, and proves that if people learn slowly, they do learn. Every exposure of the foreign missionary movement opens someone's eyes. And even though all missionaries were good men, all converts worth having, and all mission work good work, the folly of spending millions abroad when it is not wanted, while we have so much greater need for it at home, is a consideration that must appeal to a growing number of people. Mr. Abel complains of the "indignity" he suffered, when on deputa-tion work, of being "sandwiched between the items of a secular entertainment." Mr. Abel evidently likes the whole of the stage to himself. Yet we imagine that had the opinion of the audience been taken it would sooner have dispensed with the missionary than any of the other items.

Dr. R. F. Horton says that Christianity, as it "emerges from the crucible of modern thought and experience, seems to be not only the best we know, but the best that can be known." Well, it is Dr. Horton's business to say this kind of thing, and so one is not surprised when he says it. For our own part, we are of opinion that the Christianity that really finds its way out of the crucible of modern thought and experience isn't worth troubling about. And when a man dogmatizes about a thing being the best that can be known he writes himself down charlatan right away—that is, to intelligent people. But perhaps Dr. Horton has a different audience in mind.

A "new" religious sect has appeared in Holy Russia, which, with Spain, shares the reputation of being the two most Christian countries in the world. The chief tenet of this sect is, that the end of the world is at hand; but instead of running this delusion—started by Jesus Christ—on a business footing, like Prophet Baxter, these people believe that the way to secure salvation is by suicide. The police had their attention first called to this sect by finding a number of bodies hanging in the forests, and then discovered that the corpses were the products of a new Christian sect—the "Self-Destroyers." The number of suicides is said to have been very large, and in one region they have almost exterminated themselves.

This idea of immolation is by no means foreign to Christian history, and is not "new" even in Russia. Over thirty years ago a sect with an exactly similar teaching sprang into publicity. In this case men, women, and children were gathered together. The adults killed the children, the men next killed the women, and then almost emulated the famous Kilkenny cats by killing each other. In another instance they "died for Christ," by building huge bonfires and casting themselves therein. In each instance there were the usual visions seen by the leaders, the usual "outpouring of the spirit" on the people, and then followed the self-immolation. In addition to sects of this character Russia may boast of others of an orgiastic character, some of which are described—mildly—by Mr. Head in his *Russian Church and Russian Dissent*, and all of which bear evidence of the unhealthy elements always present in Christian belief. In most countries these elements express themselves in a comparatively harmless manner. But if ever the history of Christianity is written by a qualified and really scientific historian, it will provide some curious reading for the student of a few centuries hence.

"M. C. L.," of the *Staffordshire Herald*, says that John Knox was "the friend and associate of assassins," that he "preached murder and persecution," that "with one foot in the grave he shrieked for the blood of his lawful sovereign," and that he was "a witch burner." These charges may be true enough; but "M. C. L." should remember that those who live in glass houses cannot afford to throw stones, and that nothing is sillier than for the pot to call the kettle black. Catholics and Protestants have been equally proficient in the black art of persecution whenever a chance offered.

Mr. Campbell is quite mistaken when he asserts that the cause of unbelief in immortality is sorrow or disappointment. There may be some people who are so utterly dissatisfied with the present life as to wish for no other; but the overwhelming majority of Freethinkers disbelieve in a future life because they regard death as the natural termination of the life of the individual. Even though they enjoyed perfect happiness during their careers on earth, they would still be as convinced as ever that the hope of immortality is founded on an empty dream.

Mr. Campbell opened his special department of the last number of the *New Theology* weekly with a long prayer to

the Almighty, which was obviously intended for the readers. "Give us insight," he asks—and he evidently wants it. In the next column he trots out that false and foolish old story of the Emperor Julian (Julian the Apostate, they used to call him) crying out "O Galilean, thou hast conquered." The story is a Christian invention. We hope Mr. Campbell will obtain enough "insight" to recognise that it is so.

"It was a time of peace," Mr. Campbell says of the birth of Christ. Quite so; a peace over the whole civilised world, secured by the sway of Pagan Rome. How little peace there has been in the world since Christianity triumphed in the fourth century! And why? Mr. Campbell might try to answer the question. We will answer it for him if he desires.

We are going to revise and publish in a separate form, early in the new year, the long and careful defence of Thomas Paine's character which we wrote between five and six years ago against the libels of the Rev. Dr. Torrey. It will be remembered that Mr. W. T. Stead induced Dr. Torrey, in an evil moment for himself, to put his indictment of Thomas Paine in black and white. We were therefore able to deal with it step by step in the *Freethinker*, and we did the work so thoroughly that we believe the vindication of the great "Infidel" was accomplished once for all. One point is worth referring to just now, in view of some striking references to the drinking habits of quite recent generations. Torrey followed all Paine's libellers in charging him with drunkenness. Now we showed that Paine, instead of being a drunkard, was most abstemious considering the age in which he lived, when eminent statesmen, and even eminent divines, thought nothing of drinking two or three bottles of strong port wine at a sitting, and frequently went (or were carried) to bed in a state of oblivion. During Paine's last few years, when he was ill and feeble, and suffering acute pain, his liquor bill from the store was for one quart of rum per week. That was for the household, and probably for visitors also, as well as for Paine's own consumption. It must be recollected, too, that the daily use of a stimulant was ordered by his medical adviser as necessary in his bodily condition. Now if we assume that Paine drank half the weekly quart of rum himself, it would amount to two-sevenths (less than one-third) of half a pint per day. If he drank the whole quart himself, it would amount to four-sevenths (rather more than half) of half a pint per day. Tens of thousands of respectable Christians, even in the present more sober age, drink a good deal more than that, merely for their personal enjoyment, without anybody ever wagging a tongue against them. Thus the "drunkenness" of Thomas Paine is seen to be a very absurd calumny. But it is ten times more absurd if we judge it by the standard of Paine's own times.

The *Daily News* referred the other day to Lord Raglan's recent admission that he had drunk "bucketsful of beer" before he was seventeen; and it observed, in this connection, that even juvenile drunkenness was rampant in Christian England in the early part of last century—when, by the way, dozens of men and women were imprisoned for publishing and selling Paine's *Age of Reason*. "Even as late as 1844," our contemporary says, "Mrs. Wightmann—the wife of a well-known Shrewsbury clergyman, and herself a zealous temperance worker—wrote that she saw some boys and girls, who had but a few hours previously been confirmed, reeling drunk in the streets. The craze for excessive drinking," our contemporary adds, "affected all classes of society." Thackeray himself confessed to having drunk "enough to float a 74-gunship." A bottle of wine was his daily minimum; on three out of every four days he took a second bottle. "I may be called a two-bottle man," he told Cordy Jeafferson; "and that takes no account of the two or three glasses of wine at midday, nor of the punches and grogs in the hours about midnight." In comparison with this Paine's daily allowance of rum (in old age and sickness) is not worth considering.

Mr. G. W. E. Russell tells a story that was told to him by Gladstone. Gladstone was dining at a house where the principal guest was a Bishop. Thinking the decanters had gone round enough, the host gave the hint by saying, "Shall we have any more wine, my lord?" "Thank you," the Bishop answered, "—not till we have disposed of what is before us." The right reverend father in God would have smiled at Thomas Paine's half noggin of rum.

How the "classes" observe the Lord's Day, which they are so fond of making the "masses" keep holy! Look at the following report which appeared in the *Daily Mail* of Monday, December 13: "There was a very full attendance of members of the Sunday Skating Club and their friends at

Olympia yesterday afternoon. The Duchess of Teck and Lady Beatrice Pole-Carew arrived on the scene shortly after three," etc., etc. What is the Lord's Day Observance Society doing?

The Catholic Church in Spain murdered Francisco Ferrer, and Catholic priests and publicists all over the world have been busy ever since in defaming his character. That is to say, they approve his assassination. By this time, however, the civilised world has made up its mind that Francisco Ferrer was an enlightened man, devoted to the cause of rational education; and that he was done to death by the enemies of rational education,—in other words, by the Spanish clericals. The civilised world has always made up its mind that, in spite of all calumnies, Francisco Ferrer was a noble man who met a cruel death like a hero. And the civilised world is aware of the fact that he was an Atheist.

A distinguished Catholic has just died a natural death. We refer to King Leopold of Belgium. He died in the bosom of Holy Mother Church, and the "rites of consolation" were administered to him by a Catholic priest to make his way easy to the first division in Kingdom-Come. Well now, man for man, how does the distinguished Catholic compare with the distinguished Atheist? Ferrer was a simple, kind, and generous nature; he had no enemies except the enemies of his principles. He had never done harm to a single human being. He never made a single penny except by the most honorable means. Leopold, on the other hand, was a profligate whose amours disgusted even the least particular royal families in Europe. He was at variance with his own children, after ill-treating and shortening the days of his wife. He was the unspeakable criminal of the Congo, where he acquired wealth by means of the most hellish cruelties practised upon the natives; cruelties more systematic and prolonged and thoroughly devilish than almost any others recorded in the history of the world. This wretch was a Catholic. The hero shot by Catholics in the moat of Montjuich was an Atheist. And in the name of morality what does Catholicism gain, or Atheism lose, by the comparison?

Every little spot, real or imaginary, on the character of a great Freethinker—a Voltaire, a Paine, for instance—is magnified and blackened by the champions of Christianity. On the other hand, they hide or whitewash every vice or fault in the character of their own heroes. Look at what Father Vaughan—the gentleman who is always lecturing England on its sins—says of the late King Leopold. The Catholic priest wishes to "draw a veil over the private life" of the Catholic King. The great thing is that "he died publicly professing his belief in the Catholic Church." That beats charity itself for covering a multitude of sins. Please the priests and you will have very little trouble with God.

It is unlikely that the mayor and ex-mayor of Basingstoke are Freethinkers. It is pretty safe to assume that they are Christians. They act as such. They had before them, the other day, an old man named Samuel Scothern. He never ought to have been placed there, for he was eighty-one years of age. He had been arrested by a vigilant police-constable named Morgan, who saw him asking for alms and receiving money from several people; indeed, he was on the way to becoming a millionaire, no less than eightpence three farthings being found upon him when he was searched. The old man's offence was rank; it smelt to heaven. Ex-mayor Cannon sternly asked him when he did any work last, and he was not able to plead guilty to having done any of late years. That was enough. Fancy a man of that mature age shirking work and asking help of his fellow creatures! He was sent to prison for fourteen days to reflect on the enormity of his behavior; the bench adding a few facetious remarks on how much better off he would be in gaol. And the witnesses were sworn on the New Testament, in which God himself—yes, God—plainly says, "Give to everyone that asketh." And two Christian magistrates at Basingstoke add: "Give fourteen days to everyone that receiveth."

Marie Corelli is against woman suffrage and women politicians, but she likes to have her own little talk to the electors all the same. She has addressed them through the press, and told them pretty plainly how they ought to vote. She bids them be true to God, King, and Country—and we all know what that means.

We have often thought that Marie Corelli ought to have married Hall Caine—to see what would come of it. We begin to think now that she ought to have married Joseph Chamberlain.



### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

January 9, St. James's Hall; 11, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner; 16, St. James's Hall; 23, St. James's Hall; 30, Stratford Town Hall.

February 6, Manchester; 13, St. James's Hall; 20, St. James's Hall; 27, Birmingham Town Hall.

### To Correspondents.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 2, Holloway; 9, Holloway; 23, Stratford Town Hall; 30, Birmingham.

E. LEWIS.—See paragraph. Thanks.

D. WHITBY.—Always glad to receive useful cuttings.

RICHARD HUGHES.—Quite a comedy. You should tell them positively that you are no longer a member and do not mean to be considered one. Send them a letter to that effect, and keep a copy.

G. CROOKSON.—Your letter shows that the late William Wood's "encounter" with Bradlaugh was just what we suspected—a few minutes' talk after one of his lectures.

J. PENTO.—Nothing special in it. All the Churches play that game.

W. F. CORFIELD.—The book of Ecclesiastes is the one we referred to as the work of a Freethinker. Scholars agree that the orthodox ending was added by a later (probably a priestly) hand. We quite agree with you that the Bible is very little read. That's why it is believed.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

J. TOMKINS.—Much obliged. We keep the papers by us for use at the psychological moment.

F. O. RITZ.—Thanks for appreciation, good wishes, etc.

THOMAS WRIGHT (New York).—Your previous letter has not come to our notice. What was your question? Missing numbers forwarded.

THOMAS MARSHALL.—Thanks for your handsome new year's good wishes. Mr. Cohen's and Mr. Lloyd's articles deserve all the praise you give them. We note what you say of our own.

J. V. BARLOW.—Mr. Moulton will be pleased to learn that one reader, at any rate, regards his verse to "My Christian Mother" as "tender yet manly," and, knowing something of "the chill upon old friendships," feels "better for the perusal and re-perusal of those lines." The idea that Freethinkers have "less feeling" than religionists is perhaps the most comical of orthodox misconceptions.

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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.

### Sugar Plums.

Next week's *Freethinker* will be the new year's number, as it will be dated January 2. It will contain special articles by the editor and other writers; in brief, it will be an extra good number, if we can make it so; and we shall print a larger edition than usual in the hope that many readers will take an extra copy (or more) to give away to friends and acquaintances—by which means they will help along our circulation.

We invite the London Freethinkers to assist in giving publicity to the renewed St. James's Hall experiment in the new year. This handsome new hall has been engaged again by the Secular Society, Ltd., from Sunday, January 9, to Sunday, March 27, inclusive. There will be a charge for seats in the front of the body of the hall, and in the balcony, as before; but there will be free seats also, as before, at the

back of the body of the hall. There ought to be no great difficulty in fairly filling the place each evening. The main thing, of course, is to get the meetings well advertised. A liberal expenditure will be devoted to this object, but a great deal can be done by the "saints" themselves—and we beg them to do it. If they can do nothing else they can mention the lectures to their friends and acquaintances, and to others whom they meet in the ordinary intercourse of life. They might also circulate the neat waistcoat-pocket printed announcements, which the secretary (Miss E. M. Vance, 2 Newcastle-street, E.C.) will be happy to supply. Some might even be able to display a window bill. We are confident that if everyone did what he could in this way the new course of Sunday evening lectures at St. James's Hall would be a splendid success.

A special course of Freethought lectures, under the auspices of the Secular Society, Ltd., will be delivered at the Stratford Town Hall on Sunday evenings, January 16, 23, and 30. There is certain to be a good attendance, but we hope the local friends will bestir themselves to crowd every part of the auditorium. This should be easy with free admission to all seats. The lecturers will be Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, and Foote.

East London Freethinkers will please note that the Secular Society, Ltd., has engaged the Shoreditch Town Hall for another course of Sunday evening Freethought lectures in April.

London Freethinkers, and some provincial ones who may be coming to town about that time, will note that the Annual Dinner takes place on Tuesday evening, January 11, at the Holborn Restaurant. It happens to be the President's birthday, and a good number of "saints" will doubtless take the opportunity to wish him "many happy returns." The dinner is sure to be a good one, there will be some good music after it, and perhaps a few good speeches; and the tickets are only 4s. each, the price covering the entertainment as well as the repast. We hope to see a record attendance.

Miss Vance has had inquiries whether evening dress should be worn at the Annual Dinner. We beg to state that evening dress is quite optional. Anyone without it will be countenanced by the Chairman. Nobody would be welcome in a butcher's, an engineer's, or a chimney-sweep's costume. What the French call the dress of a citizen is expected; but, apart from that condition, all the rest is perfect freedom. So much for the gentlemen. As for the ladies, they will dress as they please. We are not going to give them any advice on the subject. We have often laughed at Paul's efforts in that line. We have some sense of humor. He had none.

We are glad to see that Mr. Mangasarian is causing trouble in Chicago. We mean trouble to the bigots. A poster of his lecture on "Joan of Arc and Zola" referred to the famous "maid" as having been "burned by the infallible Church as a witch at the age of nineteen, and then translated into a saint by the same infallible Church." This gave great offence to the good Catholics, who object to any religious opinions but their own being ventilated in such a public manner. Complaints from the faithful poured in on the National Advertising Company, and the Railway Company on whose lines the poster was exhibited. The result is that the Independent Religious Society has been invited either to have the objectionable lines covered with white paper or to cancel the advertising contracts. We congratulate Mr. Mangasarian on making the bigots sit up. The more they worry him the more (we know) he must be worrying them.

### TO THE CLERICALS.

There is not a poet, a writer, a philosopher, a thinker that you accept. All that has been written, discovered, dreamt, deduced, illuminated, imagined, invented by genius—the treasures of civilisation, the secular heritage of the generations, the common patrimony of human intelligences—you reject this!

And you claim the liberty to teach. Hold, let us be sincere, let us understand what is the liberty that you claim: it is the liberty *not* to teach.

Ah, you wish us to give you the people to instruct! Very well. Let us see your pupils. Let us see your productions. What have you made of Italy? What have you made of Spain?—*Victor Hugo*

## Bible Stories Retold.

### THE STORY OF SAMSON (JUDGES 14, 15, 16).

SAMSON'S entrance upon the stage of life was heralded by events as marvellous and romantic as those connected with his exit were dramatic and tragic. On the paternal side Samson was descended from an exalted and heavenly aristocracy; as the gentleman who was responsible for his appearance in the flesh was none other than an angel of the Lord.

In the early days of the human race these "angels" were frequent visitors to the new planet which had been specially prepared for man's habitation. The world had not long begun its course before "the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair," with the result that the "messenger" department "up yonder" was for awhile completely disorganised. In that far off abode from which they came there was neither marrying nor giving in marriage, and the daughters of Eve afforded a new sensation. The author of *Round the World for a Wife* probably thought he had exhausted the limits of imagination in connection with such a quest; but when we think of these celestial beings leaving a happy land far, far away, and traversing the vast expanses of space; winging their downward flight past fixed and movable stars millions of miles apart; dodging comets in their reckless and wayward career; running the risk of being knocked into the middle of the following week by a stray meteorite, and experiencing all kinds of atmospheric disturbances in order that at the end of their perilous journey they might gaze upon the swarthy features of a Rebekah or a Rachel—beside such an undertaking the mere saunter in search of a partner round our little globe pales into insignificance in comparison. After this long aerial journey these heavenly visitants used to rest their tired and weary wings, and were generally to be found sitting under a tree (see Judges 6, 11, and other passages). Like the daughters of Lot these angels were fearfully anxious lest the inhabitants of the earth should fail, and wherever a couple were unhappy because they had no child, or a mistress was distressed because a "handmaiden" had been more favored than she, there would the angel of the Lord appear and remedy the defects of Nature. The question of age, or times and seasons (after the manner of women is), made no difference in this respect. On one occasion they visited an old woman named Sarah who had passed her ninetieth birthday, and in due course she became a happy mother—for with angels all things are possible. Naturally, the old man Abraham, her husband, who was ninety-nine years of age, was "over the moon" to think that he had gotten him a son in his old age. And many a woman besides Sarah, who had been unable to successfully compete with a Hagar, had reason to be grateful to these heavenly visitors. One visit from an angel of the Lord was usually sufficient to cure the most obstinate cases.

Manoah, Samson's "earthly" father, had entered the bonds of wedlock in high hopes of one day experiencing the blessedness of the man who hath his quiver full of them; and his wife longingly shared his hopes. But the little Samson long delayed his coming. And as year after year passed away, and the quietness of the little household was still undisturbed by the sound of infant revelry by night, the childless couple began to despair. It was evidently a case for divine intervention. And one day an angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife, and informed her she should bear a son. It was not to be expected, of course, that angels of the Lord would pay much regard to mere human conventionalities, and wait until the husband was at home. Old Manoah was following his daily employment in the fields, all unconscious of the important events that were transpiring at his home. The angel seems to have been as well versed in female ailments as a quack advertisement, and discussed the subject of

her unproductiveness with Manoah's wife in terms of quite unconventional familiarity.

While it was as true then as it is now that coming events cast their shadows before, the woman thought it best not to wait for any internal or external evidences of the fulfilment of the angel's prophecy before acquainting her husband of their meeting. She went straight to the field where her husband was working, and said: "A man of God came unto me, and I asked him not whence he was, nor what was his name. And he said 'Behold, thou shalt have a son.'" Old Manoah at first had some secret misgivings; but when he remembered that his ancestor, Isaac, had also been a child of like promise, his soul was more composed. Still, that night before they went to bed, and even after they had retired, Manoah questioned his wife very closely as to what had transpired between her and "the man of God."

The child was to be a Nazarite from his birth, and was to begin to save Israel out of the hands of the Philistines, to whom they were then under bondage. Those readers who are curious to know what were the distinguishing characteristics of a "Nazarite" will find full particulars in Numb., 6, 2. But we may remark that it had nothing in common with a Hittite or a Hivite, a Perrizzite or a Jebusite, a Canaanite or an Amorite. These names had a geographical significance, whereas a Nazarite was a man forbidden to enter a barber's shop, or listen to any of the inconsequential small talk with which these worthies bore their patrons. He was also strictly forbidden to make water into wine, or follow the example of old Noah.

At the appointed time the child saw the light of day—or rather the candle-light, as the important event happened in the wee sma' 'oors. And they called his name Samson. Some of the neighbors averred that he was very like his father, but the mother, she said, Nay. Of Samson's early years we know nothing. No little glimpses of him at twelve years of age discussing metaphysical questions with learned doctors of the law; no anticipatory pictures of the shadow of the cross falling upon the shavings strewn around the carpenter's bench illumine the darkness of his early history. But we may be sure that his parents kept his divinely-appointed mission constantly in view, and trained the young shoot accordingly. He would probably drink in with his mother's milk (if he was not brought up on the bottle) the Israelite's racial hatred of the uncircumcised Philistine. As a little piccaninny he would learn the war-whoop of his people, and play at mimic warfare with his boyish companions. In thought he would slay the boasting Goliaths, and scatter the Philistine army like chaff before the wind. He would read of the military exploits of Moses and of Joshua, and be filled with patriotic zeal.

And so at the appointed time the spirit of the Lord began to move in him—the blue blood of his ancestry began to assert itself. Samson was a man who was born to rule; and in pursuance of his high destiny he went down from Zorah to Timnah, a city of the Philistines. The anointed of the Lord, doubtless, set out from his father's house full of holy enthusiasm, vowing vengeance on the oppressors of his people. He would picture in his prophetic eye the restoration of the kingdom, and a subsequent period of national prosperity and social happiness. He would feel a proper pride in the part he himself was going to play in freeing his country from the yoke of a foreign foe. The manner in which this was to be accomplished had not been revealed to him—like Joan of Arc he only heard the "voice," and felt conscious of the mystic, moving influence of the spirit of the Lord. That "voice" impelled him onwards, and passers-by noted the resolute purpose in his eye and in his bearing. The road from Zorah to Timnah was paved with good intentions; every successive footstep had intensified Samon's desire to fulfil the purpose of his life, but—"there was a

woman in Timnah." Alas! and lack-a-day! that the divine purpose should be frustrated, that the fate of a nation should depend—on the eyebrows of a woman! Indeed, she was but a strip of a girl. One little dart from Cupid's bow and the great and mighty Samson was undone! his holy enthusiasm and patriotic zeal giving place to a new passion.

He retraced his steps, and in a short while was back at Zorah. And when he was yet a great way off his father saw him, and marvelled that the Philistines had been dispatched so quickly. When they met, their feelings were too deep for words, and in silence they approached the house. Opening the door of the room where the mother was sitting, with pride in his heart the father exclaimed, "See the conquering hero comes." He naturally thought that the Philistines had been wiped off the map, that the place that once knew them now knew them no more. Judge, therefore, of Manoah's surprise when Samson rushed past him, and embracing his mother said, in tones of entreaty, "Mother, I have seen a woman in Timnah, a daughter of the Philistines; now, therefore, get her for me to wife." You might have knocked the old man down with a feather. In vain did his parents plead that among the daughters of their own people there were many maidens who were superior in form and feature, face and limb, to those of the alien and uncircumcised Philistines. To all their arguments and pleadings Samson had one emphatic answer: "Get her for me, for she pleaseth me well." And as he repeatedly assured them that he wouldn't be happy till he got her, his parents were reluctantly compelled to "get her" for him.

And so Samson and his father and mother went down to Timnah to make arrangements for the nuptials; for so used the young men to do in those days. But the road from Zorah to Timnah was like the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, it was full of surprises. A young lion appeared in the path and roared with all the might of which his juvenile lungs were capable. Other pedestrians would either have died on the spot with fright or taken to the nearest tree. But not so Samson. He wasn't going to let a lion stand between him and his little Philistina. A faint heart never won a fair lady; and so, fixing his eye on the fiery orb of the savage beast, the while he put himself into fighting attitude, he hummed the words of a ditty that was just then popular at the halls:—

"I can fight with a lion that comes face to face,  
But I can't stand a cur at my heels."

And taking one leap he seized the lion by the upper and lower jaw and "rent him in twain as if he had been a kid." No one was more surprised than the lion. After lifting the dead carcass out of the path, and placing it out of view of passers-by, he went down and talked with his intended. They sauntered round the cornfields. And she teased about the Hebrew maidens that he had left disconsolate in his native land. But Samson he said, Nay; the only Hebrew woman for whom he had any affection was his mother.

And here, for the present, we leave him with his Philistine sweetheart; to return, at the appointed time, to observe the solemnities of the wedding feast.

JOSEPH BRYCE.

#### TWO SUNDAYS A WEEK.

Many people have an idea that I am opposed to Sunday. I am perfectly willing to have two a week. All I insist on is that these days shall be for the benefit of the people, and that they shall be kept not in a way to make folk miserable or sad or hungry, but in a way to make people happy, and to add a little to the joy of life. Of course I am in favor of everybody keeping holidays to suit himself, provided he does not interfere with others, and I am perfectly willing that everybody should go to church on that day, provided he is willing that I should go somewhere else.—*Ingersoll.*

## The Narratives in Genesis.—XXI.

### THE TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

(Continued from p. 741.)

IN Genesis xxii. the third sacred writer, the Elohist, gives us an account of what has been called "the trial of Abraham's faith." He says that—

"Elohim did try Abraham, and said unto him..... Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

In obedience to this command Abraham rose early next morning, and taking his son and two servants journeyed to the place indicated. Here, after building an altar, he bound his son and placed him upon it; then taking a knife he was about to slay him, when "the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven," and stayed his hand, saying "Now I know that thou fearest Elohim, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me." From the last word it would seem that it was the god himself who was speaking, and that the words "the angel of" are a later addition. It is also quite clear that Elohim, when he gave the command to Abraham to sacrifice his son, was not without doubts as to whether that patriarch would really do so. These doubts were now set at rest, and Abraham, for his willingness to slay his son in cold blood—he could not know that his hand would be stayed—has been called "the father of the faithful."

Bible commentators say that "the Lord" foreknew the result of this "trial" of Abraham's faith; but this is sheer nonsense. It would be perfectly senseless, or the silliest child's play, on the part of the god to subject Abraham to such a test if he was certain beforehand that that patriarch would not hesitate to carry out the command given. It is evident, too, from the story that the "heaven" whence the voice issued could not be so very far away, and also that had the command to stay his hand been two or three seconds later Abraham would have been a murderer.

To this Elohist narrative another writer—either the Yahvist or the compiler—has added four verses (Gen. xxii. 15-18), in which the god Yahveh or his angel is stated to have "called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time" in order to make him a promise which had already been made to that patriarch in the Yahvist's narratives twice before (Gen. xii. 9; xviii. 18). Setting aside this interpolation, it may be noticed that no surprise was exhibited by Abraham at the command to sacrifice his son. He proceeded to make the offering at once without further orders, and he knew apparently exactly what to do without receiving instructions. Neither does the writer assign any reason for this particular method of testing that patriarch's faith. As a matter of fact, it was unnecessary for him to do so; for human sacrifice—more especially the sacrifice of the first-born—had from the earliest times been a religious rite amongst the ancient peoples of Canaan; that is to say, amongst the Israelites as well as the other tribes inhabiting Palestine. This practice, moreover, was carried on in the writer's days, and was continued right up to the Exile.

Bible commentators tell us that the sacrifice of the first-born was only made to Baal and Molech: most certainly not to the god of the Hebrews. This is incorrect; the same offerings were made to all the gods of Canaan—to Yahveh, as well as to the others. The offering which Abraham was called upon to make was not, however, the inhuman practice of burning the child alive, called in the Old Testament "passing through the fire"—which rite was performed on the eighth day after birth—but was an ordinary sacrifice, the victim being slain before offered to the deity. It was of the same character as an offering devoted to the god by a vow, as in the notable case of Jephthah (Judg. xi. 30-31). The last-named patriarch, we are told, vowed that if

Yahveh would make him victorious over the Ammonites, he would offer in sacrifice to that deity the first living thing that came out of the doors of his house. Upon his return, after gaining a great victory, he was met by his only daughter, who came out "with timbrels and with dances" to welcome him, and, notwithstanding his parental love, he "did with her according to his vow." He is reported to have said upon seeing her, "Alas, my daughter.....I have opened my mouth unto Yahveh, and I cannot go back." This was true; having made the vow in the hearing of his followers, it was registered in heaven, and there was no "going back." The following command relating to vows was known and practised in Canaan from the earliest times:—

Lev. xxvii. 28-29.—"No devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the Lord of all that he hath, *whether of man or beast, or of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be ransomed, he [she, or it] shall surely be put to death.*"

There can be no doubt, then, that Jephthah *did* offer his daughter as a burnt offering to Yahveh, and that that god allowed him to do so. In the case of Abraham, "the Lord" was bound to stop the sacrifice; for he had promised the latter patriarch that his "seed" should be as numerous as the stars, and also that "in Isaac shall thy seed be called." It would be less trouble to stay Abraham's hand than to recall Isaac to life after his body had been reduced to a cinder.

The story of the trial of Abraham's faith was probably derived from some old Canaanitish legend, in which the sacrifice was actually made. In an article on "The Gods of Canaan," Professor Sayce, speaking of similar legends, says: "Yet another myth told of the sacrifice offered by El when danger threatened his land.....El invested his son Yeud, 'the only-begotten,' with the adornments of royalty, and sacrificed him to the deities whose wrath had been aroused." That sacrifices of this character were offered in Canaan is proved by the account of the war recorded in 2 Kings iii. In this chapter, which is to a large extent historical, we are told that "Mesha, king of Moab," having "rebelled against Israel," three kings—Jehoram, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, and the king of Edom—marched against him to chastise him and bring him again into subjection. Coming to the land of Moab, the allied kings "smote the Moabites, so that they fled before them: and they went forward into the land smiting the Moabites." All seemed lost to the unfortunate men of Moab unless they received divine assistance: this their king invoked.

"And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him.....he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there was great wrath upon Israel; and they departed from him, and returned to their own land."

After this sacrifice the superstitious Israelites and their allies fled terror-stricken, followed by the equally superstitious, but now heartened, Moabites, who slaughtered all they could overtake. This slaughter was the "wrath" that came upon Israel. To commemorate this deliverance and several other victories Mesha set up a pillar—the "Moabite Stone"—upon which he recorded many of the chief events of his reign. He says, for instance:—

"I have erected this pillar to Chemosh, in Korkha: a pillar of deliverance, for he delivered me from all the kings, and let me see my desire upon all my enemies. Omri, the king of Israel, oppressed Moab many days, for Chemosh was wrath with his land. And his son that followed him said, 'I will oppress Moab.' In my days he said thus; but I saw my desire upon him and his house.....And the king of Israel built Ataroth; and I fought against the city and took it. And I slew all the people of the city for the well-pleasing of Chemosh and Moab," etc.

There is, of course, no mention on the "Stone" of the sacrifice made to propitiate the god Chemosh, and through which it was believed victory had been

obtained. Chemosh was the national deity of the Moabites, just as Yahveh was of the Hebrews: each of these gods was believed by his worshipers to be greater than any other. When the Israelites "did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" that god delivered them into the hands of their enemies; when the Moabites suffered defeat in battle, it was because Chemosh was angry with them for something they had done—or left undone. Both nations employed the same barbarous methods in warfare; both spoke the same language; both had the same religious ideas.

ABRACADABRA.

## What I Want for Christmas.

BY COLONEL R. G. INGERSOLL.

IF I had the power to produce exactly what I want for next Christmas, I would have all the kings and emperors resign and allow the people to govern themselves.

I would have all the nobility drop their titles and give their lands back to the people. I would have the Pope throw away his tiara, take off his sacred vestments, and admit that he is not acting for God—is not infallible—but is just an ordinary Italian. I would have all the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, and clergymen admit that they know nothing about theology, nothing about hell or heaven, nothing about the destiny of the human race, nothing about devils or ghosts, gods or angels. I would have them tell all their "flocks" to think for themselves, to be manly men and womanly women, and to do all in their power to increase the sum of human happiness.

I would have all the professors in colleges, all the teachers in schools of every kind, including those in Sunday-schools, agree that they would teach only what they know, that they would not palm off guesses as demonstrated truths.

I would like to see all the politicians changed to statesmen—to men who long to make their country great and free—to men who care more for public good than private gain—men who long to be of use.

I would like to see all the editors of papers and magazines agree to print the truth and nothing but the truth, to avoid all slander and misrepresentation, and to let the private affairs of the people alone.

I would like to see drunkenness and prohibition both abolished.

I would like to see corporal punishment done away with in every home, in every school, in every asylum, reformatory, and prison. Cruelty hardens and degrades, kindness reforms and ennobles.

I would like to see the millionaires unite and form a trust for the public good.

I would like to see a fair division of profits between capital and labor, so that the toiler could save enough to mingle a little June with the December of his life.

I would like to see an international court established in which to settle disputes between nations, so that armies could be disbanded and the great navies allowed to rust and rot in perfect peace.

I would like to see the whole world free—free from injustice—free from superstition.

This will do for next Christmas. The following Christmas, I may want more.

## NOT THE SAME JOSHUA.

"We had a country judge down my way, a few years ago, whose love for Biblical lore was so pronounced that he couldn't resist the desire to air it on every possible occasion," said Congressman Henry D. Clayton, of Alabama, a few days since. "One day an old darkey was brought in from the mountain district under suspicion of maintaining an illicit still.

'What's your name, prisoner?' asked the judge.

'Mah name's Joshua, jedge,' was the reply.

'Joshua, eh?' said the judge, as he rubbed his hands.

'Are you that same Joshua spoken of in Holy Writ—the Joshua who made the sun stand still?'

'No, jedge,' was the hasty answer, 'twarn't mo. Ah'm de Joshua dat made de moon shine.'"

### Let It Go.

Oh, let the old religion go,  
We'll all be better without it ;  
So weep your tears and then be done,  
And worry no more about it.

The old thing to the past belongs,  
When men were simple and fearful ;  
Its atom of good has gone long ago,  
Now, man shall be manly and cheerful.

From age to age it has held men back,  
Burdening the centuries with trouble :  
Warriors, priests, and kings have fought  
And died for the empty bubble.

Name all the darkest crimes and wars  
Of history blood-red ;  
Mark how religion fires the feud  
And smites both living and dead.

To-day it hardens men as of old,  
Destroys their brotherhood ;  
The future it will darken and curse,  
Unless boldly withstood.

They tell us without it the world will be sad,  
Its poets and painters rare,  
The prophets, reformers, no longer inspired,  
The people doomed to despair.

May be we know, with religion supreme,  
With Atheists few and faint-hearted,  
The world to-day is a poet's delight,  
And its troubles long departed.

Oh, sweet religion has driven away  
Poverty, tyranny, sorrow,  
For nineteen hundred perfect years  
No man has cursed the morrow !

So stop your prating, Atheist knaves ;  
Behold how the Church is blessing  
The people, the rulers, with wisdom and  
How love is the world possessing. [grace—

We Christians love one another so,  
Our quarrels are light as a feather ;  
Such brothers never were seen before,  
We agree so divinely together.

Still, let the old religion go,  
We'll somehow do without it ;  
So dry your tears, its day is done,  
And worry no more about it.

JULIAN ST. ORRY.

### THE TWINS.

Know ye the fate of that unhappy Twin  
Who, to his brother bound by fleshy tie  
Unseverable, woke one day to find  
That brother dead, and felt himself alive ?  
And how, in frightful company with Death,  
He died of an utterable fear ?

There be two other twins of ancient race,  
Body and Mind, bound by like fatal tie ;  
Ordned to walk through life with equal step,  
And under pain most horrible condemned  
To leave the world together, even as  
They entered it. Woe to the longer-lived !  
Woe to the Body when the Mind has fled,  
Poor helpless clod, that knows not where to turn !  
But worse the fate of the imperious Mind,  
Born to create, to soar, and to command,  
That wakes one day and finds its brother dead,  
And calls upon him vainly to arise ;  
Bound to a corpse, it feels the thrill of life.

—Eugene Lee-Hamilton.

### Obituary.

Much sympathy is felt by the local friends with Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Chapman, of South Shields, in the loss they have sustained by the death of their bright little six-year-old daughter, Edith, which took place on Sunday, December 12. The remains were interred at St. Simon's Churchyard on the Tuesday following, Mr. S. M. Peacock giving an impressive reading of Mrs. Besant's Secular Burial Service in the presence of a large gathering of relatives and friends.—J. F.

### Correspondence.

#### EDUCATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As a reader of your paper for some years, I have been always rather surprised—in fact, pained—at your attitude in State Education. There, at all events, you set limits to free thought. But in your last issue I see signs of improvement. You say :—

"The State in France has gained supreme control over Education. That is right, because the State builds the schools, maintains them, and pays the teachers. But a State which prohibits rivalry in Education is simply a tyranny. Every citizen should be free to carry on educational efforts at the expense of himself and his voluntary associates. The only just condition imposable upon him is that the secular instruction, in which alone the State is legitimately interested, shall be adequately imparted. All the rest belongs inalienably to the individual conscience."

Personally, I do not think the State (another name nowadays for some temporary majority) has any right to build either churches or schools; but my point in writing was to ask you how you consider—or, rather, in what way you consider—it just that the State should determine that the "secular education shall be adequately imparted"? For instance, many people consider book work before the age of 9 or 10 to be harmful. Are these justly compelled, in your opinion, to send their children to school at 5, as now? Again, many consider two hours a day in school to be ample. Would you compel these, as now, to do four and a half hours a day for nine years? May a child omit school attendance while attempting to add to the family larder when the father is out of work, ill, or dead? I have never seen a word in the *Freethinker* in favor of free thought as to what education a parent may consider to suffice for his child. Last week you said something, but not quite clearly. To my mind, the fact of a man accepting certain conditions himself gives him no more right to impose them on others than if he does not accept them, though you appear to hold the other opinion.

ERNEST POMEROY.

[The points raised in this letter cannot be dealt with in an editorial note. All we can say at present is that the principle of personal freedom laid down in the passage quoted from us seems the only feasible one in the present state of affairs.—EDITOR.]

By care and tenderness, we can extend the range of lovely life in plants and animals; by our neglect and cruelty, we can arrest it, and bring pestilence in its stead. Again, by right discipline we can increase our strength of noble will and passion, or destroy both. And whether these two forces are local conditions of the elements in which they appear, or are a part of a great force in the universe, out of which they are taken, and to which they must be restored, is not of the slightest importance to us in dealing with them; neither is the manner of their connection with light and air. What precise meaning we ought to attach to such expressions as that of the prophecy to the four winds that the dry bones might be breathed upon, and might live, or why the presence of the vital power should be dependent on the chemical action of the air, and its awful passing away materially signified by the rendering up of that breath or ghost, we cannot at present know, and need not at any time dispute. What we assuredly know is that the states of life and death are different, and the first more desirable than the other, and by effort attainable, whether we understand being "born of the spirit" to signify having the breath of heaven in our flesh or its power in our hearts.—John Ruskin,

### TRUE PHILOSOPHY.

The whole truth of life may be summed up in a few words. Happiness is the only good, suffering the only evil, and selfishness the only sin. And the whole duty of man may be expressed in one sentence, slightly altered from Voltaire—Learn what is true in order to do what is right. If a man can tell you anything about these matters, listen to him; if not, turn a deaf ear, and let him preach to the wind.

G. W. Foote, "Flowers of Freethought."

### CROMWELL ON TOLERATION.

The State, in choosing men to serve it, takes no notice of their opinions; if they be willing faithfully to serve it, that satisfies..... Take heed of being sharp, or too easily sharpened by others, against those to whom you can object little, but that they square not with you in every opinion concerning matters of religion.—Oliver Cromwell.

**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.****INDOOR.**

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 (noon), Discussion Class; 5, Children's Party.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, H. Percy Ward, "The Real Origin of Christmas."

STANLEY BRANCH N. S. S. (Co-operative Ante-room): 2.30, Business meeting.

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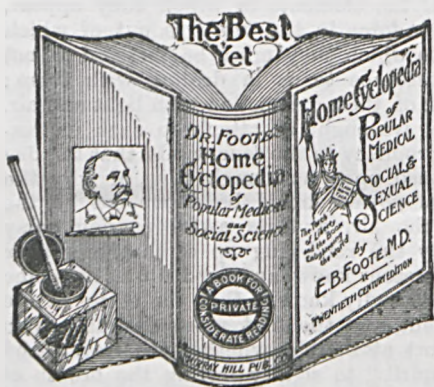
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