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Leave me, O comical little men, with your talk about eternity; go and try to live a single happy and rational day.—JAMES THOMSON, ("B. V.").

The Star of Christ.

NINETEEN hundred and ten years ago, according to Christian chronology, a wonderful star was seen in the East. Somehow or other it escaped the notice alike of Jews and Pagans. It was never heard of by the chroniclers of prodigies. In fact, it was only visible to three "wise men," who were foolish enough to follow it. They must have rested all day and journeyed all night, and we may imagine their delight when it came to a standstill. We are told that it stood over a certain house, and the three wise men knew the little King of the Jews they were looking for must be inside that building.

That star was more than wonderful—it was thrice wonderful. It must have moved along in the earth's atmosphere, and, as the Yankees say, low down at that. Anyone who thinks otherwise should just go outside his front door on a fine, clear night, fix his eye on the likeliest looking star, and then walk down the street and decide which house it is over.

Having come from nowhere, the star went back to the same place. It was never seen before or after. It was fetched out, so to speak, by the story-teller, and replaced in the bag when the trick was ended.

The wise men came from the East, which is a large region. If you face the sun at midday, north of the equator, the East is all the world on your left hand. The wise men came from there, and returned there. It is not surprising that they got lost, and there is no record of their having been found.

That wandering star heralded the birth of a baby called Joshua, or more commonly (in the Greek form) Jesus. He was to astonish the world, and he has done it. King Herod wanted to settle him in his cradle. Some people say it is a pity he failed. But the king took a wrong course. Instead of sending one of his detectives after the wise men, he exacted a promise of information from *them*, and they went home (or somewhere) and left him in the dark. Herod was therefore obliged to kill many children instead of one. He ordered the massacre of every child under two years of age in the whole neighborhood. Curiously, however, Herod's worst enemies never heard of this infamous deed. Josephus, who rakes up all he can against Herod, is silent over this stupendous atrocity. The consequence is that persons who are endowed with more sense than faith decline to believe it ever happened.

For thirty years the world knew nothing of the baby born under the wise men's star. Then he burst upon the public as a preacher. Three years

afterwards he was executed for sedition. While he was dying the sun was eclipsed for three hours. This is an astronomical impossibility. It must therefore have been supernatural. The power which produced this astounding darkness was the same power which made the moon stand still for General Joshua. Perhaps it was like the Egyptian darkness—a thick one that could be felt, one that could be cut into slices. But a still more wonderful thing than the darkness itself is the cat-like vision that was possessed by the people of that age. They saw excellently well in the dark; in fact, they did not notice it *was* dark; so they never mentioned it, and the most prodigious eclipse in all history is without the attestation of a single contemporary.

It is surprising that the star of Christ's birth did not show up again in the darkness of his crucifixion. It had a splendid opportunity of distinguishing itself. For three hours it might have skipped in the sky, and secured universal attention. Perhaps it was aware of the cat's eyes of the general public, and refrained from wasting a big display.

For some time after the crucifixion the star of Christ was *hid*. Then it began to appear to a multitude of low, illiterate persons, whom it lured to entertain great expectations beyond the tomb. Many of them expected that Christ would come again, and establish a universal kingdom, in which they would enjoy fine positions. But they looked for him in vain, and died without a glimpse of him. Whether they saw him after death is more than anyone can say. Our private opinion is that they saw him as much after death as they did before.

The star of Christ rose higher and higher in the heavens, and it shone the more brightly in the darkness which fell upon civilisation. At length it became the only light men had to walk by, and history tells us what monstrous doctrines and practices flourished in that obscurity. It was an age of faith and an age of filth. The masses were oppressed and miserable. Kings ruled despotically by the grace of God. Nobles were the masters of the very lives of their dependents. Priests lorded it over the laity, and were mostly ignorant, idle, luxurious, and profligate. Lazy monks and hysterical nuns too often realised the worst dreams of pandemonium. Intellectually and morally, Europe sank into a state which would have seemed impossible to the Greeks and Romans.

This state of things continued for nearly a thousand years. Then there was a stir in the darkness. The stifled mind of man began to assert itself. Ancient literature was read, a few bold spirits studied science, printing was invented, maritime discovery opened up new ideas of the world, and astronomy whispered the great secrets of the universe. "Light, more light!" became a daily growing aspiration, and the priests of darkness trembled at their altars. They determined to keep back the light if they

could. They imprisoned investigators, tortured those who had courage to think for themselves, and slew myriads of men who were touched by "the prophetic soul of the wide world dreaming on things to come." But the light still spread, and the star of Christ paled in its splendor.

Religions, said Schopenhauer, are like glowworms; they require darkness to shine in. This is true of Christianity as it is true of every other superstition.

The star of Christ is approaching its utter extinction. As a god, the Nazarene is dead already. Few educated and intelligent people believe the full orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Even in professional Christian circles stress is laid upon the human and ethical aspects of the "preacher of the Sermon on the Mount." All this shows a general drifting from the dogma of his godhead. It is absurd to bespeak our sympathy and admiration for a supernatural being. A god does not invite approval; he demands obedience. In vain does Count Tolstoi picture an arbitrary Christ, and manufacture a new Christianity by a process of selection from the ruins of the old system. The result only commends itself to those who are seeking a dignified escape from orthodoxy, without being ready for a complete spiritual emancipation. A played-out god should have his niche in the historical pantheon; he should not be thrust into the Valhalla of actual heroes. This truth is instinctively admitted by ordinary men and women, who listen with impatience to those high-pitched panegyrics on the man Jesus. Stripped of his deity, he is not imposing enough to be the centre of universal reverence. Jesus has had his day, and the great god Christ is dead; dead, this time, beyond all hope of resurrection.

G. W. FOOTE.

Christmas.

ONCE again Christmas is with us, and with it the usual budget of joy and sorrow—and humbug. Preachers are busy utilising the occasion by preaching on peace, goodwill, and charity, and the story of the life of Jesus Christ is being retold as though it were the most verifiable of historical narratives against which a word of doubt had never been breathed. To the mass of the people—at least to those whose lot in life is sufficiently favorable—Christmas is a season of jollification, and no one, least of all the Freethinker, would wish to rob them of any legitimate happiness that life offers. In a world where hard knocks are plentiful, and good fortune none too general, occasions for a display of good fellowship are to be welcomed, not deplored. The date now taken as the birth of the Christian Jesus marked a time of rejoicing many centuries before Christianity was heard of, and it is not a rash conjecture to assume that social conservatism will perpetuate its convivial aspect long after all superstitious associations are forgotten.

The majority of people know nothing, and care less, about the origin of Christmas. The larger number of Christians still believe that it marks the anniversary of the birth of their God-man, and are in complete ignorance that they are commemorating a very ancient pre-Christian belief. Whether Jesus Christ was a sun-god or a vegetation god, or a mixture of the two, has no bearing upon this fact. The twenty-fifth of December was the date of the birth-days of many gods all over the ancient world, and for obvious reasons. The birth, death, and resurrection of the Jesus of the Gospels corresponds in all essentials with the careers of those deities concerning whose origin in vegetative and solar phenomena there is no longer any question. Nor is there any question, with capable and unprejudiced critics,

in the case of Jesus. Christians only doubt the relationship between their own and the more ancient deities because he is their deity. The more orthodox explain the analogies by saying that Pagan corruptions crept into early Christianity; or that, in order to win the people, the early Church took over the Pagan festivals, and reconstructed them for Christian use. Neither statement is true. Pagan beliefs did not creep into Christianity; they were already there. The Church did not adopt Pagan festivals for reasons of policy or convenience; they were part of its life from from the beginning. In other words, Christianity and the Pagan religions are not distinct things; the former is simply a synthesis of the latter. *How* the synthesis took place is a matter for historical-sociological investigation. That it did take place there can be no rational doubt. And the Christian celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25 falls into line with the Egyptians celebrating the birth of Horus, the Persians that of Mithras, or the Greeks that of Hercules and Bacchus; just as the Christmas festivities, visits, presents, etc., are a mere continuation of the pre-Christian saturnalia.

Christmas—or its equivalent—began with the supernatural interpretation of physical facts. It is, however, part of the normal history of religion that in the course of time the supernatural is stripped away, leaving the moral, the social, and utilitarian elements dominant. So, to-day, growing emphasis is being laid, not upon the God who became man over nineteen centuries ago, but upon the man who became God. The great significance of Christmas, we learn, is that it commemorates a kind intellectual and moral cataclysm that once overtook the world. A new moral era, having no vital connection with all that had gone before, commenced with the birth of Jesus. Peace and goodwill was inaugurated among mankind, the slave was to be freed, woman was to be elevated, and man ennobled. The recognition of the truth in Jesus was to make all men free.

Great is the power of words! People have been constantly hearing these things, and parsons as constantly repeating them. Both may, therefore, easily believe these statements to contain nothing but the truth. It makes little apparent difference to a sturdy believer that these things are all demonstrably false. It is easy enough to prove that the Christian era deserves the name of the era of war rather than peace. It is plain that, as a consequence of Christianity, goodwill has not spread among mankind, that woman was not ennobled, and that man did not attain freedom. There never has been "Peace on Earth"—least of all among Christians. It is comparatively easy to reconcile men of different opinions on any subject except that of religion. Nay, outside the sphere of those opinions reconciliation is usually unnecessary. In politics, or science, or art, or literature, people do not feel called upon to be upon bad social terms with one's opponents. In religion, to be friendly with one of an opposite opinion is often taken as a sure sign that one's own religious opinions are of a very shaky description. All these things are plain; but, alas, it is also plain that people ignore them, and that they will go on repeating the usual Christian shibboleths for a long time yet.

By the morning's post of the day on which this article is written, two pertinent communications reach me. One is from the Waifs and Strays Society, asking for donations, and signed by the Bishop of London. The other is a notification that a large number of clergymen have agreed to preach a sermon on Peace on a given Sunday. I have no desire to say anything against either of these movements: peace is urgently needed, and the care of the waifs and strays in our large cities is no less imperative. But how poorly either accords with the claims made for the beneficial influence of Christianity. The Bishop of London says the welcome the world gave to Jesus on his birth was "There was no room," and adds that this expresses "the plight of those children for whom there is 'no room,' and who are born into surroundings of squalor, cruelty, and vice." Now

these children are not in some distant country, unblessed by the presence of Christianity. They are here in the midst of a population that makes public profession of Christianity, products of a civilisation which, we are told in other connections, owes its existence to Christianity. Children born in poverty would be bad enough, but "cruelty and vice." How does that square with Christian claims? Of course, there is to be counted on the credit side the sympathy that leads to attempts at assistance—although one might argue that this is not in any sense a Christian product. Still, the misery and squalor and cruelty and vice is here, and so far from Christianity leading to any organised social reaction against such things, it has been left to the spasmodic and ineffective action of private charity to deal with what should be the first business of a State that was based upon a rational conception of human welfare.

Richard Jefferies said that the most extraordinary spectacle, to him, was that, after so many centuries, the world had not yet learned to organise itself for its own comfort. Truly extraordinary; but the explanation lies in the fact that man has spent so much of his time and energy during all these centuries in pursuing will-o'-the-wisps, in chasing nightmares, in perpetuating superstitions, and in developing an affection for the evils they produced. Christianity never taught that the world was to organise itself for any social end whatever, still less that it should organise itself for the end of comfort. Such an aim would have been considered as next door to heresy. It did drill people for the use of the Church, it was forced to organise them for warlike purposes, but that man should organise himself for his own social betterment and comfort was an ideal that Christianity never encouraged, and, in yielding to it to-day, only evidences its sense of an unconquerable necessity. Christianity has been great on texts, mighty with homilies, but both have been directed towards preparing people for another life. People herd together under conditions that bestialise body and mind, children are born amid surroundings that make for many the prison or the workhouse inevitable, and the Christian conscience thinks it has done its duty in establishing soup-kitchens, or picking a man or a woman out of the mire here and there. "The poor ye have always with you," said Jesus, and the ideal Christian society has always been made up of a multitude of paupers seeking relief, and a handful of wealthy and benevolent persons distributing alms.

But of all the cant connected with Christmas that of the birth of Jesus having inaugurated an era of peace is the most nauseating. The other day one of the Christian journals published a story meant to illustrate the peaceful and brotherly feelings generated by Christians and Christianity. On the night of December 24, 1870, two armies—French and German—were confronting each other. A French soldier, having gained permission, advanced towards the German lines and sang a Christian hymn, the enemy refraining, meanwhile, from firing. He finished his hymn, saluted, and returned to his comrades. Immediately after a German soldier advanced to the French lines and sang the same hymn, and both camps joined in the chorus. Probably much the same would have happened had the soldiers sung any song of a non-partisan character. But the fatuous comment of the Christian writer is:—

"The same emotion filled all hearts. All diversities and enmities had been forgotten in the presence of the Prince of Peace. The soldier then departed to the German lines, and disappeared. A few hours later fighting began again."

There it is! The fighting began again, not a bit less deadly, or less determined, than it would have been had they engaged in singing something of the nature of "Knocked 'Em in the Old Kent Road." Probably the latter—or its French or German equivalent—would have had more influence for good fellowship, since it would have conjured up remembrances of evenings spent in more or less harmless conviviality. Men have drank, and fought as the result of their drinking. They have sang songs, and fought after-

wards. But they do not drink and fight at the same time, nor do they sing songs and fight simultaneously. But hymns and prayers and religious professions have never prevented fighting; they have very often accompanied it, and the combatants have declared they fought all the better because of the religious accompaniments. For the story to have had any decently serviceable moral—serviceable, that is, to Christianity—the soldiers on both sides should have refused to fight any more, or at least to have demanded some days' truce. But a few hours after—after Christmas Day had dawned, in fact—they were trying to settle the question of a future life in the only way in which it ever will be settled—by giving each one a chance to settle it by personal experience.

The story and its sequel are eminently characteristic of Christianity and its history. All religions have been on good terms with militarism—Monotheistic religions specially so—but Christianity comes out an easy first. Even Mohammedanism pales before the Cross in this respect. The least warlike of all the great nations to-day is China—China, which pinned its faith to Buddhism and Confucianism, with their *practice* of peace, and which has been plundered so ruthlessly by their Christian superiors in the art of wholesale murder. The peace of the world is everywhere threatened, as it has been so often disturbed, by Christian nations. War budgets grow, armies and navies expand, and the people who are most energetic in promoting military measures are also the ones who are most emphatic in the laudation of "Peace on earth and goodwill to all men." The average Christian in this country loves his religion, and is devoted to the necessity of keeping a navy or an army strong to beat any other two Christian powers in combination. I do not know when we shall get rid of either the mania of militarism or the craze of Christianity. But I do believe that the day which sees the extinction of the one will not greatly ante-date the disappearance of the other.

C. COHEN.

Christmas Meditations.

NOTHING can be more appropriate, on Christmas Day, than to face anew some of the great problems of existence. On this day Christians celebrate the alleged birth of the Savior of the world; but there are millions in Christendom now who are unable to join in the celebration, some because they do not believe in the alleged event, and others because their faith in it is too weak to kindle any enthusiasm within them. There are a few people who still wish to believe, but cannot. Here is a man who, as long as his wife lived, shared her faith, but who, since her death eighteen months ago, has been a practical unbeliever. He feels that she no longer exists. This is what he says: "I recognise that my brain, trained to grapple with the tangible and provable, has not been educated to face psychical problems. I am not a stupid and stubborn sceptic. I wish from my heart to recover my faith." But faith, once lost, is not easily recovered, while in the majority of cases it is lost for ever. It is highly interesting, however, to examine the method by which the divine endeavors to help such a doubter. First of all comes the admission that "there is no proper demonstration—mathematical, scientific, or metaphysical—of immortality." Ever since the appearance of Tennyson's *Ancient Sage*, it has been the custom of the pulpit even to glory in the impossibility of proving the existence of a spiritual world. How many preachers have proudly quoted the poet's words—

"For nothing worthy proving can be proven,
Nor yet disproven."

So the divine says to the doubter just mentioned: "The fact is that nothing which really requires demonstration admits of it." This is not true, and it is grossly misleading. Then the divine contradicts himself thus:—

"Demonstration is possible only in dealing with well-defined subjects which may be employed as experi-

mental materials or syllogistic terms; and it is therefore only what should *a priori* be expected that there is no scientific proof of a life beyond. But then, on the other hand, science has not disproved it.....Science leaves the question open."

Dr. Leebody thinks that, though "the doctrine of immortality cannot be proved by science, it may be fairly said that the result of modern scientific research, fairly viewed, are favorable to its reception." Our divine claims Darwin in support of that opinion; but in so doing he is guilty of misrepresenting the illustrious naturalist. What Darwin really says is that the thought of annihilation was intolerable to him, in spite of the fact that, according to all available evidences, no other fate awaits living things on this planet. But science being admittedly silent on the subject, on what evidence does the belief in it rest? Our divine utilises the following utterance from E. S. Phelps:—

"Unless he [God] created this world from sheer extravagance in the infliction of purposeless pain, there must be another life to justify, to heal, to comfort, to offer happiness, to develop holiness."

Then comes R. L. Stevenson's oft-quoted saying:—

"We had needs invent heaven if it had not been revealed; there are some things that fall so bitterly ill on this side Time."

Now, is it conceivable that a man who has "a proof-wanting, mathematical brain" will find the above argument convincing? In the first place, it is an argument that distinctly dishonors God, in that it represents him as having made a world in which "some things fall so bitterly ill," and in which there is "sheer extravagance in the infliction of purposeless pain." If a god created the present life he must be pronounced, not merely a bungler, but an Almighty Fiend; not simply incompetent, but positively wicked. In the second place, the argument is based on an unjustified faith. The people who employ it judge God, not by what he has done, but by what they believe him to be capable of doing, not by his past and present, but by his unknown and unknowable future. Surely a man whose brain has been "trained to grapple with the tangible and provable" will only laugh at so puerile and silly an argument. And there is no other. The hope of another life is built on the imperfection, the failure of this. "God is infinitely wise and good," cries the preacher; "therefore there *must* be another life. You must not judge him by feeble sense, but by pious nonsense."

Let us follow our divine one step further. "To me," he says, "the grand evidence is Jesus." What he means by such a statement it is impossible to say. Jesus never proved immortality, never offered the least evidence for it, and yet this divine accepts Jesus himself as "the grand evidence." On his own showing, all that Jesus did was to say "Take my word for it," and that is what reasonable people cannot and will not do. How can they take the word of a person like Jesus for anything? Even Christians differ endlessly as to who and what he was. Some worship him as God, others admire and love him as man, while others still go the length of calling him a myth. How on earth can a man with a mathematical brain rely on the bare word ascribed to such a being? We know that the word of the Gospel Jesus on some points proved utterly delusive. He inspired false hopes in the hearts of his disciples, hopes which, despite bitterest disappointment through all the ages, some of them cherish to this day. Fancy taking at his word a person whom some Christian ministers regard as unhistorical. "He knew what lies behind the shadows which enfold our little life," exclaims the preacher; but that is only the preacher's arrogant assertion, supported by not a single fact.

"You cannot prove the existence of God," admits the modern divine, and then adds, "No, nor can you prove the existence of an objective world." Perhaps not, O man of God; but we can both see and feel it as an objective reality, and this is evidence enough for most of us. But there is no way of getting at God at all. He is declared to be "without body, parts, or passions," which simply means that he is abso-

lutely indiscernible, hopelessly out of our reach. The very definition of God annihilates him. A being "without body, parts, or passions" is unthinkable. It is possible to *believe* that he exist, but it is impossible to make the thought of him rational. It is all very well to affirm that "the court is open for the pleadings of the heart," and that "its instincts are real phenomena, and must be taken into account in forming a just theory of the Universe"; but the affirmation is a tissue of misinterpretations. The natural, untutored heart indulges in no pleadings on behalf of the supernatural, and has no instincts whatever which speak of God and a future life. An infant instinctively cries for its mother's milk, but it only cries for God after it has been diligently taught and trained to do so. We have the authority of the Rev. Dr. Rowland, of Crouch End, for stating that, in spite of the most assiduous religious instruction in the home, in the Church, and in the school, hundreds of children grow up irreligious, which would never happen, nor would there be need for the assiduous teaching and training, if the heart had instincts which speak with no uncertain sound for God and immortality. The truth is that we are in possession of numerous facts which prove conclusively that the heart is naturally devoid of any religious instincts whatever.

And this brings us back to the subject of Christmas. Christmas is a festival filched from Paganism to commemorate a supernatural event, alleged to have occurred at the birth of Jesus. That event, according to the New Testament, was the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus, and the becoming flesh of a purely spiritual being. Professor Orr, in his *Faith of a Modern Christian*, makes great fun of the New Theology doctrine of the Immanence of God in all Nature, according to which "man is already God, or grows to be God." He rightly observes that "there is no real transcending of the limits of humanity. To say 'God becomes man,' and explain it to mean 'everything human is Divine,' or with the limitation, 'all goodness is divine,' is simply to equate God and man, and carries us no further than man himself." We fully agree, and beg to add that precisely the same thing is true of the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation. Again and again are we assured that Jesus was God confined within the limitations of human nature; and surely God so confined has no means whatever of proving that he is present. He has the knowledge, the emotions, the ambitions, the voice, and the general aspect of a man, and it inevitably follows that the evidence of his being God is conspicuous only by its absence. Dr. Orr acknowledges that it is not by proof-texts that the Divinity of Christ is to be established, and yet he gives us nothing but a whole string of Bible verses. He asserts that the root of Christ's personality is Divine, but his only proof consists of half-a-dozen texts. He declares that "by voluntary act the Son of God 'emptied' himself, 'became flesh'—took upon him a true human nature;" but the only evidence of the truth of the declaration offered is another sheaf of verses. "In this supernatural person, in consequence," he adds, "perfect humanity is united with full divinity"; and so important is this statement in his estimation, that he has put it in italics; but here, again, he contents himself with flinging four texts at us. Then comes the grand climax that "the *end* of the Incarnation is *redemption*," followed by six more texts, with a hint that many more are held in reserve. The truth is that there is not one *fact* that can be adduced in proof of the claim that Jesus, if he ever lived at all, was in any essential sense different from other men.

As a Christian festival therefore, Christmas is a mockery and a farce. It commemorates what never happened, what never can happen. Its so-called message is an unmitigated lie. There has never been peace in Christendom. The Prince of Peace has never reigned even for a twelvemonth. The militarism that rules to-day involves the negation of the religion of love and brotherhood, and gives the lie direct to the Angels' Song of Praise (Luke ii. 8 f).

which will be recited to-day in all the churches. Even the conflict between Capital and Labor, which is just now so very bitter, is a standing evidence of the total failure of Christianity. The Child of Bethlehem has never had, and never shall have, his day. The government of the world has never once been on his shoulders. The Church has traded on an empty name, and done infinite violence even to that. When shall the world learn to glory in, and to do honor to, the sublimest and noblest name ever known, the Name of Man, and cease to waste its time and energy in the service of a name that has always been the symbol of impotence and falsehood? When Man comes into his kingdom we shall have peace and prosperity,—but not before.

J. T. LLOYD.

Wild Fruit from the West Country.

Wild Fruit. By Eden Phillpotts. (John Lane; 1911.)

AMID the rampant commercialism and frivolities of modern literature it is pleasant to find a popular novelist taking his art seriously, and producing works which not only command the admiration of the many but compel the attention of the critics. Mr. Eden Phillpotts is in this enviable position that, while he is on easy terms with his publishers and his many thousands of readers, his work shows a really notable advance from the days when he wrote humorously of *The Human Boy* until he had given us the triumphant *Secret Woman*. All through his work his mastery was such that his readers felt that he was capable of so much more. That he has capacity for much more is proved by the publication of *Wild Fruit*, a volume of poetry, in which he wears in good Hellenic fashion the loose singing robes of Apollo, and who sings for singing's sake, and who seems indifferent to the praise or blame of coteries or critics.

It is something in this age of disillusion to find a poet stepping from the portals of the West Country with a message from the old, immortal, Greek world which is ever new. The joy of earth is with him, he seems to walk on air, and he confronts the carven, cold Christs of the churches and the roadside with smiling eyes, and passes on merrily, singing of youth and love as if the horrors of Calvary and Golgotha had never existed. What will first strike the reader in these poems is that they help to brighten the sunshine. The keynote is frankly and fearlessly Pagan, interpenetrated with the glory of life, with that sense of living beauty which is primitive and instinctive.

Wild Fruit is fittingly devoted to West Country subjects, and few living writers can rival the author in the wealth and variety, power and profundity, of his descriptions of Nature. Indeed, the poet, wrestling with his vocabulary, often tries to express the niceties and varying shades of his emotions, and uses the West Country Doric from pure emotion. It is this quality that gives the poems, even when in dialect, an imposing and elemental quality. At the outset of his book, with a rare modesty, he disarms criticism with his frank avowal:—

" Mine's but a frail of rushes
Filled with wild berries from a lonely path,
Gathered off humble bushes,
From no sweet, sunshine-haunted, golden garth
They come. No treasures these
Of far Hesperides."

Like spring among the seasons, youth is the most interesting period in man's life. Just as surely as he feels the joy and sunlight of the world does he feel the storm and stress of age. The same vivid keenness of perception of insight is brought to bear in the pathetic lines addressed to his little son on his ninth birthday:—

" There is a grey old haven by the sea
That stretches granite arms and lifts a light
To shield small ships by day and guide by night
From the Atlantic's wrath and sudden might
And riotous mad glee."

Thou small ship, anchor here within my ken,
My heart shall be thine harbor, while I can
Still serve and strive, with many a careful plan,
To fortify thy green young faith in man
Against the sea of men."

Nothing is more remarkable in this book than the splendid opulence of praise which Mr. Phillpotts gives to his predecessors and contemporaries. Even his criticisms are made without gall, even when he has to record a sharp difference of opinion. Listen to this splendid testimonial to that "unsubduable old Roman," Walter Savage Landor:—

" O man that hated kings—thyself a king,
What lifted trophies, what loud pæan of praise
Record the glorious vintage of thy days?
Thy marble lies uncumbered, here we fling
No symbols and no sorrows; only strays
Sweet marjoram; and vernal grasses bring
Their little verdure for a wreath of bays,
Where gold-eyed lizards bask and grey birds sing.
Thou lamp of beauty, with what crystal light,
Lifted austere in stary strength and grace,
For Freedom dost thou burn! And now thy might,
Wisdom and wonder hearten men apace
Higher and higher leaps thy dayspring, bright
As Tuscan sky above thy dreamless place."

Scarcely less powerful are the fine lines on "Swinburne" and "Mark Twain" and "Holyoake"; but maybe, the finest sonnet is that inspired by Buonarroti's "Dawn," which is sufficient to place the author among that select band of poets who command recognition. It has all the crowning beauty of great verse in its absolute directness and simplicity. For one thing, Mr. Phillpotts never trifles with his art, and does not blow bubbles for the mere sake of prettiness. He is, in a word—as every real poet must be—a thinker, a man whose business it is to help us to fathom the problems of life. Fortunately, all the shafts of superstition have failed to penetrate the shining armor of his Secularism, and his splendid talents have been devoted to the service of Liberty and to the cause of human progress. That, after all, is the thing that matters. To us Freethinkers it is not sufficient that a poet should sing pleasantly of the blue sky and the green grass and of the bright sunshine. We do not greatly care for those triflers who imagine verse to be a schoolboy's exercise or an idle man's amusement. If poetry is ever to exert any influence over the lives and thoughts of men it must deal with realities and reject the iterations of the mocking-bird. The real poets answer to their ideals:—

" Their good
Outshines all flare and glare of futile marts;
They stand beside their altars while the flood
Ephemeral rolls on and roars and parts;
It shall not chill the poets' golden blood,
It cannot drown the masters' mighty hearts."

MIMNERMUS.

WHAT IS TRUTH?

By H. C. Carle, President Truthseekers' Union, Little Rock.

" What is truth? " I asked religion,
With its many books and creeds,
With its temples and its altars,
Where in varied forms it pleads;
But when answered, I, confounded,
At the answers pond'ring o'er—
So perplexing and conflicting—
Was no wiser than before.

" What is truth? " I then asked nature,
Asked the water, earth, and sky;
But the sea rolled on in silence,
And the earth did not reply,
While the stars vouchsafed no answer
Save their winking, as though they
Truth in mystic light were shrining
And would not her throne betray.

" What is truth? " I still am asking,
Just as men have ever done;
What's the source of all things living,
Of all work beneath the sun,
Of the earth, of joy, of sadness,
Of our birth and transient youth,
Of our wisdom and our madness?
Tell, O wise men! What is truth?

—Daily Arkansas Democrat.

Anti-Cant Tickles; or, Pith and Pepper.—III.

BY A TWENTIETH CENTENARIAN.

(Continued from p. 813.)

DEATH NOT AN EVIL.

Our friend has done with sorrows: for him dawn no sad morrows; but peace and rest on Nature's breast pour surcease on past sorrows.

We (living) groan and grumble; the great, the rich, the humble, all strive in vain to fly from pain in life's crude rough-and-tumble.

If new-born babes but knew it (their future), they would rue it; for wrong and woe deal stab and blow, and cunningly they do it.

Alas, one lives and suffers because most men are duffers who scheme and strive to make 4=5, and act as selfish buffers.

If all were fair and equal, and merit earned its sequel, we should not squall, but suffer all, and of existence speak well.

But lies, intrigue, and meanness, smug pursiness and leanness, stand cheek-by-jowl, and fair and foul, spring forth with equal greenness.

So, when our sun is setting, there need be small regretting, when down it sinks and Lethe drinks, all carking care forgetting.

It may not be so always—these paltry, sordid, small ways; for light may burst on things accursed, and blast them skywards all ways.

Still, as things stand at present, life's not so mighty pleasant, that we need rue man's common due, which comes to poor and peasant.

HONOR THY PARENTS.

"Vaterwerden ist nicht schwer: Vatersein, dagegen, sehr."

When parents give us life and health, we needs must honor them; but if we are born ricketty, we well may swear: "Oh, dem!"

God gives all things, we must admit; but men are his *wakeels*—his deputies, who dower us with what each does and feels; and, consequently, if our lives are marred by their disease, it's difficult to thank them much—in spite of Ten Decrees.

It's hard enough to run life's race with all our limbs and legs, but how can we keep up the pace with stumps or wooden pegs?

So pause and think, ye would-be sires, before ye haste to do it, lest ye and your posterity most bitterly should rue it.

NAIL'T W' SCRIPTURE.

Degenerate follies of to-day—"Astrology" and "Spirits"; so long as there are fools to pay, exist upon their merits; and should you indicate a doubt to star or witchcraft vendor, he puts you to the rightabout and cites the Witch of Endor.

MORE PRECEDENTS.

While practising polygamy, that custom we denounce, and (though performed illegally) it matters not one ounce; for, should you need a sanction plain for "morganatic" larks, you search the Scriptures (not in vain) and quote the Patriarchs.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS.

Why teach our children fables of Adam and of Eve, of Sinaitic Tables, which they can scarce believe? Teach these as good examples, and *that* were not absurd; but folly to insist on their truth as word for word.

Reform, ye Priests and Presters! Be not afraid of Truth, and cease to cram such bathos in brains of trustful youth. And what I want to know is, What right have I or you, to take "religion" such as that from any antique Jew?

THE AMAZEMENT OF THE STARS.

The silent stars wheel overhead in awesome mystery: a billion worlds roll on through space unseen my mighty Me.

Our solid earth is Mystery, and *we*, its parasites, assert God's plans with certainty, with all our midget might.

A thousand dreams and manias pass current with mankind, who cannot penetrate that veil more clearly than the blind.

The sober stars mock drunken man (that helot of the earth), and twinkle on eternally in kindly cruel mirth.

What *are* we, matched with all this might, this Dance of Destiny, that sweeps resistlessly along with puzzled you and me?

Poor ignoramus—imbecile, who has the impudence, in face of *this*, to tell us *he* enjoys God's confidence!

Acid Drops.

Mr. Carnegie's £2,000,000 (in Steel Trust bonds, we believe) towards the preservation of peace will be in the hands of Trustees, who will probably not abolish war with it, or do anything else very wonderful. The income of the endowment is to be used in promoting international peace, arbitration, and good will among the nations of the world. Of course it sounds grand and fine, but one cannot help reflecting that Mr. Carnegie did not make his money in ways calculated to promote good will. This does not trouble the Peace Society, however, which has met in London and hailed the Scotch-American millionaire as something very much like the Messiah. The Committee "most gratefully recognise the magnificent service which Mr. Carnegie has thus rendered in the spread of peace throughout the world, and they earnestly pray that the blessing of the Most High may rest upon Mr. Carnegie, and also accompany the great work he has thus initiated in the promotion of the Kingdom of Christ upon earth." Such pious blather is a disgrace to the Peace Society. Why will its managers talk so consumedly about the Kingdom of Christ? Do they expect sensible people to believe that it has been reserved for a reputed sceptic like Mr. Carnegie to initiate the promotion of the Kingdom of Christ, some two thousand years after that personage is supposed to have graced the earth with his presence?

The *Christian Commonwealth* remarks—very regretfully, of course—that it cannot close its eyes to the fact that the Peace movement on the Continent, which "makes for justice, for brotherliness, and for 'life more abundantly,' is largely anti-Church." It is a pity that the sorrow over the unregenerate Continental peace advocates was so intense as to obscure its sense of accuracy. For the Peace movement abroad is not merely "anti-Church," it is anti-Christian; only perhaps it would not do for an English religious journal to say so. Hypocrisy seems very deeply ingrained in English public life, and even when one's opponents are doing something one agrees with it seems necessary in the interests of religion to misrepresent. Moreover, we venture to say that, if we set on one side the Quakers, the most persistent advocates of peace in this country, as well as on the Continent, are anti-Christians.

Rev. Percy Dearmer has compiled the following prayer for use by Christians when praying for international peace:—

"Almighty God, Who art the Father of all men upon the earth, most heartily we pray that Thou wilt keep Thy children from the cruelties of war, and lead the nations in the way of peace. Teach us to put away all bitterness and misunderstanding, both in Church and State; that we, with all the brethren of the Son of Man, may draw together as one comity of peoples, and dwell evermore in the fellowship of that Prince of Peace, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and ever."

We wonder what amount of mental striving went to the production of this. We should also like to know what Mr. Dearmer thinks will result from it. It is the kind of prayer Christians have always been offering—between fights—although its influence on the progress of peace has been, up to the present, quite imperceptible.

We have drawn attention to some of the prayers that were offered up to "the One Above" to guide the general elections in the United Kingdom for the welfare of the people. It does not appear that the distinguished personage thus appealed to has intervened very considerably. The various parties remain wonderfully as they were. The more pious Conservatives may point to the seats they have won, and say "God gave them to us." But the more pious Liberals may point to pretty much the same number of seats that *they* have won, and say, "Who gave them to *us*?" Our own opinion is that God, if there be a God, is just minding his own business. It would be well if we returned the compliment by minding *our* business, without troubling him in the matter. But what a dreadful thing that would be for the clergy! Their occupation would be gone.

One of our readers who is an elector in the Kilmarnock group of boroughs, sends us a lively account of how he tried to corner Dr. Rolland Rainy, who has just been elected for the third time. Mr. Hugh Thomson pursued the honorable gentleman gallantly from meeting to meeting during the election, sometimes in person and sometimes by proxy; but was unable to induce him to give a satisfactory, or even a straightforward, answer to questions *re* the Blasphemy Laws. Dr. Rainy seemed to be favorable to liberty in a general way, but he drew the line at Freethinkers; that is, at persons

who had the temerity and bad taste to differ from him on the subject of religion. Being asked if he would support Secular Education, the honorable gentleman struck a dramatic attitude and declared that he was proud of his Christianity. Well, he has a right to be proud of his Christianity—or anything else that is his; but the question at issue is whether he has a right make other people pay for it by saddling the cost of it upon the State. We hope he will some day have a lucid interval in which he may be able to understand the point.

Mr. Ainsworth, the Liberal candidate for Argyshire, being heckled *re* the Blasphemy Laws, said he was in favor of Freethinkers having the same rights as other people. He didn't appear to know what the Blasphemy Laws were, but he stood by his answer to the first question. Mr. Hutchison, the Conservative candidate, replied "Yes" to the first question. They all do that. The second question tests their sincerity, and we drew it up for that purpose. When the second question was asked, Mr. Hutchinson did not say he would abolish the Blasphemy Laws. What he said was this: "There is an old Scottish law against swearing on Sunday—so you had better be careful." Evidently the gentleman's legal education is susceptible of a good deal of improvement.

Mr. Stead quotes some figures in his magazine respecting the poverty of the parsons. But why should *he* be concerned about them? Does he not know as well as we do that the poorest-paid men of God in all the Churches get, generally speaking, quite as much as they would ever make in the open labor market? Does he not know, also, that most of the better-paid ones get higher incomes than they would ever earn in other occupations? Does he not know, further, that these clerical gentlemen are all professed apostles of a master who taught the blessings of poverty and the curse of wealth? They are the last men in the world who ought to complain of moderate means.

May we venture to suggest that Mr. Stead has passed a bad Hibernicism in the December number of the *Review of Reviews*, and made an extraordinarily inept observation of his own. The Hibernicism occurs in a quotation from an article by Professor A. L. Frothingham, who professes to have discovered that a certain sarcophagus in the Vatican, hitherto supposed to belong to Helena, the mother of Constantine, really belongs to Marcus Aurelius. We don't believe it, but we are not going to discuss it—at present. We have a different object in view. Professor Frothingham points out that the bas-reliefs show the massacre of German prisoners which signalised the Emperor's funeral, and then observes that: "One may be loath to believe that so humane an emperor as Marcus Aurelius would have allowed so barbarous a scene to be placed upon his tomb." Just as if a man could not only prepare his own tomb, but depict upon it incidents that took place at his own funeral! So much for the Hibernicism—and now for Mr. Stead's inept observation. "This discovery," he says, "makes us read the Meditations of the model Emperor with other eyes." This is an Hibernicism to cap Professor Frothingham's. But there is worse to come. Mr. Stead adds that "Christianity at least made such a wanton and cold-blooded waste of human life impossible." Nonsense, Mr. Stead, nonsense! Christianity only turned the current of bloodshed into other channels. Prisoners were not massacred at an Emperor's funeral, which, from the nature of things, could only be occasional; but the massacre of heretics and infidels went on every year, every month, every week—almost every day. We wish Mr. Stead would be more careful as to what he writes. He always means well, but his performance is not always up to the level of his intentions.

"The chief mark of the materialism and hopelessly unethical thought of modern years," says Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, "is that the principle of equality, in its spiritual sense, is denied to-day." This deliverance is pretty badly mixed, and one is not quite sure what Mr. Macdonald means by it. To avoid one confusion, however, we would remind Mr. Macdonald that the "spiritual equality" of man has *always* been asserted by the Christian Churches—with what result, the Socialist crusade bears ample evidence. The assertion of an imaginary spiritual equality never yet prevented people being subjected to an unjust social inequality, and to a very practical political servitude. Men were equal before God, but this was seldom taken as a reason against being considered very unequal before man. A little research might easily show Mr. Macdonald that the group of thinkers that had most to do with the spread of the conviction that the State should be based upon the conception of the social equality was the much-abused

materialistic school of Utilitarians. And, if we get social equality established, we can leave the "spiritual equality" to look after itself.

Rev. Dr. Orchard says there are three things before which religion goes down—a love of money, the desires of the flesh, and a sense of humor. We were under the impression that religion managed to get along very well with the first two, but we quite agree concerning the third. A real and active sense of humor in people does more to weaken their religion than tons of argumentation. No body of men with a sense of humor could ever have put together such monstrous documents as the Westminster Confession or the Articles of the Church of England. Still less could such people believe in them. Ninety-nine per cent. of the dogmas of religion would go down before the same test. Nor would the clergy, as a body, fare much better. For if there is one gigantic absurdity about our modern lives it is the existence of a body of men—not more intellectual nor better endowed in any direction than the rest of the community—claiming a front place, in virtue of the explanation of an invisible and incomprehensible Deity, as guides through a country they have never seen and are in no hurry to enter. Decidedly there is no deadlier enemy to religion than a healthy sense of humor.

"A Minister" writes in the *Methodist Times* about "the painful decline in the prayer-meeting." We expect this is a mistake for "the decline in the painful prayer-meeting." Anyway, the latter version seems more in accordance with facts.

The natural history of the incumbent of All Saints, Micklehurst, calls for a little attention. Dealing with the people who stayed away from church, that gentleman said that the average working man did not get up until about 10.30, and after dinner lay on the couch or across the bed, sleeping like a pig and *snoring like another*. We were under the impression that each sleeping pig did its own snoring, and that the same held good even of non-church-goers. Still, we are always ready to learn, although a sleeping pig—or man—that can't do its own snoring, elevates laziness to a fine art.

A *British Weekly* special article on Portugal mentions that the revolutionists placed rifles in the hands "of the poor shoeless loafers in the streets," and asked them to protect the Bank of Lisbon. This they did, and after the Republicans had won, the bankers of Lisbon offered to reward the men. "Notes were handed out, but not one man would accept any payment." And yet a number of the churches are closed in Portugal, and the men who engineered the revolution were Freethinkers. The *British Weekly* does not note this fact, but we do. And we wonder what would have happened had they all been Christians.

It is difficult to see what the Bishop of London has to do with architecture—unless it be the architecture of his own fortunes, in which he has been eminently successful. His lordship has, however, been addressing the members and students of the Architectural Association, and a brief report of his address appears in the Association's *Journal* for December. We see that "many well-known architects were present," and we wonder what led them there, for the Bishop's address was simply a sermon, and there is as little sense in *his* sermons as in any that were ever preached. His way of replying to the objection, for instance, that Christianity is often contrary to reason, was flatly to deny it except in the sense that it was "too good to be true." Too good! Is exclusive salvation good? Is wholesale damnation good? Is everlasting hell good? These things are not too good to be true. They are too diabolical to be true. Nor is it too good to be true that a man should get £10,000 a year for preaching "Blessed be ye poor"—as the Bishop of London does.

The Bishop of London says that at the Judgment Day, when God says "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels," the one who will be most cut to the heart will be God. Which reminds us of the parent who thrashed his child, and then explained that it hurt him more than the boy. To which the latter replied, "But not in the same place." The Bishop holds out a little comfort that "everlasting" may not mean for ever. Well, we expect it will be long enough—if the Christian hell is a reality. Still, it may not be ever, there may not be a hell, there may not be a Judgment Day. The only certain thing is that the crop of fools is large enough every year to keep men like the Bishop of London at their posts. There is no "may be" about that, at all events.

The London County Council, in licensing the hall of the Bermondsey Bioscope Company, imposed the condition (under the Cinematograph Act of 1909) that the exhibition should not be open on Sundays. This condition being violated, the Council prosecuted the Company, but the local magistrate held that the conditions imposed were *ultra vires*. This judgment was appealed against, and the Lord Chief Justice and Justices Pickford and Avory decided for the Council with costs. The Bermondsey people have thus escaped a great danger. Their minds will no more be poisoned by looking at moving pictures on Sunday. Looking at them between Monday morning and Saturday night is quite proper, but looking at them on Sunday is most demoralising. Not that this is evident on the face of the matter. But the religious people, and especially the clericals, say it is so—and they ought to know, seeing they are in regular telephonic communication with heaven.

The National Free Church Council will meet shortly at Portsmouth. It must be feeling the draught as a religious body, for it aims at deriving advantage from outside attractions. "Several social questions are to be considered" and the speakers will include Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, M.P., and Mrs. Sydney Webb. We doubt if the religion of these two speakers—in the regular and honest meaning of the term—rises much above freezing point.

An earthquake shock was experienced last week over the West of Scotland. Many buildings were shaken, but the disturbance was not sufficient to make much impression on the churches, which are generally as heavy as the sermons preached inside them.

Two sisters of charity—Miss Bernard Percival Smyth and Miss May Quinlan, said to be from an orphanage at Twickenham, under the patronage of the Catholic Bishops of England, have been charged at Dublin (and sent for trial) with cruelly ill-treating and neglecting two children—a boy and a girl aged four and five years respectively. They had been in Dublin for some time collecting money in aid of their Home, especially from theatres and music-halls which they visited nightly. The medical evidence, and the evidence of the landlady where they lodged with the children, were bad enough to warrant a committal. It is curious how many religious ladies get charged with offences of this kind.

The *Boston Sunday Globe* of December 4—kindly sent us by an American subscriber—contains a long account of the "Boy Broker," Robert E. Davie, who is wanted by the police—and by a good many other people. All sorts and conditions of men (and women) entrusted him with their money; Harry Lander, even, is said to have parted with £5,000. The defalcations amount to an immense sum. Our readers will not be surprised, therefore, to learn that the "Boy Broker" worked the pious "lay" for all it was worth. "When he was not discussing religious subjects, and planning some great philanthropic movement," the *Globe* says, "Davie is said to have confided to his friends that he was closely allied with the J. Pierpont Morgan interests in New York City. He was a young man who, everyone who knew him agreed, had no vices. He did not drink or smoke, but was very religious, a regular attendant at church, and much interested in evangelical work." Most of his victims are religious people, and several of them Christian ministers. "Davie was so free with his money in support of the evangelistic movements that the church people were positive of his integrity." They know better now.

"Evolution and God" was the subject of a lecture the other Sunday evening by the Rev. S. M. Riddick, of Grange-mouth. He has given up the idea of special creation—and yet he hasn't given it up, for he talks of God "packing away in the heart of the earth the coal we burn." But why stop there? God also made man to dig the coal out for a living, and sometimes to be blown to death by an explosion—leaving a wife and children to the mercy of the world. If one part of it is God's work, so is all the rest. The reverend gentleman forgets that. We may also remind him that if evolution "does not deny God" it does not affirm God. And when he talks about the divine wisdom shown in the "survival of the fittest" he should remember that the "fittest" only means the fittest to survive. If the reverend gentleman met a tiger in search of a dinner, and provided the animal with what it required, he would perish and the tiger would survive. The survival of the fittest would work out admirably—for the tiger.

Mr. W. Parvis, in the *Sunday Chronicle*, takes too flattering a view of the superiority of himself and his friends over the educated Hindus, who could afford to smile com-

placently at some of his uncritical observations,—especially in reference to "those young men" of Calcutta "who are members of the Democratic Club and worship at the footstool of Foote and Hyndman when they are in London, but swear by the Ganges and stick knives into their Mahometan countrymen on account of a sacred cow when they are in India." Foote and Hyndman with one footstool between them is certainly a novel conception. The same may be said of the Hindu Freethinkers who swear by the Ganges, worship cows, and murder Mahometans. What wisdom on the subject of India is dispensed by the English press! And think of the modesty of the people who accept this wisdom at its face value, and imagine themselves the divinely appointed rulers of three hundred millions of their fellow men and women in a distant part of the world!

We have been favored with a cutting from the Birmingham *Daily Mail* of December 13 containing one of those maudlin sketches which delight the maudlin pietists of this singular country. It celebrates the religious virtues of an Irishman who gets his living as an artists' model, is often out of a job, is frequently in a state of destitution, is sometimes shivering from head to foot with absolute hunger, and is apt to spend half his time praising the goodness of God. The more the poor devil suffers the more he sees the hand of God when he gets a little relief. And this spaniel-like piety seems quite sublime to the writer of the sketch—as we daresay it will also appear to a lot of the comfortable people who read it.

At the opening of a new school at Farnworth a good many clericals were present and amongst them Archdeacon Clarke, who assured his audience (which probably needed little assurance) that "religious education was necessary for the welfare of the people," and that "a nation without faith was a nation without hope or an ideal." These are very large statements, but we don't feel disposed to discuss them with Archdeacon Clarke, who is simply puffing his own profession. Nobody expects him to quarrel with his own living.

The Berlin correspondent of the *Daily News* reports appalling details of torture of boys in a Prussian reformatory, situated at Miltschin. The report concludes with the shocking, though not surprising, statement that the institution "is managed by a minister of religion named Briethaupt."

Prayers for fine weather were said at St. Mary's Church, Taunton, on Sunday evening, December 11. The Lord's answer was not gratifying. The weather got worse than ever. Thousands of acres in Somerset were submerged, and the moors converted into lakes extending in some cases for miles. Perhaps if they had prayed for more rain at St. Mary's the Lord would have sent them the weather they wanted.

"Providence" again! Incessant rain flooded most parts of Italy. The River Po rose twenty-five feet. Many lives were lost and hundreds of people rendered homeless.

Christian apologetics seem to have reached the lowest stage. One of the recent publications is a booklet on *Christianity and Woman*, by the Rev. J. E. Gun, A.K.C.: It is the feeblest defence that we have seen. Once the Christian religion was defended by the big guns. This latest champion is as dangerous as a pea-shooter.

This defender of Omnipotence uses the initials "A.K.C." after his name. We thought that this sort of thing was peculiar to side-street phrenologists and vendors of quack medicines.

A recent issue of the *Nineteenth Century and After* contains an absurd article on "Gibbon the Infidel" by the Rev. A. H. T. Clarke. It is difficult to understand the inclusion of such nonsense in this periodical, unless the editor wishes to justify the use of an antiquated title.

In a biographical sketch of Mr. Lloyd George, written by Harold Begbie, which has appeared in the *Daily Chronicle* and the *Christian World*, the journalist tells us that the statesman lost his religious belief at eleven years of age and regained it at sixteen through reading Carlyle. The Sage of Chelsea was not a defender of the Great Lying Church. He left that work to the Begbies of his time.

Carlyle's own opinions were often expressed with great bitterness. Here is an entry in his diary on a Christmas Day: "On looking out of the window this morning I noticed that my neighbors were more drunk than usual, and I remembered that it was the birthday of their Redeemer."

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

January 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, Queen's Hall, London; 10, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner.
February 5, Glasgow; 12, Manchester; 26, Birmingham.
March 5, Liverpool.

To Correspondents.

C. COHEN'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 15, Birmingham; 22, Canning Town; 29, Liverpool. February 12 and 19, Queen's Hall, London; 26, Glasgow. March 5, Manchester.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1910.—Previously acknowledged: £286 0s. 1d. Received since:—F. Rogers, 5s.; H. J. (Liverpool), 5s.; Hugh Thomson, 2s. 6d.; W. R. Angell, 2s. 6d.; H. Jessop, £5; J. de B. (South Africa), £4 4s.; Geo. Lunn, 10s.; D. H. Hayes, 2s. 6d.; T. A. Matthews, 6s.

F. D.—Tuesday is too late for paragraphs. And a report of a meeting held on December 11 might well have reached us before December 20.

R. F. ISOM.—We hope we have your name right. It is gratifying to hear that you "have to thank the *Freethinker* for more than you can write." We are sorry to hear that while the Liberal candidate answered both the "Blasphemy" questions in a perfectly straightforward manner, Mr. Keir Hardie's answer to the second one was anything but satisfactory. But we are not surprised.

T. J. DOYLE.—There is a Branch of the N. S. S. at Newcastle-on-Tyne, but it seems to be in a rather dormant condition. We have pleasure in making the following extract from your letter:—"I have been a reader of the *Freethinker* some twenty months now, and I must say the more I see of it the better I like it....I hope you will soon see its circulation doubled. I introduce it to all my friends, and have secured a few readers by that means. I look on the day that I first received a copy of the *Freethinker* from a friend as one of the luckiest in my life." We have to state, in reply to your query, that we do not issue a weekly contents-sheet. We used to, but we dropped it as an expense that brought no adequate return. We have a permanent poster, which our shop manager will send to anyone who can get it displayed.

JAMES McLEAN.—It was noticed in last week's "Acid Drops."

F. ROGERS (Kettering).—We note that the Liberal and Labor candidates both answered "Yes" to the two questions. The Conservative candidates "Yes" and "No" show a muddled or insincere state of mind. There is something quite comic in his idea that nobody is ever punished for "attacking the Christian religion in a fair manner." What is a fair manner? Those whose religion is attacked decide the question—which is the cream of the joke—and Christians can't see it.

J. H. (Liverpool).—Thanks for good wishes.

E. A. KING.—The matter of your cutting was referred to in last week's "Acid Drops." We are glad, however, to have fuller details of the case. Thanks.

R. MILLER.—All right.

C. GREATBATCH.—Thanks for your trouble in the matter. Parliamentary candidates are a tricky lot. Putting questions to them, however, educates the public.

A. J. McKIRDY.—See paragraph. Thanks.

JOSEPH LUCAS.—We have passed your letter over to Miss Vance.

J. BLACKHALL.—It is comparatively easy for the Rev. E. N. Walters to reply to "Atheists, Agnostics, and Secularists" in their absence. No wonder you found him silent when you suggested a public debate with a representative Freethinker.

A. CLARKE.—We do not deny that there may be "discretion" in the use of the word "Agnostic" instead of the word "Atheist," but the choice of one of two words involves the usage of both, and the convenience (that is, the safety and comfort) of using the least "offensive" depends upon the inconvenience (that is, the danger and discomfort) of using the more "offensive." If there were no "Atheists" the "Agnostics" would have to bear all the odium, and most of them would be looking round for a less "offensive" label.

W. P. BALL.—Much obliged for cuttings.

G. LUNN.—When you say that our articles "often contain more than can be obtained out of a volume on the same thing by others" you pay us an appreciated compliment. We like terse speech, we hate a waste of words, we always try to understand what we deal with, and we never forget that we write in order to be read. The last is a vital consideration—too often overlooked.

J. DE B. (S. Africa).—Glad your wife joins with you in the subscription. That is the best aspect of it. We will find time for a brief letter in reply shortly.

H. JESSOP, sending second subscription, as promised, towards the President's Honorarium Fund, says that "If the other friends do likewise the £300 will be an accomplished fact."

WATCHFUL.—Thanks for the Reynolds' cutting. We had overlooked it. It is pleasant to find that the man whom the Home Secretary humanely released, and who tried to borrow sixpence from a clergyman to get home to his sick wife with, found a good Samaritan in a tram conductor.

T. BARNES.—See paragraph. There is not much of a tangible character in the lectures. Thanks for good wishes.

S. WARD.—You cannot publish even a Bishop's letters without his permission. His lordship has simply evaded you, as we guessed he would. You asked him one question, and he has replied to another. What else in the name of goodness did you expect?

W. G.—Freethought lecturers all make their own terms. There are no general "conditions"—if you mean financial conditions.

D. H. HAYES.—Miss Vance has shown us your cheerful letter. Freethinkers are likely to make good patients. We wish you health and luck.

F. O. RIZZ (Paris).—Glad to have your good wishes for the N. S. S., the *Freethinker*, and its editor. Shall be pleased to hear from you again.

W. CHALMERS.—We have read your letter with a proper sense of our insignificance. Still, even a person of our humble intelligence may occasionally have reasonable grounds for his action. When there is a Branch of the N. S. S. in a place we prefer to receive local Freethought announcements and reports through that channel; otherwise we may print misleading things, or do the Branch itself an injury. This policy involves no more trouble than any other in *bona fide* cases; and, justly considered, it implies no real offence to individuals.

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

The new three-months course of Freethought lectures at the Queen's (Minor) Hall opens next Sunday evening (January 1). Mr. Foote occupies the platform every Sunday in January, and his subjects will be found in our advertisement columns this week. We invite London Freethinkers to help in advertising these meetings. They can do so by (1) by circulating neat little printed announcements which can be obtained of Miss Vance, 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C., (2) by telling their friends and acquaintances of the lectures, and (3) by trying to induce some of them to attend. We invite them to bestir themselves a little. They will never regret it; on the contrary, they are likely to increase their efforts on the next occasion. We advise the backward ones to give it a trial.

It will be noticed from the advertisement of Mr. Foote's lectures during January that they form a continuous, logical series, covering pretty well all the ground on which Freethought opposes Christianity. Mr. Foote has had this course in mind for some time and he takes this opportunity of realising it. No doubt a good many persons will attend the whole course.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, takes place on Tuesday evening, January 10, at the Holborn Restaurant. We should like to see the record beaten on this occasion. We are glad to know that some provincial "saints" are coming up to meet the London brethren at this festal gathering. The tickets (4s. each) are now obtainable at the N. S. S. office, by personal application or letter to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.

Mr. Harry Shaw, on behalf of himself and a few other "saints" at Alfreton, sends a letter which is encouraging. "You will be pleased to learn," he says, "that, in addition to buying six copies of the *Freethinker* (three from each of two newsagents) we have persuaded six individuals to become regular readers. The battle is a hard one against superstition and priestcraft, but we are slowly making progress."

Our circulation always suffers a little in times of political excitement. Our bed-rock readers hold on in spite of everything, and they are the great majority; but every paper has its casual and fluctuating body of readers, and ours are apt to drop away during general elections and other public disturbances, on which ordinary papers flourish. We venture to ask our friends to push our circulation in the new year as far as possible. The great thing is to place the paper in fresh hands.

Lecture notices for next week's *Freethinker* must be in by Saturday morning (Dec. 24) by the first post, at the latest.

Christianity in China.

THE history of Christianity in China affords, perhaps, the most striking object-lesson in wasted effort that is to be found in any sphere of propagandist activity. The colossal failure of Christian missions in the attempts made during many centuries to Christianise the Chinese needs no other proof than the evidence of figures supplied by the missionaries themselves. And those hopeful prophecies of a rosy future, which are the key-note of appeal when missionary funds need replenishing, find a very dubious prospect of fulfilment in the face of past and present results. So fruitless have the evangelical labors of missionaries been, that they have been obliged to frame numerous excuses to account for the indifference of the Chinese to "the religion of the Lord of Heaven." But doubtless the real reason is that given by the Rev. Mr. Doolittle in his *Social Life of the Chinese*, written about 1866. He says:—

"If the Chinese were ignorant savages or barbarians like the Sandwich Islanders fifty years ago, it might perhaps be expected that they would be influenced to embrace Christianity with comparative ease and speed. *But they are a civilised people; a literary nation.*"

This candid admission is tantamount to saying that the soil most favorable to the growth and spread of Christianity is a mental condition of human ignorance and credulity. And certainly its rejection by the best intellects of modern Europe is evidence that its beliefs are incompatible with advanced knowledge and moral culture, and that it lingers among the nations of Western civilisation only as a survival of the past, perpetuated not by any inherent vitality of its doctrines, but kept alive solely by the power of the vested interests at stake.

If Christianity has not succeeded in China, it is not because it has lacked favorable opportunities for its dissemination, nor because the country in the past has been left without the knowledge of this "sublime" religion. Already, as early as the fifth and sixth centuries, says M. Huc, we discover traces of the first missionaries who travelled by land from Constantinople to what they called the kingdom of Cathay; for it was under this name that China was first known in the West. Again, in the eighth, tenth, and thirteenth centuries we find missions being sent to this heathen land; and it appears that at one time the Nestorian Christians and Greek Catholics had a considerable following. But such is the religious inconstancy of the Chinese, that when Father Ricci entered the country towards the end of the sixteenth century "the seeds of the Christian faith, cast into it in the earlier ages, appear to have entirely perished." With the exception of one single inscription at Si-ngan, "no trace of the passage of former missionaries, or of their teaching, was then to be found. Not even in the traditions of the country was preserved the slightest trace of the religion of Jesus Christ." And this obliteration of all traces of missionary labors in the previous centuries tends to confirm the truth of M. Huc's observation that, "Religious ideas, it must be owned, do not strike very deep root in this country."

The later ages do not exhibit any improvement in the Chinese disposition toward the Christian faith, and what little success it has at any time met with has been mostly due to the favorable smile of some reigning emperor. And so we read that when Father Ricci, after more than twenty years of fruitless labor, had been received favorably at court, "the conversions became numerous, and Catholic churches arose in many places." And when the venerable Father died in 1610 he had the consolation to leave his mission in a flourishing condition. But the favor of a monarch is not at all a sure foundation upon which to establish an alien religion. By-and-bye, another emperor arose that knew not Ricci nor regarded the God of heaven, and then—the conversions were not so numerous. About a century later another Catholic missionary, Father Gaubil, wrote home to France:—

"I have only been a few months in China, and I was much grieved when I came to find a mission, which only

a short time ago held out such encouraging hopes, reduced to so melancholy a condition. The churches are in ruins, the Christians dispersed, the missionaries exiled, and the religion itself is on the point of being proscribed."

Thus, says M. Huc, "the prosperity that had sprung up under the protection of one emperor, disappeared at the first word of persecution of his successor." And this religious inconstancy of the Church of China proves, he says, that "Christianity had not struck deeper root in it than it had done in past ages, and that the Chinese, so tenacious and immovable in their attachment to ancient custom, had little energy and steadiness in the cause of religion."

If we come down later in the scale of history to Father Huc's own day (1845-6), we find the same apathy of the Chinese towards Christianity. The venerable Father was no more successful in his efforts than the numerous missionaries in the past had been; but he consoles himself with the thought that "the Church is never discouraged"—as long as the necessary funds are forthcoming. Speaking in one place of the few Chinese Christian communities then existing, he says:—

"All seems to indicate that the missionary will long have to sow the divine seed in tears and sorrow. Truly lamentable is this obstinacy of the Chinese people in rejecting, disdainfully, the treasure of faith that Europe has never ceased to offer with so much zeal, devotion, and perseverance. No other nation has excited such lively solicitude on the part of the Church; no sacrifice has been spared for its sake; and yet it is the one, of all, that has proved most rebellious."

The soil has been prepared and turned in all directions with patience and intelligence; it has been watered by sweat and tears and enriched with the blood of martyrs; the evangelical seed has been sown in it with profusion; the Christian world has poured forth prayers to draw upon it the blessing of Heaven, and yet—it is as sterile as ever."

Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but it is God that giveth the increase—so said the great Apostle to the Gentiles. But in the case of the Chinese, the great Fertiliser, for some reason or other, has failed to exercise his divine prerogative. And considering his refusal to recognise or bless the evangelical labors of fifteen hundred years, and that this great work has "come to nought," it would appear that in their persistence the missionaries were really "fighting against God."

Heaven smiled no more favorably on the labors of Protestant missionaries than it had done on those of the Mother Church, for the first representatives of reformed Christianity had labored, with the help of the Holy Ghost, for seven long years in Canton before they were able to number a single convert. And other cities that were attacked later were even more impregnable than Canton, for they had been established at Fuhchau fully nine years before they were able to persuade one Chinese to undergo the ordeal of Christian baptism. And since this period of "Pentecostal blessing" in the far East, the missionaries seem to have been mostly employed in manufacturing statistics for home consumption. And although Mr. Cohen, in his booklet on *Foreign Missions*, estimates that at the rate of increase given by the missionaries themselves between '95 and '99, the year 1126900 will have dawned ere the conversion of the last Chinaman will be celebrated, yet it is quite safe to prophesy that that event will never happen.

The test of the utility of a religious system has, in recent years, undergone a very marked change. That test is no longer confined to its effect upon individual character—to the changing of a violent temper into a mild one, etc.—but is being judged by its results in the social, moral, and industrial relationships that obtain in society generally. And from this wider point of view it cannot be maintained that Christian civilisation has anything to offer the Chinese; a fact of which the educated Celestial is well aware. The young Prince Tsai-Toi, during his visit to America, invited criticism of Chinese customs, and was not afraid of them being compared with those of the United States. And Mr. R. J. John-

stone, F.R.G.S., in his book *From Peking to Mandalay*, frankly says:—

"Even in the most squalid quarters of the most densely populated cities of China I have never seen anything more painful and depressing than comes daily within the experience of those who live in close proximity to the slums and poorer quarters of our great English cities."

And when we consider that China numbers her population by hundreds of millions while we only count ours by tens, it is certainly not to Britain's credit that she cannot exhibit social and economic conditions superior in any way to such a populous empire.

The Chinese themselves are not slow to recognise the moral failings of European countries, and firmly believe in their own superiority in this respect. A former Chinese Minister to Great Britain, His Excellency Kuo, when told, in answer to a question, that in Dr. Legge's opinion the moral condition of England is higher than that of China, seemed unable to comprehend how anyone, knowing the two countries, could hold such an opinion. After a moment's thought, with deep feeling he replied: "I am very much surprised." Dr. Legge also mentions a conversation he had with a Chinese Ambassador in reference to the moral condition of England compared with that of China, in which he claims that, morally, England was the better country. Dr. Legge records the effect of his pronouncement upon the illustrious Chinese in the following words:—

"I never saw a man more surprised in my life. He pushed his chair back a couple of yards, got upon his feet, walked across the room once or twice, and said: 'Looking at them from a moral standpoint, England is the better country of the two! How, then, does England insist upon our taking her opium?'"

And certainly the Chinese Ambassador had good grounds for maintaining that, with reference to benevolence, righteousness, and propriety, China is superior to Great Britain. And, this being so, it ought to be apparent to the densest British barbarian that to send missionaries to such a country is not only the worst of folly, but is also an insult to its people. It is possible that they may have converted a few bad Chinamen into worse Christians, as the number of "missionary cases," which have been such a source of trouble in China, would seem to testify; but that they have ever really converted a follower of Confucius to a belief in the supernatural dogmas of Christianity may reasonably be doubted. Christianity will, of course, continue to be propagated in China as long as the funds are supplied by a credulous religious public to keep the missionaries there; but when the truth about that ancient civilisation becomes better known there will be a good many missionaries available for the more profitable occupation of "planting trees on the bald-headed hills and mountains of Spain, Portugal, and Italy."

JOSEPH BRYCE.

THE TIME FOR PRAYER.

Reggy: "Darling, hear my prayer!"

Edith: "Y-yes, pray for all you're worth, Reggy. I hear papa coming down the stairs!"

Parson Goodman: "See here! Don't you know where little boys go who play football on Sunday?"

Small Boy: "Yazzir. Dey gets ter playin' in de cup ties when dey's big' nough!"

FREE THOUGHTS.

It is time enough to call in a priest when the doctor is gone.

The religion that has to be paid for is not worth paying for.

Heaven may have blessings for man, but only a few have enjoyed earth's blessings as yet.

There is nothing holy but believing makes it so.

Jesus did not talk or act for the twentieth century.

"Holy Orders" have become unholy.

The man who had a ghost for a father never had a mother.—L. K. Washburn, "Truthseeker," *New York*.

Lucretius on Death.

Translated from the "*De Rerum Natura*," *iii.*, 830-1094,

BY HENRY S. SALT.

So death, being naught, concerneth us no jot,
Knowing man's mind itself doth surely die:
And as, while yet unborn, we heeded not
When the armed Peni came with thunderous tread,
And all things in war's wild perplexity
Shuddered and shook beneath the heights of heaven,
Nor could men guess to whose supreme control
Would fall the lordship of the vanquished world—
So, when we cease to be, when body and soul,
Whereof our life is subtly built, are riven,
No mortal chance can reach us, who are dead,
Nor wake our senses while the ages roll—
Not though the earth and sea were skyward hurled.

And e'en if conscious thought the soul attend,
And sense still haunt the disembodied mind,
'Tis nothing here to us, whose being is knit
Of body and soul in union close combined;
Nor yet if time our scattered dust re-blend,
And after death upbuild the flesh again,
Yea, and our light of life arise re-lit,
Can such new birth concern the self one whit,
When once dark death has severed memory's chain.

Naught reck we, then, our lives lived in the past,
Nor for their sorrows feel one pang of pain;
For whoso ponders on the immense abyss
Of bygone time and matter moving fast
Through countless forms, will haply doubt not this—
That these same bodily seeds, whereof we are,
Were, years ago, in the selfsame order cast;
Yet this we grasp not, e'en by memory's aid,
So deeply is life's course broken, and so far
The streams of matter from the sense have strayed.

And, sooth, on no man's heart can sorrow fall
Save his who draws e'en now this actual breath,
For dying he passes hence, nor feels at all
What grievous tribulation may betide:
With reason, then, the fear of death we scorn,
Since he alone is scathless who hath died,
Nor matters it if erst-time we were born,
When this short life is closed in endless death.

If, then, thou hear'st some man his fate lament,
That after death he must in graveyard rot,
By fire be wasted, or by fierce fangs rent,
Mark well his plaint, for true it ringeth not.
Deep in his heart some blind resentment lies,
Albeit he vows that death is void of pain:
Methinks he grants not what he doth premise,
Nor lifts him wholly from his mortal lot,
But lets some fragment of old self remain.

For whoso pictures with his living eyes
How boasts and birds shall tear his limbs in death,
Self-pity feels, nor thoroughly doth divorce
From his live sentient self his senseless corse,
But stands beside it, and imagineth
Himself therein, as though it felt likewise:
So to be mortal fills his mind with dread,
Forgetting that in real death can be
No self, to mourn that other self as dead,
Or stand and weep at death's indignity.
And if the rending by the ravenous mouth
Of beasts be fearful, fearful too, to me,
Is the grim furnace, with its fiery drouth,
The honeyed stifling 'neath the embalmer's skill,
The posture on the marble stiff and chill,
Or the heaped earth that lies so heavily.

"No more thine home shall welcome thee, nor wife
Nor loving children haste to meet thy kiss,
And thrill thy heart with sweet unspoken bliss;
No longer shalt thou prosper in the strife,
And shield thy dear ones. Thine is woe on woe,
Robbed in one hour of all the joys of life."
So mourn they for their dead, but add not this:
"Lost, too, is all thy yearning for those things";
For this one truth, could they but learn and know,
Would scatter all their fears and sorrowings. [while

"Thou'lt sleep," they say, "in death's embrace, the
Time runs its course, exempt from pain and care;
But we, who watched thee burn on that dread pile,
And wept with inconsolable despair,
To us no length of days will bring relief."
Is't so? Then why, if death be sleep and rest,
With such exceeding bitterness oppress,
Waste ye your hearts in never-ending grief?

E'en so do men, who at some festival
Sit cup in hand, their brows with garlands twined,
Oft cry, "Alas, the brief joys of mankind,
One moment ours, then fled beyond recall!"

As if in death they most did dread the fires
Of torturing thirst, poor souls, and feverish drought,
Or lack of aught the yearning heart desires.
Fools! From all conscious life man wins release,
When body and mind are lulled in slumber's thrall,
Nor cares he though his sleep should never cease,
All piteous thoughts of self being blotted out.
And yet, in sleep, the elemental power
From its sense-stirring motions hath not fled,
For lo! we start and greet the waking hour:
Less, then, does dread of death our minds molest,
If less can be, where naught at all we dread;
For after death far greater disarray
Of matter must ensue, nor wake we may,
When once life's course hath felt that cold arrest.

Hark! 'tis the Nature of the Universe
That cries aloud to man's rebellious heart:
"Mortal, what passionate longing bids thee nurse
This sickly grief, o'er death to weep and wail?
Past life hath brought thee many a lusty day,
Nor have thy bygone joys without avail,
As through a broken pitcher, flowed away:
Be wise, then, and like sated guest depart,
And calmly greet the quiet of the grave.
But if thy comforts all be spoiled and spent,
And life itself offend thee, wherefore crave
To amass what soon must cursedly decay?
Better it were to quit this world of pain;
For further solace can no art invent,
But evermore the selfsame ills draw nigh;
Albeit nor age hath marred thy bodily might,
Nor sickness wasted, yet these ills remain—
Yea, though thou could'st outlive time's furthest flight,
Or e'en if thou wert destined ne'er to die."

What shall he say, whom Nature's laws impeach,
Save that with truth her charge she argueth?
And if some greyhaired grumbler, bent with years,
Should mourn o'er much the grievous doom of death,
Would she not rightly arraign him with sharp speech?
"Begone, thou whining babbler, dry thy tears!

Thou'st ta'en thy portion of Life's heritage;
But since thou scornest all she doth bestow,
And ever cravest for the things denied,
Thy life-days have slipped from thee unfulfilled,
Till unawares death standeth at thy side
Ere thou can'st glut thy greedy heart and go.
Drop, then, these hopes that ill beseeem thine age,
And yield thee, as thou must, since fate hath willed."

Justly, methinks, would Nature thus upbraid;
For the old must ever to the new give place,
And one thing pass, another to supply;
Yet ne'er were men to hell's black pit betrayed;
They serve as substance of the future race,
Who in their turn must pass, when life is done:
Like us, men died of yore, and yet shall die.
Thus spring we, each from other, without end,
And life is used by all, possessed by none.
Look back: what heed we, when our thoughts retrace
The immeasurable years ere we were born?
'Tis but the mirror Nature's hand doth lend
Of the coming years that shall unheeded sweep:
Seems there, in this, aught fearful, aught forlorn?
Is it not calmer than the calmest sleep?

Yet, sooth, those fabulous tales of Acheron
All find fulfilment on this earth of ours.
No Tantalus, dazed with visions that appal,
Stares skyward at the huge impending stone;
But, 'neath false fear of gods, man idly cowers,
Dreading whatever evil chance may fall.

And Tityos—him no bird of death devours,
Nor probing in his mighty heart for prey
Age after age fresh sustenance could find;
Nor, though with giant stature far reclined
And limbs outstretched, not acres nine of land
But all the wide world's surface he o'erlay,
Could he forever that fierce pain withstand,
Or flesh and blood that endless banquet bear.
Nay, here in life he lies, by lust depressed,
While anguished thoughts like ravenous vultures tear,
Or some dark passion rankles in his breast.

Here, too, stands Sisyphus before our eyes,
Who pines for power and woos the popular will,
Hoping, and ever baffled of his hope;
For thus to seek, thus lose, a paltry prize,
And in the barren quest to strive and strain—
Such is his fabled task, who heaves uphill
The accursed rock, which from the topmost slope
Goes bounding backward to the level plain.

And then to feed the insatiable soul
With all things good, yet never to fulfil,
As do the circling seasons with their freight
Of ripening fruits and pleasures in rich store—

Yet with life's joys men dwell unsated still—
This is, methinks, those hapless maidens' fate,
Who pour, 'tis rumored, in the broken bowl
A ceaseless stream, and still in vain must pour.

But Cerberus and the Furies—the deep gloom
Of death's domain, Ixion's restless wheel, [gate—
And the fierce flames belched forth from Tartarus'
These ne'er have been, nor can be evermore.
But lawless men in life such terrors feel—
Their signal guilt foreboding signal doom—
Chains, and the frightful hurling from the steep,
The lash, the felon's death in dungeon deep,
Hot irons, and scalding pitch, the torturer's tools;
And though these ills befall not, the sick mind,
On dreams of destined goad and scourge intent,
Of that self-torment no surcease can find,
Nor respite from its ghostly punishment,
But feigns it e'en more grievous in the tomb.
Lo, hell made actual in the life of fools!

Thus may'st thou with thyself of death debate:
"Long time the light from Ancus' eyes hath fled,
Whose kingly deeds were nobler far than thine;
And many another high-throned potentate,
Once ruler of some mighty race, is dead:
And he who o'er the boundless ocean-field
In olden time his warlike path did pave,
And launched his legions on the billowy brine,
And mocked with tramp of horse the murmuring wave—
E'en he to darkening death his soul did yield.
Then Scipio's son, war's thunderbolt, the dread
Of conquered Carthage, laid on earth's low breast
His lifeless bones, as might the meanest slave.
Mark, too, the lords of high philosophy;
The poets' sacred band, whose sceptred king,
Great Homer, sleeps death's sleep amid the rest;
And wise Democritus, who, when age did bring
First warning of quick memory's decline,
Himself did freely bow his head to die.
E'en Epicurus died, his life-course run,
Though other mortal men he did outshine
Like stars that pale beside the upsoaring sun.

"But thou—wilt *thou* the call of death resent?
Thou, whose own life is dead ere death draws near;
Who in deep slumber half thy years hast spent,
And e'en in waking moments still dost snore,
And with sick dreamings wear the dull days out,
Plaguings thy mind with many a foolish fear;
Nor canst discern what breeds thy discontent,
Drowsy with sorrows that beset thee sore,
And drifting aimless on a sea of doubt."

If men, o'erburdened with a haunting sense
Of some dull weight 'neath which their spirits bow,
Could learn the cause of their disease, and whence
As 'twere a mass of misery clogs the mind,
Far wiselier would they live their lives than now,
When each, unconscious of his wants, doth yearn
To quit his post and leave his load behind.
See, wearied of his home, some wretch escape
From stately mansion, then as quick return,
For, sooth, abroad small solace can he find:
To country-house he drives in headlong speed,
Like men who rush to save their roofs afire,
Then, foot on threshold, suddenly doth gape,
Or fall asleep, as rest were now his need,
Or back to town in furious haste retire.
Thus each, bewildered, his own self would shun,
And when it cleaves the closer, bides in strife,
Not knowing what curse his heart embittereth;
Which if he knew, then straight, all else undone,
He would embrace the natural law of life;
For 'tis eternal time, not some brief span,
That stands at stake—the unending lot of man,
Whate'er it be that waits him after death.

Why, then, doth danger's hour affright us so?
By what false love of life are we misled?
Since one sure term for mortals is ordained,
The unfailing death which all must undergo.
Still by the same old paths our way we wend,
Though life itself no new delights can give;
The joys we lack seem fairest; but, attained,
We crave the more for others in their stead,
As open-mouthed we ever thirst to live,
Nor guess what fate the future may bestow,
Nor when shall come the incalculable end.

E'en by long living we detract no jot
From the great death-time, nor one hour can gain
From those unnumbered years when we are not.
Heap life on life till ages pass; 'tis vain;
For death eternal waits thee evermore:
Nor for a briefer space shall he be dead,
Whose light of life but yesterday hath fled,
Than he who perished years on years before.

Blasphemy.

Copy of a Bill exposed in the workshop window of F. H. Shaw & Brother, Leabrooks Engineering Works, near Alfreton.

THE other day we quietly and respectfully asked a question at the Tory candidate's meeting held in the Girls' School, Somercates.

While we were not satisfied with the quibbling answer we received, we were pained and disgusted with the intolerance of the greater part of the audience.

We have known for some time how unpopular we are in the district, and there are many respectable people who meet us with a smile and a pleasant word of greeting, but who secretly hate us like poison.

Some of these cowards were at the meeting referred to, and showed both their cowardice and their ignorance when they jeered at us. We would ask the schoolmistress of Somercates Infants' School why she helped the ignorant crowd to jeer? Surely one who has pretensions to culture and refinement ought to be above such petty spite. We wonder if she was trying to settle old scores by thus publicly deriding us.

She has evidently not forgiven us for taking advantage of the Conscience Clause in the Education Act, and removing our children from religious instruction in the day-schools.

Or the lady, like many more who profess to be Christians, may, in her ignorance, believe that Atheists must be wicked people. To rectify this unjust attitude to Atheists, we would point out that some of the noblest of men have been Freethinkers; also most of the murderers die happy in the Christian Faith.

Atheism is a philosophy of life that has as much basis of morality, and indeed of love, as the best religion in the world.

We are often accused of being personal, and some of our Christian friends, such as the lady mentioned, who don't mind personalities when dealing with Atheism, seem to have taken offence on this account.

While we deplore personalities, generally speaking, we believe it is necessary to make use of them in dealing with cowardly traducers of the truth, or in answering the arguments of those who try to persuade a gullible public that Atheism and immorality are synonymous terms.

The question we asked Mr. Rhys was one that called for an honest reply. We simply wanted to know if Mr. Rhys was in favor of repealing the Blasphemy Law, and a plain Yes or No would have been sufficient. Our reason for asking this question was simple. As Atheists we have decided to vote for no man who is not just enough himself to do justice to Freethinkers.

As the law stands to-day, any Protestant Christian may describe his Catholic brother Christians' religion as the religion of the Scarlet Whore, and he runs no danger of imprisonment; likewise the Catholic may vilify the creed of the Protestant with impunity. But should an Atheist call the pair of them liars, and ridicule their obviously silly pretensions, then he puts himself within the power of the law, and, like Mr. Foote, the editor of the *Freethinker*, in the year 1883, may find himself sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment.

As English citizens, and as Freethinkers, we claim the right of free speech; and a good many honest Christian thinkers whom we know agree with us that the Blasphemy Law is an unjust law, that ought to be repealed in the interests of common justice.

But bigoted, narrow-minded Christians prefer to play the coward's part; and, because they cannot reply to the Atheist's sarcastic criticism, they like to know that they have in reserve the legal power to crush their opponent by putting him in prison—and they thus prove our repeated assertion that people who believe in a vindictive man-made Jehovah cannot be expected to be honest in their dealings with their fellows.

Mr. Rhys, in replying to our question, confounded the Blasphemy Law with laws relating to obscenity, and unconsciously made the audience think, what they were only too ready to believe, that we were pleading for a license for vulgarity and indecency.

We forgive Mr. Rhys for his lack of knowledge of the laws, although, as a lawyer, he ought to have known better; but what shall we say of our brothers and sisters who would not allow us to press for a fairer answer from Mr. Rhys? We can only express our sorrow for their lack of charity, and, in the words of Jesus the Carpenter, say: "Forgive them, they know not what they do."

The Christian religion, as preached by most of its priests, is an incubus on progress, mental and social; and we must continue our battle against it until the injustice and hypocrisy, the cant and intolerance it engenders, are no more.

Because we believe in truth, because we wish to love all men, because we know there is no omnipotent good God, we shall continue to preach Atheism until men shall be freed from superstition and priestcraft, and shall become lovers of men and haters of false gods.

—The Leabrooks Humanitarian Society.

Correspondence.

RELIGION AND TEMPERANCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As a Freethinker, I recently wrote to the *Alliance News and Temperance Reformer*, which, by the way, is somewhat religious, and pointed out that in this district the Temperance Party endeavored to promote temperance by closing temperance places of refreshment on Sundays, and thus causing the thirsty traveller to seek the public-house or beershop, who would, in many cases, prefer a cup of tea or glass of lemonade. I concluded by writing that the majority of temperance reformers will give the worker no alternative to Beer or Bible. Up to the present, my letter has not appeared.

I think there is a good opening for a Temperance Free-thought Society or Group, to promote same by science, economics, etc.

THOMAS P. WHITE.

Woodford, Essex.

THE DEATH OF MIRABEAU.

When Mirabeau, the mighty master-spirit of the Revolution, lay dying in Paris amid the breathless hush of a whole nation, he was attended by the great Cabanis. After a night of terrible suffering, he turned to his physician and said: "My friend, I shall die to-day. When one has come to such a juncture there remains only one thing to do, that is to be perfumed, crowned with flowers, and surrounded with music, in order to enter sweetly into that slumber, from which there is no awakening." Then he had his couch brought to the window, and there the Titan died, with his last gaze on the bright sunshine and the fragrant flowers. He was an Atheist. Why should the Atheist fear to die? From the womb of Nature he sprang, and he will take his last sleep on her bosom.—G. W. Foote.

"TAKE NO HEED FOR THE MORROW."

"Take no heed about to-morrow,"
Said the man-god, "do no labor,
Be content with eadless praying
And eternal *laissez faire*."

But the devil, being wiser,
Knows that he who fails to reckon
With the morrow, will discover
That to-morrow—is to-day!

And to-day is, now and ever,
All eternity or nothing—
He who sits and twiddles fingers
Now, hath done it evermore!

—Robert Buchanan.

Obituary.

WE regret to record the death of Mr. Charles J. Pottage, of 16 Oakfield-road, Stroud Green, which took place on Wednesday, December 7, in his 78th year. The interment occurred on the following Tuesday, at St. Pancras Public Cemetery, when a secular service was conducted in the chapel and at the grave. In his early years Mr. Pottage was an enthusiastic Christian, and for a time published a journal called the *Religious Opinion*. Ere long, however, his faith forsook him, and he became an ardent Freethinker. His admiration of Charles Bradlaugh, and afterwards of G. W. Foote, knew no bounds. The Hall of Science and the Milton Hall he dearly loved to frequent. He had strong convictions, and courage to express them. In his business relationships he was universally respected. His shining qualities were punctuality, devotion to details, and absolute trustworthiness. He was a constant reader of the works of Mr. Foote, Mr. John M. Robertson, and other Free-thought leaders. His son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. J. D. Pottage, of 97 Upper Tollington Park, Stroud Green, and their children, are also convinced and consistent Freethinkers.—J. T. LLOYD.

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