

# THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

VOL. XXXI.—No. 2

SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 1911

PRICE TWOPENCE

*A nightmare is not scattered while we are asleep. It disappears simply by—WAKING.*

—“MARK RUTHERFORD.”

## Women and Freethought.

WE have a special work to do in this journal, and we have always kept to it. Between a wooden platform and a mental platform there is an essential difference. The wider the wooden one is the more people can stand upon it; the wider the mental one is the less people can stand upon it. One principle may have a million adherents; add another to it, and the adherents of both together may be reduced to half a million; add another, and the adherents of all three together may be only a hundred thousand; and if you go on adding you will come to a handful in time, and finally to a single person.

Attempts were made, many years ago, to drive the Freethought party into the adoption of Socialism. This was met by attempts to drive it into the adoption of Individualism. Both efforts were mistaken, and the success of either would have been disastrous. The Freethought party would have been divided at once; some other effort would have been made to commit it to something else, which would have caused another division, and the last two members would eventually have wished each other good-bye.

Freethought, in relation to politics and sociology, is not a dogma; it can never be more than an attitude. Huxley and Spencer were opposed to each other, but they were both Freethinkers, and they carried on their controversy with good taste, good temper, and mutual respect. Nor was that all. They both appealed to reason, and to nothing else, in the dispute between them. Freethinkers cannot all be expected to see eye to eye with each other in relation to the vast variety of questions that have to be settled in civilised communities. Differences of capacity, temperament, training, and knowledge will naturally assert themselves. All we have a right to expect is that Freethinkers will be more reasonable, and consequently more humane, than their superstitious fellow citizens. Whether they are Conservatives, Liberals, Radicals, or Socialists, they will be so with a certain difference. They will not be fanatical; they will not be the mere slaves of a shibboleth; they will not assume that all who differ from them are necessarily rogues or fools; they will keep their minds open to argument and information; they will not try to cut the gordian knots of public affairs with the mere sword of party passion. Hobbes was an Absolutist, Hume was a Tory, Mill was a Liberal, Bradlaugh was a Radical; yet they had something in common which differentiated them from other men of the same parties—a faith in human reason and an enthusiasm for human welfare.

Those who have read this article so far will understand why we do not discuss politics in the *Freethinker*. They will not expect us to deal with the question of woman suffrage which has been agitating the public mind, or at least the public emotions. Whether women, or men either, should possess votes, how they should possess them, and when they should possess them—are political questions, with which we have no special concern. The present writer may

have his private opinions, but they have nothing to do with the public policy of this journal. We are not going to be drawn, therefore, into the discussion of “votes for women.” We may observe, however, for this is outside the sphere of party politics, that too much importance may easily be attached to voting in itself—while security exists for the freedom of the platform and the press. While that freedom obtains all questions are settled—as far as they are settled—through the growth of public opinion and sentiment, of which voting is only a mechanical and temporary expression; and the greatest rulers of any civilised country are, after all, its men of genius who lie in their graves.

What we desire to do in this brief article is to point out the relation which the Freethought party has always borne to the female sex. In one sense it has borne no such relation at all. It has never made any distinction between the sexes—having wisely left that business to Mother Nature. We must know whether members are men and women in order to address them properly. Beyond that we never trouble. Women have always had seats on our committees when they seemed entitled to them. They have not been voted in because they were women, neither have they been kept out for that reason. Women have always been welcome upon our platforms. Long ago, women like Frances Wright and Emma Martin expounded our principles with eloquence and acceptance. Later, we had Mrs. Harriet Law and Mrs. Annie Besant. And if we have few lady advocates on the platform just now it is not because of any barrier to their approach, but because we are not fortunate enough to possess them. The National Secular Society has a lady secretary at headquarters, and its Branches have often had lady secretaries likewise. Evidently, then, we do not warn women off the course. We welcome their co-operation. There is complete equality of opportunity between the sexes in work for Freethought.

We do not say that this has any definite relation to the political question of woman suffrage; but we do say that it is calculated to lead to a discussion of that question—if it must be discussed—without brutality on one side or hysteria on the other.

It appears to us that Shelley's great cry, “Can man be free if woman be a slave?” goes far higher and deeper than any political proposal. The poet of poets and purest of men, as James Thomson beautifully called him, meant something vital, not something mechanical. Whether woman should or should not drop her voting-paper in the parliamentary ballot-box—which, either for woman or man, is perhaps not the sublimest task in the world—it is of great and constant importance that she should exercise her intellect as well as her emotions, even if the balance of these be somewhat different in the two sexes that jointly, not severally, make up the unit of human life. Whatever nature, time, and experience declare her social function to be, it must be better performed, and of higher value to the race, in proportion as it is illuminated by an active intelligence. The flatterers and the insulters of either sex are the enemies of both. There is no real friendship without truth and courtesy; and the love which is without friendship is only an animal passion.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Sabbatarian Cant.

THE *Quiver* for January opens with a symposium on the question, "Are the Conditions of Modern Life Compatible with the Strict Observance of the Sabbath?" A number of well-known men, lay and clerical, responded to the question put by Mr. A. B. Cooper, although, as usual, all who were asked could be safely trusted not to say anything that would shock the feelings of the readers of the *Quiver*. On one point Mr. Cooper is to be complimented. His question avoided the misleading term "Sunday observance"—by the use of which assent is gained to the preservation of a day of rest, and afterwards applied to the maintenance of religious Sabbatarianism—and substitutes the correct word "Sabbath." This was not relished by many of the professionally religious gentlemen, who would much rather have dealt with the question of whether people ought to have a day of rest or not—as though there was, or ever had been, any dispute on that point. Mr. Cooper says that he purposely used the word "Sabbath," and quite correctly adds that "it is the Sabbath defined by the Fourth Commandment which is the question at issue."

On another point Mr. Cooper is more open to criticism. He says:—

"All thinking people, whether they be Christian or not, would see in the Christian's attitude towards Sunday observance a substratum of idealism and altruism tending towards the boundless betterment of the race; whilst he would see in the disregard of all Sunday observance the beginnings of national decadence, of the decay of that freedom and emancipation of which the Sabbath has always been the symbol and the guarantee."

Mr. Cooper is here guilty of the very confusion against which he was desirous of guarding his correspondents. The attitude of the Christian, as Christian, towards the Sabbath is determined by his religious opinions. His opinion on a *day of rest* comes—or may come—under an entirely different category. So far as the former is concerned, the "substratum of idealism and altruism" is purely imaginary. The Puritan Sabbath—the one with which we are really concerned—rested upon the simple belief that work or enjoyment or recreation on Sunday was displeasing to God. It was part of a sour, ill-balanced, jaundiced view of the world of which even Christians are now ashamed. And its altruism consisted in a fanatical resolve to force all people to observe a day of rest in the same miserable and fundamentally pernicious manner. Far from all thinkers agreeing with Mr. Cooper on this point, it is one on which only Sabbatarians would give him their support.

What Mr. Cooper means by the Sabbath being the symbol of freedom and emancipation is difficult to discern. Probably he is just talking. As a mere matter of fact, the most intolerable tyranny of the last three hundred years has been exerted in order to maintain the Christian Sabbath. Those who have read Buckle's chapters on the Sabbath in Scotland will hardly need more than reminding of this. And in both America and England the tyranny was only slightly less oppressive because circumstances prevented the Sabbatarian party working the full measure of their will. An institution which regulated the kind of books a man should read, the distance he should walk, whether he should cook his food on that day or not, which forbade his visiting the public institutions he helped to maintain, and enforced his attendance at church, can hardly be called a symbol of emancipation and freedom—at least, none but a Christian would treat it as such; and as his conception of freedom involves that of the power to curtail other people's freedom as much as possible, his testimony is hardly conclusive.

A genuine Sabbatarianism, one that is honestly and avowedly based upon religious reasons, is so far alien to the temper of to-day that not even the clerical contributors to this symposium have the

courage to commend it. On the contrary, all of them deprecate it. Mr. Ramsay Madonald, Sir James Yoxall, the Secretary of the Lord's Day Rest Association, testify in different ways to the depressing effect of the old-fashioned Sabbath. And this comes as a refreshing comment upon other references to the value of the Puritan Sabbath as a formative influence on character. What possible elevating influence could a "day of rest" have upon children to whom Sunday meant a day of gloom and repression? Consider what the effect of the old-fashioned Sabbath restrictions must have had upon some nine or ten generations brought up under its influence. To children it meant separation from all the harmless pleasures with which they were employed on other days. To the laborer it meant a day of enforced idleness with no opportunity of acquiring culture, knowledge, or recreation. Nothing was open to him but the depressing service at church or chapel, or demoralising recourse to the public-house. His abstention from labor became, thanks to Christian influences, a fresh agent in his demoralisation. And, as a matter of fact, the growth of Sabbatarianism in England was actually accompanied by a rapid increase in drunkenness. And not a little of the brutality and coarseness of the English lower classes is to be placed to the credit of the Puritan Sabbath which closed one-seventh of each person's life to all opportunities for rational recreation or development.

Several of the contributors express grave fears of what will result from secularising Sunday. Mr. Coulson Kernahan views with "sorrow and dismay" the transformation of "our beautiful English Sabbath into something approaching a Continental Sunday." Another contributor, who prefers to remain anonymous, draws a very lurid picture of what will happen to the world "without a Sabbath." It would become, he tells us, a kind of slave plantation, with mankind working continuously, without any hope of rest. The inherent selfishness of man would force people to labor "from dawn to sunset, every day of the week in the year"—a picture that loses some of its force from the writer's statement that there never would have been a day of rest but for the Bible. A man who knows so little of the past as to believe that, can hardly be taken seriously as a prophet of the future—except in the pages of a religious magazine.

English insularity, perhaps, is responsible for most of the talk concerning the Continental Sunday. One would really imagine that England was the only professedly Christian country in Europe. People who use language like that of Mr. Kernahan ignore the fact that where the "Continental" Sunday obtains the population is pretty well as Christian as is our own public. And if they "enjoy" all the horrible dissipations on Sunday that English Puritanical pruriency loves to revel in, the Freethinker may well ask for proofs of the boasted moralising influence of Christianity. Not that the Continental Sunday is as English Christians love to depict it. Naturally, if people look for vice in Paris or Berlin or Vienna or Brussels on Sunday, they can find it. But so could they in London, Liverpool, or Manchester. And the celerity with which English Christian visitors to the Continent discover vice, is, to say the least of it, suspicious. Their painstaking search for vice abroad may be due to their desire to warn others of the dangers unwary visitors may run, or to other causes, but the fact remains that many a Christian visitor to a Continental City will possess a more detailed knowledge of its resources for evil than the majority of natives have in the whole course of their lives.

One is inclined to suspect that the real reason why the Continental Sunday is objected to is not that there is more vice on the Continent than here—for no one has yet shown that there is—the real objection is that people enjoy themselves on Sunday. That is the unforgivable sin, although British Christians abroad are not slow to avail themselves of every opportunity to share in the enjoyment. Per-

sonally, I should be willing to put the Continental method of spending Sunday against the Christian English plan, without fearing that the Continent would suffer by comparison. French *cafés* are certainly not more demoralising than English public-houses. Music in theatres and public places cannot be very powerful instruments of degradation, nor can the fact of all public buildings being open on Sunday serve as active agents of demoralisation. And, thanks probably to the greater opportunities for reasonable enjoyment, one may see upon the Continent a far greater number of working-men and their families out together than one can see in this country, where the fashion is for the man to go off with his "pals," while the "missis" remains behind with the "kids."

The truth is that the Continent has the conception of a genuine day of rest, because the religious day practically ends with the morning service. After that, everybody may act as a rational human being without exciting remark. And a further truth is that we can only get a real day of rest by secularising it—that is, by conducting it in accordance with the dictates of common sense and the necessities of normal human nature. Sir Joseph Compton-Rickett says, with truth, the need for a day of rest is held as firmly by the Secularist as by the Christian. Quite so. There is no dispute on this point. The issue is raised on the question of how the day of rest is to be spent. What the Sabbatarian understands by a day of rest is a day the routine of which shall be marked out by law or by the force of social custom. And, if this cannot be done positively, then it must be accomplished in a negative manner by law or custom prohibiting occupations that conflict with religious opinions. The Secularist holds that a real day of rest—a day on which mind and body shall be refreshed and developed—involves access to all those occupations and recreations from which Sabbatarianism would exclude people. The cry that this involves labor is sheer hypocrisy. Nothing can be done in a civilised State without its involving labor. Even the opening of church and chapel involves labor. An Act of Parliament prohibiting anyone being employed more than a given number of days per week would amply meet all honest objections on this head. And one may safely say that in a few years the use of the bicycle on Sunday, cheap excursions, opportunities for listening to musical entertainments and the like, have done far more to moralise the people than our whole three centuries of Puritanism. Nay, these have done a deal to undo the intemperance and hooliganism that has been partly created by an intolerant Sabbatarianism.

The clergy and Sabbatarians generally have no real interest in Sunday as a day of rest. They are simply using this as a means of strengthening their endeavor to prevent Sunday being de-Christianised. They did nothing to secure a limitation of the hours of labor to ten hours per day; they did nothing to gain the Saturday half-holiday. Their concern was only roused when the movement for an enlightened Sunday threatened their church and chapel attendance. While the belief in Christianity was strong enough among the general public to permit the clergy to act honestly, they said plainly that people should not be permitted secular enjoyment or recreation on Sunday. When the conditions alter, and the people can no longer be forced to church or chapel, the clergy develop a suspicious concern lest people should be compelled to labor seven days a week. As though a people that had won an extra half-day per week, and legally shortened the hours of labor per day without religious assistance, could not be trusted to guard themselves against a seven-day working week—a condition of things that has never yet obtained in the history of the civilised world. What faith the clergy must have in the stupidity of their followers to place such utter foolishness before them! One day, perhaps, the working-classes will resent, in an unmistakable manner, the cynical assumption of the clergy that the working-man is the helpless, brainless idiot such arguments assume. One day the world will see that what the clergy

really fear is the competition of healthy entertainment and recreation with a number of creeds suitable only for savages. There is a commercial cry, created by a commercial instinct, but without the courage to take the risks involved in ordinary commercial enterprise.

C. COHEN.

### A Significant Sign of the Times.

THE religious press is at present replete with messages and greetings which are supposed by their authors to be suitable to the beginning of another year. Christians are told what their duties are, and how they can best do them; what their besetting sins are, and how to get rid of them; what God is prepared to do in the new year, and what the conditions are under which alone he can do it; how to account for past defeats, and how to win future victories. But in all the messages there is a minor undertone, an assertion of hopefulness with a dash of despair at its core. The subject of one article is "The Church's Weakness," and the very title is a glaring contradiction in terms. If the Church is the temple of God's Spirit, or the body of the ever-living Christ, how can it be weak? Is not the admission of its weakness a virtual denial of its alleged nature? Jesus is reported to have assured his disciples that they should "receive power when the Holy Ghost came upon them," and that they should be his "witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"; and the record is that the Holy Ghost descended on the day of Pentecost, and necessarily his presence in the Church spelt all-conquering power. And yet we read in Christian journals that the Church's most conspicuous characteristic is "lack of power," and this is equivalent to a confession that the Church is not, and never has been, the temple of a Holy Ghost, or the body of an eternal Christ. The curious thing is that religious writers do not seem to realise the true significance of their admissions. The idea that a supernatural institution, which the Church claims to be, can lack power, is inexpressibly absurd; and yet they give expression to it without the least hesitation. They attribute the impotence of the Church to a variety of causes, such as worldliness, commercialism, and prayerlessness; but it never once occurs to them that, if the Church were the body of the omnipotent Redeemer and the temple of the Holy Ghost, worldliness, commercialism, and prayerlessness would be so many impossibilities, or, in other words, conclusive evidences that the Church is not what it claims to be. If religious writers would only face the facts they would perceive that "the power from on high," for which incessant prayer used to be made, is one of the many illusions which modern knowledge has dissipated. The only power the Church ever enjoyed was due to the fact that so many people took its pretensions seriously, and its present ever-increasing impotence is traceable to the fact that people are ceasing to take them seriously. Mr. Morrison Davidson once wrote a book, entitled *The Great Lying Church*, and we contend that that title would be a correct description of every Christian Church throughout the world.

The Rev. John Hornabrook, president of the Wesleyan Conference, deplors the fact that family religion is decaying among Methodists. "It is to be feared," he says, "that, in too many instances, there has been a lowering of the religious temperature in the home; and as a result there is a decay of those virtues which, after all, are at once the strength and beauty of family life." What those virtues are he does not stop to specify; but he is quite right in the statement that family religion is indispensable, if religion is to survive at all. "The conversion of our children" must begin in the home, or, in all probability, it will never take place at all. Therefore Mr. Hornabrook's first word to Wesleyan Methodist

people, in his "A New Year's Greeting," is an exhortation to "show piety at home." Nevertheless, family religion is not enough; there must also be Church religion. Mr. Hornabrook says:—

"The Methodist people have been wont to set great store by the worship of God and the ministry of the word. Those of us who have our faces towards the setting sun remember how in the days of our youth the Sabbath hours were sacredly guarded from all intrusion, and with what a sense of holy gladness the Sabbath services were observed by those who so tenderly watched over our infant years. Guard well the sanctity of the Lord's Day, and see to it that you lose not your zest for the highest and best things."

Naturally, "the highest and best things," in Mr. Hornabrook's opinion, are the mental dissipations indulged in by faithful Wesleyans at the class-meeting, the love feast, the watch-night and the Covenant service, things which are to multitudes of others positively unendurable, some of them even repulsive. To his sorrow, Mr. Hornabrook has to admit that even Wesleyans are losing faith in them, and this is how he mourns over it:—

"The habit of infrequent attendance at the Lord's House on the Lord's Day is growing, and the constant absence from home at the week-end tends to increased laxity in this respect. Let us beware of the refined selfishness which under the plea of needful rest or relaxation robs God of his due. Think of the effect which such a habit is likely to have upon your children and your household. The man who habitually absents himself from the public worship of Almighty God is in danger of losing 'even that which he seemeth to have.' The faculty of worship must be cultivated."

There is dogmatism in all its glory. The reverend gentleman would smile disdainfully at the merest suggestion that his views may not be quite infallible. Anybody who differs from him, and despises the things he values, is guilty of "refined selfishness." The man who rests or seeks relaxation on the Lord's Day "robs God of his due" and parts with his own best possessions. Who God is and what his dues are Mr. Hornabrook can tell you with absolute accuracy. Does he not interview God so many times a day, and are not his sermons direct messages from the Lord? And, as a Divine messenger, is he not competent to warn a man that if he "habitually absents himself from the public worship of Almighty God" he will be in danger of losing all he ever had? But here the preacher is in complete error, and knows it. The sermons which he delivers as communications from above he obtains as the result of diligent digging in his own brain, and wretchedly poor stuff they often are. The truth is that the only thing a man loses by not going to church or chapel is his superstition, or religion; and in reality this loss commences *before* he begins to absent himself from public worship. Already, indeed, the majority of thoughtful people are never seen at either church or chapel.

Mr. Hornabrook greatly weakens the case for worship when he observes that "the faculty of worship needs to be cultivated." Is he not aware that there is no such faculty? In his *Psychology of Religious Experience*, Dr. Ames assures us that "the results of the varied and minute psychological study of child nature lead to the conclusion that religion is not an instinct in the child, nor a special endowment of any kind." It is an acquirement, and a child acquires it, under the tuition of parents and teachers, before he is capable of sitting in judgment on its merits or demerits. His head is first crammed with beliefs, and these produce an abnormal emotionalism. Now, worship is an emotional exercise rendered possible by the belief in the existence of a supernatural Being clothed with specific attributes. In other words, worship involves the diversion of the emotions from their natural channel in social life to an unnatural channel in the contemplation and adoration of a purely imaginary deity. Necessarily, then, the so-called "faculty of worship needs to be cultivated" most assiduously, because it is neither an instinct nor a natural endowment. Hence the invention of the Churches, the object of which is to

instil, at the earliest possible moment, unnatural beliefs into the child mind, and to prevent them from oozing out by constantly cultivating what is called "the faculty of worship." There are tens of thousands of men and women who make their living by forcing religion down the throats of little children, and then, afterwards, by availing themselves of all conceivable means to keep it down, because the mental digestive organism resents its presence. Ministers are quack doctors, whose self-imposed mission is to make religion as digestible as possible. Worship is an abnormal emotionalism artificially developed, and its constant tendency is to fizzle out; but the quacks do their utmost to prolong its existence by nursing it in the fresh air of social life. Mixing it with the emotionalism of the crowd they have managed, so far, to keep it alive. But it is dying, in spite of all the interested care taken of it. Mr. Hornabrook, Mr. R. J. Campbell, and most other ministers, frankly admit that its life is in danger, and that they are at the end of their resources.

Now, these confessions of impotence and practical defeat, made by the watchers on the towers of Zion, are a most significant sign of the times. They indicate that the death-knell of supernaturalism has been sounded. A vast amount of adaptation is being carried on in the Protestant Church, but no amount of adaptation and surrender will ever eventuate in the rehabilitation of an exhausted superstition. They tell us that there is no conflict between religion and science. Of course there is not. There is no need of any. As science comes in religion naturally goes out. There is no conflict between the two other than the silent, inevitable conflict between light and darkness, knowledge and ignorance, common sense and blind faith. As the one advances the other necessarily recedes. The only noisy struggle occurred when religion thought it was strong enough to strangle science. As soon as religion discovered that it was on the losing side it said to science, "For heaven's sake, let us be friends; let us work together for the uplifting of the world." Science made no response, but kept on its even way, scattering rays of light in all directions, and making the heavens resplendent with the glory of the knowledge of the truth. "Science is on our side now," cry the divines. But they are mistaken. Science is behind them driving them towards the brink of extinction. When a church takes to discussing whether the time has not fully arrived for the substitution of a live Literary and Debating Society for the old-fashioned and practically dead prayer-meeting, is it not as clear as noonday light that knowledge is quietly pushing superstition out of doors? When a popular preacher declares that Spinoza is at last coming into his own, and that logically the doctrine of freewill has not a single leg to stand on, when M. Alfred Loisy, until the other day a priest in the Catholic Church, does not hesitate to describe the Jehovah of early Old Testament history as "non-moral," "irritable and frantic," "tricky and thievish," and a lover of blood, and when theologians not a few renounce the historicity of Jesus and boldly criticise Paul, is it not beyond controversy that Christianity is dissolving piecemeal? In other words, the only conclusion concerning it to which sensible people are irresistibly driven may be expressed in these well-known words: *Weighed in the balances of Reason and found wanting.*

J. T. LLOYD.

## Christmas Funds.

NOTHING more clearly demonstrates the unsoundness of the prevailing conceptions of life in "the world that now is" than the periodical presentation to the comfortable classes of the wretchedness and privation of their less fortunate fellow-creatures who form the submerged tenth. At stated intervals we have various appeals for contributions for free breakfasts and dinners for the poor. In the summer

a number of slum children are sent to the country for one day. But there are many miserable human beings who are never reached, and even those who are the occasional recipients of the rich man's bounty must have between times a terrible struggle for existence.

On reflection, does it not appear that these spasmodic bursts of generosity are little more than a mockery of the condition of the poor and helpless? Christian charity is a common expedient for soothing the consciences of Christians who have a good time all the year round, and who, when they are holding their own special jollifications, are graciously pleased to allow a few crumbs to fall from their tables to the expectant dogs beneath.

Mistaken ideas of life, and how it should be lived, have resulted in misdirected energies and the misuse and abuse of the wealth produced by the community. Religious people profess to be lovers of truth; but the moment they are asked to commit themselves to an unprejudiced pursuit of truth for its own sake, whatever it may be, they put in a reservation which at once stamps them as insincere. They have their sacred books, and they have, they declare, certain definitely ascertained truths within their knowledge revealed by these books, which they will not surrender whatever impartial investigation may reveal in the future. This is the attitude of mind of people who must have mysticism. And, of course, it at once clouds the issues and makes independent inquiry on all subjects, and on an impartial basis, absolutely impossible. This kind of intellectual bondage is just what real lovers of truth have most to fear. The wider freedom we have the more will the cause of truth be served.

To Freethinkers in particular I think it must be depressing to contemplate all these "seasonable" appeals on behalf of the poor. Religion has sanctioned and been responsible for the expenditure of enormous sums on wars. The capital expenditure on ecclesiastical structures and agencies is very great, and the annual payments by the laity of the Christian world for the maintenance of clerics is also very great. But our whole social, commercial, and industrial systems are characterised by a tremendous waste of wealth in various forms, and all notwithstanding the continuous teaching in our midst of Christianity for two thousand years! Though all that wealth may be wasted, the Churches have been careful that one section of the community at any rate shall not suffer by it. There are still very wealthy laymen in Christian communities controlling huge interests in the commercial life of the nation. They are careful to subsidise the institutions which have a hold upon the people and which may be utilised to protect the interests of the wealthy. The Churches have done much to keep the laws in protection of property what they are, and to withhold from the "lower" classes opportunities of a first-class secular education. In place of information the Churches supply fear and ignorance, which they profess to cure or overcome by supernatural methods. And so long as the working classes can be held by the Churches, so long will they be contented with the position in life in which it "pleased God to place them." It is an impudent, barefaced imposture that is contained in the suggestion which came from and still rules the minds of many by terrorism.

Now the substitution of a sane for an insane conception of life would mean the right direction of energies and wealth, and a far greater indifference to—a much less necessity for—the main idea that every man should regard the acquisition of gain for himself personally as the first thing. It is a poor, ignoble thing to be always getting, and never or seldom giving. And these doles at long intervals and our system of patronising, paternal charity are degrading both to the almoners themselves and the recipients of their doles. Parasites and flunkeys we find in plenty, and they are not always in tatters or walking on their uppers. The Church has still got a strong grip of Land, Capital, and Law; and when any

real attack is made upon the vested interests and privileges they maintain and conserve, these four institutions stand shoulder to shoulder entrenched behind walls a good deal more secure than those of Jericho.

It is more light that is wanted. Mental freedom means clarity of mental vision. The priests and parsons know this well, and their policy is to limit freedom—particularly of inquiry, because upon that depends the hope of continued acceptance of their "services." The only service they render is to cause mental obfuscation. We may be told that the lot of the people has improved in a hundred years. Has it? If it has, the improvement has been lamentably slow, and any improvement that has been achieved has been, not because, but in spite of, these gentry. Their doctrine has always been one of non-intervention in political and social problems, though they hold that their God daily intervenes in human affairs. The Churches have no effective scheme of social betterment to offer, though some clergymen profess an academic interest in social questions. It is still the case of the elect, the elect, and let the wicked unbelievers go hang.

Ah, yes; the clerics have plenty of talk to offer us, any quantity of words, words, words! What a mass of wasted energies all those years are, manuscripts of useless sermons now rotting in their barrels! But religion has nothing to offer the people who are wasting for lack of equal opportunity with the privileged few in the way of facilities for increased secular knowledge, self-improvement, and the environment of a beautiful, clean, and full life. They have even gone back on much of what they declare their Master taught, who said that he had come that men might have life, and have it more abundantly.

SIMPLE SANDY.

#### GOD IN PICCADILLY.

Poisonous paint on us, under the gas,  
Smiling like spectres, we gather bereaven,  
Leprosy's taint on us, ghost-like we pass,  
Watched by the eyes of yon pitiless Heaven!  
Let the stars stare at us! God, too, may glare at us  
Out of the Void where He hideth so well.  
Sisters of midnight, He damned us in making us,  
Cast us like carrion to men, then forsaking us,  
Smiles on His throne on these markets of Hell!

Laugh! Those who turn from us, too, have their price!  
There, for the proud, other harlots are dressing;  
They too may learn from us man's old device—  
Food for his lust, with some sham of a blessing!  
Sons of old Adam there buy the fine madam there,  
Bid with a coronet,—yea, or a crown!  
Sisters, who'd envy the glory which graces them?  
They, too, are sold to the lust which embraces them,  
E'en in the Church, with the Christ looking down.

—Robert Buchanan.

#### MANY MANSIONS (St. John xiv. 2).

Pat and Mike, two chums of Irish descent, came to America in quest of "the goose that laid the golden egg," and after some buffeting with the cruel storms of fate—each busted, disgusted, and not worthy to be trusted—decided to face the stern realities of life alone—Pat a hobo and Mike a preacher. After being separated several years, Pat chanced to be passing a hamlet in "the backwoods," and, believing that he heard the voice of his former chum, hastened his gait to the "gospel-shop." Finding that it really was Mike he decided to take a back seat and receive some of "the dewdrops of mercy." Mike, pawing the air with his hands, and with all his oratorical ability, exclaimed: "In me father's house are many mansions." Pat, receiving more dewdrops than one hobo could drink, yelled: "Hold on Mike! It's a lie Your father's house is only a one-room shanty, and you can run your arm down the chimney and unlatch the front door."—Wm. P. Kyle, "Truthseeker" (New York).

"Not gwine ter meetin' dis mornin', Brer Henderson?" "Cyarn't do it, parson. Got ter hoe over some corn jist planted." "But cyarn't de corn wait?" "Not so well as de church-goin' can."

## Acid Drops.

Mr. Harold Begbie is simple enough for anything. We might even use another adjective beginning with "s" without extravagance. Reviewing Sir Oliver Lodge's latest volume—not on electricity, but on religion—that fluent journalist repeats the old wheeze about the modern civilised world's testimony to the Incarnation of God in the person of Christ by using the Christian era every time it dates a letter. We write 1910. What does that mean? Why, that it is 1910 years since the birth of Christ. So the very Atheist is a Christian in spite of himself. Such is the argument of the Christian Evidence man at the street corner, of Mr. Harold Begbie in the halfpenny newspaper, and, alas, of Sir Oliver Lodge in a three-and-sixpenny book. These gentlemen don't seem to see how easily the tables could be turned upon them. Every year has twelve months, and not one of them bears a Christian name. Two of them, July and August, are named after Julius Cæsar and Augustus Cæsar. And as Christ doesn't give his name to any one month, it follows that we honor him less in the Calendar than we do a couple of Roman Emperors. Moreover, every month has four weeks, and every week seven days, every one of which is called after some old Pagan god or goddess. Sunday is the Sun's day, Monday is the Moon's day—and so on to Saturday, which is Saturn's day. On the Lodge-and-Begbie principle, therefore, Christians bear testimony to the existence of old Pagan gods and goddesses every time they write the names of the days of the week.

One would think, from this ridiculous argument for the godhead (or something) of Christ, that the Christian Era had been in use ever since Christianity started. But the truth is, that for a thousand years after Christ, the Christians themselves dated from the Era of Cæsar, which begins thirty-eight years before the real or supposed birth of Christ. Gibbon states that the Era of Cæsar, even in Christian Spain, was "in legal and popular use till the fourteenth century." Eastern Christians, after the Sixth General Council (A.D. 681) used the Era of the World, which was calculated on the belief that the world was created 5,508 years before the birth of Christ. The Christian Era was first invented in the West in the sixth century, it was propagated, Gibbon says, in the eighth century "by the authority and writings of venerable Bede," but "it was not till the tenth that the use became legal and popular." This chronology, if it were known by the general public, would save them from being imposed upon by an argument which is only plausible because it is addressed to the ignorant.

"Blessed be ye poor." Here's one of them. The Very Reverend William Conyngham Green, for twenty years Dean of Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin, left £27,327. And the bulk of the people are so liberally endowed with wisdom that they think this is all right.

Christianity, with its gospel of poverty, makes people get as rich as possible, without giving them the courage to defend their wealth. One masked bandit "held up" a train on the Missouri-Pacific Railway recently, and went through all the carriages easing passengers of their valuables. He got safely away as the train slowed down into Kansas City. It sounds almost incredible.

Christian philanthropists are often the meanest of people. Their public gifts are always well advertised, and yield them ample interest in the gratification of their vanity. Where that poor passion cannot be subserved these "generous" beings are apt to be ignobly penurious. We know the case of a rather famous multi-millionaire, whose name is frequently in the newspapers as a benefactor of his species, who never parted with a penny in his life except for what to him is a full consideration. No human being in the direct want or distress ever received private help from *this* Dives, who would not allow Lazarus even the crumbs that fell from his table. His wife, who spends endless money on herself, once severely scolded a courier on the Continent for giving a trifle too much in tips to the servants at a big hotel. Such another multi-millionaire as this one, we imagine, is the famous John D. Rockefeller. The newspapers report that he gave the two maids, Hortense and Mary, who were in charge of his Cleveland house while he and his family were at New York, two Christmas presents, which they expected to be something good, but which turned out to be only two gingham aprons "with Mr. and Mrs. Rockefeller's very best wishes." The maids are said to have indignantly thrown these gifts into the ash-can. But the great "J. D. R." probably smiles at their indignation. He has

got his name into all the newspapers again for the very smallest sum that an advertisement ever cost him.

"Fear God and honor the King," the Bible says; but the clergy seem to prefer it the other way about. God has to take second place as far as they are concerned. We referred recently to the tercentenary of the Authorised Version of the Bible, which was first printed and published in 1611. We now see by the *Times* that in Great Britain "March has been selected as the best time for the celebration, because it cannot then clash with the Coronation festivities"—which are evidently the more important matter of the two.

"The good people of Holyhead," *Truth* says, "have been distressed on their way home from chapel on Sunday mornings by newspapers being offered them for sale in the streets. So the Town Council has appealed to the Superintendent of Police to put the Lord's Day Observance Act in force against the offenders. If the police take action I trust they will not confine it to the street news-vendors. As it happens there is a considerable sale of religious periodicals at the chapels on Sundays, and what is sauce for the irreligious goose should equally be sauce for the religious gander."

The following story is from Mr. John Fyvie's *Notable Dames and Notable Men of the Georgian Era*:—

"It is on record that one Sunday in a church near the South Downs, the clerk gave out notice that there would be no service that evening because the parson was going off to Lewes to be in time for the races next day. An aggrieved parishioner promptly went to the Bishop to acquaint him with this breach of clerical duty. 'Why is he in such a hurry to get to Lewes?' inquired the Bishop. The scandalised parishioner declared with a shocked expression that the parson was actually going to ride in one of the races. 'Then,' rejoined the right reverend father in God, 'I'll bet you two to one he wins.'"

The good old times! And the good old parsons!

The Congregational churches report a loss (that is, a decrease) of 1,587 members during the past year. We congratulate the country on recovering its common sense. The process may be slow, but we believe it is sure.

The Baptist Handbook for 1911 reports a further decrease of 3,831 members during 1910. It is significant that of this number Wales is responsible for 2,643. The world has been for so long accustomed to associating Wales with strong religious feeling that this feature of the decline will doubtless come to many as a surprise. The truth is, that young Wales is rapidly drifting away from religious belief, and with its strong emotional character, the movement in this direction—given favorable conditions—may easily become as pronounced as it has been in the other. We believe that this rationalising movement is more closely connected with South Wales than it is with the northern half of the Principality, which is accounted for by the greater development of industrialism. The religious orgies associated with the Evan Roberts' revival have also played a part in weakening the attachment of the Welsh people to religion. Thousands of those who were affected by it are now heartily ashamed of the mental degradation incurred, and thousands of others have had their eyes opened to the value of a religion that was so ready to make capital of a poor, half-demented religionist, and upon the misdirected emotionalism of ill-educated people.

The editor of the *Momouthshire Evening Post* printed, on December 24, the whole of the Sermon on the Mount in large type. The *Christian World* thinks much good would be done if other papers did likewise with other portions of the New Testament. We have no objection; but what we should really like to see would be some editor who had the courage to print parts of the Bible and the New Testament in contemporary English, giving to each sentence its current equivalent. If this were done, there would, of course, be a great outcry of "irreverence" or even of "blasphemy"; but, at any rate, readers would get a far more *genuine* version than at present. We are not thinking of whether the present version is a faithful translation of the Greek or Hebrew, although in many cases it is manifestly an unfaithful translation. What we have in mind is the fact that people are imposed upon by the archaic language of the Old and New Testaments, and thus imagine they admire the teachings therein, whereas they are really overborne by the sound. Readers of really superior literary taste are apt to forgive the teachings because of the excellence of the vehicle in which many of them are conveyed, while to another and larger class the form itself suggests something of an extremely sacred character, and, therefore, something not to be lightly

criticised. Part of the hostility shown to Freethinkers has been due to the fact that they have tried to put the Bible before people in the people's own language, and, therefore, free from misleading associations. And the clergy show a keen eye for their own interests when they persist in the use of what is really a special language for their "sacred" scriptures.

The Headmaster of Eton said the other day at the Headmasters' Conference that the Bible should be retained in the schools because it was a great storehouse of literary treasures. We have heard this often enough, and are not at all inclined to deny the literary excellence of a great deal of the Bible as it stands. It really does not belong to the Bible itself, although that, for the present, does not matter. What does matter is the truth that the Bible is not in our schools because of its literary excellencies, nor would those who use this plea trouble themselves about keeping it there merely on that account. The plain truth, and the whole truth, is that the Bible is in the schools because it is the Christian's book of religion. That is the reason why it was put in the schools in the first place, that is why it has been kept there, and that is why people still want it there—only they have not the courage to say so.

A word on this cant concerning the need for keeping the Bible in the school as literature. Needless discrimination against the Bible would, we admit, be unwise and unjust; although, as Christians have insisted on placing the Bible in a special category, they have invited special treatment. But suppose the Bible were not read at all by school-children. Will anyone say that because of that the development of their literary taste would be less complete? Are literary treasures confined to the Bible? Or are there none of equal merit outside the Bible? Anyone who is qualified to speak knows that there are scores and scores of books containing literary beauties at least equal—if not superior—to the Bible. Scores and scores of other books exist that could be profitably used for educational purposes, and scores of books have been issued that for humanistic purposes are the superiors of the Bible. This talk of the greatness and indispensableness of the Bible is just one of the lies foisted upon the public by the religious world, and accepted unthinkingly by it. And the crowning fact that stamps it as a lie is that those who want the Bible in the schools do not use it as a handbook of literature. Schoolboys are not instructed in the literary excellence of the Bible. They are simply dosed with it as a book of religion, so that they may become the stupid purveyors of an interested superstition when they go out into the world of adult life.

Tolstoy's *Course of Reading*, after being in circulation for three years, is now put under the ban of the Censor at Moscow, and all copies are being seized. Fancy a hundred million people, and over, letting one man tell them what to read! His impudence is nothing to their imbecility.

We wonder how much money there is behind the sinister press crusade, which has started already, against the infant Republic of Portugal. Reports are being industriously spread as to the "unpopularity" of the new Government, the "difficulties" in which it finds itself, and the "preparations" for a counter revolution in the interest of the Monarchy—that is, in the interest of Catholicism in opposition to Freethought. These reports seem to be entirely unfounded. King Manuel, who ran away, wants to crawl back; and his wealthy friends have their own reasons for wishing him back. Hence this crusade of lies and slander.

Rev. Dr. Guinness Rogers, the Nestor of Nonconformity, has just been congratulated by his brother ministers on reaching his ninetieth birthday. Evidently they don't think he loses much by remaining in this world instead of emigrating to the next. There's a good old proverb, you know, about a bird in the hand.

Christians seem almost incapable of acting straightforwardly where the Bible is concerned. Scores of preachers to-day will admit that there are doubts as to the historical character of Jesus Christ, and a larger number still that we cannot know with anything like certainty what he was like, what he did, or what he said. Yet, once the ordeal of facing the critic has been passed, they will commence sermonising upon what Jesus said and did, what were his feelings at a particular time, and the reasons he had for speech and action. And in spite of all this the New Testament is appealed to as though it were at least as unquestionable as the report of a parliamentary speech in Hansard. One can appreciate a man who holds to the literal accuracy of the New Testament talking in this manner. He is stupid,

but his stupidity is not inconsistent with honesty. But the man who first of all gives up the historic accuracy of the Bible, and then proceeds to build a discourse upon it, in which all its narratives are treated as unquestioned historic facts, only illustrates the demoralising influence of Christian belief.

For example, here is Mr. R. J. Campbell, who delivered a Christmas sermon with the Jewish exodus from Egypt as his text. Mr. Campbell admits there is no proof that this ever occurred. He points out that in all the Egyptian records that have come to light there is found no reference to the sojourn of the Hebrews in Egypt, nor is there a word about the loss of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. But having admitted this, Mr. Campbell next goes on to explain what occurred, and how it all happened. The Hebrews were fleeing from Egypt, although they were never there—and the Egyptian army was pursuing the fugitives—who were not before them. At one point of the flight Mr. Campbell assumes there was a ford, and as there was a ford there must have been a ford across the waters; for, as the Lord caused a wind to blow all night, the waters must have been fordable. The Hebrews crossed—under divine inspiration—and as the Egyptians followed the wind dropped, the tide turned, and the Egyptians were drowned. Mr. Campbell appears to think this quite an original version, although in reality it is a very old one. And it quite fails to meet the case. Neither the turn of the tide nor a wind blowing all night will explain the piling up of the waters on the right hand or on the left hand, and forming walls between which the Hebrews marched. The essence of the story is the dividing of the waters. Leave that out, and the whole point of the story is lost. In other words, the story as it stands is pure myth. Mr. Campbell sees this, and in his case, as in that of many others, the possession of a little clearer intelligence seems to have the result of a weakening in other directions. We would respect the City Temple Oracle more if he had less intelligence than he possesses.

Sabbatarianism—which is simply a form of priestcraft—has won a contemptible victory in South Wales. At a special meeting of the Rhondda Urban District Council, when the annual applications for theatrical licenses were considered, a deputation of ministers, headed by the Rev. W. E. Davies (Ton), protested against concerts being held on Sundays in licensed buildings. Canon Lewis (Pentre) backed up the Dissenting man of God by moving that the halls and theatres licensed by the Council should be closed for all purposes on Sundays, and this resolution was carried. When it comes to clerical protection the clergy all belong to the same Church.

Mrs. Eddy's tomb is being watched day and night by armed Christian Scientists. Her resurrection is expected, and her followers don't want the "heathen" to prevent it by getting hold of her body. Resurrections can only take place under the eyes (and ears—long ears) of the faithful. It is generally held in America that if Mrs. Eddy doesn't rise Christian Science will fall.

Rev. Donald McLeod, parish minister of Oa Islay, being tried at Dunoon on the charge of assaulting Jessie Mackay, his housekeeper, by striking her with a hay-fork and kicking her, was found by the Sheriff "not guilty." In the course of his evidence, the reverend gentleman admitted that "he spoke sharply, and might have threatened her with the fork." "Ministers," he added, "like other people, lost their tempers at times." That's true, anyhow. Men of God are no better than other people. Sometimes they are a great deal worse. Which throws a curious light on the real value of religion.

The Church Army has a Ladder League. You might think it was to assist people in climbing the golden stairs. But it has no relation to that business. It is a new plan for getting money for the Church Army. Men are "selected" from the wretched crowd on the Embankment at night and set to work at King Edward's Labor Tents, Kingsway—"where work goes on continuously night and day." Those who "work well" are passed on to the Central Labor Relief Depot in Marylebone-road, where they work "in return for food and lodging." Those who work well enough there "may" enter a Permanent Labor Home for several weeks, and get "proper trade rates for the work they do." *May!* Oh, yes! The prospect gets less certain as it becomes more satisfactory. The only dead certainty seems to be the work. "Work they must or go," says Prebendary Carlile. We quite believe him.

The *Financial Times* devoted a leaderette to the Christmas collection on the Stock Exchange for the Salvation

Army, which "realised the handsome figure of £53 9s. 10d.—as against £62 8s. 1d. the previous year." "We are asked," our contemporary says, "to thank members of the House for their liberality." There is no "tainted" money where William Booth is concerned. He takes all he can, and asks no questions. Yet he knows what Jesus Christ would think of the Stock Exchange. But the Grand Old Showman must have money. It is pretty near the be-all and the end-all of his enterprise now. No doubt he would promptly say "Amen" to the old Italian monk's sermon to the faithful, telling them that the church bells always played "Dando, Dando"—"Give-Give! Give-Give!"

The "Providence" that made sailors made sharks to devour them when they fall overboard. It seems an expensive way of providing a shark with a dinner, but the poet Cowper long ago reminded us that a certain personage "moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform." A thrilling story of the shipwreck of the pearling lugger, *Hugh Norman*, off the desolate coast of West Australia, is told in the newspapers. She struck on a reef in a heavy gale, the cutter was launched, and all the men, with the exception of Theodore Anderson and the captain, got aboard. Within fifteen minutes the boat was swamped, and huge sharks pulled every man down to their submarine refectory-room. Eight hours later the captain tried to swim ashore, but a shark caught him before he had taken twenty strokes. Anderson clung to the lugger's mast for six days, until, half mad with hunger and want of sleep, he plunged over and started for the shore, which he reached, and was eventually found by fishermen and taken to Brisbane. The "One Above" looked down quite complacently on that horrible chapter of human history; the sharks enjoyed themselves, and the men were eaten alive; and we presume it was all arranged by "Providence"—whom Dr. Russel Wallace has just been explaining and praising in a big book, which looks a good deal like taking a brief for the Devil.

We publish a letter, in another part of this week's *Free-thinker*, from a Christian who takes exception to our recent "Acid Drop" on the Tercentenary of the Authorised Version of the Bible. We wish our readers would turn to that letter, and peruse it, before proceeding with our answer in the following paragraphs.

Our correspondent starts by saying that we complimented the Bible by suggesting that in another three hundred years' time it will be forgotten—except by scholars and students. But where does the compliment come in? Scholars and students have to make themselves acquainted with all sorts of things that have historic interest, without being of the slightest intrinsic interest to the bulk of the people now living. There are things in the British Museum locked away from the general public, and the world at large wouldn't be much poorer if the whole lot were destroyed. Yet scholars and students may require to see them, and legitimately obtain permission to do so.

Mr. Fisher (we assume it is a Mr.) next states that Voltaire gave the Bible only a hundred years to live. We have heard many other Christians draw attention to that prophecy. When we have asked them where Voltaire made it, they have all been dumb. We now put the question to Mr. Fisher. We have a complete edition of Voltaire's writings in our library, including his voluminous correspondence. Will this Norwood gentleman kindly tell us where we may find this prophecy of Voltaire's about the longevity of the Bible? He makes the statement glibly enough; he should be able to give the reference.

That the Bible only had "a very limited circulation" in Voltaire's days—in the eighteenth century after Christ—doesn't speak very well for its ability to find readers in the ordinary way in which other books have to find them. The vast circulation it boasts, or has boasted for it, to-day is an artificial circulation. It has been worked up by various Societies, all supported by Christian, and mainly by Protestant, subscriptions. Such a circulation is no test of the real merit or value of a book. It is not a fact that the Bible is printed in Chinese, and "does all the rest for itself"—as we said Shakespeare did. Missionary Societies are actively engaged in circulating the "sacred volume," and even when it is sold (for many copies are given away) it is sold at less than cost price, and is thus put on the market in what we called "pauper editions." There are no Missionary Societies, with vast incomes, pushing the circulation of Shakespeare.

Mr. Fisher fancies that "a fair translation" of Shakespeare in any tongue is "impossible." Germans read him,

and see him acted on the stage in their theatres, far more than the English do, and in something much better than a "fair" translation. There is a noble French translation made by Victor Hugo's accomplished son. Without going further, we may say that our correspondent's fancy is flatly contradicted by the facts.

Shakespeare's indebtedness to the Bible is all moonshine. He knew the Bible. True. And so, a long way after him, do we. So did the Atheist poet, Shelley. So did Bradlaugh and Ingersoll. So did Thomas Paine and Voltaire. For our part, we are quite satisfied that if you cut out of Shakespeare all that he "owed" to the Bible, you would leave a very small wound. What did the Bible lend him for his greatest works—*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, and *The Tempest*? Mr. Fisher is simply talking nonsense.

We take the following from the *Times* of Dec. 31, having noticed it also in other newspapers:—

"A BOY'S IGNORANCE OF THE BIBLE.—A boy of 13 was called to give evidence at the St. Pancras Coroner's Court yesterday in reference to the death of his father. In the witness-box he was asked if he knew the nature of an oath, and replied in the negative. The Coroner.—Do you know the Bible?—No. Do you know what it is to speak the truth?—No. The Coroner said he would not take evidence from one who did not appear to know right from wrong. A police-sergeant explained that the boy's father had been an atheist and had not brought his children up to any religion."

The name and address of this dead Atheist are not given, nor those of the police-sergeant who said that he was an Atheist. The whole statement is extremely loose. We conceive, too, that the coroner might have found that the boy understood the difference between truth and falsehood and right and wrong, if he had only taken the trouble. To ask a poor lad, who probably had never been in such a sad and trying situation before, "Do you know what it is to speak the truth?" was hardly the way to get a satisfactory answer. The "charity" that Christians are always boasting about was not conspicuous in the coroner's action in this case.

The *Manchester Evening Chronicle* made the most of that vaguely reported "Atheist's boy" incident by means of sensational headlines. The *M. E. C.* is a great friend of religion. Naturally. It grew out of the *Sporting Chronicle*, and both are bought largely by public-house touts and backers.

European royal families use Jordan water for the christening of their offspring. We now see that a new article from the sacred river of the Jews is in the market. A pious paper called *Sunday Stories* advertises "Jordan Pebbles." They are a shilling each, with a suitable reduction for a quantity. One cannot help thinking of the old proverb about certain people and their money being soon parted.

It is interesting to read that "many prominent men, including lawyers and *clergymen*," are involved in the political corruption charges in Union County, Ohio.

Rev. W. E. Dexter, stationed at Powlett River, a mining region in Victoria, Australia, says that his church is "perched on a hill, and at night, in the south-western gales, it rocks like a vessel at sea." But there is nothing unique about a church rocking. Every Christian Church is rocking now, and is not likely to cease until it comes down.

#### MANY WIDOWS.

A Mormon's wife, coming downstairs one morning, met the physician who was attending her husband.

"Is he very ill?" she asked, anxiously.

"He is," replied the physician. "I fear that the end is not far off."

"Do you think" she asked, hesitatingly, "do you think it proper that I should be at his bedside during his last moments?"

"Yes. But I advise you to hurry, madam. The best places are already being taken."

#### COMING HOME FROM CHURCH.

Hobson: "Half the congregation are opposed to the new pastor."

Dobson: "What has he been doing?"

Hobson: "Pleasing the other half."

### Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 8, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W.: at 7.30, "Satan."

Tuesday, January 10, London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner.

January 15, 22, 29, Queen's Hall, London.

February 5, Glasgow; 12, Manchester; 26, Birmingham.

March 5, Liverpool; 19 and 26, Queen's Hall, London.

April 2, Stratford Town Hall.

### 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.

J. T. LLOYD'S LECTURE ENGAGEMENTS.—January 8, Abertillery; 15, Holloway; 22, Birmingham; 29, Maesteg; February 19, Pailsworth; 26, Queen's Hall. March 5, Queen's Hall; 12, West Ham.

W. A. WILLIAMS.—An office oversight. We have read the riot act, and renewed the order. Sorry you have been put to trouble.

W. H. SHAWCROSS.—See paragraph. Thanks.

W. P. ADAMSON.—We have deal with it. Thanks.

GLADYS FLORENCE.—Glad you have found the *Freethinker* so helpful.

T. P. WHITE.—Thanks for new year's good wishes. We fancy the pamphlets must be allowed to slide. We have so little time, and perhaps less inclination now, for political work.

A. A.—Heine is not exactly a fresh topic at this time of day. Your translation is good, though not quite satisfactory at the finish; but the subject is "a bit off our beat."

W. H. JACKSON.—Enclosure passed over to shop manager. The publications you inquire about will be announced shortly.

E. B.—Thanks for cuttings.

J. TOMKINS.—The letter we posted to the address you gave has been returned as "not known." The list of errata you referred to was duly received, and will be useful.

J. W. WHITE.—Thanks.

H. W. L. (Shanghai).—Schopenhauer did not believe in personal immortality. Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* and Buchner's *Force and Matter and Last Words on Materialism* should help you. Certainly there does not seem any reason for man's future life which does not apply as well to the lower animals.

A. E. QUAYLE.—Few of Voltaire's works can be obtained in English translations, and those mostly second-hand.

D. D. B.—You will have seen that the £300 for 1910 was made up before your letter and enclosure arrived. We shall print a portion of your letter next week. How is your enclosure to be acknowledged in the altered circumstances?

A. LEWIS.—Reconciliation to the inevitable is both common sense and common decency. In the great words which the greatest of the sons of men puts into the mouth of Mark Antony it is wise, as well as dignified, to "let determined things to destiny hold unbewailed their way."

D. MACCONNEL.—Mr. Lloyd could very well defend his own anti-thesis of "Capital and Labor." You prefer "Capitalism," but you do so as a Socialist; whereas Mr. Lloyd has to write *Freethought* articles without advocating Socialism or any of its rivals. There is no absurdity in his using neutral language on outside matters.

W. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings.

"LIBERATOR."—See paragraph. Thanks.

G. SMITH.—How many more times must we state that Tuesday is too late for paragraphs in "Sugar Plums"? Your postcard bears the postmark of "12.15 a.m.; Ja 3, 11." Actually Tuesday morning!

W. MOORE (Stockport) writes: "I am looking forward to your Manchester visit. Two years ago I had never heard your name, but since then I have introduced four new readers to your paper. I am confident that the circulation would be doubled if every reader would make an effort." So are we.

MARK MELFORD.—Pleased to have your genial and appreciative letter.

G. HOWELLS.—Your letter says "Jan. 1" but the postmark says "3.45 p.m., Ja. 2."

W. BINDON.—It is more than twenty years since we read Seeley's *Natural Religion*, and we cannot give an off-hand opinion on one chapter of it. Our general recollection is that the book had merit only on the critical side.

JOHN HARRIS.—Thanks for your encouraging letter. Join the Liverpool Branch by all means.

SAMUEL LIDGETT.—It is quite possible that the Right Hon. J. A. Pease, whom you heckled on the Blasphemy Laws, had "never heard of us." There was a man in America who had never heard of Abraham Lincoln, and when he was asked if he had ever heard of Adam he inquired, "What was his other name?"—Thanks for getting us two new readers for the new year. Glad to hear of the "help and instruction you have received from our writings." We had not seen Mr. Blatchford's article

in the *Weekly Dispatch*. Obviously the discussion is over a word. Had "selfish" been defined on both sides the discussion would have ended,—for both sides admit the facts.

T. EDWARDS.—The "true likeness of our Savior, copied from the portrait engraved on an emerald by order of Tiberias Cæsar" is a forgery; so is the letter on the back from Publius Lentulus. Every scholar of any standing would tell you so. But the Great Lying Church is capable of any fraud. It lives on lies and impostures, and is absolutely shameless.

We are obliged to the many readers who have sent us Christmas and New Year cards and greetings. We are unable to make separate acknowledgments.

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

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

WHEN the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.

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

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

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

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

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### Sugar Plums.

Considering the date (Jan. 1) there was a capital audience at Queen's (Minor) Hall on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote started the new course of lectures with one on "God." It was gratifying once more to see such a goodly number of ladies present. The lecture was followed with the closest attention for an hour and a quarter, and was enthusiastically applauded. Dr. Marshall, who presided, had a good deal of trouble in keeping the only opponent to the point; the gentleman being better at preaching than at debating. The vocal and instrumental music before the lecture was much appreciated.

The music extending beyond the usual half-hour on Sunday, and the lecture on "God" being unavoidably lengthy, Mr. Foote omitted the preliminary recitation for once. This evening (Jan. 8), however, he will give a dramatic or poetical reading before the lecture, which is on "Satan." This is the second lecture of the continuous course of five, and should be entertaining as well as instructive; and as the holiday time is now over the hall ought to be crowded.

This is our last announcement of the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, which takes place on Tuesday next (Jan. 10) at the Holborn Restaurant. Mr. Foote will preside, and will be "supported" by Messrs. Cohen, Lloyd, Moss, Heaford, Davies, and other leading "saints." After what is fairly certain to be a good dinner, there will be an address by the chairman and some brief speeches to toasts. There will also be an entertainment provided by Mr. Will Edwards, who is such a general favorite, and by Miss Helen Mar, the celebrated American *raconteuse*. Altogether it will be a grand evening, and the price of the ticket is only 4/-. No wonder this annual function grows in popularity.

The new year's circular from Messrs. De Caux, Nichols, and Fincken, with respect to the President's Honorarium Fund, will appear in next week's *Freethinker*. Meanwhile, of course, it may be understood that the 1911 Fund is open, and subscriptions can be forwarded by all who choose to do so. A number of subscriptions were received last year by the date of the President's birthday, which falls on the 11th of January. Some subscriptions have already been sent in and will be duly acknowledged next week, with others that may be received by Tuesday morning, January 10. In addition to the circular we shall print a brief statement by Mr. Foote himself concerning this Fund, and the draft upon it which has still to be made to meet the loss on the *Freethinker* and its adjuncts; a loss, it may be said at once, that is not relative, but absolute; representing money out of the President's pocket, over and above the no-salary for all his work on this journal.

We are happy to say that Miss Vance is recovering from the bad cold which laid her up and prevented her from being at Queen's Hall on Sunday evening. She expects to resume her duties there this evening (Jan. 8).

Mr. Lloyd lectures at Abertillery to-day (Jan. 8), afternoon and evening, under the auspices of the "New Era Movement." South Wales "saints" will please note. Mr. Cohen had good meetings there lately.

We reproduce this week from the New York *Truthseeker* the article we referred to in our last issue by Mr. Jack Binns, the "wireless" hero who saved the sinking liner, the *Republic*, and all on board her, out on the Atlantic some two years ago. Mr. Jack Binns' praise was in all the newspapers then. We don't suppose they will take the trouble to inform their readers that he was, and is, an Atheist.

We are always pleased to receive one of our exchanges, the *Positivist Review*, edited by Mr. S. H. Swinny. The January number contains some interesting articles, among them being one by Mr. Philip Thomas on "Shelley and Comte." It is curious that Shelley, and before him Paine, used the phrase "Religion and Humanity" antecedently to Comte. It is curious, too, that Mr. Thomas does not appear to know of the story related by Leigh Hunt in his *Autobiography*, of how he stood with Shelley in the Cathedral of Pisa while the music of the great organ rolled through it, and the poet remarked what a religion the world might have if it made humanity its principle instead of supernaturalism.

The Glasgow Branch holds an "At Home" on Friday, February 3, at the Baronial Halls, 48 South Portland-street (Diamonds Dancing Academy). It starts at 7.45, and carriages, motor-cars, and aeroplanes can be ordered for 2 a.m. Men's tickets are 3s., ladies' 2s. We hope there will be a big rally of the local "saints" on this occasion. They are sure of a good time. Mr. Foote, who lectures at Glasgow on the Sunday, has been powerfully invited to be present at this "At Home," and he would be delighted to attend and meet the local "saints" personally, even into the "wee sma' hours ayont the twel'." (We are quoting R. B. from memory, and hope we have got his Doric all right.) But unfortunately, owing to his living away from London, Mr. Foote would have to travel on Thursday in order to attend the "At Home" on Friday; and he has reluctantly to forego a pleasure that would cost him more time than he could possibly spare. What he will do is this. He will write a special letter to be read in his absence. It isn't much, but it's perhaps better than nothing.

A Paisley reader, whose name need not be published, writing to us on new year's eve, says:—

"I want again to express my great indebtedness to you, both intellectual and moral. I never read your articles without feeling more and more keenly how good a thing it is to hold convictions strongly and give them voice. You are one of the few men whose writings always leave me nobler than they find me. You are my hero. We all have heroes—haven't we? Your article this week made me glad that the editor of at least one paper could fittingly condemn the loathsome attitude of those contemptible wealthy vendors of Christianity that biology forces us to call men."

We print this, not out of vanity, but to show that we appeal, not unsuccessfully, to the higher natures of our readers. This is better than a "mob" circulation, gained by pandering to the mental and moral weaknesses of the multitude. If our readers are relatively few, we influence them for good, and we have our reward in the knowledge that we do so. This correspondent is none the worse for having a "hero," although we are adequately conscious that he might have made a better choice. Wordsworth well said that "We live by admiration, hope, and love." Those who admire nothing else, usually admire themselves,—which is the worst form of admiration.

We have been appealed to by some Freethinking ladies, from time to time lately, to help the Woman Suffrage movement. Some years ago we were appealed to in the same way, and we wrote a careful article on the matter. We cannot do better, in response to the new appeal, than to reprint that article with certain very slight alterations. It appears on the front page of this week's *Freethinker*. We hope it will save us from any further need of explanation.

## "The Book of Good and Evil."

LE LIVRE DU BIEN ET DU MAL ou comment MESSIRE SAINT LUCIFER ayant apporté la Lumière en ce Monde, la divine Ignorance triompha de l'humaine Sagesse. Par Edouard Daänson. (Bruxelles; 1910. A la Renaissance du Livre, 89 Avenue des Rogations. Pp. 185; 3fr. 50c.)

THIS is a charming book. It combines the archaic form of the Old Testament narratives with the *naïveté* of the Fioresetti of St. Francis, the frolicsome gaiety of Rabelais with the mordant satire of Voltaire. There is a fine imagination, much learning, and wit gleaming through these pages, while from every line there darts forth a fatal stab at some dogma of the cruel creed. In a succession of forty-four chapters M. Daänson's book relates the history and the metamorphoses of Satan the Maligned, and shows how "the worthy Saint Lucifer having brought light into this world, divine ignorance triumphed over human wisdom," established the reign of religion on earth, and deluged the world in blood and tears for the glory of God and the Church. The author's touch is light without superficiality, and this gift of combining learning with laughter enables him to spread out before us a moving panorama of narratives and romantic anecdotes, in which Jehovah jostles side by side with Lucifer, and Saints and Father Inquisitors appear before us, naked of every rag of common sense and unashamed of their superstitions and crimes. We see how "divine wisdom" darkened human intellect, crushed pity out of man's heart, and made the earth a vale of tears. In the light of Lucifer's criticisms we learn how far the adjective devilish means devilish good.

The mottoes which preface this book are a challenge and assertion of sincerity. They reveal the Man in the Author, and foreshadow the ideas which he seeks to impress on his readers. "I have written this book," says M. Daänson, "for wise people and for those who seek to become wise." He dispenses with any formal introduction to his story of his hero, the Lord and Giver of Light to mankind. But before opening his narrative he chisels into our minds the pregnant eternally true statement (which, of course, has its converse) of Pope Paul II. that "religion must destroy science, because science is the enemy of religion." Next we have the statement of Sismondi that the priest lives on the sins and the fears of the people. This is rounded off by the cynical confession of Pope Leo X.: "The thing clear from time immemorial is that this fable of Jesus Christ has been very profitable to us." M. Daänson's own positive attitude is beyond misunderstanding. "There is," he says, "only one Devil, and that is God. There is only one Hell, and that is Ignorance, the mother of all evil." The heretical pages of this clever book amply justify these twin conclusions. They overthrow the whole superstructure of Christianity by revealing it as devoid of historic basis, of elemental moral goodness, and lacking the recommendation of essential social utility. As we read, disgust, indignation, and mocking contempt of a creed now quite outworn alternately sweep through our minds till we wonder how much longer the patience of the world will bear the incubus of this Palestinian creed.

In chapter i. we are told that "before he had created the earth and its plants and animals, Adonai created heaven and its angels." And the divine Creator having breathed into space, there sprung into being an angel resplendent with light. He was so beautiful to behold that the Lord kissed him on the forehead and christened him Lucifer. At the same time he gave him a mission: "Thou shalt struggle for the light from which thou hast emanated." And Lucifer gladly accepts the task. "I will struggle," said he to God, "against your errors, in order that your glory may the more abound." And on this fable, founded on the speculations of Origen and the Midrash, M. Daänson builds his fascinating romance of Lucifer as symbolical of the insurgent spirit of man rebelling against the consecrated tyrannies of theology.

In the next chapter we witness the arrival of the worthy Saint Lucifer in Paradise. Immediately the angels cluster around and ask him what new virtue he brings to heaven with him. To this the worthy Saint Lucifer replied: "My brethren, God be praised, I bring you Evil." Saint Michael, of course, does not understand. But Saint Astaroth, who had been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, explained that "evil" was the opposite of good, and that it was a necessary good thing because God had created it. This, as is indicated, is the argument in the *Chaigah*. To the objection of Saint Belial that Almighty God was not obliged to create evil in order to manifest his divinity, the worthy Saint Lucifer replied that everything that God does he does well. As true virtue springs from wisdom, and as infinite wisdom springs from unbounded knowledge, God must be infinitely great and boundlessly wise, because he comprehends within himself all contradictions and inconsistencies. All of which proves how sound a theologian was the "Father of Lies." To this day the pulpit declares the glory of Lucifer and Christian apologetics are his handiwork!

In a later chapter, Lucifer and God, who, *pace* Job, in those early times were on visiting terms with each other, dropped down from heaven in order to see the world and admire its perfections. The Lord was beside himself with admiration of his handiwork. Why, he said, it is like a beautiful poem! That's true, replied Lucifer.....and he showed him the desert where death and desolation dwelt. Jehovah was so astonished that he wondered why he had made such a place. The worthy Saint Lucifer reminded him that it was created for.....camels! Then they climbed up a high mountain which began to vomit forth lava and cinders. And the Creator asked: What does all this mean? Why did I create volcanoes? "Master," said the worthy Saint Lucifer, "was it not in order to light up the surrounding country during the night?" "Oh, certainly," said the Lord, whose besetting sin was the Design Argument. Afterwards Lucifer paraded before his eyes the seven deadly sins: Pride, Avarice, Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Anger, and Sloth; and the sight was so shocking and unusual that he covered his divine face in order not to see; but, peeping through his fingers, he chanced to observe all the great diseases,—leprosy, the plague, cholera, and the smallpox; he saw the other great devastating scourges—locusts, famine, war, the depredations of river and flood and fire, and he wondered within himself, "Did I also create all these?"

We must leave the Deity in his bewilderment, to note that in chapter after chapter of graphic movement and dialogue the worthy Saint Lucifer is always improving the education of God; he even shows him the kingdoms of the world and the glories thereof. There is an extremely curious account in chapter vi. of the Heavenly Father's private visit to the plains of Shinah; of his arrival at Babylon; of his inspection of the temple of one of his rivals, the God Bel Mardouk; of the local priests, their families, and slaves, and all the attendant conjurers, medicine-men and theosophists who so soon after (or before) the Flood were already exploiting the credulity and the suffering of mankind, like their present-day representatives. While Jehovah was groaning as he read the inscriptions of battles on the temple walls, or envying the magnificence of the palace in which his divine rival was housed, or the mystic bas-reliefs and other religious representations which decorated the place, Lucifer appeared to him disguised as a priest (he loved and loves that mode of disguise) and was soon able to enlighten his ignorance concerning these sacred mysteries. "And who is Mardouk?" inquired Jehovah. Lucifer enlightened him: "Mardouk is Nin-ib as God of the plantation; Mardouk is Za-ma-ma as God of battles; Mardouk is En-lil as God of dominion and counsel; Mardouk is Nabou as

the God of fortune; Mardouk is En-zou during the night; Mardouk is Samas as the God of justice; and Mardouk is Adad as the God of rain." And Lucifer took a long look at Jehovah and Jehovah gazed long at the worthy Saint Lucifer. "Then, he's Me," said Jehovah, "because I am God, and all things are contained in me." "What," said Saint Lucifer, "you God! and you don't even know anything about your comrades in divinity!" The whole chapter, of which the foregoing is but a torn fragment, is most picturesque and dramatic. It concludes with a vivid description of Lucifer's flying off with Jehovah through time and space, in order to point out and describe to him a long retinue of Gods of varying degrees of solemnity and respectability. During this excursion God the Father is nestled on the back of the worthy Saint Lucifer, whose mocking description of the last God on the list—the Phallus—fills Jehovah with such terror and surprise that he loses his balance and is shaken by the rocking laughter of Lucifer into the empty void beneath.

The treatment of the story of the tragedy of Jesus is most strikingly vivid. There is the picture of Jesus nailed to the cross, the hoisting of the cross aloft with its living burden, and its violent placing in position into the hole dug to receive it. We can see the Pharisees and priests and soldiers around their victim mocking his agony. "And there was amongst them a soldier who said unto him, 'If thou art God indeed, come down from the cross and confound them all.'" And Jesus, having looked at the soldier, recognised in him the worthy Saint Lucifer. Their gaze met, and Jesus saw a tear in the eyes of the Evil One and felt that the soul of the worthy Saint Lucifer had penetrated into his. He fancied he could hear his condoling words: "Foolish, unhappy man, I pity thee! What art thou, now that they are crucifying thee for thy foolishness?" And he understood how true was this reproach, and he knew that the worthy Saint Lucifer felt sorrow on his account. And as he hung he looked out as far as his pained eyes could reach, and saw that his disciples had all forsaken him. Then he asked the worthy Saint Lucifer, "What can I do for thee?" "Lord, seeing thou art God, and that thy foreknowledge extends to all things, I bid thee cast thy gaze into the future, and thou shalt see the crimes of thy Church." Then before the eyes of the sufferer a procession of prelates arose, and a dreadful panorama of wickedness, setting forth the history of the Church, its turpitudes and cruelties, passed before his affrighted vision.....And he saw Leo X., an Atheist, and heard him and his Cardinal Bembo refuse to read the epistles of St. Paul for fear of spoiling their Ciceronian Latin. And he heard the same Leo X. cry out to him from his papal throne, "Imbecile, see what uses we have put you to!" And the heavens opened, and he saw the holy criminals of every age; he heard the holy impostors and bandits of all time dub themselves the representatives of God on earth, and declare themselves infallible. And then a violent storm burst, and he was seized with fear and horror; and as the lightning blinded his eyes, wearied with weeping and anguish, he closed them upon the horrid spectacle and exclaimed, "It is finished!"

Throughout these pages Saint Lucifer is the unsparing satirist flagellating the follies of mankind, the mocker of ignorant priests, the exploiter of their superstitions, the inventor of practical jokes in the shape of doctrinal absurdities, which he palms off upon the credulous priests as Gospel truths in order to render them and their office ridiculous in the eyes of mankind. The chapters which give an account of the worthy Saint Lucifer's participation at a witch-trial, reproduced from the usual procedure of the Holy Office; his sermon in the desert "to all the devils and damned in hell;" the caustic sermon on the proofs—and such proofs!—of Christ's divinity; and the concluding chapter giving his sermon, addressed to all mankind, on wisdom, common sense, virtue, and truth, are among the quaintest and most crushing satires on Christianity since Voltaire's pen

\*Throughout the book the original sources are noted in the margin. In the second edition I hope these notes will not be eliminated but rather amplified.

exorcised the demon of intolerance and wounded the faith unto death. *The Book of Good and Evil* is a book to read, and read again, like the immortal *Candide*. Those who love French wittily written, those who want a quaint work brimful of imagination, which in a few hours' reading will enable one to take a delightful survey of the history of religion, and to do so without the students' headaches and with the gain of a hundred hearty laughs—in a word, those who want to read a modern Freethought impeachment of Christianity, written in a style that combines Voltaire with Anatole France, should give themselves the intellectual feast that was mine when revelling in these splendid pages.

From the bibliographer's point of view, *The Book of Good and Evil* may be counted as one of the most remarkable achievements of Freethought publishing. It is beautifully printed, and the *édition de luxe*, which consists of only twenty-five numbered copies printed on thick Holland paper, is a thing of beauty to handle and behold. I am the fortunate possessor of one of these rare and beautiful copies. As I write I learn that a new and revised edition of the book—which was printed so recently as October 14 last—is now passing through the press; a fact worth noting as evidencing the enterprise of the publishers, the courage of the author, and the good taste and intelligent literary appreciation of our Belgian fellow Freethinkers. The sooner we have a translation of this book in English the better for us and for the good old cause of Freethought.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

### Immortality and Mortality.

BY JACK R. BINNS.

MANY persons who have a very ardent belief in an after life throughout eternity believe also that the concourse of matter known as the universe suddenly sprang into existence at a definite time five thousand nine hundred and fourteen years ago. So complete was this sudden change that what had previously been nothing instantaneously became something to such an extent that there was absolutely not a particle of nothing remaining—except perhaps that which was known as God; who, according to their reasoning, must have been composed of nothing, and we have not been told that he changed at the moment of creation. They believe that they too, who also commenced to have consciousness of existence at a definite time and who are part of that concourse of matter, will exist as a spirit after the universe has changed into its original composition, that is to say, after it has become nothing again. Possibly there is a great deal in this belief; at least, so it appears to me so long as their soul is composed of the same material out of which—according to their belief—God made the universe, and into which—as they believe—it will again change.

Now this belief they call faith; but faith of this description seems to have a great elasticity, for it is not by any means logical to conceive of something that has a beginning as continuing without an end. In their faith they say that the world, which was definitely created at a definite time, will also be definitely destroyed. Should this be the case it makes the Creator appear like a spoiled child who in a cross moment destroys the beautiful house of bricks he has so laboriously built. Apart from that, however, such is their belief; and yet at the same time and under the same circumstances, and almost with the same breath, they state that their soul (which needed matter in order to come into existence) will continue to live forever—even though the universe be destroyed. I only ask in what form—in the form of matter, or as nothing?

In order to substantiate their beliefs they have either to say that God was existing before he created the universe or else that he was created with it. If the former, he was in the peculiar position of being the ruler and owner of something that had no existence. If the latter, we must ask who or what made God? And in seeking the answer we are in the position of the Hindu mythologists who, when they postulated that the world was flat and supported by an elephant, had to postulate that the elephant in turn was supported by a tortoise—and then what?

The portion of themselves which orthodox persons believe will exist for ever with continued consciousness, they call their soul. This soul they believe has a consciousness now, and is part of what they call their corporeal body, although

they never have been able to say definitely which portion of their anatomy it is situated in.

If we have, as they say, a soul that has eternal life, that soul would be for ever conscious, not only after it has left the body, but also during the time it is a tenant of the body. Such being the case, I would like to ask what becomes of the consciousness of the soul during the time we are asleep or otherwise unconscious. Perchance it spends such times in periods of rest in its future home behind the veil; and thus by constant use becomes acclimatised.

Can we truthfully say, after clear and unprejudiced introspection, that we have what the Christians call a soul? By soul they mean the immortal spirit of man—something that is not anything—something that is composed of what no matter can be composed of—that is, composed of nothing. This is the thing that they believe will live for ever, and to live forever it need have no other qualification than that it has in some unaccountable manner permeated the being of some human. If we have such a soul, what a lifeless, soulless soul it must be! To think that it can gain everlasting life (good or bad, but still everlasting life) just because it has occupied a human body! Why could it not go straight away to its everlasting home without troubling some poor human body with the most miserable portion of its eternal existence? Or must we believe that God, in order to bring forth soul life, must first obtain the assistance of nature to supply him with a receptacle wherein to place the soul germ? If such is the case, when does the soul, which lives forever, reach maturity? To me such a soul is a nonentity; and were it not a nonentity I should be very sorry to own one. Rather would I try to cast it out in the same manner as the early Christians were reputed to have cast out devils—an art which, by the way, present-day Christians have lost the knack of. When one looks upon such a soul with calm judgment, one can understand the superstitious terror and fear which its owner is in when left alone with it. It is the bogey and bugbear of his earthly existence. The Devil is always trying to steal it and the priest is always admonishing the owner to keep it out of the poor Devil's clutches. The possession of such a soul offers incalculable drawbacks with only one compensation—that of eternal life, which the material intellect can never realise.

Someone may say to me, "The soul that you have described is not the soul taught by religion." In that case, I have been unfortunate in my instruction, for such is the idea of the soul that my religious teachers taught me; and, if it is not correct, my query is: What is the soul? If by soul you mean consciousness of being or intellect, I aver that neither can be a soul in the religious meaning of that word, as both are material, not spiritual. These two—consciousness of being and intellect—are phenomena of the brain and follow upon the action of the matter composing the brain. There is absolutely nothing supernatural about either, neither are they illusions. Our intellect, so far as it controls our actions, is undoubtedly governed by the laws of heredity and environment. In some cases both laws act together beneficially, to the good of the being, and in others either one or the other becomes the predominant factor in shaping the trend of the being's existence. To me, it appears that the human intellect has freed itself, to a certain extent, in abstract thought, and the tendency is to evolve still greater liberty. It is the gradually evolved power of abstract thought that has enabled man to far outstrip the rest of the animal kingdom in the struggle for existence and make him predominant. If it is of such material that the soul is composed, I glory in having one; but still I am unable to see how a material soul could find room for an eternal existence in an immaterial environment, were such an environment possible.

Although modern science and criticism have dealt many deadly blows at supernaturalism it is dying very slowly, and still clings to life with great persistence, thus proving itself as an abstract thought to be governed by the all-powerful laws of evolution; and although it evolves many ingenious methods to assist it in its struggle for existence, it is not fitted for survival, and is gradually being exterminated by more rational conceptions of life. One of the mutations of supernaturalism is spiritualism. Spiritualists claim that they can hold sweet converse with departed souls. Now departed souls, we are told, are not material; and as nature has only to do with that which is material it follows that all spiritualists are of necessity supernaturalists. They converse with departed spirits with the help of a medium, and it is only very few persons in the many millions inhabiting this vale of tears that are gifted with the propensities of a medium, and even they do not remember what they have done—they are only the medium. The conversation is carried on by putting the medium into a trance, and then, presumably, the soul of the medium makes several journeys to a place many miles outside the boundary of a universe that has no boundaries, at a speed which, could a shipping or a railway magnate reproduce, would make him a Cæsus in

about two seconds. Having arrived at the abode of departed souls, they pick out and converse with one soul out of the many billions that have at one time or another had to depart and thus become eligible to enter that abode, and then carry back the message received from the departed one to the one that has not yet reached that state of blessedness; and so it goes on.

In order to strengthen their position some Spiritualists quote wireless telegraphy as an analogy, but if they knew more of that subject they would let it severely alone. Wireless telegraphy is governed by natural laws, and has to do only with the material. Those laws are persistent, not spasmodic. Ether, as far as we know, is imponderable, but it is nevertheless matter, and therefore indestructible; and it is this indestructible matter, which exists everywhere, that is the medium in which the electro-magnetic waves formed by the disruptive discharge of high tension electricity are transmitted in ever-widening circles until they either exhaust themselves in the ether or pass down the antennæ of stations within their radii, and their potentiality is transformed into audible signals by means of suitable detectors. The time occupied in the transmission of electro-magnetic waves through ether although infinitesimal is of definite duration, and is governed by the resistance to be overcome in the transmission. How strange it would seem if only certain portions of the ether had propensities for the transmission of electro-magnetic waves, yet if wireless telegraphy is an analogy to Spiritualism, that is what would have to be for it to be a true analogy; or again, if only certain ships were able to work wireless owing to others not being in "sympathy" with the ether, yet to be an analogy such should be the case.

"Take away our belief in an after life and in God, and there is not anything left to live for!" Such is the sentence that mostly greets one from pious persons. Now the first thing that such people should realise is that no one wishes to take that belief from them; what the Rationalist really wants them to do is to leave off stifling their common sense, and the moment that they do so they will of themselves modify that belief. Such persons have no idea of the present nor of the beautiful, otherwise they would alter their cry, for—as they say—should you take away from them the airy thing called belief they would have no further use for life. How pitiable is their plight! In the event of such a calamity they would be unable to see the beauty of the sun, moon, and stars, and the beauty in that which we call art; neither would they feel any pleasure in the accomplishment of anything. What poor little creatures such people are! How unutterably narrow!

Another well-worn and idiotic saying of the religious devotee is, "Take away my hope in a future life, and I should have no other aim in life but to eat, drink, and be merry, with no incentive other than to satisfy the cravings of my animal instincts." Apparently the persons who make this kind of remark have some use for life, even should their belief be taken away, and that use is evidently of a beastly character, judging from their exclamation. Such persons are dangerous; by giving vent to an idea of that description they show how depraved their minds really are under the veneer of sanctimoniousness. The only thing that keeps them apparently decent citizens is the belief that their souls will thereby go to heaven, where they will be able to gratify the desires which they stifle whilst on earth by means of ultra-pious bonds of restraint—that is, openly, at least. But they are wrong; it is no such hope that restrains them; it is the fear of secular punishment here in this material world that restrains them from realising their beastly desires.

Our morals, fortunately, are not governed by any such flimsy hopes. They are the result of solid experience, and the penalty of overstepping the bounds of those morals is twofold. In the first case, secular punishment follows upon any such breach, and secondly the results of all bad deeds recoil upon the perpetrator mentally and morally.

Christians themselves do not follow the precepts of their Master, nor could they even should they wish to do so. Can we fancy a bishop refusing to invest his money in a brewery or other concern in order to follow the behest to "take no heed for the morrow"? Have we any concrete record of a bishop, priest, or clergyman of any description having done such a thing? "Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also." How splendidly and unreservedly Christians upon heretics as obeyed this command! Christians look upon heretics as evil persons, and in the Middle Ages they followed their Master's command to love their enemies by burning and torturing. What a sweet and logical interpretation! And in order that they should not covet the heretics' possessions they confiscated them.

The same desire to burn and torture all those who disbelieve in Christianity still exists in Christians to-day; but, with the advent of universal education, modern science has

got the upper hand, and, by using weapons of logic, experience, and scientific evidence, she has removed the deadly sting from out the bigot's clutch, and all that he now can do is to fume with impotent wrath and denounce the world that has grown so wicked as to disdain to let him use "the thumbscrew and the stake for the glory of the Lord"!

As units and as nations, by gradual evolution mankind is rising above superstition and bigotry, and is moulding morals upon solid experience and utility. Our great social questions are no longer settled by what God desires (through his bishops); they are settled by a secular government elected by the general people, and as the power of the bishop wanes we get more equable and kindly conditions, and no longer can the intellect be ruthlessly held down that refuses to grow in the straight and narrow path of superstition.

In the splendid "Hymn to Man" Swinburne says:—

"By the name that in Hell-fire was written, and burned  
at the point of thy sword,  
Thou art smitten, thou God, thou art smitten; thy death  
is upon thee, O Lord;  
And the love-song of earth as thou diest, resounds  
through the wind of her wings,  
'Glory to Man in the Highest! for Man is the Master  
of things!'"

Or in other words, when man is in difficulty nowadays he does not go to God any longer for assistance, he does something instead.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

## Correspondence.

### THE BIBLE AND SHAKESPEARE.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your issue of the 18th inst. you have a reference to the proposed Tercentenary of the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible, in which you say that 300 years ago it was entirely a book of religion and now it is largely a book of literature. You also suggest that in 300 years' time it will be forgotten except by scholars and students. At the least it will be no small tribute to a book if the only sections that remember it are the scholarly and the studious. But may I remind you that Voltaire more than 180 years ago foretold a similar but speedier extinction, for he gave it only 100 years? In his day the Bible could not speak in 50 different languages, and it had but a very limited circulation, confined very largely to a small part of the Christian Church. To-day the Bible, or some part of it, is published in about 550 tongues; it is circulated at the rate of ten million copies yearly, and it has a world-wide distribution which knows no barrier of race or religion.

Does it not occur to you that there is a remarkable vitality with the Book that you have so kindly doomed to obscurity? And does it not also occur to you that there is something very remarkable in its present circumstances when judged in the light of its origin and past history?

You speak of Shakespeare. You may be perfectly certain that Shakespeare will never be so translated and never be so distributed if, for no other reason than this, that the English soul and genius of his writings will make a fair translation in any tongue impossible, and a translation worth making at all in most tongues to be an impossibility. Possibly, too, a true judgment of Shakespeare would show that while much of his popularity is due to his literary form and power, very much more is due to those moral and human elements that have their origin and inspiration in the Bible. Take the Bible out of Shakespeare, and I do not think that even you would be disposed to boast so much about him.

You say he has but to be printed and he does all the rest for himself. How, then, would you account for the fact that for many years the Bible Society has circulated more than a million copies of the Bible in China, and that its circulation last year was a million and a half? There are three Societies working in China, and last year their combined circulation was not far short of four million copies in that country alone. These were paid for by the Chinese, and not given gratuitously. What is it that "does all the rest" for the Scriptures in China?

9 Lunham-road, Norwood, S.E.

W. FISHER.

December 29, 1910.

[This letter is answered in "Acid Drops."—EDITOR.]

### BALAAM AND HIS BEAST.

He: "Do you believe, Miss Faith, that an ass ever spoke?"

She: "Yes; don't you?"

**SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.**

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

**LONDON.****INDOOR.**

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Satan."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Public (Minor) Hall, Canning Town): 7.30, J. J. Darby, "The Fallacies of Theism."

**OUTDOOR.**

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): 7, W. Mercer, "Evolution of the God Idea."

**COUNTRY.****INDOOR.**

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Spencer Leigh Hughes ("Sub Rosa"), "Oddities of Parliament."

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): Joseph McCabe, 3, "The Pessimism of Tolstoi"; 7, "Theology and Recent Science."

RHONDDA BRANCH N. S. S. (Parry's Temperance Bar, Tony-pandy): 3, S. Holman, "Lord Byron and his 'Cain.'"

WEST STANLEY BRANCH N. S. S. (Co-operative Ante-Room): 3.30, Business Meeting.

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The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularisation of the State, etc., etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

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