

THE Freethinker

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*There is a fire-fly in the southern clime
Which shineth only when upon the wing ;
So is it with the mind : when once we rest,
We darken.*

—PHILIP JAMES BAILEY.

Satan.

CARDUCCI, the great Italian poet and Freethinker, who was buried some eight years ago at Bologna amidst the grief of a whole nation, first made himself famous by his *Hymn to Satan*. The very title of this poem is enough to upset the godly. To treat Satan with respect and even admiration is shocking; to address him as if he were intellectually and morally superior to Jehovah is blasphemy. This is how it strikes the orthodox Christian. But in this, as in so many other matters, the orthodox Christian is wrong.

Satan is the great, vague, impressive figure of the Bible. When the "sons of God present themselves before the Lord" in the first chapter of Job, Satan comes also amongst them, and the Lord addresses him in terms of the highest courtesy. They bow to each other like a couple of old Castilian nobles. And when the compliments are over the Lord boasts of his servant Job as a fine and noble fellow; but Satan throws cold water on the heat of the Lord's exultation by asking the dramatic and searching question, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" This was a fresh view of the case; the Lord had not seen it in that light before, so he resolved to put Job to the test.

Satan is here the challenger. He asks the Deity himself if he is perfectly sure of what he is talking about. And is it not curious that while one account represents the Lord as tempting David to number Israel another account represents Satan as tempting him to take the census—which was certainly a step in civilisation? Over against the Lord, with his omnipotence and his cocksure omniscience, stands Satan with the probe of his perpetual interrogation. Ancient custom is confronted with the spirit of novelty—solid conservatism with the quick spirit of revolt. Is it so? Should it be so? Shall it be so? Such is the eternal gradation of questioning which is the vital essence of all progress.

It was this spirit of revolt that Carducci addressed in the *Hymn to Satan*. In our own smaller way we touched the same point, many years ago, in an Imaginary Conversation we wrote between Satan and Michael. After reminding Michael of his unsuccessful effort to send a breath of freedom through the courts of heaven, Satan continues (in that old piece of ours) in the following manner:—

"I animate all who fight against servitude and somnolence. The heroes and martyrs of liberty and progress in every age have drunk of the strength of my spirit. I inspire the revolter, the scorner, the sceptic, the satirist. I still distribute the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. I am the soul of the world. The fire of my inspiration may consume, but it gives unspeakable rapture. I am the Prometheus of the universe, and keep it from stagnating under the icy hand of power. Milton, Goethe, and Byron made me the hero of their greatest poems, and felt my power in despite of themselves. Burns spoke of me with a tenderness he never displayed

towards God. Wits and humorists own my sway. I moved the minds of Aristophanes and Lucian, of Erasmus and Rabelais, and through the pen of Voltaire I shattered the mental slavery of Europe. I am the lightning of the human mind. I level thrones and altars, and annihilate binding customs. With the goad of a restless aspiration I urge men on, until they outgrow faith and fear, until the Slave stands erect before the Tyrant and defies his curse."

The statement that Satan is the hero of Milton's, Goethe's, and Byron's greatest poems is perfectly true. Let us look at the facts of the case for a moment.

Milton's genius dilates to its greatest capacity whenever Satan appears upon the scene. God the Father, in *Paradise Lost*, is a pompous old fogey, and God the Son is a prosy prig—but Satan is always magnificent. What a grand picture Milton draws of the fallen archangel, with his splendid presence, his sleepless intellect, his indomitable pride, and his invincible courage. Some of Cromwell's characteristics creep into the portrait. The great Regicide sat as one of the models for the great Rebel—and the result gives the poem its finest majesty. And when Satan is humiliated, as in the hissing-snakes episode, we feel shocked and pained as at the spectacle of fallen greatness trampled into the dust. This also is very noteworthy. God the Father never shivers at the thought of his creatures' damnation; he is only concerned to vindicate his own character; but Satan, as he watches the innocent couple in happiness in the garden, feels compunction at making them pawns in the game between himself and the lord of heaven, and deploras the necessity of having to do what else, though damned, he would abhor.

Goethe puts nearly all the intellect, and all the best of the morality, of *Faust* into the mouth of Mephistopheles. Satan thus became, for the great German poet, the spokesman of all sorts of daring ideas and profound reflections. Mephistopheles is the real soul of *Faust*. Faust himself, and Marguerite, are but the foils for that subtle and audacious spirit. Sentimentalism has made too much of them. For, after all, there is great force in Lamb's question as to Margaret's value, and his remark that Marlow gave his Faust no less a star of beauty and romance than Helen of Greece.

And does not Satan dominate in Byron's superb *Vision of Judgment*? Southey, George III., Michael himself—these are all nothing to the tremendous figure of the lord of hell. All the rebellious force of Byron's own nature went to the composition of that grand design. "And where he gazed a gloom pervaded space." Magnificent—yes, and true! For the rebel's spirit must, first of all, cast a gloom over the sparkling inanities of false and foolish life.

"Sabbathless Satan," as Charles Lamb quaintly called him, is the ideal of energy and activity. He is also the ideal of intelligence. His worst enemy never called him a fool. Even the clergy admit that he represents what they call the pride of intellect. And thus it is that they call every sceptic who looks as if he meant business "a child of the Devil." To believe what they preach, and to do what they say, and pay what they demand, is to be a child of God.

Jehovah, on the other hand, only represents irresponsible power. All the bloody wars, all the deliberate wickedness, all the abominable cruelty in the Bible are the work of his hands, or the execution of

his orders, or the perpetration of his friends. The Bible calls the Devil the father of lies; but even this is a wretched slander—for when the Lord wanted a lying spirit to go forth and fill the mouths of the prophets so that Ahab might be lured on to his doom at Ramoth-Gilead, there was no need to send to hell for a clever practitioner; the Lord found an excellent volunteer at his very elbow in heaven.

Why should not men, if they must worship somebody, worship Satan for a change? We never heard of anything really to the discredit of this personage. He never taught men to love their enemies—and hate all who differed from them; he never incited men to cut each other's throats for a difference of opinion; he never instigated religious wars; he never aided in the oppression and spoliation of the people; he never countenanced slavery and the degradation of women; he never promised to damn people through all eternity for exercising their wits and trusting to their common sense. "The name of God has fenced about all crime with holiness," as Shelley said; but no such charge was ever brought against Satan. He is cleaner, sweeter, more moral, and in every way more eligible as an object of worship than his great rival. But the principal advantage, it appears to us, is that he allows people to think—nay, urges them to think. In this respect, he is an improvement on all the gods we ever heard of. So three cheers for Satan!

G. W. FOOTE.

Christianity's Collapse.

WE seem a long way removed from the time when Christians generally believed that in the New Testament they possessed a unique body of teachings, concerning a unique personality, who actually lived and taught something over nineteen hundred and ten years ago. Yet a little more than half a century would carry us back to such a time. True, the knowledge that this was not the case was then available, but it was confined to a few, and the few either would not speak or were not in a position to command attention over a wide area. But a teaching that is true is tolerably sure of a growing audience. People may give up a delusion, or something that is only speculatively true; but a teaching that rests upon a basis of ascertainable fact once grasped is never lost. So when it was pointed out that the doctrines called Christian were much older than historic Christianity, and that this was also true of the teachings that had passed under the same name, even though only a few gave credence at first, the few gradually increased to many, and those who knew the truth began to reconsider the wisdom of their self-imposed vow of silence.

Then the clergy began to make admissions. They admitted that the Christian religion might not be such a unique thing as people had imagined—and as they had taught. They admitted the analogies, even the homologies, but they said that Christianity gave a new, or a deeper, or a more spiritual interpretation of these religious teachings. And so on they went, more or less cheerfully, with their criticisms and admissions, apparently quite unconscious of the logical drift of their concessions. Nor was their conduct devoid of suspicion. With some people, at least, it was impossible not to feel that they who said so much *must* know a great deal more, and that their speech bore only a distant relation to their knowledge. The policy of pretending that all that had been discovered concerning the origin, the nature, and the development of the Christian myth did not affect the essential nature of Christianity could impose only on those who wished to be deceived. The more benighted Christian believers, and the enemies of Christian belief were as one in believing that if the main results of criticism and research were valid Christianity was doomed. Both claimed that if the Four Gospels did not contain in their main outlines the record of an historic fact, if

Christianity was merely a rehash of certain widespread doctrines and beliefs, then the days of Christianity were numbered. The want of enlightenment of a certain class of believers thus led to a sanity of decision that enlightenment, combined with timidity and self interest in other believers, failed to produce.

Another class, shrewder and more far seeing, began to realise that the less Christianity was made to depend upon the historical character of the New Testament narrative the better. There could be no valid reasons for rejecting certain stories as false enshrined in other religions, and accepting them as true when found in the New Testament. It would be absurd to accept all these variously recorded stories as true, and equally absurd to select one of the bunch and dismiss the others. Far better to reject the historical aspect altogether. Sooner or later the real issue would have to be faced, and the best way to prepare for this event would be by making Christianity independent of any alleged historic event, and therefore unaffected by any purely historic criticism. The New Testament must be interpreted spiritually, not, that is, as the record of the actual birth, death, and resurrection of an historic character, but as a dramatic representation of the mental or spiritual growth of every developing human being. And the New Testament writers—who they were is of no consequence either, on this theory—become profound spiritual philosophers, whose only concern was to give a dramatic representation to certain important truths in morals and psychology.

This is the theory championed by the Rev. K. C. Anderson in the current issue of the *Hibbert Journal*. His article is in part a criticism of those Christians who either do not accept the results of the Higher Criticism, or accept those results while imagining they can retain the belief in a historical Christ. The Four Gospels, he says, are now "a complete wreck as historical records," it is a "pure assumption" to even imagine that there is "a nucleus of fact" around which the Christian legends have gathered, and if there is no other way of regarding the Gospel stories than as historical facts, "then they must go on the rubbish heap of the world." And he adds: "The idea that man is saved by a historical Savior who lived at a definite time in human history—a Savior external to himself—is the great error of the Christian Church."

Well, the first and most obvious comment upon this hypothesis is that the Christian Church—under all its forms—has always pinned its faith upon the substantial historicity of the New Testament, and has appealed to the alleged fact as the warranty for its existence. Nor can any unprejudiced reader doubt that the Gospel narratives are intended to be a relation of an historic event. The numerous little details—quite unnecessary in a mere spiritual allegory—are enough to prove this. Of course, these stories are full of absurdities and contradictions, and they are without historical verification. No one knows this better than the Freethinker. But it is a curious argument that because the stories are inherently unbelievable and historically untrustworthy, therefore they must have been intended for a purpose other than that of historical narration. For this, in a nutshell, is all that Dr. Anderson's pleading amounts to. The New Testament *must* be shown to be valuable in some way—either as a narrative of fact or as containing some indispensable spiritual truth. And as common sense forbids the first, we must fall back upon the second. And in arguing for the second Dr. Anderson is apparently blind to the fact that he is charging historic Christianity with being one gigantic lie and imposture from the earliest moment of its existence until to-day. No Freethinker has ever made a more sweeping charge against historic Christianity than that made by those who agree with Dr. Anderson's position.

Dr. Anderson is probably correct in arguing that the Gospel writers did not face these stories in the same critical spirit that we do. Against such stories

as those contained in the New Testament the modern critical attitude of mind could not be maintained—except by an individual here and there. Still, it is significant that as soon as history presents us with any such persons the Gospel stories are unhesitatingly rejected. But to the mass of the people such stories were too common for one particular version to rouse strong criticism. We have to remember the environment in which such stories were circulated. Christians have often asked how could such wonderful stories as those related in the New Testament ever gain credence if they were not based upon fact? To which the Freethinker has replied that they were believed because the mental environment were suitable to their existence. It is part of the Freethinker's case that every one of the stories related of the Christian Savior were related of other saviors in Greece, in Egypt, and elsewhere. Amid a people with whom the supernatural is domiciled, stories of miraculous births and deaths, and wonderful events, excite little comment, and rouse still less criticism. They are accepted without question, much as our not very remote ancestors manufactured and accepted stories of dealing with the Devil. The wonder is not that a religion developed two thousand years ago which taught a divine birth, a miracle-working life, and a miraculous resurrection; the wonder would be that a religion should develop two thousand years ago and be without these things. Our really great difficulty is to realise the frame of mind that could accept these ancient legends as stories of actual events. Once realise this, and all else is easy.

Moreover, Dr. Anderson completely ignores what is really a vital aspect of religious evolution. Symbolism is not the beginning of religious belief, but the end. It marks a stage when doubt has operated effectively against accepted opinions. Dr. Anderson writes of the Crucifixion:—

"The true Crucifixion is not something that happened once in the history of the world—a mere Palestinian affair; it is an eternal happening that most intimately concerns every man in his inward nature, and the story of the Crucifixion in the Gospels is but the shadow of that. The Crucifixion is something that is to be worked out in every man, and it is this mystic but most real Crucifixion that is the reality, though all others should be proved unhistorical."

Now I have no doubt whatever that it is possible to read a symbolical meaning into the Crucifixion, and to transform the whole into a profound spiritual allegory. It could be done with equal ease with Old Mother Hubbard or Little Jack Horner, or with numerous other nursery stories; and would be done had either of the stories named had the good fortune to be within the covers of the New Testament. But in making it an allegory, Dr. Anderson quite ignores all we know of the origin and nature of the sacrificed God. It is a long story to relate in detail, but the main outlines may be given in a few sentences. We have first the belief in a double that is independent of the body. Next, the power of the liberated ghost to affect human affairs for weal or woe. Next—an easy transition—the deliberate release of the double or ghost to protect the interests of the family or tribe. Dr. Frazer has furnished us with numerous examples of this, drawn from all parts of the world; and also with the creation of a guardian deity for the harvest by the annual killing of a selected victim. The first stage is not the creating of a dramatic or symbolic representation, but the killing of an actual person. The dramatic representation only takes place at a higher level of culture, and even then, not as a symbolical representation of man's spiritual development, but as a survival of the primitive brutal and concrete fact.

There is no doubt to those who read the Gospel story with an unprejudiced mind, and in the light of adequate knowledge, that we are dealing with only a late form of this ancient but common religious custom. The early Christian writers were no more profound spiritual philosophers than modern Christians are believers in the primitive rite of killing the

The Crucifixion of Jesus was accepted by primitive believers because it was in harmony with the prevailing religious atmosphere. The notion that the Christian myth appealed to certain people because of its greater purity, or because of the deeper spiritual yearnings of those who accepted it, is in the highest degree absurd. Christianity was accepted by those who did accept it far more on account of points of similarity to other creeds than because of points of difference. Afterwards, by a perfectly natural growth, just as in other directions the payment of money or a dramatic representation took the place of an actual human sacrifice, an allegorising and symbolising process sets in. Finally, the imported moral meanings become supreme, and the actual starting point is forgotten. But this is not a return to the primitive creed, it is rather its definite rejection. A Christianity that rests on no basis of historic fact, that is no more than a pictorial representation of universal human passions, a kind of glorified miracle play, is a religion that calls for no special attack, for the reason that it is a religion very few would be anxious to defend.

C. COHEN.

Theological Subterfuges.

DR. WATTS, the well-known divine and hymn-writer of the eighteenth century, counselled his brethren to abstain from all hypocrisy and cowardice in their intellectual relationships. His very words are worth quoting: "Affect not little shifts and subterfuges, to avoid the force of an argument." A more apposite advice could not be given, and there is certainly no advice that has been more completely ignored. It would be difficult to find a theologian who, whenever he ventures forth into debate with an unbeliever, does not "affect little shifts and subterfuges," to parry the thrusts of his opponent. The natural inference is that sceptical arguments are unanswerable, and that Christianity is not honestly defensible. But let us consider a concrete example. Until recently Wales was an exceptionally religious country. Practically the whole population professed Christianity. But that is no longer the case. The young people of the present generation are renouncing Christianity in ever-increasing numbers. The Churches are being steadily depleted. The *Congregational Year Book*, just issued, shows a further decrease of membership in the Principality. A year ago the Baptist Union expressed the conviction that the arrest of progress in the Church had reached its limit, but the new *Handbook* reports a decrease in the total membership of 3,775, and of this number Wales is responsible for 2,643. The leaders of the Welsh Churches are greatly perturbed by this alarming decay of religion within their borders. A fortnight ago Principal T. Rees, of the Congregational College, Bangor, delivered an address at Swansea on "The Modern Defence of the Faith." The reverend gentleman endeavored to minimise the danger which now threatens religious belief on every hand, and which has already killed it in many minds. He is reported to have said that "there was nothing to warrant the nervousness which had overtaken some people. "The attacks recently made were neither as novel as those who made them seemed to think, nor nearly as formidable as many Christians feared."

Principal Rees went further still, and asserted that whatever genuine unrest there was should not be feared but welcomed. "Organisms were capable of growth, and growth meant pain; and a good deal of the perplexity and suspense and agony which the Church was now experiencing was inevitable as a sign of health and growth." That is to say, the loss of 2,643 members in a year was in reality a gain to the Welsh Baptist denomination—"a sign of health and growth." We may be too dull to adequately appreciate such a statement; but we must protest our utter inability to understand how the conversion of Christians to Freethought can be a source of

strength to the Church. If such a statement were true, Freethinkers should be gratefully numbered among the servants of Christ. As a matter of fact, the statement is false, only it would not do for the trainer of young preachers to make so pessimistic an admission. Then Principal Rees is reported to have given very deliberate expression to the following conviction:—

"I have the utmost confidence that what the Church needs most of all to-day on the intellectual side is not less, but more knowledge, from whatever region it comes. 'A little philosophy,' as Bacon says, 'inclineth man's mind to Atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion.'"

Let it be borne in mind that the Principal is not speaking of what is falsely called religious knowledge. He forgot, however, that it is knowledge which is at this moment despoiling the churches. It was increasing knowledge that drove Darwin to Agnosticism, and it is the knowledge acquired at the University Colleges that is making Atheists of the lads and lasses of Wales. It is well known that the Ages of Faith were ignorant ages; and one cannot but admire the sagacity displayed by the Church of Rome in its consistent opposition to secular knowledge. The inevitable tendency of natural knowledge is to destroy supernatural belief, and that tendency is in full operation in Wales at the present time. Mr. Rees may rest assured that churches flooded with knowledge would soon blossom into Secular Societies.

The Principal is in favor of compelling "every opponent, doubter, and believer to formulate the question, 'What is Christianity?' What are the essential and eternal things that are worth fighting for?" The following passage is the reporter's version:—

"His answer to that was that Christianity was not essentially a creed, but a life—not a creed formulated, but a life lived brought Christianity into existence. The religion of Jesus is at once too large and too subtle to be expressed or contained in any creed."

We have heard that many times before, and have no hesitation in pronouncing it arrant nonsense. To begin with, it was not a life lived, but the belief in the resurrection of Jesus, that brought Christianity into existence. The world would never have heard of the life lived had it not been for the faith in the risen Lord. The Christian life is the direct outcome of Christian belief. It is totally impossible to worship a God in whom you do not believe. The Apostles invariably invited people to believe in order to be saved. According to the New Testament it is unbelief that damns the soul for ever. Indeed, Principal Rees himself admits all this, if the reporter correctly interprets him in the following passage:—

"Dealing with the question as to what is vital in Christianity and worth fighting for, he said that the one fact that supremely mattered was the Lordship of Jesus in moral and spiritual matters. We may hold with varying degrees of tenacity the theology, the creed, the Book of the Church, but the absolute supremacy of Jesus was vital to all."

But, surely, the lordship or supremacy of Jesus is both primarily and secondarily a creed—a thing believed. Both in its essence and in all its forms Christianity is a series of doctrines about God, Christ, and man which, if *believed*, are expected to produce certain results in the life.

Now the answer to the question as to which doctrines are considered to be essential, or vital, to Christianity varies according to circumstances. As long as science was forcibly held in suspension, Paulineism, as interpreted in Augustinianism, held the field as the only inspired version of Christianity; but when science succeeded in snapping its chains it soon knocked the bottom out of Augustinianism. Paul and Augustine were quite as competent to determine what Christianity is as are present-day divines, only the scientific knowledge which the latter cannot shut out necessitates their rejection of the Pauline doctrines of the Fall and the plenary inspiration of the Bible. Those doctrines were regarded as vital to Christianity until scientific

knowledge proved that they were false. And at this point the Principal tries to conceal the weakness of the case for the Faith by employing a most palpable artifice. According to the reporter "he next showed how Blatchford, Haeckel, and Huxley had been all along attacking, not Christianity, not modern Christian doctrines, but ancient and discarded theories." But this is neither fair nor true. Huxley, in particular, attacked, not "ancient and discarded theories," but doctrines held by living divines who met him on the arena to do serious battle in their defence. He did not waste his time in flogging dead horses, but utilised his splendid debating powers for the demolition of doctrines that daily confronted him. He assailed, not Augustine, Aquinas, or Calvin, but Mr. Gladstone, several bishops and other dignitaries of the Established Church, and the Duke of Argyle. And the doctrines which Huxley did his level best to smash are still believed by the majority of Christians in Wales. It is not so long since Dr. Lewis Edwards' famous *Doctrine of the Atonement* was published, in which he exhorts young Welsh divines to suffuse their minds with the works of Owen, Howe, Leighton, Jonathan Edwards, and their successors in the orthodox line of descent. Principal Rees himself is evidently a Modernist, who has cast off many doctrines and modified others in response to the demands of scientific knowledge; but he knows perfectly well that the overwhelming majority of Welsh ministers are still orthodox, and zealously preach the doctrines which he characterises as "ancient and discarded."

Young Wales is slowly throwing off the yoke of bondage and asserting its right to think for itself in religious matters, as well as in all others. It is at last falling into line with England and Scotland. It is doubtless true that the present Freethought activity in South Wales is largely a reaction from Evan Roberts's revival, but it is also true that some of the sturdiest Freethinkers there became such through disgust at the methods adopted in that strange movement. And they have discarded not only the orthodoxy of the majority, but the Modernism championed by such men as Principal Rees as well. They have released themselves from all the shackles of supernaturalism, and taken up the interesting and profitable study of the natural. It is not Calvinism, or Arminianism, or Modernism, but theology as such, that they now oppose with so much zest. As a rule, the orthodox people do not condescend to argue with them at all, but content themselves with making life as unpleasant for them as possible. They only throw mud and persecute, being wholly unable to meet their arguments. Neither will the Modernists enter into honest debate with them, their contention being that the views denounced by the Freethinkers are as dead as Queen Anne. This is, of course, nothing but dishonest shuffling. The lordship or supremacy of Jesus is absolutely incapable of verification. Freethinkers reject it with scorn. It is a theological figment, with nothing in the realm of fact corresponding to it. Indeed, the Rev. Dr. K. C. Anderson declares, in the current issue of the *Hibbert Journal*, that "as a result of the work of the Higher Criticism the Four Gospels are a complete wreck as historical records." This divine dubs their Jesus a myth, a being that never lived at all. But what infinite folly it is to ascribe "lordship in moral and spiritual matters" to a purely mythical character, and to worship him as God.

The modernist policy is doomed to certain failure. The New Theology is a rope of sand and falls to pieces the moment you touch it. Orthodoxy appeals to authority, either of the Bible or of the Church, and both authorities have been completely discredited both by history and by criticism. Is it not clear, then, that when Monarch Reason has fully awakened, we shall get rid of the dreams indulged in by the fancy while he was asleep? Many of them are gone already, and the rest are going. What a happy day it will be when not one of them remains to distract the mind. Their place will be occupied by realities,

the realities of the life we are living here and now; and then we shall have leisure to study and endeavor to solve life's many puzzling problems on purely rational and ethical lines.

J. T. LLOYD.

Modern Plays and Freethought.

A SHORT time ago I had occasion, in these columns, to mention the fact that in the remarkable play called *False Gods*, produced a few months ago at His Majesty's Theatre, the distinguished French dramatist, Monsieur Brioux, made the hero of his play a Freethinker, and put into his mouth a number of very fine speeches calling in question the reality of the gods of ancient Egypt, and advancing arguments against their existence and their power to work miracles, which were equally valid against any form of modern Christian Theism, or, indeed, against any form of Theism whatever. Since then another remarkable play—this time by a young English dramatist, Mr. Laurence Irving, the youngest son of the most distinguished actor of modern times—has been produced, entitled *The Unwritten Law*, and is now being performed at the Kingsway Theatre, which is worthy of the serious attention of all earnest students of the drama. This play is founded on Dostoeffski's *Crime and Punishment*, but as a play it is quite new and original. Through the courtesy and kindness of the management I received, a few days ago, an invitation to witness this piece and I desire to give an account of it in these columns which I hope will induce Freethinkers to go and see the performance of a play which is not only a fine specimen of dramatic craftsmanship, but which enables Mr. Irving, as the leading actor, to give such a display of his histrionic talent as to place him at once in the front rank of intellectual and intense actors on the English stage. The plot is simple, and is told in a very direct and powerful way in the first act. Rodion Raskolnikoff is a young Russian student, with a very sensitive nature and a highly cultivated brain; his knowledge of the universe and of man has led him to accept the Atheistic philosophy, and he is driven by the hopeless state of existence in Russia to become, in sheer desperation, a Nihilist also. Lodging in the same house in which he dwells, in the poorer quarter of the city, is a young girl named Sonia. Her father, who was a drunkard, has recently died, and left her and two younger sisters to drag out their existence in this dreary lodging-house; and while there Sonia is pursued by a base-minded scoundrel, the manager of the lodging-house, who tyrannises over her, and seeks to take advantage of her poverty and weakness to ruin her career. Young Raskolnikoff champions the cause of the defenceless girl, and follows the ruffian and bully up to Sonia's room; and, when Gromoff refuses to give back the money he has robbed this poor family of, the young student, in a fit of passion, kills him. This is really the whole of the plot, the two subsequent acts being devoted to attempts on the part of the police to find out who committed the murder. At first two men who were at work on the premises are arrested, but Bezak, the examining magistrate, having suspicions in another direction, keeps close observation upon the young student; and the great scene of the play is where this "examining magistrate," whose functions in Russia, we are informed, are "something between a magistrate, as we understand it, a consulting detective, and a trained inquisitor," endeavors to extract a confession from Rodion, and drags him through a scene of the "reconstruction" of the crime in a half-fainting and nervous condition, in the very room in which the crime was committed, and in view of the body of the murdered man. Rodion suffers great torture of mind, but resists the desire to confess, still thinking that his action under the circumstances was justifiable; knowing also that any confession on his part would leave Sonia and her sisters at the mercy of her enemies. At this moment

they bring on the two innocent prisoners, and the younger of them, to save the older, falls on his knees and confesses to the crime. In the third act Rodion pays a visit to Sonia, and urges her to fly with him to Switzerland. She, however, refuses. She has been brought up in the Christian Faith, and she believes in it most implicitly. Moreover, she has sworn to a lie and kissed the holy cross rather than betray her lover; her mind is in consequence much disturbed. She urges Rodion to give himself up to justice, and above all to return to the simple faith in which she believes. For a time Rodion is firm; but his love for Sonia conquers everything, and he returns and gives himself up to the police. Thinking that her religious faith has taken possession of him, Sonia begs of him to cross himself as she does; but he replies sternly: "Not to senseless pieces of stick will he cross himself, but to the noble spirit within her"; and, turning to the police officers who have come upon the scene, he is marched off to suffer whatever punishment may be meted out for his offence.

Briefly, then, the above may be taken as a fair summary of the plot; but to the Freethinker not the least interesting portion of the play will be the fine passages in which the young Russian student gives expression to his Freethought views. Most English Freethinkers would naturally disagree with his revolutionary arguments, nor could they be expected to share the views of Russian revolutionaries who live under very different social conditions from those which prevail in this country. But when it comes to a statement of Rodion's views on religion, most Freethinkers will cordially agree with him; and I, as a Freethinker, feel grateful to Mr. Laurence Irving for the careful and accurate manner in which he states the Freethought position. When, for instance, Sonia implores her lover to believe and trust in God, he replies by asking her what more she knows of God than he does? When, again, she refers to the Bible, he asks, Which Bible? There are many Bibles, he says; the Mohammedan Bible, the Buddhist Bible, the Christian Bible; and then, turning over the leaves of the Christian or Jewish Bible which lies before him, he quotes some passages which certainly do not represent the Christian God as a being worthy of the admiration or the homage of any honest or self-respecting person.

The chief weakness in the play, however, from a Freethought point of view, appeared to me to be when Sonia and one of her sisters fall on their knees and repeat the Lord's Prayer, and Rodion, after listening for awhile, calls on the younger sister to go on her knees and repeat the words also; but this action on the part of Rodion may represent the weakness of human nature, or, what is more likely, it may be the necessary expedient of a dramatic author who remembers that, after all, the majority of the members of his audience are Christians, and that the Christian view must at least appear to triumph in the end. In any case, the play may be commended to the thoughtful consideration of Freethinkers, who will find in it much food for thought; some sentiments with which they will disagree, as well as many with which they will be in cordial agreement; but, above all, they will see a play in which all the characters are most admirably performed, and in which the leading character gives a performance which, for power and intensity, has rarely been equalled on the English stage.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

Praise Him! Praise Him!

THE Apostle Paul says in one place, "When I was a child I spoke as a child; but when I became a man I put away childish things." It must be said that, judging by the doggerel to be found in the most up-to-date hymn books, modern Christians are still in the early years of childhood. There are two stand-points in this matter of praise so strongly enjoined

by the Churches: that of him who praises and of him who is praised. If God really has any human attributes—and according to the Bible he has a good many, for he is said to be jealous, angry, loving, hating, repenting, etc.—he must be sickened by the blatant and vulgar choruses of clamorous and discordant adulation that are hawled at him week by week. But what of those who praise? What is their object? What good do they think they are effecting by their singing? What beneficent purpose is served by it?

The fact is the ceremonies of the Church are largely in the hands of one man—the parson. The Church “service” is a one-man business. But something must be done to show that everybody else has also some participation in the so-called “service”; so the laity are admitted to an active share by periodical vocal exercise. The man of God, with his special revelation, vocation, and commission, knows full well that his position will be secured and reinforced the more he can do to keep his people in tune. The great bulk of those who go to church are really indifferent to what goes on apart from the music, unless the parson happens to be a good speaker. Men of strong mind and independent judgment, when they go to church, do so not from any personal desire for religion, but either (1) to enjoy the music or the speaking of the parson, or (2) to gratify the wishes of near relatives. In almost every church nowadays women predominate, and they are most in evidence in the musical part of the proceedings. Indeed, of late women have begun to sing solos at religious services. *Verb. sap., to saints.*

But is there not something nauseating and offensive about the continual adulation which Christians lavish upon their God? They say they honor and revere him; but the very fulsomeness of their praising puts the stamp of insincerity upon their professions. Is it honor and reverence, forsooth, to patter forth the soapy, superlative trash to be heard in church any Sunday to any being for whom one can entertain respect? Imagine any human being using the language employed by Christians in worship to his fellow whom he honors and esteems above himself. The thing is unthinkable. And the language used by Christians to their God is strong proof of the hollowness of their religion. More than that, it suggests that God is to be got round and got at by constant praising.

Modern Christians have not advanced very far yet, even from the time of terrorism in the Middle Ages. Mediæval hymns are still in vogue, and the names of their writers and of men of God who preached heartless and cruel doctrines that are now discarded by all thinking people are still held up for the admiration of the people. Thomas Beston, of Ettrick, wrote in one of his books that when he reached heaven the joy of praising God there would be increased to him by hearing the wallings and groanings of the damned, and seeing their smoke ascending for ever. And yet Beston's name is held in high honor in Christian communities to-day, and you do not hear execration poured upon his barbarous pronouncement.

Evidently it is believed that one of the efficacious methods of keeping God sweet, and so keeping one's self out of hell, is to keep on singing plenty of praise to him.

And yet it is all assumption—pure assumption. A revelation is, as Paine well said, only a revelation to the man who receives it. If I do not receive it, it is not a revelation to me. Take this mysterious and pointless verse:—

“ We praise Thee, Father, Son,
And Spirit, Three in One,
God of all grace;
Angels and Cherubim
With flaming Seraphim
Thy name, thrice holy, hymn
With veiled face.”

A striking performance, no doubt, but to what end? A powerful imagination is a marvellous thing. We know just as much about God as we do about angels and cherubim and seraphim and unicorns and

demons. The notable thing about many hymns is the insistence on the Trinity. A good orthodox lady whom I once talked with told me of a man who had lived his life as an Atheist, but when he came to die—ah, there's the rub!—he had a vision, and suddenly, with fixed gaze, he uttered with emphasis the following remarkable couplet:—

“ There's three in one and one in three,
And the one in the centre died for me!”

Once admit *one* supernatural being, and there is no limitation of the catalogue of such beings you may draw up—to such an extent, indeed, may you carry it that you will have to divide and subdivide your supernatural creatures into various classes and types. Surely we are not so badly off “here below” for a fair variety of beings which would well repay more scientific study. People might utilise their time more profitably in studying zoology than in studying seraphology. The greatest scientist amongst us knows practically nothing about the marvels of nature; and yet we must go outside what we can see, handle, and study, and manufacture or conjure up fanciful and impossible beings to gratify a morbid introspectiveness.

Nobody is more self-centred than the Christian. The preacher tells us that each man must stand by himself. Each man makes his own covenant with God. Salvation is for *me*, without reference to my millions of fellow-creatures. But if the Christian is much given to praising his God in ecstasy and elation, he is the one to show the effects of depression when sorrow comes. No one seems so appalled by the hard fortunes of this our mortal life. It is here one sees the disadvantage at which religion is placed as contrasted with philosophy. The philosophic temperament is even able to look death calmly in the face; and the philosophic temperament, be it observed, is not a monopoly of learned, or so-called learned, people. Let us have more philosophy and common sense, and less extravagant adulation of unknown beings and common nonsense.

SIMPLE SANDY.

Acid Drops.

The Evangelical Alliance, with connections in one hundred different countries, had its Annual Week of Prayer from January 1 to January 7 inclusive. Nothing has happened. No doubt that is the annual result.

There was a children's party at St. Mary's and St. Bride's Home, a Roman Catholic institution near Dorking, and they were playing a little drama called *The Nativity*. One little girl's clothes caught on fire, and in the excitement the flames reached two others. One little girl aged nine died from her injuries, and another was left in a serious condition. “Gentle Jesus” did not help them. Yet it was a very appropriate occasion for his assistance.

John Allen “dares to be a Daniel” in Hyde Park. He has been had up for assaulting Mr. Schaller at the spot sacred to outdoor oratory,—for John Allen can't abide Atheist lecturers, and goes for them on the principles of muscular Christianity. His latest adventure is appearing at the Marlborough-street Police Court charged with assaulting Mr. Arthur Hyatt, another Atheist speaker, whose face he laid open with an iron bracket (we have heard it was a door-knocker). A constable said the prisoner had struck several other people near the Marble Arch, but they refused to prosecute. The prisoner himself, in his defence, said that thousands of people went to Hyde Park and said there was no God. He was merely standing up for his religion. But if he keeps standing up for his religion in that way, he may lie down for it some day, and perhaps never get up again. It is not surprising that John Allen was remanded. The state of his intellect, if he ever had such a thing, seems to call for investigation.

One is always meeting with the blessings of religion. A school-teacher, named Annie Elizabeth Hawkins, hanged herself in her parents' house at Stoke-green, Stoke Poges, under the influence of religious mania. Her father stated at the inquest that she suffered from delusions, and was under

the impression that she had done something dreadful. Perhaps the sin against the Holy Ghost, which is all the more dreadful because nobody knows what it is.

The Lord's servants are so liable to persecution. The Rev. Richard Cuffe, M.A., for instance, vicar of St. Stephen the Martyr, Edgehill, Liverpool, was brought before the Liverpool City Police Court on a charge of "misconduct" and fined forty shillings and costs or a month's imprisonment. The reverend gentleman protested his innocence, but the Lord did not interfere in his servant's behalf, and the magistrate felt obliged to believe the police.

Another servant of God in trouble. Robert James Macfarlane, of Wigton, Cumberland, has been prosecuted by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children for ill-treating Frances Mabel Moore, his adopted daughter, fifteen years of age. According to the evidence, he had committed cold-blooded assaults upon the poor girl, who had never known a father or mother; on one occasion ordering her to strip, and when she had only the lightest undergarment on, beating her on the back with a knotted rope. He protested his innocence of the charge, but the bench considered there was good reason for sentencing him to a fine of £5 or one month's hard labor.

Another rich Jesusite has (if the Gospel is true) joined the crowd of weepers and gnashers. Rev. Thomas Aiken Sneath, of Woodchester, Stroud, formerly incumbent of St. Thomas Ryde, Isle of Wight, and for twenty-nine years vicar of Bledhow, Princes Risborough, left £34,777. A pile like that is enough to sink him almost to the very bottom of Hades—or rather to the place where the bottom would be if it had a bottom.

The *Christian World*, in a leading article on "The New Year," strikes anything but a cheerful note—for Christians. It confesses that the religious prospect is not very inspiring. It says:—

"England is sharing, with the world at large, in a seemingly embodied movement of retrograde Christianity. In France the number of practising Catholics has sunk to three or four millions in a population of forty millions, and Protestantism does not increase. In Germany the condition of Protestantism is evidenced by the immense slump in the number of divinity students, and of candidates for the ministry. And the churches are almost deserted. Here at home, while the movement is far less marked, it is, for the moment at least, in the same direction. The statistics for the Congregational and Baptist denominations show a decrease in the membership of the year, following upon a similar decrease in the preceding year. The latest Methodist returns were in the same direction."

This is a sufficiently gloomy picture, and it is not made really brighter by the writer adding that Christians have to recollect the existence of Brotherhood gatherings and similar meetings. For, in the first place, a large number of the members of these are already members of some church or chapel. And, secondly, these outside organisations are only maintained by a considerable watering down of the theological teaching. Presumably people attend Adult Sunday-schools and Brotherhood meetings because they can get there the comfort of social intercourse and the interest of discussing secular subjects without the offensive intrusion of theology. From this point of view these gatherings, instead of furnishing evidence of the strength of Christianity, actually provide proof in a contrary direction. If Christianity were really strong they would not be necessary, nor would they be tolerated. They really represent Christian concessions to the modern secular pressure, the clergy seeking to maintain in form a control that they have long lost in fact.

The *C. W.* says that what is needed in the Christian world is striking personalities, and asks: "Can modern Germany produce a new Luther? Can our England bring forth a twentieth century Wesley?" We guess not. Either Germany or England might succeed in producing—for religious purposes—an Evan Roberts or a Dr. Torrey; but the day has passed for such men as either Luther or Wesley in the religious world. The conditions are no longer propitious. When men of real ability and of powerful personality stood forward in defence of Christianity, the intellectual world was much narrower, and religion consequently much stronger than at present. Science and sociology were undeveloped, comparative mythology was practically unborn, the forces distracting attention from theology comparatively few and feeble. But every development in secular life has involved a drain upon religious organisations. This must have happened even had Christianity been intellectually defensible. The consequences were rendered the more certain and the more deadly by Christianity enshrining a

number of beliefs, each of which was discredited by every advance in knowledge. Art, science, literature, and sociology are at present claiming the ability that was once sacrificed to theology. And in default of a Luther, a Paschal, or a Wesley, Christianity has to be content with a Dr. Clifford, a R. J. Campbell, or a Winnington-Ingram.

The death is reported from Halifax, B. C., of the Rev. Dr. Murray, who has edited a Presbyterian paper. No need for an inquest under such circumstances.

The *Christian Commonwealth* asked a number of people, lay and clerical, what in their opinion was the paramount question for 1911. All, or nearly all, the parsons replied that the great need of 1911 was more religion. In other words, more trade. Had they been in some other line of business the answer would have differed in form, but it would have remained the same in essence.

We place very little value on the "Honors" dispensed at stated occasions by the Crown, but if they are valued by the recipients, we are pleased to see the name of Mr. H. J. Wood, the well known musical conductor, in the New Year knight-hoods. Mr. Wood has maintained his excellent Sunday afternoon concerts at the Queen's Hall for many years, and while this would, not so many years ago, have been quite sufficient to prevent any official honor being conferred upon him, it has won the recognition of all lovers of a liberal Sunday.

The holy war against Sunday picture-shows is going on briskly. It has just begun at Warrington. The Watch Committee's resolution that licences under the Cinematograph Act should be granted for six days only was carried at the last Council meeting by a large majority, but not without a good deal of opposition. Alderman Forshaw said it was better for the people to see harmless and sometimes informing pictures than to parade aimlessly up and down the crowded main streets on a Sunday evening. Councillor Bellan took the same view. Mr. Archer was astonished to find the Council such paragons of virtue. There were many better moral lessons learned at the Sunday picture shows than were taught from the pulpits of Warrington. That was a bull's-eye. We hope Mr. Archer will go on shooting.

Carlyle once drew attention to the fact that assassins had got rid of their enemies by mixing poison with the holy communion, which he considered the most diabolical and damnable crime that could be committed. According to a Reuter telegram from St. Petersburg, thirty-two persons were taken ill after attending the Holy Eucharist at a Lutheran Church in a village in the Peterhof district. An elder had put sulphuric acid and chromate of potassium into the chalice. Chromic acid, which is the result of that interaction, is more powerful than holy water, and no respecter of persons,—settling the hash of a Christian as readily as that of an Atheist. Three of the unfortunate communicants died the next morning.

A catastrophe of that kind couldn't overtake Catholic laymen. They are not permitted to drink the blood of Christ. They are only allowed to eat the body of Christ in the form of a wafer. The wine is solely reserved for the priests, who are often able to do it justice—in any quantity.

Mr. Arthur Haworth, M.P., has been moralising over the recent Lancashire pit disaster. With rare modesty he confessed he could not undertake to explain how a beneficent purpose worked through it all. Still he believed good would come out of it somehow. The sentiment is as morally atrocious as it is intellectually indefensible. The savage who thrashed his wooden god because the rain didn't come in time for his crops, showed decidedly more real manliness than is evidenced by this Christian thankfulness for over three hundred people suddenly blotted out of existence. The Christian may reply that he is not thankful for all these deaths. To which all we can say is, that if there is really a beneficent purpose causing the accident, and if good will result from it, he ought to be. Mr. Haworth went on to say that the disaster would do good if it taught men to be more careful and stimulated scientific invention to promote safety, which is the kind of thing a Christian would say. The good, whatever it is, can't affect the poor fellows who were killed or the families that are left. And to find people praising one, who, in order to teach others to be careful destroys over three hundred lives, is enough to make one despair of the sanity of human nature.

Mr. Campbell has settled the question of whether Jesus Christ was an actual historic character or not. The other day he gave his City Temple audience "a subjective argument"—one wonders what an *objective* argument is like—which he said was "so precious" that if he dispensed with it he would cease to be a preacher. Then he gave his argument, which was, "My own spiritual life is nourished and sustained by intercourse with Jesus, as Jesus." His audience, he said, had heard him pray to Jesus, and he was as certain "as that I am now looking into your eyes that someone has answered me out of the mysterious unseen and kept me company all these years." We are not impressed. Perhaps it is because we have heard and read it so often before. It is exactly the argument that everyone who is troubled with spiritual collywobbles uses; and it has no more value in Mr. Campbell's mouth than it has in that of the most ignorant of Salvation Army preachers. No one questions that Mr. Campbell attributes his transient or permanent moods to Jesus, but as it is precisely the Christian's interpretation of these feelings that is on trial it is hardly evidence to restate them. What Mr. Campbell, and others, persistently ignore is the fact that non-Christians are perfectly familiar with the nature of these feelings and are at no loss to explain them. Crowds of Christian saints have testified to the reality of the Devil as the cause of their undesirable mental state, but Mr. Campbell will not have their Devil at any price. And yet his Jesus and their Devil rest on an essentially similar foundation.

Parliament meets on the last day of the month, when the form and farce of swearing in Members will be enacted. The majority of the Members will, of course, go through the old performance of kissing the book, but the number of those who choose the simpler and better method of affirmation has been steadily growing of late years. We hope to see a still larger number of affirmations on this occasion. There are a number of Freethinkers, known and unknown to the general public, among the new Members, and a still larger number of representatives who, for various reasons, dislike the religious oath. In any case, it belongs to a lower stage of culture than our own, and those who pride themselves on being progressive should show it on all questions. Above all, those who do not believe in the State interfering in matters of religious belief would, by affirming, do their best to make the State really impartial.

Swinburne said, with reference to the Authorised Version of the Bible, that the New Testament was translated out of canine Greek into divine English. Jowett sarcastically said, with reference to the Revised Version, that the revisers "seem to have forgotten that, in a certain sense, the Authorised Version is more inspired than the original." Robert Lowe said that "the chief result of the revision of the New Testament was to let the Devil into the Lord's Prayer." It will be remembered that "deliver us from evil" is revised into "deliver us from the Evil One." The Revised Version is therefore a special triumph for Old Nick, who, by the way, generally does pull off the honors.

Mr. Frank T. Bullen, as a Christian, is simple enough for anything. He spent some of his Christmas leisure in defending the Book of Jonah again. He told his audience that there was one kind of whale, the sperm whale, that could swallow half-a-dozen Jonahs. But is the sperm whale found in the Levant? And if one was divinely sent there to swallow the runaway prophet, how on earth (or rather in the sea) did the submarine traveller manage to resist the whale's gastric juice or breathe without any possible air but the gases of indigestion? Mr. Bullen does himself an injustice in trying to vindicate the historical character of what every scholar knows to be a mythological story.

Mrs. Eddy's empire seems to be breaking up, like Alexander's, soon after her decease. According to reports, another lady, Mrs. Augusta Stetson, is carrying off the larger body—that is, the most ignorant and credulous—of the Christian Scientists. Reports from Boston also state that the Directors of the Christian Science Church still keep a guard of four armed men at Mrs. Eddy's tomb in Mount Auburn Cemetery. Electric lights have been installed in the tomb, together with two large electric heaters. These conveniences may be meant for the guards. They may also be meant for the deceased lady, who must not be allowed to freeze, as she is to appear in the flesh again before long. At least her followers say so.

"Providence" prepared some remarkably fine and large hailstones in Bechuanaland. A quantity of them fell in a

storm at Molepolole early in January. Twenty natives standing on the platform of the railway station. Five others inside the station were killed by lightning. "Providence" meant to bag the lot.

"Providence" has been especially active during the past few years in the earthquake line. It is reported from St. Petersburg that the whole town of Prjevalek has been destroyed by the waters of Lake Issik Kul, on which it is situated, in consequence of the recent earthquake.

The church bells nuisance has received a check at Melbourne. An Anglican parson had to pay £10 damages and costs to an aggrieved neighbor whose slumber was disturbed by the ringing of the church bells. It is high time that some of the clerical disturbers of the peace in the old country were served with the same sauce.

Rev. H. F. Tracey, of Dartmouth, in the January number of his parish magazine, says he should much like to attend the National Secular Society's Dinner in London, as "a sort of amateur Daniel among the rationalistic lions." Well, let him come next year, and try his luck. We promise that the "rationalistic lions" won't eat him or try to, but give him something to eat. "I have an idea," the reverend gentleman says, "that a parson attending such a dinner might lead to a better mutual understanding." Very likely—from a human point of view, for *this* parson seems a decent sort, but not with respect to religion. Freethinkers have too good an "understanding" of that already.

Father Degan, of Coalville, thinks and says that Protestants should keep their places. At a dinner in connection with the Holy Cross Cricket Club, Whitwick, he was asked to respond to the toast of "The Bishop, Father O'Reilly, and ministers of other denominations." His response was a protest. He said that such a toast could only be responded to by one who believed that one religion was as good as another. But it wasn't. The Catholic religion was the only true one; the rest were false precisely as far as they differed from it. Which was candid, anyhow. Father Degan esteems Protestant ministers as men and citizens, but as ministers of religion he regards them as neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor good red herring.

What an odd thing it is that a Christian congregation should be frightened at the thought of their pastor's going to heaven. While a service was going on at the new Bolsover Mission Church, the gentleman who was conducting it suddenly fell to the floor. It was a seizure, from which he recovered. But several members of the congregation were too alarmed even to wait for news of the preacher. They made tracks for home.

The poor dear clergy! How their preserves are being poached upon! How their monopolies are being invaded! Listen to this sad complaint from the Chichester Diocesan Board of Education at the instance of the district clergy:—

"That this Chapter views with alarm the gradual withdrawal from Church influence of young people attending secondary schools, the decline in the quality and the amount of the religious instruction and training received by teachers before entering Church colleges, the growth of county council colleges, in which very little religious teaching is given, and the inevitable disaster which must accrue to children attending our schools unless a speedy and effective remedy can be applied."

This appeared in a recent issue of the *Daily Telegraph* under the heading of "Brighton." The next paragraph was more cheerful. It announced that "the pantomimes at the local theatres are attracting large audiences."

There was one good thing in Mr. Birrell's Education Bill. It provided that children withdrawn from religious instruction in elementary schools should be free not to attend school during the time it was being given, and that the attendance register should be marked when the religious lesson was over. This made the Conscience Clause a reality, as Mr. Birrell showed in a pathetic passage of his speech in introducing the Bill. It lifted the weight of bigotry from the shoulders of the children who are otherwise marked out for scorn and persecution. But the Protestant party, who have drawn up a new plan which they say will lead to peace, will not hear of this. They say that the child must attend and be martyred. Just like them

Mr. Foote's Engagements.

Sunday, January 15, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, London, W.: at 7.30, "Christ."

January 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 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 15, Holloway; 22, Birmingham; February 19, Failsforth; 26, Queen's Hall. March 5, Queen's Hall; 12, West Ham; 19, Glasgow; 26, Stratford Town Hall. April 2, Manchester.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.—Miss E. M. Vance, secretary, acknowledges:—General Fund: J. D. Pottage, £2; Mrs. Newbery, 10s.—Benevolent Fund: Huddersfield Branch, 10s.

A. E. COOKE TAYLOR.—The question is too wide to be dealt with in this column. We may deal with it in a special article later on.

F. C. WYKES.—Thanks for cuttings.

PHILIP THOMAS.—We have not the review by us now, but we take your word for it, and we regret having overlooked your reference to Shelley's remark to Leigh Hunt in the cathedral of Pisa.

R. SPEIRS.—Your application and subscription are passed over to Miss Vance. The syllabus you enclose is a good one—in its way. It is not exactly *our* way, but there is room for other workers in the field of progress.

W. P. BALL.—Your cuttings are always welcome.

A. G. STAMFORD.—Your new year's good wishes are reciprocated.

T. M. MOSLEY.—Your statement is correct in the main. Pleased that you, as a miner, considered our article on the great colliery disaster "splendid." So we omitted to wish our readers a happy new year, did we? We hope they believe that we wish them happiness all the time.

W. H. HARRIS.—Reference shall be attended to. Thanks.

A. S. V.—Probably in our next.

TOME (S. Africa).—You have succeeded in getting your generous 1911 subscription to the President's Honorarium Fund in very early. It was good of you to think of it before the expiration of 1910.

F. A. BOWDEN.—You will do better later on. Our opinion of Hegel cannot be stated in a sentence or two. Besides, you should not chain your own mind up to any one thinker, however illustrious. Be rather like the bee. Gather the honey of truth from many flowers. You are very young, and may profit by this advice. Glad you find the *Freethinker* helpful.

J. PARTRIDGE, Birmingham Branch secretary, will be glad to supply programs of the new season's Sunday lectures at the King's Hall to all who apply to him at 183 Vauxhall-road.

E. D.—Certainly, write to us again later, whenever the spirit moves you. Glad the *Freethinker* was just what you were looking for, though you did not know it existed. Thanks for introducing it to your friends.

F. J. VOISEY.—See paragraph. Thanks.

K. C.—Miss Vance will send you receipts for the two membership subscriptions. We have included in *your* subscription to the President's Fund the guinea you left at the office.

J. A. BURTON.—You wish the *Freethinker* were as popular as the *Daily Mirror*. A wild wish! We should have to put much less sense in this journal to reach such a circulation. In one sense, of course, our relatively small circulation is a compliment. We did not set out to make money, but to spread principles—and very unpopular ones too.

AMY CROSS.—Glad to have your and your husband's good wishes for the new year. You know we wish you all that you wish us—more if possible. The *Liverpool Courier*, in confusing Anarchism with Atheism, is acting after its kind. Despise it—and forget it.

D. D. B. writes: "Your work in the interests of truth and liberty is amazing. I hope the rank and file will support you financially."

J. A. BATES.—Thanks for cuttings.

E. B.—Always glad to see your handwriting.

T. FISHER.—Passed over to Miss Vance. Thanks for new year's good wishes.

D. MACCONNELL.—Why so much hot language? Mr. Lloyd will have seen your objection to "Capital and Labor," which you say should be "Capitalism and Labor," and if he likes to agree with you he can. His use of the English language is his own affair, not ours, while his articles bear his signature. His education and training entitle him to be called a scholar. For the rest, you should be prepared for differences of opinion, even in the "true use of important terms"—an expression, by the way, that is itself open to adverse criticism.

G. BRADFIELD.—Sorry we do not know of such.

W. DENLITH.—Pleased to receive your "thanks for the treat you enjoy every Thursday when you get the *Freethinker*." You

did the right thing in transferring your custom from the bigoted newsagent who would rather not supply this journal.

W. P. ADAMSON.—Thanks for letter and cutting.

A. HURCUM.—Thanks for letter, enclosure, and good wishes.

C. E. COMETT.—Sunday is the sun's day; Monday the moon's day; Tuesday is the day of Tiw, the Anglo-Saxon god of war—similar to Mars; Wednesday is Woden's day; Thursday is Thor's day; Friday is Frigga's day—the Scandinavian Venus; Saturday is Saturn's day.

J. SOLOMONS.—Glad to hear you have read the *Freethinker* for four years, having been introduced to it by an elder brother, and that it has "put new life into you." Thanks for getting us new readers in your turn.

R. E. GRIFFITHS.—There is no edition of Robert Buchanan's poems in one volume, nor a collected edition at all, as far as we know.

FREDERICK DIXON.—We printed your protest, and we printed Mr. Mangasarian's reply. We are under no moral obligation to do more. We are always ready to defend our own statements, but not those in articles signed by other hands. The matter is dropped as far as we are concerned.

H. SLINGER.—Shall be sent. Thanks for good wishes.

HENRY SPENCE, subscribing through the N. S. S. secretary to the President's Fund, writes: "I am glad Mr. Foote is still able to keep up the brave old fight. I always think his articles in the *Freethinker* are splendid. They are so clear and forcible, yet couched in elegant English. If his gifts were used in the general press he ought to make £1,000 a year easily."

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

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

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

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

The President's Honorarium Fund.

To the Freethinkers of Great Britain.

January 1, 1911.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—

We the undersigned appeal to you again in behalf of the above Fund.

There is no necessity for a lengthy letter. You all know that the object of this Fund is to relieve Mr. G. W. Foote from the worst of his financial worries and leave him as free as possible to devote his time and energies to his work as President of the National Secular Society, Chairman of the Secular Society, Ltd., Editor of the *Freethinker*, and leader in general of the Freethought movement in this country.

No salary attaches to the office of President of the National Secular Society. An honorarium of £50 a year is received by Mr. Foote as Chairman of the Secular Society, Ltd. His work on the *Freethinker*, which is so heavy and incessant, yields him no salary or profit; on the contrary, he has to pay out of his own pocket a considerable deficit on the paper and its adjuncts.

This is the fourth year of the President's Honorarium Fund. We suggested that £300 might be raised in this way. The sum of £288 12s. 8d. was realised in 1908, and £277 12s. in 1909. We are happy to say that the full £300 was made up in 1910.

Unfortunately some of the most liberal subscribers to the Fund have been lost through death during the last two years. It is to be hoped, therefore, that the remaining subscribers will rather increase than lessen their donations.

All subscriptions received have been acknowledged week by week in the *Freethinker*, and will continue to be acknowledged in that way.

Subscriptions for 1911 can be forwarded to either of the undersigned. Those who prefer to do so can send, as before, direct to Mr. Foote himself at 2 Newcastle-street, London, E.C.

Subscribers who do not wish their names to appear in print should state the form of acknowledgment they prefer.

We conclude with a hope that there will be a prompt and generous response to this appeal. We

are aware that all subscribers cannot conveniently respond at once, but many can, and it would be pleasant if a considerable portion of the Fund were subscribed during January, in which the President's birthday falls.

Yours faithfully,

J. W. DE CAUX, J.P.,
92 St. Peter's-road, Gt. Yarmouth.

R. T. NICHOLS,
28 Park-road, Ilford.

A. J. FINCKEN,
66 Mount Grove-road, Highbury,
London, N.

President's Honorarium Fund, 1911.

First List of Subscriptions.

Dr. E. B. Foote (New York), £15 8s. 2d.; R. T. Nichols, £5 5s.; Tome (S. Africa), £5; K. C., £2 2s.; Mrs. J. C., £1 1s.; G. L. Alward, £1 1s.; J. M. Gimson, £2 2s.; J. W. de Caux, £2; D. D. B., £1 1s.; Henry Spence, £1 1s.; J. Chick, £2 2s.; Mrs. Forrer, £1; Mrs. Newbery (per Miss Vance), 10s.; C. B., 3s.; A Freethinker (Birmingham) £3 3s.; A. Hurcum, £1 1s.

Sugar Plums.

The second of Mr. Foote's special new course of lectures at Queen's (Minor) Hall drew an excellent audience on Sunday evening, in spite of the wretched weather. Mr. Charlton occupied the chair efficiently. Prior to the lecture, Mr. Foote recited Shakespeare's "Seven Ages" from *As You Like It*, which was highly relished. The lecture itself on "Satan" was very warmly applauded. Some questions were asked and answered afterwards. It was an extremely live meeting throughout.

The third lecture of Mr. Foote's course of lectures at Queen's Hall, to be delivered this evening (Jan. 15), is on "Christ." It is perhaps the most important lecture of the whole five—considering the great controversy that is now going on, even inside the Christian Churches, on the deity of Christ. This would be a good occasion for bringing an orthodox friend along to the hall for the first time.

It is gratifying to note the number of ladies that are attending Mr. Foote's lectures. By the way, the best question after last Sunday's lecture was asked by a lady.

The Queen's Hall audience has gone on improving thus far, and unless the weather gets positively worse, which doesn't seem easy, there is no reason why the place should not be crowded before the end of January, if the "saints" will only do their best to advertise the lectures in the various ways open to them in the intercourse of life with friends, acquaintances, and customers. A very good way is circulating the neat little printed announcements that can be obtained of Miss Vance at 2 Newcastle-street. A dozen of them will go comfortably into a waistcoat-pocket.

The Birmingham Branch is continuing its propagandist work at the King's Hall. Lectures by various speakers have been arranged for on seven different Sundays in the new year. Mr. Cohen opens the new campaign to-day (Jan. 15) with two lectures, afternoon and evening. District "saints" will please note.

Mr. Foote's article on "Keeping it Dark" is reproduced in the New York *Truthseeker*, from which we often borrow something (with acknowledgment) to our readers' advantage.

Dr. E. B. Foote, of New York, who has just subscribed so generously to the President's Honorarium Fund, is a regular reader and admirer of the *Freethinker*. "I am weekly rejoiced," he writes, "to see the grand work you are doing to justify the Foote name on the list of the 'Lord's anointed' or the 'saints' of science and progress. I am tempted to pray that your vigor and endurance may never fail, though I fear they are much overtaxed. I hope you may avoid being driven beyond your remarkable powers of endurance." We deeply regret to learn that Dr. Foote himself is far from well. We are afraid that he has been overtaxing himself. He is such a lover of liberty that he is always near the front when she calls on her defenders, which is, alas, only too often in "free" America.

The Transformation of Man.

THE heavens and hells of the higher culture theologies have their roots in primitive humanity's misconceptions of the biological processes of nature. Ages prior to the period when the posthumous lives of men were placed in abodes of torment, probation, or bliss, the continued existence of the human soul was confined to the earth upon which we dwell.

The heroes and divinities of supernatural origin are usually new manifestations of old personages. Their previous embodiments were imagined as having assumed the shapes of animal, vegetable, or mineral entities.

The great Thinklit hero, Yehl, owed his repeated births to the singular circumstance that native women were beguiled into swallowing stones, water-drops, or green vegetation which contained the potency and promise of the demi-god's life.

In his recently published volumes on *Primitive Paternity*, as also in his earlier masterpiece, *The Legend of Perseus*, Sidney Hartland has clearly demonstrated the universality of the belief that the nativity of notable personages is directly related to circumstances similar to those that caused the re-incarnation of the Thinklit god.

In the folk songs of Western Europe, passionate and devoted lovers are repeatedly driven like Tristan and Isolde, rendered immortal by the genius of Wagner, to an untimely grave. From the resting places of their mortal remains two trees arise, and their over-arching branches meet in an eternal embrace. The old English ballad of Fair Margaret and Sweet William prolongs the same sad story. Legends of stately tress which embodied the life principle of the beautiful if unfortunate lovers may be met with in nearly every European land. It is treasured among the traditions of the Schluh of Southern Morocco; far distant China is familiar with it; the natives of Kurdistan and Afghanistan will not willingly let it fade from memory. A Lesbian song preserves the story of the wicked mother-in-law who poisoned the beautiful bride whose broken-hearted lover succumbed to grief. From their adjoining graves, the bride was transformed into a lemon tree; the bridegroom reincarnated in a graceful cypress, and the two lovers fondly embraced on Easter day, Sunday, and on all the days dedicated to religious feasts.

The character of the vegetation growing upon graves is sometimes held to indicate the guilt or innocence of the dead. The Kirghiz regard a grave upon which a tree spontaneously arises as the resting place of a saint. Stories are related of victims unjustly condemned to death who made manifest their innocence to a censorious world through the umbrageous activities of nature. Before their execution was carried out, a condemned couple earnestly besought their all-seeing and omnipotent god to redeem their maligned characters in the eyes of men and implored their kindred to grant them burial in the same grave. But the incredulous and stony-hearted people disregarded their dying request and interred their bodies in separate churchyards, with that eternal enemy of all evil, the Church, standing as a solemn warning between their graves. Each burial mound, however, gave birth to a mountain ash tree, and the spreading boughs of these trees over-arched the roof of the church and became so closely interlaced that the dead saints were re-united by the grace of all kindly nature. This was interpreted as a sign from heaven of their innocence, and their remains henceforth reposed together.

Further illustrations are afforded by the following quotation:—

"Among the peasantry of the Riviera, thorns or nettles growing on the graves are a sign of the damnation of the dead; if other plants grow he is happy; if a mixture, he is in purgatory. Similar superstitious and stories illustrative of them are found throughout Europe. In the game of 'Old Roger is Dead,' a favorite among the children of England, we probably have a last echo

of them. The story chanted in the game runs substantially as follows:—

' Old Roger is dead and lies in his grave ;
There grew a fine apple tree over his head ;
The apples are ripe and ready to drop ;
There came an old woman a-picking them up ;
Old Roger jumped up and he gave her a knock ;
He made the old woman go hippity-hop.' **

Several surviving versions of ancient human shape-changing beliefs are embalmed in stories of the planting of trees upon graves. All available evidence countenances the conclusion that in the far distant past the bodily form itself was believed to undergo transformation into other forms of existence. This realistic concept was subsequently etherealised into the belief that the double of the dead or soul was transferred to some other mode of organic or even inorganic, nature. Aubrey, the antiquary, mentions the practice in vogue among the natives of Ockley, in Surrey, of planting roses on the grave of a dead lover. He adds his own opinion that "they planted a tree or a flower on the grave of their friend and they thought that the soul of the party deceased went into the tree or plant." This custom, in various forms, is very widely extended; indeed, it seems fair to infer that the prevailing practice of covering the coffin and decorating the hearse with floral tributes, conjoined with the customary planting and nurturing of flowers and shrubs on the grave itself, are merely vestiges of man's earlier misconceptions of the processes of nature.

We are, consequently, well warranted in thinking that the hoary superstitious belief in human metamorphosis into other animal or vegetable organisms, ultimately gave place to the more subtle concept of the incarnation of the spirits of the dead in the plant growths of the burial mound. This, in its turn, was succeeded by the belief that the flowers which deck the grave best embalm the affectionate remembrances of those that have journeyed through the gates of death.

A Chinese tale supplies very realistic reasons for the practice of planting trees when the object in view was to provide a resting place for the spirit of the departed. The chaste woman, Li's body, was buried in a mound. Her husband had preceded her in death, and she piously planted two cypress trees upon his grave—

"After a while, a cow bit off five inches from the top of the left tree; and when the woman was informed of this she exclaimed: 'The left one [*i.e.*, that on the principal side] is my husband,' and she ran to the grave. Wailing so bitterly that it was painful to behold, she caressed the cypress, and ere the night had gone it had grown up as high again as the tree on the right hand side. After her death she was buried in the same grave."

A practice still observed in agricultural Germany is obviously a relic of a kindred superstition. When a number of colts or calves die prematurely, one of these is selected for a special mode of post-mortem treatment. The defunct animal is interred in the farmer's garden, and a willow strippling is planted in its mouth. The willow strip is carefully tended while it develops into a tree, and is henceforth regarded as sacred and inviolable. It must on no account be lopped or pruned, but allowed to grow in its own wild way; it is now the acknowledged guardian of the homestead from any recurrence of casualties to horses or cattle. The meaning of this interesting survival is clearly illustrated by the following Kaffir custom. When the women-folk of certain Kaffir tribes bring forth twin children, the infants are carefully scrutinised, and the child which is pronounced the more weakly is asphyxiated with a lump of earth. The corpse is then buried outside the entrance to the hut, a tiny aloe-tree is fixed in the earth that covers its head.

"The aloe is regarded in some way as the living representative of the dead infant; its spirit or shade is supposed to be in it, or to be hovering about it. When it is planted its spines are carefully cut away, that the

survivor may play about it and drag himself up by it and make himself strong, as he would have done with his fellow-twin had he been permitted to live."

The metamorphosis of human beings into lower organic structures appears to have been considered as quite an ordinary occurrence throughout the various races of mankind. That fine old song, "Woodman, spare the tree," retains unmistakable traces of its former acceptance in our own enlightened land. In England's rural recesses, and throughout Ireland, moths and butterflies are spoken of as the souls of the human dead. Quite to the close of the eighteenth century, if not to a later date, the heroic British King Arthur was commonly believed in Cornwall to be still living in the form of a raven or a chough. The natives of Nidderdale declare that the souls of unbaptised babes are transformed into nightjars. In secluded districts of the eastern coasts, many veteran fishermen are firmly persuaded that when they die as men they are born again as gulls. Of significance in this connection is the subjoined quotation taken by Sidney Hartland from the antiquary, Mr. P. H. Emerson:—

"It was with great difficulty I first found out that this strange belief in a post-mortem transformation existed at all, but once having learned it, I found to my astonishment that the belief was common, but was spoken of with much reserve. Children, it seems, become kittiwakes, but women 'don't come back any more; they have seen trouble enough.'"

The foregoing examples of human superstition strongly support the contention that no distinct line of cleavage exists between the belief in the direct transformation of one organism into another, and that later and more subtle theory of transmigration which supposes that the souls of the dead are transferred into bodies or substances of a different order or kind. The roots of both these beliefs are deeply imbedded in the lowest strata of human culture.

One of the simplest aspects of transmigration or metempsychosis survives among several savage tribes of Africa and America. When the body dies and commences to decay, the soul must seek and find some new tenement in which to dwell. As it is frequently a case of Hobson's choice, the wandering and shivering soul, in default of a human habitation, is compelled to enter into the body of an animal. In more favorable circumstances, however, the reincarnation of the soul is effected through the entrance of the spirit into the body of an infant of his own kindred or descent. This transmigration is supposed to explain the resemblances that exist between parents and offspring, and is held to supply reasons for the more surprising resemblances of children to their dead ancestors. Among the Yoruba negroes newly born children are saluted with the words "Thou art come," and the tribe then determine what particular ancestral souls have returned. Missionaries and explorers have been frequently identified by African savages with the restored souls of their defunct kindred. This native belief finds proof of its truth in the pale skins and superior wisdom of the European visitors.

We will conclude by glancing at some of the very remarkable phases of savage psychology which have recently been revealed through an extended study of the aboriginal races of Australia. Ethnologists have unanimously decided that these primitive stocks display the lowest condition of culture extant. Notwithstanding the rudeness of their beliefs, however, these find their counterparts in very slightly modified forms among all savage and most civilised and barbaric peoples. The native Australian theory of a flat earth covered by a solid vault supported by pillars, which may at any moment collapse, seems to have been firmly entertained by the ancient Hebrews. No other inference can possibly be drawn from passages such as Gen. i. 6; Job ix. 6; and Psalms lxxv. 8. Not only may the Australian's spirit wander during the lifetime of its possessor, particularly during sleep, but it is also privileged to visit the spirits of the

* *Primitive Paternity*, vol. i. p. 159.

* *Primitive Paternity*, vol. i., pp. 187, 188.

celestial regions. In company with various other primitive races, the Australians abstain from suddenly awaking a sleeping friend, because were he to rise before his soul returned to him he would either die or become insane. No clear distinction is drawn between dreams and actual occurrences. Visions take place when the soul holds communion with the tribal gods and ghosts; the savage in his dreams wrestles and debates with his deities, much in the manner of Jacob and the "angel." Mr. Howitt remarks that just as the ancient Egyptian's soul maintained its relationship with its earthly tenement, so the Australian natives declare that "man's soul ever keeps up a connection with his mortal remains, visiting the corpse from time to time."

Anthropology has now become one of the most important and progressive departments of scientific investigation. It shows that mental, moral, and social phenomena, in all their vast and varied manifestations, are explicable in terms of evolution alone. It scarcely condescends to openly attack current creeds; it merely undermines them by explaining their genesis and development, and in thus explaining them it somehow explains them away.

T. F. P.

Anti-Cant Tickles; or, Pith and Pepper.

BY A TWENTIETH CENTENARIAN.

KINDLY LIGHT.

The sun-god Ra was Egypt's god; no theosophic sham; its genial glow on all below is Nature's oriflamme. It gives strong life to all that breathes—plant, animal, and man—and blessed our earth long ages ere the human race began.

Without its aid, the world decayed, would wither up and die; so why not reverence that orb which dominates the sky? Men worship stones and fire and bones, and stranger things have done; so it were scarce idolatry to venerate the sun.

UNKINDLY LIGHT.

Take brimstone hell (for instance), and old Beelzebub; Where is your God of Mercy? Ay, there's the sorest rub! Do we not suffer hardships the while that we draw breath, that there is need to *fry us forever* after death?

Quite worthy this of Jumbo, but not of cultured men; yourselves, you don't believe it—not being fools—What then?

"SELL ALL THAT THOU HAST"—AT A PROFIT.

That Jesus was a Socialist, admits of no dispute; he hated trade, denounced bad coin, and all commercial loot. He hurled the money-changers out, he scorned the Pharisee; and he, to-day, would have to dig for Christianity. Blind leaders of the blind, who pin your faith on gear and gold; go, preach a purer faith than that worm-eaten one of old.

THE CANKER IN THE BUD.

"Christianity is a perfect sphere endeavoring to fill a completely square hole."

Christ preached "Utopian views"; But *why* are they "Utopian"? Because mankind at large is mean and Ally Slopian.

The upas of our earth is money, money, money! And while *that* flourishes, Christ's bees will store no honey. Abolish coin outright, make choice 'twixt God and Mammon; there lies the crucial point, all else is windy gammon.

TICKLE-TORY.

Religion is the Grace of God, *not* Israelitish grasping. I therefore grip this pickled rod to give you folks a rasping. Let Bibles, Talmuds, Testaments, no more your thoughts encumber; but merely serve as documents—poor, dry-as-dust, back number.

Blood, cunning, greed, writ large and small, are preached in church falsetto; and those they "Holy Scriptures" call—these tales of on-the-get-O!

Mankind grows up, his teens are nigh, and (for a lad) seems clever; but cannot thrive on hotch-potch pie, or swallow pap for ever.

Can we take ethics from the Jew, adopt his love of money, and blend the poison of the two and think it sweetest honey?

Our ev'ry act, our ev'ry thought, is based on cash and credit; and we as slaves are sold and bought, and Christ himself has said it.

Great God! What do you do up there, to leave such helpless chickens, to scratch about, on dunghills bare, and all ways play the Dickens?

Correspondence.

AGGRESSIVE FREETHOUGHT.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I am writing to thank you for the splendid series of articles wherein "Abracadabra" proved Sir Robert Anderson to be a Pseudo-Critic and a Theological Ostrich.

I would say, I could not understand the mental attitude of such men did I not know that of my own case. I reached the age of forty and, in spite of a medical education, still believed the Bible "from cover to cover," as they say.

I believe that it is with theology as it is with quack medicine—a man can make himself believe anything he wants to.

I had all my life read about "Pre-historic Men," "Higher Criticism," etc., etc., without ever making any investigation, least of all making the obvious application of what I had gathered in a general way. The thing that caused my enlightenment was reading a paper here called the *Literary Digest*, which I suppose you have read. It gives a digest of the news of the week, taken from the leading journals of the world, and is clinched with General, American Politics, etc., Foreign, Scientific, Religious, etc., departments.

It was the "Religious" department that put me on the "Toboggan Slide." I became acquainted with gentlemen like Driver, Cheyne, Harnack, Dowset, Campbell, Robertson Smith, etc. I suddenly perceived that the old positions had been given up by the "faithful" themselves. This, as the Frenchman said, caused me "furiously to think."

I had often heard of "Tom" Paine, also that he was a monster of iniquity and a sort of a would-be "Anti-Christ," who had, however, been somehow or other, somewhere and "some when," victoriously conquered by the Church, and now languished in "innocuous desuetude"; but, somehow or other, I also had an idea in the back of my head that he was after a manner still in full blast and going better than ever.

I said to myself, if Thomas Paine is a better man than God, that has knocked him out. I want to know it; it seems funny, anyhow, that a "worm of the dust" should be able to go the "Almighty Ruler of the Universe" one better. How is it that the preachers tell us not to read this book under peril of losing our souls? Can a man of the eighteenth century, and a mechanic at that, be able to knock out the wisdom of the Almighty and two thousand years of learned theologians? Anyway, I went to the local book-store (kept by a devout Catholic) and secured the book for 15 cents (7½d.)—the best sixpennyworth I ever bought.

I may say I sat down to read this book with superstitious hesitation, and never shall I forget the two impressions which remained burned into my mind forever as I rose from reading it, which I did in one sitting

1. Why, Thomas Paine is a *good man*.
2. The contents of the Old Testament, and consequently the New Testament, with all that that implies, are not *historic facts*.

Don't let anybody ever tell you Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason* is a back number; it never will be as long as there is a "steeple house" or a "pulpit pounder" in the land, or an "ignoramus" ready to have orthodoxy pumped into him. It is a book that should be in the hands of every Christian.

And whilst on this point I must say that you and Mr. Macdonald are, in my opinion, both right in saying that the day for the cessation of vigorous destructive work in criticism has not passed away; in fact it is only dawning.

How can these men who criticise you hold such an opinion, with such vast entrenched corporations as the Catholic, Greek, Anglican, and orthodox Nonconformists still blaring out the "good tidings" to countless "suckers" throughout the world, calmly ignoring all the ascertained facts of modern science—preaching, in fact, the doctrines of anywhere from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century to the citizens of the twentieth, and getting them believed, *paid for*, and acted on? I say once more, how can any keen-minded man say that the time for aggressive Freethought attacks has passed?

The time for these attacks to cease will be when every orthodox Christian has a copy of the *Age of Reason* in his pocket, and has had the contents thereof engraved upon the grey matter of his brain; and I would like to know how far off that blessed consummation is?

I enjoy reading your journal every week. You have certainly collected a brilliant staff around you. Even though the paper should never attain to a very large circulation, you have what I know is the greatest satisfaction to a man of your mental calibre. It is this, I say: it is the knowledge that your journal is the diamond point upon the drill that is surely sinking the mine that will some day explode and blow orthodoxy to smithereens.

Hoping you will excuse me for inflicting this long epistle upon you.

FRED. J. S. GILBERT, M.D.

Mississippi, 1910.

The Divine.

NOBLE man must be,
And helpful and good;
'Tis humanity only
That raises the human
O'er all other beings,
All creatures we know.

All hail the unknown ones!
All hail the divine!
Whom we darkly grope after,
And fain would resemble.
In their good we believe,
Because good is in man.

For Nature is cold,
Unfeeling, and blind;
There shineth the sun
Upon evil and good.
Moonlight and starlight
Gleam down in their beauty
On one and the other.

The flood and the tempest,
The thunder and hail
Rush blindly their way;
And, sweeping along,
They strike, all unheeding,
The one or the other.

So is it with fortune;
She gropes in the crowd,
Lays her hand upon childhood's
Innocent ringlets,
And then on the bald,
The guilt-laden head.

By laws that are iron,
Grand and eternal,
We all must accomplish
Our cycle of living.

And man alone doeth
What else doeth none:
'Tis his to distinguish,
To choose and to judge.
He can to the moment
Eternity lend.

And he alone dares
The good to reward,
The evil to smite,
To heal and to save,
The wandering and erring
For service to bind.

So, likewise, we honor
The mighty immortals
As if they were men,
And did on a grand scale
What good men on small scale
Do, or fain would.

'Tis the glory of man
To be helpful and good,
Unwearied procuring
The useful, the right:
A prototype so
Of the gods we grope after!

—Goethe.

[The above poem was printed in the *Freethinker* some years ago. We have been asked to reprint it, and we do so with pleasure.—EDITOR.]

Tolstoy's Renunciation.

[The *Times* published the following translation of a letter that Tolstoy wrote thirteen years ago, to be handed to his wife after his death. It will interest many of our own readers.—EDITOR.]

DEAR SONIA,—Long have I been tormented by the discord between my life and my beliefs. To compel you all to change your life, the habits to which I myself have accustomed you, I could not; and to leave you ere this I also could not, believing that I would deprive the children while they were little of that small influence which I could have over them, and would grieve you; on the other hand, to continue to live as I have lived these sixteen years, struggling and irritating you or falling myself under those influences and temptations to which I had become accustomed

and by which I am surrounded I also cannot, and I have now decided to do what I have long wished to do: go away; because, first, for me, in my advancing years, this life becomes more and more burdensome and I long more and more for solitude; and, secondly, because the children have grown up, my influence is not needed, and you all have livelier interests which will render my absence little noticeable.

The chief thing is, that just as the Hindus nearing sixty retire into the woods, and as old religious men seek to devote their last years to God and not to jokes, puns, gossip, or tennis, so for me, entering my seventieth year, the all soul-absorbing desire is for tranquillity, for solitude, and, if not for entire harmony, at least not for crying discord between my life and my beliefs and conscience.

If I did this openly, there would be entreaties, pleadings, criticism, quarrels, and I might weaken perhaps and not fulfil my decision—yet it must be fulfilled. And so, pray forgive me if my act causes you pain, and, above all, in your soul, Sonia, leave me free to go, and do not repine or condemn me.

That I should have gone away from you does not mean that I am displeased with you. I know that you could not—literally could not—and cannot see and feel as I do, and therefore could not and cannot change your life and sacrifice yourself for something which you do not recognise. And, therefore, I do not blame you; but, on the contrary, recall with love and gratitude the long thirty-five years of our life, especially the first half of this period, when you, with the maternal devotion of your nature, so firmly and energetically bore that which you considered to be your duty.

You have given me and the world what you could give. You have given great motherly love and devotion, and you cannot but be prized for that. But, during the last period of our life—the last fifteen years—we have drifted asunder. I cannot think that I am to blame, because I know that I have changed, not for myself nor for other people's sake, but because I could not do otherwise. Neither can I blame you that you did not follow me, but thank and lovingly remember and shall continue to remember you for what you gave me.

Good-bye, dear Sonia, your loving

June 8/21, 1897.

LEO TOLSTOY.

OTHER WORLDLINESS.

There is still too much other-worldliness about the [Salvation] Army. Like Frederick's grenadier, the Salvationist wants to live for ever (the most monstrous way of crying for the moon); and though it is evident to anyone who has ever heard General Booth and his best officers that they would work as hard for human salvation as they do at present, if they believed that death would be the end of them individually, they and their followers have a bad habit of talking as if the Salvationists were heroically enduring a very bad time on earth as an investment which will bring them in dividends later on in the form, not of a better life to come for the whole world, but of an eternity spent by themselves personally in a sort of bliss which would bore any active person to a second death. Surely the truth is that the Salvationists are unusually happy people. And is not the very diagnostic of true salvation that it shall overcome the fear of death? Now the man who has come to believe that there is no such thing as death, the change so called being merely the transition to an exquisitely happy and utterly careless life, has not overcome the fear of death at all: on the contrary, it has overcome him so completely that he refuses to die on any terms whatever. I do not call a Salvationist really saved until he is ready to lie down cheerfully on the scrap heap, having paid scot and lot and something over, and let his eternal life pass on to renew its youth in the battalions of the future.—G. Bernard Shaw, *Preface to "Major Barbara," pp. 169-170.*

A DIFFERENT COMMODITY.

Mrs. Newlywed: "I don't see why you are in such a hurry to get to work every morning. You used to say that you could love me through all eternity."

Mr. Newlywed: "And so I can, and so I will, dearest. But time on earth is so very scarce and valuable."

Unctuous Stranger (who has been asked to address the meeting on the subject under discussion, "Man's Span of Life"): "Yes, ladies and gentlemen, we should be all ready an' prepared ter scuffle off dis mortal coil. But if dar am any present her' to-night dat am *not* prepared to die, let them pluck up heart and come around to Room 47 at de American Eagle Hotel, whar I am stopping as de general agent ob de Coontown Life Insurance Company."

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, "Christ."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Public (Minor) Hall, Canning Town): 7.30, R. H. Rosetti, "Christianity's Harmony with Science. I.—Anthropology."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (The Green): 7, J. Hecht, a Lecture.

ISLINGTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Highbury Corner): 12 noon, Ivan Paperno and S. J. Cook.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (King's Hall, Corporation-street): 7, C. Cohen, "Man's Search for God."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (Hall, 110 Brunswick-street): 12 noon, Class; 6.30, S. L. Gokhate, "The Date and Authorship of the Bhagavad-Gita."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Harry Snell, "The Passion Play at Oberammergau." With lantern illustrations.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, C. Wilson, "The Stepney Siege and Modern Society."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): 6.30, John Scott, "Sacred and Secular Arithmetic."

RHONDA BRANCH N. S. S. (Parry's Temperance Bar, Tony-pandy): 3, Debate, S. Holman and G. Green, "Is it Reasonable to Believe in a Supreme Being?"

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Secretary—MISS E. M. VANCE.

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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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