

THE Freethinker

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Deafness is not to be healed by breaking the head, nor blindness by pulling the eyes out: it is time the doctors should try new experiments; if they will not, it is time that the patients should try new doctors.—LANDOR.

The Logic of Persecution.

NEITHER the cruelty of tyrants, nor the ambition of conquerors, has wrought so much mischief and suffering as the principle of persecution. The crimes of a Nero, the ravages of an Attila, afflict the world for a season, and then cease and are forgotten, or only linger in the memory of history. But persecution operates incessantly like a natural force. With the universality of light, it radiates in every direction. The palace is not too proud for its entrance, nor is the cottage too humble. It affects every relationship of life. Its action is exhibited in public through imprisonment, torture, and bloodshed, and in private through the tears of misery and the groans of despair.

But worse remains. Bodies starve and hearts break, but at last there comes "the popped sleep, the end of all." Grief is buried in the grave, Nature covers it with a mantle of grass and flowers, and the feet of joy trip merrily over the paths once trodden by heavy-footed care. Yet the more subtle effects of persecution remain with the living. They are not screwed down in the coffin and buried with the dead. They become part of the pestilential atmosphere of cowardice and hypocrisy which saps the intellectual manhood of society, so that bright-eyed inquiry sinks into bleary-eyed faith, and the rich vitality of active honest thought falls into the decrepitude of timid and slothful acquiescence.

What is this principle of persecution, and how is it generated and developed in the human mind? Now that it is falling into discredit, there is a tendency on the part of Christian apologists to ascribe it to our natural hatred of contradiction. Men argue and quarrel, and if intellectual differences excite hostility in an age like this, how easy it was for them to excite the bitterest animosity in more ignorant and barbarous ages! Such is the plea now frequently advanced. No doubt it wears a certain plausibility, but a little investigation will show its fallacy. Men and women are so various in their minds, characters, circumstances, and interests, that if left to themselves they inevitably form a multiplicity of ever-shifting parties, sects, fashions, and opinions; and while each might resent the impertinence of disagreement from its own standard, the very multiformity of the whole mass must preserve a general balance of fair play, since every single sect with an itch for persecuting would be confronted by an overwhelming majority of dissidents. It is obvious, therefore, that persecution can only be indulged in when some particular form of opinion is in the ascendant: and if this form is artificially developed; if it is the result, not of knowledge and reflection, but of custom and training; if, in short, it is rather a superstition than a belief; you have a condition of things highly favorable to the forcible suppression of heresy. Now, throughout history, there is one great form of opinion which has been artificially

developed, which has been accepted through faith and not through study, which has always been concerned with alleged occurrences in the remote past or the inaccessible future, and which has also been systematically maintained in its "pristine purity" by an army of teachers who have pledged themselves to inculcate the ancient faith without any admixture of their own intelligence.

That form of opinion is Religion. Accordingly we should expect to find its career always attended with persecution, and the expectation is amply justified by a cursory glance at the history of every faith. There is, indeed, one great exception; but, to use a popular though inaccurate phrase, it is an exception which proves the rule. Buddhism has never persecuted. But Buddhism is rather a philosophy than a religion; or, if a religion, it is not a theology, and that is the sense attached to *religion* in this article.

All such religions have persecuted, do persecute, and will persecute while they exist. Let it not be supposed, however, that they punish heretics on the open ground that the majority must be right and the minority must be wrong, or that some people have a right to think while others have only the right to acquiesce. No, that is too shameless an avowal; nor would it, indeed, be the real truth. There is a principle in religions which has always been the sanction of persecution, and if it be true, persecution is more than right, it is a duty. That principle is Salvation by Faith.

If a certain belief is necessary to salvation, if to reject it is to merit damnation, and to undermine it is to imperil the eternal welfare of others, there is only one course open to its adherents; they must treat the heretic as they would treat a viper. He is a poisonous creature to be swiftly extinguished. But not too swiftly, for he has a soul that may still be saved. Accordingly he is sequestered to prevent further harm, an effort is made to convert him, then he is punished, and the rest is left with God. That his conversion is attempted by torture, either physical or mental, is not an absurdity; it is consonant to the doctrine of salvation by faith. For if God punishes or rewards us according to our possession or lack of faith, it follows that faith is within the power of will. Accordingly the heretic, to use Dr. Martineau's expression, is reminded not of arguments but of motives, not of evidence but of fear, not of proofs but of perils, not of reasons but of ruin. When we recognise that the understanding acts independently of volition, and that the threat of punishment, while it may produce silence or hypocrisy, cannot alter belief, this method of procedure strikes us as a monstrous imbecility; but, given a belief in the doctrine of salvation by faith, it must necessarily appear both logical and just. If the heretic will not believe, he is clearly wicked, for he rejects the truth and insults God. He has deliberately chosen the path to hell, and does it matter whether he travel slowly or swiftly to his destination? But does it not matter whether he go alone or drag down others with him to perdition? Such was the logic of the Inquisitors, and although their cruelties must be detested their consistency must be allowed.

Catholics have an infallible Church, and the Protestants an infallible Bible. Yet as the teaching of the Bible becomes a question of interpretation, the

infallibility of each Church resolves itself into the infallibility of its priesthood. Each asserts that some belief is necessary to salvation. Religious liberty, therefore, has never entered into the imagination of either. The Protestants who revolted against the Papacy openly avowed the principle of persecution. Luther, Beza, Calvin, and Melancthon, were probably more intolerant than any Pope of their age; and if the Protestant persecutions were not, on the whole, so sanguinary as those of the Roman Catholic Church, it was simply due to the fact that Catholicism passed through a dark and ferocious period of history, while Protestantism emerged in an age of greater light and humanity. Persecution cannot always be bloody, but it always inflicts on heretics as much suffering as the sentiment of the community will tolerate.

The doctrine of salvation by faith has been more mischievous than all other delusions of theology combined. How true are the words of Pascal: "Jamais on ne fait le mal si pleinement et si gaiement que quand on le fait par un faux principe de conscience." Fortunately a nobler day is breaking. The light of truth succeeds the darkness of error. Right belief is infinitely important, but it cannot be forced. Belief is independent of will. But character is not, and therefore the philosopher approves or condemns actions instead of censuring beliefs. Theology, however, consistently clings to its old habits. "Infidels" must not be argued with but threatened, not convinced but libelled; and when these weapons are futile there ensues the persecution of silence. That serves for a time, but only for a time; it may obstruct, but it cannot prevent, the spread of unbelief. It is like a veil against the light. It may obscure the dawn to the dull-eyed and the uninquisitive, but presently the blindest sluggards in the penfolds of faith will see that the sun has risen.

G. W. FOOTE.

The Culture of the Supernatural.

IN the course of a recent lecture I had occasion to refer to "easily recognisable pathological and sexual elements in religious development," and added that a deal of what the world had taken as proofs of inspiration and illumination could be explained in this way. I gave at the time some illustrations of what I meant. Since then one of my audience has written asking if I would be good enough to explain myself further. The writer also refers me for proofs of "cases of genuine illumination" to the late Professor James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, a work that is receiving continuous laudation in the religious press—which is almost enough to damn its character as a scientific production. I have no objection whatever to explaining more fully the position taken up in the lecture referred to, particularly as "mysticism"—of a kind—plays a large part in what is called advanced religious teaching. These deliverances are more noticeable for their misty than for their mystical character, as in general they achieve unintelligibility and mistake it for profundity. The genuine mystics of old were not unintelligible. One knew what they meant, even though one did not agree with their meaning. The meaning of the modern Christian mystic is not only difficult—often impossible—to discover, but in nine out of ten cases it is worthless when it is discovered.

Regular readers of the *Freethinker* will perhaps recall that some years ago I gave a number of elaborate proofs of the play of pathological and perverted sexual elements in religious phenomena. I have no intention of repeating those proofs now—only giving a summary, with no more than the necessary proofs of this position. And this may be done by way of criticism of Professor James's book—a work with which I am perfectly familiar, and which I regard as one of the most extraordinary pieces of religious yellow journalism ever put forward by a front rank

writer. As a scientific study, the book is simply worthless. It can help no one to understand the phenomena; it only provides them with a catalogue of cases, useful enough for preacher and religious writer, and of which both have made good use.

Let us take, for example, a passage in which Professor James attacks what I may briefly call the pathologic study of religion. He says, "Few conceptions are less instructive than this re-interpretation of religion as perverted sexuality"; and, proceeding on the assumption that this interpretation is based solely on the use of amorous language by religious devotees, he points out religious literature is full of similes drawn from eating and drinking; and so one might as reasonably call religion a disorder of the digestive organs. Or, again, the Bible is full of the language of respiratory oppression, and one might call religion a disease of the respiratory organs. And against the statement that active interest in religion synchronises with adolescence, he retorts that increased interest in art, chemistry, etc., likewise synchronises with adolescence, and might with equal justice be put down to a perversion of the sexual instinct.*

Now, this is excellent fooling, but it is really little else. No one has ever claimed either that religion took its origin in sexuality, normal or abnormal, or that this alone will provide an explanation of historical religion. All that is claimed is that a great deal of so-called religious feeling, past and present, can be shown to be due to unsatisfied or perverted sexuality—which is a very different statement indeed. Between saying that certain feelings are wrongly interpreted in terms of an already existing idea, and saying that the idea is nothing but the feelings transformed, there is a vital and important difference. In every case the religious idea is taken for granted. The origin of that idea is quite a different line of inquiry. But once the idea is in existence there is always the possibility of people finding evidence of its truth in a quite wrong direction.

The analogy of the digestive and respiratory organs is clever, but futile. For the belief that much that passes for religious fervor is merely perverted sexual feeling is not based merely upon the language employed. This is only symptomatic. The language of respiration and digestion when used in connection with religion is frankly and palpably symbolic. The language of sexual love in the same connection is often frankly literal, and can be correlated with the actual state of the person using it. Digestion and respiration must go on in any case. But it is precisely the point at issue whether with a different sexual life these so-called religious ecstatic states would have been experienced. When we find religious characters of strongly marked amorous disposition, but condemned to a physically ascetic life, using towards the object of their religious adoration terms usually associated with strong sexual feeling, it does not seem very difficult to see here something more than the use of symbolic language. Would the mediæval monk have experienced temptations from Satan in the form of beautiful women had he been happily married? Would Santa Teresa or Saint Catherine have used the language they did use of their relations with Jesus had they been wives and mothers? I hardly think that Professor James would have answered such an inquiry in the affirmative. At any rate, it is curious that such visions did not appear to, nor were such expressions used, nor such feelings experienced by those who were married and living a normal life.

Again, it may be quite true that adolescence brings with it an awakening of the whole mental life, not of religion alone. But the analogy goes no further, and, at all events, it begs the question at issue. The interest in art, in science, in literature, or in sociology, are ends in themselves, and one need go no further than the developing mental life for an

* *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 11-12.

explanation. But here the question is whether the interest shown in religion is or is not due to a misdirection of a growing mental, sexual, and social life? A developing interest in the larger social life is common to all. An interest in religion only exists with some—only with those whose natures have received this special inclination. Meanwhile, those who do not evince this interest in religion show no lack of anything—save the use of religious terms. In every respect they exhibit the same qualities as their fellows, and show the same feelings. The only discernible difference is that, while adolescent nature is expressed in the one case in terms of religion, in the other case it is expressed in terms of a larger social life. The problem might be put thus: Given a generation not taught to express its growing life in terms of religion, could satisfactory expression be found in the social life to which adolescence is an introduction? I believe it could and would. Moreover, I maintain that from this point of view modern religion is no more than an exploitation of man's social nature. At any rate, this is the essential question at issue, and yet Professor James never once, in the whole of his over 500 pages, addresses himself to it.

Farther, there is the question of the relation between nervous diseases and religious illumination. How far has the one been mistaken for the other? To what extent have people accepted states of mind, purely pathologic in origin, as proofs of intercourse with an unseen spiritual world? That this idea is general among uncivilised people there is not the slightest doubt. And when we bear in mind the dense ignorance that until quite recently prevailed concerning the relations between mental states and the nervous system, when we remember that in all ages and places insanity and epilepsy have been counted as of supernatural origin, that fasting, solitary brooding, and self-torture have been taken as paths of celestial illumination, no one can possibly dispute the connection between a sense of religious conviction and pathological conditions.

The connection is, indeed, too obvious, to be even ignored. Professor James says that "we cannot possibly ignore these pathological aspects of the subject." Unfortunately, so far as attempting to explain them goes, he completely ignores them. The whole of his book consists of a throwing at the head of the reader a mass of "religious experiences" without any serious attempt at explanation. It is a glorified revival meeting in an expensive volume. No wonder it has been welcomed by preachers as an "epoch marking work." The testimony of a crowd of religious enthusiasts of all ages is accepted at practically face value. Thus, a religious writer who interprets the fairly common feeling of exaltation during a storm at sea, and explains his carelessness of danger as resulting from his "certainty of eternal life" (p. 288) is gravely cited as evidence of the workings of the religious consciousness. What, then, are we to make of those who have similar feelings, but who are without a certainty of eternal life? The declaration of St. Ignatius that a single hour of meditation taught him more of the truth of "heavenly things than all the teachings of the doctors," is given as one of the evidences of mystic illumination (p. 410). So are numerous other cases. Even the effects of nitrous oxide and ether is cited for its power to "stimulate the mystic consciousness to an extraordinary degree" (p. 387). There is really no reason why the same claim should not be made on behalf of whisky.

The use made by Professor James of his long list of cases is the more remarkable, since he points out, quite correctly, that there are no religious feelings, but only feelings directed to a religious end. But if this be so, how are we justified in taking descriptions of religious visionaries as correct accounts of the real nature of their mental states? Clearly, what we need is a study of such cases quite apart from the religious interpretation of them. Professor James does not give us such a study, he merely supplies us with a catalogue. And he is so averse

to subjecting his cases to critical analysis, that when the extravagant features of certain cases are glaring, he warns us that it is unfair to impute narrowness of mind as a vice of the individual, because in "religious and theological matters he probably absorbs his narrowness from his generation" (p. 370). Granted; only one would like to know what reason there is for not deriving the virtues as well as the vices of religious leaders from the same source? And, deeper query still, may not a large part of the phenomena classed as religious admit of explanation apart from religion altogether?

C. COHEN.

(To be continued.)

The Massacre of the Innocents.

MANY Christian scholars now maintain that the birth-stories related by Matthew and Luke are unhistorical. The other evangelists and the author of the Acts never once mention them. Indeed, in John vii. 42, we learn that the people generally regarded Jesus as a native of Nazareth, a fact which some employed as an argument against his Messiahship, saying, "Hath not the Scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" It is a significant fact that in telling the birth-stories Matthew and Luke flatly contradict each other. Matthew says that almost immediately after the birth Joseph was commanded in a dream to "take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt," where they were to remain as long as Herod lived; but Luke assures us that when the parents "had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee." Luke knows nothing of the flight to Egypt and the massacre of the innocents, while Mark and John are equally ignorant even of the birth at Bethlehem. It follows from all this that the massacre of the innocents, described by Matthew (ii. 16), never took place at all, though there was nothing in Herod's character to prevent the commission of such a crime. And yet, whilst there is no evidence that Herod slaughtered all the male children of Bethlehem, from two years old and under, it is absolutely undeniable that Christianity, throughout its entire history, has been guilty of perpetuating itself by the metaphorical massacre of the innocents. Apart from this dark crime it would have died in its own infancy; and if this cruel offence were to be discontinued to-day, it is beyond doubt that in a few generations Christianity would only be an unhallowed memory. Of this its champions are perfectly aware, and knowing it they do not hesitate, they are even devoutly eager, to sacrifice the children. It is this alone that accounts for their bitter hostility to the policy of Secular Education and for their lamentation and mourning over decaying Sunday-schools. The children must be offered up or the Churches will cease to be.

In the *Saturday Review* for December 21, there is an article, entitled "The Children's Festival," from the pen of the Rev. Dr. J. Neville Figgis, in which Christmas is enthusiastically hailed as the child's peculiar possession. "Children have no special place at the other festivals," says Dr. Figgis, but "Christmas will always be theirs." The meaning of Christmas for the child, according to this divine, is summed up in the well-known couplet—

"Jesus, who lived above the sky,
Came down to be a man and die."

Dr. Figgis declares that "probably the child enters more readily than his elders into this notion of Christmas," which, if true, is not very complimentary to the elders. As a matter of fact, the child never enters into that notion of Christmas at all. Neither to the child nor to his elders does the so-called incarnation of the second person in the Holy Trinity bear the least intelligible meaning, and to speak of it as a fact is sheer mockery. It is indeed comparatively

easy to persuade children to believe in it, and to sing the quoted couplet with emotional delight; but they get to believe in it alone on the testimony of those who are supposed to know all about it. They naturally take it for granted that their parents and teachers, whom they trust and revere, thoroughly understand the whole subject, and that the time is coming when they shall understand too. They cannot think it out; they can only believe what they are told about it. Now, is it not the most cruel abuse possible of their filial trust thus to treat them? The conviction, of course, is that unless they acquire the habit of believing before they are able to think they will never believe at all; and no conviction could be truer. Ignorance is the only soil in which faith can take roots and grow; and the natural tendency of all serious thinking is to weaken faith, and to end in uprooting it altogether.

But why should children be taught to believe that—

“Jesus, who lived above the sky,
Came down to be a man and die”?

What good comes of such a belief? In our opinion, no good at all, but much genuine harm, comes of it; and to instil it into the minds of children, prior to the awakening of their reason, is to degrade them. Dr. Figgis, however, thinks differently. He looks upon the birth-stories in Matthew and Luke, not only as true, but as indispensable to human nature. The purport of these stories is to show that Jesus was something more than human, and our divine ventures upon the assertion that “unless Jesus Christ was something more than human, men in general become less.” But this is a mere dogmatic assertion, without a single fact adduced in support of it. Were men in general less than human before Jesus came? Are men in general less than human in China, India, or Japan? The assertion is so absurd and preposterous that one wonders how any man in his senses can make it. Dr. Figgis is bold enough to assure us that modern thought is now gradually veering round to renewed belief in it. He claims that there are many to whom the superhuman elements in the Christian faith prove “a great attraction.” He says:—

“They feel that the obstacles on the side of science are not what they were at one time thought to be; indeed, that the ‘whole mechanical theory of the world is on its trial.’ There is proceeding among us what has been well termed a ‘renaissance of the supernatural.’ The child motif is coming back into the world.”

The reverend gentleman is a gigantic idealiser. The facts are all against him. The trend is in the opposite direction. There are doubtless times when Dr. Figgis himself lugubriously admits it. It is more than probable that we still “live in the world to which T. H. Green lectured.” Science, at any rate, is just as materialistic in its terminology as it ever was. Dr. Chalmers Mitchell is not more friendly towards the supernatural than was Professor Tyndall, and Sir Ray Lankester is no less attached to the mechanistic view of the Universe than was Charles Darwin in his old age. Will Dr. Figgis have the kindness to inform us in what part of the world, or in what department of science or of life “the renaissance of the supernatural” is proceeding?

We happen to be among those to whom “the story of the birth and death of Jesus and ‘faith in his blood’ will be now, as always, midsummer madness”; but in his description of us Dr. Figgis is guilty of gross misrepresentation. It is false to say that we reject Christ because we hate or dislike him. Many of us do not even believe that he ever lived, and those of us who do, reject him, not because we dislike him personally, but because we totally disapprove of the religious system of which he is supposed to be the founder. We reject him in the same way as we reject Mohammed, or any other great exponent of supernaturalism. We are not Christians simply because we are convinced that Christianity is not true. This was true even of Nietzsche. He opposed the Christian morality not because he hated it, but because he regarded it as

morality only fit for slaves. That he did hate it is true enough; but his hatred of it was not the cause, but the result, of his firm conviction that it is false. We hoped the time was past for taunting unbelievers in that cowardly and dishonest fashion, but Dr. Figgis has undeceived us. It is perfectly true that we have no sense of sin from which the Cross can deliver us, and that we have “neither belief nor interest in any way of life which is mainly dependent on the reality of the other world”; but it is positively false to represent us as being governed by low ideals and base ambitions.

Now, it is beyond controversy that there is a growing number of people who no longer believe in the Christian religion, who are persuaded that it has done incalculable harm in the world, and that the world would advance much more rapidly and healthily were it swept clean out of the way. This being the case, there is no getting away from the fact that Christianity is an open question, a debatable subject, and that we are all called upon to examine it with care, and to come to a conclusion with regard to it, of which our reason will fully approve. Dr. Figgis says that “liberty of speech is now our custom and that people will frankly repudiate what they no longer admire”; but he does not seem to realise that the existence of thousands upon thousands of people who “frankly repudiate” Christianity as false should open the eyes of believers to the utter injustice and cruelty of the present custom of forcing it down the throats of little children before they have acquired the art of thinking for themselves. The present system of religious education is fundamentally wrong and egregiously unjust in that it involves a wicked exploitation of the filial instincts, a cowardly abuse of the trusting disposition, which is so beautiful a feature of child-life. It has doomed multitudes of children to a lifelong slavery, from which only a few ever succeed in emancipating themselves. At first, no child takes kindly either to religious beliefs or to religious practices. It takes a long time to manufacture an earnest believer out of a healthy child full of animal spirits, and in many instances the work is never completed. We are continually meeting with adults who confess that in spite of the zeal and assiduity of their parents and others, they never really believed; and a large measure of their hatred of Christianity is the outcome of the attempt to force them into acceptance of it in their childhood. Why not leave them alone? The admission that if they are not taught to believe in their childhood days they are not likely to believe at all, shows that Christianity fails to commend itself to a wideawake intellect. If it were in itself believable it would appear more believable to mature age than to ignorant childhood. It cannot be denied that the majority of Christians believe in spite of the protest of their reason, just simply because they developed the habit of believing on their mothers’ knees. Whole-hearted, ebulliently joyous believers are few and far between, even amongst ministers of the Gospel. If the children had justice meted out to them the Christian superstition would soon disappear.

J. T. LLOYD.

“Our Blessed Lord” on the Stage.

A GREAT deal has been written of late in the columns of various religious newspapers of the serious falling-off in church attendance, and a variety of reasons have been given to account for this alarming fact by the clergy and ministers of all denominations. They have noted, in the first place, that the observance of Sunday was dwindling away in a terrible manner. A large number of shops were open which might very well be closed on the “Lord’s Day.” Tobacconists, sweetstuff shops, and refreshment places of various kinds were open in every part of the great metropolis. Why could not children do without lollipops on Sunday? and as for tobacco and liquid

refreshments, they were quite unnecessary on that day, and did not induce within the bosoms of those who partook of such material things that feeling of sanctity which should possess their souls on such a holy day. Also it was to be remarked that even those who attended church did not give serious attention to the sermon, and some actually had the audacity to leave the holy edifice the moment the preacher began to give out his text. All these things were undoubtedly very disconcerting to the clergy; but Canon Newbolt had recently discovered a more important fact—or at least he had been told—that “our blessed Lord is being presented on the stage in another name, and so has escaped the censor’s notice.” Of course, such a state of affairs is too terrible for words; but it is a fact nevertheless that the “Savior” is being presented on the stage in another name; and the censor has actually passed the play, and sees nothing objectionable in its representation.

Although I had not been to see the play in question, I made it my business, as soon as I had an evening off, to pay a visit to the Lyceum Theatre to witness a play called *The Open Door*, by Arthur Shirley and Benjamin Landeck. Now both of these gentlemen I had known for many years as writers of good old melodramas of the unsophisticated order, designed for the delectation of that section of the British public who take everything for granted that they see on the stage, without inquiring too closely into the probabilities of the story—always providing that it is interesting, pathetic, and amusing. But recently we have had upon our stage a number of old morality plays, and Messrs. Shirley and Landeck thought that it would be a good idea to introduce into their latest melodrama a fine figure answering to the character of the Chorus in some of our older plays, and so they boldly introduced the character of Homo into their play, *The Open Door*; and this was the character referred to by the worthy Canon as none other than “our blessed Lord” under another name. Now, the play itself was obviously a melodrama of the old-fashioned type, with a hero and heroine who are very cruelly persecuted, and with a cunning villain, in the person of a Russian nobleman, who is constantly at their heels with crafty devices to encompass their ruin. This play, however, differs from the ordinary run of melodramas in the fact that it has no comedy scenes and no low comedian to supply the humor or fun to lighten the more serious character of the play. The story is a very serious one, and has some substantial foundation in fact as materials for a very strong play. It is the story of the persecution of the Jews in Russia by the Christians, and the fearful torture to which they are subjected by those in authority. The hero is a young Jew in love with a young Jewess, and the Christian Count makes all kinds of serious accusations against them, so that the hero is thrown into prison; but the young heroine, under most trying circumstances, always remains faithful to him; and when the young couple are in their direst trouble, there comes the fine figure of Homo—the friend of Man, as he is called—to show them the way out. At the end of the second act one of the Russian soldiers strikes Homo on the cheek, whereupon this Savior of young Jews from the persecuting hands of cruel Christians exclaims: “You have smitten me on the one cheek; I now turn to you the other.” The Russian soldier then raises his hand to strike another blow, but his arm is paralysed, and falls useless to his side. This makes what is called in theatrical language “a very effective curtain”; in other words, the curtain falls on a scene which arouses the audience to a high pitch of enthusiasm. Another effective scene is where Homo and another are ordered by the Russian soldier to whip the poor persecuted heroine, and they refuse; they and a rascal of a Jew, who was prepared to betray the hero for thirty pieces of silver—a sort of modern Judas Iscariot, in fact—are thereupon ordered to be shot. The Russian soldiers retire to the summit of a hill, and from this eminence fire upon the prisoners, all of whom fall as

though killed; but, after a few strains of celestial music from the orchestra, Homo slowly rises and, with an air of spiritual triumph, slowly walks off the stage. The audience, of course, shouted themselves hoarse at this marvellous manifestation of supernatural power. But when the curtain had gone down I asked a friend who was sitting next to me whether this action meant a resurrection on the part of Homo, or whether, after all, the authors only wished to imply that the Russians were such bad shots that they could not hit such a stately figure as this alleged friend of man? The hero escapes from prison, but Homo is ever at hand through all his trials and troubles to assist him and the faithful heroine; and the last we see of them is in a beautiful scene representing the sea by night, and they are being taken from a raft on to a ship; but Homo declines to be saved, and at last we just catch a glimpse of him on the raft alone; but what becomes of him—whether he remains there at the mercy of the sea or gets off and walks to the place of landing on shore—the authors leave to the imagination of the audience.

It goes without saying that the authors have treated the subject very reverentially—especially as one of them is a Jew, and unless he has been recently converted, has no more belief in the supernatural or historical character of the Jesus of the Gospels than I have.

The play has been beautifully staged, and the acting is admirable, especially that of the character of Homo, by Mr. Halliwell Hobbes, which was full of dignity and pathos.

But, of course, such a play as this was sure to arouse conflicting ideas and feelings in the minds and hearts of the audience, and I was not at all surprised to find members of the audience discussing various points between the acts. I ventured to remark to my friend that Christians did not often turn the other cheek when smitten on the one side, and even in this play the Russian soldier, who was a Christian, was quite ready to strike Homo on the other cheek when it was turned to him; and, as a matter of historical fact, even to-day all the Christian nations were armed to the teeth to resist the slightest signs of aggression on the part of the enemy. Most of the ladies in the audience, however, were very much impressed with what they evidently regarded as the nobility of the character of Homo—and they were almost as much moved by the elevating strains of the music and the splendid scenery—as they were by the acting itself.

Such plays, although obviously written for the purpose of teaching a Christian moral, more often provoke in the minds of the observer serious doubts, and tend to make such persons Freethinkers rather than Christians. “Our Blessed Lord,” in the person of Homo, has now gone on tour throughout the provinces, and no doubt a good many Freethinkers will go and see him, as well as thousands of Christians, to see what real resemblance they can find to the character of the Jesus of the Gospels.

While I am writing about this play I may as well mention another that is being performed at the Haymarket. It is called *The Younger Generation*, and is by Stanley Houghton. It is designed to show the absurd and narrow views of the ordinary Manchester Nonconformist—and it applies just as well to Nonconformists from other parts of this island—and no doubt would be particularly interesting to Canon Newbolt and other clergymen with broader views of human life. In any case, I found it extremely amusing, and I am quite sure that such plays go a good way towards breaking down some of the worst barriers to human progress.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

The Infidels have been the brave and thoughtful men; the flower of the world; the pioneers and heralds of the blessed day of liberty and love; the generous spirits of the unworthy past; the seers and prophets of our race; the great chivalric souls, proud victors on the battlefields of thought, the creditors of all the years to be.—*Ingersoll*.

Tales of Our Times.

BY A CYNIC.

No one doubts the existence of that inscrutable power called Fashion, which dictates how one must dress in order to be "correct"—which lays down the law as to the proper color for the ties, the proper pattern for the socks, and the proper shape for the hats of its faithful votaries. But there came one memorable London season when the worshipers of the God of Fashion had their faith sorely tried, and when that reputedly omnipotent deity was nearly sent toppling from his throne. For a strange epidemic of eccentricity in dress seemed suddenly to seize the whole male world of Fashion—fortunately, it did not spread to the other sex. Sartorial heresies sprang up on every side, not only in the lighter matter of ties and socks, but even in the weightier matters of the law. The fundamental tenets of the faith—the solemn cult of the top hat, the sacred mysteries of the frock coat—were set at defiance. The high priests of the religion of Fashion could neither understand nor check the movement. They could only watch it in dumb wonderment, their hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things that were coming on the West-end of London. Huxley has somewhere referred to the justifiable scepticism with which we should receive a declaration by anyone, however honest and truthful, that he had just seen a centaur trotting down Piccadilly; but the astonishment which such a phenomenon might be expected to arouse would have been scarcely greater than that caused by some of the abnormalities of male attire observable that season in Belgravia and Park-lane.

But the explanation came at last. After the close of the season a letter signed "Sartor" appeared in all the "society papers" in London, and it was as follows:—

"I feel that the time has come to allay that agitation in the fashionable world for which I must confess myself solely responsible. The means whereby I have been able to achieve the unprecedented feat of upsetting the long established conventions of male attire is simply my extraordinary physical resemblance to his gracious Majesty the King. In vulgar parlance, the King and I are 'alike as two peas'—indeed, the resemblance sometimes almost deceives myself, for when I suddenly see myself reflected in a large mirror I often experience a strong impulse to lift my hat.

"I happen to be a member of a Debating Society, and at one of our meetings the subject for discussion was, 'Are the English Upper Classes Inherently Snobbish?' I took the affirmative view, but was in a hopeless minority of one, all the other members being dead against me. Thereupon, in the heat of discussion, I undertook to prove my point, and incidentally booked numerous heavy bets on the subject.

"My method of procedure will be readily guessed. Taking advantage of that remarkable resemblance to his Majesty the King with which nature has endowed me, I proceeded to personate him in various incongruous and bizarre outfits. For instance, one afternoon, while the King was in residence at Buckingham Palace, I strolled through St. James's Park attired in a top hat, a short lounge coat, and knickerbockers; and this soon became the only wear for fashionable strollers in that and other West-end pleasure resorts. On another occasion, borrowing a horse exactly resembling the King's favorite steed, I rode in the Row wearing a frock coat, a red tie, and a tweed cap; and next morning my example was almost universally followed by equestrians in Hyde Park. Once, when his Majesty was staying at Windsor Castle, I walked through the streets of that ancient town in a rather 'loud' checked suit, and smoking a clay pipe; and students of fashion will remember the sudden adoption of garishly colored check suits for country wear by the aristocracy, and the rage which simultaneously set in among them for smoking 'penny clays.' When, last autumn, the King was spending a week in Scotland as the guest of the Duke of Gargoyle, I visited the same locality and put up at the village inn. And one morning, when I happened to know that the King was not playing golf, I drove a ball round the well-known links near Gargoyle Castle in full Highland costume. The effect of this among golfers was rapid and quite picturesque, for thereafter no one—none at least with any pretensions to social 'tone'—thought of playing the Scottish national game that autumn except in the Scottish national garb.

"But I need not multiply these instances. It will be sufficient to say that any costume I chose to personate his Majesty in, however eccentric, was eagerly imitated. And now, having established my contention that the English upper classes are inherently snobbish, and having won all my bets, I make this confession and retire into obscurity."

This extraordinary disclosure was, of course, received with a storm of indignation, but it had the effect of quickly putting an end to the sad vagaries of male attire in the western part of the Metropolis. Within a week of its publication, the fashionable world had returned to a state of sartorial sanity and rectitude.

Acid Drops.

Mrs. Besant has been interviewed for *Great Thoughts* by Mr. W. H. Seed. Referring to the time when she was an active member of the London School Board, and much occupied with social reform, he says it was the period of her life "in which many people still think she did the most good." "She is now," he adds, "out of sympathy with the leaders of the Labor movement, and she spoke to me of 'trade-union tyranny' in pretty much the same way as a member of the Free Labor Association might have done." With regard to her new "spiritual" beliefs, Mrs. Besant said she came to them by hard thinking. No doubt she fancies this is true. Many people, however, will conclude that she is mistaken. None of her changes were really original. She is a born disciple. She passed from one master to another. Bradlaugh followed others, and the Blavatsky followed Bradlaugh. And now the Blavatsky is dead she governs Mrs. Besant from the grave.

Mrs. Besant has found out what to most people is the very antithesis of the truth. She has discovered that the more torpid the brain the brighter the intelligence. "One can learn," she says, "to leave the physical body and find one's mental powers increased and not diminished." Of course one can. One sees, hears, and says wonderful things in one's dreams. That is, they seem wonderful things to the dreamer; but wideawake persons who hear them talking in their sleep generally find it is great nonsense. Coleridge and Shelley composed poems in their dreams, but they were great poets beforehand. There is nothing surprising in that.

People who can do better intellectually without their brains should get rid of them. Many go about already with only just brains enough to swear by, but Mrs. Besant believes in getting rid of them altogether. The body is a mere incumbrance to the spirit. Why, then, don't the Theosophists get rid of their bodies and regain their freedom? You never hear of any of them doing it. Not even Mrs. Besant. They like to live on, as other people do, under existing conditions. Which shows their common sense at "the sticking point."

Mrs. Besant once believed that all religions were false. She now believes that all religions are true. She was as confident then as she is now. She is as confident now as she was then. The one thing that does not change is her cocksureness; in other words, her belief in herself. That quality makes for courage. It has no necessary relation to truth.

Mr. Seed notices the "doleful prognostication" that Mrs. Besant will "eventually find her way into the Roman Catholic community." That was prognosticated more than twenty years ago. We disputed the prophecy. We said that the Catholic Church offers women only suffering and silence. Mrs. Besant could do the suffering; she could not the other thing. And we were right. At least, there is no sign, after the best part of a quarter of a century, that we were wrong.

"President Taft followed the precedent set by himself and again assisted at mass in a Catholic church on Thanksgiving day. 'The preparations for the mass,' the newspaper report says, 'were on a grander scale than ever before. The church was decorated with the silk flags of the nations representing the Pan-American Union. Cardinal Gibbons sat on a scarlet throne on the right of the altar. Near him were the Very Rev. James A. Burns, D.D., and the Rev. John T. Whelan, chaplain to the Cardinal, and Mgr. Russell.' All the cardinals have thrones; mere Presidents occupy chairs ten feet below. Mgr. Russell should have more prominent mention. He is the priest who invented the trap that caught Taft by calling the Thanksgiving mummery a 'Pan-American mass.' All the other Americas except the United States are Catholic, and their representatives would attend mass any way; but ours is the America the Church is after, and ours the President; and the Pan-American expedient seems to be working very well. Without a struggle it caught the presidential fish, one of whose species is said to be born every minute."—*Truth-seeker* (New York).

It is strange what a difference point of view makes! A Christian missionary, the Rev. W. A. Shedd, who has spent many years among Mohammedans, says that the missionaries suffer great temptations from a Mohammedan environment, and are often inclined to compromise with the faith they are sent to attack. By this, we suppose, is

meant that when a Christian is not an irredeemable bigot he will recognise many things to admire in Islamism. But, says Mr. Shedd, the Mohammedan seldom looks on religion as a power for personal righteousness, and this is the point a Christian preacher should emphasise. On the other hand, a missionary convert to Christianity explains, in the same magazine in which Mr. Shedd's article appears, that the reason why Christianity makes so little headway against Islamism is that Mohammedans are repelled because the Christian religion does not appear to have much influence on the lives of Christians. As a private individual a Christian may be vindictive, although he may be preaching the virtues of forbearance. Obviously, what the Mohammedan is looking for is not merely a preaching of the value of personal righteousness, but its practice. And if Christians show consistency in this respect when abroad, we feel that all of them ought to be encouraged to travel.

The old monkish proverb that *laborare est orare* was much liked by Carlyle. We see it is used by the Rev. S. C. Carpenter in a eulogy of the Church in the *English Review*. Both use it as meaning that "work is worship." Martin Luther, who was nearer the days of monkery, used it in the opposite sense, as meaning that "worship (or prayer) is work." We have no doubt whatever that Luther was right. The monks had no interest in declaring that laymen were as good as themselves; the time had arrived when they felt it necessary to declare that the lazy service of the Church was as much work as the hard service of the World.

News of the "Christian charity" and "brotherly love" of the "Soldiers of the Cross" is gradually creeping into the English press—whose policy in this matter has been simply disgraceful. Here is a cutting from the *Westminster Gazette* of January 9:—

"DISTRESS IN SALONICA.

"The *Vossische Zeitung* publishes a letter from Herr Brunau, a German pastor in Salonica, in which (says a Reuter telegram from Berlin) he asks for charitable gifts. He describes the need as beyond description, and says that the Turkish inhabitants in that vilayet have been massacred in thousands and their villages burned. Untold cruelties have been committed.

"The pastor adds that it is impossible for the expelled Turks to return to their homes, as they would perish of hunger and cold. The number of those to be fed in Salonica amounts to about 80,000."

"Untold cruelties have been committed." No one can realise the full dread meaning of that sentence. We believe it will turn out eventually, when the impartial historian records the real facts of this war of the Balkan Brigands, in the name of Christ, upon the Mohammedan Turks, already battered and drained by Christian Italy, that it was one of the bloodiest and most brutal tragedies of modern times—and one of the most inexcusable.

The Vienna correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* sends extracts from a long article in the greatest Hungarian journal, the *Budapest Hirlap*, giving new details of atrocities committed by the Christian Allies during the Balkan campaign. The following is a general list of these infamies:

"1. Slaughter of Albanians by Serbs: What the Serbs have done to the Albanians is putting all international law to ridicule. Albanian prisoners were fearfully tortured, then buried alive.

"Our Vice-Consul in Mitrovitza, Ludwig von Tahy, relates that the Servian troops slew the Albanians in masses. During the massacres of Albanians in Prizrend he himself saw Servian soldiers dragging small children into the streets, perpetrating atrocities upon them openly.

"Young girls and women were fearfully maltreated in the courtyard of the Consulate in Prizrend.

"2. Atrocities of Bulgarians and Bulgarian bands: The Bulgars murdered more than half of the Mussulman population of the vilayet of Salonica—55,000 men. Only those were saved who embraced the Catholic religion. Not a single Mussulman was left alive at Radovista and Avrathissar.

"Nearly 5,000 women who took refuge in the mosques in the neighborhood of Serres were burned alive at the order of the band leader, Sandansky. Hundreds of these corpses can still be seen under the ruins of the mosques of Tetova and Viterne, which were destroyed by fire.

"At Stundsha the slaughter of human beings lasted twenty days. Some 960 Mussulmans were murdered, while the Bulgars slew 200 Mussulmans at Toirau. In the small village of Bingoe 90 men were killed."

The writer gives particulars of alleged outrages on Jews at Salonica, and proceeds:—

"4. Greek Atrocities: Travellers from Salonica to Florina see hundreds of corpses alongside the railway line—old men, with their noses and ears cut off, corpses of women whose eyelids had been slit, and bodies of women who were hanged by their hair, can all be seen.

"Further, corpses of young men, with the heads severed from the bodies, and of infants murdered in their mothers' arms are visible."

What will the English religious newspapers say to all this? Probably nothing.

When Christians accuse Mohammedans of atrocities, although all the alleged facts come through purely partisan sources and channels, the Christian world believes them. It fits in with their preconceived notions that nearly all the good on this earth belongs to *them*, and nearly all the wickedness to the "heathen." But when Mohammedans accuse Christians, and still more when Christians accuse each other, of similar atrocities, the Christian world turns a deaf ear to them. It *can't* be true. *That's* settled. And they take the next business. This is the policy of the dear *Daily News*. "We must warn our readers," it said on Monday, "against the stream of concocted falsehoods about the conduct of the Balkan allies in the field which is being poured out from the press bureaus of Buda Pesth and Vienna. These falsehoods have been emphatically contradicted more than once by the English correspondents who were in the field with the armies." Indeed! We thought it had been a complaint from the first that war correspondents were not allowed in the field with the armies. In any case, an emphatic contradiction does not disprove a specific detailed charge. And just see what the *Daily News* argument comes to. You *mustn't* believe that Christians could be cruel to Mohammedans, but you *may* believe that Christians can accuse each other, without the slightest evidence, of the most abominable crimes. For, after all, it is Christians who run the "press bureaus of Buda Pesth and Vienna," and "concoct" all those falsehoods about the Balkan allies. This is saving them on the one side by giving them away on the other.

We don't understand it. William Nicholas Miller, aged seventy-four, a retired Canadian barrister, was worshipping at the Christian Science Church, Curzon-street, Mayfair, when he died suddenly of heart disease. "Natural death" was the jury's verdict, but it should have been "mental incapacity." All he had to do as a Christian Scientist was to think he had no heart disease, and to think he wasn't dead. He didn't think hard enough. That was the trouble.

An interesting and apparently fair-minded article is published in the *Methodist Times* for January 9 on "How Londoners spend Sunday." It deals with the West End only, and is written by Mr. H. Elmore—a clergyman, we fancy, but are not sure on that point. Mr. Elmore paid visits to a number of picture palaces and restaurants, and his comments on what he saw are instructive. First, the restaurants. The one he entered was filled with a well-dressed middle-class crowd of both sexes. Music was provided, and from the remarks overheard, the people seemed to take a genuine interest in listening to the selections given. It was, he says, a merry, light-hearted crowd, the people had probably spent the afternoon in the parks, and then dropped in for tea. Many sat for a couple of hours listening to the music. In the hands of professional purity-mongers of the F. B. Meyer type, there would probably have been seen a good deal of incipient or open ill-conduct, with a poorly concealed gloating over the presence of questionable female characters. Mr. Elmore saw nothing and heard nothing that was objectionable.

Mr. Elmore next paid a visit to a National Sunday League concert. "It is a highly respectable crowd," and the concert was "a high-class one." In a picture palace, next visited, the pictures are "popular and good," each "so far as good taste is concerned is unimpeachable." In another, described by someone as "rather bad," the pictures "are of the same class—there is the same absence of objectionable features." As to the audiences, Mr. Elmore says: "In both these picture palaces I take particular notice, so far as I can observe, of the behavior of the youth of both sexes. In the first, described as 'rather bad,' I neither see any indecorous behavior, nor hear a word that should not be spoken." In the second the same state of things prevails. The only difference noted was that in one place the audience was of a poorer class than that which patronised the other. Unobjectionable pictures and a well-behaved audience. No one should ask for more, and there seems no room for complaint.

But some complaint has to be made, and having described fairly what he saw, Mr. Elmore adds: "Thus it is on a Sunday evening in the West End. One and all, men and women, in a tainted atmosphere, sipping the cup of Pleasure, soiling their souls, and destroying their bodies." In the name of all that is reasonable, how? How can people

soil their souls and destroy their bodies listening to music, "correct, of good class, and tastefully played," looking at pictures with an "absence of objectionable features," and exhibiting meanwhile behavior and speech that gave no room for hostile criticism? Mr. Elmore could not have reported more favorably had he been writing of church or chapel congregations. Would those "youth of both sexes" have been better employed if they had been idling in the streets? For our own part, we deny that they would have been better employed had they been in either church or chapel. Mr. Elmore's only objection is that they were not at church. Well, no one can prevent their going if they feel that way inclined. And if they are not inclined, why repeat this meaningless rubbish about soiling their souls and destroying their bodies? It is a pity that Mr. Elmore should end an unprejudiced report of what he actually saw and heard with such a stupid comment.

The managers of the Metropolitan Telephone Service have issued a notice to the girls in their employ warning them of the danger of speaking to any stranger in the streets or in public places, and telling them, should such a thing occur, to go as quickly as possible and report to the nearest policeman. We wonder whether these people really imagine that a girl is in any danger from any man who happens to speak to her in the streets or in a public place. And we wonder what impression an intelligent Chinaman, or Turk, or Japanese will form of the morality of a Christian city where such notices are deemed necessary. Above all, what a glorious commentary it is upon the civilising and moralising influence of the Christian religion. A.D. 1913, and this is what we have to show! Could things have been worse without Christianity?

Lord Haldane announces that Education is the next great question which the Government is going to take in hand. The whole system is to be reorganised from top to bottom. Well, we have heard something like that before. The present Government has brought in several Education Bills already and every one has come to grief. They have all been wrecked on the rock of religious instruction. How will the next fare any better—unless the Government adopts the principle of Disestablishment, and goes in boldly for Secular Education. That is the only way to success.

Sir J. Compton Rickett warns Nonconformists that the only way in which a "complete solution of the education problem" can be obtained during the life of the present Parliament is by consent. By this he means that Churchmen and Nonconformists must arrive at some sort of a compromise that will give each party something of what they desire. And this means that a form of religious instruction must be agreed on between the two principal divisions of the Christian Church in this country, with regard to its effect on those who are not Christians. We are so used to the impertinence of Christians in counting themselves as the only people in the community that matters, that we have ceased to be either surprised or annoyed at its manifestations. All the same, we can assure Sir J. Compton Rickett that if a miracle could be performed, and rival bodies of Christians agree on a compromise and *keep* it, there is a large and growing body of public opinion that would protest against the exploitation of State schools in the interest of Church and Chapel, and which would still work for a more equitable adjustment of affairs. There is, in fact, only "one complete solution of the education problem," and that is for the State to leave religion severely alone, and let those parents who wish their children to be taught religion to get it in whatever manner they and the clergy can devise between them.

The *Methodist Times* also treats us to a Nonconformist "chestnut" in connection with the same subject. "Free Churchmen," it says, "stand for the complete emancipation of the teachers who are appointed and maintained by the State from ecclesiastical tests and conditions of appointment." There is only one word that fits such a statement, and that is "bunkum." Free Churchmen only stand for the protection of teachers who are Nonconformists against the sectarianism of the Church of England. But what of those teachers who belong to neither religious camp? What chance would a known Atheist receive of getting appointed to the head-mastership of a Council school where the majority of the members of the Council are Nonconformists? The plain truth is that you cannot avoid religious tests—official or unofficial—so long as any form of religion is taught in the State schools. The only difference is that in the one case the test is open and above-board; in the other case it is concealed. So long as religion is in the schools it is idle to expect that teachers will be appointed

without regard to their opinions on matters of religion. We do not think there is a responsible teacher in the country who will not agree with us on this point. And we have no doubt that the *Methodist Times* is as well aware of the fact as we. The bigot who denies one liberty in the name of duty we can respect, but the bigot who puts one in fetters in the name of freedom is enough to make decent people vomit.

Thomas H. C. McNeil, founder of a Red Cross boys' club in Everton, was sent to gaol at Liverpool on January 10 for eighteen months' with hard labor for obtaining goods by false pretences. It transpired that he had spent over twenty years in penal servitude for fraud carried out chiefly under the cloak of religion. There is no moral. He was not a Freethinker.

Amongst the latest wills are these:—Rev. William Wilberforce Gedge, 12 Montgolier-grove, Cheltenham, left £10,453. Rev. William Edward Allen Young, Pyecombe Rectory, Hassocks, Sussex, left £4,675. Rev. Henry Rudge Hayward, Pine-grange, Bournemouth, left £10,772. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth."

It is rumored that the Congregationalists are going to join the Baptists. Query—in the water tank?

Reporting a sermon by the Rev. J. Campbell Morgan, the *British Weekly* notes that when the preacher said that "the man who says cheerily 'I am an Agnostic' is a fool," the Rev. Mr. Rattenbury and Mrs. Hugh Price Hughes "exchanged a swift smile of decisive assent." We don't know that we should easily recognise that kind of a smile if we came across it, but we are quite ready to believe that any number of preachers would agree with the sentiment. And doubtless when such giants in the intellectual world as this trio agree, the poor Agnostic ought to sharply reconsider his position. On the other hand, it is possible that the Agnostic may reflect that the folly of preachers of this class looking down on men of the stamp of Darwin and Spencer is only equalled by its impertinence, and he may further decide that both folly and impertinence are always at home in the pulpit.

We see from an address by the Bishop of Zululand that the color problem there is beginning to assume some of the features of the color problem of the United States. In Zululand, the white Christian will not go to communion with the black one, and the Bishop, apparently, does not see why he should. The brotherhood between Christians, he says, is a spiritual brotherhood, but it does not follow that they are sworn friends. And so the Bishop's advice is to let things alone, and black and white will each find their own place. We suppose they will, but we do not see what help "spiritual brotherhood" is going to be. The Englishman's claim to "wallop his own nigger" has not prevented his admitting a "spiritual brotherhood," but, on the other hand, the "spiritual brotherhood" has never prevented the walloping, so we quite fail to see what benefit the wallopee derives from his relation to the walloper. The long and the short of it is that Christianity in Zululand will no more help the native than it has helped the negro in the United States. The Bishop has come to England for the purpose of collecting £4,000. The future relations between Black and White he is content to leave in the hands of God. The collection of the money he will attend to personally.

The dear *Daily News* follows the *Daily Mirror* in giving its circulation daily. The latter also gives an accountant's certificate. We don't notice one in the case of the former.

It is usually said that religion makes men moral, and that, in fact, whether it be true or false, it forms an excellent safeguard, a sort of police regulation and disciplinary corrective. A simple glance at history will suffice to show how utterly baseless is such an assertion. One can say without exaggeration that the most religious times and the most religious peoples, or those in which or among whom the power of the Church has been the strongest, have, generally speaking, been the most immoral.—*Ludwig Buchner*.

Whatever turn may ultimately be taken by our convictions about a hereafter, society will uphold by law or social influence rules necessary to its own security and convenience here. It may even uphold them more rigorously, perhaps cruelly, if it is convinced that the present life is all. The natural affections, parental, conjugal, and social, will also retain their force.—*Goldwin Smith*.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, January 19, Queen's (Minor) Hall, Langham-place, Regent-street, London, W., at 7.30, "More 'Bradlaugh' Fables."

January 26, Queen's (Minor) Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

- J. W. DAWSON.—It is best to let Colonel Gracie's testimony stand as that of an undoubted spectator. The "arguments" of people who were not present at the loss of the *Titanic* are worthless. It is a waste of time to notice them.
- R. NORTH.—Sailors have successfully resisted the regulation as to "divine service" and we think it might be done by soldiers if a few of them held together. Our comment in the paragraph you mention was satirical. Did we miss fire?
- J. E. REMSBURG.—Delighted to have you still figuring on our list of subscribers. Shop manager will send formal receipt.
- A. HURCUM.—Every precaution is taken at our publishing office against mistakes in the dispatch of subscribers' copies. The Post Office is often at fault; probably so in your case last week.
- H. GEORGE FABMER.—Thanks for the cutting. The Leeds police are evidently short of work. If they can find nothing better to do than worrying Freethinkers some of them should be discharged or transferred to a less holy and moral town.
- J. H. GATRELL.—Shall appear next week. Cheque divided as desired. Shop manager will forward the pamphlets.
- E. B.—Better if they reached us on Saturday. But, of course, some of them couldn't—chronology being in the way. Thanks for cuttings, etc. We note your delight at seeing that an American friend fills the 1912 Honorarium Fund to the brim.
- E. PACK.—(1) You correct what was not our real point. We had the author and not the vendor or distributor in our mind. The constant Leeds plea is that Mr. Blatchford is not prosecuted. We reply that he could not be prosecuted under the Police Clauses Act on account of any "profanity" in his books. Whether vendors or distributors could be so prosecuted is a matter of opinion. "Non prosecutable" doesn't mean that proceedings could not possibly be started; there is no limit to the possible blunders of policemen and magistrates; it simply means that the case could not be carried to a successful termination. (2) We did not say we *could* argue a case before the Court of Appeal. We said we should *like* to. We supposed it was well known by this time that we are not in the legal profession. Neither are you. But you have advised all the Leeds defendants, and not one of them escaped. Mr. Stewart defended himself and got three months; you wrote Mr. Gott's defence and he had four months.
- ISABELLA ROBERTS.—Glad to receive your good wishes.
- J. B. (Birmingham).—We have got to the bottom of it; so look out.
- ELIZABETH LECHMERE.—It will appear in list.
- COLONEL RILEY and DR. S. LAING.—Formal acknowledgment in next week's first list.
- A good deal of correspondence stands over unavoidably till next week.
- THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- WHEN the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance.
- LETTERS for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C.
- LECTURE NOTICES must reach 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.
- ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Shop Manager of the Pioneer Press, 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, E.C., and not to the Editor.
- FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.
- THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded direct from the publishing office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One year, 10s. 6d.; half year, 5s. 3d.; three months, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

The new season at Queen's (Minor) Hall opened well on Sunday evening, Mr. Foote being the lecturer and Mr. Roger the chairman. The lecture on "The King and the Bible" was greatly relished and much applauded. A few questions were asked, but there was no formal opposition. Mr. Roger appealed to the audience to help in advertising these Queen's

Hall lectures, at least by circulating the waistcoat pocket announcements. We join in that appeal very earnestly. Supplies for circulation can be obtained of the Secretary, Miss Vance, at 2 Newcastle-street, E.C.

"More 'Bradlaugh' Fables" is the subject of Mr. Foote's lecture at Queen's Hall this evening (Jan. 19). It should prove attractive.

Mr. Foote is obliged, after all, to defer any further announcement as to *George Meredith's Letters* until it is definitely decided whether a special article of his on Meredith's Freethought is to appear in a certain monthly magazine where it would command a wider audience than in our pages. This idea was dropped for a time, but has been raised afresh.

Mr. A. B. Moss has definitely retired from open-air lecturing. He has been working in that field—though not exclusively there—for more years than we care to count. Talking ancient chronology while you are alive is the way to hasten your cremation. Suffice it to say that Mr. Moss's long service deserves all the thanks which the N. S. S. Executive has tendered him in the name of the Freethought movement; thanks which are most heartily endorsed by the President personally. Mr. Moss will still be heard, as occasion serves, at indoor meetings. It will be long, we hope, before he retires altogether. Even then he may continue writing—for the pen outlasts the tongue as an instrument or a weapon.

Miss Kough occupies the platform at the Public Hall, Croydon, this evening (Jan. 19). We bespeak for her a good audience and a hearty welcome.

Mrs. Teresa Billington Greig lectures for the Manchester Branch to-day (Jan 19) at the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, where she should be greeted by good audiences. Her subjects are appropriate ones—"No Bible in School" and "Woman and the Church."

Several subscribers to the President's Honorarium Fund have forwarded their 1913 donations already. We do not wish to discourage subscribers from remitting early; at the same time, we are not opening the formal list of acknowledgments till next week. Meanwhile the usual circular will be placed in the hands of the printer.

With regard to Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner's excellent little volume on the Blasphemy Laws, entitled *Penalties on Opinion*, we have been given the right to say that the bold advertisement we gave it for several months was quite gratuitous. We wanted to see it circulated as widely as possible, and we did what we could to help it forward. The book was issued by the Rationalist Press Association, and that fact was stated in the advertisement every week, though it could easily and not unjustly have been omitted, as we were using our own machinery to push the sale of the volume. Perhaps this will be added to the list of boycottings by the wicked (and wealthy) *Freethinker*.

The new edition of the *Bible Handbook*, issued by the Secular Society, Ltd., at a very low price, as a propagandist effort, is on sale at our publishing office, and should have a large and prompt circulation. It is one of the most useful publications ever issued from the Freethought press. Nearly every question that Freethinkers ask us from time to time about the Bible can be answered by consulting this book. The references are given with great exactitude. The section on "Bible Contradictions" is printed in parallel columns, so that the contradictions stand out to the eye in a striking manner. Altogether this cheap issue of a work of such utility may be called "the sixpenny limit." The shilling edition is bound in cloth, and is the better of the two for those who can afford it, on account of the more lasting character of the binding.

Some of our readers must be getting tired of our "Fighting Fund" as it stands week after week. So are we. But it will not stand in that way much longer. We hope the London County Council will decide to act wisely and justly by withdrawing its mistaken and aggressive policy with regard to free speech and free collections (by *bond fide* societies) in the London Parks and other open spaces. It has had nearly six months' already to make up its mind in, and further delay could hardly be anything else than sheer procrastination. Our readers are bound to see a definite announcement on this matter very shortly.

Ignorance and Religion.

BY M. M. MANGASARIAN.

THE greatest thing in the world which I encountered during my recent wanderings in Europe—the greatest, not for value, but for size and force—the thing most colossal, most impenetrable, most boundless and bottomless—was *human ignorance!* Knowledge is power, say we; but what about the power of ignorance? Was it not George Eliot who warned the sanguine reformers not to be too confident, in their hopeful ardor, of their ability to cope with this Abysmal Monster—Ignorance! It was particularly in Catholic Europe that I was brought into very close touch with this fearful foe to human progress.

The conclusion was forcibly impressed upon me during my summer in Europe that the countries which are the most religious,—which have the greatest number of churches, of priests and clergymen, of monks and monasteries, of nuns and convents,—are also without a single exception the most poverty-stricken and the most ignorant. Constantinople, for instance, is one of the most religious cities of the world; it was partly the scene of the conversion of the Roman Empire, the home of the first Christian emperor, and the *rendezvous* of ecclesiastical councils and synods. To-day it is as intensely Mohammedan as formerly it was Christian; but whether the one or the other, it has never ceased to be one of the most religious and one of the most wretched of the world's great cities. Churches and mosques are as thick as blackberries in Constantinople; and what is more, these numerous houses of Moslem and Christian prayer are always open and bustling with worshipers. The Turks themselves, one would suppose, are never quite out of their mosques. Five times a day they must absent themselves from business to appear in the presence of their God, to tell him there is only one God and that he is it. This last time my windows in Constantinople looked directly into the inside of the mosque across the street, which gave me an opportunity to witness the inveterate piety of the Turk. While the *muezzin* was crying from the top of the steeple, or "minaret," that the hour for prayer had arrived—and it arrives, as I said, five times in twenty-four hours—the little mosque was filling up with turbaned and sandalled Turks. The words "turbaned" and "sandalled" are apt to give you a picturesque idea of these worshipers, while in reality they are a most ragged crowd. But they are pious. I was convinced of that when I saw them performing their *namaz* with a seriousness and a scrupulosity difficult to duplicate.

But does religiosity, the constant praying and bending with the accompaniment of tapering candles, the curling fumes of incense, the chime of bells and the music of processions as in Catholic churches, induce God to do more for a people than he otherwise would? Does he love the Moslems for their five prayers a day more than the Christians? Does he love them as much? Or is he more prodigal with his blessings to the Italians and the Spaniards, who go to mass every day, than to the Germans or the Americans, who never go to mass? Are the material and moral conditions of the people in Catholic countries where the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and the long list of saints are daily and loudly invoked, better, or even as good, as those prevailing in heretical countries? In which country of Europe is there more security of life, property, and liberty,—or better sanitary conditions, wholesomer bread for the masses, less grinding misery or blighting ignorance? Certainly not in the most devoutly religious lands.

I was standing on a Sunday morning in St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome, where I saw troops of Italian pilgrim peasants, one after the other, walk up and kiss St. Peter's toe. "You have been kissing that bare and cold foot," said I to them in my mind, "all these years, and your fathers and mothers before

you; but what has it done for you or your country? You are wretched, poor, and even filthy. I can see it. There is an unpleasant odor about your clothes. You are uncombed and unwashed, and you have had scarcely enough to eat. You look sleepy and stupid. The human element is scarcely discernible in you! What, then, has St. Peter done for you? Or is it in the next world that he is going to reward you for kissing his toe and paying his pence so regularly? But what prevents him from blessing you now and here, when your needs are so urgent and your lot is so unspeakably wretched? Besides, if he insists on getting his pence now, why do you not insist on getting your reward now? If you were to tell St. Peter that you will keep your savings until you go to the next world, where you will place it all in a lump in his hands, he will shake his head, as much as to say, 'No, pay me now.' Why, then, should you be content with *credit*, when he insists on *cash*?"

I stood before the statue of St. Peter buried in meditations which really oppressed me. A black Peter in bronze, with a golden crown in the form of an *aureola* around his head, under a canopy of blue and gold, and with two huge keys in one of his hands resting upon his breast,—the one supposed to be the key of heaven, and the other of hell,—the control of both being handed over to him. In this posture St. Peter holds out one foot, the toe of which is pretty well worn out, not from kissing, but from being wiped by people before kissing it. It seems they are afraid they might contract some disease by kissing the apostle's toe without first wiping it, which shows really what little faith, after all, people have in the power of their saint for present help. If a saint cannot save men from catching a disease when they are kissing his blessed toe, what, then, can he do for them? If people have to use their minds and then their handkerchiefs before kissing a saint, why do they not extend that practice of self-help and common sense to everything else in life? I saw some of these pious folk not only kiss the toe, but also bow and shove their heads under it as a sign of absolute submission to the authority of St. Peter. Great is ignorance!

It must be admitted that the piety of these people is not mere lip service, but genuine. As in Turkey, so in Italy, so in all Catholic Europe, there is no such thing as religious cant. Emerson used to say that only the English and the Americans are given to the odious practice of uttering hypocritical phrases to God; he was right. Of course, the sincerity of the Moslems and the Catholics does not make their faith any the less, I am sorry to say, something of the nature of a malignant growth which is eating away all their material resources, as well as withering all their intellectual powers. But the ignorant are at least sincere, though their sincerity is no protection against the ravages of ignorance. It is pathetic to see how often an Italian beggar, the moment a penny is slipped into his hands, runs away forthwith to deposit it in the church box. The "*chink, chink, chink*," of the pennies falling into the church receptacles, everywhere visible, is a deplorable, yet a convincing, evidence of the sincerity of these simple worshipers. Of course, the money is not given to the Church in any disinterested spirit. On the contrary, the people have an idea that dropping money into the church box, especially when it has been blessed by the Pope or sprinkled with holy water, is like depositing it in a savings bank. Some day and somewhere they will get it all back again with compound interest.

On our way to Pompeii we drove for hours through Naples, which gave us an opportunity to see the homes of these pious people. Ah, what wretched dwellings! These unfortunate people are crowded into dark, dirty, barren quarters, not "flowing with milk and honey," as the promise runs, but dark and dingy. No carpets, no chairs, no beds, no tables, but a few black, broken, cast-away and nameless articles in the way of household furniture. Yet in some of the meanest of these habitations there could be seen on the walls an altar or a shrine of some virgin

or saint, cased in glass, and an oil lamp burning before it day and night. The savings of the family go to give the saint a light, when it should help to give the children bread or an education. The poor Italians who buy and support these saints believe that without the presence of these saints in the house everything would go wrong with them—as if it were possible for them to sink into lower depths of want and ignorance.

In many of the Catholic churches of Italy we were shown by the guides the crutches which the lame had left there, having recovered the use of their limbs through the intervention of heaven. The pictures of the Madonnas were covered with silver hands and gold hearts in gratitude for answered prayers. In one of the Venetian churches, on the Grand Canal, we saw a wooden leg on the altar, which was exhibited to prove the power of the Church to restore lost limbs. "Is it possible," I asked the guide, "that a man came here with that wooden contrivance and exchanged it for a flesh and bone leg?" But he paid no attention to my question. Now think of an organisation that will resort to such advertisements for purposes of revenue. In this same church the religious guide led us into another room, where he explained to us how, some years ago, the roof had fallen during a fire and partly destroyed the mosaic floor, and also crushed and broken many of the images of the saints. Poor saints! they saved others, but could not save themselves!

In the Church of St. Mark, in Venice, one of the richest in all Europe, we were shown the grave of the apostle of that name. How in all the world they found out who St. Mark was and where he was buried, I cannot tell. It is believed that an Eastern anchorite, living in the desert, saw in a dream the Apostle Mark, who told him where he was buried and begged to be removed to Venice. Of course, his request was carried out. We were also shown in this church the stone upon which St. John was beheaded, and were actually informed besides that if we paid five francs apiece the guide would conduct us to the vaults in the basement, the keys of which he held in his hand, where we would see the blood "of our Lord," and a few of his bones. The Catholics hold on to "bones and blood" as their best answer to the doubter. If you say such and such a saint never lived, they show you his bones. To make sure the guide was in earnest, I asked him repeatedly if the church was really in possession of the blood and bones of "our Lord." Yes, he was not jostling. Who discovered all these relics? Money! If the ignorant could not pay, there would be no relics to exhibit.

Perhaps of all the sights the one which pained me most was what I saw in the Church of the Holy Stairs in Rome, near St. John the Lateran. From a circular posted in the vestibule of this little church, I learned that it possessed one of the richest treasures of Christendom—the marble steps which Jesus ascended when he was in the flesh, and upon which fell drops of his blood. These steps, which are supposed to have been miraculously preserved for the church, have now a wooden covering to preserve them from wearing out. What God has preserved for two thousand years is now being preserved by a wooden casing. The blood spots are there under the wood, though they are invisible except to the eye of faith. The circular in the vestibule, printed in Italian, German, and French—but not in English—says further, that these steps were brought to Rome in the year 861 by Queen Helen during the lifetime of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, and that Pope Leo IV., in the year 850, offered nine years' indulgences to everyone who climbed them on his knees while saying a prayer on each round. The circular further stated, in Italian, German, and French, that a Bull of Pope Pascal, A. D. 1100, confirmed this decree, and Pope Pius VII. declared the climbing of these steps on one's knees good also for the souls in purgatory. There were old men and women here going up these steps on their knees, some of them with arms outstretched, and muttering

a prayer as they crawled to the top—about forty-three steps in all. I am restraining myself from exclaiming, "O the power of human ignorance!" for the simple story I am telling you needs no coaching to make it convey its lesson.

I look upon the mosques in Constantinople, the cathedrals in Rome, the great army of sleek, well-fed monks, the religious establishments with their enormous wealth, as the greatest and most enduring monument ever raised to the power of human ignorance. When I saw men and women dipping their fingers in holy water, and then falling on their knees before a clumsily dressed, doll-like Madonna, done with rouge, ribbons, and ruffles, calico skirts and sun-bonnet, and calling it "the mother of God," I did not feel like exclaiming with Shakespeare, "What a piece of work is man!" but with Voltaire I cried, "What an absurd animal is man!" The clock has struck twenty on the dial of time, and yet Ignorance, the abysmal monster, rules its millions, when knowledge has only a handful to depend upon. Walking down the street the other day, I saw an organ grinder, with his wife and daughter assisting him, devouring the windows of the houses on both sides of the streets with his eyes, and grinning and courtesying to the children for a penny. He was an Italian. Did I ask a moment ago what Rome had done for Italy? But see! she has left the hand-organ to a people once the proudest in the world.

But I must now try to explain how religiosity, such as it exists, especially in Catholic and Moslem countries, became the parent of two of the greatest evils which have ever inflicted humanity—poverty and ignorance. In all such countries the clergy have succeeded in shifting the centre of interest from the present to the future. Then, again, insistence upon the authority of the Book or the Church has impaired, hopelessly, the will, as well as the ability, to think independently. In the next place, the menace of hell fire has frightened the people away from new and progressive ideas as from poisoned food. Once more, the forcing of impossible and absurd propositions upon the intelligence as holy mysteries and as absolutely essential both to morality and salvation, has unhinged the people mentally and left them mere puppets in the hands of their exploiters. Flying from one saint to another; seeking now the intervention of the Virgin, and now of that; invoking to-day one martyr and to-morrow another; on a pilgrimage now to one holy relic or grave, and then to another, but living always with the dead—the people have neither the leisure nor the taste for study. Instead of learning and trying to help himself, the believer is praying for help from above. Petronius remarks in one of his letters that there were so many gods in Rome that there was no room left for men. In Catholic countries the gods and saints do everything, leaving man only to wait. But there is no evidence that the gods have ever hurt a man or helped him. Thus, we see how superstition cramps man's energies while science expands his mind and trains his hands. A people who fear remain slaves, and without science people must ever dwell in fear.

The Northern or Protestant nations are not hurt to the same extent by their religious beliefs, because their loyalty to these beliefs is largely nominal. It is a shocking admission to make, but it is nevertheless true, that the secret of the comparative freedom of Protestant peoples from the bad effects of their creeds is that they are insincere. The Protestants only profess, while the Catholics and the Moslems believe and tremble. When Bishop Colenso had finished fitting up a house for a British eighteen-pounder, the Zulus who had often heard him preach that they must put their trust in the good God, asked him why he reserved a part of his for the English cannon. But that is English; to profess faith in God, and to appeal to the cannon. James Nasmyth, the founder of the steam hammer, speaks of an announcement posted on the walls of Edinburgh streets before the days of railroads, which illustrates perfectly the radical difference between the Northern

and Southern mind. The notice read: "The coach would set out from the Grass Market ilka Tuesday at Twa o'clock in the day, God Wullin, but *whether or no* on Wednesday." The Protestants intend to let God have his own way until Tuesday, but after that they will take the reins in their own hands. Their deference to the supernatural is partial and insincere, and it is to this fact—a fact which makes hypocrites and pharisees of them—that they owe whatever progress they have made in knowledge and civilisation.

A stupid people are worse than an insincere, hypocritical people, for while the latter may be converted to honesty, the former are past redemption. A stupid world would be infinitely less interesting even than a wicked world, for the one manifests an energy that might some day be put to better uses, while the other has the smell of the grave about it. "Against the stupid," says Schiller, "even the gods are helpless." It is this inconsistency, the insincerity of the Protestant, his "make-believe" loyalty to religious dogmas imported from Asia, and therefore alien to his native genius, that enables him to replace in all practical affairs, substitution by science, and "faith" by intelligence. But even the orthodox Catholic is not free from religious insincerity altogether. So long as religious practices and dogmas refuse to respect the rights of reason, it will be impossible to dispense with hypocrisy. My complaint against the creeds is that they make insincerity indispensable.

The Catholic nations of Southern Europe, who have no end of churches and crucifixes, Cararra marble Virgins and painted saints, bronze popes, alabaster Christs, and Madonnas with diamonds for eyes, and who are more interested in purgatory or in paradise than in life here and now, are the most backward peoples in Christendom. To be saved—that is to say, to have the *means* for a decent and useful life—ennobled by the untiring pursuit of truth in the service of humanity, the priest must become a teacher, the church a school, and the locust cloud of saints and gods must make room for *man*!

Of course, from the day that Garibaldi entered Rome, its secularisation began. Italy has at last turned her face toward the light. The reign of ignorance is drawing to a close. I have given you now a picture of old Italy. I will in my next tell you of the Italy that is breaking away from her chains.

—From a Lecture on "A Rationalist in Rome," delivered before the Independent Religious Society, Chicago.

If.

EVERY little while some Christian clergyman tells "what Christ [meaning Jesus] would do if he came again." I can think of no greater waste of words than results from such predictions, or guesswork.

But before anyone undertakes to paint a second career for Jesus it is necessary to prove a first one. There is not a particle of proof that any such person as the Gospel Jesus ever lived on earth. A character such as Jesus is not born; he is made. He does not have human parents. He comes from the brain of man, not from the body of woman. His career is manufactured to carry out the artist's idea. Divinity has been constructed in a myriad form—Jesus is only one of the mythological deities. He is made a little more human, brought a little nearer home to our hearts, than most of them have been. He is only half celestial. He is not pure divinity. There is earth in his picture. He is painted in human likeness, and is endowed with human weakness. Such a being is neither God nor man.

The Gospel Jesus belongs to literature, not to life. He has no history. All that is said of him could be said of Apollo, or Hercules, or Mercury, or of any other creature of human imagination. Jesus is only one attempt of man to make a god.

So we say that it is incumbent upon the person who tells us "what Christ would do if he came again" to show that he ever came; that he ever had an earthly existence; that he ever spoke to man; that he ever wrought a wondrous deed or died as he is represented to have died on the pictured cross.

But take the life of Jesus as a fact, and what is it but a foolish dream? As a model for humanity it is a wretched failure. Men to-day have to work with hand and brain; have to labor for all they get; have to meet the hard, cruel, heartless forces of nature with bleeding hands, with breaking hearts, with eyes burning with tears, and the admonitions of Jesus to "take no thought for the morrow" and to trust to God to feed and clothe them are but insults to the poor who live on the line of starvation and barely escape freezing.

It is the truth that Jesus never did a thing to change the destiny of mankind; that neither his life nor his death altered the conditions under which mankind lives. He did nothing to make the frost less freezing, the heat less burning; nothing to save the aching hands; nothing to stop the sufferings of the body, the agony of the soul; nothing to lessen the drudgery of toil, the misery of existence.

Admit that that Jesus lived as the Gospel story says he lived, what right has anyone to assume that he would do differently were he to return to earth? And what right has anyone to assume that his second advent would benefit the world of man any more than did his first?

The New Testament has ceased to influence human thought, and its central hero has lost his hold upon the sympathy and respect of men and women for the reason that he cannot be shown to be a historical character. Fictitious suffering does not appeal to the honest heart, and persons of a drama or a novel do not move mankind as do flesh-and-blood beings who we know have lived and suffered and sorrowed on earth as we ourselves have done.

We do not want anyone to come back to earth after having once quit it dressed in the garb of death. Life cannot be repeated. A career cannot be lived again. Every soul must be a new soul; every life a new life.

But there is no danger of any person coming again to earth who has passed from it. Nature gives one life to each. It is as foolish to talk about "what Christ would do if he came again" as it would be to predicate what Shakespeare would write or Calvin believe or Jonathan Edwards preach.

—Truthseeker (New York). L. K. WASHBURN.

Literary Gossip.

How much real knowledge of English (or any other) literature is there in the editorial offices of our London newspapers? A correspondent of the *Daily Mirror* having referred to "Macaulay's New Zealander viewing the ruins of London" is pounced upon by another correspondent, who remarks that "Macaulay's idea was not original," and quotes the following passage from Captain Marryat's *Frank Mildmay*, written in 1829:—

"London may one day be the same—and Paris; and you and your children's children will all have lived and had their their loves and adventures; but who will the wretched man be that shall sit on the summit of Primrose Hill and look down upon the desolation of the mighty city, as you, from this eminence, behold the once flourishing town of St. Jago?"

This idea is not so recondite that it might not occur to many imaginative persons. Still, if there is to be so much talk about "originality" it may as well be remarked that the conception occurs in the pages of a far greater writer than Marryat or Macaulay, who flourished before either of them. I refer to Shelley—in the serio-comic Dedication of *Peter Bell the Third*, dated December 1, 1819. I have just turned to that Dedication and read it through once more with unimpaired delight. Shelley's prose is, in its own way, as fine as his verse. I know this is a heresy, but I never trouble about a charge like that. I read for my own pleasure,—I judge from my own perception. But somebody will be telling me to "leave off my damnable faces and

begin"—or rather come to the point. Here it is then Shelley's last paragraph—the poet soaring above the satirist (you see I am incurable!)—runs as follows:—

"Hoping that the immortality which you have given to the Fudges, you will receive from them; and in the firm expectation, that when London shall be a habitation of bitterns, when St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey shall stand, shapeless and nameless ruins, in the midst of an unpeopled marsh; when the piers of Waterloo Bridge shall become the nuclei of islets of reeds and osiers, and cast the jagged shadows of their broken arches on the solitary stream, some transatlantic commentator will be weighing in the scales of some new and now unimagined system of criticism the respective merits of the Bells and the Fudges, and their historians.—I remain, etc."

The essence of this idea, in all these cases, is London in a state of ruin and desertion. Macaulay had read Shelley, Marryat might have, and both may have drawn from the same great source. I repeat, however, that the varied use made of the idea renders the discussion about "originality" and "plagiarism" as superfluous as it is inappropriate.

* * *

Fielding's genius has been the admiration of every great English writer since, and his masterpiece is one of the translated classics in most civilised languages. Gibbon's immortal compliment to our great novelist is famous; and to be mentioned by Gibbon, as Thackeray said, is like having your name inscribed on the dome of St. Peter's, where it is visible to visitors from all parts of the world. Thackeray's own admiration of Fielding is also well known. But it is not my intention to draw up a list of Fielding's eulogists. It would take too long—and would be too long. I will therefore just turn to Coleridge. That mighty and subtle genius, who was perhaps the most splendidly endowed of all English poets since Shakespeare, refers to Fielding frequently in his *Table Talk* and elsewhere. The following passage is one of the most characteristic:—

"What a master of composition Fielding was! Upon my word, I think the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the *Alchemist*, and *Tom Jones*, the three most perfect plots ever planned. And how charming, how wholesome, Fielding always is! To take him up after Richardson, is like emerging from a sick room heated by stoves, into an open lawn, on a breezy day in May."

Being asked whether *Tom Jones* is not a dangerous book for a young man, Coleridge replied "No,—unless the young man's mind is hopelessly corrupt already." The author of that great novel was "manly Harry Fielding" then, and he is manly Harry Fielding still to all whose minds are not morbid and prurient. And as to Fielding's style, it was George Eliot (in *Middlemarch*, I think) who speaks of his "lusty English." His is masculine English from head to foot. On all accounts he is admirable to men, and only distasteful to effeminate and eunuchs.

* * *

It may be objected that this classification is hard upon the Doncaster Corporation Free Library Committee. They had a copy of *Tom Jones* on their shelves and they resolved to burn it. A member took it home and read it for the first time. He reported it as immoral. In this, however, he was opposed by other members; but the majority agreed with him and resolved that the book should be burnt. We suppose the resolution has been duly carried out.

* * *

Nobody knows the name of the builder of the famous Temple of Ephesus. Everybody knows the name of the man who burnt it down. He immortalised himself by one act of vandalism. So has the Free Library Committee of the city of Doncaster.

* * *

Public Free Libraries are good things in their way, but it is easy to overestimate their value—especially now that books are so cheap that twenty classics can be bought for a pound. They provide a plethora of reading (mostly novels—and not by Fieldings) to the general public,—chiefly to young ladies who have nothing else to do with their time. But they take as much care as possible to make all the reading they supply harmless. They keep out what excites thought on great questions, not merely of the day and hour, but of all time. Books by thinkers and reformers, whose names are in intelligent people's mouths, are carefully banned. Serious readers ask for them in vain. The average man rules there absolutely, through his representatives (a local Church parson, a local Dissenting preacher, a local builder, a local tailor, a local grocer, and a local "retired" gentleman, who came from nowhere and is going to the same place). And the rule of the average man in the realm of mind is intellectual desolation and death.

G. W. FOOTE.

GOD'S ADVISERS.

The Lord's most vain and stupid friends go out
To teach his pagan children how to pray;
The god-helped pagans kill God's friends, and flout
The God whose schemes they aid, whilst thus they slay;
And all's for best, God's friends agree.

God's creatures kill God's creatures, and obey
His grinding law of change: Life, Strife, and Death;
They work and love; they preach, and hate, and pray,
And think, poor fools! that God cares aught for breath
Of infant, tiger, priest, or flea.

Does Nature's hideous strife our Reason fill
With hope that Hatred's fell Designer feels
For those whose slaughter prompts the song-bird's trill,
Or those whom tyrants crush beneath their heels?
To sharks, go bend in pray'r your knee!

A pray'r to Him that doeth all things well,
That numbers, and makes the sparrows fall,
Must shake the universe, from heav'n to hell,
With mirthful shrieks of demons, great and small—
If God, heav'n, hell, and ghosts there be.

The priests and parsons—God Almighty's staff
Of cosmical, consulting engineers—
Advising God, are fit to force a laugh
From Christ himself, the man of threats and tears,
Whose frenzied frown could blast a tree.

The foolish folk that pray—if God there be—
Were made to pray, and we were made to think
That pray'r's absurd, and yet that they and we,
Their faith and our contempt, with all things link,
Perforce, to make what is to be.

If aught we know, we know that naught is known
Of heav'nly aid—man saves himself, or dies.
Let, therefore, work, true seed of hope, be sown
On earth alone, nor waste on silent skies
The time so short for you and me.

—G. L. Mackenzie.

God is not in the world. In all business transactions there is no mention of a deity. Go into all the offices of the town you will not run against God in any of them. We live without God, we do business without God, we plant, cultivate, and harvest without God. It is only the priest and preacher who keep God in stock. The priest and preacher get their living out of the God idea and they can only live by humbugging the world into the notion that there is a God. But ask them to show their God and they stand dumb.—L. K. Washburn.

THE SOUL'S SINCERE DESIRE.

Three Philadelphia ministers were watching the score board of the last game of the world series. It was the first half of the tenth inning, and the score read: New York, 2; Boston, 1.

A large colored man attracted the attention of the ministers by his attitude and intense interest. His eyes were glued on the score board, while his hands were folded in an attitude of prayer. One of the ministers touched him gently and inquired: "Brother, what are you doing with your hands folded?"

"I'se prayin', sah," was his reply.

"For whom are you praying?" asked the minister.

Said the colored man: "For Boston, sah, for Boston! Law's sake, sah, if Boston loses I'se ruined."

THE CAT'S COMMUNION.

In order that the revival spirit might be quickened, it was arranged in a negro church, near Savannah, that the preacher should give a signal when he thought the excitement was highest, and from the attic, through a hole in the ceiling over the pulpit, the sexton was to throw down a pure white dove, whose flight around the church and over the heads of the audience was expected to provide the climax.

All went well at the start—the church was packed. The preacher's text was, "In the form of a dove," and fervidly he piled up his periods till the emotion of the congregation grew to the breaking point.

The opportune moment had arrived, the signal was given, and the packed audience was scared out of its wits on looking up to the ceiling to behold a cat growling and spitting, dangling from a string above the preacher's head.

"Whar's de dove?" the preacher called out to the sexton.

The sexton's voice came down through the opening loud enough to be heard in all parts of the building:

"Inside de cat!"

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, Regent-street, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "More 'Bradlaugh' Fables."

CROYDON PUBLIC (SMALL) HALL (George-street): 7.15, Miss K. B. Kough, "What Should We Do Without Christianity?"

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workmen's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, J. T. Lloyd, "Science and Morals."

COUNTRY.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N. S. S. (Alexandra Hall, Islington-square): 7, J. T. Arthur, "The Earth's Place in the Universe."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): Mrs. Teresa Billington Greig, 3, "No Bible in School"; 6.30, "Woman and the Church." Tea at 5.

OUTDOOR.

LEIGH (Market Place): R. Mearns, 3, "Is the Bible the Word of God?" 6.30, "Why I am a Secularist."

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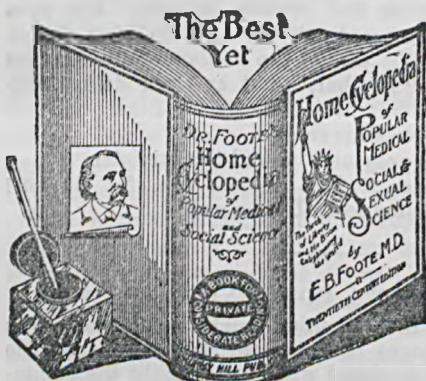
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