

THE Freethinker

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PRICE TWOPENCE

Grammars of rhetoric and grammars of logic are among the most useless furniture of a shelf. Give a boy "Robinson Crusoe." That is worth all the grammars of rhetoric and logic in the world—MACAULAY.

Milton's Plea for Liberty.

LIBERTY was not utterly unknown in England before the age of Milton. Not only was it frequently claimed by Wicklif and his followers in religion, and by the popular party in rebellion after rebellion against royal and aristocratic tyranny, but the House of Commons itself, notwithstanding the restricted suffrage and the high-handed methods of Feudalism, was always a citadel of freedom, as far as it was then capable of being understood. During the reign of the Tudors, English liberty was at a low ebb; yet there was great intellectual movement in that fateful period, and the seeds were then sown of the epoch-marking revolution of the seventeenth century, which saw the beginning of all the liberties we now enjoy. From the moment the Long Parliament met, the fate of kingcraft and priestcraft was sealed. Religion itself was, it is true, only tentatively and hesitatingly discussed by a few bold spirits; but the principle of authority was everywhere challenged, and in that principle lay the secret strength of every form of despotism. There could not be a fitter moment for a vindication of liberty, not in the style of apology, but in the lofty manner of a prophet. Fortunately, the hour had found its man. The greatest genius in England, he who is reckoned with Shakespeare a twin pillar of the mighty temple of English poetry, sprang to fulfil the task. What could be better than that the noblest of causes should be championed by the noblest of men? Milton's *Areopagitica* was the first set defence of liberty in our English tongue, and, although it has been supplemented, it can never be superseded. It is a splendid arsenal from which whole generations of the soldiers of freedom have selected their choicest weapons; Damascene blades of rhetoric that flash gloriously as they cut and parry, exquisitely fashioned stilettoes of sarcasm for close thrusts, superb long-range rifles of argument, and mighty artillery of sonorous and majestic eloquence.

Old Henry More, the Platonist, who wrote many a bulky volume himself, described his own time with disgust as "this scripturient age." The sneer is common, and it always comes from the greatest sinners. Carlyle expressed a wish that the tongues of one whole generation might be cut out, and all printing suspended, to give an age "run to tongue" an opportunity of digesting its knowledge in silence. Yet the Sage of Chelsea himself, in less splenetic moments, when the hag dyspepsia relaxed her hold upon him, allowed that "of the things which man can do or make here below, by far the most momentous, wonderful, and worthy are the things called Books," and that the noble art of printing "is like an infinitely intensified organ of speech, whereby the voice of a small transitory man may reach not only through all earthly space, but through all earthly time." Ephemeral literature may be superabundant, but every good thing has its price. How many ephemeral lives are there for one immortal? How many myriad miles of flats and bogs and swamps for

a Mont Blanc or a Chimborazo? Why complain, then, if a myriad commonplace men scribble for every man of genius? It is nature's method. Enough that the better *does* exist! The trashy books, like the trashy lives, pass and perish; but a good book, as Milton finely says, "is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up to a life beyond life."

Yet all books were once treated as interlopers, or like foreigners in a despotic country. They had to carry a passport, and conform to the most rigorous conditions on pain of capital punishment, without a trial by judge and jury. Church and State looked upon them as the chiefs of a black tribe might look upon a casual white man straying in Central Africa. They were to be closely watched, if not suppressed, and care was to be taken that they did not multiply. They only existed on sufferance, and the men who wrote them were regarded as pestilent busybodies or imps of Satan, born disturbers of the peace, and natural enemies of "the powers that be." While custom kept men placid it was easy to govern them, but who could rule them when they were set thinking? It was like sailing a ship in the Maelstrom.

As the venerable and sagacious Blackstone tells us in his *Commentaries* :—

"In England, as in other countries, the art of printing soon after its introduction, was looked upon as merely a matter of State, and subject to the coercion of the Crown. It was therefore regulated with us by the King's proclamations, prohibitions, charters of privilege, and of licence, and finally by the decrees of the Court of Star Chamber, which limited the number of printers and of presses which each should employ, and prohibited new publications unless previously approved by proper licensers."

Henry VIII., as head of the Church as well as the State, assumed absolute control over all printing, both lay and ecclesiastic. Letters Patent were at first granted for the exclusive right of printing the Bible, and to this day the Authorised Version is only issued by the King's printers. In the reign of Mary (1555) the Stationers' Company was established, with a monopoly of printing presses, but subject to the regulations of the Star Chamber. The number of men and presses was strictly limited, and nothing was to be printed without the licenser's approval. In 1585 the Star Chamber restricted all presses to London, Oxford, and Cambridge, and undertook to examine all manuscripts that were candidates for publication. Archbishop Laud is said to have instigated the first establishment of regular licensers, a trick of tyranny borrowed from the Inquisition. According to the decree of the Star Chamber in 1637, all books were to be examined before being entered with the Stationers' Company, by some of the following officials: the Lord Chief Baron or one of the Chief Justices for law, the principal Secretaries of State for history and politics, and the Archbishop of Canterbury (that is, the noble Laud himself) for divinity, physic, philosophy, and poetry. The number of master printers was limited to twenty, and of printing presses to forty; and restrictions were put upon type-founding. Laud was evidently resolved that the flock God had given him should not suffer from book-headache.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued)

The Natural History of Religion.

The Divine Mystery. By Allen Upward. (Garden City Press.) 10s. 6d.

IT is unquestionable that there is a strong spirit of religious reaction abroad. It is just as certain that the naturalistic study of religion is everywhere making headway. Nor need the two things be unconnected. The reaction may be largely due to the best brains leaving the old creed, and so giving the intolerant elements always present a chance of activity. And at the same time this would give the more scientific mind a freer chance of following its bent. However that may be, a great number of works are now being published on the subject of religion that clearly advocate the naturalistic point of view. They accept religion as a natural fact, but not an eternal one. It is associated with human nature, but it is not essential to it. The whole of the mental attitude of these writers is governed by the conclusion that the study of religion is the study of an illusion—an illusion that is universal in its extent, important in its consequences, but none the less an illusion. They do not inquire whether religion is true; they take for granted that it is not. They merely inquire how it is that people came to have religious beliefs, and what were the conditions that determined their perpetuation. Explanation has become synonymous with annihilation.

A year or so ago I noticed in these columns a very striking work by Mr. Allen Upward called *The New Word*. That work was a very strong appeal on behalf of truth, with a powerful indictment of religion in general and of Christianity in particular, in cultivating its opposite. Mr. Upward has now issued a volume planned to form the first of a series of three, intended to elucidate the history and significance of Christianity, which he calls "the greatest revolution in history." There is a sense in which this description might pass, but I do not think that this is Mr. Upward's meaning. Christians are fond of using this expression because it gives to their creed an increased importance. But in reality the revolution effected by Christianity, as such, was very slight. All the elements of the Christian superstition were present in the old Pagan Empire, and these slowly gained in strength during many centuries. Christianity did not so much effect a revolution as it marked the culmination of a series of changes that had been long in progress. The study of this "revolution" consequently becomes a study in sociology. It is a study of those social conditions that gave to certain slowly developing ideas an ultimately commanding influence.

Apart from this criticism, one may say that Mr. Upward has written an extremely suggestive work. And it is not the less valuable because he so often suggests a difference of opinion—at least in my own case—on the minor details of a thesis with which one is, in the main, in agreement. For instance, Mr. Upward finds—as do all other serious investigators—the origin of religious ideas in the ignorance of primitive mankind. And it may also be accepted that the origin of a special religious caste—wizards, priests, or prophets—began in certain individuals being credited with greater influence over natural or supernatural forces. But I do not know that this will justify Mr. Upward's conclusion that the wizard was originally a weather-wizard. There is no evidence that primitive man is much more concerned with the weather than with other things. It is true that in course of time the function of a weather prophet becomes a very general one, but that is mainly because human ignorance concerning the weather is more persistent than his ignorance concerning other things. Even among ourselves we continue with prayer for a good harvest, long after we have dropped all faith in prayer as affecting a number of other things. The truth is that in the history of man religious ideas are associated longest with just those things concerning which it is difficult to get precise knowledge. They die soonest where knowledge is

most easily available. That is why we pray that a man may be cured of a fever, but never that a severed leg may be restored.

The worship of the living, says Mr. Upward, is older than the worship of the dead. This is quite true, although it may easily be that we should have no worship of the living had it not been for the dead. It seems beyond reasonable question that the idea of a "soul" animating the body was first suggested to man by the phenomena of dreaming, and received powerful enforcement by the fact of death with its close superficial resemblance to sleep. Once this notion is abroad, it receives, naturally, all sorts of queer developments. Moreover, Mr. Upward is departing a little from the evidence when he says that "the spirits of cowards and fools did not receive worship, but only the spirits of the brave and wise." There is no evidence that I know of to support this view. The fact seems to be that primitive man worships almost anything without special regard to moral or mental qualities. A crocodile or the spirit that is supposed to send a disease will receive the same homage as agencies of a more benevolent character. What does impress primitive man is *power*. Anything that affects him, that has power to injure him or help him, may become an object of worship. It is only later, with a greater degree of moral and social development, that the good and the wise become specially selected as objects of religious worship. Religion is not only deeply rooted in fear, but when the element of fear weakens, religious beliefs usually lose their force.

One very pleasing feature of Mr. Upward's book is that it does not hesitate to affiliate the Christian theology to early and contemporary savage practices. The chief interest of research in this direction lies in showing how the Christian theology has its origin in savagery, and is, in fact, a mere continuation of savage beliefs under other names and forms. The vast majority of writers, while pointing to this conclusion, for various reasons, fail to state it explicitly. They stop short at the very point where their studies become of the greatest value. Of course, informed readers draw the inevitable moral, but they are, unfortunately, few. Mr. Upward escapes this reproach. He points out, for example, how the Christian doctrine of the Eucharist is no more than a form of the ancient ceremony of god-eating, and that the words, "This is my body" and "This is my blood," might have been spoken, and probably were spoken, over many ancient religious ceremonies that Christians now call "savage" or "heathen." And, taking the old folk-poem of *John Barleycorn*—too lengthy to quote here—he shows how, verse by verse, the visit of the three kings, the killing of John, his burial, and resurrection, with the drinking of his blood, repeats the legend that thousands of Churches retain as a veritable historic fact. Mr. Upward well says:—

"There is an awful instinct inherited from thousands of years of Pagan Culture behind the gruesome phrases of our popular hymns: 'The water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed,' and 'There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins.' When we hear language like that smiting the walls of glorious cathedrals, the Gothic walls seem to melt away, and we stand once more on the Pictish hillside among the ring of naked savages who strike their knives into the dying Genius (God) and smear themselves with the red ooze. The civilised conscience must not be expected to share this joy."

Behind every religion the savage; behind every priest the medicine-man. That is the true lesson of anthropology.

Mr. Upward is also well advised in bringing back the doctrine of the Divine Birth to its roots in savage belief. Carefully analysed the doctrine of the divine birth of Jesus is only a survival from the time when all birth was divine—that is, when all children were believed to be the incarnation of the tribal ghosts. Mr. E. S. Hartland has shown that even to-day there are still existing tribes of people who have only the vaguest idea as to the father's share in the procreation of children. There has never been a

doctrine of a divine mother, because a woman's share in the birth of a child was obvious. But the man's share—owing to the intervening period of gestation—was a slow discovery. It is a trifle far-fetched to say, as Mr. Upward does, that "Heredity first presented itself to the savage mind as a form of resurrection"; but it may be taken for granted that the belief of the Australian blacks, that the new-born child is the "avatar" of one of the tribal ghosts, represents a once common frame of mind. On this basis is built both the general doctrine of reincarnation and the Christian doctrine of the divine birth of Jesus—the latter being far nearer the savage prototype than the former. And as it is common for deposed gods to become demons, so we find in mediæval Christendom numerous stories of demons begetting children on the bodies of witches. Between the child who is the product of a demon and a witch, and the one who results from intercourse between woman and a deity, the distinction, from the point of view of a scientific anthropology, is unimportant.

I do not agree with Mr. Upward that the simplest origin to ascribe to asceticism is "the practice of putting to death the aged members of the clan." The religious origin of this practice is clear. It is connected with the notion of the ghost world, the object being to send one's relatives into the next world before reaching a state of decrepitude. Asceticism in origin is part of the practice noted by Mr. Upward in the earlier portion of his book, namely, the practice of producing abnormal states of mind as a means of intercourse with the supernatural. Of this practice, fasting and self-torture are the most common and the most persistent form. It is at the root of the world-wide opposition between "worldly" pleasure and "spiritual" development. The ascetic is everywhere credited with a closer communion with the supernatural. His is the one prominent form of the religious ideal, because the ascetic has been a powerful cause in the perpetuation of religious belief.

I have been dwelling more on points of disagreement than I had intended when I began, but it ought to be said in justice to the author that these disagreements do not affect the main thesis of the book. Mr. Upward's work is of the best kind, because it not only suggests many agreements, but also awakens almost innumerable lines of inquiry. In his main object Mr. Upward has undoubtedly succeeded—and that is to provide a synopsis of those fundamental conceptions upon which Christianity, as a distinct religion, is built. In the two volumes that are to succeed *The Divine Mystery*, Mr. Upward will, I presume, be concerned with the actual formation of the Christian religion. And the affiliation of Christian doctrines to primitive religious ideas is exactly what the world now needs most. The spade work has been well done and the ground well prepared. Substantially, we know the origin of religious ideas. We know how they originated in the fear-haunted brain of the primitive savage. The pressing need to-day is for a clear and explicit description of the way in which these took shape as Christian teaching, and of the sociological causes that enabled that religion to rule the Western world.

C. COHEN.

The Alleged Manliness of Jesus.

EXTRAVAGANCE is one of the most prominent characteristics of the Christian pulpit. This is to be accounted for by the fact that most of the subjects discussed by the preacher are of such a nature as to render a moderate treatment of them extremely difficult, if not impossible. They are chiefly subjects concerning which absolutely nothing is known. There is no theme on which the pulpit speaks with such glowing eloquence and offers such endless information as on that of the existence, character, and works of God, simply because there is no other theme about which it is so profoundly ignorant.

The preacher would never dream of talking about a brother man whom he knows in the intimate, familiar fashion in which he talks about God whom he does not know. He undertakes to tell us, not only what the Divine Being is doing to-day, but also what he did in eternity, before the Universe was created; not only what he does and has done, but also what he thinks and feels about everything both under and above the sun. He never hesitates to assure his hearers that he is in possession of all the Divine counsels and knows exactly what the Lord thinks of dancing, theatre-going, card-playing, and Sunday golf. Indeed, he has the audacity to call himself God's man, God's spokesman, or God's viceroy; and whenever he enters the pulpit he pretends to deliver God's message. We read the other day of a man who had been pastor of one church for the space of forty years; and during that period he had given his people between four and five thousand messages from God, which means that for forty years he had played the liar, speaking familiarly and falsely about and in the name of a being concerning whom he knew nothing at all.

The extravagance of the pulpit extends to all subjects. In the *Christian World Pulpit* for November 26 there is a sermon by the Rev. H. J. Nicholas, an American divine, on "The Manliness of Christ," which bristles from beginning to end with wild, whimsical, irresponsible statements. The very text chosen betrays the reverend gentleman's lack of sound judgment: "I find no fault in him.....Behold the man" (John xix. 4, 5). There is no allusion to manliness in those words, nor to anything else upon which a discourse on character could legitimately be based. We are not surprised, therefore, to find the whole sermon heavy-laden with unfounded and unverifiable assumptions. The central assumption is that "we go for the highest type of manhood to Jesus Christ, for he was at once God and man." We do nothing of the kind, for the simple reason that a God-man is a mythological being, for whom history has no place. It is perfectly absurd to say that the Gospel Jesus "represented manhood in its ideal condition realised." It is equally silly to assert that "he was the highest type of manhood physically," or that "he must have been of a perfect physical nature." As to his physical constitution, the Gospels furnish no information whatever. The words usually regarded as having been fulfilled in him describe him as having neither "form nor comeliness," so that when "we see him there is no beauty that we should desire him," and "as one from whom men hide their face, he was despised, and we esteemed him not." We admit that there is no warrant whatever for applying such terms to him; but there is even less foundation for Mr. Nicholas's assumption that he was physically perfect.

Equally groundless is the claim that Jesus "was the highest type of manhood in his manner." Mr. Nicholas describes his manner thus:—

"Bold without being brazen; humble, but not servile; gentle, but not given to weakness; strong without being tyrannical; helpful, but not intrusive; religious, without hypocrisy; devout, but not gloomy; social, without frivolity; firm, but not unreasonable; chivalrous, but not self-seeking; submissive without compromise; righteous, but not rigorous; truthful, but not blunt; optimistic, but not obsessed."

Words, words, nothing but words. As a matter of fact, the Gospel Jesus often showed exceedingly bad manners. His treatment of his mother as a boy of twelve, and again as an adult was so unfilial, and his conduct generally so wayward as to drive his relations to the conclusion that he was insane. Mr. Nicholas affirms that he was charitable with charlatans and fair with foes. We ask, on what occasions? Where are the instances? We know that in controversy the Gospel Jesus was much given to cursing and swearing. Read Matthew xxiii. and you will see him in a temper, calling the Scribes and Pharisees all sorts of offensive names, such as "serpents," "offspring of vipers," "hypocrites," "blind guides." You cannot conceive of a fair-minded debater saying

to his opponents: "Ye are from beneath; I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world" (John viii. 23). It is impossible to read such passages impartially without arriving at the conviction that Jesus was by no means the highest type of manhood in his manners. A loving son and brother would not have refused to see his mother and brethren who had probably come a long way with the object of getting into affectionate converse with him for a few moments. Jesus not only declined to receive them but cruelly denied the relationship between him and them. He was above all earthly ties and bonds, being the second man from heaven.

It is instructive to note that Mr. Nicholas, while claiming Jesus as the highest type of manhood the world has ever seen, fails to show us that ideal manhood in contact with the world. Nothing is easier than to paint an ideal character, but what we want to see is character in action. Up to his thirtieth year, with one doubtful exception, we know nothing of Jesus of Nazareth. When Mr. Nicholas declares that "he was a craftsman continually following the trade of his father and helping him in his shop," he is merely drawing upon his imagination. History there is none to attest his statement. The story of Jesus' home life at Nazareth is not told. What his parents, brothers and sisters, and neighbors thought of him, we have no means of ascertaining. Do we know much more about him during his public ministry? The Gospels deal with him only in his capacities as teacher, miracle-worker, and healer; on the subject of his private life and character they are entirely silent. Mr. Nicholas does not even attempt to analyse his manhood, though he talks grandiloquently about its being developed in the home, the shop, in teaching and in service, and tested in the wilderness by Satan, when craving food for body and mind, and particularly when cruelly persecuted and misrepresented by his enemies; but he deliberately ignores certain expressions in the Gospels, because they belie his picture of Jesus. He quotes the words, "Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again." If to revile signifies to address people with abusive, opprobrious, scandalous, and contemptuous language, Jesus was certainly guilty of reviling. He reviled the lawyers; he reviled the national leaders; he reviled the rich, though he often dined with them; and he reviled all who did not believe in him. His passiveness was purely an imaginary virtue. Mr. Nicholas alleges that his manhood was gloriously triumphant to the very last; but surely the reverend gentleman forgets the Garden of Gethsemane. His courage completely deserted him there, and he whimpered like a coward as he contemplated what lay before him. He shrank from his fate, and besought his Father to relieve him of the necessity of meeting it. The author of Hebrews states that he "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death." Mr. Nicholas observes that "he is the Divine square and compass for the measurement of every other character"; but that is not true. As we watch him in the garden, his sweat like great drops of blood falling to the ground, in an agony unspeakable imploring for a door of escape, we are reminded of Xenophon's description of the courage of Socrates after the sentence of death had been passed upon him:—

"It is indeed acknowledged that no man, of all that are remembered, ever endured death with greater glory; for he was obliged to live thirty days after his sentence, because the Delian festival happened in that month, and the law allowed no one to be publicly put to death until the sacred deputation should return from Delos; and during that time he was seen by all his friends living in no other way than at any preceding period; and, let it be observed, throughout all the former part of his life he had been admired beyond all men for the cheerfulness and tranquillity with which he lived. How could anyone have died more nobly than thus? Or what death could be more honorable than that which any man might most honorably undergo? Or what death could be happier than the most honorable?" (*Memorabilia*, p. 149).

Jesus' courage failed him, not only in Gethsemane, but also on the cross, as is testified by the cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Socrates was a much greater and stronger man than Jesus, though he never claimed to be more than a man. Of course, the Jesus Christ portrayed by Mr. Nicholas never lived at all. He is a theological creation, and nothing more. But though the Gospel Jesus is represented as being the Word of God become flesh, he is anything but a perfect character. Whenever he comes to a trying pass in his career he utterly breaks down, crying; and whenever opponents stand in his way, his wrath kindles, and he curses them saying, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" The divines have made an idol of him, and our business is to smash the idol, and make its worship impossible.

J. T. LLOYD.

"Wait Till You Come to Die."

"Why does not God give me the evidence? They say he has. In what? In an inspired book. But I do not understand it as they do. Must I be false to my understanding? They say: 'When you come to die you will be sorry you did not.' Will I be sorry when I come to die that I did not live a hypocrite? Will I be sorry I did not say I was a Christian when I was not? Will the fact that I was honest put a thorn in the pillow of death? God cannot forgive me for that. They say when he was in Jerusalem he forgave his murderers. Now he won't forgive an honest man for differing with him on the subject of the Trinity. They say that God says to me, 'Forgive your enemies.' I say, 'All right, I do'; but he says 'I will damn mine.' God should be consistent. If he wants me to forgive my enemies, he should forgive his."—COLONEL INGERSOLL, *The Dying Creed*, p. 24.

"Cases of recantation, if they were ever common, which does not appear to be true, are now exceedingly rare; so rare, indeed, that they are never heard of except in anonymous tracts, which are evidently concocted for the glory of God rather than for the edification of Man. Sceptics are at present numbered by thousands, and they can nearly always secure at their bedside the presence of friends who share their unbelief. Every week the Freethought journals report quietly and as a matter of course, the peaceful end of 'infidels' who, having lived without hypocrisy, have died without fear. They are frequently buried by their heterodox friends, and never a week passes without the Secular Burial Service, or some other appropriate words, being read by sceptics over a sceptic's grave."—G. W. FOOTE, *Infidel Death Beds* (1888), pp. 6-7.

"These their idle tales of dying horrors."—T. CARLYLE, *Essay on Voltaire*.

IT has been my lot, upon several occasions, to be told—to the accompaniment of a warning finger—that it was all very well for me to oppose the belief in God and the Bible *now*, but my sentiments would be very different when I came to die. It is the sort of thing one expects to hear, and does hear, from Salvation Army orators. But the people we are speaking of are not Salvationists, neither are they conspicuous for religious fervor; they attend no place of worship, and in the ordinary affairs of life are shrewd and capable, quick to grasp a fact, and see through a fallacy.

This groundless belief is more widely held than many Freethinkers are aware of; courtesy restrains many from giving utterance to the belief; fear of ridicule restrains others. I have been acquainted with men for years before discovering they held it.

It is worth while to examine the cause of this belief in the miserable end of infidels and unbelievers. There is no need to go into the facts of the matter; that has already been done by our Editor, in his admirable *Infidel Death-Beds*, in which the true facts as to the dying moments of all the best-known unbelievers are given from the best authorities.

Before proceeding to dissect this ancient belief, it will be as well to analyse the meaning and application of the word "Infidel."

Dr. Wace—a Doctor of Theology and the head of a college for training clergy for the Church—once told the late Professor Huxley that, instead of

calling himself an Agnostic, he ought to use the older and more "unpleasant" name of "Infidel." The Professor, in declining to adopt Dr. Wace's suggestion, caustically remarked that—

"'Infidel' is a term of reproach, which Christians and Mohammedans, in their modesty, agree to apply to those who differ from them. If he had only thought of it, Dr. Wace might have said 'miscreant,' which, with the same etymological signification, has the advantage of being still more 'unpleasant' to the persons to whom it is applied. But why should a man be expected to call himself a 'miscreant' or an 'infidel'?"*

He goes on to remark that the earliest Christians, up to twenty or thirty years after the Crucifixion, would have considered Dr. Wace himself an infidel. Professor Huxley relates how, when visiting the Hazar Mosque in Cairo—in ignorance that he should have been provided with proper authority—he was surrounded by a swarm of angry Mohammedan students, and he observes:—

"If I had known Arabic, I suspect that 'dog of an infidel' would have been by no means the most 'unpleasant' of the epithets showered upon me, before I could explain and apologise for the mistake. If I had had the pleasure of Dr. Wace's company on that occasion, the indiscriminating followers of the Prophet would, I am afraid, have made no difference between us; not even if they had known that he was the head of an orthodox Christian seminary" (p. 234).

Moreover, says Huxley:—

"I do not care much what I am called by other people, and if I had by my side all those who since the Christian era have been called infidels by other folk, I could not desire better company. If these are my ancestors, I prefer, with the old Frank, to be with them wherever they are."†

The reason why Freethinkers object to the term "Infidel" is because Christians have attached a sinister meaning to the word which it did not originally possess. Any etymological dictionary will give the derivation of the word, from *fides*—faith, and *in*—not, meaning not of the orthodox, or prevailing faith. But, like the word "Miscreant," which originally only meant "misbeliever," it has come, in popular estimation, to mean one who rejects the moral law with the divine law; and, as the Freethinker does not reject the moral law, and, in fact, rejects the divine law in the name of "Infidel" law, he naturally objects to the name of "Infidel" for the same reason that he would object to the name "Miscreant."

But, to return to our subject, why should the Freethinker be afraid to die? If he does not believe in the continuation of his existence in another life, what has he to be afraid of? Again, if he does not believe in the existence of an angry God who invented a hell to put him into, how can he be afraid of him?

The fact is, it is the Christian who has every reason to fear death; for him it means the continuance of his existence either in heaven or hell, and he can never be certain which. His Savior is reported to have explicitly declared, "Straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew vii. 14). And, again, "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matthew xx. 16). According to this deliverance, we may expect, at the judgment day, to see Voltaire and Paine leading the way, while the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury will come under the heading "also ran." It is the universal teaching of all Christian sects and Churches that if a man is sure of his own salvation, he is in a very parlous state. He is declared to be a Pharisee, accused of spiritual pride, and generally considered to be on the broad road to destruction.

Some of the greatest believers have had the gravest doubt of their own salvation, and the thought has embittered their last hours. Poor Cowper, the Christian poet, who led a most blameless life, upon being asked how he felt, is said to have replied,

"Feel? I feel unutterable despair." Dr. Johnson feared he might be damned. "What do you mean by damned?" was the soothing question of a bystander. "Sent to hell and punished everlastingly" was the grim answer of the dying man. The great Cromwell was harassed by similar doubts and fears.

It is one of the worst features of this creed that the fear of eternal punishment has poisoned the lives and embittered the deaths of multitudes of tender and sensitive men and women, whose moral conduct has been beyond reproach, while the real criminals suffer nothing from these terrors which are supposed to deter them from their crimes. As Colonel Ingersoll, with mordant irony, has remarked:—

"All kinds of criminals, except infidels, meet death with reasonable serenity. As a rule, there is nothing in the death of a pirate to cast any discredit on his profession. The murderer on the scaffold, with a priest on either side, smilingly exhorts the multitude to meet him in heaven. The man who has succeeded in making his home a hell meets death without a quiver, provided he has never expressed any doubt as to the divinity of Christ or the eternal 'procession' of the Holy Ghost."‡

Compare the edifying end of Peter Smith, a murderer, as described by a New York paper, against the end of the other eminent and pious Christians we have quoted. It is as follows:—

"Deep from the heart of this noble priest prayers kept wending their way up to the throne of grace. Frequently the voice of Smith blended with that of his spiritual adviser as he joined him in asking for the mercy of God on the sins of his past life. When not listening to the consolations that the prayer-book and ritual of the Catholic Church afforded, Smith paced up and down the corridor with the death-watch, smoking cigars furnished by these kind-hearted deputy sheriffs. The smoke of their havanas united with his and formed, as it were, an incense that wafted the religious words that he not infrequently uttered to the great beyond."‡

This murderer died in the odor of sanctity, peacefully, quite easy in his mind; confident in the declaration of his Savior that there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just men,§ and looking forward with joyous anticipation to a triumphant reception in Abraham's bosom.

What a beautiful religion! A religion which brings torment to the last moments of the tender and sensitive Cowper, who could not hurt a fly or a worm, and yet brings comfort, solace, and assured salvation to the wretch whose life has been a curse to everyone connected with him, and who, after a life of debauchery and crime, at last pays the penalty on the scaffold, from which he generally forgives his enemies, beseeches everyone to embrace the religion in which he finds so much joy, and invites them to meet him in the kingdom of heaven.

Surely the corrosive acid of Swift, in his most man-hating moments, never penned a more biting satire of human imbecility, not even in that horrible satire on the human race, the *Voyage to the Houyhnhnms*.

Science knows nothing of personal immortality, or of a future life beyond the grave. The belief arose in the dreams and illusions of primitive man during the ages of deepest ignorance. It was easy to believe in heaven, where the gods dwelt, when the sky was believed to be a solid blue vault, with little holes in it for the stars to shine through, and windows through which the gods let the rain come down.

It was easy to believe in hell, when it was believed that the earth was flat, like a table; that hell was underneath, and that volcanoes were openings into the infernal regions. One of the questions recorded in a school-book of the Middle Ages runs,

* "The Art of Dying," *Nineteenth Century*, July, 1884; cited in *Freethinker*, July 8, 1894.

† *Oration on Voltaire*, pp. 24-5.

‡ The (New York) *Evening Telegram*, May 5, 1887; cited in the *Freethinker*, June 26, 1887.

§ Luke xv. 7.

* T. H. Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition*, pp. 233-4.

† *Science and Christian Tradition*, p. 230.

"Why is the sun red at its going down?" the answer being "Because it looketh down into hell."

But science has destroyed the crystal vault, and all the gods have fallen into the void. Science has demonstrated that the earth, instead of being flat, is a ball travelling in an orbit, and that there is no room for hell or the Devil and his angels. Science, by destroying the belief in a future life, and in gods and devils, has robbed death of its terrors.

(To be continued.) W. MANN.

Sir Oliver Lodge on "Continuity."

If the address delivered by Sir Oliver Lodge before the British Association for the Advancement of Science is carefully studied, it will be observed that the distinguished physicist, instead of presenting proofs to show that science had finally succumbed to metaphysics, was simply asking for a hearing from his colleagues.

His words, "Allow us, anyhow, to make the attempt; give us a fair field; let us try what we can do in the psychic regions, etc.," is the language of one who is pleading for sympathy rather than of one who thinks he has humbled science at the feet of theology. His distinguished colleagues gave Sir Oliver Lodge not only a fair but also an earnest hearing.

But the consensus of opinion was that the address contained nothing that was in any way new or startling. "Sensational disclosures expected in some quarters were not forthcoming," writes the *London Times*. One of the scientists present at the meeting characterised the address of Sir Oliver as "a rhapsody on faith."

Sir Oliver himself, in stating the position of the men of science on the value of psychical research, said that "scientific men have not universally accepted any conclusions—not even telepathy." Again, Sir Oliver speaks of running "the risk of annoying my present hearers."

Let me say a word about Sir Oliver, and then about what I regard as the reasonable attitude on the interesting question of a life beyond the grave. Sir Oliver Lodge is a distinguished physicist. In his own department he has no superiors. It is admitted also that Sir Oliver is a confirmed Darwinian, and, though he leans toward the supernatural, he is by no means an orthodox believer. There is not an evangelical church that could consistently admit him into its fellowship.

Between the "God" advocated by Sir Oliver and that of the Bible or the creeds there is absolutely no resemblance. Yet a pinch of incense he occasionally throws upon the old altars.

Sir Oliver has been a member of the Psychical Research Society for thirty years, and has been converted to the belief in the spirit world. He thinks that a communication between the living and the dead has been established. This is also the claim of the Spiritualists. Spiritualism is nothing new.

But did the distinguished scientist present a single fact about disincarnate intelligence which could be considered adequate? Speaking for myself, I cannot affirm immortality or eternal life.

But not to affirm it does not mean to deny it. To be able to deny it I must understand what I am denying. But I cannot understand eternal life; therefore I refrain from either affirming or denying it. In the meantime I am more than willing to listen to arguments from those who think they are equal to the task of solving the problem. But will there be any morality in the world if we leave the question of a hereafter undecided? Well, whether there will be or not has nothing to do with our ability or inability to prove an eternal hereafter.

One of the points in Sir Oliver's address which seems to have given great comfort to the metaphysicians was the difference between appearance and the reality.

The world appears to be flat, but it is not; the sun appears to set, but it does not; the planets appear like points of fire—twinkling candles—but they are vast bodies. In the same way death appears to be the end of life, but it is not—there is no end to life. But this is defective reasoning.

We know the world is not flat by actual demonstration. We know the truth about the stars by the help of the telescope and mathematics.

Death appears to be the end of life, and it is, until Sir Oliver Lodge or the clergy shall prove that it is not.

It has been demonstrated that the loss through disease of certain cerebral cells would destroy memory and affection, as well as thought. Is the "soul" then a cell of the brain? But whatever our guesses about the life beyond the grave, it is in our power to pitch the life that now is to the height of our ideals.—*M. Mangasarian: Truthseeker* (New York).

Acid Drops.

Mr. Lloyd George, in his "Holloway Empire" speech, sounded the praises of Nonconformists for their love of religious liberty. We deny, however, that they ever had any such affection. They object to persecution, it is true, when they are the sufferers. Not otherwise. Hardly a whisper is raised amongst them against the late epidemic revival of the Blasphemy Laws. It is nothing to them that Freethinkers go to prison for "offences" against Christianity. What they love is not liberty but self-assertion.

We beg to ask Mr. Lloyd George a serious question. How is it that "blasphemy" prosecutions always occur under Liberal governments? We are not carrying on a discussion. We state a fact, and ask a question. And all we desire is a plain answer.

The Blasphemy Laws ought long ago to have been treated as obsolete. The late Mr. Justice Stephen said that they probably were so, in his *Digest of the Criminal Law* before the epoch-marking events of 1883. But our own prosecution and imprisonment for "blasphemy" undeceived him on this point. The fact is that laws which can be used against unpopular principles and unpopular men can never be regarded as obsolete until they are repealed—if we may be permitted that Hibernicism. There are scores of old laws which really are obsolete, because nobody ever thinks of invoking them, but this obsolescence is easily explained. They are not laws which one class of people could use to the detriment of another class. Such laws are no use to anybody—not even bigots. But the Blasphemy Laws are a perpetual appeal to Christian fanaticism and malice against Freethinkers. That is why they should and must be abolished altogether. The only remedy is "Repeal."

Abraham Arthur Ascoli, a pensioned policeman, committed suicide by hanging at St. George's Church, Westcombe Park, East Greenwich, where he was employed as verger. Of course the "sacred edifice" had to be reconsecrated. But as there was no money in it, being a purely domestic affair, the Bishop of Southwark did not officiate personally, but sent the Archdeacon of Lewisham as his proxy.

God was cleared out of that church by one man and brought back by another. And the people who believe, and practise that, put other people in prison for "blasphemy"! A mad world, my masters!

The National Church League, with Sir Edward Clarke at its head, calls upon the Archbishops and Bishops of the Church of England to save it from the Romanising party who are placing a volume called *St. Swithun's Prayer Book* in the hands of candidates for confirmation. This book is said to contain devotions "involving invocation of and confession to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints; teaches the doctrine of the Mass; enforces the duty of private confession to a priest; and contains suggestions as to topics of confession calculated to defile the minds of children." If all this is true, why are "blasphemy" prosecutions confined to Freethinkers?

"To be or not to be?" Shall the "Tango" be prohibited or not? is being debated at the Vatican. What a question to trouble the Pope's head with at his time of life and in his state of health! But nothing has ever been too large or too small for the Papacy. It is like the trunk of an elephant, which pulls down trees and picks up pins.

The German Emperor has given three thousand marks to the London Missionary Society. It is not an open gift. The Kaiser knows his business too well for that. It is towards the work of two of the Society's missionaries (Germans, of course) in Samoa.

In a letter to the *Times* lately, Dr. Clifford sought to reconcile his opposition to Catholicism with his advocacy of Home Rule. His argument is perfectly sound. He states that the liberty of political action which he demands for himself he claims also for all his fellow-citizens, "irrespective of their religious faith and ecclesiastical associations." But what Dr. Clifford rightly concedes to Catholics he would unjustly withhold from Freethinkers. To the latter he persistently opposes the giving of political justice. If there were a grain of consistency in his constitution, he would be as zealous an advocate of Secular Education as he now is of Irish Home Rule. He has been a great leader in the movement for the Disestablishment of the Church; but he is

cowardly afraid of identifying himself with the principle of the disestablishment of religion in State-aided schools. Consistency is not Dr. Clifford's jewel.

The Rev. H. B. Freeman, of Burton-on-Trent, told the Church Lads' Brigade, the other day, that God is an object of fear, and that brave soldiers always owe their heroism to their fear of the Almighty. There were signs that this wholesome fear of God was declining to-day. This the reverend gentleman greatly deplored. Naturally, for in proportion as the fear of God dies down, reverence for the parson vanishes. So long as the Heavenly Judge is feared, his earthly representatives will be held in some degree of awe. Mr. Freeman need not lose heart, however, because superstition dies hard; but, hallelujah, it is dying.

Apropos of our note last week on the conditions of Dublin and the religion of the people, here is a further word worth bearing in mind. It comes from a religious writer in the *Church Family Newspaper*. He says: "It was assumed that nothing could shake the faith of the Dublin laborers in their Church and its ministers. Industries were raised on this staple fact." Quite so; and what the conditions were under which these people lived the world has only just learned. Those interested knew that things would be all right so long as the people could be kept devoted to their "Church and its ministers." It is when the alliance is broken that people ask themselves whether social conditions are all they ought to be. Some of our ardent social reformers will yet be forced to recognise that all attempted social reform will fall short of effectiveness so long as the "great lying creed" is left dominating the minds of large masses of people.

While on her way to church, Ellen Good, of Hackney, fell from a tram and died from a fractured skull. Probably "Providence" was too busy calculating the number of idle words being used, not to mention the fall of the sparrows.

"Some of the world's rulers could make bread and butter by mechanical toil if the necessity arose," says the *Daily Mirror*. Very likely. But how many of them could earn more? The "Lord's anointed ones" do better to rely on a Civil List, with every item payable in advance.

In view of the sudden interest of the clergy in economics, it is interesting to find a writer in a recent issue of the *Referee* calling attention to the miserable wages paid to church organists, which, he says, is "an insult to the profession," and he calls upon the Incorporated Society of Musicians to interfere on behalf of the organists.

England has probably the most disgusting, lickspittle press in the world. There are papers that encourage "King" Carson in his impudent preparations for flat rebellion, and others that encourage Mrs. Pankhurst in instigating her amazons to burn down the property of their fellow-citizens for "political" reasons, but none of them has a word to say in protest against the imprisonment of poor sceptics for discussing Christianity in the language of their class, without annoyance to anyone except super-sensitive policemen. These journals pander to all superstitions, social as well as religious, and especially to the monarchical superstition, under which the King is fairly on a level with the Deity, and all royal persons whatsoever are above arch-angels, principalities, and powers. There was a very pretty sample of this in the *Daily Mirror* the other day (Nov. 28). The front page contained an alleged "new and beautiful birthday portrait of Queen Alexandra." It represented a tall, slim lady, a little, if at all, over twenty years of age. A fake photograph, of course, designed to show that royal ladies never grow old, but always retain "enduring youth and grace." This nauseous sycophancy was accompanied by the statement that the Dowager Queen was celebrating "her birthday" on the following Monday. No allusion was made to the number of the said birthday. It would never do to print such semi-blasphemous figures.

The *Mirror* went on to quote the "memorable poem" in which Tennyson welcomed the Princess Alexandra, as she then was, to England as the bride of the then Prince of Wales, who died as King Edward the Seventh. The "Welcome to Alexandra" is dated March 7, 1863. Tennyson welcomed her as "the sea-kings' daughter" coming to marry "the heir of the kings of the sea." But the *Mirror* must print it in the singular, and with capital letters, as "the Sea-King's" daughter—as though Tennyson were referring to her father, the King of Denmark, instead of to the old Vikings. What can be expected, however, but mental

sloppiness of the "loyal" fakers of Queen Alexandra's portrait?

Rev. Jams Orr, Professor of Theology in the United Free Church College, Glasgow, left £4,284 7s. 1d. Not a big fortune, but a fair-sized one for Scotland where even the godly are thrifty.

£800,000 has been collected in fifteen days in the United States for the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations. The success of the effort is said to be due to "organisation." The begging was comprehensive and pertinacious. It appears to have been directed by millionaires, including Mr. George Perkins, formerly partner of the late Pierpont Morgan. Millionaires know the value of Christianity. They patronise it for the same reason that Constantine made it the religion of the Roman Empire.

Christianity is the only religion that gives a man fortitude in trouble and consolation in suffering. Yet the Rev. William Charles, a retired Nonconformist minister of Hawthorn House, Ravenhill, near Swansea, was found hanging from a rope in the bathroom.

Bramwell Booth has made it up with his brother Ballington Booth. The family quarrel lasted seventeen years. How these godly people do keep it up!

Evan Roberts's old father has been to Leicester, but he failed to obtain an interview with his son, who is either a lunatic or worse. Nor even the cry of his sick mother to see her boy before she dies makes any impression upon him. He seems to be following Jesus Christ literally by hating his father and mother.

We are glad to find the *Christian Commonwealth* pointing out, in the course of an interview with Professor Gilbert Murray, that the great master of Greek literature "acknowledges himself a Freethinker." Those who are acquainted with Professor Murray's writings—including, of course, his wonderful translation of Euripides—hardly needed this assurance. We may say that none but a Freethinker could have given these translations of one of the greatest of the Greek Freethinkers. On his own account the *Christian Commonwealth* reviewer adds: "I gathered that this meant that he had not become associated with any organised form of religion. He stands, indeed, for freedom in thought much as the makers of the French Revolution—Condorcet and the rest—claimed of thought." We do not know how the interviewer gathered that Professor Murray's freethinking only meant that he was not attached to any Church; there is nothing in the reported interview that would give one that impression, and one may safely say that if anything had been said to that end it would not have been omitted.

Professor Murray pointed out that the golden age of Athens was a period of extraordinary vitality, and mentioned as an illustration that their books of science remained the chief text-books for some 1,500 years. This is true, with slight modifications, but it is quite as much a condemnation of the influence of Christianity as it is of the power of Greek thinking. The truth is that with the advance made by Greek science, and the fruitful speculations bequeathed to the world, there was no reason why their writings should not have been superseded in a couple of centuries. But superstition, as usual, blocked the way. And later Christian superstition very effectively perpetuated these text-books by imprisoning or killing all who attempted an improvement. Preserved some of these books, that is; for it must be remembered that the Church selected not the best, but those that suited its own teaching best. It sanctioned the Ptolemaic astronomy, and damned the Pythagorean, for example. And when the study of science revived, it was to the Greeks that earnest students, treating the Christian centuries between as a negligible quantity, turned. There is small need for wonder that Christian apologists have systematically slandered both the Greek and the Roman civilisations. The only chance of making their own dingy history bright was to completely blacken that of other peoples.

A discussion is going on in the *Guardian* concerning fox-hunting parsons. And one writer opines that a parson in the saddle with the hounds in full cry is a preferable sight to a parson playing croquet with the neighboring spinsters. So far as spinsters are concerned, we should say very much preferable.

A manifesto, signed by a number of prominent clergymen, dealing with the question of "The Living Wage," has just

been issued. It refers to "the failure of our almsgiving to provide any real remedy for social ills," and "the actually demoralising effect of so much that is done in response to the cry of need." Both these aspects of the matter have been dealt with for years by Freethinking reformers, and the clergy are, as usual, only reaching a conclusion that others have reached long before. For the rest, the manifesto makes the usual appeal to the "Christian conscience," which is about as helpful as the lamb's appeal to the wolf in the old fable. The "Christian conscience" has allowed all our present evil social conditions to accumulate, and it will rest content with their existence just so long as the non-Christian conscience tolerates them. It would be well if the clergy would make a start with the living wage on many of the industries closely connected with the propaganda of religion itself.

Lord Headley has become a Mohammedan. We congratulate him on getting rid of two gods out of three. We hope he will get rid of the other one also in the course of time.

Mr. Israel Zangwill is a born optimist. He is always hoping something impossible—such as the return of the Jews to Palestine. His latest hope is for "one universal religion." The idea is like that of co-operation amongst tigers and sharks.

Really, one might very easily compile a volume on the silly things said by the Bishop of London. We do not mean things that only those holding different beliefs to the Bishop would consider silly, but which would be admitted as such by most people not qualifying for an idiot asylum. Here is a sample. To an audience gathered in the Guildhall he said everyone present should thank God "for the purity of his daughters, and the honor of his home, and the chastity of his wife, for he owes all that to living in a Christian country." Really, an educated rabbit that had been taught to speak might well be ashamed to talk in this strain. Does the poor man really think there were no honorable homes, pure daughters, or chaste wives before Christianity appeared? And the man who says this one day will on the next be shrieking about the "White Slave Traffic," immoral plays, and obscene literature, all in this Christian country. We hesitate somewhat at frequent reference to such a person as Bishop Ingram; but he is one of the leading dignitaries of the English Church, and as he is there we may as well utilise his existence to point out what an intellectually decrepit thing Christianity has become.

The Bishop of London is not only a fool, he is something worse (if possible) than that. He continues his talking crusade against the stage, on account of what he calls its indecency and suggestiveness. He scorns the suggestion that he and his likes need not go to theatres unless they choose; and why should the views of Bishops be made a criterion for other people? Well now, we put it to his thin-nosed lordship, whether it is not his first duty to attend to his own business first? There is a book called the Bible which is placed in the hands of children in the elementary public schools of England, as the basis of religious and moral instruction. That Book contains passages of most infamous filth; passages that could never be uttered on any stage or printed in any other form. It ought to be kicked out of all schools for children; yet is kept in them, and the children are bound by law to attend them. We say this dirty book should be kicked out, but if it can't be done yet it should at least be subjected to a drastic spring-cleaning. This is what the Bishop of London should be doing, if he had any sense and honesty. Surely a man holding one of the dirtiest books in the world in his hands, while railing at the plays put upon the stage in theatres doubly licensed—first by the public authorities and then by the Lord Chamberlain—is an impudent jackass, whose braying ought to be suppressed as a public nuisance.

Another of the Bishop of London's delusions (or pre-terences) is that people who go to church are more able to control their passions than those who don't. We should hardly have thought his lordship was so ignorant of the police and legal news in the daily press.

The Bishop of London says that he had Christian opinion behind him in his crusade against Living Pictures some years ago. Exactly! All the clergy were in that demonstration: priests, parsons, preachers, rabbis, and Boothites. What noses these people have?

Three centenarians died last week, and the newspapers are jubilant. They have given up crowing over the Biblical

patriarchs who were trundling hoops at the age when our long-livers are carried to the cemetery.

"Youth is the time to lay the foundations of wide knowledge," sagely remarks Lord Haldane. That is the time when the clergy love to impress the "truth" of the Bible stories, such as "Balaam's Ass" and "Noah's Ark," borrowed from a book which sceptics are liable to imprisonment for criticising.

T. P.'s Weekly quotes a saying that "David's wife was an elderly Puritan." Her husband was earlier, especially when he had an appointment with Bathsheba after the "Splash me" business.

The *British Weekly* says that women are long-winded. Yet Solomon was more loquacious than all his wives. And nearly, if not quite, all the editors of religious periodicals are men.

Signor Marinetti, the leader of the Futurists, says that the adjective must be abolished. In that case the peripatetic patterers of the Christian Evidence Society will be unable to follow their noble employment. And "blasphemy," which is now a matter of adjectives, will die a natural death.

Tennyson had a "double" in Leslie Stephen, and Professor Schrader was very like Huxley, says the *Daily Chronicle*, whilst Alma Tadema was scarcely distinguishable from Du Maurier. The *Chronicle* forgot to mention the Christian Trinity, which Matthew Arnold said resembled three Lord Shaftesburys.

The Archbishop of Canterbury says that Disestablishment is essentially a layman's question, because if the Church is "despoiled" of its property laymen will have to make good the deficiency. But suppose they don't? If the clergy really thought that the laymen would make good the deficiency, we don't believe the clergy would bother much. But they know they won't. And there is small chance nowadays of Parliament imposing a new tax for the upkeep of religion—that is, unless the Church offered to go halves with the Nonconformists.

We quite envy the information some people have at their disposal. Here is a clergyman's—the Rev. H. J. Nicholas—description of Jesus Christ, as given in a recent sermon:—

"Not only was he a perfect specimen of manhood, physically, but he was the highest type of manhood, in his manner: Bold without being brazen; humble, but not servile; gentle, but not given to weakness; strong without being tyrannical; helpful, but not intrusive; religious without hypocrisy; devout, but not gloomy; social without frivolity; firm, but not unreasonable; chivalrous, but not self-seeking; submissive without compromise; righteous, but not rigorous; truthful, but not blunt; optimistic and not obsessed; helpful according to reason; and just according to reasonableness."

That's all. Presumably, the preacher's vocabulary ran short at this point, or he would have mentioned other things. He might have easily claimed him as a pioneer in aviation. All that is puzzling us is, How did Mr. Nicholas come to know all this?

"In the last analysis," says Mr. R. J. Campbell, "all our scientific facts are inconceivable." Rubbish! How can a fact be inconceivable? To call a thing a fact is evidence that we have a conception of it. If we cannot conceive a "fact," it is not only not a fact, but we do not even know there is a fact to be known. Stupidity in the pulpit ought to rank as a fine art.

Even the convicts at the prison "hotel," Camp Hill, Isle of Wight, are divided up by sectarian feelings. The more notorious criminals have set up a caste system; they won't consort, or talk at the dinner-table, with criminals of less repute. There are also sharp cleavages of opinion. Home Rulers and Ulsterites are at daggers drawn. Religion, of course, is the greatest divider of all. It is true of prisons, as of all other places, that (as Swift said) most men have religion enough to make them hate each other.

"There's life in the old boy yet." Bishop Samuel Thornton, D.D., who is 78 years of age, has just married a second wife, the first one having died in 1909. The reverend gentleman is almost a second Moses.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday, December 7, Queen's (Minor) Hall, London, W.; at 7.30, "Shakespeare's Humanism in the *Merchant of Venice*."

December 14, Queen's (Minor) Hall, London.

To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1913.—Previously acknowledged, £260 11s. 7d. Received since:—Harry Shaw, 10s.; Joseph Bryce, 10s.; George Brittain, 2s. 6d.

W. O. KELLERMAN.—You have filled in our address carefully with your order, but you have omitted your own. Please send it at once.

C. S. WORMALD.—The Fighting Fund closed long ago, so the balance is placed to your credit. We don't wonder that you find you cannot do without the *Freethinker* although you have left the old country for Canada. We have known several subscribers like you in that respect.

E. GWINNELL.—The second volume has not been published.

E. B.—Many thanks for cuttings.

JOSEPH BRYCE.—Pleased to see your handwriting again.

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

A. A. WELLS.—We are afraid you will never find wit or humor in that pious journal. Your excuse is that you did not buy it.

INQUIRING CHRISTIAN.—The earliest manuscripts of the Gospels are claimed to belong to the second half of the fourth century.

W. T. NEWMAN.—Yes, we shall be happy to "name" your little boy at Queen's Hall on the second Sunday evening (Dec. 14). Please supply Miss Vance, the N. S. S. general secretary, with full particulars. We are delighted to hear of your wife's attachment to the *Freethinker*, as well as your own, and of the sympathetic newsagent's remarks upon it as containing "something to think about and remember."

W. PHILLIPS.—We are having it seen to.

LORENZA GARREAU.—Glad to have your thanks for our paragraph on the death of your father, the late J. H. Levy. You say well that the *Chronicle* need not have resorted to untruth about him, while there was "so much good and true to be said." Do not miss the notice of your father in the December *Humanitarian*, concluding "He will be greatly missed in the fight for freedom and humanity."

EWART HOPPER.—Thanks for your interesting letter. We note that you are a son of the Mr. Hopper we alluded to. Never mind the anonymous postcard. The writers of such things are vermin, and there is pretty sure to be more stink than profit in hunting them down.

J. PARTRIDGE (Birmingham).—Glad to hear Mr. Cohen had so good an audience, in spite of many counter attractions.

S. MOSCOU.—Send along your advertisement. We will insert it gratuitously, but we cannot undertake to draw such things up.

M. CLARK.—We have no recollection of the H. R. Elliot who says he "lectured ten years ago in Hyde Park from the infidel platform under G. W. Foote."

J. HARRISON MAXWELL.—(1) "Vote early for the Protestant and Temperance Candidates" is indeed rich. Evidently the two species must not be confused. The joke is richly completed by the protest in the address against "the introduction of Secular candidates." (2) We hope to resume writing on Shakespeare in the new year. It is surprising to find so many readers interested in what we have to say on that subject.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sugar Plums.

London "saints" are reminded of Mr. Foote's two Sunday evening lectures at the Queen's (Minor) Hall. Some of them may be able to help in the advertising of this effort. Small, neat bills, easily pocketed and easily distributed, can be obtained of Miss Vance, at 2 Newcastle-street, E.C., or at our publishing office on the ground floor of the same building. We hope a good many will take a hand in this easy missionary work. It is quite impossible to advertise these lectures all over London commercially. The area is too vast—the expense is too great. We simply *must* rely to a great extent on the goodwill of our friends in this matter.

Lancashire and Yorkshire "saints" should note that Mr. Cohen lectures to-day (Dec. 7), afternoon and evening, at the Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Manchester. We hope the audiences will be worthy of the lectures. That will mean a crowd.

There was a very interesting article in a late number of *Harper's New Magazine* by Vilhjalmur Stefánsson on "Christianising the Eskimos." The writer evidently thinks that the Eskimos were very good people when they were "heathen" and that Christianising them has done them more injury than benefit. The conclusion is a conversation between Mr. Stefánsson and his native servant. The latter admitted the Eskimos tell as many lies now as they ever did, and steal just as frequently. But they don't work on Sunday. Which is about the only difference—for the better; for a lazy Sunday suits the Eskimos capitally, and they regard the Christians as very clever to think of such a thing.

The following is from last week's *Truth* :—

"While Mr. Justice Coleridge has been on circuit the name of his father, the Lord Chief Justice, has been curiously brought before him twice. In one case counsel referred to the story of Constance Kent as being almost exactly similar. The first Lord Coleridge's defence of Constance Kent is famous in criminal annals. In the trial for blasphemy at Staffordshire Assizes the defendant Stewart referred to Lord Coleridge's views in the Bradlaugh case. Mr. Justice Coleridge has not followed in his father's steps in giving four months to Stewart. The law as to blasphemy is an antiquarian curiosity, and prosecutions for witchcraft would hardly be more out of date and oppressive. A sober controversialist to-day can argue the subject in print or on platform without let or hindrance, and to prosecute a corner man because he does so in the style of the mob orator is to declare that bad taste is a crime. To deal with obscene language, or language calculated to bring about a breach of the peace, the common law is quite strong enough."

We suppose "the Bradlaugh case" was the Foote case. It was in connection with the *Freethinker* prosecution that Lord Chief Justice Coleridge delivered his famous summing-up.

Mr. John Masefield is returning to his old love, the *English Review*. A new poem of his, "The River," appears in the December number.

The London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner, under the auspices of the N. S. S. Executive, will be held at Frascati's on January 28. This is later than usual, but it will be specially associated with the birthday of Thomas Paine (Jan. 29) and the deathday of Charles Bradlaugh (Jan. 30). The Chairman's address will take the form of a critical eulogy of both those great men.

We were going to write this week on the Stewart (Blasphemy) case, but the paucity of information we have been able to obtain is such that writing an article on the subject in these circumstances is like making bricks without clay. The difficulty in obtaining information is extraordinary. Stewart seems to have let himself be surrounded by people who could not possibly be of any particular use from any point of view. We must let the whole matter stand over till next week. Meanwhile we may say that we have signed the petition for Stewart's release, or his better treatment in prison, by making him a first-class misdemeanant. We have tried to find out whether Lord Coleridge did, as the newspapers reported, add "hard labor" to Stewart's sentence, but we have failed. If "hard labor" was added it was an illegal sentence. The case should have been carried to the Court of Appeal, and we offered to see to that being done. But nothing *was* done—except begging for money. We never knew anything so badly bungled. We suppose it is the natural result of very common soldiers posing as generals of army divisions.

Animal-Eating Plants.

AMONG the many marvels of the vegetable world there is probably none more remarkable than the story of the carnivorous plants. Widely distributed throughout the world, some five hundred species of dicotyledonous plants are to be met with which, in some way or other capture insects and similar animals, whose bodies they digest or absorb.

It was in the summer of the year 1860 that the attention of the great Charles Darwin was drawn to the insect-catching habits of the common sundew. He noticed that a surprisingly large number of insects were captured by the leaves of this plant, which was growing on a Sussex heath. "I gathered by chance a dozen plants," he says in his famous work on *Insectivorous Plants*,

"bearing fifty-six fully expanded leaves, and on thirty-one of these dead insects or remnants of them adhered; and, no doubt, many more would have been caught afterwards by these same leaves, and still more by those as yet not expanded. On one plant all six leaves had caught their prey; and on several other plants very many leaves had caught more than a single insect. On one large leaf I found the remains of thirteen distinct insects. Flies (Diptera) are captured much oftener than other insects. The largest kind which I have seen caught was a small butterfly; but the Rev. H. M. Wilkinson informs me that he found a large living dragon-fly with its body firmly held by two leaves. As this plant is extremely common in some districts, the number of insects thus annually slaughtered must be prodigious."

Darwin then began a profound and prolonged study of this plant, the common sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), as also of other insectivorous plants; and, notwithstanding the researches of innumerable subsequent investigators, the Newton of Biology remains our leading authority on animal-feeding vegetable organisms.

Darwin's experiments on the sundew yielded highly remarkable results. But before dealing with these it will be well to pen a description of this remarkable carnivorous plant. In Professor Anton Kerner's important *Natural History of Plants* is to be found a fine colored plate depicting the sundew in company with another insectivorous plant, natural size, growing amongst sedges on an upland moor. The most striking feature of the plant consists in its rounded leaves surmounted by delicate red filaments, provided at their tip with a glistening droplet of liquid. These filaments are formed on the upper surface and margin of the sundew leaf. These filaments or tentacles, as Kerner says, look like pins stuck in a flat cushion, and are unequal in size. The longest filaments are ranged round the outermost edge of the leaf, and gradually become shorter as they approach the centre. Each leaf is furnished on an average with about two hundred of these filaments. The free extremities or heads of these filaments are glandular in nature. Each of them secretes a transparent, thick, sticky substance, and this substance shines and glistens in the sunlight much after the manner of a dewdrop; and to this circumstance is due the name of the plant. Stimuli occasioned by falling rain or the blowing wind excite no answering movements in the sensitive filaments. But if grains of sand, bits of coal, particles of paste, drops of wine, or any other non-nitrogenous matter be brought into contact with the enlarged extremities of the filaments, an augmented supply of the sticky substance arises and the secretion assumes an acid form, but the sensitive tentacles make no response, and no other change of importance takes place. The result is far different when an insect mistakes the glittering liquid on the tip of the tentacles for honey. If an insect alights on a leaf and in so doing touches the glands, or even if a piece of meat or other nitrogenous substance be artificially placed on the filament heads, the discharge of acid juice increases and a ferment also makes its appearance. "The action of this ferment on compounds is entirely

similar to that of pepsin, and we may even go so far as to speak of it as pepsin."

The winged creatures that are lured to the leaves are soon enmeshed in the sticky liquid and endeavor to release themselves from its unpleasant embrace. But the harder they struggle the more they besmear themselves, and become more and more at the mercy of the treacherous fluid. The fight for freedom is very transient; their breathing organs are choked with juice, and they are quickly suffocated.

A few minutes after a gland of one of the sensitive filaments has been stimulated through the attachment to it of a dead or living animal organism, the entire system of filaments undergoes a change. In the first place, the tentacle bearing the gland originally irritated by the presence of the captured animal begins to bend inwards. About ten minutes after the first tentacle or filament commences to move, those nearest to it follow its example. Ten minutes later, those next in succession bend likewise until, in the course of from one to three hours, all the tentacles are inflected and converge upon the unfortunate insect. It may be remarked that the insect or other captured creature does not necessarily alight on any particular part of the leaf's surface. But wherever the prey is deposited, in that direction the filaments always bend. It has been proved experimentally that when morsels of meat are placed one on the right, and the other on the left half of the same leaf, the two hundred tentacles form into two groups, and each group gathers round one of the fragments of meat. This phenomenon also occurs if two insects become entangled on a leaf simultaneously, one on one side and one on the other. But when all the tentacles converge towards the centre of the leaf, as soon as this convergence has reached its maximum, the leaf strongly resembles a clenched fist.

As Darwin points out, the sundew gathers most of its nutriment from the animal substances it captures and digests. The plant flourishes on poverty stricken soil where hardly anything but moss—a plant which derives nearly all its nourishment from the atmosphere—can exist. The roots of the sundew are, in consequence, remarkably small. And this adaptability to poor soil may be said to characterise the entire group of insectivorous plants. In whatever continent these carnivorous plants are found they all agree in inhabiting damp spots such as heaths, the banks of brooks, bogs, marshes, and moors where water is abundant but where the barren earth is unable to yield those inorganic nitrogenous substances which are essential to the well-being of ordinary vegetable life.

Reference has already been made to the intense irritability of the sundew's tentacles. Darwin discovered that a bit of thin human hair 8-1,000ths of an inch in length, and weighing merely 1-78,740ths of a grain when placed on the sensitive tentacle, though largely supported by the secretion, is sufficient to cause the tentacle to move. "It is not probable," he writes,

"that the pressure in this case could have amounted to that from the millionth of a grain. Even smaller particles cause a slight movement, as could be seen through a lens. Larger particles than those of which the measurements have been given cause no sensation when placed on the tongue, one of the most sensitive parts of the human body."*

The sundew's responses to stimuli set up by nitrogenous and non-nitrogenous fluids and solids are also well worthy of notice. Darwin's researches proved that the sundew's leaves "detect with almost unerring certainty the presence of nitrogen. A decoction of green peas or of fresh cabbage-leaves made by keeping them for a long time in merely warm water is far less efficient."

These remarkable results led Darwin to study the plant's powers of digestion. His experiments demonstrated that its leaves carry on the functions of true digestion, and he proved in detail that the glands absorb the digested substances. These re-

* *Insectivorous Plants*, p. 263.

searches fully established for the first time the existence in the vegetable kingdom of a function which had been previously regarded as special to the animal world. The intimate primal relationship of the botanical and zoological provinces of the kingdom of life was further evidenced by the study of the acids and ferments which enable carnivorous plants to assimilate their animal food. "The gastric juice of animals contains, as is well known, an acid and a ferment, both of which are indispensable for digestion, and so it is with the secretion of the sundew." Darwin was forced to conclude, from experiments conducted with a great variety of substances, that those substances which the secretion of the sundew digests completely, partially, or not at all, are acted on in precisely the same manner by the gastric juice of an animal stomach.

In another interesting carnivorous plant, *Dionæa muscipula*, commonly known as the Venus' flytrap, the late Professor Burdon Sanderson detected a resting and an action current of electricity, and was of opinion that "the property by which the excitable structures of the leaf respond to stimulation is of the same nature as that possessed by the similarly endowed structures of animals." Professor Kerner arrived at a similar conclusion, and says that "The analogy existing between these processes, especially the conduction and liberation of a stimulus, and similar phenomena of the muscles and nerves of an animal organism" is as complete as in the case of the sundew. And he goes on to state that—

"It is a noteworthy fact that, in the flytraps, actual electric currents have been observed, which prove that the greatest resemblance exists to muscles and nerves as regards electro-motor action also."*

The range of this plant is restricted to a narrow strip of country in the east of North America (from Long Island to Florida) wherever peat bogs abound. The blossoms rise on a long stalk in the centre of the plant, and the leaves are arranged in circular form, their under surfaces resting more or less on the earth. These leaves are about four inches in length, and the two halves of the leaf are movable on one another along the midrib, and, when irritated, close together just as a book would close if provided with an automatic closing-spring. Each edge of the leaf is furnished with from twelve to twenty long teeth "which interlock in rat-trap fashion with those on the other side." The leaf-centre carries numerous digestive glands, and each half of the leaf-blade possesses three highly sensitive hairs which bend down when the leaf closes over its prey. If one of these sensitive hairs be irritated by an insect settling on the leaf, in eight or ten seconds the leaf shuts up. The glands rapidly exude their digestive juice, and the digestion of the insect occupies a week or a fortnight, according to the size of the prey. When the meal is completely absorbed the leaf is reopened, and is ready to receive the next insect visitor.

Doubt was at one time thrown on the utility of the insectivorous habit to the Venus' flytrap and other carnivorous plants. Certain of these plants that were kept in greenhouses were thought to flourish better without animal food than with it. But careful experiment has since proved that when the plants which are provided with moderate supplies of meat and other nitrogenous matter are compared with those that are denied flesh food, the former are unquestionably the larger and healthier plants. The earlier observations and experiments were vitiated by the fact that the plants were overfed, and in consequence suffered, and in some instances died, from indigestion.

Another insectivorous plant of rare occurrence is found in Portugal and Morocco. It appears to flourish more extensively on the Oporto hillsides than elsewhere, and numerous observers have noted that immense numbers of flies become attached to the leaves. The insect-catching merits of the plant—*Drosophyllum lusitanicum*, as it is termed—are

well known to the peasants, who keep it in their cottages for the purpose of catching flies.

"A plant in my hothouse caught so many insects during the early part of April," writes Darwin, "although the weather was cold and insects scarce, that it must have been in some manner strongly attractive to them. On four leaves of a young and small plant, 8, 10, 14, and 16 minute insects, chiefly Diptera, were found in the autumn adhering to them."*

The butterworts and the various species of the genus *Nepenthes* are all carnivorous in habit. The thirty-six species of *Nepenthes*, or pitcher plants, unlike the common butterwort, are all confined to the tropics. They are distributed from New Caledonia and New Guinea over tropical Australia to Madagascar, and through the Sunda and Philippine Islands to Ceylon, Bengal, and Cochin China.

Varying as the carnivorous plants do in their methods of capture, they all agree in assimilating animal food. The pitcher plants are provided with pitfalls which ensnare insect prey; others, such as the sundew and Venus' flytrap, exhibit movements in securing their victims. And among the various lessons these plants teach is the lesson that a beautiful and harmless leaf may in the course of evolution become changed into a death-trap which is fatal to vast numbers of ants, beetles, butterflies, tiny crustaceans, flies, and other living creatures.

T. F. PALMER.

Some Little-Known Freethinkers.

VI.—WILLIAM JOHN BIRCH.

It was only in his old age that I had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Birch. His appearance was truly venerable, and his portrait (which adorns my room) is always remarked as that of an extremely fine-looking old man. Mr. Birch was born of a well-to-do family on January 4, 1811. He was educated at Balliol College, Oxford, and graduated M.A. at New Inn Hall. He became a barrister-at-law, but was never under the necessity of practising for a livelihood.

During the prosecution of the *Oracle of Reason*, in 1842, Mr. Birch came forward as a generous supporter of that paper and of the Anti-Persecution Union. He contributed to C. Southwell's *Investigator* valuable articles on "The Blasphemy Laws" and on "Money the Motive in the History of England." He also wrote in the *Movement*, the *Reasoner*, and the *National Reformer*. To him Mr. Holyoake dedicated his *Last Trial for Atheism*, as "a friend who was twice a friend, who helped us when we were unknown and struggling." Through his liberality "The Library of Reason"—a valuable set of reprints from Hume, Spinoza, Hibbert, Ensor, Burdon, Southwell, Strauss, Lyell, etc.—was issued, edited by W. Chilton. The *Reasoner* and the publications of the Fleet-street House, under Mr. Holyoake, were also aided by his ever generous assistance. On one occasion he gave Mr. Holyoake 600 acres of land in Canada, with the purpose of forwarding Secularism; but when the bulk of Mr. Birch's large fortune was lost Mr. Holyoake returned the land-script.

In 1848 Mr. Birch published his principal work, *An Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of Shakespeare*. Mr. Birch held that Shakespeare was a sceptic in regard to a future life, and devoid of reverence for the fundamental dogmas of religion. This position he endeavors to substantiate by a thorough examination both of his dramas and poems. He also wrote a work on *The Real and the Ideal*; and in a pamphlet, *Paulan Idea not a Fact*, first questioned the existence of the Apostles to the Gentiles. In 1856, he published *An Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of the Bible*. In his preface he states:—

"The principal inquiries in this book are the sum of what is taught in the Bible about a God, a Providence, and a future state; the Messianic idea, religion, and morality; the nature of things and of men. We shall inquire whether God and Christ are ideas or facts; or, in other words, whether they personally existed. We shall inquire whether the Bible is a revelation of a God, or a revelation that we know nothing about him."

In this book Mr. Birch strongly contended that education should be in morality, and not in religion. He says:—

"Nothing creates such a difference between mankind as religion. There often would be nothing but love between

* *History of Plants*, vol. i., p. 151,

* *Insectivorous Plants*, p. 332.

individuals, arising from their natural disposition, if they were not severed by religion. As there is said to be no morality without religion, unbelievers are treated as having no morality, and believers are absolved from morality towards them. We believe there can be no morality with religion."

Mr. Birch published through Mr. Truelove, in 1870, *The Jesus Christ of John Stuart Mill*, by "Antichrist," quoting on the title-page, "He is Antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son, and confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh" (1 John ii. 22, iv. 2, 3, and 2 John 7). This showed his standpoint. Like all Mr. Birch's productions, it was somewhat desultory. He wrote, like St. Paul, in an unconnected way, but he culled good things from all quarters. The work was adversely criticised in the *National Reformer*, and did not sell well. He also published anonymously *Bible Bestiality and Filth from the Fathers*, and a little book with much information on nicknames, entitled *Tom Paine, Charlie Bradlaugh, and Bob Ingersoll*.

Mr. Birch had a fine library and was a voluminous reader. He carried to excess the good habit of taking notes of what he read. To this I ascribe the fact that, although reading and writing all his long life, he never attained concise statement. He was always reminded of what others had said, and this led to over-much quotation and digression. Every theme elaborated itself to huge dimensions. To me he confided, when he went to Italy, the whole of his manuscripts, weighing many hundredweight. They are full of rare information; yet no publisher would venture to print them.

As a gentleman of means and leisure, Mr. Birch collected, read, and made notes upon, I think, every work on the subject of Christian origins and early Christianity, published either in English, French, or Italian. His conclusions, though expressed on many points with the caution of one who had a legal training, was emphatic on the crucial question. He held that no such person as the Jesus Christ of the Gospels ever lived. He thought the character an ideal, amalgamating Pagan myths on a Jewish basis. To the subject of the existence of Jesus, and cognate questions of Pagan religion and mythology, Josephus, Philo, the early Christian Fathers, etc., he devoted immense research, to which at least one individual (and that the present writer) is much indebted.

Mr. Birch, in the days of Garibaldi and Mazzini, had been a generous supporter of the cause of Italian freedom. He usually spent the winter in Florence, where he was well known both to the English colony and to the leading Italian Freethinkers and men of letters, such as Count Ricciardi and Angelo de Gubernatis. His wide reading was always at the service of others; and several of the Freethinking writers who gathered round Thomas Scott were indebted to him for assistance with their works. He died at Florence on April 4, 1891; and it is simple truth to say he was deeply lamented by all who knew him.

(The late) J. M. WHEELER.

Benedict Spinoza.

THE fame of Spinoza, like that of so many of the world's teachers, has undergone remarkable changes. For many generations after his death he was the object of almost universal execration; Spinozism and Atheism were identical terms; to express any sympathy with the spirit or admiration for the intellect and life of the outcast philosopher was to incur the certainty of being regarded as a wilful child of the Devil. Now, however, the poor Amsterdam Jew is elevated to the metaphysical throne, and before him loyal subjects bow. "The Systematic Atheist" of Bayle is the "God-intoxicated man" of Novalis; since the time of Lessing and Mendelssohn he has profoundly influenced Germany's noblest minds, in particular that of her greatest poet, Goethe; in France he has extorted the homage of the subtlest thinkers; and even in England, averse from ontological speculation as our best intellect is, his rigorous logic and supreme mental grasp and spiritual insight have won high and intense admiration. The grand simplicity of his life, too, has been fully recognised, and no longer are senseless accusations hurled at his memory. Even the most determined opponents acknowledge that his character was free from meanness, egotism, baseness, and chicanery; nay, they are compelled to admit his claim to rank among the few combinations of sublime genius and heroic fortitude of which the human race can boast. Every one, agreeing or disagreeing intellectually, must feel when perusing his works that they are in the clear air of a great man's presence.

Baruch Despinosa, or, to use the Latin equivalent, Benedictus, was born at Amsterdam on November 24, 1632. He was the eldest of three children—himself, and two sisters, Miriam and Rebecca. His father, one of the Jewish fugitives from Spain, who settled in the Netherlands

to avoid their Christian persecutors, was in comfortable, if not affluent circumstances, and derived his income probably from trade. He is reputed to have been a man of excellent understanding, and of this he gave evidence in the care he took to secure to his son the best education the Jewish schools of Amsterdam afforded. The classical languages of Greece and Rome had no place in the curriculum of the Jewish seminaries, but evidently the study of Latin was not interdicted, as Greek was by the Christian hierarchy, for amongst the Jews physicians and naturalists abounded. The Law and the Prophets were expounded by the rabbis, and diligently studied by the scholars, and the pupils who evinced extraordinary aptitude were selected for study in higher branches of education, with a view to becoming teachers themselves. Young Baruch, a remarkably quick and inquisitive boy, found means to supply himself with Latin, by aid of a German teacher, and afterwards with Greek. The boys on the upper form had the use of a well-furnished library, in which, probably, Spinoza pastured; at least, we know that at a very early age he became acquainted with the writings of Descartes. Pollock says that his use of Latin in his principal writings is not exactly classical, although it shows a perfect command over the language. His knowledge of Greek "was more limited, and by his own account not critical. Of modern languages he knew French, German, and Italian, besides Portuguese and Spanish, one or both of which were native to him. It appears from evidence made public early in the last century, but afterwards lost sight of until quite recently, that he always regarded Dutch as a foreign language, and wrote it only with difficulty."

In his fifteenth year Baruch was already remarkable for Biblical and Talmudic lore. The Rabbi, Saul Levi Morteira, superintendent and occasional teacher of the upper division of the school, had noticed his great promise, and is said to have taken unusual pains in aiding and directing his studies, flattering himself, doubtless, with the hope that his young pupil would some day occupy a distinguished place among Jewish teachers. But, alas for his preceptors, the curious and eager mind of the boy shot ahead of their limits; doubts, which if they entered his tutors' minds had entered only to be stifled, were to him the unsuspecting dawnings of intellectual life. His questions perplexed and annoyed Morteira, who found here material that could not be fashioned into orthodox shape. For awhile, doubtless, no open profession of heresy was made, but the strife within him must have been intense and distressing. At first he endeavored to find some ground of reconciliation between Reason and Scripture, but in vain. "I aver," he says in the "Tractatus," "that, though I long sought for something of the sort, I could never find it. And although nurtured in the current views of the sacred Scriptures, and my mind filled with their teachings, I was nevertheless compelled at length to break with my early beliefs."

His hesitating answers to delicate questions from those who sought him because of his scholarly reputation soon made him an object of suspicion. He became cautious and reticent in his intercourse with the elders of the congregation; he abandoned regular attendance at the Synagogue, and, indeed, gave good cause for being regarded as a very perverse youth. Whether propensely or from instigation, two young men of his own age, amongst others who sought his assistance in the tangled mazes of theology, pressed him on some of the most delicate topics of their faith. His cautious replies roused their anger, and excited them to revenge. At first they spread disadvantageous rumors against him, and then denounced him to the heads of the Jewish Synagogue as an apostate from the true faith. Cited before the elders, he indignantly denied having uttered some of the statements imputed to him. He was reprimanded, and ordered to make instant submission and acknowledgment of wickedness. This he refused to do; such procedure was insufferable to his proud nature. Threat of excommunication was then made, but without effect, and the contumacious youth retired from the presence of his judges.

On July 6, 1656, the Jewish synagogue at Amsterdam was crowded with excited men of Israel, assembled there to witness the excommunication of the recusant Spinoza. Angry frowning faces, and lurid dark eyes, told more eloquently than any words how enraged the faithful were, and how absorbed in the zeal of persecution. What mercy could be shown to a perverse youth who deliberately forsook the religion of his own people and forefathers, and opposed himself to the matchless wisdom of all their rabbis? While the anathema was being pronounced, the long, wailing note of a great horn occasionally sounded; the lights, seen brightly burning at the beginning of the ceremony, were extinguished one by one as it proceeded, till at the end the last went out, and the congregation were left in total darkness, and in the solemn, mysterious gloom the faithful responded with fervid *Amens!*

Dr. Van Vloten fortunately, obtained a copy of the curse against Spinoza from the then secretary of the Portuguese Jewish Church at Amsterdam. It is in the Spanish language, and is thus rendered into English by Pollock:—

"With the judgment of the angels and of the saints we excommunicate, cut off, curse, and anathematise Baruch de Espinoza, with the consent of the elders and of all this holy congregation, in the presence of the holy books; by the 613 precepts which are written therein, with the anathema wherewith Joshua cursed Jericho, with the curse which Elisha laid upon the children, and with all the curses which are written in the law. Cursed be he by day and cursed be he by night. Cursed be he in sleeping and cursed be he in waking, cursed in going out and cursed in coming in. The Lord shall not pardon him, the wrath and fury of the Lord shall henceforth be kindled against this man, and shall lay upon him all the curses which are written in the book of the law. The Lord shall destroy his name under the sun, and cut him off for his undoing from all the tribes of Israel, with all the curses of the firmament which are written in the book of the law. But ye that cleave unto the Lord your God, live all of you this day.

"And we warn you that none may speak with him by word of mouth nor by writing, nor show any favor to him, nor be under one roof with him, nor come within four cubits of him, nor read any paper composed or written by him."

"With these amenities, the current compliments of theological parting," says Matthew Arnold, with delicious humor, "the Jews of the Portuguese Synagogue at Amsterdam took, in 1656, their leave of their erring brother, Baruch or Benedict Spinoza. They remained children of Israel, and he became a child of modern Europe."

Amsterdam, at least the Jewish part of it, was in an uproar; but the innocent cause of the commotion was probably not much disturbed. Excommunication from one church in the midst of many others was not fraught with such dreadful consequences as followed excommunication where but one church existed; there was a great world outside the Jewish fold affording ample space for movement. He is said to have sent a reply in Spanish to the anathema, but Van Vloten in vain, though eagerly and industriously, searched for it. When informed of the excommunication, he is said to have replied: "Well and good; but this will force me to nothing I should not have been ready to do without it." The greatest trial of all was yet to come. No orthodox Jew could shelter beneath his roof one under the ban of excommunication, even though his own son. Spinoza had, therefore, to quit his home for ever.

Spinoza's classical acquirements stood him now in good stead. He at once found an engagement in the educational establishment of Dr. Francis Van den Ende, amongst whose pupils were the sons of some of the wealthiest and most distinguished citizens. Van den Ende was skilful, accomplished, and, in private, of irreproachable character, but was suspected of adding a grain of Atheism to every dose of Latin. At the doctor's school commenced also the one romance of the outcast's life. Van den Ende's daughter, a charming girl of twelve or thirteen, assisted in the tuition of the younger pupils; indeed, it is said (and upon its possible truth Lewes draws a very pretty picture of dawning love) that she aided Spinoza in his Latin studies. This, however, is highly improbable. That he became deeply attached to her is, nevertheless, certain; and he seems to have cherished the hope of one day being able to make her his wife. He is reported to have said to one of his friends that "he had made up his mind to ask Mdlle. Van den Ende in marriage, not carried away by her charms as one of the most beautiful or faultlessly formed of women, but admiring her, loving her because she was rarely gifted with understanding, possessed of much good sense, and, moreover, of a pleasant and lively disposition." When the maiden grew to womanhood years after, poor Spinoza was not the only suitor; he had a rival in a certain Dietrich Kerckkrink, a much wealthier man than himself. The rival's attentions were backed with costly presents, and finally the fair one consented to become his wife.

Such is the old story of Spinoza's love affair. "But here romance," says Martineau, "not the first time, gets itself into a scrape by neglect of dates. Dr. Van Vloten, provokingly turning to the register of this marriage on February 5, 1671, finds that the bride was then 27 years of age, and could not have been more than twelve in 1655, the reputed time of the rivalry for her hand." Despite the facts, however, Martineau clings to the old story as highly probable; and something of the same disposition is shown by Pollock, who remarks that Beatrice was only nine years old when she showed herself to the eyes of Dante and became immortally the "glorious lady of his soul."

(To be continued.) G. W. FOOTER.

National Secular Society.

REPORT OF MONTHLY EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON NOV. 27.

The President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. There were also present:—Messrs. Baker, Barry, Bowman, Cohen, Cowell, Cunningham, Davey, Davidson, Judge, Moss, Nichols, Quinton, Roger, Rosetti, Samuels, Thurlow, Miss Kough and Miss Stanley.

The minutes of the last meeting were read and confirmed.

The monthly cash statement was presented and adopted.

New members were received for the Birmingham and West Ham Branches and the Parent Society.

The Secretary reported the result of her inquiries from the various restaurants re the Annual Dinner, and it was resolved:—

"That the 1914 Dinner take place at the Restaurant Frascati, Oxford-street, on Wednesday, January 28."

The Morpeth Police Court case, in which Captain Mitford, J.P., recently refused to take the word of William Snowball, who, being a Secularist, refused to be sworn on the Testament, as he did not believe in God, was reported by the Secretary, who had also written to Snowball's solicitor, Mr. Shaw. The matter was fully discussed, and the Secretary was instructed:—

"(1) To write officially to the Lord Chancellor, calling his attention to the case.

"(2) To suggest to Snowball, through his solicitor, that a mandamus should be obtained to compel the J.P. to hear the case without comments of an insulting nature; and, further, to inform him that if this course becomes necessary, and the defendant is unable to bear the cost, the Executive will render him reasonable support."

The conviction of T. W. Stewart for blasphemy was discussed, and the President informed the meeting that he was making personal investigation as to the legality of the sentence, and a petition for Stewart's release was signed by all present, as a protest against blasphemy prosecutions.

A resolution submitted by the Kingsland Branch, was adjourned for consideration until the next meeting.

E. M. VANCE, Secretary.

JAHVEH AND JESUS.

While, however, there is an enormous improvement, if we compare the administration of human affairs by Jehovah (*i.e.*, the Old Testament God) and by God (*i.e.*, the God of the New Testament), there is nevertheless a blot upon the character of God (*i.e.*, the God of the New Testament) which suffices, if rigorously balanced against the failings of Jehovah, to outweigh them all. It is the eternity of the punishment which he inflicts in a future life. No amount of sophistry can ever justify the creation of beings whose lives are to terminate in endless suffering.—*Viscount Amberley, "Analysis of Religious Belief,"* vol. ii., p. 371.

Inquiry into the evidence of a doctrine is not to be made once for all, and then taken as finally settled. It is never lawful to stifle a doubt; for either it can be honestly answered by means of the inquiry already made, or else it proves that the inquiry was not complete. "But," says one, "I am a busy man; I have no time for the long course of study which would be necessary to make me in any degree a competent judge of certain questions, or even able to understand the nature of the arguments." Then he should have no time to believe.—*W. K. Clifford.*

Man is by birth so poor a creature that he is good only when he dreams. He needs illusions to make him do what he ought to do for the love of good. This slave has need of fear and of lies to perform his duty. You get the mass of men to make sacrifices only by giving them assurances that they will be paid back. The self-denial of the Christian is only a shrewd calculation, an investment for the sake of the kingdom of God.—*Renan.*

Obituary.

Mr. James Cossey, an ardent Freethinker, a member of the late Bishop Auckland Branch of the N. S. S., died after a few weeks' illness at Ferryhill on Sunday, November 23, aged 64. Admirer of Messrs. Bradlaugh, Foote, and other leading Freethought advocates, and always ready to defend the cause and its leaders. He was buried at Ferryhill Cemetery on November 26, the funeral being a silent one, in accordance with his wishes. We extend to the widow and family our heartiest condolence.—*W. R. JULER.*

To plough is to pray; to plant is to prophesy, and the harvest answers and fulfils.—*Ingersoll.*

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON

INDOOR.

QUEEN'S (MINOR) HALL (Langham-place, W.): 7.30, G. W. Foote, "Shakespeare's Humanism in the *Merchant of Venice*."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, J. T. Lloyd, "The Passing of the Christian Sabbath."

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Edmonton Green): 7.45, "Beelzebub," "Christ and His Teachings."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH N. S. S. (King's Hall, Corporation-street): 7, E. Clifford Williams, "Atheism v. Theism."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (North Saloon, City Hall): Guy A. Aldred, 12 noon, "New Gods for Old"; 6.30, "The Folly of Worship."

LEICESTER (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mrs. H. Bradlaugh Bonner, "The Influence of Religious Beliefs on Morals."

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S. (Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, All Saints): C. Cohen, 3, "The Physiology of Faith"; 6.30, "The Challenge of Atheism." Tea at 5.

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