

# THE Freethinker

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*The community which dares not protect its humblest and most hated member in the free utterance of his opinions, no matter how false or hateful, is only a gang of slaves.*—WENDELL PHILLIPS.

## A God in a Cradle.

NEARLY two thousand years ago a young Jewess was married to an elderly Jew. Her name was Mary and his was Joseph. Two commoner names could not be found, nor probably two commoner people. They discovered nothing, wrote nothing, said nothing, and did nothing of any importance. Their sole achievement was producing children, of whom they had about a dozen. But producing children is a very ordinary feat, especially among Jews, who have always been notably prolific since the days of Pharaoh. Where Joseph and Mary were born nobody knows, and the date of their birth is equally obscure.

We possess just as much information about the time and place of their death. Nothing is known as to where they were buried, or what inscription was cut on their tombstones. History is silent as to what undertaker carried out the funeral arrangements. Their biographies might be written in twenty lines without containing twenty facts.

Joseph and Mary were, according to custom, betrothed before marriage. No doubt they had a pleasant time. Joseph adjourned to the old people's house at the close of his day's work, after a good wash and a brush-up, and took Mary for a walk in the gloaming. They chattered as lovers have always done, Joseph's arm slipped round her waist, she leaned her head on his shoulder, and they kissed each other under the winking stars. When they returned Joseph looked as though he had never been within ten feet of the girl, and Mary's aspect would have defied the innuendoes of a Mephistopheles.

But one night poor Joseph's felicity was, unconsciously to himself, invaded by a stranger. After he had gone home to dream of his sweetheart, and Mary had retired to her maiden pillow, she received an unexpected visit from a handsome young archangel, named Gabriel. His features were inexpressibly beautiful, his form was more perfect than Apollo's, his brown locks hung in graceful curls about his ivory neck, and his splendid wings glowed with all the colors of the rainbow. Had he been an ugly burglar, Mary would have hidden her head under the clothes; but she was so fascinated by his immortal loveliness and his seraphic smile that she sat up and stared at him with mingled alarm and admiration.

Gracefully bowing his graceful head, Gabriel stated that he was sent from heaven to inform her that she should have a child without Joseph's assistance. She was naturally startled at this intelligence, but Gabriel assured her that with God nothing was impossible, and before he left she was fully persuaded that his prophecy would be fulfilled.

Mary hid all these things in her heart. She said not a word to Joseph or the old people, until her condition could no longer be concealed, when she told them everything. Her parents laughed at her

story, and it was with great difficulty that her mother was restrained from giving her a bald head. As it was, she gave her an illuminated face. Joseph swore that her story was a sham, and walked out of the house, vowing never to see her again. He then went home, drowned his sorrows in three bottles of wine, and fell dead—asleep.

While in this condition he had a dream. Gabriel appeared to him, stated that Mary's baby was "of the Holy Ghost," and warned him against treating her with any cruelty or disrespect. When he awoke he believed it all, and soon afterwards he married his young woman, much to the delight of the old people, who had anticipated a frightful scandal.

Some profane persons say that Joseph was easily satisfied. They doubt whether any young fellow courting a girl nowadays would believe such a story on the same evidence. They object that a dream is a shadowy basis for the doctrine of the incarnation. They assert that if Jesus wanted to prove his divine origin beyond all dispute he should have dispensed with a mother as well as a father. That, they say, would have been a miracle; but there is no miracle in a child being born without a father, for it happens every day. Let the reader, however, pay no heed to these sceptical wretches, as he values the salvation of his immortal soul. Belief is easy, and hell is hot.

In due course (reader, you *must* believe it) Mary's miraculous baby came to light. Raphael's pictures, which were painted from original photographs, give us an idea of his beauty. And this beautiful baby was God. His name was Jesus (or Joshua), but he was really God.

God cried, and screamed and kicked. God flung about his little legs, God made aimless dashes into space with his little arms. God stared foolishly at his own little toes. God smiled when he was comfortable, and howled when pricked by a nasty pin. God was suckled at Mary's breast. God lay in a cradle and was rocked asleep. God had the measles, and perhaps the whooping-cough and scarletina. Eighteen centuries later God would have been vaccinated. God learned to walk by the family furniture. God often tumbled down on his nose or on the broader part he once displayed to Moses. God was taught his letters. God got spanked when he misbehaved, and, as soon as he was big enough, God went out and played at marbles and mud-pies with other boys, some of whom he thrashed, and some of whom thrashed him.

*P.S.*—We do not believe a word of the foregoing narrative. It is not our "blasphemy"—it is *Bible* "blasphemy." And if justice were done the publishers and vendors of that book would take the place of the "blasphemer" who is now studying "Christian charity" in Stafford Prison. The above article is taken from a longer one which we wrote and published in the first Christmas Number of the *Freethinker*, within a year of our own imprisonment for "blasphemy" in 1883-84. It was our answer, as it were, to our prosecutors. It showed how little they had intimidated us by twelve months' imprisonment. Its reproduction shows how unrepentant we are after the lapse of thirty years. It will also show whether they have the courage to attack those who are not helpless.

G. W. FOOTE.



### The Forlorn Atheist.

IN dealing with Mr. Coulson's article on "The Failure of the Churches." there was one point that I left untouched, but which is well worth a word of criticism. This was concerned with the assumed forlorn state of those who have rejected religious beliefs, and who are supposed to be drifting about in a more or less miserable condition, casting envious looks towards those who are still within the ranks of the faithful. Mr. Coulson speaks of the Agnostic with his "chilly and negative creed," just as many other writers depict the Atheist having given up religion with much heartburning, and living in a constant state of regret that he is not as others are. For much of this talk many Freethinkers—of a kind—are themselves to blame. In the issue of the *Sunday Chronicle*, for example, following that in which Mr. Coulson's article appeared, a correspondent writes from Manchester:—

"It must not be forgotten that thousands of Agnostics were once among the 'faithful'; that they reluctantly left the fold because they could not reconcile the teachings of the Church with their notions of truth....."

"It need hardly be stated that the Agnostic is never up against genuine Christianity (some of us are bold enough to declare we have that), but against 'Churchianity' and shams."

I cannot say what some "Agnostics" do or do not believe—that species is divided into so many varieties that it is difficult to be certain on this point—but I can say that every Freethinker who understands Freethought is "up against" genuine Christianity with much greater vigor than he opposes the adulterated article. For the adulteration consists in mixing up with Christianity a number of social and ethical teachings to which it can lay no exclusive claim. Genuine Christianity is orthodox Christianity, and the more orthodox the more genuine. It embraces the belief in miracles, in prayer, in possession, in hell and heaven, in angels and in devils, and in other things that modern thought unhesitatingly condemns. The Christianity that is popular is not genuine; it is a hotch-potch of ideals and teachings to which Christianity can lay no real claim. My own complaint is, not that I disagree with current Christianity because it is not pure, but because it offers people what is not Christianity—because it gets them to support Christianity under false pretences. A Freethinker ought to be a clear thinker; and it is hardly clear thinking to talk about Agnostics or Atheists claiming to have a "genuine Christianity," as though that were a valuable article. Christianity is bad when it is genuine; it is also bad when it annexes good humanitarian teachings and robs these of much of their force by the association.

This talk of Agnostics being genuine Christians belongs to the same class as references to a man like Bradlaugh being a real Christian, or a Christian without knowing it. It is an insult disguised as a compliment. Bradlaugh was not a Christian, consciously or unconsciously. If Christians mean that he was a better man than the vast majority of Christians, they will be saying nothing but the truth. But his superiority was not due to his having "genuine Christianity," but to selecting the humanitarian elements from current life, and leaving the Christian ones rigorously alone.

So much by the way. Now let us get back to the unhappy Agnostic—or Atheist. Mr. Coulson most probably knows a number of Agnostics. I daresay he also numbers Atheists among his acquaintance. How many of them does he find in urgent need of consolation, or living in a state of regret that they are no longer Christians? After an experience of nearly a quarter of a century among them, I have failed to discover any of this particular type. On the contrary, the invariable testimony is that they are happier as Atheists than they were as Christians, and that their outlook on life is more cheerful and inspiring. And when they say this, their testi-

mony is final. You cannot go behind it and prove that they are less happy than they were, or that they do regret their lost beliefs without knowing it? Why, then, is there this constant talk about the disconsolate unbeliever? Really it is all a pose with the ordinary journalist. He does not know these miserable Freethinkers; he has only heard about them from religious sources, and he repeats the legend as a concession to orthodox feelings.

I have the greatest possible difficulty in realising how anyone could regret a discarded belief. Like most people, I have shed a few in the course of my life, but I cannot honestly say that I ever experienced any sorrow or looked back upon them regretfully. I can quite appreciate the fact that the surrender of beliefs may be the occasion of a great deal of pain and discomfort. But this arises from quite other causes. Let us take a common case. A man moving in Christian circles, with his family and friends and business associates all Christians, finds his belief in Christianity slipping from him. He sees that to take the honest course and to openly avow his altered convictions means loss of position and friends, and a rupture of family ties. If his friends were not Christians, and had been brought up in a mentally healthy manner, these circumstances would not arise. Being what they are, neither appreciating the nature of intellectual processes, nor of mental honesty, unpleasantness is certain. The man feels keenly the rupture of old associations, the more keenly because the change of mental attitude implies the possession of a rather more sensitive organisation than is common. The result is a period of stress and storm—not due to the loss of a belief, but to the loss of all that intolerance says shall be its consequence.

Assume another set of conditions. Suppose that the man's friends said no more about his change of opinion or religion than they would if he changed his opinion as to the nature of gravitation. How much of this greatly talked-of mental regret and pain would be experienced? Evidently none at all. It is not, then, the belief that one surrenders with reluctance; it is not the lost belief that anyone wishes he still had; it is wholly a question of social and domestic relations broken as a consequence of the dehumanising tendency of a religious education.

Let us take a further step. I have often been asked whether Atheism could ever satisfy human nature, and sometimes have been told that it would not do so. I have invariably replied that Atheism satisfied me, and so far as I represented human nature the answer always seemed conclusive. At all events, what we are satisfied with will be largely determined by what we are looking for, and to a smaller degree by the kind of human nature we are endowed with. A whisky-soddened organisation will not be content with lemonade, and a constitutionally unreflective and superstitious character will not be satisfied with Atheism. All he can do is to say that, as a religious person, he would not be an Atheist. That seems rather a silly thing to say, but it is really what the religious person does say, and a great many religious sayings are silly when we analyse them. And if, after a long course of mental development, the religious man outgrows his beliefs and arrives at Atheism, he can quite as truthfully say that religious beliefs would not satisfy him. And the one statement is as true as the other. Of course, Atheism will not satisfy the religious person. Equally, of course, religion will not satisfy the Atheist. Both are content where they are, and when they arrive anywhere else, they will experience the same mental contentment—that is, so long as the change is not accompanied with social or domestic penalties.

Why on earth should the convinced Agnostic or Atheist feel his position chilly or comfortless, or leave his religion reluctantly, or look back upon it regretfully? As an Atheist, one lacks none of the qualities of mind or nature that one possesses as a Christian. It is a crude and utterly false notion that as a religionist certain qualities are exercised, that



atrophy through disuse when one becomes an Atheist. This notion belongs to the crude psychology of the City Temple. All the qualities of mind exercised in connection with religion are exercised in connection with non-religious subjects. The strength of religion really lies in giving our normal, human, and social feelings a religious interpretation. One does not cease to admire, to love, to venerate, to praise honesty and truthfulness and cleanliness because one has ceased to use the traditional jargon. But one does these things in the name of humanity, not in the name of God. There are, as I have often had to point out, no such things as religious feelings, there are only religious beliefs and ideas, and the exercise of ordinary human feelings in connection therewith.

That being so, all that Atheism does is to strip these feelings of their religious disguise and make plain their real nature. It leaves all the legitimate avenues for their exercise and gratification absolutely untouched. It does not deny the reality or value of a single human quality; on the contrary, it emphasises their significance. It is true that the Atheist would arrange human qualities in accord with a different scale of values to that adopted by Christians, but that is about all. He would place more reliance upon reason and less upon mere faith. He would place less emphasis upon self-sacrifice and more upon self-development. He would have less to say on the charity of mere alms-giving, and more on the charity of sympathy and intellectual hospitality. He does not talk about our "poor, weak, human nature," and he does not go about fearing lest each new advance in knowledge should bring the social structure about his ears. Wrong the Atheist may be; cheerful and hopeful the Atheistic position unquestionably is. And it is one of the curiosities of the situation that they who proclaim human nature too poor and too weak to stand alone, should charge those who take the opposite view with having a cold and cheerless philosophy to offer the world.

It is too much to expect that religious preachers will drop this kind of chatter. It is a profitable line and they will work it as long as they can. The only time when a preacher talks sense is when his congregation refuses to listen to nonsense. But it is time, now that Atheism is so common, that journalists and others made themselves better acquainted with the subject. Above all, it is distressing to find Freethinkers acquiescing in this half-sorrowful pose, and speaking as though their surrender of the religious *idea* involves great heart-burnings, and leaves them to dolefully wander through life as they best know how. The Atheist has nothing to regret because he has left nothing behind him worth regretting; and to many, the losing of religion brought positive relief. It is strange, that having nearly killed the legend of the dying Atheist shrieking out for forgiveness for his unbelief, we should be confronted with living ones stalking through life miserable and depressed because they have a little more common sense than their fellows. Sterne thought but poorly of the man who could travel the world from Dan to Beersheba and cry "all is barren," and it would be equally surprising to find the Atheist, with the whole world of nature and of human nature before him, regretting the childish trumpery of the Christian creed.

C. COHEN.

### What a Century Has Done.

AT this season of the year we naturally indulge, as Freethinkers, in more or less edifying comparisons between the present and the past, and examine the prospects of our propaganda. Of course, we must judge to-day in the light of yesterday, and appraise the future by the help of that judgment. Our first question is, Has "the best of causes" made any substantial progress during, say, the last hundred and twenty years? Are we nearer the goal now than we were then? It is well known that the

French Revolution of 1789 was, at first, enthusiastically welcomed by the majority of thoughtful people in this country. There was already in existence here a Society for the express purpose of commemorating the English Revolution of 1688. On November 4, 1789, this Society observed its anniversary at the meeting-house in the Old Jewry, when a celebrated Welshman by the name of Richard Price, a Unitarian clergyman, preached a remarkably bold sermon on the "Love of our Country," in which he maintained that "ignorance is the parent of bigotry, intolerance, persecution, and slavery." Eloquent he sang the praises of three great principles, liberty of conscience, the right to resist power when it is arbitrary and oppressive, and the right to choose our own rulers and to depose them when they misbehave. His peroration was a magnificent prophecy in the following grand style:—

"I have lived to see thirty millions of people indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice, their king led in triumph, and an arbitrary monarch surrendering himself to his subjects. And now methinks I see the ardor for liberty catching and spreading, a general amendment beginning in human affairs; the dominion of kings changed for the dominion of laws, and the dominion of priests giving way to the dominion of reason and conscience."

The sermon was followed by a stirring speech delivered at a public dinner at the London Tavern. The result of these two audacious deliverances was that the preacher from Newington-square shot at once into front-rank popularity, and the cause of the Revolution became a passion throughout the length and breadth of the land. The fire burned fast and furious, the temperature rose to a great height, and societies sprang up at various centres to supply the requisite fuel.

Ere long, however, two formidable obstacles blocked the way to victory—Burke and the French Terror. Burke was a great statesman, and his opposition to the Revolution, though for a time unavailing, was bound, in the long run, to exert a tremendous influence upon British thought. He saw fit to reply to Dr. Price's utterances, who readily returned the compliment. Meanwhile, the statesman stood practically alone, his party being almost to a man against him. His appeal was to the order of the world which was pre-ordained and sacred, and with which we had no right to interfere. Parliament as then composed was in his estimation a complete representation of the commoners of Great Britain, though Old Sarum, without constituents, had two members, while Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, and Bradford, with their teeming thousands, had not one among them. The existing order was an inheritance from Providence, which it was the imperative duty of statesmen to safeguard at whatever cost. It was the shallowest and most fallacious of arguments, and Paine, in his *Rights of Man*, smashed it to smithereens. But the inhuman excesses of the Terror yielded it an apparently irrefutable confirmation, and the British people rallied to its support. Though Burke despised the common people, calling them in his wrath the "swinish multitude," there took place a wonderful reaction against the Revolution. There was quite a revolution going on, the object of which was to put down the Revolution; and it succeeded to an amazing extent. The friends of the Revolution were marvellously courageous and energetic. The Corresponding Society boasted of thirty thousand members in London alone, all of whom cried aloud for Parliamentary reform. Thomas Hardy, its founder, William Godwin, its philosophical defender, Thomas Holcroft, Horne Tooke, and many others of the leaders, were strong, brave men, who loved righteousness and truth, and fearlessly fought for what they believed to be the right; but against Burke and the Terror they could not possibly succeed. In May, 1794, the Corresponding Society held its anniversary dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, when the band played "Ca ira," the "Carmagnole," and the



"Marseillaise." Speaking of this occasion Mr. Brailsford says:—

"That dinner must have marked the height of the revolutionary tide in England. The reaction was already rampant and vindictive, and before the year 1794 was out it had crushed the progressive movement and postponed for thirty-eight years the triumph of Parliamentary Reform. It requires a strenuous exercise of the imagination to conceive the panic which swept over England as the news of the French Terror circulated. It fastened impartially on every class of the community, and destroyed the emotional balance no less of Pitt and his colleagues than of the working men who formed the Church and King mobs. Proclamations were issued to quell insurrections which never had been planned, and the militia called out when not a hand had been raised against the King throughout Great Britain.....A mob burned Dr. Priestley's home near Birmingham for no better reason than because he was supposed to have attended a Reform dinner, which he in fact did not attend. Hardy's bookshop in Piccadilly was rushed by a mob, and his wife, about to be confined, was injured in her efforts to escape, and died a few hours afterwards. A hunt went on all over the kingdom for booksellers and printers to prosecute, and when Thomas Paine was prosecuted in his absence for publishing the *Rights of Man*, the jury was so determined to find him guilty that they would not trouble to hear the case for the Crown" (*Shelley, Godwin, and Their Circle*, pp. 38, 39).

The spirit of persecution now mercilessly stalked along from end to end of the land, and no lover of truth and freedom was safe. At Essex a dissenting minister named Winterbotham preached a sermon somewhat resembling, but of a milder character than the one alluded to by Dr. Price; but the poor fellow was tried for it and sentenced to four years' imprisonment and a fine of £200. Mr. Brailsford mentions an attorney, one John Frost, who for casually saying that in his opinion we could manage very well without kings was imprisoned, set in the pillory, and struck off the rolls. In the year 1793 the Reformers of Scotland arranged to hold a Convention at Edinburgh to advocate shorter Parliaments and universal suffrage. The idea of uttering sedition in any shape or form was entirely foreign to its promoters. The Convention met and held several perfectly orderly sessions, but one day the magistrates entered and had five of the delegates arrested without rhyme or reason. They were tried before a judge and sentenced to fourteen years' exile at Botany Bay, of whom only one lived to return to his native land.

At this period religious persecution flourished abundantly. Burke declared that Atheists were "infidels or outlaws of the constitution, not of this country, but of the human race." In 1797 a man called Thomas Williams, a poor bookseller, sold one copy of the second part of the *Age of Reason*, and a society sometimes known as the "Proclamation Society," and sometimes as the "Vice Society," undertook his prosecution. He was tried before Lord Kenyon, who pompously announced that the Christian religion was part of the law of the land, and the jury brought in a verdict of "Guilty." Sentence was postponed, and the wretched man had to languish in gaol from June, 1797, till April 28, 1798, when he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment, and to be bound over in his own recognizances for £1,000. Williams humbly begged that he might be supplied with a bed, but Lord Kenyon said sternly: "I cannot order that. I daresay you will be treated properly. I wish to have it understood that this statement is a very great abatement of the punishment, as in modern times, within the period I have sat in Westminster Hall, three years' imprisonment has been ordered for an offence of much less enormity than this, for this publication is horrible to the ears of a Christian" (Mrs. B. Bonner's *Penalties upon Opinions*, pp. 81-84). And all this cruel, inhuman treatment for selling a single copy of the second part of the *Age of Reason*!

Well, we have made considerable progress since then. We are still objects of ostracism, calumny, even black lying, and sometimes of prosecution and

imprisonment under the odious Blasphemy Laws; but an impartial student of history must admit that our present treatment, even at its very worst, is enormously humaner than it was a century, even a quarter of a century, ago. There is still much room for improvement, and we must keep on agitating and educating public opinion until the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws and of the various Lord's Day Observance Acts has become an accomplished fact. As we are about to commence another year of service in the cause of freedom, let us fill our minds with the absolute conviction that Truth is mighty and must prevail and completely shatter the grievous yoke of superstition; and while cherishing and acting upon this rational conviction, may we all have

A HAPPY NEW YEAR.

J. T. LLOYD.

### "Wait Till You Come to Die."—IV.

(Continued from p. 805.)

"The Church has taken great pains to show that the last moments of all infidels—that Christians did not succeed in burning—were infinitely wretched and despairing. It was alleged that words could not paint the horrors that were endured by a dying infidel. Every good Christian was expected to, and generally did, believe these accounts. They have been told and retold in every pulpit of the world. Protestant ministers have repeated the lies invented by Catholic priests; and Catholics, by a kind of theological comity, have sworn to the lies told by the Protestants. Upon this point they have always stood together, and will as long as the same falsehood can be used by both. Upon the death-bed subject the clergy grow eloquent. When describing the shudderings and shrieks of the dying unbeliever, their eyes glitter with delight. It is a festival. They are no longer men; they become hyenas; they dig open graves; they devour the dead. It is a banquet. Unsatisfied still, they paint the terrors of hell. They gaze at the souls of the infidels writhing in the coils of the worm that never dies. They see them in flames—in oceans of fire—in abysses of despair. They shout with joy; they applaud. It is an *auto-da-fé*, presided over by God."—COLONEL INGERSOLL, *Oration on Voltaire*, pp. 25-26.

WE will now deal briefly with Thomas Paine, whose death-bed is generally coupled with that of Voltaire as dreadful examples of infidel wretchedness at the moment of death.

The first part of the *Age of Reason*, in which Paine attacked the inspiration of the Bible, was written in Paris during the French Revolution, while he was in momentary fear of arrest by the Revolutionary Tribunal. His friends were falling fast under the guillotine. To quote his own words, "I appeared to myself to be on my death-bed, for death was on every side of me, and I had no time to lose. This accounts for my writing at the time."\* He had not finished this first part more than six hours before he was arrested and taken to prison. The guard, however—whose kindness Paine acknowledges—allowed him to hand the manuscript to Joel Barlow to be conveyed to the printer.

The second part of the *Age of Reason* was actually written while Paine was in prison. Rickman says:—

"Paine, while in the Luxembourg prison and expecting to die hourly, read to Mr. Bond (surgeon, of Brighton, from whom this anecdote came) parts of his *Age of Reason*; and every night when Mr. Bond left him, to be separately locked up, and expecting not to see Paine alive in the morning, he [Paine] always expressed his firm belief in the principles of that book, and begged Mr. Bond should tell the world such were his dying sentiments. Paine further said, if he lived he should further prosecute the work and print it. Bond added, Paine was the most conscientious man he ever knew."†

There is not much resemblance here to the orthodox picture of the terror-stricken infidel faced with death. Paine's only anxiety was lest he might be executed before the *Age of Reason* was finished, and its so-called blasphemies printed and given to the public.

\* Moncreux Conway, *Life of Paine* (Centenary edition, 1909) p. 196.

† *Ibid.*, 208.



His escape from the guillotine—if it had happened to a believer—would have been cited as a miraculous interposition of Providence. For when the fatal chalk mark, which denoted that he was to be executed in the morning, was placed on his cell door, it was inadvertently placed inside the door instead of outside; so that, on the following morning, the door being closed, the guards passed it by. This saved his life until his enemies, in their turn, perished under the guillotine, and he was liberated.\*

In a pious work, entitled the *Life and Gospel Labors of Stephen Grellet*, there is a most circumstantial account, given by a certain Mary Hinsdale, that she heard Paine, on his death-bed, cry, "Lord Jesus, have mercy upon me"; she also heard him declare, "If the Devil has ever had any agency in any work, he has had it in my writing that book [the *Age of Reason*]." This statement has been the foundation for all the lying fables circulated about Paine's death-bed. But, fortunately, we have the best of evidence as to the falsity of this statement.

Sturdy old Cobbett, who, from being one of Paine's most violent assailants, became converted, through Paine's political writings, into one of his most eloquent defenders, investigated this story on the spot—in America, where Paine died.

Paine died at the house of Madame Bonneville, a French lady who fled to America from the French Revolution. The true account of his death is given by Moncure Conway in his standard *Life of Thomas Paine*, a work which cost him many years of patient research. It runs as follows:—

"After the years in which the stories of Paine's wretched end have been accumulating, now appears the testimony of the Catholic lady,—persons who remember Madame Bonneville assure me that she was a perfect lady,—that Paine's mind was active to the last, that shortly before death he made a humorous retort to Dr. Romaine, that he died after a tranquil night.

"Paine died at eight o'clock on the morning of June 8, 1809. Shortly before, two clergymen had invaded his room, and so soon as they spoke about his opinions Paine said: 'Let me alone; good morning!' Madame Bonneville asked if he was satisfied with the treatment he had received in her house, and he said 'Oh yes.' These were the last words of Thomas Paine" (p. 322).

During Paine's last days, he received many visits from Mr. Willett Hicks, a broad-minded Quaker, who visited Paine as a friend, and without any objective religious design. Willett Hicks told Gilbert Vale—the author of a *Life of Paine*—that after Paine's death he was beset by pleading questions from his Quaker brethren, "Did thee never hear him call on Christ?" "As for money," said Hicks, "I could have had any sum."

It was Willett Hicks who—when following the funeral of Paine—being told by a Christian gentleman that Paine would get a good share of purgatory before the Devil would let him go, replied that "he would sooner take his chance with Paine than any man in New York on that score."†

Now, the Mary Hinsdale (then known by her maiden name, Mary Roscoe) who floated the pious fable of Paine's death-bed recantation, was a servant in Willett Hicks's house, and ten years after Paine's death she pretended that she had been sent with some delicacy to Paine, and had heard him say the words we have before quoted.

Willett Hicks "declared she never saw Paine at all."‡ When she was hunted out by Cobbett, "she shuffled, she evaded, she affected not to understand," says Cobbett, and finally said she had "no recollection of any person or thing she saw at Thomas Paine's house."§ Cobbett declared the whole story of Paine's recantation to be "a lie from beginning to end." Finally, the same Mary Hinsdale afterwards "reported," says Moncure Conway,—

"that a distinguished member of the Hicksite Society, Mary Lockwood, had recanted in the same way as Paine. This being proved false, the hysterical Mary sank and remained in oblivion, from which she is recalled only by the Rev. Rip Van Winkle."\*

Thomas Paine never altered his opinions. Willett Hicks, the Quaker, says so. Madame Bonneville, the Roman Catholic, says so. So do the numerous clergymen and others who pestered Paine's last days by beseeching him to repent. The evidence is overwhelming.

These death-bed lies are easy to concoct, but not easy to disprove; we commend to the evangelical clergy who are so fond of using the "Infidel Death-bed" argument the following Roman Catholic account of the deaths of Luther and Calvin, the founders of the Protestant Churches. It is taken from a book written by Mgr. Segur, published in Boston by T. B. Noonan & Co., entitled *Plain Talk About the Protestantism of To-day*, where we are told:—

"Luther died forlorn of God, blaspheming to the very end. His last word was an attestation of impenitence. His eldest son, who had doubts both about the reformation and the reform, asked him for a last time whether he persevered in the doctrine he preached. 'Yes,' replied a gurgling sound from the old sinner's throat—and Luther was before his God" (p. 225).

Calvin, continues this Christian priest, died of scarlet fever, devoured by vermin, and eaten up by an ulcerous abscess, the stench whereof drove away every person. In great misery he gave up his rascally ghost, despairing of salvation, evoking the devils from the abyss, and uttering oaths most horrible and blasphemous most frightful (p. 225).†

Do we believe these "idle tales of dying horrors," as Carlyle called them? No, we do not; they are Lies, Lies, Lies. But they illustrate the power of religion in making men bear false witness when it tends to the glory of God. We do not believe that any other motive but religion would induce anyone to such wickedness as putting lies into the mouth of a man after he is past the power of contradicting them. Sir Richard Burton, the famous traveller and linguist, was a well-known Freethinker, but when he was lying unconscious on the verge of death, his Roman Catholic wife called in a priest, who administered the sacrament to the unconscious body, and Burton was claimed as "reconciled" to the Catholic Church. The same farce was played over the body of Littré, the great French Atheist.

During Charles Bradlaugh's last illness, his daughter—knowing the manners and customs of Christians in the matter of dying Freethinkers—took the precaution to get the signed testimony of the doctor and nurses who attended her father's last illness. It was well she did so, for the usual batch of lies appeared. Even such well-known public people as the late Mr. Charles Cooper, editor of the *Scotsman*, the late Sir Isaac Holden, and the Countess Wachtmeister declared that Mr. Bradlaugh changed his opinions before he died.

Mr. Bradlaugh's daughter says:—

"The very last words I heard him utter during the night of his death were reminiscent of his voyage to India. Never throughout the whole time did he by sign or sound indicate that there was the smallest change in his opinions."‡

(To be concluded.) W. MANN.

### "God's Birthday."

"On looking out of the window this morning I noticed that my neighbors were drunker than usual, and I remembered that it was the birthday of their redeemer."—THOMAS CARLYLE.

THERE is a legend as old as any in the Christian Church, which has put the premium upon gloom and has made it part and parcel of the orthodox

\* Moncure Conway, *Life of Paine*, p. 209.

† Conway, *Life of Paine*, p. 322.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

§ G. W. Foote, *Infidel Death-Beds*, p. 74; citing the *Republican* (Feb. 13, 1824), vol. ix., p. 221.

\* Moncure Conway, *Life of Paine*, pp. 324-5.

† See "Acid Drops," *Freethinker* (Dec. 18, 1892).

‡ *Did Charles Bradlaugh Die an Atheist?* by his daughter, Hypatia Bradlaugh Bonner, p. 13; 1913. (Watts & Co.)



superstition. It is that Christ was never seen to smile, but often to weep. This does not concern Freethinkers overmuch, for those unrepentant sinners do not think it likely that the "Man of Sorrows" would, as Shakespeare puts it, "laugh mortal." Man is, however, a laughing animal, and in this he is superior, if in nothing else. To be ashamed of laughter, to hold back merriment and mirth; to live in gloom and seriousness may suit the ascetics, but is unworthy of men, who love sunshine and the song of children, and the open breezy day, rather than the spectral quiet and gloom of the cloister.

Hence the convivial nature of Christmas Day, alleged to be the birthday of Christ, has frequently been noted to the discomfiture of theologians, who object to the rationalistic explanation of Christianity. "God's birthday" is an orgy of gluttony and godliness, and the reason for this is an excellent piece of Christian evidence, for it plucks the heart out of the orthodox superstition.

Christmas Day was not kept regularly until many generations after the alleged birth of Christ. When first observed, it was kept on varying dates. The precise time of Jesus' birth, like that of James de la Pluche, was "wropt in mystery"; but it certainly was not in December. Why, then, do Christians observe Christmas Day on December 25, and why is the birthday of the ascetic "Man of Sorrows" a veritable carnival of conviviality?

Like all human institutions, the Christian Churches and their feast days have had to contend in open warfare for survival. The festivals of Pagan Rome were numerous, and it was in competition with the feast of the Saturnalia, one of the principal Roman festivals, that Christmas Day came to be instituted by the Christians, and the date fixed as December 25. The anniversary of Saturn was an old-established institution, and the propensity of converts from Paganism to cling to custom proved invincible. If the apostates were to be retained in the folds of the new religion, it was imperative for the Christians to incorporate the old under the mask of the new.

This struggle for survival has been maintained ever since. In the past the Church sought for adherents by increasing her festal days, and she crushed opposition by bribing the weak and murdering the strong. In the twentieth century she is cajoling apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries, and at home by instituting Pleasant Sunday Afternoons in the place of painful Sabbaths, and by hypocritically identifying herself with social measures which appeal to the working classes.

Even the Christian festival itself, with all its hypocritical profession of goodwill, is largely pretence and make-believe. Not once in its persecuting history has the Christian Church manifested "goodwill to men" when those men were opposed to its own creed. The nations which worship the Prince of Peace keep millions in the grasp of militarism from the Elbe to the Spree, from the Seine to the Neva. Whether the nation be England, America, France, Russia, or Germany, the fact is the same. With the gospels on their tables and the creeds on their lying lips, the nations have priestly blessings on their warfare, and invoke Christ before launching their battleships.

Slum landlords, the employers of sweated labor, dealers in adulterated goods, see no inconsistency in murmuring in their seats at worship, "Return good for evil," "Blessed be ye poor," and the rest of the parrot recitative of peace and forbearance. When Freethinkers point out the inconsistency of such conduct, they are regarded as madmen, and insulted and imprisoned. Yet who can deny that, if Christ's commands had any power, it would be viewed as a frightful crime to make weapons of murder or to grind the faces of the poor. The old jest that "singing hymns never prevented a grocer from sanding his sugar" expresses in a sentence what may be said in all seriousness of the powerlessness of Christianity to affect daily life and conduct.

For of all powerless things on earth, Christianity is the feeblest, even though sovereigns are still consecrated, multitudes still baptised, parliaments and tribunals still opened, and myriads of churches and chapels still built in its name. It has become a hollow make-believe, a robe with a corpse hidden within it. There is no Devil there at all except the men who make money out of this sham, and who hiss at the thinkers who would free mankind from their influence.

The Freethinkers are not frightened by bugbears of ignorance and superstition. They stand calmly where they have arrived, knowing that in the fulness of time the altar of Christ will be superseded by the altar of Truth. Even the festival of Yuletide will gain by the change, for no longer will it be associated with an organised hypocrisy, nor will it be a pretended celebration of an event that never happened.

MIMNERMUS.

### Acid Drops.

The *Daily Mirror* struts and brags as if it had saved the life of Mrs. Williams, who was sentenced to death for the murder of her little boy. What saved her was the fact that she was going to be a mother again. Her sentence is commuted to penal servitude for life; which, by the way, does not necessarily mean that she will be imprisoned for any great length of time. Of course the *Daily Mirror* printed a few more final letters on the matter, and naturally there was one from Bishop Welldon, the Dean of Manchester. Look at this as a sample of the reverend gentleman's wisdom. After remarking that the hanging of a woman would be a departure from general usage, he continued:—

"I approve that usage of a humane instance of the privileges accorded to women, just because they are women. I hope that women will not forfeit their privileged position."

Does he approve it? But the non-execution of female murderers in no way depends upon *his* approval. And how on earth could women forfeit their privileged position, when it is theirs merely *as* women? Can they unsex themselves? The Bishop is in a sad muddle.

The principal business streets in the borough of Southend-on-Sea, which includes the "aristocratic" Westcliff-on-Sea—have been decorated for the Christmas holiday at the expense of the local tradesmen, who want to bring people from far and near outside their shops, where, like the good Christians they are, they labor not for meat which perisheth. (N.B.—The "meat" in this case applies to everything eatable.) The decorations are not exactly artistic, but there is an attempt at something beyond red, white, and blue electric lights here and there. King George's crown is not forgotten; in fact, he seems to be the presiding genius of the show. We do not notice a single religious element; it is the display of a secular festival throughout; and Jesus Christ has not so much as a look in the celebration. Yet there are a lot of bigoted Christians in Southend and Westcliff; and, with the aid of the county licensing magistrates, they have closed the Sunday picture shows for a good many years. Why then is poor Jesus Christ treated in this insulting manner? It is done, of course, in the name of *business*, which is now the most sacred word in the English dictionary—beating "God," "Christ," the "Holy Mother," ay, and the "Holy Father" into fits. Moreover, it is sad to say, that the "Let us pray!" in the Lord's house on Sunday is too often translated into "Let us prey" on the Monday morning.

One of life's little ironies is displayed in the fact that the Southend Municipal Cemetery is under the control of the local Entertainments Committee. They might plead that some of their clients join the "heavenly choir."

Lord Haldane has been telling Anglicans and Nonconformists that if they don't agree—and he is afraid they won't—on the subject of religious instruction, they will both be put out of the elementary schools in England. It is their quarreling, he says, which is making it impossible to do anything like justice to Education in this country. Is this a foreshadowing of Secular Education. We hope so. But you can never be sure of these slippery politicians.

Mr. Asquith received a Nonconformist deputation on the educational question. Dr. Clifford was the chief speaker,



and was assisted by Rev. F. B. Meyer and Rev. J. Scott Lidgett. Who wants to know any more? These Nonconformists know their book. They are not the three blind mice.

Sir Edward Grey states plainly that the sole cause of the Home Rule quarrel is religion. Belfast would be a happy family if it were not for the mutual hatred of Catholic and Protestant. Perhaps the Bishop of London will remember this when he turns his attention to Ireland again.

The Bishop of London is a sad nincompoop, and there are a great many clergymen in his diocese to match him. No less than 452 of them have signed a request for public prayer on the Irish question. The idea is that the supporters and opponents of Home Rule may gather up under the banner of the Church, who will say, "Bless you, my children!" Then the wisdom of the Lord will descend upon them, they will agree with each other at once, and a settlement of the Irish question pleasing to all parties will take place immediately. Carson and Redmond, Asquith and Bonar Law, Sir Edward Grey and Austen Chamberlain, Lloyd George and F. E. Smith, will fall upon each other's necks and weep for joy. And all will be for the best in the best of all possible worlds. What a lovely picture! And what a lovely lot of fools believe it will be realised.

"Artifex," in the *Manchester Guardian*, falls foul of Mr. Hugh S. Elliott for some of his remarks concerning the relation of neural states to neural processes. He says, by way of introduction, that Mr. Elliott is the author of "a remarkably poor book on M. Bergson." Of course, one way of meeting sneers of this kind is to reply in directly opposite terms. As a matter of fact, Mr. Elliott's criticism of Bergson is anything but a "poor book." So far as it goes, it is remarkably well done; and Mr. Elliott went the right way to work when he reduced the position of M. Bergson to plain language. In the long run, this is the most effective way of dealing with one who deals very largely in words. "Artifex" would doubtless have been better pleased if Mr. Elliott had indulged in page after page of metaphysics on the opposite side, but the result would not have been nearly so conclusive. Mr. Elliott's was one of the few pieces of writing on the subject that really pricked the bubble of Bergsonism.

The particular statement that "Artifex" falls foul of is this: Mr. Elliott, he says, writes that—

"Physiology has proved beyond any power of doubt that all our acts, all our thoughts, and all our emotions are dependent purely and exclusively on material events proceeding in the brain, and that these material events are set going by the ordinary laws of matter and motion. A human being, like all other animals, is an excessively complex organism, of which every movement is a necessary consequence of some previous arrangement of material particles. The whole is susceptible of complete explanation in terms of physics and chemistry; there is unquestionably no such thing as a vital force, nor is there the least rag of evidence in favor of the existence of a soul."

"Of course," says "Artifex," "this is pure nonsense."

It is easy enough to polish off a statement that one doesn't like with an "Of course"; but, with the exception of two or three words in Mr. Elliott's summary, all he says is the commonly accepted ground of all scientific investigation. There is not a physiologist or psychologist of any authority who does not assume in all his investigations that neural processes do provide the equivalent of mental states. How they do this is quite another question; and while there is a wide divergence of opinion on this second question, there is a fairly general agreement on the first. "Artifex" says "we are no nearer an explanation to-day of how a brain issue in a fact of consciousness than we were a century ago." "Artifex" invites plain speaking, and so we beg to say that if he really understood what he was talking about he would not make much of this. The only kind of explanation here or elsewhere is the establishment of equivalents. How a union of oxygen and hydrogen issues in water we do not know, and we do not know because the "how" is meaningless. All we do know is that one is the equivalent of the other. And it is the same with psychology. When it has been shown that neural processes always accompany mental states, we have laid the foundations of a science of physiological psychology. When we are able to show how these neural states vary with given mental states, our science will be complete. That is as far as we can ever get—either in this or in any other matter. A complete scientific explanation is the demonstration that, in the case of any two series, one is the equivalent of the

other; and that, given one, the other invariably follows. What "Artifex" and his kind lack is a little acquaintance with scientific method.

One other point in conclusion. It is generally thought by writers like "Artifex" that it is the duty of the Materialist to point out in what way body and mind are connected. This is not the case. The connection of the two is axiomatic; it is an everyday experience. What has to be shown is how they can be disconnected. In what way can the one exist apart from the other? Mr. Elliott is quite right in saying that there is not a shred of evidence in support of the existence of a "soul."

The Poor Clergy Relief Corporation advertises the fact that it has relieved no less than 32,000 cases of clerical distress. The glorious Gospel does not appear to prevent the clergy's sweating one another.

The London Missionary Society has an accumulated deficiency of over £100,000. Some of the aborigines may breathe again, for the European capitalist soon follows the colporteurs.

"We can only express our gratitude in symbols," says a writer in a church magazine. The clergy see to it that those symbols are £ s. d.

Why is it that theatrical people are made so much of by the newspapers? One would think, from the interviews they undergo, that they were of great authority in all departments of human life and thought; whereas, on the whole, it is notorious that they are very much the contrary. Sir Herbert Tree, for instance, having arrived at the age of sixty, was interviewed by a representative of the *Daily Chronicle*. Amongst the views he expressed was one on books and reading. There were rows of books on the wall of the room he was sitting in, but "he declared that he had not read more than ten books in twenty years. The neglect of books is Sir Herbert's prescription for retaining youth. 'Otherwise,' he says, 'you think in quotations.'" Now is not this ridiculous? And is it not entirely false? The most original minded men, of course, are the great poets, and great poets have always been great readers. Emerson justly notes that Shakespeare was a great reader. Did *he* think in quotations? Other people think in quotations from him. Ben Jonson, of course, was an extremely learned person. Spenser was learned too, though not quite a rival to Ben. Milton's choice erudition is proverbial. Dryden read extensively. Pope was probably less so, but many good books passed through his hands. When we come to later English poets, such as Cowper, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, we find that they were all great readers. Shelley was hardly ever without a book. Coleridge read everything. His annotations enriched the margins of half the world's literature. Tennyson was well read; one scarcely knows what Browning had *not* read; and George Meredith's reading was evidently wide and deep. Macaulay was not much of a poet; but he was reckoned amongst the great prose writers; he was an insatiable reader, he had also a marvellous memory, yet the books he perused did not impair the value of the books he wrote himself. Sir Herbert Tree was clearly talking nonsense. All men do that at times, but their is no reason why their absurdities should be paraded as wisdom.

The Rev. Albert Swift fell dead from his bicycle last week. As he was not a Freethinker, there is no moral.

"Providence" has been active through the volcano in Ambrym Island in the New Hebrides. Six new craters were formed. Large portions of the island have been devastated by fire, lava, and cinders, and most of the inhabitants had to be rescued by boats and ships. "He doeth all things well."

The Bible God's first commandment was "Be ye fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." It was given a long time ago, but it has never lost its power, especially with the clergy, who are amongst the foremost promoters of the population. Here is the Rev. J. Carden, for instance, who has just been ordered by the Brentford magistrates to pay towards the upbringing of a child. The mother, who is only nineteen years of age, was formerly a domestic servant in the reverend gentleman's employ. Such patriarchal morality is not unnatural in devout readers of the Old Testament.

"Studies of Men Mended" is the title of a Religious Tract Society publication. It sounds cracked.



Dean Inge explains the presence of pain in the world in this way. God, he says, "wished us to find out all his laws, so far as they concerned us, and he would go on punishing our ignorance until we did find them out." "God," we should imagine, will not feel flattered by the apology. If he wanted us to find out all his laws, there seems an obvious way in which this could have been done. But man was not told what the "laws" were; he was not even told he had to find out. Nay, one of the earliest offences of man, according to the Bible, was that of seeking to know too much. God doesn't tell man what these laws are; he fashions him in ignorance, allows him to grope about in ignorance, and all the time punishes him for not having knowledge. The stupidity of clerical apologies almost passes comprehension. And yet some of these clergymen are intelligent enough in other directions. It is when they turn on the religious tap that they become supernaturally silly.

"Vanoc," in the *Referee*, wants to know why we cannot agree upon a "unit of happiness," and says "that once we establish the principle that all legislation increasing unhappiness, no matter by what fine names it may be called, is bad legislation, we shall be on the road to secure the continuity of policy that we now lack, and that alone can save us." This is hardly a "unit of happiness"; it is rather a test of conduct, in legislation and elsewhere. And it is the one that Bentham, and Mill, and Spencer, and Freethinkers generally have always insisted is the only rational one. Freethinkers have a habit of "getting there" first, not because they are blessed with a superhuman degree of intelligence, but mainly because they look at life without their vision being blurred by a fog of superstition.

Apropos of nothing very pertinent, "Vanoc" remarks "Mr. Bradlaugh was regarded by those who professed and called themselves Christians as an extremely wicked man, instead of what he really was—a good man with extremely bad taste." Comment of this kind is really impertinent, and the less excusable because it is so wholly unnecessary. Bradlaugh fought the allied forces of vested interest, tyranny, and superstition, and in the end won the respect and admiration of the best of his enemies. We are not aware that "Vanoc" has ever attempted a task of this kind, and if he did attempt it, we have little evidence to believe that his efforts would meet with any measure of success. All the bad taste we know of concerning Bradlaugh is that he declined the cowardly policy of refusing to call a lie a probable truth, and expressed his opinions in plain, unmistakable English. And that is the kind of "bad taste" that a Christian community never forgives.

Speaking at a Labor gathering, Mr. John Hill, Secretary of the Boilermakers' Union, said that the Labor movement was not prepared to shed any members to secure alliance with the Church. We were pleased to notice this observation, and should be better pleased to see leaders of the Labor movement spending less time on the impossible task of placating and capturing the Churches. They might just as well appeal to the capitalists right off to join the Labor movement. It should be plain to the dullest that the clergy are coquetting with the Labor movement only because of what they can get out of it. Their interest is wholly a professional interest, and a great many very earnest spirits among the rank and file are more than disgusted at some of the leaders so openly playing into their hands. The report before us says that it is impossible to forecast what the result of this conference between the Churches and Labor (held at Newcastle) will be, but the tone and temper of the Labor speakers displayed little readiness to recognise any good in what the Churches are trying to do. That is, to our mind, the most cheering feature of the gathering. It shows that some are beginning to see through the vague amiabilities of a handful of clergymen, and are a little alive to the dangers of the proposed alliance.

The Bedford family never did a single stroke of work to earn their immense wealth. It all came to them as a gift from Kings who robbed the nation. Their high and mighty lives have always been parasitic. One of them had the impudence—and, as it turned out, the imprudence—to twit Edmund Burke with his pension. Burke's reply was that he himself was but a minnow while the Duke of Bedford was a huge whale disporting himself in an ocean of royal bounty. Burke's pension, too, died with him, while the Duke of Bedford's went on from generation to generation. It goes on still. The present holder of the title (and the plunder) has just sold a portion of his London estates for a sum said to run into millions. What is sold is the right to levy rent, market tolls, etc., etc., on the traders and

inhabitants who operate or reside in that part of London. And the value of that right goes on increasing under the pressure of business and population. Nor is that all. The holders of that right are able to banish anybody they please from the most desirable district in London. Many years ago negotiations were carried on for a vacant shop in Chandos-street; everything was satisfactory on both sides, and the agreement was just going to be signed, when a notification came from the Duke of Bedford's agent that the transfer of the lease would not be sanctioned, as a Free-thought publishing business could not be allowed on the Bedford estate. Material property and moral despotism went together. And they go together still.

In an article on "Black Magic," by a "Psychical Expert," in a morning newspaper, it is stated that "Among the 'intellectuals' there are thousands of men and women who, after abandoning Christianity, have, in the search for some kind of spiritual life which is an essential craving of the human heart, plunged into the dark labyrinths of occult science." *Essential craving of the human heart!* Is it not a high-faultin' equivalent for an *Ancient habit of the human system?*

Hans Schmidt, the priest who murdered Anna Anmuller last August, and threw portions of the dismembered body into the Hudson River, was hunted down by a clever detective whose only clue was the tag of a pillow-case in one of the parcels. The priest confessed his guilt on being arrested, and declared that he was commanded by his patron saint, Elizabeth of Hungary, to offer up a sacrifice which was to be consummated by his drinking the blood of the offering. The trial is now proceeding, and the holy priest seems likely to die in a chair. No doubt he will go to glory after a little purgatorial cleansing. Where his victim has gone is unknown.

Two nude figures in bronze representing Adam and Eve, at Potsdam, were flung into a ditch by some pious inhabitants who were shocked at the absence of clothing in the statues. Piety and pornography go together in Germany as elsewhere.

The cost of living is going up, and, owing to the unrest among undertakers, it looks as if the cost of dying were going up too. Perhaps the dear clergy may join in, and want heavier fees for post-mortem rites.

Things one might have said otherwise are only too common. Everybody knows the scriptural one: "And he said unto them saddle the ass, and they saddled *him*." Here is a trade advertisement now in use: "Why wait for indigestion? Take Beecham's Pills." Here is a dairy advertisement in South Essex: "The only firm that keep cows in the borough." Meaning, "The only firm in the borough that keep cows."

We saw one of our most "blasphemous" old jokes reprinted (slightly spoiled, of course) in a London evening paper lately. It was about the nigger preacher who, when he stated that the Lord made the first man out of clay and stuck him up against the palings to dry, was asked by one of his congregation, "Who made de palins?" Whereupon the preacher complained that such questions would upset any system of theology.

A few years ago Rev. C. F. Spurr went to Melbourne, Australia, one of his objects being—as was generally stated at the time—to overthrow the system of Secular Education as it exists in some of the colonies. He is now returning, and the Secular Education question is where it was, while Free-thought generally is more advanced than when he arrived in the country. The *Christian World* says that the Australian Government has recognised the value of Mr. Spurr's work by presenting him with a set of 200 slides for lecturing purposes. The recognition is rather amusing. We believe the Australian Government will present slides to any likely person who cares to convert himself into an emigration agent by lecturing on Australia. We have no doubt that the wine-growing firms in Australia would also be pleased to show their appreciation of Mr. Spurr's services by presenting him with a few hundred thousand circulars for distribution at the lectures on Australia.

At the London County Council Education Committee meeting, the Rev. U. J. Somerville objected to Meredith's *Ordeal of Richard Feverel* as unsuitable for use in women's institutes, but afterwards withdrew his opposition. Was he afraid of being confronted with the Bible?



### To Correspondents.

**PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1913.**—Previously acknowledged, £279 4s. 1d. Received since:—Constance, £1 5s.; W. R. Angell, 5s.; Richard Allen (New Zealand) £1; Mrs. Turnbull and Family (Glasgow) £1; Immanuel, 10s.

ORDINARY Correspondence stands over till next week, owing to our having to go to press so early, in consequence of the holidays.

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

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

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

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.

We have great pleasure in reproducing the following leaderette on the Stewart case from the *Manchester Guardian*:—

#### “THE BLASPHEMY CASE.”

“Exactly a month ago on Monday last a Mr. T. W. Stewart was sentenced at the Staffordshire Assizes to four months' imprisonment for ‘committing blasphemy by attacking the truth of the Christian religion.’ At the time we commented on the sentence, but it then seemed possible, if not likely, that the Home Secretary might see his way to advise the exercise of the prerogative of pardon, and that in a few days' time the convicted man would be free. Nothing of the kind has happened; Mr. Stewart seems to have been forgotten both by the public and by the authorities, and there seems every reason to believe that unless his case is strongly taken up he will have to serve out his sentence. We publish to-day an article by Professor Gilbert Murray calling public attention to the subject. The arguments which he brings forward will, we are convinced, commend themselves to all fair-minded and thinking people. The punishment inflicted is indeed indefensible, bearing in mind the latitude allowed, and rightly allowed, to learned persons whose offence is, essentially, the same, but who are protected by the freedom to express any opinion which is in this country permitted to people who expound their views either in print or the lecture-room. It cannot be right that professors and learned writers should go free and an itinerant lecturer be convicted simply because the former know the canons of good taste better than the latter, or are more moderate in their statements of the same views. There ought not to be one law for the educated and another for the ignorant or half-educated. ‘Coarseness,’ ‘bad taste,’ and ‘speaking so as to excite ridicule’ cannot surely be attributes converting the permissible into the criminal in public debate. If Mr. Stewart was obscene he could have been summoned and punished for obscenity; if he incited people to break the peace, he could have been dealt with for that too. But to put into action against him, and for the second time, so rusty and questionable a weapon as the Blasphemy Law is a disgrace to the legal system. We hope Mr. McKenna will look into the case.”

Stewart's case has not been “forgotten” in the *Freethinker*. We are now considering whether some more effective public action cannot be taken.

Professor Gilbert Murray's letter referred to in the previous cutting from the *Manchester Guardian* deserves the thanks of every friend of liberty and justice. The following passage will be of considerable interest to our readers:—

“Mr. T. W. Stewart is quietly left to serve out his sentence in Stafford Gaol. No responsible person seems to be stirring on his behalf; yet I have the greatest difficulty in finding anyone who seriously approves of his prosecution or defends the Blasphemy Acts. The Judge who sentenced him seems to have carefully guarded himself against expressing any approval of the law which, as he explained to the jury, he had to administer. The present Prime Minister as long ago as 1889 voted for a Bill providing that ‘after the passing of this Act no criminal proceedings shall be instituted in any court against any person for schism heresy, blasphemous libel, blasphemy at common law, or Atheism.’ The present Lord Chancellor voted with

him. The present Law Officers of the Crown have expressed no public or official opinion on the question, but I do not think that any person who knows either Sir John Simon's or Sir Stanley Buckmaster's record can suppose that on this point they are less liberal than Mr. Asquith and Lord Haldane. I have made a point of consulting some Liberal divines of high authority in the Church, and find them speaking with the same voice. They do not differ from the opinion of the Blasphemy Law expressed by Sir James Fitzjames Stephen in the *Fortnightly Review* for March, 1884: ‘No one can be more convinced of its utter unfitness for these times, if indeed it was ever fit for any times.’ Yet no one moves for the alteration of the law; and the Home Secretary does not let Mr. Stewart out of prison.”

Professor Murray points out that the alteration made by Lord Chief Justice Coleridge in 1883 in the Common Law of Blasphemy simply comes to this that “working men and imperfectly educated speakers are punished” while “highly educated sceptics can say or write what they like.” The offence of “blasphemy” becomes merely a matter of taste.

We are extremely pleased to quote Professor Murray's statement as to the real extent of Stewart's “offence.”

“But the cynical man of the world has another argument. ‘It is all very well,’ he sagely suggests, ‘to say that it is only a question of bad taste. But a jury would never convict a man unless he had said something frightfully obscene.’ The answer is simple. If Stewart is to be punished for obscene language, let him be charged with it and defend himself. Do not charge him with one offence and condemn him on another, of which not a word has been said. But there is also in this case another answer. Through the kindness of Lord Coleridge I have been allowed to see the short-hand report of the two lectures on which Stewart was condemned, and though I do not for a moment agree with their opinions or admire their style, they certainly afford no foundation for any charge of foul language or obscenity.”

Our readers will recollect that we have repeatedly written to the same effect. We reprinted the “blasphemy” alleged against Stewart at his first appearance before the Wolverhampton magistrates, and we declared that if the worst sentences had appeared in the local press, from which we borrowed, the prosecution was ridiculous even under the existing law, and the motive of it nothing but sheer malignant bigotry. Professor Murray's testimony as to the peccant parts of Stewart's lectures is extremely valuable.

The *Young Liberal* for November (we regret we have only just seen it) had a strong editorial paragraph in favor of Secular Education. Incidentally it asked “what sort of Nonconformists are those who believe that the State should teach ‘religion’—save the mark!—at public expense in the public elementary schools?” A jesuitical letter from the Rev. Dr. Clifford appears in the December number. Dr. Clifford is in favor of Secular Education *plus* the Bible; which is like being in favor of Teetotalism *plus* Whiskey. We are delighted to see that the *Young Liberal* takes him to task and leaves him in a sad state of delapidation.

A lady, giving no address, and no other name than “Constance,” sends a subscription to the President's Honorarium Fund. The handwriting is not that of a young person; it is even a little shaky; but it shows character and refinement, and an open, liberal nature. *Constance!* What a lovely name! It combines every grace with every dignity. And what a woman Shakespeare depicted under that name in the play which holy motherhood and divine childhood render so supernally sacred. There are no perfect masculine names, but how many perfect female names may be found in the pages of Shakespeare, without going any further. Portia, Desdemona, Cordelia, Ophelia, Imogen, and the rest. “One of Shakespeare's women” was the highest praise Shelley could give to a lady friend. And the Bible is woman's best friend—is it? Nonsense. Besides it is too late. The place is already filled by Shakespeare.

We have received an offer from an old member of the N. S. S. and reader of the *Freethinker* in Burmah to make up the deficiency on the President's Honorarium Fund for 1913—that is, to make up the round figure of £300. We go to press too early to deal with this communication further this week. We shall have something to say about it in our next issue. Meanwhile those who intended to be in the subscribers' list should not hold back. That wouldn't be fair.



## Christmas.

AT the present time we have many holidays in the year; the greatest of them all is Christmas, and there is every reason in the world why Christmas should be the greatest holiday to the inhabitants of the northern temperate zone.

Many thousands of years ago the people did not have fine and comfortable houses to protect them from the inclemency of the weather; they lived very much the same as the birds do at the present time; they had a comfortable and joyous time of it during the warm months of the year, and then suffered and died in the cold months. The increase of both men and beasts was retarded by the same cause—cold winters and the absence of food.

As man advanced a little in civilisation he became aware of the fact that the sun was the most important thing in existence. The sun was the god of light and warmth. It was the sun that caused vegetation to grow; in fact, the sun did everything, and was therefore worshiped. They noticed, however, that the demon of cold and darkness ruled the world for a portion of the year, and as the sun appeared to travel to the south, to rise later and set earlier each day, it appeared to them that the demon of darkness was getting the better of the god of light. They observed that this went on for some time, until the god of light resumed his power; when the god of light would for a time again triumph over the demon of cold and darkness. With the crude instruments at their disposal, they were not able to determine the exact day that the sun commenced its northern march. It really commenced between December 21 and 22, but it only showed on their instruments on the 25th. Therefore, December 25 became a day of rejoicing and merry-making, their prayers had been answered, the god of light and warmth had overcome the demon of darkness and cold.

Not only was this day fixed as being the holiday of the year in Asia, Europe, and a part of Africa, but it was observed in the same manner in Mexico long before there was any communication between the eastern and the western world.

For a time, the Christian Church attempted to suppress this day as a Pagan institution; but it had been observed for so many thousand years that this was found impossible. The people would not give up their holiday. A very brilliant idea then occurred to the high officials of the Roman Church; so, in the fourth century, they got over the trouble by announcing that one of their principal gods was born on December 25, and by this wise action the old Pagan holiday became the principal Christian holiday of the world.

(SIR) HIRAM S. MAXIM.

## The Protestants Protest.

FROM a Secular and even Protestant view the ostentatious attendance of the President at the annual Thanksgiving Mass, held in St. Patrick's Cathedral (Catholic) in Washington, accompanied by members of his Cabinet, justices of the Supreme Court, the diplomatic dignitaries, congressmen, and senators, is a national scandal. How far back the custom extends we are not prepared to say, but it seems to have come in with the Roman Catholic regime under McKinley. President Taft's flagrant disregard of the proprieties in this respect was the most conspicuous. The preparations made at the cathedral for receiving the President and his train have each year increased in pomp and show. Last year, as described by the press, they were "on a grander scale than ever before. Cardinal Gibbons sat on a scarlet throne on the right of the altar," and about him were his clergy and his chaplains. Only cardinals have thrones in this country. The

President and his escort sit humbly in seats ten feet below.

The news that President Wilson has accepted an invitation to attend Thanksgiving Mass this year, and that there will be added millinery and magnificence, arouses the Protestants of Washington to protest. On November 18 resolutions prepared by the Rev. Dr. Randolph H. McKim, former president of the Episcopal House of Deputies, were adopted by the clergy of Episcopal, Lutheran, Baptist, and Disciples of Christ Churches, expressing their indignation at this favoritism shown the Church of Rome by the President of the United States. The resolutions read:—

"The attendance of our Chief Magistrate and members of his Cabinet, year after year, has been made use of to give color to the Roman claim that the service is now the official celebration of Thanksgiving Day in our national capital.

"This fact has been understood in the United States and abroad to give the Roman Catholic Church a prestige and pre-eminence over all other Churches. Every effort is made by the Roman hierarchy to give this Roman Mass the color of an official function.

"We protest against the attempt to convert our national Thanksgiving Day into a Roman Catholic festival in a service entirely out of harmony with the history of the genius of our country and the spirit and purpose of the day.

"We desire to give voice to the widespread feeling of indignation among millions of Protestants of America against the efforts of the Roman press and the Roman hierarchy to exploit the presence of our Chief Magistrate and some of his Cabinet (which we are convinced has only been intended as an act of courtesy and goodwill) for the purpose of glorifying the Roman Catholic Church and giving this service an official characterisation it does not and cannot possess."

These Thanksgiving Masses, called Pan-American or All-American, are said to have been worked up by Monsignor Russell, of Washington. We may assume that Russell proceeded under the direction of his superior, Cardinal Gibbons, who got the idea from Rome. The Pan-American Mass is held in Washington instead of some other American capital in order to get the President of the United States, for the other countries of America are Catholic and their officials go to Mass without special invitation.

While the Protestant protest is welcomed as bringing the sectarian aspect of the President's offence up for comment and criticism, it is, after all, something of a joke. The Thanksgiving proclamation, without which there would be no Thanksgiving Mass on Thursday, is a Protestant affair. It is the Protestants who have mocked the secular theory of our government with their religious fasts and feasts, their sabbaths and holy days. The Catholics, in seizing upon Thanksgiving Day to make capital for their Church, are using Protestant material. Protestants feathered the shaft that now penetrates their gizzards. They are glad enough to have the Presidents attend their churches, as all our Chief Magistrates of late years have done, because the attendance of a President means prosperity of a parish. The Rev. Mr. McKim's denomination has nothing to complain of. When the Episcopal clergy assembled in Washington during Taft's administration, Taft gave them a room in the White House for a meeting-place, and made them a speech. The Catholic Church, very likely, is entirely satisfied with the precedents for official recognition of the Church that have been established by Protestants. Protestants are the stair-builders for the ascent of the Catholic prelates to a place above the President.

A Catholic President, were one to be elected, could not by the rules of his Church worship with a Protestant congregation, and in attending St. Patrick's Cathedral he would not be open to unfavorable comment. Should he, however, invite a gathering of Catholic bishops to meet in the White House, as Taft invited the Episcopalians, every other denomination would rightfully "put up a holler." And yet we heard no objection from Roman prelates when the clergy of the Rev. Randolph McKim's communion



occupied the Blue Room, although protest was certainly justified. Who but the Episcopal prelate has assumed the title of "Bishop of Washington"?

When the Episcopalians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ place themselves squarely on Secular ground, and, affirming the Nine Demands of Liberalism, utter a protest whenever any denomination or any religion receives the patronage of the State or the favor of any law, and resent the proclaiming of religious holidays or the enforcement of religious holy days, the appointment of chaplains of any sect whatsoever, or any religious services in political assemblages—when they all agree to this, their criticism of the Catholic Church will at least be consistent. Until then, in the scramble for recognition, it will be each sect for itself and the Devil take the hindmost. And the hindmost will not be the Roman Catholic denomination.

*Truthseeker* (New York).

G. MACDONALD.

## Benedict Spinoza.—II.

(Concluded from p. 781.)

SPINOZA never felt his vocation to be that of an instructor of youth, as indeed he subsequently confessed on being offered a professorship in the University of Heidelberg, and the drudgery of an usher's place was extremely distasteful. He, therefore, remained but a brief period with Van den Ende. Fortunately, there were other means open of earning bread. It was the custom for the youths in Jewish schools to be prepared for professional life, or initiated into some handicraft, as well as instructed in book-lore. Spinoza had acquired the art of grinding and polishing lenses for optical purposes—spectacles, reading glasses, microscopes, and telescopes—and had attained to such proficiency in the business that his manufactures were readily disposed of, their sale producing sufficient to supply his modest wants.

Naturally, while he remained in Amsterdam, he had to brook the scowls of his former co-religionists, which perhaps he soon learned to bear with equanimity. But he had yet to experience to what lengths fanaticism would go. A hot-blooded fanatic waylaid him one night, and attempted his assassination. Happily the intended victim perceived the gesture of the villain as he raised his arm to strike, and foiled him by a rapid movement. The dagger thrust was received through the coat collar, and Spinoza escaped with a slight wound on the neck.

The chiefs of the synagogue, sensible of Spinoza's magnificent intellectual gifts, were still anxious to secure his service, notwithstanding the terrible excommunication they had themselves pronounced. Intimidation had signally failed to induce submission; might not some more successful method be adopted for the recovery of the precious lost sheep? Might not a pecuniary bribe affect what threats had failed to achieve? They offered to remove the ban of excommunication, and to guarantee him for the rest of his life a pension of 1 000 florins per annum, if he would acknowledge his error and submit to the mildest censures of the Church. Egregiously had they mistaken the character of the man. He had no error to acknowledge, and money was the last thing for which he cared.

Censure, excommunication, attempted assassination, flattery, and bribes, all had failed to move the obstinate heretic; if not to be won, he must somehow be removed. As a last resource they petitioned for his expulsion from the city. But there was no precedent for such banishment. Amsterdam was a free city, where all religious denominations were tolerated. Nevertheless the magistrates, unwilling to disoblige a powerful section of the community, referred the case to the Synod of the Reform Church, for their advice and opinion. With characteristic intolerance the Synod recommended a temporary banishment at least. Whether the authorities acted on this advice or not is unknown; but it is certain that for some reason Spinoza left Amsterdam towards the close of 1656. He was yet only twenty-four years old, and the events recorded since the excommunication had all occurred within the space of a few months. He found shelter with a Christian friend, whose hospitality overleapt the narrow bounds of sectarian intolerance. The name of this good man is unrecorded, but his house still remains, and the lane in which it stands is still known under the name of Spinoza-lane.

We lose sight of Spinoza for some years until 1660, when he was still residing at Rhynsburg; but in all probability a portion of the interval was spent at Amsterdam. He still practised his handicraft of glass-polishing, and earned an independent livelihood, asking gifts of no man. Those four

years were as important as any of his life, for during that time there dawned on his mind those great principles which were to be indelibly stamped with his name. He had also formed many valuable friendships with Dr. Louis Meyer; Drs. Bresser and Shaller, physicians; Simon de Fries, a young gentleman of fortune, of whom we shall hereafter hear good account; and, above all, Henry Oldenburg, with whom throughout his lifetime he maintained correspondence. Oldenburg was the intimate friend of Robert Boyle, and helped in the foundation of the Royal Society of Great Britain. He was also the Hague Consul in London when Cromwell was Protector, and distinguished himself by highly commendable efforts to secure toleration for the Jews in England.

Spinoza appears to have quitted Rhynsburg in 1664 for Voorburg, within about a league of the Hague. His exposition of the Cartesian philosophy had brought celebrity, and he found himself obliged to intermit his studies and meditations to receive friends, and sometimes curious strangers. About two years after his arrival at Voorburg he settled finally at the Hague, boarding at first with the widow Van Velden, in a house on the Veerkay, and occupying the rooms in which Dr. Colerus, his biographer, afterwards lodged; but subsequently, finding the cost of living with Madam Van Velden too great for his means, removing to fresh quarters in the house of Henry Van den Spyck, a painter, which overlooked the Pavilion Canal; and here it was that he passed the rest of his days.

Among Spinoza's warmest friends at the Hague was the unfortunate Grand Pensioner, Jean de Witt, who was, in 1672, literally torn to pieces by an infuriated mob, who baselessly suspected him of complicity with the hated French. The philosopher himself, it may here be remarked, narrowly escaped the same fate a little later, and under the following circumstances:—Lieutenant-Colonel Stoupe, commander of a Swiss regiment in the service of France, being a man of intellectual mark, and anxious to converse with Spinoza, induced the Prince de Condé, Generalissimo of the French Army, to invite the renowned philosopher to their headquarters. The invitation was accepted, but, Condé being suddenly summoned to Paris, his guest waited a week or ten days at Utrecht in hope of his speedy return; then, as much delay occurred, Spinoza took his way back to his home at the Hague. The populace, ignorant of literary or scientific curiosity, could only interpret the visit as treason to the State. They must have made some threatening demonstrations against the philosopher, for poor Van den Spyck became greatly alarmed, and besought his lodger to quit the house. Spinoza, disdaining flight, assured the timid man, and bade him fear nothing; "for," said he, "I can easily clear myself of all suspicion of treason. There are persons enow at the Hague who know the motive of my journey, and who will right me with my townsmen. But be this as it may, should the people show the slightest disposition to molest you, should they even assemble or make a noise before your house, I will go down to them, though it should be to meet the fate of the De Witts." Fortunately, the popular fury subsided, and Spinoza and his host suffered no further molestation.

Jean De Witt was leader of the Republican party, and it was by his strenuous opposition that the Prince of Orange failed in his purpose of having himself elected Stadt-holder for life. Spinoza was Republican on principle and from impulse, feeling the dignity of independence himself, and anxious also to secure it for his fellows. A brotherly affection sprang up between these men. "In all Holland," says Froude, "there were none like these two; they had found each other now, and they loved each other as only good men love. From him Spinoza accepted a pension, not a very enormous one—some thirty-five pounds a year; the only thing of the kind he ever did accept. Perhaps because De Witt was the only person he had met who exactly understood what it was, and weighed such favors at their exact worth, neither less nor more." This pension was not, however, the only thing of the kind Spinoza ever accepted. Simon de Vries, later in life, brought him a thousand florins as a gift, or rather as a meagre instalment of a heavy debt owing by the pupil to the teacher. Spinoza "laughingly assured him that he was in no need of money, and that such a sum would turn his head. Simon then made a will, bequeathing the whole of his property to Spinoza, who, on hearing of it, at once set off for Amsterdam to remonstrate against such an act so unjust to Simon's brother. His arguments prevailed. The will was destroyed, and the brother finally inherited. Now came a struggle of generosity. The heir protested that he could not accept the property unless he were allowed to settle five hundred florins a year on the disinterested friend; and, after some debate, Spinoza agreed to accept three hundred."

These windfalls made no difference, however, in his mode of life; he was as abstemious as ever, even to the verge of indiscretion. "It approaches the incredible," says Colerus,



"with how little in the shape of meat and drink he appears to have been satisfied; and it was from no necessity that he was constrained to live so poorly, but he was by nature abstemious." His ordinary daily diet consisted of a basin of milk porridge, with a little butter, costing about three-halfpence, and a draught of beer costing an additional penny. Occasionally he indulged in wine, but his consumption of that luxury never exceeded two pints a month. Once a quarter he regularly settled his accounts, "to make both ends meet, like the snake that forms a circle with its tale in its mouth," as he playfully said. "Though often invited to dinner," says pastor Colerus, "he preferred the scanty meal that he found at home to dining sumptuously at the expense of another." Yet against this man, for generations, vulgar pretenders to philosophy cast the epithets of "immoral" and "epicurean." His epicureanism stands confest to gods and men at the rate of twopence-halfpenny a day.

It must not be supposed that Spinoza was in any way parsimonious. On the contrary, he was ever liberal to the full extent of his scanty means, affording willing aid to the suffering or needy. Once, at least, he shows himself in the prominent light of a lender; for one to whom he had lent two hundred florins, as we learn, became a bankrupt; whereupon the philosopher calmly remarked, "Well, I must economise, and so make up the loss; at this cost I preserve my equanimity."

Spinoza's fame continued to extend. Early in 1673 he received an invitation, through the learned Fabricius from the Prince Palatine, Charles Louis, to fill the vacant Chair of Philosophy in the University of Heidelberg, a lucrative and honorable post. After some hesitation, probably to avoid hurting the susceptibilities of his friend, the philosopher declined the chair, "not knowing," as he says in his answer to Fabricius, "within what precise limits the liberty of philosophising would have to be restricted." Louis XIV offered him a pension if he would dedicate his next work to him; this also he refused, "having no intention of dedicating anything to that monarch."

Spinoza's personal appearance is described by Colerus, in whose days there were many persons living at the Hague who had been well acquainted with the great man. He was of middling height and slenderly built; with regular features, forehead broad and high, large eyes dark and lustrous, full dark eyebrows, and hair of the same hue, long and curling. The prevailing expression of the face was that of thought overcast with melancholy. He was never seen either sorely depressed or greatly elated. His dress was that of a sober citizen, plain yet scrupulously neat, for he despised a disorderly and slovenly carriage as a sign of affectation or of a mean spirit. He mostly spent his time in his own room, engaged in his handiwork (at which he continued to labor), in meditation, or in writing. When wearied with these he would join Van den Spyck and his family in the evening, smoke a pipe of tobacco, and take part in their ordinary chat.

Towards the end of his life Spinoza appears to have been affected with a chronic form of pulmonary consumption. He complains frequently to correspondents of not feeling well. With the coming of 1677 he grew more seriously indisposed. On Saturday, February 20, he wrote to his friend, Dr. Louis Meyer, requesting a visit, but was still able in the evening to join the family circle and enjoy his pipe. Early the next morning Dr. Meyer arrived, and found his patient worse than was imagined. The philosopher partook of a little chicken broth, and the worthy doctor remained in attendance with him. The painter and his family went to church, and never saw their friend in life again; he had been seized with a sudden difficulty in breathing, and passed peacefully away about three o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday, February 21, 1677, aged forty-four years and three months. The funeral took place on February 25, the remains of the philosopher being followed to the grave by a numerous train of respectful inhabitants of the Hague.

Malevolent rumors were circulated as to the manner of Spinoza's death. It was reported by some that he had taken drugs and unconsciously slid into death: by others that he had been heard to exclaim: O God, have mercy on me, a miserable sinner! Colerus made inquiries concerning these rumors, which, of course, proved baseless. A sale of the philosopher's effects realised 400 florins (about £40). Rebecca Spinoza appeared on the scene, but swiftly retreated on finding no spoil. A desk, containing the immortal "Ethics" in MS, was forwarded by Van den Spyck to Jan Reinwertz, a publisher in Amsterdam.

W. Frederic Pollock's work on Spinoza is a monument of learning and criticism, and Dr James Martineau's *Study of Spinoza* is worthy to rank beside it. Dr. Willis's *Life, Correspondence, and Ethics of Spinoza* is worth consulting, although it is said by very good authorities to be exceedingly untrue-worthy. Readers of French will find an admirable translation of Spinoza's principal writings by Emile Saisset. Froude has an article on Spinoza in

his *Short Studies*, and G. H. Lewes devotes to the subject a chapter of his *Biographical History of Philosophy* and an article in the *Fortnightly Review* of April 1, 1866. Matthew Arnold's essay on *Spinoza and the Bible* is written in his finest vein.

We conclude with a parting advice. Let the curious reader not be deterred by the rigorous metaphysical system of Spinoza. All such constructions are arbitrary, and of little value except as an exercise for the intellect. They are merely the forms into which a man puts such genius as he has, and that is what the earnest student will seek to discover. In Spinoza's works he will find a rich reward; for his great thoughts on religion, morals, and philosophy are like perfectly wrought statues, which every one may place in the sanctuary of his life.

G. W. FOOTE.

## Some Little-Known Freethinkers.

### IX.—JUDGE STRANGE.

THOMAS LUMSDEN STRANGE was one of the most earnest of the band of Freethinkers who gathered round Thomas Scott. He was an illustration that a good Christian makes a good Freethinker. When a young man he experienced "conversion," and, belonging to the strictest sect of religionists, the Plymouth Brethren, it is almost a wonder that he ever got outside the wall of that exclusive body. But he was ever an earnest truthseeker, and his very earnestness brought him to the light. Educated as a barrister, he threw himself into evangelical work, and so set was his mind to religious subjects that in 1852 he published a work entitled *The Light of Prophecy: Being an Attempt to Trace out thereby the Coming Judgments and the Promised Glory*. There were also published extracts from this work, entitled *Light on the Future*. The publisher says that, some time ago, his brother gave him the work, printed at the Wesleyan Mission Press, Bangalore, 1852, and adds: "I cannot find out who T. L. Strange was, or if he is at present alive; but I have little doubt he would be well pleased to find in England an echo of his wonderful work." The curious thing is that the publisher lived at Malvern, where Judge Strange resided during the latter part of his life. He also wrote *Observations on Mr. Elliott's "Horæ Apocalypticæ,"* in which he sought to refute the historical system of interpreting the Apocalypse. Mr. Strange was in the Indian Civil Service, and was animated by a desire to bring the natives to his own faith. He obtained a judgeship in the High Court at Madras, which he occupied about thirty years, and he published a *Manual of Hindoo Law*, Madras, 1856 and 1863.

Among the natives of India he was bound to receive some impressions adverse to the exclusive claims of his own faith. He found a people essentially moral and religious, yet moved by an ancient faith different from his own. In the preface to his work on the *Sources and Development of Christianity*, he says:—

"At one time my duties in India involved the charge of a jail and attendance at the execution of criminals. Trials calling for the sentence of death had to be referred to the superior court at Madras, for whose benefit the whole of the examinations had to be translated. There was always thus in these cases a considerable interval between the trial and the sentence and its execution. I was then a devout Christian, and used to take advantages of my opportunities to 'bring' the prisoners who were in these risks 'to Jesus.' They were ordinarily of the uneducated class; but one was otherwise, having been a servitor in a pagoda. He had professed himself influenced by what I had put before him; but when we met at the gallows he proclaimed his trust to be in Rama, and not in Christ. He died earnestly, calling upon his fancied mediator and savior."

This set the judge thinking. He continues:—

"What are we to say to such a phenomenon? Rama's character is painted in the most exalted colors, and is described in a history considered to be an embodiment of divine truth. Rama was a god incarnate, devoting himself for the good of mankind. What is there to induce a follower of his to relinquish him for just such another form, presented to him from a foreign quarter? And do a man's eternal prospects depend upon his critical selection of the true history? Happily, the means are ample for our extrication from any such dilemma, and, as I may acknowledge to have been the case in my own instance when I was involved in these meshes, it is simply ignorance of the true character of the materials before us, coupled with a vein of superstition, inherited, working round us, and cultivated in us from early youth, that forges those bonds in which mankind are held to the prevailing baseless expressions of belief."

The complete breakdown of Mr. Strange's faith occurred from reading, in an orthodox work, an attempt to reconcile the facts of palmontology with the Bible statement that death came into the world through the sin of Adam.



Looking into the matter, he learnt that the earth's strata also contained evidences of man's existence for some immeasurable time before the period assigned to Adam. The fall of the first Adam necessarily shook the position attributed to the second Adam. He says, in his introduction to *Contributions to a Series of Controversial Writings*, issued by the late Mr. Thomas Scott (1881):—

"I proceeded to make as close and as full study as my opportunities gave me of the Biblical statements, and especially of the representations of Christ as a real personage; and, as I proceeded, every figuration broke down before me, and appeared even traceable to remote Oriental heathen sources."

He closely examined the alleged evidences, and came to the conclusion that:—

"There is a very decided gap between the occurrence of Christianity and the era asserted for the facts alleged as those on which the system has its foundations. It follows that the facts themselves, so bound in an historical expression of them at a particular period, cannot have been enacted, and that the creed has otherwise to be accounted for."

Truth thus discovered, Judge Strange was not slow in communicating it to others. For Mr. Scott's series he wrote a number of tracts, afterwards collected as *Contributions to a Series of Controversial Writings*. This volume contains "How I Became, and Ceased to be, a Christian," "A Critical Catechism," "The Bennett Judgment," "Clerical Integrity," "Communion with God," "The Exercise of Prayer," "The Christian Evidence Society," "An Address to all Earnest Christians," "The Portraiture and Mission of Jesus," "The Christian Evidences," "The Pauline Epistles," "Scripture and Science," and "The Supreme Power in the Universe." His larger and more important works are *The Speaker's Commentary Reviewed*, a criticism of dishonest orthodox defences; *The Bible: Is it the Word of God?* a valuable and an extended examination of the fetish books in the form of a dialogue between a pundit and a student; *The Legends of the Old Testament*, in which their similarity to Hindu and other legends is pointed out; *The Sources and Development of Christianity*, in which he traces the era and integrity of the Christian records, and the Gentile moulds of Christianity; *The Development of Creation on the Earth*, in which the teachings of science are contrasted with those of Scripture; and *What is Christianity?* an historical sketch embellished with a chart illustrating the interval between the alleged time of Christ and that of the alleged evidence. His opposition was not only to the miracles and alleged facts of Christianity, but also to its principles. In regard to its central doctrine of atonement, he said:—

"It is impossible that the sin of one man can be imposed upon another. It is by a fiction, not to be realised by the mind, that the transference is to be. Can blood of any sort wipe away sin? Sin has to be repented of and turned from, and can be got rid of in no other manner."

Judge Strange was a diligent student and writer, and ever an earnest advocate of practical piety in life and conduct. He died at Norwood on September 4, 1884, at the age of seventy-five. Major-General Forlong was appointed his literary executor.

(The late) J. M. WHEELER.

### The Missing Link

ONE of the Chicago physicians who attended the recent Medical Congress in London is a prominent Catholic. He is in charge of a Catholic hospital in this city. He returned from the Congress fully convinced of the truth of Darwinism. He said so in print over his own signature. Of course, if Darwinism is true the Catholic Church is lost. Honest people who believe in Darwinism will sooner or later stop repeating in church on Sundays "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and all that in them is," etc., when on every other day they shout from the housetops that the world was not created in six days, nor was it created at all.

Curiously enough, a few days after the physician's declaration of faith in evolution, Bishop McGavick, auxiliary bishop of the Chicago archdiocese, denounced Darwinism and declared that it was "a passing phase of scientific thought." He also said that "the proofs thus far advanced in its favor are trifling and wholly inconclusive." Which of the two is telling the truth about evolution?

Father Kelly, another priest, says that the position of the Catholic Church on evolution can be expressed in two words—"not proven." We suppose this gentleman believes in the infallibility of the Pope, the miraculous birth of the Virgin, the transubstantiation of the wafer, and in the annual liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, because they "are proven." And what is the evidence that evolution is "not proven"? The Catholic Church says so.

What is the evidence that the doctrine of creation is proven? Again, the Catholic Church says so. "How easy is't then," to quote Shakespeare.

Another divine calls attention to the missing link. Let the scientists first find the missing link before they try to convert him. But what about the missing links in theology? Where are the originals of the Gospels? If one link is all that is missing to complete the chain of evidence in favor of Darwinism, how many links are missing to prove Supernaturalism? The priest who has unbounded faith in the mysteries of his Church insists on seeing all the "links" before he will accept evolution. Unwittingly, he pays a great compliment to science. In religion one does not have to be particular, but in science the evidence must be convincing. It all shows how very much more conscientious even the priests are with science than they are with theology.

—*Truthseeker* (New York).

M. M. MANGASARIAN.

### THE FAITH-HAG.

And third came she who gives dark creeds their  
Silabbat-Paramasa, sorceress, [power,  
Draped fair in many lands as lowly Faith,  
But ever juggling souls with rites and prayers;  
The keeper of those keys which lock up Hells  
And open Heavens. "Wilt thou dare," she said,  
"Put by our sacred books, dethrone our gods,  
Unpeople all the temples, shaking down [realms"  
The law which feeds the priests and props the  
But Buddha answered: "What thou biddst me keep  
Is form which passes, but the free truth stands:  
Get thee unto thy darkness!"

—*Sir E. Arnold*, "Light of Asia."

That which mankind needs most is to secure standing room for his genuine convictions. He must be true to himself and sincere with others. We must strive to remove all artificial hindrances to the progress of civilised communities. There are certain institutions, habits, and customs which have been outgrown by the more civilised of the human race, and which cannot be protected from eventual destruction, and it would surely be a blessing to have such things removed at once, and thus shorten the period of transition always so inconvenient and distressing. We are now in the midst of a period of demolition and suffering. Perhaps several generations of our race will have to endure this dreary sojourn amid ruins. But sooner or later men will find out how to secure their own comfort and convenience, and coming generations will attain to a peaceful happiness far beyond anything yet experienced by their race.—*Max Nordau*.

The first use of all knowledge is the right ordering of all actions.—*Herbert Spencer*.

My task is to destroy old and wrong notions, and shame their vendors out of circulating them. Religious notions and practices are all wrong, most of them as false as possible. And if truth is a benefit to man, and falsehood an injury, no work could be greater or more useful than mine. Let those who think otherwise enjoy their own opinions; that is nothing to me. I follow my own leading. Let others do as they can.—*Joseph Symes*.

I am just and honest, not because I expect to live in another world, but because, having felt the pain of injustice and dishonesty towards myself, I have a fellow feeling with other men who would suffer the same pains if I were unjust or dishonest towards them. Why should I give my neighbor short weight in this world because there is not another world in which I should have nothing to weigh out to him? I am honest because I don't like to indict evil on others in this life, not because I am afraid of evil to myself in another. It is a pang to me to witness the suffering of a fellow being, and I feel his suffering the more because he is mortal, because his life is so short, and I would have it, if possible, filled with happiness, and not misery.—*George Eliot*.

I would rather know that all the earth,  
That every source of joy, of love, or mirth,  
And everything of life that loved the light,  
Would sleep forever in eternal night, [fell  
Than think one soul on which the light of reason  
Should suffer torment in a Christian hell.—*Anon*.

Many men believe not themselves what they would persuade others.—*Ben Jonson*.



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