

THE Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.

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Truth is but Justice in our knowledge; and Justice is but Truth in our practice.—MILTON.

The Burning of Heretics.

De Haeretico Comburendo; or the Ethics of Religious Conformity. By G. M. Trevelyan, late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. An Address delivered to The Heretics in October, 1913. Published for the Society by W. Heffer and Sons, Ltd., Cambridge. Price 6d.

Mr. G. M. TREVELYAN, who is honorably known in the world of literature, has launched this bold outspoken lecture on broader seas than those of the "Heretics" at Cambridge. We believe the "Heretics" are a liberal-minded body of students, who give "advanced" ideas a hearing, if not always a welcome; and that is a good deal in connection with an English university. There was once talk of getting the editor of the *Freethinker* to address the members, with a view to a good evening's discussion, but the idea never attained to realisation. We are agreeably surprised, therefore, to see that Mr. Trevelyan's lecture, now published for the world at large, is quite refreshingly honest and explicit.

Mr. Trevelyan's lecture had, of course, as a mere matter of chronology, no reference to the Stewart case. He refers to it, however, in a footnote:—

"Since I gave this address, the latest Blasphemy prosecution has developed into a huge State advertisement for a particularly offensive man engaged, among his other activities, in a particularly offensive trade."

We neither endorse nor question this judgment. We print it as one which is widely held in educated circles, and will probably occasion some future controversy. Mr. Stewart must not suppose that people who maintain his right to free speech agree with all he says; nor can he expect that imprisonment alone will raise a man to a pinnacle of virtue.

What is left of the spirit of the old statute for the burning of heretics is more disgusting than dangerous. It must be very painful to be burnt alive, but there is no indignity about it. The victim is given a certain distinction and elevation. But to dress him in felon's clothes, and put him in prison with the scum of the earth, and subject him to every kind of humiliation which does not impair his health or shorten his life; this is a meaner and more contemptible bigotry than that which flamed from the fires of the stake; just as spitting in a man's face, for a difference of opinion, is a dirtier intolerance than cleaving him in two with a sword.

It is well to remember in these rather unheroic days that the "religious peace," as Mr. Trevelyan calls it, which is distant though in sight in England to-day, was bought with a great price; it "has been purchased for us by the blood of martyrs, men who died friendless and unhonored that we might have liberty."

Mr. Trevelyan congratulates his fellow men, including his fellow Freethinkers, on the progress they have made in toleration. But what is toleration? Goethe smiled cynically at the word, Thomas Paine denounced it as insulting, and it never has meant strict justice between majorities and minorities. Mr. Trevelyan puts it in this way:—

"For real toleration is only brought about when people have got accustomed to the idea that the other

side exists, and contains quite the average number of good people."

But is not this rather an effect than a cause? Does not "toleration" really mean the growth of confidence on the part of the minority, and a growth of indifference on the part of the majority? "Christian toleration" is a phrase that is often in use, but is it not simply another illustration of Johnson's dictum that the adjective is the natural enemy of the substantive? Is it not patent, both from logic and history, that toleration only increases as the dogma of salvation by faith decays?

It seems to us that Mr. Trevelyan is rather too optimistic. He notes that disbelief had gained the day, amongst the priests themselves, as well as among the educated classes in ancient Pagan society:—

"The aristocratic Roman augurs used, for reasons of State and for the benefit of the multitude, to practise rites in the efficacy of which they themselves did not believe. No two augurs could meet without smiling. So, at least, we used to be told at school, as proof of the decadence of Rome. Yet by English standards there was nothing decadent about the business,—except the smiling."

Yet the Christian deluge came and overwhelmed all that insecure civilisation. The multitude were ignorant and credulous. They are so still. And a second deluge of superstition is not exactly unthinkable. Some of us never forget Clifford's warning.

The Blasphemy Laws are reduced to something like comic opera at present. But they still exist. That is the trouble. Who knows, if they are not repealed, what victims they may find in a time of general reaction? For "blasphemy" is not a definite crime: no man knows whether he has committed it or not until a jury tells him; and as their verdict is irresponsible and absolute there is no more real safety for scholars, with any vivacity of mind and style, than there is for the lecturer at the street-corner.

But it is from Mr. Trevelyan's own standpoint, not from ours, that his lecture must be judged. He warns Freethinkers against what may be called the bigotry of anti-bigotry:—

"The belief in some quarters that heretics were intolerable bred in others the belief that Christians were despicable. Both were lamentable errors springing from the same evil root—the spirit of *De haeretico comburendo*. In a healthy society mutual relations are extremely little affected by religious opinions. Christians and non-Christians, we must all learn to recognise that an ever increasing variety of religious experience and belief is the rule of the modern world, that we have got to live side by side as friends, and that nothing save bad old traditions inherited from the middle ages makes difference of religious opinion a bar to friendship, even close friendship. My exhortation to you to-night is, *first*, to stand up for your rights of conscience and practice as matters of course, and not of favor, and, *secondly*, to be friends with those who believe more than you do and not to think that a barrier divides us from the orthodox. So far from being contradictory, these two duties are parts of one duty. For only where freedom of conscience is completely recognised as a matter of course, not of tolerance, only there are friendship and peace possible."

We shall criticise the main idea in this passage presently; it occurs again and again in Mr. Trevel-

yan's pamphlet. Meanwhile, we wish to thank him for replying to the upper-class argument that the lower classes want religion as a crutch for the weak legs of their morality and a tonic for their mental debility:—

"The argument from the 'lower orders' is based upon two assumptions: first, that only the highly educated can thrive without dogmatic religion, and, secondly, that, unless the upper and middle classes set the example, the rest will in fact cease to be practising Christians. There are rich people who, in logical accordance with this view, seldom attend church in London, where their presence, being unnoticed by the masses, would be of no sort of use. But in the country the same persons attend the village church, where the presence of the gentfolk is noted, and their absence might be remarked."

Mr. Trevelyan argues that Freethinkers should be more outspoken. If they were so they would be astonished at their own strength. He asks for honest treatment for young people:—

"If people are brought up to suppose that the only reason for not lying and stealing is that God sees them, when they come to doubt the actuality of God's presence they will, perhaps, be more likely to lie and steal. The time of life when faith in a personal God is most often shaken corresponds to the age when temptation of all sorts is strongest and freshest to men and women, the time when life is new and untried before experience or routine have given safety. Just at that time the old beliefs are likely to be breaking up. But, fortunately, in many cases, there are other motives for morality at work besides cosmological creeds. The fear of the better aspects of public opinion is a deterrent much more real and effective with most people than the fear of God, and not really less noble. But the instinct towards morality is the noblest and most effective motive of all. At the ultimate moment of choice we feel that right is right, and wrong, wrong. This fundamental instinct, whether naked or draped in the form of a creed, alone saves the world,—so far as it is saved. This firm foundation of moral instinct is endangered by those who dig under it, striving to make it rest on a cosmological system, of which millions, even of Christians, are not at heart perfectly and constantly sure."

Our readers will see that Mr. Trevelyan's lecture is interesting and important, and will be glad to meet with it again next week.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

Why We Laugh.

THE other day I was asked why we Freethinkers took a delight in laughing at the religious beliefs of other people. As a matter of fact, I was not at the time laughing at religion or anything else, but simply arguing that religion was untrue, and pointing out, by the way, the absurd character of some of the beliefs in question. But I replied, offhand, that as I hadn't any religion of my own to laugh at I was compelled, if I wished to laugh at religion at all, to do so at the expense of other people. To this my questioner retorted, "But why laugh at religion at all?" and that I countered with the return, "Why not?" And the questioner gave it up as hopeless. He probably felt that with such a person as myself further argument was useless. Evidently he had been accustomed to people treating religion as something too solemn to be spoken about in the ordinary way, and in ordinary tones. And it was quite obvious that, so far as he was concerned, the removal of the conviction that religion was to be dealt with quite differently to the way in which we deal with other subjects, was essential to a rational consideration of the subject.

And this conviction was really at the bottom of my reply. It was not hasty, but deliberate. It is far too often taken for granted that one must not discuss questions of religion as one talks about politics, or science, or literature. Of course, this is all very well so far as the religionist himself is concerned. It is part of his mental outfit. His fear

of religion is traditional, and even though that fear be modified by modern influences, there still remains the dregs of the feeling. But why should he expect those who do not share his beliefs to manifest the same mental inclinations? On the face of it, the Freethinker, because he is a Freethinker, does not consider religion to be either useful or truthful. To him it is something that began in falsehood, and has been perpetrated by methods more or less blameworthy, and which he is convinced, rightly or wrongly, is still responsible for a deal of evil in the world. Why should he, then, be asked to deal with religion in a way that all honest men and women reserve for that which they really respect? Actually the religionist is asking the Freethinker to treat religion as though he believed it were true, or might be true. He is to sacrifice *his* convictions in order to gratify the irrational demands of other people.

What is there about a belief in religion that should protect it from ridicule? In primitive times there does exist a *prima-facie* case for such a demand. The gods are then believed to be without discrimination in the giving of benefits or the infliction of punishments. It is the tribe that benefits by God's pleasure, or suffers from his anger. If one person offends he may punish all. Under these conditions, and while this belief is actual, the rest of the community is so far entitled to demand that no single member shall act so as to injure all the rest. All being collectively responsible, each must act with a view to this collective responsibility. But we no longer have this belief. We do not believe, that is, religious people do not believe, that God will punish the whole of the nation because one person does wrong. Each is, as far as God is concerned, responsible for his own actions. My laughing at religion, my ignoring God, or speaking disrespectfully of God, is entirely a matter between myself and him. Anybody may be justified in pointing out to me the error of my ways, but no one is warranted in taking it as a personal affront because my ways are not his ways.

As a matter of fact, we all of us laugh at one another's beliefs, and in many directions it is considered quite legitimate that we should do so. I once knew a man who carried a potato about in his trousers pocket as a cure for rheumatism. I laughed at his belief in the virtue of the potato; he knew I laughed at it, and never questioned my right to be amused. There are plenty of people who will not sit down with thirteen at table. To them it is no idle fancy, but a matter of life or death. Yet they are laughed at, and there exists a club somewhere in London that sets itself deliberately to break down this and similar superstitions by holding a periodical dinner at which these things are ridiculed. The diners walk into the room under a ladder, they cross their knives, they upset their salt, they "outrage the feelings" of believers in every possible way. Yet no one ever blames them for their tactics; on the contrary, many who resent the Freethinker laughing at religion think they are doing a useful and much-needed work. And there exists, in addition, a whole host of superstitions—which really form the raw material of religion—at which the world generally laughs, and no one complains.

When one comes to think of it there are few beliefs at which some people do not laugh, and without their right to laugh being challenged. It is only in connection with religion that the right to laugh is seriously questioned. And even then it is a question of geography. We may all, in this country, laugh at Mohammedanism, or Hinduism, or the religious beliefs of primitive people. In other countries we might just as freely laugh at Christianity. The Christian forgets that the Freethinker is exercising a privilege of which he freely avails himself. I fully admit that people take their religious beliefs seriously. But so did my friend with the potato cure for rheumatism take his belief seriously. To say that we must not laugh at religious beliefs because other people take them very seriously is really stating the cause of laughter, not furnishing

a reason for gravity. If they did not take them seriously there would be no occasion for laughter. It is not the belief itself, but its setting that causes mirth. A potato is a good thing in its way, and not at all a subject for mirth. Rheumatism is a reality by no means to be despised by those who are favored with its presence. There is no cause for mirth there. It is the conjunction of the two in the mind of a professedly civilised man that makes one smile. And this is equally true of religious doctrines. We do not smile at the doctrines but at people believing them. Oliver Wendell Holmes said that many people were saved from insanity by their stupidity, and therefore one ought to go mad once in a way to prove one's intelligence. So one might say of religious beliefs. Not to be able to laugh when one finds them taken seriously shows a lack of humor perfectly reprehensible in a civilised community. One ought to laugh at them—at least occasionally, to prove that one is free from thralldom. It would really be a much saner policy to lock a man up who could not laugh at religion than to imprison him for holding it up to ridicule.

It is very suggestive that we only laugh at what are called "living" religions. Dead ones are quite safe. No one wishes to laugh at them, and people would be astonished if one were to. The religious stories of the Egyptians, or the Greeks, or the Romans may be recited or read without causing any amusement. Nay, we even forget that they are religious stories, once believed in as fervently as any current Christian doctrine, and become interested in them as material for psychologic study, as poetry, or as yielding a lesson for moral guidance. We read all these ancient legends, and none of us laugh. We hear the Christian legends preached and many of us cannot forbear smiling. Why this distinction? Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Christian legends all belong to the same class. Well, the answer is that we do not really laugh at the legends, but at those who believe in them. We do not laugh at the story of Jesus walking on the water or casting devils out of lunatics, or at the story of his ascension to heaven; we laugh at people believing these to be historical events. There is really nothing in the stories, as stories, to cause laughter. It is the Christian who is ridiculous, and he is never more ridiculous than when he is engaged in pointing out that other people must discuss him and his beliefs with a gravity that neither of them deserve. If the Christian were only out of the way, we could treat the Biblical legends exactly as we treat the legends of other people. It is the believer who blocks the way. He is the only obstacle to intelligent people getting out of the Christian legends all the interest and instruction that they might be made to yield.

Suppose the legends of the Greek gods and goddesses were believed in by twentieth-century men and women? In that case, there would be the same cause and the same need for laughing at them that there now exists for laughing at Christian doctrines. Nay, we know that when these stories were believed, people did laugh at them, and we also know that these laughers are now recognised as the liberators of their day. Turn back to Aristophanes, and you will find him driving people into Rationalism by a thousand and one digs at popular beliefs. Or, better still, read Lucian, and you will find him pouring ridicule upon the religious doctrines of Paganism. And Lucian knew perfectly well what he was about. He knew that the only way to cure people of a ridiculous belief is to make it appear ridiculous. When a belief is no longer capable of serious intellectual defence it is impervious to serious intellectual attack. And then the only weapon left, and the only weapon it dreads, is ridicule. That is why Christianity nowadays, through the mouths of parsons and judges, says, "By all means argue solemnly with us, if you will; but do not laugh, lest we die."

The last time I heard the late W. T. Stead speak at a public meeting, he said he had come there to uphold the right to blaspheme. He was a genuine

believer, and was content to leave the matter between the individual and God—who are the only parties really concerned. We, likewise, uphold the right of man to laugh at anything he pleases. If he is laughing at anything good, the world will soon be laughing at him, not with him. A good thing will outlive laughter, a bad thing will succumb sooner or later. Laughter is the great cure for fools—and the fools know it. There is nothing healthier than laughter. Physically, it aids health. Mentally, it makes for sanity. It is the world's great purifier, not only in religion, but in social and political matters likewise. So long as a people cannot laugh at an absurd practice or a ridiculous belief, they are never out of danger. They are like Madame de Stael, who had given up the belief in ghosts without ceasing to be afraid of them. The world has had many different sorts of religions, but it has never had one that taught its votaries to laugh. To have taught laughter would have been to encourage suicide. And they who understand the nature of religion among a civilised people will not lightly forgo the use of a weapon that can be wielded with such deadly effect.

C. COHEN.

The Blindness of Christian Prejudice.

IT is the custom of the Pulpit to make special appeals to the young, particularly to young men. Preachers imagine that they, and they alone, can serve as competent guides to the rising generation. The Rev. R. J. Campbell, for example, in a sermon which appears in the *Christian World Pulpit* for February 18, poses as such a trustworthy guide for the young men who attend the City Temple. It is the object of this article to furnish proofs that he seriously misleads them on several most important questions. At the commencement of his discourse, the reverend gentleman admits that "there is a good deal to be said in support of the contention" that "a Christian profession in no way argues that the person making it is superior in character to others who make no such profession." He alludes to the late George Jacob Holyoake as "one of the finest men I ever knew." In spite of his confessed unbelief, there are few men to-day, or in any other day, who, "for sheer uprightness, nobility of aim, moral courage, and generosity of soul," can be said to equal him. "His magnanimity, conscientiousness, and earnest devotion to what he considered the public good could not well be surpassed." This testimony to the exceptional excellence of Holyoake's character is more significant than Mr. Campbell imagines. On the assumption that this testimony is true, the following question inevitably forces itself upon us: If a Secularist, pure and simple, can blossom into an exceptionally good and efficient citizen, of what conceivable benefit is a Christian profession when the overwhelming majority of those who make it are morally his inferiors? Naturally, Mr. Campbell deplors the fact that the celebrated Freethinker neither possessed nor adequately appreciated what the preacher calls spirituality; but the fact remains that the supposed lack did not prevent him from standing out among his contemporaries as one who could not well be surpassed. Consequently, spirituality is not essential or indispensable to the best and noblest character.

Mr. Campbell gives copious extracts from an article in the *Hibbert Journal* by Mr. J. Arthur Hill, the gist of which is that professing Christians are not, on an average, the best people. The following passage is eminently worth transcribing:—

"I go on to affirm without hesitation or doubt, that the definitely twice-born people known to me are not specially admirable characters, as compared with the once-born. The obvious retort is that this opinion is due to my own unregenerateness; sinner does not appreciate saint; a hero is not a hero to his valet; not because the hero is not a hero, but because the valet is a valet. And so on. But it is not a matter of mere subjec-

tive likes and dislikes. It is a matter of objective fact. I find that the twice-born—the converted ones, the saints, the 'professors'—are less trustworthy in carry-out promises, in telling the scrupulous truth, in punctilious justice and honesty in the minor affairs of life, than the once-born.....Consider the converted. Among these brethren I find great (yea, even smug) respectability, great regard for externals, regular attendance at public worship, much emotion at revivals and prayer-meetings, much quoting of Scripture, and much spiritual pride. But exceptional honesty and veracity I do not find.....It seems to me that their deviations, their little meannesses and untruths, and dishonesties, are the result of their general build. Their religious temperament carries with it moral instability."

Such has been the persistent contention of this journal from its first number down to the present one, and it is exceedingly refreshing to find it so vigorously and cogently defended by a man of Mr. Hill's position. Now, having fully cited Mr. Hill's argument, how does Mr. Campbell proceed to demolish it? As a matter of fact, he completely evades it, contenting himself with assuming, without even attempting to prove it, that "the morality of to-day in this country is largely Christian morality, though tainted and perverted to some extent by other influences, such as commercialism, which are not Christian." The utter groundlessness of this assertion is proved by Mr. Campbell himself when, later on in the sermon, he makes this remarkable but true admission:—

"Christianity, pure and simple, has never yet been tried at all. What we have is Christianity mixed with a far less desirable inheritance from other sources."

How, in the name of reason, can the morality of to-day in this country be largely Christian morality when Christianity itself, in its pristine purity, has never yet been tried at all? Take the inhabitants of Christendom as they are to-day, and you will soon learn that they are not conspicuous exemplifiers of the moral maxims embodied in the Sermon on the Mount. The beatitudes pronounced by Jesus have never yet been verified in history, and they are as far from verification now as ever they were. The meek have never adorned powerful thrones, nor has the lot of the poor been blessed. Whatever the peacemakers may be in a hypothetical kingdom of heaven, upon this real earth they have always been a miserable minority, scarcely ever listened to. Like other people, Christians lay up for themselves treasures here below which, when they go above, they are obliged to leave behind them, often to be fought for in the courts by their surviving relatives and friends. The truth is that the religion of the Gospel Jesus has never yet been tried at all, and that the morality of Christendom has always been more Pagan than Christian.

What is the use of summoning the late Henry Ward Beecher and Dr. Horton as authorities on a subject in relation to which it is impossible to regard them but as hopelessly biased judges? According to them, outside Christendom and Christian influence cruelty and lust hold sway, while tenderness, honor, respect for womanhood, and consideration for the weak do not exist, and are not even understood as we understand them. Dr. Horton is stone-blind with prejudice when he says that if those who are lukewarm on the question of the necessity for foreign missions would only go and see with their own eyes the state of Heathendom they would soon change their attitude. Is not the reverend gentleman aware that many entirely unprejudiced European scholars have gone and lived for years in closest touch with Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Pagans, and afterwards have borne unmistakable witness to the fact that what those nations need is, not conversion to an alien religion, but undisturbed freedom to work out their own salvation in their own way? Dr. Horton saw India in the light of his Christian upbringing and long-cherished Christian prejudices, as well as through the eyes of the Christian missionaries there whom he so ardently admires. We prefer to trust the judgment of Lord Curzon, Professor Giles, Chester Holcombe, Eugene Simon, A. Smith, G. E.

Morrison, and Fielding Hall, who have devoted many long years to the study of Paganism on the spot, as to the true condition of Heathendom, rather than that of a Christian minister or layman who pays a flying visit to a Pagan country and looks at it through colored spectacles, with a view to promoting fresh zeal for foreign missions on his return.

Extremely unfortunate is Mr. Campbell's allusion to John Stuart Mill because of its inaccuracy. Here it is word for word:—

"The late John Stuart Mill, for example, declared that he could not imagine a better ideal of conduct for a man than so to live that Jesus Christ would approve his life."

What Mill did say on this point is contained in his famous essay on "The Utility of Religion," and is as follows:—

"The thought that our dead parents or friends would have approved our conduct is a scarcely less powerful motive than the knowledge that our living ones do approve it; and the idea that Socrates, or Howard, or Washington, or Antoninus, or Christ, would have sympathised with us, or that we are attempting to do our part in the spirit in which they did theirs, has operated on the very best minds, as a strong incentive to act up to their highest feelings and convictions" (*Three Essays on Religion*, p. 50).

Mill did not exalt Christ above all other teachers, but distinctly declared that the Gospel Jesus at his very best was equalled by Marcus Aurelius, whom "we have no ground for believing to have been in any way indebted to Christianity" (p. 46). Indeed, John Stuart Mill taught a totally opposite doctrine to that set forth in Mr. Campbell's sermon. The main point of his Essay is that, however necessary and useful belief in the supernatural may have been in the dark ages of ignorance and inexperience, it is no longer required in order to achieve the very highest moral results. Mr. Campbell does not adduce a single fact in support of his wild assertions. It is the merest tomfoolery to exclaim that "Atheists, Agnostics, Materialists, Indifferentists, and all who for one cause or another are out of touch with the Christian Church, are yet the debtors of Jesus Christ." It is not what Christ brought into the world that we acknowledge as the standard for imitation, or as the goal to be aimed at both by the individual and society. Mr. Campbell knows as well as we do that the Gospel Jesus brought absolutely nothing new into the world. Moral principles are as old as the race, magnificent expressions of which were abroad and working in the world thousands of years before Jesus Christ was ever heard of. All that is true in Christianity is as old as the hills, and good men and true have lived by it in all ages and countries; but whatever is peculiar to it is notoriously false, and has been, on that account, quietly ignored, even by Christians.

We close this article in Mr. Campbell's own words, which occur, strangely enough, in the very sermon we have been criticising:—

"To live together in anything like order there has to be give and take. If Christianity had never been heard of, we should still have been insisting on certain kinds of conduct as meritorious, and others as objectionable, the meritorious, in our view, being that which promotes social welfare, and the objectionable being the opposite, namely, anti-social in tendency."

Two or three sentences further on, however, the reverend gentleman deliberately contradicts himself by saying that if you take faith in Christ out of society you will destroy what has lifted it to its present level, and that it will only be a matter of time before it gradually reverts to its original savage state. And yet we are assured by those who know, that Pagan China is morally not one whit behind the best country in Christendom. We are quite aware that, as Emerson says, "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds"; but there is a wise, logical, and scientific consistency which a popular saying calls "a jewel," and this higher consistency the sermon under discussion repeatedly disregards.

J. T. LLOYD.

Science and the Soul.—V.

(Continued from p. 117.)

"The effect of science upon philosophy is to simplify it, to bring it down from the clouds to the earth, to incarnate it, to dispel the mysticism that enshrouds it, and establish it upon the basis of reality—in a word, to materialise it. The facts of science are multitudinous and hard to find out, but when obtained they are always simple, rational, intelligible. So plain and homely are they that, when acquired by long and diligent labor, the world is not satisfied with them. They do not come up to its ideal standard reached by pure intellectual contemplation. The ideas of things before the facts have been worked out are always tinged with many-colored hues and trimmed with a golden border. This comes of poetic imagery common to mind itself. It is this that makes all truth so unwelcome when it is first announced. Truth comes unadorned. It is straightforward, plain, and reasonable. Therefore it does not satisfy."—LESTER WARD, *Dynamic Sociology*, vol. i., p. 422.

"The true rulers of men are the thinkers who advance knowledge; for just as it is through his superior strength that man bears rule over the rest of the animal creation, so among men themselves it is knowledge which in the long run directs and controls the forces of society. Thus the discoverers of new truths are the real though uncrowned and unseated kings of mankind; monarchs, statesmen, and law givers are but their ministers, who, sooner or later, do their bidding by carrying out the ideas of these master-minds."—PROFESSOR G. FRAZER, *Psyche's Task*, p. 167.

WHEN you have explained, to one who has been brought up in the orthodox belief, how science dispenses with the soul, his first question is to ask how it is that so many people—including such distinguished men as Russel Wallace, Lord Kelvin, Sir Oliver Lodge, and Mr. Balfour—believe in its existence? This is easily answered. They believe it because the belief was instilled into their minds before they were capable of reasoning upon the subject. Their reasoning powers are like loaded dice—they always fall one way. As we have seen, the Buddhists, who are more numerous than the Christians, have no belief in an immortal soul, any more than they have a belief in the Bible, simply because they were not taught the belief during childhood.

Moreover, the beliefs of our intellectual aristocracy are not the same as those of the ordinary unlearned man, the plain man, the man-in-the-street. It is nothing less than a fraud, when apologists for religion compile lists of distinguished men who are said to believe in a God, a soul, and a future life, in order to keep in countenance the unlearned man in his superstitions. The names of the beliefs are the same, but the ideas they stand for are as far asunder as the poles. Upon this point listen to the testimony of a master of science. It is Dr. J. G. Frazer, the famous author of *The Golden Bough*, who speaks. Dr. Frazer, Fellow of Cambridge University, and Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Liverpool, whose works are discussed in every quarter of the world where learned men are gathered together. He is addressing the highly educated classes; students of universities, people who can afford five pounds—the price of the last edition of *The Golden Bough*—for a book, as easily as a working man can afford sixpence for one. Dr. Frazer has been exploring the religious recesses of the popular mind. With bated breath he enlightens his audience upon the true state of affairs among the lower strata of society—that is, among those who have not been educated at colleges and universities.

The Professor observes that the reason why superstitions survive is that the better ideas always forming in upper classes of society are so slow in filtering to the bottom, if indeed they ever get there, that they are often obsolete and superseded by others at the top. He proceeds:—

"Hence it is that if we could open the heads and read the thoughts of two men of the same generation and country, but at opposite ends of the intellectual scale, we should probably find their minds as different as if the two belonged to different species."*

And, as he further remarks:—

"The reason why the higher forms of superstition or religion (for the religion of one generation is apt to become the superstition of the next) are less permanent than the lower is simply that the higher beliefs, being a creation of superior intelligence, have little hold on the minds of the vulgar, who nominally profess them for a time in conformity with the will of their betters, but readily shed and forget them as soon as these beliefs have gone out of fashion with the educated classes. But while they dismiss without a pang or an effort articles of faith which were only superficially imprinted on their minds by the weight of cultured opinion, the ignorant and foolish multitude clung with a sullen determination to far grosser beliefs which really answer to the coarser texture of their undeveloped intellect. Thus while the avowed creed of the enlightened minority is constantly changing under the influence of reflection and inquiry, the real, though unavowed, creed of the mass of mankind appears to be almost stationary, and the reason why it alters so little is that in the majority of men, whether they are savages or outwardly civilised beings, intellectual progress is so slow as to be hardly perceptible. The surface of society, like that of the sea, is in perpetual motion; its depths, like those of the ocean, remain almost unmoved."*

That is how a Professor, speaking to the intellectual few at the surface of society, thinks of the religious beliefs of the millions beneath. It will be noticed that Dr. Frazer speaks of "the higher forms of superstition or religion" as though superstition and religion were convertible terms.

The result of the researches into the folklore of the peasantry of Europe, commenced by the brothers Grimm in Germany, are still more disquieting. They reveal, says Dr. Frazer:—

"the astonishing, nay, alarming truth that a mass, if not the majority of people in every civilised country is still living in a state of intellectual savagery; that, in fact, the smooth surface of cultured society is sapped and mined by superstition. Only those whose studies have led them to investigate the subject are aware of the depth to which the ground beneath our feet is thus, as it were, honeycombed by unseen forces. We appear to be standing on a volcano which may at any moment break out in smoke and fire to spread ruin and devastation among the gardens and palaces of ancient culture wrought so laboriously by the hand of many generations."†

Dr. Frazer also cites the testimony of Renan, who in a letter to Berthelot, declares that, after contrasting the Greek ruins at Paestum with the savagery of the Italian peasantry, "I trembled for civilisation, seeing it so limited, built on so weak a foundation, resting on so few individuals even in the country where it is dominant." Was it not Professor Clifford who declared that:—

"Every rustic who delivers in the village alehouse his slow, infrequent sentences, may help to kill or keep alive the fatal superstitions which clog his race. Every hard-worked wife of an artisan may transmit to her children beliefs which shall knit society together, or rend it in pieces. No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal duty of questioning all that we believe."‡

After being defeated on the field of science in his search for facts to establish the existence of the soul, the true believer retreats into what he considers to be an impregnable fortress, and from which he defies the Rationalist to oust him. He says, "Oh, yes, no doubt you have all the facts on your side, but you will never convince me that I am on the level of the animals." And, placing his hand over his heart, he triumphantly declares, "I feel, I know that I possess a soul. You cannot get over that."

Now, by the very action of placing his hand over the heart, he unconsciously revealed the irrational source of his conviction. For the ancients believed the source of the emotions and feelings lay in the heart; and among savage tribes the same theory prevails. The savage will eat the heart of the lion or tiger he has slain; or, among cannibals, the heart

* *Psyche's Task*, pp. 170-1.† *Psyche's Task*, p. 170.‡ W. K. Clifford, *Lectures and Essays*, pp. 343-4.* J. G. Frazer, *Psyche's Task*, pp. 168-9.

of his enemy, so that he may assimilate the qualities of strength and courage which he thinks have their origin in the heart. But, as we have seen, the seat of the emotions and feeling lies in the brain. Therefore, believers, when indicating the seat of the soul, should smite the head and not the chest.

And here, again, science is not at the end of its resources. The fortress is not so impregnable as the true believer imagines. Science shows incontestably how man arrived at the idea of a soul. It shows that religion, like the body and mind of man, has had a natural origin; that it was not revealed by God from some cloudy mountain top, but has evolved from the dreams and delusions of primitive man.

It has taken thousands of years for man to reach his present position of civilisation. But let us try and place ourselves in his position, shortly after he evolved from his brute ancestors. Nature would present innumerable pitfalls to his childish intelligence. As Lecky, the historian, remarks:—

"We speak of the Divine veracity. What is the whole history of the intellectual progress of the world but one long struggle of the intellect of man to emancipate itself from the deceptions of nature? Every object that meets the eye of the savage awakens his curiosity only to lure him into some deadly error. The sun that seems a diminutive light revolving around his world; the moon and the stars that appear formed only to light his path; the strange fantastic diseases that suggest irresistibly the notion of present dæmons; the terrific phenomena of nature which appear the results, not of blind forces, but of isolated spiritual agencies—all these things fatally, inevitably, invincibly impel him into superstition. Through long centuries the superstitions thus generated have deluged the world with blood. Millions of prayers have been vainly breathed to what we now know were inexorable laws of nature. Only after ages of toil did the mind of man emancipate itself from these deadly errors to which by the deceptive appearances of nature the long infancy of humanity is universally doomed."*

To show the steps by which primitive man arrived at the idea of a soul, or spirit, will form the subject of our next article.

W. MANN.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

The *Staffordshire Sentinel* thinks it necessary to print the truism that "Atheists don't know everything." Neither do the editors of pious newspapers. The editor of the *Sentinel* commits himself to the statement that "the late Charles Bradlaugh never condescended to call himself an Atheist." That is precisely what he did call himself. The very last number of the *National Reformer* that appeared in his lifetime contained, right under its title and his name, the statement that its policy was "Atheistic."

The British Board of Film Censors last year examined 1,444 miles of pictures. They should feel like the Second Person of the Trinity after he had seen all the nations of the earth at a glance, at the invitation of the Devil.

The British Board of Film Censors enumerates the following amongst the films rejected during the past year:—"The irreverent treatment of sacred or solemn subjects." "Materialisation of Christ or the Almighty." "Holding up a minister of religion to ridicule." The last takes the cake. It appears that only ministers of religion require protection against laughter.

"Lord Radstock, the evangelical preacher, left £64,604," says a daily paper. From a Christian point of view, it is good that he "left" the money, otherwise his chances of climbing the golden stairs were very remote.

Rev. Edward Paterson Anderson, vicar of St. John the Evangelist, Paddington, left £3,870. Rev. John Robinson Porter, 10 Vanbrugh Park, Blackheath, left £13,838. Rev. Robert Male, vicar of Wychbold, Droitwich, left £8,849.

*Lecky, *History of European Morals*, vol. i., pp. 54-55.

All three had good reason to sing "I love my Jesus, because he first loved me." Evidently.

Mr. R. J. Campbell recently paid quite a handsome tribute to the late George Jacob Holyoake, in the course of which he said that "for sheer uprightness, nobility of aim, moral courage, and generosity of soul there are very few men to-day, or in any other day, to equal him." Of course, such praise could not be given without some qualification, otherwise there would be no room at the top for the Christian. Consequently, we learn that what Holyoake lacked was "spirituality"; he had no sense of fellowship with God. Well, if a man can be all that Mr. Campbell says Mr. Holyoake was, it seems to us that he can get along very well without "conscious fellowship with God." It is quite certain that this "spirituality" does not always make those who possess it either upright, noble, generous, or morally courageous. And it is little less than insulting to praise a man for possessing all these qualities and then to conclude with a sanctimonious whine, "But, alas, my dear friend, you lack spirituality." Such impertinent cant leaves a bad taste in one's mouth.

In an article in the *Hibbert Journal*, from which Mr. Campbell gives citations, Mr. J. A. Hill compares the Freethinker generally with those who have attained this "conscious fellowship with God." He affirms the "exceptional trustworthiness of those Freethinkers of his acquaintance." He says "They are as reliable as the force of gravity, both in their fulfilling of promises, the justice of their actions, and the veracity of their statements." On the other hand, among those "spiritually" alive,

"exceptional honesty and veracity I do not find. I do not charge them with deliberate lapses, though it needs a robust charity to give them so large benefit of the doubt, in many cases known to me. It seems to me rather that their deviations, their little meannesses and unveracities and dishonesties, are the result of their general mental build. Their religious temperament carries with it moral instability."

This is precisely what we have said times out of number. Religious belief of the stronger emotional type is quite consistent with abstention from what the world reckons as vices from the legal point of view. But it is also commonly consistent—when it does encourage—with the manifestation of a hundred-and-one petty vices of character, which, while not legally reprehensible, do far more than legal offences to lower the general tone of private and public life. Veracity, for example, lies at the root of many virtues, and is an important constituent of nearly all; and it is precisely the one that counts for least in the "spiritual" scale of virtues.

Finally, Mr. Campbell declares that "what made Mr. Holyoake, that is, what makes the goodness of every good man who lives amongst us," is the fact that our morality is Christian morality. This is a very stale plea, but it is quite false. There never has been a society on the face of the earth where the morality was Christian, and there never will be. Morality comes from life, not from creeds, and any good that Christianity teaches, or has taught, is to be placed to the credit of human association, not to religion. What has the love of parent for child, of friend for friend, what the conception of duty, the feeling of sympathy, the conception of honor or honesty to do with the fantastic doctrines that constitute the essence of Christianity? Why man's greatest work, from primitive times onward, has been to moralise his religion. And the proof of this is seen in that doctrines and teachings are only abandoned as wanting in morality when the moralised social sense has made them no longer possible. Gods are moralised by man, they never moralise man. It is far nearer the truth to say that Christians owe their improved character to Freethinkers than the other way about. For ourselves we prefer to have it that improved morality results from a keener intelligence, a livelier sympathy, and a better social environment. Freethinkers are apt to express this tendency earlier and better than Christians, simply because their freedom from superstition makes them more likely subjects.

The parish church of Haverhill, Suffolk, was recently restored. Services were held on Sunday morning and afternoon, Feb. 15, and although no fire had been lighted for more than a week, the place was burnt out by a fire starting in the organ loft. Incendiarism is suspected. Was it Jehovah, who rules the lightnings—or Satan, who is able to bring blazes from Hades? We pause for a reply.

Rev. T. H. Senior, vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Aldershot, attended a jubilee meeting of the local Presbyterian Church. He thought it necessary to explain his position—after nearly two thousand years of Christianity.

It is so strange for one Church to give another a leg up. What a religion!

Will those gilt-edged Agnostics who are always declaring that the war with Christianity is over kindly ponder the following figures? The cutting is from the *Daily Mail* of February 20:—

"The following is a summary from the 'Official Year Book of the Church of England' of the voluntary offerings of the Church for the year ending last Easter:—

" For Home work	£814,808
" Foreign work	£933,981
" Philanthropic work	£609,010
" Parochial clergy	£863,802
" Elementary education	£573,647
" General parochial purposes	£3,222,118

Total £7,900,230"

The battle over—is it? Why with figures like these it hardly seems to have begun.

We don't answer for these *Daily Mail* figures. They are clearly wrong. But just as clearly they stand for an immense total.

"Mr. Roosevelt at Large" is the wording of a half-column notice in the *Daily Chronicle*. We are glad to hear it, and we may hope for that apology from the ex-President for his perfectly false and gratuitous insults to Thomas Paine.

The Paul Pry attitude of some of the puritanical United States officials towards the private affairs of Marie Lloyd is ludicrous. Probably the popular comedienne will retaliate on the Benighted States on her return to civilisation.

Lord Weardale should have the respect of all Freethinkers for his life's work on behalf of all sorts of "advanced" causes. He is still active in the International Peace movement. He was of great service to the Secular Education League in taking the Presidency for the first two years. Some of the Freethought members of the League will remember his admirable address as chairman of the fine St. James's Hall meeting, at which Mr. J. Ramsay Macdonald, M.P., the leader of the Labor Party, was one of the speakers—with Mr. George Greenwood, M.P., Mr. G. W. Foote, Mr. Cohen, and the Rev. Father Hole. Lord Weardale's face is one of great intelligence and refinement. He is sixty seven years of age, and his physique is not powerful. One could hardly have imagined him as the victim of a deliberate bodily assault. Yet such has been the fact. A female hooligan, twenty-four years of age, took a dog-whip with her to Euston Station, where she found him on his way to attend a family wedding. She struck him on the head from behind, and the blow, with others after it, brought him to the ground. The result was a visit of all the parties concerned to Clerkenwell Police-court. The female hooligan is in the prime of her young womanhood, and will not encounter unbearable suffering. Her victim is at a time of life when such assaults cannot be borne with impunity. It is positively sickening that such a man should be the object of such an outrage.

It appears that the female hooligan thought she was assaulting Mr. Asquith—as if that were a condonation of her offence. But she did not utter the least apology for her blunder. One of her leaders, Mrs. Dacre Fox, went to the length of calling this act of hooliganism "a magnificent protest." If Lord Weardale bears a resemblance to Mr. Asquith, that is his look-out. A suffragette with a dog-whip is not to be stopped by such a trifling question as to whether she is striking the right person. After all, somebody in the shape of a man gets it—and is barred by the laws of civilised society from giving it back, which is a comforting reflection to these members of the "downtrodden sex." Mrs. Dacre Fox suggests that Lord Weardale, and other men who resemble Cabinet Ministers, should "change their appearance." Otherwise they "must take their chance of being assaulted." These are the ladies who denounce the dominance of man. Fortunately, they form but a small, though noisy, portion of their sex.

It is not the cause of woman suffrage that makes certain women assaulters and incendiaries. It is their violent natures that are attracted by the violent section of the woman suffrage movement. They gain an opportunity of gratifying their personal inclinations in the name of their principles. They are the Thugs of their cause.

How some women resent having their own code of manners turned upon themselves! A pious American lady

—for no reason whatever, except his public lectures against Christianity—called Ingersoll "a dog." He replied by asking her how she would like him to return the compliment, only changing the sex to suit the circumstances. The lady didn't relish that sort of "equality."

The old notion of the sentimental novel that man is usually a sort of a devil and woman almost always a saint is as far as possible from the truth of the case. In some things man is better than woman; in some things woman is better than man. Both the resemblance and the difference are the result of evolution—of the position and history of both in the life of the race. In some respects woman is better and worse than man. She is more tender-hearted and more cruel. It was noted in the Roman gladiatorial shows that the male spectators were kinder to the defeated gladiator than the females, who generally turned their thumbs down for the unfortunate man's slaughter. It is noticeable even now that nearly all the most abominable cases of cruelty to children, except, of course, where sheer lust is concerned—are the work of women. The latest case is that of Sarah Savage—an extraordinarily appropriate name!—of George's-road, Holloway, who has been sentenced to six months' imprisonment for keeping her three girls in the most inhuman conditions in a small room for sixteen months, so that they became half-imbecile, and the doctor thinks that they will never quite recover from the effects of their treatment for that length of time. That the woman was poor is true, but that is no excuse for her crime. It was not in any way necessitated by her poverty. It is here, indeed, that we come to a critical point of the discussion. Woman's maternity—and nothing else—clothes her with a certain sacredness. It is at the root of all her virtues, and of man's respect for her sex—which is otherwise only associated with his own egoism. And the perversion or frustration of woman's racial instinct is generally connected with her most odious failings. Once more the old Roman proverb is justified. The corruption of the best is the worst.

A New York Theatre is advertising its bill of six plays as ranging "from laughs to blushes." There are plenty of "laughs" in the Bible. As for "blushes" they swarm, and some of them are quite purple.

Dr. Charles Aked, president of the Californian Church Federation, is not to resign after all. He tendered his resignation, but it was not accepted. It is open, therefore, to any preacher connected with that body to deny both the miraculous birth and the miraculous death of Jesus Christ. All that is left is his sermons, which are praised and—neglected.

What is Christianity? This question is puzzling the ministers of religion as well as laymen. The Bishop of London has presented to Convocation a petition signed by 676 clergy of the London diocese expressing their grave anxiety at this present time "in consequence of the unrebuked denial of certain fundamental truths of the Faith by some who hold office in the Church, and in consequence of the widespread tendency to approach the problem of reunion among Christians in a way that is clearly inconsistent with the belief that episcopal ordination is essential to a valid ministry of the Word and sacraments." The petition proceeded as follows:—

"We are driven to ask our spiritual fathers, first to repudiate the claim of some clergy to reject the miracles of our Lord's birth of a virgin and the actual resurrection of his body from the tomb, because we believe that these truths lie at the very centre of the faith, and that the statements of the Bible and the creeds with regard to them are perfectly plain and unambiguous.

"And, second, to make it plain that, in accordance with the teaching of the Church in all ages, the Church of England has already taught, and must continue to teach, the necessity of episcopal ordination as a condition of exercising the ministry of the Word and sacraments."

"Our spiritual fathers," as the Bishops are called, are not likely to take this stiff job in hand. The safest course nowadays is to join hands with Mr. Facing-Both-Ways.

The *Daily News* hopes that Mr. Watts-Dunton's reluctance to publish his personal reminiscences of Swinburne may be overcome. We hardly know whether to say "Ay" or "No" to this. Mr. Watts-Dunton betrayed Swinburne at his funeral by allowing a clergyman to officiate at the graveside. What if he betrayed the Atheist poet in his reminiscences too? We are afraid that is what would happen. So perhaps it is best, after all, that Mr. Watts-Dunton should potter along peacefully now to his own last rest.

Some discussion has taken place in the pages of a contemporary as to whether Baron Munchausen, the famous author, was the most mendacious of writers. Surely the championship belongs to the Oriental scribe who wrote the account of Noah's Ark, although some of his imaginative colleagues run him very close.

Sir Owen Seaman, editor of *Punch*, says that "the true parodist must be reverent." Sir Owen is far too respectable to have read Hone's clever parodies of the Athanasian Creed; but a deal less reverence would make *Punch* less like a parish magazine.

Sir Oliver Lodge has predicted a very severe winter. We do not know if this is based on "spiritual" advice; but the weather has not justified the prophet so far. If Sir Oliver's forecasts concerning a future existence are not more exact, we may regard the prophecy as something like Old Moore's.

A provincial paper recently announced the death of a person as occurring on July 14, 1914. That is certainly previous; but on the Gold Coast, medicine-men prophesy deaths, and see to it that the corpse is ready for the funeral.

It appears that a sum of £3,000,000 was subscribed last year in the United Kingdom for Foreign Missions. It is a pity that this money was not applied to a better purpose at home, and it would be if only the mass of subscribers knew the truth about the movement. Such a sum spent on such a cause is enough to make one despair of human sanity.

Some few years ago one of the President of the British Association warned Englishmen that the German danger was not in either fleet or army, but in its more efficient educational system. He added that the German public had reached a far higher educational level than our own, and that it would take two generations of hard work for us to overtake them. The other day Lord Haldane repeated the warning. There is, he said, "a deadlier peril menacing these islands than any foreign army or foreign navy. It is the peril of ignorance, of mental inertia, of slipshod ways of thinking and acting, of a depressed average of intelligence." Lord Haldane added that when he went to the War Office he found that thirteen per cent. of the recruits could neither read nor write. They had passed through elementary schools, and had then forgotten even this small modicum of education.

These are striking statements, and we believe the root of the trouble is to be found in the fact that the English people have never taken seriously the idea of education. They have assented to its being rather than desired it. The public at large places small value on intellectual attainments, even while professing an admiration for them. Moreover, the squabbles of the sects to gain control of the schools in the interests of Church or Chapel have been a powerful factor in hiding from the public the importance of the subject. "The Education Question" has come to mean little more to a large number of people than the quarrel over the subject of religion. It is this that has perpetuated inefficient sectarian schools, and, as the late Lord Salisbury once said, induced sectarian leaders to obstruct improvements in State schools in order to diminish expenses in their own establishments. Lord Haldane must be fully aware of these facts, and it will be a great pity if he lends his support to any Government measure that promises to still further prolong the struggle of the Churches for the control of the children of the nation.

Miss Betham-Edwards' *Home Life in France*, just added to Methuen's shilling library. The lady, who may be depended upon for accuracy as well as impartiality in writing of French affairs, has words of praise for both Catholic priest and Protestant pastor. Within their own Churches they are often excellent men, poor but honest and paternal; but when it comes to other Churches than their own they are intensely bigoted. Miss Betham-Edwards says:—

"Although the Catholic and Protestant population live harmoniously side by side, intermarriages are rare, and the rival churches neither gain nor lose adherents to any appreciable extent. Between Protestant pastor and Catholic priest in any part of France there is no kind of intercourse whatever."

No kind of intercourse whatever. What a terrible spirit! And this in genial, joyous France—the country of Rabelais and Voltaire. What is to be expected, then, of Orangemen and Puritans?

One cannot help thinking of the calm but awful statement of the great implacable Swift, that most men have religion enough to make them hate each other.

Gentle Jesus, A Book for His Little Children is a recent publication for the young. We never knew that the Man of Sorrows was a father. But you never can tell, and we are willing to learn of the clergy in these matters.

A new magazine has just been published under the quaint title, the *Trinity Magazine*. It has nothing to do with the popular three-headed Deity, but emanates from Cambridge University.

God's Own Country is the title of a new book on Australia. A land with such a name should have a Bible of its own. Should the humorists of the *Sydney Bulletin* have a hand in its production, it would prove a very interesting volume.

Religious statistics are often amusing reading. One of the funniest examples is that to be found in the current issue of *Whitaker's Almanac*, where the total population of the world is given as 1,623,000,000, and the population, divided as to religions, is totalled as 1,646,491,000, or 23,491,000 in excess of the world's inhabitants. A still more humorous result of the figures is that not a solitary Freethinker is included in the total. The pious statistician might have allowed a baker's dozen of sceptics to save his face; but maybe he thought thirteen an unlucky number.

An elderly woman collapsed and fell dead while Mass was being celebrated at the Roman Catholic Cathedral at Kirkdale, Liverpool. Was it a judgment or an accident?

The Bishop of Gibraltar has written a book on *The Glory of Going On*. There is a good deal of "glory" on the "Rock" at a bishop's salary; but some of the "stony" parsons elsewhere will have difficulty in perceiving it.

"One of the Christian doctrines I never had any difficulty in believing was that of original sin," says the genial Mr. Birrell, the Irish Secretary. Has he heard the peripatetic patterers of the Christian Evidence Society?

The strike habit has penetrated the Christian fold. Recently, at a large chapel in the Midlands, the choir "downed" hymn-books over the appointment of a new choirmaster, and a choir of "blacklegs" had to be recruited from the congregation. When these Christians get to heaven, they will be throwing each other over the battlements.

That sage person, the Bishop of London, considers that "The Church is becoming more human." It was about time.

We take the following news item from the *Midland Evening News* (Feb. 21):—

"CIRCULATION OF 'LIFE OF CHRIST.'"

"At Festiniog Town Council, last night, Councillor Cadwaladr Roberts gave notice of motion in favor of withdrawing from circulation in the public library Renan's *Life of Christ*. A book of that nature, he said, tended to undermine the work and influence of the ministers of religion in the town. If a book like that was circulated in the public library, what was the good of paying scores of pounds weekly in salaries to ministers? It was the duty of the Council to see that the tone of all books circulated in the library were healthy. Councillor Evan Jones: I shall second the motion."

We hope to receive a report of the sequel—which ought to be interesting, especially in view of the age of Renan's book.

The *Daily Mail* recently had a column article on "The Value of the Street Mouth." It contained no references to the amiable babblers who, in company with a harmonium and several female friends, make the streets of our towns hideous on Sundays.

The *Tailor and Cutter* has fallen foul of some prominent statesmen for their laxity in dress. It would be interesting to hear our contemporary's views of the bizarre dresses of the twelve apostles.

"Kikuyu Tracts," a series of screeds on a live theological controversy, will soon be published, and will be written by a Bishop and some Nonconformists. Let us hope that they will not kick each other too much.

Mr. Foote's Engagements

Sunday March 1, North Saloon, City Hall, Glasgow;
12 (noon), "Shakespeare's Humanism in the
Merchant of Venice"; 6.30, "Mr. Balfour on God."

March 22, Manchester.

To Correspondents.

E. B.—Thanks for cuttings and paper. There is a difficulty in the way of our noticing the latter—as we think you will have seen.

J. F. AUST.—See paragraph. Thanks.

WALTER DAVIDSON.—You are getting along all right. The Edmonton bigots have found a Tartar. We will see about the Lincoln matter and let you know.

Z. A. 2.—Your Italian postcard is no good at this end. Your personal trouble commands our sympathy, but we are not able to help you in the way suggested.

T. H. ELSTON.—Mistakes on matters of fact are easily made if the memory is not refreshed with regard to books one has not read for many years. That you tried to refer to *Tess*, but failed to get a copy in time, was unfortunate; yet the essence of the matter, after all, seems unaffected.

W. MANN.—Tuesday morning; had to shorten.

R. STIRTON.—Thanks again for your constant service in this matter.

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.

The President's Honorarium Fund.

To the Freethinkers of Great Britain.

January, 1914.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—

We renew our appeal on behalf of the above Fund, which is now so well known to the Freethought party that its object may be stated in a very few words. It is sought to relieve Mr. G. W. Foote—President of the National Secular Society, Chairman of the Secular Society (Ltd.), and Editor of the *Freethinker*—of his worst financial worries, so that he may be as free as possible to devote his time and energies to his work as the leader of the militant Freethought movement in this country. We suggested that £800 a year might be raised in this way and placed at his disposal. We are happy to say that the average has reached that amount.

A generous subscriber made up the deficit of some £20 in 1912, and another friend offered to make up any deficit in 1913. Happily but £3 odd was necessary. Perhaps it will become a fashion for the £800 to be made up fully in this manner.

Mr. Foote's income from other sources at present is more restricted than ever. He intends to explain this matter himself very shortly. In the meanwhile we have to assure the Freethought party that the time has not arrived when they might think of diminishing their subscriptions to this Fund.

With regard to the *Freethinker*, we are sorry to learn from Mr. Foote that it still yields him no salary. The business of the Pioneer Press (including the *Freethinker*) has turned the corner from loss to profit; but the latter is as yet scarcely worth a mention.

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

Subscriptions for 1914 can be forwarded to either of the undersigned. Those who prefer to do so can send, as before, direct to Mr. Foote himself, at 2 Newcastle-street, Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

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

We are aware that all subscribers cannot conveniently respond to this appeal at once, but we hope a great many will do so as early as possible.

Yours faithfully,

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

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

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

Third List of Subscriptions.

Previously acknowledged, £40 8s. 3d. Received since Isaac Jackson, £10; John G. Dobson, 5s.; E. A. H., 5s. J. F. Aust, 5s.; Robert Stirton and Friends (Dundee)—quarterly, £1 5s.; Lt.-Col. Stuart Graham, 9s. 6d.; Henry A. Lupton, £10 10s.

Sugar Plums.

Mr. Foote pays his long-expected visit to Glasgow to-day (March 1) and lectures for the local N. S. S. Branch at the North Saloon, City Hall (not far from the old Hall in Brunswick-street that was destroyed by fire). The first lecture is timed for 12 o'clock (noon)—the subject being "Shakespeare's Humanism in the *Merchant of Venice*." The second lecture is at 6.30 p.m.—the subject being "Mr. Balfour on God." This will be a criticism of Mr. Balfour's recent Gifford Lectures; one of the very few honest criticisms they are ever likely to receive.

It will be a great pleasure to Mr. Foote to meet his Glasgow friends once more. It is not the lectures that make him lose some of the old zest in these visits, for he takes nearly as much delight in them as he did twenty years ago. It is the ever-growing distaste of travelling, with its tiresomeness and frightful waste of time. Some people dread the speed of express trains. Mr. Foote wishes they went a thousand miles an hour. That would certainly prolong his work upon the Freethought platform.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd attends the anniversary meeting of the Leicester Secular Society at the Secular Hall, Humberstone-gate, to-day (March 1).

The National Committee for the Repeal of the Blasphemy Laws has engaged Essex Hall for Friday evening, March 20, when a public meeting will be held, of which a detailed announcement will follow.

The Secular Education League holds its annual Members' meeting on Tuesday evening, March 24, in Room I of the Caxton Hall. The chair will be taken at 7.30. This will be followed by a public meeting at 8.15. It is hoped that Mr. George Greenwood will be able to preside, and the list of speakers includes Mr. Halley Stewart, Sir Henry Cotton, Lady Byles, Mr. Arthur Henderson, M.P., Rev. Dr. Walter Walsh, and Mr. G. W. Foote.

Mr. Henry A. Lupton, one of the "old guard" in North London, who did good work many years ago at Milton Hall, has done a thing which other Freethinkers might imitate. Sending us his regular subscription of 10s. to the President's Honorarium Fund, he adds £10 to it for the present year. He has had a stroke of luck, and he had made a vow that if it arrived he would remember Mr. Foote. He concludes that, as vows are registered in heaven, the Lord has something to do with this matter. "God can favor me in this way as often as he likes," he says, "and I will send you a contribution every time." We cordially concur.

Mr. Isaac Jackson, the friend in Burma who offered to make up any deficit in the President's Honorarium Fund for 1913, was agreeably surprised to find that only £3 17s. 5d. was wanted on the thirty-first of December. To cover this he has generously remitted £5, with another £10 towards the 1914 Fund. We cannot ask every intending subscriber to be as liberal, but we might wish them—or all who can—to be as prompt. It would be a considerable gratification to us if the Fund could be subscribed up fully, and removed from our pages long before the end of the year.

Mr. W. Bailey, the treasurer of a Fund that has been subscribed privately throughout the Freethought party, asks us to announce that the total amount collected was £278 16s. 8d.; that printing, stationery, and postage cost £5 13s. 11d.; and that the net balance of £273 2s. 9d. has been handed over to the recipient. This is a very bald announcement, but to say more would only violate the privacy which we were asked to regard as a *sine qua non* at the outset. Mr. Bailey, and all others concerned, will understand.

Mr. Allen Upward's very able and interesting book, the *Divine Mystery*, which was the subject of an article from Mr. Cohen's pen some time ago in our pages, contains many references to matters and persons with which our own readers, and especially the older ones, are more or less familiar. We note a reference (on p. 200) to the late Mr. R. M. Morell "the worthy founder of the National Sunday League." Mr. Morell was a founder of the Sunday League, but not the founder. There were others, though he might be called the principal one. The truth is that he lived to such an old age that he stood to a later generation as the founder, by subsuming, as it were, all his colleagues who had died. But that is by the way. Mr. Upward's point is in Mr. Morell's confession of his and his colleagues ill-treatment by religious bigots in the earlier days of the League's existence. "We struggled for over thirty years," Mr. Morell said, "against calumny, vilification, and even threats before we got our petition sanctioned by Parliament for the opening of the museums [on Sundays]. We were called atheists, Sabbath-breakers, and I don't know what." Being called these names is reckoned a serious part of their ill-treatment. Yet these names did them very little, if any, injustice—except as they may have been pronounced in a sneering or malicious way. Mr. Morell and several of his colleagues were Atheists, were Sabbath-breakers, and so on. Mr. Upward is invited to take notice of this point. We knew Mr. Morell rather intimately in the eighteen seventies, when he kept a newsagent's shop in Francis-street (we believe), off Tottenham-court-road. We often called in and had a chat with him,—sometimes with James Thomson ("B. V.," the poet) who lodged round the corner in Huntley-street. Mr. Morell might then have been called a "Holyoake-ite," and he was interested in the *Secularist* which we started with Mr. Holyoake, and to which James Thomson was a chief contributor. We can hardly agree, therefore, that Mr. Morell and his colleagues were badly persecuted by being called names which were quite accurate and really deserved. If they were not Sabbath-breakers, for instance, what on earth were they? Sabbath-breaking was the very head and front of their offending.

The third section of Mr. Upward's twelfth chapter is headed "The Good Tidings of Damnation." And a very good heading it is too. But if Mr. Upward had used such language, notwithstanding its accuracy, some thirty years ago (as we did) he would have been thought guilty of blasphemy (as we were). The real crime for which we suffered twelve months' imprisonment was that of being in advance of the time,—one of Whitman's "Pioneers! O Pioneers!"

Mr. Allen Upward—with our benediction, if he cares to have it—is presenting to a ten-and-sixpenny public much that we presented all those years ago to a penny public in Joseph Mazzini Wheeler's sound and learned articles in the *Freethinker*, and in the penny numbers of our own *Bible Heroes* and *Bible Romances*. We had convictions; we had boundless health and strength of body, and some, at least, of mind; we had read and studied in the right direction, that of evolution; and we were born for the fight. Where the guns roared, and the rifles pinged, and the smoke half choked the combatants, and the bayonets gleamed in the fierce attack, and swords clashed with the sound that always thrills those who have some of the old fighting instinct of the race in them—an instinct which reason should direct, and not destroy; there we found our place. And we do not regret it—though we have paid the price. For it is not in voyaging over halcyon seas that man feels most himself, and the pride and power of his nature, and his possible worth to the world, but in struggling with the storm when the sails split, and the masts go by the board, and the sky is a black abyss, and the sea a blacker one, save for the white-foaming wolves of the ocean driven on by the thundering storm. To live then is to live indeed. It purges a man of trivialities for ever.

Mr. Thomas William Stewart was liberated on Feb. 20 from Stafford Prison, where he had suffered three months and several days' imprisonment under the infamous Blasphemy Laws.

Christian Myth and Legend.

Mythes et Légendes. Etude sur l'origine et l'évolution des croyances religieuses par la comparaison des textes originaux. Par Edouard Daanson. (Bruxelles, 1913. 89 Avenue des Rogations.) Published by the Author, and sold by subscription at 10 francs. Pp. 412. (First edition of 1,600 copies, separately numbered.)

M. EDOUARD DAANSON, whose earlier work,* so full of pungent satire of Christian doctrine, is already known to readers of the *Freethinker*, has now enriched the literature of Rationalism with an admirable study of Myths and Legends in relation to the origin and evolution of religious beliefs. By comparison of the original texts with the myths and legends of Christianity and other religions he enables us to see the contact of creed with creed and the continuity and variation of myths and cults which form the subject-matter of the several religions which have figured on the world-wide stage of superstition and priestcraft.

M. Daanson has supplied a felt want, for his beautifully printed and lavishly illustrated book is an invaluable anthology of pre-Christian and other texts scattered through a vast body of specialist works dealing with the growth of religious ideas. Our author brings and compares these texts together in order to illustrate the march and development of doctrine and dogma from one world-religion to another. When, a few years ago, he wrote his *Livre du Bien et du Mal*, he had no idea of denying, or even doubting, the historical existence of Christ. His new and richly documented book, the fruit of assiduous research in the interval, shows how his conception of Christ passed away from the ideal man whom Renan and Loisy depict for us, to linger awhile for a temporary flirtation with the ideas of Dr. Binet-Sanglé, in order ultimately to adopt its present attitude, which regards the figure of Christ as a religious romance formed by the accretion or modification of many myths.

M. Daanson's book clearly shows that the minds of our ignorant forefathers were simply dustheaps for the reception and intermingling of heterogeneous myths and legends of gods, goddesses, demons, kings, heroes, poets, and saints. The miraculous was so inextricably blended with the natural processes of life that nobody could tell for certain how soon an ordinary mortal would become deified or how the ordinary man in the street could escape meeting the miraculous round the corner or evade the performance by his own act and deed of prodigies of supernatural import. It is not known, for instance, whether Homer was a real man or a myth; but this uncertainty did not prevent the Greeks from elevating him amongst the gods. In that respect the reputed author of the *Iliad* stands in the same ambiguous position as the alleged preacher of the Sermon on the Mount. The Greek poet and the Palestinian peasant met the same fate: they became gods. In ancient times, to have died and become immortal, it was not necessary to have ever lived at all. It is certain that no evidence can be shown of the historical existence of Christ; but the fact that nothing is known of his birth has not prevented the formation of an elaborately detailed legend concerning his tragic death, his sensationally miraculous resurrection, and his glorious ascension to heaven—to somewhere far beyond the regions where our unmythical contemporary Vedrenne and his numerous rivals, aided only by atheistic science, have yet been able to reach.

All this, and much beside, is treated with elaborate detail in the special chapter which purports to tell us "how legends are formed." This chapter sheds a flood of light upon the nature of legend, and especially of religious legend, without, however, doing more in most cases than presenting to us the legends as finished articles ready for sale or circulation for the exploiting of pious ignorance. In many cases, no

* *Le Livre du Bien et du Mal*. See my *Freethinker* article of January 8, 1911.

doubt, M. Daanson does enable us to see the legend grow, notably in the case of the Poisson d'Avril and the legend of Dr. Faust. In these instances the problem is of comparative simplicity, inasmuch as here we are dealing with legends which start into being during well-known periods of modern history, during which the stages of legendary growth are clearly traceable. But when the hero of legend belongs to the twilight of history, as in the case of Attis, the Phrygian god, who was a cognate celestial with Jesus Christ, or in the legend of Orpheus, the deified poet, who is supposed to have taken part in the expedition of the Argonauts, and to have descended into hell, as Jesus Christ did (or did not) some hundreds of years afterwards—in these and similar cases we come face to face with legends fully grown. The parallels shown between the legends of Bacchus, Krishna, Buddha, Jesus, and the other savior-gods or deified men of antiquity are striking enough, but they would be more convincing if more were known or indicated of the points of culture-nexus between these varying types of legend and myth. Where (as on page 46 *et seq.*, dealing with the manner in which the Vedas were composed) the learned author attempts a reasoned statement of the origin of the sacred books of the Brahmans, the explanation is evidently too severely summarised to enable us to perceive the successive steps in the evolution of the Indian Bible.

These and various other impressions of an attentive reading of this excellent repository of documents relating to the historical criticism of religion incline one to the view that the book itself is mainly a collection of data or preparatory notes in anticipation of a larger work wherein a fuller discussion and examination of religious origins would be attempted. But the richness of these data and the suggestive nature of these "notes" make M. Daanson's delightful and instructive volume a very encyclopædia of the facts and documents which cluster around the ever-fascinating subject of the early beginnings of culture and creed.

Whatever may be the foundations of faith at the dawn of history, whether based on the conscious fraud of priests or on the abject fears and superstitions of the pious, certain it is that the more modern developments of religion, as seen in the multiplication and exploitation of religious relics, are obviously based on deliberate fraud and imposture. The absurd and sometimes indecent nature of Christian relics (see pages 58-60) would alone suffice to impeach the sanity or honesty of the Church which waxed fat by exploiting the holy prepuce, of which a large quantity once pertaining to Our Blessed Lord is scattered throughout Christendom.

One of the most striking sections in this indispensable *vade-mecum* on religious origins is the very full and splendidly illustrated chapter (pages 66-136) on "the evolution of myths." These are chiefly the creation-myths of Egypt and Chaldea, but the whole literature relating to myths of creation is brought under contribution in order to show the developments of these myths under every variety of religious experience throughout the Old and New World. An enormous body of texts and documents is thus assembled in a handy form which is quite unique in Rationalist literature. The circumstantial detail with which the myth-makers of the prehistoric past ventured to describe the precise *modus operandi* of God Almighty (or of confederated groups of God Almighty) at every stage in the creation of matter and life is here set forth in a series of extracts from the sacred documents of the old-world hierophants, who nearly all are in a position to record the exclamations of the Creator at the time or his conversations with his associated partners in the work of creation. The labor of collating the vast literature of this subject is not an inviting task, and the students of religious origins are under deep obligation to M. Daanson for the rich harvest of documents which he has so admirably collected in this intensely interesting chapter, which closes Book I. of this great work.

Book II. deals with the Jesus myth in relation to modern historical and scientific criticism. After passing in review a vast number of modern treatises on this theme, M. Daanson expresses his view that "this personage of whom no trace is found in the history of his country is merely a character invented and placed on the scene in surroundings more or less historic." His thesis is to show that the life of Jesus was a romance created by Greeks, and Jewish Cabbalists and Judaising Copts of Alexandria under the influence of the historic writings of Josephus and of the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament. In support of this theory a special chapter is devoted to the Egyptian analogies of cult and doctrine with the Jesus legend of the Christian Gospels, and though, as I think, some of these "analogies" are strained and stretched beyond the due limits of their natural significance, they are certainly indicative of many pre-Christian adumbrations of Christ in Egypt, as elsewhere in the Pagan world. It is especially in Egypt, that "paradise of legends," as M. Daanson calls it, where myths and superstitions of Savior-Gods and Holy Trinities were strewn in abundance in readiness for manipulation into Christian form and similitude. Many of these myths and superstitions are illustrated by a copious catena of exceedingly interesting documents, but I cannot quite convince myself that the Christian legends are historically affiliated, in every case cited, to the alleged Egyptian or other antetypes. On the other hand, the early outcrop of Christian heresies, and especially of Gnosticism and its numerous variants, point unmistakably to Egypt as one of the most fertile seed-plots of Christian mysticism, as the place, in fact, out of which God called his Son.

The ample materials of comparison furnished in the last two chapters of M. Daanson's book leave no manner of doubt in the mind of any reasonable student of Christian origins that all the root-ideas of Christian theology and ethics were current coin of the realm of speculation and belief in the Pagan world for ages prior to the date fixed for the miraculous birth of Christ.

I shall probably reopen later on the discussion of the intensely suggestive theories and conclusions contained in M. Daanson's excellent treatise. In the meantime let me say that the sumptuous illustrations (fifty in number) and the typographical beauty of the volume with which we have been dealing will naturally enhance the value and attractiveness of its appeal as a work which explores the whole ground of Christian origins with extraordinary erudition. M. Daanson is still a comparatively young man (he is a brand, once very pious, snatched by Freethought from the fires of a monastic career), and has already become one of the rising orators and men of letters in the ranks of Belgian Rationalism. His latest contribution indisputably stamps him as a fine scholar and fearless thinker whose fertile pen and encyclopædic learning are destined still further to enrich the literature of Freethought.

WILLIAM HEAFORD.

The Church and Literature.—II.

(Continued from p. 125.)

DURING the period rightly known as the Dark Ages the clergy were supreme. Proclaiming that the Church had the authority of God, they claimed control over minds and estates, and they demanded that their claims should be accepted without reasoning. To deny, or even to doubt, was to be a heretic, and to be subject to excommunication, fine, imprisonment, exile, and perhaps torture and the stake.

The Church only kept up so much of classic learning as was necessary for a literary education, and to give the clergy an elevated and imposing position among the barbarians. These tactics were especially successful with the northern tribes, who

had a humble veneration for the Science of the Runes. Von Hartmann says:—

"If, therefore, mediæval Christianity cultivated the study of the Greek and Latin authors, it was not from any appreciation of, or sympathy with, that culture which is to be derived from them, but solely in the pursuit of external and hierarchical interests. The old Pagan writings were looked upon as a necessary evil to which the Church submitted in order to give to the clergy a literary and theological training, but which, undoubted productions of the devil as they are, no man should take in his hands without first making the sign of the cross and trembling for his soul's salvation."

Lecky's testimony in his *History of European Morals* is that the literature of Christian asceticism "surpasses in its mendacious ferocity any that the world has seen." The Christians habitually spoke of those who deviated from the orthodox belief as demons, and exulted over the tortures which they believed were reserved for such miscreants. Lecky continues:—

"The study of the Latin classics was for the most part positively discouraged. The writers, it was believed, were burning in hell. The monks were too inflated with their imaginary knowledge to regard with any respect a Pagan writer, and periodical panics about the approaching termination of the world continually checked any desire for secular learning. It was the custom among some monks, when they were under the discipline of silence, and desired to ask for Virgil, Horace, or any other Gentile work, to indicate their wish by stratching their ears like a dog, to which animal it was thought the Pagans might reasonably be compared."

Buckle declares that the learning of the Middle Ages only ministered to ignorance. He says:—

"From the sixth to the tenth century there was not in all Europe more than three or four men who dared to think for themselves; and even they were obliged to veil their meaning in obscure and mystical language. The remaining part of society was, during these four centuries, sunk in the most degrading ignorance. Under these circumstances, the few who were able to read confined their studies to works which encouraged and strengthened their superstition, such as the legends of the saints and the homilies of the fathers. From these sources they drew those lying and impudent fables of which the theology of the time is principally composed."

Of course, the supply of literature was only proportionate to the demand. The classic works of the Pagans having fallen into disrepute, their manuscripts were erased and re-written with Christian legends. Copies of Cicero, Pliny, or Homer were valueless, and the parchments used for them were prepared by washing or scraping in order to make room for the ridiculous fables of the saints. These palimpsests or *codices rescripti* form a curious commentary on the zeal of the monks. Frequently the most valuable works were covered over with others now of no account. The long-lost treatise of Cicero, *De Republica*, was discovered written over with St. Augustine's *Commentary on the Psalms*. Within the present century Niebuhr discovered the *Istitutes of Gaius*, a work throwing much light on Roman Law, and which was believed to have perished in the confusion of the Dark Ages, beneath a second and even a third writing consisting of the epistles of St. Jerome. Hallam, in his *Middle Ages*, says: "So gross and supine was the ignorance of the monks, within whose walls these treasures were concealed, that it was impossible to ascertain, except by indefatigable researches, the extent of what had been saved out of the great shipwreck of antiquity."

The scarcity of books rendered their price so enormous during the palmy days of Christianity that even persons of fortune could not indulge in the luxury of reading. Private persons seldom possessed any books, and even monasteries of note had only one Missal. Persons who bequeathed a pious book to the library of a monastery were deemed thereby to obtain complete remission of sins. The Rev. Joseph Barrington, the Catholic author of the *Literary History of the Middle Ages*, admits that "in the most wealthy convents, where libraries were chiefly formed, a short catalogue was sufficient to comprise

the number of their books; and the price to those who were disposed to purchase was exorbitant." Hallam tells us that contracts were made verbally for want of notaries capable of drawing up charters, and these, when written, were frequently barbarous and ungrammatical to an incredible degree.

At this time, be it remembered, the Mohammedan caliphs were giving every encouragement to literature and science. Bagdad in the east, and Cordova in the west, were the seats of learning and culture, and the dawn of the renaissance of letters arose from the contact with Arabian civilisation. The Jews also cultivated literature, and produced many of their brightest lights during the long night of the Dark Ages. Their works were, of course, proscribed. St. Louis ordered the Talmud to be burnt. All the Jewish libraries were destroyed, and twenty-four cartloads of valuable manuscripts committed to the flames. All Jewish books, Bibles excepted, were ordered to be burnt because filled with the blasphemies against Christ, and it is alleged that, at one time, twelve thousand copies of the Talmud were burnt at one holocaust in Cremona—a feat throwing into the shade the destruction of five thousand copies of the Koran by Cardinal Ximenes. All heretical works were hunted out and burnt. As early as the twelfth century, Pope Innocent III. prohibited the reading of the Bible in the common tongue. The Council of Toulouse (1229) forbade the reading of the Bible in any vernacular tongue, and decreed that no layman should have in his possession any of the books of the Old or New Testament. The Council of Terragona orders that any priest or layman who possesses a translation of the Bible, and does not surrender it within eight days to be burnt, shall be deemed a heretic. The famous Council of Trent affirmed that no Bible should be held or read except by priests, and this canon remains unrepealed. The Council condemned wholesale the works of the most notorious heretics—i.e., reformers. In 1657, Paul IV. published at Rome the first official *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*. His Index includes all Bibles in modern languages, enumerating forty-eight editions chiefly printed in countries still under the jurisdiction of the Church. Sixty-one printers, among whom are Stephens and Oporinus, are put under a general ban—all works, of whatever description, from their presses being forbidden.

The Roman Catholic Church has taken the trouble to register its relationship to literature by publishing lists of the works it forbids to its followers. For a long time the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* was itself a forbidden work. It showed not only the nature of the forbidden fruit, but made manifest what it was the Church really feared. Since, however, bibliographers have published unauthorised lists, the society for the propagation of the faith has issued an Index from which, since it has the Papal *imprimatur*, there can be no appeal.

(The late) J. M. WHEELER.

(To be concluded.)

Voltaire Once More.

"Of all the intellectual weapons which have ever been wielded by man, the most terrible was the mockery of Voltaire."—LORD MACAULAY.

VOLTAIRE'S name has ever been a terror to Christians, and, with the exception of Thomas Paine, none has been more hated, none more reviled. The reason is simple. A very great writer, he attacked Christianity, not in the dry-as-dust fashion of professors writing for the dozen superior persons scattered throughout the universe, but with wit and pleasantry which survive the winnowing of generations. He made bigots and tyrants appear ridiculous as well as odious, and those who felt the sting of his satire denounced him as a literary Mephistopheles, whose writings all should avoid as they would a plague.

A notebook of Voltaire's, written in English, has been discovered at St. Petersburg, and the *English Review*, to its own credit and the delight of all lovers of literature, has published it in its current issue.

The pages, now set forth in print for the first time, are of absorbing interest, for they give an insight into the mind of the young Voltaire, and they form the notebook of one of the most myriad-minded of men. "Monsieur Multiform" was his witty name for D'Alembert, and he himself had an equal right to it. In the eighty volumes of his collected works he has proved his mastery as historian, essayist, thinker, humorist, tale-teller, letter-writer, critic, and humanitarian. So strong is his appeal to literary men that Macaulay, one of the most omnivorous of readers, selected Voltaire's works for his reading on his lengthy sea-voyage to India.

It was in 1726 that the young Voltaire came to England on his release from the Bastille, where he had been imprisoned for challenging the Duc de Rohan. He looked across the Channel towards the country of Congreve, Pope, Bolingbroke, Swift, and other renowned authors, and he hastened to make their acquaintance. A true Frenchman, he only cared for the society of men of reputation. When he visited Congreve, the English dramatist hinted that Voltaire should visit him as a man of fashion. "I answered," said Voltaire, "that had he been so unfortunate as to be a mere gentleman I should never have come to see him."

The notebook is written in English, which Voltaire learned during his three years' stay in the country. With characteristic nonchalance he said, "I have done what we do every day at school when we write Latin and Greek"; but he had done what few of his fellow countrymen had achieved, and he was as notable in this respect as Gibbon, Hume, and Beckford were across the Channel. Many of the reflections in the notebook were afterwards used in his famous "English Letter," although the wit was more polished in the later version. As may be expected, the iconoclastic note often reverberates through the pages, as in the sarcastic remarks, "dunces are the founders of all religions, men of wit founders of heresies; men of understanding laugh at both." In another mood, recalling the quips and cranks at Bolingbroke's house, or Pope's villa at Twickenham, he compares the two men: "Pope is a dark lantern, and Bolingbroke is an ordinary lamp." A suggestion of his later style is found in the scathing lines: "A Cartesian kneels and prostrates himself before me; a Quaker speaks to me covered; both do so to follow the Gospel in the most rigorous sense." Thus, the notebook gives the first promise of that superb irony which made *Candide* the wittiest book in the world, and the *Philosophical Dictionary* more deadly to priests than regiments of artillery.

The abuse to which Voltaire was subjected by Christians was awful. Dr. Johnson, by no means a bad-hearted man, voiced this terrible prejudice. In a conversation with Boswell, he said: "Rousseau, sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations." "Sir, you do not think him as bad a man as Voltaire?" inquired Boswell. "Why, sir, it is difficult to settle the proportion of iniquity between them." In artistic circles one meets the same insults. Sir Joshua Reynolds, in one of his most popular pictures, introduced Voltaire as the personification of sophistry. The clergy, naturally, out-Heroded Herod, and made Voltaire the helot of countless homilies, and lied to such purpose that whole generations of Christians firmly believed that Voltaire was responsible for the French Revolution.

The reason is not far to seek. Voltaire's crystal-clear understanding saw the absurdities and abominations of Christianity. His aim was straight to the fact, and he brought orthodoxy to the test of truth and common sense. Was it true or not that God had chosen Jewish savages as his chosen people?

Was Omnipotence born of one parent only, and that one a virgin? Did God feed five thousand people with a few loaves and fishes, and did he come back from the grave? To ask these questions, and to press for answers, was to provoke inextinguishable laughter.

Voltaire was more than a sceptic, and his exquisite wit was employed as his principal weapon. His humanity was whole-hearted and sincere. He did not jibe at men being tortured and murdered for their opinions. At the legal murder of Jean Calas he was indignation personified, and he never rested till the foul wrong was undone. Voltaire not only fought intolerance and oppression, he protected the oppressed. His championing of the Servens and La Barre will never fade from the memory of men. A true humanitarian, he did more than any other man to put an end to judicial torture. This would alone suffice to prove how intense was his detestation of violence and fanaticism.

For sixty years Voltaire waged unrelenting war against the Great Lying Church, and when this eminent Freethinker died the Church refused him burial, hoping that he would be thrown into the gutter like the famous actress, Adrienne Lecouvreur. But he had carved his name too deeply on his country's roll of honor, and his remains now rest beneath the dome of the Pantheon, with its front glowing with the splendid words: *Aux grand hommes la patrie reconnaissante*. Here he sleeps undisturbed, and by his side rest the ashes of Rousseau. Shoulder to shoulder, these great soldiers of the Army of Liberty rest under their magnificent tombs:—

"With the sound of those they wrought for,
And the feet of those they fought for,
Echoing round their bones for evermore."

MIMNERMUS.

Correspondence.

"TESS."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—After Mr. Lyle's complete statement, my first impulse is to let judgment go by default, for there is obviously nothing to say by way of excuse for the confusion which has existed for years in my mind as to the attitude taken by the Vicar on the two points of the baby's baptism and burial. And yet I feel as if something more were necessary, and I would like to express my contrition for having misled any of your readers, and for any criticism of parties unknown based on the above confusion.

Mr. Lyle's remarks are too restrained, in fact, in view of the circumstances, and I hope I can thank him in the best possible way by telling him that his graceful note has impressed me with a heavier sense of responsibility.

T. H. ELSTON.

MAXIM'S BOOK AND THE "TIMES."

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In reply to Mr. J. Tomkins' request *re* Sir Hiram Maxim's book, I wish to say that there was no review of the book in the *Times*; but in the *Times Literary Supplement*—published every Thursday as a supplement with the *Times*—it appeared in the columns of books received, with a few lines—which are sometimes given when the book is not reviewed—giving a fair and unbiased summary of its contents. I did not make a note of it, or of the date; but when writing the article in question I remembered it, and mentioned it.

W. MANN.

BIBLE MORALS.

How little good and bad conduct were associated in thought with the intrinsic natures of right and wrong, and how completely they were associated in thought with obedience and disobedience to Jahveh, we see in the facts that prosperity and increase of population were promised as rewards of allegiance; while there was punishment for such non-ethical disobediences as omitting circumcision or numbering the people.—Herbert Spencer, "Principles of Ethics."

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.**INDOOR.**

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (Workman's Hall, Romford-road, Stratford, E.): 7.30, R. H. Rosetti, "Man: A Divine Bungle or Nature's Masterpiece?"

OUTDOOR.

EDMONTON BRANCH N. S. S. (Edmonton Green): 7.45, a Lecture.

COUNTRY.**INDOOR.**

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (North Saloon, City Hall): G. W. Foote, 12 noon, "Shakespeare's Humanism in the *Merchant of Venice*"; 6.30, "Mr. Balfour on God."

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