

# THE Freethinker

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If I know your sect, I anticipate your argument. I hear a preacher announce for his text and topic the expediency of one of the institutions of his Church. Do I not know beforehand that not possibly can he say a new and spontaneous word? Do I not know that, with all this ostentation of examining the grounds of the institution, he will do no such thing? Do I not know that he is pledged to himself not to look at one side—the permitted side, not as a man, but as a parish minister? He is a retained attorney, and these airs of the bench are the emptiest affectation.

—R. W. EMERSON.

## A Parson's Questions.

THERE are two ways of meeting "Infidelity." One is to find out what are the Freethinker's beliefs, and what are his objections to the beliefs of Christians, and deal with them. The second plan is either to present him as entertaining ideas too silly for anywhere but the pulpit, or fire at him a number of questions that he really has little or no concern with. The first method has its obvious dangers. To state the case for Freethought fully and fairly is to court disaster—for the Christian. Many a Christian has tried that plan, and ended by giving up his Christianity. Even if he has not gone that distance, he has got into trouble with his pious friends. They have made him realise that he was to say the worst about Freethought, not the best. To concentrate attention upon its alleged weakness, not to dwell upon its real strength.

So it is that the second plan is most often adopted by Christian preachers. They know that for the most part they are catering for those who are not the least interested in finding out the truth about Freethought. All they desire is that the "infidel" shall "catch it hot." The bigger the fool, the greater the success he can be made to appear, the better they like it. It gives them a comfortable feeling of their own superiority, besides keeping timid folk off a religiously undesirable subject. Of course, no Freethinker could be quite such a fool as some Christians make him appear. Neither could he be so great a rogue as he is sometimes depicted. If the latter, he would soon be in gaol. And if the former, he would never have sense enough to leave the Church.

I am reminded of these things after reading an article by the Rev. F. James, in a recent issue of the *Camberwell Borough Advertiser*, on "A Few Questions to Infidelity." I haven't the ghost of an idea who Rev. F. James is, or what particular brand of Christians he associates with. This is, of course, no reflection upon Mr. James—there are plenty of great men whom I do not know, even by name; it is no more than a humble confession of my own ignorance. I am only attracted to Mr. James when he sets out as an infidel-slayer, and many of my readers may be interested to observe the way in which he goes to work.

Mr. James writes for young men, and he is distressed to find that "some young men find themselves in an awkward corner when asked questions by an Atheist—if not quite bowled over." So our parson kindly offers to show these distressed young men

how to do it. And the proper method is not to meet the Atheist's objections to Christianity, but to answer his questions by asking others. This plan is sometimes admissible, but it hardly meets the present case. Here, anyway, is Mr. James' series of questions:—

1. "How do you account for the persistent existence of the idea of God in the human race?"
2. "How do you account for the perfect adaptability of creation?"
3. "How is it that progress needs belief in God?"
4. "How is it that faith in God effects moral changes?"

These four questions deserve all publicity, not only for the way in which they illustrate the tortuous character of the clerical mind; but also because all except number one are first class examples of the art of begging the question. How does the Atheist account for the perfect adaptability of creation, for the necessity of the belief in God to progress, and for the moral changes worked by belief in God? In Mr. James' sense, the Atheist does not believe in any of these things, and one would imagine that even a parson might see the absurdity of asking an Atheist to account for something he does *not* believe in. Most people have enough trouble to account for all they do believe, without accounting for anything else. Mr. James should have proved these things to be true. But it is so like a clergyman to assume as true all he requires, and then consider the matter settled.

To take Mr. James' questions in their order. What is there more remarkable in the persistence of the idea of God than in the persistence of any other idea? (I may note that Mr. James' comments shows that he really means universality, but that may pass.) Any idea will persist so long as the conditions are suitable to its persistence; witness such notions as lucky stones, lucky days, unlucky numbers, etc. The really vital question is not the persistence of the idea of God, but the conditions of its origin. How did it begin? How did mankind come to believe originally that there was some personal intelligence controlling natural forces? And were the facts that originally suggested this belief such as would now suggest the same conclusion to an unprejudiced mind coming fresh to this study? Every instructed mind knows that the answer to these questions is in the negative. Every one of the facts upon which mankind originally based the belief in God now admit of a totally different explanation. We *know* that the idea of God began in a delusion. The premises were false, and you simply cannot get a sound conclusion from false premises.

But this is, perhaps, taking Mr. James too seriously, and carrying him into regions where he may not feel at home. So I would suggest that some reason for the persistence of the idea of God may be found in two directions. First, accurate knowledge concerning anything is of slow growth, and comes latest in the field. And when once a false idea gets established, and has a good start in time, there is no task more difficult than that of its removal. Secondly, we have always had a large army of men—of which Mr. James may be a distinguished member—whose business in life it is to keep this idea alive; and, perhaps, a still larger army whose interest it was to see that they did it. No



other idea that I know of has had the same jealous and constant care bestowed upon it to keep it vigorous. And this army is so terribly afraid the idea of God will not persist under modern conditions, that it dare not relax its hold for even a single generation. Let us have but one generation of children kept free from the idea of God, and given a good education, and Mr. James and his like would be driven to find some other method of earning a livelihood.

The persistence of the idea of God affords no ground for wonder. The fact of millions of people in the civilised world being without belief in God ought to give Mr. James food for reflection. How does he explain them? The Christian is no problem to the Atheist. He knows all about him. He has been there himself. It is the Atheist that puzzles the Christian; for he represents growth. The Christian only stands for stagnation. And stagnation is, after all, a commoner fact than progress.

Mr. James' other questions—for the reason given above—will not detain me long. The perfect adaptability of natural phenomena is either a truism or a fallacy. Mr. James marvels that "Nature is so perfectly adapted to her own ends." Most sage philosopher! How on earth could a process be anything else than adapted to its end? When the conditions of Nature are such that a child is born crippled in body and develops into a microcephalous idiot, the adaptation of means to that end is perfect. So it is when a healthy child is born who flowers into a genius among his kind. The conditions are different, and the product is of necessity different. The adaptation of means to ends is not a proof of design; it is the statement of a truism, of a universal and inescapable fact. Mr. James is staggered, apparently, that twice times two should equal four. The marvel would be if they sometimes equalled five.

If the statement is not a truism, it is not true. I suppose what Mr. James has in his mind is that there must be a God because Nature works in an ideally perfect manner. And that is simply not true. Judged from that point of view, Nature is full of flaws, imperfections, and blunders. Every time an unhealthy child is born, Nature—or God—has blundered. Every time the harvest is a failure, God has made a mistake. From the human point of view, Nature is full of evil; so full that Christians had to invent a second god—the Devil—to save the face of the first one. It is not alone the Freethinker who dwells upon the disharmonies in Nature. The imperfections of the world, the ruined lives and shattered hopes of man, are, as a matter of fact, dwelt on constantly by religionists themselves as one of their strongest arguments in favor of the belief in a future life.

How is it that progress needs the belief in God? asks Mr. James. The answer to this is simple. Progress needs no belief in either God or gods. Eliminate from our midst all the discoveries of art and science, with all that they imply, and what would the belief in God avail? The disappearance of these things would not affect the belief in God. That flourished before these things were, and it would flourish all the more vigorously in their absence. Mr. James should remember—although probably the class of readers to which he appeals makes such remembrance needless—that he has himself dwelt upon the fact that every race of people believe in a God. Why, then, is not progress a common and universal fact instead of being a comparatively rare one? What of the nations who believe in God, and who actually go backward in the scale of civilisation? These are awkward facts which make Mr. James' questions look rather puerile. I do not suppose for a moment that Mr. James will attempt to answer them. His object is to provide an antidote to "infidelity"; and with the instinct of his order, he feels that the best antidote is to confuse the minds and darken the understandings of such as are ill-advised enough to look to him for guidance.

C. COHEN.

## God's Official Dethronement.

FROM the Secularist point of view, as well as from that of orthodox theology, it would be difficult to conceive of anything more inept, or more laughably inconsequential, than the leading article, entitled "Omnipotence," in the *Christian Commonwealth* for September 15. As it bears no writer's name, this remarkable article is presumably from the pen of the editor, Mr. Dawson. Whoever the author may be, he is evidently not a theologian. Allusion is made, at the outset, to an exceptionally able article which recently appeared in the *Westminster Gazette*, entitled "Religion and the War," the object of which was to show that the interpretations of the facts of the world's history, offered by current theology, are wholly untrue. The writer quoted from Newman and Goldwin Smith to the effect that an inspection of the Universe as known to us yields "a vision to dizzy and appal, and inflates upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery, which is absolutely beyond human solution." With that article as a whole we are not now concerned, but merely wish to point out that one of its conclusions is thoroughly pertinent, namely, that "to be forced to believe that an all-powerful Creator, with unlimited choice, has so constituted the world that it is, as Newman says, 'a vision to dizzy and appal,' or that it is impossible, as Goldwin Smith says, to infer from it that he is a moral Being, is to be cut off from all rational ground for believing that he will in the end bring all things right." On the assumption that an all-powerful and all-loving Ruler sits on the throne of the question, If in the end he will bring all things right, why not in the beginning? This is how he puts the case:—

"In normal times we live our lives without asking the question or troubling about the answer. The calamities which come to our knowledge are like exceptions proving the rule that the world is usually a pleasant and orderly place. Providence in such times resembles a well-managed railway which is liable to occasional accidents. But when we see the world strewn with wreckage, when fear and pain and slaughter are our portion, when all mankind is torn with passion and hate, then the question suddenly becomes urgent. Can we at the same time believe the Creator to be all-powerful and all-loving, if he requires or permits this to be, and, if all-powerful, what hope have we that the future which he has in store for us will be better than the present?"

Now, the *Christian Commonwealth* runs foul of the *Westminster Gazette* article on the ground that it mistakes "religion" for "theology," which, in reality, it does not. Historically considered, religion and theology are absolutely inseparable. So far, at least, as the Western world is concerned, there has been no religion apart from theology. The writer of the leader in question betrays his ignorance of both religion and theology when he asserts that "it is one of the tragedies of modern Christianity that so many of its adherents do not distinguish between God and their idea of God." Such a distinction is altogether beyond the wisest man that ever lived. All that anybody can know about God is his or her idea of him, and in any idea formed of him he is bound to be either finite or infinite, either omnipotent or of limited power. According to the Biblical idea of him, he is supreme, sitting as King for ever, and doing according to his will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, whose base none can stay, and to whom none can say, What doest thou? This is either true or false. If true, then the War is his work, a conclusion of which the majority of divines are not ashamed. As the *Westminster Gazette* writer says:—

"They say in effect that slaughter and hate are sent by God for our punishment or purification. They regard God as the partisan of their cause. When Trevelyan said that 'the great God would see to it that the terrible medicine of war was not withheld from mankind, the religious people shuddered; yet when the 'terrible medicine' is actually being administered they say it is



the visitation of God.....When I go to church I expect to be taken into another world, where I may hear some voices of mercy and charity and forbearance above the din of this secular conflict. Instead, I hear chapters from the Old Testament, which appear to inculcate a merciless savagery towards enemies, and discourses from the pulpit which either dwell, like leading articles, on the political issues of the War, or attempt to prove that the horrors we are now witnessing are part of a Divinely ordered plan. These leave me hungry and rebellious."

Bible Christians have no choice but to accept the orthodox doctrine of the Divine omnipotence, and they firmly hold it in conjunction with the other Bible doctrine of the Divine compassion and mercy. And here we touch a profoundly significant point, sometimes with extreme bluntness, namely, that this all-powerful and all-loving Heavenly Father is with the British and their Allies, but not with the Germans; and one fanatical preacher is quoted as saying that "if the Germans win, I will not preach another sermon, or open my Bible again." Such a man would be much wiser if he were to stop preaching now, and never touch his Bible any more.

The *Christian Commonwealth* writer informs us that omnipotence is a theological conception, or an intellectual idea; but to him it seems wholly immaterial whether it is true or false. "It may suggest something," he observes, "that is factually true of God, while on the other hand it may be a human error"; but whether it is true or erroneous, the Divine nature remains entirely unaffected. Here our friend is hopelessly out of his depth. Concerning the Divine nature he knows absolutely nothing, and has no right whatever to speak. He admits that we are totally ignorant of omnipotence; but are we not more ignorant still, if possible, of God? Here is a specimen of his strange method of reasoning:—

"Whether our conception [of God] is wholly or partially false, or whether, being true, we cannot accommodate it to our other ideas—it would be as absurd to disbelieve in God as it would be for a man to disbelieve in the sun because he was told that it could not actually be all like that crimson ball which he has just seen set beneath a summer sea."

The comparison between God and the sun is ludicrous in the extreme. We have scientific instruments at our disposal by the careful use of which we can ascertain with astonishing accuracy what the sun is, but we have absolutely no means of finding out what God is, or that he exists at all. Since history does not reveal him, we conclude that he is merely a creation of the human imagination.

We now reach a part of the article under criticism which fills us with boundless amazement. It reminds us, indeed, of the alleged contest between Baal and Jehovah on Mount Carmel, when it was decided that the God who answered by fire should be pronounced the true God. The two altars were ready, laden with the appointed offerings. The prophets of Baal had their *innings* first. They prayed and prayed, but no fire was supernaturally kindled. Then Elijah began to mock them, saying, "Cry aloud; for he is a God; either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and out themselves after their manner with knives and lances, till the blood gashed out upon them. And it was so, when midday was past, that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening oblation; but there was neither voice, nor any answer, nor any that regarded" (1 Kings xiii. 21-29). Not far from a year ago British Christians held daily prayer-meetings, which at first were crowded, but which later fizzled out, to ask God to grant them a speedy victory; and eminent divines declared that if an adequate number of the Lord's people prayed, and prayed with adequate fervor and confidence, a favorable answer would certainly be vouchsafed. Twelve months later the War goes on seriously and frightfully as ever, with no sign whatever that God is actively present in the conflict, and the question naturally arises, Is it the Lord's will that mankind should be blotted out from upon the face of

Europe and the Near East? Now listen to the exalted wisdom compressed into a small space in the article:—

"We say, if God were omnipotent he would stop the War; we really mean, if we were much stronger than we are, we would stop the War. Yet God's omnipotence, if we could fathom or grasp it, might actually require, and be manifesting itself in, the long continuance of the War.....God may not think this War nearly such a big thing as we do, or worry about it nearly as much as we do. *His fulness may be occupied elsewhere* [the italics are ours]; *he may be spinning nebulae*; or he may be lighting a tender flame in the heart of some village carpenter which the violent blasts of centuries will not be able to put out. Therefore, when people say, God's omnipotence is in question, we find it impossible to be alarmed. When people say, if God is not omnipotent, he is no God for us, we fail to be moved. If a dog is fighting in the street, and if his master is writing an editorial article of some importance in his library [such as the one we are now quoting from], it is not necessary that he should leave his work and go out and stop the fight, although he can hear the barking easily enough, although he loves his dog dearly enough; and if the dog should say, 'Why didn't you come and stop the fight? I'll not have you for a master any longer,' it would be foolish of the dog and bad for him."

That is a masterpiece that cannot easily be surpassed. No comment is needed. All we will say is that no genuine lover of dogs could have written it, and that the God depicted cannot be the loving Father, Protector, and Friend of mankind. His omnipotence is not worth arguing about; it is his character that the writer has so shamelessly and so callously given away.

J. T. LLOYD.

Robert Bridges.

*Robert Bridges; A Critical Study*, by F. E. B. Young. Seeker. 1915.

*The Poems of Robert Bridges*. Oxford University Press.

IN the curiously chequered history of the Poet-Laureateship the name of Robert Bridges will be one of its titles to regard. His succession to Alfred Austin restored dignity to the post, for the present Poet-Laureate is the one classical singer we have. Though at times formal in style, his work has had great influence by its purity and delicacy, yet strength of expression. It may be that he is a poet's poet, and that the man in the street does not read him; but it is rash to apply such tests, for strange literary idols are worshiped in the market-place.

Every genuine poet must wait for his audience, because he sees the world freshly for himself; and has to represent to others the vision that he sees. At first his method seems strange; his epithets are unusual; the things he sings of may not be the things that readers think of. Or, he talks about them in a different way, and so the public is at a loss to understand his drift. Undoubtedly, Robert Bridges voice is individual. His lyrics do not suggest those of any other poet. His blank verse is not Tennysonian; his sonnets do not recall Wordsworth; his lyrics are totally unlike those of Swinburne; the fresh voice has to make its own impression.

Mr. Young's critical study is a natural and adequate tribute to a dignified singer. Except that it is criticism pure and simple, it could hardly have been done better. He brings out in the true proportion the Laureate's chief qualities. And the prime quality is the purely English character of the poems. Bridges has held a mirror up to nature. He is, perhaps, better at the small and quiet than at the broad and moving; for in the pictorial vein his scenery has none of the glorious movement of Meredith's muse. But few poets have surpassed Robert Bridges at the purely native quality of his art. Shelley's verse bears a wild orchid fragrance; Keats' the perfume of a musk-rose; Wordsworth's the essence of mountain loneliness. The lyrics of Bridges are fresh with the blossoms of the English countryside.



Here is a description of the north wind in October:—

"In the golden glade the chestnuts are fallen all;  
From the sacred boughs of the oak the acorns fall;  
The beech scatters her ruddy fire;  
The lime has stripped to the cold,  
And standeth naked above her yellow attire;  
The larch thinneth her spire  
To lay the ways of the wood with cloth of gold.  
Out of the golden-green and white  
Of the brake the fir-trees stand upright  
In the forest of flame, and wave aloft  
To the blue of heaven their blue-green tuftings soft."

The nightingale has been hymned by thousands of poets. Robert Bridges conveys an original note:—

"Alone, aloud in the raptured ear of men  
We pour our dark nocturnal secret; and then,  
As night is withdrawn  
From these sweet springing meads and bursting  
boughs of May,  
Dream while the innumerable choir of day  
Welcome the dawn."

For a contrast compare that fine poem, "A Passer By":—

"Whither, O splendid ship, thy white sails crowding,  
Leaning across the bosom of the urgent West,  
That fearest not sea rising nor sky clouding,  
Whither away, fair rover, and what thy quest?  
Ah! soon, when winter has all our vales oppress,  
When skies are cold and misty, and hail is hurling,  
Wilt thou glide on the blue Pacific, or rest  
In a summer haven asleep, thy white sails furling?"

Although "caviare to the general," Robert Bridges has written some very appealing verse, which haunts the memory and pierces the reader, as Newman said of old-world Horace, "with their sad earnestness and vivid exactness." Listen to the stanzas "On a Dead Child," written in unusual, but singularly effective, rhythm:—

"Perfect little body, without fault or stain on thee,  
With promise of strength and manhood full and fair!  
Though cold and stark and bare, [on thee.  
The bloom and the charm of life doth awhile remain  
Thy mother's treasure wert thou; alas! no longer  
To visit her heart with wondrous joy; to be  
Thy father's pride;—ah, he [stronger.  
Must gather his faith together, and his strength make  
So I lay thee there, thy sunken eyelids closing—  
Go lie thou there in thy coffin, thy last little bed!—  
Propping thy wise, sad head,  
Thy firm, pale hands across thy chest disposing.  
So quiet! Doth the change content thee?—Death,  
whither hath he taken thee? [this?  
To a world, do I think, that rights the disaster of  
The vision of which I miss, [and awaken thee?  
Who weep for the body and wish but to warm thee  
Ah! little at best can all our hopes avail us  
To lift this sorrow, or cheer us, when in the dark,  
Unwilling, alone we embark,  
And the things we have seen and have known and  
have heard of, fail us."

The Poet-Laureate has been very successful in the writing of odes. The following is from that written for the bi-centenary commemoration of Henry Purcell, the musician:—

"The sea with melancholy roar  
Moateth about our castled shore;  
His world-wide elemental moan  
Girdeth our lives with tragic zone.  
Yet shall his storm and mastering wave  
Assure the empire to the brave;  
And to his billowy bass belongs  
The music of our patriot songs,  
When to the wind his ridges go  
In furious following, careering a-row,  
Lashed with hail and withering snow;  
And ever undaunted hearts outride  
His rushing waters wide."

We quote the following from the ode on "A Lady Whom Grief for her Beloved Killed":—

"Assemble, all ye maidens, at the door,  
And all ye lovers, assemble; far and wide  
Proclaim the bridal, that proclaimed before  
Has been deferred to this late eventide;  
For on this night the bride,  
The days of her betrothal over,  
Leaves the parental hearth for evermore;  
To-night the bride goes forth to meet her lover.

Reach down the wedding vesture, that has lain  
Yet all unvisited, the silken gown;  
Bring out the bracelets, and the golden chain  
Her dearer friends provided; sere and brown  
Bring out the fatal crown,  
And set it on her forehead lightly;  
Though it be withered, twine no wreath again;  
This only is the crown she can wear rightly."

Born over seventy years ago in Kent, Robert Bridges is a man of many parts and of varied experiences. At Oxford he distinguished himself as a cricketer, oarsman, and scholar. Then he travelled on the Continent and in the East, and on returning home studied medicine at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, took up practice, and filled several hospital appointments. Since 1882 he has devoted himself to literature. His output has not been bulky, and few poets have challenged posterity with so small a nosegay of verse. His first poems appeared over forty years ago, and his works have long been prized by University students, and a few years since Oxford honored him with the degree of Doctor of Letters.

Robert Bridges is undoubtedly one of the surest of immortality among our contemporaries. His work maintains throughout an extremely high standard. He has never allowed the quest for popularity or gain to tell against its perfection, but careful and studied art has ever been his motto. Careless of applause, he has his reward. The little band of "Georgian" poets dedicated an anthology from their works "to Robert Bridges," presumably, as the most distinguished of living English poets. And the best critics of poetry, including Andrew Lang and Arthur Symonds, have always hailed Bridges as the singer who has carried on the splendid tradition of English poetry.

The unthinking amiability of the modern newspapers, which finds great poets are as common as roses in June, does a heavy disservice to literature. We are, in the words of Henry James, "a generation so smothered in quantity and number that discrimination, under the gasp, has neither air to breathe, nor room to turn round." A hundred years ago Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth were insulted because they gave the world of their best. To-day they would be overwhelmed in a flood of flattery, heedlessly poured forth for the sapping and destruction of their genius. The poet should work his hardest for the present, and for the rest await in confidence the verdict of posterity.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Fourth Gospel.

### THE SUPPER AT BETHANY.

In the primitive Gospel in use in the first quarter of the second century there was an account of Jesus being entertained, two days before the Passover, "in the house of Simon the leper" at Bethany. This narrative is recorded by Matthew and Mark in nearly the same words. The account by Matthew commences:—

"Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster cruse of exceeding precious ointment, and she poured it upon his head, as he sat at meat. When his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor" (Matt. xxvi. 6—13).

Mark's account (xiv. 3—9) is the same except in the words italicised in the following:—

"an alabaster cruse of ointment of spikenard.....there were some that had indignation.....might have been sold for about three hundred pence, and given to the poor."

Luke also gives this narrative; but he has so altered it that it almost escapes recognition. It commences:—

"And he entered the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And behold, a woman which was in the city a sinner.....she brought an alabaster cruse of ointment



In this version nothing is said of the waste of such precious ointment. The question raised is, as to Jesus allowing a woman known to be a "sinner" to come near him. In his reply to this accusation Jesus addresses his host as "Simon," whence it becomes evident that he is in "the house of Simon the leper"; and as Luke records no other woman with "an alabaster cruse of ointment" as anointing Jesus, there can be no doubt that it is the same story reconstructed. Luke does, however, relate a story which refers to a supper in Bethany—though the name of the village is not mentioned. This commences:—

"As they went on their way, he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at the Lord's feet, and heard his word. But Martha was distracted about much serving; and she came up to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me" (Luke x. 38—42).

In this case the Lord did not "care" a rap. Mary was sitting idly listening to his talk, leaving Martha to do all the work—to prepare a supper for thirteen guests, to lay the tables, to serve it out, and to see to everything relating to food and drink, without the aid of a servant. But what did that matter? There was but one thing in this life that was of any importance, and Mary had chosen that—and it should not be taken from her.

Whence did Luke get this anecdote? It was evidently not found in the primitive Gospel, otherwise Matthew or Mark—or both—would have recorded it. It must therefore have been taken from some of the later apocryphal writings. One point, however, should here be noticed: the story contains no mention of Lazarus. It is stated that the house belonged to Martha, and that "she had a sister called Mary" who lived with her: but nothing is said of a brother named Lazarus. This omission tacitly implies that the original writer of the anecdote knew nothing about the sisters having a brother—a fact which adds confirmation to the idea that the brother "Lazarus" was a creation of the pseudo-John himself.

We now come to that Presbyterian's version of the supper at Bethany—a story which appears to have been made up from the narrative recorded by Mark and the foregoing anecdote from some apocryphal source known to Luke and the pseudo-John. This commences:—

John xii. 1—8.—"Jesus therefore six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom he raised from the dead. So they made him a supper there: and Martha served; but Lazarus was one of them that sat at meat with him. Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment."

Here we see that the story of the supper at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as recorded by Matthew and Mark, has been completely remodelled. The pseudo John has made it "six days before the passover," instead of "two days before," and he has made the woman bring "a pound" of spikenard ointment, instead of "a cruse." But in the older and traditional account the woman was nameless, and a stranger to Jesus: here she is a beloved friend and pupil, and a sister of the hostess. Lazarus is also present; for in chapter xi. he is described as living with his sisters in Bethany: also, as in the anecdote recorded by Luke, "Martha served." In the writer puts her in the place of the unknown woman, and makes her anoint his feet. But here a figure is introduced who deserves a new heading: I therefore momentarily interrupt the narrative to give him one.

JUDAS ISCARIOT.

As we have already seen, in the First and Second Gospels either the "disciples," or "some" of those present, were indignant at the waste of such costly

ointment. Here, in the pseudo-John's version of the story, we read:—

"But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, which should betray him, saith, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? Now this he said, not because he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and having the bag took away what was put therein."

Here we see the "three hundred pence" of Mark placed in the mouth of Judas of Kerioth, whom the pseudo-John probably believed to be a historical person. This disciple, that writer says, was a thief—he being the one who carried "the bag" containing all the money which Jesus and his disciples possessed in common. It is scarcely necessary to say that "the bag" and the office of carrying it were both of his own invention: for the three Synoptists never heard of either. When, upon one occasion, the Savior required a half shekel for tribute money (Matt. xvii. 24—27) there was no "bag" to fall back upon: Peter had to go and fish for the coin. As a matter of fact, the pseudo-John appears to have believed that he had the right to invent any circumstance he thought suitable for the occasion—and he has done so repeatedly in every chapter of his forged Gospel. What he has said about Judas furnishes another example of his own low cunning; for no honest or straightforward man could have conceived such a system of petty theft, much less could have falsely asserted it to have been a fact.

We will now see what the Presbyterian John has to say of Judas at the Last Supper (John xiii. 21—30).

"Jesus said.....Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. The disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. There was at the table reclining in Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoneth to him, and saith unto him, Tell us who it is of whom he speaketh. He leaning back, as he was, on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answereth, He it is, for whom I shall dip the sop, and give it him. So when he had dipped the sop, he taketh and giveth it to Judas.....And after the sop, then entered Satan into him. Jesus therefore saith unto him, That thou doest, do quickly.....He then having received the sop went out straightway: and it was night."

Here we have another example of the underhand ways of the pseudo-John: there is no such silly by-play in the other three Gospels. In the latter, the disciples ask, "Is it I, Lord? Is it I?"—to which Jesus replies: "He that dippeth with me in the dish the same shall betray me" (Matt. xxvi. 23; Mark xiv. 20; Luke xxii. 21). In the Fourth Gospel we have, as it were, a number of schoolboys who are afraid to ask the master a question. One of them at length whispers to the master's pet pupil, "Ask him who it is." And the pet obligingly does so. Then the master in a low voice tells his pet to notice to whom he is about to give a piece of sopped bread. What a picture, truly, of the Christian Savior.

Moreover, in this absurd account, it was Jesus himself who made Judas betray him; for it was not until that disciple had received "the sop" that he had any thought of doing so. In the Synoptics Judas went to the chief priests some days before the Last Supper, and of his own accord agreed to betray his Master (Matt. xxvi. 14; Mark xiv. 10).

Again, the representation made in the Fourth Gospel that there was among the twelve a "disciple whom Jesus loved"—one who, when at table, "reclined in Jesus' bosom"—is another of the pseudo-John's ridiculous fabrications. Had such been the case, all three Synoptists must certainly have known it; but not one of them ever heard of such a disciple. If there be one fact respecting the Jesus of the Synoptics upon which there can be no possible doubt, it is that that Savior had no special favorite among the twelve apostles. On three occasions, it is stated, he allowed only Peter, James, and John to remain with him, to the exclusion of the others; but there is not a word which shows that he had more affection for John than for Peter or James, or for any of the other disciples, or that the apostle John ever reclined on his Savior's bosom. The



pseudo-John's repeated statements on this subject (John xiii. 23, xix. 26, xx. 2, xxi. 7, 20) must be characterised as pure falsehoods, besides being a slander on his Lord and Master.

The last scene in which Judas appears in the Fourth Gospel is that of the arrest in Gethsemane.

John xviii. 3-8.—"Judas then having received the band of soldiers from the chief priests cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore.....went forth, and saith unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas was standing with them. When therefore he said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Again therefore he asked them, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these [disciples] go their way."

The foregoing is a further sample of the pseudo-John's power of invention. In the other three Gospels Judas walks over to Jesus and says "Hail Master," and kisses him. Here he remains standing with the soldiers while Jesus steps forward and asks "Whom seek ye?" Here also the writer makes the divine power of Jesus shine forth so that the band "went backward and fell to the ground." In the Synoptics, again, the disciples "all forsook him and fled": here, Jesus asks that they be allowed to "go their way."

All three Synoptical writers drew their accounts of the arrest and trial of Jesus from the primitive Gospel in use in the churches of their day. The apocryphal writings then existing were not new versions of the old and well-known narratives, but later anonymous writings containing entirely new matter, such as stories relating to the Virgin birth, the childhood of Jesus, Pilate's report to the Emperor, the Acts and Travels of Peter, the Acts and Travels of Paul, the Travels of Peter and Paul, etc. There can thus be no doubt whatever that the reconstruction of older Synoptic narratives by the pseudo-John was all done "on his own" and out of his own head. He had no documentary authority either for his manifold departures from the text of the more ancient Gospel, or for the sayings and doings he has ascribed to Jesus which cannot be found in one or more of the other three Gospels. His sole desire was to write a new Gospel by remodelling some of the older narratives and by composing a series of new ones himself.

ABRACADABRA.

### The Angels at Mons.

AMONG the names and objects which have sprung into prominence during the War, we must include the angels. They have suddenly become a topic for pulpit orations and press articles, out of which has arisen an amusing controversy. On the one side we have the doubting Thomases who demand to see the credentials; on the other we have those included in the beatitude: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Proud in the possession of a faith that asks no questions, they "rejoice with an exceeding great joy" over the reputed angelic visitation at Mons. And well they may; for has it not supplied a timely rebuff to a sceptical age which had wickedly relegated the angels to the limbo of oblivion?

To those, however, who have not been providentially blessed with a blind soporific faith, the incident has only a psychological interest; to them it only exemplifies anew the well-known fact that where there is a credulous will-to-believe, hardly anything more than a suggestion is needed—undisputed evidence is quite superfluous. The readers of this journal know full well what farcical evidence is offered as proof of this story, and yet a learned divine speaks of it thus: "If anything can be established by contemporary evidence, it is established"! And this, be it noted, not for a natural event, but for

a supernatural phenomenon. One would suppose that such "educated credulity" would be at the present day as phenomenal and rare as the angels themselves, for in all soberness it is not a question to be decided by human testimony at all, be it ever so abundant and sincere.

It would be interesting to watch the faces and hear the comments of these reverend gentlemen if asked to believe in the tales of travellers who should declare that they had seen groups of dragons and griffins, and herds of fauns and satyrs; or in the yarns of sailors who should vouch that they had seen nymphs and mermaids in the far-away distant lands. It is highly probable that even Louis de Rougemont would not find it so easy a task to get a hearing as he did with his tall tales of riding the turtle. And yet the only difference between angels and fauns is, that one belongs to a dead and the other to a living creed. Both are equally fabulous and equally absurd. They were alike natural and rational enough when man, in the twilight of his intellectual dawn, indulged his creative impulses, and peopled the earth, the sea, and the air with his fanciful creations. He created his angels as he created his gods upon whom they attended; and as he had domiciled the latter somewhere above the clouds, he equipped their human form (which was his standard model) with wings, to enable them to pass to and fro from sky to earth. It is as primitive and materialistic a conception as any mythology can supply; and yet the story of Mons is declared to be "highly credible" by an educated person! It only proves that a classical education may be as compatible with grossest credulity as was the "learned ignorance" of the early Gnostics or the medieval schoolmen. It points to a pathological state, and indicates the tragic extent to which the reasoning faculty is paralysed and stultified by the religious indoctrination we receive in youth. The mind loses its natural sense of proportion, so that the highly grotesque appears as an embodiment of harmony.

The story, however, has a moral as well as a physical side. It is ethically as reprehensible as it is physically ludicrous. Is it not extraordinary that a minister of religion should have a moral sense so blunted as to think that an all-just, all-wise, and all-merciful God should choose to interfere on behalf of his beloved people only thus once, while every day since the War began has furnished hundreds of opportunities more imperative in their demand for divine intervention than that of Mons? To take notice of one case and be blind and deaf to the millions of similar cases is the characteristic of an erratic monster rather than that of a God of justice and love. Why should the alleged miraculous interventions always be of the capricious and fantastic type illustrated by the angel who stirred the waters of the pool of Siloam? Why were not the winds of Flanders kept constantly blowing in a direction to sweep back the poisonous gases to the German lines, in spite of opposing barometric pressures, and so save his "beloved people" unspeakable sufferings? What miracle could be more befitting, more urgent, more benign, more free from caprice and magical implications, or more easy for a Deity who has power to make fluids flow in opposition to their gravity? There could be no dispute as to the miraculous nature of such an occurrence. Again, since the presence of angels was so much more effective than shells, why have they not been utilised every hour since the beginning of the War, to secure bloodless victories instead of the daily infernos created by present methods? Why was there not an angel sent to warn the Russians of the plot to destroy their arsenal? Why did they not shroud the *Lusitania* and hide it from view at the fateful moment? Were these, and thousands of similar cases, less deserving of protection than the soldiers at Mons?

The practice of discussing imbecilities of this sort from the stand-point of human evidence is probably due to the example set by the late Professor Huxley in his religious polemics. With a view to avoiding the charge of bias from preconceived ideas, he con-



stantly stressed the evidence of human testimony in opposition to that derived from the uniformities of nature. It would be highly interesting to know just what amount of human testimony would be considered sufficient to outweigh the evidence derived from the particular laws of nature which were interrupted in the alleged miracles, and compel him to believe, for example, in the miraculous "conversion of water into wine" and in the destruction of the Gadarene swine by the agency of demons.

We had a rare object-lesson in the value of human testimony in connection with the phantom Russians that came over to fight for us in Belgium at the beginning of the War. If such a canard is possible in a scientific age with its thousand and one means of checking the truth of reports and rumors, what must have been the case in an age steeped in densest ignorance, superstition, and credulity? Is the attempt to emancipate the human mind, forsooth, doomed to failure? I ruefully confess that this frequent recrudescence of mediæval credulity does at times fill one with despair.

KERIDON.

### Acid Drops.

The Free Churches are considering the question of Federation. The reasons for this are obvious enough, and are to be found in their declining strength. If the Methodists, Baptists, and all the other odds and ends of the dissenting world were doing well, both with money and members, it is fairly certain that nothing would have been heard of the question of union. As they are all doing badly something must be done to meet the situation, and federation offers the theoretically—line of least resistance.

But Nonconformity would be untrue to itself if even this move were unaccompanied by a dose of that pious and greasy humbug with which it has so long been identified. Thus, the Rev. J. H. Shakespeare told a *Daily Chronicle* interviewer that there had been "great heart-searchings prompted by the War, and the mental stimulus that many people have received, has made questions of doctrine of Church government fade into insignificance." That is what one may call "pious lay." And immediately afterwards, Mr. Shakespeare lapsed into fact with the observation that "Nonconformists are beginning to realise the seriousness of their position in the country with a declining membership in churches and Sunday-schools, and large buildings serving the needs of scanty congregations." The latter statement we take to represent the truth. The first one is merely whimpering.

The most striking and the most quoted passage in the presidential speech of Mr. J. A. Seddon at the Trade Union Congress at Bristol was a quotation from Lowell's *Biglow Papers*, the famous poem written during the American Civil War. One of the best hits in the poem is the sarcastic remainder, "They don't know everything down in Judee."

At a recruiting meeting at Loughborough a member of the audience called the Germans "devils." The Rev. R. J. Sturdee, who was on the platform, said, "Don't insult the Devil!" Perhaps the reverend gentleman remembered that Satan had been a good friend to the clergy.

Whenever the Salvation Army is in need of a special advertisement, it appears to call upon Mr. Harold Begbie, who does the necessary "writing up." At present the Salvation Army is making a house-to-house call to collect funds in aid of a Harvest Festival. And, to give the Army collection the necessary fillip, Mr. Begbie contributes to the *Daily Chronicle* a two-column article on "A Talk with General Booth." There is nothing in the talk that is particularly striking, and, if we leave out of sight the house-to-house collection, there appears no reason why the article should have been written or published. The reason will only be apparent to those who know something of the Army and its methods.

General Booth, says Mr. Begbie, is more concerned than other religious leaders about the War because of the international character of the War. "German Salvationists are recruiting English Salvationists, and Russian Salvationists are recruiting Austrian Salvationists." Quite so; and to thoughtful people that may suggest a question as to the value of

Salvationism in all this international butchery. They kill each other as cheerfully and as deliberately as though they were not members of the same religious organisation. The only influence of their religious belief is to persuade them that they are fighting on God's side, and thus putting a religious edge to their lust for slaughter.

Of course, General Booth will not admit that this War supplies any additional argument against religion. People, he says, ask, "How can you believe in a God with Christians killing Christians and Europe deluged with blood?" The General's reply is to ask, "Has Christian never killed Christian till now?"—to which we answer, Most certainly. That has been one of the occupations of Christians ever since their religion emerged from the chrysalis stage. But the fact of their having been always at it does not make the argument less effective; it only casts a reflection upon the intelligence of men for their not having realised it earlier.

General Booth has a dig at his rivals in the religious business in the remark that the Churches "instead of using this War as an opportunity to convert men to the religion of Jesus Christ, are only struggling to associate their particular branch of the Church with the patriotism of the moment," and what he wants is to see England organised on a religious basis, which, we suppose, means turning the country into a huge Salvation Army with General Booth in control. But the real point of the interview came in at the end, like the postscript to a lady's letter. "We are so poor! We are the poorest of religious bodies.....What we could do if we had the support of the rich as well as the affection of the poor!" That is the true Booth note. Hand over your money. Everything about the Army leads up to that. And when that is said, all is said.

The Rev. F. B. Meyer says "Gold is on top in this world; but they pave the streets with it in heaven." Are the lamp-posts made of radium?

"British Dates from the Garden of Eden," says a newspaper headline. Looks as if the apple crop had failed.

Angels are popular at present in the parish magazines and in the sermons, and, apparently, it was caused by Mr. Arthur Machen's stories. Twenty years ago Mr. Machen wrote a book, *The Great God Pan*, but the clergy did not think then of acclaiming the fiction as fact. Perhaps they thought three gods were as many as their congregations could bear, without adding a fourth.

Mr. A. G. Gardiner, the editor of the *Daily News*, says "the world will not exchange the morality of Christ for the mailed fist of Odin." Yet the "maxims" used by Christians can do more damage than any "mailed fist."

"Root and branch, German music must be ostracised, never seen and never heard," says a writer in a morning paper. This would play havoc with the hymn tunes.

"Recently he had been doing religious work." That was sarcastically said of Frederick Sims, charged with stealing a quantity of song sheets and picture postcards from Messrs. M'Glennon, music dealers, City-road, London, a firm in which he had filled a position of trust for seven years. Who would suspect of any crime a man who did Christian work? Religion with such people is a cloak to hide their wickedness and disarm suspicion. For nefarious purposes they loudly pretend to be what they know they are not. On the whole, religion is much more the servant of vice than of virtue, of crime than of innocence.

Professor David Smith says that "the Gospel is an abiding miracle"; but we should like to know wherein the miracle consists, and how it manifests itself. The Professor himself admits that for the lack of the Gospel "the Church is perishing," and that "the world is hungering for it." Where on earth, then, is the miraculous Gospel hiding itself? Dr. Smith supplies us with information which proves it to have been the most stupendous failure in history; and yet his profession impels him to tell the open lie that it is "an abiding miracle."

Equally absurd is Dr. Smith's eulogy of the Bible. He tells us that "merely as literature, merely as an intellectual arena, the Bible is peerless"; but anyone fairly familiar with general literature is fully aware that such an extravagant assertion can only be made by a blind Bibliolater. But when he goes on to declare that it is more than literature,



in that it is "God's historic revelation, culminating in that supreme manifestation, the Incarnation," he bids farewell to reason altogether, and takes refuge in the nebulous realm wherein unreasoning faith alone holds sway. Naturally, to such a man as Professor Smith the Bible is a pre-eminently indispensable document, a fact which detracts considerably from the merit of their defence of it.

While returning from a religious meeting, the Rev. John Morton, a Birmingham Wesleyan preacher, was run over and killed by a motor-lorry. Had the meeting been a Free-thought one, there might have been a first-class moral.

"The Boom in Angels" is the title of an interesting article on the Mons fiction in a contemporary. Strictly speaking, there is no boom, but there is a slump in angels, thanks to the exposure published in this journal.

Replying to a correspondent who wished that ridicule had not been used in criticising the "Mons Angels," *John Bull* says, in an amusing reply: "The only authentic testimony we have heard of was that of the man who declared that the fables must be true because the uncle of a friend of his was one of the angels!"

There are no insane Atheists. We do not mean by this that Atheists never go insane; only that they do not remain Atheists after they become insane. So we cannot say what were the original opinions of the crew of a Dutch fishing-smack that was brought into Grimsby the other day. The fittings of the boat were all smashed, and three of the crew had been put to death by the rest. They did this under the influence of one of them who declared that he was the Almighty, and that the Devil was on board the ship. This cargo of religious maniacs was sighted by a Norwegian steamer which brought them to shore, where they are now under control.

"Christ and Conscriptio" is the title of an article in a weekly periodical. A critic might suggest that Christ knew more about carpentry than conscripts.

The clergy are protesting that the present European conflict is helpful to religion, but few agree with them. The *English Review* says bluntly: "If this War has done nothing else, it has surely gone far towards shattering the comfortable fiction of a merciful deity controlling human affairs."

The Lambeth Free Libraries Committee has decided to buy no more works of fiction whilst the War lasts. Religious people will hasten to present them with copies of the Bible.

"Beware of the slow sins," says a religious periodical. Yet sinners are sometimes called "fast" people.

A rumor is current that Mr. R. J. Campbell, who is retiring from the City Temple, contemplates returning to the Anglican Church, and the *Church Times* for September 17, while rejoicing that the reverend gentleman means to relinquish his separatism, avails itself of the occasion to warn the Establishment against laying hands on him too quickly. Our contemporary is of opinion that "in the matter of ecclesiastical preferment, a period of probation is always desirable in the case of converts and those who have returned from devious paths into the right." Fancy the oracle of the City Temple being told that he has followed devious paths and promulgated notoriously false views, and that he ought "to do something in reparation of the mischief he has caused." How humiliating will he find the following caustic home-thrust:—

"It by no means follows that if a man is a success in such an institution as the City Temple he is therefore conspicuously qualified for immediate preferment in the Church. He should be required to give proof of his fitness."

Sir William Van Horne, the railway magnate, died at Montreal. The Canadian papers rose to the occasion, one saying that Sir William "began life as a telegraph boy." The age of miracles has not passed.

"God made the world in stages," says the Rev. F. B. Meyer, "and it is no use hurrying things." This sounds very like the wisdom of a Weary Willie.

How these Christians love one another! Protests have been made at Forest Hill against services being held at the local German Church. Are the protesters afraid that God will listen to prayers on behalf of the German Armies?

A gigantic wooden statue of Marshal von Hindenburg has been erected at Berlin, and the virtuous English newspapers have been quoting the Biblical words, "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image." Statues of the virgin and sacred ikons are not unknown in the lands of the Allies.

At the Conference of Modern Churchmen at Rugby, the Rev. T. F. Royds said the barrier between the Church and Nonconformists "was largely a social one." So snobbery and not theology is the difficulty, although they both worship a carpenter-god.

Germany has enough sins to answer for, some of which will cause the name of German to smell offensively for a long time after this War is over. But there is no reason why it should receive blame where it is not due. The *Daily Chronicle*, for instance, points out that "Modern Anti-Semitism" originated in Germany—which is simply not true. Russia is the country that has always had first place in this respect, and Anti-Semitism there has assumed a barbarity quite unknown in any other part of the civilised world. The *Daily Chronicle* note furnishes an example of the way in which history is written by the modern newspaper press.

"Dardanella" and "Lily Louvain" are among the names that the Rev. T. J. McKitterick says are to be found in his baptismal register. They are nearly as dreadful as the old Puritan names, "Praise-God Barebones" and "Flee-Evil Jones."

The Salvation Army, in a friendly rivalry with the Young Men's Christian Association, has opened several canteens at Woolwich. We imagined that both these organisations were only concerned with the "bread of life."

In between the manufacturing of evidence for angels at the Front, the old yarns about the images of Christ remaining untouched by German shells are being resurrected. Mrs. Violet Brice writes to the *Morning Post* that "no matter where the ruin of a church stands, you will also see the Cross standing firm and strong, for neither shot nor shell can harm the Relic of the Passion of the Lord." There are some people who will believe this kind of rubbish—in spite of the newspaper photographs of crosses and images wrecked—otherwise people would not write it. And Mrs. Brice tells a story of one image of Christ which had the wall carried away to the right and left of it, while the image itself remained uninjured. To make the story complete, Mrs. Brice ought to have added that the *bottom* also had been shot away, leaving the statue still in its original place. When one is in the miracle business the thing should be done thoroughly or not at all.

Seriously, it is a bit difficult to realise the state of mind of people who can really believe that God can prevent a wooden or stone image being injured, and yet allows these same shells to kill so many human beings. Do they believe that God thinks more of statuary and wooden crosses than he does of men and women and children? If they do, what kind of a God is he? Lately we have had Zeppelin raids that have caused the deaths of quite a number of children. Why could not "Providence" have deflected these shells, or have caused them to explode while they were in transit over the North Sea? Was he, or it, too busy looking after wooden posts in Flanders or France to do this? A God that can do so much ought to do more. Otherwise, what he has done damns him the more effectually for what he leaves undone.

Large congregations attended the Jewish synagogues when the Jewish New Year 5676 was celebrated. This is the age of the earth, according to Biblical figures, but scientists do not endorse it.

The bishopric of Carlisle is vacant, and, as the income is only a paltry £2 500 a year, it is considered inadequate, and there is talk of augmenting it. Yet Christ never made so much money out of the Christian religion.

We are not here to apologise for God, said one of the speakers at a religious conference the other day. This may have been so, but the absence of an apology does not prove that none is needed. And surely if ever a God needed apologising for, it is the one whom Christians believe created the world, and must, therefore, be responsible for all that is. We fancy the only effective apology for God is that he doesn't exist.



To Correspondents.

PRESIDENT'S HONORARIUM FUND, 1915.—Received from March 15 : Previously acknowledged, £148 12s. 4d. Received since :— C. F. Simpson, 10s. ; R. C. Clarkson, £1 1s. ; R. C. P., 2s. 6d.

The £1 acknowledged last week from P. W. M. as a contribution to the President's Honorarium Fund should have been £1 1s.

P. P. BALL.—Many thanks for cuttings. Shall be dealing in full with the other matter very soon.

J. BROWN.—Have noted the points raised in your letter. We see no reason why there should not be a Freethought lecture in Didbury, and many reasons why there should. If you can get a few local sympathisers and helpers together we shall be pleased to do anything we can to help.

J. SPRINGER.—Your letter is a most interesting one. You will see that we have made good use of it. Many thanks.

M. MANN.—Your letter in reply to Dr. Licorish safely to hand, but unfortunately not in time for insertion in our present issue. Like the man who was always early for his train through missing the previous one, this gives us good time for publication next week.

H. CHANDLER.—Thanks for quotation, which will come in handy.

W. WALL.—What a lot of unredeemed nonsense within a little space ! It is enough to make one despair of human nature.

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Letters for the Editor of the *Freethinker* should be addressed to 61 Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

Notices must reach 61 Farringdon-street, London, E.C., by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

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

Orders for literature should be sent to the Shop Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon-street, London, 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.

Personal.

THE Rev. R. J. Campbell, with his white hair and black eyes, presented a piquant contrast to the old men who were fond of sentimental sermons all those years ago when he succeeded Dr. Parker at the City Temple. He was like an actor who came into a theatre specially built for him, or one may say that Dr. Parker built a pulpit and a sounding-board, and the Rev. R. J. Campbell preached under it. But his notoriety has diminished since then, and he must do something to refresh it. He has changed back to the Congregational Church to the Church of England, and is going to the Khaki Army at the front by special invitation. Probably the soldiers regard him as one of the attractions of the place contrast with the army chaplains who commonly preach it. The New Theology has long since been dead. It was nothing but brandy and water at first, and by the time Mr. Campbell had diluted it down for all his customers it was not worth tasting. Mr. Campbell's philosophy of Socialism is dead too. We are told that his great pulpit gifts would not be lost, while "he would enrich religious thought by his pen." We venture to predict that Mr. Campbell will never enrich anything or anybody but himself. All the prophecies I made of him when he began at the City Temple have been fulfilled. No doubt my new prophecies will have as prosperous an issue.

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The New Theology was a capital catchword. People wanted theology, but they wanted something new, and Mr. Campbell gave it them. I believe that it was manufactured by Strauss, Bauer, and other Rationalists. He called it the Christianity of Christ. The Father was dropped out; the Son was kept in; and the Holy Ghost was lost. The result was the Christianity of Christ; only one of the Trinity was

left. But when the public came to look closely into what Mr. Campbell was preaching with the help of a motor-car, a country residence, and a salary that would have made his Master shiver with economic fright, it was found to be just the same sceptical mixture that had been dispensed at the old Hall of Science by Bradlaugh, only differently flavored. In short, the bubble burst, and Mr. Campbell was obliged to expend his eloquence on other topics. But he was not clever at selection, and he finished, first by insulting the working-man, and then by playing into the hands of Mr. Foote at the Memorial Hall demonstration on the establishment of the Secular Education League. He made a stupid remark which opened the way for loud calls for the leader of Militant Freethought. I was on the platform, and met with a great reception, which curdled the faces of some of the clerical part of the meeting. It was predicted that Mr. Campbell would give no further support to the League, and he would never stand upon its platform again. And he never did.

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The Rev. Dr. Clifford has retired from his church and pulpit. He is a splendid instance of "take no thought for the morrow." What with salary, savings, testimonials, and other presents, he has amassed many thousands of pounds. Poor John! Dr. Clifford was what the Scotch call "pawky." When he preached in Glasgow he nearly drove them to despair, in spite of the skill of the local preachers in bamboozling congregations and extracting bawbees. It is said that a Jew cannot get farther than Aberdeen, but even in Scotland Dr. Clifford could go anywhere, and give points to the most successful laborers in the Lord's vineyard. He committed himself about half-way to many advanced causes patronised by the Free Churches. For instance, he was ready at a moment's notice to get up and talk on behalf of Francisco Ferrer at the Memorial Hall. I was one of the speakers, and you might have thought from his speech and its reception that he was as much a Freethinker as I was. He was a great friend of Secular Education, but when he was pressed to join the young Secular Education League he refused. He was for Secular Education plus the Bible, which I told him was like a man being for teetotalism plus Scotch whiskey. In short, Dr. Clifford had about as much real honesty in him as most gentlemen of his profession.

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My own health improves every week, but the process of complete recovery is rather slower than I expected. It was hindered by my catching a nasty cold, which ran its course in spite of all I could do to stop it. It has nearly gone now; and my sleep, always my weakest point, has much improved. I hope to pay my first visit to my London office by the end of September.

G. W. FOOTE.

Sugar Plums.

Next Sunday afternoon (October 3) Mr. Cohen lectures at Abertillery, Mon. It is necessary to announce this a little in front of the date as so many of the attendants at these lectures come in from a distance. An attempt is being made to secure meeting-places in the locality for lectures on the Saturday and Monday evenings, but nothing definite has been fixed up to the time of writing. If anything can be arranged, further than the Abertillery meetings, particulars will be given next week.

From a correspondent who is keenly concerned in promoting the circulation of the *Freethinker*, we have received a letter, portions of which we are sure will be as interesting to many of our readers as it is to us. This gentleman's brother, it should be observed, is at present in the firing line in Northern France, and from there he writes to our correspondent that he "still enjoys and looks anxiously for the *Freethinker* every week, as it seems the only solid comfort in this terribly trying experience." After having had twelve months' fighting, it speaks well of the soldier's stamina that



he can still turn to a paper such as ours with so much evident enjoyment of its contents.

But more interesting than this is the following. To his "will book" he has attached this:—"This is to certify that if I am killed in this unfortunate War that I have lived and died a Freethinker, and have no faith or belief in God, but am compelled by military law to say that I belong to the Church of England. If anything is said over my body, the enclosed would be suitable." Then follows some extracts from various Freethought writings, suitable to the graveside. We do not know this soldier personally, but we recognise in his action an example of that moral courage which is rarer, and of far greater value, than the courage of the mere fighting man. We salute him from afar, and hope one day for at least a shake of the hand from a genuinely brave man.

After the War, when the alteration of so much is promised, the Government has promised to modify those regulations which compel attendance at church whether a man is a believer or not. We hope that the Government will be as good as its word, for it is a national disgrace that, while liberty to worship or to abstain from worship should be the privilege of the civilian, the soldier should be marched to church in the same way that he is ordered to battle. It should make those who are responsible blush to find men compelled to take steps such as the one noted above in order to vindicate their conscientious convictions.

For some time past Miss Vance's health has given her friends some cause for anxiety, and we regret to say that she has lately been confined to her bed with a rather serious indisposition. Fortunately, her health is now on the mend, and although her recovery is necessarily slow, it will be, we hope, sure. How long it will be before she is able to resume attendance at the Society's offices we cannot say, but that will not be delayed longer than is absolutely necessary.

Two or three years ago it was decided that one Sunday in the year—that falling nearest the date of Charles Bradlaugh's birth—should be observed as a "Bradlaugh Sunday" by N. S. S. speakers. It was hoped that Freethought speakers would take some phase of his life for their subject on that date, so that the work of the greatest Freethought advocate of the nineteenth century might be kept before the general public. This year Sunday, September 26, is the anniversary of Bradlaugh's birth—he was born in 1833—so that taking Bradlaugh as a subject will be more than usually appropriate. We have no doubt that good use will be made of this by Freethought speakers in London and elsewhere.

France, said a writer in one of the papers the other day, has learned through this War "a noble seriousness which did not formerly belong to her." How often has the same thing been said during the past year, and what a shallow observation it is? It is, we suppose, one of the consequences of the Puritan cast of mind in this country that makes it difficult for people to realise that seriousness of purpose is inseparable from a solemnity akin to that of a professional mute on duty. The French always were a serious people, and also a practical people. The French aristocrat who, in the days of the great Revolution, went to the guillotine with a laugh or a jest was serious enough, so was the French sans-culotte who sang himself to death or liberty in the attack on the old regime. The Communards of '71 jesting on the barricades of Paris in the face of rifle and cannon were serious enough. Gravity of demeanor is not a necessary concomitant of seriousness, it may be due to a sluggishness of intellect that prevents one seeing more than one aspect of the problem in hand. The French are no more serious, and no less serious, than they ever were. They are simply pursuing the work in hand with a logic and a directness that are among their chief characteristics.

Running through Heine's letters on *French Affairs*, in search of a half-remembered quotation, we came across the following, which is not without its pertinency to the present:—

"I watched with anxiety this Prussian eagle, and while others boasted that he looked so boldly at the sun, I was all the more observant of his claws. I did not trust this Prussian, this tall, canting, white-gaitered hero with a big belly, a broad mouth, and corporal's cane, which he first dipped in holy water ere he laid it on. I disliked this philosophic Christian military despotism, this conglomerate white lies, beer, and sand. Repulsive, deeply repulsive to me was this Prussia, this stiff, hypocritical Prussia, this Tartuffe among States."

This was written in 1832, but it might as easily have been written in 1915.

## The Land of Rubens and Masterlinck.—II.

(Continued from p. 598.)

WITH the fall of the Roman Empire in the West the Roman province of Gallia Belgica was conquered by the Franks. Gallia Belgica embraced a much wider area than the Belgium of to-day, as the province extended from the mouth of the Scheldt nearly to the Seine, and from the Voeges mountains to the Strait of Dover. With the rise of the Feudal System the Belgian provinces were governed by various dukes and counts, who enjoyed a considerable measure of local independence. During the Crusades these feudal barons and their retainers suffered severely; the trading Flemings initiated and developed commercial relations with the East, and even with mighty Venice herself. They learnt much from the Venetian merchants, whom they were shortly to eclipse in the race for commercial wealth. Moreover, the feudal aristocracy of Flanders and Brabant were sadly impoverished by the Holy Wars against the infidel Mohammedans, and they were glad to obtain the means to replenish their empty purses from the burghers, who stipulated for charters and concessions in exchange.

Towards the close of the Middle Ages, Brabant and Flanders rose to a high degree of prosperity. Bruges, Antwerp, Bruges, Ghent, and other towns became the centres of a great industry and commerce, and, outside Italy, these cities were the leading capitals of the arts. In 1384 Flanders was linked with Burgundy, whose rulers by the middle of the fifteenth century had appropriated the lion's share of the Dutch and Belgian provinces. The Dukes of Burgundy sought to establish a strong state between Germany and France, and in order to accomplish this they attempted to stamp out the free republican spirit which had developed in the rapidly growing cities. But this endeavor to erect an absolute monarchy was arrested by the overthrow of Charles the Bold. Mary, the daughter of Charles, married Maximilian, the Archduke of Austria, afterwards Emperor, and the Burgundian patrimony passed (save only the Burgundian Duchy itself) to the House of Hapsburg. The grandson of Maximilian, subsequently Charles V., inherited the crown, and thus the tragedy of the Netherlands began. The son and successor of Charles V., Philip II., by his almost unthinkable intolerance, excited in the Low Countries a prolonged and bloody struggle for civic and religious liberty which, although ending in the liberation of the Northern Netherlands, and Holland, from Spanish domination, still left unimpaired the baneful power of Spain and the Roman Church in the Southern Provinces, which now form modern Belgium.

When Philip II. became the ruler of the Netherlands its provinces were at the apex of their affluence and fame. When that deeply religious monarch passed to heaven, the Low Countries had been devastated by thirty years of ruthless warfare and over thirty years of remorseless theological persecution. Before the advent of the pitiless Alva in 1567, 30,000 refugees had escaped to England, and another 18,000 met their death either at the scaffold or the stake. Then there were the numberless victims of the pious Alva's sanguinary battles, and the thousands who perished at the merciless plundering of Mons and other cities. Even after the departure of this apostle of blood, 6,000 people were slaughtered in 1576 at Antwerp alone. Alva's successors, Don John and the Prince of Parma, carried on his system of military murder, and at the finish of all this revolting butchery, the population had fallen at least 50 per cent. The more enlightened and progressive members of the community were not suffered to live. The once wealthy country was a hideous ruin, and only Catholics were permitted to breathe its air. As the Protestant Dutch were equally remorseless in their treatment of Catholics, religious bigotry and intolerance once more served to frustrate the nation.



Dutchman and Belgian, and created a terrible bitterness, which succeeding centuries have failed to efface.

Throughout the seventeenth century the unhappy country was the battlefield of Europe. The great battles and sieges of the period of Louis XIV. had their theatre the unlucky land now occupied by the German Army. When not in request as battle-grounds, the Provinces of Belgium were transferred by the diplomatists from the possession of one power to that of another. The country failed to escape, even during the wars of Frederick the Great. The French became masters of Belgium for a time, and do not appear to have coddled its citizens. Then with the peace of 1718 the country was handed over to the kind care of Austria. Afterwards, at the Brabant Revolution of 1789-90, Flanders, Brabant, and Brabant sent the Austrians packing. This rebellion had its seamy side. The Free-Thinker Joseph II. of Austria issued an edict which united the various Christian sects within the Austrian dominions—the Lutherans, Calvinists, and others—the right of private worship, and rendered all heretics eligible for public office. Joseph's edict also aimed at the scandals of convent life, and attempted to induce the clergy to set their houses in order. But natural selection, materially aided by artificial selection, had eliminated all lovers of religious liberty from the land. Priests and people regarded heretics and heresies with spiteful hatred, and the insurrection against Austria was the result. Born of such doubtful parents, clericalism and popular bigotry, the revolution soon developed into a tyranny much worse than the one it had overthrown. The Wars of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic campaigns swiftly succeeded, and the last of the great Corsican's battles was destined to be fought on the stricken field of Waterloo, within a few miles of Brussels. For 365 years Belgium was subjected to foreign rule. Spain, France, and Holland all tried to subdue the Belgians, but in vain. The Belgians managed to secure their independence, and made a splendid effort to secure their own future.

George Meredith's great triumph of art, *Sandra Belloni*, will recall that dramatic scene in the Opera House in Milan, when the singer roused the enthusiasm and the passion of the audience with her words "Italia, Italia shall be free." In 1830 a similar event occurred in the Brussels Opera House during the performance of Auber's *Maisie de Portici*. Mr. Ensor writes:—

"When the hero in the piece sang the famous air appealing for revolt and liberty, the audience were so moved that they rushed into the streets, looted the gunsmith's shops, and started a revolution against the Dutch then and there. The fire thus kindled was never put out until it had consumed all the traces of Belgium's long subjection, and left her an independent sovereign state."

Although this proved the occasion, it was by no means the cause of the revolution. The flame that burst forth had been smouldering for years. The Belgians were justly resentful at the soury treatment meted out to them by the Dutch. Despite the fact that the population of Belgium was far larger than that of the Netherlands, the sweets of office were nearly all monopolized by the Dutch. Then the King of Holland endeavored to divide both Fleming and Walloon by issuing an ordinance making Dutch the language essential to all aspirants for official honors. Then both clerical and anti-clerical were aroused to anger by an attempt on the part of the Dutch Calvinists to place the educational system of Belgium—both secular and religious—under Protestant tutelage. The outbreak in Brussels was therefore succeeded by insurrection in all the leading cities. Brussels was besieged by a Dutch Army, which entered the capital after a fierce conflict with its defenders. But the handful of Belgians, aided by the armed civilians, fought the Dutchers from behind the barricades, and shot them from the house-windows and roofs of buildings. The conflict raged without cessation for three days in

the streets. The Dutch troops, although they held the heart of the city, could progress no farther. The losses inflicted on the Dutch Army in killed were over 1,500, while thousands of the troops were wounded. Prince Frederick, the King of Holland's younger son, who was in command, at last abandoned all attempts to subdue the turbulent city, and ordered his broken forces to march away.

A provisional Government was now appointed, and Belgium was declared an independent State. A Constitution was drawn up, and this was ratified by a National Congress in November, 1830. The limited monarchy then established has remained in force ever since. But little or no attention was paid to military defence, and in the following year the embittered Dutch reinvaded the country. Belgium was saved from her enemy by the pressure of the Powers, but she was forced to cede important territories. What is now Dutch Flanders was formerly part of Belgium, and its loss gave the Dutch complete mastery over the mouth of the important river Scheldt. Portions of the province of Limburg were also surrendered, and that part of Luxembourg now known as the Grand Duchy. This was extremely unfortunate, as all these territories were anti-Dutch in sentiment, and were anxious to be incorporated in the Belgian kingdom.

In the late autumn the representatives of the Powers assembled in London to consider the problem that had arisen. The Dutch remained sullen and obstinate, but the Belgians soon assumed a more reasonable attitude. On the motion of Lord Palmerston it was decided to recognise Belgium as an "Independent Power." The frontiers of the new State were arranged, and Prince Leopold was elected King of the Belgians on June 4, 1831.

This result was not arrived at until much bickering among the Powers had expended itself. The artful Talleyrand took part in the negotiations. Each of the Powers eagerly followed the moves and counter-moves of the diplomatic chessboard, while the Hollanders awaited the earliest favorable opportunity for armed intervention. The Dutch forces were prepared for future contingencies, and less than a fortnight after Leopold's accession Belgium was invaded. A French army promptly turned the Dutch out of the country, but it was not until 1838 that the differences were composed. In London on April 18, 1839, the disputed provinces were assigned to Holland. The Belgians sorrowfully surrendered territories that were justly theirs, and the frontiers of the two States became what they still remain. The Treaty of 1839 was solemnly guaranteed by all the European Powers who had concerned themselves in the trouble. This agreement is, of course, the document which has since become the celebrated "scrap of paper." The clause of the Treaty which imposed permanent neutrality on Belgium formed part of the earlier Treaty of 1815, but its binding powers were now strengthened by the signatures of all the Powers, including that of Prussia. In 1852, however, Napoleon III. was apparently quite willing to violate its provisions, while Bismarck seems to have been fully prepared to ignore the Treaty in the interests of Prussia. So much for the security afforded by treaties!

The Belgian Constitution was largely copied from the British. The monarch reigns, but does not govern. The Chamber is similar to our House of Commons, while the Senate is a sort of reformed House of Lords. The King or the Senate may initiate legislation, but, as with ourselves, the Lower Chamber exercises complete control over national finance. No money can be applied to military or civil purposes until it has secured the assent of the Chamber of Deputies. The Legislative Chambers are bound by the Constitution, but so long as this written Constitution is not contravened, legislative power is unchecked. The King can only act through his Ministers, who are responsible to the people. Regarded as a whole, the system set up has worked moderately well. But the industrial community was very inadequately represented by the highly restricted



franchise instituted in 1831. The electoral arrangements unfairly favored the conservative element, as they were based on a property qualification. The more progressive urban voter was particularly penalised. The Liberal Government, which assumed office in the stormy period of 1848, lowered the electoral qualification from seventy to twenty florins in taxes. This reform was all they were permitted by the Constitution to accomplish, and all subsequent elections, down to 1894, were conditioned by the remedial legislation of 1848. In 1894 the present law came into operation. Every citizen of the age of 25 or over became an elector, and the electorate increased from the insignificant total of 137,772 to 1,350,891. But the reform of 1894 was more apparent than real. The "safe" people became more powerful than before, as the well-to-do classes were given additional votes. Respectable fathers of families who paid their taxes promptly, became the possessors of two votes. The same privilege was conferred on younger men who owned land or drew part of their income from money invested in the Belgian funds. Moreover, two additional votes were granted to men of professional standing, and to the holders of certain educational qualifications. And, although there are weighty arguments which favor a fuller representation of educated and intelligent minorities, the new Belgian system has led to very disappointing results.

The theory that age and wisdom go together is employed to reduce the electorate which controls the constitution of the Senate. The Senatorial voter is selected from that section of the community which has lived long enough to reach years of discretion. But the chief grievance lies in the undue power exercised by the plural voter in shaping the complexion of the Chamber. From the facts and figures furnished by Mr. Ensor, it appears that the working classes, who represent 59 per cent. of the voters, possess less than 36 per cent. of the voting power. The majority is thus transformed into a minority. Even in England such a system would appear utterly anomalous, and in a comparatively illiterate and priest-ridden population, such as that of peasant and Catholic Flanders, such electoral arrangements become a positive disgrace. The large sacerdotal army, both the seculars and regulars, gains enormous advantages. The small landowners, who usually support the Clericals, secure additional power through their plural votes. The more enlightened urban artisan, on the other hand, is severely handicapped by the swamping influence of the plural voter, and, reasonably enough, the agitation for the removal of this incubus has proceeded from the progressive parties in the State.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be concluded.)

## Jesus on the Stage.—II.

*A Lecture delivered in Chicago by M. M. Mangasarian.*

(Continued from p. 605)

IF we may trust history, the majority of men and women who have made their mark had even fewer advantages than are enjoyed by the Oberammergau villagers. Think of Robert Burns, the shanty he was born in, and his immortal song!

Attention should be paid also to the tremendous encouragement and praise which these religious actors receive. They are fairly idolised. Anton Lang almost receives the homage paid to a Pope, if not to a Christ. The pious cannot do enough for him. Gifts are showered upon him as well as upon his fellow actors, and all this, primarily for Christ's sake, and only in a secondary sense for his art. What actor on the secular stage is so favored? I am not jealous of the popularity of the Ammergau players, I am simply trying to explain it.

Let us now pass from the players to the play. I find it very hard to understand how the Churches, especially the Catholic Church, could tolerate making

a play of the "holy mysteries" of religion. The Passion Play! Is it a *play*? Can it be staged and acted? *Playing* being crucified! *Playing* rising from the grave! *Playing* going up to heaven before an applauding audience, with the help of pulleys, wires, and electric lights! If I were a devout church member I should be shocked.

May I tell you something? The increasing popularity of the Passion Play proves the decline of faith. The Mass, the most holy ceremony in the church, is being dramatised and commercialised. The stage has invaded and swamped the altar. The actor is driving the priest out of business. Christ himself, in order to live, has become the theme of a play. To cover up this transformation of the Church into a theatre, everything is done to call attention to the earnestness and sincerity of the actors in the "sacred" play. It is said that to them it is not a play but a religious service; that they feel the seriousness of their parts so keenly that it is to them a devotional exercise, etc. But is possible anyone can allow himself to be crucified every day for two or three months before an audience which has paid the admission price, without coming to look upon the affair as a show? The first time a man is crucified he may have profound religious feelings, but on the twentieth or thirtieth time he is made to go through the performance, his feelings are bound to become perfunctory. I do not know how it is at Oberammergau, but in the Tyrol, the woman who takes the part of the Virgin may be seen between the acts serving beer to the guests.

I am inclined to the opinion that the success of the Passion Play is a sign, in a sense, of the level to which Christianity is falling very rapidly. The Churches are feeling their way for a radical change in their methods. They must do this in self-preservation. Nobody can tell how soon, but the time cannot be very distant, when the story of Jesus will be added to the players' repertoire. But is it not wonderful that by the laws of nature find their proper place and level against all possible combinations on the part of man to prevent it? For two thousand years neither effort nor money has been spared to give to the story of Jesus the loftiest position in the world, but being only a play, and nothing more, what can prevent it from slipping slowly to where it belongs—the stage?

The theme of the Passion Play is not, as you well know, the life of Jesus, his teachings, or his miracles; but the tragedy with which his career closed. It is his sufferings—his passion—which the play seeks to portray. All the efforts of the players, the scene painters and shifters, of the chorus and the authors of the libretto, have one aim—to emphasise the supposed terrible torments of Jesus and to arouse the compassion of the audience for the tears of blood he is reported to have shed on his way to Golgotha. The truth is, however, that Jesus suffered much less than almost any other martyr who might be named. Of course, if Jesus really lived and was persecuted to death, and died a martyr to a cause, he deserves the admiration, homage, and love of us all. We uncover our heads gladly in the presence of a man who loved truth better than life. But why paint the whole world black to make the face of Jesus white? The Oberammergau players greatly exaggerate the passion of Christ. Jesus did not linger in foul dungeons as Giordano Bruno did, for example, for nearly seven years. He did not come to the cross from the torture-chambers of the Inquisition, as the Chevaliere de la Barr did at the tender age of nineteen, whose tongue was pulled out of his mouth, his body covered with bruises, then beheaded and flung into the flames. Jesus was not stretched upon the rack and beaten with a crowbar, his joints torn asunder, and his life whipped out of him, as was done to Jesus Calas, in whose behalf was heard the glorious voice of Voltaire. And think of Michael Servetus and John Huss, and, above all, of a young maiden, not yet twenty, the savior of France, Joan of Arc, burned to death in a raging fire after months of unspeakable torture and outrage. Jesus' sufferings are not a



circumstance compared with the unutterable tortures of the victims of persecution I have just named. Why, then, all this ado about the passion of Jesus? They placed a crown of thorns upon his head; well, was that very painful? Many secret societies do more than that to the members they initiate. But Jesus had to carry his own cross. Why, even women in the same Germany where the Passion Play is given carry loads heavier still, and do so not once but almost daily. Besides, Jesus did not carry his cross, a man was hired to relieve him of it. Think of coming all the way from heaven to carry the cross and then making somebody else carry it for him! But he was mocked and spat upon. Was he the only one who has been abused for conscience sake? Is that anything to speak of for a great man? Emerson says, "The hero is not fed on sweets." Precisely. Abuse and persecution have no terrors—know no sighs, regrets, or tears from the valiant. Sweets are not the diet of the hero.

Why weepst thou, Jesus? Didst thou expect a path of flowers? Comest thou to die on a bed of roses? If anyone is afraid of being mocked and spat upon and scorned, let him stay at home and leave it to others to fight the battle of progress. But was not Jesus nailed to a cross, and was not that a most awful death? Dear me, there were two others with him on the cross, and neither of them seemed to mind it half so much.

Let it be remembered that Jesus was arrested late Thursday night, and early Sunday morning, before it was light, he was out of his grave. His passion, therefore, lasted altogether little over fifty hours. Why, then, this unreasonable exaggeration of the sufferings of Jesus? Moreover, death by crucifixion was a common Roman punishment, and Jesus was only one of the many who died on the cross. If ordinary men, without the gift of divinity, could stand the punishment, why should the Son of God groan, and groan, and sweat tears of blood on his cross.

It might be objected that Jesus was a God and, therefore, his ill-treatment at the hands of his own creatures must have been a bitter disappointment to him. But is not that a childish idea? By bringing in the divinity of Christ, instead of simplifying matters, we darken counsel. How can a God be disappointed? If I had power to see the end from the beginning, nothing would ruffle me. Jesus not only knew just what the people would do to him but he wanted—yea, he had ordained and decreed that they should do to him the things they did. The people were really carrying out God's predestined plan, and instead of being disappointed, Jesus had reason to congratulate himself on the success of his scheme. Besides, Jesus must have known that the whole trouble could not last more than a few hours, and that he would come forth triumphant from the grave and earn a place on the right hand of God for evermore. Why should anyone with such a prospect before him faint or collapse upon the brink of the grave?

Furthermore, as you have heard me say before, which of us would not die a thousand times, and die gratefully, with a song upon our lips, if we felt our death would spell eternal happiness for every human being on the world over. I am not touched; I am scandalised to hear a God groan when he should shout for joy. When I see an engineer stick to his post and ride to death to save his passengers, I become an optimist. When I go to Oberammergau and see a Christ sweat blood and hear him cry, "Let this cup pass from me," I am saddened. Judging by the narrative in the Gospels, Jesus led, in the whole, a very comfortable life. To begin with, he assumed no responsibilities towards his parents, for whose support he did absolutely nothing. He recognised not a single claim of either his father or his mother upon his time or his affection. He completely ignored his parents. What if he had to go to work to earn enough bread, not only for himself, but also for his family, as so many who are not

divine do, and do it cheerfully. Neither did Jesus support a wife or children; the welfare or protection of a family did not cause him a solitary worry. From the sharpest griefs to which those who lose dear ones by death, Jesus was free. Nor did Jesus trouble himself about his own daily bread or future. The question of an honorable livelihood—of earning a sufficiency to be able to live decently—to have enough leisure to live the life of the mind, to earn enough to be independent of what "the people will say"—to provide for old age and sickness, or to earn enough to do one's share toward the support of great movements and great charities—from all these cares Jesus was free. He had no rent or taxes to pay. He was clothed, housed, and fed by others. He lived on the charity of his friends, and when that failed, instead of laboring for his bread with the sweat of his brow or pen, he worked a miracle and found the coin he needed in a fish's mouth. We do not have to pity a man who can live on the labor of others, or who is free from such responsibilities as tax the time and thought of man often to the breaking point.

(To be concluded.)

### Correspondence.

#### AMBIDEXTROUS PROVIDENCE. TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Criticisms of sermons are useful, if only to check the inconsistencies into which preachers, like greater men, allow their feelings to lead them. but it will be generally acknowledged that one of the essentials in work of this kind is that the author, who is being attacked, should be fairly and accurately quoted. Your contributor, J. T. Lloyd, in commenting on Dr. Jones' sermon in your last issue, does him an injustice which a writer of experience should have avoided. I make the following extract from the article:—

"Waxing very courageous, Dr. Jones pronounces God's Providence a universal providence, in other words, an ambidextrous providence. With its left hand it sinks the *Titanic*, causing the loss of a thousand more or less valuable lives; and with its right it detains a prominent London clergyman at home and so prevents him from travelling by and going down with that famous leviathan of the deep."

The general body of your readers will be surprised to learn that the sentence concerning the *Titanic* is not Dr. Jones', but has been "read into" the sermon by your reviewer. I have tried the passage on some of my friends and they have attributed it to Dr. Jones; but, as your contributor is aware, Dr. Jones does not indulge in such paltry reasoning, and I can see nothing in the sermon to justify such a conclusion.

I have no inclination to follow the lines of the other arguments gone into; I am simply anxious, in the interests of honesty and fairplay, to remove a misconception which I believe you would not willingly permit. I may add, however, that I heard the sermon preached and it struck me as a reasonable exposition of not merely a Christian ethic, but an everyday experience, which summed up in a sentence of plain unvarnished English, is—that some of the greatest trials in life often prove blessings in disguise.

September 14. EDWARD PEARCE.

[Mr. Pearce appears to be fighting the air. Mr. Lloyd did not use the remarks selected from his article by Mr. Pearce as a quotation from Dr. Jones' sermon. They were intended, as anyone will see who turns to the article, as a summary or an illustration of the position taken up by Dr. Jones.—EDITOR.]

### Via Dolorosa!

WHEN sorrow heaps its burden dire of woe  
Upon the aching spirit, numb with pain,  
At loss of friend we ne'er shall meet again  
Through all the length of years we yet may know;  
Shall we, in anguish, downward grov'ling go?  
Or join the mimes in ostentatious show?  
Or pray dumb gods, well knowing all in vain  
Is prayer or praise, to help us to regain  
The living tide of love that once did flow?  
Ah, no! in that sad hour of direst grief,  
When to the great Forever from our sight  
Passes the one who dowered our days with light;  
We must remember, all our days will end;  
And play our part, thro' years or long or brief,  
In ways that shall do honor to our friend.

W. J. KING.



## 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.

## OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N. S. S. (Victoria Park, near the Bandstand): 3.15, C. Cohen, a Lecture.

CAMBERWELL BRANCH N. S. S. (Brockwell Park): 5, H. Owen, "In Memory of Bradlaugh."

KINGSLAND BRANCH N. S. S. (corner of Ridley-road): 7.30, E. Burke, "The Great Life of Charles Bradlaugh."

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S. (Finsbury Park): 11.15, E. Dales, "Charles Bradlaugh." Regent's Park: 3.15, Miss Kough, "Charles Bradlaugh: Lest We Forget." Parliament Hill: 3.15, W. Davidson, "Charles Bradlaugh: His Life and Work."

WEST HAM BRANCH N. S. S. (outside Maryland Point Station, Stratford, E.): 7, W. Davidson, a Lecture.



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