

# THE Freethinker

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Whatever villainy exists in the world is compounded of what is inborn and what comes by circumstance; there is nothing too base and detestable, but it is the consequence of some adequate cause; and if we are to make allowances for all but causeless wickedness, there is an end of condemnation.—SIR HENRY TAYLOR

## Booming the Bible.

NEARLY everyone is familiar with the picture of an Indian chief—dressed in the manner depicted in boys' books of adventure—receiving from the hands of the late Queen Victoria a copy of the Bible. Accompanying the picture is the descriptive legend, "The source of England's greatness," this being—so runs the story—the remark made by Queen Victoria on making the presentation. Unfortunately—for Christians—Queen Victoria never made any such presentation to any such Indian chief, and she never made any such remark. But from a Christian point of view the legend is *ben trovato*, and he is a very poor kind of Christian propagandist who will allow the mere circumstance of the story being untrue to stand in the way of its circulation. It keeps the claims made on behalf of the Bible before the people; it advertises the importance of the clergy, and the value of Christianity; and anything that does these things carries with it its own justification.

From a paragraph in the daily papers of a recent date, I see there is to be a new endeavor to boom the Bible. The Bishop of Durham, Lord Blythwood, and a number of clergymen—all quite disinterested people in such a task—"are at work on a plan for advertising the Bible, preferably in the lay press.

.....The promoters of the plan contend that the very best way to reach the greatest number of people is by advertising. They also contend that the lay press circulates among just the class of people they wish to reach, while they hold the opinion that the vast majority of people seldom read the Bible at all, and even more seldom, study it carefully and prayerfully." Finally, this committee announces that it will prepare and distribute "gratis to any applicants" a "Key to the Bible as a guide to those unfamiliar with it."

There it is! The Bible Advertising Syndicate (no name is attached to the paragraph cited, but this one appears to well express the purpose of the committee) is in process of formation, and when it is completed we may expect to see things done in the most approved business style. In newspapers—and perhaps on hoardings—we may expect in flaming headlines, "Do You Read the Bible? If not, why not?" or "Have You Tried the Bible? A sure cure for human ills. Worth a guinea a page. Full instructions for use [the "Key" above named] with every copy. Once used, always used. N.B.—Beware of imitations. Copies issued by a syndicate with headquarters in Rome are only worthless imitations. Also, those issued by an older firm, hailing originally from Judea, are incomplete."

And there need be no lack of testimonials, in the most approved style. I suggest that the following, from the Kaiser, published in the religious journals a few years back, should head the list:—

"I often read the Bible. I like to read it every night. A Bible lies on a table at my bedside. I find the most

beautiful thoughts expressed in it. I cannot understand how it is that so many persons pay so little attention to the Holy Scriptures. Can anyone read the Gospels and other portions of the Bible without feeling convinced that the words contain a simple truth established in unquestionable facts. Whenever I have to make any decision, I ask myself what the Bible would teach me to do in that particular case. The Bible is to me the fountain from which I draw light and strength. In hours of sorrow and depression, I seek consolation therein."

Following these—of course, a long and respectful way behind—could come a selection of testimonials from the Salvation Army. Mr. Harold Begbie would doubtless be happy to prepare these. But one feels that our old friend the converted burglar, brought to see the error of his ways when too old to follow his usual calling, and the wife-beater, made repentant and happy *after* he has worried his wife into her grave and ruined the lives of his children, ought to occupy a prominent place in the literature issued by this Bible-booming syndicate. It might be even possible to enlist Mr. Bottomley's help in this direction. This testimonial-compiling business admits of almost endless development, and I am quite sure it will not be lost sight of by the committee.

There are, however, one or two things told the newspaper man which would have been, I fancy, better unsaid. For instance, "the vast majority of the people seldom read the Bible at all." That seems to be a most unwise admission. I do not question its truth, in fact I know it is an under-statement rather than an over-statement of the truth. Very few people read the Bible. They carry it to church or chapel, and maybe dutifully turn to selected passages. It is in nearly every house—where it is put to various useful purposes. But really few read it as they would read another book, copies of which were as numerous. And, in all probability, amongst those who do read it a large number of them do not believe in it—in a religious sense.

Still, it seems unwise—from a Christian point of view—to advertise the fact. For we have been held up to people of other nations—especially to the heathen Chinese and Hindoos, and the like, as essentially Bible students. Missionaries assure them that our greatness results from our belief in the Bible. The Rev. Dr. Horton once said that the whole difference between ourselves and the Chinese resulted in the difference of religion. If they had the Bible, they would be as we are; if we were without the Bible, we should be as they are. And the Chinese looked at us—and decided to leave the Bible alone. We have been held up to the world as the people of a Book, and I verily believe some people believed that every Englishman went to bed with a Bible under his pillow. And now to inform the world that few people read the Bible at all, and still fewer study it religiously, is letting the cat out of the bag with a vengeance. It may even lead to some people questioning the "source of England's greatness" story. For how can a book be the source of England's greatness if few English people bother about it?

It might even be questioned whether the mere fact of announcing an intention to advertise the Bible is a wise one. It is never a good policy for ministers of religion to speak too plainly. People may understand them; and understanding is the beginning of wisdom—and the end of religion. But some people

may be led to wonder what on earth the clergy—40,000 of them—have been doing all their lives except advertising the Bible. Their work is mainly this. They owe their position as a class to its assumed value. In its absence their whole religion is without visible means of support. And to justify their power, their pay, and their position, they have assured the nation that the life of its people is so saturated with the Bible that to separate the two, even to keep it out of the schools, is to make English history a chaos. They have advertised the Bible because the Bible supported them. And it is a not unreasonable assumption that if our huge army of priests and their supporters are now compelled to form a society for advertising the Bible, the resolve carries with it a plain confession of their present failure, without any assurance of their future success.

There is, in sober truth, no other book so extensively advertised as the Bible. Millions of money are spent on it, and thousands of people are engaged in the work. The advertisement is such that it has become almost a part of the furniture of every house. It is placed in schools in a privileged position, so that the children may grow up with the conviction that in some way or other it is vastly superior and more important than any other book. It appears in our law courts, so that a man may hardly receive seven days for being drunk and disorderly or hung for murder unless the book is made part of the scene. It is distributed by the hundreds of thousands at a price that barely pays the cost of paper and printing. Religious writers and preachers are daily advertising its value with a persistency that must make the firms of Beecham and Pears jealous. It lives by advertisement, and by advertisement alone. Drop all this advertising machinery, and in the course of a generation the Bible would be read only to the extent, and for the same reasons, that we read the early history and primitive mythologies of other peoples. Other books have had to work their way into fame on the strength of their own merits; and in this way their survival is a rough and ready test of their excellence. No party or class boomed Shakespeare, but he has become the pride of the best of our nation, and his sayings are household words. The Bible has never done this. It is the book of a religion, the certificate of a caste—established by law, not by public taste. Even the literary excellence of the Bible does not belong to it as a book. It is the gift of several generations of translators, polishing and repolishing its sentences until no further improvements could be made. And now, as a climax, we have a committee formed for the avowed purpose of advertising it! Just as though it were soap or pills.

C. COHEN.

### A Perplexing Christian Problem.

THE sovereignty of God in the universe is an alleged fact, the denial of which is generally regarded as a symptom of the thorough depravity of the human heart. The Bible declares again and again that "God reigneth over the nations." "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; and let them say among the nations, the Lord reigneth." But if God sitteth as "king for ever," and "reigneth among the nations," does it not inevitably follow that he is absolutely supreme everywhere, and that it is impossible to thwart him in the execution of his will? Indeed, he is often defined as a being who doeth according to his will, both in heaven and on earth, and to whom none can say, "What doest thou"? The same doctrine has been systematically promulgated by the orthodox Church in all ages. The *Shorter Catechism* informs us that "the decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass." But if God, who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and all-good, be supreme, does not this supremacy necessarily involve the regnancy of righteousness and

truth in all parts of the world? If everything that comes to pass has been foreordained, are we not bound to conclude that a righteous Deity must have fore-ordained only those events which are right and good? Consequently, people are anxiously asking, "Why does not God stop the War"? The Rev. T. Rhondda Williams endeavors to answer this question in a long article in the *Christian World* for November 4. As is well known, Mr. Williams is a New Theologian, whose attempts to solve difficult problems are always marked by great ingenuity and plausibility. His present endeavor to explain why God does not and cannot stop the War is more ingenious than plausible. He goes back to the Gospel Jesus for what he regards as a vital principle. When Jesus was being cruelly persecuted and threatened with a violent termination of his career, God did not intervene to protect him from his enemies, but allowed him to be crucified as a malefactor. Mr. Williams says:—

"We find that the God who could have sent twelve legions of angels only sent one angel, and that instead of saving Jesus from the ordeal, he strengthened him for it. What would have happened if the angels had come either to destroy those people or to carry Jesus out of their reach? Is it not evident on reflection that that would have destroyed the character of Jesus, and made impossible the work which he had done for the world? If the angels had come, Christianity would never have been."

Let us pause a moment here. It is true that had there been angels, and had there been a God who could have sent them, Christianity would never have been. The advent of Christianity and its continued existence and history in the world demonstrate the non-existence of its Divinity. Mr. Williams tries to make much of the fact that, comparatively speaking, there were so few miraculous interventions in the life of Jesus, which, he concludes, comes to this: "God could not have saved Jesus without destroying him." So important is this statement, in the reverend gentleman's opinion, that the whole of it is italicised, as is also the principle deduced from the Heavenly Father's treatment of his son Jesus, which is as follows:—

"Miraculous rescues out of situations which are the outcome of processes would undo the whole meaning of the processes, and make the world and life absolutely unintelligible. It would make moral training and spiritual growth impossible. This, I think, is the explanation why God does not do things which we often think he might do. If God to-day could send legions of angels to the battlefields to put an end to the fighting, bad as war is, that would be worse for the world. For this reason, the world has got in the War what it deserves; what it prepared for."

That is how Mr. Williams tries to exonerate the Divine Being from all blame for his masterly inactivity during the War. He does not stop it simply because Europe deserves it, and because, if he did stop it, he would do Europe far greater harm than the War itself is doing.

Mr. Williams does not seem to realise that his justification of God in relation to the War is, in reality, his most fatal condemnation. According to the teaching of his article, the European nations are now reaping what they have been sowing for many generations. To save them from this bitter reaping would be to cast the moral world into utter confusion and render moral character and spiritual improvement quite impossible. This is an attempt to white-wash God's character at the expense of black-washing man's:—

"To have the War ended by supernatural intervention would not affect the fighting spirit in any nation; it would do nothing whatever to settle disputes, nothing to change ambitions, to get rid of hatred, or even to soften rivalry. It would leave the roots of war untouched. The best thing for all the nations now, terrible as war is, is to suffer the anguish which their own doings or their own neglect have brought upon them, and through that anguish and tribulation learn the better way of life."

Does not Mr. Williams see how utterly unfair this limiting of God-redemptive and regenerating power is? Does he not think, that if his God existed and

could end the War, he could also, with equal ease and delight, uproot the fighting spirit of the combatants, and put a new spirit within them, take away the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh in its stead? But the reverend gentleman does a more humiliating injustice still to his loving Heavenly Father when, by implication, he admits that his government of the world has been a stupendous farce. He says that we have no right to complain of the frightful destruction of civilian life and private property by Zeppelins which periodically visit our land, because all nations alike encouraged the development of aircraft, and that it does not become us to deplore the enormous loss of life on the various battlefields, because all the Powers involved approved of the rapid increase of competitive armaments. In consequence of all this, Mr. Williams would not pray for supernatural intervention to end the War, even if he knew that in answer to his prayer such intervention would take place, because he thinks "it is better that we should suffer the result of our own doings, or our own neglect, as the case may be, in order that we may work out our own character." But he forgets that all the drifting towards war for the last forty years occurred while the Lord of lords and King of kings sat upon the world's throne, and was believed to be governing mankind in righteousness and truth. The view advocated by Mr. Williams is doubtless true, but, while holding it, he ought logically and ethically to be an Atheist. At any rate, he gives his God away without a single qualm. His whole article is fundamentally anti-Theistic, though he wrote it as a servant of the Lord.

Mr. Williams closes his article on a sentimental, vaguely pietistic key. He believes in God even while conducting an argument that wholly discredits him. He believes in prayer, though he declines to pray for victory, or for any angelic interposition. But he does "not believe that God can do any good which he is not doing," and he has the audacity to add that "there is a limit to God in his relation to his creation." At this moment he is doing for us all that he possibly can without destroying our souls. As a matter of fact, however, the limitation of God's possible activity is on such a scale that neither Mr. Williams nor anyone else can furnish the least evidence that he ever does anything at all for anybody whatsoever. We do know that believers have never exhibited the slightest approach to the exercise of superhuman power. It is easy enough for clergymen to assert that they get spiritual accessions of power which do not belong to them as mere individuals, but only belong to them as spirits, one with the spirit of God; but of the truth of that assertion they never can adduce one scrap of proof. They merely grow sentimental, and imagine that they are telling the truth.

The problem of God's relationship to the world and its administration is absolutely insoluble. What is the use of telling a man that he is "not alone in fighting his battles, in bearing the result of his own doings, in working out the meaning of his own character," when the sense of any companionship other than human is nothing but an emotion dependent upon a certain belief wholly unverifiable in actual life? Mr. Williams frankly admits that parents cannot make their prayer "a shield for their boy's body if he goes into the battlefield, the most prayed for being just as liable to a German bullet as any other." When relations and friends pray for the soldiers at the Front, they do but think deeply of them, and give expression to their good wishes on their behalf. All else is but erratic fancy or vain delusion. The only bonds that bind human beings together are those of human love, sympathy, and service, all other bonds being imaginary only. The moment God is introduced upon the scene, it becomes inexplicable, full of chaos and confusion, of sadness and dissatisfaction. God only complicates the problem, and makes its solution impossible. The existing conditions of the world cannot be harmonised with any conception of Divinity ever elaborated.

Of such conceptions, Meredith represents Nature as saying:—

"And I spin none; only show,  
Would humanity soar from its worst,  
Winged above darkness and dole,  
How flesh unto spirit must grow.  
Spirit raves not for a goal.  
Shapes in man's likeness hewn  
Desires not: neither desires  
The sleep or the glory: it trusts;  
Uses my gifts, yet aspires."

J. T. LLOYD.

## G. W. Foote—As a Man.—II.

(Continued from p. 710.)

A MAN is known by his friends, and Mr. Foote had a very wide circle of acquaintances. His correspondents ranged from George Meredith, the greatest writer of his generation, to obscure people who wrote to him for sympathy or advice. With his remarkable gifts, it was inevitable that he should attract attention. His readings from Robert Browning's poems in the "seventies" attracted the notice of the great poet, who wrote an appreciative letter congratulating Mr. Foote on his selection of the "gold" from his verse, and adding that he was "able to bring it to the surface." Years after he corresponded with the ill-fated John Davidson, and the last letters of the series were written just prior to the poet's death. Mr. Foote was very intimate with James Thomson, the author of *The City of Dreadful Night*, and their letters make delightful reading. Indeed, chapters might be written on the friendship of these two very remarkable men. In later years Mr. Foote numbered among his correspondents Thomas Hardy and Bernard Shaw, for both of whom he had a real admiration. Shaw's letters are very characteristic, and he sent presentation copies of his books, with autograph inscriptions, from time to time. He was also friendly with William T. Stead, the famous journalist, and they saw a good deal of one another during the time of the Torrey exposure, in which Stead rendered very valuable help. There were letters, too, from Colonel Ingersoll, but latterly the correspondence was mainly conducted by the Colonel's son-in-law. A pathetic interest attaches to the long series of letters written by Frederick W. Walsh, an afflicted admirer of Mr. Foote's, who wrote beautifully with his pencil held in his teeth. Other notable correspondents included Robert Blatchford and Austin Harrison. With Horatio Bottomley the Chief was on the most friendly terms, and I hope that some day an account of their early association will be given to the world.

Mr. Foote's life was a strenuous one, and even his holidays were concerned with Freethought. His trip to America and his journey to Rome, although there was work to do, were very happy experiences. He really enjoyed himself, and his record of his impressions reflected a buoyancy of spirit which resulted from these pleasant interludes. The gay freedom of the press in the States amused him, and he sent me copies of the American papers, containing interviews with himself, with the humorous comment, "What do you think of the land of tall buildings and tall statements?" But he felt that he was amongst friends, and he wrote with enthusiasm of his meetings with Colonel Ingersoll and George Macdonald, and of his kind reception everywhere. He was always proud of the fact that Mangasarain held the flag in the West, and he popularised that scholar's admirable writings in England by reprinting them in the columns of the *Freethinker*.

He was a brilliant and powerful talker; and to listen to his conversation was to add to one's education. Few men so overpaid the smallest suggestion with such a wealth of principle. And he made his companions feel quite at home. You never felt as if you were piling up something upon the cold mass of information in his mind. You seemed to be tossing fuel into a glowing intelligence by which these enormous masses had long been fanned. One might

fill a book with his happy *bon-mots*. Speaking of *Punch* one day he said, "There is no blood in it since the great Leech dropped off." Referring to the trial of Joan of Arc he remarked, "A lily in the jaws of hell." Speaking of his friend Wheeler's fondness for buying books on the barrows at Farringdon-street, he said, "Kind-hearted Joe. He can't bear to see a book in the rain." He never objected to a joke against himself. He laughed merrily when I told him that a waiter at one of our favorite restaurants had asked me if my friend "was on the music-halls."

A singularly well-bred man, he had a vast fund of general knowledge and observation befitting a man of action. His memory was phenomenal, and he seemed unable to forget. His lecture-notes were simply a few lines on a half-sheet of notepaper, and from them he could speak for an hour or two. In his lectures, no less than in his conversation, he gave his hearers the result of long years of patient and exhaustive study, which his enemies would have us believe were spent in idle amusement, and in the sacrifice of duty to pleasure. Every book in his library was bought for the sole purpose of adding to his knowledge, and few men ever read more closely. After one of his lectures, an opponent referred to him as "a walking encyclopædia." "I wish I could have returned the compliment," said Mr. Foote afterwards, "but I could hardly tell the man he was a volume bound in calf."

His readiness on the platform was extraordinary. Once when he had been lecturing on "An Hour in Hell," a clergyman present complained of the cruel attack on religious belief. "I am not cruel," replied Mr. Foote. "If I took the audience to hell, I brought them back again." At another lecture entitled "After Death—What?" an opponent complained bitterly that Mr. Foote had not told him what would happen after his (the speaker's) death. The Chief looked blandly at him, and said, "Without being dogmatic, I should say a funeral." On one rare occasion an awful snowstorm depleted his audience. When he rose to address them, he began, "When two or three are gathered together in my name."

All who knew him must remember his beautiful, soft voice, with its marvellous range. Always individual, he invested his recitals with his own personality. His rendering of Hood's *Bridge of Sighs* and of Tennyson's *Rizpah* were revelations. As for his Shakespearean recitations, no actor of our time rivalled him, excepting Salvini. His rendering of Othello's last speech, and of Shylock, and Hamlet's soliloquy were masterpieces. Indeed, he could easily have taken a foremost position on the stage had he cared to do so. But he recognised that he had nobler work to do, and he did a soldier's work, and was satisfied with a soldier's pay. As a young man, he was singularly handsome, and he had fair hair. This gives point to the compliment paid him by Mr. Cunningham Grahame, after one of the Chief's finest speeches, "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean."

This thing I know. George William Foote has done more good than many admired philanthropists. His sympathies were universal, his charity only bounded by his income, his helpfulness unending. He has saved many a poor Freethinker's home from destruction. Men and women in trouble never appealed to him in vain. Once, when a poor derelict had left him the richer by a sovereign, I said that I feared the money would be spent in a public-house. He flashed his eyes on me, and said, "What of it? He will be happy for an hour or so!" His heart was pure gold, as his brain was pure crystal. He was a man amongst men.

In looking through the dead Leader's private desk after his death, we found in one of the drawers a pair of baby's shoes, brittle with age. They were the first shoes worn by his first child, now a handsome woman with a baby-boy of her own. For many years those tiny shoes had been one of his most treasured possessions. And this man, as tender-hearted as he was brave, occupied one of the most onerous positions, and was the object of countless

libels and calumnies. It was like him to hide his feelings from the gaze of the world. Those who saw him "clad in compleat steel," in the forefront of the battle, thought him hard and stern, but his close friends knew his great and noble heart:—

"Nevermore, O heart of gold,  
Loyal comrade, perfect knight,  
Shall we see thee as of old.  
Us thy charm of speech will hold,  
Us thy sharp sword bring delight  
Nevermore—O heart of gold.  
Never, wroth for honor sold,  
Never, glad for wrong set right,  
Shall we see thee as of old.  
Shall that kindest hand enfold  
Ours with pressure warm and light;  
Nevermore, O heart of gold,  
Shall we see thee as of old."

MIMNERMUS.

## The Fourth Gospel.

### THE ALLEGED TRIAL OF JESUS.

IN the three Synoptical Gospels Jesus, after his arrest, is led away to the high priest's house to undergo a preliminary examination by Caiaphas before sending him to Pilate. In the Fourth Gospel, however, the writer says:—

"They led him to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, who was high priest that year" (xviii. 13).

Then follows some questioning by "the high priest," after which the writer says:—

"Annas therefore sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest" (xviii. 24).

From this somewhat "mixed" account it is uncertain whether the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel was brought before Annas or Caiaphas—or both. In either case the writer has set aside the three Synoptic accounts, and has given us an entirely new one, which he, no doubt, composed himself. In this we read (John xviii. 19—24):—

"The high priest asked Jesus of his disciples and of his teaching. Jesus answered him, I have spoken openly to the world; I ever taught in synagogues and in the temple.....Why askest thou me? Ask them that heard what I spake unto them?.....And when he had said this, one of the officers standing by struck Jesus with his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so?"

Here the pseudo-John has invented and fraudulently recorded a new indignity towards his Savior. He evidently could not resist the temptation to alter and rewrite the older Gospel narratives, even when they related to the trial of his Lord and Master.

The trial and Crucifixion he has placed a day earlier than that given in the other three Gospels—viz., on the day when the paschal lamb was to be eaten in the evening—so that the chief priests and other accusers of Jesus, after delivering their prisoner to Pilate, were unable to go into the Judgment Hall where the trial was held "that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover" (xviii. 28). As a consequence, the accusers remained outside the hall, and Pilate had to go out to them to hear the accusation, then to return to the court to question Jesus, then to go out again and tell the accusers what he thought, then to return and further question Jesus—and so on, throughout the examination. This was the pseudo-John's idea of conducting a trial: but no Roman procurator would have allowed himself to be played with in this absurd manner. If the accusers were unable to enter the court that day, the procurator would have postponed the trial until they could attend. Neither, again, would the Jewish authorities have arrested Jesus at a time when they could not enter a court of justice without "being defiled": they would have put off the arrest to another day. There can thus be no doubt whatever as to the fictitious character of the account in the Fourth Gospel.

From this account I will only notice some of the additions by the presbyter John:—

John xviii. 29—31.—“Pilate went out unto them and saith, What accusation bring ye against the man? They answered and said, *If this man were not an evil-doer, we should not have delivered him up unto thee.* Pilate said unto them, Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law. The Jews said, It is not lawful for us to put any man unto death.”

Here the accusation brought against Jesus recalls the words put in the mouth of that Savior by the pseudo-John—“*If it were not so, I would have told you.*” It was the writer of the Fourth Gospel, and not the Jewish accusers, who framed the accusation. It was also the Gospel writer, and not the accusers, who stated that the Jewish Sanhedrim had no power “to put any man to death.” The Jews, like every other nation subject to the Romans, had supreme authority in all matters connected with their religion, and had power in those matters to take whatever measures they thought necessary.

John xviii. 33—35.—Pilate “said unto Jesus, Art thou the king of the Jews? Jesus answered, *Sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee concerning me?* Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews,” etc.

Here again, it was the pseudo-John, and not Jesus, who was responsible for the reply to Pilate. The insolent words in italics are just what might be expected of a writer who has made his Savior talk and act like one who was scarcely sane.

John xix. 9—11.—Pilate “saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore saith unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to release thee, and have power to crucify thee? Jesus answered, *Thou wouldest have no power against me, except it were given thee from above,*” etc.

These questions and answers, like the preceding, are purely imaginary: they merely tend to show that the pseudo-John was a past master in veiled insolence.

John xix. 12.—“The Jews cried out saying, If thou release this man thou art not Cæsar’s friend; every one that maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar.”

This threat must not be regarded as uttered by the Jews—who would not dare to make it. It is one of the silly ideas of the pseudo-John. Pilate, as we know from Josephus, would not have stood threats from the Jewish priests for a single moment.

#### THE ALLEGED CRUCIFIXION.

The compilers of the first three Gospels took their accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus from the primitive Gospel in use in their days—one of which (that by Mark) being known to the presbyter John. The latter individual, however, took the liberty of altering the more ancient narrative wherever he thought fit. I will here notice only some of his additions.

John xix. 17.—“They took Jesus therefore; and he went out, *bearing his cross himself,* unto the place called Golgotha, where they crucified him.”

In the three Synoptical Gospels Jesus did not carry the cross himself: it was borne by Simon of Cyrene every step of the way (Matt. xxvii. 32; Luke xxiii. 26).

John xix. 19—21.—“And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And there was written, *Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews*.....and it was written in Hebrew, and in Latin, and in Greek. The Jews therefore said to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am the king of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.”

Here the writer has credited Pilate with a knowledge of Hebrew, as well as of Latin and Greek, and makes him write the name three times—for no earthly reason. The attempt to make Pilate alter what he had written is another of the pseudo-John’s absurdities. In the other three Gospels the superscription reads:—

Mark.—“The King of the Jews.”

Luke.—“This is the King of the Jews.”

Matt.—“This is Jesus the King of the Jews.”

The pseudo-John has simply added the full name—“Jesus the Nazarene” to the superscription of Mark. The words “written in Hebrew, and in Latin, and in Greek” found their way from the Fourth Gospel into Luke’s account in some of the very late MSS. from which the Authorised Version was made: but they are not found in earlier MSS. written in the fourth century, and are therefore omitted in Luke xxxiii. 38 in the Revised Version.

John xix. 23, 24.—“The soldiers when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also the coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled which saith, *They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*”

The words in italics are from Psalm xxii., which was believed by the early Christians to be a prediction referring to Jesus Christ: hence, the soldiers were represented as casting lots for his garments. The words are an example of Hebrew parallelism, in which two short sentences in slightly different terms are employed in describing the same thing. Thus, the second sentence—“Upon my vesture they cast lots”—is but a varied repetition of the first—“They parted my garments among them”—the meaning being that the garments were divided by casting lots. This was clearly understood by the three Synoptists, who say “They parted his garments among them, casting lots.” The pseudo-John, however, took each of the sentences as referring to different articles of apparel, and therefore gave his Savior five garments—one for each of the four soldiers, and a “coat” or tunic woven and without seam, which could not be divided. A complete suit, in humble life, in those days comprised only an under and an outer garment. The pseudo-John’s mistake was very similar to that of Matthew, who placed Jesus upon two asses, when only one was meant—“a colt, the foal of an ass” (Matt. xxi. 4—7).

John xix. 25—27.—“There were standing by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother, and the disciple whom he loved standing by, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home.”

Here the pseudo-John has made another foolish addition. The foot of the cross was not the place for three women to be standing, unless they desired to mix with the rabble, or to watch the agony and contortions of three nude crucified men. The Synoptists were fully aware of this, and they say—“And there were also women *beholding from afar.*” Again, Jesus during his ministry contributed nothing towards the support of his mother, who, besides, appears to have had other sons who *did* take care of her. The fisherman, John, had no home to take her to, unless he went back to Zebedee his father, and resumed his fishing: he could not carry her about with him if he went preaching.

John xix. 33—37.—“When they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: howbeit one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side.....These things came to pass that the scripture might be fulfilled, *A bone of him shall not be broken.* And again another scripture saith, *They shall look on him whom they pierced.*”

The paragraph from which the foregoing extract is taken is perhaps the most outrageous of the large number of frauds in this Gospel. The writer wished to make his Savior fulfil two Old Testament prophecies—that “A bone of him shall not be broken” (Psalm xxxiv. 20), and that “They shall look on him whom they pierced” (Zech. xii. 10). Hence, after Jesus was dead, he represents the Jews as going to Pilate and asking him to have the legs of the men crucified broken, so that they would not be alive after sunset, when the Sabbath commenced. To this cruel action he made Pilate agree: consequently Jesus, being dead, had no bones broken. Next, in

order to fulfil the second prophecy, he made one of the soldiers pierce the body of Jesus with a spear.

Having completely altered the older Gospel narratives upon so many points, the pseudo-John now began to be somewhat doubtful as to whether his new Gospel would be allowed to pass for that of John the apostle: he therefore makes that imaginary individual, without naming him, solemnly declare that every statement was absolutely true. He represents that apostle as saying:—

John xix. 35.—“And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe.”

Here we have two deliberate falsehoods. We have not the testimony of the apostle John for any of the events related in the fourth Gospel: the writer of that Gospel knew perfectly well that all his additions were fabrications. One more paper will, I think, bring this series to a close.

ABRACADABRA.

### Into the Quiet.

RIPE were the nuts of the hazels that wooded the glens. Golden brown was the bracken that clothed the hills. Laden with grains of loam were the waters; for the rains had filled the irrigation channels, and the mountain earth was loose amongst the roots of the heather. Thick with mist was the air, and warm withal. Fall of beauty was the countryside, yet oppressive. Autumn, the extravagant color artist of the seasons, had madly mixed his weightiest pigments on the foliage. The brilliancy of the summer had been slowly transformed into the sad splendor that heralds the time of sleep. Everything seemed burdensomely heavy with the fulness of life.

Carving along by the hillfoots, the road might have been an avenue twining into a country where all was beautifully mellowed by age, where change and decay had ceased just when ripest and most lovely, where the most sombre tints of nature were preserved for an eternity of changlessness. The workings of nature seemed to rest, her forces to have fallen asleep in the strange stillness, her vitality to have become too full for activity. She had reached the zenith of her power. She basked, deep-breathing, in her own fragrance, drowsily intoxicated with her own somnolence.

The road was muddy with the early morning mists and rains. Walking was tiresome. Something dreary despoiled the luxuriance of its influence, and sobered thought, and sapped the body of its muscularity. Despite the beauty, one felt somewhat weary and old, desiring rest; and we were glad to reach the old kirk and sit down.

Gradually the feeling of suffocation lightened and vanished. Gently from our minds glided the burden of autumn; and in the peacefulness of the old kirk we could appreciate contentedly the weird witchery of her age-worn joys, and feel the significance of her message.

Through the unstained windows glinted the leaves of the huge oaks and planes that guarded the church from the storm fiends of winter, and shaded it from the sun spirits of summer. Ivy climbed all over its walls, softening the crudities of architecture in its thousand nuances of green, hiding the ugliness of the simple masonry in a garment ever fresh and never frayed, and peeping through the glass at the common pews, as if it longed to take them also in its embrace, to robe them, too, in homely beauty.

From where we sat were visible the tops of tombstones; for, all round the kirk, lay the trysting-place of parted friends, the democratic resting land where there are no follies and no fetters, where the strong relinquish their power and the weak their slavery, where all are equal, and none blessed and none cursed.

In death there is no warfare, only peace. The froth of enmity dries up; the sparks of hate disappear; the

bitterness dissolves; the foolish suffering subsides; and the deep lying friendliness of man to man, the seal of our social association, recognised and honored by so few of us, and taken advantage of by so many of us, becomes suddenly evident, when too late to be of service.

As the sun's rays waned in penetrative power with the passing of the months, the gloom and the quiet of the old kirk darkened and deepened. Always a twilight lingered within it. Always was there the quiet peace of the gloaming, so narrow were the windows, and so heavy was the foliage; but with the coming of the long nights and dull days a fuller quietude came, a more inexpressible peace issued from Nature to dwell within the lonely walls. The peace that the world shuts out, the quiet at which it scoffs, the tranquillity it disdains, and the calm at which it sneers, were here in the plenitude of their consoling might, to soothe the tortured soul, and to ease the heart of the burden of the world's madness. The questionings were solved by evanishment. Problems conquered themselves by evaporation. The terrible disputes of man drifted into invisibility like flocks of cloud into the sun's eye. Warrings sank into the peace with a sigh that wearily confessed folly. Into the darkness dropped the great trivialities of nations and men, and were no more, because they were so little.

Only when the noisy worshippers began to enter, and the service commence, did one experience a revolt of emotion. Redolent of primitive mentalism, hopelessly vulgar, and horribly coarse and harsh, were the psalms and hymns. They shattered the quiet and annihilated the peace. The voice and clamorous prejudices and powers of the ailing world entered the sacred precincts, crucifying the spirit of the place, and blaspheming its soul. Lacking in sensitiveness were minister and congregation. Fall-mouthed as they were with praise of the peace that strengthens the soul, they were as remote from knowledge of it as an egret is from the motive of its callous murderer. To have remained quiet in the quiet would have appalled them. Nearer to the joy of the place of peace was the Atheist whose heart they had made shiver with cold; and he thanked God the shepherd of the flock had a sleepy, droning voice; for, when the minister began to speak upon Truth, quietude again rose from the graves of the dead, and fell from the tinted leaves, into the old kirk, in its return manifesting its supremacy of rightful possession.

To the slumberous words of the preacher the ears of the Atheist were fast closed. His thoughts were of the man who had just gone into the quiet to rest; and the pastor's monotonous tones fell unheedingly upon his mind, like wind-whirled leaves falling silently upon an earth unconscious of their kiss. The congregation faded into the gloaming, and were lost in it. The small pulpit, with its red-cushioned and tasselled book-board, receded farther and farther into the dark. Human sounds all melted away. Intense peace resumed its sweetness. The quietude became ineffably profound; and the stillness encompassed him, closely shielding him against intrusion, with the memory of the man who had died.

The fighter had passed from the fight into the quiet that awaited him. Into the restland of life he had gone, and over him Nature had dropped her mantle of peace. She had clothed him in her solitude, and covered him with her deepest silence. She had given him her choicest priceless gift; he had fallen asleep.

And the spirit of the old kirk nestled down in the Atheist's heart beside the farewell that had never been uttered, as if it would soothe, in the deeps of its tranquillity, the sadness of the lost god-bye.

ROBERT MORELAND.

At a recent Cabinet Council Meeting at Washington the members, led by President Wilson on his knees, indulged in prayer. On his knees! An appropriate position for a statesman "too proud to fight."

## Acid Drops.

Lord Derby has written to Sir Robert Perks, the eminent Wesleyan Methodist, assuring him that every regard is paid to the religious convictions of soldiers and sailors, and says that "Freedom to worship according to his own conscience" extends "to every soldier and sailor serving in His Majesty's Forces." We are pleased to hear it; but if soldiers and sailors are to enjoy real freedom of conscience, there must be not only freedom to select which religious service they will attend—there must be liberty to *abstain* from religious services altogether if they are so inclined. And that obtains in neither the Army nor the Navy. In both Services men are ordered religious worship, and would be punished if they disobeyed. We have had scores of letters from both soldiers and sailors complaining of this, and if Lord Derby would only take up this matter, and use his influence to make attendance at religious service really voluntary, he would be looked upon as a benefactor by a much larger number of men than his lordship would imagine possible. In this matter we are in a much better position for knowing the truth than is the War Office.

According to the Bishop of London, there has been 260 churches built in London during the last fifty years. This is doubtless a fine record from the builders' and the parsons' points of view. But we believe that had 260 buildings devoted to a sane, humanitarian teaching been erected within the same period, the results for good would have been far more noticeable. Perhaps the Bishop will next tell us how much value the public has had for its outlay on these same 260 churches.

The Bishop of London also says that "God's curse" is on the German nation, while "we are on the side of God." It is not for us to contradict a Bishop on such high subjects, but we humbly submit that if "God" were to show more activity in helping his friends, and a greater readiness to give his "curse" operative value, everyone would be the better pleased. It is all very well to say that the Germans are against God because they shot Nurse Cavell, while we are on God's side because we wish to avenge her; but the fact remains that Nurse Cavell was shot, and God's blessing or curse didn't seem to affect the matter either way.

Mr. Herbert Burrows sends the following letter to the *Daily News* of November 4:—

### "THE CLERGY AND THE WAR."

"Sir,—The Archbishop of Canterbury says that 'solemn ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament is not consonant with combatant service in the field.' Does the Archbishop mean by that that combatant service by the clergy is contrary to Christian principles? If so, is the persuasion of laymen by the clergy to combatant service also contrary to those principles? And again, if so, what about the Bishop of London?—HERBERT BURROWS."

A hit! A palpable hit!

The point raised by Mr. Burrows is raised also, in the *Church Times*, by the Rev. B. O. Heywood, of Swinton Vicarage, Manchester. He says:—

"Either the work of the combatant is right or it is not right. If it is not right, no one—clergyman or layman—should fight. If it is right, what justification can there be for forbidding the clergy, or at least those of the clergy who can be spared for R.A.M.C. work, etc., to share the hardships of the laity?"

The logic of this seems to us impeccable. There is no reason that will justify acting laymen to volunteer for active service that will not also justify asking the clergy to volunteer also. The plea that the clergy are doing work that cannot be done by others is simply untrue. There is nothing a clergyman does in a modern community that cannot be done equally well—if it needs be done at all—by scores of other people. The day of the clergy as a class possessing some supernatural quality not possessed by ordinary persons is over. The clergy are just ordinary men—often very ordinary men—and it is monstrous that at a time when it is widely held that the country's need warrants everything being subordinated to one end, that the clergy should set up a plea that their calling renders them immune. There is no other class that the country could better spare.

The merry birthday of the Man of Sorrows is not to be allowed to pass uncelebrated in the Trenches. A London newspaper has received nearly £2,000 for the supplying of Christmas puddings for the soldiers. Such a trifle as Christ being opposed to murder, wholesale or retail, is of little consequence compared to the Christmas gorge.

There was to be what is called a "novel arrangement" in this year's Lord Mayor's Show. A halt was made at St. Paul's for a religious service. It was also arranged that the service should be a short one. Perhaps this was part of the much boomed, but little seen, revival of religion.

"Why should middle-aged people ask to be out of all the danger?" asked the egregious Bishop of London. This was said with reference to the Zeppelin raids. And, as though it gave a conclusive finish, he added, "Why should the boys face all the danger?" Perhaps this clerical Solomon will inform us what good it will do "the boys" to expose their people at home to the attacks of these aerial infernal machines.

The retirement of the Rev. A. J. Waldron from the post of Vicar at Brixton, has led to a number of press comments. The *Daily Mirror* says that Mr. Waldron "was at one time a disciple of Charles Bradlaugh." This is news! We imagine that Bradlaugh was dead before the ex-vicar had completed his education.

According to the papers, Mr. Waldron will "for the next two or three years" "lecture and devote himself to War problems and literary work." Has he had the intimation from the Throne of Grace that the War will last so long?

A lot of people have been wondering, quite naturally, why God doesn't stop the War. Rev. T. Rhondda Williams considers that it is because if God did so he would upset the universe. This is how he puts it:—

"Miraculous rescues out of situations which are the outcome of processes would undo the whole meaning of the processes, and make the world and life absolutely unintelligible."

This seems to us only saying in the name of piety what has often been said in the name of Atheism. And it really is Atheism in substance. Put on one side the verbiage about what God does do, or can do, or cannot do, and we are left with the statement that everything which occurs is the exact resultant of all the processes that have led up to it. God does not interfere, and if he did we should have chaos in place of cosmos. Now, what we would like Mr. Williams to explain is, where God comes in? He interferes in nothing, therefore he does nothing. And there is clearly no useful end served in bothering about him. That seems to be the logic of Mr. Williams's explanation.

Mr. Williams also says that it is much better for God not to interfere (we wonder what all the intercession services are about?) because his interference would leave the roots of war untouched. "The best thing for all the nations now, terrible as war is, is to suffer the anguish which their own doings or their own neglect have brought upon them, and through that anguish and tribulation learn the better way of life." We could appreciate this kind of reasoning if the sufferings of people bore any relation to their stupidity or callousness in bringing about the War. But is this the case? As a matter of fact, it is those who have done least to bring it about who will suffer most. Already Belgium has suffered more than any other country. And how can the hundreds of thousands who have been killed benefit from the lessons of the War? Will even the present generation get from the War a lesson at all proportionate in value to the cost paid? If there is any benefit at all derived from it—and we are very dubious even of that—it will be gained by a generation that took no part in the War, and experienced none of its anguish. If Mr. Williams were not a clergyman, he would realise this. As he is a clergyman, he must needs put forward absurd apologies in defence of a ridiculous creed.

A "popular Canadian novelist" recently occupied the pulpit of the City Temple, London. It is said that as a writer he appeals "particularly to the women." He should feel quite at home in a Christian church, for almost invariably the audiences at such places include more bonnets than brains.

"Boy with a Conscience" is the delightful headline in a weekly contemporary. Most boys are innocent of this article, and resemble the youngster who was eating a large apple. "Give me the core," said his brother. "There ain't going to be no core," was the young hopeful's reply.

Sir Charles Tarring, formerly a judge at the Consular Court at Constantinople, speaking at a Bible Society Meeting at Southend-on-Sea, said that this "terrible War" was due to the fact that "the people had forgotten God."

As is usual with converts, Mr. Bottomley is obsessed with his religiosity. In a recent outburst, he refers to His Majesty's Theatre as "Tree's Tabernacle." There is a difference between a theatre and a tabernacle which appears to have been overlooked. You pay to enter the one; and you pay to get out of the other.

Mr. Bottomley should be delighted. He has gained the approval of Mr. W. R. Bradlaugh, who writes in the *Christian's Armory* that he little imagined that he would have seen such a "stalwart as Mr. Horatio Bottomley coming right out from the ranks of infidelity." We trust Mr. Bottomley is gratified. But we are afraid his conversion may be exaggerated. Mr. Bottomley was never a "stalwart" in the Freethought camp. He was, so far as we are aware, never connected with any Freethought paper, nor with any Freethought organisation. His activities lay in quite other directions.

Mr. R. J. Campbell announces that he is going to France, to minister to our soldiers at the Front, until Christmas. It will be remembered that Mr. Campbell gave up the City Temple on the grounds of continuous ill-health, and the necessity for an easier life. He then entered the Church of England, which was hardly complimentary to the National Church or to the strength of Mr. Campbell's convictions. And his going to the Front—after leaving a church in London because he was not strong enough for the work—throws a strong light upon the arduous labors of these men of God at the seat of war. They treat it as a holiday—with an advertisement thrown in.

A *Daily Chronicle* reviewer noting a new edition of Mr. Harold Begbie's book, *On the Side of the Angels*, remarks that Mr. Begbie "produces evidence in support of his statements from both officers and men who saw the phantom armies of angels." We beg to remark that Mr. Begbie does nothing of the kind. He says that he has evidence, which is quite a different thing. And he cites some alleged testimonies from officers and men, but as he gives no names and offers no opportunities for verification, it can hardly be considered evidence. Certainly no magistrate would convict on such evidence. When names are given the statement can be tested. Up to the present only one name has been given and his statement was proved to be an unmitigated falsehood.

In these hard times, when everybody is feeling the financial pinch, more or less, it is a relief to hear that the Rev. Joseph Hill, of Herefordshire, died leaving £24,943; the Rev. A. Jackson, of Northfleet, left £23,601; Rev. C. D. Powell, of Nottingham, £4,381; and the Rev. J. B. Forster, of Manenden, Essex, £21,398.

The *Inquirer* says that a recent lecture by Professor Gilbert Murray on the War was "one of the greatest utterances on the religious side which the War has produced." It is curious that this "religious" utterance should have emanated from an Agnostic.

The exposure of the pious fiction of the "angels" of Mons in the pages of the *Freethinker* was not a moment too soon. None of the prominent clergymen associated with the original fable have since apologised for their share in its inception, and already their dupes are "out-Heroding Herod." Pictures of the "angels" are actually being shown at the bioscope theatres, and the churches are reaping the results of the advertisement. Is it not true, as Ingersoll pointed out, that a lie travels many miles before truth can get its boots on?

What Secularists pious folk are! The Rev. Dr. Lindsay, Vicar of St. Erkonwald's, Southend-on-Sea, has issued a card for hanging up in the home, and advising thrift in war-time. "Remnants of food, bones, crusts, etc., can be put to profitable use," he advises, and adds that "swede-turnips" form "an excellent dietary." Not a word about the value of prayer to "Our Father, which art in heaven." The omission is significant!

Five million apples are being collected in the United States for the use of the troops of the Allies. Let us hope these apples will not cause as much trouble as the fruit eaten in the Garden of Eden.

"It is disgraceful in the eyes of God," cries Prebendary Webb-Peploe, and one feels prepared for awful revelations. Further reading discloses the fact that it is all about a circular from the Incorporated Soldiers and Sailors Help Society, stating that entertainments were going to be provided on Sunday evenings. We can only say that if God

feels it disgraceful that wounded soldiers and sailors should pass a pleasant hour on Sunday evening, it is comforting to find that other people are of a different opinion.

A certain type of Christian apologist used to be fond of holding up freethinking France as a "horrible example" to religious Britain, because of its supposed neglect of home life. We have heard some of them declare in horror-stricken tones that the French language even lacked an equivalent for the English word "home." Of course, this was only amusing to those who knew anything of France or of French home life, but it served its purpose with other people. Since the War began, however, a great many people have discovered many unexpected virtues among the French people, and now we have the *Church Times* pointing out that "No nation has a more perfect family life, or a greater reverence for family life, than the French. Nowhere are mothers more loved and more respected, and nowhere, probably, is entrance to the family circle more carefully guarded. To be introduced to the members of a man's family is immeasurably a greater compliment in France than it is in England." This is no more than the truth concerning a nation in which one-seventh is avowedly non-religious, and it gives the death-blow—or ought to—to a slander that has for long been current in the interest of Christian evidences.

The observance of Guy Fawkes Day, which for so long helped to fan the flames of hostility between Catholics and Protestants, has at last fallen into desuetude. The finishing touch was given by the police, who forbade the use of fireworks. Poor Protestants! They will no longer be able to "choke the Pope" even in verse.

*John Bull*, which presumably reflects the newly found religiosity of its editor, refers to the Bishop of London's sermons as "much more inspiring than those of some contemporary divines." This is a back-handed compliment after all, for it is equivalent to speaking of the one-eyed king amongst the blind.

An article on the military situation in the pages of a contemporary bears the beautiful and touching title, "Till Hell Freezes." Evidently the writer had what the Americans call "cold feet."

The Bishop of Chelmsford considers that "the Church must have the first call upon all incomes." We fear that few Christians will sing "I hear you calling me."

Germany, says the Rev. Mr. Snell, "has repudiated Christ in order to inspire fear." This is sheer humbug. Germany has done nothing of the kind. It is as Christian as ever it was. It is, of course, sickening to read of the religious cant with which it has accompanied its many acts of brutality, but it is also cant to pretend that it has repudiated Christianity. If it had had less Christianity this War would probably never have occurred. As it is, it is a Christian War, if ever there was one. Mr. Snell says that in this War "everything has failed but Christ." And as he does nothing, it would seem to be a case of failure all round.

### The Master's Hand.

"We can only grope about in the darkness for a touch of the Master's hand."—G. W. Foorx on *Lear*.

Give me your hand—  
That gave me strength and guidance while 'twas day,  
Who knew your soul's serene and generous might—  
Give me your hand;  
Still with you in the uttermost I'd stray  
And hold your hand the faster now 'tis night.  
Indissolubly knit, we cannot part;  
So much we've fared together life's rough way—  
Give me your hand.  
And, if a little while before you start,  
Some magic of thy touch must stay behind;  
Some throbbings of that stilled and noble heart.  
Give me your hand!  
Nor tongueless silence of the dreamless dust,  
Nor mortal bolt by Fate's dark angel sped,  
Nor vanish hand  
We'll fear; but mightier, more august,  
Still leading us, as in the past it led,  
The Master's hand!

ANDREW MILLAR



## To Correspondents.

H. BLACK.—We have written Lord Derby direct, and if a satisfactory reply is received you will learn the result. Your own letter in the *Manchester Guardian* is on the right lines, and will do good. Your suggestion concerning the *Freethinker* will be borne in mind, for use, as you say, "whenever necessary."

W. H. HUNT.—Pleased you think the *Freethinker* articles on the War are the best you can read.

J. R. LICHTFIELD.—Your practice of taking three copies of this paper weekly, and giving away two, is a very practical way of helping. It is, perhaps, the best way, since that means new subscribers ultimately, and it is these we want.

CORPORAL S. WISHART writes of Mr. Foote:—"Two of his achievements alone—the sustained conduct of the *Freethinker* and the establishment of the Secular Society, Ltd.—rank him with the greatest in the glorious line of Freethought heroes."

C. HEATON (Burton-on-Trent) says that although he has never seen Mr. Foote, he feels that he has lost a counsellor and a friend, and tenders his sincere sympathy to Mrs. Foote and family.

JULIAN ST. OREY.—Sheer carelessness is the only explanation.

WILFRID LEE.—We can quite understand your desire to pay your tribute to our late leader, and fully appreciate the sentiments expressed. Your experience of Christian bigotry is, unfortunately, not uncommon. We wish you every happiness in your new life—when it arrives, which you say will be soon.

KEBIDON.—Overlooked last week, and we suppose it is almost too late now. Sorry. We will consider your suggestion as to cutting and stitching the *Freethinker*.

A. B. MOSS.—Thanks for congratulations. We will try to deserve them in the future.

A. PECKOVER.—Your letter from a soldier in the Trenches is extremely interesting; our only regret is that want of space prevents our reprinting it in full. His expressions in relation to Mr. Foote do him honor, and it is flattering to learn that the stress of warfare has served only to endear the *Freethinker* to him. It is astonishing, by the way, the large number of letters we receive from the Front, a place where, Dr. Horton assures us, unbelievers are unknown. Perhaps they are all written by Christians, who subscribe for the *Freethinker* merely to deceive us.

C. T. BARKER.—Sorry that military duties have kept you out of regular contact with the *Freethinker*. Still, you seem to have overcome that difficulty to some extent, and we hope that it will not reassert itself. Your tribute to Mr. Foote is well deserved.

A. S. LYE (Coventry) writes of Mr. Foote:—"One reads line after line of praise and esteem, and knows it is true. We knew it while he lived. He was probably admired more than he knew. One could not be in his company for long without feeling he was a great man. I have not seen another who fought with such grand faith in the worth and ultimate success of his principles."

W. H. H.—Thanks for copy of the *Observer*. We are too busy at present to undertake correspondence in outside papers. Will try to do as you desire in the other direction.

H. MANN.—It is certainly an extraordinary experience of Mr. Austin Harrison's to have lived nine years in Germany and never to have met a religious man. But extraordinary things do happen—as witness the Mons Angels. May deal more fully with it next week.

J. PARTRIDGE.—Very glad to learn that your indisposition was of only a temporary character. Mr. Cohen has booked the date, as you will see.

E. HOPPER (Jarrow).—No room in this issue. Will deal with your communication next week.

D. OGILVIE.—We quite appreciate your generous indignation. But it is possible to take the person you name too seriously—far more seriously than those take him who know him with any degree of intimacy.

P. CONRERY.—We have received your interesting letter, and shall be pleased to renew an acquaintance begun so many years ago.

THE SECULAR SOCIETY, LIMITED, office is at 62 Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

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When the services of the National Secular Society in connection with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the secretary, Miss E. M. Vance, giving a long notice as possible.

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

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

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

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

## The Future of the "Freethinker."

AGREEABLE to the express desire of Mr. Foote, and at the request of Mrs. Foote, the present owner of the *Freethinker*, I have agreed to assume the future editorship of this journal. The change is really one more in form than in fact. Regular readers will know that the editorship of the *Freethinker* has been in my charge since November, 1914 and it has frequently been for periods of three months or more during the past thirteen years. Well-wishers to the *Freethinker* have, therefore, the assurance that the paper is not in 'prentice hands. And I think I may be pardoned for expressing pride at the circumstance that during the past year—the most trying year in the history of the *Freethinker*, a year which has witnessed the death of scores of newspapers and magazines, the circulation of this journal has been maintained. In such a period it is something to have lived, and to have achieved that fairly entitles one to every confidence in the future. Finally, I am proud to be able to say that I have the promise of the most cordial support from all the old *Freethinker* contributors, and, judging from the letters received, I have also the confidence of its readers. Several writers of repute have also promised me their assistance as contributors.

The present position of the *Freethinker* stands thus. The owner of the paper is Mrs. Foote. As this is not, however, an ownership that promises much in the way of income, but, on the contrary, exposes one to anxiety and loss, steps have been taken to secure her against legal and financial responsibility. Financially, the *Freethinker* cannot make inroads on Mrs. Foote's private purse; and, in the event of a legal prosecution, that cannot go further than the office. If the paper yields a profit, that will go to Mrs. Foote.

Financially, so far as I can judge at the moment, the *Freethinker* is nearly meeting expenses—including the small acknowledgments paid to contributors, but without reckoning anything for editorial work. That was the position when Mr. Foote made a statement on this head over a year ago, and it remains the position to-day. (Against that has to be reckoned the increased cost of materials, due to the War—a charge which promises to become greater in the immediate future.) Whether it will remain the position a year hence remains to be seen.

There are one or two things of a more personal character that I am reluctantly compelled to say. Realising the possibility of misrepresentation, I have taken the precaution of never discussing business matters alone with Mrs. Foote. In every case, third parties—whom both she and Mr. Foote trusted—have been present, and most often arrangements have been discussed in the presence of a solicitor who was present in the sole interests of Mrs. Foote.

I should not have troubled to say this much, but for one circumstance. Someone was good enough to inform Mrs. Foote, some months before her husband's death, that my interest in the *Freethinker* was a purely personal one; I was only concerned with what I could get out of it, etc., etc. Mrs. Foote, I am pleased to say, treated the communication with the contempt it deserved; and it was, of course, quite useless telling Mr. Foote that—he knew better. But when malicious and mendacious tongues get to work, it is as well to take precautions. And I see no reason why the extent of my "self-interest" should not be made public.

I have been writing for the *Freethinker* for eighteen years. For five years out of the eighteen, I wrote nothing but a weekly article. Then came Mr. Foote's first illness, and I conducted the paper for about four months. Since then, I have regularly contributed a signed article, with from two to six columns of other matter, besides doing other work in connection with the paper. For this—for several years past—I have taken from the *Freethinker* the sum of five guineas per month (under twenty-five shillings per week), which included out-of-pocket expenses. Fortunately, I have always been paid by cheque, so that the

statement could be verified if necessary. I think, therefore, that my self-interest was not of a very obvious or oppressive character.

I am not saying this by way of complaint. Work for a paper like the *Freethinker* must always be mainly a labor of love, and work that was otherwise would not be worth doing. It is merely said to correct a slander which, for all I know to the contrary, may have been said to others besides Mrs. Foote; and the only effective method of dealing with lies of this character is to practice perfect frankness. I have not, and never have had, any objection to being paid for my work, but I knew the position of the *Freethinker* and I knew that it could pay no better, and as Mr. Foote once said of me in the *Freethinker*, I have always been content to take soldier's rations when they were available, and have cheerfully gone without when they were not. And just as in the case of my twenty-five years' work on the Freethought platform, I have never allowed the absence of payment to prevent work being done, so I acted in connection with the *Freethinker*. And in justice to my late Editor, I must add that he never pretended that what I received was more than an "acknowledgment," and his letters to me bear generous evidence of his appreciation of my work. I regret the necessity for saying this much, but to be thus frank at the outset may avoid annoyance and misrepresentation in the future.

And now to a more pleasing theme. Our late Chief had a profound faith in the future of the *Freethinker*. He had given thirty-five years' of his life to it, and I have given eighteen of mine. He had, and I have, a stake in the paper that cannot be estimated in terms of cash. I have always given my very best to the *Freethinker*, and I shall continue to do so. And I think I may say that the *Freethinker* will bear comparison—at least—with any Freethought journal that has ever existed. It has never lacked good writers and warm friends. I hope to retain both—if promises and assurances go for anything, I shall retain both. For thirty-five years' the *Freethinker* flag has been kept bravely flying in spite of all that could be done against it. This journal has never compromised on any question of principle, it has never feared to speak out because it might offend a friend or create an enemy. It has been free from cant and as immune to prejudice as it is possible for a paper to be that is conducted by human beings. So far as I am concerned it will continue on the same lines as hitherto, provided its friends continue their support. I hope to be able to report in a year's time that the old flag is flying as bravely as ever, and with a greater certainty than ever of victory over the forces of reaction and superstition.

C. COHEN.

### Sugar Plums.

With reference to the G. W. Foote Memorial Meeting, mentioned in our last issue, we can only state at the time of going to press that the Queen's (Minor) Hall has been engaged for the afternoon of December 5. An attempt is being made to get as representative a list of speakers as is possible. We hope to announce their names next week.

By the time this issue is in our readers' hands, the portrait of Mr. Foote, referred to in our issue of a fortnight ago, will be quite ready. The portrait is a really striking one, and taken less than eighteen months before his death. It measures 10 inches by 7, and is printed on art paper mounted on a toned card. It has in addition a facsimile of Mr. Foote's autograph. The price of the portrait is One Shilling, postage threepence. As we anticipate a great demand for this portrait, orders will be discharged in rotation. Our readers will understand therefore any delay that may take place.

The Birmingham Town Hall has been booked for two lectures by Mr. Cohen on November 28. The seating capacity of the Town Hall is large, and we hope that the local saints will do their best to fill it. It will be a good opportunity for introducing Christians to the movement.

Debates between Christians and Freethinkers are not common nowadays, and Birmingham friends will be the more pleased to know that one has been arranged between Mr. G. R. Samways, Editor of the *Birmingham Weekly Mercury*, and Mr. E. Clifford Williams. The subject for discussion is "Is There a God?" and the debate will take place under the auspices of the Birmingham Branch of the N. S. S., at the King's Hall, Corporation-street, to-day (Nov. 14), at 7 p.m. Mr. Williams represents the Birmingham Branch in this discussion, and from what we know of him, we feel that the Freethought side will be in safe hands.

Mr. J. T. Lloyd lectures before the Humanitarian Society, Kingston-on-Thames, to-day (Nov. 14). The lecture will be delivered in the Fife Hall, Fife-road, and commences at 7 o'clock. West London Freethinkers will please note, and will doubtless give Mr. Lloyd the audience he deserves.

Sir W. W. Strickland writes that he "heard with sincere regret of the death of G. W. Foote, so long editor of the *Freethinker*, and indefatigable champion of the cause of Atheism, sanity, and freedom."

The New Era Union, Abertillery, sends us a resolution expressing its sense of the loss sustained by Freethought in the death of G. W. Foote.

The following is taken from the *Licensed Vehicle Trades Record* :—

"All true lovers of freedom will deeply regret the demise of Mr. G. W. Foote, who did not shrink on several occasions from suffering imprisonment for the principles he held so dear. It is a matter for congratulation that he lived long enough to see his teachings on the sure if slow road to success. The ignorant bigots who believe in imprisonment for blasphemy are gradually disappearing; they cannot bear their different religions criticised, because they are cunning enough to know the truth would be fatal to their myths of the dark ages. Mr. Foote was a stirring writer and brilliant lecturer, and was fortunate enough to possess one of Nature's sweetest gifts, a sense of humor."

It is not correct to say that Mr. Foote suffered imprisonment on "several occasions." It was once only, but that was for twelve months, and was not likely to be forgotten by either him or his friends.

Mr. Andrew Millar, whose name appears so frequently in these columns, contributes a very fine appreciation of Mr. G. W. Foote to the *Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald*.

In Mr. Moss's excellent sketch of William Platt Ball there is one incident connected with the scientific side of his work that is worth recording. Mr. Ball's book on *Are the Effects of Use and Disuse Inherited?* is a capital piece of work, and exhibits a closeness and carefulness of reasoning that is far from common. Mr. Ball's point of view was that the question, if answered, would have to be in the negative; and this brought him into conflict with the views held on this point by Herbert Spencer. There were numerous other anti-Spencerians in the field at the time Mr. Ball's book was written, and to a few of these Spencer replied in the pages of, I think, the *Nineteenth Century*. It is noteworthy that Mr. Ball was among the few that Spencer thought called for a reply. And to be thought worthy of that honor by Herbert Spencer was a compliment indeed. Although ill-health has prevented Mr. Ball writing much of late years, his interest in the *Freethinker* and in Freethought is as keen as ever, and a selection of useful newspaper cuttings is received by us with unfailing regularity.

The *Truthseeker* (New York) reprints Mr. Cohen's article, "A Parson's Questions," from our issue of September 26, with acknowledgment.

We are glad a new edition—enlarged and revised—of Mr. H. S. Salt's *Animals' Rights Considered in Relation to Human Progress*. The book has had the honor of translation into a number of European languages—at which we are not surprised, for it contains a sane, temperate, closely reasoned plea for kindness to animals on grounds that should appeal to all. The book is quite free from "sentimentality," and those who associate this particular form of propaganda with cranks, faddists, and an unscientific temperament, would do well to read Mr. Salt's treatise. It should act as a corrective to that view of the movement. For ourselves, we are convinced that Mr. Salt's main contention that the question of "Rights of Animals" is an important aspect of the social question as a whole, is absolutely sound. Callousness and cruelty must have its reactive influence on human conduct, and this is a truth that our educationalists and reformers generally would do well to recognise. The book is published by Messrs. G. Bell & Sons at 2s. 6d.

## Famous Freethinkers I Have Known.—XI.

WILLIAM PLATT BALL.

STRICTLY speaking, as some of the Freethinkers I have been writing about are still in the land of the living, and I meet them on rare occasions, it would be more correct to have the headline in these articles altered to "Famous Freethinkers I Have Met." This would, of course, include those who are still alive as well as those who have gone over to the majority. But since I chose the title some time ago, and eight of the eleven Freethinkers I have written about are dead, I do not propose to change the headline at present. I will, however, state whether the Freethinker I am writing about is still alive, so that their friends may know that I am not writing an obituary notice.

Mr. William Platt Ball, the subject of this article, I am glad to say, is alive and well. Although over seventy years of age, he is in full possession of all his faculties, and can write as clearly and forcibly to-day as he did thirty-five years ago, when he was a regular contributor to the *Freethinker* and other Freethought publications.

I first met Mr. Ball at the office of the *Freethinker* when it was at Clerkenwell Green, about thirty years ago. We became very friendly, and I visited him once or twice at his house near Victoria Park, and in various talks we had he soon convinced me that he was a profound thinker and had a fine grasp of all the problems in dispute between the Christian and the Freethinker.

Before he wrote for the *Freethinker*, I remember his splendid articles in the *National Reformer* on "Bible Lessons in Board Schools," in which he gave some searching criticisms of the old Biblical stories, that every good Christian was expected to believe thirty years ago. Many Christians acknowledge that they do not feel called upon to believe in such stories to-day; but this change of view has been brought about mainly by the persistent way in which Freethinkers have examined these stories, subjecting them to scathing criticism and ridicule, until every sensible person began to feel that such stories were no longer worthy of belief.

Mr. W. P. Ball, who was born at Birmingham on November 28, 1844, has had a very extraordinary and interesting career. His parents came from Warwickshire and settled in London when Mr. Ball was quite an infant, and he spent many of the early years of his life in Hackney, not far from London Fields, which, in those days, was a fine, grassy, open space where children pursued butterflies and made chains of dandelions and daises.

From the age of ten to fourteen, he went to the Birckback School in Cambridge Road. No religious instruction was given at this school. The only remarks on the subject that Mr. Ball can recall were that "man was a religious animal," and that "some people regarded the story of Adam and Eve as a legend." When young Ball left this school he became pupil teacher at a Church of England School near Curtain Road, where he remained four years. Here he acquired a superabundance of religious knowledge, which was further increased during the two years he was at Highbury Training College. While at this institution he regarded himself as a sincere Christian, and duly attended communion.

During the second year, he ceased to take part in this observance, with the result that he was called before the Reverend Principal and had to acknowledge that he had grave doubts concerning the truth of the Christian religion. These doubts, however, were partly removed for a time by one of the masters, and young Ball succeeded in getting appointed as assistant master at a school in London, and subsequently at another in Kenilworth. But the doubts came into his mind again and grew and strengthened until they ceased to be doubts, and became certainties, so that he could not bring his mind to teaching the boys' the Catechism, thus he put an end to this

unsatisfactory state of affairs by resigning his position and quitting the scholastic profession altogether.

In 1866 he matriculated at London University. After this, young Ball entered the service of Messrs. Brook and Co., the Crystal Palace pyrotechnists. When he had thoroughly mastered the trade he became head pyrotechnist to the Sultan of Turkey, and with the help of Turkish soldiers carried out displays near the Dolma-Baghtcheh Palace, usually from a hugh raft on the Bosphorus. During one of these displays Mr. Ball narrowly escaped death by the bursting of a twelve-inch mortar he was firing. The next morning he was instructed to attend the Palace, and received the Star of the Order of Medjidieh. His escape was regarded as perfectly providential.

Providence probably preserved him in order that he might write articles for the *Freethinker* and otherwise promote the cause of Freethought. When he returned to England he became a builder's clerk for a while, and later he gained a livelihood as assistant rate-collector.

Ultimately, he was drawn into the Freethought movement by the brave stand made for Neo-Malthusianism by Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant; and by constant reading and thinking he became a convinced Atheist. Then he began to write the articles I have referred to in the *National Reformer*, and soon after the Blasphemy Trial he joined the staff of the *Freethinker*, and for five years wrote regularly for this journal. Mr. Ball tells me that when he reflects, he is bound to admit that "the pleasantest portions of his life have been the year or more he spent in Turkey on his first visit, and the five years he was on the staff of the *Freethinker* in close and constant association with Mr. Foote and Mr. Wheeler, with neither of whom did he ever have an unpleasant word."

During the last few weeks I have been looking through several old volumes of the *Freethinker*, and I find that in 1885 Mr. Ball contributed no less than twenty-four articles and six poems. Some of these articles and poems are well worth reprinting. For example, the poem called "The Bandit's Prayer," and another called "The Bravo's Hymn," are excellent pieces of work in their way, and "The Bank Director's Lamentations" is also extremely clever and interesting. Mr. Ball, like Mr. Foote and Mr. Wheeler, was very good at titles for articles. Here are a few:—"Gordon's Religion." "Was Jesus Consistent?" "God's Complexion." "Jesus as a Faith Healer." "Christian Cannibalism." "The Devil's Names."

In addition to writing for the *Freethinker*, Mr. Ball occasionally contributed to *Progress*, and sometimes he managed to get an article in the *Weekly Dispatch* or the *Weekly Times*, advocating Evolutional Malthusianism or criticising Socialism as formulated by some of its leading exponents. He also published a pamphlet on Mrs. Besant's "Socialism," which very much disturbed that lady's peace of mind, which she considered to be too personal and bitter as emanating from the pen of a Freethinker and former colleague. For myself, I do not think that Mr. Ball meant to be offensive in the least; but he thought that some of the teachings of Socialism were mischievous in the extreme, and he did not hesitate to say so.

Unquestionably, Mr. Ball possesses a scientific order of mind; he pursues his studies in a very orderly and precise manner, and arrives at conclusions by strictly logical methods. His work on *Are the Effects of Use and Disuse Inherited?* show him to be a very profound thinker as well as a diligent student of science. This work, which was published by Macmillan's, forms one of their "Nature Series." He has also written a work on *Human Evolution*, including *The Evolution of the Races and Future Evolution*, but these will require further revision before they can be submitted to a publisher.

Mr. Ball was always a great admirer of Charles Bradlaugh, and took a keen interest in his work. He also thought a good deal of Mrs. Besant until she

strayed into the paths of Socialism and allowed herself, as he says, "to be deluded by the frauds and superstitions of Theosophy."

So far as I know, Mr. Ball has never tried his hand at lecturing. Although a trained teacher of science and music (Tonic Sol-fa) he has never had any ambition to figure on the platform, though I have seen him at lectures by Mr. Foote, and sometimes when I have been speaking in Victoria Park, Mr. Ball has done me the honor of listening to my address.

Like most Freethinkers who came into the movement in the early seventies, Mr. Ball found a study of Bishop Colenso's Examination of the Pentateuch and of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species, and Descent of Man most helpful in convincing himself and others of the absurdity of the teachings of the Bible on the origin of the world and man, and the truth of evolution.

Mr. Ball is an omnivorous reader, and his favorite authors are Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thackeray, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Sir Walter Scott, etc. He also thinks most highly of Emerson's Essays. Thomas Carlyle was a great favorite with him as a young man, as also was Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, but of late years he has devoted himself more to the study of science and its bearing on the great doctrine of evolution. Without question Mr. Ball has done very useful service for Freethought. He has helped to emancipate the minds of thousands from the curse of superstition, and to point the sure path to truth and human progress, thereby earning the gratitude of those who sought in his writings the light and guidance which have made them free.

ARTHUR B. MOSS

### My Recollections of G. W. Foote.

MY recollections of Mr. Foote go back just about forty years, when he, a young man, came from time to time to my father's house, and I, a boy, used to listen to the conversation with interest, but not complete agreement, for in those days I was an earnest Unitarian. I was the other day looking at some letters from Mr. Foote to my father, dated 1875-76, concerning ways and means for starting and continuing the *Secularist*. As I grew older and began working with the Leicester Secular Society the friendship with Mr. Foote naturally grew closer, and when I married and had a home of my own (nearly thirty years ago now), he almost always stayed with me when he came to Leicester. Many times, after a Sunday lecture, we have sat until the small hours of Monday morning discussing all sorts of things, especially the progress of Secularism and Freethought. We by no means always agreed. Perhaps in the lecture he had just given (always able, eloquent, admirable in form, and powerful in argument) there was some passage a little more sarcastic or a little more blunt than I thought wise. We could always discuss these small differences in a friendly way, and I never found that he resented direct opposition when we had it out face to face. There has seldom been a man in our movement who could write better or more forcible English, or who could speak in a way that so quickly carried his audience with him, or whose lectures gave such complete satisfaction in argument, phrasing, voice, and gesture. Both writing and speaking showed passionate yet reasoned conviction and never-ceasing devotion to Freethought.

When I look back over the years and think of the many vicissitudes of our movement—the experiments, the successes, the failures, the ups and downs, the disagreements and reconciliations, which must come into any movement which demands individual thought and draws to itself men and women of strong and unconventional opinions, I am glad to remember that through it all Mr. Foote and I kept our friendship untouched. Also I am glad to re-

member two things which must have added brightness to the last days of Mr. Foote. First, the legal judgments which showed how absolutely right he was in his conviction that the position of "the Secular Society, Limited," was unassailable. Mr. Foote's founding of "the Secular Society, Limited," is one of the greatest successes in the whole history of Secularism. Secondly, I am delighted that in connection with these judgments Mr. Foote had the pleasure of gladly acknowledging the whole-hearted congratulations of the Rationalist Press Association and the *Literary Guide*.

It seems difficult to think of our movement without G. W. Foote in it. We can none of us forget his great work. When the new generations arise, to whom his name may be less familiar, they will have greater freedom because of the work that he did.

SYDNEY A. GIMSON.

### Correspondence.

#### CHRISTIANITY IN THE TRENCHES.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I am "one of the Army," and have just arrived home wounded for a short period of leave.

I have received my copy of the *Freethinker* regularly every week since I went to France. It was a great treat to me, and regularly passed through many hands.

The news of the death of G. W. Foote is a shock to me. He knew my father years ago, and my father loved him.

I come of a freethinking family and, as a Freethinker, I have thought that perhaps a few first-hand impressions from the Front might be of interest to you. I am forbidden by the rules of the service from publishing any opinions upon the strategy or conduct of the War, so shall not touch upon that dangerous side of things.

In the first place, I should like to emphasise the fact, apparently obscure to many Christians, that love of country and high devotion to her interests are not virtues found only in the Christian's breast. I know of many Atheists, just as far advanced as myself, serving in the Trenches. I know of many who have "gone down" in blood and pain. Two of my brothers have lately been killed—Atheists, both of them, and bold, splendid soldiers. Two finer fellows never lived. They were perfect husbands, fine fathers, and good citizens. Their Freethought never wavered. The "dark beyond" contained no terrors for their clear minds and well-balanced imaginations. We corresponded regularly, and exchanged our opinions as the bloody work went on day by day.

Outside my family I know of many others. A few casual Agnostics I have perhaps brought over to a more active line of thought.

As a result of the keenest observation, I am satisfied that even to the believer, religion is of no value or support to the soldier in war.

I have passed through many trying scenes—nerve-racking bombardments, beating back enemy attacks, helping in our own attacks, the deadly gas cloud, and the soul-trying routine of—day after day, week after week—trench warfare. Through it all I see no trace of any religion. It is all in the background, and very much so at that. I've watched the men—all sects—Christians, Jews, Atheists, and the great number of "casuals." I've watched and studied them as a student of human nature. Parsons and others have claimed that the War and its hardships have brought out the religion of the soldier. I give it the direct lie. I know that in actual fact the soldier, when at his task in this bloodiest of wars, has no time for God and religion. A clean rifle, well-fitting bayonet, keen eye, and steady nerve—these are the necessary assets. The German gives us no time for psalm-singing, and we in our turn ask for none and give none.

But there lives in peace, away behind the firing-line, the Army Chaplains. They are all sleek, comfortable, well paid, and well clothed. They share none of the dangers or hardships of the men. I do not begrudge them their good luck, but my point is that they are out of all touch with the actual life and need of the fighting soldier. A regiment comes back from a tour of duty in the Trenches to a point a few miles behind the firing-line, to their billets, for a "rest." It is here the Army Chaplain appears. Sunday comes, and with it a compulsory Church Service. The men hate it—loathe it. Their minds and brains are tired and sickened with the past few weeks awful trench life, and here they are compelled to listen to the awful stuff that the Army Chaplain only seems capable of. I am too good a soldier, I hope, to lift my voice against the discipline of the Army, but I look

on the thing as something outside the realm of discipline. It may be said that I speak from only one point of view, and that the majority of the men enjoy the Church Service. I know better. In my own brigade a few weeks ago, owing to the ground accommodation being limited, an order appeared making the Church Service Parade, in billets, a voluntary one—result, no attendance. From my own regiment certainly not a single soldier paraded. So it is now compulsory again.

But, really, the English (I mean British) soldier is a splendid chap. It is all honor to command him. We must win the War. I am sure of it. Nothing seems to daunt the wonderful cheerfulness of "Tommy." If you can find room I should like to tell you one or two instances of his wonderful humor in the Trenches. I vouch for them as facts. One case, a regiment close to mine, a little while ago. It was a wet and muddy day in the Trenches. The Germans were giving us more than the usual hail of "Jack Johnsons." A lieutenant and a sergeant stood together in the trench. The situation was indeed a trying one, and a few men were down with ghastly wounds upon them. A "Jack Johnson" came and burst in the earth just in front of the pair and completely buried the sergeant under a mound of wet and heavy mud and earth. The flame and smoke having cleared, the lieutenant stood dazedly looking about him and saw a hand feebly waving from the pile of earth beside him. He grasped it, and with the help of one or two men close by, eventually succeeded in pulling the sergeant out. He was an old soldier. He was smothered in mud—eyes and mouth full. He spluttered and cursed, scraped the mud out of his eyes, and then turned to the officer and said, "Blimey, Sir, if Hell is anything worse than this, here's a muddy soldier going to make a bid for Heaven." Everybody roared. This incident is typical of what occurs all day long in the Trenches. Nothing can break down the spirit of our fellows. We are going to win, and it is this wonderful spirit of our men that is going to make the winning possible. All the Intercession Services in the world wont help us. All the parsons' lip-service and chant and psalm-singing stands for naught to our wonderful fellows. They need none of it. The wonderful cheerfulness that animates them—their patriotism, their sense of duty—these things, all controlled by sound, stern, but just discipline, are going to win the War. In the category of things necessary there is no need for religion. The supply of it far exceeds any demand, and in the hour of final victory and settlement we shall see its advocates clamoring for the major share of recognition.

If you publish this, I hope and trust that any young Freethinkers of military age who have not yet joined, and who read this, will make up their minds at once and get into the ranks. This is not a war engineered by politicians or capitalists. It is a fight for the very existence of our country and the honor of our women. I know from actual personal knowledge what happened to the villages of France when the Germans got in. The human mind cannot conceive things more dreadful than actually happened to tender girls and young women when these swines were let loose among them. The story of the Midianites even loses its horror in comparison with some of the things that happened. I can give detailed stories, but I know you do not want to hear them. But accept it from me as true. I shudder to think of what would happen in England if an invading German Army got here. There is only one way of stopping them. Every available English lad of military age must come forward—now.

Wishing the dear old *Freethinker* every success.

A SOLDIER ATHEIST.

RELIGION AT SEA.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—Having followed a sea-faring life for the past fifteen years, I read with great amusement the alleged sailor's letter to Dr. Horton, which was printed in "Acid Drops." I am a Merchant Jack myself, but have had a lot of experience of H. M. Fleet. I am at present on a transport running for the Grand Fleet, and as for the sailors making the North Sea ring with Hymns of Zion, I can assure Dr. Horton that he is a long way off his course. He would soon alter his opinion if he could only transplant himself for a few days to one of our ships and hear the after-effects of the boatswain's or his mate's roaring voice rousing the seamen to another day's toil. "Rouse out and shine." "Show a leg." "Lash up and stow." Or watch a cooling party on board any ship and hear the snatches of song coming out of the collier's hold, as thick as the coal-dust which rises with it; or, again, hear the remarks that are exchanged when the "Fall In" is sounded for Church Service on the quarter-deck and a few men are behind and the Navy. Religion is practically dead in the Mercantile Marine and the Navy. I can safely state that if Freethinkers had the same religious privilege as men of the other denominations in the Service, two-thirds of the salaries of the un-

wanted *Holy Joes*, or chaplains, would be saved by the nation.

By the annual reports of the Missions to Seamen they would make an outsider of the Merchant Service believe that merchant seamen heartily welcome their religious propazanda. It is only by bribery, in the majority of cases, that they can get the seamen to attend their services. For instance, whilst I was serving on the s.s. *Harberton* (Messrs. W. Cory & Son, Mark-lane, London) and lying at anchor in the Thames, the Mission launch, by name *Wishart the Martyr*, came alongside the ship. The psalm-smiter asked the men to come and hold a little service in the cabin. *Won't keep you long, you know*; and I have a present for each man who will come. Of course, there is always a ready response when there is something to be given for nothing, so he got a good attendance. After the service each man was presented with either socks, muffler, or gloves, and a bundle of tracts and other Gospel trash was sent aboard for the wicked infidel who did not attend—that infidel being myself. And no doubt in the Society's next report the crew of my ship were numbered as fresh converts. I take two copies of the *Freethinker* every week; one I send to my brothers in France, and the other is passed on among my shipmates. I have made five new readers in the last few months, and will further our cause to the best of my ability. Trusting that I have not taken up too much of your valuable time. You can make whatever use you like of this letter. Wishing you and the *Freethinker* every success, I remain at your service.

BOATSWAIN, M. M.

THE CLERGY AND LORD DERBY'S APPEAL.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—I was struck with amazement when I saw from one of your "Acid Drops" in last week's *Freethinker* that the Archbishops of York and Canterbury, and since then, in some other paper, the Presbyterian body, had protested against any of their ministers being left "unstarred." If that protest means anything, it must mean that they refuse to bear their fair share in the death struggle in which we are at present engaged. I note, too, that they are advising their clergy against joining the Colors. One wonders what effect such advice will have on recruiting generally—an ill effect, I fear. A short time ago I noticed that some person of less note than an Archbishop had been prosecuted and heavily fined for using language which tended to prevent enlistment, and, consequently, to injure the Realm. We shall see shortly whether the Defence of the Realm Act is to be applied impartially. I do not think, either, that the clergy can be safely trusted with the appraisalment of the value to the nation of the duties they are at present discharging. Since the commencement of the War, I have never heard anyone so much as mention the clergy in connection with it, let alone assert that their efforts were of any use. It seems to me they are treated as a factor that may safely be left out of the calculation by all responsible for the prosecution of the War. If they are to be allowed to have all their clergy, young and old, fit and unfit, "starred" on the ground that, in their own opinion, they are "rendering the best service which they can offer the nation at this juncture," surely, in fairness, the same excuse ought to be valid for the rest of the community. After such an exhibition of "shirking and slacking" on the part of the clergy, it is to be expected that Lord Northcliffe & Co. will be thirsting for their blood—perhaps.

JOHN ROBINSON.

G. W. F.

WHILE half a world was drunk with blood and lust  
Of blood, we few, who hold man's peace in trust,  
Yesterday laid our warrior in the dust.  
What foolish gods are those who rule the stars  
In blood? Our warrior strove to heal the scars  
Those gods have made: man's brawls and hates and jars.  
Nobler was he than all the souls who pray  
For peace, what time they hasten forth to slay,  
Who bawl for blood in foul Jehovah's way.  
Or right or wrong, what matters it? He gave  
His life for man; though man he might not save;  
His is a nobler tomb than Jesus' grave.  
Christian slays Christian still: the years of peace  
Are fables still. Our warrior found release  
Striving that Christian hate of love might cease.  
So: it is finished. And whatever fate  
Be his, he is no beggar at God's gate  
Who died at war with Christian love of hate.  
He died for man, and when man's race shall dwell  
Careless of heaven, godless, free from hell,  
Our warrior's name shall be man's miracle.

VICTOR B. NEUBURG.

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

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