

THE Freethinker

Founded 1881 by G. W. FOOTE.

Edited by CHAPMAN COHEN.

VOL. XXXV.—No. 52

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1915

PRICE TWOPENCE

France is one torrent of splendid scepticism from Abelard to Anatole France.—G. K. CHESTERTON.

The Fear of Death.

THE Christian view of death owes its origin to the ignorance of primitive man. Natural death is generally believed to signify the separation of the soul from the body, but this conception of it is derived from the ancient custom of regarding death and sleep as identical. The wonderful experiences undergone in dreams gave rise to the belief in the double, the second self, the soul, or the ghost. The conviction was that in dreams the soul left the body, and actually visited the various localities seen, and witnessed or took part in all the phenomena that occurred. Whilst the body lay still and silent in the hut, the soul might be hundreds or thousands of miles away; hunting, fishing, fighting, dancing, or performing feats of strength and skill; but sooner or later it returned, and in due time the sleeper awoke and went about his business as if nothing had happened. When a man died, the first impression would be that he was only asleep. Dead bodies were kept in the huts for weeks, months, and even years, in the expectation that eventually they would awake and once more participate in the affairs of the living. Death was believed to be nothing but profound and prolonged sleep. However long the slumber lasted, all it signified was that the double, the soul, or the spirit, was absent. In other words, death, as we understand it, was utterly inconceivable to primitive man. Death, "morningless and unawakening sleep," was wholly unnatural, and therefore impossible. The next step was to look upon death as a penalty for some misdemeanour during life. This idea is prominently brought forward in most of the myths that once sprang up in the attempt to account for the fact of death. There is our own Garden of Eden legend, for example, in which death is so treated, and which furnishes a minute and interesting description:—

Of man's first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe.

We meet with the same fable everywhere in one form or another. Death was invariably introduced, not as a natural event, but as the consequence of violating some custom or taboo. In Australia a woman was forbidden to go near a certain tree wherein a bat lived. Like Eve she disobeyed, the bat fluttered out, and men began to die. The Ningphoos lost Paradise and became mortal because one of them had the audacity to bathe in water which had been tabooed. In the *Atharva Veda* we read that Yama "first spied the path to the other world," which all men since have taken.

Such is the mythological interpretation of death; half-playful, half-serious, but the central thought is that death has no place in the economy of Nature. It is an event brought about by supernatural power, in punishment of some real or imaginary wrong action. Paul tells us that it entered into the world "through sin." Before Adam fell from his first estate no living thing had ever died; but ever since that

initial catastrophe no living thing has managed to escape death. It is this view of death that has rendered it such a universal object of fear. It is this primitive character attributed to it that has caused mankind to anticipate it with such inexpressible aversion. But, worse luck, the penalty which death is by many supposed to be, does not exhaust itself in the act of dying. Those who die in the Black Books of God are destined not only to bear the penalty of death, but also a far worse punishment afterwards in Hades. Almost every religion of antiquity, except Judaism and Buddhism, had its hell, some execrable pit wherein pain and torture were inflicted without stint. Some eighty years before our era began we find the great poet, Lucretius, in his *On the Nature of Things*, speaking thus:—

Those fears of future torment that distract
Man's total being, with the gloom of death
Tinge all things; nor e'en suffer once the tide
Of present joy to flow serene and pure.

Celsus used to taunt the Christians with the fact that all their doctrines, especially those of rewards and punishments, were stale. "We, too," he said, "believe that the unrighteous shall suffer everlasting punishment." Plutarch also "refers to persons who regarded death as an evil, on account of eternal torments and horrible punishments suffered underground in hell." There is, therefore, very little originality in the Christian doctrine of eternal punishment; although the descriptions of it by the divines have often been of the most repulsive and horrifying character. Take the following sample from a book entitled *Consolations against the Fear of Death*, by Charles Drelincourt, of France—a book which was immensely popular three hundred years ago, both on the continent and in this country:—

Fancy to yourselves a man devoured with worms, burning in hot flames, in continual torments, in whose wounds kindled brimstone is poured without intermission, with boiling lead, and burning pitch; if there be any other pains more sharp and grievous, fancy them also. All this will give us but a light and imperfect image of the state of hell; for all the pangs of the body are nothing in comparison to the horrors, troubles, and incredible griefs that shall for ever rack and torture the damned souls (p. 18).

Here is another:—

All their senses shall share in these horrid torments; they shall be crushed in the wine-press of God's eternal wrath, and they shall feel for ever and ever the strokes of God's vengeance, and of his almighty hand. They shall then learn by experience what a terrible thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God, and how insufferable that fire is that shall consume his enemies. Their eyes shall perceive nothing but the Bottomless Pit, the Devil's image, and the Furies of Hell; their ears shall hear nothing but the horrible outcries and fearful roarings of tormented devils and damned souls. They shall be choked with the noisome smell and fumes of the Bottomless Pit; they shall then drink the very dregs and bottom of God's anger and indignation, and they shall suck the venom of his arrows: Fire and Brimstone shall be the Portion of their Cup (p. 19).

It is very true that the overwhelming majority of present-day preachers no longer believe in such a hell, and are incapable of painting such pictures of it as those supplied by a Drelincourt or a Spurgeon; but they practically all declare that the people who die impenitent shall be punished in the next world,

though they differ as to the duration of their retribution. It is not the mere act of dying, therefore, that is feared, but its consequences. All who die without accepting Christ as their personal Saviour shall abide under the wrath of God, whatever that may mean, the only possible way of preventing the fulfilment of such a doom being through whole-hearted acceptance of the glorious salvation purchased by the God-man on the Cross. Thousands upon thousands of our brave young men have been killed in this terrible War, and many, perhaps the majority, of them entered eternity in an unsaved condition and are now being tormented in hell. The fact that they sacrificed their lives in the service of their country makes no difference, because the sole condition of salvation is faith in Christ's atoning work. Many scores of chaplains are making desperate attempts to induce the soldiers to give their hearts to the blessed Redeemer that they may be delivered from the fear of death. "Life with Christ," says Canon Newbolt, "prepares us for death with Christ. Life here, which is true, prepares us for life beyond death; and there abides with us the everlasting promise—'I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever believeth on me shall never die.'"

Now, we maintain that the Christian doctrine of death is utterly false, though as exploited by the Church it has proved enormously profitable, perhaps the most profitable, of all doctrines. There has been countless money in it. But there is absolutely no evidence of its truth beyond the bare word of the priest. Science has succeeded in actually demonstrating that death is in no sense the outcome of sin, but the perfectly natural end of individual existence, which we share with all other living things. Canon Newbolt is as ignorant as ourselves of any life beyond death. When he assures his hearers that, if they believe in Christ and sit loosely to the present life, they shall at death "emigrate to a happier and better place," he is feeding them with mere fables and disuading them from making the most and best of the only life concerning which they possess any knowledge. So far as we know, death is the end of all for the individual, and neither pope nor archbishop can prove that it is not; but while it destroys the individual, it serves the race. Were there no death the race would of necessity perish. As Meredith says, "we go that others may come, and better if we rear them in the right way." And surely if our going serves the race we should train ourselves to contemplate the event with serene submission. There is nothing whatever to justify fear. We ought to live as long and as wisely as we can, and when the end approaches learn to greet it with a cheer.

A wind sways the pines,
And below
Not a breath of cold air;
Still as the mosses that glow
On the flooring and over the lines
Of the roots here and there
The pine-tree drops its dead;
They are quiet as under the sea.
Overhead, overhead
Rushes life in a race
As the clouds the clouds chase;
And we go,
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,
Even we,
Even so.

J. T. LLOYD.

Christianity and Peace.

TRADITIONALLY, Christmastide is a season of goodwill and peaceful jollity. And in this respect tradition is much nearer the truth than is often the case. Writing in the second century, the wise and witty Lucian makes the priest of Cronos laid down the following rules for the Saturnalia:—

All business, be it public or private, is forbidden during the feast days, save such as tends to sport and

solace and delight. Let none follow their avocation save cooks and bakers.

All men shall be equal, slave and free, rich and poor, one with another.

Anger, resentment, threats, are contrary to law.

No discourse shall be either composed or delivered, except it be witty and lusty, conducing to mirth and jollity.

And Lucian was only putting into the mouth of the priest of Saturn sentiments that had been illustrated in practice long before he was born.

Long before Christianity was heard of, and amongst people who knew nothing of Christianity for centuries after it, appeared the time of the year that we call Christmas—associated with feasting and fun and jollity. In this direction Christianity had nothing to give the world. The burden of its preaching was the misery of existence, not the joy of life. Its figurehead was a Man of Sorrows, its message one of preparation for death and for what lay beyond the grave. What Christianity did was to eventually take over these customs as it took over many others, and add a claim of a very peculiar character. It claimed that the birth of the mythical Christ inaugurated a new era in the history of mankind—an era of peace, love, and brotherhood. And of all the shams that besprinkle the world of make-believe, this is the greatest. It is given the lie direct by the whole of Christian history. Is it true that peace has been preached. But while the Christian Churches have preached peace they have encouraged war. They have talked largely of love and brotherhood, while they have helped to create and maintain conditions which make real brotherhood a practical impossibility.

At present the world is in the throes of the greatest and bloodiest War in human history. And it is entirely a Christian War. All the combatants—with the exception of Turkey, which has been dragged in by Christian intrigue—are Christians. All of them appeal to the same God to witness the justice of their cause and the purity of their motives. All of them pray to the same God for victory, and thank him for his favour when good fortune enables them to kill a number of their fellow-believers in Christ. The peace of the world has not been broken, and could not have been broken by non-Christians. China is too unwarike, Japan is too far away, Turkey is too powerless for that. The quarrel is wholly between Christians. The causes from which the War has sprung—the hatreds, the jealousies, the cupidities, the distrusts—have all originated and developed amongst Christians. The blood-soaked battlefields of Europe enforce the lesson of how little Christianity has done, or is capable of doing, to encourage the growth of a genuine universal peace.

The Christian Church became the heir of the Old Roman Empire. It ruled over the same territory, but without either the old Roman dignity or justice. And for long it wielded a power far more despotic and terrifying than any of the Cæsars. And with what result? Warfare instead of being occasional and local, became almost constant and universal. The soldier was honoured amongst the Old Romans, with the Christian Church he became the symbol of the cross and the power of the faith. Says Hallam in a very striking passage:—

Writers of the Middle Ages compare the knightly to the priestly character in an elaborate parallel, and the investiture of the one was supposed to be analogous to the other. The ceremonies upon this occasion were almost wholly religious. The candidate passed nights in prayer among priests in a church; he received the sacraments, he entered into a bath, and was clad with a white robe, in allusion to the supposed purification of his life; his sword was solemnly blessed; everything, in short, was contrived to identify his new condition with the defence of religion.

The Romans had honoured the soldier, so far as he was necessary to the protection of the State. But the road was clear for the developing ethical sense of mankind to disapprove and even condemn the use of brute force. Between this condemnation and the

profession of arms the Christian Church interposed the sanction of religion. The soldier became a warrior of the Church, and how could anyone condemn what the Church blessed? Under the Roman rule the *Pax Romana* was a very real thing. Black and white alike found the title of free citizen open; and the citizen might travel from Edinburgh to Babylon, secure under the protection of Roman law. Four hundred thousand soldiers, as Gibbon tells us, could maintain peace over the area now covered by the Great Powers. And two thousand years later we find between twenty and thirty millions engaged in actual warfare, while at other times no less than four millions are required to keep the peace. So much for the peaceful tendencies of fifteen centuries of Christian rule.

The peaceful proclivities of Christianity is pure myth. Nothing of the kind ever existed. In nearly all the wars that have afflicted modern Europe, religion has played some part, and often an important part, and it has never failed to aggravate the existing causes of hostility. And the more prominent the religious factor, the more brutal and relentless the warfare. In this respect the Crusades stand out for all time as an example of the degree to which the naturally brutal side of human nature may be encouraged by religious feeling. In motive and object, these wars were religious. The soldiers fell down and wept on their first sight of the Holy City, and when the city was taken, "the brains of young children were dashed out against the walls, infants were thrown over the battlements, every woman that could be seized was violated, men were roasted at fires, the Jews were driven into their synagogues and there burnt, a massacre of nearly 70,000 took place, and the Pope's legate was seen partaking in the triumph."

Why should any reasonable person expect that mere religious belief would ever lay the foundations of peace? As a matter of fact, there is nothing about which men quarrel and divide more than about religion. This is so generally recognized, even by Christians themselves, that in thousands of clubs and institutes and societies up and down the country, discussions on religion are carefully excluded. They are forced to recognize that, while men may differ on questions of art, or science, or literature, or even politics, and yet retain each other's friendship and esteem, the one thing which will not permit friendly discussion is religion. In other directions, the social bond is strong enough to stand the jar of differing opinions. In connection with religion, even the deep-lying social bond is often unable to stand the strain.

It is the tendency of social life to unite; it is the tendency of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular, to divide. In the present War, we have seen people of all classes and opinions responding to the call for military service. They have responded because the call was a social one, and appealed to their social consciousness; and before that appeal other differences faded away. But suppose the call had been in the name of religion? At once we should have had the nation split up into a number of warring sects, each one ready to sacrifice everything to the gratification of sectarian feelings. Even at the seat of war there is the same lesson. For a common social purpose men of all opinions will share the same dangers, will hold their food, their clothing, their bed, in common. But they still remain separated in religion. And the lesson of the moment is the lesson of history. If ever universal peace is to become an accomplished fact, it will not be because of increased religious belief. Peace can come but in one way, and that is by the growth of enlightenment under the coercive sway of human sympathy.

C. COHEN.

The Most-Read Novelist.

I'll say of it
It tutors Nature, artificial strife
Lives in these touches, livelier than life.

—SHAKESPEARE, *Timon of Athens*.

Old Delabole, by Eden Phillpotts. Heinemann. 6s.

MR EDEN PHILLPOTTS is the best-loved contemporary novelist. The feeling for him among his numerous admirers is like that of our forefathers for Sir Walter Scott, or like that of our fathers for Charles Dickens. There is admiration in it, gratitude, pride, and above all, an immense and intimate tenderness of affection. To few writers is it given to win a sentiment of this quality. Great generals, like Napoleon or Grant, sometimes win this affectionate regard, but in Mr. Phillpotts' case it is a compound of what Dickens enjoyed in England half a century ago, and of what Lord Kitchener enjoys to-day. The popularity of politicians is a poor and flickering rushlight by the side of this full flame of personal affection.

It has gone out to Mr. Phillpotts, not only for what he has written, for the clean, irresistible humour and his unflinching command of the primal feelings, for his tenderness to read the hearts of boy and man and woman, but for his brave dashes against tyranny in every form and shape. He stands for the greatness of letters in these sad days.

In the West Country, it is said, they call Mr. Phillpotts, "him what puts we into books." And so he does—the very life. There is no one who writes of peasant life with more insight, more power, more absolute and perfect comprehension. He never looks down at the country folk and pat them on the head, but, with level gaze, straight into their eyes—straighter still into their hearts. The angel of Justice could hardly know them better; the angel of Mercy could hardly deal with them more generously and tenderly.

Mr. Phillpotts' rustic men and women are charming, so are his country scenes. His power of sublimating his gifts of observation is marvellous. The country people of other writers are often stagey and artificial; his rustic folk are at once natural and romantic. His books would be capital reading even if there were no story in them—the talk of men and women would satisfy any reasonable mind.

On page after page brilliant touches of rustic wisdom strike the reader, as for instance:—

A place with empty church and empty pubs stands in the very forefront of progress.

We hide ourselves behind education.

Brains have got to be more and more the measure of men.

Christianity is a dead thing in London.

The first and greatest thing for us human creatures is to keep our self-respect.

Religion's a station off the main line, and mighty few passengers call there nowadays.

Surprise has followed surprise in Mr. Phillpotts' literary career. Years ago he came to the topmost place as a writer of brilliant short stories, which sold the magazines in which they appeared like hot-cross buns. Then his powerful novels of life and character marked him as a novelist to be reckoned with. Later, he turned to play-writing and to poetry, achieving marked success in each direction. Then we were astonished to find our favourite author had written a shelf-full of books, which represented a prose-epic of the West Country. The advance in art, too, is noticeable. The books seem to show how the realities of life caught the writer more and more in their grip, gradually making him shed the more fanciful and emotional outlook to come with masterly touch to the heart of life itself.

Brunel's Tower marked the latest stage, and was a wonderful panorama of the Potteries, and of the men and women engaged in the industry. His new book, *Old Delabole*, is an even finer work. The whole atmosphere of the countryside is limned by the hand of a master-artist, and human nature is portrayed as lovingly as nature. The rustics, indeed, are realistic

A baby, aged seven months, and a little girl were burnt to death in London recently. Apparently the eagle eye of Providence can only watch the fall of sparrows.

in the extreme, and the Doric aphorisms are as appetizing as the never-to-be-forgotten talk of Shakespeare's clowns. There are love affairs of many kinds in the book, and rarely has the subjective and objective attitude of men and women in sex-matters been more truthfully suggested than in these delightful pages.

The novel contains living and lovable creations. It reminds us of those aspirations towards happiness which youth exhales as it looks at beauty in the sky, in gardens and meadows, and in the face of woman. The story of the love of Edith Retallack by Wesley Bake and Tom Hawkey is told with potent art. Mr. Phillpotts gives us a set of other characters who excite genuine sympathy. Leave must not be taken of the book without calling attention to the inherent intellectuality. The author writes of many things, and he makes them all interesting. Mr. Phillpotts has a mind that plays round life with extraordinary brilliancy. The novel is a great and splendid piece of art that is, so far, the author's best work, and it is characteristic of the author that he has dedicated it to his elder brother in art, "To Thomas Hardy, in honour of his unapproachable art, and with affection for his most approachable self." This is a splendid tribute worthily expressed.

MINNERMUS.

The Evolution of Sea Power.—III.

(Concluded from p. 806.)

THE Portuguese were soon ousted from the best commercial centres in the East by the more vigorous Hollanders and English. Then the two interlopers began to squabble among themselves for the possession of the Oriental trade. Despite many causes for complaint on both sides, an open conflict was averted until the crown of England passed from the feeble head of Charles I. The victorious Commonwealth was in no mood to tolerate nonsense, and its aggressive activity was heralded by an order prohibiting the customary trading of foreign ships with England's American colonies. This was followed up by the application of the Navigation Laws, which not only aimed at a monopoly of commercial relations with her oversea possessions, but demanded that imports from foreign countries should be shipped only in vessels of English origin and belonging to English shipowners, or built and owned by the foreign State which exported the goods to England. The main object of these enactments was to promote home shipping, and to make England the great emporium of the world. Whether these laws were as wise as Adam Smith thought them, and he regarded them as of such unspeakable importance, that had they been specially designed by Providence they could not have proved more fruitful to the State that adopted them; in any case, their operation was coincident with an immense expansion of English industry and commerce. The Dutch were driven to the less contested trade regions of the Baltic and the Mediterranean, where for a time they held their own.

So far France had played but a negligible part in the struggle for sea dominion. But as her monarchy became more centralised, it grew apparent that a country with a seaboard so splendid might worthily command a prominent position as a maritime power. The famous Cardinal Richelieu, the brainy minister of Louis XIII. of France, prepared the foundations of that country's fleet. The semi-independent provincial admiralities were either bought or abolished; a central authority was established, and Richelieu placed himself at its head. One of the Cardinal's ambitions was to lessen the naval influence of Spain in the Mediterranean, as well as in more northern waters. Many were his initial mishaps, but Richelieu was determined to secure his objective, and with the assistance of Holland, he at last created a French Navy.

On the Cardinal's death a period of reaction set in, and the tottering State of Spain gave little cause for alarm. At the moment, France did not suffer from her failure to further the efforts of the departed statesman. The Iberian country was internally troubled. Portugal and Catalonia both rose against Spain, and although the revolt of the latter was suppressed, little Portugal gained her independence, and materially weakened Spain as an ocean power.

The great Oliver had noted the importance of Gibraltar as a fortification, and Jamaica came into the possession of England as a result of Cromwell's conflict with Spain. The Protector's witty but unworthy successor, Charles II., on his marriage with the Portuguese princess, Catherine of Braganza, was presented with Tangier in Africa and with the island of Bombay as a wedding gift. Tangier was returned as a too troublesome present, but Bombay was placed under the shrewd control of the East India Company. As England and Portugal drew together, the breach between France and Spain was healed. Louis XIV. now graced the French throne. The able, if avaricious, officials trained in the schools of Richelieu and Mazarin, proud and insolent in the military prowess of France, were bent on making that fair country a great commercial and manufacturing State, endowed with rich and valuable colonial possessions. France and England were simultaneously obsessed with the same ambitious dream of world domination, and were destined to become more dangerous neighbours on that very account.

The impecunious Charles II. was kept in leading strings by the influences of French gold, and Louis XIV.'s minister, Colbert, evolved a tariff system which was designed to embarrass and ultimately destroy the carrying, export, and fishing industries of Holland. French policy was directed towards the annexation of the Northern Netherlands, and England then, as now, could not prudently permit an ambitious and powerful State to possess that important territory. But, despite this palpable verity, an English expedition was despatched by Charles II. in 1672 to co-operate with the French forces in an attack on Holland. The truculent policy of the French Crown precipitated a European War, and Louis XIV. was compelled to encounter a league composed of Spain, the Empire, and the princes of Germany.

Although Charles II. supported France, English sentiment was hostile to the rapacious plans of the French monarchy. This hostility became so strong that Louis was eventually driven to surrender the lands he had taken from the Dutch, as well as to relinquish the protective arrangements of Colbert. When not engaged in seconding the French, the English remained neutral until the fall of the Stuarts and the crowning of a Dutch prince as William III. of England. With the Revolution of 1688 it was no longer possible to bribe the British Crown in the interests of France, and war was declared against that country in 1689.

The assumption of hostilities in 1689 had sanguinary consequences to the two nations concerned. For a period of 126 years the antagonistic States were in conflict. From 1689 to 1814 France and England were never really at peace. When not engaged in fighting, the two peoples were preparing for the resumption of war. With the Parliamentary Union with Scotland in 1707, England became Great Britain. The island races or, in any case, their rulers supported the continental foes of France, and strove with all their might to secure supremacy on the waves. This prolonged combat with our Gallic neighbours embraced the war of the Augsburg League, which was intended to frustrate the attempt of Louis XIV. to establish a hegemony in Europe. Then came the long war of the Spanish Succession, from 1702 to 1713, when the combat was suspended by the Treaty of Utrecht. This was followed by a war which lasted from 1789 to the signing of the Peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748. The seven years' war succeeded; there was the struggle for American Independence, in which France and England, Spain and Holland all

participated. Then dawned the Revolutionary War, which began in 1793, and was patched up by the Peace of Amiens in 1802, but only ended in 1814. Even then, the return of Bonaparte to France brought about further fighting, which was finished on the historic field of Waterloo in 1815. Our armed conflict with the United States—let us hope the last—raged from 1812 to 1814, and it was not remotely associated with the greater European struggle of the same period.

In 1689 the French Fleet was as large as ours, and possibly better organized. But the French seaman was no match for the English sailor. French commerce in the Levant was considerable, and possessed prospects of further development. Recruited from her coast-dwellers, the tars of France were to the fore in the Newfoundland seas, and her commerce with the American mainland and the West Indies flourished. France had established excellent colonies in Northern America, and her East India Company had every prospect of success.

Holland was past her prime, and the most formidable opponent of French maritime ascendancy was England. The English had obtained possession of the Atlantic shores from Maine to the frontiers of Florida, and they secured Newfoundland. The Dutch city of New Amsterdam had fallen to England, and was renamed New York, and her influence in the West Indies had increased. Bombay, Madras, and other stations in India had been annexed to the Empire, while English oversea commerce was developed in the North and Baltic Seas, as well as in the Eastern Mediterranean. Meanwhile, the Scandinavian States were stagnant, Venice struggled on, Spain lingered hopelessly in the rear, while the once powerful Hanseatic League had dwindled to a mere relic of its former glory. Geneva was now little more than a name.

Glancing onward from 1689 to 1814, we discover that the island and continental possessions which were Dutch or French at the earlier date, had passed into the hands of the English. And to these conquered regions many territories, never previously under European control, were added to the British Empire. England's naval power and her maritime commerce knew no rival. It is true that the North American colonies had won their independence, but Canada had been wrested from the French.

Louis XIV.'s navy had many fine opportunities, which it never adequately embraced. Its commanders either suffered from indecision or were prepared to act when it was too late. The unspeakable extravagance of Louis and his inordinate passion for war, reduced a naturally rich country to the verge of exhaustion. At the end of his reign Holland had been ruined past recovery through French aggression, while Britain was left without a serious competitor on the sea.

From the war the English learnt the hard truth that it was absolutely imperative that an island people must constantly guard itself against invasion, and that to ensure invulnerability it became essential to exercise unchallenged command over the waters that encircled its coasts. Political and commercial interests alike demanded that no single sovereignty should sway the continent of Europe, or even one European sea. Not merely must an island community be free from risk of invasion, but it must also be at liberty to export and import merchandise if its industrial and commercial efficiency is to be maintained. Moreover, some were wise enough to see that it was not entirely to England's advantage to be too closely concerned in continental strife.

In the early eighteenth century Sweden's maritime importance was humbled to ruin. Russia reaped the largest benefits from her neighbour's downfall. The Swedes were anxious to completely control the Baltic. For a time they nearly succeeded, but their ambition was opposed by the Dutch. The grim contest between Peter the Great of Russia and Charles XII. of Sweden followed, and the numerical superiority of the Moscovite forces triumphed. Sweden lost her Baltic provinces, and her independent existence was menaced.

But while it appeared congenial to British interests that Sweden should not become too powerful, it was contrary to British desires that Russia should dominate the Baltic coasts. England's Fleet was dependent upon the trade in wool, flax, iron, tallow, and other commodities, which an enemy power in possession of the Baltic could easily prohibit. Therefore, in the interests of the balance of power, Sweden was saved from utter ruin, and the Baltic trade was, in consequence, preserved.

England's ambition was to obtain the place which Holland had occupied as the main centre of the world's commerce. She was comparatively free from land encumbrances; her ports stood near the leading markets of Europe, while the wide waters of the Atlantic led her ships to the great Western World. Also, she was better equipped than Holland had ever been for commanding the commerce of the East. In all these, and in other activities, morality was seldom considered. Knavery, cupidity, luck, and cunning were, only too frequently, the premier factors which decided this or that country's temporary triumph in the universal scramble for gain.

The victory of England in the conflicts of the eighteenth century has been very generally attributed to her inflexible enforcement of the Navigation Laws. These sea regulations were undoubtedly advantageous to the power that employed them, but they were one only of the various factors which ministered to her success. Our naval victories were instrumental in making us masters of the sea. Holland was reduced to impotence; France was everywhere beaten; Spain had sunk from bad to worse. Pitt's eloquent orations concerning oceanic dominion not only led the English to regard sea supremacy as the all in all of national greatness, but other peoples were persuaded that maritime influence was indispensable to continental States.

The French proceeded to improve their navy, and Spain concluded that her sea forces needed strengthening. Spain's rulers considered that the overthrow of France would leave their country at the mercy of the dictatorial English, and they drew closer to France in consequence. The preparations of the two Western nations proved inadequate to the task they had set themselves, but their fleets were sufficiently strengthened to cause trouble to Britain when the North American colonies rebelled against the rule of George III.

The New England colonies had long chafed under the exactions and restrictions of the British Crown, and when the revolt came it was not confined to the land. The American sailors fitted out privateers, which ravaged the West Indies, and ultimately swept over the Atlantic. It became imperative to protect our merchant marine from their audacious depredations. These "piracies," however, made little material difference to the English shipping. But the ocean warfare became really serious when France entered into hostilities with England in 1778.

In all Britain's earlier conflicts the enemy States had been forced to centre their attention on military warfare. This circumstance which had proved so favourable to England, was now reversed. England's foes combined against her on the sea while she was sadly incommoded by her land operations. England's naval supremacy enabled her to transport troops to America, but it was powerless to protect the army from the disaster which overwhelmed it at Saratoga. The French saw their opportunity and seized it. The British Admiralty allowed the French Fleet to reach the open ocean, instead of blockading it at the outset of hostilities. Had this been done, some think that neither Spain nor Holland would have joined France. But if the British naval authorities lacked initiative, their opponents were not clever enough to deal the navy a smashing blow. The enemy fleets were concentrated in the Bay of Biscay in 1779 and 1780. The united navies of France and Spain were numerically much superior to the English Fleet. Their ships entered the channel, then faltered, and finally retreated, not daring to risk an invasion.

T. F. PALMER.

"Out of the Mouths of Babes."

I SPENT the early and orthodox part of my career as a teacher in a Church School, and during that time I heard some very curious things said in scripture lessons. The period of religious instruction is the most productive of "howlers," history lesson coming second in this respect. Readers should be warned that the real quaintnesses actually uttered by living children are vastly different from the absurdities served up in the humorous papers, most of the latter being far removed from anything possible to a natural child. The examples given below are not so perfect as those already in print, but are genuine, most of them coming within my own experience, and the remainder vouched for by trustworthy colleagues.

As for the causes of these slips, the majority of which have little point, confusion of mind and the intrinsic difficulties of the subject are mainly accountable, together with the abstract nature of religion, which is foreign to a child, who wants something concrete, tangible, and apparent before it can really apprehend and comprehend. Professional and theological weakness on the part of teachers has some connection. Most of them have little love for the subject. The practice of taking several classes together in scripture, making a big crowd, and of having them say, simultaneously, passages of the Bible, texts, prayers, and hymns, gave rise to frequent misconceptions. Most of these are merely verbal slips, or mistakes caused by confounding like-sounding words.

A little girl went home chanting in a monotone, "Mad horse ran into school." Questioning by her parents could only elicit that it was learnt in Scripture, that they said it altogether, and it was, "Mad horse ran into school." I have examined numerous hymns and texts but can find nothing resembling it.

The second verse of Hymn 538, Ancient and Modern, runs:—

Ah! the doleful change when in
Darkly, subtly enter'd in!

We once detected a lot of boys singing, "Darkly, Suckley, enter'd in!" Suckley being a village about two miles away. Very likely they did it on purpose. "Scrip." is a favourite subject of jest with boys. Many good people would be shocked if they heard the fearsome and wonderful parodies composed on hymns and prayers.

One morning prayer had a line which ran, "Teach us to shun that which is evil." Numbers of the children used to say, "Teach us to show what is evil."

Two lines of verse one, Hymn 222, Ancient and Modern,—

Fling open wide the golden gates,
And let the victors in,

got altered to:—

Fling open wide the playground gates,
And let John Victor in,

when John Victor E— was enrolled in class four

Children are often what religious people call irreverent. Usually, it is pure innocence, though older children are deliberately so. The innocent sort was that of a little girl who ran up to her mother and some other women who were talking together, and pointing skywards shouted, "Hey, look; there's Jesus Christ a-looking at us!" then ran away playing.

One night some little boys were jumping off a wall, waving their arms and shouting, "I'm a ghost!" the others pretending to be frightened. Getting excited, one boy climbed on the wall, gave a mighty spring, and landed amongst the others with the shout of "I'm the Holy Ghost!"

Some others, playing at police, arrested their "prisoners" "in the name of the law," which presently got altered to "in the name of the Lord."

Older boys, age about twelve to fifteen, always swear. Like cigarette smoking, it is a sign of manliness—sort of propitiatory rites to the spirit of adolescence, "Damn" is their favourite word, "Hell"

and "Devil" coming close, and then the names of God, particularly "Christ."

Soon after reading the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard (Matt. xx.), a boy was heard, one frosty morning, to say that "Many be cold, but few frozen." "Many be called, but few chosen" (Matt. xx. 16).

Either simultaneous work, badly said, or a poor ear for sound was responsible for the following: a class was being questioned on the parable of the Good Samaritan, and a little girl stated that "A priest and a fleabite passed by" (Luke x.).

An astonished master was informed that Jesus told the Jews to "Hold a grater to Solomon's ear." "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Luke xi. 31).

The famous verse, Luke ix. 58, has more than once been rendered, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his eggs."

A scripture inspector, examining a very backward class on Noah and the Ark, finally got no answers from them at all. Three times he said, "Tell me the names of some more animals that went into the Ark," then up came a little girl's hand. "Well, my dear?" "Pleath thir, duckth," in the most extreme lisp.

Questions on scripture are prolific of quaint answers. A class was asked what was the matter in dispute between Joseph and Potiphar's wife, and a boy replied that "Joseph tore her apron, and she told Potiphar."

In the same class, Jim Butler and Tom Baker sat side by side, and the teacher told the class that "Pharaoh's butler and baker were thrown into prison together." Some genies in the front row turned and grinned at Jim and Tom, and a broad smile went all round the class.

To introduce variety, a teacher discussed religious pictures with her scholars, and one said, "Please, Miss, we've got a picture of Jesus Christ knocking at a door, and carrying a milkan in his hand." An up-to-date account of Holman Hunt's "Light of the World."

Slips in written scripture are chiefly errors in spelling—always the schoolboy's bugbear. Writing out the Tenth Commandment, a boy of nine put, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's Oxo." It is significant that this boy passed on the way to school a huge advertisement hoarding.

If given the Bible to read, boys and girls want watching, or they will spend the time searching out the purple passages in the Old Testament and calling their classmates' attention to them. Reading aloud is productive of blunders.

Reading 1 Kings xiii. 27, a boy would emphasize the final "him" in "Saddle me the the ass. And they saddled him." The effect of this misunderstanding of the Saxon dative was very comic.

I had described to a class the Roman rule of Palestine, with its strictness. Next day I dealt with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, dwelling strongly on the shouting crowds and the anticipated Jewish king. When I finished, a boy rose up and said, "Please, Sir, why didn't the Roman soldiers stop it?" I replied, "I don't know." I consider the logic of the question excellent for a schoolboy; he was only ten. An attempt to answer it raises many problems.

The other gem arose from similar circumstances. I described the Mediterranean civilization, and the comparative calm under Roman rule. Presently I asked, "What are civilized nations?" Straight came the answer from a pupil, "Nations that do not fight each other." That was since the War began, but he was too young to be suspected of sarcasm.

A. R. WILLIAMS.

The best Yuletide present is a twelvemonths' subscription to the *Freethinker*, which may be sent for fifty-two weeks to your friend. Rates, including postage, on application to the Business Manager, Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.

Acid Drops.

A lively sense of proportion is a glorious thing. It is, in truth, one of the best possessions with which a man may set out in his battle with the world. It saves the philosopher lapsing into the fool, and enables a fool to become something of a philosopher. And if only Christian preachers were dowered in this way, they would either remain silent or sing to a very different tune than is actually the case. Here, for instance, is a well-known clergyman who tells us that when our Army comes home, the soldiers will bring a new force into our midst, because "out there" they have seen the "realities of life." Not a reality, be it observed, seen *the* realities. Of course, war, struggle, the zest for destruction, are all realities—none but a blockhead would deny that; but to speak of these things as *the* realities is the talk of a fool—or a knave.

Consider all the realities that cluster round life in its more normal moments. The realities of birth and growth, of marriage, of death, of mutual esteem and affection, of social obligation, of moral and intellectual effort, and a thousand other things. Why, these things are a thousand times more insistent and more important than war; for, after all, it is only as war helps to secure the continuance of the normal phases of social life that it becomes in any degree defensible. Apart from these things, war is senseless and indefensible butchery. And if we realize this, what are we to think of men who take up the position of teachers, and have so little sense of proportion as to attempt to concentrate attention on war, as though it were the chief reality in life, and the mother and school of all the virtues? War is a reality—perhaps one that will be always with us—but it is a reality that deadens and degrades and destroys, a parasitic reality that lives by devouring the virtues developed in social life, as it lives by devouring a nation's economic resources. And in a recognition of this truth lies our only hope of ever destroying war, or of reducing it to a negligible quantity. Therefore, let us seek to cultivate a sense of proportion; for proportion is as essential to mental health as it is to physical perfection.

Mr. Harold Brierly, writing in the *Christian World*, argues in favour of the "scrapping of denominational divisions for the purpose of producing unity among Christian bodies." He says, in support of his position, that our men in the Trenches have been united at the call of a common need, in spite of their religious differences. Quite so; but it does not follow that they will unite on *religious* grounds—quite the contrary. Mr. Brierly need not go to the Trenches for proof of either statement. Here, at home, Catholics, Protestants, non-Christians, and anti-Christians are to be found working together in various social causes. Divisions arise when religion is introduced. It is a common social necessity that brings men together, whether in the Trenches or at home, and it is religious belief that divides them, both in the Trenches and at home. Men will work together, eat together, talk together, live together, and die together. The one thing they will not do is to be religious together. Introduce religion, and you dissolve the social unity into a multitude of warring fragments. Religion is the most divisive force that exists among men.

"'I'm tired holding fellows' hands and speaking easy words to them,' said a young chaplain at the Front." Thus runs a sentence in the *Evening News*. No clergyman at home has so far complained of being tired of holding the girls' hands.

Mr. Harold Begbie, who seems to aspire to the position of maid-of-all-work to the religious folk, is writing a series of articles in a Sunday paper, entitled "London in War-Time." A recent subject was "The Christ of the Streets," and it dealt with an open-air mission. If Mr. Begbie intends to deal with all the religious side-shows in the same generous spirit, the series should be a lengthy one.

The Vicar of St. Mary Magdalene, Wandsworth Common, supplies to the *Daily Telegraph* a reason why the clergy should not be asked to enlist. "We of the clergy," he says, "do not take up our profession as lawyers and doctors, for example, take up theirs. We are most solemnly appointed to it, and set wholly apart for it, by ordination, in which we receive the Holy Ghost for the work and office of priests in the Church of God." We are bound to assume that there are people who really believe this kind of thing, but it is hard to realize of anyone claiming to be a civilized person. For it is only the claim of the savage medicine-man over

again. He also holds the position of priest in virtue of a supposed "call" and commission from the tribal deities, and is even often set apart as a sacred personage. Between the mental view-point of the primitive medicine-man and the modern priest there is not the slightest fundamental distinction. It is the case of the savage in our midst. Nor does it make a pin's difference whether we treat the Wandsworth vicar as the representative of the medicine-man or the medicine-man as the spiritual father of the Wandsworth vicar.

But the cant of the "call"! "We of the clergy do not take up our profession as lawyers and doctors take up theirs." The delicious absurdity of it! Who decides whether a young man shall study for the clergy? Is it the Holy Ghost, or is it his friends, or parents, or himself? He takes up with his theological studies exactly as the budding lawyer and doctor take up with their studies. His period of preparation is really a notice to the Holy Ghost that he expects to be "called" on a certain date determined by those who arrange the divinity examinations. And the Holy Ghost never fails. Stupid and sensible, good and bad, he calls them all, and sets them "wholly apart" for the work. And they who are "called"—by appointment—are as keen on the question of pay and promotion as is any lawyer or doctor in the kingdom. Note the zest with which the possibility of any increase in the salaries of the clergy is debated, and the joy with which promotion is received. Of course, they cannot all become bishops, and they cannot all receive big salaries, but they are all hopeful. And it is what a man hopes to be, or hopes to get, not what he is getting, that is important. "We of the clergy do not take up our profession as lawyers and doctors take up theirs"! Oh, the cant of it!

Rev. R. J. Campbell was one of these gentlemen who was called of the Holy Ghost—into the Church of England. Then the Holy Ghost found he, or it, had made a mistake, and called him over to the Congregationalists. Then the Holy Ghost moved him to propound the "New Theology," but advised him to climb down when it was found that it lost him friends. Finally, the Holy Ghost discovered it had all been a blunder, and recalled him to the Church of England, although it had been thoughtful enough to provide him with a good fat salary all along. And now his late congregation has presented him with a purse of £150 and a motor-car wherewith to tour France. And his Lord and Master had to ride through Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, and had nowhere to rest his head. What would have happened if R. J. Campbell had been at the beginning of the series instead of the end?

A police-sergeant at Willesden Police-court complained that a Jew refused to give his Christian name. The defendant remarked that it was very absurd to ask a Jew for his Christian name, and all smiled except the policeman.

"The manufacturers' dream of a millennium has come true: the combination of high prices and increased demand," says the *Daily Mail*. An artless comment on Christian civilization, remembering that 21,000,000 men at war is a component part of the "millennium."

Rev. F. B. Meyer has been writing to the *Times* protesting against the growth of Sunday entertainments. With the restrictions placed on the sale of drink, we should have thought that anyone with real regard for the mental and moral health of the nation would have welcomed the opening of respectable entertainments on "the day of rest." Mr. Meyer says the case for their prohibition might be argued from the need for periodic rest, which strikes us as an excellent reason for their existence. But Mr. Meyer, as one might expect, has no appreciation whatever for the value of a clean, bright entertainment as an agent of rest and recuperation. At least, anything of that kind ought, in his opinion, to take place in a chapel, with either himself or some other parson in charge. That is about all there is in it, for the clergy are quite ready to utilize music and brightness in their religious services wherever possible. We are quite pleased to find Mr. H. B. Irving characterizing some of Mr. Meyer's remarks as "characteristic of the shifty humbug with which, in this country, we approach problems of this kind."

A Glasgow church announces "a grand sale of work" in aid of the church funds. A striking line in the advertisement of the sale is "soft goods." Quite an undesigned, but appropriate, wording.

"Artifex," of the *Manchester Guardian*, has been discussing the subject of religious revival in England, of which

many clergymen loudly boast; but the conclusion to which "Artifex" was forced by the facts to come was, that there is no such thing. Six months after the War began a bishop from the South wrote to him thus:—

How I envy you your work up there in the sturdy North. I expect you are seeing something of this great spiritual revival of which I hear so much. Alas! here in London and the South generally, there is no sign of it.

Not many weeks ago a man who knows the religious life of London as very few men have a chance to know it, told "Artifex" that "so far from there being any revival, he had never known a time of such deadness, such small congregations, and such discouragement among the best and most zealous of the clergy." So much for London and the South generally.

The revival of religion is to be found in the North, then. Alas! even there it is conspicuous only by its absence. Says "Artifex":—

Ask any parish priest, and it is, I think, ten to one that he will tell you of decreased congregations, of the difficulty of keeping things going, and of small and discouraging attendance at services of special intercession.

"Artifex" is solemnly convinced that there is nothing like a great revival of religion in England; and that if there is not now, it is less likely that one will take place when the War is over. We agree with him.

At last Dr. Ballard, the Wesleyan Christian Evidence champion, has surpassed himself. Lecturing on the War at Burton-on-Trent recently, he sneered at the people who say that Christianity has been a total failure in the world. As reported in the *Burton Evening Gazette* for December 14, he asserted that we have not had one year of Christianity yet. "What the War did show was, not that Christianity had proved useless, but that it had never been tried." Adopting his own language, we characterize this as "childish talk." If Christianity has never been tried, it follows of necessity that Christ himself was a tragic failure. He lived absolutely in vain if, after two thousand years, the religion he is supposed to have founded is not to be found even in the Church. "Christianity would stop the War to-morrow if human nature would let it." Then human nature has been stronger than Christ, which is only another way of saying that Christianity is a failure.

Here is a gem from the British and Foreign Bible Society's Report: "Under the King's Regulations, each man in the British Army has the right to be supplied with a Bible at the public expense." There's War-time economy! Can the Mohammedan soldiers get a Koran at the same rate?

There is a soul of goodness in things evil, as a great poet has reminded us; but the Mayor of Southend-on-Sea is even more optimistic. "This great War," he says, "is calculated to make us all more brotherly. A cynic might remind the Mayor that Cain and Abel were brothers.

Pastor A. C. Dixon, of Spurgeon's Tabernacle, will have no soldiers in his heaven—unless they have been converted beforehand. The other day this gentleman raised a strong protest against those who said that "a soldier in khaki who died for his country was clothed in a robe of righteousness." Pastor Dixon will have none of this. Every soldier in the British Army, he says, has heard of Jesus Christ, and has had opportunity of salvation. Consequently, he believes that a soldier who has not accepted Christ before he dies, can just go to perdition. He is past all salvation. We really believe that this is sound Christian doctrine; and if it sounds brutal to modern ears, there is all the more reason to thank Dr. Dixon for showing the public what Christianity really is.

After ninety-eight years' work, the London Missionary Society has decided to withdraw from Calcutta. This is not because the people there are converted. The reason is that the Society finds it is compelled to spend £10,000 less in the coming year, and that will still leave it with a shortage of £15,000. The significant feature in the report of the proceedings of the committee is the conviction that the shortage is not due to lack of money amongst the "unco' guid," but that people "lack spiritual vision and the intellectual appreciation of the issues at stake, and a personal devotion to Jesus Christ." This is a grandiloquent way of saying that a growing number of people are beginning to realise, at all events, the comparative worthlessness of Foreign Missions, and there is a weakening of belief in Christianity generally. And yet the same people that issue this report will continue

talking of the "spiritual revival" that has come over Britain since the beginning of the War!

We live in stirring times. Hence the unexampled intellectual activity of some of our religious guides. One of these high-pressure brain-workers is the Rev. Hobson Thomas, Baptist minister, of Southsea. His contribution to the pressing problems of to-day deals with the famous and sacred problem of the number 666. This represents the spirit of evil, which is, of course, the Kaiser. But this cannot triumph, because opposed to it is "the number 777, which represents the supremacy of God." So there we have it in a nutshell. Thousands are being shot and blasted and gassed and drowned out of existence, and the meaning of it all becomes apparent if only we study the scriptural value of 666 and 777. And we call ourselves a civilized people! And the friends of Mr. Thomas doubtless consider him quite sane!

The late Vicar of Wigston Magna, Leicester, Mr. R. C. Palmer, has gone to Montreal. There would be no need to record this but for the fact of his having taken a lady Sunday-school teacher with him. Hence the reason for a divorce granted to Mrs. Palmer, who raised a quite natural objection to the excursion.

The building of the Theosophical headquarters in London, which was to cost £200,000, was interrupted owing to labour troubles and want of funds. The latter difficulty has been overcome by a wealthy individual who has come forward and agreed to complete the building. It is curious that few superstitions languish for want of money. With a fraction of the money spent in this direction, we would undertake to place Freethought in a commanding position throughout the country.

It is announced that the Pope is preparing to bless wireless telegraphy. We don't suppose it will make much difference whether the Pope blesses it or curses it. But there was a time when its inventors would have been burned or imprisoned for presumed dealings with the Devil.

According to Mr. T. P. O'Connor "the fundamental mistake which Germany has made is that man has only a body which can be destroyed; she forgets that man has a soul which cannot be destroyed." The fundamental mistake that "Tay Pay" makes is to voice any kind of nonsense that may please the passion of the moment.

Professor E. B. Poulton, in his Romanes Lecture, takes the Government sharply to task for its neglect of science in the conduct of the War. There is, we doubt not, good grounds for the indictment, but it is only a part of its general neglect of science in times of peace. There is nothing more difficult than to get a grant of money from a British Government in furtherance of scientific research, there being, apparently, but small recognition of the fact that it is along the line of scientific development that national development proceeds. The War has only served to bring into sharp relief a fact that has been lamented time after time in times of peace.

The evil is, however, more than a merely Governmental one. It is part of the prevailing British temper, and if that were different the Government would perforce act in a better manner. At the present time there is not in this country a single high-class scientific magazine comparable to the many that are published in France, Italy, Germany, or the United States. Many have been founded, but have sooner or later died for want of support. The fact is deplorable, but it remains. We ourselves are, as a matter of fact, obliged to subscribe for several American scientific magazines, for the reason that there is nothing of the kind to be purchased here. Perhaps after the War, when there is to be an alteration in so many directions, there will be an alteration here also.

"Next to tobacco, the thing the British soldier is most keen to have is Gospels." This is quoted from the British and Foreign Bible Society's Report. Do they want the paper to light their pipes and cigarettes with?

The Young Men's Christian Association is still emulating the universal providers, and its latest appeal is for indoor games and puzzles, musical instruments, sheet music, gramophones, records, and, of course, remittances. It seems as if the young Christians prefer the primrose path of dalliance to the thorny road of religion.]

To Correspondents.

G. BRADY.—Pleased to have your opinion that "if good writing will ensure the success of the *Freethinker*, there is nothing to fear."

D. N.—It is tragic, as you say, that people should be affected by such "balderdash" as that supplied by Dr. Dixon. What, however, can one expect? The wonder is, after so much Christianity, not that there are so few thinking people, but that there are any.

N. DUXBURY.—Thanks for your promise of assistance in the future, if it is needed.

"STILL A BELIEVER."—As you say that you have only read one copy of the *Freethinker* and do not intend reading any more, we see no reason why your *nom de plume* should not be a permanent one.

A. D. CORNISH.—The gentleman you name receives the *Freethinker*. He is quite familiar, therefore, with its contents. Will try to find time to deal with Mr. G. B. S.'s vagaries on the subject of religion early in the New Year.

J. M. WILSON (San Diego).—Isn't a humorous paper a quite appropriate place in which to tell the story of the Mons Angels?

F. R. CROTTY.—Glad you think "the paper, if anything, is more brilliant than ever," and hope that your prophecy as to increase of circulation will be justified. We are glad to say that things are moving in that direction. Many thanks for your own efforts. Our Business Manager will communicate with the firm you name.

A. A.—(1) No relation whatever, so far as we are aware. (2) We believe that the ordinary regulations on this point have been modified somewhat since the opening of the War. Still, we fancy that if an intending soldier refused to take a religious oath, and was quite firm, an affirmation would be accepted. Under conscription, the case might be different, but would an oath be necessary at all under compulsory service? (3) We shall be very pleased indeed to renew our acquaintance with you when you return to England. (4) Lines received, and shall appear.

E. McDONALD (Rhodesia, S.A.).—We have placed your remittance to the credit of the Memorial Fund, which, we presume, will meet with your approval.

J. RALSTON.—Thanks for appreciation and good wishes.

J. NEWTON.—Portrait and pamphlets are being sent. You will see that the Rev. Docker has discovered his error—greatly to his regret, we daresay.

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 as long notice as possible.

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

THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY'S office is at 62 Farringdon-street, London, E.C.

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

ORDERS for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon-street, London, E.C., and not to the Editor.

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.

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.

G. W. Foote Memorial Fund.

(To take the form of a Presentation to Mrs. Foote)

THERE is no need to write at any length on the G. W. Foote Memorial Fund. A full statement on the subject appeared in our issue for December 5, and it is gratifying to note the way in which the proposal then made has been received. There are so many claims upon most people at this season under normal circumstances, and so many extra claims arising out of the War, that it would not have been surprising had the response been less hearty than has actually been the case. As it is we hope our suggestion that those who intend subscribing should do so promptly, will be acted upon, and thus enable us to close the Fund at an early date.

We have room for quotations from only two or three of the many letters received; and the place

of honour must be given to a note from Mr. F. W. Walsh. We had the pleasure of seeing him two or three weeks back, and found him as brave and as cheerful and as keenly interested in the Cause as ever. We left him, marvelling at such an exhibition of fortitude, and reflecting that all we or anyone else could do for Freethought, would never equal the devotion of a man such as he. Our readers must remember that the whole of the letter, of which we give a portion, was written with a pencil held between the teeth:—

I know that in my circumstances you do not look for any contribution to the Memorial Fund from me. But I have a conscience which will not be satisfied until I have done what it is the bounden duty of every man and woman who can appreciate the immense debt we owe to our late revered leader should gladly do.....In such a matter as this, Freethinkers should rise to the occasion and so help to make the Fund worthy of the noble dead it commemorates.

One subscription reaches us from—

An Aberdeen man provided with a not over filled purse, to whom after each week of tiring, and not too congenial work, the *Freethinker* brought much mental and restful pleasure.

That is the kind of letter which, it would be mere affectation to deny, gives all those concerned in the production of the *Freethinker* every gratification.

"The Roll of Honour."—Third List.

Previously acknowledged, £168 6s. 6d.—W. R. Munton, £5 J. Neate, 10s.; Caroline Neate, 10s.; Albert Neate, 10s.; G. L. Bradshaw, 10s.; T. A. Matthews, £2; G. Brady, £1 1s.; T. H. Smith, 3s.; Mrs. W. J. Palmer, 2s.; J. C. Finlay, £1 1s.; C. F. Nisbet, £2 2s.; G. Lunn, 5s.; H. Adams, 2s. 6d.; Miss A. M. Baker, £2 2s.; Postman, 2s. 6d.; F. Reed, £1; L. McFarlane, 5s.; F. W. Walker, 5s.; J. Latham, £5; F. Collins, 5s.; A. D. Cornish, £1; W. H. Hicks, £2 2s. E. Hickman, £1; Dr. C. R. Niven, £1 1s.; F. C. Wykes, 5s.; M. R. Hunter, 2s. 6d.; J. Brodie, 3s.; J. Molyneux, 1s.; E. Syers, 10s. 6d.; J. A. Fallows, £4 4s.; W. C. Johnson, £1 1s.; H. G. Rose, 5s.; J. Ralston, 10s.; Mrs. A. Robertson, £3; E. A. McDonald, £2 2s.; Mrs. D. Siger, 7s.; D. Stewart, 5s.; W. Craine, 2s. 6d.; A. Noden, 2s. 6d.; J. Robertson, 11s.; W. Mumby, £10; John Vicary, £2; Ernest and Wife, £1; H. Higgins, 2s.; L. E. S., 1s.; J. Newton, £1 1s. *Per Miss Vance*: J. C., 2s. 6d.; Raymond Newman, 3s.; F. Wood, £1

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Sugar Plums.

Arrangements are being made for Mr. Cohen to visit South Shields late in January. In connection with his visit, an attempt will be made to reorganize the local propaganda, which has languished for some time. To that end, it is hoped that all Freethinkers in the locality who can co-operate in any way will communicate at once with the Secretary of the local Branch, Mr. R. Chapman, 6 Wenlock-road, Simonside, South Shields. There used to be a very flourishing propaganda in this district, and as most of the old Freethinkers are still there, with many new ones, there seems no reason why there should not be an equally vigorous propaganda in the future.

The Bethulie Secular Society (Orange Free State) sends a resolution of sympathy on the death of Mr. Foote, with an appreciation of his life's work for Freethought.

Mr. S. L. Hughes ("Sub Rosa") says that the record for London journalism rests with Mr. George R. Sims, who has written regularly for the *Referee* for over thirty years. Mr. Hubert Bland comes second with a record of twenty-five years for the *Sunday Chronicle*, and Mr. T. P. O'Connor with twelve years for *T. P.'s Weekly*. We venture to point out that our late editor topped them all with a record of thirty-five years on the *Freethinker*, and its present editor

has been writing continuously in its pages for eighteen years. But we suppose it would never do to count in the wicked *Freethinker* when compiling such records.

The G. W. Foote Memorial Number of the *Freethinker* is nearly out of print. This means that when the few remaining copies have been sold, no more will be available.

We are glad to see that the *Clarion* has come within less than two hundred pounds of the thousand pounds asked for to meet immediate financial needs. We have no doubt that the remainder will soon be raised. Propagandist papers stand on quite a different footing to ordinary newspapers. These are commercial concerns from beginning to end, and if the loss on them becomes too great, may be easily dropped. But propagandist papers are in a different position. They must be kept going at any cost, and if funds are not present, those responsible for their conduct have to fight on to the last gasp. There are plenty of easier tasks in the world than running an advanced journal.

Heating up the Oven; or, Christianity in a Nutshell.

It is well known that the Maories of New Zealand, partly from the absence of mammals in the island and partly from motives of the higher religion, were, before the arrival of the English who have practically exterminated them, thorough going cannibals. Captives taken in war were invariably cooked and eaten, and it was the universal custom for the victim to sing his own dirge to a melody in a minor key, as a sort of mild distraction while the oven was being heated.

One day a prisoner of a peculiarly noble and benevolent aspect fell into the hands of the enemy of this tribe. He was, in fact, a social reformer, who had dreamt of a humaner and more civilized form of society than the sordid cannibalism which was all that humanity, at any rate in New Zealand, had yet attained to. Even at this last most awful crisis of his destiny he was Utopian enough to hope that the justice and sublimity of his ideals, and his own eloquence in expounding them, might so open the obdurate hearts of his conquerors and induce them to embrace the loftier conception of life, of which he was the exponent. Instead, therefore, of intoning the customary funeral dirge, he cleared his throat and delivered an eloquent and convincing harangue against the enormity of cannibalism, both from the moral and ideal, as well as from the economic and utilitarian point of view. He held his audience spell-bound. You could have heard a pin fall.

Sobs and tears in an intensifying crescendo marked the progress of the speech, from its exordium to its culminating point of inspired eloquence. The distinguished chief, for whose table the orator was destined, sobbed loudest, and seemed to be the most affected of all. But at the climax of the discourse, when the orator was carrying him and all the rest along in his irresistible flood of eloquence, the chief cook made a sign to his august master, who thereupon cleared his throat, raised a forefinger imposing silence, and then began in the most mellifluous accents: "My dear brother in the Lord, we have listened spell-bound to the magic of your eloquence. Every breast is moved, every heart beats in unison with your own. Your arguments are unanswerable. Your eloquence has carried everything before it. Both together have brought conviction to every one of us who have had the pleasure of listening to you to-day. Excuse me, then, and my unpardonable impoliteness if I venture to interrupt you for a moment before the completion of your magnificent peroration by suggesting that the oven has been heated up and is now in perfect readiness for your reception." He made a sign. The humanitarian orator was in a moment trussed, and soon in a position to satisfy the most carping criticisms of his hungry audience.

Moral.—The only arguments Christianity has ever been in a condition, or so much as deigned to employ, against its carping humanitarian critics, are those of the Maori chief: "Excuse me, but the oven is heated up!"

W. S.

CLEAR EVIDENCE.

Inquisitive Old Party (discussing the Mons vision): "And you are positive you saw the angels? Were they close to you?"

Tommy: "Close! W'y, a pal o' mine wot waq with me spotted an aunt of his among 'em."—*Tit-Bits*.

The Historical Value of the Gospels.—VI.

(Concluded from p. 811.)

DOWN to the end of the first century, the actual divinity of Jesus was not an article of faith, except among some of the Gentile converts of Paul. The Jewish Christians looked upon Jesus as a man highly favoured by God, as the promised Messiah, as in some mystical sense the "Son of God," but as distinctly inferior to the Almighty himself. Even Paul does not make out Jesus to be co-ordinate with God the Father. (See 1 Cor. xv. 27-28.) But as the Christian Church became more and more independent of Jewish ideas, and absorbed more and more of the Greek and Egyptian mystical ideas which floated around at the time, the tendency to erect Jesus into a second God, or a second person of a multiple deity, became irresistible. It was more easy to gain the ear of superstitious Greek or Italian artizans and slaves by revealing a new God to them, than by preaching to them of a Jewish Messiah of whom they could have no clear idea. The dogma of the divinity of Jesus, of which the twelve apostles, and of which Mark in his Gospel, had known nothing, was given a tremendous impetus early in the second century by the daring forgeries of John the Presbyter. This also marks the final breach of Christianity with Judaism. The Jewish connection had received a considerable blow by the destruction of the holy city and of the temple; and the distinction between the two religions was evident by the beginning of the second century, even to careless Pagan observers, such as Tacitus and Pliny. The reason obviously was that Pauline Christianity, given the conditions of the Roman Empire, had the possibilities of a universal religion, while Judaism and Jewish Christianity had not.

So it comes about, that by the second century we find no appreciable survival of Jewish Christianity, *i.e.*, the primitive Nazarenism of Jesus, Peter, and James, except in Palestine. In Asia Minor and Europe, the Pauline churches had succeeded in absorbing their rivals, at the nominal price of erecting Peter into a figure-head co-equal with Paul. This posthumous conversion of Peter and Paul into fellow-labourers and twin martyrs in one and the same cause, which so strongly contrasts with the real relations between the two men as recorded in the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians, is the visible sign of the absorption by Pauline Christianity of the machinery and prestige of Jewish Christianity, outside Palestine. We know nothing of the process by which this came about, save that one of the principal agents in the reconciliation seems to have been Clement of Rome. It is in the one authentic letter of this man, dating from the persecution of Domitian (A.D. 95-96), that we first find Peter and Paul coupled in this way. The doctrine contained in the epistle of Clement is thoroughly Pauline; but we know that the Jewish party in the Church also claimed him as on their side, since they subsequently forged in his name the so-called "Clementine Homilies" and "Recognitions," which are Jewish-Christian polemics of the second century. There is no doubt, however, that by the early years of the second century the fusion between Pauline and Jewish Christianity, or rather the absorption of the latter in the former, was, with the single exception of Palestine, complete. Judaising in the Christian Church was thenceforward a discredited and reprobated heresy.

Another important modification, the effects of which can be traced in the language of the Gospels, was that which took place in the attitude of Christianity to secular institutions. The first disciples, as we have seen, were visionary communists, who cut themselves adrift from all ties and devoted themselves to a common life in tense expectation of "the kingdom of heaven." This seems to have remained the basis of the Jewish Church in Palestine for an indefinite period. Coupled with this ascetic communism was an intense hatred of the powers of this world, above all of the Roman Empire, which

was regarded as especially the kingdom of Satan. In the Epistle of James and the Book of Revelation—the two most purely Jewish-Christian books in the New Testament, which the later Church only admitted to the canon with hesitation and struggle—the rich are the favoured of Satan, foredoomed to the eternal woe; the poor alone are the heirs of the kingdom. Rome, in the Revelation, is “the great harlot, drunken with the blood of the saints,” and the emperor (Nero) is “the beast.” If we turn to the Synoptic Gospels, the sayings ascribed to Jesus by Mark, and in “Q,” or the collection used by “Matthew” and “Luke,” exhibit the same tendency: “it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God;” “blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”

But with the rise of Paulinism, the tone changes. Paul did not wish to found a communistic brotherhood, but a universal religion, and he set himself, not to denounce the rich and powerful, but to conciliate them. He made no attempt to institute communism in his churches. “Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called. Wast thou called being a slave? care not for it: but if thou canst become free, use it rather.” “Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; and the powers that be are ordained of God.....a minister of God, an avenger for wrath to him that doeth evil,” etc., etc. Far from regarding the Roman Empire as antichrist, Paul’s converts were commanded to pray for it and render it service. Far from preaching a community of goods, they were to tolerate even slavery. This became, by the end of the first century, the universal doctrine of the Gentile churches, while the Jewish Christians of Palestine, who adhered to the old-fashioned views of Jesus, and to the community of goods, soon began to be regarded as benighted heretics. “Ebionism,” or the cult of poverty, coupled with the refusal to accept the new dogma of the divinity of Jesus, became a stigma and a reproach, although it was in fact only the original teaching of Jesus, Peter, James, and the first disciples, left high and dry by the advancing times.

In the latest recensions of the Gospel narrative, especially in that of “Matthew,” we find visible attempts to whittle away the taint of “Ebionism.” “Blessed are ye poor” is pared down to “Blessed are the poor *in spirit*.” “Blessed are ye that hunger now” is altered to “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst *after righteousness*.” The woes denounced on the rich are discreetly suppressed. It is noteworthy that the Gospel of “Luke,” probably written in Asia, preserves the primitive sentiments in these places, while “Matthew,” probably the product of the church of Rome, suppresses them. It was, of course, at Rome that the Christians were most concerned to conciliate the rich and great. It is possible that, even before the end of the first century, some members of the Imperial house itself had shown a friendly interest in the new religion. Flavius Clemens, cousin of the Emperor Domitian, may have been a Christian; it is certain that he was accused by his contemporaries of a culpable indifference to a public career, and was eventually put to death by Domitian on a charge of “Jewish superstition.” If the Roman church, by this date, had obtained even a momentary foothold on the steps of the throne, we may be sure that no chance was thereafter lost of conciliating the Imperial power, and of suppressing features in the new religion which, while doctrinally inessential, might be politically objectionable.

The attempt, of course, was for long unsuccessful, and it was yet two centuries before the Empire was brought to see the possible uses, from the point of view of despotism, that might be made of Christianity. The fact seems to have been that in this the leaders of Christianity were ahead of the rank and file. The Pauls, the Clements, the Justins, were anxious to commend the faith to the authorities by inculcating submission to the powers that be, and

exhibiting the emperor as a “minister of God.” The humbler Christians, however, thought differently. They had good reason to know that the “minister of God” was also the “beast” of the Revelation. And while the bishops and apologists were busy paving the way for Christianity to mount the throne of this world, the tactless fellows in the catacombs would persist in giving them away by holding forth to the crowd on the fine time coming at the day of judgment, when emperors and philosophers and pro-consuls would be sent to stew in a slow fire for ever and ever, Amen!

This, however, is a digression from the main purpose of this article, which is to disentangle as far as possible from the Gospel texts the actual facts of the foundation of Christianity, and to show the causes which led to the overlaying of the historical facts with the fictitious matter that forms the greater part of those texts as we now have them.

By the middle of the second century, our present Gospels were probably in existence almost in their entirety, along with a great number of “apocryphal” Gospels which are mostly lost, but some of which are preserved. There is nothing to show that, before this date, our four Gospels had been regarded as specially “inspired” or as having greater authority than the apocryphal Gospels of the Hebrews, of the Egyptians, of Nicodemus, of Peter, of James, etc., etc. The motive that dictated the selection of the four canonical Gospels was in no way connected with the question of their authenticity, but was simply the desire to select orthodox narratives in preference to heretical. Thus the Gospel of the Hebrews, which was probably written in the later years of the first century, was rejected on account of its Ebionism, while the later, and in reality less authoritative, Gospels of “Matthew” and “Luke,” to say nothing of the fictitious Gospel of “John,” were accepted as authoritative and genuine. The first evidence of the existence of four Gospels, which were esteemed superior to the rest, is the heterodox work of Tatian entitled “Diatessaron,” about A. D. 170, which apparently endeavored to extract from the four Gospels a narrative in harmony with his own views.

It may appear strange that the Gospel of Mark, with its obvious lapses from the orthodox conception of the personality of Jesus, should have been accepted as canonical. The explanation probably is that, by the time the selection was made, it had been in circulation so long, and had attained such a degree of authority in the Roman Church (for whom it was written originally), that its rejection would have been impossible. The first-century crudities of this Gospel had, therefore, simply to be ignored, in the hope that the second-century orthodoxy of “Matthew,” “Luke,” and “John” would be an adequate set-off to it. The fulfilment of that expectation has been apparent in the whole subsequent history of Christianity.

CONCLUSION.

The result of investigation is therefore to show that the doctrines taught by Jesus of Nazareth, whatever their exact nature, had next to nothing in common with the Christianity of history. Nor, on the other hand, was he a preacher of moral reformation, as “liberal Christians” suggest. The attitude of Jesus to mere respectability, even of the most spotless kind, is exemplified in the anecdote of the rich young man, given in Mark and, with slight variation, in the “apocryphal” Gospel of the Hebrews. Jesus was neither a preacher of morality, nor an example of sinlessness, as so often made out. He was a visionary, with all the impatience and intolerance of a visionary. So far from his having made any absolutely original contribution to ethics, the matter of his teaching was the direct result of the wretched conditions of Palestine in his day, acting on a mind full of the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc. His gospel was that of the *redemption of man through voluntary poverty and communism*. His injunctions were obviously incapable of execution on any large scale, and the ingenuity of Christians in

later ages has been largely devoted to explaining them away, when it was not possible tacitly to ignore them.

Carried away by the fanaticism and enthusiasm of the Galilean peasants who had joined themselves to him, Jesus accepted the title of Messiah, and threatened with supernatural punishment the majority who refused to listen to him. An attempt to rouse the Jerusalem populace to his support led to his crucifixion. He left behind him an insignificant Jewish sect who believed in his continued existence and in his impending return to judge the world, and who carried on for many generations the tradition of voluntary communism, under the nickname of "Ebionites," or "poor men."

All this has little or nothing to do with Christianity as we know it. This was founded by Paul a few years after the death of Jesus, and was essentially a "mystery," on a par with Mithraism and similar cults, but distinguished from them by its Judaistic terminology and by its exclusiveness. The Christianity of Paul converted the historical Jesus into a mythical dying-and-rising deity, like Osiris and Mithras, and shelved everything that had been distinctive in the teaching of Jesus. Paulinism speedily absorbed the Jewish-Christian communities outside Palestine, and proceeded to permeate the Græco-Roman world. With various modifications and accretions derived from Paganism, it became the Catholic Christianity of history, and the permanent ally and instrument of the rich and powerful against all subversive movements.

While Freethinkers cannot regard Jesus of Nazareth as a great moral teacher or as a very practical reformer of social ills, they freely recognize that, with all his deficiencies, he was on the side of the oppressed against the oppressors; and he has suffered the shabbiest treatment at the hands of his nominal followers, who, with the Gospel discourses up one sleeve and their creeds and catechisms up the other, juggle the ignorant into tolerating privilege, enforced poverty, and war, in the name of a carpenter's son, turned "bastard God."

ROBERT ARCH.

Letters to my Daughter.

MY DEAR JOAN,—

Curious as it may seem, I am writing to you when you are in your fourth year, an age when you cannot understand anything I have to say on everything, from ships to sealing-wax. Of one fact I am sure. When you are older, and I have passed away, you will know that I have tried to justify my existence in relation to you. Moreover, I write knowing that you are one of a million or more daughters whom, I trust, are thought of as I do of you.

You are a little Freethinker, and all other little Christian children are little Freethinkers. And, when I write to you, it is for all those who will grow up, some day, in a world which, at present, we cannot know. To us the future is a closed book, to be opened by your hands. It is our duty to see that you find nothing in it that we have omitted to do when we had the moulding of your minds.

So far, as an introduction, I trust you will forgive me if the personal pronoun (something for you to learn later) is intrusive. I will promise to keep it in the background as much as possible. You will see that I say promise. It is a word which you have helped me to appreciate in all its significance. A promise means faith in human beings whom we can see, hear, and touch, and redeemed promises are the golden fruit which grow in the garden of trust. Promise and trust are two beautiful words—more beautiful than the pink feet of white doves, more beautiful than a rainbow planted in the sea.

We men think we know something. By-and-bye the likes of you come along, and we find we know nothing. Do you remember one autumn night when the sky was dark blue and the moon hung in the

heavens like a golden sickle? You insisted upon standing on the window-ledge to look at "Miss Moon," as you called her, and you would talk to her in your own language, and I realized that you had found me much to think about. You loved the moonlight, you loved the stars, you loved the sun—and I was not jealous. It was strange that your affection should go out to these eternal lamps without the promptings of certain black-coated men who know no more about these objects than yourself. You were one of the children of light; they are the servants of darkness. I trust they will never cast their shadow between you and those luminous bodies, above and beyond corruption. "Miss Moon" would come to shine on you while you were asleep; she would do you no harm whilst you were in the land of dreams. I wish I could say the same about those black-coated people when you are awake. They, poor creatures, run round in a circle, and all their efforts cannot equal those of your "Miss Moon":—

Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.

Yes, I think you made a wise choice when you fell in love with "Miss Moon." It will never tell you lies; it will shine alike on the king's palace and the peasant's cottage; and, best of all, it shines on the revels of those fairies who dance on the grass—fairies who love all little children, whether they be black, brown, yellow, or white. This, at least, I know; they never make children quarrel, and I think they are very sad when the father of any little boy or girl goes on a long journey and never comes back.

Christmas-time is coming: already I can hear in the distance the faint tinkle of sleigh-bells; a fat, jolly old man is on the way, in spite of something—the name of which I will not write.

Although I am thirty years distance away from you, I promise to write again.—Your Father,

TRISTRAM.

Hans Christian Andersen.

OF writers of real genius, in modern times, Hans Andersen is one of the few that clung to the last to a belief in a personal God and personal immortality. The grounds of his faith are much the same as those of Tennyson, who most likely borrowed from the great Dane. The latter for fertility in literary ideas is the Mozart of modern writers, sweetness and light, however, being in both more salient features than grandiosity and the sublime. It is not necessary to plough through the four or more bulky volumes of the *Eventyre* to get at the root-ideas of the author on the subject of a future life. His faith in a paternal deity he seems to have taken for granted, and (see "The Inkstand and the Pen") to have looked upon it as the fountain-head of his own inspiration—an inspiration he did not by any means underrate.

In the story of the Flax his belief in a personal immortality of some sort is clearly asserted. The Flax passes through various transformations, and is at last burnt as newspaper or old rag; and then certain mysterious little beings—spiritual, I need hardly say—are set free, each one corresponding to a flower of the original flax plant. In "The Old Street Lamp," however, a certain concession is made to the difficulties suggested by erring reason, for the Lamp worries itself about the question whether, after it has been melted down to form another sort of lamp, it will remember that it had previously been a street one. In the pathetic and deservedly popular sketch, "A Story from the Sand-dunes," the theme is very clearly stated, and the argument ably developed by the course of events. It is the old story. Assuming an all-wise, omnipotent, all-beneficent Father in Heaven, or God, a plea for personal immortality is found in the necessity of justifying the ways of this being to man. The rich and happy husband declares it ungrateful to demand more than one life of material happiness. The wife points to the

inequalities of life, the sufferings and hardships of the poor, etc., as demanding compensation from a just God in the life to come. The husband replies that poverty also has its joys, and further remarks that our domestic animals may also justly claim eternal life and a personal immortality on the same score. His wife gets over the difficulty by admitting personal immortality also for the animals.

We have the idea versified by Tennyson in his "In Memoriam":—

"That nothing walks with aimless feet,
That not one life shall be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void
When he has made his pile complete."

In the course of events in the "Story from the Sand-dunes," the hero's life is irretrievably ruined by the chapter of accidents of which so-called civilized human life mainly consists. Insufficient circumstantial evidence causes him to be suspected of murder, he is flung into prison, but freed when the real murderer is found. The injustice suffered results in his finding a happy home in the house of a rich but childless couple, and the promise of his life is finally ruined in trying to save their niece from drowning, in which adventure a blow on the head reduces him to a state of intermittent idiocy. We must here recognise that the sequence of events and consequent injustice are in reality mainly determined by the ignorance, perversity, and stupidity inherent in the human element—at any rate, in Christianized and superstitious forms of it. This ignorance and perversity depends, in its turn, upon just those fanatical ideas of sin, morality, and an angry, so-called, all-wise, all-merciful Father-god, whose existence and power is invoked to remedy the unjust effects of it here by compensations in the next world. Let us not forget that a belief in personal immortality of the soul and the necessity of saving it at all costs by superstitious rites and worship, also intensifies both the selfishness and ignorance to which social injustices are so very largely due. Admitting the existence of this all-wise, omnipotent, all-bountiful Creator, he ought to have us perfect and perfectly happy beings, or not at all; if he is a God of perfect benevolence and the like. His revealed word exhibits him, indeed, as nothing of the kind, but as a being who delights in bloodshed, mutilations, and sufferings of all sorts, inflicted upon his suffering creatures, on the lame excuse that he is "perfecting" by mutilating and deforming them. This idea of God is as pernicious in the practical and so-called moral world as it is in the theoretical one.

In the latter it cuts short and, if it can, prohibits all investigation into natural causes and the origin of organic life by trumping up charges of blasphemy and impiety, and insisting upon the stupid dogma: "God made things so." Wherever intellectual curiosity is aroused in the former, it equally discounts all attempts to improve our lot by reason and self-discipline, exacting, instead of this, a blind unreasoning dependence upon the infinite love and bounty of the Deity. Thus, that which is supposed to compensate injustice in the next world is the main source of its existence in the present one.

W. W. STRICKLAND.

"In the White Dawn Clear."

A CLOUDLESS dawn, and over the sun
The silver star of Truth;
Bathed in the strength of the morning winds,
We thrill with the hope of youth.
Ours is the joy of the onward march:
The Best ever flies before.
Not to be won is Paradise—
Only the silver door.
In an eternal dawn we walk
Before day's triumph-car;
Below lies the old Earth glorified,
Above is the morning star.

D. GORDON.

Religion at the Front.

If you ask a chaplain what he thinks of the Australians he smiles in rather a pained way, and says something to this effect: "They are indeed excellent soldiers, though in many cases, I fear, somewhat graceless and ungodly, and prone to intemperate language." If you ask Private Boggetts, one of the Willochra's wounded the same question he roars with laughter, and tells you that they are "a wild, reckless lot of—(the censor has been at work here) — cows, but they fight like —" (censor again). The Australians, in a wild charge, it seems, are a sight to see and never forget. "Allah, Allah!" screams the Turk, as he flies from some lean, rawboned six-footer "plain bloke" from Queensland or New South Wales. "Allah, you —!" roars the Australian. "By —, I'll give you Allah!" The Australian passes rude reflections on the birth and antecedents of the flying Turk, and calls him a lot of things beginning with the second letter in the alphabet.

Very warm-hearted, very wild, very brave is the Australian. Private Smith, we will say, is wounded, and Private Jones, in a near-by trench, sees him exposed to the enemy. Jones is wrath. "You low fellow"—(this is a paraphrase)—he calls out. "Why the —," etc. While he is talking he is creeping out to save his friend. He does it, and will do it time and time again. He is a grand fellow and a fine soldier. But it must be admitted that he swears.—*Auckland Star.*

Thus Spake the Lord!

"I AM the Light,
And the [baneful] Life."
I blind the sight,
And bring open strife
Among all the peoples
Of My Great Creation.
"I am the Master"
Of the covert lies,
And pious plaster,
That create the sighs
'Neath My helfried steeples
For selfish Salvation.
"I am the Shepherd"
Of each praying lamb,
And the "Holy Word"
Of a wasteful sham
That knows neither Reason,
Nor yet Toleration.
"I am the Deity—
The Supreme Being,"
From which all gaiety
Is ever fleeing;
Whose favourite season
Is torrid Damnation.
"Have Faith in Me,"
Question not Belief,
Lest I decree
That a life-long grief
Shall be yours—here and after,
And curse all thy seed.
"All-Lovable am I,"
But Fear Me ye must;
Or, when you come to die,
You'll return to the dust,
And know not Heaven's Laughter,
Nor her harp or reed.

Thus spake the Lord
To the Unbeliever
Whom He tried to deceive,
But not one word
Did Fair Truth's retriever
Discover to believe.

C. B. W.

Obituary.

It is with regret that we record the death of Mr. George Washington Nott, of 15 Cradenhill Street, Streatham, after a long and painful illness. He was converted to Freethought by his daughter, Mrs. Parkin, who has been a zealous worker in the Cause for many years. He was a great admirer of the *Freethinker* to the end, and it afforded him peculiar pleasure to read it and have it read to him. On Tuesday, December 7, he was cremated at the City of London Crematorium, Little Ilford, when a Secular Service was conducted in accordance with his own wishes. We extend cordial sympathy to the mourners.—J. T. L.

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This Society was formed in 1898 to afford legal security to the acquisition and application of funds for Secular purposes.

The Memorandum of Association sets forth that the Society's Objects are:—To promote the principle that human conduct should be based upon natural knowledge, and not upon supernatural belief, and that human welfare in this world is the proper end of all thought and action. To promote freedom of inquiry. To promote universal Secular Education. To promote the complete secularisation of the State, etc., etc. And to do all such lawful things as are conducive to such objects. Also to have, hold, receive, and retain any sums of money paid, given, devised, or bequeathed by any person, and to employ the same for any of the purposes of the Society.

The liability of members is limited to £1, in case the Society should ever be wound up and the assets were insufficient to cover liabilities—a most unlikely contingency.

Members pay an entrance fee of ten shillings, and a subsequent yearly subscription of five shillings.

The Society has a considerable number of members, but a much larger number is desirable, and it is hoped that some will be gained amongst those who read this announcement. All who join it participate in the control of its business and the trusteeship of its resources. It is expressly provided in the Articles of Association that no member, as such, shall derive any sort of profit from the Society, either by way of dividend, bonus, or interest, or in any way whatever.

The Society's affairs are managed by an elected Board of Directors, consisting of not less than five and not more than twelve members, one-third of whom retire (by ballot) each year,

but are capable of re-election. An Annual General Meeting of members must be held in London, to receive the Report, elect new Directors, and transact any other business that may arise.

Being a duly registered body, the Secular Society, Limited, can receive donations and bequests with absolute security. Those who are in a position to do so are invited to make donations, or to insert a bequest in the Society's favor in their wills. On this point there need not be the slightest apprehension. It is quite impossible to set aside such bequests. The executors have no option but to pay them over in the ordinary course of administration. No objection of any kind has been raised in connection with any of the wills by which the Society has already been benefited.

A Form of Bequest.—The following is a sufficient form of bequest for insertion in the wills of testators:—"I give and bequeath to the Secular Society, Limited, the sum of £— free from Legacy Duty, and I direct that a receipt signed by two members of the Board of the said Society and the Secretary thereof shall be a good discharge to my Executors for the said Legacy."

Friends of the Society who have remembered it in their wills, or who intend to do so, should formally notify the Secretary of the fact, or send a private intimation to the Chairman, who will (if desired) treat it as strictly confidential. This is not necessary, but it is advisable, as wills sometimes get lost or mislaid, and their contents have to be established by competent testimony.

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

Secretary: Miss E. M. VANCE, 62 Farringdon-st., London, E.C.

Principles and Objects.

SECULARISM teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of divine guidance or interference; it excludes supernatural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide.

Secularism affirms that Progress is only possible through Liberty, which is at once a right and a duty; and therefore seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action, and speech.

Secularism declares that theology is condemned by reason as superstitious, and by experience as mischievous, and assails it as the historic enemy of Progress.

Secularism accordingly seeks to dispel superstition; to spread education; to disestablish religion; to rationalise morality; to promote peace; to dignify labor; to extend material well-being; and to realise the self-government of the people.

Membership.

Any person is eligible as a member on signing the following declaration:—

"I desire to join the National Secular Society, and I pledge myself, if admitted as a member, to co-operate in promoting its objects."

Name.....

Address.....

Occupation.....

Dated this..... day of..... 190.....

This Declaration should be transmitted to the Secretary with a subscription.

P.S.—Beyond a minimum of Two Shillings per year, every member is left to fix his own subscription according to his means and interest in the cause

Immediate Practical Objects.

The Legitimation of Bequests to Secular or other Free-thought Societies, for the maintenance and propagation of heterodox opinions on matters of religion, on the same conditions as apply to Christian or Theistic churches or organisations.

The Abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, in order that religion may be canvassed as freely as other subjects, without fear of fine or imprisonment.

The Disestablishment and Disendowment of the State Churches in England, Scotland, and Wales.

The Abolition of all Religious Teaching and Bible Reading in Schools, or other educational establishments supported by the State.

The Opening of all endowed educational institutions to the children and youth of all classes alike.

The Abrogation of all laws interfering with the free use of Sunday for the purpose of culture and recreation; and the Sunday opening of State and Municipal Museums, Libraries, and Art Galleries.

A Reform of the Marriage Laws, especially to secure equal justice for husband and wife, and a reasonable liberty and facility of divorce.

The Equalisation of the legal status of men and women, so that all rights may be independent of sexual distinctions.

The Protection of children from all forms of violence, and from the greed of those who would make a profit out of their premature labor.

The Abolition of all hereditary distinctions and privileges, fostering a spirit antagonistic to justice and human brotherhood.

The Improvement by all just and wise means of the conditions of daily life for the masses of the people, especially in towns and cities, where insanitary and incommensurable dwellings, and the want of open spaces, cause physical weakness and disease, and the deterioration of family life.

The Promotion of the right and duty of Labor to organise itself for its moral and economical advancement, and of its claim to legal protection in such combinations.

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