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Views and Opinions.

Christmas in the Trenches.

For the fourth time in succession our soldiers are spending Christmas at death-grips with the enemy, while our sailors hold their less spectacular but more vital watch at sea. It is over three years since the Christian peoples of Europe flew at each other with a ferocity and a hatred to which no other war holds a parallel. But it is over 1900 years—if we follow Christian chronology and the Christian myth—since angels sang of the peace and goodwill born into the world through the incarnation of Jesus Christ. They sang it to a Pagan world, the civilized portion of which was mainly under the dominion of Rome. Pagan Rome was without the glorious Gospel of Christ, but it nevertheless came nearer establishing universal peace and a genuine liberty than any other empire has ever done. More; surrounded on all sides by barbarian enemies, it could in its greatest day keep the peace of the world with 400,000 soldiers. At present, Christmas will be celebrated with over 20,000,000 armed men engaged in actual warfare. The difference in the two figures is the measure of the success that has crowned the Christian Gospel. There is no need to discuss theories. The facts are there, damning and damnable. The nations of Europe Christianized have not learned to trust each other more than they did Pagan. Suspicion, hatred, greed, fear, tyranny, all those forces from which wars spring, have flourished under Christian domination. Christmas A.D. 1 with angels singing the inauguration of a new era of peace and brotherhood; Christmas 1917 with the Christian peoples of the world engaged in the most universal and the most bloodthirsty war the world has ever seen! Was there ever a more damnable failure in the whole history of mankind? * * *

Ammunition for "Infidels."

In *The Outlook for Religion* the Rev. W. E. Orchard warns his fellow-clergymen that the attitude of the Churches during the War, and their impotency to prevent the War, will be "collected and served up for

purposes of infidel propaganda." Why should they not be? Look at the Churches in all the belligerent countries. Everywhere they have blindly followed the leads of their respective Governments. And one feels that had the decisions of these Governments been different to what they were, the support of the Churches would have been not less wavering. It is not upon a particular decision of the Churches that shrewd observers base their judgments, but upon the fact that whenever there is war, whether the cause that leads a country into war be clearly just or as clearly unjust, the support of the Churches is certain. "Theirs not to reason why"; their function to find a justification for whatever course the ruling powers adopt. In Germany, the militaristic Government has no stronger supporter than the Church. That is equally true of the Church's relation to the Government in this country. And when men see this, they realize that the conviction of the Church counts for nothing in arriving at an unprejudiced decision on the truth of a situation. The Christian Church is consistent only in one thing—in supporting anything and everything that will advance its own interests. No wonder Karl Marx said that the Church of England would rather sacrifice thirty-eight out of its thirty-nine Articles than lose one thirty ninth of its income.

Christian Germany. * * *

So far as we are concerned, we intend to see to it that the lesson of the War in relation to the Churches is well utilized. Freethinkers would be fools to allow so forceful a weapon to remain unused. Look at Germany! It was, and is, one of the most Christian countries in Europe. Its educational system is saturated with Christian teaching of the most pronounced type. Its soldiers bear "God with Us" on their caps. Its militaristic leaders are almost wholly Christian. It is the home of Protestant Christianity. And it has conducted the War with a ferocity and a barbarity unknown at least in the annals of modern warfare. Think of these things, and then assume that Germany, by some strange chance, had remained outside the current of European life, and had never been Christian. Can anyone imagine that had it continued the current of Pagan civilization, it would have been worse than it is? Might it not easily have been better than it is? Make German deceit, German lying, German barbarity as bad as you will, the worse it is, the stronger the indictment of Christian influence. Germany is as generations of Christian training have left her. Said Dean Inge, speaking in London on December 14:—

It is the deepest tragedy of modern history that every civilized nation seems compelled to choose one or two forms of government, both so bad that it is not easy to see which is the worse. On the one side is the Prussian system, efficient, economical, and honest, but which ends in putting the civilian under the heel of the soldier with his brutal, blundering diplomacy, and methods of frightfulness, until the nation now stands without justice, chivalry, generosity, sympathy, or mercy.

On the other side there is a squalid anarchy of democracy, wasteful, inefficient, and generally corrupt,

with a Government which quails before every agitation, and pays blackmail to every conspiracy, and in which sooner or later those who pay the taxes are systematically pillaged by those who impose them, until the economic structure of the State is destroyed.

And to that we need only add that this is a picture of the European world after having been for centuries under Christian control. Christianity could cover the world with churches, and keep armies of priests at work. It could make its influence felt in all governments and in all classes of society. It could permeate education and control the press. But it could evolve neither a desirable form of government, nor create durable feelings of goodwill among men. Decidedly, Freethinkers will not lack ammunition to carry on their warfare against the most hopeless and most useless of superstitions. And it will be their own fault if this ammunition is not fired with shattering effect.

* * *

Waking Up to the Facts.

Let us hope that the millions of soldiers who are spending this Christmas amid the discomfort of the mud, and cold, and filth of Flanders and Northern France, will reflect a little upon the moral of the situation. Thousands of them, we know, have already done so, and have drawn therefrom a sound conclusion. They have seen the clergy eloquent in sending men to war, and yet demanding complete exemption from their own order. They have seen them silent, while thousands of people have made fortunes out of the nation's necessity—silent while the very food of the people has been raised to famine price, and yet eloquent to turn the War to the advantage of their own order. They have seen, and properly seen, in the impotence of the Churches to prevent these things a proof of their worthlessness, and have learned to appreciate the cant of Christian love and brotherhood at its true value. A question often put to the Freethinker before the War was: "How can you explain the world without God?" To-day thousands are reversing the question and are asking: "How can you explain the world with God?" How can any reasonable being reconcile belief in the Christian deity with this world War? Try how one may, the theory will not fit the facts. The War has shattered many theories, and exploded many reputations. The theory of God and the reputation of Christianity, if not completely shattered, are, at least, so damaged that, in thousands of cases, they now excite derision where they formerly commanded respect.

* * *

Peace on Earth.

More now than ever does mankind feel the urgency of this message and the need for its realization. And it may well be that in making plain the brutality, the savagery, and the inconclusiveness of war, Germany has unconsciously done the world a service. But peace on earth will never come through the prevalence of the Christian religion. If the centuries have made nothing else plain that lesson is clear. You cannot keep men on the level of savages intellectually and have them highly civilized in other directions. You cannot place a Church in a position of commanding influence without its working harm to the social structure. Professor Kingdon Clifford wisely warned us that Christianity wrecked two civilizations and came very near wrecking a third, and that warning has had a peculiar urgency given it by this War. Peace and goodwill comes not by the Christianizing but by the humanizing of mankind. And if that humanizing process has hitherto proceeded but slowly, a large part of the blame must be given to those superstitious fears and teachings which have so universally prepared man for tyranny and exploitation.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Bibliolatry.

THE Bible has a most marvellous history, some knowledge of which every literary critic is in duty bound to acquire. The Bible is at once the creature and god of the Church, and were it to be lost the Church would cease to exist. It has always been regarded as the objective rule of faith, and as the court of final appeal on all religious matters. Augustine was "most deeply impressed with the evidences of Divine inspiration in the Scriptures," with the result that he could write thus: "To the canonical Scriptures alone I owe agreement without any dissent." That great divine had faith in the absolute inerrancy of Holy Writ. To the Protestant Reformers the central principle was that of the exclusive authority of the Scriptures. Luther positively denied the infallibility of the Pope, and declared that Councils often erred. Even in our own day there are a few who verily believe that God's Book is infallible from cover to cover, and who dismiss the conclusions of the Higher Criticism as groundless fancies. Professor Sayce, the distinguished Egyptologist, published a book with the bold title, *Monument Facts and Critical Fancies* in which, however, he has the candour to say that "the doctrine of verbal inerrancy is Hindu and not Christian." The amazing fact is that the overwhelming majority of present-day divines no longer hold that absurd dogma. They even grant that the Bible contains numerous errors; that much of its history is unreliable; that large portions of it are purely legendary; and that in no sense can it be looked upon as infallible. And yet, whilst making such concessions to criticism, they still believe in inspiration. In the *Christian World* for December 13, there is an article entitled "The Condition of Evangelicalism," in which such a position is vigorously defended, and the Evangelical Party is warned that, unless it adopts it, it is in danger of shrinking into "an obscurantist sect more Biblicist than Scriptural." The Correspondent says:—

Everywhere else the modern method is accepted in principle. The principle of an historical scholarship, at once critical of the record, conservative for the Gospel, and constructive for theology, is now as secure as Copernican astronomy. The particular conclusions from that method may be those of the conservative right wing. That is a minor matter. The main thing is that they shall flow from that method, which is the invention of no one man and no one movement, but is the gift of the modern Church of the same spirit that put the Bible there; and which is also a completion of the Reformation, reconstructing the perennial Bible by the Gospel of the Kingdom which made it. But, rightly or wrongly, the general belief is that the Evangelical side of the Church (which is the vital side) is committed to the obscurantist view of the Bible (which the High Churchmen have rejected). And for the Bible's sake and the Gospel's, it becomes of great moment that the prospects of evangelical religion should not be water-logged by the old infallibilism of the record.

We maintain that the policy recommended in that extract is at once illogical and immoral. The Evangelical Party is fully justified in adhering to the orthodox tenet of the verbal inerrancy of the Word of God. The Bible, if fallible, cannot be Divinely inspired. The Rev. Mr. Webb-Peploe is perfectly consistent in the statement that he has in this Book "not some words of God which are to be discovered by human wisdom and human selection, but the Word of God from cover to cover." Mr. Peploe admits that there are errors of transcription in all copies now extant; but he entertains the hope that some day we may be permitted to see a complete edition of God's original gift to man. For him there is absolutely no escape from "the conclusion that the Book,

if it be of God, must be perfect originally, and that all that lies with man as a critic is this—to discover the Original—if he can." It was to us incomprehensible how the late Professor Robertson Smith could be a Higher Critic of the most iconoclastic kind, and yet continue to subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. Sir George Adam Smith puzzles us in precisely the same way. In his *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament*, several lectures are devoted to the task of proving the legendary character of many Old Testament books; and yet the fourth lecture is called "The Proof of a Divine Revelation in the Old Testament." We have read that chapter with great care, but we have failed to find in it any proof whatsoever of any Divine Revelation in any part of the Old Testament. Indeed, in endeavouring to prove his proposition, Sir George presents us with a highly derogatory conception of the Divine character:—

The Hebrew writers claim for Israel a special choice and providence by God in order that he may make known to them, as he directly does to no other people of mankind, himself (p. 113).

Equally inconclusive is the reasoning of the *Christian World*. In no sense whatever is the Bible record infallible. The Correspondent tells us that "a fact or a truth is not true just because it is in the Bible," and that "in no such sense is the Bible infallible." Then comes the following conundrum:—

Infallible as it is, it is infallible not for information, but for salvation. Pietism may be a flush on the face of truth, but it is neither its base nor its method. Unction does not qualify us to judge of historic fact or even theological reality. And a mental gerontocracy is no fit form of rule for a Church of the Spirit.

What that extract really means is an insoluble mystery. The Bible is infallible, after all, but not for information. Here is what purports to be an item of vital information: "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"; but the Correspondent assures us that it is not infallible—that, in fact, it may not be true. Paul had his share of unction, but unction did not qualify him to "judge of historic fact or even theological reality." His pietism might have been a flush on the face of truth, but it was neither its base nor its method. In other words, the information about salvation he pretended to supply his converts was by no means infallible. What on earth we are to understand by the statement that the Bible is "infallible for salvation" we have no means whatever of ascertaining.

At this point the Correspondent loses himself in vagueness and barren verbiage. What he means by "competent knowledge" and "inspired divination" no one can tell. If we have it, he says, it will "deliver us from the dilettantists"; but who are the dilettantists and what do they teach? And what does "inspired divination" signify? The dictionary defines "divination" as "the pretended forecast of future events or discovery of what is lost or hidden, by supernatural or magical means." In Roman law it denoted the operation of choosing one of several accusers to conduct a criminal prosecution, and also the address in which the appointment of the prosecutor was proposed. It surely cannot be that the Correspondent uses the term in that sense; and yet he avers that "we need the divination of moral faith," whatever that may be. "A penetrative conscience on the scale of the kingdom of God" is a hopelessly ambiguous expression, as is also "the large ethical tact to read historic judgment unto salvation, whether it be the judgment of the Cross or the judgment of the War." To call the Bible "the charter of the kingdom of God among the nations," "the organic centre of human history and Christian civilization," "the treasury of

mankind's ruling power and the revelation of his moral destiny," is but a mere "mapping" of it which "ends in undermining it." This is a new species of Bibliolatry which is more injurious than the worship of the mere letter so bitterly denounced.

The curious thing is that the Correspondent characterizes this method of treating the Bible as scientific, and declares that the neglect of it has resulted in "the corresponding slackness of moral fibre and moral *flair* in the grasp of revelation." The truth is that the genuinely scientific method of treating the Bible robs it of all title to be regarded either as being or as containing a supernatural revelation. The historic and atoning Cross is an adaptation by the theologians of a superstition common to all the great religions. This is the view to which scholars are gradually coming round. The Correspondent, whose strange views and stilted style remind us so forcibly of Principal Forsyth, is fully aware of this, and significantly says: "The ship wants docking and scraping. Or must it be scrapped?" It is a scraping process that is now going on, with the result that Bibliolatry in all its forms is doomed.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Festival of Falsehood.

The divine stands wrapt up in his cloud of mysteries, and the amused laity must pay tithes and veneration to be kept in obscurity, grounding their hope of future knowledge on a competent stock of present ignorance.—George Farquhar.

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

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

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

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

tive for the Christians to incorporate the old under the mask of the new.

This struggle for survival has also incorporated other Pagan features. In the far-off centuries, white-robed Druids cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their hymns to the frosty air. These features were absorbed also, and the mistletoe and carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, parts in the celebration. The clergy have always had a keen instinct for proselytising. In the past the Church sought for adherents by increasing her festal days, and she crushed opposition by bribing the weak and silencing the strong. In the twentieth century she is cajoling apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries, and at home by instituting Pleasant Sunday Afternoons in the place of painful Sabbaths, and by hypocritically identifying herself with social measures which appeal to the working classes.

Nor is this all, for the bitterest irony is everywhere interwoven in this celebration of the birthday of a man-god who never lived. "Peace and goodwill amongst men" proclaim tens of thousands of pulpits, and the clergy also bless regimental colours, and pray for the troops of contending armies. The nations which profess to worship the "Prince of Peace" are in the stronger grip of Mars, the god of war. From the Elbe to the Spree, from the Seine to the Neva, the roads of Europe resound to the tread of armed men, and the continent is a shambles, ankle-deep in human blood. The countrymen of Moliere are cutting the throats of the countrymen of Martin Luther, and the compatriots of Kossuth are disembowelling the brothers of Mazzini. The women of Europe, "like Niobe, all tears," are mourning their dead fathers, husbands, and sons; and whole nations, professedly Christian, are engaged in wholesale killing. The death-moans of hundreds of thousands are drowned in the Te Deums of the victors, and the survivors are blessed in the name of the Prince of Peace.

To such a pass, after so many centuries of the Christian superstition, has the Western world come. Milton's hymn on "The Nativity of Christ reads like the bitterest mockery:—

Nor war, nor battle's sound
Was heard the world around,
The idle spear and shield were high up hung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with human blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;
The kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they knew their sovran Lord was by.

It reads like a beautiful fairy-tale. "Peace and goodwill" must wait till another year; and the present celebration of "God's birthday" must make serious men and women think. The Christmas festival itself, with all its hypocritical professions and its legendary associations, is largely pretence and make-believe. It is the paradox of paradoxes that the woeful welter of a tragic contest is going on in almost every corner of a world that professes to worship a God who commanded his followers not to kill and to obey his behests of non-resistance and forgiveness. Christmas, so far as the Christian Church is concerned, is an organized hypocrisy, a fitting celebration of an event that never happened.

MIMNERMUS.

CONFIDENCE.

A motorist, stopping his car at a country hotel, called to a man who was passing to look after his car. With much dignity the man replied, "Do you know that I belong to the Salvation Army."

"Oh!" replied the motorist, "that doesn't matter. I'll trust you."

The Bible and Immortality.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.

RESUMING our examination of the New Testament statements, we have next to notice those relating to the resurrection of the body and the last judgment. With regard to the latter there appears to be no doubt; but in the case of the resurrection this is not quite so certain. Thus, in the following paragraphs, no raising from the dead is mentioned:—

Matt. xxiv. 30, 31.—Then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn.....And he shall send forth his angelsand they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matt. xxv. 31-33.—But when the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him.....before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

In the latter case the sheep are all "blessed," and are to "inherit the kingdom prepared for them"; while the goats are all "cursed," and are to receive "eternal punishment." From the foregoing passages it would seem that only those alive at the "second coming" would be judged, and rewarded or punished. In the following passages, however, a resurrection is distinctly stated:—

John v. 28, 29.—For the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth: they that have done good unto the resurrection of eternal life; and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgment.

Rev. xx. 13, 15.—And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and Death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.....And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

1 Thess. iv. 15-18.—The Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

According to the first two of these extracts there is to be a resurrection of all men, to be followed by a judgment; but, according to the third, it would seem that only those believers in Christ who had died while awaiting the "second coming" are to be raised from the dead, and that they and the believers then living are all to mount up to heaven without a judgment. This, in some measure, agrees with the first quotation from Matthew, in which the angels are to gather together all the elect then alive from the four winds. We thus arrive at the theory that all believers in Christ who are living on the day of judgment will be taken to heaven just as they are, and that the believers who are dead will be raised and given earthly bodies before entering Paradise. But we have next to see what the great apostle of the Gentiles has to say on the subject. In 1 Cor. xv. 35 to 53 that apostle endeavours to explain the resurrection by the sowing of a grain of wheat, to which he says, God gives "a body of its own." In the case of a human body in the tomb he states:—

1 Cor. xv. 42, 44.—So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.....It is sown a *natural* body; it is raised a *spiritual* body.

In this passage the word "natural" (*psychikos*) is derived from *psyche* (life), and the word "spiritual"

(*pneumatikos*) is formed from *pneuma* (breath, air, wind). Here Paul says that the natural body of flesh and blood is the psychic, thereby recognizing the fact that *psyche* means animal life; he also says that the spiritual body, which is given to those raised from the dead, is pneumatic (*i.e.*, pertaining to air or breath). According to this statement all our writers on Psychology have chosen the wrong word, probably because *psyche* is generally translated "soul," whereas that word has nothing to do with soul or mind. Paul further says:—

1 Cor. xv. 50-53.—Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.....We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed.....For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed, and this mortal must put on immortality.

Paul says nothing of a judgment of all nations or of the punishment of the wicked. The ideas of the early Christians upon the subject of "eternal life" would appear to be expressed in the paragraphs quoted from 1 Thess. iv. and 1 Cor. xv., though they are not in complete agreement. Thus, in 1 Cor. xv., the bodies of those raised from the dead, as well as those then alive, were both to be "changed" into "spiritual bodies" before entering the abode of bliss. But in 1 Thess. iv. nothing is said about any such change, though it appears to be implied that those raised from the dead were to be given the same bodies which they possessed before death. This metamorphosis presented no difficulties to the primitive Christians, who believed that "with God all things are possible." In any case, those living at the time were to go straight up to heaven in their natural bodies, accompanied by their resurgent brethren who, we must assume, could not enter paradise in their mouldering post-mortem bodies.

According to the apostle of the Gentiles, the natural physical body of flesh and blood could not enter heaven: the heavenly body must be spiritual (pneumatical), that is to say, possessing the qualities of *pneuma* (breath, air, wind). We may perhaps conceive this spiritual body to be a living, breathing phantom; but, as a simple matter of fact, Paul knew nothing about such a body. He simply imagined what he has described, just as he imagined that he had been "caught up to the third heaven" where he heard "unspeakable words" (2 Cor. xii. 1-4). Moreover, in neither 1 Thess. iv. nor in 1 Cor. xv. is there a single word said about "the spirits of the dead" in Hades; in both the reference is to the crumbling bodies in the tombs, as is also the case in John v. Setting aside, then, the theories of Paul—for they are nothing more—it would seem that the resurrection to which the majority of the early Christians looked forward was the raising of the bodies in the grave, which were to be changed into their former living bodies of flesh and blood—the resuscitated beings eating, drinking, and sleeping as they did before death. That this was the conception of the future life by the early Christians receives confirmation from the following circumstances recorded in the Gospels.

1. Jesus is represented as saying to his disciples at his Last Supper—"I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom (Matt. xxvi. 29).

2. In the hypothetical case of the woman who had had seven husbands (Matt. xxii. 23-30) it is clearly implied that in heaven men and women would appear in their former earthly bodies.

3. In the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus (Luke xvi. 24) it is assumed that these two individuals were clothed in their earthly bodies, and that each saw and recognized the other.

4. Jesus himself, after his resurrection, appeared to his disciples in his natural body. When they "supposed that they beheld a spirit" he said, "Why are ye troubled?Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me having. And he shewed them his hands and his feet." After this he asked, "Have ye here anything to eat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish. And he took it, and did eat before them" (Luke xxiv. 38-43). Jesus also showed the sceptical Thomas "the prints of the nails" in his hands and the wound in his side (John xx. 27).

5. Others are stated to have been raised from the dead in their natural bodies. Thus in Matt. xxvii. 52, 53, we read that "the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; and coming forth out of the tombs, they entered into the Holy city and appeared unto many." Admitting that this story and also that of Jesus are pious fictions, they at least show what was the belief in apostolic times. We have, again, the case of Lazarus, who was raised from the dead after he had been in the tomb four days and disintegration had commenced (John xi. 17, 39).

6. In Matt. xviii. 7-9 Jesus is represented as saying that if a hand or a foot caused a believer to sin, that person should "cut it off and cast it from him"; for it would be better for him "to enter into eternal life maimed or halt, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire." These words, it is true, have been given a metaphorical interpretation; but, all the same, the fact of going into the abode of bliss with only one hand or foot plainly indicates that the believer would, as a matter of course, enter that abode in his former earthly body. There is no getting away from this inference; for if an entirely new body would be given after the resurrection, the mutilation of the old earthly body could not affect the new heavenly one.

The New Testament idea of the resurrection of the dead would thus appear to be that of the entire body—changed in the raising into the former earthly body, when in health. Of this belief it need only be said that it is utopian, and one which can never be realized; for we have no evidence of the existence of a being "with whom all things are possible." The same is the case with the heart (the supposed seat of reason, thought, and feeling), and of the psyche and *pneuma*: these all perish with the body.

There remains now but one point in connection with "eternal life" to be noticed: this will form the subject of the next paper, and bring this series to a conclusion.

ABRACADABRA.

Why Was Christ Born?

WERE a visitor from a distant planet, knowing nothing of this world's religions, to walk about in a Christian country, say in England, on the day of that ancient Pagan festival which is now called Christmas; were he to observe the eating and drinking, dancing and card-playing, and general jollification; he would never suspect that the people around him were celebrating the birthday of their God.

Were the visitor informed of this fact, and resolved to pursue his inquiries, he would discover that the celebrants were, for the most part, as ignorant as stones of the whole matter; that they were, in fact, the dupes of a long train of imposture.

Jesus Christ, whom the Christians worship as God, was not born on the twenty-fifth of December; at least the chances are very much against it. If he ever lived, he must have been born on *some* day; but, in the absence

of all positive information on this point, the odds are three hundred and sixty-four to one against any day that is selected being right. The orthodox date is, indeed, quite inconsistent with the Gospel narrative. The birth of Jesus Christ is related to have been proclaimed to shepherds who were watching their flocks by night. This is impossible in Palestine in the depth of winter. The flocks are not pastured out at night until the spring.

Jesus Christ had been dead for generations before his birthday became an object of interest. According to the Acts of the Apostles, it was at Antioch that his followers were first called Christians; yet it was at Antioch that St. Chrysostom said—three hundred and fifty years after the Crucifixion—that they had but lately heard of the twenty-fifth of December as their Saviour's birthday.

The twenty-fifth of December was, as we have already said, a Pagan festival. It celebrated the new birth of the sun. The twenty-first of December is the shortest day, and is assigned in the Roman Calendar to St. Thomas, who doubted his Master's resurrection. For three days (as may be seen by the Almanack) the orb of light appears to be stagnant; but the fourth day begins to lengthen, the sun decisively commences another progression, and the Pagans expressed their joy at the auspicious occurrence. This festival was seized upon by the Christian Church; the SUN was turned into the SON; and the Pagans who were weaned or forced into Christianity, under Constantine and his successors, were gratified to learn that the new religion, while it altered their shibboleths, made very little difference with regard to their rites and customs.

But if the day of Jesus Christ's birth is uncertain, the determination of the year is equally difficult. We are informed by the third Gospel that Jesus was born when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. This was at least six years after the commencement of the Christian era. Jewish chronology assigns a much earlier date for the birth of the Nazarene; a point on which the reader may consult the *Jewish Life of Christ*, a remarkable production that should be read by every student of the origins of Christianity.

All this would be discovered by our imaginary visitor from a distant planet. He would also find that the deity of Jesus Christ was never suspected during his lifetime; that the doctrine grew up gradually, with many fluctuations of fortune, in the Christian Church; and that it was only imposed on the whole Christian world after generations of fierce controversy and cruel bloodshed.

Supposing, however, that Jesus Christ *was* God, or part of God, or a messenger from God, we may still ask—Why was he born? What was his object? And how has he carried it out?

Jesus Christ was certainly not born to teach the world anything new in religion, philosophy, or morals. Every good (or bad) text in the Gospels is a repetition of what had been previously uttered. Originality was not one of his characteristics. Even the assertion that he brought immortality to light is false in the light of Jewish doctrine before his birth, and ridiculous in the light of the ancient systems of Egypt and India.

Christ did not come as a man to illuminate the world, but as a god to redeem it. Such is the teaching of orthodox Christianity. But if Christ's object was the world's redemption, his failure is "gross as a mountain, open, palpable."

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," was the command of Christ to his apostles. He also said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end." This can only mean that they, or their successors, were to convert the world to Christianity; it must at least mean that they were to preach the gospel to all ears, so that all might have an oppor-

tunity of embracing it. But has this been done? And after the lapse of nearly two thousand years, more than half of the world's inhabitants have never heard the gospel preached. Only a quarter of the human race are professed Christians, and among *them* how many are *real*? Buddhism, which was founded by a man, includes more millions than Christianity. Nor is there the slightest prospect of further success. The races that stood outside Christianity at first are outside it still. Missionary effort makes no considerable impression on the vast populations of Asia and Africa. The heathen who *are* converted in distant lands do not equal the number of persons in Christian countries who are either sceptics or indifferent.

Jesus Christ is called the Prince of Peace. Angels sang at his birth of "peace on earth and good-will among men." Surely this was ironical. More blood has been shed in the name of Christ than in the name of any other deity. It is an indisputable fact, also, that all other differences—racial, political, or social—are aggravated by difference in religion. Englishmen and Irishmen are both Christians, but they worship Christ in different ways, and this diversity is the principal secret of their long antagonism. Had Ireland been Protestant, or England been Catholic, the two nations would have found a speedier way to reconciliation. The last great war in Europe was between Catholic France and Protestant Germany. It was fomented by the Jesuits, who used the Empress Eugenie as their tool. Christ's priests never shrank from crime to win their ends. They have ever been ready to drench the earth with tears or blood to promote the interest of their Church.

Peace was *not* brought by Christ. If it was it ascended with him. He was born at a time of peace, during the reign of the mild and wise Augustus. Less than half a million soldiers sufficed to maintain the peace of that far stretching empire, and to secure its frontiers against the outer barbarians. At present, in Europe alone, six millions of soldiers grasp arms in readiness for mutual slaughter. At the close of every winter we speculate on war in the spring. After all these centuries of the reign of Christ the military systems of Europe are crushing the nations. Young men spend their days in barracks, two hundred millions are wrung from the people to support armies and navies, and another two hundred millions to pay the interest on national debts.

Peace on earth! The brotherhood of man! Yes, the peace of kings and priests; the brotherhood of Cain and Abel.

Christians dwell on the love for the poor and oppressed displayed by the Hebrew prophets, and declare that Christ, as the last and greatest prophet, was to be the best friend of the needy and the desolate. But is this a fact? So far as the poor are concerned, Jesus Christ might as well have remained in heaven. Poverty is a standing curse of Christian societies. Men die worth millions, and their ignominious corpses repose in a marble pillared mausoleum. Many of their fellow-citizens die daily from starvation, or the diseases of ill-fed bodies, and are buried out of the way as public nuisances. Dives and Lazarus still live in the same city. The beggar's stomach is as empty, and his sores as painful, as ever; and Dives is never frightened by that little parable about the dry tongue and the missing drop of water. Christ said, "The poor ye have always with you," and the remark was a prophecy. The poor *are* always with us. *They* have not been redeemed. They owe nothing to Christ. He was not born for them.

Peace has not come, poverty has not gone; the people still suffer, and are still cheated with "kingdom-come." Christ was not born to redeem us in this world. Oh, they say, he will redeem us in the next world. He was

born to lead us to heaven and save us from hell. But if he cannot help us *here*, how will he help us *there*? Let the truth be told—He is a failure. As a god he is contemptible. He came to this world to no purpose. It would have been better if he had left us Home Rulers to manage our own affairs. Jehovah was a curse to the Jews, and Christ has been a curse to Christendom. We at least are not grateful to him. We hope he will soon go the way of other gods into oblivion. We believe he is going there rapidly. He is perishing because he is being found out. His pretensions are belied by the history of nineteen hundred years. He was born once, but it was a mistake. All he has now to do is to die.

(The late) G. W. FOOTE.

Acid Drops.

Hundreds of years ago the Jews took a great revenge for all the injuries that were to be inflicted on them. They gave the Christian their God, and that was one of the most cold-blooded acts of cruelty in history. Now, Mr. Balfour proposes another act of retaliation. He is going to give the Jews Jerusalem, and found a Jewish State. This game of reprisals ought to be stopped. It will only lead to fresh trouble in the future.

To be quite serious, the foundation of a State for Jews is only of value so long as there are large numbers of Jews suffering oppression, and to whom any place is preferable to the one wherein they live. Where Jews are not persecuted they neither desire a Jewish State, nor will they avail themselves of one if it is offered. English, French, or Dutch Jews are Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Dutchmen. Their religion no more expresses nationality than does Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. True, they profess a longing for Jerusalem—in their prayers. But that is about as real as the Christian's longing for heaven. And we are quite sure that nothing short of forcible deportation will ever induce Jews to leave countries where they have been settled for generations and are fairly treated.

And what is meant by a "Jewish State?" Does it mean a theocracy on the Biblical plan with Jewish regulations enforced? That would mean a tyranny so intolerable that it would soon have to be suppressed. And if the State is to give absolute freedom to all, with no State religion, and no compulsion or restriction in any form, it is a travesty of language to call it a Jewish State. Perhaps, one day, people will recognize that the "Jewish Question" is really a sociological question.

In a recent issue of the *Daily News*, a nineteen-line extract from Paine's *Rights of Man* was published as a quotation for the day. We hope the editor did not give his readers too much pain.

Although there is a shortage of paper, and periodicals are greatly reduced in size, editors still find room for religious news. A Sunday paper actually had a hold headline: "200 Eton Boys Confirmed," with following letterpress. Perhaps the editor thought it a big bag of prisoners for the Church offensive.

Considerable interest has been excited by the *Morning Post* attack on the Papacy as having been partly responsible for the recent disaster to the Italian Army, and, of course, Roman Catholics in general are highly indignant. So far as individual English Roman Catholics are concerned, their indignation may be genuine enough. But with the Vatican itself that is quite another affair. There is a very powerful Roman Catholic party in Germany, and Austria is a stronghold of the Papacy. Here are two good reasons why the Roman Church should oblige these powers as much as is possible. Added to this, the Vatican has never relinquished its aspirations after temporal power, and the dream of a Pope who shall exercise a temporal sovereignty over Italy itself is not too fantastic for its ambitions. Finally; the Roman

Catholic Church is a *Christian* Church, and all history teaches that a Christian Church will support any and every cause that promises help. The principles of the Christian Churches are not exactly up for sale, but they can always be so explained as to assist any cause or government that supports them.

The *Referee* calls attention to the fact that just one hundred years ago the vicar of Sutton summoned Sir Montague Burgoyne, the Lord of the Manor, for non-attendance at Church. The case was tried at the Bedfordshire Assizes, and Sir Montague pleaded that he was an "invalid and had prayers read at home." So the jury found him "Not guilty." But how the clergy to-day, with their empty churches, must long for a return of the good old days!

"This hath God wrought," says the *Church Times*, with reference to the recent capture of Jerusalem. And the *C. T.* is grateful for the "privilege" accorded to the English people in this matter. It is not for us to say what "God" had to do with the capture of Jerusalem, but we do suggest that his presence—if he can achieve this kind of thing—is sadly needed on the Western Front. What God can do in the East, he might attempt in the West, and it would be far more effective there than elsewhere. It would be blasphemous to suggest that "God" is only powerful against a weak force, and powerless against a strong one. Perhaps the *Church Times* will explain the success of "Providence" in the one case, and its failure or carelessness in the other.

It was characteristic of the thoughtfulness of "Providence" that, after the terrible explosion at Halifax, Newfoundland, which killed about 1,500 people, it came along with a severe blizzard while thousands of people were homeless. And people who are indignant over German atrocities thank God for his "loving mercy."

Bristol clergy have also been holding a conference to consider the serious aspect of the future. The Bishop of Bristol dwelt strongly upon the responsibility of the clergy at the present crisis. We do not see it. Had he spoken of the responsibility of the clergy for the present crisis, we might have agreed. But no sensible person cares to the value of a mouldy communion wafer about the "highfalutin" talk of the clergy. All that is required of them is to get out of the way.

We cannot congratulate the members of the House of Commons on the success of their opposition to the 27C Regulation. It was first proposed that all leaflets and pamphlets relating to War and Peace should be passed by a censor before publication. This was such a glaring piece of autocratic legislation that the Government was driven to make concessions. The concessions amount to this: every pamphlet dealing with War and Peace must be placed before the censor three days before it is printed. If the censor decides that it must not be printed, it is forbidden. And the aggrieved party may seek a remedy in the Courts if he so desires.

We fail to see the value of the "concession." The right way, the way of real freedom, would be for the censor—who must be a Government censor—to take the pamphlet into the courts and allow judges to decide whether it really infringes the law or not. That has hitherto been the English way. To condemn it first, to seize type, etc., on the strength of the condemnation, and leave it for the aggrieved party to seek redress, is the way of Russia in its worst days. Moreover, the concession concedes nothing. To appeal to the courts was a privilege the subject always possessed, and still has, in spite of D.O.R.A. Finally moving the courts is an expensive matter, and an organization without plenty of money cannot act. It is only wealthy men, and wealthy societies that can threaten the Government, and the Government does not attack men of money.

We are not concerned in the least with the political aspect of the matter, and we protest against the fashion of labelling

all criticism of this regulation as "Pacifist." That is a mere political trick. Our sole concern is with the setting up of a practice that is foreign to our traditions and to our institutions. Freedom is the one thing in the world worth fighting for, and one must be prepared to risk something in its maintenance. Make the penalties for illegal, for treasonable, action as heavy as you please, but let the decision as to what is illegal rest with the courts of law. That is the only guarantee of freedom the subject has. That gone, everything is gone.

Patriotism and piety is a sad mixture. A poor woman at Bradford cut the throat of her boy of sixteen because she thought that her "sacrifice" would help the Allies. She had been a regular attendant at Christian Science meetings.

It looks as though "Providence" had been running amok amongst the clergy. In one newspaper paragraph the other day it was recorded that the Rev. J. W. Thorndike, of St. James the Less, Vauxhall Bridge Road, died suddenly in his church; Rev. W. T. Nicholson died after an operation for appendicitis; and Prebendary F. Wodehouse died suddenly at Exmouth.

The *Illustrated Record of the Tower Hamlets Mission* believes in making one's flesh creep—as the best means of raising subscriptions. In its Annual Christmas Appeal it darkly hints that it could give "numerous pathetic accounts" of those who have come to their teas and been converted. We are not quite certain whether the pathetic stories belong to the tea or the Gospel, but we can quite believe it of either.

In another portion of the same "Appeal" we read that the Mission is accumulating information "of a most terrible character as to the demoralization of boys and girls" in cinema shows. These "horrible centres of corruption" are open on Sundays to all, etc. Of course, we are not given particulars; so that every pious reader is given the utmost freedom to indulge his or her prurient imagination without check. But it is very thoughtless of Mr. Charrington to give the game away by saying: "Our immediate object will now be to arouse the Churches to their danger, and the terrible effect Sunday opening is having on the attendance at churches and Sunday-schools." And that, apparently, is the "corruption" that is at work. So it looks like a case of trade jealousy, after all.

A general dealer of Merthyr, S. Wales, was summoned for driving a motor cycle with side-car, thus infringing the Motor Spirit Restriction Order. The defence was that the car was being used to fetch some butter and eggs. The essence of the offence appears to have been that the cycle was being ridden on a Sunday, and one suspects that it was the Sabbatarian feelings of the Chief Constable that were hurt rather than the Motor Spirit Restriction order. Piety *plus* patriotism is a strong combination.

"The name of Father Christmas is on the lips and in the minds of all children," declares a London newspaper writer. The dear little Pagans.

The forthcoming celebration of the merry birthday of the Man of Sorrows led to an order of the Liquor Control Board relaxing in England and Wales some of the drink restrictions.

The campaign in Palestine has given the journalists an opportunity of re-hashing much Biblical knowledge. The *Times* had a lengthy note on Hebron, the City of Abraham, and said "the oak of Mamre under which the patriarch camped is still pointed out a little to the north of the town." This is the stuff that is retailed in the columns of one of the foremost daily papers.

"Take no thought for the morrow" does not, in the opinion of the vicar of Krodeshall, Suffolk, apply to sugar. At least, we assume such to be the case, seeing that this gentleman was found in possession of a sack of sugar. When charged under the Food Control Order, the defendant was unaware of the Control Order. The vicar was fined £3, and

the local grocer who supplied the sugar £5. We do not understand why the grocer was fined more than the vicar, particularly as, in small country places, the clergy have a way of bringing considerable pressure to bear upon local tradesmen. And in these days grocers are not exactly begging people to take sugar off their hands.

The War Office has issued the information that "clerks in holy office" who volunteer for military service "are permitted to select the corps to which they wish to be posted." If they do not come up to the requirements of the selected corps, they will be permitted to return to civil life. Will anyone please explain why a clergyman joining the Army should be given a privilege denied to other people? And why, if he is not suitable to that particular corps, should a clergyman be permitted to return to civil life? Under this regulation a parson has only to select a corps for which he is clearly unfitted to escape service altogether, and retain the credit for being anxious to do "his bit." And we may trust the members of the "Black Army" to make the most of the occasion.

The relation between religion and conduct, says "Vanoc," in the *Referee*, is always a mystery to the average layman. We daresay; but it is only a mystery because theology has deliberately caused the confusion. Whatever relation exists between the two, in fact, is purely accidental; it is never causal. Religion operates on morality precisely as does politics. It may lead people to regard things as right that are wholly wrong, or it may induce them to brand as crimes qualities that are of quite an opposite character. That is why religious belief forms no guide whatever as to how a person will behave. He may have enough native goodness to overcome the influence of religion, or enough inborn "cussedness" to fly in the face of its better teaching. Religion and morality spring from different roots, and it is regrettable that "Vanoc" makes such a mystery of a problem that could be answered by a very casual study of moral development.

"Vanoc's" wonderment is due to an article written by Commodore Henderson, at present interned in Holland. The Commodore finds that some of the prisoners in his camp go to church, but "there are plenty of men who never go near a church. Yet they are living straight, upright, clean lives which many Churchmen might do well to imitate." If Commodore Henderson is surprised at this, it only shows that, like "Vanoc," he also has much to learn on the question of ethics. And the value of "Vanoc's" philosophy is well shown by the following:—

Commodore Henderson's creed, which is shared by innumerable thinking souls, is that no dogmas are necessary unless belief in an All good God can be called a dogma. With the evidence of our own existence, Nature, and the laws of Nature before us, the existence of a Supreme Being is a self-evident fact which nobody except Conchies of the baser sort, degenerates, and arrogant and unobservant ignoramus can dispute.

We do not know in which category we are to be placed, but it is long since we came across a more ignorant outburst than this: "Nature and the laws of nature!" The poor man thinks they are distinct, evidently. We have no space or time to disentangle all the absurdities in the passage cited, they will be clear enough to *Freethinker* readers. We can only regret that "Vanoc" was not with General Allenby when he entered Jerusalem. Assuming "Vanoc's" ability and willingness to bear the burden, the General might then have entered the city in the same way as Jesus is said to have done.

At Broadstairs Sunday cinema shows are restricted to soldiers and sailors, and humorous films are excluded from the programme. The pious folk evidently wish the soldiers and sailors to take their pleasures sadly.

The *Daily News* anxiously asks the question, "Will there be Feasting As Usual" at Christmas? Presumably, the birthday of the "Man of Sorrows" will be shorn of some of its merriment.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

January 6, Manchester; January 13, London; January 20, Southampton; February 3, Birmingham; February 17, Leicester.

To Correspondents.

A. L. (Glasgow).—Pleased to hear of the increased sales at your newsagents. That is becoming a very general experience, but we are hungry for still more.

PTE. J. SCOTT.—Your suggestion of a fund for the distribution of literature among soldiers is a good one, but we have had to ask our readers for help in other directions, and we do not feel warranted in making any further appeals that are avoidable. We do send out literature on our own account, so far as our means permit, and we have the gratification of knowing that it does good. Thanks for your efforts in distributing pamphlets. The literature ordered has been sent.

PTE. STARLING writes: "Freethought is, in my opinion, making great strides among the soldiers, and it would be well worth getting the parodies the boys sing to the hymns they have been forced to learn." We shall be very pleased to receive specimens. Some may be quite usable.

PEDRO.—Sorry we are not able to use the MSS. you have been good enough to send.

S. R. (Belfast).—We do not know what you mean by "details of the death-bed" of G. W. Foote. The only pertinent details are that he died in his own home, with none but members of his own family in the house. And he died as he had lived, a firm Freethinker.

B. DUNLOP.—Next week. Thanks.

R. ELMES.—It is a very foolish policy to offer an explanation before you are quite sure the statements made are a record of facts.

E. RAWLINGS.—You have misunderstood Mr. Holyoake's discussion with Bradlaugh, it was not of the nature you assume. Mr. Holyoake made many professions of his authentic opinions in quite plain and unequivocal language.

J. BREESE.—We are obliged for your promise of further help in the event of there being more trouble with the L.C.C. But we do not think that likely. We can quite appreciate the worries of a business man at the present time.

J. ROBERTSON.—We quite agree with your view that in winning the fight in London against the L.C.C. it will have its influence elsewhere. By the way, is it not time Edinburgh did some work again in the shape of propagandist lectures? We shall be glad to give any assistance we can.

W. H. DEAKIN.—Thanks for good wishes. The letter to which you refer is not yet to hand, but trust it will arrive in due course.

W. JONES, G. E. GILL, AND OTHERS.—We are obliged for offers of pamphlet, but a parcel, wrongly labelled, was discovered in stock.

PIPER W. H. FYFE.—We are sending you a small parcel of literature for distribution.

J. LIVESY.—Will see about an article on the subject you name; but there are so many other things that call for attention. Thanks for your good opinion of the paper.

N. S. S. GENERAL FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges—"Ernest," 2s. 6d.

N. S. S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges—"Ernest," 2s. 6d.

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

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.

Lecture Notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4 by first post Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.

Letters for the Editor of the "Freethinker" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4.

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour 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, 3s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

The impudence of some officials almost passes belief. A friend at Goldthorpe, near Sheffield, was good enough to display a *Freethinker* poster in his shop window. The shop is situated in the central part of the town, and opposite the police station. The poster had been displayed for some weeks without anything being said, but on December 10 a police sergeant, accompanied by a constable, arrived on the scene, and informed the shopkeeper's wife that it was illegal to display such a poster, and that he had "gone into the matter fully with his superiors and they had concluded it was against the law." Our friend's wife properly asked this official to call again when her husband was at home. The reply was that there was enough trouble these times and he didn't want any more. Of course, the whole proceeding was quite illegal, and nothing else than an attempt to bully our friend into taking the poster down. We have instructed that the poster be kept where it has been, and that in case of any further trouble to let us know at once. There is nothing at all illegal in displaying the poster, and if any trouble occurs, our friends may rely upon our full support. Meanwhile, we have written for further particulars with a view to bringing this particular police officer to book.

Under the heading of "An Earnest Thinker," the *Cambridge Magazine* (December 15) has a notice of the death of a well-known Cambridge figure, Mr. H. J. Wolstenholme, of Christ's College:—

Those who knew him well would agree that his grasp of social and general philosophy was in many ways unrivalled in this country. Trained originally for the Ministry in some Nooconformist sect, his inquiring mind soon found itself unable to accept the fundamentals which others allowed to pass unquestioned, and though he retained an understanding of and a respect for the convictions of those from whom he parted company, he was reluctantly faced to the conclusion that the hypothesis of the existence of a God was amongst the least helpful and least fruitful of all the cosmogonies that mankind has devised.

We were pleased to see a letter, in the *Wine and Spirit Trade Record*, from Mr. H. Latimer Voigt, strongly recommending Mr. Foote's *Bible and Beer* as a "crushing" reply to the contention that the wine mentioned in the Bible is unfermented. The pamphlet is a crushing answer to other things beside this, and we should like to see it circulated by the tens of thousands.

We regret that by the transposition of a line in Mr. Palmer's article in our last issue one paragraph was robbed of part of its meaning. The last line at the bottom of p. 795 should have appeared as the second line in the second paragraph in the second column. The line must have been displaced in making up the columns.

We are asked to state that the "Social" arranged for Boxing Day by the Manchester Branch, N.S.S., has had to be postponed owing to local circumstances. We are glad to learn that this Branch is winding up its quarter's work with plenty of enthusiasm to recommence early in the New Year.

THE POLITICAL CHRISTIANITY OF THE KAISER.

The mainstay of the (Roman) Catholic Church rests with the Austrian monarchy and with the death of the old Emperor (written in July, 1914) they would have to look to some other country and ruler for protection. There is no Catholic ruler in a Catholic country to-day able to support and protect the dignity of the Church. The German Emperor is a Protestant monarch, but he is first and last a Christian, and thanks to his usual keen and far-sighted policy, backed up by his strong spiritual convictions, religious dissensions are almost unknown in his Empire. The Catholic religion enjoys in no country, save the United States and the British Empire, more real freedom from persecution than it does in Germany. And the Emperor's personal standing with the Vatican is excellent.—*Armgard Karl Graves, "The Secrets of the German War Office."*

Fund for Fighting the L.C.C.

THE purpose of this Fund is to clear off a portion of the liability incurred in fighting—and defeating—the attempt of the L.C.C. to prohibit the sale of literature in the London parks and open spaces. The legal expenses incurred amounted to about £250. Of this, between £80 and £100 remains unpaid, and the Protest Committee is appealing for contributions from all who appreciate the value of the triumph achieved. This is a question that should appeal to Londoners with special force, and it is hoped to raise the required amount by the end of the year. The following is the list of subscriptions to date:—

Previously acknowledged, £21 19s. E. Whitehorn, £2. Dr. B. Dunlop, £1 1s. H. Jessop, £1. J. Burrell, 1s. J. Breese, £1. G. Saunders, 2s. J. Robertson, 2s. T. Dunbar, 2s. 6d. Mrs. Annie Poole, 1s. Dr. R. T. Nichols, 10s. 6d. W. H. Hicks, £1 1s. Manchester Branch N. S. S., £1 1s. T. Underwood, 2s. E. Reynolds, 2s. 6d. "Ernest," 2s. 6d.

The Prayers of the Righteous.

THE REV. CHAS. GOODHEART is the vicar of a fine old church in one of the suburbs of London. Most of his parishioners regard him as a real old English gentleman, and a sincere Christian. Obviously, he has never critically examined the tenets of the faith in which he believes, and he knows nothing, or comparatively speaking nothing, of the heretical views of many of the more learned members of his own church. All along he has said that he has accepted his religion on faith. He believes that the Bible is God's Word—every word alike, from the first verse of the first chapter of Genesis to the last verse in Revelation; and every man, whether he is a brother in Holy Orders or only a layman, who dares to throw the slightest doubt on the authenticity or genuineness of the Gospels, he regards as a heretic who will ultimately find his portion in the lake of fire that burns without ceasing for ever and ever. And he not only believes in Christianity, but he tried to practise it in his daily life. One thing he believes in most fervently—and that is, in the efficacy of prayer.

Throughout this long and terrible War he has insisted that the one thing wanted is the united prayers of Christians, offered up in all sincerity to God, so that He would turn the hearts of men to nobler and better purposes than human destruction.

But since hostile air-raids have become very frequent in London, many have noticed that the kind face of the dear old vicar has worn a very troubled expression. People have come to church more regularly, and joined with him in prayer to God to stop this merciless and horrible murder of innocent citizens—men, women, and children; but let them pray never so hard, the air-raids continue, and not even the shot and shell of hundreds of guns can keep the infernal machines away from the London area.

One evening they had a special service of prayer at the church, and the vicar appealed in very eloquent language to the Great God of Battles to save the poor innocent children from destruction by bombs. He appealed to God more especially as "Our Heavenly Father," who watched over and protected his children; but even in the midst of his prayer, a churchwarden was observed to walk up the middle aisle, and, to the astonishment of the congregation, proceeded up the steps to the pulpit, and presented the vicar with a note. The anxiety of the congregation was soon increased, for

the vicar made the solemn announcement that he had just received notice from the police that an air-raid was taking place, and that they must "take cover" as soon as possible. The vicar said that he was inclined to continue the service and offer up further prayers, and trust to the Lord. But no sooner had he made the announcement than he observed that nearly all the members of the congregation were hurrying out of the church into the crypt, where no doubt they thought they could find safer shelter than in the church itself. Before they had been in the crypt a quarter of an hour, the members of the congregation, largely augmented by strangers, who had also sought what they considered the safest cover, were engaged in singing hymns and songs alternately, and making all kinds of noises, to drown the booming sound of the guns.

But as they proceeded with their singing a terrible sound was heard outside, as though in close proximity to the Church, although as a matter of fact it was some distance away. A dull, heavy, thud, like the falling of a bomb, followed by a terrible crash, like the tumbling down and the destruction of a great building. The boys in the crypt kept up the singing and shouting and clapping of hands to cheer up the women and children, many of whom were hysterical and in tears. For over two hours this kind of thing went on before the sound of bugles could be heard, and people knew that all was "clear" once more, and those who had sought the shelter of the crypt emerged into the streets and proceeded homewards. Some among the crowd, however, met friends who informed them that a terrible calamity had happened not far away—that several dwelling-places in a crowded thoroughfare had been reduced to ruins, and that many people had been buried beneath the *debris*. Many of them joined the constant stream of people who were going in search of the scene of the great catastrophe.

When they arrived the sight was terrible to behold. People were running about the streets in a dazed condition. The police were trying to keep the crowd back, and every now and then men appeared with stretchers carrying the bodies of those who had been killed or maimed in the destruction of the buildings. Many of the women fainted as they saw the dead and dying being taken away on ambulances. Somebody in the crowd mentioned that about a dozen children were buried beneath the ruins of the building in the cellar where they had sought shelter with their parents.

One man, who was evidently a Freethinker, said that God might at least have spared the innocent little kiddies. Another, who was probably a Christian or a Nothingarian, said that these awful calamities were enough to make a man doubt whether there was a good God or not.

"Ah," said one, who joined in the conversation, "all these disasters were brought about by the wickedness of the people. People had given up going to church and were seeking a life of pleasure, and forgetting all about God."

"What about the poor kiddies who are buried in the ruins—what have they done to offend God?" asked the Freethinker.

"God, in his wrath, sometimes destroys the children as a punishment for the sins of the parents."

"Oh, does he?" exclaimed the Freethinker. "Then all I can say is that he is very unjust, and not at all like a good father who would certainly try and protect the young, who could not help themselves."

But the Christian still persisted in saying that it was the wickedness of the people that had brought all the trouble upon us, and that what we wanted was more prayers.

"Don't talk nonsense," said the Freethinker, "there are plenty of prayers being offered up. They don't stop the enemy from dropping bombs. What we want is more guns and a stronger barrage."

"Ah, I see you are one of those who are in favour of using force against force; but that will never do," said the Christian. "We want some higher force. The Bible says the prayers of the righteous availeth much."

"Yes—but," said the other, "the Bible also says, 'There are none righteous—no, not one.' But let us cease this talk, they are bringing out some more dead. Let me quote Shakespeare: 'If you have tears, prepare to shed them now.'"

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

The Storm Cloud's Burden.

I.—CATS.

A CAT is a diminutive tiger conspicuous for its love of comfort, its dexterity in lapping milk, and its ability to see in the dark with its whiskers. It obtains access to the Englishman's home because of a pleasing purr which, by some subtle alchemy, succeeds in creating around it an atmosphere of deep content. It enters the Englishwoman's home because it is rough on mice, and, occasionally, as a substitute for a husband.

The cat population *tends* to rapidly increase beyond the means of subsistence, but here God proposes and man disposes. The murder of the cat's young is according to a section of the unwritten law. We do not care for recent extensions of this law to human beings, but a moderately worded clause providing for the painless extermination of juries would meet with our approval.

The whereabouts of a cat is easily located in the daytime (at night-time it is a matter of grave difficulty). Presuming that the larder door has been slammed, barred, and bolted, puss will be found in the position which would have been chosen as the most comfortable seat in the house. This, although not proving the animal to be of great intelligence, proves it to be, in some respects, of equal intelligence to man.

If, perchance, this position should be unoccupied, we are afraid it will be necessary to re-inspect the larder.

The young cat, or kitten, is a delightful object. The play of a kitten is an altogether joyous spectacle, albeit there is something in it of pathos to one who has seen a few decades roll away. The blot on the kitten's escutcheon is the refinement of torture it displays towards the luckless mouse before consuming it. This trait, however, disappears with age and experience, the older cat considering the mouse as a meal, and, therefore, too solemn a thing to be trifled with. Similarly a Scotsman may be observed to drink his glass of whisky with avidity, fearing lest the whirligig of time should bring about its downfall. The progress towards a kindlier spirit is often in an inverse ratio in the human race, sixty years often finding a man bubbling over with bloodthirstiness. The symptoms first become apparent, though in a restrained form, about the age of forty-five.

Owing to a cat's gentleness, affectionate disposition, and playful little ways, chivalry has fixed upon the term "cat" as a generally appropriate term to apply to the fair sex.

Where food is concerned, the ability to make distinctions between *meum* and *tuum* is not over-conspicuous in a cat. This peculiarity is not, however, confined to them. The National Anthem of Wales, in fact, is written round one Welshman—Taffy, to wit—who had quick and easy methods of dealing with a food shortage. Because of the patriotic entente, we hasten to remark that this

was a very long time ago, and that it was in Scotland where the blind beggar missed his decoy shilling.

Many mis-spent years in lodgings have convinced the writer that the cat, in these matters, often sins vicariously.

A cat has nine lives, and herein it possesses a great pull over man, as it need never think of turning over a new leaf and attending to its religious exercises until it has spent seven or eight of them. This is no small advantage. On the off-chance of influencing the character of our next re-incarnation, we here and now publicly plump for the career of a well-fed cat.

The love of a cat for its keepers has been described as cupboard love by those in whom any old kind of love would be a refreshing discovery. Yet, surely, there could be nothing more *rational*¹ than cupboard love.

Blow, blow, thou winter wind,
Thou art not so unkind
As man's ingratitude.

Puss can be relied on, at least, to love the hand that feeds her.

II.—AND DOGS.

One need not say so much of dogs. They speak for themselves.

A dog is an animate object with a bark, a bite, and one or two tails. Those with two tails are quite unreasonably happy. A tail over two and a half inches in length on dogs of certain breeds is considered by connoisseurs to be a defect. Consequently, the excess is removed, the dog whose property it is not being consulted. The only effective permanent method of removal is to have it bitten off. The gentleman told off for this duty it has been observed has rarely, if ever, had a classical education; neither is he bound over to keep the peace.

In all impartial investigations conducted by man, he is found to be a much superior creature to a dog. The foregoing paragraph lends point to this finding.

We only know a dog to be a dog by an act of faith. Artemus Ward once said he couldn't define an elephant but he knew one when he saw one. This is a very clever remark, indeed, but it doesn't apply to a dog, for the more dogs you see the less inclined you are to dogmatize. You wouldn't mistake a Dandy Dinmont for a Newfoundland even on the darkest of War-time nights. Yet many estimable people are ready to swear that they are both dogs, so we leave it there.

When they had fashioned a few dogs up aloft in the canine department the artificers were so pleased with their work that they decided not to add further ingredients, but to leave well alone. That's how a dog comes not to have a soul.

We are inclined to agree with this judgment, for a dog is a highly creditable piece of work, and, obviously, not the work of a first-year man. We make an exception, of course, of the Daschund, which is a low-down crawling beast—for the duration of the War.

Similar caution, unfortunately, was not observed in the Adam and Eve department. There the soul was introduced, probably as a make-weight for the lack of a tail. This led to original sin, saints and sinners, the Prince of Peace, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the rarity of Christian charity under the sun. It also led to a most infernal row in the celestial pattern shops, since which time there has been no further experimentation.

Defining a dog is child's play compared to defining a soul. For this task many years of theological training are necessary, and, even then, the definition must be launched in an atmosphere of reverential calm for it to have even an equivocal success. But we do know that, because of it, a man doesn't die like a dog. No matter

¹ We have written it, so let it stand.

how snivelling a lout he may be, when he's dead he is as objectionably alive as ever, and he goes either to heaven to be, for all eternity, a nuisance to the less unworthy of those who have backed the winning formulæ, or to hell, where he'll be a damned nuisance for a like period.

What happens to men, women, children, and kind words doesn't happen to a dog. A dog just dies. No canine celestial celebrations, no dead dog's Derby days, no *post-mortem* prowls for puppies. Let him wag his tail, then, while he may, for when he's dead he's done for.

But dogs can be faithful unto death; they can love with a love that wavers not; they can grieve with a grief that kills.

So what matters?

T. H. E.

A Winter's Day.

In the gloomy month of November when the people of England hang and drown themselves.—*From the French.*

THE poet asks, When Winter's here can Spring be far behind? And one reflects that the "great War" is three years and some months nearer an end than it was in the beginning. That is some comfort. To be quite exact, it was Thursday—a notable day with Freethinkers; for on that day the up-to-date one arrives, and when it does not, said Sceptics swear softly, and console themselves with a "back number," and find there, perhaps, much they had missed, and would not have missed for money. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, these, since our unhappy school days, were somewhat forbidding days, and simply appalled. Thursday was brighter, Friday lighter, Saturday was *jour de fete!* Sunday was somewhat irksome to the juvenile; but to the emancipated adult, or even to the patriarchal sceptic, it is a Pagan day of joy.

We awoke in the morning in those distant years and wondered what day was it; and the warm or cold tints of the "spectrum lines," cast on the white bedroom walls by the rising sun in at the window, were prophetic of the weather. It was Saturday, with its free and errant happiness; or merely the beginning of the week, and we trudged to the house of correction, but even this penance redeemed by azure pools in the roadway, in seeming deeps profound, but clear and fresh as the childish mind itself, reflecting the rolling skies. It was "Alice in Wonderland," and "Through the Looking Glass," as we learned later from that creator of realest fairylands, Lewis Carrol.

But to return to our Thursday and our November day. There is a conical islet in our misty Firth known as Holy Isle. It is clothed these days in glooms opaque; or only partly dwelling in the cloud—cloud, edged with the serene silv'ry splendour of filtered light from the lower horizon. Close at hand are the vandyke woods and rusty vegetation of November—landscape of sombre sere. Suddenly the sun illumines the scene, turning the bronze to gold, in the glow, as it might seem, of some Vulcan's milder, deeper, softer fire; field and wood are for the moment steeped in a rich glory the Summer never knew. Life itself is made up of mere contrast, light and shade; nor is this mere analogy—man is compounded of the elements, just as are the clouds and skies—he is gay and gloomy, good and bad; remove one quality and he is something else. No one, says the Hebrew Bible, has seen God at any time. In like manner, it may be said, no one has ever seen *himself*. Perhaps no one could endure himself if he had. Illusion there must be; natural illusion—distinct from *delusion*—and in our own minds we rear an artificial metaphysical environment in which, complacently contented, but much beguiled, we live and move and have our being.

And now it is the evening, and all is still as we peruse the dying glories of the short November day. The great furnace of the sun would seem to be extinguished every night. Its calm, mellow radiance steeps in amber-yellow light the quiet interstices of the clouds, and turning the cloud itself to glowing embers and the ruddy hue of consuming charcoal. Slowly and softly, noiselessly, the shadows fall. It is peace. And yet we are at war. I never could understand this lust of empire. I have all the empire I desire. I have just suggested it. No; I would rather be the fuddled farmer of whom Burns wrote:—

Kings may be blest, büt Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills o' life victorious!

and go down to the tongueless silence of the dreamless dust, than to be one of those iron advocates of force and murder variously known in the various countries they represent and curse alike. A clear, pearly glow lights all the encircling horizon beneath the grey and dun of the beautiful, brooding, beneficent night.

And out of the misty seas and cloudy twilight, dim shapes appear, the shoulders of huger hills, massive but mild, gigantic yet gentle, shrouded, softened, sublimed, faded at length in the folds of night's descending pall. Perhaps out there, in intervals in the rolling mists, the fitful hermit moon looks down and gleams on rock and scaur, on peak and dark ravine, lighting the solemn, solitary wild, refulgent, recluse, immune; and the sea surrounds it sobbingly and goeth forth, "dread, fathomless, alone."

ANDREW MILLAR.

A Sounding-Board for Prejudice.

THIS suggestive—and comparatively mild—description of our daily British Press has been borrowed from a paragraph in "Acid Drops" (November 25) referring to Dr. Lytton's expressions about newspapers. Anybody who has seen anything of the inner workings of newspaper offices knows quite well that newspapers are primarily commercial undertakings. But one effect of the War has been to make it more difficult for newspaper proprietors to ascertain what current public opinion on many questions is. Circulation is being kept up because all classes want to have the latest news about the progress of the War; but some editors would find their cynicism tinged with surprise if they saw the sneers of many thinking members of the public when they glance at the trashy pabulum often offered for public consumption. There was never war bread like it!

"Give us this day our daily thrill" used to be the peace-time prayer of the editor of the orthodox daily paper. The universal sensation of the War has bewildered the editorial brain, and the Government has "controlled" the editorial right hand—which, incidentally, has not yet quite lost its cunning. If it cannot do anything else, it can boom the "National" Mission of Repentance and Hope or the "National" Day of Prayer, and so try again to test the condition of the public mind; and—well, if the "National" Mission results have neither materialized nor spiritualized—and if the "National" Day of Prayer does not come up to the most sanguine expectations—we make no rash prediction one way or another—can the poor editor be blamed after he has done his best? Now, can he?

Some of the leading dailies have, unfortunately, afforded evidence to justify the description of the daily press which forms the title of this article. In these columns, more than once, have appeared reasonable, temperately worded letters containing unfashionable opinions which, though supported by arguments of general interest, had been

refused the hospitality of the columns of leading daily newspapers. And as the big cock crows, the little one learns; so, with one or two praiseworthy exceptions, we find the provincial press following in the wake of the big organs, and cutting out with valiant censoriousness any contributions which would be likely to offend the susceptibilities of the old ladies—male and female—who form the most important part of their clientele.

But we have another—and, we fear, a graver—criticism to offer about the daily press. It has of late been placing itself in a sinister light by its lack of taste in recording news about individuals. One may take leave to say that every decent person's susceptibilities were shocked by the gross and inconsiderate way in which the proceedings at the inquest on the late Mr. Fred Billington were reported. We refrain from repeating the details. Many who had no personal acquaintance with the gifted actor, but who had frequently seen him perform, and in a sense felt he was their friend, could not finish the paragraph without a sense of outrage. Such an unbecoming business accentuates the prejudice of which the daily press is the sounding-board. Independence of opinion on unpopular topics they boycott; but they are quick enough to flourish any personal matter about an actor—however offensive it may be to the man's friends. This is not the liberty; it is the licence of the Press. The Press is not free; it is the slave of convention.

IGNOTUS.

Correspondence.

THE STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Your correspondent, "Young Colquhoun," tries to discredit my claims for a Voluntary Co-operative Commonwealth on the ground that population tends to outrun subsistence, so that there must always be a struggle for existence, in which the weakest go to the wall. This is the exploded theory of Dr. Malthus, who was a Church of England parson, and propounded his plausible theory over one hundred years ago to ease the consciences of himself and his wealthy patrons. It is not a question of *tendency*, but a question of *fact*. Never mind what the tendency may be, but is it a fact that the world is now overcrowded? Is it true at this present time that every available acre of land, and every machine, and every man, woman, and child are utilized to their utmost capacity in the production of wealth, and yet found to be insufficient to maintain the population? So far is this from being true that there are millions of acres of land in the British Islands lying absolutely uncultivated, and that plenty of food for double our present population could be raised without the least difficulty.

The late Professor Huxley was a clever comparative anatomist, but showed himself to be quite ignorant of economic science when he tried to prove in a leading magazine, some thirty years ago, that capital employs labour. The idea of a spade employing a man might have occurred to him as being too ludicrous for sober assertion, yet he wasted much thought in his ill-fated attempt to prove it, and thereby lost all claim to be an authority in economic science.

If "Young Colquhoun" will study Mr. Arthur Kitson's valuable works on finance, he will find out all about the War Debt, and how easily it could have been avoided.

G. O. WARREN, Major (retired).

GOD AND THE WAR.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Please allow me to thank your correspondent, Mr. E. Egerton Stafford, for his letter with reference to mine, on the above subject. I fear I did not make my meaning sufficiently clear. As a firm believer in evolution and the Darwinian theory, I hold that some *force*, which, possibly, I erroneously called a *law*, compels us periodically to fight for

our very existence, because we constantly tend to increase beyond the means of subsistence. Man being the most highly developed of all animals has attained largely the command over the rest of creation, and, consequently, his struggle with the lower animals is comparatively a minor matter. Probably the whole world is, at all times, populated up to the limit of subsistence.

Although we see little of the struggle amongst the lower animals, the struggle is, nevertheless, intense, and instantly that an animal falters on the way there are innumerable foes at hand to assist in administering the final coup.

Now what could look more peaceful than the picture which *Nature* presents to us on a fine spring or summer day? Yet all the time the struggle for existence is there.

On the other hand, what could be more unrestful than the appearance of any of our large and busy towns during working hours—at least, to those of us who have eyes to see? Avarice, toil, vice and misery meet us at every corner, and one wonders how such a mass of numbers manage to exist at all.

The cause of all this hopelessness is, of course, "over-population," but, as your correspondent says: "it is a well-known fact that we can check and modify the processes of nature." Man has now attained to "reason," but of which, alas, he has so far made but little use!

C. RUSSELL (Major).

Margarine.

THE parsons write stale sermons in their sleep,

And church bells ring on Sunday by the score;

The bishops on their "Holy Missions" creep,

Mumbling the platitudes that we ignore.

Oh! wondrous wheels of God's divine machine;

For though in pain, with contrite hearts we weep:

Our soldier's wives must fight for margarine.

The Sunday-school may "cleanse the infant soul,"

And Christian ladies walk in fear of God;

The chapel may become life's highest goal,

And Baptist aisles the best that can be trod.

But though we stick to God like secotine,

And walk beneath the everlasting rod;

Our soldier's wives must fight for margarine.

ARTHUR F. THORN.

The people have begun to suspect that one particular form of their past misgovernment has been that their masters have set them to do all the work, and have themselves taken all the wages. In a word, that what was called governing them, means only wearing fine clothes, and living on good fare at their expense. And I am sorry to say the people are quite right in this opinion also. If you inquire into the vital fact of the matter, this you will find to be the constant structure of European society for the thousand years of the feudal system; it was divided into peasants who lived by working; priests who lived by begging; and knights who lived by pillaging.—*John Ruskin.*

The great remedy for calumny, as for afflictions of the heart, is time. If people find fault with our principles or our conduct, good or bad, the best course is to pay no regard to them, and go on as before. After a short time the subject will become stale, and the slanderers will cease talking about it, in order to hunt the trail of some fresh scandal. And the more we show ourselves steadfast and consistent in pursuing our own course, regardless of all idle gossip, so much the sooner will that which was at first condemned as strange or unreasonable be seen in another light and acknowledged as rational and sensible. The world always comes round in the end to the views of those who firmly persist in following their own path, and ends finally by giving up its own opinions and adopting theirs. Whence it results, as is well known, that the weak live as the world wills, and the strong as they will themselves.—*Leopardi.*

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LONDON.

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