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Views and Opinions.

Christians and Christmas.

From beginning to end Christianity is a bundle of contradictions. Its doctrines and beliefs are as contradictory to each other as are its precepts to its practice. It has an almighty Creator whose will is always being overcome by his creatures, and whose wisdom is seldom equal to the cunning of man. It preaches love and has been more successful in rousing hatred than any other religion in the world. It prescribes peace and Christians are everywhere foremost in waging war. Young Men's Christian Temperance Associations are evidence that it has, after centuries of rule, failed to make sobriety a habit among Christians. Societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals and to children prove how far Christianity is from making kindness characteristic of its followers. It has sown history thick with falsehood in the service of religious truth. The records of popes, and priests, and of the Churches prove that Christian history gives an air of plausibility to but one orthodox doctrine—that of human depravity.

* * *

Christmas and Christ.

The contradiction that obtains in Christian doctrines and practices dogs it in its festivals. Look at the present festival of Christmas! Traditionally Father Christmas is a jolly, red-faced fellow, full of kindness and good nature. But Jesus Christ, whose birth is supposed to have been on Christmas day, is the very reverse; of this—a pale, emaciated figure of suffering, as far removed as possible from plum pudding, and turkey, and general jollification. Christians believe in the one, their practice points to the other. If the youngsters saw Father Christmas enter the room they would shriek with delight, and he would reign the unquestioned king of their affections. If they saw the traditional "Man of Sorrows" they would shriek with fear and run to the sides of their mothers. Human nature has been too strong for the Churches. The logic of life has shown itself more powerful than the logic of faith, and as December the 25th was a period of rejoicing long before Christianity was born, so it may remain such when Christianity has taken its place in a museum of anthropology. About the pre-Christian rejoicing there was reason and logic even though of a crude kind. Christianity succeeded only in making the festival religiously ridiculous.

Who was Born on Christmas Day?

Was Jesus born on the 25th of December? Nobody knows. Irenæus and Tertullian give the year 3 B.C. as the date of his birth. Luke's account would make it about seven years later. Canon Farrar thought it should be 4 B.C. Some have placed it much earlier, and others a little later. Our accepted chronology really dates from the sixth century. The monk Dionysius decided the exact date. And imagine the trustworthiness of fixing the date of a birth that was believed to have occurred some five centuries and a quarter before, and in a period when registry offices were unknown and no records were available. But there is a reason for fixing the 25th of December as the birthday of the Son of God; it was a favourite day for the birthdays of gods, and there is a fashion in these things. In pre-Christian Syria and Egypt, says Frazer, writing of the annual rebirth of the solar deity, "the celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, "The Virgin has brought forth. The light is waxing!" In the Mithraic cult, which bore so striking a resemblance to Christianity, the birthday of Mithra was celebrated on December 25. The Egyptians exhibited a new-born god, lying in a manger, on that date. Bacchus and Adonis also had their birthdays on this date, and a Syrian Christian writer, cited by Frazer, says very frankly:—

It was a custom of the heathen to celebrate on the same 25th of December the birthday of the sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. In these solemnities and festivities the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to the festival; they took counsel, and resolved that the true nativity should be solemnized on that day.

Decidedly, there is a fashion in these things. And for ourselves, we believe the evidence for one birth is quite as good as the evidence for another.

* * *

What Happens on Christmas Day?

The truth is that December 25 does not connote the birthday of a particular historic person; it is the anniversary of an event. The recognition of this event dates far beyond the time of Christianity, and to a much wider area than is covered by Christian influence. And one cannot even understand the origin and nature of Churches without putting one's self in the mental position of our primitive ancestors, to whom "natural law" was unknown, and who saw in all natural processes the operations of supernatural agents. To these, the decline of the power of the sun and the dying of vegetation were portents full of disaster. Magic is resorted to in order to help the sun regain its lost strength; and, as Frazer suggests, we have in the kindling of the Yule log a survival of a wide-spread sympathetic magical ceremony which aimed at strengthening the heat of the sun by kindling fires on earth. And as a matter of fact, the African Bushman to-day follows exactly this plan at midwinter, to the same end. At any rate, there is no doubt whatever that Christmas is the old Pagan solar festival, which in its turn was derived from the savage

belief already noted. And with this as a key, all the customs connected with Christmas are explainable. The misletoe comes to us from the Druids, who saw in it the retreating place of the spirit of vegetation. The rebirth of the infant Sun-God is plainly a symbol of the recovery of the sun after reaching its lowest point in the heavens. The general rejoicings is the delight of a people on receiving assurance of the continuance of the life of vegetation. Even the decoration of houses with evergreens is a practice of Pagan origin, the purpose being, as one authority writes, to provide the sylvan spirits with a shelter, so that they might remain "unnipped with frost and cold winds, until a milder reason had renewed the foliage of their darling abodes." In their origin all these things have a crude logic attaching to them. As survivals, they are interestingly pretty. But Christianity, by the attempt to connect them with an historical event, only ends in making them ridiculous.

The Origin of Gods. * * *

There is no longer room for reasonable doubt that both Christmas and Easter are very ancient festivals, or that the current form of the Christ-myth represents a blend of the vegetation and solar deities—the two being ultimately one. Sacred trees are among the commonest objects of religious worship, and the god, as Robertson Smith points out, inhabits the tree "not in the sense in which a man inhabits a house, but in the sense in which his soul inhabits his body." And if we ask why *this* belief, we are brought back to the very origin, or, at least, one of the main sources, of the belief in gods. There is room here for some doubt as to the precise stages of the process, but none as to its main character. To begin with, primitive people invariably attribute the operations of nature to "spirits," amongst whom the tribal ghosts are prominent. If the crops are plentiful or scarce, it is because the tribal spirits are pleased or angry. And Mr. Grant Allen, in his essay on *The Attis* of Catullus, has given a very plausible theory why ghosts or gods should have become identified with vegetation. First, the tumulus over a dead body is freshly turned earth. Next, food is scattered over the grave to feed the ghost. Animals are killed on the grave, and their blood soaks into the earth. The result is that vegetation is likely to be richer on and around the grave than elsewhere. But this is not due to the better-fed soil, but to the activity of the ghost. It is the life of the ghost manifesting itself in vegetation, and the extension of the idea to vegetation in general is not a difficult step. And from the belief that fertility is due to ghostly action to the practice of creating a ghost, or a god, for the purpose of securing good crops is another easy step. And Professor Frazer has shown universally this has been taken. In this connection we must refer readers to the last-named author for proof that Christ is one of a group of vegetation deities annually slain to be born again in the new crops. Professor Frazer will supply scores of examples of the practice of killing someone annually, and either burying him whole or in parts to secure abundant crops. All the details of the Christian myth are there. The selection of a victim, the giving of royal or divine honours, the killing of the god, and his resurrection in the renewed life of the world. Other and later ceremonies naturally get associated with Christianity, but anthropology supplies the key to the whole. In the beliefs of the most primitive of contemporary races, we see a survival of that original frame of mind which gave religions birth. The Christian religion is to-day a principal representative of a dying superstition.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The superiority of a learned man over a mere worshipper is like that of the full moon over all the stars.—*Mohammed*.

Christmas.

It is beautiful to give one day to the ideal—to have one day apart; one day for generous deeds, for good will, for gladness; one day to forget the shadows, the rains, the storms of life; to remember the sunshine, the happiness of youth and health; one day to forget the briers and thorns of the winding path, to remember the fruits and flowers; one day in which to feed the hungry, to salute the poor and lowly; one day to feel the brotherhood of man; one day to remember the heroic and loving deeds of the dead; one day to get acquainted with children, to remember the old, the unfortunate, and the imprisoned; one day in which to forget yourself and think lovingly of others.....; one day in which bonds and stocks and deeds and notes and interest and mortgages and all kinds of business and trade are forgotten, and all stores and shops and factories and offices and banks and ledgers and accounts and lawsuits are cast aside, put away and locked up, and the weary heart and brain are given a voyage to fairyland.—*Ingersoll*, "Works," vol. xii., pp. 351.

Christmas is here:
Winds whistle shrill,
Icy and chill,
Little care we:
Little we fear
Weather without,
Sheltered about
The Mahogany Tree. —*Thackeray*.

Such is the day we are about to celebrate—a day of universal rejoicing which all mankind in the Northern hemisphere can justly claim as their own; a day on which to say, with the poet:—

Sorrows, begone!
Life and its ills,
Duns and their bills,
Bid we to flee.

It is the day of great and precious promises which have never yet been broken, the anniversary of the sun's return and life's sweet birthday. In short, it is Nature's supreme Gift-day, and it has, in consequence, become a day of general giving. On this account it is a pre-eminently popular day with both young and old. The Christmas-box and the Christmas tree, with Father Christmas behind and above both, how eagerly they are looked forward to, and how thoroughly enjoyed when they come. "What I want for Christmas" is by no means an uncommon expression, and the following is a partial list of the late Colonel Ingersoll's Christmas wants:—

I would have all the nobility drop their titles and give their lands back to the people. I would have the Pope throw away his tiara, take off his sacred vestments, and admit that he is not acting for God—is not infallible—but is just an ordinary Italian. I would have all the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests, and clergymen admit that they know nothing about theology, nothing about hell or heaven, nothing about the destiny of the human race, nothing about devils or ghosts, gods or angels. I would have them tell all their "flocks" to think for themselves, to be manly men and womanly women, to do all in their power to increase the sum of human happiness. I would have all the professors in colleges, all the teachers in schools of every kind, including those in Sunday-schools, agree that they would teach only what they know, that they would not palm off guesses as demonstrated truths (*Works*, vol. xi., p. 375).

Christmas is an egregious misnomer, and represents stolen property. Christ belongs to the region of mythology, like Attis, Adonis, or Dionysus, and Christianity put itself in line with other supernatural religions by fixing the date of the birth of its Redeemer on the 25th of December. It is highly significant, to say the least, that the two most important Christian festivals—Christmas and Easter—should owe their origin to the sun and be closely associated with vegetation. As a cult, Paganism was forcibly suppressed, but most of its

customs, and not a few of its doctrines, were appropriated without acknowledgment by the Christian Church. Yes, the Lamb's Bride waged brutal wars against her rivals, and, having gained the victory, indulged in wholesale looting, although by an ingenious system of camouflage, she has endeavoured to cover up all traces of the theft which becomes, in her vocabulary, sanctification. Thus, as we closely scrutinize it, the *Christ mass* is seen to be the worst species of fraud attached to a myth. On Christmas Day the pulpit will repeat the old lie under the guise of holiest truth, and the congregations will respond in some such deeply poetic lines as the following:—

O come all ye faithful,
Joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him
Born the King of Angels;
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Sometimes Freethinkers are accused of the unspeakable folly of flogging a dead horse; but, unfortunately, the sentimental trash enshrined in the doggerel just quoted is not an outgrown weakness of which the present generation of Christians is heartily ashamed, but a living absurdity, gloried in by myriads of devout believers throughout Christendom, who, while listening to or joining in the singing thereof, are lifted up to what they regard as an altogether seraphic frame of mind. We even pay the clergy the compliment of admitting that multitudes of them sincerely believe that they are in touch with the grandest reality in the universe when they interpret the message of Christmas in terms of the Evangelical Christian faith; but that admission does not blind us to the fact that, despite their intense sincerity, they must be placed in the same category as all the Pagan priests of whom they often speak with withering contempt. The herald angels' song, "Glory to the new-born king, Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled," is fully as unreal as the angels themselves; and they who repeat it to-day dare not seriously face the facts at which they so pitifully mock. In the *Christian Commonwealth* for December 11, there is an exceptionally eloquent sermon by Dr. Fort Newton, in which he deals with the question: "Does God speak to man now? If so, how?" We agree with the reverend gentleman when he says that "what was true in the long ago is true to-day"; but we totally disagree with his bold assertion that God *did* speak to man in the long ago, an assertion of the truth of which he adduces not a single scrap of evidence. With seeming *naivete* he says: "Argument is not needed; the fact proves it." We respectfully ask, which fact? We challenge him to produce a single fact from any period in Christian history which may honestly be taken as a verification of the angelic song recorded in the Gospels. There is nothing easier for a person of an emotional temperament than to appeal to what he calls religious experience in the conviction that what is true in experience is also true in outward fact. Benvenuto Cellini enjoyed daily communion with God, and he could not find words sufficiently strong to describe the rich, uplifting, spiritual visions graciously vouchsafed to him from time to time; but the whole world knows that God's dealings with Cellini did not result in the transformation and ennoblement of his character. And history supplies us with innumerable instances of the same kind. Cellini had the experience because he had the faith; but that there was a God behind his faith who really revealed himself to him is utterly incredible to those who are familiar with the man's *Memoirs*, written by himself. The new-born King

came to redeem the world, to deliver it from its devastating evils, and to fill it with the love and practice of righteousness and truth; but no one acquainted with the history of Christendom can have the hardihood to affirm that his self-appointed mission has been fulfilled. So far as the regeneration and purification of human society is concerned he was born absolutely in vain, and Christmas is the ghastliest farce in existence. But the grand old Sun has never failed us, never broken a promise, never been a moment before or behind the appointed time, and him, as the world's only real Saviour, we may, at this season of the year, address in the words of the Hebrew poet:—

Thou visitest the earth and waterest it,
Thou greatly enrichest it;
Thy river is full of water;
Thou providest them corn, for so preparest thou the earth.
Thou waterest her furrows abundantly;
Thou settlest the ridges thereof;
Thou makest it soft with showers;
Thou blessest the springing thereof.
Thou crownest the year with thy goodness;
And thy paths drop fatness.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Footnote to History.

Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties.—*John Milton*.

Universal tolerance is the very soul of happiness to a populous and enlightened nation.—*Napoleon*.

THE year 1881 was an eventful one. Two things happened which thrilled the world. Amid the Northern snows the white czar Alexander was assassinated, and away in the Great Republic of the West President Garfield met with a similar fate. During that year Charles Bradlaugh, the intrepid leader of English Free-thought, was dragged out of the House of Commons during a struggle that was so fierce that the muscles of his arms were ruptured and his clothes torn to ribbons. For all that, he was as cool and self-possessed as he was on the day when he handed the N. S. S. presidential hammer to his successor, George William Foote, the first editor of the *Freethinker*, which was founded the same year.

The story of the *Freethinker* is one of the publishing romances of the world. Its advent in 1881 created a furore in advanced circles, for the new periodical was the last word in audacity. Orthodoxy, so far as it condescended to notice it, dismissed it with a sneer or a light laugh. But it was not to be sneered or laughed down, and presently it was seen that the editor knew his business. There were brains and enterprise in its pages, and it began to be talked about. Its avowed policy was waging war against superstition in general and the Christian superstition in particular. Published at a popular price, edited in a lively style, it succeeded from the first. Curiously, it was the infamous treatment of Bradlaugh by the bigots that created Foote's militancy. He has told us that he was until then practically ignorant of the spirit of persecution, and with the generous enthusiasm of youth, he fondly imagined that the period of combat was ended, and that Freethinkers had nothing else to do but to devote themselves to purely constructive work. He was rudely disillusioned by the logic of events. The illusions of hope were rudely dispelled by the insults levelled at Bradlaugh; by the disgraceful scenes in the House of Commons; by the continuous and crippling litigation; by the attacks on Mrs. Besant, when ruffians struck her and threw lime at her. It was then that Foote recognised that it was war to the end. He drew his sword,

threw away the scabbard, and rushed to the side of his chief.

Like the brave Spartan that he was, Foote drew the enemies' spears to his own breast. Three times was he tried for blasphemy, and he was sentenced to a year's imprisonment as an ordinary criminal. "Thank you, my lord, your sentence is worthy of your creed," he remarked to the Catholic Judge North, who tried him. His sacrifice was not in vain. During this Homeric struggle the Freethought party increased in numbers and influence, and since then there has been no looking back.

Probably no journal in the world had so loyal a staff as the *Freethinker*, and this was one of the things that contributed to its success. The capital at command was a drop in a bucket, but the enthusiasm of the writers was as boundless as the ocean. To merely recite the names of the contributors is to mention some of the best-known names in the Freethought movement. Indeed, the services of the *Freethinker* can hardly be over-estimated. It kindled a new spirit in intellectual circles, popularized secular propaganda, and gave the apostles of liberty a new feeling of actuality and power. For thirty-eight years it has stood for Liberty of Thought. Thirty-eight years—half an old man's life, and the whole of a young man's. During those years Freethought, it may confidently be asserted, has progressed more rapidly than during any preceding half century.

The canvas of 1881, the year in which the *Freethinker* was born, was crowded with men and women of strong personality. It seems so long ago that many are but clouded memories now. Gone are most of the familiar faces, but through the clouds appear the smiling features of our old comrades-in-arms: F. J. Gould, Arthur B. Moss, and William Heaford, three of the staunchest veterans who ever wore the uniform of the army of human liberation.

For sixteen years the pages of the *Freethinker* were enriched by the scholarly contributions of Joseph Wheeler, the sub-editor. A journalist, he belonged to a profession of which not even the leisure is leisurely. The gentlest and most lovable of Bohemians, he carried a weight of learning easily. His frail body harboured an indomitable spirit. Away from his beloved books, he was whimsical, cross, kind, and amusing. We all loved him, and wondered "one small head could carry all he knew." The acquisition of knowledge was an instinct with him. As Chopin took to music, he took to books from boyhood. He handled them and made them part of himself. Into the pages of the *Freethinker* he put all his talents. A quiet scholar, he did his duty throughout a very stormy period. Instead of repining, he turned with unappeasable energy to help the Cause through greater ordeals than it had yet weathered. That was the sort of man he was, and that is why his memory shines with a spotless and concentrated lustre.

The contributors pass, but the journal remains. The *Freethinker* is thirty-eight years old, and, under its present editor, is more alive, more active, more full of ideas, and more widely circulating to-day than at any period of its long and eventful history.

MIMNERMUS.

There is no hostility so admirable as the Christian. Our zeal performs wonders, when it seconds our inclinations to hatred, cruelty, ambition, avarice, detraction, and rebellion; but when it moves against the bair towards bounty, benignity and temperance, unless, by some miracle, some rare and virtuous disposition prompts us to it, we stir neither hand nor foot. Our religion is intended to extirpate vices, whereas it screens, nourishes, and incites them.—*Montaigne*.

Justice, Human and Divine.

SOLEMNITY oft struts the stage too long, and tearful Tragedy, her tawdry trappings torn, loses our regard, for in the midst of death we are in mirth.

I have been cursed with a sense of humour, but I am not one of those who see "humour in all things." To my mind there is not a redeeming feature about the horrible murder of a little Belfast child by an epileptic youth, and one can only sympathize with judge and jury whose duty it was to deal with the sordid story, and to determine the fate of the perverted wretch guilty of such an appalling act. But when I read of seven learned judges sitting in solemn conclave in Dublin—during the progress of the War—to discuss and to argue the point, not whether Joseph Pitt was to be executed for murder, but whether it was in accordance with the law that a judge should pass a sentence upon him which everyone knew would never be carried out—then, I must admit, the comic opera aspect forced itself upon me.

In his famous theory of value, Karl Marx speaks of "socially necessary" labour. That phrase burnt itself into my mind, and fired my imagination so much, that it has become a habit with me to divide things—broadly speaking—into the "socially necessary" and the "socially wasteful." I cannot dismiss the meeting of the seven authorities on justice merely with a laugh and a shrug of the shoulders. The social aspect of their council is untouched by their decision as to whether a murderer of fifteen years of age may or may not be sentenced to death. What does concern me, as a serious-minded man, is the frightful waste of human labour involved in the administration of "Justice" in this and similar cases. We have been told that only by the most rigid economy could the War be won. I have scrupulously obeyed the requests to refrain from burning unnecessary lights (and even necessary ones) in the "halls and corridors" of my Ballymacarrett dug-out, although we have found it impossible to "cut down the number of hot baths in our household." Lest ambiguity may obscure my meaning here, let me say that the only place one could take a bath is in the yard, which a neighbouring lady actually does, to the infinite amusement of the lieges. We never have a fire in our bedroom, there being no grate; besides, we have no coal, so we have been doing our bit. But when I think of the seven occupants of my seven-foot square kitchen, in which physical exercise with a feline would be somewhat restricted, and our enforced "economies," and then think of the appalling waste occasioned by the seven learned jugglers with the jargon of justice, my humour is apt to be a trifle acid. Seven highly educated men, trained in universities, and living cultured, easy lives, fed, clothed, and housed in comfort and security by honest men's toil, and at a time of great national stress, the best service they render society is to split hairs concerning the age when a miscreant may receive sentence of death!

There might be some consolation if any justice emerged from the Dublin deliberations, but the crime and its problem remain just as they were. The inefficacy of punitive vengeance considered as a synonym for justice was illustrated to me several years ago by the facts of an execution in France. The culprit had outraged and murdered a young girl, and her father had been allowed to witness, at close quarters, the expiation of the crime. When Deibler's victim had "spat in the basket"—to use the playful argot of the French mob—a fatuous functionaire remarked, "Now monsieur would be satisfied." "Yes," replied the bewildered parent, "justice has been done, I know; but that does not give

me back my daughter." I am making no maudlin plea here for the better treatment of assassins; certainly it would appear kinder and saner to cut short the career of a ruffian than to waste the lifetime of several men in caging him up. But I am thinking of justice in this respect; not what the wicked flee from, our enemies are brought to, and the unfortunate have "administered" to them, but rather the feeling that "to know all is to forgive all." Certainly, to have this in mind, to avoid all punishment that is vindictive, to give wherever possible a real chance for evil-doers to mend their ways, are ideas which are commending themselves to progressive thinkers the world over. Even the seven luminaries whose deliberations I have ridiculed were occupied in discussing the application of a point which, after all, has something humane about it—that the death penalty should not be imposed on a child under sixteen.

When, however, we turn from the human to the divine, we find that if there is sometimes a glimmering of kindness, a soupcon of sanity, here and there a spirit of forgiveness in our all too unjust "justice," earthly judges, even of the flogging and hanging variety, are all gentleness and wisdom when compared to the Great Judge whose monstrous verdicts and sentences are applauded by believers. Granted that the laws of the land might be saner, and that the wise ones might with advantage be better administered, it is nothing short of cant to talk of squaring our justice with humanitarian principles, while glorifying this unreasoning and bloody-minded Jehovah. I like a little consistency now and then. To blame the human, to approve the divine, for the same or worse conduct is the method of Christians. No sane man can give a good excuse for the Germans' sinking of the *Lusitania* in war-time; but every Christian will say there was "some good purpose" in the torpedoing by iceberg of the *Titanic* in time of peace by the Heavenly Hun! Now, if I were a Christian judge, and living up to the principles of counting hairs and visiting iniquities of the parents on the children, I'd give a man fifty years' penal servitude for saying "damn," and hang a little child if it was proved that his grandfather stole apples; for if God is good and wise and just in holding every soldier to account for each idle word spoken, in suffering the good to be killed to point a moral to the wicked, to "punish" the innocent for the faults of others, to forgive ruffians a lifetime of villainy merely for an act of credulity, to condemn to eternal suffering noble-minded men and women whose time was too fully occupied in making this world a better place to live in—then it is illogical to carp at our judicial errors. Yes, if that frightful Ogre is to be believed in, and little children taught at school that all the hooligan characteristics of the Bible God are compatible with love and charity, the less we say about the injustice of human beings, the better. There are no juries, no consultations, with God (unless the three persons debate among themselves), no counsel for the defence, no Appeal Court, no half measures, no short sentences. With Judge Jehovah, Jefferies is out-bloodied, and God's justice is infinitely more drastic than Cromwell's "To hell or Connaught."

Justice, even in the narrow sense in which the word is ordinarily employed is not at all a simple matter, and the factors are so many and diverse that even crediting men with the best of intentions, only approximately just verdicts can be arrived at. If a drunk man blacked his wife's eye I would not condemn the magistrate who disregarded the man's plea that his heredity was to blame, and sent him to the cells; but I would stick up for the ruffian who used the same argument to Almighty God. A police magistrate might well say: "I've no time to discuss Determinism here with a man who knocks his wife about. Seven days without the option." But

if the drunkard told God all the facts of the case (if that were not superfluous) then he ought reasonably to expect that the All-wise Father would acquit him, instead of which he would be told peremptorily to go to hell, unless in his last earthly drunken delirium he had expressed a belief in Jesus the Saviour, when the verdict would be heavenly glory (and uncongenial company) for eternity.

Freethinkers are willing to believe that Christians are better than their creed, although humanitarian reformers have had the greatest obstacles put in their way by men of profound religious conviction who have always justified cruelties and horrors in the name of the God of love. Until the fear of a Heavenly Father, who seems to be a celestial Whackford Squeers, and the reliance upon brutal precepts from Holy Writ, as guiding principles for our conduct are completely banished from men's minds, social evils can scarcely be appreciably ameliorated, for, even in the restricted sense in which human justice is commonly regarded, Christianity has proved to be a positive hindrance to humanitarian effort.

High-souled men and women, whose lofty ideals transcend the police-court, see more in justice than the birching of boys, the jailing of housebreakers, undignified wrangling about a hypothetical black book, or repulsive strangling dignified by the black cap. While acquiescing in the principle of justice for all, these same reformers are chiefly concerned with *justice for all well-doers*. But such idealists whose conceptions of justice are based on a knowledge of the evolution of social forces, a wide toleration, fostered by experience, of all the idiosyncracies of individuals, a profound pity for the weak, and an instinctive detestation of punishment that merely perpetuates cruelty, such men and women have long outgrown the belief in the God whom Holy Willie apostrophizes:—

Oh, thou, wha in the heavens dost dwell,
Wha, as it pleases best thyself,
Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell
A' for thy glory,
And no' for ony guid or ill,
They've done afore thee.

J. EFFEL.

Acid Drops.

For fear the British people will not be so vengeful as they might be, the *Christian World* ex-Berlin Correspondent reminds its readers that a leading Roman Catholic journalist wrote in the early part of this year praising the sinking of the *Lusitania* with "joyful pride," and cites the Rev. Dr. Baumgarten as saying that the man who did not view that act with pride could be no true German. For our part, we beg to observe that both these expressions come from thoroughly Christian sources. And we have noticed throughout the War that, just as it was the civilian who—in his talk—was far more bloodthirsty than the soldier, so it was the keen Christian who showed most pleasure in the unavoidable brutality of warfare. We have culled quite a number of passages from religious sources gloating over shortness of food in Germany, and the mortality amongst women and children caused by the Allies' blockade. Less religious people regarded these things as some of the hateful—if inevitable—consequences of war, and said little about them.

The editors of the religious papers are trying hard to minimize the ex-Kaiser's piety, and the hired pen-pushers are obeying the editorial nod. The *Christian World* says: "All through the thirty years of his (the ex-Kaiser's) ascendancy men and women pointed to him, and declared that if he was the bright and shining example of the influence of religion on the hearts of men they would prefer to be without religion." Dear, dear! and the British and Foreign Bible Society used

to point to Wilhelm as a "bright and shining example" of a Christian monarch, and solicit subscriptions on the strength of it.

The ex-Kaiser used to figure among the subscribers to the British and Foreign Bible Society, and only since the War has his name been deleted from the annual reports. His piety was so pronounced that on one occasion he actually forbade the erection of a statue to Heine on the grounds of the poet's infidelity. As a fact, no one doubted Wilhelm's religiosity until Christians found it convenient to drop him.

In the columns of a religious contemporary there are no less than twenty-two advertisements relating to patent medicines, hygiene and health. No wonder devout Christians declare "There is no health in us."

Busmen are supposed to take holiday by riding on other 'buses; but policemen have higher notions. Here is an advertisement from a provincial paper: "The Inspector of Police from Leman Street Police Station, London, will (D.V.) preach the Gospel in the ——— hall on Sunday." This is a decided change from the announcement that a "reformed burglar" will speak, and, doubtless, the congregation will appreciate it.

Dr. Clifford, speaking at the National Liberal Club, said "the most religious document sent out recently was the 'Aims of Labour.'" The document, be it remembered, is pure, unadulterated Secularism.

A correspondent, writing from New Malden, Surrey, tells us that at a Rummage Sale held in his locality for the benefit of a church, there was found among the articles offered for sale a German Prayer-book. A discussion ensued as to what was to be done with it, for no English Christian patriot would read prayers in German. The suggestion that it should be thrown on a dustbin was rejected, and a Catholic clergyman—the name is given—decided that it should be publicly spat on and then burned. This was done, and the incident offers a fine example of the chastening and refining influence of religion in a time of war. Whatever unthinking savagery there is about people in war-time is certain to be intensified by religion.

A Sunday paper expresses astonishment that Westminster Abbey should contain the tomb of John Broughton, a former champion prizefighter. Some of the other deceased persons buried there were not nearly so respectable.

Godliness and gluttony are old stable companions. Commenting on the celebration of Thanksgiving Day by the Americans in England, the *Daily Chronicle* pointed out that the festival "shortened the lives of a great many turkeys." Anyhow, the birds had little reason for thanksgiving.

A special service was held at Southwark Cathedral to commemorate the baptism of John Harvard at the same church in 1607, and the sermon was preached by the Archbishop of York. It is fitting that a dying Church should hold services for dead men.

Newspaper paragraphs state that a sum of £60,000 is still required to complete the restoration of St. Paul's Cathedral. We should like to know the exact amount expended on that building from first to last. Supplying the clergy with money for its upkeep seems very like feeding sharks with sponge cakes.

How is it that so much literary criticism in the daily press seems as if it were written by the cricketing reporter temporarily out of work. In a review of Mrs. Barnett's book, *Canon Barnett: His Life, Work and Friends*, in a London newspaper, it is calmly suggested that Herbert Spencer is the "most ludicrous of philosophers," and that it is the figure of Spencer "who gives most of the comic relief of Mrs. Barnett's book." Fortunately, Herbert Spencer's reputa-

tion is not in the hands of clergymen's wives, or even of penny-a-liners.

The *Daily News* recently published a letter urging that the clergy should be represented in the House of Commons, and stating that a movement was on foot to attempt to remove the political disabilities of parsons. The votes of the Bishops in the House of Lords should make anyone pause before entrusting more political power to the clergy.

The Heathen Chinese will soon be as extinct as the dodo, if the religious newspapers are to be believed. A real, live Chinaman has been consecrated Bishop of Che-Kiang. Will the almond-eyed Christian require the same salary and emoluments as his dear brother in Christ, the Bishop of London?

Rev. W. Askwith, Vicar of Matlock Bath, has been good enough to fix the date of the second coming of Christ. It is to be 1935. Only sixteen years to wait. But some people are talking of an indemnity from Germany that may take fifty years to pay off. And soldiers who are in the Army of Occupation are wondering when on earth they will come home for their discharge. Well, in 1935 they may be needed to keep the streets clear for the Second Coming—perhaps for some Jewish Lord Mayor to present the freedom of the City to our celestial visitor.

In a new book on *Tory Democracy*, by Lord Henry Bentinck, the author suggests that Lord Beaconsfield worked hard for the establishment of a "truly Christian Commonwealth." This provoked a reply from the *Daily News*: "Wherever he may now be, let us hope that Lord Beaconsfield is in a position to read this. He would have enjoyed it so heartily."

The Salvation Army unites business with its piety. In an Essex newspaper the following notice appears: "The musical members of the Salvation Army are arranging to give a few suitable vocal or instrumental selections in your neighbourhood, and ask for a generous response to their uniformed collector." This reminds us of a picture-postcard that was popular years ago, showing a Salvation Army band playing "Christians, Awake!" outside the house of a Jewish financier, who is emptying the water-jug on the musicians.

It looks as if the advertising staff of the Salvation Army Emigration Department has been feeling the strain of the War. In the columns of a daily paper, an emigration advertisement included the sentences "Book at Once! Register Now. Wives and Sweethearts and other Relatives of Overseas Service Men," etc. Is it not delicious? The words *wives and sweethearts* are sufficient to make the lions in Trafalgar Square guffaw.

The Rev. H. L. C. V. de Candole has been appointed Canon of Westminster. That ancient borough will be able to hold "de Candole" to the Devil.

The Calvinistic Methodist.

THE Methodist! Incomparable theme!
E'en as the flow'r enfolds the probing bee,
The Methodist invites, nonchalantly,
And suffocates with ample self-esteem
The bold intruder on his sacred dream.
Communing with th' Invisible, he moves;
Elect of God, he goes in rigid grooves;
A Tulkynghorn at Jahweh's door he'd seem.

Phylacteries of Mother Church he's kissed,
The while he fingered precious Non-con. cash;
In "choker" white he loves to make a splash,
Hoping some day to swell the "Clergy List";
To lift humanity he's never rash,
That lovely hypocrite, the Methodist. D. V. T.

Our Day—January 5, 1919.

LAST week we asked all our readers to take an extra copy of the *Freethinker* for January 5, and post it to a likely subscriber.

Of course, we cannot expect that every reader will do this; but certainly two or three thousand should do it, and the effect of sending these round should be permanently beneficial to the paper and the Cause.

On the part of the reader, the expenditure will amount to twopence-halfpenny, *plus* a little labour. On our part, we are increasing the size of the paper that week to sixteen pages, which, with the present cost of labour and materials, is no meagre contribution. We shall also try to make the issue as interesting as possible.

Remember, the copy to be ordered is for January 5. This should be enclosed in a wrapper and directed to someone who is likely to be interested in the paper. The word "*Freethinker*" must be written on the back of the wrapper, in order to bring it under the newspaper postage rate of one halfpenny. As we cannot send out the paper on sale or return, all orders should be placed with newsagents by December 21, or as soon as possible, so as to avoid disappointment.

While dealing with this matter, may I, as the Sustentation Fund closes this week, heartily thank all those who have contributed to make it so great a success? The steady support given has been a great stay during the harassing War period, and the *Freethinker* stands to-day stronger than ever—one of the few papers in Britain that has not raised the price to its readers.

I have not hesitated to ask for help when needed, because I have taken it that we were all fellow-workers in a common cause. And if I have asked, I have also given. Those intimately concerned know that, apart from work, I have been one of the largest financial contributors to the paper. If I could not give in solid cash, I have kept down expenses by going without. I did not feel warranted in acting otherwise while compelled to ask others for support. And as we have all struggled through together, so I look forward to a brighter future in the same loyal and cheerful company.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

December 22, Glasgow.

To Correspondents.

- E. D. BROWN (Victoria).—Sending on portrait. Things will no doubt be brighter presently.
- R. HORWOOD.—The wish was father to the statement, which is only to be expected in a clergyman. As a matter of fact, the National Secular Society is larger, in a healthier state of activity, and exerts more influence than has been the case for many years.
- J. J. DARBY.—Please call and see us when you return. If you have any difficulty in getting the *Freethinker* let us know, and we will have it sent on from the office. Hope you will soon be home again.
- H. ROSSDALE AND R. H. HEYS.—We cannot, at the moment, undertake to write lengthy letters to the paper you name. We are at it all the time, and we are being warned that we may over do it. But your own letter is a good one, and you seem quite capable of handling W. Phillips—whoever he is. All we can say is that the man who attributes the "Reign of Terror" to Atheism writes himself down an ass. The excesses of the Revolution were mainly due to the intrigues of the English Government with Continental powers with a view to restoring the Monarchy and undoing the work of the Revolution.
- P. A.—Will do our best, but we have over a score of articles mutually appealing for publication, and with no space available at present.

TREVOR T. BERRY.—Sorry we cannot spare space for your communication.

HUGH P. MARSHALL (Dunedin).—Sorry to learn of the disappearance of W. W. Collin's *Examiner*. We can quite appreciate the difficulty of keeping a Freethought paper going in these days. Your communication is interesting, but we are afraid the event is too far off to be interesting to readers here.

T. LOVE.—Cheque received. Shall hope to soon hear that you are home again.

J. GIBSON.—Hope to see you when we visit Glasgow. The War has settled the religion of many, and, we think, stirred up many others to the necessity of more energetic propaganda.

MRS. C. M. RENTON.—We are obliged for cheque. There is no "religious wave" sweeping over England, although some of the clergy would like to make people believe otherwise. You may rely on our keeping at it. We are not easily discouraged, and the good wishes of our readers give us every encouragement to persevere.

J. PUGH.—We wrote you acknowledging receipt of paper, etc., and have had the letter returned. Evidently we have the wrong address.

LIBRA.—Shall look forward to seeing you on Sunday.

W. J. PITT.—Not quite there, but almost. Thanks for good wishes.

W. J.—We are really not anxious to score points, and are quite content to leave the whole matter to the judgment of our readers.

W. DODD.—We know we have your good wishes. Thanks.

J. ROLLASON writes thanking us for literature sent for distribution amongst the troops, and tells us it is being eagerly read and discussed.

M. ROGERSON.—We are pleased at getting through so well, so far. But we have had many willing helpers, and without these we should have been powerless. Will bear other matter in mind.

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 Piqueet Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C. 4, and not to the Editor.

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be crossed "London, City and Midland Bank, Clerkenwell Branch."

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, 2s. 8d.

Sugar Plums.

To-day (December 22) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Burgh Hall, Partick. Good meetings are expected, and we hope that local friends are doing their best to see that results will exceed expectations. Trams run from the centre of Glasgow to the hall, the stopping-place for which is Peel Street. The hall is situated in Hamilton Crescent, and the times of meetings are 12 noon and 6.30. There will be some good music before the evening lecture—from 6 to 6.30.

Owing to the Christmas holidays we have to get two issues of the *Freethinker* ready for the press this week. The issue dated December 29 will be in the newsagents hands on Monday, December 23.

We should like to hear from our readers how many candidates have replied to the question addressed to them on Secular Education, the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, or the question of general religious equality. We have written quite a couple of score of letters during the past fortnight, in

answer to requests for guidance, and a fair number of skeleton questions to help those who distrusted their own power of putting them tersely and effectively. This has meant a deal of extra labour, and we should like to know the result—if any.

Quite inadvertently we omitted to notice last week the publication by the Pioneer Press of Mr. Andrew Millar's booklet, *The Robes of Pan, and Other Prose Fantasies*. Some of these essays have already made their appearance in the *Freethinker*, and some in other journals. Mr. Millar's writings have a charm of their own, and are infused with a sense of the picturesque and the human that make them delightful reading. Elsewhere in this issue we print a brief notice of the work from the able pen of Mr. George Underwood. The price of *The Robes of Pan* is one shilling, postage three halfpence.

Another new work we have been waiting for space to notice is Mr. Joseph McCabe's *The Growth of Religion* (Watts & Co., 6s.). The fault from which the writings of the masters of anthropology suffer is their bulkiness. This is inevitable owing to the vastness of the field to be surveyed, and the necessity for giving the evidence its full weight. But it is perplexing to the lay mind, which often finds itself unable to see the wood for the trees. Mr. McCabe's work, which strikes us as among the most satisfactory of his writings, not only avoids this, but he carries his survey into the comparatively neglected region occupied by races of people who have not yet definitely outlined teachings concerning super-human, or extra-human, existences. Religious beliefs, like beliefs in general, do not come into existence fully formed. A belief is only the conscious recognition of a frame of mind that he has been gradually developing, and if we are ever to understand religion, we must gain a clear comprehension of the mental conditions that exist among races of people immediately below many well-known races of "savages." Mr. McCabe deals with this aspect of religion very satisfactorily, and in the closing chapters of his work traces the development of religious ideas on to higher levels. The author's conclusion strikes the right note:—

We distrust the whole content of religion. It seems to be merely a case of the evolution in human consciousness of a primitive illusion. The philosopher kneeling to God—if any modern philosopher ever does—is only the other end of a series that starts with the Andaman islander pondering over his "shadow" in the water.

We are glad to note the growth of a more determined effort to get rid of the "whole content of religion" instead of crediting it with some lofty ethereal impulse or aspiration to which it has no legitimate claim.

Mr. Erle B. Side writes us:—

No doubt you have read, in the plans for demobilizing our war horses, that those who have served in the Eastern campaign are to be sold to the natives of Mesopotamia—either Arabs or Russians, etc. What a fitting reward after playing such a great part in securing victory. One shudders to think of the terrible treatment that will be meted out to these poor creatures should the suggested plans be carried out. Yes, it is the East, the birthplace of so many of the "merciful" and "loving" leaders and heroes of religion that our horses must fear. Ever since the announcement of demobilizing was published I have watched the papers carefully, but have failed to discover a protest from any of our well known shining lights of the Christian faith.

Mr. Side has written to Major-General Sir W. H. Birkbeck a protest against the callous treatment of the horses in disposing of them to people whom our own officers have noted treat their animals with extreme cruelty and neglect, but we are afraid his letter will not avail much. The bottom fact is that war, however justifiable, involves a progressive brutalization, and, with regard to the treatment of defenceless animals, the callousness is likely to be the more pronounced and the less noticed. Still, it is well that the protest should be made, and Mr. Side has made it in a very effective manner.

We are asked to announce that there will be no meetings of the Manchester Branch at the Bakers' Hall on December

22 and 29, owing to the holiday season, but a full rally of members and friends is hoped for at the President's next visit to Downing Street on January 5. The next Social will be held at the latter place on the 28th, commencing at 6 p.m. A cordial invitation is extended to members' children, for whose enjoyment special arrangements are in progress at the hands of a ladies' committee.

Owing to want of space, we are compelled to hold over, until our next issue, letters from Mr. D. Jones and "H. V. T."

"Freethinker" Sustentation Fund.

Previously acknowledged, £460 7s. 7d. Sheffield Ethical Society, £1 1s.; J. Gibson, 2s.; J. C., for B. C., 10s.; Mr. and Mrs. T. Love, 10s.; Mrs. C. M. Renton, £2; Islay, 2s.; W. Dedd (second sub.), 10s.; C. R. King, £2 2s.; J. Anderson, 5s.; Two Sappers, 5s.; W. J. Pitt, 10s. 6d.; Libra, 10s.; Mrs. Mary Rogerson, 10s.; J. Higgins (second sub.), £1; W. H. Hurrell, 10s.; E. and A. Bullock, 5s.; Geo. Smith, 2s.; E. May, 2s.; F. Wood, 2s. 6d.; J. Tresillion, 10s.; J. T. Wadkins, jun., 5s.; Mr. and Mrs. J. Wadkins, 2s. 6d.; J. Hyde, 10s.; J. Beech, 2s. 6d.; M. P., 5s.; W. H. Blackmore, 5s.; H. Crayan and A Socialist, 2s.; D. Sinclair, £3; Hugh Thomson, 5s.; Fawn, 10s. Total, £477 3s. 7d.

This Fund is now closed.

"Conceivability."

THERE was a point raised in Dr. McDougall's defence on behalf of the "Soul" that calls for a fuller notice than was practicable or even relevant in the middle of a critical discussion.

He contends that "inconceivability" is no valid objection against his assumption. With this I fully agree. But why did he not have the candour to point out that this contention, if valid, favoured the opposite or Materialistic theory more directly and obviously than it did his own? The contention is one of general application, and not one to be employed solely on behalf of superstition.

The one outstanding "argument" against the Materialistic position has been its "inconceivability"—that it was impossible to "conceive" how the *physical* was changed into the *psychical*; how the spinings and gyrations of atoms and the dance of molecules became transmuted into feelings and thought—that is, into consciousness. And it must be freely admitted that such a transformation is absolutely inconceivable. But mere "inconceivability," as Dr. McDougall points out, is not an atom of reason against the hypothesis being true. Though I am not myself a believer in the so-called Materialistic theory, yet it is not because the change is inconceivable. There are, to my mind, insuperable difficulties to accepting the dualistic conception of the process—from physical stimulation to psychical awakening. I am therefore forced to believe that it is *not* a case of "change" at all, but one of concomitance. At all events, no one can ask the question "how" the "change" takes place without being guilty of begging the very question at issue. He must first prove that it is a "change" before a "how" can be addressed to it.

That, however, is a diversion. My object in this paper is to point out the "reason why" mere "inconceivability" is no argument against, or "conceivability" no argument for, any proposition, hypothesis, or theory.

The "conceivable" is simply the *familiar*, the *known*, or anything which the mind can picture like it. If you cannot picture it as resembling anything known, it is "inconceivable," but by no means impossible on that

account. Most modern inventions based upon discoveries of unknown natural powers were more or less inconceivable before they were "born."

For example, before the advent of steam and of the steam-engine, it was not possibly "conceivable" that a combination of iron plates and bars could be made "to pull like a horse." And, conversely, had we been conversant only with mechanical powers of transport and traction, an animal machine, like a horse, would be absolutely an impossible conception.

Had Nature evolved creatures which only could crawl or walk on the surface of the earth, a *bird* or a *fish* would be quite "inconceivable," and therefore, according to the old "argument," impossible creatures.

Before the discovery of electricity and its applied inventions, a statement which said that you could dispatch messages from continent to continent in the "twinkling of an eye," or that you could hear a person speak 500 miles away, would be received with derision—they would be quite incredible, because such processes would be then "inconceivable."

Similarly, an announcement which stated that the dead could be heard speaking, laughing, singing, or sobbing in the same familiar voice as he did when alive, would be met with the same incredulity before the invention of the phonograph made it "conceivable."

Likewise, before the discovery of the Hertzian waves and the invention of wireless telegraphy, a profession to transmit messages *without wires* would not be credited, because it was not conceivably possible.

In all this babel about the "inconceivable" hardly ever any distinction is made between the mystery implied in a "why" or a "how" problem. The mental attitude of curiosity or inquisitiveness in the two cases is wholly different. The answer to a "why" supplies a cause to a given effect.

An answer to a "how," on the other hand, simply lifts the veil from over a gap in the chain of causation—brings to view the hidden links in the sequence of "Cause and Effect."

A "why" makes an inquiry about an unknown cause, whereas a "how" implies the fact that both "cause" and "effect" are assumed as known. Hence the best-established principles and the most credible theories are often the most inconceivable.

Gravity, for example, is undoubtedly a universal physical cause; but "how" it acts across "empty" space is quite "a mystery," but that fact has no effect upon our implicit belief in its truth.

Similarly every living creature resembles its parents in form, in size, in organs, in habits, in instincts, and in mental capacities. Every butterfly reproduces those spots and hues which distinguish it from every other species with the absolute regularity and certainty of the recurrence of the seasons.

There is no disputing of the causal relation of parents and offspring. But "how" this virtual identity is effected—by what "mechanism" are these replicas eternally reproduced—is enveloped in profoundest mystery.

But the question, *why* should a child resemble its parents does not seem in the least mysterious or inconceivable; it is our universal experience. The mystery would be if it occurred otherwise. Should the offspring of a cow be a dog or a lizard, it would be an extremely bewildering experience.

Though a "how" problem is never intrinsically insolvable, yet it is often susceptible of no conceivable solution. A solution to a "Why" problem, on the other hand, is seldom inconceivable, but is never final. The "forces" and urges of substances—the "causes" of Nature—are conceivable enough, because

they are "pushes" and "pulls," but in themselves they are ultimate and absolute mysteries.

Now the mystery which is attached to the relation of mind and body is of the "how" order. It arises from the fact that we cannot fathom the nature of substance sufficiently deeply "to see it at work." There is not the slightest doubt as to the causal relation between physical and mental. One fact alone, out of a million, need be cited—the fact that a pin-prick causes pain. No sane person ever doubted the causal relation between them. But we have no "conception" of "how" the neural disturbance produced by the pin-point awakens the accompanying sensation.

But our ignorance in no way affects our belief in the fact that he who is prodded with a goad is conscious of agony if his neural system is normally active. "Inconceivability," I therefore repeat, is in itself no valid argument either against or for a contention.

KERIDON.

Man's Feline Friend.

EVEN in the piping times of peace, numerous official, or, for that matter, unofficial persons busy themselves in searching for something to tax. With the appalling waste of wealth incidental to war these inquisitive people increase their efforts, and the sinister glance of the licenser fell on the harmless and homely cat at an early stage of the recent struggle. It is reported that one of the belligerent Powers imposed a tax on our feline companion, with the plainly obvious consequence that the natural prey of that useful animal multiplied beyond measure with disastrous results. For, when unchecked, the procreative capacities of destructive rodents become truly enormous, and their devastations when conducted on a large scale attain colossal proportions.

The ravages of the mouse are relatively unimportant, but those of the rat soon assume a menacing magnitude. The multiplying powers of these loathsome creatures are almost incredible. They damage property, poison food as well as destroy it, and are only too justly suspected of spreading disease. Were it not for our cats, and in minor measure our dogs, London and other populous riverside cities, with their suburban areas, would soon swarm with rats. As it is, the rat population of the metropolis must mount to millions. All our sewers are infested with these vermin, and the drains and cellars of the older houses, particularly when near the Thames, are the habitats of rats. Various were the estimates of the vast numbers of rats roaming in the basements of Holywell Street (Bookseller's Row) at the period of its demolition, some thirty years ago. At the London Docks powerful cats of the ratter type are well in evidence, and the services these animals render are keenly appreciated by those who know from bitter experience the havoc wrought by rats when these creatures run unchecked among the merchandise. Nor are the depredations of rats confined to teeming cities resting on the banks of the river. In the country the farmer has solid reason to dread the losses sustained in fields and barns and granaries where rats abound.

The writer remembers an experience at a Sussex farm where no cats were kept, and on which the professional services of the human rat-catcher had been neglected. A stack of unthreshed wheat mounted on a high stand had been left from the previous harvest to the succeeding summer, and the interval between the hay and corn gathering was selected for the threshing operations. No sooner was the thatch uncovered, and the first cornstalks thrown into the machine, than the rats were seen scampering in all directions. Some attempted to escape altogether, but the majority

burrowed more deeply in the corn stack. Several hundreds were killed, but for many months afterwards the farm buildings and neighbouring hedges and ditches were alive with rats. What little corn remained was dark and discoloured, utterly unfit for either human or animal consumption, and represented a serious loss to all concerned. An instance such as this enables us to form some conception of the fate that would befall our large cities were our guardian cats to disappear. It is indeed difficult to estimate in terms of money our huge indebtedness to our faithful felines for their services, not only in checking the increase of the rodent race, but also in scaring the animals away.

One has only to glance at a cat's canine teeth to notice how large and powerful these organs are, and how well adapted for tearing flesh. The numerous species of the *Felis* genus are perhaps the most specialized of carnivorous animals. The fondness of the domestic cat for fish food apparently indicates some kinship to the Indian Fishing-cat, which subsists almost entirely on fish and molluscs.

Small when compared with the giant cats such as the lion, leopard, panther, jaguar, and tiger, yet the wild cat of Europe reaches very fair proportions. This fierce animal lingers in continental woodlands, but it has long been extinct in Southern England, although it survived in Wales down to a few generations ago. The animal was occasionally encountered in Yorkshire as late as 1840, while it lingered in the Lake Country still longer. In the Scottish Lowlands it is extinct, and the animal is becoming very rare in districts where it was common 100 years ago. A leading authority, J. G. Millais, considers North-Western Inverness and Western Ross-shire as the last retreats of the wild cat within the British Isles. The formidable character of this sharp-clawed, strong-toothed creature may be gathered from the fact that one shot by Millais in 1889, in Northern Scotland, measured nearly four feet from nose-tip to tail-end. In Ireland the animal is entirely absent.

The European wild cat is not the ancestor of our domesticated varieties. In company with various plants and other animals, the domestic, short-furred cat appears to have arrived from the East. And there are several reasons for concluding that our household pets are descended from the ancient Egyptian cat, which was about the same size as the modern cat, with tabby markings on a coat of sandy gray. Egypt was a densely peopled state in classic times, and constituted the granary of the Roman world. What more likely, then, than that the cat of the Nile country should be dispersed throughout Europe as that continent's agricultural arts extended and developed?

The wild cat was well known in our Island in British, Roman, and Saxon times; but the earliest reference to the domesticated animal seems to date from the tenth century. The English and Persian cats form two outstanding varieties of the organism. The English breed is of far greater practical value than the fancy Persian variety. It is an excellent mouser and ratter, unless reduced to a condition of dullness and inactivity by petting and over-feeding, while it is less subject to parasites than the long-haired and bushy-tailed Persian. It is also a hardier animal, and far less liable to disease. But from the standpoint of beauty of form, colour, and markings, the Persian stands unrivalled.

The short-cropped Russian cat is usually characterized by its fine blue, glossy coat, occasionally of a somewhat woolly texture. This animal is a handsome creature, and the finest specimens are distinguished by dark blue nose-tip, eyelashes, and "whiskers." Various explanations have been put forward concerning the term "Cyprus cat," which is applied to the tabbies of Norfolk

and Suffolk. Some assert that this cat was introduced into East Anglia from the island of Cyprus, while others assign the name to the resemblance of the animal's markings to the pattern of the textile known as Cyprus cloth. A third theory attributes the designation to the fact that Cyprus "signifies a red or a reddish-yellow colour," and that the term simply indicates a rufous or yellow brindled cat.

The Isle of Man is famous for its tailless cats, while other felines destitute of a caudal appendage are native to the Crimea and Japan. One variety of Manx cat carries a stumpy tail, while another possesses a very long tail which sometimes measures ten inches in length. The most celebrated Manx cats, however, have no visible tail whatever.

The Siamese cats are descended from a breed long carefully confined within the royal residence. This jealous restriction has now ended, and although these animals are of a highly delicate constitution they are at times successfully reared by fanciers in Britain. Numerous other varieties exist including the beautiful Angora cat from Western Asia. It is reported, and for the sake of the residents in those regions it is to be hoped that the story is true, that the cats imported into one American country never agonize the night with their horrible screams, yells, and wails.

T. F. PALMER.

(To be continued).

Writers and Readers.

THOSE of my readers who have a natural or cultivated taste for the excellencies of prose style will have noted with pleasure the essays which have appeared from time to time in this paper over the signature of Andrew Millar. Of these a small selection, together with a few that were contributed to Scottish newspapers, are now printed and published by the Pioneer Press at the price of one shilling. *The Robes of Pan and other Prose Fantasies* is, I believe, Mr. Millar's first venture as a bookman, and it makes a promising beginning. It will become in time a bibliographical treasure, the cherished firstfruits of a literary talent which, if I am not greatly mistaken, will carry its lucky possessor a very long way. Like Theophile Gautier and our own accomplished stylist, Mr. Arthur Symons, Mr. Millar is an impressionist. He is a writer for whom pre-eminently the exterior world exists. He has something more than the normal sense of sight, and among primitive folk would have been hailed as a *seer*, that is, one who sees clearly what other people only half see. He has also the other equipment without which there can be no artistry, the power to make others see with his eyes, to evoke in adequate and beautiful words the impressions that come to him from the world of Nature. As an example of the power of re-creation manifested throughout this slender and delightful booklet let me quote this paragraph:—

The amber streamlet—babbling amid its mossy stones, dinning and splashing like a child's water mill, or gliding and dimpling in swift and silent motion, channelled in brown mould and emerald turf, in that bend by the gap in the hedgerow, where the yellow *largesse* lies so richly spent—the streamlet has been busy bearing away those fallen shreds and patches with, here and there, the gleam of brambles, the red of hips and haws from the faded finery of the sylvan god..... There is a red on the rim of the hills—red, richer than rose petals, or than beauty's lip—a still, deep, crimson bar of red, far away, and low down, in a hollow of the dim brown hills, as though the vestal Eve had but gently barred the gate behind the god of to-day, and quietly curtained his retreat..... Diana, Huntress of the Morn, with silver arrows bright, and sped afar; and twilight Eve, of soft and slumbrous eye, spreading the mantle of night upon the couch of day—saffron and yellow, and gold, and tumultuous grey, above the dusky skyline, and through the still, illumined spaces, we seem to be gazing into the realms of perfect beauty and eternal rest! What a glory doth the world put on! Sombre at times, and sad, the minstrelsy of the winds, or wild their joy and rude

their unseemly mirth; but though without *purpose*, the winds are calm or convulsed; and though without *desire* to be benign, the natural scene is full of beauty and repose—the deeper, truer significance of life is caught from those varying but eternal aspects of the earth and skies.

The essays are sprinkled with purple or silver patches equally beautiful and appropriate. Landscapes of delicate beauty sketched in with a facile and flowing brush, felicities of phrase and epithet, and here and there grandiose impressions of Nature in her mood of splendid anger. The reader who knows a good thing in literature when he sees it will agree with me in honouring the writer of the last paragraph in the essay "At the Old Harbour: Saltcoats." The description of a storm is one of the finest things I know outside the work of the greater masters of prose-style.

I have given Mr. Millar great praise, but not, I think, too great. The worst fault a writer can be guilty of is enthusiasm over an unworthy object. Mr. Millar himself makes a bad slip in this way when he talks of Watts-Dunton's "glorious" "Ode to Mother Carey's Chicken" as a "magnificent inspiration." It is really a pretty piece of respectable fifth-rate verse which stands in the same relation to the great poetry of Tennyson or Browning as does the preposterously silly romance *Aylwin* to the novels of Meredith or Hardy. This want of sure critical judgment lies at the bottom of all Mr. Millar's defects; it accounts for his occasional and distressing lapses of style, the loose construction of sentences, the want of sequence in ideas, the inability to see that matter may be good in itself, but very bad when it is in the wrong place. We note one little essay which is made up of a quotation from a friend's letter. It is a delicate compliment to the friend, but rather hard on the reader who is interested only in Mr. Millar.

If Mr. Millar will allow me to say what I think, I would suggest that he does a little more reading and use his remarkable power of intelligent observation on the work of men who have made the prose-poem an effective and lovely form of art. He need only study three masters: Tourgueniev, Baudelaire, and Poe. He will see at once—his clairvoyance as an artist will ensure his not missing the lesson—that what he needs is a more closely knit form, a greater clearness of idea, a rigorous inhibition of every thought that does not help forward the idea and an insistence on the correspondences between Nature and the human mind. I don't suggest that Mr. Millar does not recognize these conditions of the prose-poem; he does and yet he doesn't. What he has yet to learn is the immense difference between literature and mere journalism. An essay that is pleasant enough to glance through in an evening paper is not always worth the relative immortality of the more permanent form. Still, the good things more than outweigh the bad, and it has promise, which is more than I would say of more pretentious collections of impressions.

GEO. UNDERWOOD.

JUSTICE.

Justice, Justice: woe betides us everywhere, when, for this reason or for that, we fail to do justice! No beneficence, benevolence, or other virtuous contribution will make good the want. And in what a rate of terrible geometrical progression, far beyond *our* poor computation, any act of Injustice once done by us grows; rooting itself ever anew, spreading ever anew, like a banyan-tree, blasting all life under it, for it is a poison-tree! There is but one thing needed for the world; but that one thing is indispensable. Justice, Justice, in the name of heaven; give us Justice, and we live; give us only counterfeits of it, or succedanea for it, and we die!—*Carlyle*.

Obituary.

South Shields.—On Saturday, December 14, at the Harton Cemetery, Mr. J. Fothergill read a burial service selected from Mr. F. J. Gould's book at the graveside of Percy Hannan, three-and-a-half years' old, who died of pneumonia after a brief illness. Deceased was an exceptionally bright, sturdy, little boy, and deep sympathy is felt with Mr. Hannan and family by local members and friends.—R. C.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON.

INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate Street, E.C.): 11, John A. Hobson, M.A., "Vital Elements in Reconstruction."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N. S. S. (The Burgh Hall, Partick): Mr. Chapman Cohen, 12 noon, "The Challenge of Unbelief"; 6.30, "The New World and the Old Faith."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Councillor J. W. Murby.

MANCHESTER BRANCH N. S. S.—No meetings at Swan Street until January 12, when Mr. Monks will give his paper, "The Lesson of the Bowman Case," postponed from December 15.

NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE BRANCH N. S. S. (12A Clayton Street East): 6.30, Members' Meeting.

SWANSEA AND DISTRICT BRANCH N. S. S. (60 Alexandra Road, Swansea): 6.30, Special Branch Meeting.

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