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## Views and Opinions.

### On Miracles.

In another part of this issue of the *Freethinker* will be found a letter from the author of *Shaken Creeds*, dealing with a point raised in my review of that work, published under date of November 12. As Mr. Rhys says, there is no difference of opinion regarding such a doctrine as the Virgin Birth, but I do not quite agree with him that the difference between us is mainly one of terminology. I believe it involves more than this. It involves a plan of attack and a view of the whole question of the miraculous which implies a difference of intellectual attitude. So far as I can put the difference between us in a sentence or two, Mr. Rhys holds that the question of whether a particular miracle is credible or not is juridical. He believes it to be a question of evidence. Is the evidence strong enough to carry conviction? On the other hand, I hold that while a rejection of the miraculous may depend upon evidence, so long as we use that term in reference to the whole course of human experience and knowledge, the rejection of a specific miracle does not so depend. And it is upon the value of specific evidence in relation to specific miracles that Mr. Rhys' whole argument rests. In the wider sense of the word there can be no dispute that all human belief is based upon evidence. That is an indispensable condition of belief in anything and everything. The question is really of first-rate importance, and its discussion should be of interest to Freethinkers, agreed as they may be upon the rejection of Christian beliefs.

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### Irrelevant Evidence.

The specific miracle with which Mr. Rhys was dealing in his interesting volume was the Virgin Birth, and the passages to which I took exception were those which stated that "no one denies the absolute possibility of a human virgin birth," and that "it is not the *prima facie* incredibility but the lack of evidence which forms the stumbling block to his (the sceptic's) belief." That, I said, was rather playing into the hands of the Christian who understands his case, and Mr. Rhys retorts that much harm is done to the cause of "rational Freethought" by a supercilious refusal to listen to other people's arguments and to examine their so-called evidence. I think I

may say without conceit that Christians do not usually congratulate themselves on the harmless character of my attacks on their creed, nor do Freethinkers find my methods harmful to their Freethought. But I fail to see wherein my attitude is open to the charge of being supercilious, or where I refuse to listen to evidence. The so-called evidence of the Christian is ruled out, not on the grounds of its weakness, but of its utter irrelevancy, and although I may be wrong in declaring it to be irrelevant, it is no more open to the charge of superciliousness than is a judge when he declines to weigh evidence that has no bearing upon the case before him. And it is playing into the hands of your opponent when you permit him to bring evidence that has no bearing upon the real issue, and at the same time refrain from bringing the real case before the court.

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### Is Evidence Possible?

Taking the case of the Virgin Birth I am rather curious as to what kind of evidence Mr. Rhys thinks is possible for such an event. Human birth, as we know it, is due to the co-operation of two human beings. But suppose a woman comes along and avers that she has borne a child without the co-operation of a man, what evidence can be produced in favour of the statement? Clearly no one else beside the woman can be quite certain on the point, and even she might not know. All the "evidence" that can be produced, all the evidence that is produced, are the statements of various persons to the effect that they believe it. And in order to impress the unwary the Christian says that these people were living at the time when the alleged event occurred. But a man living then can know no more about it than one living now. Evidence of that kind is absolutely irrelevant, and the Freethinker is playing into the hands of the Christian in admitting such statements as evidence. A Salvation Army preacher who says he believes in the Virgin Birth is as good evidence as any of the apostles. The only way to prove the possibility of a virgin birth would be to enclose a woman in a glass case, under strict guard, for a given period before the birth of the child. So that eventually we come to this. It is not the question of the evidence for the virgin birth that needs discussion, but the conditions that enable men and women to believe so great an absurdity. In other words, the question is fundamentally one of psychology, not of objective historic investigation. That is the point I was trying to impress upon Mr. Rhys.

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### The Devil's Advocate.

I said in my review of the book that an acute Christian controversialist could put up a very good fight on behalf of miracles if they are to be treated as questions of evidence merely. Evidence may be of all degrees of strength and cogency. It may range from a decided "proven" to the complete rejection of a story as being without evidence—with the intermediate stages of suspension of judgment. The Christian might well ask, "What evidence do you expect for a miracle? To be a miracle it must occur only very occasionally.

It cannot be brought under ordinary laws of happenings, if it could it would not be a miracle. Therefore, all your talk of a miracle involving a suspension of natural laws, or a violation of natural law, is beside the point. A miracle being the interposition of God in order to bring about by unusual means a particular event, can only occur occasionally, and it is idle to say that it cannot occur because it would suspend the operation of natural law. That is the essence of a miracle." How would one in Mr. Rhys' position deal with that argument? The only reply, it seems to me is to rule the argument out as inadmissible, and to raise what I conceive to be the essential question, which is the psychological one. My complaint of the treatment of miracles by those who write as Mr. Rhys writes is that they leave the sincere believer comparatively unaffected. They do not offend him, it is true, but that is largely because they do not hurt him. He is moving in a region in which the attack has no application.

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#### A Question of Psychology.

Mr. Rhys thinks he convicts me of an inconsistency by saying that while I deny that the lack of evidence is the Freethinker's reason for rejecting a particular miracle, I yet do rely upon the evidence of human experience in rejecting the miraculous. That is not really very acute. I may suggest to Mr. Rhys that there is a world of difference between evidence as applied to proofs of a particular event, and evidence as applied to the accumulated experience of the race. So far as my understanding of the world goes, I fail to find that at any time people have accepted miracles after carefully weighing the evidence for and against. Neither do I find, as a matter of actual experience, that miracles are given up from that cause. Indeed, the mere fact that one looks for reasons or examines the evidence in support of a miracle argues that doubt about it has already established itself. On that kind of evidence, the evidence to which Mr. Rhys refers, I feel tolerably certain that the belief in miracles has never rested. For there never was evidence in support of any of the biblical miracles. There was never evidence that a virgin gave birth to a child, there was never evidence that Jesus walked on the water, or that he fed thousands of people with a few loaves and fishes. And as both Mr. Rhys and myself are convinced that these things never occurred, and convinced also that as a consequence there could never have been evidence for them, we are driven to the conclusion that all that remains is the psychological, or the socio-psychological question, What are the conditions which favour the *belief* that miracles do occur? So soon as the question is put in this way we get within sight of the correct answer. Miracles are the normal outcome of a condition of knowledge where the true causes of things are unknown or ill-appreciated. As Spinoza said, knowledge and possibility exist in inverse proportions to each other. Where little is known everything is possible. But possibility narrows as knowledge increases. And in the end miracles are rejected because they are in direct contradiction with what we know to be true, and because we know the conditions that develop belief in their occurrence.

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#### God and Miracles.

Mr. Rhys takes me to task for assuming the impossibility of certain miracles without examining the evidence for them. Let us see. Mr. Rhys' own specific miracle is the Virgin Birth. In the couple of pages of his book which provided the ground for my criticism he writes, as a Christian would write, of virgin birth occurring with certain species, and that there is, therefore, nothing *a priori* impossible in the case of a

human being. I beg to differ. It is a dialectical trick on the part of the Christian to use the word "virgin" birth of parthenogenesis in the plant and lower animal world, and then assume that there is no more involved when it is asserted of the human world. The only honest use of the expression, in this connection, is the birth of young without the co-operation of a male *where that co-operation is known to be necessary* in every case known to human experience. Mr. Rhys ought to have been able to see through so shallow a trick, and not weaken his own case by allowing the argument a certain inherent strength. So that when we are told Jesus was born without a human father, knowing what we do know of reproduction among human beings, we are quite justified in saying that such a thing is impossible. It never occurred. When we are told that Jesus turned wine into water, knowing what we do of the constituents of wine and water, we know that such a thing never occurred. And so on with other alleged miracles. The only man who believes that miracles of the kind named are matters of juridical evidence is one who believes in a God above Nature with the power to temporarily refashion the cosmic system. I do not know whether Mr. Rhys believes in the supreme contradiction of God, but it is only the belief in a God that would justify his attitude, and in that case an acute Christian controversialist would soon have him at a disadvantage.

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#### Methods of Warfare.

A final word as to the relative value of controversial methods. Mr. Rhys thinks that the belief in miracles and in spiritualism will only be killed by showing that the miracles of the one lack evidence, and by providing evidence of the tricks of the other. While giving some little weight to the evidence of the dishonesty of "mediums," I beg to differ again here. The cheapest and most ineffective attempt to destroy the belief in spiritualism is to spend one's time in exposing the dishonesty of mediums. Those who truly understand spiritualism know that the only effective way of countering it is by showing the real meaning of those things that puzzle so many quite honest men and women, in the absence of all trickery, in the seance room. And with miracles, as with religious beliefs in general, there is really such a thing as taking an absurdity too seriously. I suggest to Mr. Rhys, as a psychological fact, that to argue too solemnly with an absurdity is not to kill the absurdity so much as to convince the believer in it of its importance. Voltaire said that no superstition was ever destroyed by a work in twelve volumes folio. What is needed to bring believers in the absurd to a realization of its absurdity is to destroy the atmosphere in which the absurd takes on the air of the reasonable. And in the case of miracles we do this by denying the relevancy of the evidence on which they are alleged to rest. We show that they rest on an entirely different basis. We prove that they are the inevitable outcome of a certain stage of culture. They grow as does the child's belief in fairies, and they die out in much the same manner. When we have reached, or are entering, the latter stage, the professional defenders of religion attempt to protect themselves by talking glibly about the evidence of the clouds of witnesses to the miraculous. It is their endeavour to give their beliefs something like a rational basis. But the Freethought advocate is always ill-advised to permit the case against religion to be stated by his opponent. Three-fourths of the problems in philosophy would never exist were one to question the terms in which they are stated. And the same is true of religion. Above all, we should remember that Freethought is equipped with far better weapons than it wielded in the eighteenth century. We know now the nature of religion; we know

its origin, we know the stages of its development. We are no longer groping and wondering whether the alleged marvels of the gods ever occurred, asking for evidence, and returning at most a verdict of "not proven" where the evidence is inadequate. We know these miracles did not occur, and we know the conditions that led people to believe that they actually did happen.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## The Virgin Birth.

### I.

#### THE IGNATIAN EPISTLES.

(Concluded from page 755.)

LET us now critically examine the story of the martyr-journey of Ignatius from Antioch to Rome in its bearing on the genuineness of the letters. Assuming, for the moment, the historicity of that much discussed journey, it must be borne in mind that the famous bishop travelled as a prisoner sentenced to death, and that as such he was most strictly guarded. In the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, written presumably at Smyrna, the prisoner describes his condition thus:—

From Syria even unto Rome I fight with beasts, both by land and sea, both by night and day, being bound to ten leopards, I mean a band of soldiers, who, even when they receive benefits, show themselves all the worse.

Eusebius, in his rendering (B. III, ch. 36), makes the conditions look more terrible still, for he characterizes the ten leopards to which Ignatius was tied as "the number of the military band, who, even when treated with kindness, only behave with greater ferocity." Is it likely that, under such savagely rigid conditions, the martyr would have had opportunities for writing and addressing fairly lengthy letters to Christian communities in different parts of the world? He confesses himself that the "benefits" or bribes showered on the soldiers only resulted in increasing their cruelty; and yet we read in the letters of unhindered interviews with bishops, deacons, and representative Christians from various centres who, apparently, have perfect freedom to present their sympathetic greetings to the condemned prisoner. Clearly on this point the epistles hopelessly contradict themselves. It must be remembered further that the epistles freely promulgate views for teaching which at Antioch the bishop had been sentenced to the beasts.

Dr. Lightfoot, late Bishop of Durham, admittedly one of the greatest scholars the modern Church has produced, who devoted himself almost exclusively to a careful study of the Apostolic period, in 1885 published his edition of the *Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp*, in which he makes a valiant attempt to refute the argument just outlined above, which had been so convincingly presented by the author of *Supernatural Religion*. Dr. Lightfoot's main point is that there was nothing peculiar or inconsistent with the usual Roman procedure, in the facilities for open intercourse with Christian sympathizers and the writing of numerous long epistles at different stages of the road to execution. He argues that there are several known cases, one of which is St. Paul's, in which similar liberties were allowed. The case of St. Paul, for example, was fundamentally different from that of Ignatius. The former was conveyed to Rome not as a tried and convicted prisoner, but as a Roman citizen who had made his appeal to Cæsar. As the author of *Supernatural Religion* puts it:—

It is scarcely possible to imagine two cases more dissimilar than those of pseudo-Ignatius and Paul as narrated in the *Acts of the Apostles*, although doubtless the story of the former has been framed upon

some of the lines of the latter. Whilst Ignatius is condemned to be cast to the beasts as a Christian, Paul is not condemned at all, but stands in the position of a Roman citizen, rescued from infuriated Jews (xxiii, 27), repeatedly declared by his judges to have done nothing worthy of death or of bonds (xxv, 25; xxvi, 31), and who might have been set at liberty but that he had appealed to Cæsar (xxv, 11f, xxvi, 32). His position was one which elicited the sympathy of the Roman soldiers. Ignatius "fights with beasts from Syria even unto Rome," and is cruelly treated by ten leopards; but Paul is represented as receiving very different treatment (p. 164).

Writing in the *Contemporary Review* of February, 1875, Bishop Lightfoot claims to have found a parallel case in the history of Peregrinus as related by Lucian (Vol. I, pp. 564-589); but after reading Lucian's most interesting satire a good many times, we fail to discover any similarity whatever between it and the Ignatian tale. It is true that the Christians ministered to Peregrinus while he was in prison, believing him to be one of themselves but this has frequently been allowed in most countries and ages. Ignatius was not in prison, however, either undergoing or awaiting punishment, but being conveyed to his awful doom "in chains," by ten soldiers, whom he himself represents as being guilty of brutal cruelty towards him during the whole journey from Syria to Rome.

Confronted with these facts we cannot come to any other conclusion, on the assumption that Ignatius tells the truth about his treatment, than that he could not possibly have written the epistles attributed to him during his so-called martyr-journey; but if he did not write them during this journey, but on some other occasions, they cannot be regarded as truthful documents. On the other hand, there is no evidence whatever, apart from the word of the writer of the letters, that the journey ever occurred. Even Eusebius, in the middle of the fourth century, speaks of it as resting only on the evidence of tradition.

Coming to the letters themselves we learn that there has never been unanimity of conviction as to their genuineness. We have seen that of the fifteen extant letters ascribed to the Antiochian bishop eight are now universally pronounced spurious. Again, the remaining seven have come down to us in three different forms: The *shorter Greek recension* (called G<sup>1</sup>); the *longer Greek recension* (G<sup>2</sup>), consisting of the seven in G<sup>1</sup>, with several additional ones; the *shorter Syriac recension* (S), consisting of three very brief epistles. Controversy has raged furiously between those three forms. Baronius (1538-1607), the eminent Catholic historian, preferred the group known as G<sup>2</sup>, but frankly admitted the possibility of interpolations. Other Catholic scholars agreed with him. It may be observed that G<sup>2</sup> appeared first, and that when G<sup>1</sup> was published few were found prepared to champion G<sup>2</sup>. But the battle was by no means at an end. Gradually the additional letters in G<sup>2</sup> were rejected; but Zahn and Lightfoot held that G<sup>2</sup> made its first appearance after the fourth century, and declared themselves in favour of G<sup>1</sup>. The further back we penetrate the fewer are the epistles, until, when we reach S only three exceedingly short ones are left. Finally there appeared on the scene the brilliant Anglican scholar, known latterly as Bishop of Durham, who, in a series of articles in the *Contemporary Review* between December 1874 and May 1877, and afterwards in his *Ignatius and Polycarp*, vigorously defended the authenticity of the seven epistles mentioned by Eusebius, and of none besides. Anglican scholars generally are of opinion that his verdict on the vexed question is final. Writing of the Bishop's work, Professor W. E. Collins says:—

There is no longer any doubt that, of the forms we possess, G<sup>1</sup> is the original, and that it shows no sign

of compilation, the style of the letters being the same throughout. Further, after a study of the whole question which for minuteness and accuracy is unequalled, he unhesitatingly decides that the seven letters are the genuine epistles of Ignatius.

In his highly interesting article Professor Collins makes not a single allusion to the scholarly work, *Supernatural Religion*, in which there are wonderfully effective replies to Dr. Lightfoot's arguments, which replies remain unanswered to this day. Besides, even granting that the seven letters mentioned by Eusebius are the original ones, that would by no means establish the claim that they were written by Ignatius. Not one step further back than the fourth century can they be traced. Moreover, as it is admitted that the martyrdom could not have occurred later than 115, there is no escape from the fact that the letters "show signs of having been written with a definite theological motive, that they deal with heresies of a date later than that of Ignatius," and that they express views, ecclesiastical and theological, which were not held till the latter half of the second century.

In any case, it is utterly impossible to build any cogent argument for the Virgin Birth on such a flimsy foundation as is afforded by any expressions found in the Ignatian Epistles, around which such bitter controversy has raged for so long and still rages. Those who base an argument on such documents shall be likened to the foolish men who build their houses upon the sand, which are doomed to be razed to the ground by the first real storm that blows upon them.

J. T. LLOYD.

## A Lesson in Camouflage.

Liberty's chief foe is theology. —Charles Bradlaugh.

The crime of inquiry is one that religion never has forgiven. —Shelley.

A SILENT revolution is going on within the borders of the Anglican Church, which is the special form of the Christian religion which is approved by the Governing Classes of this country. This revolution has gone so far as to affect the Book of Common Prayer, and new lessons will now be read in hundreds of churches instead of the old lessons prescribed by Authority, and to which generations of Church people have become used. This drastic alteration is the direct result of the decision of the Convocation of Canterbury to abandon portions of the Bible, and to substitute milder quotations from "God's Holy Word" in the Prayer Book in common use by congregations.

Such action on the part of the clergy is of extreme interest to Freethinkers, because, in public, ecclesiastics always profess a high-sniffing contempt for Freethought criticism. In presence of their congregations, the clergy never tire of the bold refrain, "Who's afraid?" Behind the scenes, however, they arrange quietly the means of retreat. Fortunately for civilization retreat is not only the order of the day, but it will continue to be so. Since Freethought has been organized the clergy have had little rest. The continuous and increasing frontal attacks of the Freethinkers are beginning to tell heavily, and the clergy are getting very nervous. The Black Army is actually retreating to a second line of defence, but the movement is camouflaged, not only to deceive the Freethinkers, but also to delude their own people. This astute clerical manoeuvre may deceive believers for a time, but it will not save the Christian religion.

The substitution of a new set of lessons in the Prayer Book is said by the clergy to be a measure to give the congregations a wider range of subject from

Holy Writ. In reality it is a clever ruse to cover the barbarities and indecencies of the Bible. By avoiding the public recital of such passages, the clergy hope that they will be overlooked and forgotten. It is, however, a very risky and hazardous proceeding. To ignore the unseemly parts of the Bible may spare the blushes of Christian ladies and young curates, but the cure is almost as bad as the disease. These particular passages are an integral part of the Holy Bible, and they cannot be thrown thus rudely and unceremoniously to the rubbish-heap without far-reaching consequences to Orthodoxy. It is not only a policy of despair in the particular instance, but a precedent which will exert, in the long run, anything but a happy effect upon the Christian position.

The clergy will not admit that these omitted passages are barbarous and disgusting, but they suggest that they are "un-Christian in character," which is a polite way of saying that they are utterly out of harmony with modern ideas. This is the sort of thing which the clergy do not wish their congregations to read, or even to hear:—

The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.

The quotation is not pretty, nor edifying, and it is not remarkable for its "spirituality," but the clergy see quite clearly what they must hide to save their faces. Very many other passages of God's Holy Word are equally open to objection, as, for instance, the unlovely passage in Psalm cix:—

When he shall be judged, let him be condemned; and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg; let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places.

And, again in Psalm cxxxvii:—

Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

Observe that the clergy have themselves started to pull "God's Word" to pieces. They have begun with the Old Testament, which comes in for tardy, but none the less deserved, condemnation. Let there be no mistake as to the action of the clergy. They are in retreat. One of their spokesmen has advocated further changes. Bishop Welldon, speaking at Nottingham, said that the whole Book of Common Prayer is out of date. It had never been modified since the seventeenth century, and a Prayer Book dating back over 250 years could not satisfy the present age. The Bishop even went so far as to declare that parts of the Prayer Book were "painfully distressing" to persons with decent minds, and should be altered. The Prayer Book also contained too great a proportion of prayers for individual members of the Royal Family, and not enough for the people. In short, the Prayer Book of the Church of England is past praying for.

This clerical move of mutilating the Holy Bible and the Book of Common Prayer is not a paltry matter. The parsons are seeking to camouflage the savagery of both these volumes so as to retain the respect of their congregations. Such action is the beginning of the end of the Christian religion in this country.

MIMNERMUS.

If anyone sees fit to call the sea "Neptune," and to apply the term "Ceres" to corn, and even carries his preference for wrong terms to the point of calling wine "Bacchus," let him continue to speak of the earth as the mother of the gods, provided that in all seriousness he spares his mind the taint of that foul thing, Religion. *Lucretius, "On the Nature of Things."*

## Pagan and Christian Civilization.

### X.

(Continued from page 741.)

I found that in every nation there have been, and still are, good men and bad, gentle and brutal, thoughtful and ignorant. That the best men of Paganism—Buddha for example—did not lose, by comparison with the brightest light of Christianity; and that such large cities as London and Paris have as much vice within them as ancient Rome or modern Calcutta. I found, moreover, that there is a culpable colouring in the accounts given by Christian travellers of Pagan countries. The clerical pen rests invariably and strongly upon the bad points of every heathen cult, and contrasts them with the best elements of Christianity. I do not know that it has ever instituted a fair comparison between corresponding characters in each faith. As an illustration of my meaning, let us regard the stern virtue of Roman Lucretia who committed suicide, her body having been forcibly defiled by the embraces of another than her husband, even though the ravisher was a prince. She had heard nothing of the Jewish law or Christian Gospel, nevertheless she was far better than the wives of the nobles in the courts of Louis XIV and XV, who gladly sold themselves and their daughters to the royal lechers. These, unlike the Italian woman, were instructed both in the law and the Gospel; they attended one place or another of Christian worship daily or weekly. Nay, if report be true, "the eldest son of the Church" when he visited the *Parc aux Cerfs*, made each fresh virgin, victim of his passion, duly say her prayers before she assisted him to commit adultery and herself permitted fornication!—  
Thomas Inman, "Ancient Faiths and Modern," 1876, p. 8.

SLAVERY and the Gladiatorial combats were the worst features of Roman civilization; Christian apologists claim that Christianity was the means of abolishing both of these evils. It is true that Christians did object to the Gladiatorial shows, and that a monk named Telemachus, rushing into the arena to part the combatants, was slain by the spectators, his death, it is claimed, leading to the abolition of the games.

In the first place it should be noted that the opposition displayed by the early Christians to the gladiatorial spectacles had nothing in common with the modern humanitarian feeling against the infliction of unnecessary pain. The Christians had no objection to pain at all, if it led to spiritual exaltation; many of the early saints tortured themselves by wearing hair shirts, iron girdles, by starvation and exposure to heat and cold. They entered the Pagan Temples and smashed the images of the Pagan Gods in order to be punished or executed, and so gain merit in the life to come. Their opposition proceeded from the same motive which governed the opposition of the Puritans of the seventeenth century to bearbaiting. Macaulay says: "The Puritan hated bearbaiting not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators."<sup>1</sup> The early Christians objected to all amusements, even the simplest and most innocent, they distracted attention from spiritual things, and were, moreover, sinful in themselves.

In the second place the spectacles were not suddenly abolished as is generally assumed. "Only very slowly and gradually," says Friedländer, "did Christianity succeed in weaning the ancient world from the bloodshed of the arena. Very many Christians frequented it."<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine speaks of gladiators still existing in 400 A.D.<sup>3</sup> The fighting of men with wild beasts continued for much longer, "at least to the sixth century," says Friedländer. In 536 A.D. Justinian expressly legislated that consuls were to give these sports besides other games, but the same emperor, "writing to the Archbishop of Constantinople, complained of clerics not abstaining from this spectacle."<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, if Christianity had never come into existence, these spectacles were bound to disappear with the decline and impoverishment of the Empire; they were costly, and there were no funds to carry them on with; "besides," says Friedländer:—

At all epochs, torture and executions have been attractive. In 1787 (according to Tischbein), at a burning of some witches in Palermo the fashionable ladies present had sherbet and ices served.<sup>5</sup>

Here is a description of a Christian public execution in Paris in the year 1774 of two criminals, given by Mlle. Phlipon (afterwards Madame Roland). They had been sentenced to die by the wheel and the stake:—

People had crowded to the very roofs of the houses to witness this appalling punishment. However much the girl shrank from the abominable sight, she could not shut out the shrieks of the wretches nor the smell of the burning faggots! Their cries were heard from her mother's bed, for one of the criminals lived for twelve hours on the wheel. All night this hideous occurrence racked her. However shocked at the crime, she was even more so at people who could find pleasure in such a sight. "In truth," she writes, "human nature is not at all estimable considered *en masse*. I cannot conceive what can thus excite the curiosity of thousands to see two of their fellow-creatures die. The popularity of the gladiatorial fights in Rome no longer surprises me. A kind of ferocity, a certain taste for blood, must be latent in the human heart. But no; that I cannot believe. I imagine that we all of us love strong impressions, because they give us a lively sense of existence, and the same taste which takes the educated to the theatres, carries the populace to the *Place de la Grève*. Yes, the pitiless mob applauded the tortures of the criminals as if at a play."<sup>6</sup>

Whatever the explanation may be, the fact remains that after more than a thousand years of Christianity we find human nature, in this respect, quite unchanged. In our own country public executions were abandoned because of the crowds which were attracted and the lawlessness which ensued. People took up their position hours before the appointed time of execution, and all the windows commanding a view were bought up at high prices, and would be again if a return was made to public executions. Even to-day, in that most Christian country Spain, bull-fighting is the only thing that really arouses the enthusiasm of the people, an observer tells us:—

No victorious general or statesman ever attains the popularity of a famous bull-fighter. All Spain knows the arena names of her favourite *toreros*, and their renown extends beyond Europe; they appear sometimes in Peru. A severe wound of such a *torero* disturbed all Madrid more than any political event; the great ladies call to inquire into his condition; long rows of carriages defile past his house, and hourly bulletins are at first issued.<sup>7</sup>

Even a man like Rist found in bull-fights a new and wonderful charm, and Prosper Mérimée speaks of the irresistible attraction of bull-fights and confesses that no tragedy ever excited him so much; that he never missed a bull-fight whilst in Spain, and preferred the bloody ones.<sup>8</sup> As Lecky remarks:—

Startling, therefore, as it may now appear, it is in no degree unnatural that Roman spectators should have contemplated with perfect equanimity the slaughter of men. The Spaniard, who is brought in infancy to the bull-ring soon learns to gaze with indifference or with pleasure upon sights before which the unpractised eye of the stranger quails with horror, and the same process would be equally

<sup>1</sup> Macaulay, *History of England*, 1907, ch. ii, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners*, Vol. II, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 81.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Mathilde Blind, *Madame Roland*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>7</sup> Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners*, Vol. II, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 80.

efficacious had the spectacle been the sufferings of men.\*

The Church, too, had its own spectacles in the public *Auto's da fe* when the heretics were burned at the stake, which were much worse than the gladiatorial shows, as the gladiator had a chance of his life, and, if he was victorious, was highly rewarded.

(To be Continued.) W. MANN.

### Labour and the Psalms of David.

Therefore our help  
It is the Lord's great name,  
Who heaven and earth  
By His great pow'r did frame.

—Psalm cxxiv.

The present writer recalls a meeting in the City Hall, Glasgow, after the General Election of 1906. The Labour Party had won a large number of seats and it was fitting that the unique event should be celebrated. So Mr. Robert Blatchford presided over as large and enthusiastic an audience as that hall had ever held. Nunquam was obviously ill at ease. He nearly infected his audience with his opening remark, "The Labour Party is in danger of suffering from swelled head."

The scene was recalled on the Sunday after the 1922 General Election. The Metropole Theatre was crowded. Trongate was thronged. Argyll Street never was like it before, and St. Enoch Square was a crush of fifty thousand people or more. The like was never seen. And for what? The Labour Party had won ten seats in Glasgow and many more in the rest of Scotland. And the members were leaving for the south that night. Processions and red flags. Terrible "ongauns" for a "Sawbath" Day. But this is Glasgow where the Scotch "Sawbath" does not always go for much. The writer wasn't at the Metropole, having already engaged to go to the City Hall to hear Mr. McCabe on "Man and the Ice Age." His mind would have been too busy calling up "spirits from the vasty deep." And they would have come, because that was the old Scotia, place of fragrant memories of thirty to forty years ago. The Good Old Scotia! Instead of ———, M.P., I would have been closing my eyes and seeing Jas. Fawn "Ask a Policeman." Instead of a Bolshie, "The Man that Broke the Bank." Instead of a defeated candidate (there were such in the background) he would have seen Jimmy Taylor as "Simple Simon," and Coborn "With Two Lovely Black Eyes." No it would not do, so I did not go.

But the star turns of the day were the afternoon meetings in City and St. Andrew's Halls for the "dedication" of the newly elected M.P.s. The chairman read a statement which the newly elected accepted. It promises that they would work for the good of humanity, promote good feeling and unity among the nations, help and befriend the poor, the sick, the criminal and the insane. Generally a programme which could be supported by any Secularist. One notable section was that in which they referred with gratitude to the pioneer minds who had opened up the path to the Freedom of the People.

This after singing the Psalm of which the last four lines are given above. What would Blatchford have said if instead of listening to the Great Organ thundering forth the "Marseillaise" he had invited the audience to sing one of the Psalms said to have been written by that unethical person King David? Or what if he had given out the 125th in error:—

They in the Lord that firmly trust  
Shall be like Sion Hill,  
Which at no time can be removed,  
But standeth ever still.

I fancy he would have preferred Omar, one of his favourite poets:—

When you and I behind the Veil have passed,  
Oh for the long while the world shall last  
Which of our coming and departure heeds  
As the sea's self should heed a pebble cast.

\* Lecky, *History of European Morals*, Vol. I, p. 278.

But, in all seriousness, I ask, why should the Labour Party coquet with Christianity in this wise? Do they imagine that their constituents like it? Only the other day one of their colleagues in the City Council was to be passed over by the Moderates lest he would fail to honour the king if he (the king) visited Glasgow. And the Labour members rightly resented it because of the implied insult. Ten days afterwards they honour King David in order, one supposes, to show the Moderates how little they understand Labour.

Which of the Pioneers was a follower of David? Who among them would have sung:—

"I will sing to the Lord most high," etc., etc.

Certainly not Owen, not Bradlaugh or Paine or Cobbett or Carlile or Foote or Ingersoll. None of that great and glorious company of men and women, the pioneers, would have had art or part in that piece of play-acting, that game of bluff. The Labour Party are blamed for Atheism; many of them are Atheists. Let them come into the open, rid their minds and mouths of cant and all these things—intellectual, moral and economic freedom—shall be added unto them. It was the cross of the voter that put them into place, let them look to it that the power of the supporters of the other cross, the black frocked army—*et hoc genus omne*—isn't soon used to pull them down from place again.

AUTOLYCUS.

### Correspondence.

#### FREETHOUGHT AND MIRACLES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I should be very much obliged if you would allow me to reply to one criticism made by C. C. in his very kind and otherwise appreciative review of my book, *Shaken Creeds*.

I believe that the point to which I wish to refer is of great importance to those who desire that the beliefs of men and women should be founded upon rational grounds rather than upon prejudices, and I also believe that the difference of opinion between your reviewer and myself is mainly one of terminology. At any rate we arrive at the same conclusions even though he implies that we arrive at them by a different route.

He takes me to task for stating that no one of a scientific turn of mind denies the absolute possibility of a human virgin birth, and for maintaining that the truth or falsity of a story about such an occurrence is a matter to be decided by evidence. Perhaps I have not made myself sufficiently clear in the passage which he quotes, but I hoped that the context would remove any doubt as to my meaning. For my argument is that the people whom we have to refute do not themselves pretend that a virgin birth is in the least probable, but maintain that upon one particular occasion this gross improbability actually occurred. It is therefore, in my opinion, useless merely to retort that its occurrence was impossible. For this impossibility is just short of *absolute*. C. C. himself says it "is as near an impossibility as one can get"—an expression which I think itself admits that the alleged fact just falls short of *absolute* impossibility. The fact may, it is true, be so grossly improbable that he and many others feel that it is unnecessary even to consider the evidence, but it is not so *absolutely* impossible that others are not prepared to believe that it occurred.

For such others it is necessary to examine the evidence, and I would even be bold enough to maintain that C. C. himself really considers evidence when he denies the occurrence of the fact. For when making that denial he must be influenced by a consideration—subconscious, may be—of the vast accumulation of evidence supporting the theory that parthenogenesis is normally confined to the invertebrates, and that at any rate no mammal has ever been born without previous sexual intercourse. It is that and other evidence which has caused him to hold the views which he does hold, as it is that evidence which has convinced him that human virgin births are "as near an impossibility as one can get." If he were an Australian aborigine he would not have had that evidence brought to his notice, and he would therefore not consider the

alleged fact at all impossible or even improbable. Philosophically speaking there are very few things which are absolutely impossible, though there are many which are so grossly improbable that they are *prima facie* incredible, and the believer in any miracle is, I think, logically justified in saying, "I shall continue to believe in this occurrence unless you show me that the evidence I bring forward on its behalf is unworthy of credence." Most of those who disbelieve in miracles have, at some time or other, examined the evidence brought forward on their behalf and, having always found it unconvincing, have ceased to believe in them; and many such people may have now come to the conclusion that it is unnecessary to waste further time in listening to witnesses who may be untruthful or mistaken and whose assertions are therefore unlikely to override the *prima facie* incredibility of such occurrences.

I would not have ventured to discuss this matter at such length were it not that I believe that much harm is done to the cause of rational Freethought, which C. C., I am sure, has as much at heart as I have, by a supercilious refusal to listen to other people's arguments and to examine their so-called evidence; and the sceptic will, I think, find it harder to prove that all alleged miracles are *absolutely* impossible than to prove that the evidence for their occurrence is unworthy of credit. Moreover, even if the sceptic does prove impossibility he will not convince the believer in the miraculous for the latter bases all his arguments upon alleged supernatural performances of the impossible.

I feel sure that the "spiritualism" to which your reviewer refers will be confuted only by accumulating evidence as to the fraudulent practices of the "mediums" and as to the credulity of their dupes, not by mere assertions of its absurdity. For such assertions will only interest the already convinced; they will do nothing to persuade the unconvinced. For the enlightened no arguments may be necessary; but for the unenlightened it is necessary to examine all the alleged evidence on which they rely. Though I disagree with your reviewer on this point, I remain grateful to him for a kind and appreciative notice of my book.

JOCELYN RHYNS.

### Acid Drops.

The freedom of the Press is hardly a political issue although it bears upon politics as upon everything else of public importance. For that reason we are glad to see the Government doping of the Press brought up in the House of Commons, and to gather that it will hardly be pursued with the same impunity as of recent years. During the war the Government supplied its prepared articles to the Press, its prepared sermons to the clergy, and with its faked news and bogus reports from imaginary specialists managed to direct public opinion pretty well as it pleased. The public, when it read an article, had not the slightest idea that it was a cut-and-dried piece of propaganda and not a genuine expression of opinion or a summary of reliable news. Once a government has set out upon this path it is hard to get it to return to the straighter one of intellectual honesty, and for that reason we are very pleased to see a strong protest made against its continuance. For after all, the only things that stand between the general public and absolute tyranny are a free Press and a free Platform. Given these and the party actually is a matter of subordinate consideration.

Baltimore has a six-year-old preacher in the shape of one Newton Hastings. An American paper before us says that he has "stirred" audiences, which we can quite believe. The quality of the "stir" will depend upon the quality of the audience. But on general grounds we can quite credit that smart youngster of six would be able to talk as intelligently on Christianity as many of the parsons we read about. Might we suggest to some of those who are responsible for the maintenance of churches that there is a big ground that has not yet been worked? If a number of fat women and thin men, dwarfs and giants, etc., etc., were roped in as preachers they might

well succeed in filling churches that are now empty and so pave the way to another glorious revival. The quality of the brain work of these freaks would not matter. It is their "drawing" power that is all important.

The Salvation Army in Liverpool, during the elections, issued a leaflet inviting people to vote solidly for Jesus, and leave the voting space blank opposite the name of the Devil. There is no statement of how many votes were recorded, but we think it religiously unwise to leave the Jesus government without an opposition. And it is also ungrateful, for where would such organizations as the Salvation Army be in the absence of the devil? He is their greatest asset.

The Rev. W. T. Barling, a Nottingham Baptist minister, assisted by twenty muscular young men, raided and broke up a conference of Latter Day Saints. We doubt whether the "saints" have been thereby converted to Christianity. But it is the only sort of "apologetic" that the followers of "the meek and lowly" have ever found effectual.

According to Sir Percival Phillips, the British Government terrorizes defaulting taxpayers in Mesopotamia by bombing parts of the district from the air. We referred recently to the flogging of natives at Rabaul, near New Guinea. Yet our publicists and journalists spilt gallons of ink in realistic descriptions of German cruelties to native races. This was one of the "arguments" against restoring the German colonies.

An East London Baptist minister declares that water is the finest beverage in the world. It is one of the drinks that he should know something about. We once met a perplexed truth-seeker who said that he had boxed the compass in sampling religions and religious bodies. He left the Anglicans because they were too cold for him, and joined the Methodists. But the latter were much too hot for him and he went over to the Baptists. The last mentioned were far too wet for him, and the "wet" was far too much under-proof to suit his taste.

The Rector of St. Mark's Church, New York, wishes to reintroduce the dance as a part of the religious service, and hopes to train young men to that end. This is only religion running to seed—returning to its more primitive forms as the better cultured portion of society cease to take interest in it. In the floral world we see the same thing in the gradual degeneration of flowers to their more primitive forms as they are left free from cultivation. Dances among primitive people are not wholly, or even mainly, means of amusement. They are of a very solemn nature, partly magical, and partly symbolical, often with a strong sexual significance. It is in this way that they play a large part in all primitive life and religious belief. In addition one may note that there so far as observers are concerned, they are of value in inducing a condition of auto-suggestion which the priests in all ages have found serviceable to their interests. As religion became more sophisticated the dance, as a part of the ceremony, fell into disuse. The attempt to revive it is one more sign of the intellectual decay of religious belief.

Some of the papers reported that Mr. Churchill wept when the figures announced his defeat at Dundee. This Mr. Churchill has denied, but there seems no cause for him to be ashamed. He appears to be the only candidate in Britain who had God Almighty directed against him. Mr. Scrymgeour, the candidate who headed the poll, thanked God for his election and appeared to see the hand of God in the votes cast. When he was in a certain building he says, a ray of sunshine came into the place and rested directly on him. This was a sign he was going to be elected. And now he is going to Parliament to follow the example of Jesus—whatever that may mean. So far the new House appears to face with equanimity the presence of this god-elected gentleman. At any rate it took God Almighty three or four elections to get Mr.

Scrymgeour elected—or perhaps he only discovered late in the day where Mr. Scrymgeour lived. We shall look with interest to see what God's representative does in the new House. He ought at least to be given a private room.

Mr. Gordon Street says that actors are becoming less superstitious. This is interesting news. The Bishop of Willesden recently celebrated a solemn Eucharist in the Church of St. Alban, Holborn, for actors and actresses. At one time there was a close association between religion and the representation of religious scenes on the stage. At another time the stage came to be regarded as one of the strongholds of sin and Satan. Perhaps the bishop is of opinion that there is something in common between his own profession and that of the men and women who act parts.

"There are as fine saints in Mayfair as have ever been." This is the Bishop of London's opinion, and we gladly reproduce it, as he does not often say anything that will bear quotation. This part of the world is often associated with self-sufficiency and social conceit; but these qualities do not match at all badly with a certain type of sanctity. One of our bishops recently urged upon the denizens of Belgravia the claims of religion in the interests of their social and economic privileges.

An advertisement in the agony column of a London newspaper reads: "M—Satan's old address." Since heaven is discovered to be a state of mind and not a locality, God is said to have changed his address. It would never do for Satan to follow suit. It is nothing but the permanency of his address that places him, in the clerical eye, so far above his less-favoured rival.

"Men of God" take themselves very seriously, but Providence treats them with the same scant courtesy as other men. At Bishop's Sutton, the Rev. H. McNeile was knocked down by a motor-car. At Oswestry, the Rev. A. R. I. Browne met with a cycling accident of a serious nature. At Elliston, Leicester, the Rev. H. P. Phillips was knocked down and killed by a motor-cycle. We hardly think God deserves a vote of confidence from his constituents. But he will receive one, all the same. Wait and see!

The Deputy Recorder of Belfast must be quite a pleasant person to know—to those who are interested in first-class cranks. He is a great believer in prophecy. In a lecture delivered in the Clarence Place Hall, he declared that the Irish people were descended from the last ten tribes. Moreover, the fate of Turkey is decided by prophecy. The Scripture says the Turks are to be decimated and destroyed because of their cruelty to God's covenanted people. Britain must take the sword against Turkey, etc., etc. These are nice people to have in positions of public importance. Cranks of this kind should be confined to chapels.

The *Church Times* is very wroth with the Bishop of Durham for saying that the question of divorce must be settled with reference to the needs of to-day, and that there are factors in the present situation with which Jesus Christ had not to deal. That is only a common-sense view, but the *Church Times* is strictly Christian in its rebuke. And it illustrates the way in which Christianity, so long as it is honestly believed in must stand in the way of rational and orderly progress. To the sincere Christian it is not human necessities that must decide the point as to whether an institution is to be modified, but what "Our Lord" had to say about it. And whether what "Our Lord" said was sensible or silly makes no difference. It must be followed. Of course, if it were sensible there would be no merit in following it. It would only be an exhibition of common-sense. And in that case we should not want the counsel of Jesus to settle it. Religious faith is exhibited when something is commanded to be done that is either silly or wrong and we still do it and proclaim its rightness.

Apart from that the Bishop of Durham is still a long way off the facts of the case. It is not that Jesus did not deal with divorce from the standpoint of the requirements of modern times, but that the whole matter of marriage and divorce was thought of by him—taking the New Testament at its face value—from the ordinary standpoint of the Eastern religious ascetic. Right through the New Testament the prevailing view of marriage is not that it is one of the fundamental social institutions, but that it is a concession to human weakness—a thing which we should be better without, but which is allowable to avoid worse. This absence of the human and social view of marriage and the family runs through the New Testament and through early and mediæval Christianity. The absence of a higher conception of family life is noted by no less a writer than Dean Milman, as well as by Professor Donaldson, and they rightly attribute to this the coarsening of manners and deterioration of morals that set in under Christian rule. When men and women cease discussing the needs of to-day in terms of the mental outlook of primitive Christians, who so far were little better than semi-savages, we shall be nearer getting things on a satisfactory basis.

We see that Lord Balfour is now delivering a further course of Gifford Lectures on Theism. We have not seen anything but a scrappy account of the first lecture, but it is evident that the lecturer is only serving up all the old fallacies which have done duty since it was found impossible to check the growth of the evolutionary idea. We may note the lectures at some length when we see full reports, and if they afford matter for discussion. But we are afraid that there will be very little that has not already been dealt with in Mr. Cohen's *Theism*. Quite candidly, we think that the trustees of the Gifford bequest could well have selected a lecturer who might be much more up-to-date than is Lord Balfour.

While we are about it we may again put the question as to whether the trustees of the Gifford bequest are ever going to carry out the terms of their trust with complete honesty. When Lord Gifford established the trust it was laid down definitely that lecturers were to be invited without reference to their religious beliefs. Even Atheists were not excluded. But the trustees, while not doing anything against the terms of the Trust, have taken good care that only "safe" men shall be invited to lecture. No one who was likely to make a direct and unmistakable attack upon the god-idea has been invited to lecture, and we venture to say that no one will be. It forces one to the conclusion that where the interests of their creed are concerned it is almost an impossibility to get Christians to act honestly.

## How to Help.

There are thousands of men and women who have left the Churches and who do not know of the existence of this journal. Most of them would become subscribers if only its existence were brought to their notice.

We are unable to reach them through the ordinary channels of commercial advertising, and so must rely upon the willingness of our friends to help. This may be given in many ways:

By taking an extra copy and sending it to a likely acquaintance.

By getting your newsagent to take an extra copy and display it.

By lending your own copy to a friend after you have read it.

By leaving a copy in a train, tram or 'bus.

It is monstrous that after forty years of existence, and in spite of the labour of love given it by those responsible for its existence, the *Freethinker* should not yet be in a sound financial position. It can be done if all will help. And the paper and the Cause is worthy of all that each can do for it.



## C. Cohen's Lecture Engagements.

December 3, Stockport; December 6, Labour College, Earl's Court; December 10, Leicester; December 17, Watford.

## To Correspondents.

Those Subscribers who receive their copy of the "Freethinker" in a GREEN WRAPPER will please take it that the renewal of their subscription is due. They will also oblige, if they do not want us to continue sending the paper, by notifying us to that effect.

R. U.—Thanks for poems, but we do not think we are able to use verses written in dialect form.

S. E. BEARDALL.—We should be very pleased to visit Nottingham again. Perhaps there may be an opportunity before the winter is over.

MILITANT.—The name of the writer must accompany all communications, not necessarily for publication. In this case we depart from our usual rule of not answering unsigned communications to say that we agree with nearly all you say. The question of advertising is purely a question of cash. We should be only too pleased to indulge in it had we the means.

SEARCHLIGHT.—Certainly it would do good for Freethinkers to pay attention to the Hickson Mission, but it must be done on the spot to be really effective. We have noticed it more than once in the *Freethinker*.

K. S. (Allahabad).—Quite a broad-minded address, but we do not see material for comment so far as this paper is concerned.

N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss Vance acknowledges: H.M.S. Butler, 5s.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—R. Dixon (Belfast), £2.

T. SHARP.—We are obliged for what you have done. It is a long time since candidates have had so persistent a heckling on the question of the Blasphemy Laws. When the Bill for their abolition comes before Parliament it will make some of them think a little.

H. EMERY.—Certainly we believe in the League of Nations, and we wish it could be made really effective. We should like to see it definitely brand war as a crime, and seriously set itself to kill the "will to war" by demanding the exclusion of all forms of militarism and military display from civil life. It is approaching self-stultification to talk about abolishing war and at the same time assist in holding up the soldier to the admiration of the rising generation. It is equal to attacking the Churches while insisting upon their indispensability.

G. HANN.—*La Pensée*, 70 rue de Canal, Louvain, Belgium; fr. 17.50 (annually). *L'Antireligieux*, Conflans-Honorine, Seine-et-Oise, France; fr. 3.50.

D. MASS.—We agree with you that when a man is returned to Parliament with the outlook, as you say, of a South Sea savage, the prospect is not very encouraging. Still, we may console ourselves with the reflection that the number of these mental primitives in public life are not quite so numerous as they were. We hope to be in Aberdeen before the winter is over.

H. HICK.—We have no such system as the one about which you enquire. We shall be pleased to advise you to the best of our ability if you will let us know what special subject you would like to follow up.

W. MC.—We have always been of opinion that if only the political situation in Ireland would clear Freethought would make rapid advance in Ireland. The Irish are too quick-witted to remain for ever slaves to so stupid a superstition as Christianity.

The "Freethinker" is supplied to the trade on sale or return. Any difficulty in securing copies should be at once reported to the office.

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.

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press" and 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:—

The United Kingdom.—One year, 17s. 6d.; half year, 8s. 9d.; three months, 4s. 6d.

Foreign and Colonial.—One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

## Sugar Plums.

It will be no news to anyone to learn that we are, in common with everyone else in the country, feeling the results of the depressed state of trade. With about a million and a quarter of unemployed, the amount of money available for expenditure on books and periodicals is seriously curtailed, and we are fighting at present to maintain rather than to increase sales. We have had suggestions from friends as to advertising, but that is quite beyond our means in the present circumstances. Our friends can, however, help us to advertise the *Freethinker* at the cost of a little labour on their own part, and at a very modest outlay on ours. They can do this by helping to distribute in likely quarters specimen copies of the *Freethinker*. All they need do is to send a postcard saying how many copies they can profitably distribute, and we will send on the parcel carriage paid. That is a very effective way of getting the paper better known, and we should soon see the results in increased sales of both the paper and our other publications. A postcard saying what numbers can be handled is all that is necessary.

There was an unfortunate misunderstanding over Mr. Cohen's lecture at Pembroke Chapel, Liverpool, on Sunday last. Since Mr. Cohen was there in the early part of this year the time for the lectures has been changed from afternoon till evening. Mr. Cohen was not aware of this, and so announced in last week's *Freethinker* that the lecture would be at the usual time in the evening. This must have misled a great many readers of this journal and their friends, for which we are very sorry. However, there was a good audience, and for more than an hour those present listened with the closest attention to an address that called for more than the usual amount of intellectual effort to follow. But it was evident that the address was very much appreciated, and that is all that any lecturer can ask for.

The Rev. Mr. Laughland took the chair, and also took some part in the questioning. Mr. Laughland is a man with more than the usual endowment of moral courage, and in throwing the platform of Pembroke Chapel open to all forms of thought, not even barring the much dreaded Atheist, he is setting an example to the rest of the clergy. We are afraid very few of them will follow his lead, but that only makes his own action the bolder. We understand that some very hard things are being said of him on account of Mr. Cohen's visits, and bigotry will be certain to do all that it can to injure him. But he is a man with courage to feel that his own opinions stand being attacked, and one must always admire a man of that stamp however much one may disagree with some of his views.

To-day (December 3) Mr. Cohen lectures in the Central Hall, Hillgate, Stockport, at 6.30 on the subject, "Can We Have Morality Without Religion?" Admission is free, and there will be discussion following the lecture. Next Sunday Mr. Cohen will lecture in the Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate, Leicester. In between these dates, on December 6, he will deliver an afternoon address to the students of the Labour College, 13 Penywern Road, Earl's Court, S.W., on "Materialism." With the exception of

the usual number of letters, looking after the customary business details of the Pioneer Press, and doing the usual amount of writing for the Freethinker, he will have the rest of the week to himself.

The Pioneer Press is publishing this week a volume which will, we think, appeal to all classes of readers whether religious or non-religious. It is a collection of pithy and wise sayings from all ages and from all classes of writers, which have been collected by Mr. A. J. Fallows, M.A. Generally such collections suffer from the fault of containing so much that is commonplace or platitudinous. We hardly think this fault will be found with Mr. Fallows' volume. The quotations are arranged alphabetically, and are thus easy of reference, beside enabling the reader to find something pithy on a variety of subjects. If there is such a thing as "potted wisdom" it is in a collection of this description, and we wish it the circulation it deserves. The volume runs to over 300 pages, it is well printed on excellent paper, and is published in two styles. There is a paper covered copy at 3s. 6d., and another bound in cloth, gilt, at 5s. In each case the postage is extra. Those who are looking for a present for a thoughtful friend for Christmas or the New Year, will probably find here what they seek. He would be hard to please who did not appreciate the gift.

Mr. George Whitehead will lecture to-day (December 3) in the City Hall Saloon at 11.30. In the morning his subject will be "Is there a God?" and in the evening, "Is There a Life After Death?" We hope to hear that the hall was full on both occasions.

Mr. A. B. Moss had a good audience at Birmingham on Sunday last. His lecture was listened to with great appreciation throughout. Mr. Clifford Williams presided over the meeting. The Birmingham Branch is as usual making a gallant struggle to promote Freethought ideas in their city, and we hope it will receive from local Freethinkers the support, moral and financial, it deserves.

To-day (December 3) Mr. R. H. Rosetti will visit Manchester and will lecture in the Free Library Public Hall, Dickenson Road, Rusholme, at 3 and 6.30. We believe that Mr. Rosetti's lectures are always listened to with the greatest appreciation by our Manchester friends, and we have no doubt his visit will be quite welcome to all. Freethinkers would do well to make the lectures as widely known as possible, and put in a little propaganda work in the shape of inducing a Christian friend to attend.

Among the candidates returned to the new Parliament Freethinkers will be glad to note the name of Harry Snell, who was at one time very active on the Freethought platform, and whose introduction to public life was through the N.S.S. Mr. Snell stood in the Labour interest, but he is as much a Freethinker as ever, and we are quite certain that his vote will always be exercised in the right way whenever Freethought is in question. His will make one more vote in favour of the Bill for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws whenever that measure is introduced. We should have made this announcement in our last issue, but in the rush consequent on the editor's absence in the West of England it was overlooked.

The West Ham Branch of the N.S.S. is holding a social evening on Saturday, December 9, at 7 o'clock in the Earlham Hall, Earlham Grove, Forest Gate, E. There will be the usual programme of songs, dances, games, etc. Admission is free. All Freethinkers and their friends are sure of a hearty welcome.

We are glad to see a well written letter in the *Advertiser and Times* (Blackburn?), from one who signs himself "Philo," on the subject of Secular Education. Freethinkers cannot exert themselves too much in this direction. It is quite likely that the Government will try an Education Bill in the near future, and it is certain that if they do it will aim at helping the Churches to carry out the backstair arrangement they have come to with the connivance of the late minister of education.

And every letter that is published in the papers putting the case against religious education in State supported schools is helping to educate the public as to the right view to take. The more we can use the public Press the better.

The meeting of the Discussion Circle at the N.S.S. rooms, 62 Farringdon Street, on Tuesday, November 21, was well attended. Mr. R. H. Rosetti introduced the subject, "How the Idea of God Arose," and most of those present took part in the discussion which followed. Next Tuesday, December 5, Mr. Bedborough will open with the subject, "What is My Duty to My Neighbour?"

## A World of Illusions.

ON the last two occasions upon which I put in an appearance at the lectures or "chats" of the Bishop of Woolwich and his clerical assistants in the Borough Market, there was quite a large attendance, and when I claimed that I had been instrumental in attracting many of these fresh faces by my searching questions, the Bishop frankly acknowledged the justice of my claim, and said that he and the Rev. Wade Geary were much obliged to me and were very glad to see me present, and to answer my questions in the light of the new knowledge revealed by science and the spiritual interpretation of the Christian faith. "Chats" on the story of the resurrection on the first of these occasions were given by the Rev. W. Potter. As I have said before, this gentleman is manifestly very sincere in his faith, but does not appear to have read any critical examinations of the Gospels from the Freethought point of view. Consequently all he did was to tell us the story of the resurrection as described in the four Gospels, and spoke as though the Gospels contained within themselves enough evidence to prove they were entirely authentic and reliable. On the other hand the Rev. Wade Geary who possesses a very different order of mind, and who is without doubt one of the ablest theologians and cleverest dialecticians before the public as a Christian advocate, for clever fencing, or dexterity in dealing with nice points of metaphysics, from the Christian standpoint, would require a good deal of beating. He promptly admitted at once that the Gospel accounts of the resurrection were full of discrepancies and contradictions; in fact, viewed in the light of a perfect narrative, they presented many points that were hard for the ordinary person to reconcile or understand. But when sincere people, like the writers of the Gospels, were giving an unprejudiced account of what they alleged they and others saw, it was only natural that their accounts should not agree on all points and that they should sometimes conflict one with another. The one thing they all agreed upon, however, was that Jesus did rise from the dead and that some of his disciples saw him after the crucifixion. And this was still regarded as one of the chief teachings of the Christian faith to-day. Of course, the Rev. Wade Geary said a great deal more than this, but the reader will have to glean what he said further by the questions that were asked. On this occasion I was the only questioner, and I occupied the Rev. gentleman about a quarter of an hour in putting questions and making short speeches in explanation of some of my points. No formal discussion, however, is allowed.

The Borough Market is a Trust, and I can quite understand that any formal speech delivered from a rostrum of any sort, even a costermonger's barrow, from a purely Freethought point of view, would be prohibited at once, especially as the meeting is held just outside one of the chief entrances to St. Saviour's Cathedral. But the Bishop and his clerical supporters invite questions, and they cannot prevent anyone

from making those questions of the most searching and critical character. So I began by asking the rev. gentleman whether it was a fact that Jesus was a Jew, that his disciples were also Jews, and how it was that none of the Gospels—which were in Greek—could be shown to be in existence until at least a hundred and twenty years after the alleged death of Jesus? The rev. gentleman admitted that the Gospels were in Greek, but he said that I was not up to date in my information as to how long after the death of Jesus they could be shown to be in existence. Then I asked whether he was prepared to debate the point elsewhere on some future occasion, to which he replied in the negative. Another question I put was: Could he demonstrate that either Matthew, Mark, Luke or John wrote a single line of the Gospels attributed to them? His reply was that scholars were not certain as to Matthew and Mark, but he thought that there was good evidence for Luke and John. When, after further questions, I asked how it was that Mary mistook the risen Jesus for a gardener, the rev. gentleman said that she probably failed to identify him in his new body which was a spiritual body and not a material one. Pressed as to how it was that the apostle Thomas, who doubted the resurrection, was allowed ocular proof by being privileged to feel the wound prints in the hands and side of Jesus, he said that this was purely a spiritual manifestation. In fact the Rev. Wade Geary was prepared with a spiritual interpretation for all the alleged miracles of Jesus, and when I asked why Jesus cried with a loud voice when he wanted to raise Lazarus from the dead—was it because the dead could not hear a soft voice—he chided me with my levity, and insinuated that such a method of looking at the subject approached pretty closely to blasphemy, but I reminded him that he tried to reduce one of my questions to an absurdity, and if such a method was good for him it was equally good for me. When the meeting was about to close I thanked him for his courtesy in replying to my questions, and said that his replies were very clever and displayed great dexterity in handling difficult questions. He, however, objected to the word "dexterity," and said that as he had expressed his belief in my sincerity he hoped that I would give him credit for sincerity also, and so with mutual understanding on that point we said "good day" and parted. The last lecture I attended was addressed by both the Rev. Wade Geary and the Lord Bishop of Woolwich. It was on the subject of the Ascension, and was not only interesting, but in a sense, amusing also. The Rev. Wade Geary anticipated many of the questions I intended to put by answering them by anticipation in his address. For instance, when he declared that many of the disciples saw Jesus ascend, he followed that by saying, "Perhaps you will ask where he was going?" "Well, as a matter of fact, he was not going anywhere," said the rev. gentleman. "It was a purely spiritual body that came out of the grave, and it was this body that *appeared to ascend*, but really faded away in the presence of the multitude. So Jesus did not defy the law of gravitation by going up, as many thought, beyond the clouds, he merely disappeared before the wondering gaze of the multitude, and it was this extraordinary phenomenon that surprised and bewildered them." "Moreover," he said, "when we were dealing with the career of a Divine Being we expected to find things happening which were contrary to our ordinary experience, and it was that which happened over and over again in the case of Jesus."

The Bishop followed and said ditto to many of the things his able assistant had affirmed. In fact, he declared that we are all "living in a world of illusions." We are material beings, he said, "living in a spiritual world," and in essence man was a spiri-

tual being himself. When a man's body died, man himself did not die; his soul lived on for ever. Man was eternal. Jesus, therefore, resembled all other men in the fact that after the resurrection his spiritual body lived on, but in his case he revealed himself spiritually to his disciples and many others, and this spiritual manifestation took the form of the Ascension.

When question time came I asked the Bishop to define what he meant by spiritual. "Well," said he, "love is a spiritual thing. We cannot see it or handle it; we do not know what it is in itself—it is spiritual not physical." The Bishop also said we were eternal. I then put a question which I have put at various times to many theologians. Politely, I asked whether I was alive before I was born; and when the Bishop replied that he certainly thought so, I put this conundrum to him very gravely: "If I do not remember who I was before I was who I am, how am I likely to remember who I shall be when I am somebody else?" This provoked loud laughter among the crowd, in which even the Bishop himself could not refrain from joining. Among further questions I asked the Bishop whether it was not a fact that most Christians believed a few years ago that Heaven was a little way beyond the clouds and that Jesus literally ascended to Heaven and sat on the right hand of the Father. Also whether it was not a fact that most Christians between forty and fifty years ago believed in a burning Hell, at all events for unbelievers, and many still believed in it; to which the Bishop replied in the affirmative. I also asked the Bishop whether he had read any of the sermons of the famous Charles Haddon Spurgeon on Hell. He replied that he had not read them but he had heard of them. I further asked whether he had read a little book by Father Peimonti entitled *Hell Open to Christians*, a book that was formerly read in Catholic schools by children of a tender age and which gave vivid descriptions of the horrible suffering of sinners of all ages in the quenchless fires of hell, and the Bishop frankly admitted that he had not, and he quite agreed with me that the old conception of hell fire was terrible and shocking beyond expression.

The new school of theologians have therefore not only abolished hell, but have got rid of heaven at the same time. To this the Bishop replied that heaven and hell were merely states of mind. In other words when Omar Khayyam finely said:—

I sent my soul through the invisible  
Some secret of that after life to spell,  
And by and by my soul returned to me  
And answered—I myself am Heaven and Hell

he was only anticipating the new doctrine of the Lord Bishop of Woolwich. Strange coincidence is it not? Assuredly we do live in a world of illusions.

From the above statements the Freethinker can easily guess the line the new school of Christian reformers will take in their attempt to reconstruct the Christian creed. But they will not have so easy a task as they imagine. Before the old school of Christians dies out many of them will have to unlearn by painful experience how hard it is to get rid of old and cherished beliefs which the growth of scientific knowledge among the masses has rendered absolutely untenable. Many of them will cling on most tenaciously to their old superstitions notwithstanding the new teachings. The hope of the Church, therefore, must be with the rising generation; and it is to be hoped that the majority of these will seek a still more rational teaching and ultimately join the ranks of those earnest seekers after truth, who find no halting place between the most complete subjection of the intellect to the authority of the priest and the assertion of the right to think out such problems for themselves and decide them all at the bar of reason and common sense.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

## The Historicity of the Beloved Disciple.

THE Beloved Disciple, if there had been such a person, would surely have occupied a high position in the early Christian Church, and formed the object of frequent allusions in the early Christian literature. But we never hear a word about him except in the Fourth Gospel, or in the works that appeared after the Fourth Gospel had been put on a footing with the rest. The Synoptics ignore him completely. The Pauline Epistles know him not. The Acts are mute as to his existence. The remaining treatises of the New Testament give no more light on the matter. The extra-canonical writings such as *Clement*, and *Barnabas*, and *The Shepherd*, display an equal silence. Besides this, of all the things which are, or seem to be, alleged upon his evidence, not a single one is to be found anywhere save in the book which tells of him and his doings, whilst most of them are flatly contradicted by the information contained in other and earlier works. Yet it is not pretended that he was the only witness on the occasions referred to, for the matters specified are said to have happened before other persons, and to have been of a nature so striking and significant that they could never have gone by unperceived.

In view of the above it appears impossible to regard the tales told about the Beloved Disciple as anything but a tissue of untruths, or rather of lies. This indeed does not exclude the supposition that there may have been someone who posed as, or passed for, the character in question; or that a grain of fact perhaps lay at the bottom of the falsehoods related by or about him, as will come out more clearly in proceeding to weigh the further possibilities. Here we have only to add that because the Beloved Disciple is unnamed, it does not therefore follow that everybody knew him, for if so, his fame would certainly have come down to us from other quarters, as in the case of Joseph of Arimathea for instance.

Is the Beloved Disciple a myth? In support of the mythical view, it might perhaps be urged that the author has embalmed some by-gone worthy who was reckoned among the friends of Jesus, and about whom so many glowing tales were told, that his memory had got quite encrusted with legends. This would be like an old English Chronicler dealing with Robin Hood, and provided that time enough elapsed between the death of the hero and his appearance on the page, the author could have written of him in perfect faith. But against the above theory there are two strong arguments. First, a legend does not crop up all at once, and there is no trace whatever of any development in the present case. Secondly, the stories have a clear-cut, finished look, incompatible with their being of hearsay origin, and this to such a degree that many affirm them to be the reports of an eye-witness, which indeed they clearly resemble. It is also remarkable that whereas miracles are put down to Peter and Paul who got on to the page of history long before the Beloved Disciple, though according to the account they must have flourished with him, he himself is never reported to have done anything miraculous, which is strange indeed if he were held in veneration as the one whom Jesus had taken to his heart.

Here it is very suggestive to note that at the end of the second century when the Beloved Disciple had become identified with St. John, some startling wonders soon began to gather round the name of this apostle, though none of them had ever been heard of before as figuring among his performances. Thus he was said to have come safe and sound out of a chaldron of boiling oil, to have brought back a dead man to life; and finally to have gone down alive into his grave,

and remained there alive ever since; whilst the only miracle attributed to him before the end of the first century was the cure of the lame man whom Peter and he are said to have healed at the Beautiful Gate when going into the Temple. This emphasizes the previous absence of legends attached to the Beloved Disciple.

Is the Beloved Disciple a literary fiction? Here the position assigned to him with respect to his fellows should be taken into account. He is exhibited as highly intelligent and richly endowed with the faith that springs from intuition; they are set forth as dull of understanding, and stupidly incredulous. He has from the beginning a heavenly frame, they are good for nothing before Jesus breathes on them the Holy Spirit. This sharp contrast looks very much like an artificial affair, as the lines of Mars are said to be too straight for Nature. Hence it may be contended that the author holding opinions about the person and teaching of Jesus different from those held on the same matters by the historical disciples, thought fit to invent a witness capable of attesting his views, and for this purpose evolved the Beloved Disciple, taking care not to specify him in a clearer manner lest the fraud should be discovered. According to this the Beloved Disciple bears much the same relation to the Jesus of the present work that Man Friday bears to Robinson Crusoe, the antitype of Alexander Selkirk. Certainly it would seem a hazardous thing to come out all at once with a personage so important as the Beloved Disciple, but this argument is applicable to the Fourth Gospel as a whole. How bold to produce such a new story of Jesus when the tradition underlying the Synoptics had long been on the way to become the standard authority! A writer who, fifty years after the death of Bonaparte had credited him with an unreported victory greater than Austerlitz, would not have been more venturesome than one who half a century or more after the Crucifixion gave the earliest report about the raising of Lazarus. The same author has tampered much with the history of the Baptist, and the case of Judas Iscariot; to say nothing of the long-winded and improbable speeches which he attributes to Jesus on different occasions. He may, therefore, have invented the Beloved Disciple as a dogmatic or perhaps apologetic witness.

Did anyone pose as the Beloved Disciple? This means, was the rôle claimed by anyone either before or after the appearance of the Fourth Gospel? The fact that what the work says about the personage is obviously unhistorical, compels us to forgo the belief that the author proceeded upon reliable information, but does not hinder the supposition that he may have known, or heard of, someone who gave himself out as the character referred to. If he be reporting and not inventing when he affirms the existence of the Beloved Disciple, the report he gives must have been based in the first instance, either upon what the person specified said about himself, or upon what other people thought of him. Thus he may have appropriated the title; or he may have obtained it without his own will and knowledge; or he may have received it from others, and consented to the attribution. All these possibilities rest upon the belief that the author was aware of the person before he described him in his work.

As to the existence of such a man, the testimony supplied by the writer of the appendix has a certain importance. Speaking of the Beloved Disciple, he says: "This is the disciple which beareth witness of these things, and wrote these things, and we know that his witness is true." Of course if he had said no more, his attestation would have had little weight, especially as we do not even know his name; but a little before he relates the words said to have been used by Jesus in reply to the query of Peter touching the fate in store for the Beloved Disciple, and tells of

the false construction subsequently put upon them. This looks as if he knew about someone who had finally died, after living so long that it was believed he would be kept alive till Jesus came back in the clouds. For it may plausibly be urged that if such a person had never been in view, or if he were still in existence, the necessity to invent his immortality in the one case, and explain it away in the other, would not have arisen. On the opposite side, however, it might be contended that after the book had got ascribed to the Beloved Disciple, there were people who said that it could not have been written by him because of its late date, and that to silence these objectors he was represented as having attained a fabulous longevity.

With respect to the Beloved Disciple, the writer of the appendix is just as mysterious as the author of the work. He does not tell us who the man was, or where he came from. Perhaps, then, he only knew him as the person referred to in the work and said to have written it; but if so he may have fixed up the tale about the longevity to win credit for the report about the authorship. Nevertheless, the former alternative, namely, that there had been someone whose advanced age got him the credit of being endowed with endless life, is far more probable. One thing, however, is certain, although the writer of the appendix declares that the long-lived person was the Beloved Disciple, and had composed the work, he does not produce a single scrap of evidence to show that the good man himself ever claimed to have been the one, or to have done the other. This reveals a further possibility, to wit, that the Beloved Disciple, though originally a fictitious character, subsequently became identified with an historical personage in the absence of any such design on the part of the author. The writer of the appendix does not say how he came to know that the Beloved Disciple did produce the work. Hence he may simply have jumped at the conclusion, or have got it from others who had thus reached it. This fact naturally weakens the value of his evidence, if it have any value in general.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

(To be Concluded.)

### Materialism.

A THEORY is not an unemotional thing. If music can be full of passion, merely by giving form to a single sense, how much beauty or terror may not a vision be pregnant with which brings order and method into everything that we know. Materialism has its distinct æsthetic and emotional colour, though this may be strangely affected and even reversed by contrast with systems of an incongruous hue, jostling it accidentally in a confused and amphibious mind. If you are in the habit of believing in special providence, or of expecting to continue your romantic adventures in a second life, materialism will dash your hopes most unpleasantly, and you may think for a year or two that you have nothing left to live for. But a thorough materialist, one born to the faith and not half plunged into it by an unexpected christening in cold water, will be like the superb Democritus, a laughing philosopher. His delight in a mechanism that can fall into so many marvellous and beautiful shapes, and can generate so many exciting passions, should be of the same intellectual quality as that which the visitor feels in a museum of natural history, where he views the myriad butterflies in their cases, the flamingoes and shellfish, the mammoths and gorillas. Doubtless there were pangs in that incalculable life, but they were soon over; and how splendid meantime was the pageant, how infinitely interesting the universal interplay, and how foolish and inevitable those absolute little passions. Somewhat of that sort might be the sentiment materialism would arouse in a vigorous mind, active, joyful, imper-

sonal, and in respect to private illusions not without a touch of scorn.

To the genuine sufferings of living creatures the ethics that accompany materialism have never been insensible; on the contrary like other merciful systems, it has trembled too much at pain and tended to withdraw the will ascetically, lest the will should be defeated. Contempt for mortal sorrows is reserved for those who drive with hosannas the juggernaut car of absolute optimism. But against evils born of pure vanity and self-deception, against the verbiage by which man persuades himself that he is the goal and acme of the universe, laughter is the proper defence. Laughter also has this subtle advantage, that it need not remain without an overtone of sympathy and brotherly understanding; as the laughter that greets Don Quixote's absurdities and misadventures does not mock the hero's intent.—From "Reason in Science," by G. Santayana.

### Poems in Prose.

The prose poem is a literary form of emotion impregnated with thought which produces the effect by suggestion rather than by imitation. It is the spontaneous but perfect expression of a representative mood or poignant emotion. Its importance as a work of art depends upon the careful evocation of the incomparable beauty of prose, in word, in phrase, and in cadence, the profound clarity of moral significance underlying the idea, a significance which is never forced upon the reader, but which the ethically inclined can educe for themselves. This delightful species has not been cultivated to any extent in England. We have, of course, many splendid examples of poetic prose. We find them here and there in the work of our prose masters—in Jeremy Taylor, Sir Thomas Browne, De Quincey, Ruskin, Walter Pater, and in Arnold's exquisitely phrased pæan to Oxford, the venerable and lovely city, "spreading her gardens in the moonlight and whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Age." Yet, indeed, we have few attempts to rival Tourguenief and Baudelaire. Wilde, I imagine, is the only English man of letters who busied himself with transplanting this lovely exotic plant in our English soil. But under his intelligent care it took on new, if not lovelier, colours while keeping the form fixed by its foreign habitat. It is my intention, from time to time, to place before the literary reader of our paper translations as adequate as I can make them of the finest prose-poems by foreign masters of the art. I begin with Baudelaire (1821-1867) whose originality, like that of his American counterpart, Poe, is so disturbing that even now the academic critic frequently mistakes him for a charlatan.—George Underwood.

#### THE CAKE.

I was travelling. The landscape in the midst of which I was seated was irresistible in its grandeur and sublimity. Something no doubt at that moment passed from it into my soul. My thoughts fluttered with a lightness like that of the atmosphere; vulgar passions, such as hate and profane love, now appeared to me as far away as the clouds which floated in the depths beneath my feet; my soul seemed as vast and as pure as the dome of the sky enveloping me; the remembrance of earthly things came to my heart like the thin, faint tinkle of the bells of unseen cattle browsing far away on the sides of another mountain. Across the small still lake, black with its great depth, there passed the shadow of a cloud, like the reflection of the mantle of some winged giant flying through the heavens. And I remember that this solemn and rare sensation caused by a vast and perfectly silent movement filled me with joy and fear. In a word the entrancing beauty about me made me feel at perfect peace with myself and the universe; I even believe that in my complete happiness and total forgetfulness of all earthly evil I had come to think that after all the newspapers are not wrong, and that man was born good; when, incorrigible matter renewing its exigences, I sought to refresh the fatigue and satisfy the hunger set up by so long a climb. I took from my pocket a large piece of bread, a leathern cup, and a tiny bottle of a certain elixir which chemists sold at that time to tourists to be mixed, on occasion, with mountain snow.

I was quietly cutting my bread when a slight noise

made me look up. Before me was a little ragged urchin, black and dishevelled, whose hollow eyes, wild and beseeching, devoured the piece of bread. And I heard him gasp in a low, husky voice the word "Cake!" I could not help smiling at the name with which he sought to honour my nearly white bread, and I cut off a big slice and offered it to him. He came towards me slowly, not taking his eyes from the coveted object; then snatching the bread out of my hand, he stepped back quickly, as if he feared that my offer was not sincere, or that I already repented of it.

But at the same moment he was bowled over by another little savage who had sprung from I know not where, and who was so precisely like the first that you might have taken them for twin brothers. They rolled over and over on the ground, struggling which should get possession of the precious booty, neither willing to give up the smallest part to his brother. The first, exasperated, clutched the second by the hair; and the second seized one of the ears of the first between his teeth, and spat out a little bleeding morsel with a fine oath in his own dialect. The legitimate proprietor of the cake tried to hook his claws into the usurper's eyes; the other tried his hardest to throttle his adversary with one hand, while with the other he endeavoured to get the prize of war into his pocket. But, revived by despair, the vanquished one pulled himself together and sent the victor sprawling with a blow of the head in his stomach. Why describe a hideous struggle which lasted for longer than their childish strength seemed to promise? The cake went from hand to hand, and changed from pocket to pocket at every moment; but, alas, it changed also in size, and when at length, exhausted, panting and bleeding, they stopped because it was impossible to go on any longer, there was nothing left to fight for; the slice of bread had disappeared and was scattered about like grains of the sand with which it was mingled.

The sight had darkened the landscape for me, and the joyous calm in which my soul had lain basking had wholly disappeared; I remained saddened for a long time, saying to myself over and over again: "There is then a wonderful country in which bread is called *cake*, and is so rare a delicacy that it is enough to set brother against brother in deadly enmity." CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

### Some Things I Do Not Know.

SITTING, smoking, blinking, musing,  
Whence came I, and whither go?  
Piles on piles of books perusing;  
Comes the answer: Do not know.

Was I, somewhere, watching, waiting  
For a birth or embryo  
To adapt me to my station  
Here on earth? I do not know.

When this world was incandescent,  
Twenty million years ago,  
Was I then, not knowing, present?  
Once again, I do not know.

Shall we, gentlemen and ladies,  
When to dust and gas we go,  
Find, somewhere, a heaven or hades?  
Again I answer: Do not know.

Was all space once void and formless,  
Nothing high, or on, or low,  
Starless, cloudless, breezeless, stormless?  
I cannot tell, I do not know.

If it were so, how could matter  
Out of nothing come or grow?  
What, or who through space did scatter  
Countless worlds? I do not know.

Say—God made the whole creation;  
Spake the word, and it was so;  
And to doubt involves damnation.  
Is this true? I do not know.

Still the smoker, smoking, blinking,  
With a calm unruffled pose,  
Softly questions, deeply thinking,  
Whence came God? I do not know.

S. PULMAN.

### 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 post-card.

#### LONDON.

##### INDOOR.

METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (160 Great Portland Street, W.1): 8, Mr. C. E. Ratcliffe, "Current Events."

N.S.S. DISCUSSION CIRCLE (62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): Tuesday, December 5, at 7, Mr. Bedborough, "What is My Duty to My Neighbour?"

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Trade Union Hall, 30 Brixton Road, S.W.9, three minutes from Kennington Oval Tube Station and Kennington Gate): 7, Mr. J. H. Van Biene, "Corn Plasters for Cancer."

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, C. Delisle Burns, M.A., "Freedom and Law."

#### COUNTRY.

##### INDOOR.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (City Hall, Saloon): Mr. George Whitehead, 11.30, "Is There a God?" 6.30, "Is There a Life After Death?" (Silver collection.)

LEEDS BRANCH N.S.S. (2 Central Road, Duncan Street, Shop Assistants' Rooms): 7, Mr. Allan, A Lecture. Questions and discussion invited.

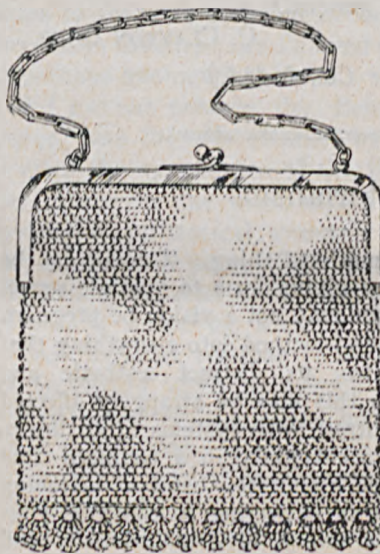
LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. Joseph McCabe, "The First Civilization in Europe." (Lantern Illustrations.)

MANCHESTER BRANCH N.S.S. (Rusholme Public Hall, over Free Library, Dickenson Road): Mr. R. H. Rosetti, 3, "Free-thought According to Facts and According to Christians"; 6.30, "Where Recent Researches in Science Have Put God."

NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S. DISCUSSION CIRCLE (Socialist Society's Rooms, 23 Royal Arcade): Tuesday, December 5, at 7.30, Mr. T. Haxton, "The Case for an International Language."

STOCKPORT BRANCH N.S.S. (Central Hall, Hillgate): 6.30, Mr. Chapman Cohen, "Can We Have Morality Without Religion?"

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