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Views and Opinions.

Christmas and Christians.

There is nothing new about Christmas—certainly so far as Christianity is concerned—for the Christmas celebration is only Christian in the sense that a Frenchman may become an Englishman by the legal process of adoption which we call naturalization. In itself Christmas is one of the group of Nature festivals which exist all over the world, which began in the far away primitive stages, born of frames of thought that precede real civilization, and which are perpetuated among us from substantially the same causes that find us all endowed with rudimentary tails. We have not developed so far as to lose them, but we have grown so far out of the conditions that gave them utility as to have forgotten their original significance. Just as some religious egotists repudiate association with our tailed ancestors, so we find Christians indignantly rejecting a lineal connection with the forms of thought from which their own religion is derived. But it will not do. The evidence is too multiform, the proof is too complete. Christianity in all its phases is too obviously a survival of savage cults, a perpetuation of savage ideas. The man who does not see this has not made an approach to a proper understanding of Christianity. So long as we properly discriminate between what is religion and what is not, there is really no distinction between the religions of the world. They are fundamentally alike; they differ only in the degree to which more civilized modes of thinking have compelled them to cloak their original savagery under a veneer of secular civilization.

* * *

A Link with the Past.

Long before Christianity, as such, saw the light, men worshipped the sun as the god of life and the lord of life; and if men must have a god to worship they might well do worse than worship the obvious giver of so much that is bright and beautiful and healthful. Far more helpful would that be than the worship of a deity who apparently exhausted his energy and intelligence in setting things going, and ever since has been watching them go, unable to alter them for the better, and remains powerless in a net of his own contriving. Primitive men saw and felt the sun and recognized its power. They saw him dying

at the approach of winter, and watched fearfully his re-appearance at the turn of the year. His victory over the winter cold meant so much to them, there is small wonder that in their ignorance they resorted to charms and spells to help the sun in its recovery to strength, and in their spring, summer, and autumn festivals, celebrated the annual drama that was for ever being performed. There was in all this a germ of poetry and the veiled expression of a truth. But when Christianity came along, and, taking this primitive myth, converted it into a sober account of an alleged historical occurrence, it made the whole thing supremely ridiculous. A god who is literally born as a human baby, who passes through all the phases of babyhood, to be petted, fondled, even smacked by its earthly parents, to grow up, to be executed, and then to rise from the dead in a surreptitious manner, when he might so easily have openly confounded his enemies and proven his power, is an indication of the pitiful level of intellectuality at which Christianity took its rise. No wonder that Christian legislators took steps to prevent by law people laughing at their creed. Those with clear intellects and a sense of humour must laugh at such a creed—unless they are driven to tears at so great a degradation of the human mind.

* * *

What Does it Mean?

Over and over again human nature has shown itself too strong for religion, and there is no exception with regard to Christianity and Christmas. Consider its applications and implications, theoretical and actual. It is with all a season of feasting and of merry-making. So far as the primitive conception of the season is concerned this is quite natural. But with Christianity what room or what occasion is there here for jollification? Man, created perfect, had fallen. He had become so bad that there was no hope of his improvement by ordinary human methods. The case was so desperate that God himself had to come to earth and die the death of a common malefactor. The very memory of that sacrifice and of the circumstances that occasioned it should fill every Christian with sadness. But does it? Instead of sorrowing he rejoices. Instead of fasting he feasts. Newspapers in this Christian country have been for several weeks liberally displaying advertisements advising Christians to arm themselves with pills and potions against the gorging and guzzling of Christmastide. Thousands of Christians will celebrate the birth of their saviour—which they believe was the first step of his pilgrimage of sorrow and suffering—by getting drunk. A much greater number used to follow that line of celebration till a developing decency taught them better. Plum puddings and mince pies, beer and whisky, Christmas-trees and pantomimes; what have all these things to do with the actual birth and death of a god masquerading in the form of a man? It would almost seem that Christians were rejoicing that he was killed. Christ came and was killed—therefore Christians rejoice. Suppose he had come and had not been killed, would Christians then have sorrowed?

The Cant of Peace.

I know it will be said that I am looking at Christianity from the wrong point of view. Christians rejoice at the anniversary of the birth of their God because his coming meant the ushering in of peace and love and brotherhood, because he opened the way to salvation. Well, the first Christians might conceivably have hoped that this would be the case—as a matter of fact they were looking for nothing of the kind—but is the Christian of to-day justified in taking the birth of Christ as a starting point for these things? When Christ was born the herald angels sang of peace and good-will on earth. That is one of the profoundest pieces of irony in all history. One is almost inclined to believe that some enemy inserted that passage in the New Testament as a satire on Christianity itself. When were passions less controlled, hatred more vivid, or bloodshed more usual than under the shadow of the Cross? What amount of good-will do the so-called inferior races of the earth experience at the hands of their Christian visitors and rulers? They are outraged and exploited without shame in the name of Christianity and morality. For centuries it has been dangerous for any unarmed nation or people in the world to possess resources that would arouse the greed of Christians. At one time it is gold, at another diamonds, at another rubies, at another rubber, at another oil, always and everywhere the Christian nations of the world have gone all over the earth plundering and fighting, and sanctifying their piracy in the name of Christianity. Even after a war such as the one from which we have just emerged the Christian nations show themselves unable to settle down to peaceful paths. Our own government has just taken in hand the building of two warships at a cost of six millions. It is to decrease unemployment they say. Rubbish! Employment could surely have been given in other ways than this. There are houses needed, there are roads that need remaking. There are a score of things that could be done with the money, which would give an equal amount of employment and would confer a benefit upon the community. The spending of six millions at this juncture of our affairs is only an indication that our Christian governors and fellow citizens cannot yet think of the world in terms of peaceful intercourse, but only intercourse with the levelled gun ready for use. "Peace on Earth!" sang the herald angels at the beginning. Let us have two six-million battleships, and thank God for the peace and love which his religion brings, sing the Christians at the other end. The one is, perhaps, the best commentary on the other.

Leave God Out.

* * *

The Archbishop of Canterbury has just issued for use in the churches the customary sanctimonious Christmas prayer for peace and brotherhood, and Christians are advised to pray to God that he will fill them with the desire for the peace of the world. How many Christmases have there been when Christians have not offered up a similar prayer? Has God answered? And if not in the past why should we expect him to do so in the present? The making of war and peace does not rest with God, but with men and women. And if the Christians of Europe really desired peace who is to withstand them? The same archbishop said a little while ago at Geneva that if the Christians of the world made up their minds there should be no more wars, wars would cease. Let his Grace look round the world to-day and see if Christians have become more fervent in the practice of peace. He will find that the same people who have voted twelve millions for two battleships, while cutting down the expenditure on education, are the same who will repeat his prayer with all fervour; and, what is

more, when the battleships are built the Archbishop, or one of his representatives will give God's blessing to the vessels when they are launched. It is, after all, religious feeling that divides men more than anything else. It separates those whom feelings of humanity would bring together. In Ireland we see it at work setting Catholics and Protestants at each others' throats. In America there is in some of the states danger of almost civil war between the same two sects, and even in the Turkish trouble, when we eliminate the grab for the oil-fields, there is the same religious feeling operating. A large part of the indignation against the Turk is based on Christian agitation against a rival religion. The Christian foams at the mouth and calls upon the Government to send troops and ships and enter on another war, because Turks are butchering Christians. But Christians might have butchered Mohammedans till doomsday without the fact exciting much attention in the Christian Press. If Christians really desire peace, there is no need for them to mumble the Archbishop's stupid prayer to God. Let them far rather forget him altogether, and decide they will quit themselves like rational human beings. Common-sense and ordinary humanity may then do what religion has always failed to accomplish.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

The Virgin Birth.

IV.

ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

It is to be borne in mind that, whilst the birth-narratives in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are undoubtedly of Pagan origin and entirely non-Jewish in character, yet the interpolators evidently endeavoured to make them acceptable to Jewish as well as Gentile converts. Matthew introduces the virgin birth as taking place in order to fulfil the prophecy in Isaiah vii, 14: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son," and even Luke gives to his account a distinctly Jewish form, as is seen in the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary and the angelic son of praise. To what extent Jewish Christians did accept the dogma we have no means of ascertaining. The probability is that Judaic Christianity had virtually ceased to be before it attained to a really prominent position even in Gentile communities. From all the facts bearing upon the subject now in our possession, the only rational inference is that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth was a theological after-thought, probably never as much as dreamed of for several generations after the crucifixion. Mary never had the ghost of an idea that the birth of Jesus had differed in the smallest degree from that of any of her other children. Had she known that the Holy Ghost was his father, is it likely, is it in any degree or sense credible, that anything could have induced her to say, or, if she could have helped it, to allow any of her other children to say that he was beside himself? And yet this is what we read in the earliest Gospel (Mark iii, 20, 21): "Jesus went into a house, and again a crowd collected, so that they were not able even to eat their food. When his relations heard of it they went to take him, for they said that he was out of his mind." Both Matthew and Luke naturally omit that incident altogether. It may possibly have been included in the original copies of those Gospels, and discreetly deleted on the insertion of the birth narratives. Be that as it may, the fact remains that, according to Mark, his family thought Jesus was mad and were eager to have him put under restraint, which proves beyond the possibility of a doubt that Mary knew of absolutely nothing that connected the Holy Ghost with his conception.

Now, the fact being that throughout the first century the Gospel Jesus was not regarded as virgin born, and that it was not until about the middle of the second century that Justin Martyr began to declare before an incredulous Christian public that his mother was a virgin, it behoves us to inquire as carefully as we can why a virgin birth came to be ascribed to him. Theologians have been accustomed to claim complete uniqueness for their Saviour, asserting that he forms a class by himself, into which no one else is worthy to enter. The divines of the second century held an entirely different conception of him, and it seems to us wholly incontrovertible that their motive in attributing a virgin birth to him was not a desire to put him in a category by himself, as a perfectly unique personality, but rather a deliberate purpose to place him in exactly the same category as the Pagan Redeemers, with some of whom, they knew quite well, he was about to enter upon a long and arduous course of competition. Indeed, already in the second century, and with deeper intensity in the third, Christ was in a process of vigorous and bitter rivalry with Osiris, Adonis, Attis, and Mithra. The cults of these saviour-gods were the influential religions of that period, and they were steadily undermining and displacing the national religion of the Roman Empire, and in violent conflict with one another. Christianity's strongest opponent was Mithraism. Between these two the competition lasted long, being often of the keenest character, but it ended, as is well known, in a nominal victory to Christianity. Christian apologists maintain that their religion triumphed because its Founder was Divine and living, while Mithra was only an empty myth and his religion a purely human product. We must pronounce that a laughably childish and silly argument which makes no appeal whatever to people of moderate intelligence and culture. Harnack, a Liberal theologian of immense learning, is certainly above making use of such an unconvincing argument, but even he goes somewhat astray on this point. He says:—

In the first instance, at any rate, our question must not run: "How did Christianity win over so many Greeks and Romans as to become ultimately the strongest religion in point of numbers?" The proper form of our query must be: "How did Christianity express itself, so as inevitably to become the religion for the world, tending more and more to displace other religions, and drawing men to itself as to a magnet?"

The famous German scholar's own answer to that query is as follows:—

From the very outset Christianity came forwards with a spirit of *universalism* by dint of which it laid hold of *the entire life of man* in all its functions, throughout its heights and depths, in all its feelings, thoughts and actions. This guaranteed its triumph And was not victory the due of this religion? Alongside of other religions it could not hold its own for any length of time; still less could it succumb. Yes, victory was inevitable. It had to come (*Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. II, pp. 143-6).

The first answer to that peculiar reasoning is that Christianity has never been the religion of the world, that it has never drawn men to itself as to a magnet, and that even to-day the followers of the Buddha are, to say the least, fully as numerous as those of Christ. Though it has been in the world for nigh two thousand years its spirit of universalism has not guaranteed the universal triumph of Christianity. In the second place the partial triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire was not at all due to its intrinsic merits, and Harnack knows this much better than we do. There were three factors which conduced to the victory of the Cross over Mithraism. The first was the superior mental calibre of some of its early protagonists, which

enabled it to capture to a large extent the Hellenistic world. To Mithraism, as Harnack observes, "the entire domain of Hellenism was closed," chiefly because of the inferior mentality of its missionaries. The second factor was the advantage Christianity derived from its wholesale borrowing capacity. Recognizing the superior excellence of certain elements in other religions it appropriated them without a moment's hesitation, and soon assimilated them into its own substance. This factor is dwelt upon by Harnack, who calls Christianity "the syncretistic religion," admitting that this syncretic quality was "a feature in which the other religions in the Roman Empire make but a poor, a meagre, and a narrow show." But it is doubtful whether these two factors, whilst giving Christianity a decided advantage over its opponents, would alone have resulted in its final victory. This end was achieved by the conversion of the Emperor Constantine the Great, and his adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the empire. It would be a radical mistake to imagine that Paganism perished through its own inherent demerits. As a matter of incontestable fact it was put to a violent death by sheer brute force, while Christianity flourished not because of its greater vitality or superior attributes, but as the direct result of imperial support.

Well, to-morrow, in the year 1922 of our era, Christendom will once more be celebrating the advent of the virgin-born Redeemer of the world, who confidently predicted that if he were lifted up on the Cross, and from the Cross to the right hand of his Father in heaven, he would draw all men unto himself. Of course, the celebration will be, as usual, a severely sentimental one, those taking part in it being swayed by heavenly faith rather than by secular knowledge, by dreams in preference to realities. When asked what Christianity did, after its recognition as the official religion of the Empire, towards the reorganization and ennoblement of society they evasively speak of the wonderful consolations religion provides for fervent believers in sickness, bereavement, and the hour of death, and of the unutterable misery and hopelessness that would befall mankind if robbed of such priceless blessings; but Christianity is to be judged not by the happy experience of a few ardent believers, individually or collectively considered, but by its success or failure to deliver the world from its corrupt practices, its debasing oppressions, its open, unashamed injustice and cruelty towards the weak and defenceless members of the community, and its horribly wicked exploitation of positive evils and wrongs for the selfish aggrandizement of the strong and privileged. It is absolutely undeniable that for six hundred years after the Christian Church came to power under the Roman Empire society kept sinking lower and lower in moral degradation until in the tenth century it reached a depth of depravity never touched before, when for more than fifty years three women, a wealthy widow named Theodora and her two daughters Theodora and Marozia, completely ruled the Church, appointing, deposing or killing pope after pope in quick succession, so that from Sergius III in 904 to John XII in 955 there were twelve popes, all corrupt, unprincipled, and unblushingly wicked, whom the Catholic historian, Möhler, describes as "horrible popes." This is what followed the triumph of Christianity over Mithraism and other Pagan religions in the Roman Empire. Instead of lifting mankind to a higher and nobler moral and social level the Church helped them to follow the road which always leads to destruction. From the tenth century down to the present age the Church has been the foe of liberty, secular knowledge, progressive reform, and toleration, but generally the fomentor of all sorts of discord, quarrel, persecution, and war. It defended and practised slavery until public opinion

forced it to alter both its attitude and its practice. The plain truth is that the alleged virgin birth of Jesus Christ has resulted in no benefit whatsoever to the human race, and that in celebrating it anew tomorrow Christendom will be celebrating the sheerest myth ever invented. And now at last Christmas is being gradually restored to its ancient dignity as a day set apart for celebrating the new birth of the sun. Regarding it in that light we who adore Nature as our mother can honestly and enthusiastically wish one another

A Right Merry Christmas.

J. T. LLOYD.

The Comedy of Christmas.

Christmas is the least ecclesiastical of all the church festivals, and for that reason, perhaps, the most popular.
—Dean Inge.

THE convivial features of Christmas Day, which is supposed by uneducated Christians to be the birthday of the "Man of Sorrows," have been noted by many critics to the discomfiture of the clergy and their supporters. Not only is "God's birthday" an annual orgy of gluttony and godliness, but it is a veritable museum of folklore and picturesque customs, tolerated and encouraged by the various Christian Churches, but only loosely connected with the Orthodox festival. It is an excellent piece of Christian evidence, for it plucks the heart out of the orthodox superstition.

Why should the birthday of the "Man of Sorrows" be associated with feasting and merriment? And why should "God," who is described as eternal, have a birthday? These are questions that would puzzle the Bench of Bishops, which is composed of elderly gentlemen of infinite leisure and limited learning.

It is one of history's minor ironies that the alleged birthday of the "Prince of Peace" was fixed in the month of December from the urgent necessity of fighting Pagan rituals. Like all human institutions, the Christian Churches and their feast-days have had to contend in open warfare for survival. The festivals of Pagan Rome were as numerous as plums in a home-made pudding. The public holidays were so frequent that they threatened to make life a series of bean-feasts, and the Roman authorities found it necessary to curtail them. It was to counteract the attractions which these Pagan holidays exercised over simple folks that the astute leaders of the Christian Churches sanctioned and incorporated some of these feasts.

"God's birthday" was not kept regularly until many generations after the supposed date of the birth of Christ. When first observed, it was held on varying dates. The Eastern Church kept January 6 as a joint commemoration of the alleged birth and baptism of Christ, and the Armenians do so to this day. The birth of the Christian god is now said to have happened in December, and it is observed in that month by believers in that religion. It was not, however, in that month, even according to their own legends. For shepherds do not watch their flocks by night in that most unromantic period of the year.

It was in competition with the feast of Saturnalia, one of the chief Roman festivals, that Christmas Day had its date fixed in December. The anniversary of Saturn was held from December 17 to 20, and the Emperor Caligula generously added a fifth day of rejoicing. On these five festal days of old Rome the schools were closed, no punishment was inflicted, the toga was replaced by undress garment, distinctions of rank were laid aside, servants sat at table with their employers, and all classes exchanged gifts. The propensity of converts from Paganism to cling to custom proved invincible. If the apostates were to be retained

in the new religion, it became necessary to incorporate the old under the mask of the new. The struggle for survival has also incorporated other features in this country. In the far-off centuries, white-robed Druids cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their hymns to the frosty air. These features have also been absorbed, and the mistletoe and carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, part in this festival of shreds and patches.

Is it not a fine piece of Christian evidence? The clergy have always had a keen instinct for proselytising. In the past the Church sought for adherents by increasing her festal days, and she crushed opposition by bribing the weak, and silencing the strong by thumbscrew, rack, stake and gibbet. In the twentieth century she is carrying on the same base business. She is cajoling apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries, and at home by instituting Pleasant Sunday Afternoons instead of Painful Sabbaths. She also hypocritically identifies herself with the working class movement, and attempts to discourage inquiry by imprisoning isolated Free-thinkers.

The Christmas festival itself, with all its hypocritical professions and its Pagan legendary associations, is very largely pretence and make-believe. It is the paradox of paradoxes that the wealthiest of the Christian Churches should be the Church of England, with its 25,000 clergy, who make millions out of this sorry superstition, and profess to worship a god who commanded his followers to sell all they have and give it to the poor. Christmas, so far as the Christian Churches are concerned, is an organized hypocrisy, a fitting festival and celebration of an event that never happened.

MIMNERMUS.

Early Religion.

II.

(Concluded from page 806.)

DRAWING no hard and fast line between himself and the things around him the savage may be readily persuaded that men may be metamorphosed into plants, trees, animals and stars. Observe how easily such worships would grow. Beside the dead are placed seeds to maintain life. Some sprout from the grave, and the life is believed to have gone into the great budding tree which becomes sacred; or an animal is seen near and the life is supposed to have passed into it; or a heavy stone being placed over his grave to keep down the ghost—it may be said the man has become the stone, and as he was revered, so must that be. In some such way sprang the curious system of Totemism, by which whole tribes claimed descent from natural objects, plants or animals, and derived from the sacredness of those objects the sanction of their marriage prohibitions and blood feuds.

A writer in the *Quarterly Review*, July 1894, well remarks:—

In the confused crowd of his impressions the savage perceives chiefly that he is beset on every side. He feels the blows dealt him by the invisible. He sees ghosts in the visions of the night. Slain animals, no less than slaughtered men, inhabit the places to which his spirit wanders during sleep. It does not, for a long while, occur to him that these multitude of influences may be summed up in a few grand poetical abstractions, any more than it occurs to a child now-a-days to strike out the theology for himself. The most ancient idols are without shape, not even human, nor even bestial; and such, too, are the conceptions they body forth. Men worshipped the fire in the tree, which their own hands had kindled, ages before they rose to the idea of a supreme, all-seeing Sun-god. They adored the

animals, tame or wild, in their neighbourhood, by no means symbolically, but with a deep reverence for the wisdom, strength, and power of evil possessed by these other shaped mortals who disputed the world with them. In vegetation they recognized gods many and lords many, born with the spring, dying at harvest, and needing to be helped by the solemn magic ritual which made things flourish or turned aside mischief. The animal, the tree, and the god were all bound up together, incarnate in king and priest, liable to injury and even to death, so that a continued succession must be provided lest their life should fail.

This interchangeability of man, god, and the tree spirit may, as Mr. Grant Allen remarks, "surprise us the less when we remember that to this day one half of Christendom identifies its own man-god with a piece of consecrated wafer" (*The Attis*, p. 107). Mr. Allen notices how ghosts are believed to be most dangerous shortly after death. When the grass grows green on the burial place it is believed to have absorbed the spirit. For this purpose trees would be planted, as we find the old barrows planted in with Scotch firs or pines, and in this Mr. Allen finds the origin of the sacred pine tree of Attis. Tree worship formerly extended all over the world:—

In the eighth century St. Boniface found it necessary to cut down a sacred oak; even recently an oak copse at Loch Siant in the Isle of Skye, was held so sacred that no person would venture to cut the smallest branch from it; and it is said that oak worship is still practised in Livonia (Lubbock, *Or. Civ.*, 292).

In early times the renewal of vegetation was a perpetual miracle. Men supposed that the trees had souls, that could retire and live again. The recurrence of vegetative life was the symbol and pledge of man's own continued existence. On tree-spirits harvests were supposed to depend. In Sumatra, as soon as a tree is felled, a young one is planted on the stump and some betel and a few coins are also placed on it. Here the purpose is unmistakable. The spirit of the tree is offered a new home in the young tree planted on the stump of the old one, and the offering of betel and money is meant to compensate him for the disturbance he has suffered.

Early man being savage, warlike, and cruel, his gods were in his own image and endowed with his own characteristics. All the early gods are ugly devils, and the later ones are but little better. Their primary characteristic is arbitrary power often combined with cruelty. Their worship had no more connection with morality than has church-going or taking the sacrament. It usually consisted of magical charms or incantations to avert disaster. Of these our prayers for rain and fine weather are a survival. Have such supplications any necessary connection with "morality touched by emotion?" The very attitude of prayer betrays its slavish spirit. The ghosts were thought to be placated with offerings of food or of blood, as on earth they delighted in cruelty and carnage, and men imagined that by gratifying this taste they might themselves escape injury. Hence they erected altars and deluged them with the blood of the innocent. Prayer and sacrifice, the main elements of religion, can alike be traced to savagery. The gods all approved of much which we now condemn. We need not refer to the recorded doings of the ancient gods of Greece, Egypt, or India. Their cruelty and obscenity have been sufficiently exposed by Christian writers.

Jahveh, the God of the Jews, like all early deities, though he is a comparatively late one, was ferociously cruel. He demanded bloody sacrifices and "smelled" their sweet savour (*Gen. viii, 21*) "I will not smell the savour" (*Lev. xxvi, 31*). It is evident from *Leviticus xxvii, 29*; *Micah vi, 6* [Hebrew], and the

stories of Abraham and Isaac and Jephthah, that human sacrifice was once common among Jews, and that animals were substituted as symbols, just as the Roman Catholic Mass is a symbol of the sacrifice of Christ. When Jahveh sent his only begotten son into the world, the old Jew-god must still have his pound of flesh. For upwards of a thousand years the whole Christian world believed that ransom for man's redemption was paid over to the Devil. Such phrases as "the sacrifice of the Lamb of God" and "the efficacy of the blood" take us back to this savage origin as surely as the eastern position of the altar in churches reminds us of former sun-worship. In some respects Christianity is hardly an advance upon savage religion. No religious conception is more atrocious than that of a god who consigns the majority of his creatures to eternal torments, saving a few elect on condition of their believing in salvation through the blood of an innocent person. That such dogmas have been held as the fundamentals of Christianity should for ever silence those who, now that belief in them is declining, attempt to find a new foothold for ancient savage superstition and priestcraft by identifying religion with morality.

The late Professor Huxley said:—

It is my conviction that with the spread of true scientific culture and with its necessary concomitant, a constant elevation of the standard of veracity, the end of the evolution of theology will be like its beginning—it will cease to have any relation to ethics. I suppose that so long as the human mind exists, it will not escape its deep-seated instinct to personify its intellectual conceptions. The science of the present day is as full of this particular form of intellectual shadow-worship as is the nescience of ignorant ages. The difference is that the philosopher who is worthy of the name knows that his personified hypothesis, such as law, and force, and ether, and the like, are merely useful symbols, while the ignorant and the careless take them for adequate expressions of reality. So it may be that the majority of mankind may find the practice of morality made easier by the use of theological symbols. And, unless these are converted from symbols into idols, I do not see that science has anything to say to the practice, except to give an occasional warning of its dangers. But, when such symbols are dealt with as real existences, I think the highest duty which is laid upon men of science is to show that these dogmatic idols have no greater value than the fabrication of men's hands, the stocks and the stones, which they have replaced.

(The late) J. M. WHEELER.

Lament.

LONELY: I have no friend,
So lone am I.
Lonely until the end;
Lone shall I die.

Earth, I have loved thee;
Sunset and dawn,
Noontide and evening,
Midnight and morn.

Men, I have envied you,
Going your ways,
Coldly incurious;
Blesséd your days!

Lovely in loneliness
Shines yonder star;
Lovely in loneliness
As my dreams are.

Lonely; without a friend.
O, lone am I!
Lonely until the end;
Lonely to die.

JOHN ERNEST SIMPSON.

Christmas.

CHRISTMAS is not a Christian festival in any exclusive sense. It belongs to Christianity because it has been taken over from Paganism and adapted to Christian usage, and its persistence into modern times is to some extent a measure of Christianity's failure to reform the thoughts and habits of a large section of mankind.

Had Christianity been a divine religion capable of transforming everything by infusing new life into all who came under its spell there would have been no Christmas in the sense in which it is known to us now, bearing, as it does, all the marks of a Solar Festival.

Even the orthodox Murdock, in his notes to Mosheim's *Ecclesiastical History*, admits the close resemblance of Christmas to certain Pagan festivals when he says:—

The Christmas holidays—which by the law of Theodosius the Great (A.D. 383-395) were to comprise fourteen days, or the seven days before and after Christmas (Codex Justinian, lib. iii, lit. xii, leg. ii)—have borne so close a resemblance to the Roman Saturnalia, Sigillaria, etc., and to the Juel (Yule) feast of the ancient Goths, as to afford strong presumption of an unhappy alliance between them from the first. (Note to p. 156—Vol. I, Ed. 1848.)

Whether the "alliance" between Christmas and other ancient festivals was unhappy or not there is no doubt that the so-called Christian festival is but a survival from a Pagan solar festival, held in honour of the birth-day of the Sun-God at the Winter Solstice.

One fact which must not be overlooked in connection with the festival of Christmas is that the so-called birthday of Christ is unknown. For a long period in the history of the Church no date was fixed upon by the authorities; and although the Western Church seems to have settled upon December 25 by the second half of the fourth century, a final agreement as to the date, between the Eastern and the Western Church, does not appear to have been arrived at until the sixth century.

The date ultimately fixed upon happened to be the mythical birthday of almost any well-known Sun-God. As J. M. Robertson says:—

His birth was placed at the winter solstice, the birthday of the Sun-God in the most popular cults. (*Short History of Christianity*, p. 16.)

This, if not indicative of the divine origin of Christianity, was at least evidence of the shrewdness which could be displayed by the Christian priests when they were out to win the people from the other cults. To adopt the main features of Pagan ritual and festival until the people could be brought under the influence of such a power-giving doctrine as that of eternal damnation, and doctored with a dose of Christian gloominess in relation to this life, was the way to success.

Mithra, one of the most widely worshipped of the sun-gods, was, according to ancient mythology, born on December 25. So also were the sun-god Osiris; the vegetation-gods Dionysos and Adonis; and the babe-sun-god Horus.

Frazer claims the Christmas festival to have been directly borrowed from the religion of Mithra (*Golden Bough*, Abridged Ed., 1922, p. 358), but whether such a direct borrowing from one religion can be substantiated or not there is no doubt of the widespread popular rejoicing on the birthday of the sun-god at the winter solstice. As Frazer himself says:—

The ritual of the nativity, as it appears to have been celebrated in Syria and Egypt, was remarkable. The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, "The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!" The Egyptians even represented the new-

born sun by the image of an infant which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to his worshippers (p. 358).

In view of the similarity, on many points, which exists between the Christian Christ and other sun-gods of the ancient world it is not surprising that we find much in common between the Christmas festival and such a festival as the Roman Saturnalia. Saturn, if not originally a sun-god, was closely related to the sun-gods as a mythical instructor in agriculture and the arts of civilized life; and the Saturnalia held in his honour may be taken as a specimen of the festival which took place at the winter solstice.

At this time of the year, December 25, and indeed for some days before and after, there was too much festival and carnival making going on among those who had not renounced their Paganism for the early Christians who were born and bred, as it were, in the traditions of the Pagan world not to feel that they, too, must snatch some brief enjoyment from a year of daily toils, when others were making merry for a few days.

So the authorities of the Church were forced by circumstances in the long run to establish, as a feast of the Church, a Christmas festival on the lines of the Saturnalia, whether they derived the details from one particular Pagan festival or from all the leading festivals.

The Saturnalia with its exchange of presents between those who could afford them, and its feasting, freedom from care, and making merry for all classes, was a time of joyousness and relaxation for the poorer folk who were banqueted and waited upon by their masters. It was a time when domestic slaves ceased for a while their too familiar labours, and, wearing the badge of freedom for a few days, were permitted to associate with those who were socially better placed.

It was the custom to grant a holiday to the schools, to suspend business, and close the courts of law during the Saturnalia; while malefactors were not punished, and to declare war was considered to be an offence against the gods.

Doubtless there was an element of seduction in all this, as there is in so many religious festivals, and the masters who made merry and free with their slaves for a brief space of time were taking advantage of their religiously trained emotionalism for the purpose of maintaining law and order during the ensuing months by bribing their slaves to remain docile. But it must be remembered that the same desire for law and order persists at the present day and in many cases Christian capitalists make presents to their work-people with no better motive than that of seductively inducing them to remain contented with a relationship to their masters which secures the work-people's easy and continued exploitation.

During the Saturnalia restrictions on public gambling were for the time being removed, just as the ban on card-playing has been lifted for Christmas-eve by puritanical Christians; and a visit to the pantomime, during the Christmas festivals, has been permitted by many a devout sufferer in Christ.

At one time, under the Empire if not under the Republic, little earthenware toys were given to children during the Sigillaria, a minor festival of the Saturnalia, which took place on the sixth and seventh days of the Saturnalian festivities. This custom is seen to persist in modern Christian times in the habit of filling a child's stocking with toys, crackers, and sweetmeats on Christmas eve.

As the writer of the article on the Saturnalia in Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* says:—

Many of the peculiar customs exhibited a remarkable resemblance to the sports of our own Christmas and of the Italian Carnival (p. 841, 1842 Ed.).

In fact there is little that takes place during Christmas at the present day which is not an heirloom, as it were, from the Roman Saturnalia and similar sun-god festivities.

The decorating of Churches; the holding of shows as a side-line to divine worship; the merry-making, drinking, feasting, paying visits and making salutations, along with the giving of presents, are all survivals in honour of the sun, and help to keep Christmas alive for the average Christian far more so than any so-called deep religious feeling. Indeed, the depth of many a good Christian's spiritual life can be measured at Christmas time far more easily in pints of wine and whiskey than in religious feeling. And, for many, there is more real joy when the symbol of sun-worship is placed upon the table than at any time of the religious ceremonies. As J. B. Hannay says:—

The English have a relic of sun worship in their spherical Christmas plum pudding with its spirituous flames representing the sun. (*Symbolism in Relation to Religion*, p. 120.)

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

Acid Drops.

When Sir Hall Caine writes a novel he says what he pleases, and if some people care to take his fiction for fact the responsibility is theirs. Others will remember that it is Sir Hall Caine, and also that if an author will only fill his pages with enough "sob stuff," and sufficient religious gush, he may be fairly certain to sell well. But when he writes what purports to be a serious article and to deal with facts he should be a little more careful. For instance, in the Christmas number of *Answers* Sir Hall Caine solemnly informs his readers that before the coming of Christ woman had no sense of her rights and responsibilities, but that "there suddenly came upon the world a great new light." Jesus Christ "was the first world champion of woman." Dear, dear! Sir Hall Caine has evidently confined his studies of woman to the Bible, and imagines that the picture of the semi-savages there is drawn of the world at large.

Sir Hall Caine should turn to the history of Egypt, and he will find there woman possessing property in her own rights, able to become queen of the Empire, and with an independence such as she did not possess in Christian Europe till our own day. And if he will then turn to Greek and Roman literature he will find pictures there that will evidently astonish him. And Jesus the world champion of women! That sounds almost like sheer bluff. When Jesus selected his disciples he carefully left the women out. True, he accepted presents from them, but he is not the first wandering preacher who has done that. Even the Roman Catholic Church while it was denouncing her as a child of the devil, never hesitated to take from her anything she would give. And it is passing strange that the followers of this world champion of women, those who made the Christian Church, should have uniformly held such a low opinion of women, and have taken from her all the legal and civil rights that she had under Pagan rule. Last week we gave our readers an illustration of the way in which the fraudulent claims of the Christian Church are passed off on the people as verifiable history. Sir Hall Caine furnishes us with another illustration.

Someone sends us a picture of Kylemore Castle, which is said to be in the poorest part of Galway, and which we are informed is now inhabited by the Roman Catholic order of "The Poor Nuns." All we can say is that if we had to live in so fine a residence we should hardly feel that we had a valid claim to the title of "Poor." But it is not at all unusual to find these religious orders living in very fine buildings surrounded by their dupes in hovels. One is a consequence of the other.

During the hearing of the Ilford murder case, Mr. Justice Shearman said, with reference to one of the counsel appealing to God, "They were dealing with human justice in that court, and he disliked any appeal to God." We were pleased to hear him say that, but we wonder whether he carries it so far as to object to the oath? He ought to, for that is wholly an appeal to God.

Mr. J. R. MacDonald, the leader of the Labour Party, writing in the *Nation*, recently described how he won Aberavon. Why religion should be dragged into such an article may appear strange to some readers, but it must be remembered that religion still counts for something in the political life of England, loud as is the outcry against Roman Catholics whenever they introduce their faith and its interests into politics. Mr. MacDonald says that the simpler communities of kindly faith seem to have left Liberalism and gone over to Labour. "The future of Nonconformity as a living and inspiring force in Wales is trembling in the balance. More, religion is truly democratic, and its inspiration is mainly working-class." The Nonconformists are bringing God's word up to date, and this affords Mr. MacDonald a fine opportunity to seize the helm of the ship and steer it clear of disaster. He will be a welcome acquisition to whatever conscience and character is left in the fold. He is keen on this work.

The *Guardian* (December 15) states in a leading article that the Church of England is the greatest of English landowners, and is therefore intimately concerned with the condition of agriculture. When the price of cereals is high, the incomes of those clergy who are paid by tithe rent-charge rise, and when the price is low, the incomes fall. Our contemporary also reminds us that many incumbents are, in virtue of their office, owners of glebe land. It is as interesting to note such facts as it is to see an occasional advertisement in the daily newspaper offering an advowson for sale. The doctrine and teachings of the Establishment are the subject of endless dispute, sometimes of a very acrimonious nature, at conferences, public meetings, and in the correspondence columns of the Press. For all that, this organization is a real legal entity in the realm, with considerable "rights of property," which represent its immediate interests. Candles, vestments, incense, and the salvation of souls merely represent its remote interests.

The *Guardian* has, of course, given very serious consideration to the proposed revision of the Prayer Book. Such proposals deserve serious consideration. In its issue of December 8 it states that "a great opportunity is offered to the Church by the proposals for an alternative Prayer Book for optional use." This represents—doctrinally, of course—the present stage of the Establishment's development. What will be the next stage? The same issue contains an advertisement of the Christian Evidence Society, appealing for funds, and an editorial paragraph on the Society's aims and objects. "The C.E.S. exists to furnish evidences of belief for those that will not believe without." Just so. There are two classes of "believers," but the C.E.S. is only concerned with one of them. "Even the gods must go." True, but the C.E.S. will not go as long as subscriptions are forthcoming.

A South London clergyman offers for sale a wood pulpit on wheels. If it could be fitted out with a praying-wheel, such as they have in Tibet, it ought to be attractive as a soul-saving instrument.

It is now possible to "listen in" to New York. If this sort of thing is carried much further, the heavenly choir will have to refrain from singing hymns during broadcasting hours.

Is there anything in the world that religious feeling will not make worse? There appears to be considerable trouble in the States with an organization named the

Ku Klux Klan. This organization appears to set the ordinary laws at defiance. It prevents the operations of the courts, and carries out its own decrees, even to the taking of life. Some of the governors of the various States say that unless something is done by the government a religious war will break out, for the Ku Klux Klan is a Protestant organization and makes a direct attack on Roman Catholics. Governor Olcott, of Oregon, says, according to the *Times* of December 12, that—

Whole communities in Oregon are torn by religious dissensions and hatred to such an extent that neighbours who used to be the best of friends are at daggers drawn. Families are disrupted by a spirit of religious intolerance. In Jackson County citizens go about heavily armed; many families are moving away from the State in terror.

Another London paper reports that a disguised member of the Klan entered a Baptist Church at Brooklyn and read a paper to the effect that the Klan were out to "down whisky sellers, maintain the supremacy of the white race, and promote Protestantism." It seems that as the intellect of the world is leaving Christianity, the lower type of believers are beginning to assume control. Many times before the secular power has had to resort to action to restrict the virulence of Christian ferocity. Perhaps we may yet see something of that kind happening again, for there is no such thing as civilizing Christianity. One can only make it impossible for its worst features to show themselves. Let it alone, and it reverts to a more primitive and a more dangerous type.

It is not often that a congregation takes a preacher at his word, but it happens occasionally. At Newcastle the other day a parson told the congregation he believed that many of them came to listen to the music and not to hear the sermon. He preferred them not to come in the circumstances. At once some of the congregation rose and left the church, and we do not suppose that even then he was satisfied.

We see that in the case of the voting on the question of whether there should or should not be a capital levy in Switzerland, the Catholic bishops issued a letter inviting their people to vote against it. The Church has its hands on too much of the world's goods to instruct its followers to do otherwise. The purpose of the Church is to take. What it gives is never more than percentage to hide the fact of how much it keeps.

Dean Welldon says that certain parts of the Bible are of little value to-day, and he sometimes wishes that an expurgated Bible could be published with the omission of certain passages that are repugnant to modern feeling. We have no doubt but that this represents the feelings of a great many clergymen, and they do, in effect, present the people with an expurgated version of the Bible. They leave out all they find awkward, and give a convenient interpretation of what is left. Of course, that is not the way in which the "Word of God" should be treated, and we wonder what "Our Lord" thinks of treating the Bible in this fashion? And what a confession of the truth of the Freethought attack on the Bible!

Allison Low Murray was charged at Cherryfield Lane with deserting her child, an illegitimate. Evidence given showed that she was one of the noted converts at the revival meeting of Jock Troup, of Dundee. Immediately after being converted she left the city, and had since been conducting outdoor religious meetings in Glasgow. She was now training as a preacher and missionary. In the circumstances one could hardly expect her to neglect the calls of the religious life to attend to anything so mundane as the maintenance of her child. Jesus commanded people to forsake family and friends and to follow him. And those who do follow must expect to be persecuted by the worldly.

Speaking of the negotiations going on with the Turks at Lausanne, the *Sunday Chronicle* says, "It is long since the Turk talked in this insolent way to Christian Europe,

and if Christian Europe is anything more than a name it will not tolerate such pretensions." That passage is very illuminative. If the human side of the matter—that is, if it were merely a question of one nation talking to another—is to pretend that one nation shall not talk to another on terms of absolute equality, it would be too absurd as a principle to be even stated. But it is the introduction of "Christian" that does the trick. The idea that a Mohammedan people should talk to Christians as though they were equals is intolerable—to Christians. If Europe is still Christian it will not stand it. So says the *Sunday Chronicle*, and we agree with it. But it is just the introduction of religion into the question that makes the position so ugly and so dangerous.

One of these days, when people are better qualified than they are now to realize the psychological significance of Christian teachings, they will realize that no other religion in the world is so admirably calculated as is Christianity to gratify the lower and more selfish passions of man, while making an ostensible appeal to his higher qualities. If it openly and plainly encouraged egotism and selfishness and revenge it would defeat itself. For men do not so readily respond to open appeals of that kind. Tell men that they ought to be selfish, that they ought to plunder other people, that they should seek for revenge, and the vast majority will revolt. But allow them to do it in the name of morality, or of justice, or of religion, and having camouflaged their own desires they will readily respond. And one who studies the history of Christianity will note how persistently and consistently this has been done. It is not without significance that the greatest piratical nations of the past two thousand years have taken kindly to Christianity. It supplied them with just that religious and moral cover which enabled them to follow their aims as though they were of a really lofty character. By its aid natives have been plundered and murdered all over the world. It has made easier the horrors of the Congo and the spoliation of more civilized people. It is really not of the first importance to see ourselves as others see us—Burns to the contrary. It is far more important to have the moral strength to see ourselves as we are. Half the mean things we all do would be impossible if we had the knowledge and the courage to do this.

We are advancing in all directions, as Mr. G. K. Chesterton would say. An article in *John O' London's* entitled "Before There Was Christmas," might have been written in the *Freethinker* by Mr. J. T. Lloyd. *John O' London's* readers are actually told that:—

Not until the year A.D. 354 does the 25th December appear anywhere to have been mentioned with certainty as the birthday of Christ, even then no festal celebration being recorded.

For light comedy or printed hysteria the following is very difficult to beat: "Let them remember that Romish practices altogether stink in the nostrils of all true Protestants, and more particularly to God himself." Thus writes "Enquirer" in the *Burton Daily Mail*, December 6, 1922. As very ordinary people ourselves we should be glad if "Enquirer" could show us God's nostrils—this would at least argue a nose and a face and all the usual etceteras, but we suppose our investigations would only lead us to "Enquirer" himself. Judging by the temper of half a column of intemperance, we are convinced that Protestants do not burn Catholics because of the law.

As an index of the comfortable and at the same time the reprehensible attitude of English thought we have the writer in *The Times Literary Supplement* stating of the essay "that the desire which impels us when we take it from the shelf is simply to receive pleasure." If this is true then there is no difference between a bookshelf and a public bar. This statement, besides being false, is simply a plea for æsthetic enjoyment, and it brings literature into low esteem; it also demonstrates that the writer of it should lay aside his pen and take up stamp collecting.

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.

J. COOPER.—It was quite accidental. We agree with you that luxury is a relative term. What is luxury to one man would be the minimum of necessity to another. But without some form of luxury, without, that is, something that is essential to merely keeping alive, life would hardly be worth the living.

H. MAYS.—We really do not know why your newsagent cannot get his *Freethinkers* on sale or return. They are sent from us to the wholesale agents on those terms. If it were worth while he could order direct from the office. He would then be quite sure, and there would be nothing to prevent his displaying the paper.

D. DUNCAN.—Your lecture notice did not reach us till Wednesday morning, a day late.

S. T. ELLIS (Belfast).—We should be pleased to visit Belfast again whenever the opportunity offers. Freethought is badly needed in Ireland.

J. ALMOND.—We are not going to be foolish enough to answer who was the greatest man in the world, but only a religious fanatic would say Jesus, and it would take one of the same breed to describe the Bible as the greatest book in the world. The Spanish Inquisition was essentially a religious institution. It was born of Christian belief, but it had political motives imported into it.

H. THISTLEWAITE.—We have but scant patience with those who cater for a sloppy sentimentality with an emasculated religion. The fanatic may have intellectual strength as a background for his fanaticism. But the other has neither moral nor mental strength to commend him, and in the end he plays right into the hands of the reactionist.

N.S.S. BENEVOLENT FUND.—Miss E. M. Vance acknowledges: B. Goldberg, 5s.

F. BELKEN.—Mr. Upton Sinclair's books are published at some four or five shillings per volume. They are published by the author at Pasadena, California, U.S.A.

W. S.—We make it a rule never to mix up advertising matter with the text of the paper. We have often been asked to do so, but it is an impossible policy for anyone who has anything in view worth pursuing. All that we are concerned with is that the advertisements shall be, so far as we can tell, of a genuine character. We should very much like to see readers of the *Freethinker* supporting advertisers where they can, but we cannot go farther than the expression of the wish. Everything else must be left to the advertiser and the purchaser.

G. WETHERELL.—Glad to learn what you say of Mr. and Mrs. Miller. If they ever come to this country we shall be delighted to meet them. Meantime, our best regards.

D. MACCONNELL.—G. Barlow's poems are published in book form, but we fancy that most of them are out of print. An enquiry through a secondhand bookseller would probably bring you a copy.

We shall not be issuing an index for the *Freethinker* for 1922. The demand for it in previous years did not warrant the expense and trouble of preparation. But the bound volumes for the year will be on sale as usual.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—Onoto, 5s.

J. BYRNE.—We are dealing with Dean Welldon and education next week.

H. MARSH.—We can see nothing ennobling in a man grovelling on his knees to God, even if he exists. It is a species of mental flunkeyism with which we have no sympathy. The fact that many good men and women have done it does not make it a bit better. Many good men have sacrificed life and fortune for some of the greatest scapegoats that ever sat upon a throne. But that makes the object of adoration not a bit more admirable.

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.

We have very little time now to call attention to the London Freethinkers' Annual Dinner at the Midland Grand Hotel on January 16. We trust that all who can attend will be present, although it will be necessary for those who wish to be present to get their tickets as early as possible. The chair will be taken by the President, Mr. Cohen, and he will take the occasion to review the position of Freethought to-day. The price of the tickets is 8s. each, and they may be obtained either at the office of the *Freethinker* or from Miss Vance at the offices of the National Secular Society.

Among the season's greetings we have received is one from "Two soldiers on the Rhine" who thank us for the weekly issue of the *Freethinker*, and who inform us that the paper is always read by them in church during the service, which they are obliged to attend. We venture to think that these two men are putting their church attendance to much better use than those who are on their knees at the service. But what a comment it is on the "manliness" bred by army life when the elementary right of a man to choose his own religion, or to reject them all is not respected! Evidently what all army life aims at, in all circumstances is a healthy machine with the capacity or the desire for independent thinking reduced to a minimum. No wonder that there is always enough religion supplied.

We are pleased to learn that Mr. Corrigan produced a good impression on the occasion of his first visit to Manchester. His lectures were followed with the greatest attention and appreciation, and there were many questions at the close. Hopes were also expressed of a return visit. Probably that will occur some time during the next session.

One of our readers writes us from Dublin that he finds it very difficult to get the paper in Dublin, since the usual agent has closed his business and the remaining wholesale one refuses to get it. We are sorry to hear this. The boycott is something we are always up against, and we are always begging our readers to help us fight it. But we suggest to this reader that he should have his paper sent direct from the office if he cannot get it otherwise. We have readers in Dublin, as in other parts of the world, and they appear to get their papers regularly.

When the Irish State overcomes the more urgent of its present troubles there will be the opportunity and the need for a vigorous Freethought propaganda. As the enemy there is the Roman Catholic Church, we expect to see Freethought follow the lines it takes in other Catholic countries. That is, it will be frankly Atheistic. There will not be the room for the compromising spirit there is here, where so many who are not Christians adopt all sorts of half-way names that may help to make-believe

that if they are not Christian in the straightforward sense of the word, they are Christians of a sort. The Catholic Church and the Irish temperament should produce a Free-thought of a more robust kind.

Commencing with the new year's issue we intend publishing a list of newsagents where the Freethinker is on sale in the various towns. We have by us the list which we published several years ago, and as a basis we will issue that. But we should be obliged if readers all over the country will send us the names and addresses of newsagents in their locality so that the list may be accurate. We expect to find that our present list needs revising.

One of our readers is anxious to start a "Freethought Rendezvous" at Walsall. To that end he would be glad to hear from anyone interested. Write to Mr. C. T. Shaw, 2 Victoria Place, Barton Street, Birmingham.

Pagan and Christian Civilization.

XIII.

(Concluded from page 811.)

It is a pregnant and striking fact that American slavery was never afraid of American religion. The solemn meeting could be held with safety in the neighbourhood of a slave auction. Neither had any quarrel with the other. They were, in fact, upon friendly terms, for men were sold to build churches, and babes to buy Bibles, and women to support missionaries; and few refused the price of blood when it was offered at the treasury of the sanctuary.—*Frederick Douglass (the emancipated slave orator); Cited in the "Freethinker," February 22, 1892.*

The Church is familiarly quoted as being on the side of slavery. Statesmen on both sides of the question have laid that down as a settled fact.—*Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin," p. 333.*

MANY of the leaders of the Abolition movement were Freethinkers, like Abner Kneeland, who had suffered two months' imprisonment and a fine of five hundred dollars, in 1834, for blasphemy. When Garrison was refused the use of a place of worship, or a hall, by the Christians of Boston, it was Kneeland who lent him the hall belonging to the "infidels" of Boston, in which to advocate the claims of the slaves. Frances Wright, his associate editor on the *Boston Investigator*, was one of the foremost workers in the Abolition cause. Mrs. Ernestine Rose, author of *A Defence of Atheism*, was another fearless advocate who lectured in the slave states at the imminent peril of her life.

Many orthodox believers abandoned Christianity altogether when they found it shielding the slave-owner. Parker Pillsbury graduated as a Congregational minister—

and then, perceiving the Churches were the bulwark of slavery, abandoned the ministry. He became an Abolitionist lecturer.¹

He wrote *Pious Frauds* and contributed to Abner Kneeland's *Boston Investigator*. Lucretia Mott had been trained up as a Quakeress, she was a delegate to the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840. Haydon the painter was commissioned to paint a sitting of the Convention, and we find him writing in his diary (June 29, 1840):—

Lucretia Mott, the leader of the delegate women from America, sat. I found her out to have infidel notions, and resolved at once, narrow-minded or not, not to give her the prominent place I first intended. I will reserve that for a beautiful believer in the Divinity of Christ.²

Geritt Smith, a Presbyterian, also gave up his creed and devoted his wealth to the anti-slavery cause.

¹ Wheeler, *Dictionary of Freethinkers*.

² Garrison, *The Story of His Life*, told by his children; Vol. II, p. 389.

Oliver Johnson tells us, in his *Life of Garrison*, that when the latter found the great lights of the American Church asserting that the Bible sanctioned slavery, "he was naturally led to consider the question of the inspiration of that book," and his examination ended in his discarding all belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible. He says:—

As a divine book I never could understand it.....It must be examined, criticised, accepted or rejected, like any other book, without fear and without favour (p. 365).

Abraham Lincoln, although in his public utterances he always acquiesced in, or conformed to, the popular beliefs of the day, was well known in private life and among his friends as a pronounced Freethinker. Herndon in his biography, *Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life*, cites the testimony of Mr. J. T. Stuart, Lincoln's legal partner at Springfield, who speaks of Lincoln (about 1840)—

as an open and avowed infidel, sometimes bordering on Atheism. He went further against Christian beliefs and doctrines and principles than any man I ever heard; he shocked me.

Thomas Paine, the author of *The Age of Reason*, was "the first to urge extension of the principles of independence to the enslaved negro," says his biographer, Moncure Conway. In an article by Paine signed "Justice and Humanity," printed March 8, 1775, says Conway:—

Every argument and appeal, moral, religious, military, economic, familiar in our subsequent anti-slavery struggle, is here found stated with eloquence and clearness. Paine's paper is as thorough as Garrison himself could have made it.....thirty-five days after Paine's plea for emancipation, the first American Anti-Slavery Society was formed in Philadelphia.³

Just as the first society formed in Europe for the abolition of slavery had an Atheist for its president—

A *Société des Amis des Noirs* was formed in Paris in 1788 for the abolition not only of the slave trade, but of slavery itself. The president was Condorcet (*Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th Edition; Article, "Slavery").

In later times [says Prof. Francis Newman] the first public act against slavery came from republican France, in the madness of Atheistic enthusiasm, when she declared black and white men to be equally free and liberated the negroes of St. Domingo.⁴

That was in 1794 during the French Revolution, by the same government that disestablished Christianity. Christianity did not abolish slavery—the Bible from first to last was appealed to for its sanction and authority. The Church all through the Middle Ages was one of the largest slave-holders, and was the last to liberate her slaves. Upon its modern revival in a worse form than ever known before, Christian merchants profited by it. Christian ministers defended it Bible in hand. Christian Bible and Missionary Societies held slaves in large numbers themselves, and Abolition was largely brought about by those known to Christians as infidels.

CHRISTIANITY AND WAR.

I suppose that when war is abolished—if it ever is abolished—Christians will claim the credit for their faith. That is if there are any Christians left. Every Christmas we hear the old falsities from thousands of Christian pulpits, of how angels brought tidings of "Peace and Goodwill" to mankind at Bethlehem 1900 years ago. The truth is, the birth of Christianity was a veritable opening of Pandora's box, from which were liberated a multitude of evils, from the effects of which we are suffering to this day.

³ Moncure Conway, *Life of Thomas Paine*, pp. 19-21, Ed. 1909.

⁴ Newman, *Phases of Faith*, p. 108.

Here is a bare statement of facts. Before Christianity was known, before it existed, an army of 350,000 soldiers sufficed to keep the peace of the world. Nineteen hundred years after we find twenty millions of Christians engaged for four years in annihilating one another with high explosives, poison-gas, and starvation by submarine warfare and blockade—at a cost of “£40,000,000,000 of expenditure or debt incurred, in addition to nearly 8,000,000 combatant lives sacrificed.”⁵ To these must be added an unknown number of civilian lives destroyed through starvation, hardships, and privation, which must amount to many millions more, to say nothing of the multitudes of maimed, disabled and mentally ruined survivors; and over the trail of all are the devastation of immense tracks of country, the utter ruin of several rich and flourishing empires, and the general impoverishment and misery of the victors and neutrals.

What did the Christian Churches do to prevent the war which everyone could see drawing nearer day by day, through the piling up of armaments and conscription of men? They blessed the banners and the battleships, and when war broke out, the clergy of all the countries involved acted as recruiting sergeants to obtain more cannon fodder to fill up the ranks. In this country the clergy added the infamy of securing their own exemption from the fighting line, and succeeded in getting themselves sent out as chaplains with officers' rank and pay!

At the very time when the angels are said to have announced the birth of Christ and a new era of “Peace and Goodwill,”⁶ the world was already enjoying a period of peace and prosperity such as it was destined never to enjoy again under Christian rule. The first chapters of Gibbon's magnificent *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* present a picture of peace and prosperity under the Pagan Emperors unequalled in the history of the world. During a period of forty-three years, says Gibbon:—

the reigns of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius offer the fair prospect of universal peace. The Roman name was revered among the most remote nations of the earth. The fiercest barbarians frequently submitted their differences to the arbitration of the Emperor.⁷

The same historian adds:—

Their united reigns are possibly the only period of history in which the happiness of a great people was the sole object of government (Vol. I, p. 76).

Of the period between 96 A.D. and 180 A.D., he says:—

If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus. The vast extent of the Roman Empire was governed by absolute power under the guidance of virtue and wisdom.⁸

Another Roman historian observes that if we omit from the imperial history the year 69 A.D., an exceptional year during which four emperors were made and deposed, and count a hundred years before and more than a hundred years after—

it would be impossible to find in the history of the

⁵ *Universal Encyclopædia*, Article, “War.”

⁶ As Mr. Lloyd points out in his valuable article of December 10, we find inscriptions in which Augustus is glorified as saviour of the whole human race. One inscription reads: “Peace prevails upon earth, harmony and order reign. Men are filled with the best hopes for the future, with joyful courage for the present.....” These inscriptions date from two years before to fourteen after Christ—long before the Gospels were written—therefore, as Soltan observes, the Gospel writers appropriated them and worked them into their story.

⁷ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Prof. Bury's Edition, Vol. I, p. 8.

⁸ *Ibid*, Vol. I, p. 78.

world any period at which peace, and probably contentment, was so widely and continuously spread.⁹

With the establishment of Christianity by the conversion of Constantine in the year 321 A.D., a new and prolific cause of war was introduced, viz., the religious war. By the fifth century, says Dean Milman—

Anathema instead of benediction had almost become the general language of the Church. Religious wars, at least rare in the Pagan order of society, seemed now a new and perpetual source of human misery—a cause and a sign of the weakness and decay, and so of the inevitable dissolution, of the Roman Empire.¹⁰

During the Middle Ages crusade after crusade was organized by the Church to recover the Holy Sepulchre. These holy wars lasted for two hundred years and recruited six million men out of Europe. They lasted until the thirteenth century. In the ultra-pious fourteenth century, as Westermarck says:—

The general impression which Froissart gives us in his history is that the age in which he lived was completely given over to fighting and cared about nothing else.

The crusade against the Albigenes was organized and carried out by the Church:—

Never in the history of mankind [says Dean Milman] were the great eternal principles of justice, the faith of treaties, common humanity, so trampled under foot as in the Albigenian war.¹¹

The Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth century was a purely religious war between Catholics and Protestants. So was the war between Spain and Holland, when, says the historian Motley:—

A sentence of the Holy Office condemned all the inhabitants of the Netherlands to death as heretics. Three millions of people—men, women, and children—were sentenced to the scaffold in three lines.¹²

Not one of these wars would have happened without Christianity.

W. MANN.

My Godfather.

I.

THE little Welsh town contained one chapel where the service was conducted in English, others using the vernacular. Consequently the English chapel was the meeting place of a group of non-Welsh people of varying views. Introductions quickly followed, and I formed a circle of acquaintances, genial men and women who were interested in all manner of topics, and prepared to enjoy life and discuss its ramifications with freedom and catholicity.

With Edward John Rhys the acquaintance ripened into friendship. He was a South Wales man, a graduate of the university, and, if typical, the Welsh University is producing fine men. He was intellectual, keen-minded and logical, sincere in friendship and society, and with all his strong mentality was humorous and often witty, and intensely human.

Physically he was above middle height, with the vigorous body and easy carriage of the moderate athlete. He had a massive well-poised head, with a high-domed forehead and mass of black sleek hair. His dark brown eyes were steady and placid, occasion-

⁹ Prof. Tucker, *Life in the Roman World of Nero and St. Paul*, p. 11.

¹⁰ Milman, *History of Latin Christianity*, 1854, Vol. I, p. 255.

¹¹ *Ibid*, Vol. IV, p. 208.

¹² Motley, *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, Vol. II, p. 155.

ally kindling into laughter or scorn or indignation. His nose was slightly Roman, and his firm jaw and evenly set lips over a row of large white teeth proclaimed steadfastness, capable also of relaxing into lines of contempt and sarcasm, or smiles. His bodily and facial build had a strongly Jewish air, though he repudiated the suggestion warmly, but the Hebrew blood largely accounted for his intellectuality. He dressed quietly, but in excellent taste.

Despite his accomplishments and culture Rhys was no prig. He boated and swam, played cricket and football, and was fond of witnessing any form of sport. He enjoyed company, danced well, played cards and billiards, and had epicurean tastes in foods and drinks and smokes. Socially he was popular. His friendships were comprehensive, ranging from working men to the highest of the many petty castes found in the little bourgeois town.

II.

Welsh Sunday School pupils continue to attend all their lives. At the English chapel about a dozen of us men used to gather in a class under the minister, a man of liberal theology, also much worldly wisdom and genial humour to season his ripe scholarship—a rare combination. This minister handled the potentially explosive mixture of beliefs, opinions and scepticisms with marvellous diplomacy. He was honest. He did not shut his eyes to the existence of differing faiths or the stirrings of modern criticism. Free discussion, with plentiful questions, was the method of the class. The regular minister reserved the right to decline an answer to any question that he could not or cared not to answer, and refused to answer a question upon a question. When visiting ministers came the fun began. Old and orthodox men we gradually coaxed along unaccustomed paths till they found themselves committed unexpectedly to some heterodoxy or landed in an impasse. At this fascinating game Edward Rhys was a master. He had a magnetism which drew from people admissions which they normally kept secret. And he did it with a deliciously sly humour.

Young ministers we treated more boldly. On students fresh from college we openly made frontal attacks, so that one raw hand, sore from a Sunday afternoon roasting, told the minister that he did not expect to come to "a den of Atheists," whereat the older man laughed, and told us about it, causing great merriment.

John Rhys bubbled over with stories and anecdotes. Most of these contained contemptuous references to religion. He could tell comic tales with inimitable drollery, and the barbed dart at some cherished superstition was delicately tipped with venom. His yarns stuck in the memory, and returned to mind with startling and effective aptness when some solemn topic was under consideration.

One Sunday afternoon a minister gravely informed us that he always could tell when Freethinkers were amongst his congregation, because then he found great difficulty in expounding his beliefs. Rhys received this confession with an expressive, "Oh, quite likely!" and discoursed to us afterwards. "That is all rot. It is the sort of feebly telepathic stuff that ministers ladle out to their admirers nowadays, making believe they are scientific and psychological. As a matter of fact most congregations contain some sceptics, and the preachers are aware of it. Then their own case is so weak that when faced with the least amount of doubt they hesitate and stumble and fail to deliver their message."

III.

In the little country town there was not a great deal to do in our spare time, and when fine enough

we went for country walks. During a tramp one spring day somebody remarked that "The trees put out their leaves quickly after a few days of this mild weather."

In his genial informative manner Rhys took up the statement: "Strictly it is incorrect to say so. It is slipshod English and unscientific thinking. It is postulating intelligence on the part of inanimate nature."

From this a long discussion arose, Edward Rhys bearing the burden of it. He called attention to the readiness with which children attributed human characteristics to dolls and toys. Adults read into the eyes and movements of animals motives that were quite foreign to them, being only found in human beings. From this he took wider sweeps to the animism of primitive peoples, and rapidly surveyed the ancient mythologies, all characterized by the attribution of human thoughts, feelings, aspirations, and even weakness to non-human elements. From this to the creation of gods was but a step, by the process of making the imagined mind behind the half-known force more and more superhuman.....

It was vastly interesting, brilliant, at times astringent, and destructive of all narrow belief in an existent personal God. The word "God" always excited Rhys to the deadliest scorn. As he concluded his survey of the growth of the God-idea he snapped his fingers and exclaimed, "These be thy Gods, O Israel!" Then, after a pause, adding, "Anthropomorphism is the prevalent human weakness. Naturally so. With most people it is overwhelming. No one is entirely free from it, not even the greatest thinkers. We are not aware how anthropomorphic we are. It accounts for much; for the majority of gods."

Another evening at the close of a showery day we walked into the country. The sun was setting in a blaze of colour, and everything looked beautiful after the refreshing rain.

A casual discussion of the weather's vagaries led Edward John Rhys to a general review of natural law. He called attention to the regular recurrence of planetary and stellar motion; to the inexorable succession of birth and growth and decay and death. Everywhere we looked we saw order, the steady sequence of cause and event, with never a variation that could not be explained, leaving no room for miracles. "There is no such thing as 'a freak of Nature.' No matter how peculiar or unusual a phenomenon appears to us, all that is wrong with us is ignorance. Whether it be the fall of a leaf or an earthquake the procession of occurrences that led to it is there, with no break in the chain."

His deduction was logical and incisive, "Why pray? It is futile!—

And that inverted bowl we call the sky,
Whereunder crawling cooped we live and die.
Lift not thy hands to it for help,
For it rolls impotently on as thou or I,

sums up the whole matter. Shakespeare is equally pronounced in saying, 'Trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries.'

"Every discovery of science further emphasizes the grand unbroken march of cause and effect. Natural law has left no room for God."

He developed the theme with a wealth of illustrations drawn from scientific research, dealing shrewdly at theology and its implications. Over vicarious sacrifice, as exemplified by the death of Christ, he waxed caustic and bitterly satirical.

IV.

On the tree-dotted side of a hill that overlooked the little town, with a magnificent view of the Vale beyond it, we used to lie in the shade on warm summer even-

ings and discuss everything under the sun, especially the peculiarly Welsh topics of politics and theology.

Edward Rhys was widely read, and had decided tastes in literature. He was fond of scientific books, being well acquainted with the works of Tyndall, Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, and other great exponents of Nature. He liked the material about which they wrote, and he admired their tone and temper, the judicial balance of opinion that they kept, their equitable attitude towards difficulties and opposition, and their generosity over controversial points. He never tired of calling attention to the excellences of scientific writers, and was enthusiastic about their clarity of exposition, and the concise, restrained, yet eloquent language they used.

Rhys also loved poetry. At a period when Omar Khayyam was known only to a few he knew the *Rubaiyat* by heart and quoted it aptly and often. He took in the *Freethinker* weekly, rarely read it, but carried it in his pocket till he found a person to whom he could give it who would be likely to profit by a perusal of that piquant journal. He made few mistakes thus, but nearly always found someone in the right state of unbelief or inquiry to appreciate the *Freethinker*. This way he made many converts and extended the circulation of the paper.

Robert Ingersoll influenced him greatly. He had read everything obtainable of the great American's, quoted him frequently and effectively, and recommended his works widely, often lending and giving away copies of Ingersoll's books.

V.

Another warm Sunday evening we were lying on the hillside. Conversation languished. A desultory talk on poetry ended with a few half-remembered quotations. I turned on my back and watched a hawk soaring into the blue sky. I made some disconnected remarks on the habits of hawks. When I finished Edward John Rhys started, in a smooth almost caressing voice, pleasant to hear. His subject was in startling contrast. He passed rapidly before us a review of animate nature in all its blood-stained crudity. Man murdering his fellows at the dictates of others for base and ignoble lusts and ideas; man daily slaughtering thousands of creatures for sport, food and clothing; man himself preyed on by innumerable parasitic and microscopic organisms; all through existence the bloody course continued. Numerous wild animals and birds prey on weaker ones and myriads of insects, all killed for the food of larger creatures, which in turn fall victims to the destructive powers of many insects. In sea and lake and river the same process prevails; fish feeds on fish, and man and animal and bird do likewise. Often pain, cruelty and lingering death accompany the hunting practices. Some living things seem to exist only to satisfy the lust of wanton destruction; man as sportsman is guilty of this equally with the woman's barbaric habit of wearing furs and feathers. The butcher bird impales insects and small animals on a thornbush, where they linger writhing for days. The sawfish tears open the belly of the whale, and feeds on the quivering viscera of the living monster. And human history is one long record of struggle and bloodshed and suffering and death.

But Nature cares not. She pours forth myriads of new lives; scatters seeds and eggs in millions, most of them wasted, the survivors only saved for later destruction.

The speaker made scathing comments on the criminality of God in creating such an unhappy parasitic world, concluding with bitter emphasis, followed by a laugh, "The only excuse for God is that he does not exist."

VI.

Rain threatened all day, but we took our usual evening walk. Before we got back rain was falling, and we took refuge under a great yew-tree. Behind us and before the hillsides rose clothed with woods, groups of sombre pines varying the richer green of forest trees. Each side of the stream was a stretch of park-like verdure dotted with huge oaks. The brook babbled and gurgled round its curves and over its stones. A distant waterfall played undertones to the music of Nature as the rain pattered sharply on the leaves. We relaxed into silence, till Rhys uttered the following poem in slow thoughtful tones. I made a scribbling transcript of the words, but the splashes of rain and other difficulties of writing reduced it to a pulpy smudge of pencil-marks, and I have to trust mainly to memory:—

I stood and I gazed on the old gray sea,
And the sea it gazed upon me,
And a question I asked of the old gray sea,
A question as old as he.

Think me not foolish, I said, or odd,
But I search for him that men call God,
Is he, or ever has been?

And the waves in play all answered, "Nay!
Ages and men we have seen pass away,
But we've heard not, nor have we seen."

I stood and I smiled on the stars at night,
And the stars they smiled upon me,
Merry they danced as they gave of their light,
Happy and gay and free.

Think me not foolish, I said, or odd,
But I search for him that men call God,
Is he, or ever has been?

And from far away came the answer, "Nay!
Ages and men we have seen pass away,
But we've heard not, nor have we seen."

I stood and communed with the realms above,
Communed with the world below;
The valleys and hills of the land that I love,
And its mountains tipped with snow.

Think me not foolish, I said, or odd,
But I search for him that men call God,
Is he, or ever has been?

And the mountains all they answered, "Nay!
Ages and men we have seen pass away,
But we've heard not, nor have we seen."

I went and I questioned the wizards of old,
And philosophers wise and hoary,
And eagerly scanned the records unrolled—
Time's secrets, and Nature's story.

Think me not foolish, I said, or odd,
But I search for him that men call God,
Is he, or ever has been?

And the sages all they answered, "Nay!
Ages and men we have seen pass away,
But we've heard not, nor have we seen."

A. R. WILLIAMS.

Correspondence.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I suggest that it is time that Secularists took up in good earnest the question of securing the removal from our Statute Book of the abomination of capital punishment.

The death penalty is conventionally defended as a "deterrent." It is difficult to believe that anyone has serious faith in it on this score. The infliction, a century ago, of hanging for small offences did not reduce those offences; nor is there any reason to suppose that its infliction for murder reduces murder.

Nevertheless, let us assume for the moment that it is necessary to kill some criminals for our own protection. Our Christian procedure shows a remarkable decline in humanity from what, in many cases, was the practice of ancient Greece and Rome. At Athens, in the case of Socrates, the condemned man enjoyed full liberty to converse with his friends, and made, as far as we can judge,

a comparatively easy end by drinking hemlock. At Rome, many offenders against the Emperor were allowed to choose their own form of death. We, on the other hand, not only surround this penalty with every circumstance of shame and horror that public opinion will tolerate, but, by a crowning barbarity, positively *prevent* the condemned from anticipating by their own hand the sentence of the law, and even nurse men back to life sometimes in order to suffer the decreed penalty at the hands of the hangman.

This alone is enough to dispose of the plea for capital punishment, on the score of social necessity, as revolting hypocrisy. But the objection to the system lies deeper than expediency. The only moral justification for the infliction of any suffering is the prevention of greater suffering to others. We, however, repay the murderer, in most cases, a hundredfold for anything which he may have inflicted on his victim. Most murders are done in hot blood, in a few moments. The social necessity of repressing murder cannot justify the infliction of the spun-out agony of the trial for life, the weeks, slowly dwindling to days, of anticipation in the condemned cell, ending with the loathsome ritual of the pinioning, the black cap, and the rope.

We seem to be still savages, offering human sacrifices, in our fear and ignorance, on the smoking altar of "retribution" and "the sanctity of the law"—fetishes, for the sake of which we miserable mortals increase one another's misery! How long will it be before we learn that there is nothing sacred but happiness, and what makes for happiness; nothing accursed but suffering, and what makes for suffering?

I conclude by suggesting a plan of campaign. Let all opponents of capital punishment—and there must be many among the progressive forces of this country, and especially in the Secularist movement—make a point of signing *every* petition that is set on foot for the reprieve of a criminal, whatever the nature of the case may be. The argument that "as long as the law stands as it is, it must take its course in individual cases," is a dangerous fallacy. A law infamous in itself ought to be, and must be, defeated on every possible occasion, until the resulting situation forces its repeal. I believe we are numerous enough to make our power felt in this way, if we choose.

As a beginning, I have signed the petition on behalf of Frederick Bywaters, the boy of twenty (imagine it!) whom they are going to slay for this Ilford business. Such is Christian government. I shall also sign any petition that may be set on foot for Mrs. Thompson, or for any other criminal, until this filthy stain is removed from our land.

ROBERT ARCH.

Obituary.

Although it was with regret it was without surprise that we saw in the papers of last week the death of Mr. Herbert Burrows, on December 14, at the age of 77. Mr. Burrows was a well known figure in advanced circles in London, and a well-known name all over the country. Years ago he was in much closer touch with the Secular movement than of recent times, but he was always strongly inclined to political activity, which in the end took nearly the whole of his attention. But he was a man of inflexible principle, and on such matters as Secular Education, or free speech, could always be depended on to give the help of voice, pen, and advice. We do not think that the question of the profit or the popularity of a movement ever troubled him for a single moment, and that kind of a man is always of invaluable help in a world where these considerations play so large a part in public life. For the past two years he had been confined to his house, although his interest in things outside was as keen as ever. We hasten to pay our tribute to one whom one never ceased to respect however strongly might be the difference of opinion that arose—perhaps one's respect was heightened by the difference. The funeral, we see, is announced for the day on which we go to press, December 19.

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, side entrance down steps): 8, General Discussion on "Capital Punishment," followed by a Social. Discussion opened by Mr. Shaller.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N. S. S.—No Meeting.

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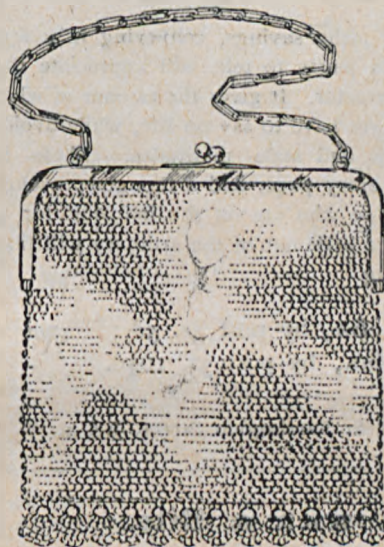
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