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## Views and Opinions.

### Ghosts.

All students of religion—I leave out parsons, as they are not students of religion at all—are well aware of the large part played by death in the formation of religious ideas. A great mass of evidence exists in favour of the thesis that nearly all Gods have developed from ghosts, that beginning with the fear of the dead chieftain or ancestor we have a series of gradations which bring us up to the God of more developed religions. In the vast majority of cases, whenever the genealogy of a God can be traced back, it seems to lead to some primitive ancestor or great man, who became an object of fear and worship after his death. And when we find in parts of India and elsewhere the same process of god-making going on, and have unquestionable evidence of the transformation of men into Gods, the proof seems almost complete. But, it may be noted, that this worship of the ancestor is not due to affection so much as to fear. The ghost is not loved, but dreaded. A great many primitive customs are devoted to guarding the living against the visitations of the dead, and nothing would give the primitive mind greater comfort than to know either that the ghost had gone too far away to come back—as Spiritualists say of their choicer spirits that have migrated to the highest spheres—or that it had ceased to interest itself in the affairs of its relatives. Most gods are ghosts, and divinity is based on death.

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### The Tyranny of the Grave.

A well-known French writer has said that the greatest tyrants humanity has known are its dead. That is a melancholy truth, all the sadder because of the fact that this tyranny increases with the goodness of the man while living. The power of the tyrant is broken by death. That of the bad man passes away with him. But the admiration and love which the good man arouses blinds people to the evil of accepting him as a guide for future generations. Whether man or myth, Jesus has proved a greater tyrant than Nero, and his rule has caused evils at the side of which the greatest attributed to the Roman are of small account. No powerful organization has been formed with the specific command,

"Thou shalt do this or that," because Nero has commanded it. But the world has been forced to refrain from this or to do that because Jesus, or Moses, or Mohammed, has said it. For that reason there is no tyranny so great as a religious tyranny, and none so difficult to remove. A Secular tyranny has against it always a mass of discontent, and, in any case, its violation of right is obvious. But a religious tyranny rules in the name of morality, and enlists some of the best motives of mankind in its service. It is a rule of the dead maintained in the name of justice to the living. No other rule has been so widely planted, and none is so difficult to remove.

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### Phantoms From the Past.

All religion, however disguised, is a worship of the dead. When it is not the transformed ghost in the shape of a God, it is in customs, ideas, ceremonies. Go into any church and chapel, and the man who can look beneath the surface finds himself in a veritable charnel house. The phraseology used is largely that of the dead. The sentiments expressed are those of the dead. The ceremonies performed, the clothing of the priest, his postures, have all been ordained by the dead. None have been suggested by contemporary thought or demanded by contemporary needs. When one is watching a church full of people going through a set religious service one can hardly escape the weird feeling that one is observing a congregation of corpses that have been brought back to life to go through a set of ceremonies that may have meant much to them, but which can mean nothing at all to those who are living the life of to-day. And beyond the officiating priest one sees the ghost of the savage whose fear-stricken mind gave birth to it all, and whose successor now sits in an episcopal chair, voicing the ideas of the cave-man in the language of Shakespeare. The whole priesthood has no greater authority than that it is continuing the rule of the dead. No one can claim that if the present generation had not found these priests in possession it would have created them. The power of the priest is based upon the dead; he perpetuates their rule as the condition of maintaining his own. He is the mouthpiece of the ghosts. If the people of the world were to revise their institutions in the light of the knowledge and needs of to-day they would all be scrapped *sans* ceremony. They are here as servants of the dead—interested agents for the perpetuation of their rule.

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### The Dead Hand.

The other week a will was printed in one of the papers in which a man threatened his heirs with disinheritance if they forsook the Catholic religion. A little while before that it was the case of a Jew who had made a similar provision. They were each trying to rule from their graves the living by means of their money-bags. And all such provisions are entirely futile—so far as honesty of conviction is

concerned. What the injunction really means is that though people believe a particular religion to be false they will go on professing its truth. They will support it, and it is their support, not their conviction, that is being bought. The religious parent in this way, instead of guarding his children from error becomes their enemy. He is a corrupting influence in their lives. He wishes his children to believe as he believes. They must discover no new truth, they must discern no established falsities. They must be as stupid as he was, as he continued the stupidity of those who went before him. The inheritance of religion thus resolves itself into, primarily, the perpetuation of ignorance and folly, and ultimately the development of cunning and deceit.

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#### Our Taboos.

Very much has been done of late years to humanize the weekly day of rest. But all over the country there are endeavours to revive Sabbatarianism, or to prevent any further encroachments on the Sabbath. Why is this so? Immediately, of course, the clergy are looking after their interests as a class, knowing, as they do, that to bring the rising generation up to spend their day of rest in a rational manner is to rob them of their congregations. But ultimately it is our dead and gone ancestors who decide how we shall spend one-seventh of our lives. Because a hundred or more generations ago a certain day became "taboo" for purely superstitious reasons, we have for several centuries done our best to convert a day of rest into one of gloom and demoralization. It is in the name of the dead that we taboo enjoyment and recreation on Sunday, and offer as a sacrifice to the spirits of the past one-seventh of our intellectual life. Human sacrifice in a physical form is a thing of the past. But sacrifice of the mental and moral life of the people in the names of our tribal ghosts continues. These ghosts are at the doors of hundreds of museums, and at the entrance to recreation grounds, warning the people off. They are in our law courts in the shape of blasphemy and similar laws which were born while they ruled in the flesh. They are found behind and beneath most of the absurdities that disfigure our lives, and prevent them being all they might be. The struggle of the living to escape the strangling clutch of the dead is one of the tragedies of civilization.

#### Past and Present.

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Of course, it is not in religious matters alone that the dead tyrannize over us. It can be traced in many other directions. Legal procedure is full of it. Our laws of primogeniture enforce the ideals of a dead and gone generation, and the administration of property is in numerous cases determined by the wishes of the dead rather than by the needs of the living. We take our rules of decorum from the past, and frown upon the one who is bold enough to set them at defiance. From the cradle to the grave we are dominated by the dead, its rule is strengthened by the passings of each generation, and the strength of our chains is intensified by their invisibility. And it lies in the nature of human society that we cannot abolish this rule of the dead; at most we can only limit its power by an intelligent revision of its decrees. In social life this is largely recognized. Political action involves this. In legal affairs we create any number of fictions in order to lessen the weight of the dead hand. There are any number of directions in which the dead rules, but it is in religion alone that it is made sacred. Do what we will the dead will continue to wield enormous power over the living, but when we add to this inevitable influence

the weight of consciously organized institutions, we are saddling the living with a load that may well become crushing. The great lesson we have to learn, and the one that most find it hardest to master, is that while the past is valuable for guidance, it becomes a power for evil when we seek to fashion our lives by its decrees. Each generation has its own problems which it must answer—if they are answered intelligently and profitably—in its own way and in the light of its own knowledge and necessities. In most directions the reasonableness of this counsel will not be disputed. It is only in religion that in the name of morality we place the dead in avowed control over the living, and shackle the existing generation with the fetters of a bygone age.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

### "Faith and Reason."

THE above is the title of the Presidential Address which the Dean of St. Paul's delivered at the Conference of Modern Churchmen, recently held at Oxford. The Dean is, no doubt, the most qualified of all clergymen known to us to discuss such a subject. His ripe scholarship is of immense advantage to him in the treatment of theological questions, as clearly shown in the address now before us. He begins by tracing the various meanings attached to Faith by well-known Greek scholars. He tells us that "*Pistis*, in Plato, means unverified conviction or incomplete science; a stepping-stone to real knowledge, but belongs itself to the region of opinion." Proclus was a mystic of the Neo-Platonic school, and wrote thus: "Those beings which are not enlightened by Reason are necessarily deprived of Faith, which is above Reason." After further quotations, Dean Inge observes: "This, as we shall see, is not quite the Christian doctrine," and then immediately proceeds to set the Christian view of Faith before us. He says:—

Faith, in the Synoptic Gospels, is a spirit of receptiveness towards Christ and his teaching, loyalty to his person. In St. Paul's Epistles, I would call special attention to Gal. iii. 23, "before the coming of the Faith," words which show that the first Christians felt their faith to be as new a thing as their hope and their love; and to "the household of Faith" for the Church. I do not think that *pistis* in St. Paul is ever equivalent to mere *fiducia*, the subjective assurance of Lutheranism. We must remember that at that time belief involved a changed life and membership of a persecuted society.

That passage is certainly an accurate interpretation of the New Testament doctrine of Faith, and, as such, no fault whatever can be found with it. Such was the conception of life entertained by the authors of both Gospels and Epistles. In their opinion a Christian must be a person dominated by sheer mysticism, to whom this world is absolutely of no account. The rule laid down was this: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." It must be admitted that no one has ever put that rule into practice. In its very nature it is at once both an absurd and wholly impossible law, and only zealots, in the fulness of their enthusiasm, can seriously recommend it. And yet even Dean Inge, unemotional as his utterances generally seem to be, once said, "It is otherworldliness that can alone transform the world." All we can say is that, if that statement is true, the world is destined to remain untransformed for ever.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Faith is described as accomplishing entirely impossible tasks, such as

seeing the invisible One, performing daily miracles, and overcoming the world. Coming down to the Fathers we find them equally enthusiastic in their praise of Faith. Ignatius says: "Faith and love towards Jesus Christ are the beginning and end of life." The same idea is to be found, beautifully expressed, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria. The Dean, developing the idea, states it as follows:—

Faith begins as an experiment and ends as an experience. It begins as a resolution to stand or fall by the noblest hypothesis, as Frederick Myers says; but it is verified progressively as we go on. It passes into knowledge, and knowledge in turn passes into love, which unites knower and known. This is the mystical ascent to God, of which faith is the first step. There is, and there must be, in it an element of real moral venture; but it is not irrational; as we climb higher we can see further.

That is a truly eloquent passage, but its most striking feature is sentimentalism. Logic is conspicuous by its absence. Every sentence expresses, not a fact, but an emotion supported by not a single shred of knowledge. Dr. Inge assures us that Faith passes into knowledge, but he knows as well as we do that it does not do so in the present life, and nobody possesses any knowledge whatever of any other life or world. The passage just quoted rests completely upon mere belief, and the belief never passes into knowledge. We can never emphasize it too strongly or too frequently that the Christian Faith retains its suppositional character till death, beyond which it is impossible to trace it. It embraces nothing that is demonstrably true. Thomas Aquinas taught that "the existence of God is demonstrable, though it requires brains and education to follow the argument," but his teaching is fundamentally and wholly false, and even the Dean acknowledges that he "does not find the position of Aquinas very clear." And yet the Catholic Church occupies the same position today. "The Vatican Council of 1870 anathematized those who say that the one true God cannot be certainly known by the light of natural reason." On this point we shall need to continue to fight Catholicism until that claim is wholly abandoned by both Catholic and Protestant Churches. Our contention has always been that the supernatural is utterly unknown and unknowable, and is solely held as an object of belief. The Dean says:—

I have argued elsewhere that Faith is belief in the objective existence of a realm of values, which religion connects with the name of God. I have also protested against the opinion, which is widely held, that while science by a deliberate abstraction contemplates a world of facts without values, religion contemplates values apart from facts. When we consider that both science and religion desire to know things as they are, this bisection of experience would seem to be suicidal to both alike. It is true and very important that science tries to express everything in terms of quantity which shall be commensurable, while religion and the other spiritual activities of the human mind are interested almost entirely in quality.

At this point the clergyman endeavours to convince us that science points the way to religion, but his attempt ends in signal failure. Science takes no notice whatever of moral values, or ends, or purposes. All it seeks to do is to trace the process of evolution and find out how Nature came to be what it is at present. The field of enquiry is practically infinite; but a sufficient number of discoveries has already been made to justify the conclusion that the whole process has been, and is, the outcome of the operation of physical and chemical forces which many call natural laws. Meredith, in his fine poem, entitled,

"France, December, 1870," declares that we owe everything to the action of those forces, saying:—

Lo, strength is of the plain root—virtues born:  
Strength shall ye gain by service, prove in scorn,  
Train by endurance, by devotion shape.  
Strength is not won by miracle or rape.  
It is the offspring of the modest years,  
The gift of sire to son thro' those firm laws  
Which we name Gods; which are the righteous cause,  
The cause of man, and manhood's ministers.  
Could France accept the fables of her priests,  
Who blessed her banners in this game of beasts,  
And now bid hope that heaven will intercede  
To violate its laws in her sore need,  
She would find comfort in their opiates:  
Mother of Reason! can she cheat the Fates?

The poet regarded everything as the inevitable outcome of evolution. To him, God, in the Christian sense, did not exist at all, and all the occurrences of human life were caused by those firm laws. Values are the products of the human brain, and to the scientist, as such, they have no existence. Their origin is in the human brain alone, and it is utterly false to assert that the realization of their existence "will bring the faith of the scientist and the faith of the religious mystic very much nearer together."

J. T. LLOYD.

(To be Continued.)

## The Passing of Waldron.

Quick, my tablets, memory.—*Matthew Arnold.*

Content thee, howsoe'er, whose days are done:

There lies not any troublous thing before.

Nor sight, nor sound to war against thee more,

For whom all winds are quiet as the sun,

All waters as the shore.

—*Swinburne*

Life swarms with lost opportunities.—*Henry Taylor.*

By the death of the Rev. A. J. Waldron, the small but fierce tribe of professional champions of Omnipotence has been depleted of its most picturesque personality. Indeed, for some years he was the only Christian Evidence lecturer who caught the public eye, and he remained a triton among the minnows to the end of his variegated career. I knew him when he first donned the uniform of the Black Army, and, in those far-off days, I hoped to convert him to Freethought. Then he was a promising young man, and I was a zealous missionary for Freethought. Little did either of us foresee the end; he hoping to make a name in the Nonconformist Church in which he had been trained; and I, fondly expecting to make a new lecturer for our own movement.

Our first meeting was curious. The Camberwell Branch of the National Secular Society, of which I was then an obscure member, held some of the open-air meetings at the side of a railway adjoining the particular congregational chapel at which young Waldron was officiating. I heard that he was a fluent preacher, and that he was likely to make a name, so I wrote to the young minister and told him the evangel of Freethought was being carried on at the very doors of his church, and it was his duty to meet the enemy at the gate. This crude "wirepulling" succeeded, so far as to induce him to come out and see for himself. Then he and I met for the first time, and we both lived long enough to laugh at the results. He became one of the foremost of our enemies; and my dream-lecturer never materialized at all.

At first Waldron asked questions, and then, greatly daring, opposed our lecturers, usually when they were away. He used to draw great crowds then; and so did our own man. Hyatt, then young and debonnaire, was one of our star-turns. He used to come down on horseback, like a veritable Sir Galahad, and charmed everybody with his oratory.

Clever and resourceful, Hyatt was never at a loss. Once, throwing out his well-gloved hand over a sea of upturned faces, he said that no preacher in all London could count such an audience. Waldron, from the back, shouted "Spurgeon." "No," thundered Hyatt, "I am addressing an audience of men, not of women and children."

Then there was our old friend and comrade, Arthur Moss, who used to get as much fun out of the Pentateuch as Harry Tate does out of the game of golf. Waldron heard most of the Freethought lecturers in turn, from Mrs. Besant to Touzeau Parris. Many of the names are but memories now, but the veteran, William Heaford, is still with us.

Waldron was not many years with the Congregationalists, who were even then losing ground. He was ambitious, and in a hurry. He blossomed out on the Christian Evidence platform, and, after a time, was studying to take orders in the Anglican Church. He became vicar of Brixton, and officiated for ten years in a building which was one of the ugliest in the Metropolis. It says much for the insularity of Londoners, that, although St. Matthew's Church, Brixton, is only a mile and a-half from the funny little chapel in the Camberwell New Road, where Waldron first held a pastorate, each congregation appeared to be unaware of the other's existence. And Waldron, curiously, never enlightened them.

Brixton was a most unfortunate choice for Waldron. It was a decaying neighbourhood, and the other clergymen were jealous of his ability as a preacher. He never got advancement, and, still in a hurry, he turned to playwriting. The success of his playlet, "Should a Woman Tell?" in which he discussed the question of whether a woman ought to tell her prospective husband all about her past, unsettled him too much. It was a poor play, and owed its success to the fact that it was written by a popular parson, and not to its intrinsic dramatic value. Waldron got the quaint idea that he was a second Bernard Shaw, and that this playlet was but the prelude to a big dramatic career. This obsession really caused his downfall. He threw up the Church, and tried to live by literature and dramatic work. For that he had small talent, and the results were tragic. When the war came he did some Red Cross work, and afterwards helped in a recruiting campaign. He was a broken man even then. The last time I met him he looked worn and weary, although he told me of the wonderful things he hoped to do for Spiritualism, which he imagined was the real religion. Poor fellow! He had nearly boxed the compass in matters theological, but he had never been an Atheist, although he used to say so when he was in the pulpit, and beyond the reach of the critics.

There was more of the showman in his many-sided personality than anything else. He loved notoriety, and nearly persuaded himself that he was a celebrity. His one sure appeal to an audience was simply rhetoric. Of learning he had very little, but his assurance was great. In a debate he always made a capital opening, and he liked a finale with plenty of verbal fireworks. But, as Artemus Ward puts it, "he couldn't raticionate worth a cent." Instead of replying point by point to an opponent, he would simply repeat what he had already said with heavier emphasis. When bankrupt of ideas, he always fell back on some poetry, which he always repeated with sonorous effect, although he sometimes mixed Browning's verse with that of Tennyson, and even Longfellow.

Although he was greatly attracted by the theatre, and wrote for the stage, Waldron was no actor. His whole training was against it. He saw, however, as Bernard Shaw, that the stage was the biggest pulpit,

and playgoers the biggest congregation in the world. He knew that Christianity was in the melting-pot, and he always assured me that Mr. Cohen's educative policy, now being used by the British Freethinkers, was even more deadly than the methods of Bradlaugh and the older iconoclasts. English people, he said, moved so slowly in the world of ideas that they will become Atheists without realizing it. The Revolution will be by the broad road of evolution.

Waldron's career as a Christian Evidence lecturer shows clearly the difference between the older school of champions and the new. The old defenders of Orthodoxy, from Brewin Grant to Woffendale, were simply hired bruisers and swashbucklers. It is to Waldron's credit that he did try to make a parade of learning. He never really liked open-air speaking, and often said he wondered how men like Foote and Cohen ever condescended to do it. Two things, he said, were absolutely necessary: a strong platform and a stronger chairman. Once he broke his rostrum in Brockwell Park by bringing his fist down too hard; and on another occasion, he added, smilingly, a debate started on "The Existence of God" and finished up with a wrangle on the part of the audience as to the price of beer at Gibraltar.

If I were writing one of those chilly obituary notices, I could not make a great story of what Waldron had done with his life. He was an opponent of our Cause all his life, and not very successful in fighting. Yet I knew the man for over thirty years, and he had likeable qualities which are quite as precious as those which make for fame and reputation. I felt a tug at the heart-strings when I heard that he was dead, my friend and my enemy.

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Gnostic Origins of Christianity.

THE origins of Christianity cannot be traced to one single source; like a river it had many tributaries. As we have seen, the Mystery religions contributed the idea of salvation through the expiatory and vicarious sacrifice of a dying and resurrected god, with the promise of a future life of eternal bliss. The Jewish religion supplied God the Father, and much of the Messianic materials for the story of Christ. Plato the Greek philosopher, as interpreted by Philo, in the century immediately preceding the Christian era, was another contributory source.

But before attempting to unravel the tangled origins of Christianity, it is obvious that we must first have a clear idea of when the documents upon which Christianity is founded first appeared.

The ordinary Christian, who has made no particular study of the subject from an independent point of view, believes that the writings contained in the New Testament appeared just in the order as we have them in the Bible. First the four gospels, in the order named, then the Acts of the Apostles, then the Epistles of Paul, and so on, finishing up like a fete at the Crystal Palace with the gorgeous pyrotechnic display in the Book of Revelation, about which last-named book Bishop South sardonically remarked, that it either found a man cracked or left him so. The ordinary Christian also believes that the four Gospels were composed by four of the twelve disciples of Christ, whose names they bear, and were written down immediately after the crucifixion, at Jerusalem, in the Jewish language, and afterwards translated into Greek, as we have them now.

All this was implicitly believed down to almost the middle of the nineteenth century; but no scholar with a reputation to lose—outside of the Catholic Church—would attempt to defend such a set of propositions to-day. The view held by many leading critics, some of them holding high positions in the Church, is as follows:—

The earliest writings in the New Testament are the Epistles of Paul, then the Gospel of Mark. Matthew and Luke are founded upon Mark with additions from other sources, then the Acts of the Apostles, and some years later, the Gospel of John. The Book of Revelation is a Jewish work altered and adapted for Christian ends, and is, in its Jewish form, probably the oldest document in the New Testament. The four Gospels, as we have them now, were unknown before the middle of the second century; that is, about one hundred and twenty years after the death of Christ.

Another pious belief of the ordinary Christian who is unacquainted with the early history of his faith, is that of a primitive period when there were no heresies, when all held the same belief, a faithful flock distinguished by their superior morality, for which they were hated and persecuted by the wicked pagans, by whom they were surrounded. This view has no better foundation than the previous one, and is directly contrary to the facts of the case. Paul himself, our earliest witness, protests against other teachers who taught a different gospel, and upbraids the converts to the new faith with giving way to all manner of debauchery, of which, indeed, they were also accused by their pagan contemporaries. The earliest historians of the new faith record a bewildering number of heresies which appeared simultaneously with Christianity, and we know now that some of these so-called heresies were much older than the one these writers claimed to be the only true and orthodox one.

In the first instance the orthodox faith was only one of a multitude of sects, which in the course of time became strong enough to overpower and exterminate its rivals, and then pose as the only true and orthodox party. It is among these early sects that we must seek for the origins of Christianity.

The most influential among these sects were the Gnostics. They laid claim to a special *gnosis* or knowledge; not mere worldly knowledge, but spiritual knowledge. Professor Bousset, one of the greatest authorities upon the subject, observes:—

Gnosticism, in all its various sections, its form and its character, fall under the great category of mystic religions, which were so characteristic of the religious life of decadent antiquity. In Gnosticism as in the other mystic religions we find the same contrast of the initiated and the uninitiated, the same loose organization, the same kind of petty sectarianism and mystery-mongering. All alike boast a mystic revelation and a deeply-veiled wisdom. As in many mystical religions, so in Gnosticism, the ultimate object is individual salvation, the assurance of a fortunate destiny for the soul after death. As in the others, so in this, the central object of worship is a redeemer-deity who has already trodden the difficult way which the faithful have to follow. And finally, as in all mystical religions, so here too, holy rites and formulas, acts of initiation and consecration, all these things which we call sacraments, play a very prominent part. The Gnostic religion is full of such sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

The same writer says that: "of the actual writings of the Gnostics, which were extraordinarily numerous, very little has survived; they were sacrificed to the destructive zeal of their ecclesiastical opponents." And

for the main part we are dependent for our knowledge of their systems upon the writings of their prejudiced and intolerant Christian enemies, who always represented them as heretical offsprings from the Christian faith, and as such they were regarded until quite modern times. But modern scholarship has proved this to be quite false, like so many other statements of the early Christian apologists and historians. Bousset himself declares: "The essential part of most of the conceptions of what we call Gnosticism was already in existence and fully developed before the rise of Christianity."<sup>2</sup> Mr. F. Legge devotes no less than four chapters of his valuable work, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity*, to a description of "pre-Christian Gnostics." Again, in the article, "Gnosticism," in Hasting's *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, we are told: "The Gnostic movement, then, was the result of that mingling of diverse beliefs which had long been in process at many different centres, and it had developed itself in all its essential features before the Christian era had fairly begun." As Professor Gilbert Murray points out:—

The Gnostics are still commonly thought of as a body of Christian heretics. In reality there were Gnostic sects scattered over the Hellenistic world before Christianity as well as after. They must have been established in Antioch and probably in Tarsus well before the days of Paul or Apollos. Their Saviour, like the Jewish Messiah, was established in men's minds before the Saviour of the Christians. "If we look close," says Prof. Bousset, "the result emerges with great clearness, that the figure of the Redeemer, as such, did not wait for Christianity to force its way into the religion of Gnosis, but was already present there under various forms."<sup>3</sup>

Many of these Gnostic sects were composed of Jews. Not the stern and orthodox Jews of Palestine, but the Jews of the Diaspora, or the dispersion, who were scattered all over the world, even as they are to-day, and who abound in all the Oriental Greek-speaking cities of the East. There were a million Jews in Alexandria alone at the beginning of the Christian era. These Jews were in many cases descendants of the Jews who had left Palestine; they had acquired a knowledge of Greek philosophy and religion, which was banned in Palestine and spoke and thought in Greek. It was among these unorthodox Jews that these sects arose. It should be noted that all the documents of the New Testament are of later date than the fall of Jerusalem, which was taken and destroyed, along with the temple, the centre of national worship, in the year A.D. 70. This is a crucial date, for no doubt the despair engendered by this event tended to still further loosen the bands of Jewish orthodoxy among the less orthodox Jews of the Diaspora.

W. MANN.

(To be Continued.)

#### MR. G. WHITEHEAD'S MISSION.

Both at Hull and at Newcastle our missioner's propaganda has been handicapped by the exceptionally severe burst of cold weather last week, but in spite of this and also in spite of a very heavy cold in the head, Mr. Whitehead managed to hold seven meetings at Hull and another seven meetings at Newcastle. We hear from Hull that the audiences were very attentive and sympathetic and that several new members are expected to join the Branch. Mr. Whitehead is in Newcastle for a fortnight, after which he finishes the summer's tour at Birmingham.—E.

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 11th Edition. Article, "Gnosticism."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> G. Murray, *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, p. 143.

## "Back to Jesus."

### IV.

#### TWO MODERN APOSTLES.

LET me now come to two men who, like the Zancigs, seem to have "two minds with but a single thought,"—the slogan, "Back to Jesus"—I take them as typical examples. Mr. Knapp-Fisher and Mr. Gerald Bullett, in this journal and the *Literary Guide*, are both very much concerned with the lack of reverence which some of us show when speaking or writing about Jesus. Mr. Knapp-Fisher wants to disarm critics a little by admitting that "Jesus had his limitations and made profound mistakes," for which we are very grateful. Mr. Bullett feels that those who do not agree with his peculiar conception of Jesus, have no humour. This is not particularly original. When some twenty years ago Mr. Chesterton found himself defending Christianity in the *Daily News*—a Christianity which, by the way, he entirely repudiates now—he found a short and simple way of settling a particularly irritating opponent. "He has no humour," cried Mr. Chesterton, and, showing us that Christianity—the particular brand he believed in then, I suppose—was "a jolly religion," and all Rationalists went about with long faces, the great master of paradox felt he had smote Freethought to smithereens. Such incidents as the Virgin Birth, the miracles, the Resurrection, were mere trifles to deal with once you had shown your opponent had no humour. I am sure lots of people believe that Mr. Chesterton had quite the best of the argument, but it's a pity they do not explain why he has since thrown over, let us hope for ever, the jolly old religion he had so gloriously defended. Be that as it may, Mr. Bullett looks upon me as a melancholy example of the "popular belief that Rationalism and a sense of humour cannot exist in one mind." This, mark you, from a writer who tells us that "if Churches had deliberately set out to suppress Jesus they could not have made a neater job of it"—a Jesus, of whose teaching, he says, "Human wisdom can reach no higher than this." Well, I've heard a good many sermons myself at various times, but I think I can say quite justly that the adoration and admiration for Jesus Mr. Bullett shows, is exactly the kind I have heard dozens of times from the pulpit or on the wireless. Indeed, if a sermon I recently heard, given by Canon Shepard, of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, had been announced afterwards as by Mr. Bullett, I should not have been surprised. He thinks those "simpletons"—I've never met any, by the way—who take the Sermon on the Mount "literally" are just as idiotic as those who, believing in Jesus, see their assailants "get a month's hard labour." It is extraordinary how even humourists jib at taking "Christ's precepts literally." Human wisdom can reach no higher than the religion or the teachings of Jesus, but for God's sake, don't take 'em literally. It's fatal. The Sermon on the Mount, Mr. Bullett assures us (here I am irreverently reminded of that humorous fable about the boy teaching his grandmother to suck eggs) "is a series of witty and illuminating maxims in which is adumbrated a spiritual attitude to life." And this is where I, with a lack of humour, of course, scratch my head and wonder what it all really means? What is exactly "a spiritual attitude to life"? I asked a Christian lady of my acquaintance, and she looked at me sorrowfully as she replied that "You know quite well what dear Mr. Bullett means." I may be wrong, of course, but "a spiritual attitude to life" seems to be the usual sort of apology whenever Christians get into a hole over the simple and beautiful

teachings of Jesus—those particular ones which obviously can't be taken literally. Whenever I have asked a Jesus worshipper point-blank, "Do you love the Christian fiend who sank the "Lusitania"? his reply was invariably, "Of course, we mustn't take that beautiful precept *literally*—we must spiritualise it." I asked one of the most famous of Congregationalist ministers who felt he had an easy victory over me when he frankly dropped the "Church" and stood by Jesus—not Paul or John, or James or Peter—but Jesus himself, if he agreed with the Son of God in telling us we must hate our parents—yea, our very lives—to be a disciple of Jesus? "Please, don't take that *literally*," he begged. "We always spiritualise that saying." But when I asked him what spiritualising it meant, he couldn't tell me. In fact, this sort of talk reminds me of the inky fluid the octopus squirts round him to blind his enemy; but as I'm sure Mr. Bullett won't allow it to be said he tried to blind me, will he explain what he means?

Let us, however, have a glance at some of the witty and illuminating maxims of the Sermon on the Mount; I do so without the reverential awe I'm supposed to show whenever the Sermon on the Mount is spoken of or "the Christ" is introduced. "Blessed are the poor in spirit" is the first of the witty and illuminating maxims. Does the Jesus-lover really believe that a weak-backed coward should be blessed? If the kingdom of heaven is full of people "poor in spirit," what a place to go to! "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh" and "Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep" are indeed a precious pair of maxims. "Please don't take them literally," begs Mr. Bullett, pathetically, "they adumbrate a spiritual attitude to life." Would he be good enough to tell me how? To say to your brother, "Thou fool" puts you in danger of "Hell fire"—could nonsense go much further? Well, yes, it could, if we are to take the drivel about plucking out your right eye or cutting off your right hand literally, or spiritually, or anyway you like. The truth is that even Christians kick at the idea of taking any notice of such witty and illuminating maxims. Bishop Magee (I repeat this for the benefit of Mr. Bullett, who probably thinks he stands alone in sorrowfully exhorting us not take the Sermon on the Mount literally), said some years ago "that it is not possible for the State to carry out in all its relations literally all the precepts of Christ.....If there really be any person who maintains this.....his proper place is in a lunatic asylum." This delightful criticism I put side by side with Mr. Bullett's opinion that Jesus of Nazareth's "point of view is singularly sane and inspiring." *Sane and inspiring*—good heavens! Mr. Knapp-Fisher says that in the mind of Jesus are "the highest conceptions of human morality set out with crystalline beauty and clarity." For example, we have the remarkably beautiful opinion of himself given by Jesus in John x 8: "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers." I think we can all admit the crystalline beauty and clarity with which that is put. But does anybody believe it? Mr. Bullett says that "the very kernel of his teaching is that the kingdom of heaven cannot be won by formal observances....." etc. Now, apart from the fact that if the kingdom of heaven contains people who are "poor in spirit" there are quite a crowd of us who have not the slightest wish to go there, these are the words in which Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven (or God, which is the same thing):

Except a man be born of water and of the wind (or spirit) he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit (or wind) is wind (or spirit).....Ye must be born again. The spirit (or

wind) bloweth where it listeth.....so is everyone that is born of the wind (or spirit).

(The Greek word for spirit and wind are the same.) I hope Mr. Knapp-Fisher will appreciate the beautiful clarity of this "sane and inspiring" exposition of the kingdom of God. We now know where we are.

But in Jesus, Mr. Knapp-Fisher sees a mind in which the highest conception of human morality are set out. Good. Will he carefully explain the following?—"If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." To tell us to *hate* our parents and children, even our very lives is, according to Mr. Knapp-Fisher, "the highest morality." It is, according to Mr. Bullett, "a singularly sane and inspiring point of view." Well, we are all entitled to express our opinions, but for my part I know nowhere more atrocious teaching. No Christian has ever been able to defend this Christ-like ethic, and I hope Mr. Knapp-Fisher and Mr. Bullett will try.

Jesus always treated his parents in accordance with his own teaching however. "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" is just what could be expected from him, and when one of the people said that his mother wished to speak to him, we need not be surprised at his loving answer: "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?"

And here I wish to say that I by no means agree with Mr. Clayton Dove in his recent article in these pages on "Mary." Supposing it is true that she was a woman of little character, that does not excuse the conduct of Jesus towards her. If he had no patience with what he considered her stupidity, all the more reason that he should have controlled himself and shown her all the love a son should show his mother. According to the Gospels, Mary loved her son. His treatment of her was unworthy of any man. How it suited a Son of God, I leave it to his followers to show.

H. CUTNER.

### On Holding Views.

ORTHODOXY is rampant in our midst. The decay of civilization so often and so trenchantly expressed by our leading moral thinkers, who have in the main lived too long, owes more to convention than to any other vice; that is, if it has really taken place.

Orthodoxy, of course, takes many forms. The decrees and beliefs of sections of society impose upon members of those sections, and so people determine to act as their small circle would have them act. The commendation of our fellow men is very sweet, except to those extravagant people who are afflicted with the virtue of contra-suggestibility.

I suppose that most circles have their peculiar foibles, but members of literary coteries are usually very marked in their definitions. They are the ideal holders of views; they discuss every activity of mankind, analyse it, and re-create the world in their own god-like image. These have their own particular orthodoxy. It consists of being unorthodox so far as their movements are concerned—incidentally, behaviour is solely expressed through movement. Their views are not always even unorthodox, but they hold them.

Since there is such a large amount of work produced each year in the realm of pictorial and decorative art, the drama and current fiction both bulk so largely, only a superman or woman would be able to see all the exhibitions, visit all the new productions, and read all the books. But in the literary coterie, everyone has always apparently done all these things. Everyone is relentlessly up to date.

In other circles, the latest *cause celebre*, murder case, or sporting event, forms the topic of conversation, not, possibly, because these things are particularly interesting, but for the reason, as the literary coteries would not be slow to point out, that they are currently discussed in the daily press.

How different is the conversation in a literary coterie! It is concerned with none of these things, but with the very latest drama, the very latest picture show, or the very latest novel. If the conventional part of society were so concerned with self-expression as the creative and unorthodox section, it would probably retort to the contemptuous judgment of the literary, that the literary people's discussions were taking place for the reason that their subjects were currently discussed in the weekly reviews.

It is as dangerous to enter a literary circle and be ignorant of these things as it would be to enter a sporting circle and be unaware that the Lincoln Handicap had been run off that day. To be a Philistine is not to know, or, at least, that is what is gathered from the use of that word. I wonder how many Philistines there are belonging to the National Sporting Club, and what their relation is to the ratio of total membership compared with the ratio of the Philistines amongst the members of the Savage Club, or worse even, the Athenæum?

To be unorthodox one must have a standard of conduct to offend. The most vindictively and virtuously unorthodox usually seek the company of their own kind, for the simple reason expressed in the old proverb about birds and feathers. In their circles they are no more unorthodox than the most conventional person in a Mayfair drawing-room. However the matter is looked at, it seems that everyone is orthodox, if it is only to some standard imposed by himself. Almost everyone dislikes conventions, with the exception, of course, of those who like them. Everyone abuses them, but everyone fails to act in contradiction of those held commonly by their circle of acquaintances.

Conscientious unorthodoxy is no use at all; it cannot help the progress of humanity, because it is simply another form of orthodoxy. Indeed, the thing is so rife that it seems improbable that there will ever be enough rebels to do anything.

Thus, people who hold the most marked views are not remarked, because everyone else in their circle holds them. Those people who do not hold any views are equally unremarked, because that is a commonplace in their circle.

G. E. FUSSELL.

### Acid Drops.

A series of articles on "My Religion" are announced to appear in the *Daily Express*. Mr. Arnold Bennett leads off, and he is to be followed by nine other well-known writers. We hope to notice them as a whole when they are completed, but at present we may note the confession of Mr. Bennett, with which he opens his article. He says:—

It is curious how bold some very ordinary statements seem when they are put into print in a popular newspaper. I do not believe, and never have at any time believed, in the Divinity of Christ, the Virgin Birth, the Immaculate Conception, Heaven, Hell, the immortality of the soul, or the divine inspiration of the Bible. These denials of belief are taken for granted in the conversation of the vast majority of my friends and acquaintances. And far from seeming bold, they are so commonplace to us that we very rarely repeat them, much less argue about them.

We leave the rest of Mr. Bennett's article for subsequent treatment, but so far, it is quite unambiguous and to the point. But as to boldness in saying this much.

Here we are at one with Mr. Bennett at marvelling that a statement of the rejection of such childish superstitions should be regarded as displaying boldness. It is undeniable that a great many people—the majority, in fact—do regard such a statement as bold, and that has always struck us as a very complete indictment of current culture and intelligence. The people should mark the rejection of such beliefs as worthy of note is, to our mind, irrefutable evidence of the low level of intelligence in relation to religion. Instead of their rejection being a cause for astonishment, it is their acceptance that should make us marvel. We do not wonder at a man's boldness in rejecting the fairy tales of childhood. On the contrary, we are surprised to find an adult going through life shivering at the supposed existence of ghosts, or holding that Santa Claus brings presents at Christmas. Intellectually there is not one of the fundamental beliefs of religion that rests upon any higher intellectual level. That should be one of the primary assumptions of the genuinely civilized intelligence.

All the same, it does not do to assume that because one's own circle of friends never discuss even the probability of these fantastic stories being true, therefore, they are not generally believed. They are. Millions of our fellow citizens still believe them, either in their original form or in a rationalized form that is intellectually even more objectionable. It is bad enough to find large numbers of people believing in these tales in their primitive form, but to find men of ability straining the meanings of words, and misstating scientific conclusions in order to make them fit in with modern thought is depressing and disgusting. The first is evidence of the extent to which the primitive mind is still with us. The latter is proof of the number who are quite ready to take advantage of this primitive intelligence to keep alive beliefs and institutions that ought long since to have disappeared. That is the salient fact of the situation, and it contains a threat to what civilization we have. Frankly we find it impossible to believe that all those who put forward such strained reinterpretations of these old beliefs are quite honest in the matter. They probably justify themselves by some such reflection that it is good for the mass of the people to have a religion, etc. And the same type of mind that does this is not likely to shrink from using the superstition of the people to other ends if occasion demands.

For this reason we think a very serious mistake is made by those who treat the superstitions of the people a negligible factor because they have themselves given up belief. It should be well for them to remember that the world is not made up of such as they. The genuinely liberated minds in this and in every other country are a small minority. Those who have courage to speak out represent a smaller number still. And it is with the few, not with the many, that the safety of the better elements of our civilization ultimately depends.

A friend sends us a copy of the *Railways Review*, which contains a quotation from the Rules and Regulations of the Taff Vale Railway, published in 1858. The men were paid about 15s. per week, but any shortcomings in that direction were made up by the care taken of their spiritual welfare. One of the paragraphs in the Rules says: "It is urgently requested that on Sundays and other holy days when he is not required on duty that he will attend a place of worship, as it will be the means of promotion when vacancies occur." That is very plain, and, in many directions, the only change in the situation is that the policy is not so openly avowed. But attendance at church or chapel is still an asset, and if all those who attended one or the other for purely business reasons stayed away, church attendance would be much lower than it is.

The Spiritualist Congress at Paris has been making researches. And one of the discoveries, according to press reports, is that Landru, the man of many wives, who disposed of them by the simple plan of murdering

them, was "controlled" by the celebrated Bluebeard. We are of opinion that there is quite as much evidence for this as for many other things that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his friends put forward. People that can believe the rest ought not to jib at this.

Discussion is going on among Spiritualists at the Paris Congress concerning the subject of reincarnation. The Continental delegates generally believed in a series of incarnations which reach gradually the highest spheres, the English delegates will have it that the "spirit" leaves this world for ever, and from the higher spheres influences the rest of us. To the outsider it would seem that with the constant intercourse between man and the spirit world this is a point on which we should be able to get an authoritative statement. But it is astonishing how little these developed spirits know beyond where mother used to keep her hairpins, and how old Jimmy was when he had the measles. It may also strike the outsider that this difference on the question of reincarnation is probably due to the difference in the religious opinions existing in Britain and on the Continent. The spirit world remains, in 1925, as in B.C. 20,000, a projection of man's view of what this world might be. The more religions alter the more they remain as they were.

Fourteen Spiritualist mediums have been charged with fraud in Indiana, U.S.A. It seems that Spiritualistic camp meetings are held, and a Miss Swain detected some of the mediums in the act of perpetrating frauds which she said a child of ten ought to have detected. About two thousand Spiritualists tried to lynch Miss Swain for her services. The incident is chiefly remarkable to us for the light it throws upon the mentality of the mass of Spiritualists. There is a fatal credulity which makes them ready to accept anything so long as it runs along the customary lines. Miss Swain was introduced to the spirit of her grandmother, who is not dead, as well as to other relatives, including a brother who has no existence whatever. It is also to be noted that Spiritualism in recent years has developed the true religious temperament which refuses to look at evidence against it, or at explanations which actually do describe what is going on in cases where there is no conscious fraud. Between the average Christian and the average Spiritualist the difference to-day is one of terminology only. The mental attitude is the same in both cases, and it is this that really matters.

The *Christian World* enquires whether Dr. Marie Stopes has a source of information not open to other people? The enquiry is made because she diagnoses St. Paul's feeling towards women was due to his being a reformed rake. Well, that would really be nothing unusual in the history of Christianity. Many a saint has begun his career that way, and often it is his chief recommendation to sainthood. And it does not require much psychological penetration to discern that, even though the saint may have left behind in practice his past life, he was still living it over again mentally. Added to which we may note that there was current a story that Paul had been rejected by a Rabbi's daughter. At any rate, Dr. Stopes has as much foundation for her story as we have for the numerous lives of Christ telling us what he did and why he did it, and all upon the basis of what present-day Christians think he ought to have meant. We see no reason why all this guesswork should be restricted to parsons. Moreover, as we understand, Dr. Stopes claims to have received something of a revelation from God, she may be in a position to know all about it.

Income tax payments have revealed Mr. J. D. Rockefeller as the richest man in the world. Mr. Rockefeller says that God has been good to him every day. We are glad to have Mr. Rockefeller's assurance on that point, and we are quite sure that the vast majority of Christians will see in the millions amassed evidence of the truth of the statement.



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. DEAS.—Thanks for copy of *Present Truth*, but it is really not worth a special article. These Seventh Day Adventists and their like are only useful as illustrating what queer things still flourish, and in large numbers, under the name of Christianity.

H. MEREWORTH.—Yes, we received the invitation all right, but was unable to find a date for a lecture. Our Free-thought work must come first, and we are not professional lecturers in the sense that we are ready to go anywhere at any time and speak on any subject. We lecture for a special purpose, and with that our interest in the platform ceases.

S. DOBSON.—Pleased to know that the opening meeting of the Birmingham Branch was so successful, with Mr. Clifford Williams as the lecturer.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—J. G. Burdon, 2s. 6d.

"BRITON."—We agree that "Britisher" is quite a mongrel word, but it is in common usage, and is so far permissible, so long as no false impression is given.

W. REPTON.—Quite well, thanks, but looking forward to an easier time one of these days. That will probably come about the date of our funeral.

J. NEIL.—Thanks for lines, which shall appear. We are obliged to you for the new readers you have secured, but, as you say, with trade so bad in many districts, the spending of a few extra coppers weekly is a consideration with many.

A. RUSSELL.—Sorry to know that you have been unwell. Hope you will soon achieve complete recovery.

F. STERN-PADELLE.—Thanks for MSS.

J. P. HAMPSON.—Your experiences were certainly amusing. Pleased to learn that nearly all the copies of the *Freethinker* guaranteed to your newsagent are now being sold. The paper only needs publicity to make its way. Mr. Cohen's pamphlet on *God and Evolution* will be published next week.

J. POTTERGILL.—Sorry space has prevented our getting your notes on *Freethought* in Tyneside in the present issue. Will appear in our next.

G. F. LAWS.—You are quite right in what you say about the Rev. C. M. Sheldon and his statement that Greek was a universal language, spoken by the poor people, at the time of Christ. But the class of people who read his sermons are not likely to know better, and so long as there is enough slobber about the love of Jesus all will go well.

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

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 the 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 "Midland Bank, Ltd., 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 at the following rates (Home and Abroad):— One year, 15s.; half year, 7s. 6d.; three months, 3s. 9d.

Sugar Plums.

Next week the Secular Society, Limited, will issue, through the Pioneer Press, Mr. Cohen's new pamphlet on *God and Evolution*. We venture to say that the

pamphlet will be found to be one of the most forceful that Mr. Cohen has written, and at the present juncture should do considerable good. Christians who read it should have their eyes opened, and Freethinkers will find it useful in controversy with their Christian friends. We bespeak the help of our readers in getting this pamphlet the circulation it deserves, and an extra copy for the purpose of lending would be a very useful form of propaganda. It will not do, now that the issue has been raised, to let Christians repeat the old trick of trying to harmonize a godless evolution with Christianity. The pamphlet extends to about 48 pages, and is published at 6d., postage one penny extra. Orders should be sent in at once, and so secure copies as soon as issued.

We have received a letter from Miss Rose Witcop, in which she says that she was the lady who recently interrupted in the McCabe debate, and on which certain press comments were made. She complains that no attempt was made by "Professor" Price to get to grips with the arguments advanced, and he brought his "reply" already written. She thinks it would have had a bad effect in America if it had gone forth that a London audience had been either impressed or converted by the "feeble" utterings of Professor Price. We are sorry we cannot agree with Miss Witcop. We are not of the opinion that Americans would have been at all impressed by what this Professor Price said or did. His scientific standing in the States is nil, and no one either here or there is likely to be impressed by what he said. Special creation as against evolution is a position that not a single person of scientific standing in any part of the world would take up. And in our opinion nothing can excuse interruptions in a public meeting. The right of free speech is one of the most valuable things we possess, and the right of uninterrupted speech for ourselves must include that of others. However foolish a speaker may be, if he is invited to speak, he should be allowed to do so. There is no virtue whatever in listening quietly to opinions with which we agree. The only virtue is listening to those with which we do not agree.

We get some very queer letters, but one of the queerest comes, just as we are finishing this week's issue, from a Christian reader. He is only a chance one, for someone has sent him a copy of the paper, and under the impression that it comes from this office he asks us not to send him any more, as he feels that reading it will unsettle his faith. That is quite a neat way of paying us a compliment, even though it be unintended. And incidentally, it illustrates what we have so often said about Christianity encouraging a very cowardly type of mind. For cowardice that robs a man of the courage of facing the truth is the worst form of cowardice that exists. Physical courage is cheap, common, and easily developed. It is mental courage that largely lifts man above the animal world, and Christianity has generally tended to weaken it.

Mr. Sidney Dunce, of the South London Branch, writes as a young man in warm approval of the suggestion that Social Circles for Freethinkers should be formed. We have noted Mr. Dunce's name and address, but if this suggestion is to materialize, those who wish it to do so must send along their names. It is useless for each one to be waiting for the others to make a start before they signify their readiness to take a hand.

The Rev. Conrad Noel has a playful way with him in dealing with bishops. We gather from the objects of a meeting at Exeter Hall that God required help. In an address delivered in the interests of "Catholic Crusade for God and the Worker's Commonwealth," the rev. gentleman stated that Jesus, if he had preached "be kind to the cat" morality, he would have been almost as harmless as an English bishop. This is just a little light scuffling between low heels and high heels, and passable—if one has not read the history of bishops and popes.

## The Gospel History a Fabrication.

### VI.

#### THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

THE three Synoptists, as we have seen, were editors who re-wrote and revised a long series of narratives which they found in a more primitive Gospel. The writer of the Fourth Gospel, however, was a born fabricator who could not copy a reputed historic event from an ancient document without so altering the details as to make a practically new story—and with an utter disregard for truth. Not content with taking some of the primitive narratives and transforming them almost beyond recognition, he boldly fabricated some new ones himself; to which, at the same time, he added a number of new sayings and long discourses, which he piously placed in the mouth of his Saviour. Next, he altered the plan of the public ministry of Jesus, and placed it in Judæa instead of in Galilee, as recorded in the three Synoptics. Finally, though he took his account of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus from the same primitive records as the Synoptists, he could not refrain from altering and making additions to those alleged events also. He has placed the trial a day earlier than the Synoptists—on the day for eating the passover in the evening—so that the accusers of Jesus could not go into the Pretorium where the trial was held, lest “they might be defiled,” and Pilate is represented as repeatedly going out of the court to speak to them outside—a thing which no Roman procurator would have done. The writer has further introduced new incidents at the Crucifixion, and has fabricated new appearances of Jesus to his disciples after the alleged resurrection. Space will not allow me to go fully into all these matters here; I shall therefore content myself with giving some brief examples.

#### THE CALL OF PETER AND ANDREW.

The call of these two brothers, as revised by the first two evangelists from the primitive source (Matt. iv. 18-20; Mark i. 16-18) is thus recorded by Matthew:—

And walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishers. And he said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left the nets, and followed him.

Mark relates the incident in nearly the same words. We now turn to the Fourth Gospel, and find the event completely transformed. According to this writer, Jesus came to the Jordan the day after he had been baptised. The writer says (John i. 35-42):

Again on the morrow John was standing, and two of his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as he walked, and saith, Behold the lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye?.....*One of the two that heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He findeth first his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah. He brought him unto Jesus. Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of Joanes: thou shalt be called Peter. On the morrow he was minded to go forth into Galilee.*

The writer of this account knew that in the primitive documents Jesus did not go into Galilee and commence preaching until *after* John the Baptist had been cast into prison (Matt. iv. 12; Mark i. 14), and that the call of Peter and Andrew did not take place until *after that*; also, that the two brothers were strangers to Jesus when called to be apostles. These

facts he knew quite well; but he could not resist the temptation of trying to make a better story of it, as in the case of casting lots for the garments at the Crucifixion (John xix. 23-24). We find, further, that this fraudulent writer has put his own words and ideas in the mouth of the Baptist. This will be seen by comparing the following paragraphs: Mark i. 4-11; Matt. iii. 1-17; Luke iii. 7-17, 21, 22; John i. 6-7, 15-51; iii. 23-36. Here Matthew and Luke have evidently made additions to the primitive account; but these are small in comparison with those made by the accomplished fabricator of the Fourth Gospel.

#### THE POOL OF BETHESDA.

In John v. 2-9 we find the following extraordinary narrative, piously fabricated by the writer himself in order “that ye may believe that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God” xx. 31):—

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a multitude of them that were sick, blind, halt, withered [waiting for the moving of the water: for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole, with whatsoever disease he was holden.] And a certain man was there, which had been thirty and eight years in his infirmity. When Jesus saw him lying, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he said unto him, Wouldest thou be made whole? The infirm man answered him, Sir, I am no man, *when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.*

There is no need to read further; Jesus, of course, healed the infirm man. But the method employed by the writer's God to show his love and compassion for his afflicted people was, to say the least, god-like. That deity possessed the power, if he thought fit to exercise it, to heal all the sick people around the pool; but, in all his loving-kindness, he chose to heal but one. Moreover, the writer's Saviour, like the writer's God, never gave a thought to the healing of more than one person, but went away leaving all “the sick, blind, halt, and withered” unhealed.

Now, that the foregoing story is a fiction is beyond the shadow of a doubt. In the first place, the account was not in the primitive Gospel from which the other three evangelists drew the main portion of their narratives. In the next place, no such pool at which an angel agitated the water for the cure of sickness or disease is mentioned by any writer known to history. Josephus, in his description of Jerusalem, states that there were places within that city called “Bethso” and “Bezetha,” and mentions “the fountain of Siloam” and “Solomon's pool”; but he knew nothing of a periodical intervention of heaven for the cure of disease at a pool in Jerusalem. It is probable that Bezetha was the locality which the Fourth Gospel writer selected for his imaginary pool. Writing, as he did, many years after the destruction of Jerusalem, he had no fear of his fraud being detected.

The Christian Church would be glad to get rid of this miracle; but not being able to do so, they have in the Revised Version omitted from the text the words I have placed within brackets, and relegated them to the margin, though they admit in doing so that “Many ancient authorities insert wholly or in part” the words they have erased. The reason for this action was to get rid of the statement that “at certain seasons” an angel agitated the water of the pool—which they all knew to be a fabrication. But these apologetic efforts to conceal the fraud are vain; for the words I have italicised in the reply of the infirm man prove that the words within brackets

were originally an essential part of the narrative, which is not only founded upon them, but cannot be understood without them.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.

In the same questionable Gospel, chapter xi., we have the story of Jesus restoring to life a man named Lazarus, who was not only dead," and putrefaction had commenced. This miracle Jesus is stated to have performed by "crying with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth"; whereupon the putrescent corpse came out of the tomb restored to life and perfect health. The only evidence we possess for such an astounding miracle is that it was written by the man who fabricated the story of the Pool of Bethesda. No one ever witnessed it, and the three Synoptists never heard of it.

The same pious fabricator excogitated the little story of turning water into wine (John ii. 1-11), a miracle which no one ever beheld, and of which the Synoptists had also never heard.

NEW INCIDENTS AT THE CRUCIFIXION.

In his account of the Crucifixion, the same fraudulent writer says that "there were standing by the cross of Jesus" his mother and other women, besides the disciple John; that Jesus, looking down upon them, said to his mother, "Woman, behold thy son," and to John, "Behold thy mother"; and that "from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (John xix. 25-27).

This mendacious writer next represents the Jews as asking Pilate to have the legs of the three persons who were crucified broken (xix. 31), in order to have a pretext for making one of the soldiers pierce the dead body of Jesus with a spear, and by so doing, fulfil two Old Testament "prophecies"—"A bone of him whom they pierced"—after which he has the hardihood to say: "And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe" (xix. 35). This last statement is implied to have been made by the apostle John, in whose name the Gospel was written.

A NEW PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS.

According to the Synoptists, Jesus came to Galilee and commenced preaching after the Baptist had been cast into prison (Matt. iv. 12; Mark i. 14; Luke iv. 14), and remained in the northern province teaching and working miracles until within a fortnight of his crucifixion. He was arrested six or seven days after entering Jerusalem. The writer of the Fourth Gospel has, however, represented Jesus as spending nearly all his time in Jerusalem or Judæa, with only three flying visits to Galilee, the latter recorded in John ii. 1-12; iv. 43-45, vi. i.-vii. 9. The first of these visits was to "Cana of Galilee" where the water was turned into wine, which visit was made before John was cast into prison; that is to say before Jesus had commenced preaching in Galilee, and before he had chosen any of his disciples. Yet this writer represents Jesus as having all his disciples with him, and says that they "believed on him" after witnessing the miracle. The events in these three visits are equivalent to the following paragraphs in the Synoptics: Matt. xiv. 13-34; Mark vi. 30-53; Luke ix. 10-17—that is to say, less than one chapter in each—which scarcely affects the public ministry at all. Hence, while Jesus is preaching in the cities and villages of Galilee, according to the Synoptics, another Jesus is represented as declaiming and wrangling in Jerusalem or Judæa, in the so-called "Gospel of John." Two such conflicting ministries cannot both be historical: one account or the other must be a fabrication.

Christian apologists endeavour to reconcile the two by saying that "the apostle John" had read the other Gospels, and wrote his own to supply circumstances which they had omitted. This is simply apologetic nonsense; for not one of the canonical Gospels was written in apostolic times, and not one of them by an apostle. The forger of the Fourth Gospel lived in the second century, in the days referred to by Luke in his Preface (i. 1-4), when "many" Christian scholars were making revised copies of the primitive Gospel, and when the new Gospels, after they were made, circulated singly in different districts. Later on, when the four canonical Gospels had become known, fresh forgeries would be impossible. But the unprincipled Christian who wrote the Fourth Gospel—probably, John the Presbyter, a friend of Papias—succeeded in getting his forgery received as the evangel of the apostle John.

I have no space for noticing the sayings and discourses of the Fourth Gospel. It must suffice to say that they were all composed by the writer himself, and placed by him in the mouth of Jesus. This fact is beyond all doubt, but it would take too long to deal with the matter in this series of papers.

ABRACADABRA.

Drama and Dramatists.

READERS of Oliver Wendell Holmes will remember that writer's story over our mental tea and toast in which he tells of the youthful angel who comes up to us holding in his right hand cubes like dice, and in his left spheres like marble. The cubes are of stainless ivory, and on each is written in letters of gold—Truth. The spheres in a certain aspect make the word—Lie. Over the spheres and cubes there has been eternal wrangling. Poets have had their eyes glued on the spheres—but everyone knew it; dramatists have hardly ever lost sight of the cubes, but their difficulty was to give them a pleasing appearance for the sake of getting mankind to spare a glance. Ibsen, to us, in all his plays, has striven to use the cubes only, and if we approach him bearing in mind his time and place, the general gloom of his works is easy to understand.

His gloomiest play, "The Wild Duck," has appeared at the St. James's Theatre, and, to those interested in coincidences, Mr. Thomas Hardy has just concluded his search for an ideal "Tess." Ibsen, like a master musician, weaves and interweaves in this play many themes, and with an aggravating sincerity and honesty settles nothing. No God in the Box trick for him to get his characters in the sugary elysium that our irrational nature demands; no "happy ever afterwards" conclusion that sends us away wondering what there is for supper, and no halo for virtue triumphant. Tess of the D'Urbervilles is in "The Wild Duck," and this strange wild fowl is in Hardy's novel, and this phenomenon is the Athanasian creed of the stage—easy to understand because both myth-makers are dealing with real life.

Gregers Werle is an idealist at large in Norway in 1884. He is busy with cubes in a society where spheres are the rule, and needless to say, he is a failure, and he fails because he is without the technique of putting his ideals effectively before the superficial people with whom he is surrounded. His father, a successful merchant, Mr. Worldly Wise, is divided from his son by a chasm that cannot be bridged. Success in the world is not gained by ideals which obsess his son. In the play there is a pair of sons and

a pair of fathers—and there is nothing to choose between them, as they are both alike, but both different. The sons have not reached that stage mentioned by the Dutch philosopher, Multatuli, who thought that a man had grown up when he could forgive his father—for being his father.

Mother and daughter, Gina Ekdal and Hedvig, are cast in a different mould. The mother, like most mothers, has an infinite and ox-like capacity for suffering and sacrifice, but Hedvig's intuition soars like a bird above the marshes and vapours of the studio. The drunken old Ekdal has flashes of insight, and throughout the three acts is like the ominous crackling of a fire before it bursts into flame, whilst Hjalmar, his son, is an utterly forsaken fool with the vanity of a Labour leader. Dr. Relling is the voice of common sense in this story of mist and jangling, and the clamour of the photographer's household reminded us of the rivetting in Devonport Dockyard. Of this material, Ibsen has made a tragedy which may be translated as the consequences of insincerity. Whilst it may appear far-fetched to an English audience, it must be remembered that the forces at work in Norway produced Ibsen as France produced Napoleon, and Germany produced a Luther. Norway must have been a very unpleasant country to live in; the Bible occupied a position of authority, and the student of sociology may ask, if this was the case, how did it come about that Ibsen, the champion of women, was produced in a country where the old book received the veneration of that hog's back washed by the North Sea? It is no part of this notice to give the answer, but the three women in the play are sketched with a certainty that relieves the dull background of a country emerging from the chrysalis stage where theology's valuations were feeling the effect of an attack from a transvaluer.

Molvik, an ex-student of theology, does not occupy the stage during the three acts for more than ten minutes. He had evidently followed the advice of Luther in one respect; he was always more or less drunk. His contribution to social questions was on a level with any of our own brand of religion to those matters that fiction, in the guise of religion, cannot even scratch. In the last act, where Hedvig has taken her final farewell from the atmosphere of the studio, Molvik, with a flourish, says: "The child is not dead, but sleepeth."

To this Relling utters the one word, "Bosh!"

Not to be dismissed with this, Molvik stretches out his arms, and mumbles: "Blessed be the Lord; to earth thou shalt return; to earth thou shalt return——" and Relling, in a stage whisper, says: "Hold your tongue, you fool; you're drunk," and the ex-student of theology slinks out of the room. Relling, who can see the effects of the whole turmoil, finally turns on Gregers, and tells him: "Oh, life would be quite tolerable, after all, if only we could be rid of the confounded duns that keep on pestering us, in our poverty, with the claim of the ideal."

Like a guttering candle, Gregers goes out, with his destiny resolved into nothing more than to be the thirteenth at table.

William James in one of his many odd moments compressed the cathartic values of the drama by saying that it was effective if it made you want to go out and kiss your aunt. One of our closest friends answered Pilate's question by saying that truth is the statement and awareness of reality, and throughout this play, through the medium of superb acting, one can hear the dynamo of intensity and sincerity. Brember Wills was a perfect study of a dipsomaniac, George Merrit was inflexible in his portrayal of Old Verle. Ian Swinley, who reminded us of John Ball in Halcott

Glover's "Wat Tyler," was well cast in his part of a young idealist who wanted the moon and had not even tried to reach it with a ladder. If bricks could be taken as compliments one would like to have hurled a few at Milton Rosmer, so well did he carry the part of Hjalmar, the male butterfly. Sidney Bland as the doctor, and Harold Scott as the ex-student of theology, were everything to be desired. Miss Mary Robson as Mrs. Sörby, played her part with dignity without losing our sympathy. When one has tired of eating and drinking, will not run to catch a 'bus or cross the road to see a royal procession, reads the papers only by the placards, and is certain that aeroplanes will not make one blade of grass grow, and cannot remember the style of hat now worn by Mr. Winston Churchill, such a person has much time left to look at and study the real things in life. We know that there are devils in the world; the sum of rascality is equally divided between rich and poor, but when Ibsen drew the portraits of Gina Ekdal (Miss Sybil Arundale) and Hedvig (Miss Angela Baddeley), he said in effect, lift up your hearts. Displacing that organ is serious, but in a practical sense, to see these two characters is to realize that Ibsen believed in the goodness of women. Above and beyond the gloom of tragedy, these two actresses carried us to that sphere where, in a world of imperfections, we catch a glimpse of the highest truth told in parable. With Stopford Brooke's valuation of Portia we can say of these two characters, "They will live as long as the stage lives, and, after that, in the hearts of men who like a woman to be better than themselves." And our enjoyment of the best and sanest part of Ibsen owes not a little to the perfect sensing of these two characters of Ibsen by Miss Sybil Arundale and Miss Angela Baddeley, who have in their voices the gift of magic giving us an awareness of reality.

WILLIAM REPTON.

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### "Tannhauser."

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In the "Tannhauser" of Richard Wagner the struggle between Christianity and Paganism, at least in the less philosophical and more everyday aspects, is presented to the listener through the combined medium of poetry and music. Christianity is not victorious at every point. In fact Paganism in many respects lives in spite of Christianity; and can be seen in the process of being taken up into the newer religion, with modifications, and under cover of a new guise. A process which has taken place during the whole history of Christianity and is evidently historically, if not divinely, necessary to the existence of that religion. In striving to capture the minds of the masses Christianity has had to compromise with the older beliefs, and we find in the myth which has been used by Wagner, the hero of the popular imagination, a Pagan in love with all that is beautiful and joyous in life, is overlaid by the product of the priestly mind, the Christian knight and minstrel, in a state of abject contrition seeking pardon for his sins.

Without entering into the details of the many variations of the myth which were current in medieval days concerning the Mountain of Venus, an outline of the main story may here be given. It will be but one of a multitude of illustrations of how easily Christianity could adapt itself to the requirements of Paganism when it was necessary to gain a footing on the ground that had been worked by Pagan priests. A full account of the myth may be looked up in Baring-Gould's *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*.

There was more than one Mountain of Venus to be seen in Europe during the Middle Ages, but the

Hörselberg, which stands between Eisenach and Gotha, was no doubt wrapped in as much myth and mystery as any other. In outward appearance it was very desolate, but within the mountain there was a magical world of wonders, to the dread or joy of those who thought of it, according to whether they were swayed by the old Pagan love of life and enjoyment, or the Christian fear of hell and damnation.

High up on the north-west side of the mountain was a huge cavern which, to the Christianized mind, was an entrance to Purgatory. The more ancient belief being that the mountain enclosed the palace and domains of Venus, goddess of love; and therein she held her court with much splendour, and with equal gaiety. From time to time music came up from the cavern in seductive strains and someone was enticed into the mysterious underworld. None save Tannhauser, a French knight and minnesinger, ever returned to earth; and he is described as having spent seven years in pleasure and revelry with Venus, and then desiring to revisit the earth in order to make peace with God. This desire is owing to the spirit of Christianity not having died out within him, and he is thus made, for priestly purposes, to revolt against all the beauty, variety, splendour, and joy of a sensuous life, and strive for Christian salvation by undergoing unneedful hardships and miseries. Tannhauser longs, of course, to feel the freshness of the breezes on earth, to see the sky at night, to hear the tinkle of the sheep bells, and pluck the mountain flowers, but all this naturalness is overcast by Christian misery the more the myth is transformed under the influence of priestly thought. It is not suggested that unhappiness and sorrow failed to find expression in the lives of Pagans; nor is it suggested that there was nothing dark and gloomy in the religion of Paganism. Greek, Roman, and other European Pagans often thought of death with fear and performed awe-inspiring rites in the hope of effecting a renewal of life. Pagan thought was indeed overloaded with superstition; and the Greek thinking of the torments of Tartarus and the fearsome blackness of the river Styx, was no better a spectacle than the Christian contemplating hell with its bottomless pit. Except that the Greek seems to have been inclined to think more frequently of getting the best out of life than of going to hell. It is because Christianity not only failed to wipe out such theological horrors, but actually took them over into her own doctrine and brought them to the forefront, to be used as a means in an organized attempt to keep the people in subjection, that Christianity must be classed as a first-rate system of humbug and oppression.

In the Christian transformation of the myth of the Mountain of Venus into that of Tannhauser we have the old process going on. Instead of Christianity producing something better than the original myth to take its place, the worst transformation is effected. Purgatory, penance, and hell as a reward for sin are substituted, for the abode of wonders and the life of joy as offered by Venus. No attempt is made even to save the best side of the old Pagan myth and make of it a picture of joy such as might help to relieve the drab hours of the average life in medieval society. Pleasure, except such as might be taken at the discretion of the Church, has become a sin; and Tannhauser is condemned for his few years of enjoyment in the world below. Nothing but a long pilgrimage to Rome can wipe out his sin of living with Venus.

That the Medieval Church could allow eating, drinking, and merry making on certain feast-days and holidays, does not alter the fact that by myth and by doctrine she inflicted upon the people an interpretation of life which was of the blackest kind. She could

permit many things provided she could keep the minds of her people drugged with her own sanctity, and thus assure for herself the chief call upon the economic resources of all, whether rich or poor.

Had the Church permitted the free, joyous, Pagan love of life and pleasure, such as Tannhauser experienced in the Mountain of Venus, to all her people, she would soon have lost her power, if she had ever once gained it. None but Tannhauser had ever returned to the earth, and he did so, having been trained in Christian sanctity, when a sense of sin came over him and revealed all his life of pleasure as a crime against his god. He was thus still under the influence of the Church, and herein is contained one of her secrets. While the Church can control the pleasures of the people her power is almost unlimited. She can permit excess to a mind trained in the sanctity of submission to herself with more safety than she can permit the growth of a normal Pagan love of enjoyment free from all care of sin.

Bad as much of the Pagan mythology undoubtedly is, there is much of the better type, but it seems to have been characteristic of Christianity to make most of the worst of it. The Pagan had his sense of sin and cult of death, but instead of Christianity seeking to put both into their due places in life and thought, she must needs overstress them out of all proportion. This is seen in Tannhauser. Full of life and love at the opening, and greeted, on his return to earth, by the shepherd boy with his song of May, which is significant of rejuvenated nature, the hero passes in the height of manhood under the blight of an ascetic idea of love and an appalling sense of sin and shame, which engulf both him and the frigid Elizabeth, whose life is given more to the Virgin Mary than to her lover.

In the contrast between Venus and Elizabeth, the earthly type of the heavenly virgin, we have in miniature the struggle between a Pagan and Christian conception of woman. It is noticeable that while Venus was not necessarily a wanton to the Pagan mind, Christianity strove to make her such in order to foist her own ideal upon the people; and as early as the tenth century the transformation of Venus, the Roman goddess of beauty, into a female demon, had been accomplished. She had indeed lured many Christians to perdition. That it went hard with the Church, in spite of her capacity for adapting her doctrine and myth when occasion called for it, is proved by the fact that, as in the case of Tannhauser, so much of the old myth lives for the modern student. Christian thought having failed to accomplish complete effacement of the old Pagan ideas. This is especially so when we remember that to many a German Pagan the Roman Venus was not only goddess of beauty, but also Dame Holda, who, as the Moon or Wandering Isis, scattered snow on the earth in winter, revived the earth in spring, and blessed the fruit in autumn. And, while the shepherd boy was unconscious of the meaning of his May song, his words to Holda were full of meaning to those who knew her to be the goddess of fertility, whose return to earth in May brought a renewal of life.

In the Pagan side of the myth there is retained the idea that the land of the gods and goddesses was not so far from earth that men could not visit it, in quest of new joys, and there mingle with the divine ones. Yet this was turned by Christianity both into a Pagan place of sensual degradation, and a Christian Purgatory with its long drawn out punishment of sin, and the possibility of eternal damnation on the one hand, or on the other a perpetual playing of the harp in a heaven more sanctimonious than the Church itself.

On the social side the myth of Tannhauser reveals the conflict between the Church, with her music and

hymns; and the minnesingers with their love songs, together with the wandering minstrels and their folk-songs: while the power of the old faith to break through Christianity is seen in the Hall of Song when Tannhauser, in a moment of reversion to Paganism, brushes aside the Christian sentiment of the other singers and glorifies love and the goddess of love as only a Pagan could.

As in doctrine, so in the matter of music and song, the Church was forced to compromise, and the one-time social outcast, the wandering minstrel, was in the long run accepted, by those who wished to scorn him, as being useful to take part in the hymns and sacred plays.

The mountebanks and strolling minstrels were in close touch with the people, but, inclined to much latitude in their singing and performing as they were, it was thought better to receive them with their jesting and fooling as actors in the Passion plays, rather than sacrifice economic power by setting the people against the Church and driving them to establish their own permanent places of drama, before the Church could afford to permit such independence.

It was essential in the interest of her survival that the Church should, as far as possible, be all things to all men for many centuries, and that seems to explain why the Medieval Church included almost every social institution; for which she is so often praised. There was little room for outsiders, whether in the sphere of doctrine or of action.

Fortunately, the Church is neither as old as nor as vital as humanity.

E. EGERTON STAFFORD.

## Correspondence.

### LOGIC AND SCIENCE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I hope to be able to reply to Mr. H. Russell's query in the next issue; and incidentally to offer a few remarks upon Mr. M. Barnard's very pertinent contribution. Our difference is one of terminology arising from different points of view—Mr. Barnard's from the "orthodox" standpoint, and mine from the sceptical. But the sceptic's outlook will probably interest the readers of this journal, and no one more, I trow, than Mr. Barnard himself.

KERIDON.

### MIRACLES.

We do not say that a miracle is impossible, we say only that no miracle has ever yet been proved. Let a worker of miracles come forward to-morrow with pretensions serious enough to deserve examination. Let us suppose him to announce that he is able to raise a dead man to life. What would be done? A committee would be appointed, composed of physiologists, physicians, chemists, and persons accustomed to exact investigation; a body would then be selected which the committee would assure itself was really dead; and a place be chosen where the experiment was to take place. Every precaution would be taken to leave no opening for uncertainty; and if, under these conditions, the restoration to life was effected, a probability would be arrived at which would be almost equal to certainty. An experiment, however, should always admit of being repeated. What a man has done once he should be able to do again, and in miracles there can be no question of ease or difficulty. The performer would be requested to repeat the operation under other circumstances upon other bodies; and if he succeeded on every occasion, two points would be established: first, that there may be in this world such things as supernatural operations; and, secondly, that the power to perform them is delegated to, or belongs to, particular persons. But who does not perceive that no miracle was ever performed under such conditions as these?—Renan.

## SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

### LONDON.

#### INDOOR.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (South Place, Moorgate, E.C.2): 11, S. K. Ratcliffe, "Thirty Years of Fleet Street."

#### OUTDOOR.

BETHNAL GREEN BRANCH N.S.S. (Victoria Park, near the Fountain): 6, Mr. E. Burke, a Lecture.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Regent's Park, near the Fountain): 5.45, Mr. J. J. Darby, a Lecture.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Brockwell Park): Mr. H. Constable, 3, "God and Devil—a Natural Explanation"; 6, a Lecture.

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (Outside Technical Institute, Romford Road, Stratford, E.): 7, Mr. H. C. White, a Lecture.

### COUNTRY.

#### INDOOR.

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S.—All meetings held in the City Hall are at 3 and 7. On Sunday, September 20, an outing to the Art Galleries, meet at the Galleries at 2.30. Tickets for the Reunion and Social on Saturday, October 3, will be on sale.

HULL BRANCH N.S.S. (Albany Room, Metropole Hotel): 7.30, General Meeting; Business important; all members attend please.

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NEWCASTLE BRANCH N.S.S.—Mr. G. Whitehead's Mission. Sunday, at 11, at Sandhill; at 7, at Town Moor; remainder of week at Bigg Market, at 7.

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