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Views and Opinions.

A God's Birthday.

Christmas Day is someone's birthday. There is nothing surprising in that since there are probably as many babies born on that date as on any other. Our divisions of days and months are of no significance in the world of nature, and natural processes go on without the slightest reference to the calendar. But there is one alleged birthday, which is dated December 25, that is out of the common. It is so because it is not the birthday of a mere man or woman. It was, say millions of human beings, the birthday of a God. In thousands of Churches on Christmas Day will be repeated the statement, which only long training enables one to make with suitable gravity, "On this day God himself came down to earth and was born of the Virgin Mary." And that strikes the first note of suspicion. A God who deigned to come to earth might have made his appearance in a more spectacular, a more unusual manner. When this particular God left the earth the happenings were quite suitable. The veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom. There was a darkness that spread over the whole earth. The earth quaked and the rocks were rent. The dead came out of their graves and walked about Jerusalem in the full sight of the people, and the God himself, even while he spoke to his followers, was "parted from them and carried up into heaven." It is true that these things were not absolutely unique. Others had been carried up into heaven in the sight of people, and other dead men had been brought out of their graves. But it was at least fitting that a God should not quit the earth in the same humdrum manner as Mr. John Smith.

* * *

A Half Miracle.

A miraculous career should have been initiated and terminated in a manner that was equally striking, and which admitted of no dispute. But the introduction of Mary rouses suspicion. If the father could be dispensed with, why not the mother? There

really is nothing unusual in a baby making its appearance with no localizable father. But to have been born without a mother! That would, indeed, have been a miracle worth recording. It would not have been merely unusual, it would have been absolutely unique. It would have dispelled the possibility of disbelief. Instead of its being said of such a being, "Never man spake as this man," which may be easily dismissed as the language of extravagant praise, we might have said, "Never man came as did this man," and that would have been a statement of sober fact. The great stumbling block to the general and ready acceptance of the story is not the father, but the mother. She presents the one unquestionably suspicious circumstance. The supreme objection to the acceptance of the divine origin of Jesus is Mary. Without her we might believe. With her in the picture there is room and justification for positive disbelief. But it should be said in her defence that the statement of the divine origin of her son was not of her making. Although the only one who could actually know whether God was the father of her baby or not, she never says so. She contents herself with the production of a natural fact. She leaves the responsibility for the statement as to the supernatural cause to others.

* * *

The Orthodoxy of Gods

Gods who should, with their boundless command of illimitable forces be the most original, are the most conservative in their births, their deaths, and their general behaviour. They seldom attempt anything new. Whatever they do has been done elsewhere by other gods. They are as fearful of being out of fashion as is any woman, and with less justification. And this particular deity ran true to form. His miracles followed the usual line, and his birth showed no originality. Gods by the dozen selected this manner of coming into the world, and many of them selected the very date. There was good reason for this last fact. December 25 is an important astronomical date. If it does not mark the birth of the Son, it does mark the re-birth of the Sun, and that is a very important and a very fearsome thing to primitive humanity. It gives the promise of the re-birth of vegetation, the triumph of the life-giving Sun over the cold of winter. And whether we talk of the birthday of Christ, or the birthday of the new year we are on pretty much the same ground. Many of the early Christians knew this and admitted it. The Puritan scholars, who began to look anew into the origins of Christian customs saw it also, and many of them said so. It is only the ignorant sections of the Christian world who are at sea about it. And the clergy are certainly not going to enlighten them—if they can help doing so. But all through the basin of the Mediterranean there was spread the worship of the Mother goddess, and the

divine one who was slain for the sins of the world, but who was miraculously resurrected. It is a very old story, and one would have expected that here and there a God might have come upon the scene with something new. But, no, they are as orthodox as revolutionists. A God must be born in a certain way, he must do things in a particular manner. They do not go in for originality, and they dislike originality on the part of their followers.

Man or God? * * *

I know that nowadays the God who was born on Christmas Day is losing caste, with even the clergy. All of them take their pay and enjoy their privileges to preach the *God*. They content themselves, and fool their followers by talking about the *man*. And that simply will not do. If Christian theology is to be trusted the world is not saved by the birth of a man, but by the death of a God. If Christ be not "God of every God," as the prayer-book has it, if he be not raised from the dead, then, as St. Paul says, is faith useless and nothing matters. The body of believers who gathered round the name of Jesus would not have winked an eyelash over the man who came preaching a collection of moral sayings with which they had all been familiar from their childhood. With nothing but his moral teachings to commend him the Jesus of the New Testament would never have been heard of. He was perpetuated on account of the very feature which many of the Christian clergy to-day are so anxious to keep in the background. Moral teachers, vocal and written, have always been fairly common. The New Testament figurehead lived on wholly because he was the God of a particular religion, that by a series of happy chances in the first instance gained power, and by unscrupulous lying and trickery, cold-blooded persecution perpetuated it. The clergy emphasize the man, because the world is outgrowing the God. And they hope, by a species of thimble rigging, having got you to admire the man Jesus, to get you to accept Christ the God. It is the purse trick in another form, where the performer shows you three shillings, but sells you three half-pennies. You cannot build a religion on a good man. And the world is getting sick of religions that are built on impossible gods.

* * *

The Failure of Jesus.

But why, in the name of all that is reasonable, did God get himself born on that Christmas Day? The orthodox answer is that he came to save the world, to teach it the benefit of peace and brotherhood. If that is so, the world has never known a more lamentable, a more terrible failure. We need not discuss whether that was his object, the certainty is that he has not succeeded in doing so—he never did succeed in doing so. Even in the pages of the New Testament the general picture is not that of a body bound in the ties of a loving brotherhood, but a number of quarrelsome people denouncing each other for errors of faith or faults of living. And when the Pagans noticed them they were astounded, not at their goodness or their manifestations of brotherliness, but at their vindictiveness. The first clear view that we get of Christians in history bears out that picture. So soon as the Church emerges as a distinct historic body we find it fighting over points of doctrine, fighting not merely with word of mouth but with fire, sword, and general persecution. The teacher whose mission it was to bring peace is followed by men who outdid anything the ancient world has to show us in sheer savagery and religious hatred. To say that these people misunderstood Jesus, or distorted his teaching does not disprove the failure of Jesus, it merely

emphasizes it. I do not believe that they misunderstood Jesus nearly so much as is claimed; on the contrary, I think it could be shown that what transpired was the logical result of what was taught. But I need not prove that now, because the failure is clear on either view. A God that came down specially to earth for a special purpose should have had at least the capacity to make himself understood. If his apologists are right he has never done this. He has not made men love each other, he has not brought peace to the world, and for all the good done, might just as well never left his celestial home. A man who tries and fails deserves our sympathy. A God who fails deserves only the neglect and the contempt into which he is rapidly falling.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

"The Motive of Creation."

SUCH is the title of a most remarkable sermon by the Rev. Sparrow-Simpson, D.D., published in the *Church Times* for December 10, 1926. It is the second of a course of three preached at St. Mark's Church, Ilford. Dr. Sparrow-Simpson belongs to a high class of Anglo-Pulpit eloquence, and thus the best that can be said on any disputed subject of his Church is sure to be said by him. He is an Anglo-Catholic divine, and of this party he shines as one of its most distinguished members. In the Christmas week the supreme subject of contemplation by the Church is the personality of Jesus Christ. "Consciousness," he declares, "is never a mere awareness of self. It does not only look within, but also, and of necessity, looks without. Consciousness cannot be limited to self-contemplation. It is always contemplation of that which is other than self." All this may be true enough, but we fail to realize why it is stated in this connection. On what ground does Dr. Sparrow Simpson assume the existence of an infinite Being who at one stage in his history was "friendless," and who yet longed unspeakably for companionship? Our divine does not even attempt to give complete answers to such questions, but by partial replies supplied, suggests as much. He says:

What is the object upon which the consciousness of God is directed? The answer frequently given is that the object whereon God's mind rests is the material universe. Is it thought in that way to provide an object of interest for the loneliness of Deity? And since God is eternal, there are thinkers who suppose that the object of his contemplation must be eternal also. Otherwise God in eternity would be deprived of anything to contemplate beyond himself. He would be in his real existence reduced to solitary self-contemplation. Of course, those who say that the material universe is eternal do not intend thereby to claim perpetual in the past for the particular material objects we see around us, nor for any of the kinds of beings which now exist. All that they affirm is that the underlying substance, out of which the phenomenal universe developed, is eternal. Granting the eternity of the material substance of the worlds, then there has always been an object for God's mind and the utmost stretches into the remotest past, as a Unitarian writer says, "bring us no nearer to a lonely God." That is the point. They say that God never was alone because he always had the universe to contemplate. That answer, however, is manifestly incomplete: for God has not only intelligence, but also affections. Above all things God has Love, and therefore the question to be answered is, What object was there in the universe for God to love? This problem has caused the thinkers much perplexity. The solitude of Deity seems oppressive. The lonely Person in

heaven, having heaven all to himself, could contemplate, indeed, the material universe and all its splendours. But there existed in that universe no being whom God could love, no object for the affections of Deity. Where, then, could such an object be discovered. The German poet, Schiller, rose to the occasion. He took to heart the problem of the lonely Deity. He couldn't see how the moral qualities of Deity could find anything to call them forth into exercise in a universe where no other intelligence existed. Accordingly the poet solved the difficulty in the following way. He said:—

Friendless was the mighty Lord of worlds,
Felt defect—therefore created spirits.

The poet speaks of God as friendless. By the startling expression he intended that the solitude of Deity is a defect; that until the defect was remedied, there was no object God could love.....Now, in all these expressions there is undoubtedly a large element of truth. It is certainly true that the life of Deity cannot be a self-centred life. It is not in self-keeping, but in self-giving that the ideal of moral existence consists. This theory that man was created to supply the defects in Deity is quite natural to those who regard God as one Person, and so are impressed by the thought of his unrelieved solitude.

Such is Dr. Sparrow-Simpson's theory of the Motive of Creation, with which we have been familiar for many years. It came into general recognition after the orthodox and old commentary of the creation story in the Book of Genesis had been discredited by the majority of theological teachers. With the hours and days of that interesting document went even time itself, and the theologians went on weaving theories after theories as to how the Deity loved and worked in the eternity which preceded time. For a long time only two were in existence, God the Father and God the Holy Ghost. Somehow the two became three, though no act of birth occurred, and the third was described as a Son, but with neither father nor mother. The three held frequent councils at which not a few relations were passed, out of which came the earth and heavenly bodies, the human race and innumerable animal races of all kinds. According to the Divine Council the human race got into disgrace and the plan of restoration was disclosed, in the working out of which the Incarnation and the atoning death on Calvary took place. All this finds expression in the first part of Dr. Sparrow-Simpson's impressive sermon; and it is really the teaching of the whole Church.

At this point it is essential that we should realize that the God so familiarly spoken of in this discourse is a purely imaginary being, and that the various kinds of works herein ascribed to him are of necessity equally fictitious in their character. Dr. Sparrow-Simpson undertakes to inform us what the Deity said and did, and what they planned to do when time was introduced, though he omits to mention the authority on whom or which he speaks. His only authority is that of the Church, which in fact is no authority at all, because the Church can quote from no one who was present and heard and witnessed all recorded here. It is not the intellect or reason that is at work here, but sheer imagination. It is simply as a novelist that Dr. Sparrow-Simpson speaks here, though this is not the kind of fiction that proves the most popular in our day. Having already heard so much about the loneliness of God in eternity, take the following passage:—

Thus, according to the Catholic religion there is no such thing as the loneliness of Deity. God is no solitary Person. The Father never was alone. Fatherhood does not merely mean God's relations to his creatures; it is incomparably deeper than that. It means that Fatherhood represents God's essential characteristic. He is the ideal of all

fatherhood, the everlasting, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and earth is named. I am constrained to say that this doctrine and this doctrine only of all that I have met, gives a perfect object of contemplation and love in Deity. There is such a thing as mutual love in heaven, a social life within the Deity.

Here, again, the preacher supplies us with more information about the Deity without the remotest reference to the source from which he drew it. It is simply given as being in full accord with the teaching of the Catholic religion.

Dr. Sparrow-Simpson is always interesting, even when dealing with the most obtruse and speculative subjects, but the charm of his style is at its best when it deals with the following point: "There remains an important question which it is quite natural to ask. If God lived in the perfect fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, finding therefore within his own essential being the joy and blessedness of social life and love, in itself altogether complete, so that no satisfaction could be needed beyond the glories of his own eternity, why did he determine to create? What need was there for any other being to exist beyond the perfections of Deity? Why add the imperfect and the transitory to the perfect and the eternal? The only answer that can be given is, because life is too glorious a possession not to be imparted."

Such is the teaching of the Catholic party concerning God in the Anglican Church. Our only objection to it is that it is not true. Our only comfort lies in the fact that God does not exist. The fact is that mankind does not need God for any purpose whatever, and that the belief in his existence and activity has done infinitely more harm than good. There is no evidence whatsoever that the Gospel Jesus was born on Christmas Day, or that he was ever born at all, and it was only a small and ignorant Church which called him the Second Person in the blessed Trinity clothed in human flesh.

J. T. LLOYD.

A Christmas Cracker for Christians.

Christianity has never lost the instinct of universal dominion.—*Bible Society Report.*

The only hope for the future of society lies in the absolute extermination of Christianity.—*G. W. Foote.*

Of all the superstitions of the world the Christian Religion is one of the gloomiest. Its most sacred symbol is that representing a dying man nailed to two pieces of wood. Its most earnest command to its disciples is that they must acknowledge themselves to be miserable sinners. If Christianity be true, the vast majority of the human race will suffer eternal torment in an alleged hereafter. It is a gospel for gravediggers, a creed for coffin-makers. Yet such is the power of environment that levity is occasionally associated with this lugubrious religion, and godliness and gluttony go hand-in-hand. Good Friday, which is supposed to be the day that their "god" was executed as a criminal, is associated with "hot cross buns," and Christmas Day, the alleged birthday of the same deity, is commemorated by a carousal of eating and drinking, particularly drinking.

God's birthday is the strangest of all festivals. A critic might ask why God, who is said to be eternal, should need a birthday at all. A cynic might even suggest that a three-headed deity should have three birthdays instead of one only, like a mere mortal.

But the paradox of paradoxes is not that the birthday of the Man of Sorrows should be the merriest festival of the year, but that a material religion such as Christianity should be founded upon a pure ghost story, the accuracy of which is vouched for by fifty thousand straight-faced priests in this country alone, and by countless thousands in other nations. Not only do these priests protest the truth of this particular ghost story, but millions of their followers support their pastors and masters in their truly extraordinary allegation. It is, therefore, fitting at this season of the year to recount the chief points of such a remarkable legend, because naughty Freethinkers say it is all bogey.

In the year nought B.C. or A.D. nought, a child with a ghost for its father is alleged to have been born in a stable at Bethlehem, in Judæa, a province of the Roman Empire. The infant was considered to be of such importance that a massacre of children was said to have been carried out in the hope of getting rid of the prodigy. So thorough and sensational was this wholesale murder that profane historians did not consider it worth notice. The subsequent life of this ghost's child is one long string of marvels, quite as extraordinary as the stories in the *Arabian Nights*, the favourite hunting-ground of the pantomime producer. The ghost's son is said to have restored blind persons to sight, and brought the dead to life. He is alleged to have fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, the fragments remaining being more than the original amount used. He is also alleged to have turned water into wine. At his death a three days' darkness is said to have overspread the earth, although no contemporary astronomer noticed the awful and distressing occurrence. After death he is said to have risen from the grave, and reappeared in ghostly form. Finally, he ascended into the sky like an aeroplane, and has never been seen since. For all that is known he may be "looping the loop," or "nose-diving" somewhere in space to-day. There has never been so astonishing a career. Yet, outside of what are known as the four Gospels, written no one knows when, no one knows by whom, there is no corroboration of this most popular of all ghost stories. So far as sober historians are concerned, "the rest is silence."

Nor is this all, for this particular ghost story is said to have happened in the month of December. It was not, however, in that month, even according to the ecclesiastical legends. For shepherds do not watch their flocks by night in that most unromantic time of the year. Why, then, are these truly wonderful events said to have happened on the twenty-fifth day of December? The answer plucks the heart out of the Christian superstition concerning Christmas.

The Christian Religion had its origin within the bounds of the Roman Empire, and it was in competition with the Roman Saturnalia that this particular ghost story was fixed in December. It was to counteract the attractions of these Pagan holidays that the artful priests of the Christian Churches sanctioned the merry associations they could not suppress. So many curious things were incorporated in the Christian festival. Not only Roman, but also Druidic features, were adopted. In the far-off centuries white-robed Druid priests cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their hymns to the frosty air. These features were absorbed, and the mistletoe and carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, part of the celebration of an important festival of the Christian Churches. Christmastide is a jumble of Paganism and Christianity, and has as many diverse ingredients as a Christmas pudding. Christian priests have always had a very keen instinct for proselytizing, and,

modestly, wished to overrun the earth. In the past the Church sought for adherents by increasing her festival days, and she crushed opposition by bribing the weak and murdering the strong. In the twentieth century she is still at the old game. She is cajoling apostates all over the non-Christian world by means of medical missionaries, and at home by instituting Pleasant Sunday Afternoons in the place of painful Sabbaths, and by hypocritically identifying herself with social measures which are likely to appeal to members of the working class.

Christians believe all this nonsense concerning Jesus because they have been taught to do so from infancy, and such widespread belief is at once a triumph for Priestcraft and a negation of Reason. Freethinkers and non-Christians regard Christ as a purely mythical personage, like all the other saviours and sun-gods of ancient mythology, who were generally born miraculously of virgin mothers, and whose careers, like that of Jesus, were one long string of marvels. Whether there ever was a man called Jesus, who lived in Galilee, is a matter of slight importance. Christians worship the supernatural figure in the Gospels, and not the Galilean carpenter, and have done so for many centuries.

The present celebration of "God's birthday" ought to make men and women think. After the world-war, and after years of industrial unrest, the protestations of priests concerning "Peace and goodwill" must sound curiously. The Christmas festival itself, with all its hypocritical professions and its legendary associations, is largely pretence and make-believe. Christmas, so far as the Christian Churches are concerned, is an organized hypocrisy, a festival of falsehood, a fitting celebration of an event that never happened. The legend upon which it is founded is inconsistent with ascertained knowledge, and even with common sense, and, sooner or later, it will have to be so regarded in spite of the tens of thousands of priests in this country. The festival itself existed before the Christian Religion, and it will survive it, but the social rejoicings at the birth of a new year will be shorn of the theological significance associated with an outworn superstition. Under present-day conditions the Christmastide rejoicings justify the grim comment of Thomas Carlyle: "On looking out of the window this morning I noticed my neighbours were more drunk than usual, and I remembered that it was the birthday of their Redeemer."

MIMNERMUS.

The Credulity of Faith.

[By a series of curious chances, and through no fault of either writer or editor, the publication of this article has been delayed several weeks beyond the date when it should have appeared.—EDITOR.]

THE Clergy, especially those ministering to the middle and working classes, often find themselves in a very awkward dilemma, calling for the exercise of much diplomacy, not to say guile. The older members of their congregations, who were trained in the Victorian belief in an inspired Bible, and an implicit belief in the miraculous stories contained in it; expect their pastor to endorse the faith that is in them.

On the other hand, the younger generation are not taking these antique fables for granted, like their grandfathers did, and demand that the truth shall be told. The Clergy, for the most part, try to conciliate both parties by dwelling upon the poetic and literary quality of the ancient tales, and discreetly avoid alluding to their unscientific character.

Under these distressing circumstances, the Clergy are always thankful when something occurs which seems to give support to some of the supernatural stories contained in the Bible. They clutch at it like a drowning man at a straw.

These reflections were caused by an article which appeared in *T.P.'s and Cassell's Weekly*, for November 6, 1926, entitled "Whale which swallowed a Man. Sailor's experience confirms the Story of Jonah." By the Rev. Desmond Morse-Boycott.

The Rev. gentleman states that he has "never adhered to an uncritical view of the Scriptures"—which reminds us of the Spiritualists, who invariably declare, that before conversion to Spiritualism, they had been particularly hard-shelled sceptics, and super-materialists. He even went so far as to say, of the story of Jonah and the Whale, "I felt the story rather doubtful." There's daring for you! Happily these infidel carpings of the carnal reason, have now been completely disposed of, and the Rev. Desmond Morse-Boycott implicitly believes that Jonah really resided for three days in the stomach of a whale.

Perhaps he would not go so far as that old lady, who declared that if the Bible had said that Jonah had swallowed the whale, she would have believed it; and he would most certainly reject, with indignation, the rationalistic suggestion, that "The Whale" was the sign of a public-house, from which the prophet was thrown out, after staying three days.

The instrument, under providence, of the Rev. gentleman's escape from the dark depths of infidelity, was a book, entitled *Sixty-three Years of Engineering*, by Sir Francis Fox (1925). In which is described the swallowing of a sailor by a whale and his ultimate rescue alive. The following is a summary of the story, as given by the Rev. Morse-Boycott, in *T.P.'s and Cassell's Weekly*, for November 6:—

In February, 1891, the whaling ship *Star of the East* was in the vicinity of the Falkland Islands when it encountered a large sperm whale. After the attack one of the seamen, named James Bartley, could not be found. The whale, however, had been killed, and attention was drawn from the tragedy of the man's death to the necessary work which had to be done with the body. They worked all day and part of the night removing the blubber.

Next morning they attached some tackle to the stomach, which was hoisted on to the deck. The sailors were startled by something in it which gave spasmodic signs of life, and presently disclosed James Bartley, doubled up and unconscious. He was revived, but remained for two weeks a raving lunatic. At the end of the third week he recovered.

While he was in the whale's body his flesh was bleached by gastric juice to a deadly whiteness and became like parchment. Bartley said that he lost consciousness, but would probably have lived in the whale's stomach until he starved, for he did not lack air. He remembered the sensation of being thrown out of the boat into the sea, and of slipping along a smooth passage that seemed to move and carry him forward. Then he realized he had more room. His hands touched yielding, slimy substance that shrank from his touch. The heat was terrible, but he could breathe. It seemed to open the pores of his skin and draw out his vitality. He became weak and sick. The next he remembered was being in the Captain's cabin.

His skin never recovered its natural colour, but his health was not affected. Whaling captains say that it frequently happens that men are swallowed by whales, although Bartley's experience is almost unique.

Thus, by the inscrutable dispensations of providence, is faith vindicated and the infidel put to

shame, he can now go and scrape himself with oyster shells and clothe himself in sackcloth and ashes, while the faithful go on their way rejoicing, feeling capable of swallowing the most incredible miracles, and, like Oliver Twist, asking for more.

But wait, there is another act yet. There are always officious, interfering 'people about, who can never leave well alone. It was so in this case, and the transgressor this time was not an infidel, or even a clergyman, but a full-blown Canon of the Church.

The article by the Rev. Morse-Boycott, attracted the attention of Mr. S. E. Akerman, the well-known publicist, and author of *Popular Fallacies*, who wrote the following letter which appeared in *T.P.'s Weekly* for November 27:—

WHALE WHICH SWALLOWED A MAN.

SIR,—In your issue of November 6 there is an article under the above heading, which makes one think of Spurgeon's saying, that "A lie gets half-way round the world before truth has got her boots on." I wish to refer to the story connected with the *Star of the East*. When reviewing *Sixty-three Years of Engineering*, by Sir Francis Fox, in the *Journal of the Society of Engineers* (October-December, 1925) I was greatly struck by the story of Bartley and the whale, but at the same time, from internal evidence, found the account lacking in many important details.

Consequently, a letter was published in *Notes and Queries* of January 2, 1926. This resulted in the following reply by Canon A. Lukyn Williams, which appears in *Notes and Queries* for January 16, 1926: A Whale Story: "In 1906 I investigated this and got as far as the then owners of the ship and the widow of its captain at the time that Bartley was supposed to be swallowed. As neither the owners nor the widow had ever heard of the incident, I think we may safely assume it was a *canard* pure and simple. See the *Epository Times* for August, 1906, and February, 1907."

There is no dispute about the cachalot whale having an enormous throat, well capable of passing a man; but that is not the principal point of the above whale story, which needs a still bigger throat to swallow it, so I hope that in the interest of truth and progress you will be good enough to publish this letter in your interesting weekly.—
A. S. AKERMAN.

Thus perishes this confirmation of the fable of Jonah's submarine excursion. This is a good example of the credulity of faith, eager to seize upon anything that tends to bolster up religion and accepting it without examination or criticism. This is exactly the way in which the Gospels were compiled, every rumour, every "they say" was accepted if it tended to edification, by the credulous and uncritical scribes who composed them.

If the Rev. Morse-Boycott had not been so anxious to accept this story, he would have asked himself a few questions about it first. For instance, what became of Bartley afterwards? For he must have lived—according to the tale—for some time afterwards, because it says: "His health was not permanently injured." How is it we hear no more about him? A man who had been through such an experience would have been interviewed by every newspaper reporter who could get at him, and, in America, by a good many who could not. All the showmen in the world would have been after him as an attraction. Think of the enormous audiences he could have commanded among the Fundamentalists of America as "The Modern Jonah." He need never have done another day's work in his life. Everybody would have wanted to see him and hear the story of his marvellous adventure. Yet we hear nothing more about him. Just as in the Gospel, at the crucifixion, the graves opened and many of the dead came forth and walked into the city. We hear

no more about them, whether they retired to their graves again, or whether they lived on and suffered another death.

As for Canon Lukyn Williams, it seems to us that this gentleman has mistaken his vocation. If he is going to examine the evidences for religion, in this fashion, what will become of the Church? Bombarded from without by the sceptics, and cannonaded from within by the Canons, how long is it going to stand?

Since writing the above, we have seen an article, contributed by the Rev. Desmond Morse-Boycott to the *Sunday Chronicle* (December 5, 1926), dealing with the case of the boy who was sent to a Reformatory School for four years, for the alleged offence of stealing pears. We quite agree that the sentence was monstrous, but the rev. gentleman adds, "For stealing fruit a child deserves a walloping, but not four years in a reformatory"! We can only remark that the rev. gentleman's ethics match well with his primitive beliefs, they both belong to the Middle Ages.

W. MANN.

Spiritualism and Clairvoyance Examined.

THE death of Harry Houdini first suggested this article. His death, one imagines, must be a joyful event in spiritualistic circles, as much of his life was spent in exposing the tricks of the mediums, and of the clairvoyants, who, now that he is safely dead, have claimed him as one of themselves. They would have us believe that the tricks for which he was famous were brought by self-dematerialization, though why, if that was the case, he should have spent a large portion of his life in combating exactly what they maintain he practised, they do not take the trouble to explain. Nor do they explain why his challenge to them to demonstrate their psychic powers under conditions that he would name was not accepted. The two chief spiritualists are, of course, Sir Oliver Lodge and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, both are men of whom one wishes to speak with respect, both have done good work in the past. Sir Conan Doyle exposed the oppression of the negroes in the Congo, and was indefatigable in his efforts to bring about the release of two wrongly convicted men, and in the first case was successful; but in his book on spiritualism he appears to me to have not sufficiently placed the evidence on which he bases his belief under scrutiny. He tells us that if it had not been for the war, he would probably have remained undecided, and it is this which at once makes one suspicious of the accuracy of his statements. It is natural that, though anxious to credit the possibility of being able to speak with the dead should easily be persuaded that they can do so, it is just this that makes them the dupes of the medium. The claims of Sir Conan Doyle that no scientific mind has given the subject its attention without being convinced is not borne by the fact, both Mr. Wells and Sir Ray Lankester have closely studied it without being made converts. In his first two books that deal with so-called psychic science, Sir Conan Doyle maintains a liberal mind, but in his *Wandering of a Spiritualist* a tendency is shown towards dogmatism. The supporters of the movement continually complain that their opponents will not give the subject an examination, but when challenged by the late Mr. Cook to a test they refused, though had the mediums really believed in their powers they must have been only too glad of a chance of proving them. The assertion of the spiritualists that the

miracles of the New Testament were wrought by physic powers is surely utterly absurd and not worthy of thought in days when such myths have ceased to be credited. Every medium has been exposed some time or other, the notorious Madame Blavatsky was proved a fraud only a little time after Sir William Crookes had pronounced himself confident of her authenticity, the same fate also overtook Madame Paladino, while Home, a man who treated his benefactor with gross ingratitude, was shown to be a scoundrel. We see, with regret, that in *The Land of Mist* Sir Conan Doyle stoops to a trick unworthy of him, a character in the story at first extremely sceptical is finally converted to belief. This is far too like the Catholic propagandist novels of the late Monseigneur Hugh Benson, and of Miss Isabel Clarke, what may be forgiven to a Catholic writer of propaganda is not expected from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In one of his works he very properly expresses a dislike of ritualism, yet in his story, *The Land Mist*, the attendants at a seance are represented as singing hymns at the commencement, and what is this but pure ritualism. If one great scientist may be duped, as in the case of Crookes, there is no reason to suppose that others are not as well. Both Darwin and Huxley attended seances and were left assured of fraudulence. Among the lesser lights of the movement are Mr. Vale Owen, Mr. Elliot O'Donnel, and Mr. Dennis Bradley.

Mr. Vale Owen belongs to the Anglo-Catholic or High Church party that pays the greatest attention to ceremony and all forms of superstitious rights. Mr. O'Donnel firmly believes in Witches, Wizards, Vampires, Werwolves and all those superstitions that people have agreed in regarding as fit only for the Dark Ages. Mr. Dennis Bradley is no one whit less amusing. In his two books, which rather affectedly he names *Towards the Stars* and *The Wisdom of the Gods*, he tells us that Mephistopheles in the form of materialism has been kicked by him into the rubbish heap, but to do this would require a bigger man than Mr. Bradley. The theatrical style in which these books are written makes one smile every now and again. It would be unjust to make illusion to Mr. Bradley of credulity when others of much greater capacity than himself have shown themselves equally credulous. He is a clever but shallow man who has not yet grasped the elements of scientific debate, and though no doubt well meaning enough, is something of a blusterer. While it is against the law clairvoyance is practised in the spiritualist churches, while in Vienna it has been found necessary to put down spiritualism by law owing to the great numbers of people it was sending to the asylums, might not the law in England take pattern by this example.

H. G. VAUGHAN PHILLIPS.

Savonarola.

BRING forth the paltry playthings of an hour;
And with the banner of the Cross unfurled—
Ev'n all the idols of a godless world
Consign to Vanity's consuming tower:
Thus spake the man of holy fame and dower;
The slaves obeyed, and all their treasures hurled,
Where seen the flames around their victims curled.
The Arts a bold Renaissance nursed to power
Were set at nought! But seen, with zeal o'erspent,
They found the Kingdom of the World at hand,
With stronger ties than those at Heaven's command;
And he who came to save—to ruin sent!
He sang to Folly his divinest note—
Expiring, with her hands upon his throat!

W. J. LAMB.

Acid Drops.

The Rev. H. E. Fosdick has the certificate of the *Christian World* for being "one of the most influential forces in the whole religious world." In the same issue in which this certificate is published, the *Christian World* publishes a sermon by Mr. Fosdick, so we are able to estimate his calibre, and incidentally, the calibre of the rest of the religious world. It appears that a man came to visit Mr. Fosdick, who made no bones about his lack of religion. "He said his trouble had battered his faith into wreckage, and he did not know whether there was a God or not, but if I had human sympathy perhaps I would give him help." Mr. Fosdick gave him help, and as he departed, the man said, "Love and kindness! Then there really is a God."

Now we do not care whether this story is true or not. Most preachers exercise an extraordinary licence in inventing this sort of thing and passing it off as real. But true or not, it is interesting to find that this tremendous force in the religious world finds it remarkable that a man who, because he has had trouble, should cease to believe in a God, and who directly he gets a little help from a fellow human being straightway believes in God again. One would have thought that any man of common-sense would have recognized that a man who drifted about in this way was of a peculiarly unstable kind, and that a mere expression of human kindness is hardly enough to prove to anyone of common-sense the existence of a God. Mr. Fosdick was not merely exhibiting the mental quality of his visitor, he was also exhibiting his own. And if the leaders of the religious world are made of this kind of stuff, what are we to expect from the rank and file? Is it any wonder that men of intelligence and education are fast leaving the Churches?

Where religion is concerned common-sense appears to take a holiday. Here is another sample. Dr. Rendell Harris is credited by the *Morning Post* with having said that he believes to have in his possession the Holy Grail, the actual cup from which Jesus Christ drank at the Last Supper. One would have expected at least an inscription on the cup to the effect that it was the actual cup, and to find it certified by the twelve disciples. But the evidence appears to be that the cup is considered by experts to be a Sidonian product of the first century, and that this kind of cup was used at convivial gatherings. So that, assuming the Jesus Christ of the New Testament to have existed, assuming there to have been a Last Supper, assuming a few other things, then we may also assume that Jesus drank, and if he did drink he must have drunk from something, and it might as well be this cup as any other. What more does anyone want in the shape of proof?

The most convincing feature of all is the Greek inscription which runs round the cup, "What are we here for? Be Merry." Now that seems strikingly appropriate. The Jesus of the Gospels is such a jolly fellow, that we can quite imagine him saying at that supper party, "Now, boys, be merry, drink up, and raise the roof while you are about it." We have all heard of the bottle containing some of the darkness that overspread Egypt, we shall not be surprised to find that someone will turn up soon with a slab of earth containing the serpentine tracks of the disciples as they went home from that Last Supper.

We are not surprised to find that the newspapers, in their haste for something sensational, quite misrepresented Dr. Rendell Harris, in making him claim that the cup in his possession was the one from which Jesus Christ drank. He only said that the cup used at the Last Supper was one of the same kind. That is more reasonable, and removes Dr. Harris from the ranks of religious lunatics. And, of course, if Jesus Christ lived, and had supper with the disciples, and if

he drank with them and exhorted them to be merry, like some jolly, old Father Christmas (although the character hardly fits him), then he must have used a cup of the period, and any cup of the period might be like the cup of the period that Dr. Harris has. It is all so comforting to the Christian mind, and provides such clear evidence of the truth of the Gospel. And when one reflects on these things one can quite understand how it is that Christians believe the wonderful stories in the New Testament.

Apparently the *Daily News* thinks that it is an extraordinary phenomenon that the Vicar of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields has given permission to a street hawker to display his wares on the steps of the Church, St. Martin's-in-the-Fields. And this is a round-about method of stating that a vicar may possibly have the same sentiments as an ordinary human being, but now that the Christie mystery has gone flat, copy may be scarce. When are the papers going to bring out Smyth-Piggot again?

Pastor Jeffries, whose escapades in the faith-healing line was responsible for driving certain people insane, boldly announces his determination to fight the devil to the end. In his own words, he defies "every devil from hell and his Satanic majesty himself." Bold man! Just when other Christians are beginning to agree that the devil does not exist, Pastor Jeffries challenges him to mortal, or immortal, combat. No time or place is named for the combat.

It is well known that Freethinkers do not get value for their money in respect of rates paid for the upkeep of prisons. According to statistics there is an extremely small percentage of prisoners who have no religious belief, in spite of the awful effects of infidelity predicted by parsons. To celebrate the jolly season of Christmas, prisoners in Maidstone Gaol are to compete in an essay competition on the subject of the Life of Christ. And we presume that, whatever the results, the naughty boys of society know as much about the subject as those who make it their stock-in-trade.

An announcement that the London Hospital has been forced to economize—that healing is costly, will come as a strange criticism in comparison with the huge sums of money spent to keep Christianity in evidence. We are forced to the conclusion that there is something wrong with the nation's mentality that can agree to spend more money on a superstition than on a bad leg.

In reference to a report issued by the Imperial Conference, a pious journal tells the world that if the report is adopted the Empire will have a seven-fold monarchy: The King will be ruler of each self-governing dominion separately, the whole bound together by a common allegiance to the Throne. This seven-fold business reminds one of the three-fold business of the Christian Deity, and is just about as comprehensible. After a few more remarks the journal closes with: "God save the King—and the Kingdom!" Will the result of the reports being put into practice be so bad as this pious wish seems to imply?

An attempt is shortly to be made to improve the culture of the people of Japan. A translation of a book dealing with the trials of such English worthies as Dr. Crippen, Bywaters, Mrs. Thompson, and Dr. Pritchard, is being prepared for Japanese enlightenment. One supposes that a demand for the translation is anticipated, and possibly with good reason. Christian Japanese having been made familiar with the blood-thirsty exploits of Bible heroes, will no doubt be anxious to read about the stirring achievements of more modern heroes of the same type. In that case, the publishers will be well repaid for their trouble.

The Rev. Arthur C. Adams, in a South African paper, *Unsteteli Wa Bantu*, has a page on the "Theology of

the Old American Slave Songs." The article is interlarded with the old negro emotional songs, full of sound and nonsense. On another page there is a letter from a correspondent who criticizes the Native Land Act of 1913, and mentioning that the native is a living entity. From which, one may gather, that a little more justice and less theology, if not settling native problems, would help to bring about better conditions for all who have no other home but the earth.

Some of the clergy at Irvington, New Jersey, recently invoked one of the old "Blue laws" in order to close some cinemas on Sundays. But what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, and a retort has been made by securing a summons against about 100 persons, all of whom were willing to be summoned, for infraction of other Sunday laws. The writs were issued against taxi-men, shopkeepers, tram drivers and omnibus drivers and others. Wherever anyone rendered a service for money or appeared to be working his arrest was ordered. The victims were all willing, and at the gaol the "criminals" were released upon furnishing a two-dollar bond. Then the Counsel, who is conducting the protest, swore out warrants against the leaders of the raid, and also for the policemen who arrested the law breakers. Under these laws it would seem that breathing, if it were what novelists call "laboured," might become the subject matter of a charge.

This is one of the things that shows, as clearly as anything, the change that has come over religion. Here we have a series of laws which were once the expression of a profound sense of the importance of religion to the community, now so ridiculous that only a few can treat them seriously. One wonders how long it will be before all religious doctrines will appear equally ridiculous to sensible men and women?

There are 4,500 clergymen less in the Church of England than there were before the war. We seem to remember the khaki-wearing Bishop of London declaring that the war had decided many young men to enter the Church when the war was over. Evidently something has happened to them. Or perhaps it is that the Bishop thought that by saying as much simple-minded folk might adopt the suggestion.

It is a favourite plea that men do not join the Church because the salaries are not high enough, which is doubtless true of some of the posts, although it does not say much for the spiritual fervour of the possible applicants. But there appears to be difficulty in getting suitable men for even those posts where no reasonable fault can be found with the obtainable salaries. The official Year Book of the Church of England probably hits the nail on the head when it says that a number of men of "suitable character and antecedents," are now absorbed by other walks of life. That is probably true, and it illustrates what we have so often said, namely, that the real enemy the Church has to fight is civilization. If it could only get the world to forget all that it has learned during the past three centuries, the outlook for Christianity might be much brighter than it is.

In an address at Westminster, the Rev. W. H. Aldis, a missionary, spoke apprehensively of the Chinese outlook. He feared a victory of the Southern (or Red) party would create serious difficulties for the Western Powers. That is the rev. gentleman's oblique way of saying that a triumphant Southern party would put missionaries on the unemployed list. China, he declared, demanded our sympathy. Her great need was Christ. Well, if China's intellectual state is such as to need Christ, she most certainly deserves our sympathy. We fancy, however, that the reverend gentleman exaggerates. China hasn't fallen quite so low as he seems to think.

Those who read Missionary reports will be quite familiar with the statement that the "door is opened

for the Gospel" in India, in China, and elsewhere. It is one of the phrases with which the various Missionary societies encourage their subscribers to greater efforts. In the light of this statement it is interesting to note that the last report of the Church Missionary Society acknowledges an expenditure of £82,507 on China, it has 1,327 agents there, and the net result is that at the end of 1925 it had 237 less adherents than it had the year before. Unquestionably a door has been opened. And it is also evident that a door may let people out as well as let them in.

On Sunday last we listened to the sermon preached over the wireless by the Rev. Nightingale, Secretary of the Free Church Council. And once more we were left wondering how much of sheer dishonesty goes to the make-up of these sermons. There was, of course, all the sickening talk about love, and when we hear this phrase pouring out from the lips of a grown up man, we always feel inclined to swear. Men, real men, don't go about the world slobbering about love. If they do care for their fellows they show it in their lives, but don't spend their time mouthing about it. We should, in fact, like to lay it down as an almost unquestionable truth that no stronger condemnation of the clergy exists than their constant mouthing of the term love. Stronger and better men do not behave in that way.

But the thing that did strike us, and what we set out to say, was the use made of the New Testament story. This was told as though the preacher was dealing with an unquestionable series of historic facts. The miraculous birth of Jesus, his miracles, his resurrection, were all told as though they were quite natural events about which no conceivable doubt could exist. Yet Mr. Nightingale knows quite well there is very great doubt about the lot, he probably would question some of them himself, and yet when he mounts the pulpit, even the studio pulpit, out they come as though he had no doubt whatever about them. But we imagine that in ordinary matters Mr. Nightingale is about as honest as other people, and in connection with ordinary matters would recognize that what he is doing in connection with religion is thoroughly dishonest. We are aware that the apology for using the wireless studio as a preaching station is that so many elderly and sick people can hear a sermon who would otherwise be without it. But one ought to remind these Sunday evening Studio preachers that elderly and sick people are not of necessity in the last stages of senile decay.

Mr. T. P. O'Connor, in opening a Catholic bazaar, said that religion was a question of a man's own conscience, and no one had a right to interfere with it in the slightest degree. We fancy that all Mr. O'Connor meant by this is that no one has a right to interfere with Roman Catholics. We do not imagine for a moment that he meant Christians were not to interfere with the religious opinions of other people, for they have never done anything else. And we should be the last to blame for that. Our complaint is that they will not, if they can help it, give to others the same rights of interference that they demand themselves. The truth is, of course, that you cannot help interfering with the beliefs of other people. It is done every time a religious belief is controverted, or an opposite one stated. But there is no one like the Christian for crying out against being attacked, while all the time demanding the utmost licence to attack everyone else.

Mr. O'Connor said that he hoped to see the time when every Catholic school would be in the same position as the schools of other denominations. By that he meant a time when all would be equally supported out of the public purse. For our part we are hoping for a time when none of them will be on the rates, and when the State will confine itself to its legitimate sphere, and leave religion to be paid for by such as desire it. But that is an ideal of social justice which we do not anticipate will make a very strong appeal to the average Christian.

The "Freethinker" Endowment Trust.

PREVIOUSLY acknowledged, £725 6s. 2d. Miss M. Rogerson, £1; E. Bentley, 12s.; R. Crum, 10s.; E. Brotherton, 10s.; J. H. English, 2s. 6d.; J. Wearing (3rd sub.), 1s.; V. H. Smith (2nd sub.), 5s.; A. Heath, 5s.; W. S. C., 2s. 6d.; Rustic, 11s.; J. S. Buckle, £2 10s.; T. G. J., £2 2s.; George Royle, £2 2s.; O. W. Allan, 10s.; E. Egerton Stafford, £1.

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We have to acknowledge promises of further subscriptions from several of our Friends, for which we thank them.

Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the *Freethinker* Endowment Trust, and addressed to me at 61 Farringdon Street, E.C.4. Every contribution will be acknowledged week by week in the *Freethinker*.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

To Correspondents.

J. HIGGINS.—The editor of the *Belfast Telegraph* is quite safe in writing as he does about Foreign Missions. No one will be permitted to contradict him, the discovery of "Ibia's and China's throbbing interest in Jesus Christ" will make those on the spot smile. We are obliged for article.

A. HOLMES.—Your idea of testing the actions of God by ordinary standards of human decency is simply shocking. It is worse than blasphemy, since if everyone were to act on that plan God would have no followers left.

R. AHERTON.—We are not surprised that Canon Moule, after denying that he made the statement quoted in the *Freethinker*, remained silent when you forwarded him the newspaper account of his speech. He is not the only clergyman who, when found out in an untruth, thought it the wiser policy to remain silent. We do not suppose for a moment that his reputation will suffer among his brother clergy as a consequence. Thanks for cuttings.

H. S. TEMPLEMAN.—Thanks. We shall not be closing the special appeal on behalf of the Endowment Trust for another month or so.

ALFRED KIRBY.—The Secretary is sending you a form of membership. The minimum subscription to the N.S.S. is 2s. The balance we will put to the Endowment Trust.

D. LAMB.—MSS. received, but regret that we are unable to use the poem on Christmas, owing to space being already used.

A. B. MOSS.—As you will see, Mr. Lloyd is occupying his usual place in the paper this week. The paper is being sent to the addresses given.

S. MORRIS.—We may be writing again on the China question next week. It should strike any thoughtful person as curious that the preachers of so much goodness manage to get themselves so generally disliked.

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.

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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.

As we mentioned last week, the Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society is fixed for Wednesday, January 12, and we would again urge upon all who desire to attend to send for tickets as early as possible. There is only room for a limited number, and applications that are left too late run the risk of disappointment or inconvenience.

A very good report of Mr. Cohen's afternoon lecture at Weston-super-Mare appears in the local *Gazette*. The one or two mistakes are in no way intentional, the whole tone of the report being remarkably free from bias.

A new edition of *The Bible Handbook* is now in the press, and will be issued by the Secular Society, Limited, about the end of January. This work is a steady seller, and is of great use to Freethinkers when dealing with Christians. It is the most thorough work of its kind, and at the price, 2s. 6d., cloth, is not what would be called a commercial proposition. But the object of publishing it is propaganda, not profit, and we are glad to know that wherever it goes it does its work.

We have had the remaining stock of *The Parson and the Atheist*, the discussion between Mr. Cohen and the Rev. Dr. Lyttleton, bound up, and in order to clear it is being sold at 6d., postage extra. Considering that the discussion runs into over 140 pages of type, and that it ranges over most of the subjects in dispute between Christians and Freethinkers, the price is one that should tempt those who wish to do a little propaganda to invest in extra copies. The original price was 1s. 6d., and a very large edition was printed. We hope to make rapid clearance of the remaining copies.

We are always obliged to those of our readers who send us newspaper cuttings which they think may prove interesting. But, unfortunately, some of these good friends omit to write the name and date of the paper, from which the cutting is taken, and thus make them unusable. We hope they will attend to this necessary item in the future.

Thomas E. Brown.

It is seldom I read literature in a state of creed-consciousness. I cannot distinguish between the innate beauty of a line like, "At lovers' lies Jove laughs," and "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." The first quotation suggests a happy toleration of man's proneness to make a good impression on his lady friends, even at the cost of veracity. The second quotation might perhaps be improved on by punningly adding "*parting* is such sweet sorrow," or, as some may suggest, the Lord's pleasure is as nothing to the lady's delight in finding that her Lord "coughs up" cheerily. My object in introducing "Jove" and "The Lord" into my discourse is only to claim that Freethinkers are not prejudiced in their appreciation of literature merely because a happy idea wears a theological outer garment.

Unfortunately, the majority of Christians imagine that the introduction of their pet terminology automatically makes for poetry and sublimity. It is quite disgusting, in going through an "Anthology," edited by Christians (as most of them are), to see how obviously sense, rhythm, beauty, profundity and humour are sacrificed for the sake of dragging in an allusion to deity, immortality or revelation.

In the case of well-known poets one can ignore this nonsense, trusting that all intelligent readers will go to the fountain and not imbibe only bottled

samples. There are many minor poets, however, possessing some measure of Olympian inspiration, whose works are never read because all the known anthologies choose inadequate lines to represent their genius. That is where a theological bias hits both poet and reader.

Thomas E. Brown, the Manx poet, author of the inimitable *Foc'sle Yarns*, is "represented" in most of the anthologies by the ridiculous lines:

Not God! in gardens? when the eve is cool?
Nay, but I have a sign;
'Tis very sure God walks in mine.

A hundred other of his lines, even religious lines, for Brown was pious, are more poetic and finer in every sense. He wrote the daring *Catharine Kinrade* ballad, telling how the "light o' love" woman, drowned as a punishment for her immoral life, by Bishop Wilson, becomes in Heaven a saint whom the Bishop mistakes for the B.V. Mary herself.

Brown was the son of a parson, and was himself ordained in the Church of England, but never accepted clerical office. In later life he was offered a high position in the Church which he declined for very interesting reasons:

I seek no preferment anywhere. At some cost I have purchased my freedom, and will not lightly part with it. I must be free—free to do what I like, write what I like.....I need absolute freedom, freedom to go to church or not.....freedom to smoke a pipe in a public-house.....in short absolute freedom.

One cannot imagine his accepting an archdeaconry offered him in 1894, unless he had mightily changed from his earlier years, when he lectured in the very town (Douglas), where his father's Church (St. Matthew's) was situated. He chose for his subject the venerable and famous Old Kirk Braddan, a subject everybody regarded as far too sacred for jesting or frivolity. Young Brown was too full of his love of human beings, especially poor peasants, to think of anything except the amusing and entertaining ideas of a very primitive country folk. His audience enjoyed all he said and encouraged his "mimicry and buffoonery;" he is said to have treated the old Church as a school of comedy with his father as the central figure.

He became a schoolmaster, first in the Isle of Man, and later at Clifton College, where, after his retirement, he died in 1897, while lecturing to the students during one of his visits to the school where he had become famous.

W. E. Henley was one of his pupils, who has placed on record his impressions of the poet's personality.

Cynic, saint, salt, humourist, christian, poet,
.....Withal a brain stored with experience, letters,
fancy, art,
And scored with runes of human joy and pain.

In due course the world of letters came to appreciate the "far-glancing, luminous utterance.....his gift unparalleled of laughter and tears," but T. E. Brown seems farther off than ever from anything like popular favour. He is, to all intents and purposes, quite unknown outside the small circle of Henley's admirers, and the slightly larger group of Brown's enthusiastic readers in his own home-island, where the Manx peasant had a congenial friend in this unpuritanical teacher. He wrote one of the most strikingly heretical of poems, called "Sunset on Dartmoor," in which "Homo" addresses God, in terms of the bitterest satire. It is impossible to do justice by quotation, to what is an unanswerable indictment of deity, written with an almost savage wit, a perfectly pathetic appeal to an impossible non-human monster to cease his non-existent existence, his "senseless jargon" of unintelligible

"messages" in the skies, and to learn that man is no longer interested in old theologies and creeds. It would be interesting to know the state of mind our poet was in when he wrote this exceedingly sane, wise and convincing *Homo Loquitur*. All we know is that he suppressed it—or perhaps his publishers did so. It never appeared during his life-time, but, fortunately, is given not only in his Complete Works, but in the admirable *Golden Treasury* "selections," which contains the gems of his genius.

Thomas E. Brown wrote an "Answer" to his own heresies. Naturally no publisher objected to a defence of deity—even by a poet, consequently we had the amazing spectacle of God answering T. E. Brown, without the reader having any clue to what on earth God was talking about—not perhaps an unprecedented or even unusual phenomenon.

The "Reply" itself is quite a good specimen of Brown's work at its best—it certainly is poetry, and it contains some admirable lines and fine ideas. The "defence" of the deity turns out to be a very two-sided affair, not at all likely to commend itself to the orthodox. Brown seems to have used a notion, not original or new even then, but "introduced" since Brown's day, by writers claiming to have "invented" the same plea for deity. God simply pleads incapacity and limitation as his excuse and explanation if not his justification. God simply cannot—that is the whole story, stripped of its poetic beauty of expression and robbed of its charming irrelevancies. "But I," says Brown's deity,

Who have not sat
Since first into the void I swam,
Obeying Mine Own laws
Persist, because
I am but what I am:
I am old and blind,
I have no speech
Wherewith to reach
Your quick-discerning ears,
And yet I mark your tears

Very beautiful, one is bound to admit, but the logic of it contrasts strikingly with the original "Homo Loquitur":—

.....Is it ironical, a fool enigma
This sunset show?
The round earth rolls,
I cannot hear it hum—
The stars are dumb—
The voices of the world are in my ear,
A sensuous murmuring. Nothing speaks
But man, my fellow—him I hear
And understand; but beasts and birds,
And winds and waves are destitute of words.

But neither religion, nor satire, nor plain, homely wit can make a poet. T. E. Brown was a humanist with the gift of expression. He loved mankind, especially ordinary people, and he could tell his love in words which could not be improved upon. He had all Wordsworth's delight in simplicity. He did not, like the wrong-headed poet of his lines, often

Strut and strain the cogs
Of the machine, he blushes
To call his Muse, and maunder.

Brown could perpetrate his screaming-farce-jest descriptive of a "Good Friday Sermon," giving words from the pulpit, interspersed with some choice examples of the mental receptiveness of the student-listener. "Dry Bones, Dry Bones," is the poet's conclusion: a pretty apt summary of most Good Friday and other sermons.

He could also express an idea which has often found utterance but never more happily:—

Moreover all the things that men have done,
The things that men have said,
Have made another light beneath the sun,
Another darkness shed.

Perhaps he, more fully than most poets, realized that love is something different from sexuality, and he put into the lips of one of his peasant women:

"But George," I said, "isn't there no love.
That's greater than that, that's risin' above
The lek o' that—why can't there be
No love without wooin' and all that spree?
Couldn't ye love, and never make to her
No love nor nothing, nor never spake to her?
Couldn't ye look to her like a star
Up in the heavens quite reggilar?"

That is not Puritanism, it is merely a sign that we recognize that the love of our fellows is different from the sexual attraction which he, like all wise men knew to be natural and potent for human happiness. Brown's lack of Puritanism was strongly evidenced in his criticism of the apologetics for Hardy's *Tess*. "The heroine," he said, "was condemned under an arbitrary law not founded in nature, that is, the law of chastity is not founded in Nature."

We may wish with all our heart that Brown's religion did not so often intervene in his words, but the religious terminology will last ages longer than belief in religious creeds. We can at least echo Henley's hope that some day—

The great silence fallen upon his ways
Break into song, and he that had love have praise.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

The First Christmas.

CARLYLE must have been in dyspeptic mood when he looked out of his window, saw some drunken folk, and suddenly recollected that it was Christmas Day and they were celebrating the birthday of their Redeemer. To say the least, it was a caustic comment.

Children all enjoy Christmas, even when they grow up. There is a Peter Pan element in most of us, and we love to play at make-believe. Watch how paterfamilias likes to play with a toy-engine he bought for his boy.

For a day or two we like to think it is a time of peace on earth and goodwill toward men. We fill the children's stockings, tip the postman and dustman, tax our digestive apparatus, and submit in paying extravagant prices for goods we palm off on other people who would rather be without them. It is the only time the drapers can get rid of lugubrious ties.

Christmas presents and the choosing of them strike terror to our hearts. One has much sympathy for the man who bought a score of pairs of braces and presented them indiscriminately to male and female.

Milton is responsible for a good deal of the sentiment so lavishly displayed. He is to be blamed, too, for some of our notions concerning the Fall, the Conferences in the Garden, the Diplomacy of the Archangels, and the theological views of our first parents. We can forgive a poet a good deal, yet Milton strains our imagination in his picture of the First Christmas:—

No war, or battle sound
Was heard the world around:
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstain'd with hostile blood;
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

An admirable picture which almost makes us wish it were true. The sonorous roll of the last line is exquisite music.

St. Luke undoubtedly gives us the best account of events leading up to the birth of the wonderful child in the manger. Mark and John take too much for granted. They pass over some strange occurrences as if they were hardly worth recording. Matthew does better, but he contradicts Luke in several particulars, though he gives a touch of romance to manly incidents. He gives Joseph the preference as to the angel's visit. He relates Herod's bloodthirsty massacre and the flight into Egypt. St. Luke appears to have forgotten these, but even a doctor cannot be expected to know everything.

What with the celestial performance for the benefit of the astonished shepherds, the remarkable journey undertaken by three sages, under the guidance of a special star; the extraordinary appearance of Gabriel to Zacharias and either Joseph or Mary, the prophetic zeal of Anna and Simeon, who appeared to know all about it, the attitude of the Madonna is highly creditable. She was the only one who knew all the facts, but she was extremely modest. She certainly became enthusiastic at her meeting with her Cousin, but, as a rule, "she kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." She knew. Perhaps she remembered a similar tale told of the birth of Perseus, after Zens had visited Danaë in her prison, in the guise of a shower of gold.

We feel grateful that our Early Fathers settled the date of the birth of Jesus at Christmas. It took them a long time to do it, but it is well that births of this kind should fall into line. Let us have them all on one date and be done with it. There are at least seven; and two or three days after the sun has passed the shortest day, turned the corner, and has begun to arise with healing in his wings, is a suitable time for a God's birthday.

ALAN TYNDAL.

Christ's Fool.

To be a fool for Christ's sake is an exhilarating and altogether jolly business.—*Rev. Desmond Morse-Boycott.*

I AM a fool, an utter fool, O spread the news abroad,
Its such a jolly business being foolish for the Lord.
Some people praise intelligence, but that's all tommy rot,

Its more exhilarating far to be an idiot—
An idiot for Christ's sake, in a calling that's divine,
Is really stimulating to a man who's asinine.

I play the fool and thus I gain the public's cheap
applause,

So long as I am quite inane they will not boycott
Morse!

The nonsense that I wallow in some folk would
think abysmal,

But I enjoy it every bit—*this* Desmond is not dismal!
And though the stuff I put across is often quite
absurd,

I know my congregation, and I never get the bird.

Oh, I'm a fool, a silly fool, I never will deny it,
I only wish, dear brethren all, that you would also
try it:

Just try and be a fool like me, forsake all common
sense,

And be a silly ass for Christ—it really is immense.
And when the unbeliever with his questions comes
a-baiting,

Just look as stupid as you can, its so exhilarating.
I know my congregation, and the learned stuff would
bore 'em,

I keep my reputation, for I'm just *pons asinorum*.
And if some critic asks me why I make such folly
vocal,

I say "I'm doing it for Christ"—and wasn't he a
yokel?

Oh, I'm a fool, a giddy fool, just spread the news
abroad,

Its such a jolly business being foolish for the Lord.

VINCENT J. HANDS.

Myth or Man?

SINCE Mr. Robertson published his first edition of *Pagan Christs* in 1903, the theory of the mythical nature of the Gospel Jesus has been steadily working its way to the front, and to-day is quietly accepted by a very large number of thinking people. The recent translation of Dr. George Brande's *Jesus—A Myth* is one instance of the interest increasingly aroused in the subject, and of the large output of books and articles dealing with it.

It is more than a hundred years ago that the idea was first mooted by the Frenchmen, Dupuis and Volney, who showed that much of the Christ myth is of an astronomical nature. In early Victorian days the German scholar, Strauss, pointed out that much of the Gospel story was avowedly narrated "that the Scriptures might be fulfilled." Strauss himself believed that there was in it a narrow margin of historicity, but considered that it was for the most part a Messianic myth.

Later on, at the close of the last century, Gerald Massey worked at the astronomical (especially the zodiacal) aspect of the myth. A very good idea of his argument can be obtained from the little pamphlet (published by the Pioneer Press) containing the gist of it, entitled, *The Historical Jesus and Mythical Christ*.

The antiquity of the zodiac, together with its influence on the religions of the past, is a fruitful and enchanting study which will have a large share in the destruction of the belief in the historicity theory. Owing to the precession of the equinoxes, the sun enters the zodiacal constellations in turn at the spring equinox, completing the cycle in about 26,000 years. Massey showed that with each successive constellation the object of worship changed, although the preceding solar deity often retained his power side by side with his successor. Thus, when the sun, at the vernal equinox, entered the constellation of the Bull, the latter was the object of worship as well as sacrifice, as in Mithraism; and when the sun entered the Ram at the same season, the Ram or Lamb became divine. This took place in Mithraism as well as in Amun-worship and in Christianity. Some time before the Christian Era the sun's place was in the Fishes at the spring equinox, which explains why Jesus was called not only the divine Lamb but also Ichthys, the Fish; why fishermen were his apostles, and why the early Christians were called Pisciculi, or little fishes. In our own time the sun has passed into the Waterman, as the Arabs knew when they watched for El Mahdi, the Samaritans for their Messiah, and Theosophists for their new Christ.

Let us for a moment look back into the dim recesses of the ages before the era of the Bull. It seems probable that the sun seen at spring in the constellation of the Twins was propitiated with human sacrifices, and that reminiscences of the Great Brethren may be found in the two figures with torches occurring in the sculptures of Mithra sacrificing the Bull, and also, as J. Rendel Harris has pointed out, in the various pairs of saints worshipped in the Catholic Church. Further back still, traces of the Asses in the Crab are seen in the gospel legend of the entry into Jerusalem, while the Bee-hive in the same constellation is surely the swarm of bees and the honey found by the Hebrew sun-god Samson in the lion he had just killed, the latter signifying, of course, the constellation from which the sun had newly emerged. Probably, too, as Massey thinks likely, the Babylonian Oan or Oannes, the original Fish-man, dates from the previous cycle of precession, 26,000 years before Jesus, the Christian Ichthys or Fish.

The weighty contributions made to the subject by J. M. Robertson must now be considered. Robertson himself started by believing in an historical gospel Jesus, but found himself obliged to abandon that position. Besides developing the myth theory on the lines already indicated, he put forward two additional hypotheses, one that of a Pre-Christian Jesus-God (which was further expanded by the German Professors W. Benjamin Smith and Arthur Drews), and the other (characterized by Dr. Greenly in the new *Rationalist Annual*, as "a flash of penetrative genius") the theory that the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, Agony, Betrayal, Trial and Crucifixion were transcriptions of a mystery-drama evolved from a Palestinian rite of human sacrifice.

In connection with the first of these hypotheses—that of a Pre-Christian Jesus-God—Mr. Robertson justly refers to the tremendous strides made by the higher critics of the Old Testament owing to the surrender of the historical position. The Old Testament heroes are thus shewn to be ancient Hebrew deities euhemerised or brought down to a human status. One of these, the legendary hero Joshua (Greek Jesus), was probably, like Samson, an old Semitic Sun-God, whose worship lingered on in the land, and who was the object of a pre-Christian cult. This may help to explain the curious account in the Gospels of the Seventy mastering devils in the name of Jesus in a country where Jesus had never been, and also the equally strange discovery of Jesus worshippers by early Christian propagandists in places where Christianity had never been preached. It also throws light on the mysterious pre-Christian eucharist of the "Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" and on the Lamb-God Jesus of the pre-Christian Apocalypse.

This theory, however, Mr. Robertson acknowledges to be still conjectural, and the second hypothesis is perhaps his most valuable contribution to the solution of the problem. Bearing in mind the improbable and dramatic character of the Gospel story of the Last Supper, the Agony, the Betrayal, Trials and Crucifixion, as well as the Resurrection, he supposes it to be a transcription of a mystery-drama—a mystery-drama originating in the ghastly source of "a Palestinian rite of human sacrifice, in which the annual victim was 'Jesus the Son of the Father.'"

Remembering Frazer's guiding principle that the myth follows the ritual or cult and not the ritual the myth, Robertson points out that the Christian eucharist, the centre of the cult, tells nothing to the uninitiated of the awful process of its evolution, and that the Gospel story invented to account for it is a mere fable. Here it is with the race as with the individual. The latter, by the process known as rationalization, often makes futile attempts to explain the reason of actions which in reality have their roots in deeply buried instincts. But in the case of the race, the illuminating searchlight of scientific criticism, thrown on "the dark, backward and abysm of time," brings to light the appalling horrors which are the true sources of the chief Christian sacrament. In a passage of austere grandeur, Robertson voices what he justly terms "the dreadful truth":—

If to die as a human sacrifice for human beings be to deserve the highest human reverence, the true Christs of the world are to be numbered not by units, but by millions. Almost every land on the globe has during whole ages drunk their annually shed blood.....Thus has the human race paid in death for its faith in immortality.....Thus have nameless men and women done, many millions of times, what is credited to the fabulous Jesus of the Christian gospels; they have verily laid down their lives for the sin of many; and while the imaginary sacrifice has been made the pretext of a historic

religion during two thousand years, the real sacrifices are uncommemorated save as infinitesimals in the records of anthropology. Twenty literatures vociferously proclaim the myth, and rivers of tears have been shed at the recital of it, while the monstrous and inexpugnable truth draws at most a shudder from the student, when his conceptual knowledge becomes for him at moments a lightning-flash of concrete vision through the awful vista of the human past."¹

This it is which lifts the question of the historicity of Jesus out of the region of mere academic interest and invests it with a vital and far-reaching importance to mankind. For hitherto men and women have been wasting, and still are wasting, their most sacred and precious powers of devotion and sympathy on the sufferings of an imaginary Jesus, who, either as God or man, exists only in the minds of those who made him and the hearts of those who believe in him. But the realization of his true origin and nature will set free this mis-spent love and energy for the use and service of humanity, which will no longer be exploited by a myth of its own creating.

F. E. M. MACAULAY.

"Is Catholicism Natural or Supernatural?"

AN excellent audience, attentive and well-behaved, attended the debate on the above subject between Father Hugh Pope, O.P.D., Sc., and Mr. A. D. Howell-Smith, B.A., held on December 14, 1926, at the Working Men's Institute, Clerkenwell Road. The speakers were listened to with the greatest interest, and Mr. Le Maine, the chairman, and the organizer of the debate for the Non-Political Metropolitan Secular Society had, in consequence, quite an easy time.

It made an interesting study from the psychological point of view to hear and see the two disputants, both very much in earnest, both scholarly, both courteous, and both entirely unconvinced by each others arguments.

Mr. Howell-Smith, in his first speech, gave an eloquent, historical resumé of the rise of Christianity and its relationship with contemporary Paganism—showing how, if the one was purely a natural product, the other was equally so. He showed astonishing facility in quoting authorities from memory, and an ease and familiarity with Christian history as well as Buddhism, Babism and other religions, much to be envied. Father Pope did not trouble the audience with history—his endeavour was to show the Catholic Church was Truth, and Truth came from God. Just as the major part of the work of past scientists had to be discarded leaving a residue of truth, so the sins and crimes of Catholics could be put aside and what was left, the *permanence* of the Catholic Church, represented the Divine, the Supernatural, in other words, came from God. And granting his premises, Father Pope used the weapons of logic and analogies with great effect. His answer to history, to the faults and failures of Catholics, was that the Catholic Church lived through it all, was still a tremendous force in the world, still "was all things to all men"—that is, a religion for saints and sinners, for man wherever he was or whatever he was. This, in substance, formed his thesis, delivered quietly and effectively, and Father Pope obviously was certain he dealt, not with the Bible or authorities, but with *Reason*, the ultimate to which thinking man, of whatever creed, had finally to submit.

On these things, of course, much could be said from the Rationalist point of view which, unfortunately, time prevented. Perhaps the two gentlemen will meet again on some definite argument which can be thrashed out to a conclusion. In any case, the debate was excellent, most appreciated by the audience and all concerned in bringing it about, deserved the thanks that was so heartily voted for them.

H. CUTNER.

¹ *Pagan Christs*, Edition 1908, pp. 212, 13.

Correspondence.

SECULARISM AND FRENCH FREEMASONRY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It is a strange commentary on the activities of Secularism, but is, no doubt, largely an expression of the idea of Nationalism, that there should be no link between Secularist bodies in this country and Secularist bodies in France. France is pre-eminently the Freethought country, and is, in the practical expression of belief in Secularism, the most advanced country in the world. France, the country of Comte, Voltaire, Renan and Anatole France, was the first country in the world to disestablish the Church: the first country to sever its educational system from the teaching of the Church. To the Church, France is the "infidel, heretical France," the most irritating thorn in the flesh of His Holiness the Pope.

The question is often asked: How is it that France, a country with such a large peasant population, a population ignorant and directly under the strong, determinate influence of the Catholic priests, should yet manage to be so utterly different from, say, reactionary, Catholic, priest-ridden Spain? How is it that she should succeed in remaining a Freethought country and the greatest, most-feared enemy of the Catholic Church?

The answer is to be found in the influence of the activities of the intelligentsia of the French nation, grouped in what are known as "secret societies"—the French Freemasons. Take away from France the Grand Orient of Freemasons of France, and France would rapidly become a reactionary, Catholic, priest-ridden country, little better than Spain or Austria.

The definition of Freemasonry, according to the constitution of the Grand Orient of France, is as follows:

Freemasonry, an essentially philanthropical, philosophical, and progressive institution, has for its object the search for truth, the study of morality, and the practice of solidarity; it tends to develop the moral and material improvement, the social and intellectual perfection, of mankind.

Its principles are mutual tolerance, respect for others and for oneself, absolute liberty of conscience.

Considering metaphysical conceptions as belonging exclusively to the *individual* appreciations of its members, it abstains from any dogmatical affirmation.

Its motto is: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.

With regard to the relationship between English Freemasonry and French Freemasonry, what

now distinguishes the English Grand Lodges from the Masonic Powers which draw their inspiration from the traditions of the Grand Orient of France, is that the former make it an *OBLIGATION* to believe in a "Living God," whilst the latter, sincerely free from all intellectual constraint, admits this same creed as optional, for the same reason as it admits all the other conceptions of the individual conscience.

The English Grand Lodges proclaim the liberty of human conscience, and at the same time contradict themselves by proclaiming a prescribed dogma, the acceptance of which would compel Freethinkers to perpetrate painful acts of hypocrisy.

It is obvious, therefore, that no sincere Secularist can honestly become an English Freemason.

A close study of present-day France will reveal the militant activity defensively of the Freethinkers of France. The expression of her public opinion on the subject of the Embassy to the Vatican was an indication of the stand which France is taking. In common with other countries, France is to-day passing through a period of serious religious reaction. But the best thinkers of France fated with the militant attitude of the Church and its determination to win back France from the "infidel," are alive and determined to keep France safe for the humanitarian doctrine which is Secularism.

The writer pleads for a closer relationship between the Secularists of the two countries. The aims of the National Secular Society and of the Grand Orient of Freemasonry of France are identical. Let those members of the N.S.S. who believe that a militant policy is more necessary to-day than ever it was enquire whether

in organizing such a policy they cannot find magnificent support amongst the adherents of French Freemasonry.

ALPHA.

[There is a Lodge of the Grand Orient in London, the Secretary of which is F. L. Monnaie, M.A., 87, Ashbourne Avenue, Mitcham, Surrey.—EDITOR.]

THE ALLEGED DESIRE FOR IMMORTALITY.

SIR,—I wonder if you will allow me to say—as one who has read the *Freethinker* for more than forty years—and admired its two Editors, or is it three Editors, when Mr. Foote was in prison Dr. Aveling took charge—that I still retain the desire for some form of immortality. Every shred of fear has vanished from me, except some fear of the present life, with all its uncertainties. But I find my mind hungering for more knowledge than the present life affords me to gather. Why has nature given some of us this desire to know her vast secrets and wonders—only to disappoint us and smother us in death? I should be very glad to wake up on the other side, and find that my reasoning here was wrong. Nature seems to me to be a mischievous jade to have planted Eternity in our minds—and then to kill us.

Like W. G. Forster who wrote to Harriett Martineau: "I sometimes feel that I would rather 'be damned than annihilated.'" Fancy exploring the milky way—free from the trammels and limitations of the body, of meeting old societies, of listening to the talk of dear, old Bradlaugh, of meeting again Chapman Cohen, J. M. Robertson, and Moses, and Jesus, and laughing at mistakes here, and knowing old Shakespeare and Queen Elizabeth and Bishop Laud, and the whole circle of saints and sinners, and poets and thinkers that have blessed and cursed the world. I don't feel superstitious, but I would even like to meet the old Devil, especially if he has reformed.

T. S. WILLIAMS.

AS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACHES.

SIR,—Mr. Desmond Morse-Boycott may be merely a fault-finding humorist, or he may be under a misapprehension. So far as I can remember, Freethinkers have never denied that, "as the Catholic Church teaches," there was a Jesus who is the Son of God; for those who are Egyptologists have learnt that 3,000 years ago he was known as Horus, the Redeemer of Mankind, Son of God the Father, then named Osiris, and of the Immaculate Virgin Mother, then named Isis; the Holy Trinity of that period being—Osiris, Horus and Ra. Possibly, intelligent persons may be sceptical upon one point; they may suspect that many Catholic teachers have taught, "tongue-in-cheek," the things in which they, themselves, were too well-educated to believe.

E. G. ELIOT.

KARL MARX AND JESUS CHRIST.

SIR,—As a new reader of your interesting and enlightening journal, the *Freethinker*, may I give expression in your columns to my disagreement with your gifted contribution in to-day's issue. The offending paragraph is the concluding portion of an article, entitled, "Some Reminiscences," by Mr. J. Bryce.

"No wonder that with two such blind guides as Jesus Christ and Karl Marx, the miners should have been led into a ditch," etc. Without desiring for the present to go into the merits or demerits of the recent coal-stoppage, or by whatever other name Mr. Bryce would prefer to call it, may I ask to be enlightened by Mr. Bryce how he finds it relevant to introduce the figure of Karl Marx as a blind guide? If Karl Marx the man, and his works on *Capitalist Economy* are part of Mr. Bryce's universal reminiscences, I apologize off-hand. But otherwise, I fail to see the relevancy of coupling the figure of Karl Marx with the mythical Jesus, as the blind guides of the miners, and directly or indirectly spelling their ultimate defeat.

In view of the new universally known epithet of which Karl Marx was the author, *Religion is the Opium of the People*, what, I wonder, was in Mr. Bryce's mind to couple two such figures?

To meet Mr. Bryce's query as to why Labour leaders are either religious humbugs or political cranks, I would counter query: "Why do Freethinkers show such a ready tendency to dub as cranks anyone differing

from them politically? Surely it is not a case of "all the papers say so"?

Freethinkers would be of more service to the cause of emancipation if they sought to concentratedly reiterate the fallacy of the Jesus myth, and *that* figure as a guide; and not introduce any gratuitously controversial factors. It is abortive, and, in my estimation, it is an unconscious manifestation of ill-suppressed bias.

J. L. GARRICKSON.

Glasgow Secular Society.

On Monday, December 13, Mr. James W. MacLean ("A. G. Nostic"), an honorary member of the Glasgow Branch, lectured to the Glasgow Ethical Society. The title of his address was "From Plymouth Brethrenism to Rationalism." The lecture was followed by discussion. There was much opposition; but seed sown in this fallow will flourish. On Sunday last, Mr. E. Hale, the President of the Glasgow Branch, lectured on the topical subject, "Christmas B.C." Mr. Hale lucidly explained a difficult and intricate subject, and perhaps few realized the lecturer's achievement in making the obtruse seem elementary and complications simple. Mr. Hale was evidently regarded as an encyclopædia of curious and out-of-the-way knowledge, for he was invited at question time to explain subjects such as, "Why is holly used at Christmastime?" and "How does Santa Claus come to be mixed up with Christmas?" On Sunday, December 26, the Glasgow Branch will hold an open discussion night on the question of Prohibition. Mr. Fred Mann will lead off by stating the case against Prohibition.

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.

- NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—No meeting.
- SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—No meeting.
- SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY.—No meeting.

OUTDOOR.

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Clapham Common): 11.30, a Lecture.

THE NON-POLITICAL METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Hyde Park): 11.30 and 3. Speakers—Messrs. Botting, Hart, and Piper.

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY, Branch of the N.S.S. (No. 2 Room, City Hall, "A" Door, Albion Street): 6.30. Mr. Fred Mann will lead in a discussion on Prohibition. Silver Collection.

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