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Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums,
Letters to the Editor, etc.

Views and Opinions.

Spiritualism.

It was said last week, in the "Acid Drops" columns of this paper, that the *Daily News* articles on Spiritualism appeared likely to leave the subject where it found it. Up to the time of writing these notes, nothing has occurred to alter that judgment. One set of writers declare they have had communications with the dead, the other set declare that it is all imposture, and there the matter ends. Both sets are agreed upon one point, and that point is hopelessly wrong. And the Editor of the *Daily News* adds a third to this agreement. It has not dawned upon the disputants that Spiritualism might be altogether wrong, and yet the hypothesis of fraud be inadequate. It is common ground that there is an unusually large amount of fraud connected with Spiritualism. That may, however, be due to the fact that this particular form of primitive superstition is not endowed and legally established, and they who wish to live by it must get their living as they best can. If we can imagine the practice of prayer in the same position as Spiritualism, there might easily be as much fraud connected with that. We should have experts instructing people how to pray, and we should have alleged answers to prayer produced in verification of the utility of the practice. But prayer is part of the established religious ritual of the country, and those who live by it, and certainly tell many lies to encourage folk to keep at it, are not so open to the charge of direct fraudulent practice.

This policy of making the case against Spiritualism rest entirely upon fraud is the more regrettable, since it plays directly into the hands of Spiritualists. It is easy enough to detect "mediums" shamming the trance state, or "faking" written messages from the spirits. This has been done many times. But I do not know how that is going to affect the belief in the genuineness of either when the person himself does actually go into a "trance" or himself writes things without being in the least conscious of what he is

writing. To tell him that other people are frauds, simply cannot convince him that he is himself a fraud. And when, ignorant of the real nature of his experiences, he is told that either these things are the work of disembodied spirits or of swindlers, he is left with no other alternative than to adopt the hypothesis of spirits. That is why I have said over and over again that Spiritualists have no greater helpers than those who insist upon "fraud or spirits." On that issue the Spiritualist wins all along the line. On that question the Spiritualist is always ready to join issue. What he fights very shy of is another, and a scientific form of criticism.

* * *

What is Evidence?

Look at the *Daily News* notion of getting evidence for or against Spiritualism! Nothing could be more irrational than the plan adopted. Let us suppose that one wanted to get evidence for and against Einstein's theory. The first thing would be to get persons who were qualified to express an opinion about it. One would never dream of going to a bricklayer for an opinion on music, or to a musician on the best method of laying bricks. But in the case of Spiritualism anyone and everyone seems, in the opinion of the Editor, to be qualified to express a judgment. All sorts of people—novelists, lawyers, journalists—are asked to discuss Spiritualism, as though the subject involved no more knowledge than hearing evidence as to the kind of weather experienced last Sunday week. Mr. Blatchford is asked, because he says he had a communication from his dead wife. His qualifications are well indicated to a mental pathologist by his explanation that trances mostly take place in the dark because a trance "is a form of sleep," and people go to sleep easiest in the dark. On which I may assure Mr. Blatchford, as will any competent medical man, that a "trance" is not a form of sleep, and there is no need for it to take place in the dark. Those cases of "trance mediumships"—in other words, of dissociation—that come under the care of a competent medical man, do not take place in the dark. A lawyer, Mr. E. P. Hewitt, is invited to give an opinion because the editor apparently thinks that it is just a question of weighing evidence—whether the stories told contradict one another or not. The value of Mr. Hewitt's endorsement of Spiritualism is seen when he says that his experience has been "mainly in connexion with automatic writing." The wonders of that appear to him quite conclusive. Mr. Hewitt's opinion on law may be worthy of the greatest respect. But his opinions on Spiritualism are not worth the paper they are written on, because they clearly indicate an entire ignorance of what he is dealing with. He may be surprised to learn that automatic writing and writing things that are not within the conscious memory of the writer, are daily occurrences, and

have no more connexion with spirits than the swishing of a cow's tail has to do with the motions of the planets. He was greatly impressed by a "medium" who wrote Greek. On that one would merely ask him, first, how does he know the medium knew no Greek, and secondly, what does he make of a case such as the famous one cited by Abercrombie, where an ignorant serving woman was found in delirium repeating passages in Hebrew? I hasten to add that there was no suggestion that spirits were controlling the woman. The explanation, a quite adequate one, was of a much simpler nature.

So the game goes on, and it is this kind of thing which the *Daily News* calls an examination of Spiritualism. Except for the use of the name, the real issue is never raised. I think I could, any competent pathologist and psychologist between them could, name the formation of a committee that might express a really authoritative judgment on the subject. But that kind of a Committee is never formed, and the proper kind of evidence is never heard. It is not to be wondered that while the subject is discussed on lines of "fraud or spirits," so many honest but ignorant men and women plump for the spirits.

* * *

How Some Folk are Converted.

Mr. Robert Blatchford wrote the opening article of the series, and his article is either very artful or very ingenuous. After being for some years loud in his affirmation of the truth of Spiritualism, he now professes to have doubts about it. First he believes, then he asks for proof. Excellent! But Mr. Blatchford's story of his conversion throws much light on the degree of critical intelligence brought to bear on Spiritualism by those who believe in it. Up to the time he lost his wife he was "a convinced Materialist" (one wonders what was the quality of his Materialism): "But when my wife died I found I did not believe she was dead. I felt that somewhere she was still alive." Naturally, he then tried to find where she was. "I bought all the best Spiritualist books and studied them." This means that he just stuffed himself with necessarily inaccurate stories told for the purpose of proving the truth of Spiritualism. Thus equipped, he went to a medium. And after saying what he had said, he remarks:—

I went in a judicial spirit. I was prepared to weigh the evidence; but I did not expect to get any solid results.

I have probably read as much as Mr. Blatchford on Spiritualistic wonders, and I daresay seen as much. And I can assure him that his experience agrees with mine. I never knew a case of conversion where the convert expected to get solid results—although he usually went quite prepared for them. But Mr. Blatchford having got to the medium, received evidence that was "so startling, so overpowering, that at the end of ninety minutes I went away convinced that I had been in communication with my wife." And he adds that the evidence then received "is unshakable."

Every convert is not quite so candid as Mr. Blatchford. Disbelieving in a future life, the death of his wife convinced him that she was still alive. Believing that his wife was still somewhere, he went to a medium to find out if it was true. He went there in a judicial spirit, but made up his mind on the main fact before he went; he was prepared to weigh the evidence, having already decided as to its value; he did not expect to get any solid results, although he was convinced the results were there before he saw them. The evidence he then received was "overpowering," and is "unshakable," but he is now in doubt and begs the *Daily News* to help him find out if

the overpowering proof is good, and the unshakable evidence solid. And the *Daily News* nobly responds by asking the opinion of a number of men and women who, however able in their own departments, clearly are very ill-informed in this one. So the jumble of unreason runs on. And when Mr. Blatchford adds that having had a message from a certain "spirit," he put to himself the "judicial" question, whether it was a genuine spirit or only an impersonation—Mr. Blatchford's experience of spirits being so intimate, he was quite able to tell a real one when he saw it—the farrago of foolery seems about complete. I am really in doubt as to whether Mr. Blatchford is trying to pull the leg of the *Daily News*, or whether he is trying to exhibit to the world the kind of basis on which conviction of the truth of Spiritualism rests. And Mr. Hillaire Belloc is impressed by Mr. Blatchford's testimony because he is of "the greatest intellectual vigour"!

* * *

Fact and Fable.

All these wonderful stories of spirit communication, when stripped of their conscious and unconscious distortion, and even of fancies stated as facts of experience, and reduced to the proper proportions, are not perplexing to the disbeliever in Spiritualism who understands what is going on before him. What, to a Spiritualist, could be more convincing than the case of a lady who received communications, written through her own hand, concerning a man of whom she honestly avowed she knew nothing? The details extended to his name, where he lived, date of death, habits of life, and at a later date a vision was vouchsafed showing what he looked like. These details were subsequently verified. To a Spiritualist nothing could be more convincing. And yet the whole case—one of very many—was shown to have not the slightest connexion with spirit life. It is not really enough that one should go about in search of proof. It is essential that one should know what kind of evidence is required, and against what delusions one must be on one's guard. Of course, if one is merely on the look-out for ordinary trickery, then a gentleman like Mr. Maskelyne is very valuable. But if we are dealing with certain well-understood automatisms, or with cases of dissociation, then Mr. Maskelyne is worse than useless. And I am only stating facts well known to all students of abnormal and normal psychology in saying that "crystal gazing," "automatic writing," etc., are well known things that are subjects of daily experimentation, and have not the slightest bearing on or connexion with a future life. The literature on this subject is very large. There are magazines devoted to it. Yet Spiritualists do not seem to be aware of its existence, neither do many of those who criticize Spiritualism.

So with "trance mediumship." The phenomenon of people who manifest personalities different from their normal selves, who evidence change of voice, bearing, mental characteristics, who are tricky where normally straightforward, abusive where normally gentle, in other words, who manifest qualities such as make the judicial Mr. Blatchford, the legal Mr. Hewitt, and the ready-to-believe-anything Sir Arthur Conan Doyle hold up their hands in ecstatic wonderment, are things quite well known to modern science. The facts are there, the explanations are there, and they have as much connexion with the stupid and impossible Summerland of the Spiritualists, as a savage rain dance has to do with the procuring of a thunderstorm.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

(To be concluded.)

A Festival of Fudge.

"Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be more cakes and ale?"—*Shakespeare*.

"There is a great deal of false coin in circulation, and the cynic does good service by ringing it on his counter."
W. R. Inge.

ALMOST every child has heard of Santa Claus, but it would puzzle very many adults to give a really clear account of this legendary personage. For few people regard the ponderous "Lives of the Saints" as being, in any sense, light reading, and no other kind ranks among the "best sellers." Yet Santa Claus has been evolved from Saint Nicholas, who is alleged to be the patron saint of children, sailors, and thieves. Nicky is a shadowy person, very unlike George of Cappadocia, a rascally army contractor, who became, in good time, the emblem of chivalry, and the patron saint of England, almost as remarkable a transformation as that of the brigand of Abdulla to that of David the "author" of the "Psalms."

Santa Claus is almost the opposite to the saintly freakish creation from which he emerged in the process of time. For Santa Claus is a jolly figure, and the original saint is usually depicted by artists as being as solemn as a tired funeral horse. It is, however, the rubicund latter-day figure that children associate with the seasonable custom of hanging up their stockings for Christmas gifts. Scholars tell us that this custom comes, indirectly, from the legendary story of the saint's gifts to three poor maidens, who were unmarried for want of a dowry. Nicky, to befriend the girls, threw purses of gold through the window of their house. It is also said that the three golden balls, now the trade-mark of the pawnbroker (Everyman's uncle); and the coat of arms of the once great family of the Medici, had their common origin in the three golden purses of Nick.

Santa Claus is nowadays associated with Christmas, which is a time of jollity and merriment. Curiously, this is supposed to be the birthday of Jesus Christ, who is often referred to as the "Man of Sorrows." Here there is a distinct clash of sentiment, and the convivial features of Christmas Day have been noted frequently by critics to the discomfiture of the thousands of clergymen who find themselves hard pressed to explain this annual association of gluttony and godliness, legend and licence.

Indeed, the jolly figure of Santa Claus almost overshadows the gaunt figure of the Man of Sorrows. Yet it is alleged that Christmas is the birthday of an unfortunate god, who never seems to be able to have his own way. Not only is he elbowed out of his natal day festivities by a stout, saucy figure resembling old Sir John Falstaff, but naughty "intellectuals" ask a number of very pertinent questions. They say, for instance, that a deity, who is said to be eternal, ought not, strictly speaking, to have such a thing as a birthday at all. Critics also contend that, according to the New Testament, Jesus was not born in December.

God's birthday was fixed in December by Christian priests who saw the urgent necessity of fighting Pagan rituals. Like all human institutions, the Christian Churches and their feast-days have had to contend in open warfare for survival. The festivals of Pagan Rome were as numerous as plums in a pudding, and finally became a public nuisance. The Roman Emperors, especially the austere Marcus Aurelius, snuffed some of the feast-days out. It was to counteract the undoubted attractions which these Pagan holidays exercised over a light-hearted people that the artful leaders of the Christian Churches sanctioned and incorporated some of these feasts.

Thus it is that the figures of Santa Claus and the Man of Sorrows jostle one another at the annual Yule-

tide festival. The figure on the cross is an emblem of perpetual misery, yet his alleged birthday is associated with feasting and merriment. The thing seems incongruous, but social customs bend even great religions in their direction.

What we call Christmas, or Yuletide, is in reality a survival of the feast of Saturnalia, one of the chief Roman festivals. It will be recalled that the Christian religion is associated primarily with a celebrated province of the Roman Empire. This festal transformation took many generations to change its character, and the festival of Saturn, to finally emerge as the Merry birthday of the Man of Sorrows, thus making the five acts of a divine comedy.

The anniversary of Saturn and his wife was held in December, and during the five festal days general rejoicing took place. The schools were closed, no punishment was inflicted, the toga was replaced by simpler garments, distinctions of rank were laid aside, servants sat at table with their employers, and all classes exchanged gifts. All these things were appreciated by rich and poor alike, and the Christian Church had to face the music. The propensity of converts from Paganism to cling to custom, proved irresistible. If these apostates were to be retained in the then new religion, it became necessary to incorporate the old under the mask of the new, an old pastime of priests from time immemorial.

This struggle for survival makes fascinating reading. So many odd features have been incorporated in "God's birthday," which makes it of special interest to scholars. In the far-off centuries, white-robed Druid priests cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their old-world hymns to the frosty air. These Druidic features have been absorbed also, and the mistletoe and carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, part in what is alleged to be a purely Christian institution, founded to commemorate the birth of the founder of their Oriental religion.

The Christmas festival, it will be seen, is a jumble of odds and ends from various Pagan religions. From its purely secular side it is a welcome holiday relief from the routine of ordinary life, but the loud-mouthed professions made on its behalf by tens of thousands of priests is pretence and make-believe. As a holiday the festival has survived throughout the centuries, but as the alleged birthday of the third part of the Undivided Trinity of the Christian Religion, the thing is an organized hypocrisy, a celebration of an event that never happened.

MIMNERMUS.

About Ben Adhem and the Angel.

ABOU BEN ADHEM (may his tribe increase!)
Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,
An angel writing in a book of gold;
Exuding peace had made Ben Adhem bold:
And to the presence in the room he said,
"What writest thou?" The vision raised its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answered, "The names of those who love the Lord,"
"And mine is one!" said Abou. "Nay, not so";
Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,
But cheerily still; and said, "I pray thee, then,
Write me as one who loves his fellow-men."
The angel wrote and vanished. The next night
He came again, with a great wakening light
And shewed the names whom love of God had bless'd
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784-1859).

Change or Decay?

It is not often that we get a distinguished journalist giving a candid view of "where," he considers "the Bible stands to-day"; but, it sometimes happens. Thus, "Candidus," of the *Daily Sketch*, who writes brilliant articles on a variety of subjects, gave the readers of that journal his view on why the Bible is not read to-day by the rising generation, as it used to be by their forefathers, in reply to a pastoral letter by the Bishop of Southwark. In the first place, "Candidus" observes: "This is a critical and sceptical age, indisposed to accept any ideas unquestioningly. To hold, as many people still do, that the Bible is verbally inspired, is not to commend it to our own time, but rather to obstruct its message. For what is verbally inspired cannot be questioned or argued with; it must be accepted or rejected as it stands, and to accept anything without question is against the grain of this generation, and it has tended to take the other alternative and to reject it." The results, he considers, "are very serious." "Candidus," however, does not give the reasons why most of the highly educated among "the rising generation" unceremoniously reject much of the teachings of the Old Testament; but obviously the reasons are because they find that the teachings of "The Pentateuch" for example, and some of the other books of the Bible, are in direct opposition to those of modern science as taught in the schools and universities. They find, as a matter of fact, that the Bible is absolutely wrong in its science—that the early writers knew little about astronomy; less about geology, and nothing at all about biology from a scientific point of view. They find also that the Bible is not historically true, and that much of its morality is of a low order. This leads intelligent students to reject the teachings of these books; while others who do not read the Bible to-day as they formerly did, also reject it because, as they have been taught it in the schools, they consider its teachings are either out of date or in conflict with plain common sense. "Candidus" does not agree with the Bishop "that a nation which neglects its Bible must inevitably 'lose its sense of the supernatural and the ideals of life and conduct.'" On the contrary, he affirms: "The Bible is one, but *not the sole revelation of truth*, and as there were great and good peoples in the past that never read the Bible, so there may be again. It is not the sole way to the good life, and those who maintain that it is are making the same mistake as those who regard it as infallible on every subject that it touches." On this point "Candidus" certainly scores against the Bishop, and when he goes on to declare that "Even the moral tone of the Bible is not uniformly high, and that those who regard it as an encyclopædia of human knowledge are putting on it a strain that it was never intended to bear," he is only reaffirming the view that Freethinkers have put forward over and over again during the last half a century. However, it is something to find a distinguished journalist writing in a popular journal like the *Daily Sketch*, with a circulation running into hundreds of thousands daily, making such candid and bold statements respecting the so-called "Holy Bible." How then should we judge the Bible? "Candidus" says it is no more an "inspired production" than other good books. "It is, in fact," says "Candidus," "an anthology of the best Jewish literature in its classical days. Now the distinction of the Jew in history is that he regarded everything in life—politics, science, history, poetry, in terms of his religion. Just as the Greek in the classical period

judged everything by the standards of beauty, measure and proportion, so the Jew reduced everything to the terms of man's relation to his Maker. That is the distinction of the Old Testament in the literature of the world." Well, that is a view, in general terms, with which the Freethinker would not be disposed to quarrel very much; but it is one which the majority of Christians would reject without the slightest hesitation.

If the Bible is no more inspired than, say, the Talmud, the Koran, or any other religious book—why put it on a pedestal and call upon the people to worship it as a kind of fetish? If one religious belief is as good as another, may they not all be as worthless as one another, for the purpose of the salvation of mankind? And if one book alone contains the recipe by which mankind can be saved, what is to become of the countless millions who believe in the other books? "Candidus" puts the New Testament in a different category from that of the Old. And he gives this strange reason: "The New Testament," he says, "I regard in a different light, for it is not characteristically Jewish, and much of it is Greek in its inspiration and idiom."

But Christians have always claimed that the four Gospels were written by Jewish writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—and they are the main sources from which we get all that is known respecting the life, teachings, and character of Jesus. These Gospels, Freethinkers contend, are open to the same kind of objections as those of the books of the Old Testament.

Nobody can say, with any degree of certainty, when, where, or by whom they were written. As to whether Jesus was a part of the godhead; whether he claimed to be the King of the Jews; performed a number of miracles, and as a climax to a brief but chequered career, was crucified, and arose again from the dead; are points about which Christians themselves are entirely at loggerheads; on the other hand Freethinkers are prepared to reject these claims upon what seems to them to be sufficient evidence, and these things put the New Testament into the same category as the Old, from the evidential point of view. No doubt, however, "Candidus" reserves a few points so that he can still call himself a Christian.

"Candidus," however is quite right when he claims that if we desire the rising generation to judge the Old Testament, or indeed the whole of the Bible as a great literature, "it must be read as we would read any other literature, reverently, as indeed it is the decent frame of mind to all classics, but critically and with the freest exercise of your own judgment." And, clearly, it follows from this that if readers are unable to believe in the Christian scheme of salvation, or any of the doctrines, they must reject them as freely as they do any other proposition that does not commend itself to their unbiased judgment. All this is, no doubt, to the good. But there is one statement in the admirable article of "Candidus" with which I most emphatically disagree, and that is when he declares that "the English Bible, considered purely as literature, is the greatest book of all time." I deny that any one book, however brilliant, can be said to contain the "greatest literature of all time." Such a book should give at least all the latest deductions from modern science and philosophy, all the great truths of history, the best poetry, the finest romance, the noblest art—in short, everything of value that can be expressed in words—and these things are not to be found in any one book, but in all the best literature from every civilized nation in the world.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

A Heathen's Thoughts on Christianity.

(Continued from page 813.)

BIBLE PROPHECY.

GREAT importance is attached to the Bible as a book of prophecy. Future events, even down to this present day, are supposed to be foretold in it. What possible concern twentieth century England could be to people living some 3,000 years ago, or what ideas they could have had of it, passes comprehension. I have examined the "prophecies" supposed to apply to these latter days, and fail to see the application. They all relate to the time and period when they were uttered, as is quite obvious from the context. Some appear to have been fulfilled, since the trend of events was all in that direction, but a good many were not.

For example, Judah was to remain an independent state until "Shiloh" (supposed to be Christ) should come (Genesis xlix. 10), but it did not. The Israelites were to be led to a land flowing with milk and honey, that is, an exceedingly fertile country (Exodus iii. 7, 8), but Palestine was certainly not this. Israel was to be established in its own country for ever (2 Chron. ix. 8, and 2 Sam. vii. 1), but it was not. Damascus was to be destroyed (Isaiah xvii. 1), but is still flourishing. Egypt was to be laid utterly waste, desolate and uninhabited for forty years (Ezek. xxix. 2, 9, 10-14), but nothing of the kind has ever happened. Zedekiah was to die in peace (Jer. xxxiv. 4, 5), but the King of Babylon bound him in chains, carried him away, and held him in prison to the day of his death. Nebuchadnezzar was to capture Tyre and destroy it (Ezek. xxvi. 3, 4, and xxvii. 36), but he did not. These are a few instances, taken at hazard, of quite definite prophecies of immediate events which were falsified. They could be extended to the limits of this pamphlet.

All these things were written *after* the time of such events, and not by the persons said to have spoken them. They bear out what I have said about the fictional character of the supposed history, and also that its subsequent editors, whoever they were, did their work badly, or, as is more probable, they had no knowledge of the real history of those times.

As regards supposed prophecies of modern times, it is noticeable that only *after* an event is an isolated text sought out, detached from its context, and made to apply, often so absurdly as to make one speculate as to the sanity of those who so apply it. Thus I had a book given to me called *Creation*, published by the Bible Students' Association. Daniel xii. 4, is quoted as follows: "... even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." This is held to be a prophecy of the twentieth century, and of the impending end of the world. It is pointed out that people nowadays "run to and fro" "... at a rapid rate upon land or sea," by means of steamships, railways, motor-cars and aeroplanes, and there is a great increase of knowledge. It is to be regretted that this increase of knowledge does not appear to have affected these Bible Students in the least degree. Reading this and some other, similar, books, I am astounded at their colossal and invincible ignorance. In fact, they would seem to have been written by lunatics for lunatics!

The Bible contains 66 books, 1,189 chapters, 31,102 verses, and 773,746 words, relating to all kinds of events and affairs. To lift a verse, or part of a verse, from this collection, as is done, and then make it seem to apply in a more or less vague way to some present event is the easiest thing possible. It can be done with any other similar collection, such as the texts of the Buddhists or of the Hindus, or even the verses of Homer or the works of Shakespeare.

The most striking of all the unfulfilled prophecies is that attributed to Christ himself. He is represented in Matthew xxiv. and Luke xxi. as predicting the end of the world and his second coming. It is stated as clearly and as unmistakably as language can convey, that these events would occur in the lifetime of the generation then living. That the Apostles and disciples believed it literally and implicitly, is shown in 1 Thess. iv. 15-17, and elsewhere. If it does not refer to that generation, then language has no meaning. The surprising thing about it is that the subsequent compilers of the New Testament should have failed to see this, and have allowed these verses to stand, or that they were not expunged or altered later on by the Church. But it was not a critical age, and the early Christians undoubtedly believed in the imminence of the end of the world. Certainly the writers of those verses had no idea of any time so remote as twenty centuries to come, any more than we have.

Pope Gregory I took a very practical advantage of this superstition towards the year 600. He encouraged the belief then current that the end of the world would occur in that year, and persuaded credulous people to hand over their possessions into the care of the Church. When nothing happened, of course, the Church refused to disgorge! Thus the Papacy acquired some 1,800 square miles of land, and somewhere about £500,000. The same idea has been profitably "worked upon" at various times ever since, right down to this present moment when we are assured that there are "millions living who will never die." Nothing quite so ridiculous as this can be found in association with any Heathen religion. When the Christian approaches us, with portentous solemnity, on this subject, we are apt to regard him curiously, doubting whether he is altogether in his right mind!

THE STORY OF CHRIST.

We are told that the coming of Christ is prophesied in the Old Testament. Certainly, the Israelites looked, and are still looking, forward to the coming of the Messiah, or a great, "anointed" king and leader. He is to restore the glories of a kingdom about as historical as that of King Arthur, concerning whom a legend arose that *he* would return again. There is nothing peculiar about this Jewish idea. The Hindus have a legend about a mythical "golden age," and some time or other a hero will arise to restore it. The Buddhists believe that another Buddha, that it to say, an "enlightened teacher" will restore their religion should it fade from the minds of men. Almost every people entertain some similar idea. I read only recently that those queer folk, the "Christian Scientists," believe that Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of their cult, will return to earth shortly.

Before reading the story of the life of Christ, as set forth in the Gospels, I look up those alleged prophecies. But I find that they are all of the nature of the "prophecies" previously alluded to, selected verses detached from their context and plain meaning. When read in relation to their context they imply something entirely different. A leading example is that of Isaiah vii. 14: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." A Jewish friend, a Hebrew scholar, tells me that the word translated "virgin" really means "young woman." Incidentally, he said that he, and others, do not believe the Gospel story to be genuine history at all, or that any such events as are narrated in it ever occurred. He regards it as a fanciful romance; but, since Christians will have it otherwise, well—he shrugged his shoulders and left it at that! Jesus Christ was not called Immanuel, or Emmanuel. The only other place in the Bible where the name occurs is Matthew i. 23, quoted almost exactly from

Isaiah, but even Christian scholars admit this to be an interpolation into the ancient text.

Reading the narrative of Isaiah, I find that the event happened shortly after he had made the prophecy. Isaiah himself made it happen! But the woman called the child Mahershalal-hash-baz, and not Immanuel at all, and in connexion with him a further prophecy was made concerning Damascus and Samaria, to which Isaiah had previously referred. 'This child was to be a "sign," not for some 700 years later, but then and there, for King Ahaz! In any case, what sense would there have been in making such a prophecy at that time? Every single one of the alleged prophecies in the Old Testament concerning Christ can be taken up in exactly the same way, showing how the subsequent writers twisted the texts to this end, generally very clumsily.

It is said that Christ was descended from King David, and that this also was prophesied. Two genealogies are given, one in Matthew and the other in Luke, but they do not agree. The only two names that are alike in them are those of David and Joseph. One gives twenty-eight generations and the other forty-three. If one were to set up a claim, say, to a title or an estate on evidence such as this, it would be rejected by the court at first sight. Here again is an indication of the carelessness of the compilers (or forgers) of these documents, and it gives us some inkling as to why the Roman Catholic Church opposed the translation of the Bible and its circulation among the people at large. Many more such flagrant contradictions and discrepancies could be given from the New Testament had I the space for them.

But, we are told, Joseph was not the father of Jesus, and this does away altogether with the application of the genealogies. In order to get over this difficulty, it has been alleged that one of them relates to Mary, the mother of Jesus. This is a gratuitous assumption; the record says nothing of the kind, unless we are to assume that Joseph was in some way Mary's father, or uncle, or something! The whole of the circumstances related concerning the birth of Jesus, coupled with the virgin-birth story, stamps the whole narrative as fiction at the outset.

I go through the four gospels, and lay the book down surprised that so jejune a compilation could be made the basis of a great religion. There is nothing whatsoever original in it. It bears throughout all the signs of a not very well written fiction story. The specific teachings put into the mouth of Jesus, especially the ethics, were commonplaces in other religions long before his time. Though expressed in other phraseology, they amount to the same thing and inculcate the same lessons. The ethical system inculcated by Gotama the Buddha, some 500 years before Christ, is far superior, both as regards its comprehensiveness and the manner of its presentation. It is the same with the teachings of Confucius.

Assuming Jesus to have been a man who really lived, and not the hero of a sort of novel, as I believe actually is the case, he seems to have been a superstitious character, with a petulant and uncertain temper. His attitude towards his mother was not exactly that of filial affection and respect, and it certainly gives no authority for the eminence to which the Roman Church raised her in later centuries. When, on a certain occasion, he was hungry, he came to a fig-tree, but since "the time for figs was not yet," it naturally bore no fruit. Whereupon he cursed the tree, and it withered up. This sounds like the old god in the Garden of Eden, and if Jesus was his son he evidently inherited his temper, as is shown again in his assault on the money-changers in the temple. His denunciation and abuse of all those who did not accept him at his own valua-

tion, or agree with his views, disqualifies him from association with such great figures as the Buddha or Confucius.

Jesus believed in all the current superstitions of his age and time, that various diseases, particularly of a mental nature, were caused by "devils" entering into people, and that he had the power to cast them out. The story of the Gadarene swine is amusing. One can imagine the stampede of the unfortunate porkers when a number of devils went inside them and they all ran squealing over a cliff, the consternation of the swineherds, and the wrath of the owners at the drowning of their property!

Let us compare with this the attitude of the Buddha when he was asked to allow a "miracle" to be performed. He replied that all such performances as walking on the water, exorcising devils, and so forth, were in the nature of trickery. He refused to do anything of the kind himself or to allow his disciples to attempt it. He said: "I despise and reject the miracles of magic power. I and my disciples resort only to the miracle of instruction."

Throughout the whole of the teachings attributed to Jesus, there is not a word that adds any single thing to the sum of the world's knowledge. Compare them with those of other, and greater, teachers, and they fall into correct perspective, namely, a composition, or compilation, not very well done, from other sources by men who themselves were not well informed.

The signs and wonders that are said to have attended the birth, life and death of Jesus, completely fail to impress the Heathen, who is aware of similar things in connexion with other religions. They only serve to arouse his suspicion that they were borrowed, and to confirm his conclusion that Jesus Christ is a composite figure of a wholly imaginary character, reflecting the myths already in existence concerning such other semi-divine personages as Krishna, Osiris, Attis, or Mithra, and not very well drawn at that.

The final episode of the resurrection puts the last touch of fiction upon the whole narrative. Jesus is said to have risen in his physical body, and so ascended up into heaven. Such a feat as this we now know to be impossible. But the writers of the story evidently had no knowledge of the nature of the world, or of the space beyond the atmosphere. For them, and for Jesus also, the world was a fixed body. The sky was the floor of heaven up to which one might ascend if he had a ladder long enough, or by means of a tower such as that of Babel, or in a "fiery chariot." Yet this event is spoken of with bated breath by Christian clergy and others who, presumably, ought to know better!

E. UPASAKA.

(To be continued.)

Acid Drops.

Reynold's Illustrated News is responsible for the information that the King's illness was the result of his attending church at Sandringham for fear his absence would excite notice. He had previously caught a chill. So the Lord rewarded his piety by nearly killing him. Providence moves in mysterious ways! But the man who cannot believe in the goodness and wisdom of God in spite of trifles of this kind is really not worth saving.

There is bad feeling in Derby between Catholics and Protestants, because someone took a child to be baptized at a Roman Catholic Church instead of at a Church of England sprinkling place. Now what is going to happen to the child? Will it be damned for getting into the Roman Catholic Church, for getting there by false pretences? Or will the Lord say he doesn't care a hang, but is going strictly by the label? The Protestant vicar has solemnly

decided that though the child has been baptized into the Universal Catholic Church, "it is not sealed for ever as a Roman Catholic." So we presume the child will be solemnly disinfected by some Protestant minister, and then re-sprinkled by the vicar. We suggest that both parties wait until the child is old enough to have an opinion of its own on the matter.

The absurd is not always funny, but it often is; and when it is, one would not speak of it harshly. So we view some notes in the *Two Worlds* on the *Daily News* articles on Spiritualism with all good feeling. Thus, investigators of Spiritualism are warned that, if they would get into touch with the denizens of the next world, they must be filled with love. Mr. Blatchford is cited as a case in point. He, it appears, tried to find out something about spirits, but failed. Later, he made another attempt and succeeded. But there was a new factor then present. His wife had died. The result was communication between the two. That is really humorous, and if it appeared in an anti-Spiritualist journal would certainly be taken as a sly dig at Mr. Blatchford and spiritualistic converts. What the *Two Worlds* is really saying is that if Mr. Blatchford had not been so grieved at the death of his wife he would never have had communication with her ghost. We fancy that most unbelievers will agree with this, but it is hardly likely to convince them of the truth of Spiritualism.

The *Two Worlds* also remarks that it has "seen men of great intellectual attainments go into the seance room, and have repeatedly seen them draw blanks." That we quite believe; also that, "We have seldom seen a bereaved soul, humbly, sincerely, and even sceptically seeking its lost love, go empty away." Hear! Hear! The *Two Worlds* seems to be developing an unexpected vein of satire. The condition of finding evidence of the truth of Spiritualism is believing, or at least expecting, before you get it. So have we always said.

Once more. The *Two Worlds* says scathingly of the *Daily News* that there are none on the other side that is "particularly in love with a newspaper." That is crushing. But, by the way, what do the spirits read? Do they read the *Freethinker*? If so, we hope they will bear in mind that the editor has always defended them. He has always protested against them being made responsible for the absurd antics of the seance room.

The Bobsall Urban Council was compelled to adjourn its sitting owing to the noise made in front of its meeting place by a Salvation Army band. We are not informed that the Council made any protest. If it had been an ordinary band there would have been a bother, probably a summons. But anyone may create a disturbance in the name of Jesus and get away with it. That is one of the comforts of living in a country that is not priest-ridden.

The Rev. Professor A. S. Peake has written a Bible Commentary, and a wealthy Leicester Nonconformist has been considering buying up all copies of it, and burying them. Capital! But we beg to point out that the *Freethinker* is a much more drastic enemy of Christianity, and we wonder whether he would consider buying up all the *Freethinkers* he could get hold of, and building a big bonfire of them in Leicester Market Place? If he will, we will offer him special terms, and will even go to the length of printing an extra edition, so that the bonfire shall be a good one. We hope he will fall in with the proposal, it might help in getting the extra £2,000 the Trustees of the *Freethinker* Endowment Trust have their eyes on.

The trouble has arisen because Professor Peake has been asked by the Free Church Council to visit Leicester, and a local minister, Rev. J. Ellison, denounced him for denying the historicity of the Old Testament. He says he is acting on the advice of the New Testament, which says:—

If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine receive him not into your house, neither bid him God-

speed; for he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Hear, Hear! It is just as well that Christians should be reminded what a kindly, brotherly, and tolerant creed Christianity really is. The proper God-ordained method would be to stone him to death, but the secularized laws of the country will not allow Christians to do as they ought, so they just have to content themselves with a good "cussing."

An Indian "fakir," who might easily have claimed, and received, credit for "psychical" power has been performing in Paris. He claimed to be able to stand knives and needles being run into various parts of his body. A specially appointed jury reported that the performances were nothing more than the tricks of an illusionist. The "fakir" made a mistake; he should have selected a jury of "psychic" experts. Their verdict would probably have been more favourable.

In Sheffield, the Chief Constable has had the impudence to order that promoters of Sunday concerts shall submit their programmes to him for approval, so that this Jack-in-office may see that all are "in keeping with the spirit of Sunday." And the promoters have had the silliness to obey the order. It almost looks as though public liberty will never be secure in this country so long as we have these sabbatarian fanatics in office. And we wonder when those who run these Sunday concerts will have the courage to stand up and tell these officials to go to the devil—and fight afterwards against any mean revenge they may afterwards attempt.

The Chief Constable of Maidstone has issued a decree forbidding any "lottery, draw, Christmas draw, or lucky dip," and the Maidstoneites, with their German-like obedience to official orders, will bow their heads before this guardian of public righteousness. Which makes us wonder how long we shall have to wait until the British public is roused to making a clean sweep of all these silly puritanical devices for the preservation of public morals. There seems a growing conviction abroad that public life consists in the manufacturing of regulations and the multiplication of officials, while the sole duty of the long-eared public is to obey orders, and pay the officials. The latter is of supreme importance.

This latter has some bearing on what we have heard lately about the corruption of the police. For it is certain that the multiplication of silly, and childish regulations such as are now being passed year after year, and which cannot, in their very nature, command the respect of the public, multiplies the opportunities for the corruption of the police. Scarce anyone feels that he is doing wrong in ignoring such laws, and no one feels he very much offends when he offers a "tip" to a policeman for closing his eyes to what is going on. We seem a long way removed from the time when it was regarded as good business to keep laws down to as low a point as is consonant with the public welfare.

A reader of *John Bull* suggests a "listeners' referendum to assist the B.B.C. in programme-building. He proposes that, attached to each licence when issued, should be a prepaid form, on which listeners could state their views, so that, within a year, it would be possible to gauge the desires of the majority and cater for them. We doubt whether the suggestion will commend itself to the Gospel-propagating B.B.C. Such a referendum would disclose the fact that the majority of listeners objected to: (a) too much time being devoted to religion and semi-religious topics; (b) the closing down of all entertainment during Church hours; and (c) the lack of an alternative programme on Sunday. Even if a referendum were taken, the B.B.C. would be hardly likely to publish an accurate statement of the results. There's a committee of clerics on the B.B.C. staff.

The Rev. W. R. Wilkinson (Primitive Methodist) said recently: "Like Wesley, we must be very tolerant and ready to welcome fresh light upon old truths. Thus shall we be enabled to meet the needs of the age." We like

the idea of Wesley as a perfect knight of tolerance! He and his eighteenth century converts were about as unlovely a crew of self-righteous bigots as could be found anywhere in any age. And tolerance is not often found associated with bigotry and self-righteousness. Be that as it may, it is nice to know that Methodism (modern brand) is preparing to meet the "needs of the age." What this really means is that the time has come for white-washing the truths "as revealed to our fathers."

At a luncheon to entertain the Bishop of Haarlem, Bishop Gore declared that a "pan Protestant reunion," by which he meant "the recognition of all bodies of Christians whose work gave manifest token of the Christian spirit," was an unsubstantial dream. The Bishop is quite right. Bearing in mind the kind of "Christian spirit that has been manifested by one Christian sect towards another, most students of Christian history would be inclined to agree with His Grace.

Says the Rev. Thos. Tiplady: "At Christmas we do reverence to the children. Like the Wise Men we bow before the cradle. In the presence of helpless innocence we correct our standard of values." Christians have been doing this reverence-to-the-children antic for hundreds of years at Christmas. It doesn't appear to have prevented their ill-treating children during the other part of the year. The appalling treatment of children by Christian manufacturers during the Industrial Revolution may be cited as an illustration. The better regard for children in Christian countries nowadays is the result, not of an annual Christmas reverence, but of humanistic study of child psychology.

The Rev. J. W. Graves, of Walworth, who is travelling for the sake of his health, was a passenger in an aeroplane wrecked in a gale the other Sunday off the Mediterranean coast. He and the pilot escaped injury. The good man will no doubt declare he prayed for the Lord to save him, and that the Lord answered the prayer. The *Daily Express* should interview him with all speed. He has another wonderful piece of evidence in favour of Prayer.

Seeing how hard the giant intellects of the Church of England work towards solving the nation's very serious problems, one ought not to begrudge them a day's holiday at Canterbury Cathedral dumping a new Archbishop on his throne. The Archbishop having been well and truly fixed, let us turn away with the solemn thought that his Master—the Great Exemplar—had no fat stipend, no huge palace, and no comic clothes, and he used the open air for a doss house when he couldn't get a lodging.

We are indebted to the *Christian World* for the information that the Instructional Staff of the Bible Institute, Los Angeles, are every year compelled to swear adherence to the following:—

The Scriptures are without error or defect of any kind.

Men are justified on the simple and single ground of the shed blood of Christ and upon the simple and single condition of faith in Him who shed the blood.

All those who persistently reject Jesus Christ in the present life shall be raised from the dead and throughout eternity exist in a state of conscious, unutterable, endless torment and anguish.

There is a personal devil, a being of great cunning and power. He shall ultimately be cast into the lake of fire and shall be tormented day and night for ever.

Well, but it was not so long ago that this was the general belief of all Christians. And it would be so still, but for the activity of Freethinkers during the past century.

Prof. Cuthbert Murray: "A study of the science of peace is the first business of any nation." Such study, one may add, does not begin and end with what Jesus said 2,000 years ago. It is a study of all the factors that make for peace or induce war, and of the principles derived inductively from observation of those factors. For the benefit of Christians, it may be mentioned that

one factor inducing war is creedal and sectarian hatred germinated by sacred books.

When Mr. James Douglas gets his second wind, after his prolonged howl for the censoring of books, he might, we suggest, try his hand at replying to Milton's *Areopagitica*—a speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing. Portraits of himself and Milton should accompany the reply, otherwise readers may have difficulty in following the argument.

Mr. A. B. Houghton says there is a new spirit in the world and a new conscience. Maybe the decay of interest in religion and the waning of priestly influence has something to do with these new things.

The Bishop of London has been denouncing the slum dwellings of London. That, we presume, is an indication of the fact that the Church leads the way in social reforms. No one, we may point out, has ever noted the slums of London or said a word against them. But what we should like the Bishop to make public is the names of the owners and of the ground landlords of these slum areas, and particularly how much of the land or property is owned by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. We may remind the Bishop of the famous Boundary Street slum area in Bethnal Green. This was one of the worst in London. It has now been improved. But nearly the whole of this area was owned by the Church of England, and we do not know that any action of the Bishops led to its clearance. The Church also owns land and property in many other parts of London and the provinces. We invite the Bishop to prove that the tenants on this property are in any better condition than those who live under such as are not called by God to act as guides for the people.

Harry Rhodes Buckley, a regular attendant at the chapel in Royton, near Leeds, was charged that during the service the other Sunday he abstracted some keys from the pocket of a brother worshipper, went to the man's house, stole some notes, and returned to his devotions. It is not likely that Buckley's religious exercises will be broken. The religious convictions of inmates of H.M. Prisons are well known and adequately catered for.

The following copy of a prayer offered some years ago is given in the *West Somerset Free Press*:—

"O Lord, Thou knowest that I have nine houses in the city of London, and likewise that I have lately purchased an estate in fee-simple in the county of Essex. Lord, I beseech Thee to preserve the two counties of Essex and Middlesex from fires and earthquakes; and as I have a mortgage in Hertfordshire, I beg thee likewise to have an eye of compassion on that county. And, Lord, for the rest of the counties, Thou mayest deal with them as Thou art pleased. O Lord, enable the bank to answer all their bills and make all my debtors good men. Give a prosperous voyage and return to the Mermaid sloop, which I have insured: and, Lord, Thou hast said, 'That the days of the wicked are short,' and I trust Thou wilt not forget Thy promises, having purchased an estate in reversion from Sir J.P., a profligate young man. Lord, keep our funds from sinking; and if it be Thy will, let there be no sinking fund. Keep my son Caleb out of evil company and from gaming houses. And sanctify, O Lord, this night to me by preserving me from thieves and fire and make my servant honest and careful, whilst I, Thy servant, lie down in Thee, O Lord. Amen."

After all, this man knew what he wanted, and said so with complete honesty. Others less honest wrap up their petitions in language which they evidently think will prevent the Lord finding out what they are after. But all prayers are at bottom the same.

The Rev. Dr. Ritson told the boys of Truro College (Wesleyan) to remember that it is just as important "to choose clean, healthy books for your mental companions, as right-minded boys to be your friends." Excellent advice, and when the boys are recommended to read the Bible, we take it that this holy catalogue of obscenities is for guiding the boys' choice of the right kind of books—by contrast.

Freethinkers' Annual Dinner.

THE Annual Dinner of the National Secular Society will take place this year on Saturday, January 19, at the Midland Grand Hotel, St. Pancras. There will be the usual high class musical entertainment, interspersed with speeches, and if the function is not of the most enjoyable kind, it will be something new in the history of N.S.S. dinners. The price of the tickets will be 8s. It is expected that, with the week-end rail-fare in universal use, there will be many visitors from the provinces. This will give an excellent opportunity for London and Provincial friends to meet.

Tickets are now on sale at the N.S.S. office, or at the office of this paper, and we venture to express the hope that application will be made for these as early as possible. The arrival of numbers of visitors at the last moment means extra trouble to those responsible, and some little disorganization. May we seriously press this point upon all interested? We should like to see the 1929 dinner establish a record for attendance.

CHAPMAN COHEN,
President, N.S.S.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

THOSE SUBSCRIBERS WHO RECEIVE THEIR COPY OF THE "FREETHINKER" IN A GREEN WRAPPER WILL PLEASE TAKE IT THAT A RENEWAL OF THEIR SUBSCRIPTION IS DUE. THEY WILL ALSO OBLIGE, IF THEY DO NOT WANT US TO CONTINUE SENDING THE PAPER, BY NOTIFYING US TO THAT EFFECT.

W. C. ELLIOT.—Thanks for clipping. Jaques Loeb's experiment in fecundating the ova of lowly organisms was performed some years ago. His experiments on the action of heat and light in inducing certain movements in insects are also very important, and serve as strong endorsements of Materialism.

A. C. HIGH.—The letter sent you by Mr. Cohen has been returned as insufficiently addressed. You put the name of your town only on your letter, and that was evidently not enough.

A. SPENCER.—It is indeed "sloppy stuff." But could you reasonably expect otherwise of articles on Jesus written for popular consumption in *T.P.'s Weekly*? They are not written for people who understand the Christian myth, but for those who believe it.

D. R. LAMB.—Shall be glad to see the volume of poems when published.

ATHOS ZENO.—Sorry, but the subject has already been largely dealt with in this paper, and at a very recent date.

H. LAWSON.—Why bother to contradict? Mr. Cohen has been "completely crushed" so frequently by Christian adversaries, that there is nothing either new or exciting in finding someone who is able to do it over again. Fortunately he is thick-skinned and does not appear to be any the worse for the crushing.

W. MILLWARD.—We quite appreciate the objection that some might have to a public verbal discussion on Freethought versus Christianity, but Mr. Cohen would have no objection at all at entering into a written discussion if a suitable representative of Christianity cared to undertake it. The *Freethinker* is always open for that purpose.

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

The Secular Society, Limited, office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

The National Secular Society's office is at 62 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all com-

munications should be addressed to the Secretary, Mr. F. Mann, giving as long notice as possible.

Orders for literature should be sent to the Business Manager of the Pioneer Press, 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, and not to the Editor.

All Cheques and Postal Orders should be made payable to "The Pioneer Press," and crossed "Midland Bank, Ltd., Clerkenwell Branch."

Letters for the Editor of the "*Freethinker*" should be addressed to 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Friends who send us newspapers would enhance the favour by marking the passages to which they wish us to call attention.

Lecture notices must reach 61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, by the first post on Tuesday, or they will not be inserted.

The "*Freethinker*" will be forwarded direct from the publishing office at the following rates (Home and Abroad):—
One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

Sugar Plums.

Owing to the holiday rush we are obliged to hold over for publication next week, several letters that have come to hand.

We give our opinion of the *Daily News* discussion on Spiritualism in another column, but it may be taken as a sign of the times that two Freethinkers so well known as Mr. J. M. Robertson and Mrs. Bradlaugh Bonner should have been asked to write articles for the series. Of course, the articles are not criticizing Christianity, but one day we may hope that when this subject is discussed in the public press, avowed Freethinkers will be permitted a hearing. Here is one more piece of evidence of the breach Freethought propaganda has made in the religious defences.

The *Church Times*, by the way, regards Spiritualism as one of the most dangerous of heresies. We are not surprised. What is the use of a religion that hasn't a special priesthood? Every man his own ghost provider is not a formula that promises much in the way of a religion.

The following letter has been sent to the B.B.C., by Mr. D. P. Stickells:—

With regard to the B.B.C.'s declared intention to use broadcasting for the propagation of the Christian religion, to prevent the decay of that religion, I wish to register an emphatic protest against: (1) the using of Freethinkers' licence-money for the propagation of religion; (2) the unfair practice of not inviting Freethinkers to broadcast their views about religion, although Christians are permitted freely to state theirs; (3) the practice of withholding entertainment of a secular kind during Church hours; (4) the policy of not offering an alternative Sunday programme for non-religious or non-Christian listeners; (5) the unsporting practice of not publishing in *Radio Times*, letters from Freethinkers that criticize the B.B.C.'s present policy of unduly favouring the Christian Churches and the Christian religion, and of unfairly ignoring the needs and wishes of non-religious listeners.

It is just as well for Freethinkers to let the B.B.C. know what a great many people in this country think of its policy. It may rouse in them a recognition of the fact that there are others beside Christians in the world. We have received copies of other letters sent to the B.B.C., some of which will be published next week.

Mr. F. P. Corrigan will lecture at Plymouth on Sunday, December 23, in the Co-operative Hall, Courtenay Street. The subject of the lecture at 3 p.m. is "Where are the Dead?" and at 7 p.m., "Why I am an Atheist." This is not the first time Mr. Corrigan has visited Plymouth, and we hope to hear of excellent meetings.

From Spiritualism to Freethought.

ABOUT thirty years ago, Mr. H. G. Wells published a remarkable short story called "The Stolen Body." At that period of time, we did not talk of Wellsian characters, or of a Wellsian outlook on life. Mr. Wells was comparatively unknown, and had yet his spurs to win. But already he was showing that remarkable blending of the coldly scientific and the warmly credulous which has made him to-day our foremost fictionist.

To state that "The Stolen Body" marked a milestone in my life is not an exaggeration of the truth. I was young—in my middle 'teens—romantic, religious, and already a facile rhymers. Doubtless, even at that immature age, I realized that I should never be a poet, as Mr. de la Mare and Mr. Masfield are poets. But I could write harmonious prosody with sufficient flexibility and verse to find a home for all such rhymings in the magazine press. I earned a modest income from my poems and songs. Nor have my ambitions risen much higher in the intervening three decades. He is a wise man who learns his own limitations. If he be a carver of cherry-stones, he should not strive to eclipse the frozen mucus of the Milos Aphrodite.

I had been coquetting with Spiritualism ever since my schooldays. This remarkably vivid short story of Mr. Wells' made me investigate with a keener interest than ever. If so brilliant a brain as that of this highly-individualistic author could believe in trance mediumship, and in a "cloud curtain" about the world of disembodied spirits, faces of thin shadow, "faces of gaseous tenuity . . . vague hands clutching . . . nebulous forms . . . an envy and craving for life, their one link with existence," surely, then, there must be a sound and scientific basis for my own belief in a continuity of life after the change known as Death?

So I reasoned; and the years 1897 to 1907 saw me most fervently devoted to occult investigation. I made many personal friends in the Spiritualistic circles of that time. Men like J. J. Morse, Hudson Tuttle and Thomas Olman Todd; and women like Mrs. Hardinge Britten, Mrs. Piper and Eusapia Palladino were my daily intimates.

Yet I tried to be honest and truthful. My impressionable nature was such that at many a *seance* I would develop so semi-hysterical a condition that I appeared to give way to what was complacently called by thorough-going Spiritualists, "control." There was a later period when I appeared to assume half-a-score different personalities inside the one evening, and when I could be in the course of a few brief hours of communal "sitting" both man and woman, child and valetudinarian.

None the less, I never once consented to *sell* these hysterical impersonations. I was perfectly well aware of a *self* deception: but I would not let the deceit pass over to others for monetary gain. I had worked my imagination to such a high degree of acceptance of the Occult, that I quite believed the atmosphere about me to be full of bodiless forms—creatures that were mere shadows of the Unborn, or spirits of the Once Living.

I could "picture" them, and almost swear to "seeing" them. They were phantom creatures, who crowded to every *seance* so that they might enjoy "life," or communicate with those they knew, or send a message to those they hoped one day to know.

Always, however, to the question, "Are you clairvoyant—or clairaudient?" I would answer an emphatic "No!" I would sometimes accept platform engagements, so that I might enunciate my philosophy of the Supernatural; and my only terms were my rail-

way-expenses. I was true to my salt in-so-far that I would not benefit by my self-delusions. Had I professed to be clairvoyant, and had I followed the stereotyped rigmarole of "I can see with you, lady, the form of . . .," I might easily have commanded two guineas a Sabbath. But my gifts, such as they were, had no such price of prostitution.

Then other things began to happen about me. I saw deception on the part of the leading lights of Spiritualism. I had become so intimate with the *creme de la creme* of the Movement (a quarter of a century ago, remember!) that I was able to think matters to a sane conclusion. There seemed to be no more striking example of the infinite credulity of humanity than this *wish to believe* in Immortality. Thus I often shared the platform with J. J. Morse (then editing *The Spiritual Review*); and I realized that while he—in what was termed "trance"—was addressing the immense audience his gifts invariably called together, his keen gaze, through the veil of what appeared to be sealed eyelids, was taking in every tiny detail of the thronged hall. These details he used with startling effect when "question time" or "clairvoyance period" arrived. How? Well, his powers of verbal description were marvellous. My own gifts in that direction are not altogether negligible: so I soon discovered something. With this discovery I afterwards challenged him. I was given a laughing agreement, and the added phrase: "I am really describing what I *do* see, am I not?"

What J. J. Morse did was to describe to a person at the back of the hall, the appearance of *some living person* in (probably) the front of the hall. First came the preface: "I see with you a spirit-friend, whose appearance is as follows . . ."

Ingenious? Convincing? Let me assure my readers that J. J. Morse was able to claim ninety per cent of "recognitions" at practically every one of his meetings: for virtually every member of the audience believed, or wished to believe, that personal identity, involving memory, persisted beyond the grave. They came to the meeting more than half convinced already.

A typical description would go something like this: "Madam—you, the third from the right on the fourth seat from the back of the hall—hold up your hand, please—yes, you!—I see with you, touching you gently on the shoulder, the form of a young man. He has a fair complexion, downy one might also call it, a long fair moustache, and curling light-brown hair. His eyes are gray; and his teeth, as he smiles, are white and shapely. His manner is quiet and self-possessed. He answers to the name of William. Ah! You recognize the form? Thank you! His message is, 'Cheer up—the trouble will soon be over—there's a silver lining to every cloud' . . . And now, sir, I see with you—I mean the gentleman wearing a brown suit, whose hand is at his chin—you on the fifth row from the front—I see with you . . ."

At intervals of two or three purely imaginary descriptions would come an actual prototype from the audience. Thus at last the clairvoyant would hit upon the *actual living young man* with downy complexion and gray eyes of a few minutes before. This fortunate youth would have described to him some *other living person* in the audience. Ten to one he would stand perfectly convinced that he had recognized the spirit-form of a dead friend or relation . . .

My experiences in the materialization *seance* were equally disillusioning. Not once, but a dozen times, I have had perfectly satisfactory evidence that the *soi-disant* spirit was the medium masquerading. Had I not still been thrall to my own leanings toward a belief in the indestructibility of the soul, I might have dared an exposure. But it took many years, years of

suffering and painful thought, years of unrest and unhappiness, before I myself became certain that death ends personal identity and memory.

Without boring the reader, I should like briefly to describe these steps. Frankly, I had been uneducated—or, maybe, educated in the wrong way. It is very easy to believe what we *wish* to believe. Hence all my reading matter had been confined to romance and religion. The word Rationalism actually frightened me; and I believed, with shuddering, that an atheist was both an anarchist and the potential anti-christ. Even to read Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*, cost an almost superhuman effort.

But the zest of discovery swept over me, and I passed to Spencer, Huxley and Haeckel. Soon came Frazer's *Golden Bough*; and gradually I began to see that the beliefs of living humanity are relics of the past.

Then financial circumstances brought me into direct touch with the African race. At twenty years of age, I began what has proven to be more than half-a-lifetime's intimate contact with primitive religions. I am thus able, day after day, to watch the evolution of the West African negro from savagery to civilization—to see his development from the credulity of witchcraft and Ju-Ju to the (lesser?) credulity of Christianity. I even have room to hope that his innate sound sense (for he is no fool!) will eventually make of him a Rationalist. That day may be, nay, must be, distant. But it will come.

None of us can honourably ignore the truth that this doctrine of immortality is so age-old that it is well nigh impossible to create in my half-trained mind a *resignation* to the fact of our mortality. Delusion is always preferable to doubt; and doubt easier to bear than dismay! The stupendous task of Rationalism and Freethought is to change that dismay into delight—delight in the knowledge that we live out our little day, do the best that is in us, and then pass to the appointed end of all things living—into the realm of death and dissolution! J. M. STUART-YOUNG.

(To be concluded.)

A Sceptical Philosopher.

(Concluded from page 805.)

ONE chapter of Prof. Bertrand Russell's book is entitled: "The harm good men do," a theme he illustrates by showing the evil that has resulted from carrying into practice the teachings of our religious moralists.

For instance, it is now known that venereal disease can be entirely prevented by simple precautions taken in advance. If the subject had been dealt with in a purely scientific manner immediately the method of its prevention was discovered, this horrible disease, with its terrible infliction of suffering upon the innocent unborn, might by now have been entirely stamped out in all civilized countries, as science has, practically, stamped out cholera, typhoid, and smallpox, which at one time decimated the population.

But no, the God-inspired moralist stands in the path, Bible in hand, and bars the way. He says: "You shall not teach people how to be immoral and escape the penalty which God has attached to sin. Let the immoral suffer, and the innocent children inherit the curse, as the Bible commands, 'unto the third and fourth generation.'" Rather let the blood stream of the race be fouled and defied, with its resulting desolation and death, than allow sin to go unpunished and God's intention frustrated." Upon which, Bertrand Russell, with biting sarcasm, makes the following comment:—

How dreadful it would be if this were otherwise, for, if sin were no longer punished, there might be people so abandoned as to pretend that it was no longer sin, and if the punishment did not fall also upon the innocent, it would not seem so dreadful. How grateful we ought to be, therefore, to those good men who ensure that the stern laws of retribution decreed by Nature during our days of ignorance, can still be made to operate in spite of the impious knowledge rashly acquired by scientists. All right-thinking people know that a bad act is bad quite regardless of the question whether it causes any suffering or not, but since men are not all capable of being guided by the pure moral law, it is highly desirable that suffering should follow from sin in order to secure virtue. Men must be kept in ignorance of all ways of escaping the penalties which were incurred by sinful actions in pre-scientific ages. I shudder when I think how much we should all know about the preservation of mental and physical health, if it were not for the protection against this dangerous knowledge which our good men so kindly provide.

Another way in which good men can be useful is by getting themselves murdered. Germany acquired the province of Shantung, in China, by having the good fortune to have two missionaries murdered there.—(*Sceptical Essays*. pp. 116-117.)

Treating of moral ideas, and comparing the marriage customs of different countries, where, in some, a man may possess many wives, with others, as in Tibet, where one woman may possess many husbands, our author remarks: "It seems that sin is geographical. From this conclusion, it is only a small step to the further conclusion that the notion of 'sin' is illusory, and that the cruelty habitually practised in punishing it is unnecessary. It is just this conclusion which is so unwelcome to many minds, since the infliction of cruelty with a good conscience is a delight to moralists. That is why they invented hell." (p. 16.)

There is indeed a sadistic strain of vindictive cruelty in the mind of the religious moralist. He looks with jealous and envious hatred at the sinner enjoying delights, and satisfying desires, from which he himself is debarred by his religious taboos; and when he has the power he punishes the sinner in this world, and consigns him to hell in the next. Indeed, Bertrand Russell goes even further than this, for he declares: "Speaking psycho-analytically, it may be laid down that any 'great ideal' which people mention with awe is really an excuse for inflicting pain on their enemies. Good wine needs no bush, and good morals need no bated breath." (p. 62.)

Bergson, whose philosophy—if it can be described as such—was received with such enthusiasm by the religious world, comes in for some severe criticism. Of his work *L'Evolution Créatrice*, Prof. Russell observes: "This book contains, from beginning to end, no argument, and therefore no bad argument; it contains merely a poetical picture appealing to the fancy. . . . A great part of Bergson's philosophy is merely mysticism expressed in slightly novel language. . . . The invention of the phraseology certainly shows great ability, but it is that of the company promoter rather than the philosopher. (pp. 64-65.)

Of Bergson's answer to a certain dilemma, "that what happens is 'growth,' in which everything changes and yet remains the same, this conception, says his critic, "is a mystery, which the profane cannot hope to fathom. At bottom, Bergson's appeal is to mystical faith, not to reason; but into the regions where faith is above logic we cannot follow him." (p. 68.) As he truly observes. "It is only when people have given up the hope of proving that religion is true in a straightforward sense, that they set to work to prove that it is 'true' in some new-fangled sense." (p. 48). And further:—

I believe that all solid progress in the world consists of an increase in rationality, both practical and theoretical. To preach an altruistic morality appears to me somewhat useless, because it will appeal only to those who already have altruistic desires . . . I believe that the control of our acts by our intelligence is ultimately what is of most importance, and what alone will make social life remain possible as science increases the means at our disposal for injuring each other. Education, the press, politics, religion—in a word, all the great forces in the world—are at present on the side of irrationality; they are in the hands of men who flatter King Demos to lead him astray . . . It is to intelligence, increasingly wide-spread, that we must look for the solution of the ills from which our world is suffering. (p. 53.)

We think well of ourselves, and therefore of mankind, and consider its preservation important; says Prof. Russell: "Mr. Jones, the Nonconformist grocer, is sure that he deserves eternal life, and that a universe which refused it to him would be intolerably bad. But when he thinks of Mr. Robinson, his Anglican competitor, who mixes sand with his sugar and is lax about Sunday, he feels that the universe might well carry charity too far. To complete his happiness, there is need of hell-fire for Mr. Robinson."

In the days before Copernicus, there was no need to labour the anthropocentric view of the world, for the heavens visibly revolved about the earth, and man had dominion over the beasts of the field. But when science deposed man from this lofty eminence, it became necessary to invent a metaphysic to correct this indignity, says Prof. Russell: "This task was achieved by those who are called 'idealists,' who maintain that the world of matter is unreal appearance, while the reality is Mind or Spirit . . . The reasons offered for these views are carefully camouflaged so as to conceal even from their authors the connexion with human wishes."

Many people contend that even if the old ideas are false, they are harmless, and should be left undisturbed. But, says our author, "they are in fact not harmless, and the comfort they bring is dearly bought by the preventable misery which they lead men to tolerate." And further:—

Apart from all utilitarian arguments, the search for a happiness based upon untrue beliefs is neither very noble nor very glorious. There is a stark joy in the unflinching perception of our true place in the world, and a more vivid drama than any that is possible to those who hide behind the enclosing walls of myth. There are "perilous seas" in the world of thought which can be sailed by those who are willing to face their own physical powerlessness. And, above all, there is liberation from the tyranny of Fear, which blots out the light of day, and keeps men grovelling and cruel. No man is liberated from fear who dare not see his place in the world as it is; no man can achieve the greatness of which he is capable until he has allowed himself to see his own littleness. (p. 34.)

There are many more things in this wise and outspoken book worth quoting, but we have given enough to show its quality, and we hope the book will have the wide circulation it deserves.

W. MANN.

I do not merely *believe* there is such a place as hell. I *know* there is such a place; and I know also that when men have got to the point of believing virtue impossible but through dread of it, they have got into it.

John Ruskin.

The whole faculties of men must be exerted in order to nobler energies, and he who is not earnestly sincere lives but in half his being—self-mutilated, self-proscribed.—Coleridge.

The Late A. B. Wakefield.

AN APPRECIATION.

ONE by one time takes its toll of a school of thought which, in the turbulent Victorian political age, bred men of great courage, far vision, and a desire to secure real social progress which somehow seems lacking in these days, when the bigger issues are so often allowed to be overshadowed by minor and trivial things, fallaciously enhanced by the modern craze for stunt controversy. These were the men who, in the later part of last century and in the early part of this century, fought with lion-like truculence and amazing perseverance for their principles and ideals, often sacrificing considerable material comfort and financial prospects.

The most recent departure—he was a militant Radical Rationalist—leaves the diminishing circle much poorer, for Mr. A. B. Wakefield, of Hipperholme, near Halifax, who died on November 29, at his home, was a life-long fighter in the cause of liberty, freedom of thought, and social progress. Leaving us at the age of seventy-four, he had fulfilled far more than the mission of most men in his self-imposed task of doing something for the betterment of a world which he had found bitter in his youth.

I was in the happy position of having known A. B. Wakefield for a number of years, and I have spent many pleasant hours in his company, chatting with him in the last years of his life in front of a window that overlooked a little valley at Hipperholme, as charmingly natural as he was charmingly human. More than once we have together inspected and discussed the wonderful collection of Freethought and social literature that he possessed, and I was never more delighted than when I watched him take up one of Bradlaugh's works (he was Bradlaugh's ever-ready helper for many years) with almost the same affection that he bore for his leader in the stormy days of C.B.'s life.

A. B. Wakefield possessed a rare complex. Kindly and gentle in demeanour, a devoted husband and father; yet he was a living fire in his active days in the cause he loved—a foe to be feared, yet admired; a friend to command respect; always to be honoured, for he never fought an un noble fight.

The name of Wakefield, in connexion with Freethought, would be incomplete without mention of Robertshaw, too. Edwin Robertshaw, of Boothtown, Halifax, laid down his sword in 1923, after a plucky fight against a long standing illness. Robertshaw and Wakefield were staunch friends for years, and accompanied each other on scores of occasions when they walked miles to face hostile audiences from the Freethought platform. On their last trip together—I think it was early in 1923—I accompanied them to Huddersfield to hear Chapman Cohen, and I marvelled at the courage of these two old warriors, one the victim of partial paralysis, and the other handicapped by an artificial leg, travelling under difficulties to give support to the new leader of Freethought. Wakefield took the chair for Chapman Cohen on that occasion, and we had a fine meeting. It was the last time Wakefield presided at a Freethought meeting, and it was the last meeting Robertshaw attended, but they each remained firm to the end—staunch Atheists, contemptuous of hiding their convictions beneath any compromising, half-hearted cognomen.

Wakefield knew in his youth what it was to be dismissed from a situation for holding and proclaiming convictions, but far from being discouraged, his militant spirit led him to join the then organized Secularists of Leeds, and to become a disciple of Holyoake's Freethought and Co-operative principles. In later years he was active in politics, and eventually he found

himself engaging in an unceasing campaign on behalf of Secularism for seventeen years, as Bradlaugh's right hand man. He was the author of many pamphlets, and during those seventeen years he travelled 30,000 miles and delivered over 1,000 lectures. He was chosen by the Australasian Secular Federation to be their lecturer, but, fortunately for the Movement at home, he did not take the appointment. During the Constitutional Rights struggle in 1883, he organized one of the largest gatherings held in Halifax—a demonstration of 50,000 people in the Halifax Piece Hall.

He was an intrepid debater, and a convincing speaker, his services being in big demand on both Freethought and political platforms. Not content with these activities, he formed the Halifax Sunday Lecture Society, and a similar society at Brighouse. He was a skilled Yorkshire dialectician, and a very dear friend of John Hartley, the Yorkshire poet, about whom I may now reveal a secret, though Wakefield himself would have been the last to permit me to do so. When John Hartley had fallen on bad days, and had the additional burden of poor health, Mr. and Mrs. Wakefield undertook to help their old friend, and entirely by their own efforts in giving dialect recitals, they raised a very substantial sum of money, which they presented privately to Hartley. Her friends will be interested to know that Mrs. Wakefield has, for the time being, gone to live with her married daughter at Bradford. Mrs. Wakefield, who is a highly respected personality in Halifax, and was among the first women magistrates, shared largely in her late husband's work, and I take this opportunity of extending to her the sympathy of the Freethought Movement in her great loss.

Of Mr. Wakefield, I can probably say nothing better in conclusion than that which he himself said of Robertshaw, when that stalwart died in 1923. I was writing Robertshaw's obituary notice for the *Freethinker*, and wanted a tribute from Wakefield. He said, "A militant Freethinker, his hand was ever ready to lift the pen, his tongue ever ready to mould into words his great faith in the Freethought cause. He was a reliable and trustworthy citizen who put conscience into his activities, and his approaching dissolution held for him no terrors." What Wakefield said of Robertshaw I will say of Wakefield, knowing no finer tribute, nor any more deserving subject.

FRANCIS J. CORINA.

Some "Sketchy" Skits.

THE Christmas number of the *Sketch* contains some skittish verses and caricatures relating to such well-known Biblical characters as Adam, Noah, Jonah, and others, more appropriate to the *Freethinker* than to a journal which circulates equally among the righteous and the unrighteous. That the editor should have thought fit to publish them is a straw indicating in which direction the wind is beginning to blow.

Here are three of the verses, the illustrations to which are equally comic:—

Balaam was a Jockey. He rode upon a "moke,"
It stopped and Balaam flogged it till it turned to him and spoke.

It said: "Go easy, Boss,—for there's an angel in the way."
But Balaam took no notice, as he'd signed the pledge that day.

Daniel was a Circus Bloke; and one fine day some men
Deposited poor Daniel inside a lions' den.
The lions were as friendly and as coy as any spaniel,
They wagged their tails and didn't seem to care two hoots for Daniel.

Abel kept a sheep ranch. His brother drove a plough.
Cain could not make farming pay, and so they had a row;
For Abel prospered mightily and was inclined to scoff,
So Cain drew forth his Webley and bumped the blighter off.

Freethinkers cannot do better than get a copy of this Christmas number. By this time the editor of the *Sketch* is probably experiencing a "draught" in the opposite direction! Let us hope it does not cost him his job, for ridicule is just the thing needed finally to break the back of the camel of Christian superstition. All that was needed was a few gibes of a similar nature from the new Testament. Perhaps one of our poets will oblige?

E. J. LAMBL.

Ode to the Nativity.

THIS is the season of good will and cheer,
Faith breathes at last;
The dreary winter days are almost past,
And brief existence rounds the corner here.
Autumn her fruitful burden long hath shed,
And with the fallen leaves did mourn the dead:
The mourning winter winds did toll her knell,
And withered boughs did nod a sad farewell.
The songs that with the sun were wed
We hear no more.
The music now is hushed, the singer fled;
His heart was revealed with the golden store.
The seasons onward roll.
He lived his little day,
He sang his merry lay,
And with the bounteous season paid the toll
Of life full blooded with his latest breath;
The Life full bloom that lives
Full souled, and ever gives
Its all, and still lives on defying Death.
We still faint echoes hear,
The Spirit still is near
And breathes the promise of a verdant Spring;
A glorious offering,
A vision clear,
A song of hope another yet shall sing.

The God of life and light,
Through death and darkest night,
Shall from the grave in triumph claim his own;
And from destruction's spoil
Corruption, strife and toil,
Will reap a harvest where the seed was blown.
Then join and let us sing,
Clasp hands and make a ring,
For youth and age are one where life compels;
Come, sing with full souled ease,
Nor bend the supple knees,
And let your voices drown the heathen bells.

We saw a brighter star;
The wise have followed, more will follow yet:
For Bethlehem's must set,
Our's is diviner far,
And leads to peace and love, not holy war.

Then hail the holier times,
And far diviner chimes
That ring the Truth aloud to all the world.
Where once the flames around the victim curled
The Right shall triumph, and with Justice bind
A wiser humankind,
A nobler race that loveth Liberty;
And then our song shall be—

The dreary days are past,
And Winter gone;
In Faith our lot was cast,
Hope urged us on:
The Peace of Earth is won,
Love reigns at last!

WM. J. LAMB.

Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness; and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity.

BURNS.

The Three Kings.

THE day known to us as the 25th of December has been celebrated, from time immemorial, as the birthday of the Saviour of the world. Why? Because on that day, each year, the sun has reached the lowest part of the heavens, as seen from the northern hemisphere, in his apparent path round the earth. And the earliest race of civilized mankind recognized, as every sensible person knows, that the sun is the real saviour and revivifier of nature.

On the 25th of December then, the sun commences to rise in the heavens towards the equator, which he crosses at the vernal equinox, entering the constellation of Aries on March 21. Not only Christians, but the followers of Zoroaster, and the worshippers of Krishna, rejoiced at this time, for the worst of winter was over and spring was on its way. The Roman Saturnalia was a continuance of the custom founded by the Babylonian astrologers some 10,000 or more years ago.

I was reminded of this matter upon seeing a new carol printed this week in a London paper (the *British Weekly*). It was written by a reverend gentleman, and the particular thing in it which struck me was a line stating that "three kings" brought to Bethlehem "gold, frankincense and myrrh." Now the Gospel of St. Matthew does not mention kings, but "wise men;" and the revised version gives as an alternative "magi." Why then does the reverend writer say "kings"? The reason is because he evidently knows that the whole legend is astronomical or rather astrological. The kings are the stars in the belt of Orion, which are visible in the heavens at the time when the constellation of Aries is rising in the east, and so the concoctors of the legend, or myth, naturally brought them into the picture.

Another interesting carol, which boys in Kent sing, runs thus:—

As I sat on a sunny bank (*repeated three times*)
On Christmas Day in the morning. (*repeated after each line*)
I saw three ships come sailing by.
Who d'ye think were in those ships?
Why, Pharaoh and his three sons.
What do they bring in those three ships?
Why gold and myrrh and frankincense.

It may be wondered why such strange presents should be brought from the far East. Among the ancient astrologers everything was sacred to one or the other "god," and these three articles were sacred to the sun.

There is no reason why Freethinkers should not be as happy at the period of Christmas, as it is called, as any believer in supernaturalism. Indeed he has more reason for rejoicing, for he knows that Nature is always renewing herself, and that no interference of her laws can come from any god. So we can wish all our readers a Merry Time in the coming season, with a hope for a prosperous New Year.

ERNEST ANDERSON.

Correspondence.

CHRISTIAN PARENTAGE.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—It is surprising that any kind-hearted man or woman can consent to become a parent, seeing the enormous probability there is of the child's spending millions of years in the tortures of hell. One would think that if there were even the remotest chance of its suffering such a fate, only the most careless and callous of parents would undertake such a terrible risk. Yet most of them bring offspring into the world without any apparent thought of the frightful doom that almost certainly awaits them, under the orthodox faith; but the fear of which would be entirely removed if they simply refrained from the pleasures of parentage!

EVACUSTES A. PHIPSON.

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LONDON.

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LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Capt. J. E. Ellam—"Tibet the Mysterious." Lantern illustrations.

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