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

Views and Opinions.

**War and the Churches.**

I AM forced to conclude that angels are either optimists or liars. For somewhere about 1,930 years ago the angels are said to have celebrated the birth of Jesus Christ by singing to the universe that the event heralded the beginning of an era of peace on earth and good will to all men. That angelic capacity for optimism—or lying, has never yet forsaken the Christian world. In 1931 Christians repeat the statement as lustily as the angels are said to have done centuries ago. They have said it every Christmas-time—even when they were engaged in war with other Christians, and Christian ministers have never ceased to say it even when consecrating big guns and blessing battle-ships. They said it right through the Great War, they say it to-day when from one end of the world to the other one Christian nation cannot trust another Christian nation so far as each can see the other, and when even their “peaceful” meetings can be conducted only under the dominating shadow of big guns. Even their consideration of commercial relations are conducted in a spirit of warfare since they meet, not as co-operators, but as peoples engaged in another kind of conflict in which one must somehow or the other get the better of the other. That is my justification for saying that Christian angels and Christian believers are either monumental optimists or colossal liars. They may really believe what they say, for, after all, buying gold bricks in the world of finance is only the equivalent of believing that good-will between peoples will be secured by the spread of Christianity.

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**Praying for Peace.**

The period of religious cant was this year officially opened by a gathering in St. Paul’s Cathedral on December 15, on behalf of the peace of the world. An official prayer was issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the first Sunday in the New Year is

to be set aside to ask the Lord to induce his followers to cease making wars and to agree to a measure of disarmament. The Archbishop in his sermon reminded the gathering that the Treaty of Versailles undertook, as an obligation of honour, to take the disarmament of Germany as the beginning of the disarmament of Europe. This is quite true, as is also the fact that Germany was forbidden to have any kind of military drill in its schools, because that meant using the schools as a training ground for the army. The best comment upon this is that military drill is still encouraged in our own schools, the present government has just renewed its patronage of the cadet corps, and Europe is seething with military preparations, while France, the most military-minded nation in Europe rules the continental roost. As things are going it is a mere question of time to have our own militarists furiously agitating for increased armaments in this country, with the lie factories getting to work again with reference to the French as they have worked in the past with regard to other countries.

And with all this the most that is asked for by the “Christian conscience,” as expressed by these days of prayer and official services is a reduction in armaments, and war is chiefly preached against because it is so expensive and so deadly that it may destroy civilization. So long as our wars were smaller and cheaper the churches took them quietly, even approvingly, but now they cost so much and they kill so many, they even threaten civilians, who for so long have merely made the wars, leaving it for the soldiers to do the fighting, that wars are becoming undesirable. Consider the number of wars in which this country alone has been engaged during the past century and a half. I question whether there has been a decade in which we have not been engaged in a war somewhere or the other. But they were small, comfortable kinds of war, and they were mainly fought at such a distance that to those at home they brought some sort of profit, and little-noticed loss. Against these wars the Churches said little or nothing, they raised no general protests, they said nothing about them being opposed to “true Christianity.” It is when wars get costly and very dangerous that the Christian conscience is roused to activity. But only in times of comparative peace. If war commenced to-morrow, if England, Germany and Italy declared war on France, we should find the Churches at their old game; the clergy would again dress in khaki, telling us that it was God’s war, and gloating over the “moral uplift” it was giving the nation.

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**Christian Blood-Lust.**

It was fitting that this Christian protest—not against war, but merely in favour of a measure of disarmament—should have taken place in St. Paul’s Cathedral, which was referred to as the central church of the British Empire. I wonder whether the

Prime Minister or any of the other dignitaries gathered there reflected on the number of military trophies and military monuments which distinguish the building? Or whether they remembered that during the war a sermon was preached there—by the Bishop of London, I think—with a big gun decorating the altar steps? Did they reflect that in the orgy of lying that took place during the four years, in the hatred deliberately encouraged in each of the countries at war, and which made a reasonable peace almost impossible, the Christian clergy, in each country were the most active? Brigadier-General Crozier has borne, unasked, the testimony that "The Christian Churches are the finest blood-lust creators we have, and of them we have made free use." Can anyone say when and where Christianity did the least thing during that four years of brutal warfare to make war less brutal, to make a reasonable peace possible, or to make future wars less likely? Perhaps some of the congregation may have recalled the fact that when at Christmas-time 1914-15 the men in the front line trenches were led by the pagan spirit of the season to attempt to fraternize with the enemy, they were sternly checked lest the blood-lust should grow faint and the preaching of the clergy lose its force. Even now that war has become rather too expensive, and too dangerous—for civilians—the clergy are found once every year using Armistice Day to paint the greatness and grandeur and self-sacrifice of the men who died in the war, and by suppressing the other side of war entirely helping to fix on the mind of the rising generation, the ideal of the soldier as the saviour of the nation. We have still no better creators of blood-lust than the Christian Church. The fact that their work is done in the name of self-sacrifice and nobility of character, and duty, makes it the more effective. Man has actually advanced too far along the road of civilization to be thoroughly savage unless the reversion to savagery is moralized in some way or other. For that work of covering barbarism with a cloak of moralization the Christian Church stands without an equal.

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#### Camouflage.

The St. Paul's service was held, as Peace Sunday is to be held, to direct attention to the Disarmament meeting to be held early in the New Year. That is as far as the Church can go, and even this ineffective assemblage came into being without the assistance of the Church. When the League was formed, we pointed out that it was almost damned by its name and personnel. The war was largely the product of the survival of tribalism in the shape of inflated nationalism, and of the leadership of politicians who were thinking of the world in terms of a couple of centuries ago. The Treaty of Versailles did what it could to establish a number of little nations in Europe and so make the possibilities of conflict more than ever likely, and it constituted itself of men who were members of the old governing gangs, who were certain to do little that would initiate a new era. The result was to be foreseen. It was certain that in the event of a quarrel between two or more of the "Great Powers," the League of Nations would, so far as that quarrel was concerned, cease to exist. The only good that could result from a League so constituted was the incidental one of keeping alive the idea of settlement by judicial appeal instead of by brute force. What was said in 1920 has been borne out recently in Manchuria. The Japanese did not make the mistake made by the German Emperor of brandishing the sword. They followed our own line of establishing supremacy over another country, or a portion of another country, by talk of treaty rights and the

establishment of order in the name of civilization and progress. And the League simply dare not take any drastic action against it. So will it be with the question of even a cessation of an increase in armaments. They will talk of the horrors of chemical warfare, as though whenever war occurs every nation will not indulge in it, and as though every nation is not doing what it can to perfect itself in it. They will discuss cheaper warfare, when what is required is to outlaw war altogether. They may cease to increase armaments, as though people cannot go to war with smaller armaments as well as with larger ones. War will never be stopped because it is dangerous, or because it is expensive. It is a case of relative danger and relative expense all the time. As usual the Church is doing what it can to blind men as to the realities of the situation, and to moralize an essentially immoral situation.

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#### What, Might be Done.

Yet the Churches might as collections of human beings do much to stop war, as might all who will, whether belonging to the Church or not. If the Archbishop and his clergy are genuinely in earnest when they denounce war, why not cease to take any official part in its preparation or encouragement? Why not make a commencement by removing from St. Paul's all insignia of war, at least? It is urged that when Christian men join the army, they are entitled to have their priests with them, and also in times of war they must accompany the men to give them what "spiritual" comfort they can. But is that a justification for their wearing a military uniform, taking part in military parades, and doing what they can to encourage the blood-lust? Suppose the clergy were to act with decency and common sense, and to tell the authorities that if their services were required for the Christians who are in the army they would refuse to wear a military dress, or to bless battleships, or dedicate weapons of war, and would not cease to impress upon the world the savagery and degradation of war, however "inevitable" it was. Would not that have a much better influence than they at present exert? That would be a very little thing for them to do, it is something that a man might do without failing in his duty to his country. The clergy might say that as clergy they simply have nothing to do with the waging of war, and would take no hand in preparing for it. What they do say is that they are against war, and then do all they can to make militarism an inevitable part of our lives.

What is true of the clergy is true of others. What is the good of men and women, from the throne downward, professing a hatred of militarism when it still occupies the most honoured place in our national life? If the king's birthday is to be honoured it must be done with a military display; if the king pays an official visit to a town there must be guards of soldiers drawn up to receive him. The finest square in London has for its sculptured adornments nothing but soldiers and sailors. It is soldiers, soldiers everywhere, honour to the military everywhere, in our monuments, in every phase of our social life, in our school histories, in our general literature. Life, whether mental or biological, is a question of adaptation to environment, and when militarism, and the glorification of militarism form so large a part of the environment to which the growing generation is called upon to adapt itself, we are doing what we can, not to end war, but to make war part of our conception of the nature of things. We can make war improbable, but it can only be by making it hateful, and an unmistakable registration of the barbarism of those who encourage it.

## A Sham Antique.

- — —
- "Solemnity is of the essence of imposture."  
Shaftesbury.
- "People swallow falsehood as a cat laps milk."  
G. W. Foote.
- "Reason is a rebel unto faith."—Thomas Browne.

At this season of the year our thoughts turn to the Yuletide festival, and, incidentally, to what it means. Each person approaches it from a different angle, and with differing ideas, and, perhaps, very few look beyond the purely festive nature of the event. Historical research has a queer way of turning the tables, ironically, on the preconceived ideas of the average man, and what we might almost term one of history's little jests is to be found in the story of the origins of Christmastide, which are not what the dear clergy pretend.

Yuletide means to most of us jovial feasts and dances held in homes, and even in clubs and hotels. To children it brings visions of "Santa Claus" and delightful presents. To all it means a cessation of ordinary work, and an atmosphere of conviviality and friendliness. The great annual festival meant much the same thing to the peoples of the old Roman Empire, long prior to the birth of Christianity and the invention of the Jesus legend.

Christmastide, indeed, is a salmagundi of Roman and other superstitions. It is a jumble of Paganism and Christianity, and has as many diverse ingredients as a Christmas pudding. It is largely based on the old Roman Saturnalia, but there are also Druidic, Scandinavian and Teutonic features incorporated. The Roman occupation of Britain lasted five centuries, and one of the principal festivals could not fail to be observed. It was this particular circumstance which caused Christmas Day to be fixed as December 25 by the Christian priests when they overcame the older religions. The anniversary of Saturn was then a very old established institution, and the propensity of converts from Paganism to cling to old custom proved invincible. If the apostates were to be retained in the fold of the new superstition, it was abundantly clear that the new priesthood should incorporate the old festival under the mask of the new.

Hence the Christ legend was incorporated with the older festival. It is a fantastic and most improbable story, but people who profess and call themselves Christians pretend to believe it.

A child with a ghost for its father is alleged to have been born in a stable at Bethlehem in Judæa. This baby was considered to be of such importance that a wholesale massacre of children was said to have been carried out in the hope of getting rid of this infant phenomenon. The after life of this bogey's son is one long string of marvellous happenings. He is alleged to have brought the dead to life, and restored the sight of the blind. He is said to have fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and turned water into wine. At his death the earth was enveloped in darkness for three days. After death he is said to have appeared again, and he finally ascended into the sky like an aeroplane, and, for what is known, may be careering in space to-day.

There has never been so astonishing a career. Yet, outside the Christian Scriptures there is no corroboration of this most sensational of all ghost stories. So far as sober historians are concerned, "the rest is silence."

This Oriental ghost-story is, obviously, Eastern fiction, but, unfortunately, the legend is associated with organized Priestcraft. In order that fifty thousand Christian priests may make a comfortable living, this pretence and make-believe is treated with respect in-

stead of with laughter. The clergy make millions out of this sacred sham, ranging from the £15,000 yearly of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the £5 weekly of the greenest and youngest curate. The clergy themselves are not deceived. They keep control of the machinery of education so as to ensure that their absurd abracadabra is treated with respect by the rising generation, and their own salaries and position are safeguarded. It is the sorriest form of trade protection known, for it implies the mental slavery of a whole nation in the interests of a pharasaical crowd of priestly profiteers.

Christmas, Yuletide, or by whatever name the annual festival has been known, has survived many religions, and for purely secular reasons. It is a period of respite from daily cares, and it comes but once a year. It is a period of joviality, the giving of gifts, the union of rich and poor. It is the season of the warm heart and the open hand. It is thousands of years old, and reaches back to the twilight of human history. It antedates Christianity and will survive that Oriental religion just as it has survived other and older superstitions. Christmas, so far as Priestcraft is concerned, is an organized hypocrisy, a celebration of an event that never happened. But as a purely human institution it is a period of goodwill and happiness which the modern world will not willingly forego:—

"Life still hath one romance that nought can bury,  
For still will Christmas gild the year's mischances."

MIMNERMUS.

## Christmas.

THE great advantage of protesting against useless old customs, no matter how well-founded the case for complaint may be, is that hardly anyone will trouble to listen to one's protests. No matter how earnestly or melliflously one may spout, one's oratory is seldom interrupted by the rude voice of the heckler. Such is the delightfully narcotic effect of habit and tradition. Even those, who by accident fail to turn a deaf ear, refuse *en masse* to make any intelligent effort to consider, reasonably or dispassionately, the arguments for or against. Only when a custom has become an intolerable nuisance to the community and its evil effects are almost ineradicable, does anyone dare to whisper anything but high praise of its pestilential influences.

For the majority of people the continued existence of a custom is amply justified if its whiskers are hoary with age. They will suffer for an incredible duration of time, and with varying degrees of hard-boiled cheerfulness, all the discomforts and abuses inherent in its practice, without ever attempting to rid themselves of the incubus. "It has always been so," is the universal plea, implying that it must always be so for ever and ever, world without end, amen. Verily, it may be hard to kick against the pricks; but to the average woodenhead it seems that permanently lacerated shins are a joy and a comfort as compared with the slight mental effort which would be required to clear away the brambles of tradition.

Yet, if haply by some miracle of mischance anyone should succeed in penetrating the bemused mind of the public with his criticisms of moth-eaten customs, the only thanks he is likely to get is to be branded with some opprobrious name and to be relegated to the rank of criminal or crank. And since most of our mouldy customs are tied up with more than one tradition, the number of derogatory labels he will receive will increase in proportion to the decrepitude of the custom. If the background to it is a religious one,

then our reformer is automatically condemned as atheistic, as an agnostic, a heretic, a schismatic, or some other sort of - tic. All these flattering terms carry with them the necessary implication that he is a blackguard, an evil liver and in fact an irretrievably bad hat. If the custom is of national or royal character, then our critic is hailed as a traitor, a bolshevist, a nihilist, a terrorist, a communist, or even a wild socialist. (I apologise if there is any other - ist that I've missed from the list.) If the custom is supposed to be observed solemnly, then he is deemed rowdy, irreverent, ribald and the rest of 'em; while if it is meant to be joyful, he is called kill-joy, unsociable and a Scrooge. If there is no particular tradition or superstition attached to the custom, then failing any of the foregoing compliments he is quite simply and conclusively regarded as suffering from delusions, melancholia, paranoia or some other more complicated and up-to-date form of lunacy. On the whole there's no end to the pleasant permutations and combinations which can be worked out by those who manage to get themselves sufficiently worked up.

One does not have to seek far or wide for instances of priceless idiotic customs. Some are older, some more widespread and some more footling than others. But it is against none of these relatively harmless qualities that the reasonable critic protests. It is against the unwarranted claim to prestige and respect which they make on the sole ground of being established; and it is against the abuses which such a claim tends to perpetuate and conceal when a custom has developed—as few customs of long-standing fail to do—along irritating and harmful lines. It is also against the attitude of taboo with which the unthinking public irrationally defends institutions that it has become inured to, simply because it has become inured to them.

The Christian fetish book says in three different ways (while the revised version provides yet a fourth): "Ye have the poor always with you." So begging was tolerated; not so much as an unavoidable evil, but as a divinely appointed method of providing the rich with a convenient key to heaven. The more Christian the country, indeed, the more prolific, proficient and professional the beggar. With increasing secularization and diminishing religiosity, however, the public conscience began to object to the nuisance, such that in the more civilized communities mendicancy came to be looked upon as a mild crime. One fine day we shall become civilized enough to realize that poverty is also a crime—not on the part of the genuine poor, who cannot be accused of enjoying or profiting by their poverty, but on the part of the community in which persons are to be found who have not the wherewithal to maintain life in decent comfort.

The same applies to patriotism (or "narrow nationalism" as some prefer to call it) and to all those customs which tend to keep this parochial, jealousy-breeding spirit alive. One ghastly international war does not seem to have been enough to knock the common-sense side of this subject into the heads of those responsible for governing the peoples. Perhaps the present world-wide commercial and financial troubles will do more to make them see the utter stupidity of artificial boundaries and barriers than anything else has done hitherto. For it is true that most men's brains are in their pockets. And it is not true that one must wave a coloured rag on the end of a stick or march in step behind a brass band in order to appreciate that particular part of the earth where one feels most at home.

One fine day we shall become civilized enough to realize the futility of celebrating semi-official and semi-compulsory "days." Guy Fawkes Day has had

its day. In the opinion of one fairly large section of the public—the Roman Catholic—this "day" has already been too long by several years. But they, of course, are prejudiced. Of those true patriots—the Protestants—who go to most trouble in keeping this custom alive, ninety per cent (the street urchins) are totally ignorant of its origin and implications. Not that this really matters concerning any custom. But the remainder are childlike persons who, knowing the facts, ignore them, yet take advantage of the excuse for making a din on the grounds that it amuses the children. The annoyance caused and the possible danger to others is a mere bagatelle. What a grand finale for such a noble old custom!

"Remember, remember, the 5th of November, when gunpowder, treason and plot," has decayed into an evening of mere gunpowder, akin to the celebration of Chinese New Year. Its decease has undoubtedly been hastened by the too close proximity of its modern rival, November 11th. And this, in its turn, is already in process of deterioration. It will doubtless end as a day of mere silence and stupid solemnity, akin to the old—or not so old—Scottish Sabbath. If the public had been allowed by the Powers—that-be to choose its own method of celebration it might have been quite otherwise, though none the less futile. Yet, on second thoughts, rejoicing of any kind does seem to be less noxious than useless melancholy. Now, however, it is certain that if any four-footed donkey had the temerity to break the two-minute silence with a protesting bray, it would immediately be trampled under foot by an infuriated mob. Costers, beware!

I do not know of any law which compels a man to stand up and stand still, bareheaded, when the national anthem is played. If there is such a law, I would be glad to have information of it. But I do know that it is dangerous for a man to attempt to walk out of a London cinema while this extremely dull tune is being blared out by the orchestra. Women will risk their shins and corns, while men become positively pugilistic in an endeavour to force their herd-mentality upon you in these circumstances. The brain-pans of such human sheep would probably burst before it could occur to any of them that there might be good and urgent reasons for a member of the audience to get outside quickly at that precise moment. One wonders what "respect for royalty" would be shown if someone were to cry "Fire!" Some fine day we will become civilized enough to realize that respect for governments or rulers cannot be inculcated by compulsion, nor by the continued practice of chauvinistic customs.

When that day arrives, judges, provosts, mayors, archbishops, lords, and other functionaries will cease to enhance their respective dignities by means of wild and woolly wigs, childish chains and chasubles, and fantastic fancy costumes. Trust and respect will be measured and given to them in proportion to the wisdom and usefulness of their deeds, not in proportion to the number of feathers in their hats. Eminent persons will also refrain from breaking reputed quarts of reputed champagne upon the bows of battleships, the while some holy man calls down God's blessing upon their humanitarian purpose. Individuals or social groups will choose and change their own days and methods of celebration in accordance with their respective fancies, with the understood condition that no sort of compulsion, interference or discomfort is thereby forced upon others who are not like-minded. Official or semi-official dragooning will cease to be possible; and men and women will be free to be mournful or gay, to look solemn or smile, to give or refrain from giving presents, without fear of social ostracism in private circles or mob violence in public places.

And what (some inquisitive reader may ask) - what of Christmas?

Come, come, my friend. Surely you must be aware that this beautiful old custom is maintained in order to celebrate the birthday of God knows who; and that he was born God knows where, God knows when and God knows how? Who, then, am I that I should venture to say about it - God knows what?

C. S. FRASER.

## Man and the Universe

(Concluded from page 810.)

"Youth of to-day is determined to think things out for itself, and to take nothing for granted."—(The Bishop of London. *The Observer*, May 3, 1931.)

"For the first time in history a generation has grown up of which it may be said with much truth that it has no religion."—(Father Woodlock. *The Observer*, May 10, 1931.)

"Whereas only a comparatively little while ago theology was almost universally conceded to be the very acme of human knowledge, to-day it occupies a position among the sciences almost exactly like that of alchemy or astrology."—(Prof. D. S. Robinson. *The God of the Liberal Christian*, Ch. 2.)

It is difficult for the present generation to understand the consternation, and dismay, with which the Victorians received the theory of evolution. The impact of the new Darwinian ideas was terrific. They saw at once that if man had descended from the animals, then he shared their fate at death and ceased to exist, and away went the immortality of the soul. In fact away went the soul altogether.

While Lord Balfour stirred the emotions in philosophic prose, Tennyson did the same in poetry. It was a subject that distracted his attention, and tormented his peace of mind all his life. Was he not the Poet Laureate? The favourite of the great Queen, to whom he read his *In Memoriam*, and who graciously informed him that it was her favourite reading? Was he destined to end in "Dust to dust, and ashes to ashes," and there an end? It was unthinkable. And yet doubts would continually intrude, and then he would rant and rave, and declare defiantly, "But I was born to other things," and like a man in wrath the heart stood up and "answered 'I have felt.'" (*In Memoriam*) But forty years later we find him still distressed, and lamenting, in his poem *Vastness*:—

What is it all, if we all of us end but in being our own corpse  
—coffins at last,  
Swallow'd in *Vastness*, lost in Silence, drown'd in the deeps  
of a meaningless Past?

The distance we have travelled since those ideas prevailed, may be measured by the calmness, and often, complete indifference, with which the subject is treated to-day.

Bertrand Russell has dealt with the modern man's reactions to the subject in his book, *Mysticism and Logic* (1918) in a chapter entitled "A Free Man's Worship." In the beginning he introduces Mephistopheles, who tells Dr. Faustus the story of the Creation. Of how God grew weary of the endless praises of the angels. For, after all, he deserved their praise for the gifts he had bestowed upon them. "Would it not be more amusing to obtain undeserved praise, to be worshipped by beings whom he had tortured? He smiled inwardly, and resolved that the great drama should be performed." Then the story goes on to show how the drama was enacted. During countless ages, nebulae condensed into stars and planets, life appeared, and ultimately man, with his animal ances-

try strong upon him. And when he followed the animal instincts he called it sin, "And he gave God thanks for the strength that enabled him to forego even the joys that were possible. And God smiled; and when he saw that Man had become perfect in renunciation and worship, he sent another sun through the sky, which crashed into Man's sun and all returned again to nebula. "Yes," he murmured, "it was a good play; I will have it performed again."

Such, in outline, but even more purposeless and void of meaning, says Bertrand Russell, is the picture of the world presented by Science, which teaches that Man, with his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are the accidental outcome of the evolution of the forces in the universe. That nothing can preserve the individual life beyond the grave: "That all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noon-day brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system." No philosophy which rejects this view can hope to stand, and it is upon this foundation that henceforth man must arrange his life and his ideals:—

Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate; to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.

That it is better, and nobler, than drugging one's self with religious morphine. Prof. Clifford, the mathematician, after stating the teaching of science, that the world and all its contents, including man, must some day come to an end, asks: "Do I seem to say: 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die'?" Far from it; on the contrary I say: 'Let us take hands and help, for this day we are alive together.'"<sup>1</sup> And Clifford was an uncompromising Atheist. Bertrand Russell, in the following beautiful passage, gives the same teaching:—

United with his fellow-men by the strongest of all ties, the tie of a common doom, the free man finds that a new vision is with him always shedding over every daily task the light of love. The life of Man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach, and where none may tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Very brief is the time in which we can help them, in which their happiness or misery is decided. Be it ours to shed sunshine on their path, to lighten their sorrows by the balm of sympathy, to give them the pure joy of a never-tiring affection, to strengthen failing courage, to instil faith in hours of despair scale their merits and demerits, but let us think only of their need—of the sorrows, the difficulties, perhaps the blindnesses, that make the misery of their lives, let us remember that they are fellow-sufferers in the same darkness, actors in the same tragedy with ourselves. And so, when their day is over, when their good and their evil have become eternal by the immortality of the past, be it ours to feel that, where they suffered, where they failed, no deed of ours was the cause; but

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Clifford: *Lectures and Essays* (1886). p. 159.

wherever a spark of the divine fire kindled in their hearts, we were ready with encouragement and sympathy, with brave words in which high courage glowed.<sup>2</sup>

That is better, and nobler, than wasting supplication, prayer, and praise upon a mythical God.

W. MANN.

### Drama and Dramatists.

"Why stay we on the earth unless to grow?"

*Browning.*

IN a marked transitional period of the world's history, the thinking man will be straining his ears to catch the note of human welfare. His efforts will be towards that welfare—he owes that through loyalty to his species, and wherever there are signs of growth of the spirit of humanism, willing feet will take him there. A writer, I forget whom, stated that the disappearance of the horse from the streets was a fact of greater significance than flying the Atlantic. Kropotkin, in his *Mutual Aid*, stresses the importance of human contact with animals; that the introduction of masses of machinery into daily life has created a hardening of the human feelings is an observable fact will scarcely be denied; that the disappearance of money from circulation with its fatal and anti-social consequences in an age of plenty, is a sign that the citadel of the human spirit is being attacked, none but the timorous and fearful will deny. The remedy to all this is thought and action, or, I might say, fact and feeling. The high priests of religion and finance as a result of their own operations threaten to engulf the world with problems of their own creation passed on to the human race. There is even a squeal from interests that the despised working man will not drink enough beer, but this is a subject for Lucian. So, leaving the world of fact for a time, come with me to see "The Barretts of Wimpole Street"—in the following notes, for it is soon to be withdrawn.

Elizabeth Barrett, the daughter of Edward Moulton-Barrett, is seen lying on a couch in a mid-Victorian drawing-room. She is ill, and Doctor Chambers is in attendance. An effort to walk across the room with him, fails, and he leaves her with words of hope and encouragement, after deciding that she may have milk to drink instead of porter, as ordered by her tyrannical father. He comes along, like a character in Remizov's *Fifth Pestilence*, stern, implacable, forbidding. He forces her to empty a tankard of porter and the scene closes with the loneliness of Elizabeth and a break-down.

In the second act, Robert Browning arrives to see Elizabeth. Young, handsome, tall, strong, exuding health, and loquacious, he does what the doctor cannot do. His word pictures of good health, of the sun, of Italy, his joke against himself in a passage of Sordello—that only God and himself knew what he meant—all these break down the barricades of ill-health, and the curtain falls on Elizabeth as she walks across the room unaided, to catch a departing glance of her lover.

Robert calls again. There are secret arrangements for marriage and flight to Italy. The poet has his way, and Elizabeth writes farewell letters to her brothers and sisters, not forgetting her father. With her maid, and her dog Flush she prepares for the journey and leaves the prison-house and the onlooker's interest is excited in what kind of domestic fun there is to follow.

Elizabeth's sister, at a later time, enters the empty room, finds a letter addressed to her, and has a fit of hysteria that alarms the household. Brothers and sisters come trooping in and the letters are read. Henrietta, who was chosen for special restraint by her father, jumps at the chance of handing him his letter. It is Elizabeth's message to a stern and pitiful parent; Elizabeth was the apple of his eye. He had given her the love of Saturn—not of Jupiter, and she had almost withered away. Foiled in his inability to hold her, he orders her dog Flush to be destroyed. And in the information to

him that Elizabeth had taken Flush with her, the curtain descends on a play of which, the author, Mr. Rudolph Besier, has every reason to be proud. He has kept well within the life-stream, and readers of Dowden's life of Robert Browning will see how a dramatist selects his material for an artist's own particular purpose. Browning was more indebted to Landor than to any other of his contemporaries. The old lion stayed with Browning at his villa in Italy; irascible as ever, it is recorded that he only threw his dinner through the window once during a visit. Of the quality of Landor's philosophy and writings it can be said that their very faults would make a good book, and a real friend of Landor would have to qualify in no easy manner for the privilege of his friendship. Landor, a man of eighty-six years old, was, as Mrs. Browning called him, her "adopted son." The good joke about Browning not being at all like a damned literary gent., was also brought in by the author, who deserves our praise and thanks for a beautiful modern rendering of one of Æsop's fables. The contention between the wind and the sun with a traveller ended in the Sun's victory, for the sunshine of a kind and gentle manner is better than the threatenings and force of blustering authority. Mr. Besier's play is a man's contribution towards the retention of mankind's sanity that is threatened by newspaper hooliganism, and its long run is a proof that the froth and bubble drama demerited by the tar brush of America has had its day.

The cast fits the play like a glove. Mr. Cedric Hardwicke, after his long run in the character of Jove (Churdles Ash) has gone to the opposite in this play; he is Saturn, and his performance carries that excellence in the execution that he is at once a sign and a warning. He is the embodiment of selfish love, yet, like the feeling towards Don Quixote, there come moments of pity towards the puritanical parent who cannot see that the supply of affection is like the widow's cruse of oil. Every one of his actions on the stage has a significance; we can read his thoughts as he strums on the window-pane with his fingers. His elocution is superb, and there is the carrying on of the best tradition of the stage in his art that brings to mind, Irving, Bancroft, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Miss Marie Tempest and a host of others who underline the expression that genius consists in the art of taking pains. Miss Eileen Bendon, Miss Marjorie Mars, and Miss Susan Richmond, together with Miss Joan Barry seemed to enjoy their parts of truly feminine women, and Scott Sunderland as Browning made a day to be marked by a white stone.

As I am late in offering for your delight my version of Mr. Besier's play, I will balance it up with an early announcement. Mr. Cedric Hardwicke is to play Churdles in a few week's time in the same house—the "Queen's Theatre," Shaftesbury Avenue. Once again, therefore, you will be able to see country life through the eyes of Mr. Eden Phillpotts, whose feet always have the habit of being on the earth. Once again, you will be able to see "Little Silver" farm, and once again you will be able to hear the language of common sense which threatens daily to become a dead language but for the efforts of thinkers, artists, and actors—all utterly useless in getting nations to hate each other or gibbering about a tax on asparagus. But there are many signs of hope that we shall not lose human values, at the whim and fancy of a handful of dictators. One of them is the "Barretts of Wimpole Street," and another is the arrival of "The Farmer's Wife."

C-DE-B.

Without tact, you can learn nothing. Tact teaches you when to be silent. Inquirers who are always inquiring never learn anything.—*B. Disraeli.*

Titles of honour are like the impressions on coins; which add no value to gold and silver, but only render brass current.—*Sterne.*

The virtue which has never been attacked by temptation is deserving of no monument.—*Mlle de Scuderi.*

<sup>2</sup> Bertrand Russell: *Mysticism and Logic*. p. 56.

## Acid Drops.

Writing on the "Wondrous Birth," the *Church Times* says that the Evangelists, Luke and Matthew write of the virgin birth independently of each other, and their "mutual confirmation is complete." That is not really more surprising than the fact that people in various parts of the world should have written about ghosts without borrowing from one another. But the gem of the article lies in the sentence that "they represent the only ultimate witnesses by whom the facts could be certified, namely, Mary who declared it, and Joseph who believed it to be true." That is really delicious. Mary declared it, and granting that she knew all about the question of who was the father of the child, we imagine that any modern jury listening to the same story from an unmarried woman about to become a mother, would have "winked the other eye." Mary could hardly be called an independent or impartial witness. And as to Joseph's testimony we are told the source of his information. He dreamed about it. We wonder whether in connexion with anything beside religion two such witnesses would be put forward as furnishing evidence to which men outside an idiot asylum or a church would not pay the slightest attention?

Rev. E. I. Macassey, a North London Vicar, says that "the London diocese is littered with redundant Churches attended by a handful of depressed worshippers, whose needs in every case could be met by a church round the corner." That all these "redundant" churches are "livings"; that although the worshippers are only a "handful"—and depressed withal—the parson gets as much for preaching to oak pews or pitch pine chairs as he would if the place were crowded out: these are the reasons why the litter referred to exists. If parsons had to work "for use and not for profit," how many would be employed?

The Vicar of St. Stephen's Hampstead, Rev. H. Sharp, gets very neatly ticked off (in the *Hampstead and Highgate Express*) by an old school teacher for some contemptuous remarks on Council Schools. Mr. Sharp, it seems, said that in Church schools "the first aim is loyalty to God, and loving service to others," but, "as regards the Council schools although a little religion or moral training is thrown in, the curriculum trains the children to put mammon first." Says the old leader (Mr. W. Sharman) "several members of St. Stephen's congregation are old scholars of Fleet Road Board School, and they will smilingly deprecate the Vicar's aspersion on their old school." Mr. Sharp, who has averred that "the average man is hopelessly incompetent to form any judgment on any subject that is of any value," will no doubt prove to be as pachydermatous to criticism as parsons mostly are; but as the Council Schools aforesaid have "Simple Bible teaching" every day, and as (according to Mr. Sharman) "many of the teachers in Council Schools are good church people" (and therefore, implicitly instil the dual loyalties aforesaid by way of "Simple Bible teaching") he would seem to have bitten off a good deal more than he can chew on this occasion.

The Bishop of London is at it again. We gather from a report in the *Christian World*, that a series of Conferences are to be held in the London Diocese to consider the future relations of the Church and the State. The Bishop asserted that there were not conferences for Disestablishment or the Bishop of Durham would have been in the chair. He also said that he (Dr. Ingram) had predicted for thirty years that if Disestablishment came, it would come, not on the ritual question, but on the marriage question. We should like to point out that there is no difference between the two issues which both involve the same question, whether the Church, which is in legal theory and fact controlled by Parliament, shall

obey the law. It is only accidental that the general public which does not care a damn about whether its ritual is legal, cares a good deal about the flagrant refusal of State-paid parsons to recognize what the law recognizes as legal marriages. Ever since the Report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Disorders (1906) the Church has dodged judgment on the former issue through the "masterly inactivity of the Bishops," but his lordship of London could not more plainly show his characteristic stupidity than by this pretence that as a defender of "Christian marriage"—*i.e.*, the marriage of idiots and decadents provided it is in Church—will save his bacon as easily as it has done over the Victorian age's "ritualism."

A correspondent draws our attention to a useful comment from an unlikely source, the *Listener*, one of the organs of the B.B.C. In an article by Professor Ernest Barker therein, the anomalous position of our Established religion is effectively demonstrated. "The Church of England for long centuries claimed to be one side of that politico-ecclesiastical commonwealth, of which the State was the other side. The King, the head of the State, is also, by an Act of Elizabeth, the Supreme Governor of the Church . . . the bishops, or most of them, are not only bishops, but also peers in the House of Lords, and all of them, though they are Church officers, are appointed by the State . . . This means what we call Disestablishment. It also means what we call Disendowment; for the endowments of the Church—its buildings and its revenues—belong to it as a National Church which is dovetailed into the State, and they cease to belong to it if, and when, it ceases to be so dovetailed. They may instead be given back by Parliament, wholly or in part, on conditions determined by Parliament." These revenues, it may be mentioned, greatly exceed such profits as may be conceivably accrued to our financially embarrassed nation by a 50 per cent tax upon imported broccoli.

According to the *Church of England Year Book* (1932) in forty-seven years church people have contributed £55,624,000 in voluntary contributions for "the Endowment of benefices, the building restoration and furnishing of churches and parsonage houses, and the purchase and enlargement of churchyards." "Blessed be ye poor."

Church Livings, unlike "rotten Boroughs" can still be bought and sold for cash. A Committee, under the Dean of Westminster, has found that in 1,030 parishes the "living" belongs to a party trust, 932 under Low Church control and 98 under Anglo-Catholic control. "Economic conditions," according to the *Times*, "have diminished the reluctance of landed proprietors to sell," and competition in the Advowson business is brisk. We do not see anything to justify a *Times* leader in these by no means novel conditions, nor why it should be more wicked for a landed proprietor to buy the right of presentation with the estate than for a corporate body to buy it from him. He would appoint a parson to suit his views, and they appoint them to suit those views represented by their money. In neither case is there in law or in fact any question of consulting the parishioners. Why should it be more sacrilegious to sell a "living" than to pick the pockets of citizens who do not go to church by the legalized robbery of Tithes?

The Church Assembly has "for reasons of economy" adjourned until February; but, as it is powerless to act in this matter without Parliament, and as Parliament is well known to be engaged in grave matters of national emergency relating to spring greens and lip-stick, we fear this trade will go on unabated. The *Times*, like the wise old owl it is supposed to be, observes that "there are difficulties in the way of retrospective legislation in this matter"—for if Church finances once came under "retrospective legislature," it is just possible that the bottom would be knocked out of the traffic in Advowsons and a

good deal more in the way of "sound speculation" in religious beliefs—the most deeply entrenched of all the vested interests.

"Society or Solitude?" is the theme of an article in a Nonconformist journal. The writer argues that:—

We need society also for criticism. We may strongly resent it, but we must not escape it. We may strive to hear nothing but what flatters our conceit, or, hearing adverse comment, disregard its wholesome ministry, but that way lies disaster.

In heartily agreeing with this dictum, we would point out that Christians ought to be truly grateful that there is a *Freethinker* to provide them with a "wholesome ministry." Let them not disregard it, for in that way lies disaster!

The trustees of the Wesleyan Chapel at Etwall (Derby) are to receive £200 from the estate of the late Mr. F. H. Hilton, a retired Burton-on-Trent draper, and a staunch Wesleyan. The deceased left £17,058, and on the death of his widow the residence is to be shared between a Bible Society, a children's orphanage, and two Wesleyan associations. The bequests would appear to suggest that the deceased was rather apprehensive when making his will. He suddenly remembered that he ought not to have "laid up treasure on earth," and that there is a difficulty in getting a camel through the eye of a needle. And so he endeavoured to avert divine displeasure by dumping his accumulation of wealth on religious and charitable institutions. It's an old manœuvre, but God Almighty must be credited with enough intelligence to see through it.

The "Best Jokes of the War" are being reprinted in some of the newspapers. Apropos of this, a contemporary suggests that the best joke is that the war was a war to end war. We suggest that the best post-war joke is the parsons', when they declare that the Christian religion and the Churches can end war. It is a great joke in view of the Churches' achievements in that direction during the past nineteen centuries. As religion does nothing to develop a sense of humour in its devotees, the joke goes unperceived by the followers of the Prince of Peace. What a pity.

Mr. Justice McCardie, who is to be congratulated on acting on Voltaire's privilege of saying what one thinks, has stated that perjury in our law courts has never been more rife than it is at present. Christians may take what credit they like for this compliment to the quality of the evidence given on the grand old book. It is a well-known fact that Counsel nearly always take exception to being reminded by a witness that the oath has been taken; it is also a well-known fact that in many cases affirmation is made as difficult as possible. There is no prize offered for the solution of this conundrum.

The Chaplain of Marlborough College declares that he has "never met a man who had won money by luck who was happier for it." Yet most of us know that parsons are made happy by money won by luck. It is luck that provides parsons' salaries—the luck being in the fact that their Christian sheep are mighty credulous. This explains, we presume, why parsons often carry a lucky charm in the shape of a cross!

Sir T. Crichton-Browne, aged ninety-one, says "I believe in hard work, and a merry heart that goes all the way." This will be cheering news to a few millions of unemployed who cannot get work—hard or soft—because

of an unintelligent economic system. Somehow, one can't quite imagine half-filled bellies engendering merry hearts that go all the way.

According to Dr. Roche Lynch, a thimblefull of tears can dissolve and annihilate 50,000 million germs in a few minutes. Now we can see why the good Lord invented so many ways in which suffering and tears would be inflicted upon his human creation, and why the Christian religion was such that its followers felt impelled to be cruel to one another. It is all part of a divine plan to make antiseptic tears to flow and annihilate harmful germs. The Creator desired that his experiments with germs should not do too much damage to his other experiment, man. Thus the Christian problem of suffering is at least solved!

Speaking about England's difficulties, Sir George Paish declares that "we shall get through by the action of reasonable people and not by politicians." This is rather hard, not only on politicians but parsons, who have worked damned hard to save the nation, by praying.

The destructive humour of Mark Twain—to whose services to Freethought tribute was paid in our last issue—is also illustrated in a leader in the *Manchester Guardian* (December 12), in which it observes: "From time to time someone will estimate in money value the world's wasted activity. Mark Twain proved that if the movements of Simon Stylites as he swayed backwards and forwards on his lonely pillar had been utilized so many looms might have been kept going for so many weeks and so many shirts manufactured for so many bare backs; but the Saint's limbs were connected with no revolving wheels, and his religious contortions, from a purely utilitarian point of view, were quite wasted." To which apposite moral we may add that if the vast expenditure of money and human energy which is diverted from useful and productive service by the worship and servants of God was available for practical uses the plight of the whole Christian world might be less desperate than it is to-day.

If Alderman C. L. Solley, of Sandwich, is right, what used to be called "God's tenth" will have to be snitably re-named. "For generations," said the Alderman—at an anti-tithe meeting the other evening—"the tithe has been one tenth of the produce. In recent years legislation had fixed it at a figure which in many cases was nine-tenths." God's monetary necessities have always been so serious. He did not object to taking even "the widow's mite."

### Fifty Years Ago.

DAVID.

DECEIVER, murderer, tyrant, man of God,

King-rascal of the giant slaying fame,—

In all the Hebrew annals thy dark name  
Is only equalled by the wretch, whose rod  
Stretched o'er the sea to bid the water part;

Thy sweet example of Theistic worth

Is taught to men, the noblest of our earth,

By those like thee—men after God's own heart,

Who far from ill as thee, yet deem thee pure,

And prate of all thy goodness to the throng

Whom thus they teach to walk with looks demure,

And see the greatest worth in foulest wrong;

Oh great dead David, shameless man of shame,

Thine is a base and ignominious name!

*The "Freethinker," December 25, 1881.*



## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S.B.—We do not quite see the point of your letter. No one has ever dreamed of denying that Marx was a great man. And every man who fights accepted ideas, even though he be proved to be wrong, is doing something for the education and the betterment of mankind.

T. CARTER.—The right to reply to any criticism has never been denied to anyone so far as we are concerned. You have been misinformed.

H.W.—Of course there is such a thing as "Bible English." What we said was that the English of the Bible was never written or spoken by the English people. It is a special and peculiar type of English. The idea that it formed the style of the great English writers is simply not true. The persistence of such a statement is an example of how hard it is to kill a superstition once it is got going.

B. THOMAS.—You may trust the *Daily Herald* to do all it can to play the religious game.

R. REMINGTON.—We do not care to publish your letter without having the proofs in our possession. The instances given are serious enough to challenge the production of the evidence.

J. STEPHENS.—The likeness to our article is close, but we have noted similar instances in other papers.

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*When the services of the National Secular Society in connexion with Secular Burial Services are required, all communications should be addressed to the Secretary, Mr. R. H. Rosetti, giving as long notice as possible.*

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

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## Sugar Plums.

We do not mind giving a free advertisement now and again, and this week we give one to the firm of Pope & Bradley, tailors. (We believe the "Bradley" here is the gentleman who has written so much nonsense concerning the spirits he has held intercourse with.) In their shop windows this firm exhibits the notice that "Every man on our salary pay list is a British born Christian." That is very cheering, and helps us to realize what a nice place the world would be to live in if people like Messrs. Pope and Bradley had their way. Why if these men had ruled the roost there would never have been any Christians to employ, for it is an unquestionable fact that Jesus was not British born, and his establishment in this country put a number of genuine British gods out of business.

The following reaches us from Mr. Victor Morris, Secre-

tary of the Wembley Branch of the N.S.S., and may well follow the above item:—

Dear Sir,—An incident that has just occurred in connexion with our Branch of the N.S.S. emphasizes how essential it is that there shall be an independent Free-thought Movement, bound in no way to any set of political ideas.

A member has resigned after spending three months in our ranks; not because he repudiates the principles, aims and objects of the Society, but because he has joined the Socialist Party of Great Britain. When informing me of his decision to resign, he said he was acting on the advice of the Committee of the S.P.G.B. that dealt with his application for membership of that body.

Instead of basing his resignation on any experience of his own during his short connexion with the Society, he has accepted the word of his new love that the N.S.S. is an anti-working-class organization, the "evidence" for which is the statement that some N.S.S. speakers are also connected with political bodies with different economic doctrines from those of the S.P.G.B.

Obviously, he has now found his most suitable environment for mental stagnation, the N.S.S. being no place for those who voluntarily submit to dictation regarding how they shall think, speak and act.

Yours truly,

P. VICTOR MORRIS.

We do not think any comment is necessary.

We continue to receive many letters congratulating us on the publication of *Selected Heresies*. Those who have written will please take this as an acknowledgment. We venture to suggest that those who wish to give a friend a New Year's present—whether he be Christian or Freethinker—illustrating the scope of Free-thought might easily select a worse volume than this one.

We notice a good, strong letter from Mr. H. R. Clifton in a recent issue of the *Croydon Advertiser*, on the question of Sunday Cinemas. Letters of this kind do much good in letting the general public know the extent of the opposition to the stupid and sectarian, legislation which still dominates the country. We should like to see very much more activity among Freethinkers in this direction.

An effort is being made to form a Branch of the N.S.S. in Poplar, London. There are plenty of Freethinkers in the district, and those willing to co-operate should communicate with Mrs. Jones, 10 Duff Street, Poplar, London, E.

## MAN AND GOD.

Worship culture is the letter that destroys: exhausted air, breathed many times and heavily carbonized, it kills by asphyxiation. Knowledge is always virgin soil and the air of the mountains. We cannot know too many things. We cannot know enough that the forms of matter of which we consist are the substance of the farthest star and of all the stars. We can never sufficiently realize that no thought or fancy of man, however extravagant in seeming, can be in essence an error: matter can never belie itself. The search and the name are often wrong: wireless telegraphy is much more wonderful than sorcery: lightning, light, radiation are much more wonderful than spirit; the imponderable, invisible, inaudible ether is much more wonderful than God: the omnipotent omnicontinent ether which fills space, and out of which the elements evolve, secreted by the tingling nerves of the bi-sexual lightning to become systems, and suns and men. We can never know enough that man is the Universe capable of self-consciousness, and there is nothing higher than man. This is the knowledge that will change the world."

From John Davidson's "God and Mammon."

## "Catholic Essays."

THERE is one claim made by the Roman Catholic Church which deserves our serious consideration. It is a claim constantly made, and I, for one, am not disposed to quarrel with it. Go wherever you will, cried Cardinal Manning in a famous essay, years ago, you will find the Church—North, South, East and West. And he insisted it was always the *same* Church, unchangeable in doctrine and morals, in ideas and claims, since its foundation by Jesus on the rock of Peter or Peter the rock (I have always been lazy as to which was which).

I admit that as far as its theology is concerned, Protestant writers have hotly contested the claim. They have written many books to prove that the Church has added, during centuries, many strange and new doctrines not countenanced by the Bible, to their preposterous creed. But I think that in bigotry and intolerance, in arrogance and ignorance, no Free-thinker would claim for a moment any change in the attitude of the Roman Church during well nigh 2,000 years. Given powerful opposition it will humbly plead for tolerance for its followers. Given weak opposition and it will ride rough-shod over any "heretical" opinions and stamp them out if at all possible. Nothing like this unchangeable two-faced attitude can be paralleled in any other organization.

If one goes by the increase in population in this country, it is doubtful if the Roman Church is really adding to its numbers. But no one can deny that many eminent people have gone over to it, and we must give them the credit for sincerity. Why do they? It is difficult to say. Perhaps we don't know enough of the psychology of conversion. Perhaps we are too hard-headed materialists to understand the fascination the Roman ritual has for some minds. But the fact remains that people, and mostly famous literary people are either Catholics born and never change, or somehow or other, join the ranks of the converted with unconcealed pride.

The comment one must make, however, is that for unadulterated balderdash, it would be difficult to beat some of their *apologias*. When Mr. Evelyn Waugh, for example, tells us how and why he became a Roman Catholic, or Miss Sheila Kaye-Smith, or when Mr. D. B. Wyndham Lewis doffs his cap and bells, and attempts to be serious in a defence of the Faith (capital F. please), their reputation as writers seems to vanish in a cloud of ink. Even the best of writers can nod, of course, but, bless me, how *do* they manage to churn out such dreary drivel?

You get the same phenomenon with other writers converted to other things. Sir A. Conan Doyle as a story teller ranks very high—look at *The Speckled Band* or *Rodney Stone* or *The White Company*; but turn him off his true *metier*, let him meander through, or dash furiously down, the *shady* lanes of Spiritualism and where is the entrancing novelist? Lost in a maze of sloppy credulity and blind faith, an astonishing combination for an experienced and well read writer. We all know what a hide-bound bore Mr. Chesterton can become directly he gets the word Atheism somewhere in conjunction with *the Church*, and looking through his latest essays, I can see Mr. Hilaire Belloc following closely on his friend's heels. These *Essays of a Catholic* are really worth reading, for they exemplify more than a hundred books of the enemies of Roman Catholicism what I have said about the unchangeableness of the Church.

Mr. Belloc tries to write with an air of urbanity, as if, conscious that God, Jesus, Mary, the twelve Apostles, the four Gospel writers and the (so-called) first Pope were all behind him, nothing he said could

be disputed, *really* disputed, I mean. The Church, the Faith, is Truth itself. Nothing can prevail against it. He, the humble Belloc, is merely putting forward a few ideas to the Intelligent Reader, or the Intelligent Sceptic (if they are not already either in or half way in the Church) to show them, gently and suavely, that, if they wished to be right with the aforesaid God and His Satellites, they should be in, neck and crop, without any question whatever. You can see Mr. Belloc (who always could write, anyway) calmly and methodically giving his reasons why the Faith requires unrestrained allegiance, true-till-death obedience; and why we are in the midst of a crisis, from which recovery is quite impossible, till the priest is called in and given *carte blanche* to deal as Jesus (or Our Blessed Lady, it is quite immaterial) tells him to deal with the state the world is in through deserting "Catholic doctrine and morals."

At least that's how it appears on the surface; but if you read a little—just a little—between the lines, you will gather Mr. Belloc is not at all happy. Oh, yes, the Church gives him all the happiness that ought to be given him, and no doubt he smiles at times and even, over a friendly glass, he may laugh, but it is difficult to discover any signs of happiness in his book, or wit, or humour. Mr. Belloc is very grave, with the gravity of the proverbial owl, and he is very solemn in this task of defending the Faith. He has set himself the task, however, and through 320 pages, we gather, apart from the undeniable fact that the Church is Truth, that everybody is quite wrong about the Faith and its history and its morals and its philosophy, except Roman Catholics.

There is quite a delightful essay in his book on the *Approach to the Sceptic*. The Sceptics are divided into two classes, the intelligent and the unintelligent or "stupid" ones. The latter are those who claim "it stands to reason that such and such a thing, to which they are unaccustomed, *cannot* have taken place." Supposing you tell Mr. Belloc that, as you are not accustomed to devils, "it stands to reason" that Jesus couldn't have been carried about by a Devil or he couldn't have pulled devils out of men and shoved them into pigs, he would tell you that you are not intelligent but "stupid," and that your argument "has no intellectual value whatever." On the other hand, the intelligent sceptic is he who can be approached on the subject of devils by an appeal to the "authority of the Church." Mr. Belloc uses this authority with that air of finality which makes him look with angry wonder at anybody who dare question it. If you do, you are unintelligent, "stupid." If, however, he can approach you in a "reasonable" way, point out that, however hard it is to accept the "authority of the Church," still, as that "authority" comes straight from God, you, as an "intelligent" sceptic, must be ready to see how wrong you are in your scepticism, and how right he—Mr. Belloc—is when he humbly begs you to accept that "authority" and come bodily into the arms of God's only true Institution in this vast Universe of ours. If you do thus find yourself safe in the arms of Jesus—and Mary and the Apostles and the Gospel writers, and the 107,932 Holy Saints—well then you prove yourself to be an "intelligent" sceptic. How true and beautiful and serene and logical it all is.

Of course, there are many other things which may have to be urged to the intelligent sceptic. It is necessary to know what "the Catholic system" is; and Mr. Belloc can do this easily by a delightful splash of inky rigmarole in which he welds all sorts of words like "Humanities" and "highest masterpieces" and "save civilization" together and thus you soon get to know what the "Catholic system" is.

The intelligent sceptic must also be asked to appreciate the "Thing" as an organism endowed with life "having a character and saviour of its own; a personality, and, above all, a personality undoubtedly and wholly One." After the intelligent sceptic has—easily—swallowed all this and more, Mr. Belloc goes to the next stage which is "the postulating of mystery." The Faith he tells us, "will be found to contain or rather to be inextricably bound up with, mysteries." One of these is "that supreme foundational mystery," the Doctrine of the Incarnation, and "just as it is a test of intelligence to be able to separate categories, so it is a test of intelligence to accept mystery." When we unlucky "stupid" sceptics have recovered our breath, Mr. Belloc suddenly pulls himself up too, and hastens to assure us, "It is no test of intelligence to accept a *particular* mystery." And the intelligent sceptic soon begins to find out that the only "mysteries" he would be allowed to accept and thus prove his intelligence, are Roman Catholic mysteries.

Protestant mysteries or the mysteries of the *Arabian Nights* or *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, Mr. Belloc shrinks from with horror. To accept any of them would prove the acceptor quite unintelligent—nay, stupid; and he is very angry with anybody who *laughs* at Catholic mysteries. And so on, or, as Mr. Belloc wittily puts it, "All that. All that. First to know where the House is: then to be shown that the Gates are open. Then to find himself in the House. And what other roof is there in this world?"

Ah, me!

Mr. Belloc prides himself on his powers as a true historian. All through his essays runs this obvious pride. Nobody but a Catholic *can* write history. Nobody but a Catholic has the Truth. Every scrap of current English history has been distorted, except when written by Lingard or other Catholics, and this is why Mr. Belloc is very sad at the spectacle of most English people refusing to see any good in Romanism. What he would like is a Catholic daily newspaper, it would be the only true newspaper in the world, or a good Catholic review to take the place of our own weekly reviews. Gradually Catholic views would spread and the people would come into the Faith, but the "fear that a Catholic body within a non-Catholic society will use all means to destroy the non-Catholic elements . . . and reduce it by force or fraud to the Catholic discipline is baseless." Quite baseless. Mr. Belloc, I am sure, would be prepared to prove from Catholic history—the only true history—that there never was an organization so benign, so tolerant, so thoughtful for the welfare of non-Catholics, as the Church. He says:—

If you doubt it, look at the attitude of the Church towards the Jews. Here, if anywhere, there would have been according to this erroneous theory of Catholic action, a policy of extermination. The Jewish community should have been forbidden to exist; its children should have been taken from it and brought up in the Catholic faith wholesale; its worship should have been forbidden, it should have been the subject of a crusade. *History is a flat contradiction of this, Alien and unpopular the subject of violent mob attacks, treated as foreigners by the civil power, and therefore liable to expulsion, the Jewish body, when the Church was at the height of its power in Europe, was specially protected in its privileges so far as moral theology could protect it. When Jews conspired against the State or were thought to be so conspiring, as in Spain, the State prosecuted them. But there never was and there never will be, an effort made by the Catholic Church as such to absorb or destroy the hostile community by force. (Italics mine.)*

When I read in history, and I am as able to judge an historian equally as well as Mr. Belloc or his whole Church, of the thousands of Jews and their wives and their children burnt alive, foully tortured, murdered, massacred wholesale, mutilated and robbed during at least twelve centuries of Christian power, I cannot help reflecting on Catholic "Truth" after reading this extract from the Catholic historian, Mr. Hilaire Belloc. It needs no further comment of mine. It speaks for itself. But it surely reflects that spirit of Catholicism to which I alluded in the beginning of this article.

The Catholic Church never changes. Its history is stained by the record of bloodshed, persecution and superstition. Mr. Belloc may run away from Free-thought, but he will have to face the Freethinker at last, and then, intellectually, it will mean his annihilation.

H. CUTNER.

### The Influence of Jewish Renegades on the Reformation.

It is a remarkable irony of history that it was some of the Jewish converts to Christianity, hailed by the Church with the utmost rejoicing, who consciously and unconsciously worked potently for that undermining of the official Christian Church and its dogmas which set in with the Renaissance and culminated in the Reformation.

This influence of the Jewish apostates on the Church was exerted both directly through their active work within the Church, and indirectly through the social, intellectual, and emotional leaven of the converts. It is a task of great delicacy and difficulty to trace out the ramifications of this indirect influence.

But one characteristic example will suffice to show its importance. I have in mind the case of Michael Servetus, who was burned alive at Geneva in 1553.

It has not been generally recognized that when Calvin burned Servetus he was trying to burn away the influence exercised by Marrano-Judaism on the dogmas of Christianity. Servetus was a Spanish Christian, born at Villanueva, in 1509. At an early age, very probably owing to Marrano teachings, he became a Literalist, basing his belief on the New Testament alone, and utterly rejecting the traditional system of the Roman Catholic Church. At the age of twenty-two he wrote a trenchant treatise, entitled, *Errors regarding the Trinity*, expressive of his new religious views. The Church of Rome met this work with an imperial edict ordering its destruction everywhere. The Protestants were no less outraged by its bold views, for its theology was too advanced for the Reformation.

His book characterized the dogma of the Trinity as an insanity, and spoke of the faith of the Lutherans as "empty, vain, and monstrous, good for nothing but to make men spiritually lazy and torpid." Little wonder, therefore, that it drew from the Reformer Bucer of Strasburg, the public declaration that Servetus "ought to be disemboweled and torn to pieces." For his personal safety he withdrew to Paris.

Here he wrote his most important work, the *Christianism Restitutum*, which was issued in an edition of one thousand copies, 998 have been confiscated and destroyed, only two have come down to our day. The author was entrapped by the Catholic Inquisition and condemned to death by slow fire. He escaped the glory of martyrdom by the Church of Rome, but only to fall into the equally merciless hands of the Reformers at Geneva. Calvin, after subjecting him to a specious semblance of a legal trial, condemned him to

be burnt alive. Thus in 1553 both the Roman Church and the Reformers praised Jesus for this act of Love.

In his writings Servetus maintains that the conversion of the Jews is hindered chiefly by the dogma of the Trinity. This he calls a "phantasm of demons, a three-headed Cerberus, an impossible monster," and he laments that he cannot restrain his mourning when he sees how easy a victory Rabbi Kimchi obtains over the Church in his polemics against this teaching. This reference to a Jewish Scholar is by no means isolated. For, Servetus in his earliest works shows a knowledge of Hebrew literature. He quotes from the Medrash Rabba, from the Guide to the Perplexed by Maimonides, and from a multitude of other Jewish sources. The quotations made by him from the contemporary work of Abraham Saba are especially noteworthy, showing as they do the living interest Servetus took in Jewish literature.

It is beyond all reasonable doubt that this Spaniard derived his unusual Hebrew knowledge from Marranos in the Spanish Peninsula; and we are surely justified in assuming that his vigorous anti-Trinitarian views were also absorbed from the same sources. This one sample is selected for the sake of its obviousness.

The direct influence exerted on the Reformation by apostates from Judaism is easier to prove. The Jewish renegades appear constantly behind the scenes. Charles Beard, in his *Hibbert Lectures*, 1883, relates that when Charles V., was holding the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, a party of actors asked leave to present before him a play in dumb show. Permission being granted, there entered the hall a masked figure in a doctor's gown, upon whose back was a label "Johann Reuchlin." He threw down upon the floor a bundle of sticks, some straight, some crooked, and so departed. Next followed another in like attire, whose name was Erasmus of Rotterdam; for a long time he tried to make the crooked sticks square with the straight ones, and then, finding his labour in vain, retired in manifest disturbance of mind. A third figure was that of a monk, labelled Martin Luther, who, bringing in fire, set a light to the crooked sticks and retired in his turn. Then came in one clad like an emperor, who with drawn sword tried to keep the fire and sticks apart, but when the flame gathered strength all the more, went away in great anger. Last of all, a Pope, bearing the name of Leo Ten, came in wringing his hands, looking for help, he saw two jars, one full of oil and the other of water, and rushing to them like a madman seized the oil and poured it upon the fire, which, spreading itself all around compelled him to flee." To understand the origin of this silent drama we must go back in the events portrayed beyond Reuchlin to the Jewish apostate Pfefferkorn, who was the proximate cause of the whole action. In 1509, the notorious Jewish butcher, Pfefferkorn, gave heroic proof of his four-year old Christian affiliations by obtaining an edict from the Emperor Maximilian ordering the confiscation and destruction of all Hebrew books. This activity of the ignorant and mercenary convert was instigated and encouraged by the fanatical Dominican friars of the German Holy Inquisition. Its results are indicated in the story just related. How the Christian scholar Reuchlin was drawn into the controversy is well known, and need not be repeated here at length. His pronouncement in favour of preserving the Jewish books bitterly incensed the heresy hunting Dominicans, and the "Battle of the Books" grew fast and furious.

Two parties were formed throughout Germany, the Reuchlinists and the anti-Reuchlinists. These parties quickly developed into those of the Humanists against the clericalists, and finally into the Reformers against

the Church. In this way an ignorant Pfefferkorn contributed no less than did a brilliant scholar like Servetus breaking up the authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

A secondary actor in this controversy was Victor von Carben, a renegade associated with Pfefferkorn and the Dominicans in Cologne. This town was the central stronghold of the Dominican party which waged the battle of obscurantism against the Humanists. Von Carben was a fair Hebrew scholar, and since this controversy gave to academic Germany a stimulus to study Hebrew literature, he was able to perform a useful service.

For the best opening that presented itself to a convert from Judaism was to act as a teacher of Hebrew to the Christians. In Italy it was by no means a rare occurrence for Christians to flaunt Church prejudices by taking lessons in Hebrew from Jews. But in Germany where the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church was strong such an occurrence was very rare indeed. Therefore, not a few of the apostates from Judaism at this period flit across the pages of history as teachers of Hebrew to the Christian world. Some of these converted Jews, such as Matthew Adrian, Paul Staffelsteiner, Emanuel Tremellius, Antonious Margaritha, and Johann Isaac, reached some eminence as teachers of Hebrew. The lack of knowledge of Latin by these converts put a limit to the number of Hebrew teachers, yet despite this handicap in the majority of cases, there were some who possessed a knowledge of Latin, and were thereby enabled to render important service to the Reformation.

Mention should be made incidentally of Marcus Raphael, whom Croke, Henry VIII.'s, agent for collecting opinions in justification of his divorce, describes in a letter written to the monarch on May 31, 1530, as "The Jew converted that so earnestly wrote in favour of your most honourable causes." Raphael wrote first for and afterwards against the legality of the king's divorce, and his change of opinion gave Croke great concern, for it is often referred to in his letters to the King. Eventually Raphael came to England and arguing from Jewish law, he justified the divorce to Henry's complete satisfaction.

Heine was right when he wrote in his *Confessions* that the Inquisitors of Cologne were by no means simpletons. On the contrary, they were farsighted officials, who foresaw clearly the disasters which a familiar acquaintance with the Hebrew books would bring on the Church. Hence the persecuting zeal with which they sought to destroy the Hebrew writings.

The Council of Trent (April 8, 1546) decreed the Vulgate to be the sole authentic version of the Bible, with an authority superseding that of the original texts. Tactically the Church was justified in driving Theodor Fabritius out of Cologne in 1527, because he had ventured to teach Hebrew in the University of the City, just as the Dominicans some years earlier had determined to burn the Hebrew books because they did not agree with the Vulgate.

The policy of the Church was to suppress the original Hebrew Bible as far as possible; and in self-defence Rome took advantage of the ignorance of both priests and populace to set up the Vulgate as the sole and original Old Testament.

When the oppression of the Church succeeded in making pseudo-converts from Jewish ranks, men were driven into the Church ranks, who could not refrain from setting the original Hebrew above the authority of the Vulgate. Thus the seeds of revolt were sown; and thus the Reformation was begun.

Servetus' opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity is traceable directly to his knowledge of the Hebrew Bible.

The Pfefferkorn-Reuchlin controversy centred apparently around the Talmud; but it resulted practically in mustering the party of enlightenment against the party of blind subservience to the *ipse dixit* Church, and in the general publication of the Church's secret that there was a Hebrew Bible more original than the Vulgate, which conflicted with the traditions of the Church. M. Adrian was dismissed from Louvain for accusing Jerome, the father of the Vulgate, of ignorance of Hebrew. The life-work of Tremellius was to publish a Latin version of the Hebrew Bible that should more truthfully reflect the Hebrew original than did the Vulgate.

## XX.

## David Hume.\*

HERE we have a book from the pen of J. Y. T. Greig, which every Englishman should read if he wants to know something of the queer folk ayont the Tweed. Old squalid, dirty Edinburgh lives again, the Edinburgh described by Henley "a city of harlotry and high jinks, above all a city of drink":—

"Whare Couthie chieils at e'ning meet  
Their bizzin' craigs and mous tae weat  
And blythely gar auld care gae bye  
Wi' blinket and wi' bleerin' eye."

Hume was born in 1711, only fourteen years after the abominable ecclesiastical murder of Thomas Aikenhead, "whose habits were studious and whose morals were irreproachable," as Macaulay notes in an account which we must pronounce disingenuous. In his concluding words he writes, "The preachers who were his murderers crowded round him at the gallows, and while he struggled in the last agony, insulted Heaven with prayers more blasphemous than anything he had ever uttered. Wodrow has told no blacker story of Dundee." The boy was eighteen.

Hume came of a family with good connexions, and was able to mix on terms of equality with the best society in Edinburgh. Yet he had to be careful, and in this book there is often proof of the careful pruning of passages likely to offend the orthodox. The Scottish Kirk was weakening, but still powerful for evil. The full true Calvinism as displayed in the Westminster Confession of Faith still held sway.

"Adam as the federal representative of the human race had determined its fate once and for all by violating that unfortunate covenant which he and the Deity had contracted with regard to the forbidden fruit. A vicarious sacrifice had indeed been offered; but the power to avail themselves of this expiation was to be communicated to only a few of the minority to whom it had been made known; and these were to be saved to show that God was merciful, as the rest were to be damned to show that He was just."

So the central doctrines in Mr. Mathieson's "Scotland and the Union."

The opening verse of "Holy Willie's Prayer," where a typical Scots hypocrite is "impaled on the barbs of a murderous satire," puts it with the power of genius:—

"O, thou that in the Heavens does dwell!  
Wha, as it pleases best thyself  
Sends ane to Heaven and ten to hell  
A' for thy glory  
And no' for ony guid or ill  
They're done before thee  
When frae my mither's womb I fell  
Thou might hae plungèd me in hell  
To gnash my gums, to weep and wail  
In burning lakes  
Whare damned devils roar and yell  
Chained to their stakes."

Let not the English marvel at our hypocrisy—rather let them marvel how we escaped from such a pit. But we are growing better and no man did more in his day than David Hume to break the chains of the Kirk.

"Hume's influence is international. He awoke Kant from his dogmatic slumber and started him on the line of

speculation that led directly to the Critique of Pure Reason, and so to Hegel Fichte Lotze and all the other idealists, German, English and Scots of the nineteenth century."

"He marks the ending of one period in European thought and the starting point of another."

This great Scot is not known to the Scots who have glorified so many lesser men. He was a Freethinker, and that is to say all. From 1600 to 1900 Scottish Theology, although it was a passion, produced no enduring theology unless we name with reservation Rutherford's *Lex Rex*.

It survives only in that truly terrible book Boston's *Fourfold State of Man*.

Robertson Smith, a distinguished scholar of Continental reputation was expelled from the Free Church for heresy in the eighties of last century after an embittered ecclesiastical wrangle to find a welcome in Cambridge. The national spirit had not changed in three centuries, but it is safe to say there will be no more heresy hunts for the Church is weakening. Empty churches and a ministry which is not drawing recruits from the educated sections of the population are sure signs of rapid decay.

The motor-car, the cinema, the theatre and the press are helpless to broaden the cultural basis of national life. As Dr. Grieg well says "imagination boggles at the thought of what Scotland would have become without the Act of Union with England."

Now I have a grumble to make, and it is for the cars of Dr. Grieg. Hume was the equal of Locke and Berkeley. In addition he was a great English man of letters. Why, oh why so often use the nudging and familiar "David" when referring to him? Is this not to copy the tone of recent biographers who spoil good work by a smirking condescension?

Dr. Grieg objects to "David's" repeated sneers at the Godly. His book is the answer. A Church with the record of the Scottish Church can well endure a few score jokes.

Let me end by thanking him for a great pleasure. To all my fellow Freethinkers I say, "Get this delightful book and read of this great philosopher whose epitaph from the pen of his friend Adam Smith is well worth quoting—"he came as near the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man as perhaps the nature of human frailty would admit."

R. STEVENSON.

## Correspondence.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

## MASS OPINION.

SIR,—Noting, with great interest and approval, what you have to say, in your issue for Sunday, November 22, 1931, under editorial heading of Views and Opinions, about recent-day celebration of Armistice Day, I am moved to acquaint you with some specific agreement in your views on this side of the Atlantic by enclosing herewith a copy of the Proclamation issued for that event in our city.

You have placed the editorial finger upon exactly the spot whence comes the trouble: it is the production of "mass opinion," or lack of opinion, by our so-called leaders, the press and the pulpit—the sources which are corrupted by "a greed for power and a lust for gain" in the handling of our governmental affairs.

To combat this usurpation of the rights of the common people and to teach them to do independent thinking in their own interests is the great job of Rationalism. You have made, and are making, excellent headway. You may be, as often I am, defeated—but, I trust, never discouraged; and I offer you these thoughts for your cheer and encouragement to press onward in the noble struggle for the emancipation of all mankind from the thralldom of ignorance, superstition and intolerance.

SPENCER M. DEGOLIER.

Bradford Pa., U.S.A.

\* By J. Y. T. Greig (Cape, 16s.).

## THE DEATH OF VOLTAIRE.

SIR,—Voltaire, a born Catholic, never separated himself from the Catholic Church, and was never excommunicated by it. He lived and died possessing all the rights proper to men of the Catholic profession. Condorcet, an avowed Atheist, who wrote the life of Voltaire shortly after his death, says that from his youth Voltaire thought it advisable for the friends of reason to avoid scenes of intolerance in their last moments, and that, on this account, when he first fell ill he summoned the Abbé Gauthier, Almoner of the Incurables. Then we read:—

The Abbé Gauthier confessed Voltaire, and received from him a profession of faith by the which he died in the Catholic religion wherein he was born.

Thereupon, says the account, the curé of St. Sulpice, being jealous of the Abbé Gauthier, blamed him for not getting a more explicate confession from his penitent, and, when Voltaire, after a short recovery, had a final relapse, he himself took the case in hand.

He wished absolutely to make Voltaire at least recognize the divinity of Jesus Christ, in which he interested himself more than in the other dogmas. He drew him one day out of his lethargy by crying into his ears: "Do you believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ?" To which Voltaire responded, "In God's name, monsieur, do not talk more to me about that man, and let me die in peace."

This, beyond doubt is the entire truth. But, since the days of Condorcet the most fantastic lies have been told about Voltaire's death, which by the way occurred in his eighty-fourth year. Whilst residing in France, several years ago, I read of a priest who had edified his congregation by relating how Voltaire died in ignominy, eating his own dung.

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

## "HONEST DOUBT."

SIR,—Cpl. Stewart must know there is overwhelming evidence that Tennyson was not "a Secularist at heart." The difference between his view of life and death and Swinburne's is only emphasized by the lines he quotes, for Swinburne's lines (quoted by me) are positive about man's mortality and sceptical about God's existence: but Tennyson's are dependent on the significant "If" with which the last two lines quoted by Mr. Stewart begin. Moreover in his most seriously theological poem (*In Memoriam*) we get these lines:—

"... and yet we trust  
That nothing walks with aimless feet,  
That not one life will be destroyed,  
Or cast as rubbish to the void  
When God has made the pile complete."

I will only add that in his own life-time and since Tennyson's poetry has been a constant theme for preachers of all denominations.

ALAN HANDSÄCRE.

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## OUTDOOR.

FULHAM AND CHELSEA BRANCH N.S.S. (corner of Shorrolds Road, North End Road): Saturday, November 14, at 7.30, Messrs. F. Day and C. Tuson.

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S.—A meeting will be held at White Stone Pond, Hampstead, near the Tube Station every Sunday morning at 11.30 a.m. Speaker to-day Mr. L. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Mr. B. A. Le Maine; at 3.30 and 6.30, Messrs. Bryant, Hyatt, Tuson and Wood. Current *Freethinkers* can be obtained opposite the Park Gates, on the corner of Edgware Road, during and after the meetings.

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SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (New Morris Hall, 79 Bedford Road, Clapham, S.W.4, Hall No. 5, near Clapham North Station, Underground): 7.30, Mr. H. Preece (South London Branch)—"Religion and Art."

## COUNTRY.

## INDOOR.

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Boilermakers' Hall, Argyle Street, Birkenhead): 7.0, S. Wollen (Liverpool)—"A Ghost and His Baby—A Christmas Story."

GLASGOW BRANCH N.S.S. (City Hall, Albion Street, No. 2 Room): 6.30, Mr. A. Rennie—"Reminiscences." Questions and discussion. Silver collection.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Tea, Concert and Dance.

LIVERPOOL (Merseyside) BRANCH N.S.S. (Transport Buildings, 41 Islington, Liverpool, entrance Christian Street): 7.0, G. H. Taylor (Macclesfield)—"Scepticism in Present Day Thought." Current *Freethinkers* and other literature on sale.

PAISLEY BRANCH N.S.S. (Baker's Hall, 5 Forbes Place): 7.30, Mr. John Grant—"Has Science Abolished God?" There will be no meeting on January 3. A Branch Business Meeting will be held in the same room on Thursday, January 7, at 7.30.

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