

# THE FREETHINKER

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

**Views and Opinions.**

**Christ and Christmas.**

ALL my life I have been a firm believer in the divinity of Jesus Christ. I do not believe he was half man and half God; I do not believe that he was all man or all God. He was just a God, all of him and all the time. In this matter I am a whole-hogger. I will have no half-measures. My faith in the complete divinity of Jesus Christ is without compromise of any sort. I will not yield an inch to the ethical culturist, who is inclined to follow him because of his alleged unapproachable moral teaching, or to the half-sceptical Christian who will attribute the faults of Jesus to the God who took on the nature of a man. Without the slightest shadow of compromise or qualification I assert that Jesus Christ was God, and never anything else. No man could have been born as he was born; no man could have done what he did; no mere man could have risen from the dead and ascended to heaven, the abode of the Gods, and remained there to judge both the living and the dead. Only a God could have accomplished these things. Only Gods have done these things. Let us therefore keep to the one sure fact about Jesus Christ. He was a God.

When I speak of Jesus Christ I do not mean the one who is a probable chairman of the Independent Labour Party, or the mongrel figure that is drawn in the numerous up-to-date lives of Jesus, the authors of which apparently base their knowledge on the kind of "inside information" that figures so largely in newspapers. I mean the Jesus Christ of the New Testament, the one who was born of a virgin, whose birth created a disturbance in heaven and an uproar on earth, who fought with the prince of demons, who raised men from the dead, and who after being completely and thoroughly killed, rose from the dead and went straightway to heaven. I believe that "never man spake" as he did, that never man was born as

he was, that never man rose from the dead as he did. These stories can be true only of a God; they are manifestly impossible with man.

\* \* \*

**What Might Be.**

Why am I so certain that Jesus Christ belongs to the order of the Gods, and to the gods only? Well, my reasoning is of precisely the kind that leads me to class an animal as belonging to either the vertebrate or the invertebrate class. Looking at Christianity as a form of religion, and in the same way that a zoologist would look at a new specimen that was brought before him, the first thing that emerges is that Christianity belongs to a very wide group of religious beliefs. If, indeed, we can imagine ourselves living in a time when those who know the truth about religion tell the truth about religion, we can imagine one who holds the post of Professor of the History of Religion in one of our universities, beginning an examination of Christianity along these lines:—

Gentlemen,—We have now to examine a religious system which presents no difficulty of classification because its essential structure and characteristics are clearly marked, well-known, and fall easily into their place in that vast network of superstitions that meet us in the early history of humanity. The main features of the specimen before us is made up of the following features. A God who takes on the form of a man through being born of a virgin. The God then in his man-like form delivers certain teachings to men, performs miracles of various descriptions, enters into conflict with the spirit of evil and overcomes it, and is finally ceremonially sacrificed, by crucifixion or otherwise, and then rises again from the dead to resume his godhead. Chief among the teachings attributed to the God, and which afterwards figure prominently in the cult devoted to him, is that of purification by initiation. There are a number of subsidiary features but these are the main ones, which enable us to place this particular mythology in its appropriate place in the history of the world.

Of course, taking the sum of the characteristics of this myth, we have always to allow for local alterations, modifications and additions. There is in these changes a strict analogy with what takes place in the animal world. Science shows that in the development of animal life, the same primal structure gives birth to fur, feather and hair; the bony structure is modified into paddles, or legs, or arms and legs; the skeleton is broader or narrower, shorter or longer, more or less erect. But anatomists and physiologists count these differences as of small importance at the side of the fact of fundamental identity.

So it is with religions. New situations involve fresh modifications. The contact of one superstition with another superstition often involves a modification or a rejection of one or of both. Sometimes there is an amalgamation of the two, as when the

Sun-God is joined to a purely vegetation-God, and then the two combined with a teaching God. Or when social development has brought new forms of social life, there is a translation of the old forms of superstition into terms of a more advanced social and ethical life. But these no more affect the fundamental features of the superstition we are studying than the modifications in the structure of an animal, due to changing conditions of temperature, etc., affect the place of an animal in a scientific scheme of classification. The Christian religion is as surely one with the rest of the world's superstitions as animal life is one from the single cell to man.

\* \* \*

#### Christian Origins.

Gentlemen,—These conclusions rest upon a basis of fact so well-known and so completely understood that only ignorance can excuse or self-interest explain their non-recognition. Take the Virgin birth. Without going back for its probable origin to a time when every birth was thought of as due to an incarnation of one of the tribal spirits, this belief is almost universal in the classic religions of the pre-Christian world. Sometimes both father and mother belong to the divine order, but more usually it is the father alone, as in Egypt, India, Greece, China, and elsewhere. The belief was so deeply-rooted that a virgin birth was ascribed to many great historical or semi-mythical figures round whom the story did not originally centre. The fixing of December 25 as the birthday of the God Jesus, is in line with the birthday of all the solar gods of antiquity. It was the date of the winter solstice, when the sun began to regain power and gave the promise of renewed vegetative life. The miracles are, of course, common to all religions, and are characteristic of all Gods. The resurrection falls into line with the birth. It marks the appearance of the new vegetation just as Christmas marks its beginning.

The ceremonial sacrifice of the Divine king or Divine man is as old as any superstition. In addition to the crowd of illustrations given by Sir James Frazer, Professor E. O. James, Professor of the History of Religion in Leeds University, has just given us *Christian Myth and Ritual*, in which almost every item of the Christian ritual is traced back to its pagan prototype. But a whole chapter is devoted to the sacrifice of the King-Saviour, on whom depends the health and welfare of the world. The king-worship which meets us in secular life to-day has thus a deeper basis than many imagine, and witnesses to the strength of sheer superstition in many who regard themselves as free from its influence. In these early, but persistent, myths as Professor James says, the theme of the God who dies and is restored to life again, so that the initiate in union with him may be raised to the blessedness of heaven, is constant.

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#### Being Born Again.

Gentlemen,—Nothing is more evident in the Christian religion than the belief in the union of the saved with the God through a process of mystical initiation. In this connexion I would like to call your attention to a remarkably interesting and informative work by Professor Willoughby, Professor of New Testament literature in the University of Chicago, published in 1929, and which received but scanty notice in our own press. The title of the work is *Pagan Regeneration*, and it traces the doctrine of the rebirth, or the new birth, to the pre-Christian, Græco-Roman world, in what have now come to be known as the "Mystery Religions." I have only time for but a few illustrative instances. The actual phrase used of the initiates is that they are "as of those who have been born again," a form of speech common to Christian usage. In some of the mysteries there is a blood bath for the initiate, either actual or symbolic. Initiation is by

some sort of baptism, and all that the early Christians could say against it was "They washed themselves with water that is widowed. For washing is the channel through which they are initiated into the sacred rites of some notorious Isis or Mithra." In the Mithraic ceremonies "Before the Communicants stands a tripod supporting tiny loaves of bread, each distinctly marked with a cross. One of the standing figures . . . presents the communicants with a drinking cup. These mystery religions, says Professor Willoughby, "were popular. They told men of saviour gods that were very human, who had come to earth and toiled and suffered with men, experiencing to an intensified degree the sufferings to which flesh is heir . . . The great need which the mystery initiation supplied was that of emotional stimulation through the mystical experience of contact with a sympathetic saviour."

\* \* \*

#### Faults and Fallacies.

Gentlemen,—I do not know that anything that has been said would have been denied by the earliest generations of Christians. They could not do so, for the beliefs were functioning all around them; Jesus Christ was just a competing God in a world where Gods were plentiful. A favourite explanation of the likeness was that "the Devil, whose business it is to pervert the truth, mimics the exact circumstances of the divine sacrifice in the mysteries of idols." Justin Martyr, in defending Christianity from the pagan criticisms, takes a different line. He argues that the pagans have no ground for criticizing Christian beliefs since the pagan religions contain identical ones. He points to the virgin-born gods, and to the sacrificed saviours, and takes the main pagan beliefs point by point in order to prove that if the Christian beliefs are rejected on the score of their irrationality pagan beliefs must fall before the same criticism. Quite a good argument against a fellow-believer, but a very weak one against anyone else. Finally, to take a great jump, and to come to a present-day writer, Bishop Gore, we find him saying of the period of the alleged birth of Jesus, the world was dreaming of saviours—incarnations or avatars of the divine Soul, born maybe of a virgin, or nature gods dying and rising again, through whose mysteries initiates could be freed from the bonds of matter. And "in Jesus the dream came true."

Of course, the proper reading should be "In Jesus we see another form of myth." And when we add to the bald outline of facts given, the further consideration of the alteration in general conditions brought about by the conquests of Alexander the Great, and of the existence of the Roman Empire, with the disappearance of the old city States, and welter of world beliefs in the then centres of travel and intercourse, we have all the conditions for the rise of that synthesis of superstitions which the world came to know as Christianity.

This, I take it, might well form the introductory address of a course on the origins of Christianity, to be delivered some time in the future, when Professors in our universities show a little more thoroughness than they dare to show at present. To-day the most that has been done by them was well expressed by Sir James Frazer who, in spite of his great and valuable work, confessed that he had only dragged the guns into position. He left it to others to fire them.

Christianity offers nothing that cannot be found in other systems of mythology, and very often it is a mere reversion to lower forms of belief. Christmas itself is no exception to the general rule of affiliation to earlier beliefs. And we can see in that one of the ways in which the human gradually displaces the supernatural. For the very young, Christmas speaks far more eloquently of Santa Claus than of Jesus Christ, plum-pudding is to all more enjoyable than the Communion bread and wine, jolly songs are better

responded to than melancholy hymns, the price of turkeys is more in the general mind than the birth of Gods, and a box of cigars or a case of wine more acceptable than an assurance of eternity with Jesus.

Certainly I believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, just as firmly as I believe in the divinity of Mithra, of Isis, of Horus, of Jove, of Ishtar and of Mumbo-Jumbo. A difference of size, or colour, or name makes no more difference than the mere size or colour of an animal lifts it out of one class and places it in another. I do not say that I believe Jesus Christ was God. I am more emphatic than most Christians, I say that I know he was a God. I am as certain of this as I can be of anything. The one thing I do not believe about Jesus is that he was a man. A God is quite good in his proper place; a man is good enough in his. But the two make a most horrible mixture.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

## "The Old, Old Story."

"Solemnity is of the essence of imposture."

Shaftesbury.

"People swallow falsehood as a cat laps milk."

G. W. Foote.

"MAN cannot create a flea," said Voltaire, "but he has made gods by the hundred." Some people, especially those belonging to Eastern races, do so on the slightest provocation. Not only have they worshipped cats and crocodiles, but even a stolid British general has received the questionable honour. It seems also quaint to a modern man. He would soon expect his neighbours to deify the Port of London Authority, the London Passenger Transport Board, or Mdme. Tussaud's Exhibition. Yet, otherwise sane and estimable citizens, even in this country, pay lip-service to superstition as gross as any professed by their olive-skinned and dusky complexioned contemporaries.

December 25 is alleged to be the birthday of one of the deities associated with the religion of this country. It is, therefore, not without interest to ascertain the kind of God that people who profess and call themselves Christian hold in respect. In these matters, "men are but children of a larger growth," and, as far too many leave school at fourteen years of age, they are very hazy concerning the "terminological inexactitudes" of theologians.

The first thing that strikes one is that this particular deity is not "made in England," like the brass gods manufactured in Birmingham and elsewhere by Christians for the use of the poor misguided heathen. The figure is Oriental, not Occidental in any respect. The Christian Bible used in this country is also Oriental from cover to cover. Indeed, nearly all the Bibles of the world may be found in *The Sacred Books of the East*, to which the Christian Bible is clearly allied. The one notable exception is *The Book of Mormon*, the fetish-book of the newest of the new religions, a work written by an American boy with the prosaic name of Joe Smith. Master S. may not have risen to the dizzy heights of popularity of some of his religious rivals, but his followers are sufficiently numerous to embark upon a £100,000 temple for London, which is to challenge comparison with that in Salt Lake City, U.S.A. Old Egypt may have been the motherland of superstition, but the little village on the Thames has been a foster-mother for a hundred religions and a thousand superstitions.

The story of the deity, whose alleged birthday is associated with December 25, has been described by

the editor of *The Radio Times* as "the supreme Miracle of history." Yet, had this journalist but admitted the soft impeachment, this particular narrative remains the strangest and weirdest of all the ghost stories of the world. Its accuracy is vouched for by fifty thousand straight-faced clergymen, whose habitual solemnity would wrinkle the face of a funeral-horse with smiles. Not only do these men-of-God protest the truth of this particular supernatural story, but hundreds of thousands of their innocent followers loudly support their pastors and masters in their most extraordinary allegations. Let us, therefore, recount the chief points of this remarkable legend, which is so often recited "with bated breath and whispering humbleness."

In the year nought B.C., or A.D. nought, which is equivalent to the usual beginning, "Once upon a time," a child with a ghost for a father is said to have been born in a stable at Bethlehem, in Judæa. This infant 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 prodigy. So thorough and sensational was this slaughter of the innocents that profane historians did not consider it worth notice, even in footnotes. The subsequent life of this ghost-child is one long string of marvels, quite as extraordinary as the fictitious stories in the *Arabian Nights*, the favourite hunting-ground of the producers of pantomime. The ghost's son is said to have restored blind people to sight, and brought the dead to life. He is alleged to have fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and turned water into wine. At his death a three-days' darkness is said to have overspread the whole earth, although no contemporary astronomer noticed the awful and depressing occurrence. After death this ghost's son is said to have appeared in ghostly form, and he finally ascends into the sky like an aeroplane, and has never been seen since. He may be "looping the loop," or "nose-diving" somewhere in the ether to-day. Not all the priests of all the world can inform us.

There has never been so astonishing a career. Yet, outside of what are called "the four gospels," there is no corroboration of this most startling of all ghost stories. So far as sober historians are concerned, "the rest is silence." Nor is this all. This ghost's birthday is said to have happened in December. It was not, however, in that month, even according to the legends. For shepherds do not watch their flocks by night in that most unromantic time of the year. Even "the four gospels" are not above criticism. They are written in Greek, which was not the language used in Judæa. And, might one ask of what value is the testimony of men who are said to have met the alleged ghost's son, when he was thirty years of age, as to events which are alleged to have happened to his mother three decades earlier? One is tempted to use the words of Casca, "'twas Greek to me."

This old, old story first took shape in the wild, uncouth, and illiterate Palestine in the days of the ancient Roman Empire. In the wider knowledge of to-day this Oriental ghost-story is looked at with more critical eyes. Why so many people hesitate to express their disbelief is because they are taught to regard the story as sacred in their childhood. Education in this country is under the iron rule of the priests, whose livelihood is bound up with the perpetuation of superstition. The Christian Religion is a vested interest, bolstered by millions of money, and supporting an army of no less than fifty thousand clergymen, to say nothing of their satellites. The

so-called Church of England, one only among a hundred sects, holds property worth a hundred millions of money, imposes a ten-per-cent charge on agriculture, collects coal-royalties and ground-rents, and its bishops sit in the House of Lords and hold the balance of power in our legislature. It is due entirely to the machinations of Priestcraft that the Christian fetish-book is used in the educational programmes of our universities, public schools, and national schools, and is also used for swearing upon in our Courts of Justice. Priests do not want real education at all. What they desire is that the rising generation should be instructed in the barest rudiments of knowledge, and taught the tenets of that faith which means an easy and comfortable existence for themselves at the expense of their fellow-citizens.

That is precisely the reason why the vast majority of our population is not even half-educated, despite nearly two thousand years of Christian teaching. Denominational schools tell the tale, for they are the worst staffed and the most meanly equipped of all places of education. The clergy know only too well that to be a Christian one need not be educated, nor intelligent. To be a Freethinker one must learn and think. The strength of Priestcraft throughout the ages has always lain in the unthinking and uninformed masses. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the Christian is a man who does not understand his own religion, who does not know what he himself believes or disbelieves, and has never given a solitary hour's study or thought to his own or any other faith. Christian priests batten upon this ignorance, and the Christian Religion to-day represents the lowest culture in modern society. Even priests are bowdlerising their own Bible because so many parts of it are utterly out of harmony with the times in which we live. The elimination of a silly oriental ghost story from the Yuletide Festival will do no harm. For Christmastide will have a new beauty, the poetry of home a sweeter ring, the highway of the years a kindlier face. The annual festival has survived the gods of Paganism; it will survive the Christian Religion.

MIMNERMUS.

## The Usual Answers.

### IV.

PERHAPS the least frequent of all the vague answers which greet the Atheist in his casual discussions on religion is the one which takes this form:—

- (4) "If we just fizzle out to nothing when we die, then I cannot see the use of living."

There are at least three good reasons why this answer is less frequently met with than others. The first is because it is less vaguely worded than most, and is therefore easier to tackle on common-sense lines. Religious persons do not, as a rule, like to involve themselves in arguments from which they cannot readily find a loophole of escape. And in using terms that are not vague or ambiguous, they run a more serious risk of having to admit defeat.

The second reason is that a belief in a so-called "future life" has no necessary connexion with a belief in a "God" of any sort. Spiritualists profess to be scientific investigators of the supernatural. Yet the "revelations" of their mediums, while full of detailed descriptions of persons and conditions to be found in the "higher planes" (descriptions which bear a remarkable resemblance to things on this plane), seldom, if ever, treat us to a clear picture of any deity, whether it be Allah, Osiris, the Holy Ghost

or even God Almighty himself. This is a remarkable omission, which can only be explained by the supposition that Gods of any kind are not essential to a belief in a "future life." And it is further supported by the fact that one of the most popular varieties of this belief is the one known as metempsychosis or reincarnation. The belief that the "soul" returns to earth either in some human or animal body is still widespread, and it requires the presence of no Gods.

The third reason is this. When the believer expresses his belief in a continuance of life after death, he always implies that this "future life" will be, at least for him, more pleasant than the present one. If he is of a vengeful nature he will allow the possibility of a future "hell" or "purgatory." But this is never seriously regarded as a probable contingency in his own case. For it is obvious that if he really thought this "future life" would constitute an eternity of torment for him personally, he would be quite ready to listen to any arguments which might prove his belief to be wrong. Of course, there are a few, a very few, who believe that they are doomed to an eternal "hell" hereafter; but such persons are well on the way to, or already in, lunatic asylums. For the sane believer "hell" has long been a myth—or else it only applies to the other fellow.

In addition to the fact that it endangers two important religious tenets, namely, the need for a God and the existence of Hell, this answer is unpopular for other reasons. If it is treated analytically, it brings to light certain qualities in the believer which do not reflect very favourably upon his character. We have already observed its vengeful implications in those who include a "future life" of an unpleasant sort in their belief. Its egoistical element is disclosed when we discover that the words "If we just fizzle out" are a camouflage for the words "If I just fizzle out."

The validity of using the first person plural is quite simply cancelled out by the fact that there are many people who find a great deal of use in living, yet who do not believe that they go on living after they are dead. Furthermore, when it comes down to dots, we find that the kind of "future life" which the believer has in mind is of a very circumscribed nature. A "heaven" in which he alone existed in magnificent solitude would not be at all to his liking. And a "heaven" which included all, or any, of the unpleasant people and things he has had to encounter in this life, would equally fail to come up to his ideals. What he really wants and believes in is a sort of select existence in which he can retain and enjoy only those things he personally wants to retain. Apart from these, the rest of creation could go hang for all he cared. Unfortunately this is exactly what every other believer hopes for—and it is obvious that they can't all have it their own way! But then, what believer ever bothers to work out the logical consequences of his beliefs?

Incidentally, too, one might observe that the universe existed for millions of years while our believer was non-existent. And he seldom exhibits any vast concern about what happened before he was born. Why, then, should he consider it so essential for him to be concerned about all time after he is dead?

Then, again, one might ask, "If your future life is going to be so great an improvement on the present, why wait? It is simple enough to commit suicide comfortably these days." But to this practical suggestion the believer has a very convenient reply. "We are taught that suicide is wicked." So

although in his own mind he utterly repudiates the idea that he will go anywhere except to Heaven, he is unwilling to take the golden opportunity of getting there sooner than he need. So much so, indeed, that when his God (or whatever power he believes in) puts him in danger of dying a natural death, he rushes off for medical assistance to postpone the happy event! Just like an Atheist!

The Atheist is naturally not hoodwinked by this excuse that suicide is wicked. He realizes that it is no more than another of those religious contradictions which are intended, but which fail, to provide a loophole for illogical beliefs. No one in his normal senses wishes to commit suicide. Most people have a capacity for putting up with, or resisting, evil; and they seldom find life so intolerable as to wish to end it sooner than need be. So apart from its convenience as an excuse for the illogical belief in a "future life," there is no necessity whatever to make suicide a sin.

In addition to this, the grief exhibited by mourners who are firmly convinced that their dear ones have gone to Heaven, is another proof that the survivors have no real faith in their "life after death" theory. For if one truly loves a person who has died, then one's sorrow at a merely temporary, and comparatively brief, period of parting should be completely swallowed up in joy at the good fortune of the deceased. The fact that Christians mourn their dead with as great grief as Atheists is convincing evidence that they do not believe what they think they believe. Otherwise it can only be regarded as a sign of superlative egotism.

The statement that there is no use in living at all unless one goes on living for ever, is easily shown to be untrue on quite other grounds. For if the use, or value, of any action, emotion or event depends upon its capacity to last indefinitely, then no action, emotion or event can have any value at all in this life. Do we enjoy a hearty meal the less because we know beforehand that we cannot go on eating the same meal for ever? Do we refrain from going to see a good play because we know in advance that it will come to an end? Is not, indeed, our sole reason for refusing any pleasure or enjoyment based upon our knowledge that too much of a good thing inevitably falls in the long run? What rational grounds, then, are there for expecting that an everlasting life is going to prove less sickeningly monotonous than any other experience, pleasant or unpleasant, which is continued with too great frequency or at too great length?

The answer to this last question most often takes one of two similar forms. Either the believer declares that, when he dies, he does not think he will have had *his* fair share of the good things of life. Or he declares that there must be other people who will not have had *their* fair share. In these cases the "future life" is regarded as a sort of makeweight for the unpleasantnesses already experienced in this life. Be it noted that the "everlasting" nature of this "future life" is here allowed to drop into the background. But let that pass. For whichever answer is favoured, the argument remains the same. And the second form, though it has the appearance of altruism, is in fact as much a cloak for laziness as the first.

In the first place, how can anyone show what exactly *his* fair share of joys should be? Secondly, even if he could prove that he had not had his fair share now, how can he prove that he will not have had it—and perhaps more—when he comes to die? The fact is that this hope for good things after death

is nothing more than a cover for slovenly procrastination in the present. A man is either satisfied with his conditions and content to enjoy them without worry about a dim and dubious future; or else, if he is really dissatisfied, he would not calmly sit down under his calamities in the fatuous hope of an early release by death. He would get to work and do something about it.

As for his pseudo-altruism and concern for other people, what is this in reality but sheer callousness and indifference? For, if everything is going to be put right for everybody in that wonderful "hereafter," then what valid reason can there be for feeling uncomfortable about the unfairness and injustices of *this* life? If, on the other hand, the hardships of others are really such a matter of concern to the believer, then he would not spend a moment in theorising or preaching about a makeweight Heaven—he would set to at once and do his utmost to mitigate them here and now.

The truth is that from whatever point of view one regards the belief in a "future life," its logical and inevitable results are the encouragement of egotism, indolence, indifference and even sadism. The whole history of the Christian religion bears witness to this. As a theory this belief is completely lacking in evidence. As a matter of practice it is not only useless, but pernicious. As a matter of logic it is absurd. For since "death" means the "end, or cessation, of life," the phrase "life after death" is a pure contradiction in terms, which is as nonsensical and meaningless as saying that a car can travel "up a hill downwards," or that the "end of a story is at the beginning."

C. S. FRASER.

## Voices of the Past.

(From the *Freethinker*.)

### R. G. Ingersoll.

THOUGHTS on Christmas. It is beautiful to give one day to the ideal—to have one day apart; one day for generous deeds, for good will, for gladness; one day to forget the shadows, the rains, the storms of life; to remember the sunshine, the happiness of youth and health; one day to forget the briars and thorns of the winding path, to remember the fruits and flowers; one day in which to feed the hungry, to salute the poor and lowly; one day to feel the brotherhood of man; one day to remember the heroic and loving deeds of the dead; one day to get acquainted with children, to remember the old, the unfortunate and the imprisoned; one day in which to forget yourself and think lovingly of others; one day for the family, for the fireside, for wife and children, for the love and laughter, the joy and rapture of home; one day in which bonds and stocks and deeds and notes and interest and mortgages and all kinds of business and trade are forgotten, and all stores and shops and factories and offices and banks and ledgers and accounts and lawsuits are cast aside, put away and locked up, and the weary heart and brain are given a voyage to fairyland.

Let us hope that such a day is a prophecy of what all days will be. [1891]

### G. W. Foote.

CHRISTMAS comes but once a year, and considering the gluttony and wine-bibbing which goes on when it *does* come, it is perhaps a very good thing that the season occurs no oftener. Hundreds of Christmasses,

and therefore hundreds of years, have rolled by since the first one ushered into the world the most surprising baby that ever suckled and squealed. All the babies born since were common-place in comparison with this astonishing youngster, and never, except when the stars sang together for joy, in a chorus that would have been well worth a shilling ticket, did nature show such uncommon interest in any event as in the appearance of this little lump of human dough. Nature has probably been sorry for her enthusiasm ever since. She is not easily excited, and her pace is steadier than a mule's. But as Jove nods, nature has an occasional fling. She went into raptures on the first Christmas, and when the chief person born on that day made his exit from this mortal stage, she went black in the face with panic, fear or hysterical sorrow. From that time she has conducted herself with exemplary decorum. [1906]

### J. M. Wheeler.

THERE is little apparent connexion between Jesus Christ and kissing under the mistletoe, or between indulging in goose and plum-pudding and partaking of the sacrament. The Puritans may be excused for denouncing Christmas as a pagan custom opposed to the Christian conception of life, and more worthy of the worship of Bacchus than of Jesus. But Christmas endures as a Christian festival despite the puritans, just because it goes back to the elements which Christianity has in common with paganism; because indeed, the religion that made its way under the name of Christianity was but a modified paganism.

Let, then, the older ones join the youngsters in celebrating the old pagan festival in its true spirit of sociality, hope and delight. [1890]

### J. T. Lloyd.

As a Christian festival, Christmas is a mockery and a farce. It commemorates what never happened, what never can happen. Its so-called message is an unmitigated lie. There has never been peace in Christendom. The Prince of Peace has never reigned even for a twelvemonth. The militarism that rules to-day involves the negation of the religion of love and brotherhood, and gives the lie direct to the Angels' Song of Praise (Luke ii. 8), which will be recited in all the Churches. Even the conflict between Capital and Labour, which is so bitter, is a standing evidence of the total failure of Christianity. The Child of Bethlehem has never had, and never will have, his day. The government of the world has never once been on his shoulders. The Church has traded on an empty name and done infinite violence even to that. When shall all the world learn to glory in and to do honour to, the sublimest and noblest name ever known, the name of Man, and cease to waste its time and energy in the service of a name that has always been the symbol of impotence and falsehood? [1910]

*Sir Peter*: Joseph is, indeed, what a youth should be—everybody in the world speaks well of him.

*Sir Oliver*: I am sorry to hear it; he has too good a character to be an honest fellow. Everybody speaks well of him! Psha! then he has bowed as low to knaves and fools as to the honest dignity of genius and virtue.

*Sir Peter*: What, Sir Oliver, do you blame him for not making enemies?

*Sir Oliver*: Yes, if he has merit enough to deserve them.

R. B. Sheridan, "The School for Scandal,"

### Santa Sacked.

"Methinks sometimes I have no more wit than a Christian or an ordinary man has: but I am a great eater of beef, and I believe that does harm to my wit."  
"Twelfth Night," Shakespeare.

HERALDED by the usual bloody signs—namely, the gruesome preparations for the slaughter of millions of friendly animals and birds—the carnivorous Christian's carnival, or joyful season of "goodwill" to all "Creation," is now approaching, and it is, therefore, appropriate that several topical words be said about the time-dishonoured tradition of Father Christmas.

Should children be taught belief in Father Christmas? This is a question that no doubt seems irrelevant to those ardent pessimists who think that very soon there will be no more children; and it should be admitted that this extreme view has some little justification. For consider: There is the serio-comic proposal of certain full-bellied amorality (writing from the depths of luxurious Berkeleys) to sterilize the rapidly increasing numbers of undernourished unemployables—a spreading cancer in society caused by the malignant disease Capitalism, a cancer which even now is beginning to infect the hitherto complacent middle classes; then there is the increasing use of contraceptives among the educated members of all classes; and also there is the growing reluctance of intelligent youth to marry and beget children, a reluctance due to the present criminally insane organization of society which would compel most of them to live like starving pigs in third floor backs, and their children to be decimated by tuberculosis and other deficiency diseases. *O tempora! O mores!*

None the less, at the moment, there are still a few children left, and these are, for the most part, saddled with parents profoundly ignorant of the child mind. One aspect of this ignorance is seen in the needless and harmful lies told to children by their parents; the story about Father Christmas is merely one instance of this foolish practice. And it is deplorable that Rationalists, and even mature Atheists, are not always guiltless in this connexion.

Fundamentally, everything associated with Father Christmas is contrary to all the natural laws observed by the child; and because of this, very few children really believe wholeheartedly in him. Their native and unspoiled intelligence tells them that there is something "fishy" about the whole fabrication. The same doubting attitude is seen in their naive, but unanswerable, questions about God. Such as: Why the Great Man or Woman doesn't do many beneficent things that, if given the power, any ordinary decent mortal would; and Why He or She does other things for which a human being would be universally execrated and hanged by the neck until dead.

Father Christmas has many wonderful attributes. Like the Christian's God, he is ubiquitous or omnipresent, and contrives in one comparatively short night, to visit myriads of homes in all the habitable parts of the globe. He flies without wings, and even if he did have them, would be a grotesque monster; he is represented as a corpulent old gentleman, blithely carrying a huge inexhaustible sack, a sack which—despite the sanguine Guinness advertisement—would need a Hercules to carry; even so, in some miraculous manner, this old fogey manages to fly about with it, and even to wriggle down and up innumerable chimneys much too small for him. Although the fire is sometimes still alight, he never gets burnt, and, unlike a common chimney-sweep, his countenance and snow-white beard always remain clean, and never become sullied o'er with the dusky cast of soot; while his nice warm coat retains, through all its vicissitudes, its rich red colour unspotted.

The child is taught to believe in all this nonsense by those whom it regards as virtually infallible, and if it does believe, becomes very mystified and confused, and begins to feel that this is a topsy-turvy world—which is not so with regard to natural laws, although it may be so in many other ways.

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," declared Keats. And the love felt by parents for their children is a beautiful

thing and an everlasting truth. It is shown in a concrete manner by the sacrifices they often make to buy their children presents; but in return, the child believing in Father Christmas is grateful to some supernatural and fictitious figure for the happiness it has received.

In one of the most penetrating indictments of lying ever penned, the greatest and gloomiest dean of all, Jonathan Swift, says: "The use of Speech was to make us understand one another, and to receive information of facts; now if anyone 'said the Thing which was not,' these Ends were defeated; because I cannot properly be said to understand him, and I am so far from receiving Information, that he leaves me worse than in Ignorance, for I am led to believe a Thing 'Black' when it is 'White,' and 'Short' when it is 'Long.'" Because it is a lie, the belief in Father Christmas should not be taught to children; moreover, it is a lie that is certain to be discovered.

The Jesuits, those very peculiar people who constitute an almost insoluble puzzle to the mental pathologists, have a saying: "Give us a child until it is seven years old and then anyone can have it." We know by the science of psychology that early impressions are indelibly imprinted on the mind, and these have lasting effects. Thus, at a very impressionable age, the questioning child unhappily discovers that mother and father—the very people in whom it had placed implicit confidence, and who had taught it not to lie, and no doubt chastized it for so doing—were guilty of the very same offence. What is the child to think? And the Father Christmas story is a falsehood propagated by all the foolish adults with whom it comes into contact. Thus an early cynicism, and unbelief in the virtue of truth, is inculcated, the child mind warped, and a favourable foundation induced for the injection of the poisonous serum of Christian dogma. Furthermore, it is only through clear, logical thinking, and a reverent regard for truth, that, from the Cimmerian abyss of religious belief, we ascend into the sunlit heights of the beautiful and joyous philosophy of Atheism.

ARNOLD NORTON.

## Acid Drops.

The Archbishop of Canterbury has issued a Christmas message to his flock. It runs thus:—

To all the clergy and people of my diocese I send my wishes for a truly blessed Christmas.

Once again the old and ever-new message of light and hope, never more welcome than at the present time—will come to each of us in his own personal life, and in a world full of anxiety, perplexity and fear, that "unto us is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. O, come let us adore him."

The Archbishop receives his appointment from God, via the Prime Minister, although how the P.M. gets the message—God only knows, but we are quite prepared to believe that some of our Prime Ministers would feel themselves sufficiently in touch with God Almighty to be a safe mouthpiece for him concerning the peace of the world. Still, looking at the possibilities for the post of Archbishop, we do not see that either God or the Prime Minister could do much better. And the incumbent will probably feel concerning his replacement as Charles the Second, the last wise and witty English King, did concerning his brother and heir to the throne, "They'll never kill me Jamie to make you King." Or it may be a case of the old lady who was mourning the retirement of the minister, and when he told her to cheer up, she might get a better man, replied, "No, no, we've had four ministers already, and each one's been worse than the last."

But look at the Archbishop's message, and then seriously consider the sheer imbecility of it, addressed to a world in the state that this one is. The people are to rejoice because there is born unto them a Saviour! But that event happened a long, long time ago. And ever

since there has been the same hope, the same "good news," the same invitation to adore him. And what has it all done? Of course, it has given us the Church, and the Archbishops, and the Bishops, and the parsons, etc., etc. It has also given us a world in which for any purpose that is useful the whole gang is absolutely worthless. The only Christmas advice is "Let us adore him." That is quite safe, for when men and women surround themselves with an atmosphere of religious adoration they are not likely to be very critical concerning the things that really matter.

A quite unintentional, but very apt comment on the Archbishop's message was given by a Methodist minister, the Rev. J. H. Bodgener. He says, "The Church may have little to offer in practical suggestions for the settlement of the country's and the world's burden and agony, but it would be an impertinence both to intelligence and piety merely to offer them sentiments, a few carols, and that pleasant but evaporating Christmassy feeling." Well, there is certainly more honesty behind this statement than in that unspeakably fatuous, "O, come let us adore him."

Mr. Gillie Potter, well known to users of the wireless for his solemnly nonsensical talk, intends putting up for Parliament. But he will not find his particular method of talking the most utter nonsense with a perfectly grave air quite so easy in the House of Commons as it is on the music hall platform or in the B.B.C. studio. He will be among masters at the game. Still, it will be interesting to see how these professionals fare with each other. On the whole, we do not know which is the more amusing, the grave nonsense of Mr. Gillie Potter or the nonsensical gravity of many eminent M.P.'s.

Some Roman Catholics do not seem quite so enthusiastic about the Holy Year as was Archbishop Macdonald the other day in his Pastoral letter. For example, here is Bishop Cogwell, who bemoans the unprecedented falling away from God the Holy Year has shown. He says:—

Never, perhaps, in the history of the world was there such a falling away from God as in the present day. Never possibly in pagan days was the world so godless. It is too appalling what is passing in Russia for example. . . .

and so on. We sympathize with the Bishop, of course, and if we were not so heretical ourselves, we should suggest that perhaps the *real* reason of the influx of Paganism is because the Pope inaugurated a Holy Year. Surely that is obvious. The falling away from God and the inauguration of the Holy Year coincided, and if one is not the cause of the other, what, in the name of God Almighty, is?

We are glad to see that Roman Catholics stand no nonsense about Hell being merely "figurative" or "symbolical." In answer to a correspondent, a Catholic editor says:—

We certainly consider it part of the ordinary teaching of the Church, that those who die in mortal sin go to Hell for ever, even if it be true that this has never formed the subject of a solemn definition. . . . It would presumably not be heretical to say that God could liberate a soul from Hell, but that is quite different from saying that He *does* do it.

This ought to clinch the matter. Roman Catholicism, the Salvation Army, the genuine Primitive Methodists, and, of course, Anglo-Catholics, all believe in a real super-hot Hell, wherein are frizzling billions of heretics. Give us true orthodox Christianity every time rather than the pale, cold-blooded Modernism free from all Miracles, Inspiration and a Saviour. Besides, in this bitterly cold weather, Hell does lend a certain attractiveness to a future life.

The *Daily Telegraph* reports the rise of another incarnated deity in the United States. This is a black man, possessed of huge resources, from unknown quarters,

with numerous temples devoted to his worship. He travels around to the various centres in either a private aeroplane, or a fleet of motor-cars. He is accompanied by a number of "angels," in the persons of negroes—"Truelove, Peaceful, Faithful, Bouquet," etc. The lines do not appear to be unorthodox as the Messiah business goes. But he is born rather late in the day. Born some centuries earlier he might have firmly established himself, and by this time would have had as a following as Joseph Smith, Mrs. Eddy, Mohammed or Jesus. As it is, all that is likely to occur will be a lynching. But if that happens at the right moment the black deity will leave a new church, and his followers will soon provide a Bible.

A long report has been filed in the New York Court, and at present the Court is trying to determine whether the man is "a prophet or a pest." But why this tautology?

By the way, how will a court decide whether the negro is either a prophet or a pest? There are one or two ways laid down in the Old Testament of determining whether a man is a prophet or not, but we can hardly imagine a modern civilized assembly tolerating their being applied. And would the American white public stand a black prophet coming from God? It would probably do as they do to an offending nation—break off all diplomatic relations. Up to date, Christians have not permitted Jesus to be drawn as a typical Jew, or his mother as a typical Jewess, and what would happen if a theatrical producer put before the public a play in which Jesus was made to talk as the ordinary stage Jew speaks baffles imagination.

Which reminds us of the immense amusement the average British audience seems to find in hearing a man speak broken English. It probably gives them a sense of superiority on knowing more of their own language than the poor creature before them.

It is fitting that at this season there should have been discovered a pre-historic monster in Loch Ness. And, of course, there is no lack of people who have seen it. Not all of these are liars, although this simple explanation of the origin of the marvellous or the miraculous is not readily resorted to. Many people see what they go out to see, and we would undertake to wager that if a thousand people paid individual visits to Loch Ness for the purpose of discovering the monster, quite a respectable proportion would find distinct evidences of its existence. And the people who can swallow the miracles of the Christian religion ought not to jib at a mere fifty-foot pre-historic survival.

We are less than twenty years from the manufacture of a legend that, in slightly more favourable circumstances, would have added another manifestation of God's interest in human affairs. Shortly after the retreat from Mons Mr. Arthur Machen wrote for a London evening paper an account of a vision of a troop of angels standing between the retreating British Army and the pursuing Germans. He never intended the article to be taken as more than an essay in fancy, and it was obviously based on a very old Roman legend. But the clergy saw a chance and began to preach on it as evidence of the activity of "Providence," on the British side, of course. Mr. Machen wrote explaining that the tale was pure fiction, and that he never intended it to be taken seriously.

The clergy would not have it so. The Bishop of London, the Rev. R. F. Horton, with numerous other clergymen, insisted that it was an actual fact. Soldiers were discovered who had seen the angels, or some who knew others who had seen them, and Mr. Harold Begbie, who was always ready to exploit religious credulity, wrote a booklet defending the angels. A few centuries earlier the tale would have been generally accepted, and every credulous fool or unscrupulous knave in the country would have championed it.

Eventually, thanks partly to the work of this journal, the story was laughed out of existence, although none of the prominent parsons had the decency to apologize for their efforts to establish the lie they had been instrumental in circulating. There were many other legends of the war, but this came as near as any to getting generally accepted. And if this could be done nowadays, we need not wonder at the Christian legends being accepted as historic truth.

We heard the other day of a very sad case. A number of Christian Scientists developed a "belief" that one of their number was dead. Unfortunately they buried the poor beggar before the subject of the belief had time to convince his fellow "scientists" that they were wrong.

Among publishers announcements for Christmas we note a book of selections *From Virgil to J. B. Priestley*. Of course, we all know Priestley, but who the devil is Virgil? Perhaps he is a friend of Priestley's, or the man who writes the press announcements of his books, and Mr. Priestley is anxious to do him a return favour by linking the two names together.

The Duke of Atholl has issued a notice to the public, that anyone who buys a ticket in the next Irish Sweepstake is a traitor to King and Empire. But what is the matter with those who drink Irish whisky or Guinness stout? Or those who eat Irish pork? If we were not dealing with a Duke we should be inclined to say that his Grace was after a little cheap notoriety. But there is nothing *cheap* about a Duke, particularly an English one.

The Rev. Herbert Lockyer, of Leeds Road Baptist Church, says that congregations expect a minister "to possess the strength of an eagle, the grace of a swan, the gentleness of a dove, the friendliness of a sparrow and the night hours of an owl." We wonder why other members of the animal kingdom are not mentioned.

## Fifty Years Ago.

MR. W. J. RAMSEY AT THE HALL OF SCIENCE AFTER HIS RELEASE FROM HOLLOWAY PRISON.

AFTER the verdict of the jury and the sentence on Mr. Foote, there was a terrible scene in court, as you are aware. I stood looking at the judge, waiting for my turn. Somebody said, "Cheer up, Ramsey." I found it was the voice of Mr. Cluer. I saw two very big tears in his eyes. This made a lump come up in my throat. I am not ashamed to own it. So that when it came to my turn to be sentenced I could say nothing. I felt myself pushed down the steps from the dock into the presence of Mr. Foote, who, on hearing my sentence, said "Won't we be revenged when we come out!" (Loud cheers.) Presently we heard Mr. Kemp coming down the steps, who informed us what term he received. We then heard a tremendous roar. Friends, we heard it through the thick walls and through the gloomy, dark passages. After a time we were conducted to our various cells, and fell asleep.

... And now friends I have done. I little thought when I had been reading the lives of Freethought martyrs that I should be one, however humble in the ranks. I promised before our trial that I would stand firm; I said I would never flinch. If you believe I have not disgraced the Freethought flag; if you are satisfied with my conduct, and the Freethought party is satisfied, I will try to repay a little of the debt of gratitude I owe it for the kindness it has shown to me and mine, by devoting every day of my life to the furtherance of the grand old cause. (Loud and continued applause.)

The Chairman, in proposing a vote of thanks for the lecture, said it was exceedingly interesting, and that Mr. Ramsey was full of his old fun and humour; but the lecturer was not just to himself when he spoke of the littleness of his sacrifice for the cause. He was thoroughly entitled to rank among the martyrs of Freethought. (Loud cheers.)

The "Freethinker," December 23, 1883.



# THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE.

EDITORIAL

61 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

- W. L. ROWE (Transvaal, South Africa).—Many thanks for your kind remarks, also for your warm interest in the welfare of the Freethought movement.
- J. LATHAM (S.A.).—Thanks. Shall appear.
- H. HENRY.—We are not surprised at the answers to your invitation to the various clergymen to debate. Most of them realize that Christianity has no case that will stand full, free, and public criticism. Our best wishes for your success.
- G. F. LAW.—Excuse delay. You are writing in ignorance of all that transpired, or you would think mild the terms used in the circumstances. A man who undertakes a public office of any kind, is loyally bound to refrain from taking advantage of his position to air his own private views, and so misrepresent those whom he represents.
- M. HARRIS.—Sorry we do not know the address about which you enquire. You have omitted to place your full address on the letter, so we cannot return your enclosure.
- CINE CERE.—We hope your friend will not fail to make himself known when he has the opportunity to do so.
- L. MORRIS.—We appreciate your high praise of *Bradlaugh and Ingersoll*. We also appreciate your desire that we should write similar appreciations of some of the great Freethinkers of the past. We should much like to do so, but we should have to be relieved of much of the "donkey work" we are at present compelled to do, before we could undertake the task which would involve much detailed research.
- R.W.—It is not likely that any of the leading clergymen of this country will ever meet Mr. Cohen in public debate, either written or oral. Why should they? If they really know their own case, and the case for Freethought, they have everything to lose and nothing to gain.
- E. COLD.—Sorry we are unable to cite the passage from *Ingersoll* you require without better reference.
- FREETHINKER ENDOWMENT TRUST.—R.H., Ingram, 2s. 9d.

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One year, 15/-; half year, 7/6; three months, 3/9.

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## Sugar Plums.

The National Secular Society's Annual Dinner is a little later than usual, and will take place on Saturday, February 3, at the Holborn Restaurant. The tickets will, as usual be 8s. each. The number attending the dinner has been on the increase for several years, and this time we expect a large number of visitors from the provinces. There will be the usual excellent concert, and some speeches. May we impress upon all who intend being present, the need for securing their tickets early. They may be obtained from either the *Freethinker* or the N.S.S. Offices.

A fortnight ago in our "Acid Drop" columns we commented on a passage taken from the *Catholic Herald*, but which we attributed to the *Catholic Times*. We published a correction last week, but the editor of the *Catholic Times* thinks we ought to make it quite plain that our correction applies to him as well as to his paper. We willingly do so. Our original comments applied wholly and exclusively to the *Catholic Herald*.

We have received many letters of appreciation of *Bradlaugh and Ingersoll*, some of which we may reprint later. Meanwhile we again draw the attention of readers to the suitability of this volume for a New Year's present. It contains, of course, all that appeared in the *Bradlaugh and Ingersoll* issues of the *Freethinker*, but a large amount of new matter has been added. The book extends to over 200 pages, and has 12 plates. The price is 2s. 6d., by post threepence extra.

Apropos of the issue of Mr Cohen's *Bradlaugh and Ingersoll*, we smother our blushes and reprint the following passage from Mrs. S. M. Farrell, a member of the *Ingersoll* family. It is concerned with the *Ingersoll* issue of the *Freethinker*:—

Dear Mr. Cohen,

Your beautiful tribute to my adored brother-in-law, has made me very happy, happier than I can say. It is so absolutely just, so correct in every detail, so eloquent that in reading it I have been many times moved to tears. To me nothing that you have written equals this lovely expression of your admiration—your friendship. With all my heart I thank you.

It may interest readers to know that Mrs. Farrell recently presented the Congress library—at the request of the Librarian—with thirty-four scrap-books containing letters to or from *Ingersoll*, and has been twice thanked by the Government for her gift. A copy of our *Ingersoll* issue has also been filed for reference of future readers.

We are pleased to know that Mr. Whitehead had a successful meeting at Bradford on Sunday last. There was also a brief report in the local press.

One sentence of the Bulgarian, Dimitroff, on trial for the burning of the Reichstag, deserves to be put on record:—

I ask you, my lord judges, what Fascism, in what land is not savage, is not barbarous?

There spoke a man. No braver sentence was ever spoken before any court, certainly not before such a court as a German Court in existing circumstances. Fascism wherever it exists is savage and barbarous. It is an assertion of the will of men against the rights of man. It cannot exist without the grossest tyranny, and its savagery is limited only by its opportunities. Its whole aim is to silence opposition, and it naturally appeals to the barbaric mind in every class of existing society. We do not know much of this Dimitroff, but to say such a thing in such conditions marks that greatest of all rarities, a Man.

One of the outstanding figures in both the American and French Revolutions was the great Marquis de Lafayette. A new biography has been written of him by Michael de la Bedoyere, and it was only to be expected that a Catholic reviewer of the book would have a word to say about Lafayette's religion. He was, of course, brought up as an orthodox Roman Catholic, but the "orthodox" played very little part in his life. At all events, the reviewer does his best to bring the Marquis back to the fold, and this is how he does it:—

In 1834 he died. It is certainly possible that the prayers of his wife were fruitful; that the "constitutional religion" he had espoused in life, a purely natural religion that meant everything to him, more than wife and family, more than the faith in which he had been born and educated, was transformed before death into the religion his wife so splendidly practised.

"Certainly possible" really means very cold comfort to a genuine believer. It is pretty obvious that Lafayette was an *unbeliever*, and there is no proof whatever he changed. Modern biographers must tell the truth, and sometimes it is very very hard on religion,

## The Thralldom of the Dead.

THE dread of the disembodied soul is almost, if not entirely, universal in savage life. In semi-civilized societies the story is the same, while even in the most cultured communities the fear of spirits remains widespread. Throughout the historical period the belief in ghostly influences has induced all races, civilized and savage alike, to postpone and positively neglect the crying needs of the living in order to attend to the imaginary demands of the dead. In Patagonia all property accumulated in life is incontinently destroyed at death, and the traveller d'Orbigny assures us that the same custom prevails among the Tamanaques of the Orinoco, who ravage the crops and cut down the trees the deceased has planted, as also among the Yuracares "who abandon and shut up the house of the dead, regarding it as a profanation to gather a single fruit from the trees of his field. It is easy to see that with such customs they can nourish no real ambition since their needs are limited to themselves; it is one of the causes of their natural indolence, and is a motive, which, so long as it exists, will always impede the progress of their civilization."

While goblins are everywhere feared, the souls of the slain are especially dreaded by the murderer. Even in ancient Hellas the spirit of the slain was supposed to haunt the slayer and perchance drive him mad. Even when homicide was accidental the man-slayer was banished for a year to persuade the aggrieved ghost to lessen his resentment. Moreover, the culprit was not permitted to return until acts of sacrifice and purification had been solemnly performed. Frazer thinks that: "The legend of the matricide Orestes, how he roamed from place to place pursued and maddened by the ghost of his murdered mother, reflects faithfully the ancient Greek conception of the fate which overtakes the murderer at the hands of the ghost."

To increase the terror inspired by the vengeful spirit, the murderer was shunned by the people as a dangerous neighbour, as there was no certainty that the mortified ghost would confine his anger to the culprit. So the homicide was banished for a period, and thus appeased, the spirit would be more inclined to spare those innocent of its disembodiment.

Similar ideas persist in East Africa to-day. The Akikuyu believe that when one native kills another and happens to share the family repast in a hut, all the participants contract a deadly pollution which yields to the treatment of the savage doctor alone. "The very skin on which the homicide slept has absorbed the taint and might infect anyone else who slept on it. So a medicine-man is sent for to purify the hut and its occupants."

Millions of Europeans regard the blood of the Redeemer as an atonement for the original sin of Adam. In civilized antiquity this survival of savagery was also shown in the Greek custom of cleansing a murderer by slaughtering a sucking-pig and bathing the hands of the homicide in its blood. Yet modern missionaries express their pity when they encounter the Bengalese hill tribes who fine an aggressor in a quarrel that ends in bloodshed a pig or a fowl, "the blood of which is sprinkled over the wounded person, to purify him, and to prevent his being possessed by a devil."

Blood is regarded by many savages as an antidote to ghostly malevolence. So, to obviate this, it is customary to taste the blood of the deceased, thus rendering the spirit impotent for harm. For instance, the natives of Guiana are convinced that, "an avenger of blood who has slain his man must go mad

unless he tastes the blood of his victim, the notion apparently being that the ghost drives him crazy." So to avert this misfortune the man-slayer repairs on the third night to his victim's grave, punctures the corpse with a pointed instrument, and then withdrawing it, licks the dead man's blood. This lays the perturbed spirit and the manslayer returns to his tribe without misgiving.

When a Maori warrior had sent his enemy to his long account he sucked his blood, thus making himself free from ghostly reprisals. The imbibing of a foe's blood made the enemy part of one's own personality. Other savages drink the blood of their dead enemies, and some make manifest the act by marking their faces with a bloody hand. Sir James Frazer suggests that: "The motive for this practice may have been, as with the Maoris, a desire to appropriate and so disarm the ghost of an enemy. In antiquity, some of the Scythians used to drink the blood of the first foes they killed, and they also tasted the blood of a friend with whom they made a covenant." The custom of the executioners who sucked the blood of their victims from their weapons betrays similar ideas among some of the Lower Niger natives. Incredible as it appears, this weird belief survives in contemporary Italy. For we learn from Vincenzo Dorsa that there persists "a widespread opinion in Calabria that if a murderer is to escape he must suck his victim's blood from the reeking blade of the dagger with which he did the deed."

Not merely those who fall in battle or are murdered in times of peace, but the spirits of all who die a violent death, are deemed dangerous to the survivors. The ghosts are bent on revenge and are apt to inflict injury on anyone they encounter. Measures are therefore taken to appease these truculent sprites. The Karens of Burma suppose that these ghosts depart neither to paradise nor to damnation, but linger to haunt their earthly surroundings while making men miserable by stealing their souls. These evil spirits are greatly dreaded, so to soften their anger and mitigate their powers of mischief supplications and sacrifices are made to them. Baskets of choice rice are placed in the forests for their sustenance, and they are beseeched to remain in the woodlands and abstain from their malignant activities.

More forcible methods are occasionally adopted to overcome the undesired attentions of the spirits. With the North American Indians it was customary to create a tremendous uproar after a conflict, in order to scare the spirits of the slain. Again, the Papuans of Dutch New Guinea, when a deed of blood had been done, used to congregate in large numbers for several successive nights and "shriek and shout to frighten away the ghost in case he should attempt to come back." Careful precautions are taken by the Herero of South Africa to prevent the loitering of evilly-inclined ghosts. Men who have led bad lives continue their wickedness after death, for it is said that, "they rob, steal, and seduce women and girls, sometimes getting them with child." So to preclude these sinister deeds the Herero used to saw through the spine of the corpse, bind it into a bunch, and enclose it in the hide of an ox. The Armenians and West African Negroes, on the other hand, disarm the dangerous ghost by disinterring the body and cutting off its head, while to remove all doubt of the ghost's disablement the Armenians smash the skull or run a needle through its heart.

The souls of women who die during pregnancy, at confinement, or soon afterwards are dreaded in many lands. Pious Hindoos in the Punjaub believe that

when "a mother dies within thirteen days of her delivery she will return in the guise of a malignant spirit to torment her husband and family. To prevent this, some people drive nails through her head and eyes, while others knock nails on either side of the doors of the house." Similar superstitious customs prevail throughout India, are common in Burma, as also in the Indian Archipelago.

Some races utilize a scapegoat to banish evil spirits. Near the Himalayas dwell the Bhotias who perform "an elaborate ceremony for transferring the spirit of a deceased person to an animal which is finally beaten by all the villagers and driven away. Having thus expelled the ghost the people return joyfully to the village with songs and dances."

In Africa widows live in constant dread of their husbands' ghosts, and many irksome duties and privations are deemed imperative to protect them from the spectre's spiteful pranks. Among the American Indians and uncivilized stocks in various other lands, widows and widowers alike must be guarded from the baleful activities of the spirit of the dead wife or husband. With the Shushwap Indians of British Columbia protective devices are very realistic for "widows and widowers fence their beds with thorn bushes to keep off the ghost of the deceased; indeed they lie on such bushes in order that the ghost may be under little temptation to share their bed of thorns." Again, the morbid fear of the departed is so intense with the Papuans in British New Guinea that on the death of a wife the poor widower is pitilessly abused and thrashed by his wife's family, his dwelling is demolished, his property destroyed, and he becomes a pariah among his people. He is deprived of all civil rights, is compelled to sleep on his spouse's grave, no one will associate with him, and, until kindly death releases him from his misery, he remains an outcast, and is driven to steal the bare necessities of savage existence.

T. F. PALMER.

## A Flying House.

WRITERS of Freethought literature expend much energy on ridiculing the belief that thousands of years ago, certain men divided the waters of the sea, or disappeared into space. Yet there is actually standing to-day, a house that has twice flown through the air for hundreds of miles—at a comparatively recent period; and no Freethinker, strange to say, has made any allusion to this singular phenomenon.

Just over 1,900 years ago this house stood in Nazareth, and was the abode of Christ, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph. In it occurred the greatest of events for Christendom: the Incarnation of God the Son.

This house remained at Nazareth till the year 1291. That year, "as every schoolboy knows," the Latin kingdom established by the Crusaders in Syria and Palestine went down amid flame and carnage. Its earthly protectors were too busy at home to interfere with the Mameluke progress. Edward of England was forcing his supremacy on a reluctant Scottish nation: Capet of France was warring with Arragon to keep his cousin on the throne of Naples; Germany was in chaos, while Rudolf Hapsburg endeavoured to play the role of Adolf Hitler.

So in that memorable year the house we treat of, flew from Nazareth to the Balkan peninsula. It lighted on the north-west corner, occupied by the Croats, the "regnum Catholicissimum." Of course, no self-respecting house would remain in the Balkan Peninsula; so one fine night, in the year 1294, saw it

once more arise, fly across the Adriatic, and settle near Ancona, in the Papal Kingdom. There it has remained.

Nobody, at the time, mentioned these astounding flights—or indeed for two centuries after. Europe, it is pointed out, was then disturbed (as it usually is), and what with the Scotch question, and the South Italian question, and the German chaos, who could be expected to notice these airy peregrinations? At the end of the fifteenth century, however, the miracle became known; since then crowds have flocked to see the wonderful building, and wealth, on its account, has surely "flown" into the coffers of the Holy Father.

The strangest part of the story remains to be told. From an early period, Christians have visited Palestine to view the places hallowed by the life of the Redeemer. About the year 680, Arculf, a French Bishop, who had performed such a pilgrimage, came on his return journey to Britain, and stayed in Iona with the Irish Abbot, Adamnan. The latter (as he tells us), took down from Arculf's lips an account of the Holy Places he had visited, and subsequently presented it to the King of Northumbria. In this, Arculf clearly states, "I saw at Nazareth a church where *formerly stood the house* in which our Lord was brought up." So the house had vanished from Nazareth before the year 680!

Willibald of Hampshire, a bishop who went on pilgrimage about the year 721, and Saewulf, another Englishman, who did likewise about the year 1102, describe a church or monastery as standing at the periods of their visits, on the site of the former dwelling place of the Holy Family.

Therefore, a house that did not exist in Nazareth from the seventh century to the twelfth, flew away from Nazareth in the thirteenth, and had been built there before the first century of our era began! And nobody in Palestine or Italy, observed this unprecedented movement for 200 years, and then they noticed it in Italy alone! and advertised it!

Surely little in the domain of miracle or mythology can rival such a cock-and-bull story—(unless maybe the Yankee who used to go a-fishing with whales for bait!)

EUREANNACII.

## The Twilight of the Gods.

A LETTER which I have received lately, though merely colloquial, states a position which is of interest to Freethinkers, because it is fairly representative of that held by many of those who are outside the Atheistic Freethought Movement. The writer thinks it is a laughable idea on the part of Freethinkers

to hope to abolish religion. An amazing idea! Abolish *creed* perhaps—that would be all to the good. But—unless in the advent of another great and disastrous war, when in all probability we should revert to barbarism\*—Religion in its true sense can never be abolished; in coming time it will grow stronger and stronger. Why, even the modern scientists now agree that mind was the origin of the Universe. Jeans says that "The Universe looks more like a great thought than a great machine," and that we must "hail mind as the creator of this realm of matter."

These remarks give a very fair idea of the type of loose Freethinking for which scientists are responsible when they embark upon the dangerous waters and

\*The writer apparently admits that "Religion in its true sense" would be abolished by barbarism instead of the other way about.

shifting currents of metaphysics, on which their views are of no more weight or value than anyone else's. The term "mind" has no esoteric significance. The only mind-power of which we can form any conception is vested in the brain as known in biology. And the brain is a physical organ, not a metaphysical thesis. It follows, therefore, that the psychological dogma of a creative mind, responsible for the Universe, is neither more nor less than a reversion to the religious dogma of a personal anthropomorphic creator, the "God" of the religious creeds which the writer of this letter is quite ready to scrap. It is, in short, impossible to postulate mind-power except in terms of personal power.

The position taken up involves also a misuse of the word "religion." Unless a religion is sailing under false colours it carries with it creed and dogma, though in the case of Christianity many attempts are made by Modernists to lighten the cargo. Mr. Bernard Shaw, speaking at the Bradlaugh Centenary Meeting, condemned the educational authorities for continuing "to teach our children lies."

But the words "I believe" still stand inviolate in the liturgy of our Established Church, and creeds perpetuating primitive notions and archaic absurdities continue to be reverently voiced by millions who unthinkingly accept them as sacrosanct.

Psychological religion, which shakes off the fetters of outworn creeds, is a subjective form of faith, and varies with individual idiosyncrasy. It is however a faith which though it adopts a new departure in religious dogma, often leads back to the "home of the Gods in or beyond the sky," the Olympus of the ancients, the Heaven of later times.

But the twilight of the Gods is deepening.

MAUD SIMON.

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### The Christ Myth.

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THERE is a crude philosophy contained in the popular saying, "The age of miracles is past." It is not time or space, however, but knowledge, which transports the supernatural beyond the sphere of the actual. Given an experience of life sufficiently circumscribed, it would be as easy to date such a phenomenon as the birth of a god-man yesterday as two thousand years ago, or to place it in the next parish as at the other end of the earth. The only advantage which a distance of time or place can confer is derived from the fact that the fancy tends to invest with a halo of wonderment that which is remote and unapproachable. A bold and candid reason can alone dispel the meretricious glamour of the past, and survey the truth that is obscured in the mists of time and tradition. If truth be stranger than fiction, it is because the reason spontaneously rejects as unlikely the fantastic fabrications which the latter so often presents, and is startled when some aspect of the former seems to run contrary to the rule of cause and effect divined in the course of normal existence. If human reason, as religious propagandists so very well understand, were left untrammelled by the influences of early teaching, it would be as impossible to promulgate the belief in the authenticity of the birth of a god-man as to convince people that they are walking on their heads.

Amongst the religions of the present era, Christianity is unique in its claim of a directly divine origin. The Gods of Asia and Egypt, of Greece and Rome, with their attendant rites and ceremonies, have long been relegated to the realm of discarded superstitions; the great rivals of the Christian religion seek their sources in the more rational if more prosaic forms of inspired men; while Christianity, oblivious of the advance of reason, still insists on the godhood of its founder—probably the last great consecration of the theistic mythology of ancient times.

If one could extract such truth as there may be from the welter of tradition and discrepancy which surrounds

the story of the birth of Christ—and on the analogy that where there is smoke there must be fire, it may be assumed, at least for the sake of argument, that there was such an incident—there would probably remain nothing noteworthy to record. Of course, in the circumstances in which the Bible narrative was written, it is as easy to say one thing as another, for there is no independent evidence by which we can test its veracity. To say that a certain occurrence was witnessed by a multitude of people, proves nothing. But when we read such a passage as that which describes the conversation which ensued between Pilate and Christ, after the Roman Governor had taken his prisoner aside, we can only conclude that the sober historian has borrowed the licence of the author. So, too, the arcadian simplicity of the nativity is wrecked by the flamboyant melodrama of the heralding star and the far-travelled worshippers. Christ is presented to us in the tawdry splendour of a sixpenny novelette.

If the persons named in the New Testament narrative could learn what posterity has made of their story, none of them, I imagine, would be so greatly surprised as the mother of Jesus. It is clear that no consciousness of an immaculate conception tempered her bearing toward her son. Had she entertained any belief in his divine descent and mission, it is inconceivable that she would have attempted to restrain him in his work. Her whole attitude plainly suggests that to her Christ was but the son of a man. The writer of the book of Matthew, too, in a moment of mental aberration, leads to the same assumption, when he commences by setting forth "The generation of Jesus Christ,"—a tedious genealogy, which is utterly pointless if Joseph were not the father of Jesus. The book of Luke, on the other hand, distinctly states that it is about to tell what was "Told to us" by those who had been eye-witnesses—*hearsay evidence*, in short.

On this frail foundation rests the story which Christmas is designed to commemorate, with carol-singing, bell-ringing, and idol worship. Nor is the bringing of offerings to the manger forgotten. On one day out of 365, the wealthy Christian provides a decent dinner for the poor, and extols the blessings of peace and goodwill.

ARTHUR COPLAND.

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### Liberty—Sham or Real.

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IN CANADA.

OVER a great part of the American Continent there is complete liberty—in theory. In actual practice there may be almost none at all. And the trick is worked by a system of local "licences." In this city not a tract may lawfully be given away, not a pamphlet may be sold from door to door, not a hall may be used for public meetings, not a "sandwich-board" may appear on the streets, not an advertisement of any sort may be exposed on a vehicle, without a licence. And this licence may at any time be refused or withdrawn. On paper, complete liberty exists. By means of the "licence" system, there may, in practice, be hardly any left. A complete embargo can thus be placed upon any propaganda which is not popular or approved by the authorities. At present about thirty individuals are under arrest in Quebec on a charge of "sedition." They are Bible Students, followers of Judge Rutherford, whose outstanding tenet is a denial of the doctrine of "eternal punishment." A Catholic ecclesiastic gave evidence that their preaching was likely to disturb the mind of the public and to cause dissatisfaction. Under such laws, Wesley, Whitfield, the early Quakers and Freethinkers would have spent most of their lives in jail. A hall was nearly wrecked, and the speaker nearly murdered in Montreal lately because he had spoken disrespectfully of some of the religious orders. By threatening the landlord with a refusal of his licence, the authorities can make it almost impossible to hold a meeting to propagate unpopular views.

J. C. WILSON.

## LIGHT FARE.

### APPROVED DIET.

Bishop: And do you think it is right to partake of haggis, considering that the day is Friday.  
 Scotch Clergyman: Quite in order, sir. It is composed of thirty-nine articles.

### FORCE MAJEURE.

Clergyman (to little boy): I suppose you say your prayers, my boy?

Boy: Yes, Sir.

Clergyman: Does your father say his?

Boy: O No! His father's dead.

### BIZNESS IS BIZNESS.

"When the Queen of Sheba came and laid jewels and fine raiment before Solomon, what did he say?" asked the Sunday-school teacher.

"How much d'you want for the lot?" suggested a boy.

### PULL DEVIL PULL BAKER!

Little Annette was always very devout in saying a prayer on entering church. One day her mother asked her what words she used.

"I always pray that there won't be a Litany," she said.

### PEACE WITHOUT HONOUR.

Clergyman (dining with family): I noticed during the sermon you were very quiet, Tommy; a very good boy indeed.

Tommy: Rather! I was afraid of waking pa.

### FAITH ABOUNDING.

Rector (to boy in class): George, can you give me an example of the exercise of faith?

George: Yes, sir. When you are preaching and believe all the people are listening.

### OMNIPOTENCE IN DIFFICULTIES.

"There is no difficulty in the world that God cannot overcome," declared the Sunday-school teacher.

"Please, sir," said little Harry, "have you ever tried squeezing the tooth-paste back into the tube?"

### SPIRITUAL INDIGESTION.

The vicar was appealing to members of his congregation to supply refreshments for a church social.

"And now, please remember," he ended, "what we want are not abstract promises, but concrete cakes."

### THE APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION.

"Did you hear about Elkins, the bank cashier stealing fifty thousand and running away with his best friend's wife?"

"Good heavens! Who'll teach his Sunday-school class to-morrow?"

### JUST IN TIME.

"It had been my intention," said the good pastor, beaming over the pulpit, "to offer prayers for rain, owing to the distressing drought which prevails all over the country. The superintendent has, however, very opportunely informed me that the Sunday School picnic has been arranged for Tuesday."

### PI-JAW.

Little Archibald was saying his prayers the other evening, while his mother was stroking his curly head, and thinking of something else. Suddenly it struck her that the child had wandered from the beaten track. "What is that, darling?" she interrupted. "Give us this day our daily pie and cake, and forgive—" "Why, my love, that isn't right. This isn't what mamma taught you to say." "I know," little Archibald replied, "but I like pie and cake, so why not try him."

Another association of Christmas is with rent-day; and here perhaps the man of sorrows may come in.

J. M. Wheeler.

## Howlers.

The capital of Norway is Christianity.

Mephistopheles was a Greek comic poet.

Elisha was a prophet who went on a cruise with a widow.

Esau was a mighty hunter who wrote fables and sold them for a bottle of potash.

The masculine of vixen is vicar.

The words, "Would to God I had died for thee," were uttered by David after he had murdered Uriah and married his widow.

The Egyptians taught the immorality of the soul.

The Minister of War is the Clergyman who preaches to the soldiers in the barracks.

Lollards were lazy people who always wanted to rest against something.

Joan of Ark was Noah's wife.

An epistle is the wife of an apostle.

Moses was discovered burning insects at the Altar.

The Mediterranean and the Red Sea are joined by the Sewage Canal.

Excommunication is when burglars cut the telephone wires.

A vacuum is where the Pope lives.

An abstract noun is the name of something which has no existence, as goodness.

A dirge is a song which a man sings when he is dead.

A grass widow is the wife of a dead vegetarian.

Many Crusaders died of salvation.

Horses are fed on proverbs.

Virgil is the man who cleans up churches.

Before a man can become a monk he has to have his tonsils cut.

Because Henry VIII. wrote in defence of the Catholic Faith, the Pope called him a D.F.

The Clerks of the Weather are the instrument-makers Spagetti and Zambuk.

An infant's version of the well-known hymn after some hot weather:—

He sends the snow in winter

The warmth to smell the drain.

Another infant's version of the 23rd Psalm: "Thy rod and thy staff they come for me."

Yet another infant: "The Lord is my shepherd. That's all I want."

[Correct as to subject-matter or syntax (whichever is required.)

The hen has three legs.

God done it.]

The hen didn't done it. God done it.

## Santa Claus.

The small boy had been only a day or two at school when he approached his father, showing a great deal of indignation.

"Papa, that isn't a good school. I don't want to go to that school any more."

"Why, my boy?"

"Well, do you know what the boys at that school say?"

"What?"

"Well papa, they say there ain't any Santa Claus; that it's not true; there ain't any such thing. Papa, there is a Santa Claus, isn't there?"

The father thought a moment. Then he decided to tell the child the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So he took him on his knee and told him how it was a pretty fabrication made up by fathers and mothers who loved their children to make them happy, and the fathers and mothers were the real Santa Claus. The small boy listened in silence. This was a shock to him, because, we suppose, like older and more inexcusable people, he felt he had been making a painful exhibition of his ignorance. He slid down from his father's knee, and walked across the room to the door. He opened it, and stood holding the knob for a moment in a kind of deep thought. Then he turned and looked at his father.

"I say, papa, is there anything else you have been filling me up about?"

## Correspondence.

### TURKEY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—As a resident of nearly three years in Asiatic Turkey (the *real* Turkey—not the cosmopolitan miscellany on the European side), I was naturally interested in the extracts you quoted in your issue of November 26 on this country.

Mr. Kenneth Williams is a connoisseur of matters Near Eastern, and, though I have not read the article mentioned, judging by the extracts you quote he seems to have summed up the situation here very fairly, an unusual thing in England concerning countries which develop along unorthodox lines. Even such a friend of Turkey as Miss Grace Ellison, tried to convey in her article on the Tenth Anniversary of this republic, printed in the *Daily Telegraph* recently, an assurance to the people of England that Turkey was still a religious country, which is really not the case, and especially so with the rising generation, who hear not a syllable of religious instruction in their schools and universities—in keeping with the law of the country.

But what impels me to write you in this matter is the second extract you quote of Mr. Williams' article, concerning "freedom of thought," which is said to be non-existent here. I feel this statement needs qualifying, especially for the benefit of those Freethinkers who may not have read the whole of the article—and they may be many.

There is complete freedom of thought and expression as regards what the French term "la liberté de conscience," in that those who want to go to the mosque may still do so, and those who want to damn religion loudly may also do so. In other words, public worship is still free and unfettered, and even army chaplains are provided, besides faculties of theology at two of the universities. The point, of course, is that the greater part of the population is beginning to see the futility of religion, and I can certify that rare use is made of the facilities for worship.

In the matter of political freedom, the position is this: In 1927 the illiteracy rate was 91.8% of the population—a staggering figure, for which many centuries of Islam and Sultans, *i.e.*, religion and autocracy, were to thank. Therefore Mr. Williams is quite correct in saying that the great majority do not desire political freedom. An illiterate peasant would not know what to do with it, nor is he interested. He prefers to leave everything to that super-man, the Gazi Mustapha Kemal, who has been everything to his country—leader, saviour, teacher, reformer, and who is, moreover, an out and out Atheist. Please, therefore, do not say that "this is, of course, to be regretted," for no-one whom I have met here has any regrets, except the priests, who no longer live on the fat of the land, as they did in the bad old days.

When you say, "but we do not imagine that the repression of thought is greater than in religious Turkey," I can only refer you to pre-war history, for I see that my letter is becoming rather long, and your space is valuable. I will merely say that not only was the Turkey of the Sultans a den of intrigues, spying, torture and of repression of all kinds of thought, not to mention the slavery of women, now gone for all time, but that even the printing of certain words, such as "freedom," for instance, was prohibited in any connexion whatsoever, whether political or literary.

H. DELLA-VERDE.

### CHRISTIAN ORIGINS.

SIR,—With respect to my letter on which Mr. Cutner comments, I may mention that a reference to the "obscurity" of the subject has been overlooked in the text. What I wished to convey by my remark on "originality" in sayings ascribed to Jesus, is his interpretation of the Jewish Messianic hope in a different sense, as the coming of the Kingdom of God, or of Heaven, as it is variously phrased. This suggests a clue to the movement. Belief in an impending restoration or revival is

a feature in more than one faith, and more than one prophet has assumed the mantle of this expected restorer—usually with fatal results. The Sudan "Mahdi" is a late instance in point.

AUSTEN VERNEY.

### METHOD IN PRESENTATION.

SIR,—Upon reading R. S. N. Stoner's article on "Tone" in your issue of the 3rd inst, I was strongly reminded of the following passage from Thomas Carlyle's Rectorial Address to the students of the Edinburgh University on April 2, 1866, which I offer without further comment:—

For if a good speaker—an eloquent speaker—is not speaking the truth, is there a more horrid kind of object in creation? (Loud cheers). Of such speech I hear all manner and kind of people say it is excellent; but I care very little about how he said it, provided I understand it, and it be true. Excellent speaker! but what if he is telling men things that are untrue, that are not the facts about it—if he has formed a wrong judgment about it—if he has no judgment in his mind to form a right conclusion in regard to the matter? An excellent speaker of that kind is, as it were, saying—"Ho, every one that wants to be persuaded of the thing that is not true, come hither." (Great laughter and applause.) I would recommend you to be very chary of that kind of excellent speech. (Renewed laughter.)

CINE CERRE.

### Obituary.

HEMAN JACOBS.

It is with the very deepest regret that we record the death of Heman Jacobs, only son of Mr. and Mrs. J. Jacobs, of Maida Vale. The deceased was only nineteen years of age, and had shown evidence of great intellectual gifts, and a promise of a brilliant future. It is a terrible blow to the parents, and they will have the sympathy of all friends and of our readers in the bereavement they have experienced.

### SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

#### LONDON.

##### OUTDOOR.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.0, Sunday, B. A. Le Maine. 3.30, Platform 1, Messrs. Collins and Bryant. Platform 2, B. A. Le Maine. 6.30, Various speakers. Wednesday, 7.30, Messrs. Collins and Le Maine. WOOLWICH (Beresford Square): 8.0, S. Burke—"The Christmas Pantomime."

##### INDOOR.

STUDY CIRCLE (N.S.S. Office, 62 Farringdon Street, E.C.4): December 25, No meeting. On Monday, January 1, 1934, at 8.0 p.m., Mr. P. Goldman will speak on "Freethought and the Child."

THE METROPOLITAN SECULAR SOCIETY (Reggiori's Restaurant, 1 Euston Road, opposite King's Cross Station): 7.30, Next meeting January 7, 1934.

#### COUNTRY.

##### INDOOR.

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): No meeting until January 7, 1934.

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, M'Lellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Mrs. S. Whitefield—"That Star of the East." *Freethinker* and other literature on sale at all meetings. All January meetings will be held in the M'Lellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow.

PLYMOUTH BRANCH N.S.S. (Plymouth Chambers, Hall 5, Drake Circus): Next meeting, January 7, 1934.

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N.S.S. (Central Hall, Chapter Row, South Shields): 7.0, Mr. A. Flanders—A Lecture.

SUNDERLAND BRANCH (Unity Chambers, Athenæum Street): Sunday, December 25, no meeting. Thursday, December 28, at 7.15, Speaker's Class will be held.

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