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Views and Opinions

The Bethlehem Baby

WITH Christmas at hand all the parsons in this country, and in others, will be looking up their sermons on the wonders of the "Christ-child." The real wonder of the Bethlehem baby began before he was born, and the cause of that wonder was the greatest thing he ever accomplished. For we have it set down on record that no male parent was ever found who could be made responsible for his appearance. I do not wish it to be understood that this, in itself, was a cause for wonder, for very many other babies have come into this world with everyone, save the mother, in doubt as to who was its father. The real cause for surprise is that for this baby an earthly father, known or unknown, was repudiated. Divinity was claimed for him, but not by his mother, who although a prejudiced witness was the only one who could speak with authority. She "marvelled" at him, as many a mother has marvelled at her boy, but she never said that some human being was not his father. Others said that the father of the Bethlehem baby was not of earth, but of heaven. And curiously enough our authority on this point is the man who was engaged to be married to the Bethlehem baby's mother. He, apparently, knew this to be the fact because he dreamed an angel told him it was so. How he came to be certain he could rely on the information is one of those things on which history and religion remains silent. Whether Mary really believed Joseph's explanation we cannot say; but if she did she kept the belief to herself, because at no time did she profess what would have justified her in claiming to have passed through one of the most remarkable experiences that ever happened to any woman. I have heard such expressions as a "son-of-a-gun," or a "son-of-a-sea-cook," but in this case we are brought face to face with a son-of-a-ghost.

* * *

A Modest Claim

I would suggest to sermoneers in general, if these notes should meet their eyes before the Christmas ser-

mon is delivered, that they might present one argument which would help to weaken the opposition that the orthodox story might rouse on a first hearing. This is the restraint which the gospel writers set upon themselves, the modesty with which their tale is told. They knew perfectly well that the birth of a child who had a mother, but no earthly father, who was born of a union between a woman and a God, was not anything new, even though it might be a trifle unusual. It had occurred in India, in Egypt, in China, and in many other parts of the world. Telling the tale as it had always been told they ran a great risk of being met with a shrug of the shoulders and a murmur of "One more baby brought from above." Extravagance, the desire to put forward something distinctive, might have led men less conscientious than the four evangelists to disclaim not merely an earthly father for Jesus, but an earthly mother as well. That statement would have placed no greater strain on one's sense of the probable than merely rejecting the father; it would have been no greater remove from ordinary experience. They could have claimed that the Bethlehem baby owed his origin to a union of a ghost with a cloud, instead of a ghost and a woman. And on a question of miracles a little more in this direction or in that direction makes no difference whatever. It would only have enabled faith to express itself more gloriously. Tempting as the opportunity was, the evangelists held themselves in, they restricted themselves to the plain common-sense statement, "For that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost." The story has all the marks of a "gospel truth."

* * *

An Old Custom

There is yet one other line of argument which might help to convince the naturally sceptical. The birth of a child who is an incarnation of a tribal deity, is, as I have said, nothing new in the history of the world. But it goes farther back than most people are aware. It exists not merely in the elaborated religions of the ancient East, but it goes back to the most primitive stages of human society. It is found also among the most primitive peoples of the world that are still existing. To some of the native Australian tribes there would come nothing surprising in the information that a child was born in Jerusalem who had no earthly father. In all simplicity they might ask, "Why should he have one?" For to them every birth is the incarnation of one of the numerous tribal spirits. And the many magical customs that are still practiced in different parts of Europe are obviously reminiscent of the same belief. With the advance of knowledge and civilization this primitive method of procreation is abandoned, and the father comes into his place as an indispensable party to the birth of a child. I think that some of our semi-scientific parsons in their Christmas sermons

might well make use of these facts. They might point out that there is nothing in the birth of the Bethlehem baby that conflicts with evolution. Nature is constantly gaining her ends by modifying the ways in which they are gained. She is constantly transforming an organ to a new use. The swim-bladder becomes the lung, the fin blossoms into the arm, the leg or the wing. May we not also argue that the present function of the male parent in relation to birth is something that is acquired late in evolution. Dispensing with the male parent is common, probably universal, among uncivilized people, it occurs occasionally with semi-civilized peoples, it ceases altogether when civilization has reached a particular stage. The ability of a woman with the aid of a ghost to produce a child belongs to a low phase of civilization, but later the tribal ghosts exert their ancient privilege on special occasions only. In the process of social development the co-operation of a male with a female for the birth of a human baby has now become so well-established that it will never be superseded—unless we assume a rapid retrogression of the race to a very primitive stage. It may well be, then, that it is because the union of a ghost and a woman led to the birth of this Bethlehem baby that so much is made of it on the anniversary of the event. It is the last historic example that we have. We are never likely to have another.

* * *

Marvel on Marvel

Every adult mind that remains young, without being infantile, takes delight in a fairy story well told, and I do not think that sermon manufacturers make the best use of the out-of-the-way features in the life of this Bethlehem baby. They are too inclined to talk of it nowadays as though it were the birth of a baby that afterwards grew up to be merely a prominent personage. That will not do. These parsons are throwing away their strongest cards. Consider; directly the baby was born some shepherds who were keeping watch in a field were astonished to see and hear a large congregation of angels, who had come down from heaven for the express purpose of singing to them—and no others—that a child had been born who was to bring peace on earth and establish goodwill toward men. And having sung their song the angels returned to heaven. There was also a wonderful star that led a number of wise men to the place where the Baby lay, and the star remained stationary over the house, so that the wise men should make no mistake. That in itself is something worth dwelling upon. Every airman will appreciate the impossibility of hitting a building the size of Westminster Abbey from a height of, say, ten thousand feet; and every astronomer knows that this task of hitting the Abbey would be as infinity to nothing compared to deciding which particular spot a star hung over. No other star ever acted in this way; no other "wise men" were ever shown a particular house in this way; no other band of shepherds ever received musical honours of this kind. And having performed their allotted part in the life of the Bethlehem baby, they all disappear from the face of history. No one recorded even the names of the shepherds and wise men who had undergone such a tremendous experience, no astronomer has attempted to plot the path of this wonderful star; the shepherds and the wise men retired into obscurity, the star retreated into the depths of space, the angelic choir went home, the stage is left to the Bethlehem baby. None but men who were profoundly convinced of the truth of what they were saying could have been content with telling the story with the simplicity the gospel writers tell theirs. They saw what

was, they said what is, and no one has ever been able to prove that the angels did not sing, the shepherds did not hear, and the wise men did not see a star, millions of miles away, hovering over a Judean inn.

The wonders of the Bethlehem baby continued. Herod, ruler of Judea, heard of the birth of the child and feared the consequences. Evidently a believer in meeting trouble before trouble met him, and to make sure that the wonder-child was killed, he ordered a massacre of all children under two years of age. An angel, probably one of the band that sang to the shepherds, was promptly dispatched to warn Joseph to take the child out of the way. Again we have to note the striking manifestation of the extraordinary in everything connected with this baby. The angel might have been sent to Herod to warn him not to massacre the children. That might have saved the children, but it would not have shown the particularity of Jesus. So the wholesale slaughter occurred, a slaughter that must have filled the whole civilized world with horror. There is no wonder that the very horror of it kept everyone, everywhere, silent concerning it—except the writers of the New Testament. From birth to death the "signs and wonders" continued. At the Baby's death a thick darkness came over the "whole of the land," the dead came out of their graves and walked about the streets of Jerusalem, still none but the New Testament writers record the facts. No one took the names of these resurrected men, no one interviewed them, or thought to take down their experiences. Along with the shepherds, the wise men, and the star-guide, they all disappear into the unknown. But for the determination of the gospel writers to set down the whole of the facts the world might have been in complete ignorance of these stupendous events. Is it any wonder that the expressions "Gospel truth," or "True as Gospel," have become common? Does it not clearly imply the existence of a form of truth that is peculiar to a very extraordinary event?

* * *

Peace on Earth

And the promise of the angels, which we have on the testimony of the shepherds. How has that been borne out? It was carried out in the letter. Was ever peace among peoples and love among men talked about more than it has been during those centuries that have worshipped the Christ-child? It is true that the pagan writers spoke of the brotherhood of mankind, and of a community of worldly interest that existed among men. But that was all. It is also true that with a rule that extended from Bagdad to Edinburgh the Roman Empire could maintain peace with an army of not more than 400,000 men. But these people frankly believed in the inevitability of war; they made war for conquest, they upheld war as an inevitable part of the inter-political situation. Under the benign influence of the Jerusalem baby war was transformed. Men did not go to war for the sake of war, or for the sake of conquest, they waged war in the interests of peace and of peace only. There is not a nation that has owned the headship of the Christ-child that has ever waged war save for the purpose of securing peace. Even in the last war this object was paramount. Ten millions of men, the vast majority of whom worshipped the baby that was born at Bethlehem, died in the interests of peace. Christians have poured out their money, sacrificed the youth of the nations, laid bare cities, all because they were determined to secure peace at all costs. Always there was ringing in their ears the angelic message, "Peace on earth, good will toward men." The influence of the Bethlehem baby transformed men's attitude towards

war. It taught them that they must not maintain armies, slaughter millions, or threaten the security of civilization through lust of conquest, desire of gain, or hatred of their fellow men. War under Christian auspices is possible only when it is waged in the name of brotherhood, justice, and humanity. Our readiness to maintain large armies and navies, the demand for more deadly bombing-machines, the sacrifice of every consideration to the need for continuing preparations for war, are all attempts, not yet completely successful, to make the message of the angels a living reality. The Christian peoples are determined on securing peace, even though the whole race be wiped out in getting it.

I do not marvel that the Bethlehem baby is spoken of as the "wonder-child." Everything about him was wonderful. His birth was wonderful, his preservation in infancy was wonderful, the things he did was wonderful, the manner of his death, was wonderful, his rising from the dead was wonderful, the spirit of love, brotherhood, truthfulness and justice developed among his followers is the wonder of the world, his influence on the world was wonderful, and his method of realizing "Peace on earth" more wonderful than anything else. Let us ponder these things.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

Remarkable Additions to the Biography of Judas Iscariot

THERE was, in Jerusalem, a certain man which is named diversely Reuben and Simeon, and which, after some, came of the stock of David, but, after others, was of the tribe of Issachar. One night Ciborea, his wife, after conceiving in her womb, dreamed that a child would be born of her which should be for a destruction unto their people.¹ [Anon, being delivered in due time, she brought forth a son and called his name Judas]. The child, as he grew, was so grievously vexed of Satan, that he bit all them which met him, and if he found none nigh unto him, he bit his hands and other members. But his mother, hearing the fame of the Lady Mary and her Son Jesus, arose and brought him unto the place where they were. It happened, however, that James and Joses, having taken Jesus from the house that they might sport with other children, were sitting together with him; unto whom now came Judas, the possessed one, which did then sit down among them at the right hand of Jesus, and being, according to his wont, infested of Satan, he sought to bite Jesus, but could not; albeit he struck him on the right side, so that he wept. And straightway Satan went forth out of Judas, fleeing like unto a mad dog.² The parents of Judas wist not what they should do, abhorring to slay their child, and yet fearing to let him grow up to destroy his lineage, but at last they took counsel, and put him in a basket bedaubed with pitch, and abandoned him unto the sea. Now it came to pass that he was carried of the sea unto an island named Iscarioth, whence he was called Iscariotes, and as he drew nigh, the queen of that island did play upon the shore and she espied the basket, and saw the child that it was fair to look upon, and she sighed and said, Would God that I had such a child, that there might be an heir unto my kingdom. Then she commanded the babe should be nourished, and did give out that it had been born unto her, and the King when he heard thereof was glad and made a feast unto all his people. But it

chanced anon that the queen herself did conceive, and bring forth a son, which, when he grew up, was oft times evil entreated of Judas, till at last the queen had compassion on him and chastised Judas, and made known the history of his coming; nevertheless, before this was made known, he slew the child weening it to be his brother; and then, fearing for his life, fled into Jerusalem, and came into the court of Pilate, who showed him amity and honour. Now it fell on a day that Pilate for his pleasure, was nigh unto a garden which belonged unto the father of Judas, and he beheld apples that hung in the garden, and did lust after them, the which when Judas saw, he leaped over the wall for to gather the fruit, that he might give it unto Pilate. Then his father, which knew him not, and esteemed him dead, did seek to hinder him in stealing the fruit, and they strove together by words and afterwards fought, and Judas smote his father and slew him with a stone, and took the fruit, and carried it unto Pilate, and told him all that he had done. Then gave Pilate commandment to seize whatsoever had appertained unto the dead man, and to give the wife thereof unto Judas in marriage. There upon came it to pass that the woman did cry and bewail for that her child was drowned, and her lord slain, and she herself married against her will; and Judas, when he heard this complaint, demanded to know the story of the child, and after it was told, he perceived that he had wedded the mother which bore him, and slain the father by whom he was begotten; therefore, he departed and went unto Jesus, that he might beg forgiveness of his sins. Jesus, however, received him graciously, and numbered him among his twelve apostles, and made him his procurator. Moreover, he kept the purse and did steal of that which was given unto Jesus. But being aggrieved because Mary Magdalene had poured three hundred pennyworth of ointment over the feet of Jesus, which money he esteemed himself to have lost, he sold Jesus for thirty pence, of which every penny was worth ten pence, and so he recovered three hundred pence.³ And the same were the thirty pence for which Joseph was sold of his brethren unto the Ishmaelites; and the Ishmaelites delivered them unto Pharaoh to buy corn therewith; and thence came they by the hands of merchants unto the Queen of Sheba, which brought them unto Solomon; and they lay among the treasures of the king's house at Jerusalem, and were carried away unto Babylon at the time of the captivity, and there abode till the coming of the wise men to Bethlehem which brought them for a gift unto the young child Jesus, then were they lost upon the Flight into Egypt, but a herdsman did find them and bring unto the Temple, and so came they into the hands of the priests which delivered them unto Judas for the reward of his iniquity.⁴ But Judas, when he saw that Jesus was carried before Pilate, repented himself and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the high priests and elders, and spake saying, I have done evil in that I have betrayed innocent blood. They said unto him, What is that to us, see thou to it? And forasmuch as they would not take that which he had brought back unto them, he cast it among them and departed. And he returned to his house for to make a sling that he might hang himself. And lo, he found his wife sitting, and a cock roasting upon the coals, and he said unto her, Fetch me, I pray thee, a rope that I may hang myself as is meet. But his wife said unto him, Why speakest thou so foolishly? And he answered and said unto her, Hearken unto the truth, behold, I have unrighteously betrayed my master,

¹ *The Golden Legend* (St. Matthias).

¹ *The Golden Legend* (St. Matthias). Dent's Edition.

² *Evangelium Infantiae Arabicum* (c. 35) Tischendorf's *Evangelia Apocrypha*. Leipzig 1876.

³ *The Golden Legend* (St. Matthias).
⁴ Rudolf Hofmann's *Das Leben Jesu nach den Apokryphen*. p. 333. A most instructive and amusing work. Leipzig, 1851.

even Jesus, into the hands of evil doers, and they bring him before Pilate for to slay him. Yet the third day shall he rise again, and then woe be unto us. His wife, however, answered and said, speak not so and believe it not, for even as this cock which is upon the coals cannot cry out, so neither shall Jesus rise again as thou hast said. And while she yet spake, the cock lifted up his wings and cried thrice. Then was Judas the more convinced and forthwith made ready the sling from the rope and went away and hanged himself⁵ on a sycamore tree in a coppice at the west side of Mount Zion,⁶ but the branch whereunto the cord was made fast, bowed down so that his feet touched the ground, and he died not; nevertheless he was stricken with the dropsy, and did so swell, that in climbing over a style he fell headlong and burst asunder.⁷ Now it came to pass that a certain holy man, named St. Brandon, a monk of Ireland, saw a great rock in the midst of the sea, and on it sate one in sore distress, having his sinews and bones made bare by the beating of the waves. And there was a canvas above him which clouted his body when the wind blew; and two ox-tongues and a great stone that were a comfort unto him. Then, said St. Brandon, Who art thou? and he answered and said, my name is Judas, which sold our Lord Jesus Christ for thirty pence. I am worthy to be ever in the fire of hell, but our Lord of his mercy suffereth me at certain seasons of the year, to wit, from Easter till Whitsuntide, and all feasts of Our Lady, and every Saturday noon till Sunday at evensong, to come here; elsewhiles am I in torment with Pilate and Herod and Caiaphas. And Judas, when he had said this, besought St. Brandon to abide near him that night that the fiends might not fetch him to hell. And St. Brandon asked him concerning the cloth, and the ox-tongues, and the great stone. And he answered and said, the cloth did I buy with the money which I stole from my Lord, and I gave it unto a leper, wherefore it clouteth me upon the body, and the ox-tongues I bought of my own substance and gave unto two priests to pray for me, wherefore they ease me because the fishes gnaw them and spare my bones; and the great stone, I found lying idle, and I took it and mended therewith a fowl way, wherefore it easeth me now.

Anon, on the Sunday towards even came many fiends with a tumult and demanded that St. Brandon should depart, for they dare not come before their master without bringing Judas. Then St. Brandon charged them to leave Judas till the morrow, and they departed roaring and crying towards hell, and Judas tearfully thanked St. Brandon, and did rest him that night, but, on the morrow came the devils with great fury, saying they had been tormented for the leaving of Judas, and avowing that he should suffer double pain the six days following and they bare him away trembling with fear.⁸

C. CLAYTON DOVE.

⁵ *Evangelium Nicodemii*. Tischendorf.

⁶ *Adrichomius in theatro terræ sanctæ*. p. 175.

⁷ Theophylactus. *Ad. Matt.* xxvii.

⁸ *The Golden Legend* (St. Brandon).

Very Odd of God

WHEN Jesus Christ with a rod
Scourged the money-changer's greed;
The Pharisees were agreed,
It was strange behaviour,
On the part of the Saviour:
They said it is odd,
Of the Son of God,
And could only abuse
The Son of the Jews.

W.N.H.

Christian Science in the Dark Ages

NEARLY all the knowledge acquired by the civilized races of ancient times which related to the earth's form and extension was lost in the Christian Dark Ages that followed. With the triumph of the Church, intellectual paralysis descended upon Europe, and it was only with the long-delayed rediscovery of Pagan culture that science was slowly restored to life.

Instead of extending the knowledge so laboriously gathered by their Pagan predecessors, priests and monks solemnly propounded mystical and metaphysical doctrines, which in the light of modern reason, seem almost insane. This appalling degradation was mainly due to the baleful superstitions fostered by the new faith. The Scriptural texts were slavishly regarded as the inspired utterances of God himself, so that passages from the Bible, as interpreted by the Church, were given the impress of mathematical demonstration. The statement in Ezekiel, for instance, "This is Jerusalem: I have set it in the midst of the nations," made that holy city the exact centre of the earth, and all monkish maps conformed to this absurd supposition.

In these medieval maps the magnitude of the Asiatic land-mass was greatly exaggerated, and as its eastern areas were unknown to the monks, they made good their ignorance by indulging in the wildest flights of imagination. The many fables and fictions recorded in the Bible, in addition to those transmitted from Pagan sources, found in far eastern Asia their customary abode. In remote areas of that vast continent, two terrible nations, Gog and Magog were said to dwell whose future mission was to overwhelm the civilized world. Their habitat was in what is now called Siberia, and there Alexander the Great had isolated them beyond the Iron Hills. And with the Tartar migration of the thirteenth century, these ruthless invaders were identified as the Gog and Magog of tradition, and the monkish tale was in this manner confirmed.

In medieval maps the east of the earth was placed at the apex, and there was located the realm of paradise. Also, various marvels descending from classical centuries served as Christian anthropology. The Sciapodes, a strange community resident in a distant country, were said to possess feet so large that in the glare of the summer sun they could lie on their backs with their legs extended in the air, and shelter themselves in the shade afforded by their enormous feet. Then there were men whose heads grew beneath their shoulders, while other prodigies were adorned with the heads of wolves and bears.

That fourteenth century fabulist, Sir John Maundeville, is alleged to have visited these curious creatures whose likenesses were reproduced in his book of travels. Cosmas was another imaginative author who flourished in the sixth century A.D., and he was determined to expose the puerility of those heathen upstarts who spoke of the earth as a sphere. A true blue believer, Cosmas was greatly exasperated by those foolish men who asserted the existence of the Antipodes where people could live upside down. He drew a picture, we are told, "of a round ball, with four men standing upon it, with their feet on opposite sides, and asked triumphantly how it was possible that all four could stand upright?"

A few still survived who had treasured the enlightenment of earlier times, and they ventured to query Cosmas' contentions, and in answer to those who inquired how it was possible to explain day and night

unless the sun journeyed round the earth, he stated that there stood a giant mountain in the north behind which the solar luminary vanished during the hours of darkness. Cosmas also asserted that the sun, instead of being larger, is considerably smaller than the earth, and according to his weird geography, our planet became a moderately-sized plane, whose four corners were provided with pillars which supported the heavens above. Thus did Cosmas reconcile science with Genesis.

A very fine specimen of medieval maps is preserved at Hereford in which, according to the custom of the time, the extreme east is placed in what we consider the north. At the top of the map stands the earthly paradise with Jerusalem the Golden seated in the centre, while in the lower part is shown the Mediterranean, with its several islands. This map is interesting, as it shows that the Viking invasions had made Christendom better acquainted with north-eastern Europe, but the dense ignorance of the age is illustrated by the map designer's location of the dog-headed race—the Cynocephali—as near neighbours to Norway. Near the residence of these mythical people dwell the Gryphons, wicked men who use the skins of their slain enemies as garments for themselves and their steeds. Here likewise live the Seven Sleepers, whose longevity amazes the heathen and hastens their conversion to Christ. As a guide to travellers such maps were plainly useless, and were chiefly consulted for edification.

The contemptible state to which the education of the clergy had fallen is exemplified by the fact that when William of Wykeham drafted the rules for the Fellows and Scholars of New College, Oxford, their studies were confined to chronicles of doubtful authenticity or to reading accounts of the world's wonders. The maps of this period contain pictures of these marvels which adorn their vacant spaces, and these fantastic productions continued to influence cartographers until the opening years of the nineteenth century. Such maps may be seen in curiosity shops, with the open spaces filled in with sailing vessels or imaginary monsters.

The Romans constructed splendid roads, and their useful road-guides survived into Christian times. The monkish maps proving useless, itineraries were utilized by travellers. These guides afforded no information of the nature of the country, but simply indicated the leading cities on the most frequented roads. Pilgrims carried them, and pilgrimages, then, as now, were not always undertaken for pious purposes only. Many pilgrims combined business with piety, and much of the knowledge that reached Western Europe from the Near East was conveyed by pilgrims who visited Palestine in pre-Crusading generations.

In the fifth century of our era, three barbarian hordes hurled themselves against the tottering Roman State. Vandals ravaged the Imperial Provinces of Spain and Gaul, and founded a temporary kingdom in Northern Africa. Then Germanic invaders entered France, Italy and the Iberian Peninsula; other Teutonic stocks settled in Britain; while the Franks subdued Gaul and conferred upon it its present name of France. At the close of the eighth century Frankish rule embraced both France and the larger part of Central Germany. Thus arose the so-called Holy Roman Empire, and on Christmas Day, 800 A.D., Charlemagne was crowned by the Pope in Rome as secular head of these extensive domains, which were to restore and perpetuate the grandeur of departed times. The Emperor's office, however, was to be purely temporal. Spiritual supremacy became the prerogative of the Pope.

When the Moslem cult arose in Arabia it soon spread throughout the East and was destined to play an important part in shaping subsequent European history. The faith of Islam extended to India in the East and to Spain in the West. And when the Moslem conquerors had settled down in their new territories they soon acquired a taste for civilization and refinement. Science, Art and Letters were eagerly encouraged by the Caliphs, who now reigned in nearly every Eastern centre of early Christendom. Greek philosophy and science were restored and studied, and Aristotle and other illustrious ancients served to enlighten the thoughts of progressive Islam. Then came the Crusades, ostensibly waged to hurl the presumptuous Moslem from the soil held sacred by the Christian world. Despite their ultimate failure these religious wars helped to introduce sounder geographical knowledge to the West. The Arabs were acquainted with Zanzibar and Sofala in Africa as also with Ceylon, Java and Sumatra. In the ninth century Moslem merchants had penetrated to China of whose inhabitants they spoke very favourably.

During the eighth and ninth centuries other influences were re-shaping Europe. Scandinavian seafarers attacked many wave-swept shores, and in the course of two hundred years settled on the coast lands of several leading States. Some of these invasions were sporadic, but in others they established stable Governments whose influences have continued to our own time. The Vikings and kindred peoples settled in Britain and Ireland, Iceland, Normandy, Sicily and other places, and thus extended knowledge of Northern Europe to the South and West.

These Norsemen knew Greenland and apparently sailed to the shores of Labrador and Newfoundland, thus proving themselves the first Europeans to reach America. In the fourteenth century a tradition lingered in Iceland of a far country situated 1,000 miles to the West of the Faroës. Both civilized and savage races were said to dwell in this remote land, and the Mexicans appear to be indicated by the people "who built large cities and temples, but offered up human sacrifices in them."

When in possession of the mariner's compass, which the Arabs seem to have obtained from China, long voyages became less venturesome. Long in use with the Arabs in their Eastern sailings, the compass was later introduced into Christian communities by Moorish Spain, but it was seldom employed, and when Dante's preceptor, Brunetto Latini, visited Roger Bacon in 1258, and that pitilessly persecuted friar explained to him the magnet's properties and usefulness he added that "no master mariner would dare to use it, lest he should be thought to be a magician."

Still the growth of industry and commerce stimulated progress. The clergy clung to their outworn traditions, but the compass was improved and was ultimately recognized as indispensable, while seafarers prepared maps and charts on rational principles. Superstition declined, and with the close of the Middle Ages modern civilization dawned.

T. F. PALMER.

The King is but a man, as I am; the violet smells to him as it doth to me; the element shows to him as it doth to me; all his senses have but human conditions; his ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man; and though his affections are higher mounted than ours, yet, when they stoop, they stoop with like wing.

Shakespeare.

A Christmas Cracker for Credulous Christians

"If every man said what he thought the existing religion could not subsist a day."—*Shelley*

"Men often think they have religion when they only have dyspepsia."—*Ingersoll*.

THE Christian Religion is one of the gloomiest of all superstitions. Its symbol is the figure of a dead man nailed to two pieces of wood. The grim exponents of the gospel of this "Man of Sorrows" seldom smile themselves, the study of the "Word" having, apparently, a depressing effect upon them. So much is this the case that one can almost tell Christians by their mere facial expressions. Nay, more, the tell-tale features advertise how far the victim is suffering from the disease of religiosity. From the slight droop of the mouth which distinguishes the Catholic and the High Churchman to the resemblance to a tired funeral-horse worn by the non-military warriors of the Church and Salvation Armies, one might classify them accurately.

Christians are cankered through with austerity. Generation after generation has been stifled under a system which was joyless. The results are to be seen in the dull, dismal, rectangular, frequenters of the churches, chapels, tin-tabernacles and mission-tents. The professional pulpit-punchers and bible-bangers are, in the main, so far incapable of honest laughter than any undertaker is a Merry Andrew compared to them. It could scarcely be otherwise. This gospel that life for the majority of the human race is but the ante-chamber to an eternal torture-chamber is an arraignment, not merely of the Christian Superstition, but of human nature itself.

Yet, strangely enough, conviviality is the predominant note on Christmas Day, which is supposed by Christians to be the birthday of their "Man of Sorrows." People avail themselves of the occasion to give presents and join in family gatherings. Mince-pies and seasonable plum-puddings are on the menu for the day. Feasting and merriment go on in every home. These convivial features have no meaning when associated with the sad central figure of the Christian Religion. How many of the millions who will be eating mince-pies in their homes, or watching the flaming plum-pudding, or toasting the health of absent friends, will stop to think that this bonhomie and conviviality is older than the Christian Religion, and that it was once associated with the older Paganism which preceded the Oriental religion to which they give such easy lip-service.

For it is ironical that the birthday of their "Prince of Peace" was fixed in December by Christian priests from the urgent necessity of fighting Pagan rituals. Like all human institutions, the Christian Churches and their feast-days have had to contend in open warfare for survival. The festivals of Pagan Rome were as numerous as plums in a pudding. The public holidays were so frequent that the Emperors, especially Marcus Aurelius, found it necessary to curtail them. It was to counteract the attractions which these Pagan holidays exercised over the people that the leaders of the Christian Churches sanctioned and incorporated some of these feasts.

God's birthday was not kept regularly until many generations after the supposed date of the birth of Christ. When first observed, it was held on varying dates. The precise date of Christ's birth was "wrapt in mystery," but it was not in December, even according to the legends. Why, then, do Christians observe Christmas Day on December 25? Why, also, is the birthday of the "Man of Sorrows" associated

with feasting, merriment, and laughter? The answer is the key that unlocks the sordid story of Christian origins.

It was in competition with the feast of Saturnalia, one of the chief festivals of Pagan Rome, that Christmas Day had its date fixed in December. The anniversary of Saturn, and his wife was held from December 17 to 20, and the Emperor Caligula generously added a fifth day of rejoicing. On these five festal days of Ancient Rome the schools were closed, no punishment was inflicted, the toga was replaced by undress garment, distinctions of rank were laid aside, slaves sat at table with their masters, and all classes of people exchanged gifts. Pantomime, now so beloved by old and young alike, was a favourite amusement shared by all.

The propensity of converts from the old Paganism to the then new Christian Religion to cling to custom proved invincible. They simply would not relinquish their feast days. If the apostates were to be retained in the new religion, it became necessary to incorporate the old under the mask of the new. The struggle for survival has also incorporated so many other features. In the far-off centuries, white-robed Druid priests cut the sacred mistletoe with a golden sickle, and chanted their hymns to the frosty air. These features have been absorbed also, and the mistletoe and carol-singing still play their minor, if amusing, parts in Christmastide celebrations.

Nor is this all, for a plentiful irony is everywhere interwoven in this celebration of the birthday of a man-god of an Oriental superstition. Christians assert, and even shout, that Jesus Christ was neither more nor less than God. Why God, who is described as eternal, should have a birthday like little Johnnie Green is a matter for Christians to settle among themselves. Non-Christians regard Christ as a purely mythical personage, like all the rest of the saviours and sun-gods of antique religions, who were generally born miraculously of virgin-mothers, and whose careers, like that of Jesus, were marked with miraculous happenings. Whether there was a man called Jesus, who lived and taught in a province of the Roman Empire, is a matter of microscopic importance. Millions of Christians for many centuries have worshipped the purely legendary figure in the "New Testament," and not a fanatical Galilean carpenter.

It will be seen that this Yuletide Festival has almost as many ingredients as the world-famous Christmas pudding. The Christmas festival itself, divorced from its original, benevolent meaning, with all its hypocritical religious professions, is so very largely pretence and make-believe. It is the paradox of paradoxes that wholesale military preparations are going on in almost every corner of a world that professes to worship a god who commanded his followers not to kill and to obey his behests of non-resistance and forgiveness. The merry birthday of this "Man of Sorrows" is a fable agreed upon, an organized hypocrisy, a fitting celebration of an event that never happened. So desperate is the dilemma that almost is one persuaded that modern Christianity has entered upon a down-grade of hypocrisy, sensationalism, and sentimentalism. To-day, it is far too reminiscent of the Mad Hatters' tea-party.

MIMNERMUS.

It is the nature of tyranny and capacity never to learn moderation from the ill-success of first oppressions; on the contrary, all oppressors, all men thinking highly of the methods dictated by their nature, attribute the frustration of their desires to the want of sufficient vigor.

Burke.

Acid Drops

We are indebted to Judge L. W. R. Silke, of Cape Town for information concerning the following case which is reported in the *Cape Argus*. In the Belgian Congo a South African missionary was very zealous in his attempts to suppress witchcraft and superstition. That means, we presume superstitions other than those in which he believed. He was convicted by the Belgian Court at Leopoldville of beating 89 natives—men, women and children, the "arresting" of 94 natives, and forcibly entering the houses of natives. The charges were admitted and proven. The British Consul-General instituted an enquiry and reported that the Court had imposed as lenient a sentence—imprisonment for 222 days and some fines—as was possible in the circumstances. On the intervention of the British Consul-General, the sentence is to be reduced to 66 days, and the missionary will probably be deported. Now if this had been a case of white men, women and children being ill-treated by, say, a member of one of the native South African peoples, we wonder whether the British Consul-General would have interfered in the matter? Perhaps General Smuts, who recently waxed very eloquent about the administration of justice in South Africa, will consider the effect of this on native opinion generally.

How these Christians love (to contradict) one another! Mr. G. K. Chesterton won a rather cheap "immortality" for saying that Christianity has never been tried because it "is so difficult." Now enter Rev. H. E. Fosdick, who complains that Christians "have found ingeniously fatal ways in which they have made their faith and practice easy." Chesterton says it has been found difficult; Fosdick that it has been found easy. The fact, of course, is that it has been found . . . out!

The Bishop of Ely in his *Diocesan Gazette*, writes that "There is reason to believe that scepticism about the future life is widespread." Fancy the Bishop finding that out! What a splendid detective he would have been—for, of course, this particular "scepticism" is very difficult to find. The good Bishop, however, has been thinking about it very much, and he has come to the conclusion that "one cause of this unbelief is to be found in the mistaken teaching upon the subject, which has been almost traditional." So smash goes "tradition" on the question of the future life! The Bishop feels that "Judgment Day" is for most people like an assize, with judge and prisoner, etc., but naturally, God can't do things like that. Then again, hellfire "seems to shock our moral sense—though to reject it and put nothing in its place, is the height of folly." As for the "resurrection of the body," it has been presented in a form "which is unintelligible or even absurd." So the Bishop of Ely thinks if the clergy will only give the subject "this treatment" the scepticism about immortality may vanish. What a hope!

The Dean of Harrow apparently disapproves of the "Ten commandments," while patronizing what he mistakenly regards as the superior "Sermon on the Mount." He claims that "the weakness of the former is that they are all DON'T'S, while the strength of the latter is that it is all DO'S." He praises the writing of the Second Person of the Trinity at the expense of the First Person, although both writings were said to be inspired by the Third Person. And the Dean is wrong. The "Ten Commandments" include Do "Remember the Sabbath Day," and Do "Honour Thy Father." The "Sermon" includes ALL the "DON'T'S" of Moses (Matt. v. 17-19) and actually reinforces with greater strictness several Mosaic Prohibitions (e.g., Adultery, Taking Oaths, etc.). In fact Matthew vi. and vii. which are two of the three chapters reporting the alleged sermon, literally start with DON'T'S. The Dean must read his Bible again.

Here is an unsolicited testimonial to the Providence of God, from the pen of the Rev. John Bevan, M.A., in the pages of the *Christian World* :—

I have known many people whose trust in God has been unwavering and complete, but whose material affairs have been chaotic and have ended in ghastly tragedy. Also I have known many people who have had no trust at all in God, but whose material affairs have been beautifully tidy and beneficent and have ended with the calm serenity of a summer day.

Bishop Moriarty of Shrewsbury sadly admits that the prophecies made during the past two hundred years, that England would go back completely to the Faith—in other words, to Popery—have not been fulfilled. He adds :—

We see no signs of it; rather do we see a growth of Secularism. . . . We see less belief in the Divinity of Our Lord than there was a hundred years ago . . . the bulk of our countrymen have remained uninfluenced, and they are drifting into paganism and into utter ignorance of Our Lord.

We congratulate Bishop Moriarty upon so accurately reading the "signs of the times"—especially the one relating to Secularism. On the other hand, we don't think much of his remedy. It is that "more prayers and masses are needed for the conversion of the country and for the salvation of multitudes of souls." The money spent that way would surely only go to the upkeep of more priests. Perhaps that is what it is really needed for.

It is interesting to note that that great orthopaedic surgeon, Sir Robert Jones, whose life has just been published—a life, by the way, devoted to healing, full of love, hope and courage—"could find no foothold in any of the established religious denominations." A Catholic reviewer is full of praise for the magnificent work of the famous surgeon, and suggests that his was a case of one "eminently *anima naturaliter Christiana*,"—a true Christian. But do not the facts point out that he was a true *Secularist*? Was not his work entirely of this world, for this world, and utterly regardless of the next?

In spite of the fact that there is a Roman Catholic priest who goes about exposing spiritualistic tricks and spirits, Father Rauport, O.P., lecturing to the Catholic Evidence Guild, declared there was no doubt that "some of the phenomena of the seance room were genuine as they were produced by independent intelligences." Fr. Rauport claimed "the spirits were not, as spiritists held spirits of the departed, but were angels—fallen angels." And he proved it. The fact is, that disembodied souls had no access to man and no power over matter, "whereas fallen angels *did* possess such power and were only too eager to use it." If that is not absolutely convincing, we give it up. The father was, however, very strongly opposed to the belief that "fallen angels" meant a new revelation. This was "not only unthinkable, but blasphemous." The fact is, the true Church never can tolerate a rival—never, and the only True Church must be that of the Rev. Father.

We never knew that there was a saint, patroness of domestic servants, called St. Zita. She was a touching example of devotion to daily work as she went to her first situation at the age of eleven, and actually had stayed with the same family for 49 years when she died. A shrine has just been erected to her in Aldeburgh, Suffolk, and it was blessed by Fr. Flanagan, the rector. One day, when she was taking some bread out of the house—her own, by the way—to give to the poor, her master asked to see what was in the parcel; and as Zita didn't want him to know, the Lord performed one of his convenient miracles and turned the bread into flowers. So little girls always offer flowers to the saint. Her "relics" are in Lincolnshire. St. Zita, with her forty-nine years work as a domestic servant, should be a great ideal for Christian Socialists.

The Bishop of Croydon has written a book on that grand old, but ever new original theme, *What is this Christianity?* A Church reviewer thinks it a splendid essay, but gently chides the Bishop for quoting more

freely from Canon Barry, Canon Streeter, Prof. Raven, and Mr. Studdert Kennedy, than from the Gospel or St. Paul. Perhaps he was a little surer of what his contemporaries said or meant. After all, the Bible is just a wee bit uncertain, and the Christianity of the Churches—all of 'em—is not particularly like that of either Jesus or St. Paul. Or is it?

Another Church reviewer thinks "there is no lack of material for a life of St. Mary Magdalene, provided that her biographer is fettered by no restraints of the critical historic conscience." In other words, he has little use for anybody who goes to myth and legend for the "facts." But surely the life of St. Mary Magdalene deserves to be recorded a little more fully than the meagre details and the "reticence of the Gospels." Has not that been done in the case of Jesus? How many ponderous volumes have been written giving the life of Jesus in full detail—while we have nothing but the "reticence of the Gospel" as "evidence" or "authority?" Pious stories of Bible heroes and heroines will always be written so long as there is a public ready to pay for the "biographies." The Bible is still of golden value to many people.

Inspiration is a strange thing. Who would have thought it could work out in tactless frankness as it did last week with Mr. A. J. Russell. Mr. Russell, author of *For Sinners Only*, and other best sellers of the Group Movement was preaching in Wesley's old Chapel. He says (in the *Methodist Recorder*) that when he got into that ancient pulpit "I felt a remarkable influence had taken possession of me," and he gave out his text. The management at this historic chapel must have felt their hair stand on end as Russell solemnly told the assembled Wesleyans: "If thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not be removed." It was about as cruel a text as the well-known case of an old clergyman preaching at his son's church from the text: "Lord have mercy on my son for he is a lunatic."

We get a shock often enough when reading religious journals. Seeing a leading article in the *Methodist Recorder* headed "Give Ye Them To Eat," we foolishly imagined that at last piety had become practical, and that a Methodist Editor had discovered the poverty problem. Not a bit of it. The leading article was just another sermon! The "eats" were not bread or even "shredded wheat." They were mere meaningless words about such unrealities as "the Real Presence," and "Free Salvation."

Christian Ministers make a pathetic attempt to "modernize" the incidents of their ancient "mysteries." Christmas Sermons lend themselves to this kind of "attraction." We expect this Christmas to see more and more of it, judging by the nonsense printed in religious "Christmas Numbers." A poet in one of these quaint issues has a "poem" called "Nativity." He places the "scene" of the birth of Christ in the Garage of a Hotel where "Mary," the wife of an out-of-work carpenter goes because of the housing problem. It would be interesting to know what a "Manger" is doing in a garage.

To represent Joseph as poor or unemployed or a "hand" at a Cabinet Factory, is inconsistent with Holy Writ, our only source of information on the whole story. Joseph was a "boss" who could leave his "factory" while he went on frequent jaunts, staying at the best hosteleries of the time, like any capitalist of to-day. The fact that he miscalculated or forgot to notify his desire for accommodation is quite in keeping with this rôle. We have all met travellers who boast that during the Racing Season they had to sleep on a billiard table rather than stay away from their favourite hotel. At least three Excursions of the happy Holy Couple are recorded. The so-called "Flight" into Egypt reads like an anticipation of our aeroplane trips, and must have cost a pretty shekel.

Few sermons to-day care to dwell on what used to be the principal decoration of the Christmas tree. That "Star"! Few Ministers are brave enough to tell their most credulous congregations that a real star "came and stood over" the stable where the creator of the world was being born. There is a Cinema in South London where an electrically lighted "Star" actually "stands over" a picture-palace. But, like the Rev. Mr. Trimmerig's "Halo" in Housman's novel, people take for granted that it is merely advertising something.

We welcome Mr. Carl Heath's denunciation, in *The Friend*, of the threats to human liberty involved in certain political ideals current in Europe to-day. We cannot follow Mr. Heath in his suggestion that opposition to attacks on freedom are rendered any more powerful by the possession of "a concept of a beyondness, a knowledge of God; something in man which is more than materialistic." Well, the world has passed through over a thousand years of "Dark Ages," in which human liberty was practically dead, but men had more "concept of a beyondness," and the other things we have quoted, than at any other time in history. Fascism is all that Mr. Heath says, except that it is not "anti-Christian," as he claims. But millions of good Christians think Mr. Heath is not a Christian, and he and his Friends doubtless believe that most Christians are "materialists," and at the same time "idolators."

Mrs. W. E. Clarke, widow of a Samoa Missionary is said to have severely censured Robert Louis Stevenson for the atrocious crime of "joining in a Sunday Paper-chase." The *Christian World* reports on the authority of a Mr. H. J. Cowell who was told by Mrs. Clarke that R.L.S. "humbly confessed that he did wrong and was even persuaded by the persistent lady to repeat his admission to a group of young Germans and Englishmen." We should need better authority than the singularly illusive "witnesses" quoted, ere we could believe that the famous author was amenable to the discipline of a Missionary's wife who had told him, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself." Anyone who wants to know Stevenson's real opinion of missionaries, Protestant ones in particular, should read his *Father Damien*.

Fifty Years Ago

THE Atheism of *Queen Mab* is no less apparent in *Prometheus Unbound*, only it is less crude and didactic. Mr. Rossetti well calls that magnificent drama "the poem of regenerated man." It is a dramatic allegory of Man triumphing by wisdom, virtue and endurance over the evils of life and the terrors of superstition. Take the glorious "Ode to Liberty," one of Shelley's later poems. What does Mr. Conybeare think of these lines?—

"When from its sea of death to kill and burn,
The Galilean serpent forth did creep,
And made thy world an undistinguishable heap."

Was the man who wrote that a Christian? Shelley said to Trelawny shortly before his death: "The delusions of Christianity are fatal to genius and originality; they limit thought." What does Mr. Conybeare think of these lines:—

"O that the free would stamp the impious name
Of * * * into the dust; or write it there.
 this foul Gordian word,
Which, weak itself as stubble, yet can bind
In a mass, irrefragably firm,
The axes and the rods which awe mankind."

What word is that politely veiled by asterisks? Shelley's editors and publishers might tell us. William Howitt filled in "Pope," but that is too weak for the context. It might have been "Christ," or more properly, as Mr. Swinburne thinks, "God." Yes, "God" is indeed "a foul Gordian word." Shelley saw that the tyrant in heaven sanctioned all the tyranny on earth, that the superstition of the altar supported the despotism of the throne. He penetrated to the secret of all injustice and oppression, and called it "God."

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Sugar Plums

Mr. Cohen's new book, *Primitive Survivals in Modern Thought* will be published in the first week of the New Year. We venture to say that it contains some of Mr. Cohen's best critical work, and is provocative enough to cause considerable discussion. The work is issued by the Secular Society, Limited, and the published price will be 2s. 6d. cloth gilt, and 1s. 6d. paper, postage 3d. and 2d. respectively.

We again remind our readers that the Annual Dinner of the N.S.S. will this year be held at the Holborn Restaurant, on Saturday, January 26. There will be all the usual features, and, we hope, the usual muster of provincial friends. There will also be cheap week-end tickets from everywhere to the place that matters. Full particulars of these will be published later. The price of tickets is 8s. each. They may be obtained from the *Freethinker* or from the General Secretary of the N.S.S. at 68 Farringdon Street, E.C. 4.

In our issue for December 9 the following paragraph appeared:—

Communism is warned by the Rev. Harold Roberts, in an article which asks rather needlessly: "Is the Church Necessary?" "Communism will come to grief," he says more in sorrow than in anger. Mr. Roberts predicts a sad failure for Communism, "unless it relates its programme to a world other than this, and plants its citizenship in Heaven." We imagine this means little more than a polite invitation to Communism to go to Hell.

We have received a letter from the Rev. Harold Roberts, of 54 Maple Road, Surbiton, which complains that the statements cited are alleged to have been written by him. No such allegation was made in the paragraph, although the name of the author of the statements and that of Mr. Roberts are identical. But the paragraph was based on an article which appeared in the *Methodist Times*, dated

November 29, so there can be no question of its authenticity. The mistake of Mr. Roberts of Surbiton is that of assuming he was the person cited. Instead of that there appears to be a Methodist minister with an identical name. It is only fair to say that Mr. Roberts says he received a copy of the *Freethinker*, which he seems to think was sent by us. However, we regret that he should have been annoyed in any way, although a simple letter asking us to explain that he was not the Harold Roberts of the passage would have been at once published. That is now done. Mr. Roberts of Surbiton, is, we assume a minister of the Church of England. The Mr. Roberts of the paragraph is, we believe, engaged in the North of England. While we are about it, we may as well make a further correction. The title of the article we quoted from is, "What is the Church? Is it Necessary to Salvation?"

Some excellent propaganda work has been done in Stockton-on-Tees and Middlesboro', thanks to the efforts of Mr. J. T. Brighton and his helpers. Good meetings have been held, and there is great interest taken in the lectures. These have alarmed some of the good Christians in the neighbourhood, and one of these complains, in the *North Eastern Gazette*, of the apathy Christians show to this growing danger. He says that the "most deplorable aspect of this Society (the N.S.S.) is that they seem to be winning an increasing amount of support from their listeners." He appeals to Christians to attend these meetings and question the speakers. We hope they take this advice. It is likely that Mr. Cohen may pay a lecturing visit to the district early in the new year. As we have often said there is a splendid field for development on Tyneside and Teeside, and much more ought to be done there than is done.

The *Liverpool Echo*, in noticing Mr. Bedborough's *Arms and the Clergy*, thinks that war-time sermons delivered by the clergy "might well have been allowed the oblivion that most of them deserved," and there was "no need to drag them from the obscurity in which they had best been left." We have no doubt that all the clergy will agree with the *Liverpool Echo* on this, but it is because the memory of the public is very short, and is likely to take the present speeches of the clergy as representing their real attitude that these utterances are dragged from the obscurity in which they might otherwise have been left. The greatest compliment to Mr. Bedborough's work is given in the comments cited. A copy of it should be in the hands of everyone who wishes to understand the clergy in peace and war.

We showed last week that the attitude of the clergy during the European War was not peculiar. It was the same in the South African War, and it will be the same in the next war, whenever it comes. There is not a war in which this country has been engaged, even in the infamous Chinese wars, waged to force opium on the Chinese people, in the Burmese War, in which the main objects were the ruby mines, not a war in which leading clergymen have not beaten the war-drum and done their best to keep the war-spirit alive by covering it with a cloak of religious phrases and moral aspirations. *Arms and the Clergy* is more than an indictment of the clergy during the last war; it is an indictment of the clergy as an order. We are glad to report excellent sales of the book. It would not be a bad thing for each of our readers to send a copy to a Christian friend.

"The *British Weekly Calendar, 1935*" contains a "gem" for every day in the year. It starts with: "A Faith which does not introduce us to a conflict with the world is not Christianity." Christianity, at any rate, can be trusted to "introduce us" to "Conflict" all right. As Canon Wilberforce said in 1915, "The part that Britain is taking in Armageddon is a clear example of 'being about our Father's business.'"

Any Old Bones!

ONE of the most widely distributed Roman Catholic journals in this country makes a point of reproducing photographs showing its votaries grovelling before all sorts of men and things. Whenever a priest or cardinal opens a bazaar, or enters a church, or pays a visit or does something at which a crowd is present, then one gets this sickening exhibition of human beings prostrating themselves abjectly, and worst of all, actually believing that they are thus finding favour in the sight of the Lord. It never seems to occur to these people that if there were a God existing in heaven, and if he really were the kind of person they claim him to be, he would be revolted at this grovelling spectacle. In actual fact there is no difference whatever between, let us say, Mr. Chesterton or Mr. Belloc, grovelling before a Roman Catholic altar or a cardinal, and a poor, so-called benighted, savage doing the same before a trumpery idol or witch-doctor.

I think I am right in saying that all Roman Catholic altars are obliged to contain some relic; so that this is given as a reason for the grovelling—honouring some "saint" or "martyr." I am not, of course, against the idea of honouring the great men and women who have passed, and to whose work progress and civilization owes, perhaps, a great deal. I believe their memory and what they did, should be honoured. But I am quite sure that Darwin or Dickens or Rembrandt would have been horrified if people went on their knees before any of the "relics" they left to posterity. And these "relics" are, I venture to say, of immeasurably greater value than anything left by any saint, martyr or cardinal that ever lived.

This worship and adoration of relics began very early in the Roman Catholic Church. The truly pious believer on his knees was a far more useful individual for a growing faith than the man who stood squarely on his feet with his head erect and his reason working. How can one think grovelling in the dust with his head down? And it did not take long for the astute leaders in the church to discover that "holy" relics could play a great part in keeping the faithful almost always on his knees when practising the rites the believer is told must be practised before God Almighty.

Relics therefore soon began to multiply. Churches vied with each other in obtaining them. The competition grew keener and keener; and desperate efforts were made to obtain whatever was said to have belonged to a saint, or martyr or apostle, or even Jesus Christ himself. Moreover, believers are notoriously very gullible, and crooks and impostors are not exclusive phenomena of the modern world. Bones of saints were as good relics as any other, and as one bone looked very much like another, the churches were soon happily satisfied. After all, in the days when there was no post as we understand it to-day, and no telephone; it is not surprising that one church a thousand miles from another church was certain that it alone had the truly original bones of some saint or martyr. Probably they each had some for centuries before they found out that these bones were not human at all, but belonged to some animal. Yet, animal or human, the relics were worshipped or adored, and when they started performing miraculous cures, it made no difference. The good saint would not deceive a sick person for worlds; so, as long as the prayer was fervent and genuine, he performed the cure—whether the "relic" really was his, or belonged originally to some contemporary pig.

When that pious Christian, John Calvin, who is remembered mostly for the persecution and burning of Servetus, was doing his best to convert the world from Roman Catholicism to his particular obnoxious brand of Christianity, he wrote a famous *Treatise on Relics*, not, I imagine, particularly well known these days, but which in its day did valuable work in exposing the holy frauds. It was translated very early into English, and the title may be interesting to reproduce:—

A very profitable treatise, declaring what great profit might come to all Christendom if there were a register made of all the saints' bodies and other reliques which are as well in Italy as in France, Dutchland, Spaine and other kingdoms and countreys. Translated out of the French into English by J. Wythers, London, 1561.

Calvin knew all about the fraud of relics, and he took a malicious delight in exposing them. As was to be expected, he commences with Jesus and his precious blood. He points out that there had been many fierce disputes anyway about this blood, some holy theologians maintaining that Jesus had no blood except of the miraculous kind. In spite of this, the natural blood was shown in a hundred places. At Rochelle, for example, a few drops are on view originally collected by Nicodemus in his glove. At Mantua, and elsewhere, they have full phials, and there is (or was) a full cup at St. Eustache in Rome. In the Church of St. John of the Lateran, however, it was found necessary to have the special blood mixed with water which poured out of Jesus' side when pierced with the spear. This makes an interesting and far more original variant, and was a stroke of genius on the part of the original discoverer of the blood.

Next there is the manger in which he was placed at his birth. This was at the Church of Madonna Maggiore at Rome. His swaddling clothes are kept in St. Paul's Church, and there are other pieces in Spain. St. James', Rome, has the altar on which he was placed at his presentation in the temple. One half of his umbilical cord is at St. John Lateran, the other half at St. Marie of the People. The pots in which Jesus changed the water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana, seem to be all over Europe. They can be seen at Pisa, Ravenna, Cluny, Antwerp, Salvatierra in Spain, Venice, Moscow, Bologna, Tongres, Cologne, Beauvais, Paris and Orleans. Calvin says there were only six original pots, but over thirteen others are found, and there is not a great theologian living in the world who can distinguish the false ones from the true. In Orleans, in addition, they still have (or had) some of the original water-changed-into-wine, and the priests used to give a small spoonful to everybody who brought gift-offerings. This wine—owing to its having been miraculously conceived—had the remarkable property of never decreasing; so hundreds of thousands of people had a taste.

The famous table at which Jesus ate the Last Supper—known throughout the world through the genius of Leonardo da Vinci—can be found complete at St. John of the Lateran at Rome. Nevertheless, bits of it are also at Chartres, Cologne and the Escurial. Calvin naïvely remarks that as Jesus sipped in a borrowed room, and as the table was not removed by the apostles, and Jerusalem destroyed very soon after, how could the table have been preserved? Moreover, tables did not then have the same shape as now. People took their repasts in a lying position, not sitting up, and this was specially mentioned in the Gospels. How *could* the table in Rome be genuine? If Calvin had carried his sceptic-

ism a little further, he might never have caused the unfortunate Servetus to be burned.

At the death of Lazarus, Jesus dropped a tear; and this precious relic can be found in Vendôme, where, it is said, it brings in 4,000 francs (pre-war value) a year, to the priests. Less celebrated, but equally genuine, tears can be found in Trèves, Selincourt, Thiers, Orleans and Foucarmont. The cup in which Jesus gave the sacrament of his blood is shown at Notre-Dame de l'Isle, near Lyons, but Calvin reports another in a convent of Augustine monks in the Albigeois. Both, he says, cannot be the true one, especially when Sigonius, a celebrated historian of his own time, contended there was still another genuine cup in Genoa.

There are four towels representing the original one with which Jesus wiped the feet of the apostles, and bits of the genuine bread which miraculously fed the 5,000, in Rome and Spain.

As for the True Cross, for the way in which the astutest church in Christendom has worked the swindle for all its worth, one can only have the profoundest admiration. Calvin did not believe the story that it was Helena, Constantine's mother, who rediscovered it. He says also:—

Now let us consider how many relics of the True Cross there are in the world. An account of those merely with which I am acquainted would fill a whole volume, for there is not a church, from a cathedral to the most miserable abbey or parish church, that does not contain a piece. Large splinters of it are preserved in various places, as for instance in the Holy Chapel in Paris, while at Rome they show a crucifix of considerable size made entirely, they say, from this wood. In short, if we were to collect all these pieces of the True Cross exhibited in various parts, they would form a whole ship's cargo. . . . (The Church) has invented the tale that whatever quantity of wood may be cut off this True Cross, its size never decreases. This is, however, such a clumsy and silly imposture that the most superstitious may see through it.

Calvin is no favourite of the Roman Catholic Church. Exposures of this kind are rank heresy.

Then the tablet, on which was the inscription placed upon the cross, by order of Pilate, can be found both in Toulouse and Rome. There are literally dozens of places where can be seen the Holy Nails of the Cross; and four towns which possess the genuine spear which pierced the side of Jesus; and a huge number which claim the crown of thorns or individual thorns. The Holy Coat which Jesus wore is still seen at Trèves; but as other churches claim the relic too, it is obvious Jesus had a few changes. He would be wearing one while the other was at the cleaner's.

It would take too long to go into the question of the famous Veronica handkerchief, but it is just as genuine as are the sudaries or holy sheets preserved in various churches. No exposure can prove their falsity to the faithful; nor that of thousands of other relics relating to Jesus.

It is instructive as well as interesting to look back upon this question of relics, especially of Jesus. They prove how profoundly his story, as related in the Gospels, moved the medieval world—as indeed it does this day. The relics of his followers can never have the same value, but an account of some will, I hope also prove interesting.

(To be concluded.)

H. CUTNER.

Materialism and Matter

MATERIALISM, with many, is not popular, and this is really not hard to understand. It tends to discount, *a priori*, the importance of man. It offers a scientific alternative to the religious plan of man's origin, nature and destiny. Consequently there was little reluctance to interpret the revision of the physical conceptions which were in use in the last century as the breakdown of Materialism.

In his *Materialism Re-stated*, Mr. Chapman Cohen has shown that the connexion of Materialism with the atomic theory was no more than an historical accident, that Materialists naturally adopted the prevailing conceptions, and that newer discoveries can be adopted without loss to the essentials of the Materialistic philosophy.

The newer knowledge relates chiefly to the compositeness of the atom. It has not an internal block-like stability, but contains various constituents, which may be passed on to neighbouring atoms. Furthermore, the determinism of causality is *not nearly so obvious* as before. I would emphasize the phrase in italics: that causation is not so obvious is not the same as saying that it is absent.

In view of these changes, then, in the conception of our mechanical models, opponents of Materialism have endeavoured to push home certain conclusions. The stable, inert solids on which Materialism "depended" have been taken from him; away goes his philosophy—exploded to the four winds.

Now if it were true that Materialism depended on billiard-ball atoms, it is no less true that it is discredited. On the other hand, if the connexion of nineteenth century Materialism with such atoms is not vital, then our philosophy can embrace the later theories and still persist in its essential outlook.

To decide this is to ask, what have the older and newer Materialism in common? In what respects does contemporary Materialism¹ correspond with that of the last two centuries? The universe of the old Materialists was deterministic. Do modern theories render it less so? It was also monistic and fundamentally non-purposive. Have later discoveries made room for some transcendent cosmic intelligence, or some immanent unfolding purpose? If there is nothing in the modern theories which would call for an affirmative answer, then the attitude of the old writers still holds, and their adoption of the current theory of the atom is not of permanent significance.

In other words, until it can be shown that the new knowledge, such as that relating to the constitution of the atom, entails the postulate of some kind of an intelligence at work, other than that evolved in the process, whether transcendent (outside), immanent (inside), co-existent (dualistic) or noumenal (metaphysical), then Materialism definitely remains unaffected by the particular view of matter in vogue.

That there has been no back-peddalling on Materialism in other branches of science has been the subject matter of the last three articles, inadequate though they be. Turning now to Physics, the importance of which is grossly exaggerated, we can assert that here, too, Materialism offers the only scientific account of phenomena. The following considerations are enlisted in support:—

(1) *Porosity of matter foreshadowed.* In other words, the nineteenth century scientists were able to predict that atoms would be broken up into simpler elements. Boyle, and then Dalton, reintroduced the

¹ Russell, Dewey, Santayana, Broad, Hogben, Levy, Dotterer, etc., take the place of Ueberweg, Czolbe, Mole-schott, Mach, Vogt, v. Holbach, Diderot, Lamettrie, Feuerbach, etc.

atomic theory of the Ionian Greeks, and it was adopted by chemistry over a century ago. But physicists then began to speculate on the atom being composed of smaller particles. In the year of Waterloo, 1815, a physicist (Prout) suggested that atoms of hydrogen were the basis of all other atoms; a striking theory, in view of our present knowledge.

In his *Handwörterbuch der Philosophie* (1910) Dr. Eisler gives the names of twenty physicists, from 1840 onward, who held the dynamic or energy-theory of the atom. The list includes such masters as Faraday, Oersted, Ampère, Cauchy and Carnot. Lange, in his history of Materialism, adds other names.

In Prof. Lester Ward's *Dynamic Sociology* (1883) he refers to the "Dynamists" or "those who would resolve matter into centres of force." (McCabe).

There was also Sir Wm. Crookes's "prothyle," of which particles he thought atoms were composed. (See *The Development of Physical Thought*, by Loeb and Adams). And in 1891 Dr. Stoney invented the name "electron" for the particle of electricity, and two other investigators (Larmor and Lorentz) independently suggested that these electrons were the long-sought constituents of the atom. The name "electron" was transferred to the "corpuscles," which J. J. Thomson found to be rejected from atoms (1897).

The case of Haeckel and of Büchner will be more familiar. The former held that atoms were composed of simpler particles, and the latter recommended them as being somehow compacted of ether, and "consisting of units of a higher grade."

To carry the argument further, it may, I think, be claimed, that every old Materialistic writer regarded atoms of matter as active, "energetic." For them, force and matter were inseparable. If we go back to the eighteenth century, we find Lamettrie contending, in his *L'Homme Machine*, that motion was potent in matter; we find Baron von Holbach maintaining, in his *Système de la Nature*, that matter carries its own principle of motion, and we find Diderot, author of the important *Encyclopædia*, holding that "the great musical instrument we call the universe plays itself"; matter is by nature active.

Who was it, then, that regarded atoms as immutable? None other than the religious physicist, Clerk-Maxwell, and Christian apologists built on him saying that atoms were therefore specially created (see *The Triumph of Materialism*, by McCabe).

(2) *The Atom's constituents are still material.* A house is composed of matter, i.e., it is material. We knock it down and get the isolated bricks. These bricks are still material. By "resolving" a house into bricks we do not destroy its materialness. And if we resolve atoms into electrons, protons, etc., we are still in the category of materiality. And the same holds if we analyse light, or probe into any of the newly discovered phenomena—neutron, dipion, photon, positron. Whether we shall think of them as particles, or vortices foci of wave-groups, "wavicles," etc., does not concern the Materialist. What does affect his philosophy is this: is there a single one that does not fall into the category of "matter"? i.e., is there one that has no space-time relations and no weight? There is none that does not fill the qualifications, i.e., they are all material. For example, over four million tons (weight) of "energy" is radiated from the sun (space) every second (time).

Sir W. J. Pope defines an electron as "an elementary unit of matter" (*Matter and Energy*, 1923) and Loeb and Adams define it, in their manual, as "a unit of matter which carries a negative charge." This makes the proton a unit of matter carrying a positive charge. The velocity (space and time) of light-par-

ticles (photons) can be calculated, and so we might go on. The point is, the new realities discovered in Physics are all material. So that Bishop Barnes concedes, in his *Scientific Thought and Religion*, that: "The truth is that energy, . . . belongs completely to the material world." Science can even weigh moonshine!

(3) *The Universe is a "self-starter."* It has been argued by Jeans that the universe is like a clock that is running down. (Therefore God wound it up, chimes in the anxious religionist, eager for the crumbs that fall from the table). What think ye of Sir James? McCabe speaks of "the charming way in which he ignores equally distinguished astronomers like H. N. Russell, who differ from him."

American astronomers (e.g. Harkins and Millikan) hold the view that while some stars are disintegrating others are being built up, so that there is a "winding-up" process to compensate for the "running down" process (see *Freethinker*, October 9, 1932). Expositions of this rival theory to Jeans' will be found in Prof. R. H. Baker's *Astronomy and Russell's Composition of the Stars* (1933).

But let us suppose with Jeans that all the stars were annihilated. Even then, Dr. Harlow Shapley claims in his *Flights from Chaos* (1930) that there is as much matter outside the stars as in them, being conglomerate in meteorites, aerolites, etc., and that decomposed stars will leave large "cinders." Shapley suggests, too, that the vast interstellar space may contain the cosmic soil from which new suns and galaxies arise.

Sir J. Jeans' theory is not so new, either; it was put forward by Clausius in 1850.

To me, the phrase "universe running down" suggests no violation of Materialism. It merely conjures up the idea of energy having reached a state of equilibrium, so that, although everything exists, nothing happens.

(4) *"Atoms" are still a useful concept.* So far from having destroyed the atom, physics has, says Lord Rutherford, "dissipated the last doubt about the reality of atoms." That is to say, the old atomic concept is still useful in problems where there is no need to take into consideration the atoms' constituents, e.g., in Chemistry. And as Prof. H. S. Allen says, the classical conceptions still hold good in macro-mechanical problems (*Electrons and Waves*, 1932).

(5) *Exact Nature of Matter Irrelevant.* Materialism conceives a fundamentally non-purposive and self-existent universe, in which purpose is an evolved product; there is no other purposive agency at work; monism and determinism are the features of existence; man is an animal with a developed brain; and "mind," like other phenomena is the expression of conditions, and therefore cannot survive their dissolution. That is Materialism as I understand it. How on earth, then, can it be affected by the discovery of the composite nature of the atom? Obviously the physical nature of the atom can be left to science. It is the metaphysical question only that affects the Materialist, i.e., what is the status and character of the substance from which all phenomena are born?

Meanwhile, the doctrine of "Indeterminacy" (atomic free-will) is on its last legs. Why do I say that? I say it because on September 5, Prof. Jeans himself (one of the modern authors of the theory) stated explicitly at the B.As'n meeting at Aberdeen that "the indeterminacy of the particle picture seems to reside in our own minds rather than in nature." (Presidential Address).

So that it looks as though the anti-materialist will

have to hunt for some more residual obscurities for his opponent to explain.

Nor does the Jeans' God seem to be making much headway. "I do not agree with this theological diagnosis," replies Prof. C. G. Darwin, author of *New Conceptions of Matter* (1931).

* * *

To sum up, it may be said that twentieth century physics has penetrated into that subatomic world which was predicted over 100 years ago, and that it has found nothing that is inconsistent with Materialism, whether old or new.

G. H. TAYLOR.

Christian Piety and Peace

UNUSUALLY melancholy are the dreary pages of Christian journals when the approach of Christmas brings the proprietors a rich harvest of advertisements. Front rank preachers are engaged regardless of expense, to entertain the credulous readers.

On the whole (although there are some courageous exceptions) these clerics are dull out-of-date performers. If ever they were brilliant, their light is extinguished by monotony. They repeat year after year not only the same old story, but quote the same silly "interpretations" of the same old story from the same old commentaries.

A shadow of pessimism too is visible in the outlook. As the Rev. J. A. Hutton's Editorial says, in the "Great Christmas Number," forty-four pages of the *British Weekly*: "Just about this season the Christmas hope seems unusually hard to keep burning bright."

In the pages of Mr. Hutton's typically sanctimonious paper, in which even some of the huge advertisements are sermons, we find the usual attempts to identify Peace with Piety. Several centuries after the alleged "Nativity" the Christian Church annexed an old Pagan custom and called it Christmas. The so-called "Angels' Song" of Peace on Earth has never stood for any kind of Human Peace. It meant either the incomprehensible "Peace of God," or a "peace" reached by a war of extermination.

Christians to-day might be concerned with ordinary international peace. There is need for it. But if one may judge by the religious press, Christian leaders are still seeking to exploit popularity for the sake of proselytizing for piety. When war was popular, the ministers of religion, from the Archbishops down to the Rev. Mr. Joneses proved from Holy Writ that their religion had always delighted in war. As citizens we wish we could recognize as a lost sheep one of these parsons who has so long been only a big bad wolf. Paul, the real founder of Christianity, was never so much at home as when he preached on the Hill of Mars.

The Rev. A. D. Belden unearths a genuine Bible Friend of Peace, but misrepresents him as "a loyal prophet of Jehovah." Oded, whose story is told in 2 Chron. xxviii., although of the prophetic family was just a rebel against Jehovah. He frustrated Jehovah's abominable vengeance. Oded intervened and saved the lives and liberties of thousands whom Jehovah had led to their doom in punishment of their ruler, Ahaz. Not a word in the Bible suggests that Jehovah approved of Oded's humanity. On the contrary, Jehovah's vengeance still pursued Ahaz because "he provoked to anger the Lord God."

Pious leaders might learn a few facts if they would "check up" ("Search the Scriptures") and not swallow what pious writers say the Bible says.

On other pages not wholly devoted to advertisements, the *British Weekly* makes a special feature of expositions from well-known preachers of the fatuous "prophecy of Isaiah" ("Unto Us a Child is Born"). The preachers generally prate only the usual familiar non-

sense about Christ being the "Prince of Peace," of whom Isaiah was thinking prophetically. The Editor, however, made the fatal blunder of inviting Professor W. P. Paterson to join his cavalcade of expositors. The learned, if religious Professor makes short work of all his colleagues' blather. He explicitly states that Isaiah's "Prince" was evidently to be a contemporary warrior King, "a mighty man of valour, not Jehovah in human form." He brushes away orthodox pretence by submitting that "the Hebrew title (translated 'Prince of Peace,' etc.) meant Father of Spoils, in the sense of Gatherer of Booty"—the Great Plunderer, in fact.

The Rev. George Macleod hopelessly wambles in the same paper in meaningless rhapsody, ignoring common-sense and common fact. He apostrophises Christmas Day as "shaming the class-war out of existence." "Hitler," he says, "may feel bound to order executions but there will be no executions in Germany on Christmas Day," and no war will take place on that day, "because we know that JUST FOR A TIME the 'Government will be upon His Shoulders.'"

This parson talks about "men laying down their quarrels and stretching out hands of friendship" on that sacred day. If this were true, it would only be equivalent to the recent case of a merciless gangster in America, an Italian Catholic, who refused to eat meat on the day before his execution, because it was a Friday. But is there any truth in the suggestion that men lay down their arms on Christmas Day? It is sheer bunkum. Every Christmas Day during the World War saw bloody shambles on all fronts, wherever Christians were at war on either or both sides.

On the first Christmas Day of the war, December 25, 1914, there was a small sector where a few soldiers made an attempt to fraternize until stopped at the point of the pistol. But on that self-same Christmas Day, 1914, the following actions were proceeding with murderous intent and result:—

The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th British Squadrons in the North Sea joined up with 1st Battle Cruiser Squadron for action.

Air Squadron with Fleet assistance including battleships and submarines raided Cuxhaven, and were attacked by German Zeppelins and Seaplanes.

Five British Airmen were captured under fire by German submarines.

Sir John French ordered formation of two British armies on the Western Front.

German Zeppelins raided Nancy.

Second German air-raid over England.

Italians occupied Avlona.

German offensive against Warsaw successfully arrested.

Russians recovered Lupkov and Dukla Passes in the Carpathians.

Austrians defeated in Galicia.

Turks captured Khorasan

What a delusion to imagine that a Christian festival could keep Christians from fratricidal slaughter! Yet a greater gullibility is involved in the oft-repeated phrases of pious preachers claiming that a belief in their religion offers any sort of security against another atrocious war.

The Rev. J. D. Jones, for instance, in this pious Christmas Number, with obvious insincerity as his previous utterances witness, mouths the cry of myriads of ministers everywhere: "There is only one thing that will make Peace secure, and that is the rule of Christ." This is the same Mr. Jones who addressed his own congregation on November 29, 1914, in a sermon justifying "an appeal to the dread arbitrament of the sword." He assured his flock that "God uses Dreadnoughts and mighty armies to accomplish His purposes." And Mr. Jones approved of our following the Highest Example a Christian can know.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

Sir, your levellers wish to level down as far as themselves; but they cannot bear levelling up to themselves.

Samuel Johnson.

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."
LIFE AND PHYSICS

SIR,—In your issue of December 16, you seem to dispute my statement that the whole of the inorganic universe has now been reduced to physics. If that is your position, then all experts on the subject are against you. Take, for example, *An Outline for Boys and Girls and their Parents*, published in 1932, and written by a number of able young scientists. On page 241 the editor says: "There is really no boundary between physics and chemistry, but it is traditional to think of them separately." That is corroborated by the chapters on physics and chemistry.

Many biologists think it likely that living organisms will be manufactured from inorganic matter. In the above book the writer on biology says. "It is quite possible that in the future we may find out how to create new organisms from non-living matter in the laboratory." (p. 167). Even Sir Oliver Lodge has admitted the likelihood of that.

The word "mechanistic" is obviously taken from the science of mechanics, which is merely another name for physics. Surely in the interest of logic and lucidity the word should be reserved for those persons who maintain that every movement in the universe is capable of being explained by the laws of mechanics.

R. B. KERR.

[Mr. Kerr does not, I think, quite appreciate the significance of his terms. I do not doubt for a moment that one day living matter may be created in the laboratory, nor do I think that many scientists would question its theoretical possibility. But that is not quite the same thing as reducing everything to laws of physics. Living things, once they appear, in addition to manifesting phenomena that can be described by physical laws, also manifest something that cannot be so described, hence the need for new "laws," which are created by scientists in order to cover the new phenomena that is produced. To seek for everything in laws of physics because laws of physics represent the widest of scientific "laws" is equal to ascribing wetness to oxygen and hydrogen because the wetness of water is a product of the combination. Far from all experts being against me here, I should be surprised to find a single expert who would oppose what I have said, without sacrificing his reputation for an understanding of scientific methods and scientific principles.

With regard to the use of the word "mechanistic." Mr. Kerr is right in saying that the word is derived from mechanics. But he is not justified in restricting it to mechanics, and so concluding that everything in the universe may be explained by the laws of mechanics. The truth of the matter is that laws of mechanics stand for a type of law that is the most exact known, and therefore it is taken as a model for all laws—biological and other—which are aiming at attaining, and one day may attain the same exactness that at present rules in the world of physics. But I never hope, nor does, I think, any scientist ever expect to see, say, aesthetics, reduced to laws of physics.—EDITOR.]

FREETHOUGHT AND SOCIOLOGY

SIR,—Mr. Shortt's contribution under this heading is characterized by haziness, and in the finish he lands himself in a veritable fog of "pure theory." It is impossible to criticize the article acutely, because heaven only knows what it sets out to prove, or what was the point in its being written. The conflict of ideas should be mental, like the social conflict, says the writer. Will he tell me what is the difference between the social conflict and the conflict of ideas? Physical force is unwarranted in this conflict, proceeds Mr. Shortt. What is meant is that it would be in a state of society which favoured Freethought as a method. But physical force used to defend or prosecute ideas is a sociological phenomenon, and the Freethinker has to resort to such force at times. There is no disgrace in this. If the prevailing social code acknowledges physical force, which it does, then it is impossible for the Freethinker to escape entirely from using it. To imply as Mr. Shortt does that physical force is outside the social arena brands him as a metaphysician, or one who knows little of social evolution.

RALPH KEARNEY.

The City of Dreadful Night

O MELANCHOLY Brothers, dark, dark, dark!
O battling in black floods without an ark!
O spectral wanderers of unholy Night!
My soul hath bled for you these sunless years,
With bitter blood-drops running down like tears;
Oh, dark, dark, dark, withdrawn from joy and light!

My heart is sick with anguish for your bale,
Your woe hath been my anguish; yea, I quail
And perish in your perishing unblest.
And I have searched the heights and depths, the scope
Of all our universe, with desperate hope
To find some solace for your wild unrest.

And now at last authentic word I bring,
Witnessed by every dead and living thing;
Good tidings of great joy for you, for all;
There is no God; no Fiend with names divine
Made us and tortures us; if we must pine
It is to satiate no Being's gall.

It was the dark delusion of a dream,
That living Person conscious and supreme,
Whom we must curse for cursing us with life,
Whom we must curse because the life He gave
Could not be buried in the quiet grave,
Could not be killed by poison or by knife.

This little life is all we must endure,
The grave's most holy place is ever sure,
We fall asleep and never wake again;
Nothing is of us but the mouldering flesh,
Whose elements dissolve and merge afresh
In earth, air, water, plants, and other men.

We finish thus; and all our wretched race
Shall finish with its cycle, and give place
To other beings, with their own time-doom;
Infinite æons ere our kind began;
Infinite æons after the last man
Has joined the mammoth in earth's tomb and womb.
JAMES THOMSON.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

LONDON.

OUTDOOR.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park): 12.30, Sunday, Messrs. W. B. Collins and E. Gee. 3.30, Messrs. Wood, Bryant, Collins, Gee and Tuson. *Freethinker* on sale outside Park gates, and literature to order.

INDOOR.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. ("The Laurie Arms," Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.): 7.30, Mr. L. Ebury—"Christianity and Socialism."

COUNTRY.

INDOOR.

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. Cobden Hall, Cort Street, Blackburn): 7.30, Mr. F. Hargreaves—"Astronomy and Religion."

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley): 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—Christmas Prior to Christianity."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow): 7.0, Debate: "Gambling." Mr. A. B. MacKay and Mr. J. McKenna. *Freethinker* and other literature on sale at all meetings.

GREAT HARWOOD (Labour Hall): 7.30, Discussion Group. Mr. J. Clayton—"God and His Birthday."

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall, Humberstone Gate): 6.30, Mr. H. B. Lowerison—"The Xmas Mummers' Play." Address preceded by short play.

SOUTH SHIELDS BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Hall, Laygate): 7.30, Friday, December 21, Mr. J. T. Brighton—"Survival of the Fittest."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street): 7.0, A Discussion on Secularism. *Affir.*: Mr. J. T. Brighton. *Neg.*: Mr. E. M. Maccoby.

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The N.S.S. is the only organization of militant Freethinkers in this country. It aims to bring into one body all those who believe the religions of the world to be based on error, and to be a source of injury to the best interests of Society. It claims that all political laws and moral rules should be based upon purely secular considerations. It is without sectarian aims or party affiliations.

If you appreciate the work that Bradlaugh did, if you admire the ideals for which he lived and fought, it is not enough merely to admire. The need for action and combined effort is as great to-day as ever. You can best help by filling up the attached form and joining the Society founded by Bradlaugh.

PRINCIPLES AND OBJECTS.

SECULARISM teaches that conduct should be based on reason and knowledge. It knows nothing of divine guidance or interference; it excludes supernatural hopes and fears; it regards happiness as man's proper aim, and utility as his moral guide.

Secularism affirms that Progress is only possible through Liberty, which is at once a right and a duty; and therefore seeks to remove every barrier to the fullest equal freedom of thought, action, and speech.

Secularism declares that theology is condemned by reason as superstitious, and by experience as mischievous, and assails it as the historic enemy of Progress.

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The Funds of the National Secular Society are legally secured by Trust Deed. The trustees are the President, Treasurer and Secretary of the Society, with two others appointed by the Executive. There is thus the fullest possible guarantee for the proper expenditure of whatever funds the Society has at its disposal.

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BY

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH

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