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PRINCIPAL CONTENTS

	Page
<i>Cant and Christmas—The Editor</i> - - - -	801
<i>A Jester in Real Earnest—Mimnermus</i> - - - -	802
<i>Things Worth Knowing</i> - - - -	804
<i>“Christianity as a New Religion”—George Bedborough</i>	805
<i>As Witchcraft Disappeared, so must Christianity—F. Hill</i>	806
<i>Spirit Photography—H. Cutner</i> - - - -	811
<i>Machiavelli and Christianity—J. M. Wheeler</i> - -	812
<i>Acid Drops, To Correspondents, Sugar Plums, Letters to the Editor, etc.</i>	

Views and Opinions

Cant and Christmas

A RECENT message from Rome contains the news that the Christmas tree has received its death blow in Italy, except in the territory that was Austrian until the end of the “Great War,” when it was made over to Italy as part payment for its desertion of Germany and its coming over to the side of the Allies. Two reasons for this banning of the Christmas tree are given. From Mussolini the explanation is that it is a foreign importation. From the Roman Church—which in Italy has the job of providing religious and moral apologies for whatever Mussolini orders—that the Christmas tree is a Protestant symbol derived from pagan rites. But the Italians are to keep pictures of the Holy Family and the celebration of the miraculous birth because they deal with an historic event. The reason advanced by the Church is an interesting illustration of the Christian habit of persisting in a lie so long as it remains profitable, and then assuming an air of honest candour when it becomes politic to let out a little of the truth.

The reason given by the Church for agreeing with the abolition of the Christmas tree looks like a long delayed retort to an old charge brought by some Protestant writers. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries quite a number of Protestant critics dwelt on the derivation of Roman Catholic rites and ceremonies from paganism. Middleton’s *Letters from Rome* is a well-known instance of this. The early Christian writers had never denied as much, but the suppression of critical thought under the Church had caused the fact to drop out of mind. The Roman Church said little on the subject when the point was again raised by Protestant critics, perhaps because it thought that an enquiry might make plain the fact that all Christian beliefs and practices were derived from paganism. I think also that the reason for this statement of the relation of Christianity to Paganism being dropped by Protestants was due to the discovery that the argument was of the boomerang kind. The rise of the study of comparative religions, and later of a scientific anthropology,

showed that not merely were Christian beliefs a continuation of Paganism, but that religious beliefs could be traced back to a primitive mentality which thoroughly damned all religion. So both Protestants and Catholics, on the principle that to hang together was the only alternative to being hanged separately, tacitly agreed that the less said about origins the better. Enquiry on these lines might result in the conviction that the history of religion was no more than a history of the world’s greatest illusion, and there developed a tendency to stress points of agreement with Catholics rather than of difference. This had the effect of producing with many a conviction that Christians were agreed upon “fundamentals,” whereas the fact is that Christians are only able to maintain a semblance of unity so long as they remain uncertain about the meaning to be given to the language used.

* * *

The Bethlehem Baby

But what of the birth of Christ which millions of Christians believe they are celebrating on December 25? The only sense in which that can be called an anniversary of an historic event is that it is a date upon which a celebration has been held, not merely during the Christian era, but for many, many centuries before the name of Christianity was heard. Just that and no more. Scores of gods have been worshipped who were born of virgins; these gods performed miracles, they were ceremoniously killed for the benefit of mankind, and after death they ascended into heaven. Mithra, Adonis, Osiris, with other gods in various parts of the world have passed through the same cycle, and have been enthusiastically worshipped by millions of followers. Jesus Christ offers no exception to the general rule. The date of the birth and death of Jesus, what he did when alive, and what he did after his death, were not determined by the circumstances that determine the life and death of men, but by the circumstances that create and determine the actions of gods. These saviour-gods appear as vegetation gods, as astronomical gods, as teaching gods, and in the New Testament we have a glorious Olla Podrida of all of them. That is why no single key will serve to unlock the riddle of the New Testament character. There is not a single thing recorded of the New Testament Jesus that cannot be paralleled in the history of other mythologies. Jesus Christ is as historic as Krishna, or Adonis, or Dionysus, or William Tell or the Old Woman who lived in a Shoe. The early Christians knew this. Most of them admitted it. It was only when the Christian Church by its persecution and intolerance had succeeded in stamping out the knowledge or the worship of these other gods, that it was able to put forward the preposterous claim that their mythology differed in kind from the mythologies that had preceded it. There is no need to argue whether the New Testament Jesus

ever existed; we know that he could not have existed. A being whose birth is determined by the winter solstice, and his death by the date of the Spring Equinox cannot have been a man. A being over whose cradle a star pauses in its passage in order to indicate to three humans where the God is born, who raises men from the dead, and casts devils out of epileptics, who feeds a multitude with a handful of food, who is born without a father and rises from the dead to ascend to a geographical heaven has "god" written all over him. His life forms a chapter in the history of mythology, not a record of sober secular fact.

And so the Italian people are told that while they may not have a Christmas tree because it is of pagan origin, they may celebrate the birth of Jesus because that is an historic event? After all a lie more or less in the history of the Christian Church cannot be of great consequence.

* * *

Christianity and Peace

One further piece of Christmas cant, which although coming from Rome is common to the whole of Christendom. The Pope is anxious to see an end of the war between Abyssinia and Italy before Christmas, because the object of the Birth was to establish Peace on earth and good-will towards men. It may be admitted that the Pope has done what he could to help bring the war to a close. He has never in the slightest degree raised any protest against the smash and grab raid of Mussolini, he has never protested against the bombing of women and children by Italian aeroplanes, and he has said nothing against the handing over of Church plate to Mussolini to supply funds for carrying on the war. It is true, in this last instance, the Roman Catholic *Universe* has pointed out that the gold was given for the benefit of the poor. But the plate was handed to Mussolini, and there is little doubt as to what use he will put it to. And one would have thought that if there is one body in Italy best acquainted with the needs of the poor, and therefore the best able—if so inclined—to deal with the poor, it is the Church. It is, at all events the only instance I can recall of the Christian Church in any country allowing this method of holding the people to pass out of its hands.

But why drag in Christmas? In pre-Christian Rome we know that December 25 was a day of jollity, and although there seems little in the Christian story to encourage jollification, the Church has never been able to suppress this element in association with the date of Christmas. But we do not recall an instance in which the happening of Christmas made for an improvement of the feeling between nations, particularly if a war happened to be on. Some very important battles have been fought on Christmas day, and if one Christian army hoped to catch the other Christian army wrapped in religious meditations, it must have been sadly disappointed. It may be remembered that in the first Christmas of the 1914-18 war soldiers in France did fraternize with their German opponents. The result was an order from headquarters that such proceedings must be stopped, lest it should breed good-fellowship and so limit the degree of "hate" which the British soldiers were expected to display towards the enemy. And at home not one of the clergy preached a sermon against this order, or pointed out that Christmas was a season of love and brotherhood and Germans and Britishers should be encouraged to be as friendly together as possible. But the Christmas cant of peace on earth, good-will towards men went on with undiminished force.

The cant of Christmas is peculiarly nauseating because no one but Christians ever appreciate the value of its doctrine of peace on earth. At the moment we

are faced with the position that before the world has recovered from one of the most destructive wars in history, made and waged by Christian nations, these same nations have so little trust in each other's word or intentions that each is proclaiming that ultimately the peace of the world can only be secured by each nation living in fear of the other. That is the pass to which many centuries of the rule of Christian peace on earth has brought us! Could there have been any worse ending if the angels had never sung their hymn, if the star had not rested above the stable, and if Jesus had had for his parents an earthly mother and father instead of a mere woman and an anonymous ghost!

But it is worthy of note that the one feature of Christmas that has remained constant, and the one feature that has made for human friendliness and good cheer is that which Christians admit is wholly and irretrievably pagan. The meeting of friends, the gathering of family parties, the eating, the drinking, the merrymaking, is directly descended from the Roman Saturnalia. There is no question whatever of this, at least it is questioned by no one whose opinion is worth noting. And to-day in the thoughts of professing Christians the dominating feeling has no reference to the birth of a God who was doomed to suffer an agonizing death for the sins of man, but of good cheer and good fellowship properly associated with a seasonal change from which men hoped for a prosperous year. Roast beef is not in the least reminiscent of salvation from hell, there is no connexion whatever between plum pudding and a crucified man-god, drinking and singing has nothing to do with any religious plan of salvation. In these matters believers have risen higher than their creed, and it may well be that when the Christian religion has become, in the belief of all, one of the many dead superstitions that face the student of human history, something of the old winter feasting and merry-making will continue in social and family life.

CHAPMAN COHEN.

A Jester in Real Earnest

"Some for the glories of this world, and some
Sigh for the prophet's paradise to come;
Ah! take the cash and let the credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant drum."

Omar Khayyam.

"Priestcraft could never have availed without lay incompetence."—J. M. Robertson.

THE celebration of the centenary of Mark Twain's birth has been widely noticed, and justly so. Not only was he a prince of jesters, but he was a great man, a great citizen, and a great writer. Indeed, Mark Twain was one of the national authors of the United States in a sense in which we, in England to-day, have no national writer. The feeling for him among Americans was like that of the Scottish for Walter Scott, or like that of our own fathers for Charles Dickens. There was admiration in it, gratitude, pride, and, above all, affection. This was shown at one of the last public dinners Mark Twain attended. When he came in he was escorted to the table, and the whole company, in which no man was indistinguished, rose to greet him, and remained standing till he had taken his seat.

This full flame of personal affection went out to Mark Twain for what he had written, and what he had done. His fiery dashes against tyranny, humbug, and corruption, attracted men no less than the irresistible laughter of his humour. The incident of his financial failure, which, like Walter Scott's, was wholly the work of others, raised him to the rank of literary heroes. For he assumed a moral, where there

was no legal responsibility; and he set to work the harder and paid off the huge mass of debts. It takes a real man to engage in and win such a fight with fate as that. Such a man's humour was bound to be based on seriousness. "Papa," said his young daughter, "can make jokes, and enjoys funny things, but he is more interested in earnest books and subjects."

Mark Twain was a thorough Freethinker, but he always wrote under the restraint of a family full of religious prejudice. His pious, well-meaning wife edited his jokes, and pruned his profanities. Once she objected to his using the word "stink," and wished him to substitute a less vulgar word. "My dear!" protested Mark, "if you were censor, there would be no English language left." Some of Twain's best jokes, and some of his more serious attempts at philosophical writing, such as "What is Man?" were suppressed, or else withdrawn from circulation, by the unseen hand of piety. We shall never know what we lost by this procedure, or what we missed by this kindly philosopher being trammelled by the critic on the hearth.

Discerning readers, however, could not fail to notice his innate irreverence even in the joyous pages of *The Innocents Abroad*, the lighthearted *New Pilgrim's Progress*, and the hilarious *Tom Sawyer*. Towards the end of his career, the censorship appears to have been relaxed, and at his death his literary executor revealed fully the extent of the great writer's heterodoxy. The posthumous publication of *The Mysterious Stranger*, a volume discovered among his papers, is the strongest expression of Twain's views on religion, and must prove of unusual interest to all those who share the great author's philosophical and sceptical views. The book, indeed, is a very serious publication to proceed from Twain, and is as startling as would be the transformation of Ariel into Prospero. The volume deals with the crimes and follies that men are led into by priests and religion, and the mysterious stranger is Satan, who appears as a handsome youth named "Philip Traum." A fierce attack is made on the God idea, which is described as being so monstrous that Satan wonders why man does not regard the universe as a horrible nightmare. The iconoclasm is not veiled, for Satan goes on:—

Strange, because they are so frankly and hysterically insane—like all dreams: a God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short; who gave his angels eternal happiness unearned, yet required his other children to earn it; who gave his angels painless lives, yet cursed his other children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body; who mouths justice and invented hell—mouths mercy and invented hell—mouths Golden Rules and forgiveness multiplied seventy times seven, and invented hell; who mouths morals to other people and has none himself; who frowns upon crimes and yet commits them all; who created man without invitation, then tries to shuffle the responsibility for man's acts upon man, instead of honourably placing it where it belongs, upon himself; and, finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor, abused slave to worship him!

And the Satanic Philip sums up by saying:—

You perceive now that these things are all impossible except in a dream. You perceive that they are pure and puerile insanities, the silly creations of an imagination that is not conscious of its freaks.

So Mark Twain goes on holding the noses of his pious readers to the grindstone of thought, forcing them from comfortable complacency to discontent, stinging them into sensitiveness. Under the relent-

less questioning and rhetoric we are pierced through and through with a sense of the contrast between what life actually is and what it might be.

What are religious folks making of life? This is, in the last analysis, Mark Twain's question, and the burden of this arresting book of his. He is the corrosive acid that eats into the Christian complacency that "God's in his heaven, all's right with the world." He is the critic who does not give a moment's peace for cheap, pious, tailor-made conclusions. Quieter in tone than most of his books, with no jesting at all, the book is unique in the author's shelf-full of masterpieces.

What is significant is that this attack on the god-idea was written by one who was, in his day and generation, the most eminent man-of-letters in the United States of America, and whose books are still a large and important asset of national pride. When Mark Twain died, the event eclipsed some of the gaiety of the English-speaking peoples. Despite his motley dress, his cap and bells, he was ever a knight-errant charging down the wind at the hosts of superstition. Honour was his shield and truth tipped his lance. Gentle in his dealings with gentle people, he was relentless as fate in his contest with hypocrisy and humbug. Never did he do finer work than when he penned this scathing indictment of a mischievous superstition, and raised the standard of Freethought against all the priests of all Christendom. It was a fine gesture of defiance. Finding his fellow-men bound with galling chains of their own manufacture, it was his purpose to break those fetters and set them free. He hoped to cure the evil of religion by bringing priestcraft into contempt, and by widening the boundaries of thought. It was the worthy ambition of a very noble man, whose genius illuminates the country of his birth.

MIMNERMUS.

The strangest thing that ever happened to Jim was the time he went fishing on Sunday and didn't get drowned, and that other time that he got caught out in the storm when he was fishing on Sunday and didn't get struck by lightning. Why you might look and look and look through the Sunday School books from now till next Christmas and you would never come across anything like this. Oh no; you would find that all the bad boys who go boating on Sunday invariably get drowned; and all the bad boys who get caught out in storms when they are fishing on Sunday infallibly get struck by lightning. Boats with bad boys in them always upset on Sunday, and it is always storms when bad boys go fishing on the Sabbath. How this Jim escaped is a mystery to me?

This Jim bore a charmed life—that must have been the way of it. Nothing could hurt him. He even gave the elephant in the menagerie a plug of tobacco, and the elephant didn't knock the top of his head off with his trunk. He browsed around the cupboard after essence of peppermint, and didn't make a mistake and drink aqua-fortis. He stole his father's gun and went hunting on the Sabbath, and didn't shoot three or four of his fingers off. He struck his little sister on the temple with his fist when he was angry, and she didn't linger in pain through long summer days, and die with sweet words of forgiveness upon her lips that redoubled the anguish of his breaking heart. No, she got over it. He ran off and went to sea at last and didn't come back and find himself alone in the world, his loved ones sleeping in the quiet churchyard, and the vine embowered home of his boyhood tumbled down and gone to decay. Ah no! he came home drunk as a piper and got into the station-house first thing. And he grew up and married and raised a large family and brained them all with an axe one night, and got wealthy by all manner of cheating and rascality; and now he is the infernaldest, wickedest scoundrel in his native village, and he is universally respected and belongs to the Legislature.—Mark Twain.

Things Worth Knowing*

XIX.

THE PAGAN ORIGIN OF CHRISTMAS

WHEN and where did the keeping of Christmas begin? Many of the details of its early history remain in uncertainty, but it is fairly clear that the earliest celebration of the Birth of Christ on December 25 took place at Rome about the middle of the fourth century, and that the observance of the day spread from the Western to the Eastern Church, which had before been wont to keep January 6 as a joint commemoration of the Nativity and the Baptism of the Redeemer. The first mention of a Nativity feast on December 25 is found in a Roman document known as the Philocalian Calendar, but embodying an earlier document belonging to the year 336. It is uncertain to which date the Nativity reference belongs; but further back than 336 at all events the festival cannot be traced.

The French *Noel* is a name concerning whose origin there has been considerable dispute; there can however be little doubt that it is the same word as the Provençal *Nadan* or *Nadal*, the Italian *Natala*, and the Welsh *Nadolig*, all obviously derived from the Latin *natalis*, and meaning birthday. One naturally takes this as referring to the birth of Christ, but it may at any rate remind us of another birthday celebrated on the same date by the Romans of the Empire, that of the unconquered Sun, who on December 25, the winter solstice according to the Julian Calendar, began to rise to new vigour after the autumnal decline.

Why, we may ask, did the Church choose December 25 for the celebration of her founder's birth? No one now imagines that the date is supported by a reliable tradition; it is one of various guesses of early Christian writers. As a learned eighteenth century Jesuit has pointed out, there is not a single month in the year to which the Nativity has not been assigned by some writer or other. The real reason for the choice of the day most probably was, that it fell upon the pagan festival just mentioned.

The *Dies Natalis Invicti* was probably first celebrated in Rome by order of the Emperor Aurelian (270-5), an ardent worshipper of the Syrian sun-god Baal. With the *Sol invictis* identified the figure of Mithra, that strange Eastern God whose cult resembled in so many ways the worship of Jesus, and who was at one time a serious rival of the Christ in the minds of thoughtful men. It was the sun god, poetically and philosophically conceived, whom the Emperor Julian made the center of his ill-fated revival of Paganism, and there is extant a fine prayer of his to "King Sun . . ."

The strictly religious feast of the *Saturnalia* was held on December 17, but the festal customs were kept up for seven days, thus lasting until the day before our Christmas Eve. Among them was a fair called the *sigillarium celebritas*, for the sale of little images of clay or paste which were given away as presents. Candles seem also to have been given away, perhaps as symbols of, or even charms to ensure, the return of the sun's power after the solstice. The most remarkable and typical feature of the *Saturnalia* was the mingling of all classes in a common jollity. . . . The festivities were marked by

"drinking and being drunk, noise and games and dice, appointing of kings and feasting of slaves, singing naked, clapping of tremulous hands, an occasional ducking of faces in iced waters," and the slaves had licence to revile their lords.

The spirit of the season may be judged from the legislation which Lucian attributes to Chronosolon, priest and prophet of Cronus, much as a modern writer might make Father Christmas or Santa Klaus lay down rules for the due observance of Yule. Here are some of the laws:—

All business, be it public or private, is forbidden during the feast days, save such as tend to sport, solace and delight.

Let none follow their avocations save cooks and bakers.

All men shall be equal, slave and free, rich and poor, one with another.

Anger, resentment, threats are contrary to law.

No discourse shall be either composed or delivered except it be witty and lusty, conducing to mirth and jollity.

There follows directions as to the sending of presents of money, clothing or vessels, by rich men to poor friends, and as to poor men's gifts in return. If the poor man have learning, his return present is to be "an ancient book, but of good omen and festive humour, or a writing of his own after his ability. . . . For the unlearned, let him send a garland or grains of frankincense.

Christmas in Ritual and Tradition,
by C. A. MILES, pp. 20-22, pp. 165-6.

XX.

THE worship of the Great Mother of the Gods and her lover or Son were very popular under the Roman Empire. Inscriptions prove that the two received divine honours, separately or conjointly, not only in Italy, and especially in Rome, but also in the provinces, particularly in Africa, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany and Bulgaria. . . . The estatic frenzies, which were mistaken for divine inspiration, the mangling of the body, the theory of a new birth, and the remission of sins through the shedding of blood, have all their origin in savagery, and they naturally appealed to all in whom the savage instincts were still strong. Their true character was indeed often disguised under a decent veil of allegorical or philosophical interpretation, which probably sufficed to impose on enthusiastic worshippers, reconciling even the more cultivated of them to things which otherwise must have filled them with horror and disgust. . . .

An instructive relic of the long struggle (between Mithraism and Christianity) is preserved in our festival of Christmas, which the Church seems to have borrowed directly from its heathen rival. In the Julian Calendar the twenty-fifth of December was reckoned the winter solstice, and it was regarded as the Nativity of the Sun, because the day begins to lengthen and the power of the Sun to increase from the turning point of the year. The ritual of the Nativity, as it appears to have been celebrated in Syria and Egypt was remarkable. The celebrants retired into certain inner shrines, from which at midnight they issued with a loud cry, "The Virgin has brought forth! The light is waxing!" The Egyptians even represented the new-born sun by the image of an infant which on his birthday, the winter solstice, they brought forth and exhibited to the worshippers. No doubt the Virgin who thus conceived and bore a son on the twenty-fifth of December was the great Oriental Goddess whom the Semites called the

* Under this heading we purpose printing, weekly, a series of definite statements, taken from authoritative works, on specific subjects. They will supply instructive comments on aspects of special subjects, and will be useful, not merely in themselves, but also as a guide to works that are worth closer study.

Heavenly Virgin or simply the Heavenly Goddess; in Semitic lands she was a form of Astarte. Now Mithra was regularly identified by his worshippers with the Sun, the unconquered Sun, they called him; hence his nativity also fell on the twenty-fifth of December. . . .

What considerations led the ecclesiastical authorities to institute the festival of Christmas? The motives for the innovation are stated with great frankness by a Syrian writer, himself a Christian. "It was a custom of the heathen to celebrate on the same twenty-fifth of December, the birthday of the Sun, at which they kindled lights in token of festivity. . . . Accordingly when the doctors of the Church perceived that the Christians had a leaning to this festival, they took counsel and resolved that the true Nativity should be solemnized on that day, and the festival of the Epiphany on the sixth of January." The heathen origin of Christmas is thus plainly hinted at, if not tacitly admitted, by St. Augustine when he exhorts his Christian brethren not to celebrate that day like the heathen on account of the sun, but on account of him who made the sun. In like manner Leo the Great rebuked the pestilent belief that Christmas was solemnized because of the birth of the new sun, as it was called, and not because of the Nativity of Christ.

The Golden Bough (abridged edition),
by SIR JAMES FRAZER, pp. 356-9.

"Christianity as a New Religion"*

If we could be sure of the total disappearance (preferably by voluntary euthanasia) of all existing churches and their "fatally opulent" officials, we might insist on having a really new religion, but for one consideration. All old religions were once new.

Since Joseph Smith introduced us to the Angel Moroni and the Book of Mormon (on plates of solid gold too), no new religion of importance has been discovered, invented or born.

Conversion to a new religion might be convincing if the high dignitaries of an ancient one resigned position and emoluments and pronounced their old religion false. This has not yet been done in England.

It is all very well for Dr. Inge to declare that "the centre of gravity in religion has shifted in our day from authority to experience," and that "to ascribe infallibility to the pronouncements of a church seems almost monstrous." All this is too indefinite. Most readers thought the Dean was just "falling foul" of the Romanists.

Professor MacBride, puzzled like the rest of us to know exactly what religion means to-day, asked for a definition of Christianity. He challenged the Archbishops in the *Times*. The Primate of Canterbury was silent. He of York replied in the *Times* of June 28 last, declaring it politic to wait till "the new synthesis is built up," and "in the meantime to present what any of us believe to be essential, IN THE MANNER THAT WILL LEAST EXPOSE IT TO CRITICISM."

A few Christian teachers appear to be "waiting" as instructed. Perhaps Dr. Percy Dearmer's book may be taken as the Canon of Westminster's contribution to "the new synthesis," which is to be "built up."

Dr. Dearmer is certainly more frank than most modernists. He directly and definitely rejects several "Christian" beliefs. It is true he claims that "Jesus was always right" (p. 6). He therefore heads the chapter embodying his rejections: "What Jesus Did Not Teach."

Leo Tolstoy produced an expurgated edition of the Gospels and his expurgations are a guide to the ferocious nature of what the Bible teaches of Christ's character. The Bible is the only authority we possess as to Christ's

teaching. Tolstoy taught Tolstoyanism, not Christianity.

Ingersoll never denounced the atrocious doctrine of Hell more vigorously than Canon Dearmer, who in his severe criticism of orthodox Christians describes eternal punishment as "the most grossly immoral of all their teachings." It is unfortunate that the Canon also thinks "Jesus always right." Perhaps he has never read Matthew xxv. 41, which commits Jesus not only to a belief that human beings are to suffer "everlasting fire," but that this eternal hell has actually been "prepared" in advance, for "the Devil and His angels."

Freethinkers will sympathize with Canon Dearmer's desire to discard what is abhorrent to modern knowledge, logic and humanity in the only Christianity that we know. No Freethinker of any era believed that Christianity consisted exclusively of what Christ is said to have taught. Nor did Freethinkers ever believe that Christians, or anyone else, followed all Christ's alleged teachings, some of which are obviously ridiculous, some impracticable, and others—against taking oaths for instance—having to wait Atheist insistence and secular legislation before Christians permitted Christians to follow them.

In some cases we cannot blame Churches for making creeds which ignored teachings declared by such authorities as Bishop Magee to be inconsistent with human citizenship. To "take no thought for the morrow" would destroy not only human government, it would destroy mankind.

It is, however, easy to find justification for the worst clauses of the worst of creeds of Christendom in the rigmorole records of the Old Testament, and in Pauline and Johannine teachings. Nobody ever felt any particular need for tracing every doctrine of Christianity to what Jesus actually said, any more than one ceases to call Quakers by that name, even if we have never met a Quaker who quaked.

The worst of running with a wealthy if moth-eaten church, and at the same time hunting with the rather lean hounds of a "new religion" is the compromise and make-believe involved. First, of course, Dr. Dearmer has to argue that Jesus Himself agrees with him. "Jesus," he says, "not only avoided all claims to divinity, but did not even call himself the Son of God" (p. 37). At the outset therefore we not only throw over Paul, but also the writer of John's gospel.

The divinity of Jesus is fairly implied by Christ's frequent references to "My Father." It is Mark who tells us that even the "unclean spirits fell down before Him and cried saying, 'Thou art the Son of God.'" On that occasion Jesus instead of denying the allegation, confirmed it by begging "that they should not make Him known (Mark iii. 11). Only by subtlety can anyone suggest that John x. 30, 36-37 are consistent with Dr. Dearmer's theory.

Doubtless, as Dr. Dearmer claims, his predecessors were often guilty of falsifying the records, and "the old theologies and Christologies were all built upon a false exegesis" (p. 40) which "misinterpreted . . . and completely perverted the gospels." But that is Christianity. We agree that "the message of Christ unperverted is a new religion," but Christianity has too definite and long a history to allow DEARMERISM (or Tolstoyism) to acquire its name and goodwill.

GEORGE BEDBOROUGH.

Home is where the virtues grow. I should like to see the law so that every home, to a small amount, should be free, not only from sale for debts, but should be absolutely free from taxation, so that every man could have a home.—Ingersoll.

No man has imagination enough to paint the agonies, the horrors, the cruelties, of war. Think of sending shot and shell crashing through the bodies of men! Think of the widows and orphans! Think of the maimed, the mutilated, the mangled! Every good man, every good woman, should try to do away with war, to stop the appeal to savage force.—Ingersoll.

* *Christianity as a New Religion*, by Percy Dearmer, D.D., Canon of Westminster; London, The Lindsey Press.

As Witchcraft disappeared, so must Christianity

Must not the shedding of religious superstition, completely and decisively, come in a manner similar to that which marked the end of witchcraft? My suggestion to this effect is based on the researches and conclusions of Lecky (*Rationalism in Europe*).

There is, I consider, a true parallel between witchcraft and Christianity—in the vogue of the two superstitions over the same period, and the fate that has attended the one being the fate that must inevitably await the other. For more than fifteen hundred years, declares Lecky, it was universally believed that the Bible established, in the clearest manner, the reality of the crime of witchcraft, magic, and sorcery, and that an amount of evidence, so varied and so ample as to preclude the very possibility of doubt, attested its continuance and prevalence.

"The clergy," he proceeds, "denounced it with all the emphasis of authority. The legislators of almost every land enacted laws for its punishment. Acute judges, whose lives were spent in sifting evidence, investigated the question on countless occasions, and condemned the accused."

Tens of thousands of victims perished by the most agonizing and protracted torments, without exciting the faintest compassion. The Church of Rome proclaimed in every way that was in her power the reality and the continued existence of the crime. She strained every nerve to stimulate the persecution. She taught by all her organs that to spare a witch was a direct insult to the Almighty, and to her ceaseless exertions is to be attributed by far the greater proportion of the blood that was shed. Nor, in this respect, were the Reformers in the least conflict with the Church of Rome. Luther was clear and emphatic.

His words were: "I would have no compassion on these witches—I would burn them all!" The persecution, at its worst in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, extended to all European countries. It was common to Catholics and Protestants—in fact, to all branches of the Protestant faith. From Britain it spread with Puritanism to the New World.

The executions in Massachusetts form one of the darkest pages in the history of America. A widely-cited case in Scotland—where the persecutions were pursued with "a thirst for blood that knew no mercy," and "a zeal that never tired"—is that of Dr. Fian, who was suspected of raising a storm at sea during the return of James I. from Denmark. "A confession," relates Lecky, "was wrung from him by torture—which, however, he almost immediately afterwards retracted. Every form of torture was in vain employed to vanquish his obstinacy. The bones of his legs were broken into small pieces in the boot. All the torments that Scottish law knew of were successively applied.

"At last, the King (who personally presided over the tortures) suggested a new and more horrible device. The prisoner, who had been removed during the deliberation, was brought in, and (I quote the contemporary narrative) 'his nails upon all his fingers were riven and pulled off with an instrument, called in Scottish a turkas, which in England we call a payre of pincers, and under everie naylor there was thrust in two needels, even up to the heads.' "However, notwithstanding all this, 'so deeply had the devil entered his heart, that he utterly denied all that which he had before avouched,' and he was burnt unconfessed."

Everywhere it was the same. On the craziest of charges—brought, it might be, by the enemy of a victim—the most fiendish tortures were inflicted. But here let us heave a sigh of relief at the change that was dawning. Particularly pronounced was this in the seventeenth century. In England, the last trial—at least of any notoriety—was that of Jane Wenham, who was prosecuted in 1712 by some Hertfordshire clergymen. "The judge," says Lecky, "entirely disbelieved in witches, and accordingly charged the jury strongly in favour of the accused, and even treated with great disrespect the rector of the parish, who declared 'on his faith as a clergyman,' that he believed the woman to be a witch.

The jury, being ignorant and obstinate, convicted the prisoner; but the judge had no difficulty in obtaining a remission of her sentence."

In 1736 the laws on the subject were repealed. Still, there were some fanatics with whom the superstition long persisted. For example, as late as 1768, John Wesley stated that "the giving up of witchcraft is in effect giving up the Bible." How was the great transformation effected? Lecky states that the progress of the movement was not marked by any clear, definite incidents—except, it may be, in the events following the Restoration. "Everywhere," he points out, in this connexion, "a disbelief in witchcraft was becoming fashionable in the upper classes; but it was a disbelief that arose entirely from a strong sense of the antecedent improbability.

"All who were opposed to the orthodox faith united in discrediting witchcraft. They laughed at it as palpably absurd—as involving the most grotesque and ludicrous conceptions—as so essentially incredible that it would be a waste of time to examine it." A reflection that here prompts itself in this: "Here was a superstition that for centuries had universal credence; the undivided support of both Romans and Protestants, together with the fullest backing by the civil powers; and the clear, explicit authority of the Bible. Yet to-day the person who professed a belief in it would merely invite admission to a mental home.

Let me try to give, in a few words, a hint of the Lecky process of reasoning with regard to the eradication of witchcraft. He referred to the circulation of the blood and the motion of the earth—truths admitted by all. But there are comparatively few, he points out, who could themselves demonstrate these truths. The result is that they are taken as proved on the repute of others. Similar are the conditions surrounding the creation and formation of enlightened public opinion. For example, there arose with regard to witchcraft an intellectually-directed movement—in time to become too general and too powerful to be resisted.

Thus, then, Lecky's deduction.

May we not extend this deduction? In this way. For a long time witchcraft was considered to be just as invulnerable as Christianity. Witchcraft has already been destroyed by the forces outlined by Lecky. More widely than ever—more effectively than ever—are the same forces operating to-day with regard to Christianity. How, then, can there be any escape for Christianity from what has been the extinguishing fate of its sister superstition—witchcraft?

FRANK HILL.

Sydney, N.S.W., Australia.

Acid Drops

Just about twelve months ago we wrote in these columns that short of something wholly unexpected the days of Abyssinia as an independent State were over. Italy's payment for entering the "Great War," a payment guaranteed by both France and England, remained undischarged. And although the Italy of Mussolini was one that neither this country nor France wished to see placed in a strong military position in Africa, it looked as though some means would be found of getting round the difficulty. Moreover the present government had never been over-friendly to the League of Nations, the stipulation of open covenants openly arrived at had been openly ignored, and private talks and private agreements had been made between France and England, and in all probability Italy.

Then came the Great Peace Ballot, one of the great surprises for the Government, which with an election that had to take place could not afford to set the expressed votes of eleven millions of voters at defiance. So to the surprise of everybody, the Government began to talk of its responsibilities under the Covenant of the League, and Mr. Baldwin to talk about having a sufficiently large air force, and navy for this country to play its part in carrying out the decisions reached by the

League with reference to the Italian-Abyssinian dispute. And a specific claim for this larger armament was that Britain because of its dominating position would be bound to play a large part in enforcing "sanctions." Not once, but many times, right up to the eve of the election, the British public was told that the Government was firmly and irrevocably committed to the policy of collective security through the League of Nations. On this issue the election was won, on that issue the Government secured a backing for huge armaments, on that issue and on that issue alone, we were assured it was possible to do away with war and usher in an era of peace.

Now there is a sudden right about face. The election had been won, the Government had secured a large majority. France had made private arrangements with Italy, Britain had private understandings with France, and possibly with Italy. Sanctions had been imposed, and if persisted in, particularly with old sanctions added, would be certain to make Italy listen to reason. The time appears to have arrived when the pretence of the Government being wedded to the policy of collective security had to be shelved. So like a bolt from the blue came the news that the artfully honest Mr. Baldwin, the unctuous Sir Samuel Uriah Heep Hoare, and the gallant and dashing Anthony Eden had between them agreed with M. Laval to give to Italy nearly half of Abyssinia and to place Abyssinia under the controlling influence of the League, or of Italy through the League. It may be that Sir Samuel Hoare will be picked out as a scapegoat, but it is ridiculous to imagine that he would have signed such an agreement with Laval if he had not had the authority of the Government to do so, particularly when in submitting the "settlement" to Mussolini he was informed that the British Government would bring its influence to bear upon the Emperor to get him to agree to the terms. The smash and grab raider is to be bought off by giving him more than he could possibly hope for without several years of fighting, and might even have brought about the economic ruin of Italy, and probably his own downfall. The only hope of Europe to escape from the era of war, the League of Nations, is being destroyed.

Mr. Anthony Eden told the League Committee of 18 that if the League Assembly dismissed the proposed Anglo-French arrangement to give Italy half of Abyssinia, Great Britain would not complain. But one would like to know what happened when Mr. Anthony Eden and Laval met the small nations whose votes had to decide the issue. What promises or threats were held out to them? Why see them in private conclave before the meeting of the League? We care nothing for politics, but we do care very much about the liberties and the rights of peoples being sold in this hole and corner manner.

We write this, on December 17, the day we go to press. It is possible that in face of the hostility aroused the Government may climb down, and by a whisper here and another whisper there, may escape disaster. In that case, it will serve to illustrate the truth of what we have so often said, namely, that the well-being of parliamentary government depends not so much upon the kind of man who is in Parliament as it does upon the type of mind outside. We would trust neither government assurances, nor the honesty of governmental officials in the absence of a critical and determined public opinion.

We have often said that we have no strong objection to liars: They form a very ancient, a talented, and a generally esteemed assembly. But we do object to the clumsy liar, and above all to the religious liar who is the most clumsy of all. Take the following. The *News-Chronicle* reports a speech by Canon Sheppard, in which he explains why he started his peace crusade—which is likely to last until this country starts another "Great War." He says:—

A dying soldier told me his first baby was coming at Christmas, and "if it's a boy, he won't have to take part in this hell, will he?" he asked. And I replied, No!

No! The Christian people will see that this sort of thing never happens again.

Now can one really imagine a dying soldier asking whether his baby, not yet born, will have to come out and take part in a war in which the father was engaged. And imagine the calibre of a man who can tell such an absurd yarn, and who needed the picture of a dying soldier fearing that his unborn baby would be sent out to take part in a then existing war, causing a Christian parson to commence a peace crusade! And what was the influence of his own creed worth, so far as war is concerned?

In the light of the above it is difficult to understand why Canon Sheppard professes to be "frightened of stupid people." It looks as though he ought to have a very great affection for them. He adds to this the further confession that he is "frightened to death of clever people who are unconverted," and that we can quite understand. It does not require a great degree of "cleverness" to see through the Christian myth, and those who do see through it cannot help affecting to some extent, naturally *un-clever* person, and we fancy this is the influence of the "clever" unconverted frightens the Canon. More and more he finds himself surrounded by the relatively foolish. And that Canon Sheppard rightly estimates the metal calibre of his probable supporters is shown by the story of the dying soldier and his unborn baby.

Perhaps there is an indication of a genuine experience in a further remark of the Canon. "It is no good putting a C.3 Christian up against an A.1 Materialist. You cannot expect an enthusiastic rabble of good-hearted people to stand firm in the battle with opponents drilled to stand firm and disciplined for the combat." That sounds like a disillusioned parson who has given up all hope of the spirit of God entering into the minds of his defenders, or indulging in some striking semi-miraculous defeat of his opponents. But it is not the fault of the A.1 Materialist that it is only the C.3 believer who will publicly attack him. The Materialist is always ready to meet the A.1 believer, but he seldom appears nowadays. Perhaps it is because he has enough intelligence to appreciate the strength—or weakness—of his own position, and is able to perceive that his wisest course is silence—whenever there is an A.1 Materialist about. And we have never observed any anxiety on the part of the Rev. "Dick" to show the weaker brethren how it should be done. If he ever feels that way these columns are open to him.

Bishop Pearson, O.S.B., laments that "there is a habit of missing Sunday Mass that is growing appreciably in our large towns. It is impossible to shut our eyes to this knowing as one does the terrific dangers that beset both faith and morals." We imagine that morality can look after itself, but we admit the danger to faith, for faith in religion is just a habit, and like so many other habits when it is broken one feels none the worse, and often very much better. After all, the Bishop's complaint lies against those who once attended Mass, so that the Mass was evidently not strong enough to hold them. It looks as though all the Bishop is saying is that if people will only continue to come to Mass they will not stay away. Now, if the Bishop will explain why Mass is not able to hold people he may say something instructive.

The Archbishop of York told an American interviewer that "it may be necessary to have another great and horrible war in order to establish the League of Nations." We would not mind so much a great and horrible war if it meant the forcible suppression by some united body to wanton war, and to act against those who tried to break the peace, much as the law of a civilized country acts against those who try to settle disputes with the neighbours by force of arms. But if the next war is to end as the last "Great War" ended, in the creation of a body of untrustworthy politicians, not one of which will (with justification) trust the other, with secret

arrangements made with each other, and with a perpetuation of conditions that make another war inevitable, then the longer this new great and horrible war is put off the better. Up to the present the time since the last war has been mainly expended in a series of manoeuvres which may enable one "Power" or one group of Powers being in a commanding position when the war occurs.

And we would remind this Right Reverend representative of the Christian faith that it is not the perception of the intility of war, or the bestiality of modern war, or the savagery of war that has created a desire to end war on the part of a section of the Christian public and its leaders. While wars did not involve a too great financial cost, and while they did not threaten the safety of those at home, wars went on with the full blessing of the clergy and the acquiescence of the general Christian public. But nowadays wars are very, very expensive, and the financial profits are very, very small. And the bombing-plane is so very dangerous for the home population that no one is safe. It is these things that has moved the Christian conscience to protest against war. And it must also be noted that it is this sense of cost, and fear of danger beyond that which an army—away from home—faces which creates support for a policy of competitive armaments that cannot but end in war. Fear generally is short-sighted, and cupidity has a habit of over-reaching itself.

Mr. C. M. Beach, a writer in the *Church Times*, puts forward a suggestion for those that wish to get the best out of a religious service. He thinks there should be a period of five minutes "absolute silence" with each service because "it is only in silence that man can seek the divine centre of his being." The idea is interesting, even fascinating. And we think it might well be handed on to Sir John Reith and his committee of parsons. So far as the licence-holders go we are quite certain that a large number would not merely welcome five minutes "absolute silence" during the time devoted to religious services, but they would also be in favour of an extension of the time. The appreciation would be the more pronounced if during the period of "absolute silence" with regard to the religious service, the time was filled in with some agreeable light music, or a few minutes with "Stainless Stephen." A few words from him as to what is the "divine centre" of man's being, and what the devil he is going to do with it when it is located, would be most inspiring.

Now that the trial of Lord de Clifford is over, we hope that Parliament will take the hint thrown out by Lord Hailsham, and abolish the legality of the right of a nobleman to be tried by his peers. This procedure is semi-barbaric origin, and should have no place in a self-governing country. Whether a man is peer or peasant, there should not only be the same law for each, but also the same courts for each. The legal procedure that is good enough for a dustman should be good enough for a Duke. It is bad to have a class legislating for a class, to have the law of a country administered by a class for a class is infinitely worse.

The theory that this right of trial by one's peers, which is laid down in Magna Charta, is the palladium of English liberties, is a piece of that interested national mythology which has grown up around the Great Charter. The right of trial by one's peers had no reference to the *people*, but only to the nobility and a few others who were already in possession of certain *privileges*, which were or might be threatened by the King, either in his own interests or in the interests of the people at large. What the Great Charter did in fact was to convert *privileges* into legal rights, and it did much to make it difficult to fight medievalism in social life. But it suited the lawyers of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries to read the Charter as the "palladium of English liberties," and in the teaching of history it came to be accepted as an unquestioned truth.

Another Atheistic convert to Christianity has turned up in the person of Miss E. M. Donaldson, author of *Scotland's Suppressed History*. Miss Donaldson says that she was converted from Atheism after being originally baptized according to the rites of the Church of Scotland and brought up to Presbyterianism in her youth. But the rites of the Scottish Church were not strong enough, for she seems to have lapsed into Atheism, and was then converted over again, and is now a member of the Anglican Communion. Perhaps she will stay there, or perhaps she may like a change in stupidities and go somewhere else. But what we are curious about is the nature of this lady's Atheism. Perhaps she only means that she doubted the God of Presbyterianism, and then after a time found the God of Anglicanism. She does not say, and we do not know. All we feel is that a man or a woman who is once an Atheist cannot ever be anything else. One can go on never knowing, but once having known how can one forget. Atheism implies a definite stage of mental growth, and, short of the case being one of mental degeneration, one cannot go backward. Probably all that the lady means by Atheism is that she indulged in some very mild and transient scepticism, or fell out with people associated with the church to which she belonged, or had doubts about some specific doctrines. There are many such cases.

By way of the *Christian World* we learn that in the opinion of the *Christian Century*, the late Billy Sunday will be the last of his kind on the Christian platform. The article, apparently, depicts him as he was, rough, vulgar, uncultured and abusive. The *Christian Century* says, that Billy Sunday's idiosyncracies

were signs of the desperate and hopeless condition of the evangelical type of piety. . . . It had to make a last desperate attempt at its own resuscitation. . . . This revivalism has been running down by progressive stages since the great days of Finney a hundred years ago. In Billy Sunday it exhausted itself. . . . It is to be hoped that we have had our last religious revival.

The interesting and significant thing, however, is not the blackguardism and ignorance of Billy Sunday, but the degree of support he received from Christian leaders, who were ready to support anyone and anything that promised "converts," a large number of whom were quite mythical, and the majority of them worthless. The support given to Billy Sunday is a commentary on the moral and intellectual value of Christian leadership.

There was a similarity in the case of the Torrey and Alexander evangelists. They came to this country and had the support of the bulk of Free-Church leaders, and we think, many belonging to the Established Church. Torrey, who indulged in the usual stock lies and invented experiences of the professional Evangelist, made a scandalous and vile attack on the character of Colonel Ingersoll. This roused the anger of G. W. Foote who, it will be remembered, wrote several articles, afterwards re-published as a pamphlet, exposing the lies and also the character of Dr. Torrey. The exposure was so convincing that it brought W. T. Stead—a sincere believer, but an honest one—on the scene. Stead made up his mind to expose Torrey and to drive him from the Christian platform. He circularized the leading Christian leaders who were supporting Torrey, from not one of these could he secure a promise of public support to drive so convicted a blackguard from the Christian platform. Nearly all wrote—we saw some of the letters—in the same strain. They admitted that Torrey was a liar, and an undesirable person, but to publicly proclaim him as such would "bring discredit" on the Christian Cause. Only one thing they promised, Torrey should not come to England again. But he was allowed to leave with his flag flying high. Had it not been for the influence of the *Freethinker* Torrey might have been an annual visitor to this country.

THE FREETHINKER

FOUNDED BY G. W. FOOTE,

EDITORIAL

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

Telephone No.: CENTRAL 2412.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

H. BAMFORD.—Most of the Bishops have spoken at some time in relation to the subjects you name, but your question would have to be more definite before we could attempt an answer.

W. LAWSON.—The attitude of the National Secular Society and of the *Freethinker* was quite clearly defined with regard to the Incitement to Disaffection Act. In our judgment, and we believe in that of the members of the N.S.S. the Act is one of the most villainously stealthy attacks on freedom of thought and publication that has been passed for many years. As we said at the time, it was not meant for immediate use, but for the future. Fifty years ago no British Government would have dared to introduce such a measure. We cannot understand anyone with the slightest claim to be called a Freethinker supporting such a measure.

I. ABRAHAM.—Thanks. Next week.

ZINCALI.—Thanks for article. Useful for filing. May deal with it later.

C. AMERY.—Pleased to know that you find *Humanity and War* useful, and that it has been the means of securing a regular subscriber to the *Freethinker*.

A. E. GRAHAM.—The whole story of the incarnate God suffering for mankind is a piece of mythology. We agree with you that the Jesus of the Gospels is just plain "God," and gods of all sorts belong to the region of myth.

JACK BARTON.—The statement that Darwin believed in a God is based on Darwin having used the word "Creator" in the closing sentences of *The Origin of Species*. Darwin afterwards explained that he meant by creation nothing more than "happened through unknown causes," and expressed his regret for having used the term. He definitely described himself as an Agnostic.

E. W. CORNFORD.—We are sending out a large number of copies of the *Freethinker* to possible subscribers, and some of these are bound to fall into the hands of those who already take in the paper. We note what you say; but the important thing is that each shall do what he can to spread Freethought. What we do must depend on circumstances.

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

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

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

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

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

The offices of the National Secular Society and the Secular Society Limited, are now at 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Telephone: Central 1367.

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

Sugar Plums

Each year the number of provincial Freethinkers attending the Annual Dinner increases, and for the convenience of those wishing to attend this year's function, which takes place on January 25 next, in the Holborn Restaurant, the following are the excursions to London, with return fares; starting on Friday night, January 24, Liverpool, 16s.; Burnley, 17s.; Accrington, 16s. 6d.; Manchester (L.R.), 15s. 6d.; Manchester Central, 15s.; Saturday, January 25, Rugby, 10s.; Sheffield,

14s.; Bradford, 16s.; Leeds, 15s. 6d.; Wolverhampton, 7s.; Coventry, 5s. 6d. Further information can be obtained from the General Secretary, 68 Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4, or from local railway stations.

C. H. Richardson, writing from Bordeaux says: "Many thanks for *Humanity and War*. It clears up many questions and makes the whole situation clear. If I were a rich man it would delight me to have a hundred thousand copies printed for free distribution." A hundred thousand is a goodly number, good work may be done by distributing smaller quantities.

We take this opportunity of thanking those who have written us concerning *Humanity and War*, and who have taken advantage of sending for the extra copies for circulation among friends. They will, feel that the best thanks for their efforts is in the many letters to hand expressing appreciation of the pamphlet itself.

The advice of a reviewer in *Reynold's Illustrated News* is "Lend this pamphlet to the next fire-eating militarist you meet. It will demoralize him."

A note that should have been in last week's issue got squeezed out, so that we atone this week. On December 8, Mr. H. Cutner paid his first visit to Leicester and gave an address on "Liberty, Church and State," to a good and interested audience. There were many questions following the address. On Sunday last Mr. Rosetti lectured in the same hall. The audience was again of gratifying size, and much interest was shown in what the lecturer had to say. The Leicester Society provides an excellent programme year after year, and deserves that the fine hall should be crowded to the doors.

An attempt is being made to form a Branch of the N.S.S. in Leeds. Will those who are interested in the project please communicate with Mr. M. Feldman, 139 North Street, Leeds. To our own knowledge there are enough Freethinkers in Leeds and district to form a very strong society. We hope they will get together as quickly as possible. If the Branch is formed Mr. Cohen has promised to pay Leeds a lecturing visit, and advise the Branch as to its future activities.

It was an excellent idea on the part of Messrs Cassell & Co., to re-issue in a revised form the very bulky *Science of Life*, by Messrs. H. G. Wells, Julian Huxley and G. P. Wells, in handy volumes, each complete in itself, and yet forming part of a connected whole. The last three volumes are *Reproduction, Heredity and the Development of Sex, The History and Adventure of Life, and The Drama of Life*. Each volume runs to between 250 and 300 pages, strongly bound and well illustrated. With such volumes at hand, and issued at such a price there is no excuse for anyone pleading ignorance of the scientific view of the world to-day. Naturally, there is room for differences of opinion, even with convinced evolutionists, but these provide a plain and "popular" outline of a scientific view of nature, without the story being slap-dash, or "cheap" in the literary sense of the word. And they are written by men who may safely be regarded as authorities, and not mere compilers of the work of other men, which is so often done without adequate understanding of the subjects on which they set out to enlighten others. The price of each volume is 4s., and may be ordered through the Pioneer Press. We cannot think of a better New Year's gift for intelligent young men and women.

At Brighton a number of houses are being built for aged poor people at a rental of one shilling per week. The balance of the rent is being paid by the Corporation out of the amounts received from the Sunday tax on Cinemas. This, while not relieving the racketeering quality of the greatest piece of hypocrisy ever placed on the statute book, does represent the best use made of the money.

The Infamous Thing

THE Dean replied, "Some people say of us we're not sufficiently ingenious, cards up our sleeves and rabbits in our hats (although the ruder critics whisper bats in belfries: no one yet has rung a toll by dint of tugging at my lofty soul). Can we invoke then, to disguise our game, the name of Plato and Christ's greater name, plainly confessing, when we speak abroad, we do not use the words we give the Lord? Language is dual. Sir, don't think it odd I have one word for you and one for God. We speak in parables and proverbs when we stand explaining things to listening men. Call it perhaps a simple modesty or terror of damnation. For we'll be forever safe from any heresy when we ourselves in all the veils we weave are not precisely sure what we believe. Admitted that we have not spoken out and shown our knowledge severed from all doubt, the blank of faith that's blanker when interred within the blankness of a ritual word—no Treatises we've published, I'll admit, Whether through lack or through excess of wit. I cannot plank a penny-answer down although my bankrupt logic earn your frowns. For it takes two to tell the truth. The two are speaker, sir, and listener, I and you."

"Have you not truth then when you go apart, no phoenix-god within your blasted heart? Does not God listen? So your logic's lame; for else to him and me you'd speak the same. Either confess that God is wholly dim, or I to whom you speak can image him. O, there's no faith, because the words you speak are not your thought but copies faked and weak, and still the reservation must remain to coil its wormy doubt along the brain."

The Dean demurred and said my insults went beyond the premise of his argument. He spoke of Logos (for the Light was in Darkness, and Ignorance was only Sin, and dialectic's net, when dogmas pall, lets God escape; yet holds him after all). He spoke of Logos and then went to tea. I watched the people walking furtively along the street, and waited till I saw a girl whose sudden eyes abhorred the law. Her placard-checks and her bedizened hair suited my mood of arrogant despair. We sat and talked and drank.

"Come, Mary, tell me, can you conceive a god without a belly?"
 "An education makes a difference. My father beat me, and that's why I'm dense. I like your face. Don't keep me in suspense."
 "What do you think of when you think of God?"
 "Well, first it gives me O an awful prod, and then I see my father, bearded too, and then just nothing but a pot of glue, although the pot's not there. You'll understand. Just glue. I'll tell your fortune from your hand."
 "Think harder. Strain. What lies behind the mist?"
 "I'd tell you better after I was kissed."
 "Think harder."
 "Well, you're scared to death at first, then you feel dizzy and about to burst, and then it clears away and you're alone unless, of course, you have a gramophone."
 "Then you'll agree that God is nothing more than the dark terror fumbling at the core, the unacknowledged memory of fear, the hurdles that at birth we couldn't clear."
 "Certainly. I can't think. I never could. Love me instead. I'm touching here some wood."

"That's all; but we are fools who complicate the pulse of fear with arguments of fate, then say it shows the lack of human wit because no intellectual garments fit the dummy that evaporates behind the damp illusion of a windy mind."

We met and parted, parted as we met, but my indignant wrath is talking yet.

O cast the traitors out. Let mockery slay the priests of twilight on the brink of day. A symbol is a piece of broken thought and not a net where deity is caught. Stone every man who needs a parable to utter what his appetite can tell. Stone him who needs a symbol to express the fear that breeds that dirty kind of stress, and then pretends that the entangled mess creates, not flagellates, his righteousness.

If fear we must, admit the fear that drains the blood of action from our clouded brains, but don't pretend some brighter thought expands out of a fog which no one understands. We understand it well enough, but lack the will to put the broken pieces back. O, it is easier to say we miss the something that's beyond hypothesis, the something vanishing beneath, above, the old man's face denouncing us with love. What sweetness to embalm our failure, make a glory of the very pains that break! It eases conscience, and beneath it hide revenge, a wish to blame and suffering pride.

Come then, and let our laughter crucify whoever still proclaims the Infamous Lie and mixes pang with thought, and wonders why the universe, affronts with mystery. Clean the church-sewers, make the clergy flee and try some honest work; and likewise cart to hell or heaven the theorists of art, the poets breeding fantasies too sweet like maggots in some consecrated meat. Hang all the liars who to ease their throes confound the darkening stimulus that blows out of the ravaged past, with breasts of hope for which their infant-fingers venus-grope.

A power-beyond! The baby as it seeks to comprehend the pain that tears and reeks out of its flesh, can only think of *Breath* as power inhabiting all life and death, the wind that cleaves its purposes and brings relief that warms and anguished loss that stings. It learns the power-symbol long before the individual. Thus its fears adore the unknown breath-god that by day and night vouchsafes all pang and sustenance and delight and in his jealousy by night and day demands a hostage-self to bear away.

Then all that breaks the attempt to realize the individual, must still arise from that first symbol of unspoken power, the Word without a word at which we cower, the stricken and absorbing thunder-hour. Since it was born before the brain could span the simple fact of woman and of man, it falsifies all sex-conceptions, sees the jointing limbs as struggling enemies. Therefore the Father, who'd be surely shamed to bear the child of flesh, is loudly acclaimed the source of freedom, and the Mother grows the weaker vessel that his potency chose.

Therefore all fear returns here to placate the unspoken word, the breath, the father-fate. This is the damned ineffable that's come to make our Dean with mysticism dumb. This is the fear that he and all his kind

translate in myth and peepshows for the blind.
 This is the still-escaping blast of faith
 that turns earth's richness to a fetid wraith.
 This is the God, the Only He that Is,
 the Truth, the Way, the Pure Hypostasis.

O let the lucid warmth of knowledge slay
 the things of twilight in the broadening day.

JACK LINDSAY.

Spirit Photography

I.

WHEN I said in these columns, a short while ago, that a spirit photography was unmitigated fraud, I was severely taken to task by one of the Spiritualist journals. Had I seen the thousands of genuine spirit photographs that had been taken during the past few years? If I had not, it was obvious that I was thoroughly uninformed, ignorant, biassed, and stupid, and that I had no right to make any pronouncement on such an important subject.

Well, I am still quite unrepentant. I still claim that spirit photography is *all* fraud. There is no redeeming feature whatever about it. Nothing can impress itself on the sensitive film of a photographic plate but light. (I hope no one here will interject that a sticky thumb can, or that certain vapours might, affect the sensitiveness of the film—for, of course, I know that. To take the photo of a spirit means that the spirit was there, *reflecting light*; otherwise the film would not be able to record it. A spirit would therefore have an objective existence in which case it could not be exactly a spirit.

The stories one gets about the truth of spirit photography, either from spiritualists who always insist that the most rigid tests only convinced them; or the thorough sceptic who went bodily over to spiritualism because the facts were too strong for his scepticism, are invariably amusing if not always veracious. It is generally a complete stranger to the town, utterly unknown by everybody there, who wanders into the medium's house; perhaps owing to a friend who was surprised (and delighted) at what the medium did, and who was quite unable to explain the wonderful visions, or prophecies, or the uncanny way in which his (the friend's) past history was known to the medium down to the smallest, and particularly private, details. The medium—if a photographer—is always one of those delightfully simple souls breathing nothing but the highest altruism, and never being able to explain how "extras" come on his plates. Everything is done fairly and above board—providing, of course, that the necessary fees are paid. And nothing proves more astonishing to the stranger than to find when his photograph has been taken and the plate developed, there appears an extra of Aunt Emma, or Father, or the one baby that died young in the family, all thoroughly recognizable—Aunt Emma wearing her well-known "fevvers," or Father smoking his age-old pipe (one could almost smell it from the photograph, so realistic is it), or Baby with Uncle George's one and only present—a silver rattle. Stories like this have appeared wholesale in our popular Spiritualist journals; they are rarely debarred from the columns of these monuments of truthfulness and scepticism. There are plenty who swallow them as easily as Catholics swallow a Lourdes miracle—which, by the way, offers similar points of contact.

In the rigid tests which evil-minded persons sometimes feel disposed to try, not merely to convince themselves that all is fraud, but to do pious believers

a similar disservice, it is surprising how quickly "extras" appear on a virgin plate, fresh from the makers. These "extras" are rarely the sceptic's relatives. Rather are they the portraits of well-known people like Gladstone or Julius Cæsar. Gladstone is, of course, too well known to be mistaken; while Julius can always be recognized because he is the "spittin' image" of the bust in the British Museum. The sceptical enquirer who cannot be convinced by Gladstone or Julius Cæsar must be given up as quite hopeless. Most of those people who insist upon "tests" are thoroughly unfitted to cope with the average spirit-photographer. Generally they know nothing or little about the technique of photography. They may have a vague idea that "exposures can be washed away," and the plates "repeatedly used"; but these words convey little meaning to them, unless—as in my own case—they are practical photographers, with many years of real experience in most photographic methods.

In the early days of photography negatives were made by what is known as the "wet-plate" process. Those in use now-a-days are "dry" plates, and the sensitive film is put on by the manufacturers. Sixty or more years ago, one had to coat one's plates oneself, before exposure, with collodion and silver nitrate an expert's job in a way; the result was very good if everything went right; but the process was a nuisance in many ways. If the negative was not wanted, the film (not the "exposure") could be washed off and the glass plate used again. If this washing was not thoroughly done, so tenacious was the old wet-plate film, that a faint "halo," so to speak, of the old negative remained; and if the glass was again coated with the sensitive material, and a new negative made, the resulting print would likely enough also show the "halo." This was the "ghost" or "spirit"; and there were one or two of the early spirit-photographers who took advantage of this fact. But the wet-plate process has been more or less dead for fifty years, and there are few of the modern spirit-photographers who know anything about it.

Nowadays they are much too sly to go in for anything so crude; their methods are not always easy to discover. Just as in conjuring, new tricks, baffling the most expert and experienced magicians, are constantly being invented, so the really expert spirit-photographer varies his own methods or hits upon something new by accident, and exploits his discovery anew to the amazement of even the most sceptical. If I took part in a test and was sure in my own heart I had left no loopholes for fraud and if an "extra" did duly appear, I should only be convinced that a new method, hitherto unknown to me, had been discovered.

Let me recount an experiment which took place some years ago in New York. The idea was to see if a spirit "extra" could appear on a plate if the most rigid steps were taken to prevent fraud. A number of people got together for the test, most of them intellectual, and well-known in New York, including Mr. W. Van de Weyde, the famous photographer. The group of people controlled the purchase of the plates—that is, a few of them went together (including Mr. Van de Weyde) to a local dealer and brought a new packet; the camera was carefully examined and found quite innocuous; the plates were sealed and remained in the possession of the gentleman chosen by the committee until the experiment took place. Everything possible was done to prevent fraud of any kind.

The principal idea was to see if the spirit of Dr. James Hyslop, the President of the American Society of Psychological Research, who had recently died, could be made to appear on the negative. One of the ladies present went into a deep trance; and the plate-

holders were carefully examined before the plates from the sealed box were put in.

The photographer then exploded his flashlight, and the photograph, which included, as well as the medium, most of the other people in the room, was taken. It was then developed under the strictest supervision. As Mr. S. Frikell, who reports the case, says:—

Apparently every avenue of fraud was closed and barred; every precaution to prevent trickery or practical jest; all the rigid conditions demanded by sceptics thoroughly imposed—yet the first print that came out of that dark room contained upon its surface a face that did not belong there, a face that had not been visible to our naked eyes, the staring, bearded, unmistakable countenance of the old Columbia professor, who gave his life to the pursuit of phantoms, and who died unsatisfied—the face of James H. Hyslop!

And in case anyone should imagine that this face was like that of any of the known photographs of Hyslop, it may be said at once that it was not. It was quite unlike any picture taken while he was alive, yet unmistakably like him.

The photograph caused a sensation when it was published—no one could point out where, if it was a fraud, the fraud could have come in. I leave it to readers of this journal to ponder over; and will give the explanation next week.

H. CUTNER.

Machiavelli and Christianity

AFTER the mythical Judas Iscariot, the best-abused name among men is probably that of the Florentine Republican, Nicolo Machiavelli. For three centuries it stood as a proverb for all that is odious. Samuel Butler even said "he gave his name to our Old Nick." Be that as it may, common people often show an instinctive dislike to men of brains. Schopenhauer has many who respect but few who like him. In the case of Machiavelli there is more than this. There is such a relentlessness of purpose, so complete a severance of statecraft from individual morality, that even some of his admirers have felt it necessary to defend his *Prince* as ironically portraying the actual practice of the despots of his day¹ (1467-1527).

But Judas has been whitewashed and Machiavelli has been vindicated. Nobody who has read Macaulay's Essay, J. A. Symonds' *History of the Renaissance in Italy*, and above all *The Life and Times of Machiavelli*, by Pasquale Villari, can longer regard Machiavelli as a sort of political Iago, a fiend incarnate, as he is depicted in Nat Lee's *Caesar Borgia*. Every man must be judged by his age and his life purpose, and no one can go through the works I have mentioned without being forced to acknowledge with Villari that "Machiavelli had at least one great and heroic passion, redeeming, elevating, and raising him above all his contemporaries; an ardent and irresistible love for liberty, his country, and even for virtue."

I do not propose to discuss his character, but his attitude towards Christianity. Whether a great patriot or not, assuredly he was a great thinker, and one of the shrewdest men that ever trod this planet. What he thought of Christianity lies particularly patent in his *Discourses on Livy*. He looked back to Repub-

lican Rome as to a model. He was too astute to directly attack the prevailing superstition, but it is easy to see he regarded it as a mere tool in the hands of designing tyrants, and the real cause of Rome's fall and the hindrance to Italian independence and unity.

The Church was guided by a true instinct in placing his works on the *Index*. In pointing back, as he continually does, to the heroic Pagan days of Republican Rome, he was, in fact, giving the most vital blow to Christianity that could be given with impunity in Italy. In treating religion, as he always does, as the mere servant of politics, he was in truth preaching the subordination of the service of God to the service of man. With what gusto he tells the tale of the old Roman consul, who, when the soothsayers found the chickens did not peck—which was regarded as a bad omen and a sign they should not fight—declared his auspices were good, and if the prophets prophesied falsely so much the worse for them; whereupon he put these augurs in the forefront of the battle; and when it happened that the principal prophet was slain, observed it was a sign that all things went luckily, for now the army was purged from his lies. Probably that was the way in which Machiavelli would have liked to serve the priests who were leagued with foreign mercenaries to the ruin of Italy.

Mr. Paul Ferdinand Willert, in an able study of Machiavelli which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* (March, 1884), says: "It is clear that his was a thoroughly irreligious nature. Notwithstanding occasional and conventional expressions of respect, he was indifferent or hostile to Christianity. He was deeply imbued with the Pagan spirit of the Renaissance; he reserved his admiration for the republics of antiquity and for those civic and intellectual virtues which maintain them, and he naturally disliked a religion which cherished virtues of another life." Evidently Mr. Willert sees that hostility rather than indifference expresses Machiavelli's real attitude. "Ancient religion," he says, "exalted men of worldly glory such as great captains and founders of nations. Our religion glorifies humble and contemplative men rather than those of action. It places the chief good in humility and contempt of the things of this world; Paganism sought it in loftiness of soul, in bodily strength, and all that renders man valiant. If our religion wishes men to show courage it is but in endurance, rather than in bold deeds. Hence the world has become feeble and has fallen a prey to scoundrels, who rule over it securely as they list, finding men rather anxious to gain paradise by suffering than of avenging their wrongs on their oppressors."² Such was the judgment of this great statesman, and herein he indicates his whole political philosophy of religion.

Christianity, he saw, had rooted out the old patriotic spirit. But for the Latin language, he says, it would have crushed out all memory of the Paganism which it supplanted. Again his words are of weight. "The first endeavour of a new religion," he says, "is to blot out the memory of the old, and when the founders speak another tongue this is easily effected. Consider the means the Christian religion employed against the Gentiles, demolishing and defacing their ancient religion. True, they did not entirely wipe out all knowledge of its most famous men, but this was because, retaining the Latin tongue, they were forced to write their new law therein.³ For if they could have written it in a new tongue, considering their other persecutions, no record whatever would have survived from the past. And whoever reads what

¹ Note an instance of satire directed against Ferdinand of Spain at the end of chapter 18: "There is a prince at this time, whose name I shall not mention, who preaches nothing but faith and peace. Had he kept either, they had taken from him both his power and reputation."

² *Discorsi*, bk. ii. c. 2.

³ Did Machiavelli think the New Testament was written in Latin, I wonder?

courses St. Gregory took; and the other heads of the Christian religion, will see with what animosity they persecuted all the ancient memorials, burning all the poets' and historians' works, defacing their images, and destroying everything else that gave any light in that antiquity. So that, if to this persecution they had added a new language, everything in a short time would have been forgotten."¹

I cannot avoid the suspicion that Machiavelli felt himself nearer to the days of Pagan and Republican Rome, than Christian chronology would allow. In his *Prince* (chap. xi.) he expressly says that the temporal power of the Papacy was not established until the time of Pope Alexander the sixth, that is, in his own age. Apparently he did not know or did not credit the legend of how Hildebrand had kept the Emperor Henry IV. barefooted and without food or shelter in the courtyard of his castle. How much he detested the Papal pretensions, breaks out in his contempt for the cowardice of the tyrant of Perugia, Giovanni Pagolus Baglioni, who, having Pope Julius II. and his cardinals in his power, yet dared not seize them; "an exploit," says Machiavelli, "that every one would have admired him for, as being the first to teach prelates how little worthy of esteem be those who live and reign as they, and so had done an act whose greatness had surpassed all infamy and danger attaching to it."⁵

What Italy owed to the establishment of the Christian Church, he declares, was division and disaster. He argues against those who hold that the welfare of Italy depends on the Church of Rome, that "the contrary might rather be proved," since, he continues, those in the Church observe not its precepts, but only adulterate and make them a pretence. "Moreover, the Church hath always held, and still holds, this country divided; though truly never was any province either united or happy unless it were reduced to the obedience of one Commonwealth or prince, as in the case of France and Spain."⁶ The cause of Italian disunity, he proceeded to point out, lay solely in the Church. So true was this that it was not till over three hundred years after the death of Machiavelli that Italian unity was guaranteed by the abolition of the temporal power of the Papacy.

Mr. Symonds' view of Machiavelli is, I think, a very just one. He says: "Occupied with practical problems, smiling at the supra-mundane aspirations of the Middle Ages, scorning the æsthetical ideals of the Renaissance, he made the political action of man (*l'homme politique*) the object of exclusive study. His resolute elimination of what he considered irrelevant or distracting circumstances from this chosen field of research, justifies our placing him among the founders or precursors of the modern scientific method. We may judge his premises insufficient, his conclusions false, but we cannot mistake the positive quality of his mind in the midst of a rhetorical and artistic generation." It is this, together with his proximity to the time of the publication of the Christian books and to the Reformation—which he clearly anticipated, though he would have carried it out in a totally different direction—that must ever make the writings of the great Florentine of interest to students of history.

(Reprinted).

J. M. WHEELER.

The wise hand does not all the tongue dictates.

Cervantes.

⁶ *Ibid*, bk. i., c. 12.

⁴ *Discorsi*, bk. ii. c. 5.

⁵ *Ibid*, bk. i., c. 27.

Correspondence

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER"

RELIGION IN THE HOSPITALS

SIR,—A little experience I have had since I have been a patient at the St. Nicholas Hospital, may be of interest to you.

I was brought here with an abdominal complaint some five weeks ago, and on the first Sunday evening a band of about ten Christians—of the Plymouth Brethren type—came into my Ward doing their usual *turn*. They came again on the second Sunday, but on this occasion one of them, before leaving, handed me a tract, this gave me an opportunity to put in a word for Freethought, and to cut things short, I offered him the current issue of the *Freethinker*, which to my surprise he accepted.

The next Sunday they came again, I was by now feeling far from well, in fact I was anticipating an operation. Their leader, on this occasion, stood a few feet from the foot of my bed, and began preaching loudly—with gesticulations—at me.

I tolerated this as long as I could and until he roared, "Where are your Hospitals!" "Where are your Schools!" etc., until I could contain myself no longer, and sitting up in bed I put the Freethought case as well as my poor education, and physical condition would allow, and in a very short space of time the nurse came to me and begged me to be quiet. I therefore told her that if she expected me to be quiet on such an occasion she would have to put me out of the Ward.

At this point it would be interesting to say that while this wordy battle was on, everyone else in the ward who *could* sit up was doing so, whereas before they were either feigning sleep or reading, even the boys with their *Chips* and *Coloured Comics*, in fact all the other patients in the Ward, and even one nurse expressed their appreciation of my action, although the nurse added that I had incurred the wrath of the Ward Sister.

However the next day I had my operation, and for several days was on the danger list, but nevertheless by the next Sunday I was armed with *Bible Handbook*, Freethought pamphlets, etc., and when the Holy Brethren and Sisters arrived the Ward Sister stood in the doorway, and would not allow them in my Ward.

Two Sundays since that, one of their number walked into the Ward to see if I was still here and then went elsewhere, and my fellow patients are not sorry.

No doubt other Freethinkers have periods in hospital, and I think a word of protest—perhaps put better than I am able to put it—would soon stop this awful *bilge* poured forth by these people who imagine hospital patients like it, and I feel sure that if I sent this matter to the local press it would be ignored, whereas I know that I shall at least receive an acknowledgment from yourself.

W. DRIVER.

FREETHOUGHT AND VIVISECTION

SIR,—I echo Dr. English in the disclaimer about personal attack. Dr. English gives no details of the things which he does almost daily, which my original letter stated were wrong.

With regard to the questions 1 and 2 I can only reply, "I don't know." That I am not alone in this state of ignorance as regards diphtheria is evidenced by the fact that no treatment or nursing has been devised to lower appreciably the total mortality, but it is significant that this is true for this epidemic disease alone, having regard to the fact that it is also the only disease for which routine therapeutic serum injections are given, and has been given for the last 30 years. Improved methods of nursing and better conditions in isolation hospitals have tangibly lowered the mortality of both Scarlet Fever and Measles, and it is I think a legitimate surmise that the deaths from diphtheria would have shown a comparable diminution, had not extracts from blood poisoned horses gravely complicated the issue.

The Ministry of Health figures published in report for 1933-34, giving average annual deaths from diphtheria,

scarlet fever and measles in ten year periods from 1871 to 1930, are :—

Diphtheria, 2,943, 5,401, 5,340, 6,092, 5,058, 3,270; Scarlet Fever, 17,423, 9,177, 4,829, 3,608, 1,706, 885; Measles, 9,195, 12,107, 12,684, 10,548, 9,868, 4,241.

Bereaved parents on the slender foundation of early and unexpected demise, often give expression to the belief that the death of their child or children was the result of the serum injections following an attack of diphtheria.

With regard to serious hæmorrhage arising from child-birth, my knowledge is insufficient to enable me either to support or condemn the use of the alkaloid extract from a fungoid growth on cereals. The attempts by the laboratories to find something better than Ergot is interesting, and there are many doctors who won't resort to this poison under any circumstances.

There is good material for an article in the *Freethinker* on Ergotism, since it had in early days a very special connexion with religion, which doubtless played some part in delaying the identification of the causes of epidemic, gangrene, or epidemic convulsions to which Ergot gives rise. Many European Monasteries arrested or cured Ergotism, seemingly by prayer, but actually though unconsciously, by changing the food of the sufferer.

As a last word, I would point out that in my first letter I did not attack the healing practitioner, and those who, as reported in the *Lancet*, December 7, 1935, define medicine "as the art of keeping the patient amused till nature effects the cure," are very useful members of society. My aim was to ridicule that group in the medical world, whose beliefs, like those of the priests, are that we suffer from remediable imperfections at birth. On this account this group conduct campaigns which owe success to credulous fears of similar origin.

The mischief of this sort of campaign is that it seriously diminishes attention to sanitation and hygiene, the only controllable factors contributing to good health.

DON FISHER.

Obituary

GEORGE ROSE

ANOTHER of the Old Guard has passed away by the death of George Rose, which took place on December 6, following a short illness; Asthma and Bronchitis being the cause of death. George Rose had seen service in the Freethought movement from the days of Charles Bradlaugh, and right up till last summer was a familiar figure in Victoria Park, having charge of the platform at the pitch occupied by the Bethnal Green Branch N.S.S. for its meetings there. He was a member of the Bethnal Green Branch for many years, always loyal, and ever ready, even at 77 years of age, to journey in support of a Freethought meeting. The burial took place on December 13, in the Queen's Road Cemetery, Walthamstow, where in the presence of many relatives and friends a Secular Service was conducted by Mr. R. H. Rosetti.

MRS. JANE CROMPTON

I REGRET to chronicle the passing of Mrs. Jane Crompton of Openshaw, in her 84th year. The death took place on Sunday, December 8, quite peacefully. Mrs. Crompton was one of the earliest members of the present Manchester Branch, and one of the last links connecting the old Branch with the present one.

Along with her late husband she often recalled the stirring times of the last century, and on several occasions she has narrated to me their experiences at some of the debates which they attended—one in particular being the discussion which took place in Bury in 1870 between the historic figure of Charles Bradlaugh and David King, an evangelist and one-time editor of the *British Harbinger*, who is now forgotten

Mrs. Crompton, like her husband, shunned the limelight, but was always a staunch supporter of the secular movement, and she will be missed not only amongst secularists, but in the neighbourhood where she spent much of her life.

There was a large gathering of relatives and friends from Manchester and Failsworth on Thursday, 12th instant, at the Manchester Crematorium, when Mr. F. E. Monks performed the last offices and paid a final tribute to her memory.—H.I.B.

SUNDAY LECTURE NOTICES, Etc.

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

LONDON

OUTDOOR

NORTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (White Stone Pond, Hampstead) : 11.30, Mr. Ebury.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Hyde Park) : 3.30, Sunday, Messrs. Gee, Wood, Bryant and Tuson. Current *Freethinkers* on sale.

INDOOR

SOUTH LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (Gauden Hotel, Gauden Road, Clapham, S.W.4) : 7.30, Debate—"That Communism is not the Remedy." *Affir.*: Mr. H. Preece. *Neg.*: Mr. R. Roberts.

SOUTH PLACE ETHICAL SOCIETY (Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, W.C.1) : 11.0, S. K. Ratcliffe—"The Old and New Year."

STUDY CIRCLE (68 Farringdon Street, E.C.4) : 8.0, Monday, December 23, Mr. A. D. McLaren—"The Ethical Lesson of Historical Study."

WEST HAM BRANCH N.S.S. (The Labour Rooms, 70 Grange Park Road, Leyton, E.10) : 7.30, Mrs. F. Venton—A Lecture.

WEST LONDON BRANCH N.S.S. (The Laurie Arms, Crawford Place, Edgware Road, W.) : 7.30, Mr. F. Corrigan—"Figs and Thistles."

COUNTRY

INDOOR

BIRKENHEAD (Wirral) BRANCH N.S.S. (Bechcroft Settlement, Whetstone Lane, Birkenhead) : 7.0, A Social Evening.

BLACKBURN BRANCH N.S.S. (Cobden Hall, Cort Street, Blackburn) : 7.0, Impromptu Debate on "Evolution."

BRADFORD BRANCH N.S.S. (Market Tavern Hotel, Godwin Street, Bradford) : 7.30, Mr. W. Whit oak—"Socialism and Christ."

EDINBURGH BRANCH N.S.S. (Unity House, Hillside Crescent) : 7.30, Professor Gordon V. Childs—"Does Science Spring from Religion?"

EAST LANCASHIRE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION (28 Bridge Street, Burnley) : 2.30, Mr. J. Clayton—"Born of the Blessed Virgin."

GLASGOW SECULAR SOCIETY (East Hall, McLellan Galleries, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow) : 7.0, S. G. Service—"Habit, Heredity and Evolution." Illustrated by diagrams.

GREAT HARWOOD (The Labour Club) : 7.30, Mr. J. Clayton. A Lecture.

LEICESTER SECULAR SOCIETY (Secular Hall Humberstone Gate) : 6.30, Dramatic Performance by the Secular Players. "School for Husbands," Molière. "Black 'ell," Miles Malleston.

LIVERPOOL BRANCH N.S.S. (Cooper's Hall, 12 Shaw Street, Liverpool) : 7.0, D. Robinson (Liverpool)—"Christian and Social Morals."

S.D.F. (St. James' Hall) : 11.0, Sunday morning Class. H. P. Turner (Burnley). Subject—"A Merry Xmas."

SUNDERLAND BRANCH N.S.S. (Co-operative Hall, Green Street) : 7.0, Mr. J. T. Brighton.

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