

## THE LATE MR. G. W. FOOTE

This letter to the Editor originally appeared in the 16 December 1915 edition of *The New Age*.

Sir,—Like most superior people, Mr. John Duncan does not quite understand. His remarks on superstition need no comment. The Archbishop of Yorke and Mr. Foote both attacked superstition. True. And they both read the Bible and both wore hats. The identity is unmistakable: long ago it was remarked that Shelley was *really* a Christian and Torquemada *really* an Atheist. Mr. Duncan's pseudo-Shavian sophistry is neither original nor clever. As for nobody liking superstition, the vast majority in this country like nothing else; that is why the wage-system persists, and that is why "John Bull" has a circulation of over a million. Is it not so? Superstition is just the "sticky stuff" that clogs the minds of the people, but if they did not "like it" they would scarcely patronise it so passionately.

I take it, and I think that Mr. Duncan will not contradict me that a man's attitude towards wagery, like his outlook upon life generally, is mainly determined by his spiritual state. The late G. W. Foote saw with perfect perspicacity, and he worked for more than forty years to clear out the weeds of religious superstition from the mind of man. As he worked almost single-handed against the most tremendous odds he was unable to devote himself to every branch of political, ethical,

and religious reform. For this sad failure of purpose I feel sure that the dead Atheist's ghost would, if it ever heard of him, apologise to the eminent reformer, Nietzschean, and Christian, Mr. Duncan. Mr. Foote "made his choice" indeed: and who but Mr. Duncan shall say that it was not a wise one? No one, I imagine, except professional theologians and their "flocks."

G. W. Foote was the spiritual heir of Laing, of Richard Carlile, of Holyoake, of Bradlaugh, and of other pioneers and heroes who, however much they may be despised by superior and ultra-refined persons, are the men to whom we owe such mental freedom as we possess. (If any doubts this, let him read the contemporary accounts of the almost incredible heroism of Carlile and his crowd. No greater courage was ever recorded than that chronicled in the "Lion" and the "Republican" of the early years of the last century.)

If Mr. Duncan is really a Christian, his remark that Mr. Foote was not a Nietzschean is an impertinence. If he is not a Christian he is merely a farceur, and it is not in the best possible taste to "rag" the memory of a man but just dead.

To call Ingersoll "pious" is one of the less-than-half truths so dear to Christian apologists. But if everyone who is non-Nietzschean is to be labelled "pious," there is no more meaning to be attached to the word. It is a lie to call Ingersoll pious in any attempted sense.

The sooner Mr. Duncan loses the habit of expressing "sentimental regard" for men whom he libels the moment they are dead, the better

it will be for his friends and for his ethics. "Sentimental regard," of course, has no connection with "slave morality." It is, no doubt, a Nietzschean virtue.

Mr. Duncan's "licence to laugh" at Atheists because they are not all Nietzscheans will be endorsed by the eminent Duncanian Ther-sites, but by no one else of any distinction.

If Mr. Duncan wants "a contemporary comic prayer," might I suggest the "Christian Herald" instead of the "Freethinker"—to which, by the way, at least two NEW AGE writers contribute? It is even more Christian, and only half the price. Mr. Duncan might also find "a new suit of values" at the "Freethinker" office. It might not be Nietzschean, but it would at least be decent, and proof against "intellectual" sneers at the great dead.

VICTOR B. NEUBURG.

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This letter to the Editor which corrects printer's errors present in his letter of 16 December originally appeared in the 23 December 1915 edition of *The New Age*.

Sir,—May I correct three printer's errors that occur in my letter? "Laing" in paragraph 3 should, of course, be "Paine"; "any" in the same paragraph should be "anyone"; and "at-tempted" in the 5th, "accepted."

VICTOR B. NEUBURG.