

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

PROVIDENCE AND FLOODS.

VOLTAIRE was a Deist, but his belief in a beneficent God was rudely shaken by the Lisbon earthquake. It seems to us, also, that many believers in Providence must be staggered by the terrible flood in Pennsylvania, which has desolated a whole district and caused the death of thousands of people. The Lord is supposed to know everything. He must, therefore, have known that the lake-dam was insecure. Perhaps it was too much to expect him to repair it, although his worshippers pray for many things just as unlikely. Still, he might have warned the inhabitants of the impending danger. There were several ministers in the locality, but he did not give them a hint, and they are drowned like the laymen. Some of them may have been burned to death in that fatal pile of wreckage which caught fire and consumed fifteen hundred men, women, and children; and very likely, when they saw the flames around them, they began to hope that there was no truth in their doctrine of everlasting hell.

Mrs. Ogle, the Johnstown manageress of the Western Union Telegraph Company, stuck to her post like a heroine. She sent the warning to station after station in the doomed valley. Finally she wired to her companion at South Fork, "This is my last message," and at that very moment the torrent engulfed her. Noble woman! She gave her life for others. She died to save. Why was God less generous? Nay, generosity was not required of him. Why was he less thoughtful? Why did he keep back the dreadful information? Why did he allow twenty thousand people to be drowned, or battered to death, or burnt alive, when it would have cost him nothing to save them? Did he remember the old Deluge, in which he destroyed the world, and did he relish the expectation of a similar slaughter, although on a smaller scale?

Carried along that raging flood was a driftwood raft, on which there crouched three figures, a man, his wife and his mother. As they swept past a projection a rope was slung to them. The man caught it, but his companions failed. He could have saved himself, but seeing they must be lost he dropped the rope and shared their fate. Even in death they were not divided. Love was stronger than fear.

They tell us God is love. If he had as much love as that tender-hearted man, would he not have gone to their rescue? Would he have looked on while they perished? Would he not have sent a squadron of his unemployed angels to act as a salvage corps? Brave men tried to save, risking their lives, and sometimes losing them in the attempt. Why did the Lord do nothing? Is man more merciful than God?

They tell us God answers prayer, and here is the proof. One bereaved woman was found near a muddy pool looking for her loved ones. When the rescuers approached her she cried "They are all gone. O, Heaven, be merciful to them! My husband and my

seven dear little children all swept away, and I am left alone!" Her terrible story is best told in her own words.

"We were driven by the awful floods into a garret, but the water followed us there inch by inch. It kept rising until our heads were crushing against the roof. It would have been death to remain; so I raised the window and placed my darlings one by one, on some driftwood, trusting them to Providence. As I liberated the last one, my little boy, he looked at me and said 'Mamma, you always told me that the Lord would care for me. Will He look after me now?' I saw him drift away with his loving face turned towards me, and in the midst of my prayer for his deliverance he passed from my sight for ever. The next moment the roof crashed in, and I floated outside to be rescued fifteen hours later. If I could only find one of my darlings I could bow to the will of God, but they are all gone. I have lost everything on earth now but my life, and I shall return to my old Virginia home and lay me down for my last great sleep."

"Silence is the best comment," says the *Star*. But why? Silence means imbecility or cowardice? That poor mother taught her darling a lie. She did not think so; she took it on trust from the priest, who taught it as a trade. How much is the doctrine worth now? Find the answer in the boy's dying face and the mother's bleeding heart.

Let us cease humbugging each other. Let us face the facts. Let us have the courage to tell the truth. God does not help. Perhaps God does not even exist. Only the priests profit by the deception. Providence is like the black vault of midnight to the cry of despair, but man's heroism shines like a throbbing star.

G. W. F.

CHRISTIANITY AN IMMORAL RELIGION.

WE are sometimes taken to task for chronicling the criminal records of the ministers, as though, it is said, there were not good and bad of all creeds and of no creed. Now our purpose is not simply to retort on those who habitually associate infidelity with immorality; it is to show that the arrogant claims of the one divine religion actually break down, and that its effects are not salutary to society, but the reverse. The great support of Christianity at the present time is not a belief that it is true, but a notion that it is of service in the case of morality. An illustration is always more effective than an abstract argument, and so, without going out of our way to collect cases, we from time to time note the constant aberrations of those most brought under the influence of religion.

We object to Christianity in the first place that it is not true. It is founded on alleged events contrary to the known order of nature, and its doctrines and promises are unverifiable. We further allege that it is not only false but immoral—a pernicious superstition, as the early Pagans called it. A graver charge could not be made. It will be impossible to prove the charge up the hilt in the limits of one article.

But I hope to say enough to show it is not lightly made.

So far from morality and religion being identical they are antagonistic. Moral principles are essentially irreligious. Religious principles are essentially immoral. Morality is founded upon and regards only the duty of man to his fellows in society. Religion is based upon obedience to the arbitrary commands of an irresponsible supernatural being. True, religious teachers have always professed to teach moral laws. They would obtain little hearing otherwise. But their religion has always warped their morality.

What is the chief doctrine of religion? It is reliance upon God. Such reliance is weakening to the moral fibre. It destroys manly independence. The habit of mind induced is one of impotence in the face of temptation and of callousness towards human suffering, which may be but a divine affliction. If God has made a poor woman a widow, why should a believer mitigate her chastisement? The Bible commends Abraham for his readiness to offer up his only son as a burnt offering at the command of God. A more immoral act could hardly be conceived. Yet the disposition induced in every believer is such blind obedience to the divine command, with expectation of some such interference as the ram in the thicket to prevent unpleasant consequences. It is not simply that every villainy and injustice that has defiled the world has sheltered itself under the sanction of the will and the word of God. It is that sincere belief in that will and that word has made persons otherwise good do most immoral acts. A notable instance is that of Calvin, whose conscientious piety impelled him to commit an atrocity on behalf of religion, and Melancthon and other pious persons to condone it.*

What is the Christian scheme of redemption? Salvation through the vicarious punishment of an innocent person. No wonder that loose notions of human responsibility arise in people who believe in such a falsification of moral principles. Punishment can only be justified on the plea that it is for the good of society. To punish the wrong person is not only villainously unjust, it strikes at the root of social order. To punish the innocent instead of the guilty is a direct incentive to avoid innocence and punishment, and to accept guilt and vicarious atonement. The Christian doctrines of salvation through faith, and of the forgiveness of sins, are equally noxious.

There has been a murder. A man has been suddenly and brutally set upon, slaughtered and robbed. The assassin is arrested and condemned to death. He is visited in prison by the chaplain, and exhorted to repentance. He is told that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin; that Jesus is able and willing to save to the uttermost; that while the lamp holds out to burn the vilest sinner may return; and that Jesus will say to him as to the dying thief, "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Before the execution he repents and makes a confession. The drop falls and he mounts to Paradise; jerked to Jesus, he joins Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David in glory, where there is more joy over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety-nine just persons that need no repentance.

But how about his victim? Well, he was an honest man, owed no one anything, was a good husband, a good father, and a firm friend, and strove to do his utmost to assist his fellows. But he was a Freethinker. He could not believe the story of a God born of a woman without a human father, and had no faith in salvation through the blood of an innocent person. His doom is everlasting damnation, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. What doctrine could discourage morality more than this?

The belief, too, in eternal torments has not only been productive of immeasurable anguish; it has

been a direct incentive to cruelty. What is anything that man can do compared to that which the Almighty will inflict? Is it not indeed merciful to put heretics to death rather than permit them to lead souls to eternal torture? The crimes of Christianity have flowed naturally from its doctrines. The common notion that the religious wars, persecutions, and atrocities, which have disgraced Christianity more than any other faith, have arisen from corruptions which crept into the divine faith after the days of its primitive simplicity were over, is unfounded. The spirit which led to all the mischief can be clearly traced to the fountain head.

J. M. WHEELER.

ZOLA AND THE BIBLE.

MR. VIZETELLY is paying the penalty of his folly and weakness. By pleading "Guilty" he gave up his case without escaping punishment, besides branding himself as a purveyor of obscene literature. His only consolation is that indecency is held to be a very much slighter offence than blasphemy. Three months' imprisonment as a first-class misdemeanant is the penalty for the one offence; twelve months' imprisonment like a felon is the penalty for the other.

That Zola's works should be suppressed in England by a few professional busybodies, who make a trade of "purity," is a scandal to our civilisation. To call them obscene is simply nonsense. Any person whose lust could be stimulated by Zola's exposure of social ulcers must be in the last stage of satyriasis. It must be remembered that Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* is also suppressed. This novel was prosecuted under the virtuous Third Empire and the verdict was an acquittal. Flaubert spent ten years in writing that masterpiece of fiction, and his counsel, the great Senard, asked the Court if they ever heard of anyone giving ten years of his life to the composition of an obscene book? *Madame Bovary* is literature, and Zola's novels are literature. If they depict what is disgraceful to society, so much the worse for society which prefers silence and rotteness to exposure and remedy.

It is a miserable reflection that literature is under the ignorant and irresponsible censorship of a chance magistrate or a dozen small tradesmen at the Old Bailey. It is a still more miserable reflection that literary men remain silent under this indignity. Mr. Robert Buchanan is the only one who has protested. He points out that the matter will not end here. "Our prudential legislation," he says, "is orthodox in religion as well as moral in literary taste; so that we may soon return to the dark days of Lord Eldon, and see philosophers and publicists criminally punished for opinions adverse to established creeds." We may possibly, he adds, have an Act of Parliament "deciding that all books, original or translated, must be submitted to a committee composed of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Mr. Monro, and the editors of the *Guardian* and the *Christian World*."

Mr. Buchanan might have gone farther. He might have suggested an authoritative expurgation of the Bible as a standard of literary purity. Novelists and journalists would then know what was expected of them. The expurgation would be extremely difficult, and, if done with any thoroughness, would make some frightful gaps in scripture. The filth begins in *Genesis* and ends in *Revelation*. Some of it fills a whole chapter, some one verse, and some half a dozen. And there are all degrees, from Noah's drunkenness and indecent exposure to the extravagant harlotry in *Ezekiel*. Right in the middle is the Song of Solomon, with its luscious descriptions of female charms and amatory adventures. Here and there, especially in the Old Testament, are passages of lust, murder, and mutilation, which seem written by Jack the Ripper.

* See article on "Servetus," *Freethinker*, April 7.

Yes, it will be a hard task to expurgate the Bible. But it must be done if Zola's and other novels are to be suppressed. It will not do to keep indecency from adults and force it upon children, to penalise it in police courts and deify it in Sunday-schools. We call upon the authorities to be consistent and impartial. Let them tolerate Zola or prosecute the Queen's printers for publishing the Bible.

LETTERS TO THE CLERGY.—II.
ON "THE BELIEVING THIEF"—(Concluded).

To the Rev. C. H. Spurgeon.

THE lessons you deduce from the story of the believing thief are not very edifying. First, you say, it shows the Savior's condescension; and as man, in your view, is the riff-raff of creation, there is a great solace in his stooping to the worst of sinners. "It gives me an assurance," you exclaim, "that he will not refuse to associate with me." I presume you would call this modesty, but to my mind it is the pride which apes humility. You cannot boast of being the chief of sinners, for St. Paul seized upon that distinction. Nevertheless you may pride yourself, with a humble face, on being an excellent second! This attitude is common among the elect. They are miserable worms; but how they rear their heads if others tell them so! Several times in the course of your sermon you positively annex the Redeemer, calling him *yours*, and inviting your fellow sinners to come to "my Lord." See, sir, how tastes differ. You regard this as solemn; to me it is laughable. I smile at your masked pride, and when you turn the seamy side of your cloak outwards I observe that the purple is all the nearer your heart.

A great poet has satirised this "humble" posturing, and you will forgive me for quoting his epigram.

Once in a saintly passion
I cried with desperate grief
"O Lord, my heart is black with guile,
Of sinners I am chief."

Then stooped my guardian angel
And whispered from behind,
"Vanity, my little man,
You're nothing of the kind!"

The second lesson is the supremacy of grace over works. According to your philosophy—borrowed chiefly, I suspect, from Martin Luther's commentary on *Galatians*—our noblest virtues are only splendid rags, that will make us burn all the better in Hell. Works cannot save us. The best man on earth deserves everlasting torment every minute of his life. We are saved by grace. And the crowning proof of it is the salvation of the believing thief. Death stared him in the face; he was incapable of good works. The grace of God entered into his heart, his soul was filled with faith, and, notwithstanding his life of crime, he soared from the cross into Paradise.

Let me ask you why the other thief was less fortunate. Why did the grace of God hold aloof from him? Without that grace we cannot have faith, and without faith we cannot be saved. Do you not see that this makes God everything and man nothing; that it is a gospel of divine fatalism, or arbitrary predestination; that all your preaching is wasted, except as it procures you a living; and that it cannot possibly make the slightest difference how men act in this world, since God imparts grace or withholds it at his pleasure, saving whom he will save and damning whom he will damn?

The third lesson is that the vilest sinner, who has led a life of selfishness or crime—the thief, the seducer, the adulterer, the murderer—may be saved at the very last minute. "In a single instant," you declare, "the sins of sixty or seventy years can be

absolutely forgiven." "If a man dies," you say, "five minutes after his first act of faith, he is safe as if he had served the Lord for fifty years." The believing thief went to Paradise through faith, and faith will enable the heaviest sinner to fly up to the pearly gates.

Far be it from me to say that God, who made men, should plunge them in Hell, or inflict upon them the smallest suffering. I even deny his right to do so. He would be infamous to punish his own failures. Whatever responsibility there is in the case is from God to man, not from man to God. The creator is responsible, not the created.

Still, man is governed by motives, and your doctrine is a premium on immorality. You set up a Heaven and a Hell, you offer pleasure or pain hereafter, and you declare that a death-bed repentance will wash out a life of sin. True, you stipulate that the repentance shall be sincere, but the sinner will have little apprehension on that account. You appeal to his personal hopes and fears as to the future life; and you tell him that, however wicked he may be, he stands as great a chance of Heaven as the holiest saint, if he only looks to Jesus at the last. You call this a glorious gospel. I call it infamous. It is not a doctrine of mercy, but a doctrine of license. After appealing to men's selfishness, without regard to reason or humanity, it shows them an easy way of making evil as profitable as good. Were I to adopt your own language I might call it "infamous bosh."

You are in the habit of reading Flavel. From his sermon on this very subject you borrow the case of Marcus Caius Victorius, a heathen of the primitive times, who was converted to Christianity in his old age. But you dress up the story in an unscrupulous manner. According to Flavel, the Christians would not trust him for a long time, owing to "the unusualness of a conversion at such an age." Old age, however, is not enough for your purpose, so you turn him into "a gross sinner."

Your accuracy or honesty is a small matter. My object in citing Flavel is to point out that he saw the snare of death-bed repentance, and warned his hearers against it. You are more accommodating, sir; and in view of your belief, the more accommodating you are the more you sap the foundations of morality.

Considering the company you picture in Heaven, the believing thief being a "sample" of the "bulk," I shall not be sorry if I am quartered elsewhere. I do not play the Pharisee, but, like every sensible and self-respecting man, I choose my company. If it makes no difference to the caterer, I prefer going below in the society of honest and intelligent sceptics, rather than above in the society of all the abject scoundrels who earned salvation by crying "I'm sorry."

You appear to know a great deal about the invisible, and I venture to ask you a question. "Heaven and hell," you assert, "are not places far away." They are very near; in fact, you say, we may be in one or the other before the clock ticks again. Do you mean that heaven and hell are in the atmosphere? Or do you mean that the soul, on leaving the body, flies with such inconceivable rapidity that distance is annihilated? Surely you have not stumbled on the truth that heaven and hell are *within us*.

Let me conclude by asking you another question. You talk much about the believing thief. Do you know anything about the unbelieving one? Daniel O'Connell declared that Benjamin Disraeli was the lineal descendant of the impenitent thief. Will you tell me if this is true? And if so, have you any objection to preaching another sermon on the unbelieving thief, and his unbelieving posterity? At any rate, it would be quite as instructive as your first sermon, and probably far more amusing.

G. W. FOOTE.

ACID DROPS.

The Vigilance Society, which has put Mr. Vizetelly in gaol and stopped the sale of wicked French novels, is going still further, and threatens if it receives money enough—that is always a prime condition—to make our literature as “pure” as—well, say the Song of Solomon. But what will the Society do when it finishes that job? Will it sit down and cry like Alexander, who wept because there were no more worlds to conquer? Oh, dear no. The officials must earn their salaries, and we suspect they will then go for blasphemy. Well, if they do, they will find us a tougher morsel than Mr. Vizetelly.

How funny it is that this Vigilance Society was started by the author of the *Maiden Tribute*. Such is the fact, and it is the biggest joke of the age.

The London police are mighty particular about Free-thought meetings. Even a place like Camberwell Green, where there is no traffic on Sunday, they regard as unfit for open-air assemblies. But look, on the other hand, how they wink at Christian meetings. Last Sunday evening, in the vicinity of Finsbury Park, we passed a dozen Christian gatherings in ten minutes. All of them were obstructions, and two were being held on the pavement; but the policeman looked as if his “missis” were playing the harmonium and his “kids” singing the hymn.

On Tuesday evening we stumbled on a little open-air meeting in the bend of the Gray's Inn Road, by King's Cross Metropolitan Station. Perched upon the rostrum was a sturdy preacher with a Scotch accent, who turned out to be the “Scottish Spurgeon,” the Rev. J. McNeill of the Presbyterian Church in Regent Square. There was an infernally long prayer by a gentleman named White, who screwed up his eyes desperately, and turned his face to the zenith. During this performance the Scottish Spurgeon ran his fingers through his stubby hair to cool his surging brain. Now and then he felt he was guilty of too much movement and placed his fingers over his eyes, but they wouldn't keep still and bobbed down to his beard. There were also two infernally long hymns, and our patience was nearly exhausted before the sermon. But we waited. We wanted to hear the great man speak.

Mr. McNeill has a queer smile, something like a Scotch bagman's; a canny, up to dick, all there, sort of smile. He is an effective speaker in his way, but his matter did not strike us as especially good, even from a Christian point of view; and his manner was too much of the “all action and no go” style. Perhaps he is heard to better advantage indoors. Out of doors he is no better than dozens of other speakers.

Gilbert Grace, son of the rector of Thwaite, is a graceless youth. He is reported to have struck the son of one of his father's parishioners for not bowing to him, and when the boy's mother, Mrs. Hervey, went to the rectory to complain he struck her four times with a whip. The magistrates fined him seventeen shillings, or seven days in default. His cross-summons against Mrs. Hervey was dismissed with costs. If this is the result of godly breeding it is well that godless education is becoming general. The Grace of God may be a good article in its way, but as displayed by the Grace of Thwaite it doesn't reflect much credit on the firm.

Has anyone seen anything of the Rev. L. Walker, who was at one time a popular minister in California? He disappeared in 1886, and several thousand dollars entrusted to his care disappeared at the same time. His wife who has got tired of waiting for his return is suing for a divorce and is anxious for particulars of her lord and master.

Prophet Baxter doesn't like exposure. Mr. E. Neighbour, of Greenwich, has been circulating tracts in which the public is informed that Baxter prophesied the battle of Armageddon and the general smash-up for 1873. The prophet caught the critic at his impious task, gave him a severe blow on the arm, and sent his leaflets flying.

Two sky-pilots, the Rev. G. M. Wilson, and the Rev. E. F. Geypys, sitting on the magistrates' bench at the

Dunmow Petty Sessions, have sent Henry Arnell to gaol for a month's hard labor. The impecunious wretch couldn't raise £1 fine and 10s. 6d costs laid upon him for filching four partridge eggs. William Wright was fined £2 10s. and 12s. costs for filching ten eggs. Eggs are dear eating in Essex, and sporting parsons are, as usual, the friends of the poor. They give them a month's board and lodging for nothing.

John Henry Baker is a young man desirous of acting according to the dictates of the divine will. In Piccadilly Circus he took off his coat and trousers and began preaching clothed only in his drawers and shirt. Arrested and brought before the magistrate he said he had been called upon by the Almighty to take off his clothes and sell them in obedience to his divine will. In Isaiah (xx, 2,) might be read a command to walk naked. The prisoner further said he had been a doctor, but now “Religion occupies my whole mind.” When religion comes in at the door common sense and often common decency fly out at the window.

At Toledo, Ohio, Rev. Peter van Etten has been arrested for attempting to run away with 3,000 dols., the property of a widow.

At Salem, Oregon, Rev. J. Harris has starved himself to death, being “commanded to do so by God.”

Ernest Pestrige, a Birmingham grocer's assistant, who committed suicide through being jilted, left a note stating, “My life is miserable in this world but I hope it will be happier in the next.” Yet religious scepticism is put forward by Talmage as the chief cause of suicide.

Louis J. Murik, an Austrian who jumped from Westminster Bridge into the Thames, also left as his last injunction that he should be buried in a Christian graveyard.

Religion sanctions anything; even the detention of children against the wishes of their parents. Dr. Barnardo having been ordered to give up a child who had been taken away and kept from its mother for many months, even the enlightened *Christian World* is evidently dissatisfied with the verdict because the child's parent is a Roman Catholic.

The Rev. J. M. Mather, of Rawtenstall, is giving a series of addresses on “The Fools of the Bible.” He has already dealt with the Sceptical Fool and the Wordly Fool. It is to be hoped he will not forget the Credulous Fool. He might find a good text in Hosea ii, 7, “The prophet is a fool, the spiritual man is mad.”

Sir Algernon Borthwick, the Tory, M.P. for South Kensington, wrote to one of our readers about the middle of April, saying “Certainly I will support a bill against religious prosecutions.” We chronicled the fact at the time, but thought it too good to be true, and our suspicion turns out to have been correct. Being asked why he did not vote for Mr. Bradlaugh's bill according to promise, Sir Algernon says, “I do not think the Blasphemy Libel Law can be called religious prosecution. Pray read Mr. Waddy's and Mr. Samuel Smith's speeches in the debate, especially the latter.” Evidently this muddle-headed gentleman, who refers Freethinkers to the speeches of their most bigoted opponents, had never taken the trouble to read Mr. Bradlaugh's short bill when he first wrote to Mr. Richardson.

Sir Algernon Borthwick adds, “We have already too much indecent literature.” Does he mean that the *Freethinker* is indecent? If so, we challenge him to point out a single indecency in our columns. If he declines the challenge, he is a slanderer and a coward.

Yes, Sir Algernon, we *have* too much indecent literature, and most of it is circulated by the Bible Societies. Your “blessed book” reeks with filth. Some of it is so shocking that we dare not print it. If we did so, we should be liable to imprisonment. We can only give references, and let the reader find out the dirty passages in private.

The Catholic Apostolic Church in Gordon Square,

London, is circulating invitation cards to a series of special sermons on Sunday evenings. The first is on "Christ Turning the Water into Wine." Unfortunately they don't say the trick will be exhibited, or ask you to bring your own bottles. The next is "Christ Walking Upon the Sea." Here, again, they don't promise a performance, or even a magic lantern view from a photograph taken on the spot. The other sermons are on similar subjects. And this is how London is to be improved and elevated! It is enough to throw a mule into convulsions of laughter.

The Seventh Day Adventists in America very justly complain of persecution. They choose to keep their Sabbath on the only day commanded in the Bible, and then because they work on the following day (Sunday) they are prosecuted, and in several cases have been fined and imprisoned by their Christian neighbors.

The *Birmingham Daily Times* reports some extraordinary scenes at a revival meeting at Oldbury Chapel, where sinners are drawn to Christ by the simple process of threatening them with sudden death. The chief revivalist, who is also a faith-healer, is the Rev. B. Dinnick, known as Brother Dinnick. His *modus operandi* is to call out, "Come up and be saved or you will be a dead man to-morrow. The Lord says it is so. Yes, there is another here who will be dead to-morrow if he is not saved to-night. It is so; the Lord tells me so!" Some of the auditors actually laughed at these denunciations. Two girls of sixteen or seventeen were amongst the number, and this made the "Prophet" in the white waistcoat so wroth that, white with passion and almost gnashing his teeth, he went down to them and hissed out "You shall go to hell. You snigger now, but you shall cry in hell-fire." One of the girls looked rather frightened, but the other told the "Prophet" he ought to be ashamed of himself, and answered him back in a way which rather surprised him. Another man who interrupted was told he would be struck dumb that night. Brother Dinnick seems to have the Lord's judgments in his hands, like old Elisha and the other prophets.

The Rev. C. Musgrave Brown of St. Luke's Church, Leece Street, Liverpool, is enraged at the rivalry of the theatres to his own form of entertainment. The theatre he said was a relic of idolatry and among the works of the devil. He read extracts to show that "the stage was the hot bed of vice." He thanked God that he had never seen a single play—which no doubt enhances his competence to speak upon that subject.

Mr. F. Engels, the Marxite Socialist, is a gentleman of means and leisure; but he seems to spend some of his time in getting up ingenious mistakes. He has made the discovery, somehow and somewhere, that Robert Owen, "by opposing the compulsory sanctity of religion, paved the way for the present pigmy race of Freethinkers, who are nothing but Freethinkers." Letting the "pigmy" nonsense pass, we would remark that the battle of Freethought was carried on quite independently of Robert Owen and before his time. Richard Carlile was imprisoned for selling Thomas Paine's works, and Daniel Isaac Eaton was imprisoned and pilloried before that. As a matter of fact, Owen was somewhat of a wet blanket on the Freethought cause. He rather checked the ardor of the advanced section.

After denouncing Mr. Caine the Baptists practically admit that he is right. They are sending out six bachelor missionaries to live among the natives at Calcutta. India is to be captured for Christ on the celibate ticket. If that fails they will have to take a step further. It was recommended by Jesus and taken by Origen.

The Edinburgh Free Presbytery has resolved to petition the Board of Works against the opening of the Botanic Gardens on Sunday, although they were plainly told that a poll of the inhabitants would be dead against them. Being in the gospel line they are Protectionists on Sunday, and they stick to a lost cause like that other Protectionist, Baron De Worms, stuck to his poor Sugar Bill.

"The man who gives up belief in a God and a future life, to be rational, should say 'My mother in heaven, I can never come to you, I have larger and more liberal ideas.'"

This idiotic rot was talked by Spurgeon the other night at Exeter Hall. It was cheered by the members and friends of the Young Men's Christian Association. They did not reflect on the absurdity of a disbeliever in a future life addressing remarks to his mother in heaven. They also forgot that, according to Christianity, most men's mothers are in hell.

The spirit of the age, said Spurgeon, is the spirit of Atheism. Right for once. The spirit of the age just leaves the gods and ghosts to mind their own business, if they have any, and sets about making the world better worth living in.

A lady at Burton-on-Trent recently presented her husband—he is only a working man—with triplets. They were all girls, and were christened Faith, Hope, and Charity, but Hope died soon after the ceremony. How natural! When Faith and Charity, at least of the Christian brand, go into partnership, Hope generally clears off.

"The Feast of Belshazzar at the Universal Exhibition" is the title of a pamphlet which is being widely circulated in Paris. The writer wonders how any Christian can take part in this reign of Anti-christ. "The Exhibition," he says, "is the exact reverse of the thought of God. Christ draws a veil over the world; the Exhibition makes a display of it. Christ would fill the soul with the apprehension of coming judgment; the Exhibition fills it with a sense of carnal satisfaction and false security." The old tune again! Let us all be unhappy till Doomsday!

The Wesleyan Mission Band Union had "a regular stand-up fight with the Devil" during the Derby week at Epsom. Borrowing a wrinkle from the Home Rule Union the promoters had a couple of vans to sleep in and preach from. They were also provided with 2,000 penny Testaments, 100,000 tracts, and 300 yards of blue ribbon for the people they got to sign the pledge. It was a first-rate advertising idea, and reflects great credit on the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, but it is very doubtful if many converts have been made. The Devil generally gets the best of it in a pitched battle.

The organiser of this scheme is a Mr. Nix. We expect the net result will be Nix too.

Here is the result of one of the big races on Tuesday at Epsom. How galling it must have been to the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, especially if he had a fiver on the Churchwarden, another horse who was supposed to run in the race but was knocked out of it.

WOODCOOTE STAKES.

MISS FOOTE	-	1
HERESY	-	2
BEL DEMONIO	-	3

The Wesleyan Mission Band Union ought to have packed up and bundled home after this awful defeat.

It is related of Paley that when compiling his work on *Natural Theology*, he visited John Hunter, the anatomist. The surgeon explained the structure of the knee to the theologian, who noted down this wonderful adaptation of means to ends as a singular proof of creative wisdom and goodness. "You little know," observed Hunter, "to what manifold disorders this complicated contrivance, through its very complication is exposed." In fact the great anatomist held that the brittle mechanisms of organic nature are evidence not of omnipotence, but of limitation. The world is "fearfully and wonderfully made" but it would be more wonderfully made if it were made less fearfully.

The Young Men's Christian association of an eastern city, with a view to correcting the evils of literature, advertises Byron without "Don Juan," and Shakespeare without "Venus and Adonis." What are the refined gentlemen going to do with the Bible?

The Rev. John Dickson of St. Ninian's, Leith, has again been lifting up his voice against the desecration of the Sabbath by Sunday sailing. He said sordid selfishness was at the bottom of the traffic. It would of course be

very uncharitable to suggest that desire of larger collections may have something to do with the opposition.

The Welsh papers denounce the appointment of the members of the Commission on Sunday closing as a "Tory job." Out of the five Commissioners there is not a single Welshman nor one Nonconformist.

The Rev. Dr. R. Z. Tafel has been "refuting" Prof. Huxley from the Swedenborgian standpoint. He finds no difficulties in the story about the devils in the pigs; indeed he says all diseases are the work of evil spirits of hell. "Men, at the present time, are thus frequently the prey of, or are haunted by, a certain class of disorderly spirits, who cause in them mental states of discomfort, which, when they are intensified, are called the 'blues.' The influence of these very same spirits also is productive in the vegetable kingdom of a weed called 'tobacco'; and when the men who are troubled by those spirits smoke that weed, the influences of these disorderly spirits called the 'blues' are sent off by them in the tobacco smoke. Hence the relief experienced by smokers."

Smokers, it seems, apply the same principle which the Lord Jesus Christ applied in sending the devils into the swine. The swine, according to Swedenborg, represent avarice, and therefore the devils have a natural affinity to pickled pork. This may account for the bad reputation of Chicago. Only it was rather hard on the owner of the pigs to permit the devils to drown so many.

Somebody has been hoaxing our Spiritist contemporary *The Two Worlds*. Mr. T. Postlethwaite is represented as "flummoxing" Mr. Foote after his Rochdale lecture on "After Death—What?" by quoting from the Dialectical Society's report. As a matter of fact, Mr. Postlethwaite pretended that the report, which he did not have with him, was published seven years ago, and was favorable to Spiritism. Mr. Foote replied that the report was published more than twice seven years ago, and that none of the wonderful phenomena happened before sceptical members of the Committee like Dr. Edmonds and Mr. Bradlaugh. And this is true. Does our contemporary deny it?

The *Brighton Examiner* reports a lecture by Mr. J. Vaughan on "The Babylonish Origin of Romanism." Mr. Vaughan seems to have no suspicion that for Romanism may be read Christianity. He showed that in Babylon they had the confessional, the worship of the mother and child, known as the mother of God, etc. He said it was 2,000 years before the birth of Christ that the 25th of December was set apart for the commemoration of the birth of this woman's son; pan-cakes were dedicated to his worship; the hot-cross bun was but the symbol, by this round shape, of the mother, the moon, while the cross was but a modification of the initial, that of Tanus, stamped on it in honor of the son; the yule log, the wassail bowl, the misletoe, were all symbols of Babylonish celebrations, and even the letters "I.H.S." stood in ancient Egypt for Isis, the mother, Horus, the son, and Seb, the father of the gods. Easter was also of Pagan origin, the special season dedicated to the worship of Astarte at Babylon; and the Easter egg was the symbol of the birth of this goddess under the name Venus, who it was said was hatched out of an egg by doves. The yellow-haired Madonnas were in no sense representative of the dark-haired Jewish maiden, but they were remarkably like the pictures of the yellow-haired mother of Tanus found amongst the ruins of Babylon. When Mr. Vaughan learns that the doctrines no less than the practices of Christendom were pre-extant in Paganism, he may perhaps begin to suspect that he is not engaged in a very Christian task in exposing these similarities.

Christian ministers are discussing whether they should take money from people engaged in the liquor traffic. While they are making up their minds, and meanwhile receiving the cash, a writer in the *British Weekly* gives them a pious warning. "I know of a church," he says, "which, originally founded by one connected with this business, has proved in its spiritual conditions and surprising evidences of divine grace in its midst, one of the most remarkable, for its size, of any village churches I have

ever met with." One fifth of the members could lead in prayer, but the writer omits to state whether they fortified themselves with a drop of the founder's concoction.

The Grand Lama of Thibet, who occupies the position of Pope to the Buddhist world, seems to be somewhat superior to his tribe. According to Mr. Keenan's account in the *Century Magazine*, he was very anxious to know the shape of the earth. Mr. Keenan told him it was round and adduced in proof that he himself had been round it. The Lama said he had heard the same from the Russians, and although it is not in accordance with the teachings of the sacred books the Russians must be right.

The *Church Review* says: "A neat story is told of a Roman Catholic priest in Victoria, whose sermons are usually of a practical kind. On entering the pulpit one Sunday, he took with him a walnut to illustrate the various Christian Churches. He told the people the shell was tasteless and valueless—that was the Wesleyan Church. The skin was nauseous, disagreeable, and worthless—that was the Presbyterian Church. He then said he would show them the Holy Roman Apostolic Church. He cracked the nut for the kernel and—found it rotten! Then his reverence coughed violently, and pronounced the benediction."

The Armenian Patriotic Association circulate a statement that women are abducted from Armenian villages, and on the relatives demanding the reinstatement of the victims, the ravishers produce two or more Moslem witnesses, who declare on oath that the woman has embraced Mohammedanism. The plaintiffs invoke in vain the proclamations of liberty of the subject. "The Turkish judge habitually replies that the Koran is the supreme law, and that it would be blasphemous to suppose that any subsequent enactments could in any way have modified its sacred teachings." Should a victim effect her escape, the Moslem inhabitants eventually put an end to her life, for by so doing they fulfil the laws of Mohammed to put apostates to death. Another instance of the beneficial effects of having a divine law and a revealed religion

Under the heading "Missionaries in Great Danger," the papers give a letter from Dr. Kerr Cross to the secretary of the Foreign Missions of the Free Church of Scotland. Dr. Cross states in the calmest way that "Things had been in a stagnant state for weeks, when Captain Lugard with 300 men went up on February 21st and shelled Kopakopa's and Salema's villages. Twenty-six shells were fired with some effect, setting both villages on fire, and causing much loss of life. We are convinced now, Dr. Cross adds, that the Senga Arabs united against us, and what a year ago was a petty quarrel is now rapidly developing into a racial war. Why were we not advised long ago of the coming dangers on the coast? Matters up here, in my opinion, were never more serious than they are at this moment, and our lives were at no time in greater danger." It seems that if the Senga Arabs united against the missionary party they were not without pretty good reason after the shelling of two villages by the Christian intruders.

Dr. Koelle, who has been a missionary in Sierra Leone, has been writing of Mohammed and Mohammedanism. The prophet of Arabia, he says, closely copied the acts of him of Nazareth, and exhibited to a credulous world an "obvious parody" of J. C. It is curious then that Mohammed never pretended to work miracles. We read of no such hanky-panky tricks as turning water into wine, and devils into swine. Mohammed gave a wide berth to wine and swine alike.

Bishop Wilberforce had rather a liking for a quiet game of billiards. One day, in a country house where he was staying, he had lost a game to his host, and with the game his temper, the result being that he broke the cue over his knee. Instantly recollecting himself, he apologised effusively to his host, who replied, "I beg of your lordship not to think of the matter. I am glad it occurred, as I was always desirous to see what a bishop was like when he swore."—*Star*.

"I am humble," said the preacher; "anything is good enough for me." "I believe you," replied the listener, "I have heard your sermons."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

June 9, N. S. S. Conference; 23, Hall of Science, London; 30, Hall of Science, London.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LITERARY communications to be addressed to the Editor, 14 Clerkenwell Green, London, E.C. All business communications to Mr. R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.

THE *Freethinker* will be forwarded, direct from the office, post free to any part of Europe, America, Canada and Egypt, at the following rates, prepaid:—One Year, 6s. 6d.; Half Year, 3s. 3d.; Three Months, 1s. 7½d. Australia, China and Africa:—One Year, 8s. 8d.; Half Year, 4s. 4d.; Three Months, 2s. 2d. India:—One Year, 10s. 10d.; Half Year, 5s. 5d.; Three Months, 2s. 8½d.

SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS.—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 3s.; Half Column, 15s.; Column, £1 10s. Special terms for repetitions.

It being contrary to post office regulations to announce on the wrapper when the subscription is due, subscribers will in future receive the number when their subscription expires in a colored wrapper.

ROBERT GREEN.—The name of David's mother is unknown. Some learned duffers have conjectured from 2 Sam. xvii, 25, that it was Nahash, but that is a masculine name. Bible conundrums of this character should be sent to the *Christian Commonwealth*.

W. M. KNOX.—Received with thanks.

JUDAS—You cannot do better than read Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*. Mr. Foote's *Darwin on God* will assist you.

HARRY RICHARDSON.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

F. MULVEY.—American jokes specially welcome.

J. B.—We should certainly oppose the motion. There are individual members of the N. S. S., as well as Branches, and they cannot be disfranchised.

JOSEPH BROWN, secretary of the North-Eastern Secular Federation, acknowledges parcels of Freethought literature from a Bristol friend and J. Tullen; also the following subscriptions: J. H. Cresswell, 5s.; J. Tullen, 2s. 6d.; A Friend, 4d.

R. FORDER, secretary of the National Secular Society, 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C., is anxious to hear from Freethinkers in DUBLIN who are willing to form a Branch in that city.

EDWARD TAYLOR, Grunside, Dalton, Huddersfield, has the first eight volumes of the *Freethinker* for sale, bound in stiff cardboard, with American cloth backs. He will take £1 for the lot, and it is a cheap bargain. Carriage to be paid by purchaser. The vendor is old and out of work.

H. W.—Glad to hear you are making such good use of our tracts and pamphlets.

E. W. GRAY (Port Adelaide).—Mr. Forder has handed us your letter. We are pleased with your report. The illustrations are not discontinued. We are only varying them.

INQUIRER.—Mr. Foote does not remember lecturing or speaking at any meeting in Thorpe.

OXONIAN.—Letters should not be enclosed inside papers. You will find what you wish, perhaps, in future numbers.

Freethinker Circulation Fund.—This fund is spent in advertising the *Freethinker* and generally pushing its circulation. Received—A. H. Guest, £1 1s.; J. Cooper, 2s. 6d.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Two Worlds—Scotsman—Liverpool Daily Post—Freethought—Islington Gazette—Western Figaro—Brighton Times—Brighton Examiner—Liberator—Truthseeker—Brighton Gazette—Brighton Argus—Edinburgh Evening News—Boston Investigator—Secular Thought—Thinker.

CORRESPONDENCE should reach us not later than Tuesday if a reply is desired in the current issue. Otherwise the reply stands over till the following week.

SUGAR PLUMS.

THE Annual Conference of the National Secular Society will be held at the London Hall of Science to-day (June 9). There will be two sittings, at 10.30 and 2.30, and at 7 a public meeting, to be addressed by Mr. Bradlaugh, Mrs. Besant, Mr. Foote and other speakers. All Freethinkers are welcome, but only members of the N. S. S. can speak and vote.

OUR next number will contain a descriptive report of the Conference, and of the banquet to the provincial delegates at the Bridge House Hotel, London Bridge, on the Monday evening. Time, 6.30. Tickets, 3s. 6d.

MR. G. W. FOOTE will preside at the banquet. There will be a few brief speeches to toasts, and some vocal music by Madame Burgwitz, Miss Flint, Mr. Lee and

others. Mrs. Wheeler will preside at the piano. London friends should turn up in force and give their country fellow-workers in the good old cause a hearty greeting. The opportunity seldom presents itself, and when it does it should be made the most of.

THOSE who attend the Conference will be glad to learn that lunch will be served on Sunday at one o'clock at the Manchester Hotel, Aldersgate Street. Tickets 2s. 6d. This will be what pious circles call a godsend, for London is a frightful place to feed in, or rather to feed out in, on Sundays.

THE Bruno Statue will be unveiled at Rome to-day (June 9). A special telegram will be forwarded from the N. S. S. Conference, so as to be read at the ceremony. We shall look out for a report in the Italian press, with a view to giving our readers an account of the proceedings.

FREETHINKERS all over the country would do well to think of Giordano Bruno that morning. It will fortify their courage to look back in imagination across the centuries, and behold that grand figure standing alone at the stake, firm and proud to meet his fiery death.

POOR old Pecci, the occupant of St. Peter's chair, is in a frightful rage. His Swiss and Palatine Guards, and his Papal Gendarmerie, are to keep within the Vatican while Rome is desecrated by the unveiling of a statue of a hero whom the Church murdered. The object is to "make an impression on Europe" Europe isn't waxy enough for that, though evidently the Pope is.

JUST as we go to press we learn that the Bruno ceremony will partake of an official character. Parliament, the municipality, and even the government are to be represented. This is the last drop of poison in the Pope's cup. The whole clerical party will leave Rome or keep indoors; but, in any case, the authorities are prepared to put down any disturbance.

MR. FOOTE'S *Darwin on God* has been kept back for a few days in order to deal with some points raised in Dr. Wallace's new volume on *Darwinism*. The pamphlet will, however, be on sale soon after this journal is in its readers' hands. It runs to 64 pages, and the price is 6d. A superior edition, printed on fine thick paper, and bound in cloth, is priced at 1s. This work should be in the hands of every Freethinker.

WE have just issued a fresh part of Mr. Wheeler's *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers*. The work has involved enormous labor, and it costs a great deal of money to produce. Freethinkers should buy the parts and thus assist a laudable enterprise.

WE are now issuing a weekly contents-sheet of the *Freethinker*. Any newsagent, or other person, who will undertake to display it, can have one or more copies posted weekly by applying to Mr. Forder.

A NEW Branch of the N. S. S. will be opened on Sunday, June 16, at Woolwich. An open-air lecture will be delivered at the Dock Gates in the afternoon by Mr. Foote, and Mr. Forder will take the chair.

OPEN-AIR work is the thing needed in this weather. Subscriptions for reaping the splendid harvest, which only awaits the sickle, should be sent to Mr. R. O. Smith, honorary treasurer of the London Secular Federation, 142 Old Street, E. C. It takes £6,000 to convert a Jew to Christianity, yet the Christians shell out the needful. We make converts at about 5s. a head, and the cash ought to be forthcoming.

MR. SAM STANDRING is working away like twelve missionaries rolled into one. On Sunday he lectured in the morning at Wood Green, making two new members, and collecting 7s. in coppers for the London Secular Federation. One of the new members came from Edmonton. He buys fourteen or fifteen copies of the *Freethinker* weekly for as many readers. He thinks a Branch might be formed there, and will cooperate with Mr. Standring in establishing one.

MR. STANDRING spent the rest of the day in organising and propagandist work. He tramped about ten miles, had four railway trips, attended three meetings, and finally had to hunt up his evening lecturer. We wish there were a dozen such good workers in the suburbs of London.

MR. STANDRING wants help, especially in the matter of lecturers, and we hope he will find it immediately, or he will break down. His address for letters is 7 Finsbury Street, E.C.

THE French Revolution having been decried in both the high class quarterlies, Mr. F. Harrison seasonably writes in the *Fortnightly* on "What the Revolution Did." A comparison of the present condition of the French people, with that which can be gathered from the observant writings of Arthur Young shortly before the great outbreak, suffices to show the much needed improvement effected by the Revolution.

THERE was a pretty battle at the last monthly meeting of the South Shields School Board. Mr. S. M. Peacock, the Secular member, tried to stop the scripture examination in the schools, but did not succeed. Then he tried the next best thing, namely to give the examining committee a liberal color. He moved the addition of the Rev. A. Ashworth, the Unitarian minister, and this was carried. He also moved the Rev. M. Grey, and this was carried. Emboldened by success, he then moved Captain Duncan, the Atheist navigation schoolmaster; but this was "really too much, you know." Still, Captain Duncan had three supporters; and as this was to examine children in scripture knowledge, it shows what we are coming to.

AT the London County Council a resolution in favor of opening public museums, art galleries, and libraries during convenient hours on Sunday was carried by 60 votes to 9. In face of such an overwhelming evidence of enlightened public opinion something ought to be done to bring about this long delayed reform as speedily as possible. While waiting for legislative action the London County Council might do something itself in the way of providing bands in all the public parks on Sunday.

THE fourteenth public annual meeting of the members of the Sunday Society was held on Saturday evening at the Freemasons Tavern, in Great Queen Street. Sir James D. Linton, P.R.I., who succeeds the Rev. W. Rogers, as President, occupied the chair, and among the gentlemen present were Sir V. K. Barrington, Mr. T. E. Powell, Mr. H. Rutherford, and Mr. H. Ackrell. Letters of apology for their inability to attend were received from a number of prominent supporters of the Society, including the Duke of Westminster, the Earl of Derby, the Earl of Carlisle, Viscount Powerscourt, Lord Bramwell, Mr. T. Burt, M.P., Mr. W. Mather, M.P., Mr. Brunner, M.P., Mr. Picton, M.P., Mr. Lawson, M.P., Sir Henry Thompson, Sir Everett Millais, Mr. Alma Tadema, Mr. E. Armitage, R.A., Mr. Holman Hunt, Mr. Andrew Carnegie, Prof. Huxley, Mr. Romanes, Prof. Frankland, and Prof. Max Muller.—Mr. Mark H. Judge, the hon. sec., read a report, from which it appeared that after fourteen years' work the Society had no Parliamentary triumph to record, but the past year had been fruitful of results which must do much towards the ultimate success of its cause. Not only was the *status quo* maintained at Kew, Hampton Court, Greenwich, and Dublin, at Birmingham, Manchester, and the municipal boroughs recorded in the previous year's report, but they had two notable instances of places recently added to those previously opened on Sundays, viz., the public libraries of Salford and the Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. The People's Palace and four public libraries were now open on Sundays in the metropolis, while during the past year six Sunday art exhibitions had been opened by the Society, which were visited by 9,352 persons, the Sunday labor involved never exceeding that of three attendants. In conclusion, the report expressed satisfaction at the action of the London County Council in supporting the objects of the Society by an overwhelming majority.

A NEW and important work has just been published in Germany, the *Geschichte des Aberglaubens*—History of Superstition—by Dr. S. Rubin.

BUT few of the many who have heard of James Lick, of San Francisco, who left an immense fortune to found the Lick Observatory, Mount Hamilton, California, where there are the finest astronomical instruments in the world, know that that philanthropist was a Freethinker. We read in the San Francisco *Freethought* the report of a speech by Mr. J. L. Hatch, who was well acquainted with Mr. Lick, whom he visited upon his dying bed. Mr. Lick announced himself a Materialist without expectation of a future life or desirous of one. Mr. Lick spoke regretfully of the fact that there was no Liberal, *i.e.*, Freethought, organisation in the city which he might aid with his means. If such had existed he would gladly have donated it 50,000 dollars for a hall.

THE *Brighton Examiner* gives a good report of Mr. A. B. Moss's lecture on "Is Christianity Dying Out?" in the Town Hall. Mr. G. H. Holyoake took the chair and a minister opposed.

HERR GNAUTH, a prominent councillor of Giessen, Germany, and widely known as a leading Atheist, has been elected mayor of that city. The religious element have made a great outcry against his taking his seat. He was elected by his fellow councillors without a dissentient vote, and solely upon the ground of his administrative fitness.

AS regards efficiency, the Board Schools distance all competitors in the number of "excellent" merit grants received, and the small number of refusals of this grant. Putting the seven standards together, the Board Schools last year passed 89.92 per cent., the Catholic, 89.33, the Wesleyan, 87.87, the British, 87.45, and the Church came a bad fifth with 86.72.

FRAU HEDWIG HENRICH-WILHELMI, famous as a Freethought lectress among the German speaking population of the United States, is on a visit to Europe. Her address will be at Untertürheim, near Stuttgart.

GOUNOD, the composer, is a devout Catholic, and once spent an hour on his knees for the conversion of Sarah Bernhardt in that lady's presence. Sarah's only response was, "I am an Atheist."

AT the Renaissance Theatre, Paris, they have produced a new operetta "La Tour de Babel"—of course with reference to the Eiffel Tower. Several of the Bible patriarchs are among the characters. Noah gets drunk, and Methusaleh at the ripe age of 900 runs after the lassies!

MR IRVING, we believe, professes to be a Sabbatarian, but he was present on Sunday evening at a private performance of "The White Carnation" at Mrs. Campbell Praed's. Henry seems broadening a bit. He doesn't appear to associate with bishops as much as he used to.

AN effort was made at Salford to arouse feeling as to the advisability of closing the public-houses on Sundays, and a public meeting was called, presided over by the Mayor. An amendment to the effect that things should not be interferred with was carried by twenty to one. At Newcastle also the Sabbatarians have had a blow by the authorities permitting a band to play "sacred music" in Elswick Park.

SENDING the *Freethinker* to your friends and acquaintances is a capital way of promoting its circulation. A gentleman writes this week from Dublin, sending a mail subscription, and says: "I have received one or two copies from a friend, and am desirous of subscribing to such an excellent paper. I felt so very lonely hitherto, hearing no protest against superstition from the outer world."

T. FISHER UNWIN has just published a good-sized volume, entitled *Essays towards a Critical Method*, by John M. Robertson, whose name will be familiar to most of our readers. It would be wrong to say that Mr. Robertson is "nothing if not critical," but he has the conscientious temper and the well-informed judgment of the true critic. The larger portion of his work, entitled "Science in Criticism," expresses its aim in its title. Other papers follow on "Mr. Howell's Novels," Mandeville's "Fable of the Bees," and "The Art of Tennyson." Mr. Robert-

son is a young man with great possibilities before him. We trust his first large volume will be an encouraging success.

MR. CHARLES WATTS, now of Toronto, has had three nights discussion at Chicago with Dr. I. D. Driver, who was put forward as the champion of Christianity by Moody the revivalist. Mr. Watts conceded the last half-hour every night to his opponent, but nevertheless satisfied his own party, and Mr. E. A. Stevens reports as a result an accession of strength to the American Secular Union.

THE *Open Court* has on its front page a discourse by Moncure D. Conway on "The Transient and Permanent in Theodore Parker," given at the dissolution of his society. Mr. Conway tells a very good tale of an Adventist who met Emerson and cried "The end of the world is at hand." "All the better," said Emerson, "man can do well without it." The same fanatic presently made the same announcement to Parker. "My good man," said he, "that does not concern me; I live in Boston." This reminds us of the Boston lady, who as the story goes, died and of course went to Abraham's bosom. She held communication with her friends still in the flesh, and—fortunate beings—still in Boston. She was asked how she liked her new abode, "Oh!" answered her spirit, "it isn't bad, but it isn't Boston, you know!"

WE see from an American exchange that during the Ingersoll controversy the *North American Review* more than quadrupled its circulation.

FREETHOUGHT is spreading in Australia. Here is an extract from a letter to one of our subscribers out there who circulates our literature among "the heathen":—"I have duly received all the papers, *Freethinkers* and others, which you so kindly sent me. I have read and distributed all of them. Many a good laugh we have had over the merry pictures in the Christmas number. Works like these are undermining the churches. The young men about here—not larrikins, but respectable young fellows—are dropping away from the pious pap of their infancy."

HOW TO HELP US.

- (1) Get your newsagent to exhibit the *Freethinker* in his window.
- (2) Get your newsagent to take a few copies of the *Freethinker* and try to sell them, guaranteeing to take the copies that may remain unsold.
- (3) Take an extra copy (or more), and circulate it among your acquaintances.
- (4) Display, or get displayed, one of our permanent placards, which are of a convenient size for the purpose. Mr. Forder will send them on application.
- (5) Leave a copy of the *Freethinker* now and then in the train, the car, or the omnibus.
- (6) Distribute some of our cheap tracts in your walks abroad, at public meetings, or among the audiences around street-corner preachers.
- (7) Do one of the above, or all of them if you can.

PAT'S FINES.

AN Irishman was brought up, before the magistrates in the county of Durham, for being drunk and disorderly, and was fined ten shillings. "Can I have a receipt, sor?" said Pat. After consulting with a brother magistrate, the "beak" informed Pat that he could have one. Presently the following conversation took place:—

Magistrate—Well, have you got your receipt?

Pat—Yes, sor.

Magistrate—Well now, Pat, what do you want the receipt for?

Pat—Shure, an' I make it a rule to get a recate for iverything; an' ye see, if I were to present myself at the Gates, and Peter should say "Have ye paid that foine?" an' I had no recate, it would take me a long toime to go to Hell and hunt yer honor up for the same.

ANGELS IN ACTION.

ANGELS, if the Bible or the theologians are to be believed, have many things in common with terrestrial beings. In the first place, they have their active and their passive moments. Whether in their passive moments they sit still, or merely sleep on celestial perches, is a point which, in our present state of knowledge, cannot be answered. The reason of our inability to affirm one way or the other whether angels comfort themselves complacently in a sitting posture in their moments of leisure, may be best explained by an illustration. In one of the famous plays at the old Haymarket called "The Overland Route," in which the celebrated playwright and comedian, Mr. Buckstone, was wont to perform, a certain lady of very large proportions named Chippendale used to appear. In the course of his part Mr. Buckstone had to describe this charming creature as "an angel," but in order to indicate the species to which she belonged, the comedian added "an angel with something to sit down upon." The addition was quite necessary. So far as I have yet been able to ascertain celestial angels have nothing to sit down upon; they are all head and wings and no bodies. Most appropriately they have been called "celestial pigeons," although it is to be hoped that they do not make the heavenly regions monotonous with a perpetual moan after the manner of their terrestrial prototypes.

It is doubtful whether they ever sleep, or if they do whether young angels require their manmas or papas to "put them in their little bed," or whether they all roost on one long perch in a colossal sort of celestial cage. Those of them that sleep in cots would no doubt require a nice neat night-shirt such as we frequently see in the pictures painted by artists who have doubtless made themselves acquainted with the habits of angels. But then a strange thought at once suggests itself; If angels require clean night-shirts—at least every time they approach the Heavenly throne—do they undertake their own washing, or do they employ a certain number of menial angels in the laundry? Who does the angelic ironing and what is the name of the angelic firm that supplies the starch? These are questions of some importance to those engaged in such trades who may feel disposed to tender for some Heavenly contracts, or send a traveller to solicit orders.

My business, however, is not to make a number of fruitless conjectures respecting angels, but to say a few words regarding some of their actions, recorded in holy writ and vouched for upon the high authority of God's chosen representatives on earth. The first angels mentioned in the Bible were of the male sex. They waited as a deputation upon "Father Abraham," in order to communicate the important information to him and Sarah, his wife, that she would bear a child. The Bible writers seem to have been doubtful as to the proper description of one at least of these angels; for it says first of all that they were "three men," then Abraham addresses one of them as "My Lord," as though he were conversing with a "Peer of the Realm"; and further on the writer, still referring to one of the angels, says, "And the Lord said unto Abraham wherefore did Sarah laugh, etc.," clearly showing that he did not know precisely whether the creature aforementioned was a man, an angel, or the Lord himself.

One thing, however, the Bible writer is perfectly clear upon, and that is, that Abraham invited them to "eat a morsel of bread," and "wash their feet," but whether they did the latter is uncertain from the text, though it is recorded they rested themselves under a tree and "did eat." Are there some Angels so vulgar as to have feet and stomachs? In ancient times when the telegraph and telephone were unknown it was no doubt convenient to have an angelic mes-

senger handy; but the particular angel in question it is very evident felt quite annoyed at being laughed at for telling a young lady in the first blush of her womanhood—she was just ninety years old—that she would soon be in that interesting condition in which all ladies who love their lords delight to be at least once in their lives.

Among other "active" Angels whose doings are recorded in the Old Testament, may be mentioned the angels that Jacob saw in his vision, one that he wrestled with, and one that stayed Balaam's intelligent quadruped in a narrow path, and caused the talkative moke to administer a sharp admonition to Balaam for his brutality.

What language the ass spoke I know not, but no doubt it was quite as intelligible as religious creatures' language generally is, and especially when they fancy they are in the presence of an angelic stranger. The angel in question, however, had a "sword" in his hand. Is there a sword factory or cutlery department in heaven? If so, our Sheffield friends may depend upon constant employment. But if swords are used in heaven there may be a repetition of the terrible bloodshed we have from time to time witnessed on earth. Ay, there's the rub.

The angel that wrestled with Jacob may be dismissed with only one word. The active, not to say lively fashion in which he closed with his Jewish adversary must be commended, but he may at the same time be advised to study the Queensbury rules before he engages in any future encounter.

As to the angels Jacob saw in his vision, they were of the acrobatic order, and could, no doubt, slide up and down, especially "up," a ladder as well as anybody, and as their performances were admirably suited for great "Al Fresco Shows," I earnestly entreat them, if they are still in the "profession," to put in for an engagement for the summer season at the Crystal Palace or the Paris Exhibition, where their performances would be a great attraction, and divide the honors with Professor Baldwin, or the "Blondin Pony." Having said this much in respect to a few of the Old Testament angels, let me at once turn to the doings of the angels of the New Testament.

The angel Gabriel, who had the unpleasant communication to make to Joseph, that he would shortly be the father of a child that was not his own, had the good sense to convey this intelligence in a dream, thus avoiding angry argument and unpleasant consequences. If any of Joseph's shop-mates had conveyed the self same information to him it would probably have upset his mental equilibrium altogether, but in Biblical times any intelligence, no matter of what character—sacred or profane, conveyed by angels was accepted unquestioningly, not only in good faith, but often for publication also.

Another angel mentioned in the New Testament is the one that rolled away the stone from the Sepulchre in which Jesus was laid after the crucifixion. This angel made his appearance on the earth simultaneously with an earthquake (Matthew xxviii-2), but whether he came from below through a trap-door like Mephistopheles, or descended like Baldwin from the clouds, there is not sufficient evidence to determine. Of this angel Dr. Talmage says:—

"Notice what the angel did with the stone after he had rolled it away from the Savior's mausoleum. The Book says he rolled away the stone from the door and sat upon it. All of us ministers have preached a sermon about the angel's rolling away the stone, but we did not remark upon the sublime fact that he sat upon it. Why? Certainly not because he was tired. The angels are a fatigueless race, and that one could have shouldered every rock around that tomb and carried it away and not been besweated. He sat upon it, I think, to show you and to show me that we may make every earthly obstacle a throne of triumph."

Angels then can sit down after all! Dr. Talmage

says so, and says also, that it is a "sublime fact," and therefore as such we must accept it.

An angel lifting a rock however, on to his shoulder, "hitching it on" as the American's say, must be even a sublimer fact than an Angel squatting on a stone.

Samson walking away with the gates of a city must be regarded as a "sublime fact" in all conscience, but an active angel shouldering a mountain may be regarded as the *ne plus ultra*, of sublimity. Picture it, think of it, but never attempt it "laboring man."
ARTHUR B. MOSS.

HUMBUG IN CHURCH SCHOOLS, No. 2. EXAMINATIONS.

A DESCRIPTION of the amount of extra work entailed upon Teachers and Children for the Scripture Examination has already been given by myself, and corroborated by another teacher, an utter stranger to the writer of this article,* and although as the careful reader will see, an immense amount of over-time is worked, yet this is increased upon the near approach of the Government Examination. About eight weeks before this grand event, sweating commences; instead of the previously-mentioned plethora of Scripture, a famine of the same sets in. Bibles are burked, prayers rushed over in a minute and a half or thereabouts, and the Scripture lesson packed into as small a time as possible, to the youngsters' mixed delight and sorrow. I say sorrow, because when not absolutely cramming for either examination, the hour marked on the Time Table as "Religious Instruction" means one hour's lolling about, joking and talking on the quiet, whilst the teacher wearily descants on the Miraculous Conception or some such wonderful subject.

Scripture finished, Secular cramming (not instruction) begins and goes on till one; this in itself is illegal, for all work should be finished at 12, but the fault lies with yourselves, for were parents to insist upon their children being released at the proper time, the point would be gained. Some parents, indeed, *have* done their duty in this respect, so that at certain schools the head-master says to the teacher, "You had better let young Brown home at 12 and 4.30, instead of keeping him in with the others, for you see his parents are so obnoxious."

Accordingly at 12, young Brown, with triumphant looks, proudly packs up and leaves his fellows still hard at work. *Moral*—Let all parents be obnoxious. Generally at one o'clock the majority are released, but the so-called backward ones are often retained for the whole of the dinner hour. At five o'clock, or rather 5.30, in the same manner the most backward are kept in, but all alike must do a certain amount of home-work, which, if not up to the expectation of the autocratic teacher, procures for the pupil a caning. This system of giving home-work, a short time ago, caused some uproar, so that Board schools have vir ually dropped the practice. But not so in the Church schools, for the system flourishes there as merrily as ever.

Even this extra amount of work does not ensure every boy passing, so that in some schools a new and very artful trick is adopted. Be it known that children are only exempt from examination if—

1. They have not attended the same school for 13 weeks before the examination.
2. They are proved by doctor's certificate to be physically unfit.

It will be easily seen that to get a dunce as an exception means that the average number of passes will not be diminished. Accordingly, in two schools that I know of, a health committee has been formed. This committee consists of the parson, the parson's wife, a couple of the previously mentioned ancient vestal virgins, an old and weak-kneed party, aged about eighty, and a retired doctor. This committee visit the school about five or six times a year, in order to watch the health of those children *whom the head master reports as unfit for examination*. As might be expected, at the commencement of the year the head-master orders his teachers to make out lists of the proposed exceptions; only those who are likely to fail, however, are wanted on the list. Should a bright and clever boy be delicate in health, his name is either never put on the doctor's list, or, if put on, it is worked off by the end of the year. The following is a sample of a list I have by me, only altering the names:

* See *Freethinker*, May 12th and 19th.

*Exceptions for Examination.
Standards III. and IV.*

1. John SmithBad eyesight
2. Chas. WilliamsOne arm
3. Bill BrownGeneral weakness
4. Frank OwenSubject to fits
5. Alf. HardyNatural dulness

The parson would agree with these, and the vestal virgins and the old party would, for the sake of their souls perhaps, agree with the parson, but really speaking, the only genuine exceptions were the first two. Regarding Number Three, who was found to be stupid through under-feeding, but with no other discoverable complaint, the head-master had *invented* his excuse. Number Four had had two fits whilst a baby, but these the master had heard of and turned to account when the boy, then aged 12, was slow and stupid, but otherwise healthy. Number Five was an invention as far as regarded the complaint, and to the best of my belief the doctor thought the boy would be benefited by elastic stockings.

Some of the youngsters were given bottles of physic and some had their teeth drawn, but all this was of absolutely no consequence beside the one great fact that the boys were excepted from Examination.

By a little judicious speech-making a few days before the Examination, the youngsters are persuaded to buy pots of flowers etc., to make the room look pleasant for the Inspector. For that day, the floors and desks are scrubbed, the windows and maps are cleaned, window-sills and tables are nicely decorated with the said flowers, and that fearful cane carefully hidden away in the recesses of some cupboard. For their own sakes, the boys come wondrously clean and, taken altogether, the school presents an uncommonly nice appearance to the eyes of Her Majesty's Inspector. Accordingly he gives it an excellent grant, and all are well content except the children, who, after the Exam., see the flower-pots walked off to the master's own house in order that they may be properly taken care of, and the school resumes its dull and dirty aspect.

A CHURCH SCHOOL TEACHER.

OPEN-AIR "DEFENDERS OF THE FAITH."

THE admirable account of the annual meeting of the Christian Evidence Society, given in the *Freethinker* last week by my friend Mr. J. M. Wheeler, showed that body as it assembled in the odor of such sanctity as Exeter Hall could impart. There, "Christian Evidences" were represented by clean-shaven, glossy-coated parsons and soft-spoken ladies; and an atmosphere of intense respectability brooded over all. A necessary sequel to that impressive picture, in the form of a brief outline of the tactics pursued by its open-air emissaries, I now propose to give.

Roughly speaking, the Christian Evidence Society duplicates the Freethought out-door propaganda: it dumps a stand and a speaker in close proximity to every station of Secular advocacy. Of this, of course, we have no right to complain, provided always that reasonable courtesy and fair play are observed in the matter of distance. So far as I am aware, Wood Green is the only case in which systematic annoyance has been resorted to by the faithful.

Freethinkers have, however, very grave cause of complaint as to the men who are authorised by the Christian Evidence Society to speak in its name. Almost without exception they seek to justify their existence by personal abuse of Freethought leaders and by grotesque misrepresentations of the principles which they are paid to assail. From a dismal stock of personal experience I cull two examples, for the accuracy of which I hold myself responsible.

One of the most active and virulent opponents of Secularism is a Christian Evidence agent named Dunn. One instance will show the manner in which *he* discharges his duty to his employers. Three or four years ago I was invited by a Christian lady to attend an open air lecture given by Mr. Dunn, at a street-corner in Stoke Newington. In the course of his address, he asserted that the Secularist leaders had publicly recommended the adoption of the old Roman custom of *USUS* (a kind of probationary cohabitation with a view to marriage, but capable of dissolution by agreement of the parties). In the subsequent discussion I challenged Mr. Dunn to produce any proof of this statement. No proof was forthcoming; but, in private conversation, Mr. Dunn made vague allusions to a "Mr. Moss" who was alleged to have uttered some favorable references to "usus" in a lecture at Clerkenwell Green. Mr. Arthur B. Moss was *not* the man: and Dunn could not give the slightest clue to identification.

I recounted the circumstances of this affair in an article published in the *National Reformer* shortly afterwards; but no proof or explanation has yet been given. I am informed that Dunn now denies that he ever made such a statement.

Another distinguished champion of Christianity in the open-air is a more or less agreeable rattle named Tarry. His intellectual outfit consists of two "points": one to the effect that "Infidels claim that man has come from the monkeys and is going to the dogs;" the other being a quotation from Mr. G. J. Holyoake's share in the debate with Mr. Bradlaugh on Secularism, with reference to the geographical relation between the Hall of Science and St. Luke's madhouse. No matter what the title of his "lecture" may be, you shall hear these ancient wheezes brought out in aid of Christ and him crucified. He has one "lecture," which mainly consists of quotations; and he expends a considerable amount of ingenuity in devising various titles for his solitary bantling. He speaks rapidly, breathlessly, and with little or no sequence, uttering a vast number of words in the course of an hour, but doing little besides this.

Of the remainder of the troupe I have no space to speak. Their method is in all cases the same—garbled and distorted extracts from the writings of such scientific men as Tyndall, Huxley, and Darwin, quoted for the purpose of attempting to show that those distinguished thinkers are humble soldiers of the Cross. Attacks upon the leaders of the Freethought movement complete their stock-in-trade. By such soldiers of fortune, armed with the stiletto of the assassin and defended by invulnerable armor of impudence, is the faith of Christ "defended."

G. STANDING.

CORRESPONDENCE.

A CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE FALSEHOOD.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—With regard to the statements made concerning the Hyde Park Branch of the N. S. S. in the Christian Evidence Society's annual report, I beg to say that, so far from our having scarcely put in an appearance during the '88 season, we began a month earlier and ended a month later than the C. E. S., and delivered a lecture every Sunday. The fact of our not delivering several lectures during the week now as formerly is due, not to our doctrines being (as asserted) in less favor with the frequenters of the Park, or to the Branch being in a less flourishing condition as regards finances or number of members, but to the fact that when we held several meetings per week we did so merely to break down the violent opposition we had to contend with—opposition which was (though, it is true, only indirectly) fostered by that virulent abuse of Secularism in general and of leading Secularists in particular which, with the C. E. S. lecturers in Hyde Park as elsewhere, usually has to do duty for "Christian Evidence." Having so far Secularised the Christians we found there as to be able to hold a meeting without risk of personal injury, it became unnecessary to hold so many meetings, and we now accordingly carry out our original intention of having one meeting per week—on which occasion "the frequenters of the Park" show their sympathy with our views in the most practical manner by subscribing liberally to our funds.

Messrs. Engstrom, Waterman and Co., of course, must show they have done something for their salaries, and their patrons are not likely to make any investigations.

The report does not state that though balls are dear and Christian evidences cannot be made entertaining, and though Secular doctrines (their "weakness and error having been exposed" by the great and good Dunn, and his holy brethren in the cause) "find little favor with the frequenters of the Park," the all-but-annihilated Secularists managed to lecture indoors from the close of the open-air season till a month after we began in the open-air again this year; while the "Hyde Park mission" did nothing indoors after the '88 season until January, when it mustered up sufficient courage to bury itself in an underground schoolroom.

I may add that though the editor of the *Daily News* gave publicity to the pious lucubrations indulged in by the C. E. S. at Exeter Hall, he has not seen his way to insert a correction, or even to mention that the statements are disputed.

J. F. HENLEY,

Hon. Sec. Hyde Park Branch, N. S. S.

Mother: "Yes, Bobby, God made you. I'm surprised that you should have forgotten that." Bobby: "Well, it happened a good while ago, ma. Seven years is a long time for a boy to remember anything."

A speaker in a meeting long since, enlarging upon the rascality of the devil, said: "I tell you that the devil is an old liar! For, when I was about getting religion, he told me that if I *did* get religion I would not go into gay company and lie or cheat or any such thing, but I have found him out to be a great liar."

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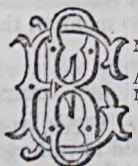
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