

# The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

## LETTERS TO THE CLERGY.—VIII. ON "PRAYER."

To the Rev. T. Teignmouth Shore, M.A.  
Chaplain-in-ordinary to the Queen.

SIR,—Having read your little volume on Prayer in the "Helps to Belief" series, I venture to address some remarks to you upon it. I have read several other volumes in this series without finding my faith assisted; on the contrary, I have only wondered that such flimsy arguments and paltry evasions could be put forward by men of reputation in the Christian Church. My wonder diminishes, however, when I reflect that men did not become Christians by reason, but by early training. Their faith is not a conviction, but a prejudice; and the least plausible answer to objections is sufficient to preserve a belief which reposes on authority instead of evidence. It was remarked by Carlyle, in his essay on Diderot, that the usual "evidences" of Theism never did, and never ought to, convince any Atheist. The fact is, creeds are taught first, and "evidences" manufactured afterwards; so that they are not the *proofs* but the *excuses* of faith.

I do not deny, therefore, that your volume may help the belief of an otiose believer, who has heard that there *are* objections to his creed, and is satisfied to see some kind of printed rejoinder, in order to assure himself that the ministers of religion are looking after his faith. It will doubtless quiet his apprehensions, and enable him to sleep in peace, while the sentinels are watching at the gates. But I am perfectly positive you will allay no single doubt in the mind of any thinking Christian. Such a person, I am confident will be tempted to exclaim, "If this is all that can be said in reply to sceptical objections, I had better at once regard my faith as untenable, and cry like the Israelite of old—Ichabod, the glory is departed."

According to your Preface, you have made "an attempt to put simply and plainly the answer which may be given to the most ordinary difficulties which are urged regarding Prayer." I admit that you have put the answers *simply*, but you have not put them *plainly*. You have involved them in a great deal of preaching, as though your purpose were rather exhortation than discussion; and, like the other writers in this series, you contrive to leave the real point at issue until the last chapter, where you treat it with a very discreet, if not judicious brevity.

You insist, at the outset, on the necessity of definition, and ask the pertinent question—What is prayer? But instead of answering it at once, you occupy a dozen pages in talking loosely upon the subject. When you condescend to define, you say that Prayer is "the intercourse of the spirit of the child with the Father of Spirits; it is the submission of the human will to the Divine." In a later part of the volume you observe that you are not called upon to "explain or to defend parodies of Prayer offered

up to travesties of God," but merely the "reasonableness of Christian Prayer to the God whom Christians worship."

I venture to assert that your definition is the parody, and that what you call the parody is the true doctrine of prayer. It is true that, with the progress of science and civilisation every religious doctrine becomes attenuated, until at length it becomes a vague sentiment, and finally disappears. But while Prayer has any real existence it will always savor of its origin. Prayer is not the submission of the human to the divine will. That is worship. Prayer is a petition. It is an appeal to God, who, as Jeremy Taylor says, loves to be held in a sweet constraint. The man who prays *asks* for something. He may do it as crudely as the converted heathen, in Tylor's *Primitive Culture*, who, on being asked by the missionary to come to morning prayers, replied, "Thank you, I don't want anything just now." Or he may do it as superfinely as a Queen's chaplain. But, however he does it, his prayer will be found to contain a request for *something*, that would not arrive in the ordinary course of nature. Even in the Lord's Prayer, between two thick slices of flattery, is sandwiched a petition for daily bread; and when I open the Prayer Book of your Church I find prayers for rain and sunshine, for calm weather at sea, for good harvests, for recovery from sickness, and for "grace, wisdom, and understanding" for "all the nobility," who certainly need it without ever appearing to obtain it. What is all this but an appeal to God's goodness, and an attempt to influence his will? You admit this yourself in a subsequent chapter, and therefore your definition is as childish in substance as it is childish in expression.

Your definition having broken down, I must follow you as closely as your tortuous course will permit. You innocently observe that the efficacy of Prayer must depend on our conception of God. If he answers prayer, it is reasonable to pray; if he does not, it is unreasonable. Exactly! If a shop sells bread, it is reasonable to go there to purchase it; if not, it is unreasonable. But the question is—*does* the shop sell bread? And that, you will observe, is not a matter of opinion, but a matter of fact.

When you assert that the efficacy of Prayer must only be discussed in relation to "the idea of God" which is expressed in "the doctrine of the Church," you are begging the question most flagrantly. A child might see through such a shallow artifice. Still more absurd, if possible, is your later assertion that "Christianity as a whole is the true explanation and the strongest defence of the doctrine of Christian Prayer." "Admit the truth of Christianity," you say, "and Prayer is perfectly intelligible." Of course it is. Swallow the whole box, and you will certainly have any particular pill. Prayer is an integral part of Christianity, and telling me that if I admit Christianity I accept Prayer, is informing me of a very obvious truism. You can hardly regard this as an argument, and its use implies a gross contempt for the intelligence of your readers.

Although your definition of Prayer is a lamentable failure, you continue more or less in the spirit which inspired it. You assert that "true Prayer cannot flourish in an atmosphere of probability; it must breathe the air of clear and certain confidence. Only those can really pray who believe absolutely that every true prayer is heard and answered by God." This is a most convenient theory for the theologians. If the prayer be not answered, they can always reply that it was not a *true* prayer—whatever that may be—or that the supplicator's faith was not *absolute*. Nay, I observe that you go to a still greater length of precaution. You assert that "No is quite as much an answer as Yes." If we obtain what we pray for we are answered; if we do not obtain it we are also answered. What a beautiful theory! How blandly the theologian plays the innocent game of "Heads we win, and tails you lose." Your theory is quite incapable of proof or disproof; argument is useless on the one side or the other; it can only be left to the indignation of honesty and the derision of common sense.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

### CHRISTIANITY AND MEDICINE.

(Concluded from p. 536.)

DR. G. C. SMYTHE in his *Medical Heresies Historically Considered*, p. 51, remarks:—

"The doctrines of the Christian Church, as understood during the early centuries of the Christian Era opposed a formidable obstacle to the progress of medicine. The idea prevailed extensively that the power of curing diseases by divine interposition was received from Christ by his disciples, and had been transmitted to the elders and deacons in each community, where churches had been established. A belief in this power contributed more to the establishment of Christianity than any other thing connected therewith. The people had escaped from the clutches of the priesthood of the *Asclepiadæ*—who practised medicine in the temples of *Æsculapius* more than five hundred years previous to this time—only to be enslaved by a more bigotted and intolerant priesthood."

All through the ages when Christianity was triumphant disease was attributed to the agency of the devil. He it was who had afflicted Job. The history of the demoniacs in the New Testament proved that devils deranged the bodily functions, and to deny that they were the cause of disease was to impeach the sacred narratives. Even after the dawn of the Renaissance, Luther said:—"Idiots are men in whom devils have established themselves; and all the physicians who heal these infirmities as though they proceeded from natural causes, are ignorant blockheads, who know nothing about the power of the demon." And he goes on to assert that, "I myself saw and touched at Dessau a child of this sort, who had no human parents but had proceeded from the devil."

During the early centuries of Christianity, says Dr. Tylor (*Primitive Culture*, vol. ii., p. 127), demoniacal possession became peculiarly conspicuous, perhaps not from unusual prevalence of the animistic theory of disease, but simply because a period of intense religious excitement brought it more than usually into requisition. Ancient ecclesiastical records describe, under the well known name of "dæmoniacs," "possessed," "energumens," the class of persons whose bodies are seized or possessed with an evil spirit; such attacks being frequently attended with great commotions and vexations and disturbances of the body, occasioning sometimes frenzy and madness, sometimes epileptic fits, and other violent tossings and contortions. These energumens formed a recognised part of an early Christian congregation, a standing place apart being assigned to them in the church.

A striking difference between Paganism and Chris-

tianity was in the regard paid by the former to the human body. To the Greek the health and beauty of the human body was the central conception of art and a permanent object of life. The early Christians, in the words of Lecky, "regarded the body as an unmingled evil, its passions and its beauties as the most deadly of temptations." Many of the saints made it their boast that they never washed, and had never seen their own body. Disease and death were regarded as inflictions for sin, and continued to be so, as long as Christian doctrines had vital hold upon life. Compare what Luther says of death with the manly light in which it was regarded by Pagans. In his *Table Talk*, the great Christian reformer says: "It were a light and an easy matter for a Christian to suffer and overcome death if he knew not that it were God's wrath; the same title maketh death bitter to us. But an heathen dieth securely away; he neither seeth nor feeleth that it is God's wrath, but meaneth it is the end of nature and is natural."

Such attempts as were made to cope with disease in the dark ages, which were pre-eminently the Christian ages, consisted in St. James's method of rubbing with holy oil and laying on of hands, the belief in prayers, pilgrimages to holy shrines, incantations, holy water, and relics, neglecting all knowledge of the human body itself. The belief in the efficacy of relics, which to the priests formed so lucrative an item of Christian faith, was supported by the New Testament stories of the woman who was healed by touching Christ's garment and the diseases that were cured by Paul's handkerchiefs and aprons. The first beginnings of medical science, as of natural philosophy, in Europe were brought by the Moham medans and Jews, who for long were the chief physicians.

Two proverbs which were current in the learned world show the suspicion attached to the medical calling. *Ubi tres medici due athei*, where there are three physicians there are two atheists, and *Optimus inter Medicos ad Gehennam*, the best of the physicians go to hell. Many of the early physicians like Petrus de Abano and Arnold of Villa Nuova were persecuted for heresy.

There is every reason to believe that the purposes of medicine were converted by the monks to the basest uses, and that the authority of the physician joined to the terrors of the church were exercised upon patients enfeebled by disease in extorting money and lands for the benefit of holy church. Want of knowledge was supplied by mystery, faith took the place of anatomy, physiology, and chemistry. Hence the wide sale of relics, charms, amulets, and similar signs of Christian fetishism. The ignorance and cupidity of the monks caused the Lateran Council, under Pope Calistus II. in 1123, to forbid the attendance of priests and monks at the bedside of the sick other than as ministers of religion. Still, however, the lucrative practice was secretly followed, and Pope Innocent II., in a council at Rheims, 1131, enforced the decree prohibiting monks from frequenting schools of medicine, and again in 1139 the Lateran Council threatened with the severest penalties all clergy who practised medicine.

When the priests ascertained they could no longer confine the practice of medicine to themselves it was stigmatised and denounced.\* At the Council of Tours, held in 1163 by Pope Alexander III., it was maintained that the devil sought to seduce the priesthood from their holy office by following the mundane methods of medicine, and in 1215 Pope Innocent III. fulminated an anathema against surgery by ordaining, that as the Church abhorred all sanguinary practices (shown by its taking life without the effusion of blood), no priest could be permitted to follow surgery, or to perform any operations in which either instru-

\* T. J. Pettitrew on Superstitions connected with the history and practice of Medicine and Surgery.

ments of steel or of fire were employed; and that they should refuse their benediction to all those who professed and pursued it. Much prejudice was excited by the Church against the practice of dissection.

The feeling that physicians were interfering with the judgments of God has lasted to our own time, and many can remember how the use of chloroform in parturition was denounced as an attempt to thwart old Jahveh's curse on Eve.

J. M. WHEELER.

#### HOW THREE COPIES OF THE "FREETHINKER" FELL AMONG THE ENEMY.

As far back as memory carries, smart advertising has had for me a strange fascination. If there is one thing in this world I admire above all others, it is a clever and telling advertisement. I have often felt that nature intended me to boss a big show, but, unfortunately my lines have fallen in other places. Now, don't misunderstand me. I do not complain because it is my lot to earn a living at the desk, instead of running a show like Barnum's. I know my catechism too well to murmur. I know it says "God hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." I know that if this be true I deserve neither praise nor blame for filling my present niche. If this be true I am at the present moment merely a pen in God's hand, writing to his dictation; and everything I do is only the action of a puppet which dances while the great "I am" pulls the string. I say, I know and realise all this, and sincerely trust that those who believe the catechism will bear in mind, that this is a message to them from the Great Foreordainer, and is therefore intended for their edification and guidance. But to my tale. Whenever I take up a paper I look at the advertisements, and make a note of those that are quaint or telling. When, therefore, about two years ago I bought my first copy of the *Freethinker*, I went through its advertisements, and was charmed by one headed "How to help us." This seemed to me worthy of Brother Jonathan. That any one should ask those who bought his wares to advertise them in the fashion suggested by the editor, had novelty and courage to recommend it to a mind like mine. I have many times since then burst bombs in the enemy's ranks by acting upon the suggestion "Leave a copy of the *Freethinker* now and then in the train, the car, or the omnibus," and the following may be taken as a fair sample of the *modus operandi*. I do a good deal of railway travelling. One afternoon as I took my place in a carriage, I was followed by a gentleman who wore a profusion of jewellery. Just as the train moved off my fellow-passenger shook hands with a friend on the platform and exclaimed: "Goot bye, goot bye, may Got plesh you." "Now, thought I, this is a foreigner in a strange land, and he has not, so far as I see, any literature with which to while away the hours that must pass before he reaches London; I will do him a great service if I supply him with this week's *Freethinker*." Accordingly I drew forth my only copy, cut it open for the stranger, and, as my destination was at hand, I laid it down on the seat, buttoned my overcoat, left the carriage and my paper.

I lingered on the platform until the train moved off and as the carriage passed me, there, sitting bolt upright, deeply engrossed in the columns of my paper, sat the German dandy.—That was bomb number one. Two days later I got into the same train but this time in a carriage filled with passengers. Right opposite me sat a burly clergyman who eyed each occupant with a searching glance. Having finished his inspection, he heaved a deep sigh, and then stared at the roof. As the train was now in motion, and I had only ten miles to travel, I produced an old copy of the *Freethinker*, which contained some spicy articles, and with all the sauvity I could command, asked the man of God if he cared to read it. Without deigning a reply, he took the paper and was adjusting his spectacles when the train drew up at my station. I do not know what he did with the paper, but if he read it I trust that God blessed the reading of the word. The third shell burst in this wise:—I had occasion to visit Glasgow on a recent Sunday, and had a carriage all to myself till fully half the distance was covered; I had placed the current number of the *Freethinker* on the opposite seat, and was deeply engrossed in Ingersoll's *Rome or Reason* when the train stopped, and a young man with bible under his arm, and dressed in Sunday garb entered and sat down. He glanced furtively first at the paper on the seat, then at me. As I

made no movement, he lifted it up gently and gingerly glanced at the title, and then with a start, laid it down again. I read on as quietly as before. After looking at it for a few minutes, much as a jackdaw looks at an object it covets, the young man lifted the paper once more, curled himself in a corner, and beginning at the first page, read on steadily till the train drew up in Glasgow. He then folded up the paper carefully, and with dazed look, but without uttering a word, left the carriage with his prize. Bomb number three did damage in the bursting.

R. M. RYTON.

#### A NICE PRIEST.

The Rev. Don Giacomo Cassini, the parish priest of Ceriana, has been convicted by a jury at San Remo of "qualified" theft, and has been sentenced to three years' penal servitude. The theft was the abstracting of from thirteen to fourteen thousand francs from a chest which was committed to his safe keeping by the heirs of a certain Francesca Veneziano, one of his parishioners, who died lately. The "qualification" consisted in the plea that the priest took this sum to repay himself for money spent by him on an "Asilo Infantile" which the deceased parishioner had built in her lifetime under his direction, and which on her deathbed she had promised to endow. The trial which lasted nine days, and at which 120 witnesses were examined, was followed by the people of this town with intense interest, and the verdict has produced a profound impression, the more so that this is the second priest who has been condemned to imprisonment at San Remo within the last few months.—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

CONSISTENCY.—"I have more respect for Calvin burning Servetus, and for one of the peculiar people who trusts to prayer and rejects physic, than I have for an intelligent bishop who insures his life and property and preaches woe to the rich; or for a Freethinker who knows better, but allows reliance upon God and the forgiveness of sins to be taught to his little children."—*H. K. Rusden*

#### ACID DROPS.

By and bye, when cremation is general, the burying of distinguished corpses in Westminster Abbey will be stopped as silly and pernicious. Meanwhile the Deans of Westminster will follow the example of the first great "body-snatcher," Dean Stanley. Robert Browning's remains are to be brought from Venice and buried in the Abbey, and the good Christians who, with all their talk about soul, are so anxious about dead bodies, will be able to sav in the words of Hamlet, if they are able to quote them—"Here is Robert Browning at supper, not where he eats, but where he is eaten."

The real part of Robert Browning is his life, which he distilled into hundreds of poems. Men are but what they do, and what Browning did is, at least in part, an imperishable legacy to his fellow men. And we may depend upon it that what will be ultimately prized is not his opinions but his poetry. It is all very well for the Rev. Stopford Brooke to say, "It is well that both our great poets have maintained for us undismayed and firm as lofty rocks above a misty sea the mighty truths of God's fatherhood and man's continued life and perfection beyond death." But the fact is that Browning and Tennyson know no more on such questions than the most prosaic men who tramp the streets of London. Besides, you can neutralise the theology of poets by citing them against each other. Lucretius and Shelley were as great as Browning and Tennyson, and the religious opinions of the two couples are entirely diverse. The poet has a keener eye than ordinary mortals, but the laws of optics are inexorable, and he cannot see through walls. Death is a wall, at least to the living, and the poet is as unable as his meanest reader to perceive anything beyond it. The great point is, how does he use his eyes on the things of life? Does he reveal to us fresh beauties, does he disclose new and subtle fancies and emotions, does he point out what may be seen but has been unperceived, does he stimulate the humanity within us, does he suggest nobler ideals, does he create new forms of poetical life that interest our intellects and animate our hearts? The poet must make us

think and feel; it is not his province to make us believe. His opinions may be interesting, as he is a person of distinction, but they are no part of his poetical endowment, nor are they necessarily true or in anywise authoritative. They are only valuable, just like other men's, in proportion to his intellectual force, and the amount of study he has given to the question at issue.

The Rev. S. A. Barnett, the Bishop of Whitechapel, says that "Browning, unlike many theologians, who had woven their garments round God's character as revealed to us, stripped off the disfiguring clothes, and in his poems showed us the unity of power and love." Now we must be pardoned for calling this pulpit nonsense. Browning, the poet, will live. Browning, the theologian, will be as dead fifty years hence—nay, twenty years hence—as any other dabbler in dogmatic mystery.

We beg the theological gentlemen, who are "improving the occasion" of Browning's death, to ponder the following passage from Matthew Arnold's essay on "The Study of Poetry"—"Most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. . . . Our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasoning about causation and finite and infinite being; what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness the more we shall prize 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge' offered to us by poetry."

Professor Palgrave has recently edited a *Treasury of Sacred Song*. In reviewing it the *Athenæum* remarks that "Mr. Palgrave is too keen a critic not to feel that somehow or other religious poetry is seldom of a high order." Now why is this? We believe the answer is to be found in the pregnant epigram that religion is the poetry of unpoetical natures.

Lest in its strong faith in the educational code the public should imagine vain things about the ages of intellectual darkness being past in these happy isles, I must tell the following authentic story, which happened on Sunday last in the church of a great London preacher:—

Reporter (after the evening service): "Would you be good enough to tell me whether any allusion has been made to Browning's death in to-day's sermons?"

First deacon: "I'm sure I don't know, but I don't remember any allusion to a man of that name."

Second deacon: "Well, yes, he *did* mention somebody who had died, and prayed for the widow and little ones."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

The murderers of Dr. Cronin are sentenced to imprisonment for life. We suppose the death penalty is generally obnoxious in Illinois, for a more sordid and dastardly crime has seldom been perpetrated. The wretches who committed it were religious. They were all good Catholics, with a full measure of Catholic superstition. Their faith did not prevent them from luring Dr. Cronin to his fate by a pretended call of humanity; it did not prevent them from battering him to death and pitching his corpse headlong into a sewer hole; but it *did* prevent them from stripping the naked body of the Agnus Dei, a Catholic charm worn round the neck. They were too superstitious to touch that, and the fact threw a light upon the religion of the assassins.

Poor old Pigott lied, forged, perjured himself, sold smutty books, and finally blew his brains out; but he wore a scapular all the time, and the holy bit of woollen was found on his dead body.

*The Coming Man* is a curious little cranky monthly sheet, emanating from Govan, and seems to be devoted to expounding the flat-earth theory. It holds that the Bible teaches that the earth has ends, and that its ultimate end is very near. Its first article is entitled "Infinite Space an Atheistic Supposition." It denounces the doctrine of infinite space as blasphemy, "seeing that there cannot be two infinities, the one necessarily limiting the other." We suppose *The Coming Man's* Infinite Deity exists without any space to exist in.

"The Poetry of the Bible" is a subject that doesn't attract much at Guildford. "Brother John" writes to the *West Surrey Times* that he looked in the Church Institute, and found only six people. The lecturer ought to have advertised "The Song of Solomon." That would have fetched them.

A good deal of dirty clerical linen was aired in the Court of Queen's Bench last week in the case of the Rev. Mr. Leamon, formerly vicar of St. Paul's, Camden Square, against the Rev. Mr. Adams, formerly vicar of the parish. The plaintiff accused his vicar—who it appears has himself been suspended for gross immorality—with having slandered him by telling the churchwarden that the plaintiff had venereal disease. The plaintiff went into the witness-box to deny the allegation, but judgment was nevertheless entered for the defendant.

Another clerical libel suit is occupying the attention of the Court of Queen's Bench. The Rev. O. J. Reichel sues the Rev. C. Mackarness, the representatives of the late Bishop of Oxford, and the Rev. E. P. Wellings for damages laid at £41,000. The plaintiff was vicar of Sparshalt and was accused of immorality by a woman who kept a lodging house. He brought a charge of attempting to extort money against her, but she was acquitted. He was then induced by the bishop to resign his living, but withdrew his resignation because, as he alleges, the conditions were not carried out. Perhaps the further progress of the case may disclose the conditions upon which it was sought to hush up a clerical scandal.

A priest who rejoices in the name of Toussaint Boudes is under trial in France. According to the Paris correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph* he has had an extraordinary career of crime. He is asserted to have perpetrated acts of bestiality, and pilfered right and left, corrupted young boys and girls, robbed the sick people whom he visited, and, under the guise of almsgiving, lent out money at usurious interest. The desperate rascal, despite all these crimes, was appointed Curé of Taurines, where he violated a girl. He is now charged with embezzlement, but solemnly protests his innocence.

A man named Cunningham was murdered last week on his road home to Ballinahinch, Ireland. He was set upon by three men, and literally beaten to death. Religious strife is assigned by the police as the cause, and certainly the cause assigned is a true one in the sense of being adequate to account for any brutality.

Some Newcastle bigot got two newspaper boys arrested for calling out the *Sunday Chronicle* on Sunday morning. Alderman Hamond very sensibly discharged the lads, saying that they were not to be prevented from earning an honest living on any day of the week when the law permitted it.

Parson Bowly, of St. Michael's, Sydenham, should keep his aristocratically-named son, Arthur Devereux, in better order. This young blood went into the Crystal Palace, and amused himself by smashing the statuary, for which elegant pastime the magistrate fined him five pounds and costs. Arthur Devereux pleaded it was an accident, but that little game didn't answer. He should have said that he was a lover of the decalogue, and couldn't bear the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth.

Another fact for Talmage! George Partridge committed suicide on the Albert Embankment with a revolver. A letter to a friend, Mrs. Hill, was found on his body, full of pious expressions, such as "pray for me," "God have mercy upon me," "God bless Lizzie." The poor fellow seems to have been a victim of misfortune, and to have derived no support from his belief in God.

Last week the Rev. W. Wyke Bayliss, the vicar of Upham, Hants, fell down dead in the schoolroom, after giving a reading there, and last Sunday there were two deaths of old men in church, one at St. Mark's Church, Pennington, near Lymington; and another at Tabernacle Baptist Chapel, Cardiff. There is no moral.

Walter Johnson, a Sunday-school teacher at Birmingham,

shot himself last Sunday in presence of the class. The injury, however, was only superficial. He was taken to the lock-up, but released on bail.

The Rev. Simon Sturges, vicar of Wargrave, died suddenly while reading prayers at the National Schools.

The vicar of Empsay, near Skipton, Yorkshire, declares that dissent is a crime equally grave with drunkenness. He probably finds that it affects his interests far worse.

Jean de Bonnefoi's *Le Pape de Demain*—the Pope of To-morrow—has just been put on the Roman Index. All Catholics are forbidden to read it under severe penalties. As the publisher's name is given as well as the title, we expect there will be a run on the book. Jean de Bonnefoi and his publisher, E. Dentu, may be congratulated on obtaining a first-rate advertisement.

TEXT—"Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth."  
SERMON—The Venerable William Lea, Archdeacon of Worcester, has just died, leaving £56,000 personalty, besides real estate. He bequeaths the bulk of the property to his brother, who is also a parson.

There is no truth in the report that the Rev. Josiah Lea, who comes into this fortune, intends to preach next Sunday on the text, "Blessed be ye poor."

The *Star* has its knife into some of the advertising East-end philanthropists. It was turned round in one of them on Tuesday. His name is the Rev. J. W. Atkinson, who advertises his thousand free meals very widely. According to the reporter, who got a ticket for soup, the stuff was of the thinnest and poorest description, and "all agreed that after one spoonful they had had enough." The reporter thought he would like to see the house the good philanthropist lived in. He found Mr. Atkinson had removed from a semi-detached villa to a "fine substantial edifice standing in its own grounds." Advertising philanthropy seems to be a paying game, especially if conducted by "reverends."

The vicar of St. Giles's, Reading, arranged for a series of lectures against Secularism in that ancient borough. But some of his lecturers, in discussion, seem to have given up the belief in eternal punishment and other distinctive dogmas of Christianity, and the *Reading Observer* now remarks: "We learn on good authority that a strong feeling prevails in influential quarters of the Established Church in Reading that these anti Secularist lectures are a great mistake, and that they should, if possible, be brought to a close." Christians generally do find it a mistake to open up the fact that there are difficulties in their creed; for the difficulties usually only appear the more the more they are examined. So they usually prefer to shut their eyes and avoid discussion.

The Salt Lake papers are full of the examination of the Mormons as to their alleged rebellious oaths, and things are getting so uncomfortable for the Latter-day Saints that they are said to be prospecting for a new settlement in the wilds of Canada. Much has been made of the oath to avenge the blood of the saints, but this, as the Mormons point out, is just as scriptural as their polygamy. In the Book of Revelation the souls of the saints cry out, "How long, O Lord, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth!" and the same spirit animates most of the old Jew-book.

Not only the Mormon Church and the Catholic Church, but as Cardinal Manning some time ago pointed out in the *Nineteenth Century*, the Greek Church, the Anglican Church, and the Presbyterian church all elevate the spiritual power above the temporal. And they are consistent. If God is supreme, and the churches are the custodians and interpreters of his word, their authority must be superior to that of any human power. But the truth is the Mormon President, the Pope of Rome, and the Archbishop of Canterbury know exactly as much of the will of God as the savage who seeks to obtain his own wants by declaring that they are the will of his fetish.

There is a great moral in the Mormon trial if the

American people will only heed it. The question being tried is, Are the claims of the Church to temporal and spiritual power such that membership of the Church disqualifies from citizenship of the United States? When the Americans have the courage to apply this question to the Roman Catholics they will be face to face with one of their biggest problems.

The Rev. A. J. Harrison has been lecturing at Milnrow on "The Atonement." According to the *Rochdale Observer*, he delivered an eloquent address, but spoke for about an hour before he came to the subject. Most of the discourse was devoted to maintaining the deity of Christ, and we dare say J. C. is duly grateful. Still, we wish Dr. Harrison would be a little more accurate about other persons than J. C. For instance, he referred to Maurice as "once a Unitarian." Now, we should very much like to know his authority for the statement. Maurice was "unsound" with regard to everlasting punishment, but we are not aware that he ever had a doubt about the Trinity.

Spurgeon's voice is impaired, and he begs his congregation to ask the Lord for a box of heavenly jujubes. Spurgeon doesn't want to go to heaven before his time. He is anxious to serve the Lord here as long as possible. His mansion at Beulah Hill is a good deal better than a mansion in the skies.

The Christian papers frequently point to intolerance by their fellow Christians in Russia or Bohemia, without indicating that much the same feeling is exhibited at home, as witness the late Hoo case. The lady who was refused the sacrament because she attended a Wesleyan chapel has since been charged by the Dean of Rochester with being actuated by a mean and revengeful spirit. At the invitation of the lady's solicitor, however, the dean climbed down and apologised.

Dr. Marcus Dods says the Christian religion *tends* to make men moral. "Tends" is a good word. It saves you the trouble of coming up to the scratch. The biggest thief in London might say he is tending to become an honest man.

The Archbishop of Prague has issued a Pastoral Letter against the movement for honoring the memory of John Huss. He damns the stout old heretic over again, declares that he met with less than his deserts, and commands—yes, *commands*—all Catholics to set their faces against the Huss memorial. Evidently dear old Mother Church would burn heretics still if she could. She is the most malicious, vindictive, merciless old beldame that ever cursed and screamed.

Dr. Walter Smith, of Edinburgh, is trying to fix up the tottering authority of the Bible. His capacity for the work may be judged from the statement that "Criticism has left the New Testament canon very much where it was before." The man who says that will say anything.

The gay and festive Talmage has been amusing himself in the Holy Land and other Eastern places, the cremation of his Tabernacle having given him a good opportunity of his talking about. He has also been to Athens, and preached a sermon from Mars Hill, from which he brings away a piece of stone to be built into his Brooklyn joss-house. We don't *know* what Talmage's sermon was like, but we can *guess*. Very likely he thinks it a good deal finer than Paul's; and we dare say it was, if finer means tawdrier. Paul was no idle rhetorician, beating out small ideas into the thinnest sermons, stuck all over with Yankee pinchbeck decorations; but everyone must allow Talmage to be a past-master in that line of composition, which debauches the mind, in its way, quite as much as a lascivious story.

More religious sweetness! Ameer Ali, a Mohammedan, has been appointed a judge of the Calcutta High Court. The leading Hindoo paper has attacked the appointment. Of course! All the good things of life—honors, places, and salaries—are intended by Providence for persons of *our* creed.

M. Carnot has been presented by the Bible Society of London with a Breton translation of the Jew-books. The

Pre-ident expressed himself grateful for the attention, but, as the books can be of no use to him, has decided to send them to the National Library. This is a good deal better treatment than a great number of the Bible translations are subject to. Travellers in India and China declare they are often employed to useful but ignoble purposes.

Poor Mrs. Booth is dying of cancer. Faith-healing, and all the prayers of the Salvation Army, are powerless against that incurable disease. It is a curious fact that the efficacy of prayer never outruns that of medical science.

The Episcopal Church in America is in somewhat of a quandary in regard to the question of marriage with a deceased wife's sister. The Church in England is violently opposed to any relaxation in this respect, but such unions being permitted by the United States law, the Church feels it cannot denounce them, and has revised its canons, which now only affirm that "If any persons be joined together otherwise than as God's Word doth allow, their marriage is not lawful, and such marriage is hereby prohibited." This grounding the canons on the Bible evades the difficulty, for one party affirms that marriage with a deceased wife's sister is prohibited in Leviticus, while the other side declare that it is countenanced in Deuteronomy.

A pious contemporary tells "a new story" of the famous Robert Hall. A friend took him to the house of a lady who was remarkably plain, and the great preacher stared at her so that she left the room in confusion. On being remonstrated with for his rudeness, he said he was simply struck with the thought of what a wonderful change there would be for her on the resurrection morning. Did rudeness ever offer a sillier excuse? There are very few people who can imagine themselves other than they are; and very few people, even including preachers, who think they could be much better looking. If the lady felt insulted by Robert Hall's stare, she might have been excused if she had slapped his face for his explanation.

The Rev. John McNeill, as we had occasion to notice, said the other day that anybody might have his copy of Calvin for the asking. Some people took him at his word and made application for the volumes, but they discovered that he didn't mean what he said. It was only a fashion of speech.

"Overworked Ministers" is a subject of correspondence in the *Christian World*. A New Connexion minister says it is no wonder that many Methodist sky-pilots die of overwork, for in some circuits they preach *three* times every Sunday, and sometimes during the week. Shocking, to be sure! But what would this New Connexion minister say to the work of a Secular leader—Mr. Foote, for instance? Three lectures on Sunday are frequent, with discussion after each sometimes, and perhaps four hundred miles travelling to and fro. Then there is the editing of the *Freethinker*, to which he contributes an average of six columns weekly. Then there is the writing of many pamphlets, and a lot of correspondence—averaging between thirty and forty letters a week—for which there is nothing to show. Finally comes a great deal of committee and other work, Mr. Foote being President of the London Secular Federation and Chairman of the N.S.S. General Organisation Committee. Surely if ministers die of overwork it is wonderful that Secular leaders manage to live at all.

The Cincinnati Presbytery recently took a vote on infant damnation. Twenty-two members voted to ease up a little on the infants, whilst eighteen clung to the good old doctrine of preordination, according to which, and in accord with their sense of God's justice, infants by the thousand million not a span in length are writhing in a brimstone fire.

Dr. McGlynn has given his opinion that the election of a Catholic as President of the United States would lead to something like civil war. He pointed out that the Papacy has meddled in the politics of every country where it gained a foothold, moving the people simply as pawns on the political chess-board. "The Pope's machine," said this excommunicated Catholic, is opposed to American public schools. The first move of the Catholics in power would

be to introduce a new source of corruption in giving churchmen a school fund.

A critic gravely remarks that the picture in our Christmas number representing Jahveh working among electric dynamos and saying "Let there be light," is an anachronism. Anachronisms, we would remind our critic, are found in the works of some of the most celebrated artists. There is no greater anachronism than representing the Jew carpenter as a sort of feminine Greek. We have seen a picture of the Circumcision, in which Simeon is depicted wearing spectacles. Tintoretto, in his picture of the children of Israel gathering manna, arms them with muskets. In a representation of Abraham offering up Isaac, the patriarch holds a blunderbuss at the head of his son. In Verrio's picture of Christ healing the sick, the lookers on wear periwigs; Albrecht Dürer draws the angel who expelled Adam and Eve in a fashionable dress with flounces; and the same artist depicts, in the scene of Peter's denial, a Roman soldier smoking a German pipe.

An article on the "Life and Writings of the God of Literature," by a Chinese missionary, appears in the *Chinese Recorder* of Shanghai. This being appears to have lived seventeen lives before he attained his present sublime state. From the specimens given of his literary powers we fancy the Chinese God of Literature would have to take a back seat if confronted with Shakespeare or Goethe.

The Rev. Daniel Moore, of Paddington, has been clearing up the question of how soon you get to Paradise after death. He is sure that you go at once by express train, arriving within three hours. Those who do the journey will find out that Moore is right, or they will find out that he is wrong—it doesn't much matter which. For our part we are in no hurry to get to Paradise, and we don't find any very great hurry amongst Christians. There is Spurgeon, for instance. After singing "Art thou weary, art thou languid?" he books through to Mentone instead of to Paradise, and we should follow suit if common sense paid as well as religion.

The Wesleyans have been having a Holiness Convention. Its object is the "deepening of the spiritual life." One of the chief speakers was the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, a gentleman who whose spiritual life doesn't want much *deepening*. Judging by his story of the Converted Atheist, he is *deep* enough for anything.

Dr. Wright in an article in the *Nineteenth Century* entitled "Stamping out Protestantism in Russia" shows that the pretence of religious toleration in that country is a fraud. When Christians persecute fellow Christians on every opportunity, we may judge what would be their attitude towards Jews and Freethinkers.

Mr. C. D. Holmes of Dakota sends a letter to the *Times* in which he makes the statement that in that region eight million bullocks have been slaughtered during the last ten years. Evidently Paul was right in ridiculing the idea that God cared for oxen.

Their heavenly father, however, has a watchful eye over sharks. He sent them a treat recently in the shape of Professor von Tassel, a daring aeronaut from New York, who descending in a parachute to the water near Honolulu was quickly drawn under and devoured by sharks before those in a steamer could rescue him, although they heard his frightful screams.

One of the speakers at a recent Foreign Missions meeting at Ashford said he believed that, if the farmers were more careful to lay apart a portion of their income for the work of the Church, there would be less agricultural depression. This is quite a new idea. The speaker was at least original.

Preaching isn't enough to fill the gospel shops. All sorts of secular attractions have to be added. Grace Church, New York, spends 10,000 dollars a year on music. Even our own Dr. Parker is getting up a band for the City Temple. A first performance was given the other Sunday, but was not a great success. About ten years' rehearsing will be required.

## MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, December 22, Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town, at 7.30, on "God's Birthday."

Dec. 29, Hall of Science, London.

Jan. 5 and 12, Hall of Science, London; 19, Liverpool; 26, Camberwell.

Feb. 2, Hall of Science, London; 9, Blackburn; 16, Milton Hall, London; 23, Hall of Science, London.

March 2, Manchester; 9, Camberwell; 23 and 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.

OUTSPOKEN ATHEIST.—The statement about the priest at Morocco was taken from a French paper. The name, however, was not given. Our correspondent says that he takes two *Freethinkers*, one for his own use and one to put in the newsagent's window, which was sold, and he has done the like with the Christmas Number.

"FREETHINKER" CIRCULATION FUND.—L. D. G., 2s. 6d.; D. Rogers, 3s.

QUIZ.—(1) Yes, the blood and water from Christ's side is bad science. (2) If a Christian says "Nothing is impossible with God," you might answer, "Very likely; of course he could have made you a logician; but the question is has he?"

H. PORTER, a Lincoln's ire working man, sends his mite towards the expenses of the London Secular Federation; and, in fact, over eighty per cent. of the money sent in response to our appeals comes from the country. What are the well-to-do Londoners thinking about?

H. T. BAILEY.—We suffer greatly from printer's idiocies. The lines on p. 35 of the *Dictionary*—2 to 6 from the bottom—have no business there at all. They will be noted as superfluous in an addition to "Errata" on small slips to be pasted under the present list. Any purchaser of Part XI. can have a slip by applying to Mr. Forder.

P. BRABAZON.—We wish the West Ham Branch the success it deserves.

ROYAL DRAGON.—Thanks for the *Echo* reference, which has brought a few applications for copies.

A. LOVETT.—Pleased to have your opinion that "Satan and Michael" in our Christmas Number is "splendid." Professor F. W. Newman is a vegetarian but not an Atheist. He is a Theist, who has written some strong things against Christianity.

E. PONSONBY.—Thanks for the jokes. *Bible Romances* will be issued in fortnightly parts early in the new year.

ATHEIST.—Of course the Bible is *historic* in a certain sense. There are real events related in it here and there, but they are all more or less overlaid with supernatural fiction. We note your good opinion of our Christmas Number, and thank you for taking extra copies.

H. CALASCA (Newcastle) says: "We are delighted with your Christmas Number."

W. W. CHILT.—The two American papers could be obtained through Mr. Forder. Write to him direct.

ATHEIST (Grimsby).—Sorry we cannot find room, though we read your letter with interest.

F. MORRIS (Cardiff).—We have written a paragraph. Certainly it would be a good thing to insert Branch reports, and the matter is occupying our attention. The difficulty is want of space. We are already a wonderful pennyworth—for a Freethought journal. Mr. Foote will write about visiting Cardiff.

C. J. RUSE, 61 New Church Road, Camberwell, SE will be happy to receive subscriptions towards the Children's Party.

J. W. EATON.—The passage in full runs thus:—"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. xii., 31, 32). A number of cranky people have been made crazy with fear lest they had committed the unpardonable sin against the Ghost.

C. J. SINGER.—We are confident that Theosophy has no chance with Freethinkers. There may be a few silly creatures, such as you refer to, who swallow Mrs. Besant's tale of Madame Blavatsky's drawing a picture by merely *willing* it; but, if there are such, the sooner they leave our party the better. As for the rest, Mrs. Besant is very eloquent, but she will not make them stand on their heads.

J. ANSON.—Contents-sheet shall be sent. Glad to hear you have not a single one to pay for of the copies you guaranteed your newsagent. It is a capital plan, and always succeeds. Thanks for taking extra copies of the Christmas Number for distribution.

Mr. URRY, newsagent, 64 Leonard Street, City Road, E.C., supplies the *Freethinker* and other Secular literature

J. SAUNDERS.—Thanks for letter and cuttings. Mr. Foote will visit Reading.

J. KEAST.—What is the use of discussing with such a shuffler? If he has a copy of Eusebius, he can satisfy himself by opening it; if has not, he is very impudent to flout the combined authorities of Gibbon, Jortin, Lardner and Milman. Of course there are many editions of Eusebius. It is impossible to say *who* forged the Josephus passage, but that it is a forgery is allowed by every competent scholar.

C. DORG.—Mr. Foote will write you. The feasibility of inserting reports is being considered.

J. COLLINSON writes—"I took a dozen of the Christmas Number and sold the lot by Sunday night, and I am taking orders for more. If other Freethinkers who like your paper would do the same I am sure it would help the sale."

G. L.—Always glad to receive papers or cuttings.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Fair Play—Lucifer—Der Arme Teufel—Freidenker—Echo—New York Press—Ironclad Age—Neues Freireligiöses Sonntags-Blatt—Freedom—Sunday Chronicle—Open Court—West Surrey Times—Menschentum—Freethought—Barnet Press—Reading Observer—Seafaring—The Coming Man—Evening Standard—Twentieth Century—Joyful News—Consett Guardian—Rochdale Observer—Newcastle Weekly Chronicle—Freethinkers' Magazine.

FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish our attention directed.

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.

## TO ALL WHOM IT CONCERNS.

A GENTLEMAN asked us at Nottingham if the invitation we printed early in the year was still open. We replied that it was. Our resources are not adequate to carry on our Freethought business properly, and they are diminished from time to time by investors requiring to withdraw their money. We have indeed to repay a good deal of money during the new year, and we shall be glad to hear from any friends who have spare cash to entrust us with. Every investment bears five per cent. interest, and the investor receives a legal document entitling him to recall his amount by six months' notice. We intend, if possible, to be very active in publishing during the next year or two. There is a certain market for all we produce, and a reasonable, if not handsome, profit on sales. It will be borne in mind that the *Freethinker* brings us no direct return for our labor, at least for the present, though the prospect is slowly improving. We have, therefore, to rely upon what is yielded by the publishing business, which, besides lecturing work, is our only source of income. Our stock of publications is a large one, and some idea of the resources needed may be gathered from the fact that the *Dictionary of Freethinkers* alone has cost £150 to produce, exclusive of the binding, the expense of which is incurred gradually as the work sells. Those who cannot afford to invest are not desired to inconvenience themselves; we only appeal to those who can; and they who respond quickly will be doing us the greatest service.

G. W. FOOTE.

THE *Freethinker* will be published on Tuesday next week, in order to get it into the hands of the trade before Christmas day. Retail vendors should order on Monday.

## SUGAR PLUMS.

MR. FOOTE lectures this evening (Dec. 22) at Milton Hall on the seasonable subject of "God's Birthday." There will be nuts and cake, and perhaps some sparkling wine. All are welcome, on the usual conditions.

THE Circus at Portsmouth is a big, cold, dreary building on a foggy December morning, and the folk who did turn out of their comfortable houses to hear Mr. Foote's lecture showed something like heroism. Even a strong man confessed to having turned up his overcoat collar to protect his neck. The afternoon lecture was better attended, but many persons were kept away by a natural indisposition to sit in an ice cellar. In the evening the gas gave the place a more cheerful appearance, and the attendance was considerably improved.

THE Portsmouth Branch includes a band of men of whom any cause might well be proud. To meet such men is a privilege, to address them is an honor, to win their applause is a distinction. One of them, alas, is laid up with sickness, though if love and respect could procure his recovery he would be well to-morrow. Mr. J. Brumage has been a chief pillar of the Branch. He has great natural capacity, but that is eclipsed by his character, which is firm as granite, honest as daylight, and transparent as crystal. Here indeed is an Englishman in whom there is no guile. His many friends—among whom we are proud to be reckoned—are anxious to see him restored to health. Fortunately he has an excellent nurse in the staunch Freethinker who is his wife.

LONDON readers will remember the Secular Federation dinner at the Bridge House Hotel, London Bridge, on Tuesday, January 7. Mr. Foote will preside, and several well-known Freethinkers will speak to the toasts, of which a full list will be given in due course. A big gathering is expected. The tickets are 2s. 6d. each.

LONDON SECULAR FEDERATION FUND.—II. Porter 1s.; G. Vickers 1s.; A Friend £10.

THE Hall of Science annual Children's Party is being organised by Mr. Forder. Subscriptions should be sent to him at once. The committee will meet at the Hall this evening (Dec. 22) at 8.30.

THE West Ham Branch has added a piano to its attractions. One of the lady members discourses music now before and after the lecture. Unfortunately the piano is but partially paid for, and the Branch would be glad to hear from any Freethought millionaire in the district. Mr. Foote is going to give the Branch a gratuitous lecture in aid of its funds in January.

THE South Shields Branch holds its third annual tea and entertainment at Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools on New Year's Day. The affair will wind up with a dance. The tickets are 1s. for adults and 6d. for children. There is sure to be a good party.

THE Cardiff Secularists are reorganising. The Branch has made a fresh start, and is inviting Freethought lecturers to visit the town. A fair sum of money was collected at the first meeting. The Branch now foregathers every Sunday evening in the Small Hall, Queen Street Arcade, the large hall being available for special lectures. Business begins at 6.30. There are comfortable chairs to sit on and a good fire to make the place cheerful. We hope all our Cardiff readers will lend a helping hand.

THE Vicar of St. Giles's, Reading, and his lecturers contradict each other on many important points, an amusing list of which is printed in the *Reading Standard*. Anyhow there is considerable stir in the town, and Mr. Foote will pay it a visit early in January. Mr. Forder will accompany him as chairman, and a Branch of the N. S. S. will be started.

ONE of the latest sermons of Mr. Chas. Voysey is on "Christ and the Gospels." Mr. Voysey speaks out boldly and says, "If their New Testament is all true, then Christ could neither have been perfect God nor perfect man; not

even a trustworthy teacher in matters of religion." It is no light task to wean Christians from their idol of a God man and their fetish of an infallible book, but Mr. Voysey has emancipated himself and done much to emancipate others.

"NUNQUAM," of the *Manchester Sunday Chronicle*, is getting warmer than ever. His last week's assault, as "a deliberate, wicked, blasphemer," on the canting Christianity of Cottonopolis, was in his best vein, and must have made some of his orthodox readers lift their eyebrows. Very likely it made some of them swear. To one correspondent, who wants something in place of Christian faith, he gives a rule of life from Ingersoll, only Ingersoll's name is not printed. "Nunquam" now makes the confession that he does not "believe *any* religion that does [exist] or has existed in the world to be *true*" Good, "Nunquam." That's just our position, only we have held it all along.

DR. E. B. TYLOR has been delivering the Gifford lectures on "Natural Religion" at Aberdeen. Dr. Tylor reveals with a master hand the origin of religions in the belief in departed spirits. He finds that religion exists in the lowest races, a negroid race in Tasmania, who were in the same stage of culture as palæolithic man, having a distinct religion in the worship of spirits. We trust that Dr. Tylor's lectures will be published, and meantime shall be glad to see any good reports in the Aberdeen or other papers.

MR. J. A. CLARKE has been taking a tour in Durham county. One of his lectures on The Absurdity of Prayer is noticed in *The Consett Guardian*.

THE *Freethinkers' Magazine* for December opens with a good article on "Reason at Rome and Romanism in America," by Mr. T. B. Wakeman, a portrait of whom is given. There is also a portrait of Mr. L. K. Washburn, the new editor of the *Boston Investigator*, and a full view of Bruno's monument as frontispiece to the magazine, the contents of which are of the usual varied and interesting character.

THE *Freethinkers' Magazine* pays us the compliment of saying that if "our American cousins" only knew what a bright, able, spicy, and interesting paper the *Freethinker* is a thousand of them would at once subscribe for it.

DR. MONROE'S *Ironclad Age* quotes our tribute to its interest and usefulness, and returns us a handsome compliment. "There are no more able writers and workers in the Freethought ranks," says our American contemporary, "than Mr. Foote and Mr. Wheeler of the London *Freethinker*." Ahem! What will you take, doctor?

*Freedom*, edited by Mr. W. W. Collins, says:—"There is something intellectually refreshing and invigorating in Mr. G. W. Foote's robust *Letters to the Clergy*. The strength of the convictions of the able editor of the *Freethinker* is due to long, severe, and careful thinking—this is evident in all he writes."

FROM an editorial in *Freedom* we learn that the Sydney Secular Society has safely weathered a tempestuous year. It has £300 to its credit at the bank, the Freethought Hall Company has made splendid progress, nearly £2,000 being subscribed, and the "Benefit Society has done much to mitigate the harshness of sickness as well as to encourage thrift and friendliness among the members." We congratulate Sydney, and we congratulate Mr. Collins.

THE *Barnet Press* gives a pretty fair account of the recent rumpus at Southgate, and completely exonerates the Freethinkers from the ridiculous charges of the bigots. It also describes one of the Christian speakers as "extremely offensive." This is the man we referred to last week as a nuisance to all the decent folk on his own side.

MR. SAM STANDRING informs us that the Christian Evidence lecturer, Reynolds, is going to prove Christianity at Southgate by reading tit-bits from the file of the *Freethinker*. The performance comes off this evening (Dec. 22) at 8 in the Village Hall. The villagers' mouths are watering for the treat. We thank Mr. Reynolds for advertising this journal and hope he will persevere.



## WHAT IS TRUTH?

ST. GEORGE MIVART'S "CRITERION."

ONE wonders whether, when the glaciers and the ice and the snow of the Arctic regions have slowly crept northwards and southwards until they freeze together in cold embrace at the Equator, the last man as he emerges from his "crystal palace" to take his last (will it be "fond") look at the dying sun, will put this question for the last time. We do not know; and if we wonder when it was first put we are equally ignorant. Does the amœba ask the question as it pseudopods itself over a grain of sand only to find that its movements have been "love's labour lost?" Does the most complex micro-organism with the highest "Psychic life" ever put the question? We are here, much as we were with the last man on the frozen equator; but still we would like to know when the question was first propounded. Did it occur to our Simian ancestry before articulate speech began? It is quite possible to conceive that this might have been, since the words are, after all, nothing more than putting into interrogative form a feeling which must have already existed. Who can say how many generations of monkeys had come and gone, all their lives occasionally cracking bad nuts, before that more sagacious monkey first took to throwing the light ones away, because he *felt* they were not good (true) ones? He didn't put the query into words, but the conclusion is irresistible that the discriminative process must have been gone through. Again, what is truth? Who was the first to put the query after man had acquired his "roots?" Is this among the things that "India can teach us?" I am afraid we shall never get a very satisfactory answer. The wise men of the East are about as unsatisfactory to-day as in the days of Herod.

The Greeks once more come out as the keenest and shrewdest of the ancients, at any rate in putting questions, and if their answers were not so satisfactory as we wish they had been, it was obviously more their misfortune than their fault. That academic inscription of theirs, "Know thyself," was but a command to keep on asking this very question until a satisfactory reply was obtained. They were constantly asking it; yes, and they were constantly getting answers, but they were shrewd enough to perceive that all the answers could not be correct, and they were comparatively modest in consequence. No doubt they had their Cagliostros with their "golden thighs," but as a rule the Greek, not over sure of his solution, passed on the query.

But what is Truth? We do at last come upon the question, said to have been put plainly and bluntly (if somewhat satirically) by a certain Roman governor to the second person of the Christian Trinity, who certainly might have been supposed capable of answering it. But did he? He doesn't appear to have given any reply at all (John xviii., v. 38), possibly because Pontius Pilate was in too much of a hurry to wait for one. Possibly it was because he considered that the answer had been already given, since it was for the purpose of "bearing witness to the truth that he came into the world," and was thus before the Roman tribunal; and bearing in mind that one of his biographers states that a full, true, and particular account of the sayings and doings of this witness to the truth could not have been contained in all the books of the world, we ought, I suppose, to be exceedingly proud of living in this enlightened age, when one of the latest, and by many supposed to be the smartest and cleverest of the modern witnesses to the truth, can get what he professes to be a convincing "self-evident" demonstration of it in one volume of about five hundred pages. Some people call it a big book. Evidently, considered from an historical point of view, it is but a veritable 16mo compared with what the "Father of all Truth" himself wanted in order to put the question fairly. We are getting on, and Mr. St. George Mivart may be congratulated upon having exhibited an example of brevity to the "second person," who will no doubt profit by it, if ever his "Second Advent" does come off. His first Advent as a reply to our query, has, obviously not been of very much service, possibly because John did not fill all those volumes which he might have filled, possibly because he made a large number of mistakes in the volume which he did fill. The fact appears to be that John, whoever he was and whenever he wrote, went wrong on several points. He understood "Our Lord" to say that the universe belongs to the Devil, which, considering that it had been made by the Trinity, was slightly inconsistent, to say the least. He also

understood the Logos to assert that the then condition of the world should not last long,—indeed, that a most important change for the better should occur before every one of them who were listening to him had taken their departure; and this certainly wasn't the truth. In one matter, however, John is alleged to have really stated the truth. The Logos said he would send the "Comforter," and it is loudly proclaimed that that promise has been fulfilled. The Church is quite certain *that* is true because she has got him, caught him in fact as soon as he came down, and has received advice, "development" and comfort from him ever since. Indeed, if the Comforter were not at the Vatican just now, how on earth could the "prisoner" exist?

But what is Truth? I wish every Freethinker could and would read St. G. Mivart's book. I hardly know any other production in which he would obtain such an insight into the capabilities of Romanist "Men of Science," for hoodwinking their fellow creatures. Arthur Balfour is a fine hand at the Defence of Philosophic Doubt, and at making a metaphysical fog appear like a ray of philosophic sunshine. But neither Balfour, nor Lilly, nor Myers is a patch upon St. George Mivart, who is rapidly surpassing his teacher and master, John Henry Newman. Some people imagine that the Roman Church did a foolish deed as well as a disgraceful one, when it persecuted Galileo, but that is quite a mistake; so far from its being a disgraceful deed, it was, rightly considered, quite providential, and St. G. Mivart makes it almost "self evident" that it was really a most fortunate circumstance after all. His method of extracting "kudos" for his church out of this transaction could not be surpassed by the individual who extracted sunbeams from cucumbers. Galileo's punishment—persecution—was a fortunate circumstance, because, we—to day—seeing how futile it was, may be sure that the Church will never be guilty of such folly again! Yes, indeed, St. G. Mivart is very clever. Whether he is under the special guidance of the Comforter one hardly knows, but he is doing a great work. He is clearing things up a bit. He is proving to a demonstration that the Logos did not know everything. The universe is not a bad place after all, whoever it belongs to, in fact it is a grander place than the second person in the Trinity had any idea of. To him it was a very trumpery affair, put together in six days, the Earth of course being the most important item in it, and that only fit for a "foot-stool." He had never heard of Evolution, and wouldn't have believed it if he had. St. G. Mivart, however—assisted of course by the Comforter—knows it is true, in fact he glories in it, and admits that with a few slight alterations, such as a new lock stock and barrel, it might be converted into a very workable theory, which the Church and the Comforter could get along very well with. Nor is that all, had the Logos been introduced to Charles Darwin, he would no doubt have shuddered with horror at a man who had the audacity to suggest that the "Lord's people" as well as every other people, had descended—or ascended—from a "speck of jelly;" but St. G. Mivart would, there is little doubt, have explained to him "how deep a debt of gratitude is owed to Charles Darwin, a debt which it is difficult to over estimate," and if the Logos was not surprised as to how this deep debt of gratitude had been incurred, there is little doubt that Charles Darwin himself would, seeing that "it is to Charles Darwin we are indebted for the proof that the doctrine of natural selection is untenable." He would also have explained to the Logos how "deeply it pained himself to criticise anything which Charles Darwin had written." Who will say that St. G. Mivart is not clever? But what is Truth? It appears strange, and yet it isn't when you think of it; that generally, people who commence the task of explaining what the truth is to you, do so by taking a lot of trouble to propound and to answer another very different question first. Would you know the truth if you saw it? Can you be certain about it when you think you've got it? That is, they have generally a patent "criterion" for sale, which if you will only purchase, you shall have it dirt cheap. Many of these philosophers attach more importance to their criterion than they do to their truth. St. G. Mivart appears to do so. What is this criterion, this ground of certitude? It is "self-evidence." He says: "If any reader is dissatisfied with self-evidence as the one criterion of ultimate truths, let him ask himself what better criterion or ground of belief ultimate truths could possibly have"; and we may admit that the man who does want a better proof of a truth than its self-evidence is as bad as Shakespeare's man "who has no music in his soul." He would be a perfect monster,

capable of erecting monuments to Bruno or any other enemy of the Church.

What fault, then, can be found with a criterion like that? Surely if a truth is self-evident, it must be true. Of course it must; but the criterion after all isn't so good as it looks. It is mixed up with so many other suspicious truths that one is never satisfied one has hold of it properly. It is necessary to ask what this means. "All proof or reasoning must ultimately rest upon truths which carry with them their own evidence, and do not therefore need proof." This looks like an extended statement of the criterion, but it contains the fallacy. Who is to judge of the self-evidence of these final truths which "need no proof"? The Church, we know, is supposed to have a large assortment of truths, not generally considered to be self-evident; and we must not lose sight of the fact that the apparently innocent criterion has to be so manipulated that it can be so applied to every one of these "truths" until they are also proved to be self-evident; not a bad bit of conjuring, but like most other logical tricks, the success depends on the acceptance of the criterion with its accompanying explanations. Accept these and you are just the flat St. G. Mivart hopes you may be. The particularly innocent looking *petitio* here is that "self-evident truths are incapable of proof." Swallow that along with the criterion, and every miracle that the Church ever palmed off on its ignorant worshippers can be made to appear self-evident, because they, too, bear the mark of being "incapable of proof." Yes, St. G. Mivart is remarkably clever. But is it a fact that self-evident truths are incapable of proof? When I learned geometry I was told that axioms were self-evident, ultimate truths which were incapable of demonstration. The demonstration here meaning the reduction of the axiom into any still more elementary truths, and in this sense it is true. But it is easy for a very clever logician to slip in his fallacy here. A self-evident axiom or truth is incapable of further proof because its self-evidence is already sufficient, and because it is sufficient it needs no further proof, and the assertion that it is a truth which is incapable of proof is a piece of logical jugglery quite in keeping with the character of the Church; and, what is more; St. G. Mivart knows this as well as George Henry Lewes did, who explained this fallacy long ago.

J. H. ELLIS.

#### HOW IT STRIKES AN AMERICAN.

CHARLES BRADLAUGH has announced that on returning from his voyage to India he will resign the presidency of the National Secular Society. The intimation was conveyed in a letter to the Executive Committee of the Society. He desired a special meeting of the members of the Society to be called in February to receive the formal resignation, and to listen to a statement of his reasons for his course.

At the meeting of the Executive Committee at which this notice was received, after some friendly discussion, the following resolutions were adopted, as expressing the feelings of the Secularists so far as they had considered the matter:

"(1) The Executive Committee of the National Secular Society receives the notice of Mr. Bradlaugh's intention to resign the presidency with the deepest regret. It feels itself to be expressing the universal sentiment of the Freethought party in heartily thanking him for his many years of leadership and in deploring the great loss that must be entailed by his resignation.

"(2) That a meeting of the members be convened early in February to receive the president's statement."

There are a good many good men in England to take Mr. Bradlaugh's place, but nevertheless his resignation will be a strain upon the Secular organisation, so nearly synonymous have been the names of the Society and Mr. Bradlaugh. As a leader he is just the man for the members of the Society, though occasionally he and his prominent assistants would "fall out," chiefly upon personal grounds. But if he shall still be willing to advise the party, and to devote some portion of his talents to its welfare—which it would be a reflection upon him to doubt—it will get along all right and still be an effective opponent to ecclesiastical misrule.

It is probable, from the position he now occupies in the Society and before the Secular public, that G. W. Foote, of the *Freethinker*, will be selected to succeed Mr. Bradlaugh. Mr. Foote is a practical man, a hard-working and very able editor, and a brilliant orator. He has, we believe, the affection of the masses of the party as has no other but Mr. Bradlaugh. If he "is in the hands of his friends," he will probably be chosen, and the choice will be wise.—*Truth-seeker* (New York).

#### MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.

BY COL. INGERSOLL.

(From the "North American Review.")

[Concluded from page 542.]

Question 2. *Ought divorced people be allowed to marry under any circumstances?*

This depends upon whether marriage is a crime. If it is not a crime, why should any penalty be attached? Can any one conceive of any reason why a woman, obtaining a divorce without fault on her part, should be compelled as a punishment to remain forever single? Why should she be punished for the dishonesty or brutality of another? Why should a man who faithfully kept his contract of marriage, and who was deserted by an unfaithful wife, be punished for the benefit of society? Why should he be doomed to live without a home?

There is still another view. We must remember that human passions are the same after as before divorce. To prevent re-marriage is to give excuse for vice.

Question 3. *What is the effect of divorce upon the integrity of the family?*

The real marriage is back of the ceremony, and the real divorce is back of the decree. When love is dead, when husband and wife abhor each other, they are divorced. The decree records in a judicial what has really taken place, just as the ceremony of marriage attests a contract already made.

The true family is the result of the true marriage, and the institution of the family should above all things be preserved. What becomes of the sacredness of the home if the law compels those who abhor each other to sit at the same hearth? This lowers the standard, and changes the happy haven of home into the prison cell. If we wish to preserve the integrity of the family, we must preserve the democracy of the fireside, the republicanism of the home, the absolute and perfect equality of husband and wife. There must be no exhibition of force, no spectre of fear. The mother must not remain through an order of court, or the command of a priest, or by virtue of the tyranny of society; she must sit in absolute freedom, the queen of herself, the sovereign of her own soul and of her own body. Real homes can never be preserved through force, through slavery, or superstition. Nothing can be more sacred than a home, no altar purer than the hearth.

Question 4. *Does the absolute prohibition of divorce where it exists contribute to the moral purity of society?*

We must define our terms. What is moral purity? The intelligent of this world seek the well-being of themselves and others. They know that happiness is the only good; and this they strive to attain. To live in accordance with the conditions of well-being is moral in the highest sense. To use the best instrumentalities to attain the highest ends is our highest conception of the moral. In other words, morality is the melody or the perfection of conduct. A man is not moral because he is obedient through fear or ignorance. Morality lives in the realm of perceived obligation, and where a being acts in accordance with perceived obligation, that being is moral. Morality is not the child of slavery. Ignorance is not the corner-stone of virtue.

The first duty of a human being is to himself. He must see to it that he does not become a burden to others. To be self-respecting he must endeavor to be self-sustaining. If by his industry and intelligence he accumulates a margin, then he is under obligation to do with that margin all the good he can. He who lives to the ideal does the best he can. In true marriage men and women give not only their bodies, but their souls. This is the ideal marriage; this is moral. They who give their bodies, but not their souls, are not married, whatever the ceremony may be; this is immoral.

If this be true, upon what principle can a woman continue to sustain the relation of wife after love is dead? Is there some other consideration that can take the place of genuine affection? Can she be bribed with money, or a home, or position, or by public opinion, and still remain a virtuous woman? Is it for the good of society that virtue should be thus crucified between Church and State? Can it be said that this contributes to the moral purity of the human race?

Is there a higher standard of virtue in countries where divorce is prohibited than in those where it is granted? Where husbands and wives who have ceased to love cannot be divorced, there are mistresses and lovers.

The sacramental view of marriage is the shield of vice. The world looks at the wife who has been abused, who has been driven from the home of her husband, and the world

pities; and when this wife is loved by some other man, the world excuses. So, too, the husband who cannot live in peace, who leaves his home, is pitied and excused.

Is it possible to conceive of anything more immoral than for a husband to insist on living with a wife who has no love for him? Is not this a perpetual crime? Is the wife to lose her personality? Has she no right of choice? Is her modesty the property of another? Is the man she hates the lord of her desire? Has she no right to guard the jewels of her soul? Is there a depth below this? And is this the foundation of her morality? this the corner-stone of society? this the arch that supports the dome of civilisation? Is this pathetic sacrifice on the one hand, this sacrilege on the other, pleasing in the sight of heaven?

To me, the tenderest word in our language, the most pathetic fact within our knowledge, is maternity. Around this sacred word cluster the joys and sorrows, and agonies and ecstasies, of the human race. The mother walks in the shadow of death that she may give another life. Upon the altar of love she puts her own life in pawn. When the world is civilised, no wife will become a mother against her will. Man will then know that to enslave another is to imprison himself.

ROBERT BROWNING.

A SONNET BY MR. GEORGE MEREDITH.

Now dumb is he who waked the world to speak,  
 And voiceless hangs the world beside his bier.  
 Our words are songs, our cry of praise a tear;  
 We are the smitten mortal, we the weak.  
 We see a spirit on Earth's loftiest peak  
 Shine, and wing hence the way he makes more clear:  
 See a great Tree of Life that never sere  
 Dropped leaf for aught that age or storms might wreak.  
 Such ending is not Death: such living shows  
 What wide illumination brightness sheds  
 From one big heart—to conquer man's old foes:  
 The coward, and the tyrant, and the force  
 Of all those weedy monsters raising heads  
 When Song is murk from springs of turbid source.

—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

OBITUARY.—On Thursday, 5th inst, at his residence, Charles Street, Horselydown, William Hurtle, aged 71, died after a long illness. He had been a Freethinker for upwards of forty years. He was well read, a diligent student of science and philosophy, and possessed a vast knowledge of astronomy and geology for one who was not a recognised "man of science." He was a modest, kind-hearted man, esteemed by all who knew him. The deceased was buried on Saturday, 7th inst, at Nunhead cemetery. His friends communicated with me, but as I was away at Liverpool I could not deliver the Secular Service over the remains of one who had been a true friend to me for nearly twenty years. The remains were consequently interred without any ceremony whatever.—ARTHUR B. MOSS.

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