

# The Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

[Sub-Editor, J. M. WHEELER.

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## MR. GLADSTONE'S ROCK OF SCRIPTURE.

THERE is something exhilarating in the vivacity which Mr. Gladstone preserves at the age of eighty. His restless energy, his unflagging interest in so many pursuits, if not the signs of a great originality, are indications of a wide sympathy and a strenuous intelligence. Age cannot stale nor custom wither him. His shining personality irradiates the nation at a period of life when most men who linger so long are but the shadows of their former selves. Surely it is a glorious spectacle, which heightens our sense of the dignity of human nature.

The Grand Old Man spent a few days of academic retreat at Oxford before the opening of Parliament, and in the intervals of college sociality he wrote a series of articles on the Bible for *Good Words*. The first appears in the current number of that magazine, and is entitled "The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture."

According to a writer in the *Speaker*, the late Dr. Döllinger placed Mr. Gladstone in the front rank of English theologians. "I do not think," said the great German scholar, "that you have in your Church any theologian superior to him." But this, we fancy, must be taken with a large grain of salt. When one Grand Old Man praises another Grand Old Man, who happens to be his personal friend and admirer, we must allow a liberal margin for the warmth of sentiment. It appears to us, indeed, that Mr. Gladstone does not shine as a theologian. Lord Macaulay chopped up his early work on Church and State very respectfully, but he made mincemeat of it nevertheless. One remembers, too, how his pamphlet on the Vatican Decrees fared at the hands of Cardinal Newman. More recently, his tilt with Ingersoll was no credit to his reputation; in fact, as we think, he hardly grasped the full significance of the points at issue. And his present defence of the inspiration of Scripture shows, in our opinion, an imperfect acquaintance with the subject or a serious misunderstanding of sceptical objections. If Mr. Gladstone is one of the best theologians in England, and this is the best defence he is able to make of the Bible, the orthodox case is utterly hopeless. For our part, we think there are better theologians, but they understand the question too well to risk a battle for their creed.

With admirable and engaging ingenuousness Mr. Gladstone tells us, at the outset, what are his qualifications for the task he has undertaken. He does not understand Hebrew, but that is a trifling disadvantage in the present stage of controversy. There are very few persons who understand Hebrew, and some of them understand nothing else. Nor will the inspiration of Scripture, with the masses of thoughtful people, stand or fall on the discussion of Hebrew texts. In this country they think in English, and must be saved or damned in English. The question will be decided, so far as they are concerned, not on grounds of archaeology or minute scholarship, but on the broad

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grounds of science and common sense. Whitman's advice to every reader is, "Dismiss what affronts your own soul," and men can and will do this while the pundits are wrangling over textual obscurities and subtle problems of syntax and style.

Secondly, Mr. Gladstone believes, what is true, that "there is a very large portion of the community whose opportunities of judgment have been materially smaller than his own." But this is only saying that the one-eyed man will be king among the blind. Thirdly, he has devoted a great part of his leisure during forty years to "the earnest study of prehistoric antiquity and its documents in regard to the Greek race," and here he flings in the perilous statement that "the early Scriptures may in the mass be roughly called contemporary with the Homeric period." In other words, Mr. Gladstone is the author of *Juventus Mundi*, a volume which attests his industry, but is not generally cited by scholars as an authority. Were the truth told, we fancy Mr. Gladstone's political leadership would be called his work, and his Greek studies his recreations. But in any case the most profound study of Greek antiquities, would scarcely confer any special fitness for a judgment on the antiquities of a people so dissimilar as the Jews. The real fact, therefore, is that Mr. Gladstone has the same qualifications, perhaps a little heightened, as ordinary educated Englishmen. He is at the mercy of specialists like the rest of us, and only argues from the obvious results of their labors.

A much less acute man than Mr. Gladstone would see that those obvious results have effectually disposed of the doctrine of plenary inspiration. It is not surprising, therefore, that he warns the Spurgeon-Denison school against their danger. He sums up the difficulties of their position under seven heads. He says "there may possibly have been"—

1. Imperfect comprehension of that which was communicated.
2. Imperfect expression of what had been comprehended.
3. Lapse of memory in oral transmission.
4. Errors of copyists in written transmission.
5. Changes with the lapse of time in the sense of words.
6. Variations arising from renderings into different tongues, especially as between the Hebrew text and the Septuagint, which was probably based upon MS. older than the compilers of the Hebrew text could have had at their command.
7. There are three variant chronologies of the Old Testament, according to the Hebrew, the Septuagint, and the Samaritan Pentateuch, and it would be hazardous to claim for any one of them the sanction of a Divine revelation.

"That in some sense," Mr. Gladstone says, "the Holy Scriptures contain something of a human element is clear, as to the New Testament, from diversities of reading, from slight conflicts in the narrative, and from an insignificant number of doubtful cases as to the authenticity of the text." This admission is honest, but is made with considerable discretion. "An insignificant number of doubtful cases" is a very judicious expression; while "slight conflicts in the narrative" is perhaps a trifle more than judicious. There are three contradictory accounts, for instance, of such an extremely important event as the conversion of Saint Paul; and although the inscription on

the cross of Christ was written in Greek, as well as in Latin and Hebrew, the Holy Ghost inspired the four evangelists (in Greek) so accurately that they copied it in four different ways. These instances are only a sample of a monstrous mass of "slight conflicts." We must further add that "diversities of reading" is a very mild expression of the fact that there are a hundred and fifty thousand various readings of texts in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

This does not exhaust Mr. Gladstone's admissions. He refers, with apparent approval, to Dr. Driver's recent article in the *Contemporary Review*, in which it is shown "with great clearness and ability that the basis" of continental criticism is "sound and undeniable." Then he writes as follows:

"It has long been known, for example, that portions of the historical books of the Old Testament, such as the Books of Chronicles, were of a date very far later than most of the events which they record, and that a portion of the prophecies included in the Book of Isaiah were later than his time. We are now taught that, according to the prevailing judgment of the learned, the form in which the older books of the Old Testament have come down to us does not correspond as a rule with their titles, and is due to later though still, as is largely held, remote periods; and that the law presented to us in the Pentateuch is not an enactment of a single date, but has been formed by a process of growth, and by gradual accretions."

Mr. Gladstone says that these are "disturbing announcements," and they would be far more "disturbing" if he made them as complete as he might find warrant for in the pages of Dr. Driver, Canon Cheyne, and Archdeacon Farrar. Nevertheless, the Grand Old Man does not lose his equanimity. He was brought up a believer, he has lived a believer, and he will die a believer. So far from being dismayed, he is in a perfect state of jubilation. The more the old Book is turned about in the kaleidoscope of scientific criticism, the more it shifts into new forms, the better he likes it. If the old arrangement showed it was inspired, the new arrangement shows it still more. He rejoices to think that no "weapon of offence" has "yet been forged" which can impair the "efficiency" of Scripture for "practical purposes." Let destructive criticism do its worst, we "yet may hold firmly, as firmly as of old," to the impregnable rock.

Such words sound like and are a challenge "to accept the Scriptures on the moral and spiritual and historical ground of their characters in themselves, and of the work which they, and the agencies associated with them have done and are doing in the world." But this is the introduction of a fresh argument. For the present at any rate, Mr. Gladstone is bound to argue in the light of Cardinal Newman's aphorism, "A true religion is a religion founded on truth; a false religion is a religion founded on falsehood."

Mr. Gladstone goes even farther. He is ready to be on with the new love as soon as he is off with the old one. He surmises that "this destructive criticism, if entirely made good, would, in the view of an inquiry really searching, comprehensive, and philosophical, leave as its result not less but greater reason for admiring the hidden modes by which the great Artificer works out his designs." In other words, the Lord may have been keeping us in a fog for two thousand years in order to make us appreciate the change when he brings us into the daylight. But this is not the method adopted by human parents towards their children; and any Board School teacher who followed it would be soon amongst the unemployed.

The argument indeed—if it be an argument—is a *paucy* one; for, if Mr. Gladstone thinks the new view of the Bible is likely to increase our faith, why does he not accept it unhesitatingly? His attitude is really that of a man who has made up his mind to cling to the Bible in any circumstances, and he is obviously writing for readers who are filled with a similar determination.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be concluded.)

## BIBLE QUOTATIONS AND MISQUOTATIONS.

THE Bible is a great deal more revered than read. "He has scripture for it" is the expression of the illiterate, who think everything correct that gets into print. Sky-pilots have so pandered to this superstition that there is nothing the average Christian likes better than a mixture of chopped-up Bible. Everything is right if rivetted with scripture. In sermons and tracts and controversial divinity we find a miscellaneous assortment of texts slung together, with little regard to their original meaning or their proper connection. A minister thinks nothing of making a hash of the Holy Ghost by jumping from the Old to the New Testament, and illustrating the Song of Solomon by the Apocalypse. "It's all equally divine," as the old Covenanter said, who would always read aloud the long list of names in Chronicles and the obscene chapters in Genesis and Leviticus. If the Holy Ghost is really sensitive to blasphemy, we should guess that many a preacher will never have forgiveness, neither in this world nor in the world to come. The Dutch theologian Cocceius held that scripture means whatever it can be made to mean, and this apparently is a common view, though it is not everyone who would carry it as far as the divine who preached against a once fashionable way of dressing the hair from the text, "Top-knot come down," the full passage being, "Let him that is upon the housetop not come down." Bibliolators are not only careless of the meaning of the word of God, they are often careless of the word itself. What is more common than to hear of the place where "there is weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth"; but in the many texts where weeping and gnashing occur wailing is never mentioned. Only the other day Mr. Foote corrected a ministerial opponent of scepticism, who made the common mistake of quoting "a reason for the faith that is in you" instead of "the hope that is in you"; and Sir William Harcourt has recently been taken to task for his misreading from scripture.

A former Bishop of London quoted 1 Tim. iii. 1, as "He that desireth the office of a bishop desireth a good thing." No doubt he thought £10,000 a year indeed a good thing. We often hear of Mount Calvary, though there is nothing whatever in scripture to show the crucifixion took place upon a mount. We hear of "doing your duty in that state of life in which it has pleased God to call you," as a divine injunction although it is taken from the catechism, and so with such phrases as "God ordains whatsoever comes to pass."

Some misquotations of the Psalms are taken from the Prayer Book, the rendering of which is on the whole superior to that of the authorised version. Such a practice is of course legitimate if one knows what one is doing, which, unless expressed, may usually be doubted. Catholics quote from the Vulgate, and many recognise no other version, but when one quotes Job as saying "Bless God and die," a Protestant is somewhat astonished to find his holy book has "Curse God and die;" and whereas the Catholic quotes the Douay translation of the Vulgate "We shall not all be changed," the authorised version declares "We shall all be changed."

Everyone knows there are thousands of various readings in the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible. In some passages the Septuagint Version reads altogether different from the received text. With regard to the New Testament Dr. Tischendorf states in his introduction to the *Tauchnitz New Testament* (p. xv.) : "I have no doubt that very shortly after the books of the New Testament were written, and before they were protected by the authority of the Church, many arbitrary alterations and additions were made in them." Dr. Scrivener in his *Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* says

of the various readings—"If the number of these variations were rightly computed at thirty thousand in Mill's time a century and a half ago, they must at present amount to at least fourfold that quantity." Pretty fair for an infallible revelation.

What a multitude of sermons on the Trinity have been preached from the now admittedly spurious text of the three witnesses (1 John v., 7)! What eloquent discourses have been delivered on false translations! Take the famous text "I know that my redeemer liveth," etc. (Job xix., 25). Compare the Authorised and Revised Versions, then go to the Vulgate, and see what scope there is of making what you please of the blessed word. Just fancy one minister preaching from the text "Thou hast multiplied the nation and not increased the joy" (Is. ix., 3), while another uses the Revised Version and reads "Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased their joy." Even punctuation may alter the eternal word of God, as with the passage "The wicked flee [or flea], when no man pursueth but the righteous, is as bold as a lion." The mistakes made by nervous people like the one who said "Christ made the dem to hear and the duff to speak," the blushing corrector of "tot and jittle" to "tit and jottle," or the one who said "Immediately the cock wept and Peter went out and crew bitterly," are appalling to contemplate.

Some preachers have even not scrupled to play on the words of Scripture. An apt quotation, and quite as pertinent as that of the texts of many preachers, was that of Dr. Mountain, who, being asked by George II. who was a fit person to be appointed to the see of Durham, replied, "Hadst thou faith as a grain of mustard seed, thou wouldst say to this mountain [laying his hand on his breast], 'Be removed and be cast into the sea.'" The king, pleased with his joke, gave him the bishopric.\* Equally personal was a curate named Joseph who, when preaching before Butler, Duke of Ormonde, chose the text, "Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him." Another clerical at Bedford used scriptural puns during an election contest. One of the candidates was named Sparrow, and the sky-pilot took for his text, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? Fear ye not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." Then there was the gay Mr. Paul, who, preaching a farewell sermon to ladies, founded it upon the passage, "All wept sore, and fell upon Paul's neck and kissed him." One of the best of the punning applications of the scriptures was that which compared the Royal Academicians to lilies, since Solomon in all his glory was not R. A.'d like one of these. This very text, by the way, was chosen by the chaplain of Colney Hatch Assylum the first Sunday after the female patients got their new and gaudy, but old-fashioned, bonnets with pink ribbons and red shawls.

Scripture often gets the credit of many good things to which it is not entitled. "Know thyself," the inscription on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, is often quoted as scripture. So, too, is the old Latin proverb, "A word to the wise is sufficient." Robert Hall once planned a sermon on the text, "In the midst of life we are in death," which occurs in the Church of England Burial Service, and has been traced back to a monk of the tenth century. "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb" is another scriptural saying taken from Laurence Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, though it is found earlier in the French Freethinking printer and writer Henry Estienne.

A provincial newspaper, in doing an obituary, says: "We may say of him as the holy scriptures have so beautifully expressed it, 'An honest man is the noblest work of God.'" This stock quotation is

\* A Freethinker gave an apt misquotation of this text: "If thou hadst faith even as a mountain, it could not remove a mustard seed."

from Pope's *Essay on Man*, a poem inspired by Lord Bolingbroke. The text has been improved by Ingersoll into "An honest god is the noblest work of man." "Spare the rod and spoil the child" is another proverb usually ascribed to Solomon, though it is a paraphrase in *Hudibras*, by the Freethinker Butler, of Proverbs xiii., 24: "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."

"A merciful man is merciful to his beast" is an improvement on Proverbs xii., 10, "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." How many quote from Paul the sayings, "Evil communications corrupt good manners," and "For we are his offspring," unaware that these are quotations made by Paul from older Greek writers with no pretence to inspiration?

J. M. WHEELER.

## TO THE MEMBERS AND FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

The Executive has sanctioned my scheme for augmenting the Society's income—so seriously reduced by the loss of £60 a year consequent on the cancelling of the bond under which Mr. Bradlaugh paid that sum to the Treasurer in respect of the Thompson Bequest—and has authorised me to draw up and issue a circular on the subject.

My scheme is to open a list of annual subscribers to the Central Fund. Hitherto it has been the custom to subscribe spasmodically in times of excitement, but henceforth an effort must be made to secure regular subscriptions for the regular work of the Society. Members who can afford to do so should feel it incumbent upon them to give a certain sum annually, and the list of donors should be published in the Society's organ, provision being made to print initials or pseudonyms for those who do not wish to be identified.

With an assured, and it is to be hoped an increasing income, the Society will be able to extend its operations, and carry on a more systematic work of propaganda and organisation; while, without something of the kind, the loss already referred to will leave the Society in a worse financial position than it has known for many years.

I have therefore to ask you to give a prompt and generous response to this appeal, and I shall be glad to receive the names and addresses of annual subscribers. Those who can forward the current year's subscription at an early date will help to relieve the Executive of a grave anxiety, and brighten the prospect of the approaching Conference.

I remain, yours faithfully,

G. W. FOOTE (President).

P.S.—Intending subscribers are requested to state the amount they will give. Those who desire to withhold their names from publicity, should notify to that effect. Cheques and Post Office Orders should be crossed.

A negro, was being baptised, and slipped from the parson's grasp and came near being drowned. He floundered around though, and finally rose up out of the water considerably strangled, and furiously angry, and started ashore at once, spouting water like a whale, and remarking with great asperity, that "one of dese days some gen'leman's niggarr gwyne to get killed with jess such dam foolishness as dis!"

Mrs. Shoddy: "What has become of your bean, Belle?" Miss S.: "He has gone to the seaside for his health." Mrs. S.: "He's rich, and I can't see why you shilly-shally with him so long. Why don't you marry him?" Miss S.: "I don't care to marry him. He is a valetudinarian." Mrs. S.: "What's that got to do with it? We're no sticklers about religion. It ain't like as if either of you were Catholics and needed a dispensation. You ought to be glad of the chance. If I was in your place I'd marry him if he was a vegetarian."

## L O T .

Tune—"The Rakes of Kildare."

I WILL tell you a story that's perfectly true.  
Though I have to confess it's not very new;  
It is needless to try to conceal it from you  
That I find it narrated by Moses.

Away down in Sodom there dwelt Mr. Lot,  
A jolly good fellow and fond of his pot;  
A wife and two daughters it seems he had got,  
For so 'tis narrated by Moses.

Now so shockingly black grew the sins of this town  
That God's anger was kindled. Said he, with a frown,  
"With brimstone and fire I will burn the lot down,"  
So I find it narrated by Moses.

Two angels he sent to inform Mr. Lot  
That it was his intention to make the place hot,  
And to tell him he'd better be off like a shot—  
That's how 'tis related by Moses.

They arrived at Lot's house the same evening at ten,  
And he urged them to enter for fear of the men—  
This Sodom, it seems, was a queer sort of den,  
For so 'tis narrated by Moses.

He pressed them so hard that they could not refuse,  
Then he gave them a supper and plenty of booze;  
And they had, we are told, quite a jolly carouse—  
So you'll find it narrated by Moses.

When the citizens heard he had strangers within  
They surrounded his house and kicked up a great din;  
But the visitors smote them all blind for their sin—  
So I find it narrated by Moses.

When morning arose they prepared to depart,  
Telling Lot it was time he was making a start.  
Poor Lot seemed to take the thing sadly to heart,  
A fact that's narrated by Moses.

They warned him expressly to look straight ahead,  
For whoever looked back would be surely struck dead.  
Then they left him with thanks for their supper and bed,  
That's what is narrated by Moses.

He then packed up his bundle and cut for his life,  
Followed close at his heels by his daughters and wife,  
And he cautioned them not to look round on the strife,  
So we find it narrated by Moses.

But poor Mrs. Lot, like the rest of her kind,  
She could not refrain from just glancing behind—  
When, Holy Jerusalem! what do we find  
In the story narrated by Moses?

Why, we find that the moment she came to a halt  
God converted her into a pillar of salt,  
Which seem rather hard for so trifling a fault,  
But so 'tis narrated by Moses.

Now what after to Lot and his daughters befell  
While up in the hills, I would rather not tell.  
If you're anxious to know you'll find it as well  
Just to read what's narrated by Moses.

T. CLARK.

Mrs. Ward, in the *Nineteenth Century*, says "The English Life of Christ, which must come, has still to be written, cannot perhaps be written yet." It strikes us that whatever criticism may do in the way of destruction, there will never be any more materials for the life of Christ than there are now, and Mrs. Ward ought to be aware that a book with this very title, *The English Life of Christ*, was published by Thomas Scott. It was, we believe, written by Sir G. W. Cox, though Scott's name was on the title-page; and though it neither satisfies us, nor possibly Mrs. Ward, it contains some good criticism on the Gospel stories.

## ACID DROPS.

The "City of Paris," one of the Inman liners, after being almost given up as lost, has turned up badly damaged, but with all her passengers alive and well. They owe their safety to the steady courage of the captain and the heroism of the second engineer, who shut off the steam at the risk of his own life. Before leaving the ship, however, the passengers held a meeting, and returned thanks to Providence. But they also thanked the captain and crew, without whose assistance it would no doubt have been impossible for Providence to save them.

After the tornado in the United States came floods, almost entirely stopping the railway traffic of the Mississippi Valley, literally washing away some places, and depriving thousands of their regular food and ordinary communication with the world. Cyclones and floods are also the order of the day in Australia. Yet parsons continue to preach that all is ordered for the benefit of man.

Saint Joseph's Convent, Milwaukee, has been burnt to the ground. The Brides of Christ within were saved by the firemen, not by their Bridegroom; but one who jumped from the window was fatally injured.

"Mont-Thomas," writing in the *Sunday Chronicle* on a sermon by Dean Oakley on the righteousness of war in certain cases, says "Christianity and bayonets were never intended to mix." Well, they mix remarkably well, and have done so almost ever since J. C. said he came not to send peace but a sword. Even Christian volunteers begin their Easter manoeuvres on Good Friday by way of celebrating their blessed Savior's death.

"I solemnly believe," said Dr. Dana Boardman at Washington, "that my Divine Master is summoning earth's nations to a policy of disarmament." What a pity he didn't do it eighteen hundred years ago!

Over 800,000 gallons of whiskey were sent from this country to Africa last year. We had no idea that the missionaries were so numerous on the dark continent.—*Kansas City Times*.

After all the columns of gush over Sister Rose Gertrude it is amusing to read that the Sisters of the Sacred Heart at Molokai won't let her nurse the lepers there because she belongs to the Dominican Sisters. So much for Christian charity.

Miracles happen still—in places where they are believed in. A story was spread in Kangra that a yogi, or Hindu saint, had cut out his tongue, and that the goddess to whom he was consecrated had replaced it. Hindus flocked in crowds to see the wonder. The fact, as declared by the civil surgeon, is that three-sixteenths of an inch was cut off the tip of the tongue, and that, when the wound healed, the yogi was able to speak without difficulty.

Clergymen have hitherto been exempted from taxation in Ontario. But the Government has carried a measure for putting an end to this little privilege. Alas, the poor clergy have fallen on evil times. By and bye some villainous Government will take them at their word, insist on their practising "Blessed be ye poor," and compel them all to live like Goldsmith's vicar, who was "passing rich on forty pounds a year."

A young woman went to St. George's Church, Camberwell, on Sunday evening. After the preacher had held forth for a few minutes she jumped up and exclaimed "Judas Iscariot." Later on she shouted again, and two churchwardens made tracks for her pew, but on their arrival she flourished a knife and screamed "Judas Iscariot." It does not appear whether her observation was addressed to the preacher or to the gentleman who hurried on the Atonement. Perhaps it would be well to explain to her that Judas died more than eighteen centuries ago, and that if she wants to "knife" him she must wait till the Resurrection and find him out in the crowd.

Over at Oakland, in the far West of America, there is a

blatant crank named Bennett, who goes through the streets on a bicycle, crying out, "Flee to the mountains." Sometimes he stops and harangues a crowd at the street corner. He predicts the destruction of Oakland and San Francisco by an earthquake and a tidal wave, and there are many people foolish enough to believe it will happen on April 14. They meet and arrange plans for saving the faithful; and what with Prophet Bennett, and the Salvation Army, and "holiness bands," the sensible part of Oakland's inhabitants are beginning to wonder whether they can find money enough to build the necessary asylums.

A New York man was fined ten dollars for sleeping in church. We are not told how much the preacher was fined for not keeping him awake.

The Rev. R. F. Horton, to whom Mr. Foote addressed one of his *Letters to the Clergy*, has a short and easy way of getting rid of Bible difficulties. Writing in *The Young Man*—we should say for very young men—he declares that the proper answer to an objector who cites the text as to the Lord putting a lying spirit into the mouth of the prophets, is to say simply "We cannot believe it." Very likely not, for yours is a gruel-and-water faith. But why give children a book to read as God's truth when you know it contains a lot of lies?

*Nil Desperandum* is Spurgeon's motto. He says that "the Lord has still a people left on the face of the earth." P.S.—Apply at the Tabernacle any Sunday morning. Good old Spurgeon!

A man with influenza died,  
As many have before,  
And then he swiftly upward skied  
And knocked at Peter's door.  
Before the gate did Peter stand—  
"Canst give the sign?" With pride  
He gave the *grippe* to Peter's hand,  
Then entered by his side.

For a courteous, indeed an unctuous man, the Rev. C. J. Engstrom is capable of strange things in the way of misrepresentation. He was the mildest-mannered man in the world to Mr. Foote's face, but he took the opportunity of saying the other Thursday night, in Mr. Foote's absence, that the *Freethinker* called the Virgin Mary a low, wanton woman. Challenged by Mr. Rowney, however, he was unable to produce his proofs. All he could do was to read a verse from Mr. Mackenzie's clever *jeu d'esprit* in our Christmas Number. The fact is, we have laughed at the story—Mr. Engstrom's story, every parson's story—of Mary's having a child by a ghost; but we have said again and again that the story was a pious concoction; that the Jews, even according to the Gospels, never heard of it; and that Jesus was in all probability the lawful and natural offspring of Joseph and Mary.

It is not we but the Christians who asperse Mary's character. We believe she married Joseph, and had her first baby in the usual course of honest wedlock. But they say she did nothing of the kind. They declare that her husband was no relation to her baby, and affirm that she was visited one night, before her marriage, by an angel. Indeed, some Catholic writers have described him as a handsome young man of five-and twenty. Yet these traducers of poor Mary have the impudence to turn upon us, and accuse us of calling her a wanton!

The pious ladies of Paris know how to combine religion with pleasure. Last Sunday being Palm Sunday, that is the supposed anniversary of Jesus Christ's ride into Jerusalem, there were high jinks in Paris. The Eiffel Tower was reopened and gaily decorated, and the Spring races were on in the Bois de Boulogne. "Many ladies," says a telegram from Paris, "went straight from the churches to the racecourse."

What humbug the keeping of Lent is! Because J. C. went through the farce of fasting and being tempted, his followers are supposed to mortify the flesh on Lenten fare from Ash Wednesday to Easter Monday. The High Church papers, which insist on this as highly meritorious and look on marriage in Lent as something akin to blasphemy, at the

same time advertise a book of "Maigre Cookery," giving 250 recipes of how to mortify the flesh luxuriantly with twenty different sauces, forty different soups, twenty-five ways of dressing fish, and as many of cooking eggs, etc.

Dr. Klein says that according to Jewish Talmudic law, women who do not cover their hair break the law, and may be divorced without compensation. But the Bible allows any man to divorce his wife if she is disagreeable to him. Among the Polish and Russian Jews a custom prevails of cutting off the bride's hair on her nuptial day, thereby compelling her to adopt a wig as a head-covering.

According to the *Jewish Standard*, the Motso bakers of the chosen race sharp their brethren at Passover time by putting but a small supply of unleavened bread on the market and thus keeping up the prices of an article indispensable for Pisach.

Dr. Duncan, the Islington fossil, apparently does not relish our recent observations on himself. In lecturing on "Foes to Fight" he classes "the infidel print" with "the obscene volume." "He should protect himself from infidel publications of all sorts because their tone was always low and their methods always tricky." To class antagonists with the obscene is of course high-toned Christianity. Nothing tricky about that.

Dr. Duncan appears to have information direct from Satan or his angels, for he says, "I say on the testimony of those who know, that the waltz has waltzed thousands of girls into hell." He does not mention the fate of the girls' partners. But dancing-halls, theatres and music-halls are all "Foes to Fight" in the eyes of the doctor—for they are rivals to his own show.

It appears from the second volume of the new series of *Records of the Past*, edited by Professor Sayce, that a standpoint has been found linking the chronology of Egypt with that of Assyria and Babylonia, and proving that the Hebrew Exodus, if it took place at all, cannot have been earlier than 1320 B.C., whereas the usual date given is 1491 B.C.

The Rev. T. Ashcroft, of Manchester, is a popular lecturer on "Spiritualism: a Farce and a Fraud." This thesis, illustrated by a spirit hand—a glove stuffed with cotton wool,—may be correct, but it does not exhaust the question. Spiritism gains adherents by offering a slightly improved theory of a future life to that which launches us suddenly into either heaven or hell.

Was there ever a cruder notion of human nature than that of Jesus Christ dividing all into sheep or goats, the one meriting eternal happiness, the other deserving eternal misery? As a matter of fact, the hair and wool are so mixed only a God could tell t'other from which. Suppose a husband and wife, both with the virtues and the frailties incident to humanity. One, however, weighed in the balance is just on the right side, the other just on the wrong. Orthodoxy says they will be eternally separated; Spiritism denies this, and we cannot wonder that it makes some way with the orthodox, despite its humbug and absurdities.

Are there any real Christians in the world? It looks as though there were not. The Catholics regard the Protestants as heretics, and the Protestants appear to reciprocate the compliment. There was an annual meeting on Monday at Exeter Hall of the "McAll Mission," which is devoted to "evangelical work among Roman Catholics and sceptics." The society's operations are carried on in France, and last year's income was £19,499. It is a very pretty sum, and no doubt affords some decent "pickings" to a number of pious gentlemen.

What a mass of contradictions is the life of England. We are a Christian people, yet we do all sorts of things in defiance of Jesus Christ and all his apostles. For instance, Jesus looked askance at all domestic relations, and Paul teaches that celibacy is preferable to marriage. Yet a Christian judge, Mr. Justice Day, on the verdict of a Christian jury, has just mulcted William Ambler, a farm laborer, in forty shillings damages for breaking his promise to marry

Rebecca Lorrinan, after discovering that she was subject to epileptic fits. For such a woman to marry and procreate is a crime against humanity. Human justice, therefore, would invalidate her claim for damages; while Christian justice—if there be such a thing—would pronounce the “fickle swain” a true follower of Christ.

Professor Blackie gives a diatribe on Atheistic Science in the *British Weekly*, and winds up with a sonnet, which in his view is all that Darwin deserves. The sonnet is a sort of paraphrase of David's polite remark about the fool, and ends with these lines:

Go to! go to! when two and two make five,  
Men shall greet thee the wisest fool alive.

If this is the only sort of refutation to which they are subject, Darwinian Atheists will go on their way rejoicing.

In a recent paragraph we called H. L. Hastings a “cowardly liar” for libelling Colonel Ingersoll in England. One of his admirers (or, for all we know, himself—the letter being unsigned) sends us two American editions of Hastings' lecture in which the libel appears. One of these American editions, however, bears no imprint, and the other bears the imprint of “Simpson, printer, Richmond, London.” On the whole we have nothing to retract. Hastings seems to have borrowed the libel from that wretched creature Clarke Braden; and, like that wretched creature, he thinks personalities are arguments, and slandering Ingersoll is a good defence of Moses.

We notice that Hastings leaves himself a loophole of escape. He begins his libel on Ingersoll with the saving premise of “it is said.” Thus he avoids the necessity of proving what he does not absolutely affirm, while enjoying all the advantage of tickling the prurient ears of his Christian readers. “Cowardly liar” is therefore a happy description of H. L. Hastings. We uttered it in a moment of “inspiration.”

The business side of a God business came out in a correspondence in regard to St. George's Church Brighton. Sir Charles Peel, the owner of the chapel, divides with the Rev. Mr. Selwyn, the incumbent, any income in excess of £500. Mr. Selwyn offered £4,000 to get all the extras to himself, but some of the parishioners think £500 the full value and a considerable correspondence has ensued.

James Albert Mason, scriptural reader has been mildly emulating the example of the Lord's favorite patriarchs. James only had two wives, and Jehovah, according to Ezekiel xxiii, 4, had as many, but he, that is James not Jehovah, has been committed for trial at the Liverpool assizes.

Christian Evidence lecturers never tire of citing Sir George Stokes as a scientist who accepts their creed. Well, we hope they derive comfort from his lecture at the Finsbury Polytechnic last Sunday on the soul. He repudiated the immortality of the soul, which he evidently felt himself unable to support by any scientific or philosophical reasoning. Indeed, he relied entirely upon the Bible for his belief in a future life. We are promised a future life in the blessed book; therefore there *will* be a future life; and the “spirit,” which Sir G. Stokes knows nothing whatever about, will have some sort of a body, which he also knows nothing about, except that Scripture tells us it will be very different from our present bodies. Here, then, is the scientist, who is cited in support of the Bible, absolutely leaning upon the Bible for every article of his faith.

Mr. Engstrom is a minister of the Church of England, which teaches the “resurrection of the body.” Yet Sir G. Stokes calls it an “extravagant and incredible belief.” It would be interesting to hear these two Christian Evidencers discussing this point in public.

Puritanism reigns in Boston, and they consequently believe in Solomon's doctrine regarding the use of the rod. In that city 18,000 cases of flogging occurred in the Boston schools in 1889. We think Col. Ingersoll should pay Boston a visit, and try to civilise this centre of “culchah” a little.

At a Conference of Swedish Lutherans, held at Rockford, Illinois, a resolution was presented, thanking God for the prosperity of the past year. The Swedes, however,

thought it over in their practical hard-headed fashion. They remembered the failure of their crops and the low prices now obtainable, and concluded that God had not come up to their reasonable expectations. They accordingly negatived the resolution. When the pious Portuguese sailors found that prayers to the Virgin did not abate the storm they pitched her statue overboard, and the Swedes seem inclined to act similarly to their God.

We read in the *Hindu* that the Hindu Preaching Society is sending its missionaries to counteract the work of the Christian missionaries. One of them is reported as preaching for six hours at a stretch! He boasts of having preserved many of his countrymen from the awful fate of becoming converts to the Christian superstition. Surely the competition is very amusing. We are inclined to say to Christian and Brahmin, “A plague on both your houses.”

The barbers of Bombay, it is said, refuse to shave widows' heads, rightly holding that the custom obliging widows to shave once a week is a barbarity. Native journals have denounced the practice despite the opposition of the Brahmins, the most pious of whom have threatened to cut the hair of the widows if the barbers refuse. This, however, it is said, they could not do without losing caste. Any practice, stupid, barbarous and likely to enforce the subjection of women, has naturally the priests in its favor.

Among the injunctions of Paul are that women shall be veiled, and “if the woman be not covered let her also be shorn” (1 Cor. ix., 6); and “if a man have long hair it is a shame unto him” (v. 14). But no one thinks of paying any more heed to Paul in this matter than to the holy injunction of Leviticus (xix., 27), “Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard.”

The Rev. Samuel Topham, of 38 Amersham Vale, Deptford, did not gain much by summoning Walter Nicholson for assault. Walter was able to prove that the man of God molested his sweetheart. The holy man's statement that no window was broken was directly contradicted by the police-constable, who said that the prisoner was sober but the prosecutor was under the influence of drink. The next time the rev. gentleman gets razzle-dazzled, molests young females and has his face slapped, he had better hush it up in the sublime interests of the Church of Christ.

How hard it is to get Christians to see that Freethinkers have *convictions*. Here is the Rev. H. Bromby who, addressing a meeting at Oxford Hall, referred to Mr. Bradlaugh as once a Sunday-school teacher in the neighborhood, and expressed a belief that “he might have used his terrible earnestness in a different direction if the clergy had treated him more sympathetically.” Nonsense, Mr. Bromby, flat nonsense! Mr. Bradlaugh might have shown a little more tenderness to the feelings of your species if you had shown him a little charity, but his assurance of the falsity of your creed is not based on personal grounds. It rests on evidence, which would remain unaltered if the clergy were as charitable as they are bigoted. What an absurdity it is, for instance, to suppose that a kind-hearted clergyman is a bit of solid proof that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

In Spain the Minister of Public Worship looks after the schools. That is, nominally. Practically, he does nothing of the kind. He has no time to listen to the complaints of the teachers, many of whom are reduced almost to beggary by their salaries being a year overdue. But he has plenty of time for bull fighting, and has accepted the presidency of a Society for promoting that sport. We suggest that the Spaniards should make him Minister of Public Worship and Bull Fighting, and appoint another official to take care of the public schools.

“The New Genesis, or Moses made Scientific” is the announcement of Dr. Joseph Parker's discourse at the City Temple on Good Friday. Holy Moses!

The following announcement appeared recently in one of the papers: “St. James's Church—on Sunday next the afternoon service will commence at half past three and continue until further notice.” Perhaps it is not finished yet.

## MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

*Sunday*, April 6, Milton Hall, Hawley Crescent, Kentish Town, at 7. 30, "Did Jesus Christ Rise from the Dead?"

*Wednesday*, April 9, Shelley Society, University College, Gower Street, at 8, "The Religious Opinions of Shelley." Free Admission.

*Friday*, April 11, Secular Hall, 61 New Church Road, Camberwell Road, S.E., at 8 "Freethought and the Bible." Free Admission, and unlimited discussion.

April 13, Portsmouth; 20, Hall of Science; 27, Hall of Science.

May 4, Newcastle; 11, South Shields; 18, Hall of Science, London; 25, N. S. S. Conference.

June 1, Hall of Science London; 8, Gladstone Radical Club and 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.

W. DUFFIELD (New Plymouth).—Your order and remittance to hand. Both have been handed to Mr. Forder, to whom all such business communications should be addressed.

E. ANDERSON.—Particulars of Beethoven's scepticism are given in Mr. Wheeler's *Biographical Dictionary of Freethinkers*.

I. IRELAND.—No doubt, as the worthy deacon declared, a Bible Class which allowed free discussion would make more sceptics than Christians. Fortunately there are some Christian young men who will see through the trick of silence.

S. M. PEACOCK.—It is an old circular, and not worth recurring to. Delighted to hear the good news as to the gentleman you mention. He would be worth having, and we should be proud of having contributed to the result.

T. A. BRUCE.—We should prefer the official statistics to the Archbishop's figures. Someday or other—perhaps before very long—we will look them up. Our view is that the conscription, with its attendant evil of barrack life, must have a bad effect on the morale of the French people.

H. P.—You have a legal right, under Mr. Bradlaugh's Act, to affirm instead of swearing in the witness-box. But it is difficult to say whether you should avail yourself of the right. As a government servant, liable to be discharged by a bigoted superior without any cause being assigned, you should weigh the danger before you resolve. There is no special law to prevent a Freethinker from holding a civil office under the crown.

SENEX.—We have not heard from you. Has your letter miscarried?

HUGH IRVING sends us £1 for the Swedish Prisoner Fund.

No. 12.—Pleased to hear you are still pushing our circulation. We missed the Canon Boynes incident, and it is too late to return to it now.

VANINI.—You need not go to a church to get married. Give the usual three week's notice to the registrar of your parish. At the expiration of the notice you can get married at the registrar's office, as myriads of people do every year.

J. S.—Good sentiment but not good verse.

J. ROWNEY.—Thanks. You did us a service by challenging Mr. Engstrom's statement.

J. K.—We think you are mistaken. In our opinion Home Rule will be a blow to the Irish priesthood. They will lose their old prestige as patriots, when they no longer oppose the rule of the Protestant Saxon; and when Irishmen have a Parliament of their own, they will no longer be bound together by a common antipathy to an alien government. All their natural differences of interest, sentiment and opinion, will assert themselves, and the break-up of Ireland's stagnation will begin. Protestants will not be tyrannised over by Catholics—not, at least, for any length of time. In the first place the Protestants are too strong; in the second place, the Catholics would have to count with men like Parnell and Davitt; and in the third place, the weight of British influence would be too great. In short, Ireland will learn more from England when the hatred is out of her heart.—The rest of your letter we have read with interest.

J. BURRELL.—If the crank is in the Westminster Branch you had better get rid of him at once and return his subscription.

S. STANDRING corrects a mistake in our last issue. The workmen's meeting he addressed in the Brighton Town Hall was not on Saturday but Sunday.

J. ROBINS.—There is nothing of a religious character on the bill you enclose.

B. STEVENS.—We agree with you that the opposition was rather feeble.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Neues Freireligioses Sonntags Blatt—Der Arme Teufel—Western Figaro—Liberator—Truthseeker—Ironclad Age—Bulletin des Sommaires—Menschentum—People's Press—Echo—Methodist Recorder—Freidenker—Lucifer—Church Reformer—Dundee Evening Telegraph—Sussex Daily News—Open Court—Portsmouth Evening News—Jewish Standard—Sunday Chronicle—Tocsin—Reading Standard—Vancouver Weekly News Advertiser—Islington Gszette—Chatham and Rochester News—Secular Thought—Star—Daily Graphic—Freethought Record.

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

## SUGAR PLUMS.

*Letters to the Clergy* will be resumed next week. The tenth letter will be addressed to the Rev. Dr. Matheson on "The Fear of God." Owing to a press of other matter, the conclusion of "Freethought in Spain" stands over till next week.

Mr. Foote's lecture on Mr. Gladstone's *Good Words* article was listened to by a good audience on Sunday evening at the Hall of Science. The lecture lasted for an hour and a half, and riveted attention until the end, when the lecturer received a perfect ovation. Two Christians mounted the platform and defended the Bible, the Rev. Mr. Brennan and the eccentric Mr. Mitchell. When they were replied to the meeting broke up, but discussion was carried on in groups on the pavement, Mr. Brennan's voice being distinctly audible in the committee room.

This evening (April 6) Mr. Foote lectures at Milton Hall on a subject suitable to Easter Sunday—"Did Jesus Christ Rise from the Dead?"

Mr. Foote lectures before the Shelley Society next Wednesday evening (April 9) on the poet's Religious Opinions. Any person who wishes to hear the lecture and discussion will be admitted free. Time, 8 o'clock; place, University College, Gower Street.

The London Secular Federation's second course of Free Lectures will begin at the Secular Hall, Camberwell, on Friday, April 11, when Mr. Foote lectures on "Freethought and a Future Life." Mr. Foote will also deliver the fourth lecture of this course. The other lecturers will be Mr. J. M. Robertson and Mr. G. Standring.

The Federation's third course of Free Lectures will begin at Milton Hall on Tuesday, April 15. Mr. Foote will deliver the first and third lectures, and the second and fourth will be taken by Mr. J. M. Robertson and Mr. A. B. Moss. As soon as possible a fourth course will be organised in the East-end, where there is such an inadequate propaganda of Freethought among a population of two millions. Freethinkers in the various localities where these Free Lectures are given should make a special effort to bring their Christian friends and acquaintances.

Captain Thomson telegraphed to us on Monday that the King's Court had sentenced Viktor Lennstrand to an additional three months' imprisonment. Thus the cowardly scoundrels pile the penalties upon a young hero who has dared to challenge their superstition and affront their bigotry. The only consolation is that he is brave enough to bear their malice. He has a full measure of that noble spirit which made one of Carlyle's shopmen exclaim, when sentenced to three years' imprisonment for selling the *Age of Reason*, "My lord, I have a mind that can bear such a sentence with fortitude."

The Swedish courts imprison Freethinkers, but they cannot destroy Freethought. On the contrary, they strengthen it by kindling the martyr spirit in its champions and exciting

public admiration of their heroism. The growls of indignation at the infamy are swelling into a roar, and thousands of Swedes are being taught, in the most practical manner, that Christianity is the implacable enemy of liberty. That is worth something; and if Viktor Lennstrand suffers, as he must, it is only by such suffering that Freethought is possible.

SWEDISH PRISONER'S FUND.—Heckmondwike Branch N. S. S., 14s.; W. Hardie, 5s.; Darlington Branch N. S. S., 7s. 6d.; John White, 2s. 6d.; Jas. White, 2s. 6d.; A. White, 2s. 6d.; R. White, 2s.; J. R., 6d.; J. Stapleton, 1s. 6d.; J. Fitzgerald, 2s. 6d.; D. Colville, 2s. 6d.; G. Carter, 2s. 6d.; "Lawret," 2s.; F. Bayle, 2s.; E. Sims, 2s.; E. Meek, 1s.; E. Parker, 6d.—R. Forder, Secretary.

The *Chatham News* gives a long and fair report of Mr. Foote's "able and eloquent" lecture in the Gladstone Hall. Some of the jocularities are included in the report. They will be good reading for the Archbishop of Canterbury and the clergy of his diocese.

Seriously speaking—really now, we are in earnest—it is something to get a bit like this in a "reputable" newspaper: "The Church resisted every reform with might and main, and when at last the reform was carried, the clergy took off their hats and wiped their perspiring brows, and said 'We did it.'"

The Newcastle Sunday Music League's candidate was beaten in West All Saints' Ward by the narrow majority of sixteen, the figures being 403 to 387. According to the local press "The only municipal question apparently upon which the candidates differed was that of Sunday music in the parks." It is obvious therefore, that the bigoted action of the City Council is not supported by any serious majority of the citizens; and it will probably be reversed before very long, as the Sunday Music League intends to press the question at outdoor meetings during the summer.

The Newcastle Branch keeps Good Friday this year after the fashion of the Paris Freethinkers. The celebration takes the form of a tea, concert and dance at the Arcade Assembly Room, Pilgrim Street. The Branch's rooms will be open at 10 in the morning for the convenience of friends from the country. Tickets can be had at Mr. Peter Weston's, news-agent, Newgate Street.

Mr. Clarke, our latest special lecturer, is touring in the north of England this month under the auspices of the North-Eastern Secular Federation. He begins at Hartlepool on April 6, and winds up on the 20th at Newcastle. The intervening dates are taken by Middlesborough, Stockton, Chester-le-Street, South Shields, West Auckland, Darlington, Wallsend, North Shields, Bedlington, and Oxhill.

"I regard the Church as the basic principle of immorality in the world, and the most prolific source of pauperism, of crime, and of injustice to women." This is the testimony of Mrs. Matilda Joselyn Gage, one of the leaders of the Women's Rights Movement in America, who has recently presided at a conference at Washington.

The Leicester Secular Society sends us its report for 1889. We have read it through and found it instructive. There is evidently some good work done by the Society. The cricket club, the sick club, and other departments are no doubt useful. So is a Club (with a capital C) where members, not necessarily Secularists, can spend their evenings at cards, billiards, and skittles, or hear a song, or enjoy a glass and a smoke, or read the periodicals of the day. But all these things are more or less provided elsewhere. The chief business of a Secular Society, at any rate at present, is to propagate Secularism, and to assist in this work the late Mr. Josiah Gimson left £100 a year for ten years. Well, we look into the Balance Sheet and find that while the Society's income has increased during the past three years, chiefly through "Sales in the Club," from £710 to £826, the amount expended on lectures, week days and Sundays, has diminished from £43 to £34—just a third of the Gimson bequest. Nor have the lectures, apparently, been of a very definite character. They have been delivered by all sorts of persons on all sorts of subjects. It seems, therefore, that the Leicester Secular Society is far from realising Mr. Gimson's

ideal. Instead of extending Freethought we believe it simply lives on the stock accumulated in the old days of vigorous propaganda.

Our remarks are not made in an unfriendly spirit. The Society sent us its report, and we have criticised it honestly. And having done so we venture to offer a piece of advice. A little "respectability" might be exchanged for a little earnest Freethought, and we are confident that the alteration would be welcomed by the rank and file of the Secular party in Leicester, who, we understand, are in the position of being obliged to take what is given them.

It is all very well to say, as the Leicester Secular Society does say, that Secularists need not contest the divine origin of the Bible; but the statement is nonsensical in view of the other statement that Secularists accept no authority but that of Nature. If the Bible is of divine origin Secularism is impossible; and while the divine origin of the Bible is upheld by English law, and inwrought with English thought, it is idle, and in fact ludicrous, to assume these airs of most unphilosophical indifference. After all *ideas* rule the world, and there is a logic of ideas, whether the Leicester Secular Society admits it or not.

George Harrison, the poor fellow who got five years' imprisonment for his share in the Trafalgar Square "riots"—heaven save the mark!—has been released after serving two years and three months of his sentence. He called at our publishing office on Tuesday to thank us for our poor efforts on his behalf. It is a curious thing that the least assistance to his family was rendered by those who were most eager for a second raid on the Square.

Donations are still required for the memorial to Kit Marlowe, the Atheist poet and founder of the English drama, and may be sent to the hon. treasurer, Mr. Sidney Lee, 18 Edwardes Square, Kensington, W.

The department of the Seine spends twenty-six millions of francs in the education of 150,000 children. The French are beginning to find this is a better investment of their money than putting it in fortifications.

Mary A. Ward, authoress of *Robert Elsmere*, calls attention in the *Nineteenth Century* to a new work on *The First Three Gospels; their Origin and Relation* by Mr. J. E. Carpenter. It is written from the Unitarian standpoint, but does much to show the results of criticism upon the Synoptics.

Mrs. Ward says "When we have learnt something of the literary habits which prevailed in the first two Christian centuries and in the two centuries immediately preceding them; when we have understood something of the process of 'dramatic personation' which produced the Book of Daniel about 165 B.C., and led to the composition of the fourth Gospel about 120 A.D., and of the Pastoral Epistles later on in the second century; when we have penetrated something of the force of diffusiveness of the Messianic idea under its two forms of 'The Ideal King,' and 'The Servant of Yahve'; and when, moreover, we have realised the presence throughout the period of those legend-making forces which attend the birth of all religions: then, and then only shall we have grasped the first elements of the Christian problem." This looks a good deal like suggesting that Christianity depended on the forgeries of its propagators and the credulity of its believers.

Paul Janet in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, argues that Chateaubriand was at bottom a sceptic despite his *Génie du Christianisme*.

We are delighted to see that the Russian students are in revolt. Under the pious Czar and the ignorant and besotted clergy of the Holy Greek Church, Russia is in an intolerable position, and every open sign of discontent is cheering to the friends of liberty and progress. It is noteworthy that the Moscow students demand "freedom of instruction and equality of educational rights for the Jews" as well as for the rest of the community.

*Secular Thought* (Toronto), after recording Mr. Foote's election as President of the N. S. S., says: "This we think a wise selection, as we know of no other man in the old



country so well qualified for the office." *Freethought* (San Francisco) says: "Conceding that Bradlaugh is the ablest Secularist in England, Mr. Foote certainly holds the second place as an all-round Freethought advocate." Evidently the American Freethinkers do not take a despairing view of the prospects of our party in England.

We opened the little box with wonder. It contained wedding cake. What a curious thing in a newspaper office! But it came from two good Freethinkers who are honeymooning. Miss Hawksley, the President of the Nottingham Branch, has condescended to marry the Secretary, Mr. Atkey. We congratulate him. He is a lucky man, and we believe he has the sense to know it.

Things are going on famously at Reading. The Rev. D. Amos, Unitarian, is demolishing Christianity, and is being feebly replied to by Mr. T. Barber, of Northampton. Mr. Barber's ignorance is almost amazing. For instance, Mr. Amos derided the Josephus passage on Christ as a wretched interpolation, which no scholar accepts as genuine. To this Mr. Barber replies that "the writings of Josephus were never questioned during the first four centuries." What imbecility, to be sure! The fact is, there is not a single Christian writer before Eusebius who ever heard of this Josephus passage. What Mr. Barber has to explain is the silence of all the early Fathers as to a passage which, if it existed, they would have seized on with avidity. We are really tired of giving Mr. Barber elementary lessons in Christian evidences.

Freethought is spreading in the police force. It is also spreading in the navy, one of our war-ships having a large company of Freethinkers on boards. In the army, too, the cause is making headway. Two Branches of the N. S. S. have just been formed at Gibraltar and Barbadoes. The members in the former Branch, for a very good reason, are all passive; but those of the latter are all active. The secretary is Sergeant Westerman of the York and Lancaster regiment. A quantity of Freethought literature has been sent to both places, as well as to Trinidad.

The N. S. S. Branches should make a special effort to secure the success of the approaching Annual Conference. Coming so soon after the General Meeting of February 16, the Conference will be a tax on the party's resources of money and enthusiasm, but it will be a very important gathering, and steps should be taken at once to provide for a full representation.

Freethinkers of any means are earnestly desired to think over the President's circular to the members and friends of the National Secular Society, which appears in another column. Money is indispensable to the Society's work, if it is to be done with any degree of efficiency. New members are being enrolled, and there are signs of fresh activity in many directions. But no enterprises can be engaged in, except spasmodically—and that can only lead to transient results—without an assured income. The N. S. S. ought to have an income of £1,000 a year at least, and although this cannot be realised all at once, it is high time to make a beginning. What is wanted is a list—a gradually growing one—of yearly subscribers; that is, of persons who undertake to give a definite sum annually. Some can afford five or ten guineas, others five or ten shillings; but all should do *something* who can, and do it regularly.

A special meeting of the N.S.S. Executive has been summoned for Thursday evening at the Hall of Science. Every member should attend if possible.

#### CANON SHUTTLEWORTH EXPLAINS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

DEAR SIR,—You have apparently been misled by an inaccurate report of my lecture at the National Liberal Club upon the matter of Church and State. I have already been obliged to publicly disclaim any responsibility for the sentiments and sentences with which this report has credited me; and I will ask you to allow me to say that I cannot accept as mine the position and proposals upon which you comment in last week's issue.—Faithfully yours,

March 28.

W. SHUTTLEWORTH.

#### MRS. BESANT'S RESIGNATION.

MRS. BESANT has definitively resigned her vice-presidency of the National Secular Society, and I presume her membership as well. The reason she assigns is that she could not work in harmony with the new President. Behind this, of course, is the fact that she has become a leader of Theosophy.

Greatly as I deplore the loss of Mrs. Besant I do not feel any shock at her nominal resignation. Her real resignation took place many months ago, when she gave her enthusiasm to the cause of Theosophy, and ceased attending the Executive meetings of the National Secular Society.

In common with the rest of the Executive, I recognise the great services which Mrs. Besant has rendered the Society during her fifteen years' membership. Her eloquence, accomplishments, and high character were invaluable to the movement. And her absence will of course be felt. At this moment the Society is passing under a heavy cloud. I assumed the Presidency, which I did not seek, in a time of adversity. Mr. Bradlaugh's leadership is summarily ended by a break-down of his health, Mrs. Besant goes over to Theosophy and leaves us, and the Society's finances suffer a heavy loss at the same time. Still, I am not discouraged. I believe in the future of the Freethought party. If I fail or fall in the struggle, the party will go on, and ultimately prosper.

Mrs. Besant hopes the Society will not degenerate into a mere sect. But it always was a sect, and it will remain so until its principles triumph. Those principles were drawn up as they now stand with Mrs. Besant's assistance. She was aware that a declaration of adherence to them was indispensable to membership. In that sense the Society will remain a sect, but I hope in no other sense. And I do not believe I have given any reasonable cause for thinking otherwise.

G. W. FOOTE.

#### THE NIGHTMARE OF THEOLOGY.

THEOLOGIANS are continually proclaiming their belief in an infinite spirit; and in addition to this infinite spirit pervading the whole of the universe, they profess to believe in an infinite number of infinite spirits, which take possession of human bodies and act upon them in a similar manner to a musician who performs upon an instrument.

But is it not a contradiction in terms to talk of an infinite spirit, and in the same breath to speak of a number of finite spirits—separate and apart from the one infinite spirit? A God who is everywhere, is a God who is everything, and nothing can be conceived as existing apart from him. Yet this infinite spirit existing everywhere throughout all time is alleged to be the creator and governor of the universe. But if God created the universe, where was he when he did it? Either he must have been in the universe or out of it. If he was in the universe, the universe must have been already in existence—and therefore did not need to be created; on the other hand, if he was not in the universe, but was somewhere outside of it—where is that?

Nature seems boundless. Man can set no limits to it. In whatever direction he turns man finds something, and he is driven irresistibly to the conclusion that something is everywhere; that the universe is infinite, limitless. Now if the universe is everywhere, what room is there for an infinite spirit? Is it possible to have two things in the same place at the same time?

Although theologians tell us that it is absolutely necessary that we should believe in Deity, when we seek to understand what is meant by the term, they gravely inform us that we cannot by searching find

out God; that he is incomprehensible, and yet that the evidence of his existence is so plain that every sensible man must be at once convinced. Obviously this is an attempt to beg the question by sheer audacity. If every sensible man is satisfied with the evidence of the existence of Deity, it must be because the evidence appeals to his senses—in other words, the theologian is wrong in saying that God is incomprehensible—because all sensible men are convinced the moment they bring their minds to bear upon the subject. But is this true? Are there not thousands of intelligent unbelievers? Man takes cognisance of the phenomena of nature, these act upon his senses; but the God of the theologians acts upon none of his senses. God is said to be everywhere. Point to a particular object—say, to a table, a building, or a book—and ask your learned divine, are any of these things God? Go on pointing out objects until you have exhausted everything on the earth of which you have any knowledge. Point to the sun, to the moon, and the myriads of stars in the heavens, and press for an answer—are these things God? and the theologian will be bound to say “No.”

Where, then, is the evidence of God's existence? “Oh,” reply the theologians, “the evidence of God's existence is to be found in the order prevailing in the universe.” What order? Is an earthquake evidence of order? Are volcanoes, famines, diseases, droughts, evidence of order?

The truth is, *per se*, there is neither order nor disorder in the universe. Nature goes right to her end, ruthlessly mowing down whatever happens to be in the way. A thunderbolt falls. In its descent it is just as likely to kill a priest as a publican, a bishop as a sportsman, if they happen to be in the road. A shipload of soldiers are as safe in a storm as a similar number of parsons. Nature has no respect for persons; she is perfectly impartial in all her actions; she treats the Freethinker as kindly as the Christian, and at times she treats them both with equal cruelty. Nature kills us all once, and sometimes by the most cruel and insidious methods it is possible to conceive. Nature starves millions of creatures that are born into the world; others she freezes, burns or drowns; indeed Nature's methods are so cruel that there is scarcely an animal whose existence is not dependent upon the destruction of others. If God is behind Nature, directing her, he is the cause of these horrors. What order, we may ask, can be seen in this?

The fact is, man calls that order which affects him pleasantly, and that disorder which affects him painfully. Much of what we call order is the result of man's intelligence. The gods have given us no assistance. Man has learned by a hard and painful experience how to control the forces of Nature, how to use one force to counteract the effects of another—and thus man creates the very results which the theologian points to triumphantly as evidence of harmony.

Now although the theologian talks of harmony in the universe, he is forced to recognise that there is something in the world, the very antithesis of this very evil; and as he regards his God as the embodiment of all that is good, he cannot ascribe the existence of evil to his Deity; he therefore manufactures another being, more powerful than God who is able to frustrate his purposes at every turn.

But who made the Devil? Either he is co-eternal with God, or must have been created. But as God is the only eternal and uncreated being, the Devil must have been created by God. An eccentric gentleman named McGrigor Allan has been writing to the *Echo* to say that the Devil is a fallen angel. Poor Devil!!! But if the Devil was ever an angel, how came he to fall? Either he must have fallen by the will of Deity or the fall was opposed to God's will. But how can the Devil or anybody else resist the will of an

omnipotent being? If the Devil fell by the desire of God then God is the cause of his fall.

Again, if the Devil has fallen, why are not steps taken for his conversion? A story is related of a simple-minded Italian monk, who one day gravely announced to his congregation that by dint of meditation he had discovered a sure way of rendering all men happy. “The Devil,” said he, “is the cause of all sin. He it is who tempts men only to have in hell companions of his misery. Let us therefore apply to the Pope, who has the keys of heaven and hell; let us prevail upon him to pray to God, as the head of the whole Church, to consent to a reconciliation with the Devil, to restore him to favor, to reinstate him in his former rank, which cannot fail to put an end to his malicious projects against mankind.” Poor, simple-minded monk; he had evidently been bamboozled by his professional brethren, and did not know the value of the Devil to the priesthood. Evidently he was not aware that the Devil was a theological scarecrow, manufactured in an age of ignorance to frighten poor credulous Christians into supporting an incredible creed.

It is nonsense for Christians to talk of man's free will. If God is infinite in power how can man resist his desires? And if an omnipotent God cannot conquer the Devil how can man be expected to triumph over him? The fact is, theology is a nightmare. It is worse than a dream; the effect of a dream wears away with time, especially if the dreamer walks about with his eyes open in the world of fact; but the nightmare of theology clings to one—its effects are felt through generations—and only by a vigorous course of reasoning, and a firm adherence to facts can we gradually eradicate the evil effects of a subtle and poisonous theology from the brain and blood of mankind.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

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#### A NOTE ON EASTER.

The very name of Easter denotes that it is a Pagan festival, and its dependence upon the moon shows that it is an astronomical feast, being, in fact, identical with the Pagan spring feast which celebrated the procreative powers of nature, and, after mourning the death of the sun-god, rejoiced at his resurrection. The early Asiatic Christians celebrated Easter on the fourteenth day of the moon, on whatever day of the week it fell; so that if some years they kept Good Friday, at others they kept Good Monday or Wednesday. These Eastern Christians pretended they had the authority of St. John. The Western Churches used to observe the day of the sun after the fourteenth day of the March moon, and they said St. Peter and St. Paul were their authorities. About the year 190, Victor, Bishop of Rome, presumed to excommunicate those Christians who kept Easter in the Eastern fashion. They held, however, to their custom, until the civil power of Constantine established and enforced uniformity. Even after this a difficulty arose when the fourteenth day of the full moon of March fell on a Sunday. The Eastern Church then celebrated it, but the Western Churches deferred it till the Sunday following.

SUNDAY MEETINGS.

LONDON.

Battersea—The Shed of Truth, Prince of Wales's Road, 7.30, a lecture. Social evening every Tuesday.  
 Bethnal Green—Opposite "Salmon and Ball," Mr. J. Fagan, 11.15, "Is there a God?"  
 Camberwell—61 New Church Road, S.E., 7.30, Mr. T. Parris, "Why I am a Freethinker."  
 Claremont Hall, Penton Street, Pentonville Road, N., at 7, Mr. J. M. Robertson, "What Christianity has done."  
 East London—Mile End Waste, 11.30, Mr. F. Haslam, "The Miracles of the Bible."  
 Edmonton—Corner of Angel Road, 3, Mr. L. Keen, "Christ and Crime."  
 Finsbury Park (near the band-stand) 3.30, J. Rowney, "The Resurrection."  
 Hall of Science, 142 Old Street, E.C., 7, Mrs. Annie Besant, "Easter Day."  
 Hyde Park, near Marble Arch; 11.15, Mr. H. Courtney, "The Converted Cobbler: a Challenge to the Rev. Hughes Price Hughes."  
 Milton Hall, Kentish Town Road, N.W., 7.30, Mr. G. W. Foote, "Did Jesus Christ Rise from the Dead?"  
 West Ham—121 Broadway, Plaistow, Good Friday, soiree: 6, concert; 9, dancing. Sunday, 11.30, a member, "Practical Socialism"; 7, Mr. F. Haslam, "Miracles"; 8.30, music.  
 Westminster—Old Pimlico Pier, 11.30, Mr. C. J. Hunt, "Christianity and Secularism."  
 Wood Green—Jolly Butchers' Hill, 11, Socialist speakers.  
 Woolwich—"Sussex Arms," Assembly Room, 60 Plumstead Road (entrance, Masey Road), 7.30, "Theosophic Facts, Fallacies, and False Pretences," by an Orientalist.

COUNTRY.

Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Mr. R. S. Fransby, 7, "Shelley."  
 Glasgow Secular Society and Branch of N. S. S., 122 Ingram Street.—6.30, Mr. Ritchie (Edinburgh), "Two Visions of Judgment: Byron and Southey."  
 Hanley—Secular Hall, 51 John Street, 7, A. Hall, a reading, "How Man Makes Gods."  
 Hull Branch—No. 2 Room, Friendly Societies' Hall, Albion Street, Mr. Smith, "Why I am an Agnostic."  
 Liverpool Branch N.S.S., Camden Hall, Camden Street—at 11, Tontine Society; 7, Mr. Harry Smith, secular sermon, "Her House is the Way to Hell" (Prov. viii. 26).  
 Manchester—Rusholme Road, Oxford Road. Good Friday, 6, ball, gentlemen, 1s. 6d., ladies 1s.; Sunday, see Saturday's *Manchester Evening News*.  
 Newcastle-on-Tyne—4 Hall's Court, Newgate Street. Good Friday, in Arcade Assembly Rooms, Pilgrim Street, a grand conversation and dance, tickets of Mr. Peter Weston, newsagent, or J. Brown, 86 Durham Street, 1s. 6d. The Society's Rooms will be open for the convenience of strangers on Good Friday at 10 a.m.; tea at 4.30. Sunday, 11, meeting of Sunday Music League.  
 Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham Street, at 3, members' quarterly meeting; 7, special music and other recitals, etc.  
 South Shields—Captain Duncan's Navigation Schools, King Street; at 7, business meeting.  
 West Pelton—Co-operative Hall, April 9, 7, Mr. Clarke, "The Childhood of Jesus."

A series of Sunday organ recitals will be given at the Albert Hall from April 6th. Tickets can be obtained from Mr. H. Mills, Secretary National Sunday League, 8 Theobald's Road, W.C.

LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Oredon Road, London, S.E.—April 6 (morning), Kingsland Green (evening), Ball's Pond; 13, (morning) Pimlico, (evening) Camberwell. May 18 (morning), Clerkenwell Green, (evening), Ball's Pond; 25, (afternoon) Regent's Park. June 1 (morning), Pimlico; 15, Ball's Pond; 29, Mile End. July 13, Mile End.

TOLEMAN-GARNER, 8 Heyworth Road, Stratford, London, E.—May 4 (morning), Mile End Waste; 11, Clerkenwell Green; 18 (afternoon), Regent's Park; 25 (morning), Hyde Park. June 1 (morning), Mile End Waste; 8 (morning), Clerkenwell Green.

JAMES HOOPER, 11 Upper Eldon Street, Sneinton, Nottingham.—April 13, Nottingham.

T. THURLOW, 7 Dickson's Villas, Rutland Road, East Ham.—April 13 (evening), Plaistow; 27, Hyde Park.

H. SMITH, 3 Breck Place, Breck Road, Everton Road, Liverpool.—April 6, Liverpool; 13, Manchester; 20, Rochdale. May 4, Birmingham.

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