

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

[Sub-Editor, J. M. WHEELER.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

STANLEY ON PROVIDENCE.

BUCKLE, the historian of Civilisation, points out that superstition is most rampant where men are most oppressed by eternal nature. Wild and terrible surroundings breed fear and awe in the human mind. Those who lead adventurous lives are subject to the same law. Sailors, for instance, are proverbially superstitious, and military men are scarcely less so. The fighter is not always moral, but he is nearly always religious.

No one acquainted with this truth will be surprised at the piety of explorers. There is a striking exception in Sir Richard Burton, but we do not remember another. From the days of Mungo Park down to our own age, they have been remarkable for their religious temperaments. Had they remained at home, in quiet and safety, they might not have been conspicuous in this respect; but a life of constant adventure, of daily peril and hairbreadth escapes, developed their superstitious tendencies. It is so natural to feel our helplessness in solitude and danger, and perhaps sickness. It is so easy to feel that our escape from a calamity that hemmed us in on every side was due to a providential hand.

Whether Stanley, who is now the cynosure of all eyes, began with any considerable stock of piety, is a question we have no means of determining; but we can quite understand how a very little would go a very long way in Africa, amid long and painful marches through unknown territory, the haunting peril of strange enemies, and the oppressive gloom of interminable forests. Indeed, if the great explorer had become as superstitious as the natives themselves, we could have forgiven it as a frailty incident to human nature in such trying circumstances. But when he brings his mental weakness home with him, and addresses Englishmen in the language of ideas calculated for the latitude of equatorial Africa, it becomes necessary to utter a protest. Stanley has had a good spell of rest in Egypt, and plenty of time to get rid of the "creeps." He should, therefore, have returned to Europe clothed and in his right mind. But instead of this he deliberately sits down and writes the following rubbish for an American magazine, with one eye on God above and the other on a handsome cheque below.

"Constrained at the darkest hour humbly to confess that without God's help I was helpless, I vowed a vow in the forest solitudes that I would confess his aid before men. Silence, as of death, was round about me; it was midnight; I was weakened by illness, prostrated by fatigue, and wan with anxiety for my white and black companions, whose fate was a mystery. In this physical and mental distress I besought God to give me back my people. Nine hours later we were exulting with a rapturous joy. In full view of all was the crimson flag with the crescent, and beneath its waving folds was the long lost rear column."

Danger and grief are apt to make us selfish, and no one would be hard on Stanley for showing weakness in such circumstances. But he rather glories in it. The danger is gone, and alas! the egotism remains. Others perished miserably, but he escaped.

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Omnipotence took care of him and let them go to the Devil. No doubt they prayed in their extremity as heartily as he did, but their prayers were unheard or neglected. Stanley was the lion of the party. Yes, and in parading his egotistic piety in this way, he is in danger of becoming a *lion comique*.

There is something absolutely farcical in Stanley's logic. While he was praying to God, millions of other persons were engaged in the same occupation. Agonised mothers were beseeching God to spare their dear children; wives were imploring him to restore the breadwinner of the family to health; entombed miners were praying in the dark depths of coal pits, and slowly perishing of starvation; shipwrecked sailors were asking for the help that never came. Providence could not, apparently, take on too much business at once, and while Stanley's fate trembled in the balance the rest of mankind might shift for themselves.

But the farce does not end here. Stanley's attitude was much like Jacob's. That smooth-skinned and smooth-tongued patriarch said that if God would guarantee him a safe journey, feed him, clothe him, find him pocket money, and bring him safe back again—well, then the Lord should be his God. Stanley was not so exacting, but his attitude was similar. He asked God to give him back his people (a few short, killed or starved, did not matter), and promised in return to "confess his aid before men." Give me the solid pudding, he says, and I will give you the empty praise. And now he is safe back in Europe he fulfils his part of the contract, and goes about trumpeting the praise of Omnipotence; taking care, however, to get as much cash as possible for every note he blows on the instrument.

Even this does not end the farce. Stanley's piety runs away with his arithmetic. He reminds us of a Christian lady we heard of the other day. She prayed one night, on going to bed, for news from her daughter, and early the next morning a letter came bearing the Edinburgh post-mark. This was clearly an answer to her prayer. But a sceptical friend showed her that the letter must have been posted at Edinburgh before she prayed for it. Now Stanley reasons like that lady. Nine hours is no time in central Africa. The "long-lost rear column" must have been near, though invisible, when Stanley struck his little bargain with the Almighty. Had it been two or three hundred miles off, and miraculously transported, the hand of Providence would have been unmistakable; but in the circumstances its arrival was natural, and the miracle is obviously a creation of Stanley's heated brain. He was "weakened by illness" and "prostrated by fatigue," and the absurdity was pardonable. We only protest against his playing the child when he is well and strong.

That it is childishness, and not humbug, we are willing to believe. Still we confess to a certain suspicion. Stanley's denunciation of the Quakers as connivers at slavery is so utterly grotesque as to require something more than ignorance as an explanation. It looks as though he had sufficient pliability

to truckle to the prejudices of his patrons, and this reflects a sinister light on other of his utterances.

Stanley is not the only sinner in this line. The Grand Old Man himself is quite as ready to take God's name in vain. Jumping out on the platform at Ipswich for a five minutes' speech, he said that "neither the wisdom nor the folly of man is strong enough to separate these countries [England and Ireland] which the Almighty has joined together." With these words before us we should say that human folly is strong enough for anything. Mr. Gladstone enrols the Almighty as a member of the Liberal party. He makes God a Home Rule Unionist, and "with the help of God," his new colleague, he promises to make Pat, Sandy, Taffy and John Bull "a united people." We wish him success, but what does he mean by saying that the Almighty has joined England and Ireland together? If the Almighty has done anything, he has clearly separated them. The St. George's Channel is broader than the straits of Dover, and, talk as we will, the dividing sea makes two nations. Mr. Gladstone may, if he pleases, thank the Almighty "for preserving him to such a green old age. That is a personal matter, and it is simply a question of taste whether a lucky man should thank God effusively in the presence of his unlucky neighbors. But flying publicly in the face of geography, ethnology, and other sciences, is not an edifying spectacle; and when an eminent statesman presses God into a political partnership, we may be pardoned for thinking of Hamlet's description of a politician. Is it not strange that those who uphold the Blasphemy Laws are so ready to tell us how God would vote in a contested election? G. W. FOOTE.

THE LAST WORDS OF EPICTETUS TO HIS SON.

BY VOLTAIRE.

[Originally published in the *Recueil Necessaire*, a collection of heretical tracts, mostly by Voltaire, issued at Leipsic in 1765, and afterwards published with the imprint, Londres, 1768. Unaware of any previous translation, I have somewhat freely rendered this dialogue.—J. M. WHEELER.]

Epictetus. I am dying; I expect your tender memories, not useless tears. I die content, since I leave you virtuous.

His Son. You have taught me to be so, but you know what troubles me. A new Palestinian sect seeks to implant in me remorse.

E. Remorse appertains to scoundrels. Your hands and your soul are pure. I have taught you virtue, and you have practised it.

S. Yes; but this new sect announces a new virtue to me unknown.

E. What sect is this?

S. It is composed of Jews who sell old clothes and philtres, and clip the coins at Rome.

E. The virtue which they teach is apparently false coinage.

S. They say it is impossible to be virtuous without clipping the prepuce, or without being plunged in the water in the name of the Father by the Son. It is true they are not of accord in this. Some desire circumcision, others not; some think the water necessary, others omit it; but all say it is necessary to give money.

E. What! money? Doubtless one should with his superfluities succor the poor who cannot work, pay those who cannot gain their livelihood, and divide his necessaries with his friend. This is our law, our morality; thus have I done since freed by Epaphroditus, and thus have I seen you do also, with a satisfaction which renders my last moments happy.

S. The teachers of whom I speak exact far other than this; they desire brought to their feet all that one has, even to the last farthing.

E. If it is thus, they are robbers, and you are bound to give them up to justice.

S. Oh no! These are not robbers. They are merchants who give you the best bargain in the world for your money; for they promise you eternal life; and if in putting your money at their feet, as they order, you keep only enough wherewith to eat, they have the power to make you die suddenly.

E. These are assassins from whom society must be purged forthwith.

S. No, I tell you, they are magicians, who have wonderful secrets and who kill with words. The father, say they, has bestowed this grace through the son. One of their proselytes, who smells horribly but who preaches with much success in garrets, told me of one named Ananiah, who having sold his land to please the son in the name of the father, carried all the money to the feet of a magician named Barjona, but having kept in secret enough to buy necessities for his child, he was punished with instant death. His wife followed. Barjona killed her likewise in pronouncing a single word.

E. My son, here are abominable people. If this is true, they are among the most infamous criminals on the earth. They have told you ridiculous stories. You are a good fellow, but I fear lest you turn out a simpleton.

S. But father, if one wins eternal life by giving all one's goods to Simon Barjona it is clear one buys it cheaply.

E. Believe me, my son, eternal life, communion with the Supreme Being, has nothing in common with your Simon Barjona. The good and great God who animated Cato, Scipio, Cicero; the father of gods and men, has not, doubtless, remitted his power into the hands of a Jew. I knew these people were among the most superstitious of Syria, but I did not know they carried their insanity so far as to call themselves the prime ministers of God.

S. But, my father, they continually work miracles. You sneer, my father. You shrug your shoulders.

E. Alas! One who is dying has little desire to laugh, but you force me, poor child. Hast thou seen the miracles?

S. No; but I have spoken to men who have spoken to women who say that their gossips have seen them. And then the fine morality of the Jews who are circumcised and are washed from the feet even to the head!

E. And what are the moral precepts of these people?

S. It is, firstly, that a wealthy man cannot be a well-doer, and that it is more difficult for him to get to the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, so that all the rich should give their goods to the beggars who preach this kingdom. Secondly, that the fools and poor in spirit are blessed. Third, that those who neglect to hear the Church should be detested like a tax-collector. Fourth, that if any man hate not his father and mother, and wife and children and brethren, he has no part in the kingdom. Fifth, that they bring not peace but a sword. Sixth, that when one makes a wedding feast, one forces the passers by to attend, and casts into outer darkness those who have no wedding garments.

E. Alas! my son, a little while ago I was on the point of laughing, and now I feel you make me die with indignation and grief. If the wretches of whom you speak seduce the son of Epictetus, they will seduce plenty of others. I foresee frightful evils on the earth. Are these possessed people numerous?

S. Their number increases daily. They have a common fund from which they pay certain Greeks who write for them. They have invented mysteries. They exact an inviolable secret. They have instituted inspired ones who decide upon all their interests and who will not suffer that those of the sect recognise or plead before the magistrates.

E. An imperium in imperio. My son, all is lost!

CAN MAN OFFEND GOD?

CHRISTIANS of all denominations believe that it is possible to offend Deity. They allege that God is looking down from heaven upon his creatures and is frequently displeased at what he beholds. The orthodox hold that man began to manifest an offensive spirit very early after his creation; in fact on the very first day of his existence; and then maintain that on account of Adam's alleged sin all mankind deserve to be punished. "If," say these orthodox gentlemen, "God made man, surely he has a right to punish him when he sins."

Now in the first place I deny that it is possible for man to sin against God; and if it were possible, I should hold that if it were true that the God who made man is omniscient and omnipotent he would have no right to punish the creatures of his manufacture.

Observe how I propose to demonstrate these two positions. First let us understand what is meant by sin against God. All Christians will admit that sin against Deity implies that man does something that God does not want him to do. But if God is Almighty how can man resist the all powerful? To say that man can offer opposition to the all powerful will of Deity, is to say that the finite can overcome the Infinite; which is a contradiction in terms and an absurdity.

Nor is it conceivable that an infinitely good God would permit a wicked act to be performed, since his goodness, being allied with infinite power, would prevent not only the deed itself, but the thought that would give rise to it. But if it were possible for man to sin against God, by what right would he punish him? If a man makes a watch that will not go, does he blame the watch or himself for its imperfections? Suppose I made a machine which, when set in motion, killed somebody. Would the machine or I be held responsible for the result? Besides, God is not only the manufacturer of human machines; he is also the author of the materials out of which they are composed. If there be any inherent defects in the material, he is conscious of it, and can supply the remedy. Moreover, I hold that it is impossible to injure an infinite being, and, as all sin implies injury, it is impossible to sin against God, or even to offend or annoy him in the smallest degree. In truth, if God could be either pleased or annoyed, or influenced in any way by the conduct of his creatures, he would of all beings be the most miserable.

Imagine what he would behold if he looked down from heaven upon his creatures and saw and heard all that was going on on this terrestrial globe! He would hear millions of lies told every hour of the day. He would see the strong crushing the weak, the lion devouring the lamb; the iron heel of imperial tyrants trampling on the rights and liberties of the people. He would watch the poor in their hovels herding together like beasts; hear the children's cry for bread, see the starving child die upon its mother's breast, while in the palaces of the rich he would see nothing but splendor, luxury, and wanton waste. He would see the drunkard's home, hear the foul words and see the brutal blows given to the poor half-starved wife. He would watch the licentious man in the house of infamy, and listen to the prurient talk of painted harlots. He would see the burglar laying his plans; and watch the murderer as he lifted the assassin's dagger to destroy the poor unfortunate. He would understand the statesman's ambition, and be behind the scenes when position and place were given to time-servers. He would understand the causes of wars, and behold thousands of innocent lives destroyed for the glorification of ignorant and heartless kings. He would see asylums in flames and hear the moans of madmen in despair. Vessels would be wrecked before his eyes, and trains collide, and he

would hear the sufferers' prayers and feel their sorrow. Indeed, in imagination, he would suffer all the agonies and experience all the joys of mankind. Billions of prayers would be offered up to him from the various races of mankind, and he would have to discriminate between them, to determine which among them, if any, were worthy of answer. In truth he would be so fully occupied in hearing and seeing the comedies and tragedies of life, that he would have no time for action, and probably his mind would get so distracted with what he saw, that at times he would, like Juliet, propose to "dash out his desperate brains."

Was I not right in saying that such a God would be the most miserable of all creatures? A good man who had the power to stop these calamities would be impelled to do so. Will a good God be less kind?

Away at once with such absurd ideas of God; dispel them for ever from the human mind. Learn that man cannot offend God, cannot sin against an Infinite being. But while it is impossible to sin against Deity it is possible to sin against our fellow man. We can offend him; we can sin against him; we can do him injury. And once the sin is done it is irrevocable. Remember that it is written indelibly upon the book of nature from which no leaves can be torn and nothing expunged. With this truth burned into his brain the Freethinker should strive day by day to work earnestly and faithfully in the service of man; for man needs our service—while God does not.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

A PROTEST FROM TOYNBEE HALL.

DEAR SIR,—I shall esteem it a favor if you will find a place in an early issue of your paper for the correction of certain inaccurate statements concerning the Toynbee Library, contained in the *Freethinker* of May 4th, to which my attention has just been directed.

As librarian I can speak with absolute knowledge of the facts in stating:

(a) That "Freethought works" are not "gradually creeping into the library." I would fain believe that the expression "gradually creeping" was a slip of the pen, for, to say the least of it, it is not a pleasant phrase.

(b) That "Freethought works" are not "much sought after," if by "much" it is intended to convey that many or even several persons make such request.

(c) That no discussion has ever been held in the Library Committee as to the admission of the *Freethinker* within the library.

(d) That no vote has ever been taken in Committee on the question of admitting the *National Reformer*. True it is that an offer to supply it *gratis* was kindly made by one of the readers, but by unanimous agreement of the Committee it was decided to decline the offer.

Only a few months previous to that, a proposal was made to place on the table the *Pall Mall Budget*; that proposal too was negatived, the Committee being of opinion that newspapers and controversial journals are not within the scope of the purposes of this library.

A printed catalogue of the library is in course of preparation. As soon as that is issued, nay, this very day, in the manuscript catalogue open to the inspection of any person, the public may ascertain for themselves what are the contents of the library.

Permit me, sir, to add, in justice to our work here, that that work is neither *for* nor *against* "Freethinkers" as such, nor indeed is it for or against anything but what the best men of all parties would most wish to help or to hinder.—Yours truly,
SAM. HALES, Librarian.

Toynbee Hall, 28 Commercial Street, E.

[We appear to have been slightly misinformed. At the same time we fancy the worthy librarian has somewhat exaggerated the error. If all works of a controversial nature are excluded from Toynbee Hall Library, it must be deficient in some of the chief works of the leading men of the age.—
EDITOR, *Freethinker*.]

First elder (at the kirk "skailin'"): "Did ye hear Dougal More snoring in the sermon?" Second elder: "Parfecly disgracefu! He waukened 's a'?"

ACID DROPS.

Sir Harry Verney, speaking at the Bible House, said that Stanley, being asked to name what he would like as a present before starting for Africa, asked for a Bible—as though he couldn't have bought one for a shilling. During his wanderings Stanley read that Bible through three times. So Sir Harry Verney says, and the Bible House folk are in raptures. Of course they forget the story of the Gothic Bishop who would not translate the fighting parts of the Old Testament into the language of his people lest their sanguinary passions should be inflamed beyond all bounds.

We suppose it will be said that the Bible is at the bottom of Stanley's success. But how about the rifles and the gunpowder? If Stanley had nothing better to trust to than the blessed book, the natives (every man of them God's image) would have eaten him, and perhaps have cooked his best joints with his Bible.

We are disappointed in the Rev. Walter Walsh of Newcastle. We understood he was a gentleman, but he loses his temper like any vulgar Christian. Replying to Mr. Foote's lecture on "A Defence of Atheism," last Sunday evening in his own chapel, Mr. Walsh said he had given his reasons against entering into a public debate, and his special reasons for not meeting Mr. Foote he would not give there. We beg to tell Mr. Walsh that this is the merest insolence. We also venture to observe that while Mr. Walsh's objection to discussing with Mr. Foote does not prevent his answering him in his absence, there are many sensible Tynesiders who will see through such a thin pretence.

Mr. Walsh let the Christian right out of the bag at the end of his discourse. He declared that the philosophy of the National Secular Society was "a kind of jackal philosophy, which lived by snarling at and worrying and rending the constructive thoughts of abler and nobler men"—Mr. Walsh himself for instance. All this shows he is badly hit, and when he takes to calling names we agree with him that it is time he retired from the controversy. It was none of Mr. Foote's seeking. Mr. Walsh obtruded himself on the Newcastle Secularists, thinking to "bring them to God." His object, it appears, was exhortation and not discussion, and he has come to grief. He does not like discussion, and the Secularists can dispense with his exhortation.

In leaving Mr. Walsh, as he desires to be left, for ever, we ask our readers to give a candid judgment on the whole matter. Mr. Walsh wanted to show Atheists that they were wrong. They asked him to debate the subject with one of their representatives in a friendly way. He declined. Then we offered to put the *Freethinker* at his disposal for a written discussion. Again he declines, and leaves the "jackals" in disgust. Now, we ask whether the Secularists have not shown perfect fair play, and whether Mr. Walsh has not displayed a childish egotism and ill temper.

Emperor William has been insisting that he reigns by the grace of God. So did Charles the First, but he had his head cut off. So did Louis the Sixteenth, and he lost his head—what there was of it—in the same way. The grace of God is an excellent thing till you put it to the proof, and the young Kaiser may yet learn it by experience.

Mr. Ben Tillett, the real organiser of the Dock Laborers, whose claims are apt to be overshadowed by those of more showy figures, in addressing a big meeting outside the East India Dock gates on Sunday morning, said (we quote from the *Echo*)—"Talk of the 'sweet by-and-bye'—what they wanted was not promises but performance, money down on the nail now; something here as a pledge of the better hereafter." Right in substance, Ben, but wrong in expression. So far from the good of this life being a pledge of a better hereafter, it is the people who get least of it who look for the sweet bye-and-bye! Just inquire among the rich and the poor, and see for yourself.

Mr. W. W. Wills, a local preacher of Musbury is a person of curious taste. At a funeral at Axminster he thought it his duty to attend and give at the grave a long oration on the sinful life of the deceased, who it appears had avoided Mr. Wills and his ministrations, as we should fancy most persons will do in future.

Mr. Edward Davy was going to the Tabernacle to hear Spurgeon. On the way he stopped to listen to another trader in mystery. This gentleman was doing the purse trick, and Mr. Davy bought two purses for very much less money than he believed was in them. But on opening the purses he found the shillings were halfpence and the half-crowns were pennies. This incensed his pious soul. The large profit he calculated on, at the vendor's expense, turned out to be a bad loss. Not all Spurgeon's eloquence could allay his virtuous indignation, and the purse-trick performer was indicted for larceny, but the law said "No, Mr. Davy, you made a bargain and you must abide by it." No doubt Mr. Davy will remember that gentleman in his prayers.

Stupidity and Bigotry met and kissed each other, as they often do, in Exeter Hall on Tuesday when that pious alderman Sir R. N. Fowler presided over the anniversary meeting of the British Society for the propagation of the Gospel among the Jews. Rarely is a questionable society matched with so fitting a chairman.

The Manchester *Sunday Chronicle* tells, in its graphic way, of a romance in real life which has just happened in that city. Mr. Aaron Howard, a devout Manchester fishmonger and staunch churchman, recently gave a peal of bells and illuminated clock and a window illustrating Aaron the High Priest, to the parish church of Blackley. He died just before the bells were set pealing, and it was discovered that this wealthy churchman had three daughters, whom he had turned out of home and who had a desperate struggle for existence, two of them being in domestic service. They now come into a fortune of thirty thousand a piece, and may put up memorial windows to their father with the inscription, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."

Near to the top of Highgate Hill is a handsome edifice known as St. Joseph's Retreat. It is a fine Roman Catholic church, costing a goodly sum, much of which has yet to be paid. The process of raising the wind is illustrative of the credulity and humbug which is doing so much for Catholicism. Circulars are issued in England, Ireland and America, offering 50,000 shares at one dollar, or four shillings English. Shareholders are divided into three classes. Those who take one share are entitled benefactors, those who take five shares are zelators, those who take twenty are founders.

£500 is offered in bonuses to the faithful who dispose of shares. The touter who sells most gets £100, the second £50, the third £25, the fourth and fifth £10; the next twenty-five get £5 each, while one hundred and eighty will have £1 for selling shares. The bait to the buyers is largely spiritual. Every one who subscribes a dollar will have a share "in all the masses, communions, prayers and good works offered up in St. Joseph's Church for as long as it will last." Moreover, 1,000 masses will be offered up for all benefactors.

Zelators will, in addition, get five books of photographs and a medal of the Holy Father, while the founders may each call himself Fundator, and will have his name inscribed in a splendid volume, which will be presented to the Holy Father. Moreover, like the man and his wife in Grimm's stories, Mr. Fundator may have a wish, and "Holy Mass will be said for his intention in the new church." Well, it is a foolish world.

Dr. Martineau's latest work on *The Seat of Authority in Religion* will be sad reading for the orthodox. He accepts Vischer's view of the Apocalypse as "a Jewish apocalypse, with Christian interpolations, set in a Christian frame." He says the Fourth Gospel "has its birthday in the middle of the second century, and is not the work of a witness at all," while the Synoptic Gospels are only "compiled and edited." The Book of Acts is the work of a writer who stood at "a distance from its inner conflicts," and "gives a distorted and highly ideal representation" of the primitive history of the Church, while the "vain attempts" of the first disciples to "solve the mystery" of Christ's personality, have "left us the unfortunate legacy of a Christian mythology." In other words—for this is what it comes to—the New Testament records are works of imagination.

Dr. Martineau is just as plain-spoken on another subject. After a list of the highest human qualities, he writes: "When I pass through Church history in search of these, I doubtless find them, but in such sparse and partial gleams from a wilderness of passion and of wrong, that secular history itself, though less inspiring in its supreme heights, is less dreary on its ordinary levels, and less dreadful in its darker depths."

God's tender mercies are over all his works, especially the human ones. A few days ago a ferry boat was crossing the Oder from Slawikau to Thütze, carrying forty-two children just returning from confirmation. By some accident it overturned, and as Providence winked just then, all the children were precipitated into the river and thirty-six were drowned. Moral—Don't go to confirmation or be particularly careful how you go home afterwards.

In an article on Mr. R. L. Stevenson's [vindication of Father Damien, the leper hero, the *Speaker* makes some excellent remarks on General Gordon. "The first portraits of Gordon," it says, "were all in treacle. His eyes were always cast heavenward, and he thrust his Bible on you like a certificate of character. It seemed wicked to think of him singing, smoking, falling into a passion, doing a stupid thing. Then, in due time, came the blessed truth that he was capable of all these enormities. We were permitted to see him in his futile rages, his grievous lapses from common sense, in his inexpressibly silly commentaries on the Book of Genesis, in his childish attempts to identify the Forbidden Fruit with something that grows on an island of the Seychelles. From that background of human frailty his true greatness stood—fresh, clear, and bright. The courage, and the faculty of his management of the ever-victorious army, found a splendid foil in the fiddle-dee-dee of his theory of the Fall. The grandeur of his death at Khartoum was a bill of indemnity for all the pettiness of his taunts to the Mahdi in that curious system of theological controversy by cartel which they kept up from their respective sides of the wall. Gordon became one of us by this revelation of his weaknesses; and it was stimulating in the highest degree to know that one of us might, upon occasion, become so much like one of the angels. But if he had been left all angel from the beginning, as the chromolithographers had drawn him, the sense of brotherhood which gave the sole interest to the study must have been altogether lost."

The London *Echo* prints a curious extract from the parish magazine of All Saints, Clapham Park. Here it is in all its naked loveliness: "Unmarried workers are requested not to marry for some little time, as we cannot afford to lose their services, as we have lost many lately. If marriage is a blessing, workers should continue their work in thankfulness; if a curse, in penance for their folly. The caution is particularly addressed to the ladies, who seem to be the offenders, judging both by parish experience and by Bible history—which latter, with many an Eve and Jezebel in its annals, mentions no case of a man leading his wife astray."

Had the parson who penned this exquisite flattery of the ladies lived sixteen hundred years ago, he would doubtless have cried "hear, hear!" when a certain Christian Father called woman "a malignant she ass."

Of course the Bible mentions no case of a man leading his wife astray. And why? Because men wrote it.

Mr. W. H. Hurlbert's *France and the Republic* is one long libel on the country of Voltaire. This gentleman's animus is easily seen in his references to religion. He calls the republican Mayor of Amiens a "rampant Atheist, and a cotton-velvet bagman of blasphemy." "The doctrine of the Third Republic," he declares, "is that all Frenchmen must be Atheists." Even the clerks in the Ministry of Worship are "all of them now, doubtless, good Atheists." Well, we are very glad to hear it; and if Atheism necessarily puts Mr. Hurlbert in such a ferocious temper, we hope he will never cool down.

A scurrilous paper, supposed to be run in the interests of religion, gives a paragraph from the *Daily Graphic* with this comment: "Secularists who want to know where the water of the flood went, will find a part of the curiosity

satisfied if they read the last two sentences. *Freethinker*, copy if you dare!"

We do copy the paragraph, as our readers may be interested in seeing what is considered a confirmation of the legend of the Flood. Here it is: "The second volume of the 'Report on the Scientific Results' of the Challenger's voyage has recently been published, and it is no whit less interesting than its predecessor. The deep sea is full of wonders. There are fish living 2,600 fathoms down; some blind, others almost eyeless, which are so compressed from the weight of the water, that when brought to the surface their bodies expand. Three miles down there is no light and no change of temperature. Being no light there is no vegetable growth, and the fish feed on each other—at least so many of them as have teeth probably do so. Those without teeth no doubt feed on animalculæ. From Professor Tait's experiments it seems that at a depth of six miles the sea is compressed about 620 feet. May this compression long continue: for should it cease something like 2,000,000 square miles would be inundated."

Who after this will see any difficulty in getting all species of animals into the ark, and providing them with proper food and temperature, and landing them above the snow line on Mount Ararat? Who after this can doubt that God repented of his own handiwork, and showed his loving-kindness in drowning nearly all creation, including "beasts and fowls of the air," for human sin? Who will henceforth wonder at what became of all the water which covered all the highest hills under heaven.

We have called the paper a scurrilous one, and our epithet is warranted by its attack upon Dr. Allinson (presumably because he is known to be a Freethinker) treating a paper, the *Rising Sun*, which contained his biography, as though it was edited and written by himself, when really it was issued by a vegetarian entirely unconnected with Dr. Allinson.

Dr. Westcott, the new Bishop of Durham, like a true disciple, of the meek and lowly Jesus, has gone through the blasphemous farce of "enthroning." After the completion of the ceremony his lordship preached a sermon from the text, "Brethren, pray for us." He receives a bigger salary than the Prime Minister, and perhaps he doesn't know how to spend it. Hence he desires the prayers of the brethren. We suggest however, that he should apply to the poor curates of his diocese. They would help him to get through his salary.

Alfred Carter has been studying for the Wesleyan ministry, but his brain does not seem strong enough for that. He has asked the Queen for some money, and offered to marry her. The magistrates regard him as a lunatic, and have handed him over to his father for safe custody.

South Missouri preacher reported by *Life*: "Now, my brethren, having disposed of that arlyin' hypocritical cuss, who runs the Methodist church across the way, I'll continue my discourse on 'peace on earth, good will to men.'"

The Virgin Mary is reported in the *Tablet* to have appeared to two peasant women at Castel Petroso a remote mountainous village of Southern Italy. The B. V. M. seems like her son only to show herself to believers. To sceptics the family trait was evasiveness.

Oberammergau seems to be demoralised by the profits of the Passion Play. The performers and the villagers reaped such a golden harvest in 1880 that they lived in indolence for five years. Then want and discontent ensued, and the second half of the decade has been spent in looking forward to the next raking in of the shekels.

How entertaining this must be to the cynic! Thousands of well-to-do Christians flock to Oberammergau to see the drama of the Crucifixion enacted. Probably their faith is a little weak, and they want to have the "agony and bloody sweat" and the "cross and passion" of their Redeemer performed before their eyes. What a pity it is all simulation! If the villager who acts Jesus Christ were only crucified in reality, the bull fights of Spain would sink into commonplace spectacles, and half the idle classes of Europe

would flock to Oberammergau for a strong sensation. But all simulation, and when the play is over J. C. goes on drinking and playing skittles.

The Religious Tract Society's income last year was £211,675. What a lot of money for waste paper!

London seems to have acquired a good clown in the Scotch Spurgeon. The Rev. J. McNeill has been holding forth against preaching in a gown. He says a minister should preach with tongue, eye, hands, and feet. Yes, but how about *head*, Mr. McNeill, how about *head*?

The Scotch Spurgeon advocated plain speaking. Christ, he said, had in his work a splendid *abandon*. Well, he certainly did let out in ferocious style now and then. But his chief case of *abandon* was on the cross, when he cried out "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

How the men of God differ! The Rev. Fleming Williams told the Congregational Union that "the new tenderness and sympathy that was finding expression in social channels was melting away out of the land all the societies that were formed by Mr. Bradlaugh's influence years ago." But Mr. Williams is an emotional gentleman, with no corresponding powers of perception and intelligence, and the wish is the father to most of his thoughts. A very different verdict is given by Mr. Spurgeon. Addressing the annual meeting of his Colportage Association, he referred to the 500,000 people who assembled in Hyde Park the other Sunday, and remarked that probably not one per cent. of that multitude gave any attention to religion. There were entire streets where not one of the inhabitants attended any place of worship. Infidelity was also bolder than ever.

Mr. Spurgeon appears very anxious to break up the association of his old students, some fifty in number, who preferred to stand by the Baptist Union. Some, it is true, have been excommunicated beyond all hope of forgiveness, and cut off from even personal intercourse. Others who were considered more hopeful have had a final chance of returning to the Spurgeonic fold. A few in this latter category have each received a letter from Mr. James Spurgeon, holding out hope of pardon; but they prefer impenitence, if that means liberty of conscience, to the Calvinistic yoke which it was sought to impose upon them. —*Christian World*.

Bigotry and Bible reading go together. It is therefore not surprising to read that there is an energetic circulation of the blessed book in the country which has disgraced itself by imprisoning Viktor Lennstrand. The Swedish Bible Society, since its formation, has distributed 338,607 Bibles and 730,505 New Testaments.

At the recent conference of the Congregational Union, the Rev. Robert Mansergh produced two gaily colored handkerchiefs, bearing striking sketches of beer-bottles and spirit-glasses, which were being sent out to Africa in vast quantities by Glasgow merchants to advertise their business. The members of the firm thus bent on alcoholising the negroes for a profit are *all Christians*.

Dr. Parker complains that when Dissenters get £1,000 a year they go over to the Church of England. We sympathise with the Doctor. It must be hard to lose the birds that are best worth plucking.

Dr. Parker protests that, as a Liberationist, he will never associate in destroying the Church Establishment with men who wish to destroy religion. But what of that? He will vote the same way as they do, and that is all they want of him.

The Dissenters protest against the proposed religious census next year. Perhaps they are afraid that a lot of indifferentists will put themselves down as belonging to the Church of England. It can hardly be that they are moved by a perfect hatred of State recognition of religion, for do they not keep up the Blasphemy Laws, and do they not support Bible reading in Board schools?

The College Committee of the Free Church of Scotland in their report upon the alleged heresy of Professors Dods

and Bruce, with Scotch caution say there is ground for anxiety on the subject of their beliefs but not ground for a prosecution. The professors have themselves made statements, Dr. Marcus Dods giving mild instances of what he had called the inaccuracies and immoralities of Scripture. Professor Bruce holds that "Inspiration does not inderdict the hypothesis that the Evangelists may in some cases have modified the form of the Lord's words, for good and worthy reasons."

The Sabbatarian Laws in Indiana have been brought into play against an automaton, which was convicted at New Haven of acting when a nickel was dropped into the slot. The proprietor was fined fifty dollars for not stopping the hole on Sundays. God's feelings, we suppose, were damaged to the extent of fifty dollars. That automatic machine will never get to heaven!

FLO'S LETTER.

"Dear God, the baby you brought us
Is awful nice and sweet,
But, 'cause you forgot his toofies,
The poor little thing can't eat.
That's why I'm writing this letter
A purpose to let you know.
Please come and finish the baby;
That's all. From little Flo."

The Manchester Corporation declines to grant permission to one of our readers to give a band performance on a Sunday afternoon in Alexandra Park. No matter, the time will come.

Last week we told of a Middlesboro Christian who said that St. Paul, Shakespeare and Milton were the three most learned men in history. This week we have to tell of a similar piece of nonsense, perpetrated by one who should know better. Mr. Augustus Birrell, a very much over-rated "literary gent," who, owing to the accident of the choice of a Scotch caucus, sprang suddenly into a seat in Parliament, was one of the speakers at the recent Liberation meeting in Spurgeon's Tabernacle. In the course of his speech he named what he considered the three greatest events in history. The first was the birth of Christ—of course. The second was the Hegira of Mahomet. The third was—well, we will give the reader five thousand guesses, and bet him ten to one he doesn't name it. The third greatest event in history was—but wait a bit, it is too good to hurry over. Nobody but a Scotchman would ever think of it at all. "Ah," cries the reader, "it was the battle of Bannockburn, or the opening of the Forth Bridge." No, guess again. You give it up? Well, here it is then. It was the Disruption of the Scotch Church!

O canny Augustus Birrell, you spoke as a Scotchman and a Liberationist. But very likely as a Scotchman, pure and simple, you have a shrewd suspicion, which it would not do to give tongue to in Spurgeon's Tabernacle before the hosts of Dissent, that the day will come when the Disruption—ay, and the very existence—of the Scotch Church will be a matter of archæology, and when the birthday of Robert Burns will be looked upon as the greatest event in Scotch history.

Then as to the birth of Christ. Some centuries before that event three hundreds Spartans died in the Pass of Thermopylæ to give the Greeks time to rally against the Persian hordes. Afterwards was fought the battle of Marathon, and the little army of Grecian freemen broke the pride of Persia, and scattered its power to the winds. Yes, Mr. Birrell, the battle of Marathon was a very big event. Had the Greeks lost, Asia would have overrun Europe, and perhaps Christ himself would never have been heard of.

CHRISTIANITY AND MORALITY.—When we realise the true position of Christianity in the world; when we admit, on the strength of plain facts and figures, that it has only existed during a relatively brief period of the whole history of the race, and then only amongst a small minority; that it has broken up into numerous and utterly discordant sections, that it has decayed as knowledge has increased, and that a vast majority of the race has got on very well without it, it is hopeless to assert that morality is caused by a belief in Christianity.—Leslie Stephen, *Nineteenth Century*, Sept. 1888.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

May 25, N. S. S. Conference at Manchester.
 June 1, Hall of Science, London; 8, Gladstone Radical Club and Hall of Science, London; 15, Manchester; 22, Liverpool; 29, Reading.
 July 13, Hall of Science; 27, Hall of Science.
 August 3, Camberwell; 31, Birmingham.

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.

SOUTH PECKHAM AND WEST HAM.—Your Guide Notices were sent to Stonecutter Street. The Editorial address is 14 Clerkenwell Green. Unless notices are sent to the proper address there is sure to be delay.

P. W. BARKER.—You must see that we cannot give you names of our subscribers that "we are not free to publish." They are sent to us in confidence, and confidence means telling no one.

BLUE-JACKET.—The personalities of the journal you send us are beneath contempt. We discuss principles, not persons.

DOLF.—Good, but hardly good enough. Besides, the incident is no longer fresh.

H. ROWDON.—You forgot to stamp your letter. No, the magistrate cannot go behind the witness's declaration that taking an oath is contrary to his religious belief. Mill's *Utilitarianism* is published at 5s.

D. C. B.—Your letter to the *Glasgow Herald* should do good. It is gratifying to see the press gradually opening for such communications.

W. A.—"Pat and the Parson" fails in reproducing the Hibernian dialect.

THE friend in Berlin (Germany) who sent the *Freethinkers* to Mr. Smith, Liverpool, for distribution, is thanked and assured that his wishes shall be carefully carried out.

H. SMITH.—The matter shall be mentioned at the Conference.

W. HOLLAND.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

J. NEATE desires to correct a misstatement in his last Lecture Notice. Mr. Elfein is not a member of the Christian Evidence Society.

J. SAUNDERS.—Nobody knows how far Jonah travelled, and there are no whales in the Levant. But if a whale did get Jonah on board, the animal must have been frightened and pained. A harpoon in him would be nothing to it. Reckoning the animal started off at twenty miles an hour, and kept it up for three days and nights, he must have covered—well, you can reckon it yourself. Thanks for the cuttings. We are glad to hear the Reading Freethinkers were so pleased with Mr. Robertson.

F. C. P. states that the *Freethinker* can be obtained at another newsagent's in Bournemouth,—at 141 Old Christchurch-road. There also it is difficult to get a copy unless you go early.

T. THURLOW.—Yes, it is quite right to exclude from any of our open-air platforms a Christian who is systematically abusive. Some of that creed think they have a vested interest in insult, and it is time they should be taught a lesson.

W. C. JOHNSON.—Mr. Bradlaugh's pamphlet on the laws relating to Blasphemy and Heresy gives what you require. We may ourselves draw up something brief on the subject.

INCOG.—You will no doubt breathe freely now you have resigned the post which obliged you to teach what you did not believe. The world is wide, and honest livings are not so scarce but that an energetic Freethinker will find one.

G. FRASER.—You should return the Christian compliment at Reading by distributing Freethought tracts. We are just preparing a fresh supply.

T. SHORE.—Much obliged. See Sugar Plums.

H. CALASCA.—Thanks for the cuttings. Mr. Walsh must have played very low if he urged that, because Mr. Foote said that philosophically every thing was natural, he was therefore an advocate of vice. The very report before Mr. Walsh showed Mr. Foote to have said that *natural* and *unnatural* were purely moral distinctions. In the face of this, Mr. Walsh was positively dishonest. But what can we expect from these professional soul-savers?

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Neues Freireligioses Sonntags Blatt—Der Arme Teufel—Western Figaro—Liberator—Truthseeker—Ironclad Age—Bulletin des Sommaires—Menschentum—Progressive Thinker—Fair Play—Freidenker—Freethought—Fritankaren—Cosmopolitan—Boston Investigator—Echo—East Devon Mail—Accrington Chronicle—Newcastle Daily Leader—Newcastle Chronicle—Grimsby News—Seafaring—Der Lichtfreund—Wolsingham Parish Magazine—Tailor and Cutter—South Wales Echo—Loyal American—Lucifer—Sunderland Echo—Worcestershire Echo.

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.

THE FREETHOUGHT FUND.

MR. FOOTE'S appeal, as President of the National Secular Society, for funds to extend the Society's work, is being responded to by friends in various parts of the country. Some of the subscribers promise to remit annually as much as they can afford; others, who can only send a little at a time, promise to remit half-yearly or quarterly. As soon as possible a list of intending subscribers will be prepared. Meanwhile the following subscriptions are acknowledged as actually received by Mr. Foote or Mr. Forder.

Sixth List.			
	£	s.	d.
W. C. Johnson	1	1	0
A. Carter	1	1	0
J. H. E.	0	10	0
J. Moffat	0	7	6
W. R. (per Mr. Bradlaugh)	1	0	0
G. S. H.	1	0	0
G. Alward	1	0	0
Incog.	0	1	0
R. Birtwistle	0	2	0
C. N.	0	1	0

SUGAR PLUMS.

Notwithstanding the fine warm weather there was a capital audience at the London Hall of Science on Sunday evening, when Mr. Foote lectured on "Is there a Future Life?" Discussion was invited, but only one gentleman arose and he was a questioner. He wanted to know which was the safe side, and his primitive state of mind caused a good deal of laughter.

To-day (May 25) the National Secular Society's Conference takes place at Manchester. The morning sitting opens at half-past ten. Every member of the National Secular Society has a right to attend, and speak and vote. Other Freethinkers can watch and listen from the back seats or the gallery. In the evening there will be an open meeting addressed by various speakers.

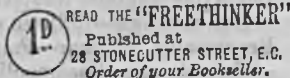
Mr. Wheeler will attend the Conference in order to report for the *Freethinker*. Our readers may look forward to a full, though not a tediously minute, account of the proceedings.

The Council of the London Secular Federation held a special meeting at the Hall of Science, on Thursday evening, May 15, to discuss the Agenda of the N.S.S. Conference. Mr. Foote thought it better not to attend the meeting. Being president of the N.S.S., he did not wish to lay himself under the suspicion of pre-influencing the votes of the London Branches; and, in the second place, he did not think it right to anticipate the explanations he will have to make before the whole Society. The agenda was thoroughly discussed, and most of Mr. Foote's proposals were cordially approved. About the first proposal for altering the annual subscription there was a division of opinion, but a majority were in its favor. Some of the objections to it, as reported to Mr. Foote, were founded upon a misconception, and will probably disappear at the Conference.

Mr. Foote's four-nights' debate with the Rev. Dr. McCann is a present running through *Secular Thought*. Mr. Watts, the editor of that journal, seems to find debates good copy.

He is himself a veteran debater, and has crossed swords with many Christian champions in America. We have just received a written debate he held recently with the editor of the *Halifax Evening Mail*. It makes a big pamphlet, priced at a quarter of a dollar. Mr. Watts more than holds his own in this discussion on Secularism. He demolishes his opponent.

This is a fac-simile of a stamp which Messrs. Ireton and Co. have produced for Miss Vance, who desires to advertise us by thus marking her paper, envelopes, etc. Any reader who feels disposed to go and do likewise will be supplied by Messrs. Ireton and Co. with the complete apparatus for 2s. This is a wonderfully cheap and we think effective way of advertising us.



We have just issued from our publishing office a little volume which every Freethinker should possess. It was written more than a hundred and fifty years ago by Anthony Collins, the father of English Freethought, a man whose character was equal to his intellect, which is saying a great deal. He was a personal friend of the great John Locke, who praised his love of truth and moral courage as superior to almost any other he had ever known, and by his will made him one of his executors. Many works in defence and illustration of Freethought proceeded from his active pen. The one we have reprinted is his masterpiece, and it goes to the root of the matter. It deals with the doctrine of Free Will, and, on the admission of Professor Fraser, the learned Editor of *Berkeley*, it "states the arguments against human freedom with a logical force unsurpassed by any necessitarian." Professor Huxley also, speaking of Collins's encounter with Dr. Samuel Clarke, the famous theologian, says that the *Freethinker* "writes with wonderful power and closeness of reasoning."

Mr. Wheeler has contributed to this reprint a full and very interesting account of Collins's life and works, and Mr. Foote has supplied some annotations. The price of the volume is one shilling. A small number of copies, printed on superfine paper, and well bound in cloth, are priced at two shillings.

Should this reprint meet with a favorable reception—and we can hardly doubt that it will—it will be followed by some other reprints of the "Fathers of Freethought."

Mr. John M. Robertson's articles on "Christ and Krishna" in the *National Reformer* have been reprinted and are now published in a two shilling volume which should receive attention of all interested in the disputed question of the influence of India upon Christianity. We shall shortly notice the work at greater length.

Among the signs of the spread of heresy among women may be mentioned a novel *The New Continent* by Mrs. Worthey, published this year by Macmillan and Co., apparently called out by Robert Elsmere. It depicts the progress of the heroine from the Broad Church influences of Maurice, Hinton, and Kingsley, via Matthew Arnold and Wm. Kingdon Clifford to Positivism, or as she calls it Human Catholicism.

Among the fresh letters of Keats just issued by Mr. Buxton Forman there is one which contains the following: "Parsons will always keep up their character, but as it is said there are some animals the ancients knew which we do not know, let us hope our posterity will miss the black badger with tri-cornered hat."

The Italian Liberals are preparing to erect a monument in Rome to Arnold of Brescia, who was burnt by the Inquisition in 1155 for the crime of denouncing the corruption of the clergy. This will be another thorn in the side of the Papacy which now laments that it cannot escape from its past. Thus does the whirligig of time bring its revenges.

The titles of our streets when they soar beyond the commonplaces of High, King, Church or Chapel, usually register the names of some landlord or jerry-builder unknown outside the district of his property. They manage these things better in France, where the thoroughfares call to mind the existence of men who have been a glory to the nation. We see by a new decree the names of the eminent Freethinkers;

Danton, Paul Bert, and Pierre Larousse are among those given to different Paris streets.

The number of *Fritankaren* which announces Viktor E. Lennstrand's release, contains a translation into Swedish of Mr. Wheeler's recent article on Christianity and Civilisation, made by Captain Otto Thomson.

No doubt there is room for much Freethought work in India, and we are pleased to see the *Cosmopolitan*, of Calcutta, is continuing its useful work. The fourth number now before us, reprints articles by Messrs. Foote, Wheeler, and Ball, as well as original ones from the pen of the editor and others.

The French drama "Mahomet," which was prohibited at the instance of the Turkish ambassador, has been printed. It seems that the author, with a reckless disregard of history and probability, makes the prophet of Arabia commit suicide and in his last moments embrace Christianity.

Mr. Hyndman is more courageous or less prudent than Mr. Burns, and he is going to debate the legal eight-hours question with Mr. Bradlaugh. From the papers we see that propositions are drawn up on both sides. The discussion will be looked forward to with great interest.

A correspondence on the truth of Christianity has been appearing in the *Grimsby News*. We hope our friends will keep the ball rolling.

The Yorkshire Secular Federation had a picnic on Sunday at Bingly. After tea the company went into the heart of the town and held an open-air meeting. Mr. White delivered a stirring address, which was listened to by a large crowd. Arrangements are being made for another excursion to Shiply Glen on June 8.

Mr. M. D. Conway is in England again. He discoursed at South Place Chapel last Sunday morning, and his dry humor refreshed the congregation after Dr. Coit's greater solemnity. Speaking of Mde. Blavatsky, Mr. Conway said that he saw her in India, and asked her what the "miracles" of Theosophy were all about. What was the meaning of plucking jewels and broaches out of flowers, and tea plants growing out of chairs? The astute lady replied "It is all glamor, all pretence." Mr. Conway thinks her frankness was intended to prevent the investigations he proposed to make, which might have produced a bad effect on the ignorant disciples downstairs.

THE HALO OF THE SCAFFOLD.

A rollicking, reckless villain I've been,
And now—unwillingly guest of the Queen—
The prison knell I with longing await,
For the gallows-trap is but heaven's gate.

I've put out the light of more people than one,
And got nabbed at last long before I had done;
Yet I care not a jot for my well-deserved fate,
For the gallows-trap is but heaven's gate.

My partner, Will Cracker, they strung up last Spring;
To heaven he flew upon angelic wing;
In the regions of bliss I shall soon join my mate,
For the gallows-trap is but heaven's gate.

The chaplain declares that to glory has passed
All the hanged who for mercy have cried out at last;
So I'll soon mix with saints in a happier state,
For the gallows-trap is but heaven's gate.

A. GUEST.

Who is the Rev. W. Jacob of Willesden, advertised in the *Tailor and Cutter* as "late Secularist lecturer" who will conduct a gospel meeting in the Tailor's Lecture Hall, off Regent Street? His fame never travelled so far as to reach our ears.

A Falkirk Christian felt a call from the Lord to kill every woman he met. Armed with a stout stick, he chased a woman in Comely Park Terrace, and beat her badly about the head before he could be secured. On being seized he shouted "Hallelujah, praise the Lord." Evidently the poor man was born three thousand years too late. As an ancient Jew, during the conquest of Palestine, he would have been in his element.

THE GOSPEL OF FACT.

PART II.

FACT is strength. The man who accepts the Gospel of Fact as his guide can neither believe in, nor have any fear of, anything with which neither he nor anybody else has any acquaintance. Standing on the pedestal of the Gospel of Fact, its disciple can calmly look the world in the face, and examine the dogmas and the theories of his fellows by applying to them the infallible test of reason.

Before reason everything not in strict accordance with fact will vanish away. The first thing that will go is the belief in inspired books. The inspired books in which men believe and trust cannot stand the test of reason, even were we assured that there was such a being as could inspire the writers of them. As to the origin of those books all is uncertainty. The only evidence offered of their inspiration is the books themselves. This evidence is absolutely worthless. We would not for a moment accept it in a history or a biography. We should have some facts to back up the assertions of the books themselves; without those facts the assertions are absolutely worthless. The inspired books purport to deal with actual facts, and, accordingly, we are as much bound to have those alleged facts supported by corroborative evidence as we have in the case of Cæsar's narrative of the Gallic wars. But nobody knows who wrote the Bible or the Gospels; nobody knows when they were written; nobody of whom history has any knowledge ever experienced anything like the Bible occurrences; in a word, nobody knows anything for certain about the Scriptures except that they exist, and that they assert that they are inspired, or are believed to be inspired, which is much the same thing. Their authenticity, therefore, being impossible of proof, and incapable of proof, the inexorable Gospel of Fact brushes "inspired" literature aside as so much rubbish.

The Bible being rejected, the Bible God of necessity goes with his inspired book. His history and character as painted by his "prophets" would damn the Bible, even if strong evidence were advanced in proof of its authenticity. To think that a being who could make this world out of nothing would be such a failure when he made angels and men is inconceivable. To imagine him making angels who turned out rebels, and making man who disobeyed him almost as soon as he was made, is to have the most unqualified contempt for his character. From the time when he is alleged to have made hell for man, and man for hell, until he is alleged to have sentenced his own son to death, his record is that of a divine Czar, with the success of the human Czar left out. A fickle tyrant, a brute, and a failure, this scarecrow of the skies would, were he possible and existent, deserve nothing from men but contempt and rebellion. But the Bible evidence of his existence, and the character in which he is therein painted, are in themselves infallible proofs that he is a myth.

But there are people that reject the Bible who still say that there is a God. These do not profess to know so much about his sayings and doings as those who accept the Scriptures as divine truths. They want to explain the origin of the universe, and they do it by saying that God made it. They cannot explain God, or give any definite opinion about him. To these people God is a convenient refuge when their minds fail them in trying to imagine the origin of the world. Belief in him is soothing to timid minds, as it is self-satisfying to those for whom the mystery of the world's origin is too much.

But when we apply the teachings of our Gospel of Fact to the God of the Deist, we shall find that he is no better than a mere guess at the origin of what is really incomprehensible. Once the Bible is rejected there is no justification for dethroning reason in con-

sidering the existence or non-existence of a supernatural being. It is inconsistent to apply reason to the Bible without applying it to God afterwards. If reason is applied to the Bible, it must also be applied to God. There is no possible justification for any other course.

Immediately reason is applied to the assertion that there is a God, God disappears. By thought we may not be able to add a cubit to our stature, but by thought we can dethrone a God. For God is incomprehensible. We cannot possibly conceive such a being as a God. The human mind is incapable of the thought. What the mind is incapable of thinking, and what it has no evidence whatever of, is not a fact, and is almost unworthy of being speculated upon even for a moment. The Gospel of Fact only allows what is *known* to be true, and nobody *knows* that there is a God. Far from knowing, nobody can even conceive him, no matter how he tries. It is no use to say that without a God there would be no world. The world is a *fact* of which we have absolute knowledge, even if we are ignorant of its origin. It does not help us a bit to endeavor to explain the inexplicable by alleging that an incomprehensible being is the explanation. This is only making confusion worse confounded.

When people talk of believing in a God they must ignore fact and reason, the latter because reason forbids belief in a God, the former because there is not the smallest particle of evidence that such a being exists. Out of infinite space no word, no token, has ever come that a God dwells among the stars. If he is there he takes care to keep dark and to reveal nothing. In infinite space there is no room for him. Where he could be, and how he could come into being, and what could be his motives, are all unknowable and unthinkable. Did he exist he would never have let us be undecided about him, nor have given us minds that cannot form an idea of his existence. Did he exist he could never be so cruel as to cause and maintain the sufferings of human beings. A being who could run a world could make the lot of man less free from pain and misery. No; reason, our only criterion, forbids us to think that God exists. He is unthinkable, unknowable, a mere invention, a bogey,—anything and everything, that speculative minds may imagine, but never a fact!

J. O'DONOVAN.

(To be concluded.)

ARE CLERGYMEN FRAUDS?

By HUGH O. PENTECOST.

(From the "Twentieth Century.")

[CONCLUDED.]

THERE are a great many ministers who preach what they do not believe and many more who do not preach what they believe. When they cease to believe in a dogma of their church they keep silent upon that point instead of giving up their salaries and leaving the church. But I have tried to put the case in the most favorable light possible.

Clergymen have a way of juggling with words that is very dishonest. They will say they believe in the *divinity* of Jesus, because *divinity* means anything or nothing to them. The fraud consists in trying to make other people believe that they mean the *Deity* of Jesus.

I once saw a young clergyman examined for installation. In his examination paper he said that he believed in the *divinity* of Jesus. But one of the most influential ministers in the council asked him if he meant that he believed in the *Deity* of Jesus. The poor fellow was so scared that he said he did. It so happened that I had been talking to him on that very subject, and he told me that he did not believe in the *Deity* of Jesus but he believed in the *divinity* of Jesus, and when I asked him what he meant by the *divinity* of Jesus he did not know. But he said before the council that he believed in the *Deity* of Jesus. He was a liar. But he is one of the most what they call "active" clergymen in his denomination. The last time I heard of him he was begging

for 150,000 dollars with which to build a billiard room and tennis alley as an annex to his church.

How do you suppose those very liberal Episcopal clergymen, of whom we all know, get along while they go through their Prayer Book service, which declares that Jesus was born of a virgin and that children are regenerated when they have the baptismal water put upon them? Why, some of them say that the word virgin was sometimes applied to any married woman who was faithful to her husband; and as for baptismal regeneration, they say that is what the church teaches, not what they believe. They simply read the service; that is all. But do you believe that any man on this green earth would higgie and quibble and whip his conscience into justifying such humbug if there were not some worldly advantages to be gained by it?

Every one knows that there are a great many priests in the Episcopal church who do not believe in the Thirty-nine Articles, a great many ministers in the Presbyterian church who do not believe in the Westminster Catechism, a great many ministers in the Baptist church who do not believe in the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, a great many ministers in the Methodist church who do not believe in the Book of Discipline, a great many priests in the Roman Catholic church who do not believe in the infallibility of the Pope. All these ministers and priests are frauds; they are hypocrites, although that is an ugly word to apply to anybody; because they encourage people to think that they *do* believe in all these things, and if many of them were put before an authoritative examining committee they would say they believe in them.

Nobody will or can truthfully deny these facts, and whatever may be the motives of these clergymen in thus living their false lives, however they may have succeeded in making themselves believe that what they are doing is right, I think I am safe in saying that if some worldly advantage were not to be gained by their doing as they do, they would act differently.

It is not a pleasant nor an easy thing for a man to stifle his convictions or pretend to believe what he does not believe. There are very few joys that are comparable to the joys of freedom. There is hardly any pleasure so great as that of speaking your mind, honestly and truthfully. And no man would forego that pleasure unless he was tempted to do so by safety from physical pain, or freedom from poverty or social ostracism. Nobody can possibly believe that clergymen would conceal their real opinions if money and power and respectability were to be obtained by speaking them.

It is proverbial that clergymen will confess in private conversation what they will not confess in the pulpit, that they will talk more freely about their doubts among each other than before their congregations, that they will sympathise with a heretic in private and denounce that same heretic in public. Everybody who has had private conversation with clergymen knows that this is true, and everybody knows that it could not be true of men who were thoroughly honest.

But the saddest part of the whole business is that the laymen of the Christian Church all know that everything I have said is true, but they do not seem to care. Of course, knowing their ministers as well as they do, they cannot respect them as they would if the clergymen were thoroughly honest men, but they pretend to; they become partakers of the sham; perhaps because the clergy are their faithful friends in all their legal and respectable dishonesties.

This leads me to say that I could forgive the clergymen all their intellectual immoralities much more easily than I can forgive them for their persistent enmity to the poor. Whatever may be said of Jesus of Nazareth, as he is portrayed to us in the four Gospels, it must be admitted that all his sympathies were with the poor. It is plain to me at least, that he was not God. It is equally plain to me that he did not understand why the poor were poor; he did not understand economics as that science is coming to be understood, after all these centuries of experience; his solution of the problems incident to wealth and poverty—that the rich should give their possessions to the poor in charities—is not the true solution of these problems. But he loved the poor, he lived among them, he was one of them, and all his fault-finding and denunciations were directed toward the rich. His heart was in the right place.

But the modern clergyman praises the intelligence and enterprise of the rich and blames the poor for being poor. He accuses them of indolence, intemperance and unthrift.

The clergymen of to-day are the defenders and apologists of land monopoly, money monopoly, machinery monopoly and transportation monopoly. If a rich employer and a poor employé are members of the same church the clergyman will be for the rich employer and against the poor employé. There is hardly a clergyman who would not be delighted to have the most greedy monopolist in the land join his church. The causes of poverty are now well understood, but the clergymen are in favor of continuing those causes.

It may be said that they are ignorant. That is true to a great extent. But they have no business to be ignorant. The very fact that Jesus was the poor man's friend while they are the poor man's enemies ought to startle them into the recognition that something must be wrong with their position. They cannot possibly be ignorant of the fact that churches run away from poor districts as men run from a plague. They cannot possibly read the story of their Master, as they call him, and not see the immense difference between what he was and what they are. If they can—if they are so ignorant as that—they are not fit to teach and lead the people.

I wish to say again that I know nothing of the motives of these men. They may be perfectly conscientious for aught I know to the contrary. Nothing is easier than for a man to debauch his conscience and then follow in its horribly diseased condition. But I am firmly convinced that facts indicate that clergymen, as a class, are shamefully dishonest men, intellectually. They are—and this is the kindest thing that can be said of them—blind leaders of the blind, and as long as the people follow them they will continue to fall into the ditch of poverty and superstition.

HUXLEY ON PERSECUTION.

PROFESSOR HUXLEY'S paper on "Government" in the current number of *The Nineteenth Century* is a very thoughtful production. He argues neither in favor of socialism or individualism but against *a priori* method. So far from being content with the present lot of the workers, he says if the increase of knowledge, the winning of greater dominion over nature and the wealth which follows that dominion are to make no difference to the extent and intensity of want, with its concomitant physical and moral degradation among the masses of the people, he would hail the advent of some kindly comet which would sweep the whole affair away, as a desirable consummation. If he believed the socialistic schemes would attain their desired end, he would gladly devote the remainder of his days to their advocacy. But he sees a cardinal defect in all such schemes in that they ignore the population question. On the subject of the sphere of government he has the following words on the influence of Christianity:

"One heritage of old Roman statecraft, at any rate, passed bodily over to Catholic churchcraft. As soon as the Church was strong enough, it began to persecute with a vigor and consistency which the Empire never attained. In the ages of faith, Christian ecclesiasticism raged against freedom of thought, as such, and compelled the State to punish religious dissidence as a criminal offence of the worst description. The ingenuity of pagan persecutors failed to reach the shameful level of that of the Christian inventors of the Holy Office; nor did the civil governors of pagan antiquity ever degrade themselves so far as to play the executioner for a camarilla of priests. The doctrine that the authority of the State extends to men's beliefs as well as to their actions, and, consequently, is continuous with the whole of human life; and that the power of the State ought to be used for the promotion of orthodoxy and the extermination of heterodoxy is, in fact, a necessary corollary of Romanism, which, however disguised by prudence when the Papacy is weak, is sure to reappear when it is strong enough to dispense with hypocrisy. In the sixteenth century, the theory and practice of a thousand years had so thoroughly incorporated intolerance with Christianity, that even the great reformers held firmly by this precious heirloom of the ages of faith, whatever other shards of ecclesiastical corruption they might cast aside. Happily, the pretensions to infallibility of sects, who differed only in the higher or lower positions of the points at which they held on to the slope between Romanism and Rationalism, were so absurd that political Gallios have been able to establish a *modus vivendi* among them."

"An old salt is a man who has for many years followed the sea, I believe?" "Certainly." "I know of a woman who never went to sea, but who is the most famous old salt the world ever knew." "And who is it?" "Lot's wife!"

Young curate (on a parochial visit): "You go to Sunday School, little girl?" Little girl: "Yeth, sir," Y. C.: "I hope that the little girls and boys whom you meet there never do or say anything naughty?" L. G.: "Well, thir, Bobby Brown said yetherday that Bill Thomath was a damn fool, but then he *ith*, you know."

CORRESPONDENCE.

GENESIS I., 16.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

Sir,—I read in your able leader on Gladstone's rhapsodies on Genesis,—“The sun and moon were *two great lights*, and the stars were thrown in with an—*also*.” Of course you quote from the faulty English translation. Permit me to add for the information of your numerous readers, not conversant with the Hebrew text, that no such a sentence as, “*He made the stars also*,” occurs in the vernacular. Literally translated verse 16 reads thus: “And then made Elohim two instruments of light, *great ones*; the light, great for the rule of day, and the light little for the rule of the night, *and reflectors*.” (i.e. stars.) It clearly shows what a poor idea the concoctor of this silly fable had of the innumerable worlds, revealed to us through the telescope. In Hebrew *two words* dispose of those innumerable worlds,—more important than the sun, moon and our planet. Our sun is only a speck in the infinite expanse,—a mere drop in the universal ocean. The clergy justly alarmed at the rapid and enormous progress of the human intellect, try to make this clumsy biblical fiction dovetail in with modern science, but in vain.

CHARLES KROLL LAPORTE.

SUNDAY MEETINGS.

[Notices of Lectures, etc., must reach us by first post on Tuesday, and be marked "Lecture Notice," if not sent on post-card.]

LONDON.

- Battersea—The Shed of Truth, Prince of Wales's Road, 730, Mr. Dipper, “The Resurrection—Did it Happen?” Social evening every Tuesday. Thursday evening, discussion.
- Camberwell—61 New Church Road, S.E., 7.30, Mr. F. Millar, “A Future State.”
- Hall of Science, 142 Old Street, E.C., 7.30, Mr. T. Parris “Free-thought: What it Means.”
- West Ham—121 Broadway, Plaistow, 7, Capt. C. Pfoundes, “The Ethics of Buddhism.”
- Woolwich—“Sussex Arms,” Assembly Room, 60 Plumstead Road (entrance, Masey Road), 7.30, Mr. W. Heaford, “Bible Barbarities and Absurdities.”
- OPEN AIR PROPAGANDA.**
- Battersea Park Gates 11.15, Mr. T. Thurlow, “Jesus and his Beliefs.”
- Bethnal Green—Opposite St. John's Church, 11.15, Mr. G. Spiller, “In the Year of our Lord 1890.”
- Camberwell—Station Road, 11.30, a lecture.
- Clerkenwell Green, 11.30, Mr. W. Heaford, “The Mission and Teachings of Christ.”
- Hyde Park, near Marble Arch, 11.15, Mr. J. Rowney, “Miracles.” May 28, at 8, Mr. W. Heaford, “Miracles.”
- Kingsland Green, 11.30, Mr. S. Soddy, “Religion and Science.”
- Plaistow Green (near the station), 11.30, a lecture.
- Regent's Park near Gloucester Gate, 3.30, Mr. A. B. Moss.
- Victoria Park, near the fountain, 11, Mr. F. Haslam, “Dr. Daper's Conflict between Science and Religion.”
- Westminster Old Piccadilly Pier, 11.30, Mr. F. Millar, “The Evolution of Religious Ideas.”

COUNTRY.

- Hanley—Secular Hall, 51 John Street, 7, a lady Freethinker, miscellaneous recitals.
- Liverpool Branch N.S.S., Camden Hall, Camden Street—7, Mr. Harry Smith, “Why Call ye me Lord?” Train for Manchester leaves central station at 9 a.m.
- Newcastle—Lecture Hall, Nelson Street, Mr. C. J. Hunt, 11, “Life and Death”; 3, “Mind and Matter”; 7, “Free Will and Responsibility.” Monday, 26, Tynemouth Sands, “The Christian Creed.” Thursday, 29, Gateshead (Sunderland Road end), “Christianity and Secularism.” Blyth (in the open air) May 27 and 28. Tea provided in Society's Rooms, Newgate Street, after the Sunday afternoon lecture.
- Sheffield Hall of Science, Rockingham Street, 7, musical and other recitals, by several ladies and gentlemen.

LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

- ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon Road, London, S.E.—May 25, Manchester (Conference). June 1 (morning), Pimlico, (evening), Woolwich; 8 (morning), Bethnal Green, (evening), Camberwell; 15 (evening), Ball's Pond; 22 (morning), Clerkenwell; 29 (morning), Mile End, (afternoon), Victoria Park. July 6 (morning), Pimlico, (evening), Woolwich; 13 (morning), Mile End, (evening), Camberwell; 20 (afternoon), Victoria Park.
- E. STANLEY JONES, 3 Leta Street, City Road, Walton, Liverpool.—May 18, Failsforth. June 8, Manchester.
- H. SMITH, 3 Breck Place Breck Road, Everton Road, Liverpool.—May 25, Liverpool. June 1, Sheffield; 15, Birmingham.
- T. THURLOW, 7 Dickson's Villas, Rutland Road, East Ham.—May 25 (morning), Battersea. June 15 (morning and evening), Battersea.

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