

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

DID JESUS ASCEND?

THE story of the Ascension of Jesus Christ is as absurd as the story of his Resurrection. Both, in fact, are the products of an age prone to believe in the wonderful. So prevalent was the popular belief in the supernatural character of great men, that the comparatively cultivated Romans accepted a monstrous fable about Julius Cæsar. "The enthusiasm of the multitude," says Mr. Froude, "refused to believe that he was dead. He was supposed to have ascended into heaven, not in adulatory metaphor, but in literal and prosaic fact."

Similarly the enthusiasm of the first followers of Jesus, and especially of hysterical ladies like Mary Magdalene, refused to believe that he was dead. The fable of his resurrection was gradually developed, and his ascension was devised to round off the story. Whoever will read St. Paul's epistles first, and the Gospels and the Acts afterwards, will see how the Christ myth grew from vagueness to precision under the shaping imagination of the Church of the first century after the age of the Apostles.

It is a significant fact that the appearances of Jesus after his Resurrection were all made to the faithful, and his ascension took place before them, without a single impartial person being allowed to witness an event of which it was of the utmost importance for the world to have positive assurance.

When we turn to the Gospels and the Acts, five documents whose authorship is absolutely unknown, we find the most contradictory accounts of what happened after the Resurrection. It may safely be affirmed that five such witnesses would damn any case in a legal court where the laws of evidence are respected.

These witnesses cannot even agree as to whether the risen Jesus was a man or a ghost. Now he comes through a closed door, and anon he eats broiled fish and honeycomb; now he vanishes, after walking and talking with his disciples, and anon he allows the sceptical Thomas to examine the wounds of his crucifixion as a proof that he was not a spirit, but solid flesh and blood.

According to Matthew's account, Jesus first appeared to the women—as is very probable! Mark says his first appearance was to Mary Magdalene alone; Luke says it was to two of the disciples on the road to Emmaus.

His subsequent appearances are recorded with the same harmony. While Matthew makes him appear but once, Mark makes him appear three times—to the women, to the two disciples going to Emmaus, and to the eleven apostles. Luke makes him appear but twice, and John four times—to Mary Magdalene alone, to the disciples in a room without Thomas, to the same again with Thomas, and to the same once more at Tiberias. John is the only one who tells the pretty story about Thomas, and John of course is the only one who mentions the spear-thrust in Christ's side at the crucifixion, because he wanted a hole for

Thomas to put his hand into, and the other evangelists had no need of such a provision.

Matthew and Mark relate that the disciples were told by an angel to go to Galilee, while Luke keeps them in the Holy City, and Acts declares that Jesus expressly "commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem."

The ascension itself, which involved the last appearance of Jesus, as well as his disappearance, is not related by Matthew, nor is it related by John. Now Matthew and John are *supposed* to have been apostles. If the ascension happened they must have witnessed it; but both of them are silent, and the story of the ascension comes from three writers who were *not present*.

Nor do these three writers agree with each other. Luke informs us that Jesus ascended from Bethany, a short distance from Jerusalem, on the very day of the Resurrection, or at the latest the next morning; while Mark, without any precision as to time, distinctly affirms that Jesus ascended from Galilee, which was at least sixty miles from Jerusalem. Now the ascension could not have occurred at two different places, and, in the absence of corroborative testimony, Mark and Luke destroy each other as witnesses.

The author of Acts agrees with Mark as to the place, but differs both from Mark and Luke as to the time. He declares that Jesus spent forty days (off and on) with his disciples before levitating. This constitutes another difficulty. Mark, Luke, and the author of Acts must all leave the court in disgrace, for it is too late for them to patch up a more harmonious story.

According to the detailed account in Acts, Jesus ascended in the presence of his apostles, including Matthew and John, who appear to have mistrusted their eyesight. After making a speech he was "taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight." He was in a cloud, and they were in a cloud, and the millions who believe them are in a cloud.

This time of the year is seasonable for an examination of the story of the Ascension. Would that the opportunity were taken by Christians, who believe what they have been taught with scarcely a moment's investigation, and read the Bible as lazily as they smoke their pipes. We do not ask them to take our word for anything. Let them examine for themselves. If they will do this, we have no fear as to the result. A belief in the New Testament story of the supernatural Christ is impossible to any man who candidly sifts and honestly weighs the evidence.

If Christians would pursue their investigations still further they would soon satisfy themselves that the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ are largely, if not entirely, mythical. Now, for instance, when they are preparing to celebrate the ascension of Christ, they are welcoming the ascension of the Sun. The great luminary is (apparently) rising higher and higher in the heaven, shedding his warmer beams on the earth, and gladdening the hearts of men. And there is more connexion between the Son and the Sun than ordinary Christians imagine.

G. W. FOOTE.

FREETHOUGHT AND UNITARIANISM.*

THE late Mr. McQuaker, of Glasgow, entrusted the sum of £30,000 to the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, the interest thereof to be employed "in maintaining and diffusing the principles of Unitarian Christianity in Scotland." We rejoice that the most liberal section of Christians—if, indeed, they can justly be accorded that term; a position denied by the orthodox—have this advantage in propagating their views in the very stronghold of Calvinism. At the same time, we cannot refrain from pointing out the injustice under which we suffer, since any similar endowment for the propagation of an advanced form of Freethought would be illegal.

Under this trust lectures were delivered last year in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and Dundee by leading Unitarian ministers, and are now published in the neat little book before us.

The lectures are preceded by a thoughtful introduction on "The Condition and Prospects of Liberal Religion in Scotland," by the editor, the Rev. Robert B. Drummond, B.A. Mr. Drummond reviews the extent to which heresy has spread in Scotland, as indicated by the *Scotch Sermons*, by Prof. Robertson Smith's articles in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and the change which is taking place in Sabbath observance. In all these we see signs of a break-up of the old faith, an evidence that Scotland, which is always advanced in political matters, will not always be clergy-cowed, but take an intellectual position worthy of the countrymen of Hume. But we see no sign that Scotsmen will find their resting-place in Unitarianism or their temple at St. Mark's Chapel, Castle-terrace, Edinburgh.

The first lecture, on "Rationalism: What it is, and What it is Not," by the Rev. Frank Walters, is too rhetorical for our taste, and we fancy no more acceptable to hard-headed Scotsmen. Mr. Walters' faith, though devoid of the harshness of Calvinism, is more entitled to be called Sentimentalism than Rationalism. He accepts reason on the understanding that it runs not in the direction of Atheism, and says that if the mission of Unitarianism was simply critical and destructive, he would leave its ranks.

More noticeable is the second lecture, on "The Place of Jesus of Nazareth in Modern Religion," by the Rev. R. A. Armstrong, B.A. Mr. Armstrong is frank as to the unhistoric character of the Gospels. He says: "I am compelled to recognise, as controlling elements in all four Gospels, tendencies, prejudices, desires in their writers which, unconsciously or consciously, shape their witness and modify their presentations in every incident from first to last." He finds the fourth Gospel, "as history and biography, quite untrustworthy," and the other three "penetrated and permeated with disagreements and irreconcilabilities among themselves"; and perceives "that they have grown and changed, and changed again and grown, under the hands of successive collectors and revisers and editors, till at last they crystallised in their present form." Yet he thinks that here and there he can seize a word or deed which he can be quite sure is the actual word or deed of Jesus of Nazareth himself. The reader who may fancy himself in the same position is asked to reflect on the fact that one of the finest stories—that of the woman taken in adultery—is unquestionably spurious, being wanting in all the earliest manuscripts. Mr. Armstrong, like so many others, even when he sees how little safe is his ground, proceeds to construct an ideal Jesus with "a gleam as of the divine presence shooting through his soul; vast, vague emotions stirring in him, which

seemed to be laden with messages of a heavenly love," and so on—far more in keeping with a poetical fiction like Sir Edwin Arnold's *Light of the World* than with matter-of-fact history. Without according to Jesus any supernatural authority, he gives him a place apart, pre-eminent among the leaders of men. This position seems to me as little consistent as that of those who pray to him without regarding him as having power to answer prayer.

The next lecture, by the Rev. H. W. Crosskey, deals with the question, "What is a Unitarian Christian?" Mr. Crosskey makes a manly protest against the notion that theological errors are crimes. From many points of view this lecture is well worth reading. It is full of fine spirit, and an able and convincing plea for freedom in religion. But Dr. Crosskey does not define his terms, and his question remains unanswered. He tells us, indeed, the crucial question is, What was the religion of Christ himself? We can but think this an evasion from a safe and open ground into the region of utter obscurity. The religion of Christ, he argues, is the religion of the Unitarian Christian. But this is the parrot cry of each of the hundred of sects into which Christianity is divided. To me it has always seemed that the term Christian implied a belief in Jesus as the Christ, and when I could no longer hold that he was the Messiah of the Jews, I felt I had ceased to be a Christian, even though I then clung to some aspects of his teaching dwelt upon by Dr. Crosskey.

J. M. WHEELER.

THE DIFFERENCE.

North Carolina probably never produced an abler preacher than Dr. Francis L. Hawkes, who a quarter of a century ago was pastor of Grace Episcopal Church, New York. Short, thick set, black eyed and black haired, he was a striking personage. He was not only a great pulpit orator, but considered the best reader in the New York episcopacy. His rather luxurious family deterred him from accepting a bishopric which would have otherwise been tendered. One day a delegation from a Buffalo church waited upon him and invited him to accept a pastorate in that city.

"Well, gentlemen, other things being satisfactory, the question of acceptance narrows down to business matter," said Dr. Hawkes. "What salary do you offer?"

"Dr. Hawkes," said the spokesman, "we recognise that you have a high reputation and are willing to be liberal. Our recent pastor has received 2500 dols., but on account of your standing we have decided to offer you 3500 dols."

"My good man," cried the doctor, "do you know what salary I am receiving here?"

"No, sir."

"I get 15,000 dols., and this parsonage; and as I have an expensive family I do not see my way clear to accept your offer."

The spokesman looked rather sheepish, but made another essay.

"If we had known that fact, sir, we would undoubtedly have looked elsewhere, but you should remember that the work of the Lord must be done, and as for providing for your family you know the story of Elijah and the ravens."

"Now, my friends," responded the clergyman quizzingly, "I have made the Bible my study ever since I was twenty-eight. I have read it through carefully and prayerfully over a hundred times. I remember the raven incident perfectly, but nowhere can I find any reference to the Lord's providing for young Hawkes."—*Washington Post*.

IDEALS.

If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. He will put some things behind, will pass an invisible boundary; new universal, and more liberal laws will begin to establish themselves around and within him; or the old laws be expanded, and interpreted in his favor in a more liberal sense, and he will live with the license of a higher order of beings. In proportion as he simplifies his life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex, and solitude will not be solitude, nor poverty poverty, nor weakness weakness. If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.—*Thoreau*.

* *Freethought and Christian Faith*. Four Lectures on Unitarian Principles. Delivered under the terms of the McQuaker Trust. Edited by Robert B. Drummond, B.A. Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate.

REMINISCENCES OF CHARLES BRADLAUGH.

By G. W. FOOTE.

(Continued.)

[IN the last instalment I omitted to state a fact of some importance. When Mr. Bradlaugh put me into the witness-box at his trial—a proceeding which I thoroughly approved and concurred in—he did not examine me; he only tendered me formally as a witness, leaving Sir Hardinge Giffard to do as he would in the matter. For once the wily old Tory lawyer overreached himself; he was obliged to interrogate me after all his braggadocio, and thus gave me the opportunity of honestly stating that Mr. Bradlaugh had absolutely no connection with the paper for which he was prosecuted, and for which I was already imprisoned. Of course Mr. Bradlaugh did not in any sense sacrifice me. It would have been contemptible on my part to let him bear any responsibility for my own deliberate action, and if I had not been tendered as a witness I should have tried to tender myself.]

My own trial followed Mr. Bradlaugh's, and I was not found guilty. Three members of the jury held out against a verdict that would have disgraced a free country; and as the prosecution despaired of obtaining a verdict while Lord Coleridge presided at the trial, the Attorney-General was asked to allow the abandonment of proceedings. This he granted, the case was struck off the list, and I returned to my prison cell at Holloway.

Let me now go back to the crowning incident of that long struggle between Charles Bradlaugh and the House of Commons. On May 10, 1881, the House passed a resolution authorising the Sergeant-at-Arms to prevent Mr. Bradlaugh from entering. On June 20, the jury gave a verdict in Mr. Newdegate's favor for the £500 penalty and costs. A motion for a new trial failed, and Mr. Bradlaugh appealed to the country. Enthusiastic meetings were held in his behalf, and he prepared a fresh *coup*. It had to be something striking, and it was. On the morning of August 3 Palace Yard and Westminster Hall were thronged with his supporters. Every one was armed with a petition, which he had a legal right to take to the House of Commons. Mr. Bradlaugh himself drove up in a hansom cab, and entered the precincts of the House by the private door. He made his way to the door of the House itself and tried to enter by a sudden effort, but he was seized by fourteen officials and stalwart policemen, picked for the work, and thrust back through the private passage into Palace Yard. Not expecting such indignity, he contested every inch of the ground. Inspector Denning said he never thought that one man could have offered such resistance. The small muscles of both his arms were ruptured, and a subsequent attack of erysipelas put his life in jeopardy. When he was finally thrust on to the pavement in Palace Yard his coat was torn and the rest of his garments were disarranged. His face was livid with the intense exertion when I saw him a minute afterwards. There he stood, a great mass of panting, valiant manhood, his features set like granite, and his eyes fixed upon the doorway before him. He seemed to see nothing but that doorway. I spoke to him, and he seemed not to hear. I believe a mighty struggle was going on within him, perhaps the greatest struggle of his life. He had suffered a frightful indignity, he must have been tempted to avenge it, and he had but to hold up his hand to bring around and behind him the myriads who stood outside the railings. The action would have been impolitic, but what a temptation he crushed down, and what an effort it necessitated! Never was his heroic nature more sorely tried. He justified his mastery of others by his mastery of himself. How small in comparison seemed the mob of his enemies! I never admired him more than at that moment. He was superb, sublime. They had wound their meshes about him, and the lion had burst them. Their plans were frustrated by one swift, daring stroke. He who was to be quietly suppressed by resolutions of the House had cut the knot of their policy asunder, made himself the hero of the hour, and fixed the nation's eyes on his splendid audacity.

Reaction set in after that terrible struggle, and he accepted a chair that was brought him. Several members passed as he sat there. One of them was the coward, Frank Hugh O'Donnell. He had a lady on his arm, and he passed with her between himself and Mr. Bradlaugh, so that her dress trailed over the hero's feet. It was a wretched display of insolence and cowardice. But the lady must be exonerated. She looked annoyed, her cheeks reddened, and her eyelids fell. It is so hard for a woman to resist the attraction of courage, and the coward by her side must have suffered in her estimation.

There was a crowded meeting that evening at the Hall of Science, at which I had the honor of speaking. Mr. Bradlaugh's greeting was tremendous. Two days afterwards he was seriously ill.

During that great constitutional struggle I was present at many "Bradlaugh" meetings, and I never witnessed such enthusiasm as he excited. No man of my time had such a devoted following.

The last "Bradlaugh" demonstration I attended was on February 15, 1883, in Trafalgar-square. Seventy or eighty thousand people were present. There were four speakers, and three of them are dead, Joseph Arch being the sole survivor. Mr. Adams, of Northampton, lived to see his old friend take his seat and to do good work in the House of Commons, became himself Mayor of Northampton, and died universally respected by his fellow-townsmen; William Sharman, a brave, true man, is buried at Preston; and Charles Bradlaugh sleeps his long sleep at Woking.

For another twelve months I attended no public meetings except the silent ones on the exercise ground of Holloway Gaol. But I saw Mr. Bradlaugh at several demonstrations on various subjects after my imprisonment, and I could perceive no abatement of his popularity. He had his enemies and detractors, but the spontaneous outburst of feeling at his death proved his hold on the popular heart.

I must now leap forward to that dreadful illness which left him a broken man. Years before, in 1882, when we were roaming the Law Courts together, he tapped his chest as he coughed, and seeing my anxious expression he told me that he brought up a good deal of phlegm in the morning, and that strangers who heard him clearing his chest would fancy he was very ill. But he looked so well that I soon dismissed the unpleasant fact, though it returned before his breakdown when I saw he was obliged to cancel engagements. I heard in 1884, though not from himself, that he had some heart trouble. But I was far from prepared for the shattering illness that laid him low in October, 1889.

When I called to see him after his partial recovery I was shocked by his appearance. He looked twenty years older, grey, and infirm. I sat down half-dazed. Theoretically I knew he was mortal, but I did not realise it as a fact until I saw him thin and pale from the valley of the shadow of death. His mind was clear enough, however; and although everything about him was pathetic he was quite self-collected.

One thing he said to me I shall never forget. There had been talk of his wavering in his Freethought, and as he referred to this folly he spoke in grave impressive tones. Pointing to the humble bed, he said, "When I lay there and all was black the thing that troubled me least was the convictions of my life." I felt awed as he spoke. The cold shadow seemed to linger in the room. A moment or two later he said with tears in his voice, "The Freethought party is a party that I love."

The memory of that interview will always be a precious possession. I treasure it with the sacred things of my life. I had seen and touched the naked sincerity of a great soul.

(To be concluded.)

HOW TO HELP US.

- (1) Get your newsagent to exhibit the *Freethinker* in the window.
- (2) Get your newsagent to take a few copies of the *Freethinker* and try to sell them, guaranteeing to take the copies that remain unsold.
- (3) Take an extra copy (or more), and circulate it among your acquaintances.

THE IRISH QUESTION.

"Bryan Boru" contributes the following lines to *Free-thought*, of San Francisco:

There is a double mortgage on my dear old native sod;
It runs until the judgment day, the mortgagee is God.
England holds the body, but Rome must have the soul,
Oh, pity Pat, what has he got when the Devil takes the whole!

They feed him on wind pudding, with glimpses of Home Rule,
Catholicism, catechism, mysticism, and thin gruel,
The litany in Latin and a song called Tweedledum,
And when he dies they'll give to him a note on kingdom come.

"We agree to pay the bearer in the lovely bye-and-bye,
A pair of wings, a golden harp, and a mansion in the sky;
With liberty to sing and dance before the heavenly host,
Here witness now our signatures, the Father, Son and Ghost."

But if he don't pay the piper, and promptly come to time,
We will speedily consign him unto a warmer clime,
With a short note to the Devil to burn him body and soul,
To sizzle him and frizzle him; and, boys, pile on the coal.

You have been sold out to England by his "Holiness" the
Pope,
And for their joint amusement you oft dangled at a rope.
Crushed, beaten, and degraded by your hereditary foe—
Which is it, Rome or England? That's what I want to know.

The calm domain of reason you have willingly resigned,
From choice you wear the fetters upon body and on mind.
Farewell, all thought of liberty, farewell to every hope,
While you worship a demented Jew and an Italian Pope.

Your faith has brought you not a thing but sorrow, want, and
grief—

A prey to every pious fraud and every royal thief.
'Tis only a delusion made to mystify the mind,
While you caress and hug it you'll be always left behind.

THE HOLY BULL.

WHY THE FRUITERERS OF NAGPOOR CEASED TO PAY TRIBUTE.
(From the *Hindoo*.)

In a little street in Nagpoor a small company of fruiterers earned a meagre subsistence by disposing of their wares to pedestrians.

Contrary to the general rule, these fruit sellers gave the place of prominence to the poorest fruit, and many intending purchasers passed on without buying on account of this peculiarity.

Now, the reason why the good fruit was thus kept in the background was that an exceedingly white and glossy bull, pronounced by the Brahmins particularly holy and an especial favorite of Deity, daily wended his way among the fruit stalls and quietly devoured such fruits thereon as caught his fancy.

When the poor fruit vendors counted up their earnings at eventide, they always found that the sacred animal had lessened their gains by his levying at least one-tenth, and sometimes as much as one-half.

But they never interfered with the holy bull in the exercise of his divine rights.

One day, however, a poor man, who had been notified that he must pay his rent that day or his family would be homeless, and who was happy in the consciousness that a large bunch of bananas which lay on his stand, and which was ordered for a wealthy European, would bring enough to pay his indebtedness, was horrified to see the bull approaching.

Frenzied with anger, he forget the divine character of the animal and, as the bull stretched out his neck to appropriate the cherished bananas, the fruiterer dealt him a heavy blow with a stick on the nose.

Amazed beyond manner of things at this reception, the bull wheeled around and rushed like the wind toward the outskirts of Nagpoor.

The other fruit sellers were horrified at the sacrilege. They expected to see their comrade stricken dead for the insult to the favorite of Deity.

But when night came and the fruiterer, instead of being a corpse, was not only in robust health, but also in the best of spirits at having sold all his stock, and they found themselves wealthier by the bull's omitted exactions, they came to the conclusion that the bull was no more an especial protegé of Deity than they.

And when the next day's sun illuminated the fruiterers' quarter in Nagpoor, it revealed an extra ornament on every stand in the shape of a stout and lengthy truncheon.

W. L. LUXTON.

ACID DROPS.

Sunday night being the time fixed for taking the census, there was a good opportunity for the ministers of Jehovah dilating upon the text in 1 Chronicles xxi, which tells how, because Satan induced David to take a census, this crime was punished with optional penalties of famine, military ruin or pestilence. David chose the latter, and seventy thousand were slain; although according to 2 Sam. xxiv., it was Jehovah himself who moved David to number Israel. If Jehovah hasn't evaporated, the fact that so many of those who had to go to work on Monday morning wrote out their census papers on Sunday ought to bring on us all the plagues prophesied in the book of the Prophet Baxter.

A comparison of these texts induces the suspicion that Jehovah and Satan are one and the same. For this opinion there are many good scriptural reasons. Jehovah says, "I make peace and create evil. I, the Lord, do all these things" (Isaiah xlv., 7). The Lord says he delights to dwell in thick darkness, and is described as a consuming fire, as a jealous God, visiting the sins of the father upon the children, and with other diabolical attributes. Indeed, as the maker of hell, the Bible God is one of the worst devils ever conceived. He must either be the creator of Satan or one and the same.

At General Booth's meeting in the City Hall, Glasgow, he is reported as saying one great truth. It was "The more people reasoned the less they believed." This was followed by a more questionable statement. "They said there were no miracles nowadays. But people who said that were liars." Booth asked all who had faith to stand up. The large audience rose, but the reporters imperturbably kept their seats, merely turning round to see the effect. These gentlemen have souls beyond the reach of salvation.

The *Reading Standard* has letters on the "Sunday Desecration" at Sunningdale, where it appears the heathen lads march about on Sunday afternoons "in profane imitation of the Salvationists, who have recently established themselves in the place." Noise and vulgarity are consecrated when used in the service of religion, but most abominable when only in profane imitation thereof.

A new sect of dancers have started as an offshoot of the Salvation Army at Glenwood, Iowa. Leaping up and whirling round before the Lord is the principal feature of their worship.

What is the meaning of Easter? Hugh Price Hughes says, "Easter Day means that Slavery, Drunkenness, Lust, Gambling, Ignorance, Crime, Pauperism, and War are to be utterly abolished from the earth." We do not observe Lying in the list. It is a characteristic omission.

After eighteen hundred years Christianity still talks of what it is *going to do*. It would be more to the purpose if Christianity could tell us what it has *done*.

When Talmage went to Cana of Galilee he saw "the very firkin that tradition says contained the wine that the Lord made." Now, according to the story in John, Jesus turned six stone waterpots full of water into wine, each "containing two or three firkins." What nonsense is this, about the original firkin! But it is near enough for Talmage.

Talmage of course doesn't suppose that Christ and the Devil are one and the same, yet he says that Jesus made the wine at Cana and the Devil made all the rest.

C. A. Whitmore, writing to *Notes and Queries* from Preston on the Wild Moors, says: "A lady of my acquaintance, meeting a farmer whose wife had recently been confined, inquired if the baby had been christened. 'Yes,' he replied, 'but I do not think the parson drove the devil out of him, for he never cried.'" Here we have an instance of the original meaning of baptism to ward off evil spirits by putting the

party under the protection of benevolent ones. Church bells were originally rung for the same reason.

Archdeacon Farrar, in his little book on the *Nooks and Corners of Westminster Abbey*, undesignedly calls attention to the old superstition of his church, for, describing the baptistry, he says, "The little useless north door at the end of the nave was built for the escape of the evil spirit exorcised in the water of the font."

The able writer of Folk-Lore articles in the *Evening Standard* dealt last Saturday, April 4, with "Sacramental Money," which in some parts is still believed to cure fits and certain other maladies. Here again we have the old superstition, so deeply rooted in the New Testament, that diseases are the works of evil spirits, who can be cast out by holy things.

We see that Mr. George Wise, of Liverpool, has been imported to Spennymoor to say a good word for Christianity. There does not appear to be a single minister in the district able and willing to champion the faith. Mr. Wise replied to Mr. Foote's lecture, "Is Christianity True?" and according to the local papers, he exposed its "fallacies." As a matter of fact, Mr. Wise did not hear the lecture, nor was there any report of it to which he could refer. We are bound to presume, therefore, that Mr. Wise has access to supernatural sources of information.

There is talk of a debate between Mr. Foote and Mr. Wise. Mr. Foote, however, is president of the National Secular Society, and cannot make himself too cheap. He has debated with Dr. Harrison and Dr. McCann, and it is rather a descent from them to Mr. Wise, whom he does not feel bound to meet. Nevertheless if any Spennymoor church, or any Spennymoor ministers, will put Mr. Wise forward as a representative, Mr. Foote will meet him, and throw the responsibility for his fitness upon his sponsors.

We are told that Mr. Wise shrinks from discussing Christianity. He wants to discuss Secularism. That is, he wants to act on the offensive, and never on the defensive. This being so, Mr. Foote wishes it to be distinctly understood that he declines to discuss Secularism with any Christian champion who declines to discuss Christianity.

As a matter of fact, the only real question for debate between Christians and Secularists is the truth of Christianity. Christianity claims to be divine, it spends millions of public money, it thrusts its Bible into the public schools, it maintains laws against sceptics—and its pretensions have to be settled first. Further, if Christianity be true, Secularism is impossible; and if Christianity be false, nothing but Secularism is left. Any Christian, therefore, who declines to discuss Christianity must either be too obtuse to see the real point at issue, or conscious that his creed is practically indefensible.

The *Catholic Times* reports a lecture delivered by Father Abbot Snow in the Royal Institution, Colquitt-street, Liverpool. Dealing with Catholicism and science, he said of Galileo—"According to the custom of the time, Galileo was sent to prison. In our days the case would be met by a paper read at a learned society, or by a more or less complimentary letter to the periodicals; but in those days prisons of every land closed on those who held unpalatable opinions." This passes over the grave part of the charge against the Catholic Church, which is, that not only did the Pope sanction "the custom of the time," but censured the opinions of Galileo as erroneous, proving at once his own bigotry and fallibility.

Father Snow went on to say that "a Catholic should exhibit an unyielding faith in religion and a wholesome scepticism on science." That is to say, "Swallow blindly all I offer, but examine carefully anything coming from another quarter."

During the Sligo election it is reported that some of the priest-driven Irish crossed themselves as they passed the Parnellite M.P.s. and cried "Anti-Christ!"

What a farcial business is this of the Rev. C. Berry, of Wolverhampton. Every now and then he gets an invitation to take another pulpit. He receives a deputation, takes time

to think over the proposal, seeks the Lord in prayer, and finally decides to stick to his old congregation. Why on earth does he not plainly say one of two things, either that he is not open for another call or that he is? And why does he write such unctuous letters after keeping two congregations in suspense?

A census of churchgoers at Dundee was taken last Sunday by the staff of the *Dundee Advertiser*. It showed that the attendance at forenoon worship was only 24,369, as against 30,658 ten years ago. The number of churches had increased from 85 to 94, of which four belonged to the Salvation Army. The percentage of churchgoers to population was 15 per cent. The weather, it is explained, was not favorable for good attendance.

As an incident in the Welsh Tithe War, the Rev. J. Tegryn Phillips, Minister of the Hebron and Hebro Congregational Churches at Llandissilio, has been served by the police with a summons charging him with having assaulted a bailiff while discharging his duties with the auctioneer at the Cilanfach tithe sales last week.

James Marchant states in the *Stratford Herald* that he "publicly debated with S. Standing, the National Secular Society's representative." This is untrue. The debate was privately arranged between the two disputants. They had a perfect right so to arrange it, but it is idle to use the word "representative." It is doubtful if any Branch of the N. S. S. would put forward a "representative" to debate with S. Marchant. Certainly the N. S. S. would not.

On Good Friday, upon the consecrated spot where is situated the most Holy Catholic Church at Highgate, an exciting scene was witnessed between a number of ardent disciples of the Pope and a few open-air, soul-saving lecturers. The former, upon leaving their edifice, where they had been kneeling before the altar in prayer, found the latter in the street opposite, preaching Christ. The Catholics thereupon ridiculed and hooted their rivals, and went so far as to knock them down, and send their books and tracts flying about the place.

The vestry of St. George's-in-the-West is moving the Home Secretary to abate Sunday bawling. Perhaps it would be as well to include Sunday bawling. A lot of it goes on, especially of the Salvation species.

The Universal Association Bank and Trust Company of France, which was started with the blessing of the Pope for the purpose of buying up the property of the religious congregations in France in order to evade governmental tax, has come to grief with one of its directors, to whom it has to pay heavy damages.

In Belgium one out of every two hundred of the population is a monastic brother. These thirty-two thousand monks, notwithstanding their vow of poverty, have property valued at 26,000,000 dols. In France there are fully ten thousand Sisters of Mercy, who, upon entering the eight hundred cloisters of that country, resign all claims to their property. Yet the property of these orders is worth more than 5,000,000 dols.

A circular has been issued by the disestablishment party in the Free Church of Scotland, entitled "The Highlanders' Claim of Right," which contains some interesting figures. It shows that £44,000 a year is paid to the ministers of the Established Church in the six Highland counties of Scotland for the religious instruction of 12,241 members. This is an average cost of some £3 5s. per annum for each member. In Inverness-shire each State Christian costs £4 9s. 3d. per annum; in Caithness, £5 8s. 9½d.; in Sutherland, £9; in Ross, £10 3s. 3d. Examining the table of parishes in Inverness (which, as is seen from the above, is one of the most favorable from the State Church point of view) the following results appear:—The annual cost per member is, in Bracadale, £16 10s.; in Abernethy, £19 14s.; in Bernera, £26 16s. In Moy eight communicants cost the State £41 12s. 6d. per annum; in Waternish three individuals cost £47 7s. 6d. per annum; or during the allotted span of 70 years the handsome sum of £3,316 5s. each; or £9 948 15s. for the interesting trio!—*Star*.

The Rev. Howard MacQueary, of Ohio, who has been prosecuted for heresy, has received sentence of deprivation for six months, with the understanding that if, at the end of that time, he will promise to preach what he don't believe and not preach what he does believe he shall be reinstated. Mr. MacQueary, we trust, will be sufficiently honest to come out from among them.

The Bishop of Ohio lays down the doctrine that a priest cannot resign, but must be deposed. He says Mr. MacQueary may resign the parish and desert the communion of the Church, but he cannot resign from the ministry. Once a priest always a priest, even if you no longer believe any single doctrine of the Church. Yet the Rev. Robert Faylor shocked the godly, earned the title of Devil's Chaplain, and got imprisoned for blasphemy for preaching that Christianity was a myth, while dressed in canonicals.

The impudence of Christians is unbounded. In New York State a member has the audacity to introduce a bill exempting from taxation all the property of the Young Men's Christian Associations in the State. This means to endow them at the expense of those who are taxed. We trust the citizens will resist this barefaced attempt at pious spoliation.

A Huntingdonshire jury has perpetrated a gross libel on the Devil. It appears that a young fellow called Andrewes got drunk, assaulted a married woman, and fell into a reservoir in fleeing from her husband; but not being born to be drowned, he scrambled out again, and finally threw himself in front of a Great Eastern train. An inquest was held on his corpse, and the jury found that he "committed suicide at the instigation of the Devil." No evidence, however, was produced to this effect, and Old Nick has a good ground for an action for slander. But perhaps he prefers to wait for that jury.

Mr. Quillian is not to remain unsupported in his endeavors to convert Christian and drunken England into the faith that there is but one God, and that Mohammed is his prophet, who has interdicted all intoxicants. One Hassan Alia is now travelling through India collecting money for a Mohammedan mission to England. This is turning the tables at last.

Superstition continues even among the grandees of Rome. Mariya Bashkirtey in her *Journal* tells how when Count Pietro Antonelli—nephew, or perhaps son, of the Cardinal, and one of her lovers—was at death's door, his mother made him cut slips of paper, on which this word was written over and over again *Maria, Maria, Maria*. It was a method of praying by repetition of a name as the Hindus repeat Krishna, Krishna, Rama, Rama, etc. Mariya says "She did this that the Virgin might cure him. It's perhaps on that account he fell in love with a Maria—a very earthly one however. Besides that, they made him drink holy water instead of medicine."

The Easter Vestries have resulted in several scenes between clergymen and vestries owing to the increase of sacerdotalism among the first named.

Dr. G. W. Brown points out a trifling omission in the inscription on the American dollar. There is an ellipsis of one word which is supplied by the possessor. It should read "In this God we trust." With this correction it exhibits in its device the real faith of the people.

We receive from Chicago a curious paper called *The Flaming Sword*, which is dated Year of Koresh 52. We have not yet got much light on its principles, though it seems to go in for a bisex God, sexless humanity, and a speedy end of the world, which, according to Koreshan astronomy, is concave. "Cyrus," the chief of the sect says: "Koreshanity differs from Christianity in this, that it is a religion of the Aquarian era, while Christianity has been the religion of the Piscatorial era or dispensation." This we interpret to mean that Koreshanity is as watery as Christianity was fishy. Selah!

The *Flaming Sword* of Chicago, is dissatisfied with the usual theistic evidences. It says "The first essential step, in order to demonstrate a God personality, is the rejection of the Copernican system of astronomy with its innumerable worlds and groundless philosophy, and an acceptance of the fact that we are living on the inside of a hollow globe."

Once realise this and the God conception becomes clear as mud.

Do the spirits of animals live again? is a question that has often been debated. The writer of Ecclesiastes says expressly that "man has no pre-eminence above a beast," and indeed few arguments can be adduced for human immortality which do not apply to animals. But from San Francisco comes startling proof of animal immortality. A Rev. Miles Grant called on Dr. Louis Schlesinger, a famous medium, and wrote down the names of dead friends he would like to communicate with. Their names were Henry Major, John Leo, and Billy Wakefield. From each of these he obtained assurances they were still living, and that immortality was "a great and glorious reality." It turned out they were the names of a dead cat, dog, and horse.

William Smith is a barber, of East-street, Derby, who is wicked enough to think that persons may need shaving on Sunday morning. For his abominable conduct he has been fined with the alternative of seven days imprisonment, by magistrates who possibly derive benefits from Sunday labor by holding shares in railway, gas, or tramway companies.

A machinist named Korner, at Olmutz, Moravia, has invented a water-cycle, by which he can progress through smooth water at the rate of a mile in a quarter of an hour. He would have astonished the apostles as much as when they were out fishing and cried, "Whist, whist, the bogey man!"

Parsons are under the special care of God, but not doctors. Statistics prove that the clergy are the longest livers in the land. Taking the mean average mortality at 1,000, ministers contributed only 556, gardeners 599, legal men 842, while medical men exceed the average, being 1,122. The lives of cabmen and publicans are even more precarious. The parson has an assured income, lives in the country, with little work or care, and evidently runs little risk of infection by visiting sick parishioners.

In addition to the renewed prosecution of the Rev. Bell-Cox at Liverpool, the Anti-Ritualistic party are determined not to drop the case against the reredos at St. Paul's, and to appeal against the Archbishop's judgment in the matter of the Bishop of Lincoln. If a house divided against itself cannot stand, the Church should stand a good chance of tumbling.

The Rev. Thomas Moore, continuing his articles on "What the Church has Done for England," in the *Church Monthly*, deals this month with the Church's treatment of the criminal classes, which he declares have been much benefitted by its ministrations. This is an entirely *ex parte* statement. The deplorable condition of our prisons last century were improved by individual philanthropists like Howard and Mrs. Fry, without help from the church. National education has done more to diminish crime than all the churches put together.

General Booth has set up a match factory in Hackney, and his "Blood and Fire" matches will soon be in the market. He is giving employment to a hundred women, but every box he sells will mean the sale of a box less at other factories where women are already employed. General Booth, as an economist, is like the Irishman who lengthened his shirt by cutting a piece off the top and sewing it on the bottom.

The *Pall Mall Gazette* finds that Professor Huxley's phrase "Corybantic Christianity" is "not quite original," because Celsus said that the Christians took the old doctrine of future rewards and punishments, and howled it out like Corybantes. At this rate there can hardly be such a thing as originality. As a matter of fact, Professor Huxley does not claim originality for his phrase, which is admirably descriptive of Salvationism.

That unsavory plagiarist, Lord Mayor Savory, was to have given a *conversazione* at the Mansion House in honor of Prophet Baxter; but friendly pressure has been put upon the chief of the City Fathers, and the *conversazione* is postponed indefinitely. No matter. Baxter can stand it. Christ is coming again soon, and Baxter expects to cut a big shine in the millennium.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, April 12, Secular Hall, 61 New Church-road, Camberwell; at 7.30, "An Oration on Charles Bradlaugh."
 Friday, April 10, Co-operative Hall, Powis-street, Woolwich, at 8, "Oration on Charles Bradlaugh."
 April 19, Belfast 26, Liverpool; 30, Hammersmith.
 May 3, Hall of Science; May 4, Northampton; 10, Camberwell; 17, N. S. S. Conference; 24, Manchester.
 June 7, Camberwell; 14 and 21, Hall of Science.

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. 8d.; 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.

J. ROWNEY.—Thanks for papers and cuttings. What Woffendale prints about Mr. Wheeler is so disgusting, as well as false and silly, that we resolve never again to mention the man or his paper. William Richards is as much "an old, tried and proved friend" of Mr. Wheeler's as Z. B. Woffendale is a gentleman.

INQUIRER.—The poor man is an inveterate boaster. He oracularly refers us to the Life of Locke in the "English Men of Letters" series, not knowing that *the Life of Locke* has lately come from the pen of Professor Fraser. We decline to notice him any further, until he musters courage for a public debate, when he may receive enough medicine for his malady. So far from regarding Christ as a mere man, as their Trinitarian adversaries declare, the Socinians assert that he was born of the Virgin Mary by the operation of the Holy Spirit; that he was caught up to heaven and endowed with a portion of the divine energy and a full knowledge of God's will; that he was raised from the dead, and given power over all things but God himself; that all who do not obey him will be damned; and that he is to be worshipped. Faustus Socinus denounced Francis Davidis for denying that Christ should be worshipped. The continental Socinians declared that the English Unitarians were not Christians at all. When Simon Budnæus taught that Christ was not to be prayed to, and that he was born, not by an operation of the Holy Spirit, but in the ordinary way, he was deposed from the ministry and excommunicated, and only restored to the Socinian communion on abjuring his "heresy."

E. SMEDLEY.—The reference to the Jesus who cried Woe to Jerusalem, is found in Josephus's *Wars of the Jews*, book vi., chap. 5. On this matter see Solomon's *Jesus of History*. You had better procure Greg's *Creed of Christendom* from a library. Our *Bible Handbook* and *Bible Romances* should be of service.

S. B. SYKES.—(1) Our Reminiscences of Charles Bradlaugh will be published, after revision and some amplification, in a separate form. (2) Herbert Spencer has written against gambling in one of his Essays; for the moment we forget which. (3) Giles's *Christian Records*, though the author was a clergyman, is a good, honest book. *Supernatural Religion*, in three vols., is more elaborate and thorough, but expensive. (4) It is no "trouble" to answer such questions.

W. HOLLAND.—Yes, it will be the best route. Perhaps Belfast is less bigoted than it was. Anyhow, it is to be hoped Mr. Foote will survive the visit.

H. J. SUTTON.—See answer to Inquirer.

J. COLLINSON.—Castelar's book on Byron has been translated into English. If you read it you will be able to judge for yourself as to his intellectual position. We fancy there must have been some personal motive in his attack on Charles Bradlaugh. The Reminiscences will be printed shortly.

R. O. SMITH, hon. treasurer London Secular Federation, acknowledges £2 from D. Colville.

E. W. OSBORN.—A paragraph was already in type.

J. P. G.—Thanks, but the matter had better be dealt with locally.

H. R. CLIFTON.—Cuttings always welcome. Dr. A. J. Harrison is a candid-minded gentleman.

P. W. B.—Shall appear.

W. T. LEBKEY.—We are obliged.

J. F. SILKSTONE.—Mr. Bradlaugh thought a coroner had no power to compel the attendance in court of any one but a

witness when the jury was once sworn. But the question has never been raised in a practical form. Of course the difficulty is as to the exact nature of the incident, and the insulted jurymen must be very careful to say nothing that might be construed into an insult to the coroner. The jurymen should ask respectfully, "In what capacity do you want me to remain?" If no satisfactory answer is given, and he quietly walks away, his being stopped would afford ground for a legal decision in a higher court.

S. SODDY.—It is hardly a matter we can go into.

S. HARTMANN.—We do not know whether the jurymen is a member of the N. S. S. Nothing can be done unless he communicates with Mr. Foote.

G. VINCOMBE.—Mr. Wheeler thanks you for the interesting note.

T. SHORE.—Hunt's epigram is pretty good, but hardly caustic enough for Stead.

G. BATE.—Shall have attention.

R. KILLICK.—Thanks; it will be useful.

A. CLARK.—Old birds are not caught with chaff.

W. SOWDON, 61 Nascott-street, Watford, sells this journal and other Secular publications.

G. F. DUPLEX.—We agree with your remarks on the Prince Napoleon affair. The 10s. 6d. will be acknowledged next week by Mr. Reynolds.

A. HOOK.—Butler's *Analogy* is not an argument against present-day scepticism, but against the Deism of last century. He argues that there are as many difficulties in Theism as in the Bible, and that natural and revealed religion practically stand or fall together. As we admit this, we have no occasion to answer Butler. That is a task for Deists.

LONDON SECULAR FEDERATION.—We have received 10s. from H. M. Ridgway.

H. M. RIDGWAY.—The Benevolent Fund is administered by a sub-committee of the N. S. S. Every application is investigated, the committee charge no expenses on the fund, and secrecy is observed.—When we can afford it, and can find a good artist, we shall give an occasional illustration.

BRADLAUGH MEMORIAL FUND.—£15 from X. arrives as we are going to press. Mr. Forder's list is too late for insertion.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Fritankaren—Liberty—Freethought—Ironclad Age—Menschentum—Echo—Neues Frereligioses Sonntags-Blatt—Freidenker—The Liberator—Der Arme Teufel—Secular Thought—Boston Investigator—Western Figaro—La Vérité Philosophique—Progressive Thinker—Flaming Sword—Loyal American—Two Worlds—Star—Stratford Herald—Shields Daily News—Arkansas Traveller—Le Matin—La Lanterne—Le XIX. Siècle—L'Epoque—Le Radical—Open Court—Leeds Daily News—Hull Critic—Twentieth Century—National Press—Fabian News—Newcastle Daily Leader—Spennymoor Chronicle—Manchester Guardian—Church Reformer—Glasgow Evening Citizen—Glasgow Herald—Daily News—New York Herald—Eastern Argus—Liverpool Courier.

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.

SPECIAL.

FROM a report in the newspapers I see that a jurymen named Robinson, who desired to affirm at an inquest at Kennington, was grossly insulted by the coroner, and ordered to sit in court apart from the jury. If Mr. Robinson will send me, in writing, full particulars of the incident, I will try to have a question put in the House of Commons. The coroner acted with insolence and illegality. Under Mr. Bradlaugh's Act jurymen have a right to affirm, on stating that they have no religious belief or that the taking of an oath is against their religious belief. The National Secular Society's Almanack contains special instructions on "The Right to Affirm" drawn up by Mr. Bradlaugh, and Freethinkers should carefully act upon those instructions if they want the Act to be a reality.
 G. W. FOOTE.

SUGAR PLUMS.

South London friends who would like to hear Mr. Foote's "Oration on Charles Bradlaugh" will have an opportunity of doing so this evening (April 12) at the Camberwell Secular Hall. The subject is one of interest to outsiders, and Freethinkers would do well to bring as many as possible of their orthodox friends.

Applications for shares in the Bradlaugh Memorial Hall Co., Limited, may now be forwarded to Mr. Forder. The

memorandum of association is now signed, and the Company registered with a capital of £10,000, the shares being one pound each. One shilling per share must be paid on application and one shilling on allotment. We hope that the British Freethinkers will raise a durable monument to the memory of Charles Bradlaugh—a noble Hall and Institute where his principles may be propagated and carried out, and the work of his life continued after his death.

The Rev. George Walters, Unitarian minister, of Sydney, N.S.W., gave an eloquent sermon upon Mr. Bradlaugh, in which he said that "heaven was now the richer for the presence of a brave man's soul." Upon this Joseph Symes says: "If Bradlaugh has gone to heaven, he has gone in on his own terms, as he did into the House of Commons; and the people there will wheel round to his views."

Friends in Belfast, North Shields, and South Shields, have arranged to have the *Freethinker* contents-sheet displayed weekly by a local bill-poster. The names and addresses of local newsagents who supply the paper are printed at the bottom. If friends in other towns will undertake to get contents-sheets posted in this way, we shall be happy to forward them a supply.

Editorially it is a sacrifice of space to print the National Secular Society's principles and objects, with the form of application, in our columns. But it is a good thing for the N. S. S. A considerable number of new members have been obtained in this way.

Mr. James Rowney opened the outdoor campaign in Finsbury Park on Sunday. There was a good audience, which stuck to the platform despite the occasional rain.

Mr. Næwiger keeps the ball rolling on the subject of religious instruction in the *Hull Critic*, a lively little paper which seems ever ready to accord fair play.

The annual balance-sheet of the Glasgow Branch shows £25 7s. 9½d. in the treasurer's hands. The report shows a substantial increase in the membership, a large proportion of the accession consisting of young men.

The Rev. R. W. Dale contributes to the *Contemporary Review* a sympathetic account of the late Constance Naden, whose Freethought views he touches on but slightly, drawing attention mainly to her as a poetess.

The *Contemporary* also has an excellent paper by P. G. Hammerton, entitled "A Basis of Positive Morality." The writer shows that a religious basis is inefficacious. Morality with the religious, is never so strong a bond of fellowship as ritual. He holds that "To accept the idea that morality is relative instead of positive, and that it changes with different social states, is not to abandon morality. On the contrary, it encourages the hope that a better social state than ours may evolve a higher morality than that which is now practised."

We trust the report in the *Boston Investigator* that Mr. G. E. Macdonald will have to retire from the editorial conduct of *Freethought* through ill health is incorrect. Mr. Putnam will find it difficult to procure so versatile an assistant and impossible to prevent his lively "Observations" being misread by his readers.

A debate on the Bible, between David Kirkwood and the Rev. Mr. Sheehy, packed the Investigator Hall, Boston, in every part. Mr. Kirkwood affirmed that "The Bible is not the Word of God, and is opposed to human progress." His reverend opponent refused to defend orthodox Christianity, and declared "he would prefer a dreamless sleep for all who lived on earth rather than accept the doctrine of an endless hell." The debate is to be renewed at some future date.

Miss Ada Campbell, the Australian lectress, is now lecturing with acceptance at Philadelphia.

We receive from Barre, Massachusetts, No. 2 of a new Freethought journal, entitled *The Moralists*. It is a monthly, devoted to the interests of the Brotherhood of Moralists, at the price of one dollar per year. Ella E. Gibson, a pronounced Freethinker, is the editor, and the publication is a very creditable one. The Brotherhood of Moralists is a

society organised at Hannibal, Missouri, three years ago, and has now a membership of over a thousand, scattered throughout the United States. It opposes all priestcraft and superstition.

The *National Press*, the new organ of the anti-Parnellites party, prints a long extract from a recent *Freethinker* article on "Parnell and the Priests," which it says "contains some most truthful and pregnant observations on the consequences of the present policy" of the Parnellites. That is, the *National Press* recognises that Parnell is fighting the priests, and that the struggle may lead many an Irishman to Freethought.

The *National Press* quotes the *Freethinker* passage to damage the Parnellites, thus showing that it relies on the power of the priests and the bigotry of Irish Catholics, which proves the truth of our contributor's contention.

In Denmark there is a movement in favor of separating Church and State, and a bill has been brought forward by the Radicals in the Folkething, or House of Commons, to permit lay persons to speak at funerals. Progress moves slowly in Scandinavia, but still it moves.

The Ecclesiastical Committee of the Lichfield Diocesan Conference has to deplore that Church marriages are on the decline, while those with civil ceremony only before the registrar are on the increase. The committee confess two reasons; marriages before registrars are more private and cheaper. But there is a third reason they take no notice of, yet which operates with self-respecting women. There are no vows to "love, honor, and obey."

The *English Illustrated Magazine* for April has an excellent portrait of William James Linton, the well-known engraver, author of the *Life of Paine* and editor of *The English Republic*. Though his life has been chiefly devoted to his art, W. J. Linton in his young days wrote some very pronounced Freethought pieces.

The Workers' Co-operative (Productive) Association, Limited, (Bakers' Section), issues a stirring appeal to the "Workers of London." It is proposed to establish co-operative bakeries in the metropolis, in which the workers will own the capital and reap the profits. But outside support will be needed at first. Five shilling shares are offered, bearing no interest, to be repaid out of first profits. Mr. F. Gilles, the hon. sec., 64 Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus, will be happy to hear from any friend of labor willing to aid the experiment.

LONDON SECLULAR FEDERATION.

COUNCIL MEETING held at Hall of Science on Thursday, April 2, the President, Mr. G. W. Foote, in the chair. Present: Messrs. G. Standing, J. M. Wheeler (Vice-Presidents), R. O. Smith (Treasurer), Baker, Baxter, Brown, Colville, Enderby, Heath, Hooper, Lupton, Renn, Rowden, Rutland, Thomas, Turner, and Miss E. M. Vance. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed. The Secretary announced the affiliation of the Lambeth Branch, and reported as to Battersea and Stratford courses of free lectures. At the request of the Council, Miss Vance undertook to conduct the work at Midland Arches during the summer. The President announced the grant of a sum of money by the Executive of the N. S. S. in aid of open-air propaganda. The Treasurer made a statement as to the financial position of the Federation, and some discussion took place as to subscriptions and collections by the Branches. After some business details had been considered, the matter of the Summer Excursion was discussed, and the Secretary was instructed to make inquiries thereupon, and report at next meeting. The lecture list for May was ordered to be printed, and the Council adjourned.—EDWARD POWNCEBY, sec.

[Branches requiring a further supply of lecture lists, please notify.]

"My boy," said the good deacon reprovingly, "do you know where little boys go who go fishing on Sunday?" "Well, most on 'em goes to de lake. Dat's de best place."

INGERSOLL AND WHITMAN ON DEATH.

(From the New York "World.")

AROUND the table in the dining-room of the Lafayette Hotel, Philadelphia, Walt Whitman, the aged poet, and Colonel Robert Ingersoll, discussed religion and death.

The clock struck midnight while they were talking.

It was Tuesday night, after Colonel Ingersoll's address in the Horticultural Hall for the benefit of Whitman.

With a deal of care and tenderness the crippled poet, who cannot stand upright, and who must be handled as carefully as the daintiest glass, was removed from the platform of the hall back to the hotel.

He was put into his invalid-chair on descending at the hotel and rolled through the long corridor to the dining-room, where he was to partake of some light refreshment.

A dozen of the poet's friends, who heard that Colonel Ingersoll was to chat with him while he ate, accompanied him to the dining-room. As the little procession followed the chair through the corridor it had a funeral look. The old poet, suffering from the reaction after the excitement of the ovation he had received at the hall, looked thirty years older than his seventy-one years. Some said he was the oldest looking man they had ever seen. He realised one's idea of the Old Man of the Sea—long, white beard "breaking in venerable flood upon his breast," unkempt locks as white as snow tumbling over ear and temple, and half-dimmed, mild eyes looking out beneath frosty eaves, hands thin and trembling as they lay upon the arms of the chair.

In the dining-room Walt was drawn up to a table whereon was placed a glass of champagne. Into this, during the evening, the poet dipped pieces of bread, which he munched with difficulty.

Colonel Ingersoll sat beside him in a light overcoat, his high silk hat lay aside. Walt's broad-brimmed felt partially covered his long hair. The Colonel had a glass of apollinaris before him.

The conversation was fragmentary for half an hour. The large dining-room was half dark except where, here and there, a late diner was seated.

Suddenly Walt's right hand fluttered feebly into his right pocket, and he drew forth a crumpled, well-worn piece of paper. He opened the sheet, and a look of surprise lighted up his pallid face.

"I found this in my coat," he said. "I don't often put on this coat. This poem is a translation of mine from the French of Henri Murger. I'll read it you."

This he said with difficulty and much hesitation. All through the evening he seemed to be making an effort to pull his great mental forces together. The sight was sad.

Raising his voice he began to read in a childish treble. The scattered diners left their seats and flocked about the long table at the head of which sat the two gray-haired men.

The room was dark, save where one chandelier threw a patch of light upon the reader's yellow paper.

The waiters in their white aprons flitted about on the edge of the listening group like semi-ghosts.

The words whistled through the poet's thick beard as they came in aspirate puffs from his thin lips. Several ladies looked round at the darkness, and, shivering, moved up closer to the patch of light. Here are the lines he read:—

THE MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

Whose steps are those? Who comes so late?

Let me come in, the door unlock.

'Tis midnight now; my lonely gate

I open to no stranger's knock.

Who art thou? Speak? Men call me Fame;

To immortality I lead.

Pass, idle phantom of a name.

Listen again, and now take heed;

'Twas false. My names are Song, Love, Art.

My poet, now unbar the door.

Art's dead, Song cannot touch my heart,

My once love's name I chant no more.

Open then now, for, see, I stand,

Riches my name, with endless gold,

Gold, and your wish in either hand.

Too late—my youth you still withhold.

Then if it must be, since the door

Stands shut, my last true name to know,

Men call me death. Delay no more;

I bring the cure of every woe.

The door flies wide. Ah, guest so wan,
Forgive the poor place where I dwell;
An ice cold hearth, a hearth-sick man,
Stand here to welcome thee full well.

Not a sound had disturbed the reading. When he had finished, Whitman looked up at Ingersoll, who had never taken his eyes off the old man, and said, with a cracking inflection—"Isn't that funny?"

Ingersoll shrugged his shoulders, drew his head down, and said slowly—"I don't think there is anything funny about death. It's so sort of cold, so white. I don't like it."

Walt nodded his head slowly. There was a pause, as if he were trying to make a connection between death and what he was about to say. At last he said: "I believe religion has done more good to the world than harm."

This unchained the dialogue that followed. Ingersoll, who addressed the group more than the poet, quickly replied:

"It might have done so had it only stuck to the good. It didn't; it taught what was mean and cruel. It puts me in mind of my visit to a church when I was a boy. It was a Presbyterian church, and the preacher was in a high box over my head. I fell asleep, and at last rolled off the seat, which awoke me. I awoke just in time to hear the preacher tell the story of Dives and Lazarus. He dwelt on every detail with vividness. I was filled with an awful fear as I heard him speak."

Ingersoll's facial play here was superb. Expressing his fear, his eye gradually widened, and he half rose, peering into the darkness.

"I can remember," he went on, "how I looked up at the pulpit with an ever-growing fear as the preacher told of how Dives suffered the tortures of hell, and he was mocked with the cry that he had his good things in this world and must suffer in the next. I hated that God then, and when I came to be a man and realised that in the two thousand years God had never sent Lazarus out of Abraham's bosom to put a drop of water on Dives' tongue—bah! If religion had kept to the good for this life, it might have done much less harm."

Whitman: "Sometimes it is better to soar."

Ingersoll: "No, the reason why I like you, Walt, is that you have written for people here and now."

Whitman (raising his bony hand in air): "I think I have soared in the clouds a great deal, and —"

Ingersoll (interrupting): "Yes, but you have taken lots of dirt with you."

This sally brought a burst of laughter from the group.

Walt only raised his bushy brows and shook his head. He saw he could not make front against a man whose repartee came like flashes.

Ingersoll: "My grandfather was a sort of man who believed all the world would be damned except himself. He was sorry for it, but couldn't help it. My grandmother thought all would be saved except herself, and—(here Ingersoll half rose from his chair and extended his hand aloft)—she was as much above the man as the stars are above a duck's tracks in the mud."

Whitman: "Do you believe in all I have written?"

Ingersoll: "No; far from it. Much you have written I do not believe in, but you have made men and women stronger, and I like you for it. There is only one thing I have against you, Walt."

Ingersoll took hold of the old man's sleeve. Those who had heard Ingersoll say in his lecture that "the most indecent word in our language is celibacy," half expected what followed.

"I have only one thing against you, and that is that you didn't marry. You ought to have got a girl, Walt."

The old poet looked at him puzzled, as if he had long since forgotten the meaning of the word girl.

"The religion I bow to," went on Ingersoll, "is the one that teaches men to love their wives more tenderly, to hold their children on their knees a little tighter. As to worship and prayer, if I saw a savage kneel before a stuffed snake praying that wife or child might be given back to him, I would kneel and pray with him, but that cruel God in heaven I cannot pray to, I hate him."

The old poet's bread had absorbed all the champagne, and he began to look fatigued. The party gathered around him to say good-bye, probably the last one. Tears were in the eyes of some as they watched the poet utter his feeble good-bye.

When Ingersoll's turn came to go, he tapped Walt's hand and said, cheerfully: "I hope you'll live many a year yet."

To this Walt replied: "You might wish me something better than that."

PAINE'S FIRST ESSAY.

MR. MONCURE D. CONWAY, who has been devoting considerable time to his forthcoming *Life of Thomas Paine* (now almost ready for the press), has made a little discovery of some significance. Early in the century Dr. Benjamin Rush mentioned that he had been first drawn to Paine by having read an essay on slavery, which Paine told him was "the first thing he had ever published in his life." Some have declared this inconsistent with Paine's having written in 1772 "The Case of the Officers of Excise." That, however, though printed as an official document, was not published until 1793. As this essay on slavery could not be found in the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, which Paine edited in 1775, it was thought that Dr. Rush may have been mistaken. But it occurred to Mr. Conway to search the file of the *Pennsylvania Journal*, where he found the essay in a "postscript" to the paper of March 8, 1775. Mr. Conway, in an account of his discovery which he sends to the *Manchester Guardian*, says: "It bears intrinsic signs of having been written before the tea riots which closed the year 1774, and of thus being the first thing Paine ever offered for publication." Probably the editor thought it inopportune during the excitement over the tea in Boston Harbor.

The essay, which was signed "Justice and Humanity," was a denunciation of the slave trade and a plea to Americans to consider "with what consistency or decency they complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many thousands in slavery, and annually enslave many thousands more, without any pretence of authority or claim upon them." Mr. Conway says Paine writes as a Christian and combats the scriptural defence as slavery. Upon which we take leave to remark that, although his purpose would have rendered it inadvisable to draw odium upon himself as an infidel, there is little doubt that Paine had at that time relinquished orthodox Christianity. He tells us himself in his *Age of Reason* that doubts on the Atonement began in childhood, and John Adams tells how, in the stirring year of 1776, he rallied Paine upon his having argued that monarchy was opposed to the Old Testament. "'Do you seriously believe, Paine,' said I, 'in that pious doctrine of yours?' This put him in good humor, and he laughed out. 'The Old Testament,' said he: 'I do not believe in the Old Testament. I have had thoughts of publishing my sentiments of it, but upon deliberation, I have concluded to put that off till the latter part of life.'"

The essay is important as showing that Paine was the first to propose a plan for negro emancipation, which, with his usual practical sagacity, he suggested. It is, moreover, of interest as supporting the thesis long advocated by Mr. W. H. Burr, that Paine had a considerable hand in drawing up the American "Declaration of Independence." In the original draft of that famous document there was a vehement protest against slavery, which was struck out, Jefferson tells us, "in complaisance to South Carolina and Georgia"; the northern carriers of slaves also feeling "a little tender under these censures." As Mr. Conway shows, the sentiment and almost the phraseology of Paine's essay is the same as that of the clauses eliminated from the Declaration of Independence. At the time when this was drawn up, Paine again pleaded, "Forget Not the Hapless African"; and in his essay he prophesied what proved correct in the days of Lincoln—that the slaves would prove a trouble to their masters when "any enemy promises them a better condition." Lincoln offered them a better condition, and broke the Southern Confederacy. As in France the Freethinker Condorcet led the way in advocating the claims of the slaves, so in America the Freethinker Paine was not

only the first to propose American independence, but also the first to advocate the abolition of slavery.

J. M. WHEELER.

THE LATE WILLIAM JOHN BIRCH.

ONE of the most generous and enlightened of the supporters of the Freethought movement has passed away in the person of William John Birch, Esq., M.A., who died at Florence on April 4, aged eighty years and three months. Mr. Birch had the advantage of being educated at Oxford, where he graduated with honor. He became a barrister-at-law, but was never under the necessity of practising for a livelihood. For about half a century his interest in progressive movements has been unceasing. During the prosecution of the *Oracle of Reason* Mr. Birch came forward to support the Anti-Persecution Union. Through his liberality the *Library of Reason* was brought out. The *Reasoner* and the publications of the Fleet-street house, under Mr. Holyoake, were also aided by his ever-generous assistance. In 1848 he published *An Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of Shakespeare*, in which he contends that our greatest dramatist was a sceptic, and upholds this position by an examination of each of the plays. *An Inquiry into the Philosophy and Religion of the Bible* (1856) is a shorter and less known work. Mr. Birch was a constant contributor to Freethought objects, both with pen and with purse, and his initials may be traced through all our literature. A friend of Mr. Thomas Scott, he aided that gentleman in his efforts to propagate Freethought among the cultured classes. Mr. Birch was himself a highly-cultured gentleman of distinguished appearance and benevolent disposition. His whole life had been devoted to study. He was one of the best-read men I have ever met, and had a capital library, ever at the service of his friends. He was especially at home in the department of mythology and early Christianity, having, I think, mastered every book of value on these topics in English, French or Italian. He held the view that the Jesus Christ of the Gospels never existed. On these subjects he has left many manuscripts, in my possession. For many years past he has resided during the winter at Florence, where he was much esteemed, having aided the Italians in their efforts for national unity and freedom in the days of Garibaldi and Mazzini. He was a member of the Italian Asiatic Society, and a friend of de Gubernatis and other distinguished literary men of Florence. He was a vice-president of the National Secular Society, which in him has lost one of its best friends.

J. M. W.

OBITUARY.

Died at his home, near Springfield, Illinois, on March 17, William H. Herndon, aged seventy-two. Mr. Herndon was for many years the law-partner of Abraham Lincoln, and it was not until the latter became President of the United States that their business relations were severed. Mr. Herndon was a contributor to the New York *Truthseeker*, and wrote a *Life of Lincoln*, in which he showed that those were laboring under a delusion who thought the great President was a Christian.

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PROFANE JOKES.

Ethel: "Do you think there will be marriages in heaven?"
Maud: "For your sake I trust so, dear. Eternity may furnish you the opportunity which time refuses."

Beggar (after knocking at door): "Please give me a bit of bread, sir, I haven't had anything to eat for three days."
Old Gentleman: "Here's a piece for you, my poor fellow. I don't give it to you for your sake, nor mine, but for God's sake."
Beggar: "Then for Christ's sake give us a bit of cheese."

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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.

- Ball's Pond Secular Hall, 36 Newington Green Road, N.: 7, Mr. J. B. Coppock, F.C.S., "Why the Sea is Salt." Members' quarterly meeting after the lecture.
- Battersea Secular Hall (back of Battersea Park Station): 7.30, Mr. W. Heaford, "Booth and his Book; or Salvation on Earth." Monday, at 8, social gathering. Wednesday, at 8, dramatic class.
- Bethnal Green Branch N. S. S.—"The Monarch" Coffee House, 166 Bethnal Green Road, E.: 7.30, Mr. C. Johnson, "The Bible Unworthy of God, Unsuitable to Man." Admission free, discussion challenged.
- Camberwell—61 New Church Road, S.E.: 7.30, Mr. G. W. Foote, "An Oration on Charles Bradlaugh."
- East London—Swaby's Coffee House, 103 Mile End Road: 8, Mr. W. J. Ramsey, "The Kingdom of Heaven."
- Hall of Science, 142 Old Street, E.C.: 7, Mr. Touzeau Parris, "What is Truth?"
- Hammersmith—Hammersmith Club, Grove House, 1 The Grove, Broadway: Thursday, at 8, Dr. Alice Vickery, "The Population Question."
- Leyton—Mr. Beadle's, 10 Daisey Villas, Manor Road: 7, Mr. W. Jenkinson, "Ghosts."
- Milton Hall, Kentish Town Road, N.W.: 7, Orchestral Band; Dr. T. R. Allinson, "A Lesson in Anatomy." Monday, at 8.30, social meeting. Tuesday, at 8, singing and dramatic classes (practice).
- West Ham—Secular Hall, 121 Broadway, Plaistow: 10.30, members' quarterly meeting; 6, tea and social gathering (tickets 9d. each). Thursday, at 8, open debate.
- West London—8 Norland Road North: Monday, at 8, Mutual Improvement Class, Mr. J. M. Wheeler, "The Authenticity and Credibility of the Gospels."
- Woolwich—"Sussex Arms," Assembly Room, 60 Plumstead Road (entrance, Maxey Road): 7.30, Mrs. Thornton Smith will lecture. Friday, April 10, at 8, in the Co-operative Hall, Powis Street, Mr. G. W. Foote, "An Oration on Charles Bradlaugh."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

- Battersea Park Gates: 11.15, Mr. A. B. Moss, "Ancient Saints and Modern Sinners."
- Bethnal Green—Opposite St. John's Church: 11.15, Mr. H. Snell, "Why Fear Death, and After?"
- Camberwell—Station Road: 11.30, Mr. George Standing, "Why I became a Secularist."
- Edmonton—Corner of Angel Road: 3.30, Mr. J. Fagan, "The Apostles' Creed."
- Finsbury Park (near the band-stand): 11.30, Mr. J. Rowney, "The Jews' March out of Egypt"; 3.30, Mr. H. Snell, "From Creeds and Priests, Good Lord Deliver Us."
- Hammersmith Bridge (Middlesex side): 6.30, Mr. J. Rowney, "Bible Criticism."
- Hyde Park, near Marble Arch: 11.30, Mr. F. Haslam, "Who was Jesus and what did he Teach?"
- Kilburn—Salisbury Road (close to Queen's Park Station): 6.30, Mr. E. Calvert, "Religion and Secularism Contrasted."
- Mile End Waste: 11.30, a lecture.
- Old Pimlico Pier: 11.30, Mr. S. Soddy, "Christianity in the Middle Ages."
- Tottenham—Corner of West Green Road: 3.30, Mr. Sam Standing, "Are any but Roman Catholics Christians?"
- Victoria Park, near the fountain: 3.30, Mr. W. Heaford, "God's Truth."
- Wood Green—Jolly Butcher's Hill: 11.30, Mr. Lucretius Keen, "Samuel Kelly and his God."

COUNTRY.

- Belfast—St. Anne's Hall, Donegall Street (opposite Turkish Baths): Saturday, April 13, at 8, Mr. G. W. Foote, "Oration on Charles Bradlaugh."
- Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge Street: 7, Mr. R. S. Bransby, "Mr. Gladstone's Apology for the Bible."
- Chatham—"Old George Inn," Globe Lane: 6.30, Mr. A. E. Rowcroft, "Home Rule or Local Self-Government."
- Glasgow—Albion Hall, College Street: 12 noon, debating class, Mr. J. Forrester, "Human Anatomy" (with practical demonstrations); 6.30, Mr. J. Robertson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on the Rights of Women."
- Heckmondwike—At Mr. John Rothera's, Bottoms: 2.30, a meeting.
- Leeds—Crampton's Temperance Hotel, Briggate: 7, members meeting.
- Liverpool—Camden Hall, Camden Street: 3, discussion class, Mr. Rowbotham, "Eternal Torment as Taught by Christ"; 7, Mr. Harry Smith, "God Winked."
- Manchester N. S. S., Secular Hall, Rusholme Road, Oxford Road, All Saints': 6.30, Mr. Ernest Evans, "The Heroes of Science."
- Newcastle-on-Tyne Branch N. S. S.—4 Hall's Court, Newgate Street: 3, fortnightly financial meeting.
- Nottingham—Secular Hall, Beck Street: 7, debate between Mr. J. Hooper and Mr. W. H. Hofmeyer on "Is the Bible True?"
- Oldham—Hall of Science, Horsedgate Street: Mr. John Grange, 3, "Why I am Not a Christian"; 6.30, "Does man Survive Death?"
- Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington Street, Southsea: 3, debating class, Mr. G. Hore, "The Ethics of the Parnell Case"; 7, A Friend, "Thoughts on Republicanism."
- Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham Street: 3, quarterly and, subsequently, special meeting of members; 7, musical and other recitals, singing, etc.
- South Shields—Capt. Duncan's Navigation School, King Street: 7, business meeting.
- Spennymoor—Victoria Hall, Dundas Street: Mr. C. J. Hunt, 11, "History of Priestcraft"; 3, "Freewill and Responsibility"; 7, "Christ—God, Man, or Myth?"
- Sunderland—Albert Rooms, Coronation Street: 7, Mr. A. J. Lovell, a reading.

LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

- ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon Road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.—April 12, morning, Battersea; 26, evening, Hall of Science. May 3, morning, Clerkenwell; 10, morning, Bethnal Green; afternoon, Victoria Park; 17, morning, Westminster; 24, morning, Kingsland; afternoon, Victoria Park; 31, morning, Battersea; June 7, morning, Clerkenwell; afternoon, Victoria Park: 14, morning, Woolwich.
- C. J. HUNT, 48 Fordingley Road, St. Peter's Park, London, W.—April 12, Spennymoor; 19, morning, Mile End; 26, morning, Hyde Park; afternoon, Finsbury Park; evening, Woolwich. May 3, morning, Kingsland Green; afternoon, Regent's Park; 10, morning, Pimlico; evening, Kilburn; 17, morning, Clerkenwell; evening, Battersea; 24, morning, Hyde Park; evening, Hammersmith; 31, morning, Camberwell; evening, Lambeth.
- H. SMITH, 3 Breck Place, Breck Road, Everton Road, Liverpool.—April 12, Liverpool.
- STANLEY JONES, 3 Letra Street, City Road, Liverpool.—April 19, Liverpool. May 10, Manchester. Sept. 6, Liverpool.

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