

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

[Sub-Editor, J. M. WHEELER.]

Vol. XI.—No. 22.]

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 1891.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

A REAL MIRACLE.

It is a common belief among Protestants, though not among Catholics, that the age of miracles is past. For a long time it has been very difficult to find a real case of special providence. There are stories afloat of wonderful faith-cures, and the followers of John Wesley, as well as the followers of William Booth, often shake their heads mysteriously, and affect to trace the hand of God in certain episodes of their experience. But such cases are too personal, and too subjective, to challenge criticism or inquiry. Investigating them is like exploring a cloud. There is nothing tangible for the mind to seize, nothing to stand by as the basis of discussion. What is wanted is a real objective miracle, a positive *fact*. Happily such a miracle has come to the aid of a distressed Christianity; it is worth tons of learned apologetics, and will give "the dying creed" a fresh lease of life.

Unfortunately the world at large is in gross ignorance of this astonishing event. Like the earthquake, the eclipse, and the wholesale resurrection of saints at the crucifixion of Christ, it has excited very little public attention. But this dense apathy, or Satanic conspiracy of silence, must not be allowed to hide a precious truth. We therefore do our best to give it publicity, although in doing so we are blasting our own foundations; for we belong to a party which boasts that it seeks for truth, and we are ready to exclaim, "Let truth prevail though the heavens fall."

Most of our readers will remember the late accident on the Brighton line at Norwood. A bridge collapsed, and only the driver's presence of mind averted a great loss of life. Of course the driver did his obvious duty, and presence of mind is not uncommon enough to be miraculous. But that does not exhaust the matter. The driver (Hargraves) is perfectly sure he received divine assistance. He is a man of pious habits. He never leaves his house without kneeling down with his wife and imploring God's protection. He never steps on the engine without breathing another prayer. On the morning of the accident his piety was in a state of unusual excitation. He begged his wife to "pray all that day"—which we presume she did, with intervals for refreshment; and he knelt down himself in the passage before opening his front door. When the accident happened he put the brake on and cried "Lord, save us," and according to the *Christian World* "it has since been stated by expert engineers that no train was ever before pulled up in such a short distance."

A carping critic might presume to ask the names and addresses of these "expert engineers." He might also have the temerity to inquire the precise distance in which the train was pulled up, the shortest distance in which other trains have been pulled up, and the weight and velocity of the train in each case. He might also meanly suggest that putting on the brake left as little as possible to Providence. For our part, however, we will not pursue such hyper-criticism. It is applying to a miracle a test which it

is not fitted to stand. Something must be left to faith, something must be reserved from reason, or the stoutest miracle would soon fall into a galloping consumption. The man in whom a pious disposition counteracts the restless play of thought, will not demand absolute proof; he will only require an encouraging amount of evidence; and he will dutifully lift his face and hands to heaven, exclaiming, "Lord I believe, help thou mine unbelief."

The line we shall follow is a different one. Without questioning the miracle, we venture to ask why it was not more complete. Lives were saved, but several persons were injured. Was this due to the fact that Hargraves' prayer was not sufficiently above proof? Did the Lord answer the prayer according to its insensibility? Was there a sceptic in the train who partially neutralised its effect? Or did the Lord proceed on the method favored by priests, preventing the miracle from being too obvious, but giving the incident a slightly supernatural appearance, in order to confirm the faith of believers without convincing the callous sceptics, whose deep sin of incredulity places them beyond "the means of grace and the hope of glory?"

Nor are these questions exhaustive. Very much remains to be said. It appears that the Norwood bridge collapsed through a secret flaw in the iron-work. Could not the Lord, therefore, in answer to Hargraves' prayers—which surely extended to the interests of his employers—have inspired one of the Company's engineers with the notion of some unsoundness in the structure? This would have saved a good deal of property, and many passengers from suffering a shock whose effects may haunt them for years, and perhaps send them to untimely graves? Might not the Lord have cleared the roadway below, knocked down the bridge in the night, and brought some one to see the collapse who could have carried the tidings to the signalmen? Certainly there seems a remarkable want of subtlety in the ways of Providence. It looks as though the Deity heard a prayer now and then, and jerked out a bit of miracle in a more or less promiscuous manner.

What has happened to Providence since the Bible days? Miracles then were clear, convincing, and artistically rounded. You couldn't possibly mistake them for anything else. Baalam's ass, for instance, was not a performing "moke"; it does not appear to have known a single trick; and when it opened its mouth and talked in good Moabitish, the miracle was certain and triumphant. In the same way, the Norwood miracle might have been unadulterated with the usual operations of nature. The bridge might have collapsed as the train approached, driver Hargraves might have said his prayer, the train might have leapt across the chasm, picked up the connection on the other side, and pursued its way to Brighton as if nothing had happened. But as the case stands, Providence and the safety-brake act together, and it is difficult to decide their shares in the enterprise. Further, the miracle is sadly mixed. Any human being would have

planned it better, and made it stand out clearly and firmly.

This Norwood miracle, however, seems the best obtainable in these days. It is a minute return for all the prayers of the clergy, to say nothing of pious engine-drivers; a miserable dividend on the gigantic investment in supernaturalism. We pity the poor shareholders, though we must congratulate the directors on the large salaries they draw from the business. We also pity poor old Providence, who seems almost played out. Once upon a time he was in fine form; miracles were as common as blackberries; Nature seldom got an innings, and Jehovah was all over the field. But nowadays Nature seems to have got the better of him. She scarcely leaves him a corner for his operations, and what little he does (if he does anything) has to be done in obscurity. Poor old Providence, we fancy, has had his day. His vigor is gone, his lively fancy has degenerated into moping ineptitude, the shouts of millions of worshippers cannot stimulate his sluggishness into any more effective display than this Norwood miracle. Most sincerely we offer him our condolence as the sleeping partner in the business of religion. By and bye we may offer our condolence to the active partners, the priests of all denominations, who still flourish on a prospectus which, if once true, is now clearly fraudulent. When their business dwindles, in consequence of a failing supply of good supernatural articles, they will only live on the price of actual deliveries, and a Norwood miracle will hardly afford six of them a mouthful apiece.

G. W. FOOTE.

BIBLE LIES.

"LIES" is a good, strong Saxon term for wilful and deliberate misrepresentations. Fortunately, the majority of the errors and imperfections of the Bible are not of this description. When we are told of the creation of grass upon the earth before the existence of the sun, this is an error due merely to the ignorance of the narrator. It is true he may be blamed for writing confidently of that whereof he was ignorant, yet it may be contended in his behalf that false conjectures have served as exercises for the mind, and even stimulated the discovery of truth. Nor must we take the many narratives of miracles as entirely the offspring of deception. In a credulous age such stories abound, and pass from mouth to mouth with additions, without any conscious intention of deceiving. Only when, as in the case of Jesus, certain wondrous events are said to have happened, "that the prophecy might be fulfilled," we cannot but suspect that but for the prophecies the miracles might not have been alleged. Had not the Israelites been said to have been fed by manna in the wilderness under Moses, we might not have heard of the miraculous feeding by Jesus. But for the prior story of Elijah restoring the widow's son at Zarephath, should we have heard of the parallel occurrence at Nain? It is difficult to acquit Matthew of deliberately inventing the story of the virgin birth, the slaughter of the innocents and the flight to Egypt, seeing how he attempts to make these events fulfil misapplied prophecies. Yet such stories were part of the myths current about many legendary heroes, and are more properly termed "myths" than falsehoods.

All early history is involved in fable; nor is it always easy to disengage fact from fiction. The wonderful story of Samson—how he took three hundred foxes and tied their tails together, how he slew thousands with the jawbone of an ass, and how his strength lay in his hair—is more properly described as mythical than mendacious. It is possible these were originally stories of a sun-god. But the confines of falsehood are dangerous approached in describing

the enemies of Samson as Philistines—the early inhabitants of Palestine and the hereditary enemies of the Jews. The statements about the abominations of those whom they slaughtered and dispossessed must also be received with caution. The disgusting story of the incest of Lot and his daughters seems merely invented to cast odium on the ancestry of the Moabites and Ammonites.

When we are told that an angel of the Lord slew one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrians in one night (Isaiah xxxvii., 36), we may perhaps credit that this was possibly the Jewish way of describing a pestilence. But when we are told that Abijah and his people slew at once "five hundred thousand chosen men" (2 Chron. xiii., 17), or that twenty-seven thousand were slain by the falling of a wall (1 Kings xx., 30), or that fifty thousand and seventy of the village of Bethshemesh were slain for looking into Jahveh's travelling trunk (1 Sam. vi., 19), what can we call the statements but big, bouncing, bragging lies? The stories of David's immense wealth, of the gold and silver of the temple, and of Solomon's forty thousand stalls of his horses for his chariots (1 Kings iv., 26), are of the same fabulous description.

It was probably the same vaunting spirit which led to the legends of the long lives of the patriarchs and of the wondrous prowess of their heroes, Shamgar slaying six hundred Philistines with an ox-goad, Gideon with three hundred men defeating an army of Midianites "like grasshoppers for multitude," etc.

National vanity gives rise to such exaggerations and perversions of the truth. But we can see in the Bible that caste vanity and selfishness are also at the bottom of many of its stories. The earthquake swallows up Korah, Dathan and Abiram, with their wives, sons, and little children. Why? Because they disputed the authority of Moses and Aaron, from whom the priestly writers derived their authority. Ascribing to the Lord the laws on which they founded their own pretensions to tithes, to the best parts of animals sacrificed, and to special immunities, may, I think, fairly be ascribed to priestly fiction, by which I do not mean that the recorders of the laws were the same persons as their inventors, but only that in their origin they were inventions.

The story how forty-two little children were torn by she-bears, after they insulted the prophet of the Lord, is evidently dictated by the same spirit. I have recently been taken to task by a correspondent for putting it that God destroyed them. This, I think, is the fair inference from the narrative. It tells how, when Elisha went up to Bethel, "there came forth little children out of the city and mocked him." He turned back "and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she-bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them." If this does not mean that the children were torn in consequence of their action and the prophet's curse, it is certainly well calculated to inspire that idea.

Similarly I say that the story of Jesus founding his Church on Peter, and saying to him, "whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," if not a direct invention in the interests of the Church, is certainly well calculated to serve that purpose. If not a lie, it looks like one.

J. M. WHEELER.

PREFERRED TO BE WITH PAPA.

One of the best children's *bon mots* is told by a well-known bookmaker in town. His little daughter was happy amid a parlorful of company when bedtime came, and she rebelled against having to leave. She threw herself on the floor, face down, and kicked and screamed. "Come," said her mother, "be a good little girl, now, and go to bed. Don't you know what mamma has always told you—if you aren't a good little girl you can't go to heaven?" "I don't want to go to heaven," said the child; "I want to go where papa goes."

GODS AND THEIR ORIGIN.

BY J. P. RICHARDSON.

(From the "Independent Pulpit.")

THE great Alvan Clark telescope, mounted at the Lick observatory in California, looks into space to an extent of more millions of miles than the mind can clearly comprehend. It finds new worlds in process of formation; from the first aggregation of matter in the nebula, a little nucleus, obeying the law of all matter, whirling amid the cosmic dust and drawing all particles within its influence, growing as our earth has grown, and destined to go through the same phases that she has experienced. It finds old worlds dying out and going to decay; and it finds worlds in all the processes between these two extremes; but it finds no God, nor any place or room for one. The great white throne vanishes like a dream of the night, and the towers of the New Jerusalem flee away like our "castles in Spain." Nothing is found within the scope of vision through the great instrument, but matter and its properties.

The microscope opens to our sight the wonders of the invisible world, down to its minutest organisation; discovers to us the composition of that life-fluid that supplies the building materials to all organised life, and traces it through the network from arteries to veins, depositing the nutrition it carries, wherever it may be needed to repair the waste caused by expended force, or natural action. It detects the single cell of protoplasm that through chemical action multiplies itself and takes form in an organised and independent being. It searches the rocks and metals, and finds the same law of chemical action prevailing throughout all matter, in the formation of crystals as in the growth of worlds, or the more complex arrangement of fibre in animal life. But with all its revelations it finds no God, or place for him; nor can it find any use or need for such a being in all the economy of nature. It finds matter and its properties, and absolutely nothing else.

"But," asks the theologian, "how can matter exist, unless there was a God to create it; and how can matter have any properties without a God to declare what those properties should be?" In answering these questions I might claim the privilege of the universal Yankee, to answer by asking another, or several questions. How does it account for the existence of matter, which we know exists, to suppose the existence of a being of whom we have no knowledge? How does it solve the mystery of the existence of matter by supposing the existence of a still greater mystery, a being who had no creator? Is it not as easy to believe that matter, with all its properties, is infinite and eternal—self-existing—as it is to believe that it had a maker who was infinite and eternal—self-existing? We readily assume the infinity of time and space, because it is a greater difficulty to believe that either has a beginning point, or an ending. The universe has been described as having its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere. If we could start from the earth with the speed of a cannon ball and travel for a thousand years, we would still be no nearer to the end of the universe than when we started. Old worlds would be going out of sight behind us, and new worlds would be coming into view before us. Thus it is easier for us to believe in infinite extension in space than it is to conceive a stopping place where there should be nothing beyond. So also as to time, which has been said to be the succession of events. It is impossible for us to conceive of a time when events did not follow each other, or when minutes, hours, days and years did not come, one after the other. It is true that these are but artificial measurements of time, but they represent a real succession, and we can conceive of no time, either in the past or in the future, where there is not such a succession. It is reasonable, therefore, to believe that time is infinite and eternal, as is space; and if time and space are infinite and eternal, why not matter, with all its properties? It needs no God to command that lodestone should attract iron; that an acid, in contact with alkali, should produce an effervescence; that combustion should produce heat; that water should freeze in the hemisphere that is turned away from the sun, and that ice should melt in the one that is turned towards it. All of these things happen in consequence of the law of nature; and when we speak of the law of nature, we mean not the command of a being or power, but the manifestation of a force inherent in matter itself, which could

not act otherwise though all the gods that man has ever imagined had commanded the contrary.

Science has demonstrated the universality of matter, and the equal universality of force as a property of matter, a part of matter itself, its very nature and essence—a quality without which it could not be matter. Whenever two particles of matter come together a change takes place, which we call a chemical action, and they take a new form and character through one of the manifestations of this universal force. This union matter and force contains the potency of all the phenomena of nature. Life itself, from the formation of the crystal in the rock, up through the vegetable kingdom, where it expands every leaf and opens every flower, to the more complex organisation of animal life, and finally man, is but the action of this universal force, this all-pervading chemical action. Thought is but a manifestation of the same force, a result of chemical action in the brain. All the forms of electricity, light, heat, motion, as well as thought, are but different forms, different manifestations of this one universal force; and modern science has found out how to convert one into the other. As we have found no room for God in the universe, so we find no need for him in the operations of nature.

"But," again asks the theologian, "does not the almost universal belief in a supreme being prove that somewhere such a being exists?" On the contrary, I answer: it only proves the almost universal prevalence of ignorance. The gods were born of ignorance, and go where you will, in any part of the world, you will find that faith in supernatural beings is in exact proportion to the popular ignorance. It is in the most enlightened countries, where science and art have achieved their highest triumphs, that scepticism most abounds. It is minds like Humboldt, Darwin, Hæckel, Huxley and Tyndall that have entirely thrown off all faith in the supernatural. It was before the dawn of civilisation, that man conceived the notion of gods. When man was but a naked savage, but little above the wild beasts that surrounded him, he saw the operation of forces of whose nature he knew nothing. The movement of the sun, moon and stars; the cataract, the tornado, the earthquake and the volcano attracted his attention and aroused his fears and excited his hope. As far as he could see, they were self-moving and seemed to be actuated by dispositions good or bad, according to their influence upon him and his interests. Fear and hope prompted him to appeal to them by prayers, such as might influence such a being as himself—flattery to secure their good will, and supplication to turn away their wrath. Then came cunning men who pretended to be favorites of these superior powers and to be able to influence them. Men, in their ignorance and fear, were ready to give credence to any one who promised to protect, or intercede for them, and thus a priesthood was formed, whose interest it was to prevent men from acquiring a knowledge of the true nature of those powers they so much feared and dreaded. Then a system was formulated and theology became a trade, or profession; priests monopolised all knowledge and cursed all outsiders who attempted to learn anything beyond what they chose to teach. It was the tree of knowledge, you know, that was forbidden to Adam and Eve, and its fruit is still forbidden to men, as far as priests can make it so.

Behind the veil of the temple, that screened the "holy of holies" from the gaze of the common herd, the priests observed the motions of the heavenly bodies and constructed an astronomical theology which they taught to men by allegory, personifying the powers of nature and representing them as Gods, with the feelings, passions and weaknesses of human beings. The broad expanse of the sky became the All-seeing God, the great All-father, "whose tender mercies were over all his works" literally. The sun that came to dispel the darkness of the night and dissipate the clouds and storms—personified as evil spirits—became the savior of the world. Born on the 25th of December, the time when he commences to rise from his lowest depression in the winter, he calls his twelve disciples, personifying the twelve signs of the zodiac, and begins his work casting out the devils of cold and storm, and bringing light and life to regenerated nature. He starts the sap in the vine, ripens it in the grape and thus literally turns water into wine. He pursues his course through the signs of the zodiac, performing appropriate miracles in each one and finally descends into the grave of winter, after having been crucified on the cross, where his track in the zodiac crosses the equator. But he is bound to rise again and go up in

the heavens to repeat the process of saving the world from the death of cold, storm and arrested vegetation.

But where is the third person in the trinity of Gods, the holy ghost? The very word in its etymology tells us what it is. It signifies nothing but the wind and the word spirit has almost the same significance. If it was pronounced the gust, or the holy gust, it would convey to our ears exactly the meaning it had in the minds of men two thousand years ago, when they supposed "it blew where it listed, and no man knew whence it came or whither it went." We know now all about it, but that does not prevent our priests from talking solemnly about the holy gust.

(To be continued).

THEY WANT INGERSOLL.

THE members of the senior class of the school of law of Cornell University are highly indignant over the recent action of the faculty in vetoing the decision of the class to invite Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll to deliver the annual address before the students of the school of law during commencement week.

Some time ago the faculty asked the members of the senior class to select the lawyer whom they wished to deliver the annual address. A few days later a meeting was called for the purpose of selecting a speaker. The class unanimously voted to invite Colonel Ingersoll, and so reported to the faculty. The decision of the class was at once vetoed by the faculty. Professor Charles A. Collin, Governor Hill's legal adviser, being foremost in opposing the action of the class.

The seniors have hardly recovered from the surprise occasioned by Professor Collin's opposition to Ingersoll. Professor Collin excuses his action by saying that Ingersoll was "an advocate—not a great lawyer." Professor Collin has always been considered a very liberal man in his religious views, but the spirit of orthodoxy, it seems, is permeating the University owing to the recent establishment of the School of Philosophy.

The law seniors feel very sore over the decision of the faculty, and as yet no other person has been selected to deliver the commencement address.

ACID DROPS.

On the cold weather with which our heavenly father has thought fit to afflict us this May, a correspondent of the *Daily News* mentions a legend in South-east Devon that St. Dunstan was the inventor of beer—or, at any rate, a great brewer—and that he sold himself to the Devil on condition that his Satanic Majesty should blight the apple trees, and so stop the production of the rival drink, cider. It was, however, stipulated that the blight should be accomplished in three days, which were the 17th, 18th and 19th of May, St. Dunstan's Day being the last of these. The cold wave has, however, extended a good bit beyond St. Dunstan's Day this year.

The Memoirs of that versatile genius, Lawrence Oliphant, by Mrs. Oliphant, tell how he fell under the influence of the Rev. T. L. Harris, a sort of Swedenborgian seer and teacher of occult mysteries. Oliphant learned the lesson of self-sacrifice so well that in a very short time he had placed all he possessed in his master's hands, and his mother had done much the same thing. Indeed, the discovery of one of this lady's sacrificed rings on the finger of another lady in whom the Prophet happened to be particularly interested, first suggested the suspicion that the Prophet might possibly be a humbug in his spare time. Oliphant, though a mystic, saw through the humbug of Blavatskyism, and his paper on "The Sisters of Thibet" is a smart satire on the nonsense of Esoteric Buddhism.

To those who have read the whole of the published correspondence between Mdme. Blavatsky and Mdme. Coulomb, or even the mention of it in *The New Cagliostro*, there is not much novelty in the account of Mdme. Blavatsky's exposure now being given in the *British Weekly* by Professor G. Patterson. Certainly he supplies additional evidence of his care in ascertaining that the letters were genuine. That they were all handed to him within the space of fourteen hours strongly corroborates this. But indeed their genuineness can only be disputed by those who are prepared to believe that Mdme. Coulomb is not only a most audacious forger,

but that she could invent so extraordinary a character as the letters reveal that of the foundress of Theosophy to have been.

Those who have not seen the letters in question will find Professor Patterson gives sufficient evidence to irretrievably damage Mdme. Blavatsky's character for honesty. The only question is why he did not re-open the question in England while Mdme. B. was alive. For our part, we think that lady's Theosophic career has been pretty well exposed. The chief point remaining to be investigated is her connection with the Russian secret service; for this, after all, casts the greatest reflection on those who, if the charge be true, were her dupes and tools.

The writer of Personal Politics in the *Penny Illustrated Paper* says of the late Madame Blavatsky: "Those who best knew her movements and associates always declared that she was a Russian spy. She was certainly expelled from Madras on suspicion of being employed on Russian detective business."

Salvation Army religion proved too strong for the brains of Charles Coots, a baker's assistant, of Islington, who was arrested for attempting to commit suicide. The poor fellow had the delusion that he had sinned beyond hope of forgiveness, and hell was his doom. A small dose of Freethought would have relieved his trouble.

Joan Patterson, the captain of the S. A. at Sutton, was fined £1 or three days' imprisonment for persisting in singing to the annoyance of an inhabitant when requested to desist. She urged that she was "singing for Jesus." Booth does not permit his followers to pay fines, so Joan had to sing for Jesus in prison, and will come out a blessed martyr.

Two Salvationists at Wimbledon fell out about a lady. One of them was her husband, and the other was a lodger. In the end a gun went off at the lodger's expense, and the husband is sent for trial without bail.

The Salvation Army, at Sunninghill, near Reading, is the occasion of so much disturbance that a large body of police has to be drafted to protect peace. The *Reading Standard* speaks of them as dragging the name of religion in the mire and giving occasion to profanity and blasphemy.

A farmer of Aswardby has been fined 10s. and costs in the sum of £3 1s. 6d. for shooting a hare on his own ground. The bench comprised three clergymen—the Rev. E. Rawnsley, of Spilsby, chairman; the Rev. G. Hales, of Stickney; and the Rev. R. Cracroft, of Harrington.

Judge Barber, of the Ilkestone County Court, is a nice gentleman. A lady defendant said she was not religious, and the judge exclaimed—"You are not religious! I never heard a more disgraceful statement. You are held up to scorn by every one in this court. Turn her out." Judge Barber is a living proof that a Christian and a gentleman are synonymous.

Real cash in exchange for promises of benefit after death is the essential feature of the priest's business. It is curious that it has been reserved to a French priest, one Father Durin, of St. Joseph's Depere, Wisconsin, U.S., to form a Soul Insurance Company. This enterprise is called The Deliverance Society, and Father Durin is manager. He has issued a prospectus, which says, "This Society is organised on the plan of mutual assurance. The admission is twenty-five cents, and the annual subscription ten cents. There is to be no reserve fund, and all the funds subscribed will be immediately employed for the celebration of Masses for the deliverance of souls in purgatory." There are already eight hundred members, and branches are to be established in all parts of the States. We are not aware if Father Durin issues a policy guaranteeing deliverance from purgatory, but doubtless a person of his business capacity will do all that is needful in this matter.

Catholics are adapting themselves to the spirit of the age. In Paris a priest announces that he hears confessions and grants absolution through the telephone.

That old story about Beecher and Ingersoll, which both of them publicly contradicted, is now dished up by Miss Agnes Weston in a little pamphlet bearing the appropriate

title of "Yarn Spinning." Those who fancy that early Christian lies could not have gained credence in face of Pagan exposure, should reflect on the success of this Beecher-Ingersoll falsehood. Pious writers don't ask if a story is true; all they care about is whether it will serve their turn.

The New York Presbytery has decided to prosecute Prof. Briggs for teaching that the Bible is not infallible. This it declares is in blank opposition to the Westminster Confession of Faith. The case is likely to lead to a pitched battle between the orthodox and the progressive sections of the Presbyterians in the United States.

The Copts of Egypt have a tomb at Damietta, which they assert is the last resting-place of Jesus Christ. J. C., it appears, according to the Coptic story, did not die on the cross. He was taken down by friends, and retired to Damietta, where he died at the ripe age of over sixty.

According to the Talmud, Jesus was stoned and hanged in the city of Lud some sixty years or so B.C.

Among the pictures at the Paris Salon this year is a striking one by Juan Beraud, representing Mary Magdalene, who has been dancing before a throng of *fin de siècle* Parisians, when Christ enters and is blessing and absolving her.

Four of Jan van Beers' pictures were thought too broad for the Barcelona Exhibition, but there was a hot discussion on the peccant canvases, with the result that it was decided to put them in a room by themselves, and admit no one to see them under thirty years of age. It is not stated whether visitors must bring certificates of birth, or whether both sexes will be admitted together. However, it may be presumed that most persons over thirty have little to learn from Jan van Beers, and on the whole the compromise may be deemed satisfactory.

Could not a similar compromise be adopted with regard to the peccant parts of the Bible which the Jews did not allow their sons to read until they were thirty? The blue passages might be printed in a separate volume, and only sold to purchasers of the requisite age. We commend the idea to the next meeting of Convocation. It might also be discussed at Nonconformist Conferences.

District Visitor: "Your boy looks very bad, Mrs. Jones; what's the matter?" Mrs. Jones: "Yes, ma'am, he be very bad; and, what's more, the doctor has made him worse. I'm sure we poor people ought to pray with all our hearts, 'From all false doctrin', good Lord deliver us.' I never saw its meaning afore."

The Rev. Walter Walsh, of Newcastle, has apparently been waxing too much with "infidels" and has contracted a taint of "heresy." His views on everlasting damnation do not satisfy his Baptist brethren of the district, and judging from a long report and a leading article in the *Daily Leader*, it seems likely that Mr. Walsh and his congregation will be cut off from the Northern Association of Baptist Churches. Altogether, if it is not a hell of a row, it is a row about hell, which is a subject to kindle *warmth*.

Our Freethought contemporary, the *Boston Investigator*, after printing a long extract from Mrs. Besant's lecture at Boston on Theosophy, winds up as follows: "To us it looks as though Mrs. Besant, when she gave up philosophic materialism for Theosophy, exchanged her feet for a flying-machine. There may be a more delightful sensation in taking a flight through the atmosphere than walking on the ground, but those who fly must sooner or later come to earth again."

Mrs. Besant returns from her *Theosophic* mission to the States, and announces a lecture at the Hall of Science on "*Freethought in America*." We see from the *Boston Investigator* that although she discoursed in the "hub of the universe" on the oriental superstition which she now prefers to the other oriental superstition called Christianity, she "only found opportunity to pay the Paine Memorial a short visit" in company with another Theosophist. "We hope," says the *Investigator*, "she will find it convenient to return here ere long and permit the members of the Ingersoll Secular Society to cross-question her as to her change of front from Materialism to Theosophy."

The *Investigator* honestly praises Mrs. Besant's "wonderful oratorical power," which "charms" if it does not "convince." But after all, eloquence is no substitute for fact and logic. Edward Irving shook London with his preaching, but it was all moonshine, and in the end Irving died forsaken and disappointed.

While Prof. J. T. Marshall, of Manchester, contends that the Synoptic Gospels are based upon a common original Gospel in Aramaic, Dr. Resch, in Germany, comes to the conclusion that they are translations of a common Hebrew original. Professor Sanday adheres to the two-document hypothesis, the theory that the Synoptics are based on a collection of *Logia*, or sayings of Jesus, by Matthew, and on Memoirs of Peter, digested by Mark.

What a religion of divine charity is Christianity! Here is the Rev. A. G. Brown, at the East London Tabernacle, denouncing a Unitarian pamphlet written by his own brother, the Rev. John W. Brown, a Unitarian minister. He said, "That thing came very near at hand to him, and they saw now what a snakish thing sometimes came creeping into families. He would not stand in his brother's shoes for all the world." Something snakish seems to have developed in the religion of the orthodox brother.

"Professor Story," says the *Echo*, "thinks that a child brought up amid the slums of a city like Glasgow is from its youth inclined to practical Atheism." This is another form of the Dr. Jayne insult. What a *practical* Atheist means we cannot determine, but we have no doubt as to the meaning of Professor Story. He wants to make Atheism a present of the refuse of Christian society. Atheism answers—Declined with thanks.

The report that Mr. W. T. Stead has been converted by Prophet Baxter, and that his new political paper is to be entitled, *The Arrows of Armageddon*, is without foundation.

"Recently," says the *Australian Independent*, "a number of Victorian ministers, representing various denominations, betook themselves to a sequestered spot about forty miles out of Melbourne, and for five days gave themselves up to prayer and the study of the Scriptures"—diversified, we presume, with eating and drinking and sleeping. No doubt it was an enjoyable picnic, though the company must have been rather monotonous. But what is really wanted is something very different. Let the *laymen* retire for a while to study the Scriptures, and there would be a rapid growth of scepticism. At present they read the Bible but little, and that little is under clerical guidance.

Dr. Cunningham holds that the instructions of Jesus Christ to his disciples were not intended for him. Now-a-days, said the doctor, a minister is all the better for money in his purse, and a change of raiment. A bishop one day, when being driven in his carriage to the House of Lords, was addressed by a demagogue with "What would the Apostle Paul say if he saw you?" The bishop quietly remarked to a friend that St. Paul would very likely say "that things were much improved."

At the trial of August Olsen for murder, the question of moral character was brought up, and during the catechising of witnesses upon the question of reputation, one of the attorneys cited the case of Judas as bearing a good character up to the time of his betrayal of the Savior. Several lawyers on the other side jumped up to demand an authentic report of the case. The court interposed with a scriptural authority demonstrating that prior to the betrayal, when the treacherous disciple objected to a waste of ointment, the comment was made that it was not on account of his caring for the poor, but because he was a thief and "carried the sack," and from that day his character was smirched. The bar indorsed the book as an authority, but none of them claimed to have it in their law libraries.—*Freethought*.

The *St. James's Gazette* calls attention to the case of a stockbroker who has got into the Bankruptcy Court, from whom Mr. W. Bramwell Booth claims over two thousand pounds. The impertinent paper wants to know if Mr. Booth was dabbling in stocks with money saved from his own salary in the Salvation Army.

The Bishop of Lincoln has issued a special form of prayer against the influenza epidemic. He asks the Lord, who sends the disease, to mitigate and abate its ravages. Evidently his real notion of the deity is that of an evil spirit, whose malignancy is to be overcome by cajolery.

Professor Massie, in the *Expositor* for May, copies Lardner in contending that the Zacharias, son of Barachias, mentioned in Matt. xxiii., 35, represents not the Zacharias son of Baruch, mentioned in Josephus (Wars IV., chap. 5) as slain in the Temple (A.D. 68), but Zacharias son of Jehoiada, of 2 Chron. xxiv. This effort is made to avoid the clear proof that the gospel was written after the death of Jesus, and that sayings were attributed to him which he could not have uttered.

That Josephus and Matthew meant the same person is evident from the name. Prof. Massie seeks to discount this by the suggestion that the Zacharias of Chronicles may have had a father named Barachias, and the father may have died so that he got named after Jehoiada his grandfather. It is sufficient to reply this is pure conjecture, of which the Bible says nothing. Further, the purport of the remark ascribed to Jesus is that the Jews of that generation would have to suffer for all the righteous bloodshed upon the earth. As Jesus began speaking of Abel, it is not likely he would stop at the earlier Zacharias B.C. 840, when there was a flood of righteous bloodshed among the Jews after that date.

"Laicus" in the *Church Review* strongly recommends the Church of England clergy to adopt celibacy. Is he aware of the scandals that continually have to be hushed up in Catholic countries, or of the evidence that clerical celibacy is usually something worse than a farce?

The Rev. W. Irwin, of Kilrea co. Londonderry, had a fall out with his congregation, and the church was locked against him. He, however, took a crowbar, broke open the door and conducted service. The affair will probably lead to litigation.

As Dr. Bridgman, of New York, could not conscientiously believe in a literal hell of fire and brimstone, he very properly resigned from the Baptist ministry, and did not linger to be kicked out. Dr. Bridgman's plans are unsettled, but fire and brimstone will continue to be liberally dished out at the old stand.—*Kansas City Star*.

According to an advertisement in the *Belfast Morning News* prayers are going cheap at Ilkeston, Derbyshire. Any one living or dead will be prayed for by the Rev. P. J. McCarthy on sending a shilling for each name. This, as Mr. McCarthy's advertisement says, is "a golden opportunity." He doubtless hopes to reap a golden harvest.

Dr. John Hall, the noted Presbyterian minister of New York, is paid 20,000 dols. a year to tell a lot of millionaires that a poor man named Jesus, who hadn't a nickel in his vest pocket, was their Savior.—*Investigator*.

Wealth tends to concentrate in the hands of the Church of England as the most "respectable" body. Church missions grow fat despite their inefficiency, while the Baptists acknowledge a debt of £10,500, the Wesleyans £19,377. The London Mission Society has spent £15,000 more than its current income, and the British and Foreign Bible Society, whose debt last year was £15,488, is hampered by a new debt of £14,434.

The *Birmingham Gazette* publishes (what would it not publish against Freethought?) a letter from that malignant lunatic, John Mite' ll, at whose personality even the Christian Evidence Society draws the line. The letter states that the N. S. S. does not publish a balance-sheet, though it is printed every year, and copies are sent to all the Branches and may be obtained by every member. It also states that the Secularists have not one hall of their own in London, which is legally true, for the Christian law does not permit them to own one, though virtually it is a lie. We print this correction simply because the misstatements appeared in the *Birmingham Gazette*. The writer, in himself, is regarded in London as beneath contempt.

In a footnote to a sensible letter by Mr. R. S. Bransby, correcting the *Gazette's* misreport of the Birmingham Conference, the editor inquires why the *Secularist* "came to an untimely

end." One would imagine that Christian papers never died. Besides, the *Secularist* was conducted by Mr. Foote who now edits the *Freethinker*, so that the loss of one paper simply means the gain of another. We may also inform the editor of the *Gazette* that the regular circulation of the *Freethinker* is five times greater than the highest point ever reached by the *Secularist*.

It is an age of counterfeits. Writing to a lady customer the other day, a local bookseller said: "Enclosed is an *Imitation of Christ*, the nearest the makers now have to your sample. Trusting it will prove satisfactory," etc.

"I have to make the announcement this morning," said the minister, "that our dear brother in Masailand has written me that the heathen are so sparsely clothed there that he finds very little use for pearl buttons, and he begs that the congregation will refrain from contributing them as generously as heretofore."

A BROKEN IDOL.

I once found a preacher to suit me;
He was eloquent—sound as a rock;
But the feature that tickled my fancy
Was the way he roasted his flock.
Such a one was dishonest as blazes,
Such and such, undeserving the name—
Of course no addresses were given,
But I knew 'em, you bet, just the same.
I had thought to unite on probation,
But before I could bring it to pass
This ideal preacher got on to my trail,
And sketched mine full as an ass!

The head of the Jesuit Mission in Madagascar has had to pay a fine of £10 and damages of £400 for libels propagated against the Freemasons of the island. The *Times* characterises the verdict as a well-deserved defeat of Jesuitism.

Bishop French, who recently died from sunstroke at Muscat, was of opinion that the English missionaries should lay aside Western externals and approach the natives "like their own teachers and fakirs, who live on charity, and whose self-denial commends itself to the native mind." It is to be doubted, however, if such a prospect would tempt the gentlemen exported from England as missionaries; though, at the same time, it must be allowed that, wherever they go, they live on "charity," only they take more of it than the Hindu fakirs.

Mr. Isaac Roberts has succeeded in photographing the satellite of Neptune, which has a diameter of about 2,000 miles and is about 225,000 miles distant from the planet. The satellite is nearly three thousand millions of miles from our earth. What a shock it gives to the paltry astronomy of the Bible!

A thin, nervous-looking man stepped up to the pastor as the latter came down from the pulpit. "You had a good deal to say this morning," he observed, "about a fellow that killed a man named Abel." "Certainly," replied the pastor, "The 'Sin of Cain' was the subject of my discourse." "I wish you to do me the favor next Sunday," said the thin man, in some excitement, "to tell the folks that the man you was talking about this morning ain't no relation to the Kane that keeps a livery stable down by the grist mill. I don't want none of my friends to think that I had a hand in that killin'. That's all. Good-day."

"What have you got in your carpet-bag?" asked one clergyman of another, at a railroad station. "Dried tongue," was the reply. He had some manuscript sermons in it.

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.
- (4) Display, or get displayed, one of our contents-sheets, which are of a convenient size for the purpose. Mr. Forder will send them on application.
- (5) Leave a copy of the *Freethinker* now and then in the train, the car, or the omnibus.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Thursday, May 28, Enterprise Hall, Great Eastern-road, Stratford; at 8, "Heaven and Hell." Admission free.

Sunday, May 31, Exchange Hall, Wolverhampton: at 11, "The Gospel of Life and the Gospel of Death"; at 3, "Deed and Creed," a Reply to the Rev. C. A. Berry"; at 8, "What has Christianity done for the Word?"

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. 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.

R. H. CATTELL.—Thanks for the enclosures. See "Acid Drops." We fear that soldiers will have to put up with bigotry and oppression for a good while yet.

A. J. NEWTON.—Clem O. Boardman's letter is not worth much of our space. He certainly did say he was going to reply to Mr. Foote's lecture. If questions can be put about the Bible not fit for ladies to hear, so much the worse for the Bible. We fancy Boardman is hardly worth your powder and shot.

TOM SHORE says he copied out a few elegant extracts from our *Bible Handbook* on the back of a "five." He thinks this a good way of circulating "blasphemy," as the banknotes are not likely to be destroyed, even in a fit of piety.

ALPHA.—A poor old man's mite for Dr. Voelkel will be duly appreciated.

G. GALE.—In our next.

W. LAPPAGE.—If a hall can be obtained, Mr. Foote will be happy to lecture at Wandsworth. Seven members are required to start a Branch.

G. COOPER.—Thanks for paper and cuttings.

J. BEVITT.—Glad to hear you find this journal "invaluable." As you say, it is a pity that good books are so dear, but the reason of this is the comparatively small demand. Free-thought would never reach the people at all if it were not for the self-sacrifice of the writers and speakers of the Secular party; for it is easier to earn five pounds outside our movement than one pound inside it.

J. T. BAKER.—Your note to hand.

J. STOKES.—The lecture was reported in the *Chester Chronicle*.

R. O. SMITH, treasurer, London Secular Federation, acknowledges:—J. Dean, 10s. 6d.; E. O., 6s.

D. HUGHES.—It was a mere verbal trick on the preacher's part, like the statement that the Greeks had no such word as *humanity*, though they had *philanthropy*, which means the same. If the Greek language had no word for *mercy*, the preacher should explain how the New Testament came to be written in Greek.

G. WHEELER.—Thanks for the cutting. A man who says there is no evidence that the earth is more than 6,000 years old ought to be exhibited at Madame Tussaud's.

X.—We write English for brevity as you speak of the English language. "British" would include Scotland, but exclude Ireland.

C. JOHNSON.—Thanks. See paragraph.

E. SIMS sends 5s. and a Manchester friend 2s. 6d. towards the expenses of Mr. Foote's visit to Chester.

H. E. SMITH.—No doubt people get "converted." We underwent the process at the age of eleven. Usually it is nothing but excitement.

W. DAVIS.—The bill has been frequently printed. With respect to the "Christians" at Rome in the time of Nero, read Gibbon's criticism in the fifteenth chapter. Certainly it would not be fair to judge early Christianity by the standards of this age, if it did not claim to be a superhuman system.

J. SILKSTONE.—Glad to hear you were so pleased with the Conference report. Thanks for the letter and cuttings.

J. H. W.—Your letter shows the necessity of our war against superstition and bigotry.

C. LANGLEY.—We cannot reply to such letters by post. Personally we cannot see what good results to the planet from this wretched weather in England, but if you do you are entitled to your opinion.

W. BOWDEN.—*Secular Thought* (of Toronto) price 2 dollars yearly; *Boston Investigator*, 3 dollars yearly; *Ironclad Age*

(of Indianapolis) 2 dols. 50 cents.; *Truthseeker* (of New York) 3 dollars per year; *Freethought* (of San Francisco) 2 dollars per year; *Freethinker's Magazine* (of Buffalo N.Y.) monthly, 2 dollars. There are others, but these are the principal. They may be procured direct, or with addition for postage, from Mr. Forder.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Fritankaren—Liberty—Freethought—Ironclad Age—Menschenthum—Echo—Neues Freireligioses Sonntags-Blatt—Freidenker—The Liberator—Der Arme Teufel—Secular Thought—Boston Investigator—Western Figaro—La Vérité Philosophique—Progressive Thinker—Friendly Greetings—Freethinker's Magazine—Birmingham Gazette—Newcastle Leader—Reading Observer—Reynolds's Newspaper—Bulletin des Somnaires—La Gazette des Travailleurs—Chat—Surrey Times—Midland Evening News—Flaming Sword—Cheltenham Mercury—Polytechnic Magazine—Newcastle Daily Leader—Reading Standard—New York Sun—Burton Chronicle—Staffordshire Sentinel—Cosmopolitan—Lucifer—Kent Messenger—Truthseeker.

FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish to call our attention. CORRESPONDENCE should reach us not later than Tuesday if a reply is desired in the current issue. Otherwise the reply stands over till the following week.

SUGAR PLUMS.

Manchester goes holiday-making at the end of Whit-week, and the rush is so great that the train service of the district is frightfully disarranged. Nevertheless Mr. Foote had first-rate audiences on Sunday. There was an improved attendance in the morning and afternoon, and the hall was crowded in the evening. The opposition after the lectures was poor. The Rev. Mr. Collier spoke in the morning, but his remarks were more fit for an experience meeting than for a Secular hall. One thing, however, that happened after the evening lecture was gratifying. A good collection was made for Dr. Voelkel.

Mr. Foote's free lecture at Stratford drew a good meeting. Several West Ham friends attended to look after the arrangements. With the exception of some fearful and wonderful questions there was nothing like opposition. A local evangelist, who was announced to reply to Mr. Foote in the following week at the Mission Hall, got on his legs, but his speech was a short advertisement of the said reply. That evangelist was slow in defending the Grand Old Book, but he had a strong sense of the market value of the occasion.

"Asmodeus" in the *Cheltenham Mercury* gives a glowing report of the Secular Conference at Birmingham. His reference to "the great number of known Secularists" in Cheltenham is enough to inspire a hope that a Branch of the N. S. S. may be formed there.

More letters on Secularism appear in the *Birmingham Gazette*. Thanks, Mr. Editor, thanks! Though you ought to know, without asking for further information, that Secular Societies are illegal bodies and cannot receive bequests.

Our appeal on behalf of Dr. Voelkel, imprisoned for blasphemy at Madgeburg, has brought the following:—G. W. Foote, 10s. 6d.; Dr. A. Walker, £1; collection at Mr. Foote's Manchester lectures, £2 8s. 6d.; Alpha, 6d.; X., 2s. 6d.; E. Sims, 5s.; R. Davies, 2s. 6d.; Sydney A. Gimson, 10s. 6d.

By means of a concert the Westminster Branch has raised £6 6s. for the Bradlaugh Memorial Fund.

The London Clubs have had a jaunt to Kettering. One of the indoor songs by Harry Fullbrook contained an allusion to Charles Bradlaugh, which "made the audience rise and wildly cheer, and hats and handkerchiefs were waved." So says the *Club and Institute Journal*.

At a recent meeting of the London Liberal and Radical Union, held at the National Liberal Club, the Rev. S. D. Headlam moved to include in the programme for the forthcoming School Board Elections "that the instruction in the schools be in secular subjects only." Mr. Headlam's resolution was carried by an overwhelming majority, and the result was hailed with long-continued cheering. Some of the speeches were refreshingly outspoken.

The reformed Bradford Branch holds its quarterly meeting at Laycock's Temperance Hotel on Sunday, June 7. Tea will

be provided at sixpence. A good meeting is desired by the committee.

There are large crematories at Buffalo, New York, and Philadelphia, but none at present in Canada.

The parsons have got a misgiving
Cremation won't add to their bread.
Less easily they'll earn their living
When people once more urn their dead.

The Burial Board of Portsea has passed a resolution in favor of establishing a crematorium. The project has been advocated in the local press by Mr. J. E. Brumage, and has the support of the most intelligent people in Portsmouth.

Portsmouth *Chat* for the 22nd gives a capital portrait and sketch of the career of our good friend John E. Brumage, one of the vice-presidents of the National Secular Society, and member of the Portsmouth School Board, who has recently retired from his position as manager of Dockyard Storehouses. The same number contains a long letter from Mr. Brumage on the education of girls, in which he shows how the Bible has stood in the way of woman's emancipation. Mr. Brumage is a striking example of the respect which may be won by an uncompromising adherence to principle.

Colonel Inger-oll is now convalescent. Good! The world cannot afford to lose Bra-laugh and Ingersoll in one year.

We have received from Barcelona a copy of a discourse in Spanish on the monks, delivered by D. Juan Canellas y Rivas, who is head of the Laic College "Guttenberg." The lecture is an eloquent denunciation of the crimes of the clergy and the inhumanity of their faith, and concludes with a defence of Freethought and secular education. It is issued at a popular price, and is in its third edition. Freethought is making far greater strides in the cities of the Peninsular than the compromise of Protestantism.

Dr. G. W. Brown, author of *Oriental Researches*, writes: "Instead of being 'ashamed' to be known as an infidel, I glory in it. The word may grate harshly on the ears of newcomers into our ranks, and be really obnoxious to those clinging to the skirts of Christianity; but they who are 'kicking hell' because they hate the infernal teaching, and those who are disbelievers in original sin, total depravity, blood sacrifice, vicarious atonement, and all the incidental, damnable doctrines of the church, will manage to bear up under a name which those *in the faith* will be 'ashamed of.'"

The *Medical Record* says: "Happiness has a distinct æsthetic and hygienic value. In itself it will secure perfect poise and respiration. The old order put the cart before the horse; it said, 'Be virtuous, and you will be happy'—a rule with many exceptions. But the old order changeth, and the modern gospel postulates happiness and material prosperity as the basis of morality. Other times, other manners. The world has yet room for two or three truths, of which not the least is the fact that the definite desire for personal beauty—which was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be—constitutes in itself a perfectly proper and meritorious inspiration to effort, especially in a country where the shades of Puritanism linger as a sad inheritance, and where disinterred Buddhism claims too often the frail neurasthenic for its own."

The *Histoire de l'Inquisition*, by Maurice Lachatre, has been published in cheap form by the Bibliotheque Anticlericale, of 11 Rue Bertin-Poirée, Paris.

Renan's *Histoire du Peuple d'Israel* is placed on the Index Expurgatorius. No Catholic is now allowed to read it. This is said to delight Renan, who takes it as a compliment, and believes it will extend his circle of readers.

Pearson's Weekly has an excellent article on "Is Death Dreadful?" correcting the popular notions on the subject, and asserting that while pious people sometimes die in fear of the beyond, the infidel generally dies without the least dread. Such articles, in widely-circulated papers, are good counter-actants to Christian superstition.

Our ever-welcome Freethought contemporary, Dr. Monroe's *Ironclad Age*, pokes fun at Theosophy, which hasn't caught on with American Secularists. Mrs. Beasant's definition of Theosophy is given as follows, quoted, we presume, from one of her American orations:—"The central idea of Theosophy is one great circle of light spreading from the rare to the dense, from the intangible to the tangible, from the subjective to the objective." Dr. Monroe says "that puts the case in a nutshell," though he declines to crack it.

Watson Heston's latest picture in the New York *Truth-seeker* shows Talmage slaying Infidelity. Talmage belabors a dummy, knocks its head off, jumps upon it, and finally exhibits it in a dreadful state of dilapidation. But down in the corner is the living Robert Ingersoll, waiting in vain for Talmage to "come on."

Dr. Momerie, who was formerly preacher at the Foundling Hospital, seems to have given up Christianity pretty thoroughly. Lecturing on the Corruption of the Church at Prince's Hall, Piccadilly, he declared that venerable institution was within measurable distance of dissolution. The clergy did not see the danger, but that made it all the worse.

The orthodox doctrine of the atonement, continued the doctor, was a survival of the greatest abuses of earliest times, and it was immoral to the core. The doctrine of predestination was also a delusion which must be rejected, as it made God the most wicked being possible for the human mind to conceive. The doctrine of the Trinity was a blundering misconception of the original text, and the vulgar theory of the Crucifixion was a contradiction in terms, and, therefore, jargon and nonsense. All the ignorant blunders of barbarism were stereotyped in the fundamental doctrines of Christendom.

Dr. Momerie calls the idea of hell "monstrous," and the Bible "full of contradictions," yet he clings to the hope that the corrupt faith which has battered on these corruptions for fifteen hundred years can be reformed from within. Dr. Momerie is doing excellent work in uprooting these pernicious beliefs; and we trust that, having gone so far, he will yet come to see that the effort to reform the Church from within is vain. It must be destroyed from without.

THE THEOSOPHIC GOD.

The following Sonnet to Nothing, clipped from J. E. Smith's *Shepherd*, of Jan. 20, 1838, seems to just hit off the above:

Nothing, how great art thou, stupendous nought!
Who reignest nowhere, sittest on no throne!
Unseen, unheard, unthought by anyone,
Whose solemn dictates in no school is taught!
To thy non-ential region are we brought,
By old abstraction, dull ascetic croon,
Who aye to leave this sensual earth is prone,
Which with bright Nature's hues and warmth is fraught!
Nothing to thee what gorgeous names are given!
We call thee light, and love, and power, and heaven,
When of thy might to novices we preach.
Thy patient votaries, great cipher hear!
Keep us from marriages, rump steaks, wine, and beer,
And henceforth all our works shall Nothing teach.

OBITUARY.

On Wednesday, the 20th inst., Thomas Kidd, aged 71, passed away. He had been ailing for a considerable time past, and was unconscious for several days prior to his death. He was a life-long Freethinker, and for several years has been a member of the N. S. S., and constant subscriber to the *Freethinker* and *National Reformer*.

It is with deep regret that I have also to record the death of Mrs. Emma Hall. She, together with her husband, has been a member of this Branch for a considerable time. She died at King's College Hospital, London, on the 16th inst., of internal abscess, after long suffering borne with great fortitude. That she died as she had lived, an Atheist, is amply shown by the fact that two hours before she died she requested the chaplain to leave the room.—W. JANNAWAY, sec. Portsmouth Branch.

APOLLO AND YAHVE.

In the Iliad of Homer we are told that in the Trojan war, the Greeks, having sacked some of the neighboring towns, took two beautiful captives, Chryseis and Briseis, and allotted them, the first to Agamemnon, the second to Achilles.

Chryses, the father of Chryseis, and priest to Apollo, went to the Grecian camp to ransom his daughter. Being contemptuously repulsed by Agamemnon (the people being willing that she should be restored to her father), he appealed to Apollo, who, for the offence of Agamemnon, inflicted a terrible pestilence on the Greeks, dismissing many strong souls to Hades; giving their bodies to beasts and birds of prey. The people perished of disease in the camp, inflicted by the son of Dios and Leto. On mules and dogs the stroke first fell, then on the camp for nine days.

Achilles proposed that some augur should be consulted. Chalcas Thestorides, who the past, present and future knew, told the Greeks the cause of their woes, and Agamemnon, after a time, agrees to send Chryseis back to her father, with hecatombs, and without ransom.

Chryseis was sent back in charge of Odysseus, the hecatombs, sacrifices of an hundred oxen, were offered to Apollo, the priest interceded for the people, and the plague ceased.

Good orthodox doctrine this, in perfect accord with the New Testament assertion that "without shedding of blood there is no remission."

Yet we do not believe Homer's story. Why not? Change the name Phœbus Apollo into Yahve Elohim, the locality to Judæa, give the principal actors Hebrew names, insert the story in the Hebrew Chronicles, and it would be divinely-inspired holy writ, and we should be dubbed infidels if we doubted it.

Agamemnon was a religious man; he revered Apollo, offered bloody sacrifices, and performed an act of justice. Apollo was pacified, and the pestilence ceased. Here, I believe, we have a faithful presentment of the customs and beliefs of the times in which Homer wrote, exhibiting the close affinity existing between ancient religions. But we do not believe this story in the Iliad (Book I.). Then why are we asked to believe similar stories in anonymous Hebrew books? One is just as likely (and unlikely) to be true as another. Apollo was a god of the Hellenes. Yahve was the god of the Hebrews, or one of them.

We are told in a book, written nobody knows when or who by (1 Chronicles), that Satan (or Yahve) induced David to have a census taken. It was done. In these days one sees no harm in census taking; but the sacerdotal Chroniclers did. They were superstitious and crafty fellows, and, in accordance with popular conceptions, they made an assertion which no one can verify nor disprove—that Satan, Yahve's minister, tempted David to number the people. In both stories (Iliad and Bible) it is a king who offends. David's augur, Gad, offers him a choice of seven years' famine, three months' defeat in war, or three days' pestilence. He accepts the latter; and seventy thousand souls are dismissed to Sheol for his own offence.

In reading both of these old yarns we naturally ask—Why are thousands of human beings murdered for the offence of one? What crude and barbarous notions of justice the writers of those holy stories must have entertained; and what despotic tyrants these gods were—gods made in the likeness of their makers.

The American and British Governments have recently been so wicked as to have censuses. Perhaps our God (who is he?) has sent the influenza as a punishment for such impiety. Who knows? Let us pray. Apollo and Yahve were appeased by the odor of roast beef. Let us sacrifice a few hecatombs to the Christian God. It might remove the influenza, and save doctors' and undertakers' bills. It is a good old-fashioned plan.

What anthropomorphic conceptions of their gods these ancient peoples had. Yahve is so magnanimous that it requires seventy thousand corpses to pacify him, plus roast beef. The Homeric story is the better of the two, and the older; Agamemnon does an act of justice by restoring Chryseis to her father's arms.

JAMES BREVITT.

THE BENEVOLENT FUND.

Hanley Branch, 4s. 5d.; Surplus, Concert, Birmingham Branch, £2; T. Campbell, 2s. 6d.; Balance, Children's Party, £1 2s. 10d.; Legacy, per G. W. Foote, £50; G. Anderson, £5 1s. 6d.; Liverpool Branch, 15s.; Stalybridge Branch, 5s.—R. FORDER, hon. sec.

CHRISTIAN INCONSISTENCY.

A Christian required to define the two terms *Atheist* and *Christian*, would say the former was a person who doubted the truth of the Scriptures and the existence of God, and that the latter was a believer in all that the former denied. An *Atheist* asked to explain the same terms would not get far out of his latitude in defining himself as a man who declined to accept for truth what he knew to be a lie, and that a Christian is one who blindly accepts a falsehood and won't be dissuaded from cherishing it as the truth. The best definitions I can frame are, that an *Atheist* won't believe a lie, and that a *Christian* won't believe the truth! Not long ago Christians refused to believe that the earth was round, that it rotated diurnally on its axis, and that it traversed annually round the sun; and they cruelly resolved that nobody else should believe such heterodox rot! They even now insist that the discrepancies abounding in the *Guid Auld Scriptures* are invincible proofs of their veracity! Therefore (analogically), if not a single flaw existed in the G . . . A . . . S, this would be sufficient evidence to damn the whole fabric. There are some millions of orthodox Christians who do not hesitate to declare that Christ made his ascension simultaneously from half a dozen different places, that his crucifixion commenced at both the third hour and the ninth hour; that, during the previous night, events transpired which under no possible circumstances could have occurred in less than a week; that there are three nights between Friday and Sunday; that Annas and Caiaphus were both high priests at once that year, and somebody else the next year; that Christ's first miracle was both the miraculous fish trick and the port-wine trick; that the *Greek* of A.D. 200 was the most suitable language for the holy gospels to be written in (we think the Lancashire dialect of A.D. 1300 would have been safer); that Godalmity, who was never known to forgive an offence, is ever merciful; that the Devil, who told Eve *the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth*, is the father of lies; that Goliath was slain by David and then killed by Elhanan; that one king was by two years his father's senior; that 40,000 and 4,000 are synonymous; that 18 cubits are 35 cubits; that the wicked prosper and become old, but don't live out half their time; that Solomon possessed more bullion than all the nations in the world do at the present day; that David rescued a lamb from the *one* mouth of a lion and a bear; that the Egyptian cattle died two or three times over; that the Amalekites were exterminated several times over; that 180,000 chosen men were hanging out on a small church eleven years; that a whole army awoke one morning and discovered that they had all been dead several hours; that ointment and prayer are a cure for small-pox, measles, consumption and fever; that Godalmity is all love, but requires gentle Jesus to act as a mediator in order to appease his ebullitions of wrath; that no Christian myope gropes benightedly along, dimly discerning everything through his opaque spectacles of faith; and that an infidel is a wicked monster simply because he has an opinion of his own, and refuses to be bamboozled by any black-frocked, pigeon-livered parson or priest, and denies the veracity of a book full of contradictions, absurdities, atrocities, obscenities and immoralities.

P. W. BALDWIN.

C O U R A G E .

TOIL on and falter not,
Think how the heroes wrought,
Who in the ages past
Braved priest and tyrant craft.

Now as hope brighter grows,
As each year onward flows,
Let us fresh courage take
And ne'er the cause forsake.

Still let the struggle be
Ever for liberty,
Till God's dark reign is past,
And Reason reigns at last.

Then in that day of light
Shall our reward be bright;
He, who for freedom strives,
Wins praise while time survives.

Twentieth Century.

HENRY F. FLETCHER.

GENERAL SHERMAN'S RELIGION.

THE Rev. P. T. Sherman, son of the late General Sherman, a Jesuit priest, has explained why "extreme unction," which is a Catholic rite, was administered to his father. His statement is in three sections, the first of which is: "My father was baptised in the Catholic Church, married in the Catholic Church, and attended the Catholic Church until the outbreak of the civil war. Since that time my father had not been a communicant."

That is, General Sherman has not been a Catholic, but has been an apostate, since 1860. That this is true is testified to by General Sherman, who wrote, "I am not, and cannot be, a Catholic."

The second section is: "But he [General Sherman] always said to me that if there is any true religion, it is the Catholic religion!"

There is but one conclusion from these statements, and that is that General Sherman did not believe there is any true religion. And his further statement that he believed in a supreme power, but that belief was as far as his religion went, bears out this inevitable conclusion. Moreover, the statement, "If there is any true religion it is the Catholic religion," is a common one among logical sceptics to Christianity; for if any part of that system of imposture were true, the Catholics have got the logical and consistent part of it, just as the Calvinists have got hold of the logical and consistent end of Protestantism. We have heard General Sherman's statement made by avowed infidels a hundred times.

The third section of the Rev. P. T. Sherman's statement is: "A week ago to-day my father received absolution and extreme unction at the hands of Father Taylor. My father was unconscious at the time, but this fact has no important bearing, for the sacrament could be administered to any person whose mind could be interpreted as desirous of receiving it."

That is, when General Sherman was unconscious and could not object, the church hastened to his bedside with her rites, that she might in after years claim another great man as hers. The assertion that "the sacrament could be administered to any person whose mind could be interpreted as desirous of receiving it" is thoroughly and openly Jesuitic. General Sherman meant that no religion is true, and the Church interprets his remark to mean that Catholicism is true! Tortuous are the sinuosities of theology, and skilful is the Church in following them!

Had General Sherman been conscious when the rite was to be administered to him, he would, undoubtedly, have said to the priest what he said to a pious woman who sought to entangle him with her theology, taking advantage of his good nature in standing godfather to a child named for himself. When the baptismal ceremony had been performed, the godmother said to the general: "Now, we have promised to teach this child the Lord's Prayer, the Creed and the Ten Commandments. We have been arranging it so that the father shall teach him the Lord's Prayer, I am to teach him the Creed, and the Ten Commandments fall to your lot."

"There are eleven Commandments, madam."

"What! Eleven Commandments? Why, what do you mean, general? There are only ten Commandments!"

"Yes, madam; there are eleven, and the eleventh is, Mind your own business."

The Roman Catholic Church does not appear to advantage in her swooping down upon a dying man, and the explanation of the Rev. P. T. Sherman, Jesuit priest, does not add to her glory.—*Truthseeker* (New York).

TORQUEMADA.

In his eighteen years of office, Cardinal Thomas de Torquemada had burned alive, it is computed, eighty-eight hundred victims and punished ninety thousand in various ways—not for offences against the moral law or crimes against society, but for thoughts of their own about religion; or for being Jews that would not be apostates; or for refusing on the rack to confess what they had never done.—*Rev. J. Martineau, "Seat of Authority in Religion,"* p. 156.

THE CHURCH'S MERCY.

The Church took good care that the nature of the request [for mercy] should not be misapprehended. It taught that in such cases all mercy was misplaced unless the heretic became a convert, and proved his sincerity by denouncing all his fellows.—*H. C. Lea, "History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages,"* vol. ii., p. 535.

THE LIMITS OF THE LAW.

Lately a story has been told about a well-known London magistrate, who had a crazy street-preacher before him, charged with obstructing the thoroughfare. He saw that he was a harmless imbecile, and, being a kind-hearted man, did not feel like punishing him, so he said: "Of course we can't have thoroughfares obstructed in this way; but if you can give me the name of a friend who will be your surety that there shall be no recurrence of this nuisance, I'll discharge you."

"I have no friend," said the man, "save the Lord."

"Quite so," said the magistrate; "but I mean a friend who is a householder in London."

"The Lord," said the man, "is everywhere."

"Certainly, certainly," replied the magistrate, as he took a fresh pinch of snuff and twisted up his brow; "but I must trouble you for a surety of—well, of what I might call a more settled residence."—*Pick-me-Up*.

REVIEW.

Reasonable Christianity. By DOUGLAS PHILLIPS. C. H. Lemmon, 121 Hawkstone-road, Rotherhithe.—Mr. Phillips, believing in the divine authority of the Bible, is at some pains in this little pamphlet to try to reconcile the foreknowledge and election of God with human responsibility. His conclusion is, that all actions of God are right and just. If any statement in the Bible appears to represent differently, we can feel assured such is only apparent. If Mr. Phillips examined the Bible as any other book, he might come to a very different conclusion.

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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.

Battersea Secular Hall (back of Battersea Park Station): 7.30, entertainment by members and friends. Monday, at 8, social gathering. Wednesday, at 8, dramatic entertainment. Thursday, at 8, discussion.

Camberwell—61 New Church Road, S.E.: 7.30, Mr. Touzeau Parris, "How I became a Freethinker."

Hall of Science, 142 Old Street, E.C.: 7.30, Mrs. Annie Besant, "The Doctrine of the Trinity."

Leyton—Mr. Beadle's, 10 Daisey Villas, Manor Road: 7, Mr. R. W. Dowding, "Life of David." Admission free; discussion invited.

Milton Hall, Kentish Town Road, N.W.: 7.30, Orchestral Band; 8, Mr. G. Bernard Shaw, "Freethinking, Old and New." Monday, at 8.30, social meeting. Tuesday, at 8, singing and dramatic classes (practice).

Stratford—Enterprise Hall, Great Eastern Road: Thursday (May 28), at 8, Mr. G. W. Foote, "Heaven and Hell."

West Ham—Secular Hall, 121 Broadway, Plaistow: 8, Mrs. Thornton Smith, "The Atonement." Thursday, at 8, open debate.

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Battersea Park Gates: 11.15, Mr. A. B. Moss, "Bible Prophets." Bethnal Green (opposite St. John's Church): 11.15, Mr. F. Haslam, "The Fall of Man and the Atonement."

Camberwell—Station Road: 11.30, Mr. C. J. Hunt, "God, where art thou?"

Clerkenwell Green: 11.30, Mr. H. Snell will lecture.

Edmonton (corner of Angel Road): 6.30, Mr. Sam Standring, "The Dignity of Secularism."

Finsbury Park (near the band-stand): 11.30, Mr. P. H. Snelling, "Salvation, Here and Hereafter"; 3.30, Mr. A. B. Moss will lecture.

Hammersmith Bridge (Middlesex side): 6.30, Mr. H. Snell, "Has Christianity been of Benefit to the World?"

Hyde Park (near Marble Arch): 11.30, Mr. W. Heaford, "The Teachings of Christ."

Kilburn—Salisbury Road (close to Queen's Park Station): 6.30, Mr. W. J. Ramsey, "Christ's Moral Fables."

Kingsland Green: 11.30, Mr. S. Soddy, "Christianity in the Middle Ages."

Lambeth (corner of Belvedere Road, opposite St. Thomas's Hospital), Westminster Bridge: 6.30, Mr. C. J. Hunt, "God: where and what is it?"

Midland Arches (corner of Battle Bridge Road): 11.30, Mr. Stanley Jones, "The Soul Idea and Immortality."

Mile End Waste: 11.30, Mr. J. Rowney, "The Creation Story."

North Finchley (opposite "The Swan"): 11.30, Mr. Sam Standring, "Man's Search for God."

Old Pimlico Pier: 11.30, Mr. W. J. Ramsey, "God's Pets."

Regents Park (near Gloucester Gate): 3.30, debate between Mr. C. J. Hunt and Mr. R. Dunn on "Does Physical Science Support the Theory of Evolution?"

Tottenham (corner of West Green Road): 3.30, Mr. E. W. Osborn, "The Bogie Man."

Victoria Park (near the fountain): 3.15, Mr. W. Heaford, "Plain Truth about the Bible."

West Ham—Plaistow Green (near the Station): 11, Mr. R. Rosetti, "God is Love."

Wood Green—Jolly Butcher's Hill: 11.30, Mr. J. Fagan, "What is Sin?"

COUNTRY.

Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge Street: Mr. John M. Robertson, 11, "The Transformation of Heaven and Heaven"; 3, "A Sketch of a System of Politics"; 7, "The Anatomy of Jesus."

Glasgow—Albion Hall, College Street: Close of Session. Excursion to Campsie Glen. Brakes leave Montrose Street at 9.30 a.m. Tickets (2s. each) of R. Ferguson, 82 Ingram Street.

Liverpool—Camden Hall, Camden Street: 11, Tontine Society; 7, Mr. Harry Smith, "We boiled my son" (2 Kings vi., 29).

Manchester N. S. S., Secular Hall, Rusholme Road, Oxford Road, All Saints': 6.30, Mr. H. Smith (of Farsley), "Mind and Body."

Newcastle-on-Tyne—Nelson Street: 7.30, Mr. Fox (of Sunderland), "Is God Good?"

Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington Street, Southsea: 7, Mr. G. J. Hore, "The Education of Secularists."

Sheffield Branch N. S. S., Outing to Frith Park. Members and friends meet on Lady's Bridge and start at 2, by tram-car, for the Steam Clock, Brightside Lane, and walk from there to the Park.

South Shields—Capt. Duncan's Navigation School, King Street: 7, important business meeting, annual election of officers, etc.

Sunderland—Albert Rooms, Coronation Street: 7, half-yearly meeting.

Wolverhampton—Exchange Hall: Mr. G. W. Foote, 11, "The Gospel of Life and the Gospel of Death"; 3, "Deed and Creed—a Reply to the Rev. C. A. Berry"; 8, "What has Christianity Done for the World?"

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Manchester—At the corner of Denmark Road and Oxford Road: 3, Mr. H. Smith (of Farsley), "Secularism and Cruelty—a Reply to the Bishop of Chester."

STANLEY JONES, 28 Stonecutter Street, London, E.C.—June 7, morning, Plaistow Green. July 5, morning, Plaistow Green; 19, morning, Kingsland Green; 26, morning, Battersea.

LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon Road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.—May 31, morning, Battersea; afternoon, Finsbury Park. June 7, morning, Clerkenwell; afternoon, Victoria Park; 14, morning, Woolwich; afternoon, Finsbury Park; 21, morning, Westminster; evening, Camberwell; 28, morning, Clerkenwell; afternoon, Finsbury Park. July 5, morning, Clerkenwell; afternoon, Victoria Park; 12, morning, Woolwich; 19, morning, Westminster.

C. J. HUNT, 48 Fordingley Road, St. Peter's Park, London, W.—May 31, morning, Camberwell; afternoon, Regent's Park; evening, Lambeth. June 7, morning, Kingsland Green; afternoon, Regent's Park; 14, morning, Pimlico; evening, Kilburn; 21, morning, Clerkenwell; evening, Lambeth; 28, morning, Hyde Park; evening, Hammersmith.

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