

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

"Let us think freely and speak plainly, and we shall have the highest satisfaction that man can enjoy—the consciousness that we have done what little lies in ourselves to do for the maintenance of the truths on which the moral improvement and the happiness of our race depend."—LESLIE STEPHEN.

GOD'S IDEA OF RIGHT.

THE Bible states that David kept God's commandments, and did that only which was right in his eyes (1 Kings xiv. 8). The same authority also assures us (Acts xiii. 22) that this very David was a man after God's own heart. It may be interesting, therefore, to endeavor to ascertain from "God's Word" what ideas the Christian Deity seemed to possess of right in reference to the actions of one of its principal characters. To enable us to do this accurately no better method could be employed than the study of the conduct of one whom God said was "after mine own heart," and did "that only which was right in mine eyes." Thus the conduct of David had the special sanction of God, and sad indeed is the picture of depravity here presented, surrounded with an assumed halo of "divinity."

If the poet's words are true, that "to shun vice we must see it," it is only necessary to read the history of this Bible hero, for therein we shall see vice in all its glaring enormity. Many Christians consider David as if he were the embodiment of goodness and holiness. He is supposed to have been great as a king, great as a poet, and great as a moralist. The sins he committed are said to be cast in the shade by the repentance he so frequently assumed, and thus his sorrows are made a cloak for his errors. Dr. Spillan says that David was a man "who has done more to aid the spiritual progress of humanity than has been accomplished by all else put together." And Professor Wray alleges that David "was so filled with lofty aims and love of God, so marvellously was his mind illuminated by heaven, that to speak of him is to speak of one who will ever fill us with thoughts worth repeating, which will surely come in forms worthy of preservation." Here David is exalted to a lofty pinnacle of intellectual and moral greatness. Let us see how far his conduct justifies this elevation. Early in his life, this leading Bible character began to intrigue against Saul, and became an ambitious pretender to the throne. He took every opportunity to ingratiate himself with the people, and sap the foundations of their loyalty to their king. In 1 Samuel xx. and xxi. we have an account of his deceitful and lying disposition. It appears that fearing Saul would take his life, David fled from Ramah, and on arriving at Nob, he sought the chief priest and represented to him that he, David, had come on business from the king, and that the errand was a strict secret. This was a direct falsehood, for the king had not sent him. The real object of David's deceit appears to have been to possess himself of some weapon by which he might be able to pursue his wicked and cruel design. Having through his falsehood gained the confidence of the priest, he said

unto Abimelech, "And is there not here under thine hand spear or sword? for I have neither brought my sword or weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." Here this "holy man" resorts to a second falsehood. So far from his coming on business from the king, which required haste, he was then a runaway, seeking his own selfish ends. Having obtained a sword, he departed and came to King Achish; but here finding that he was known as the murderer of "ten thousands," he changed his behavior and feigned madness. The result of this deceit and falsehood on the part of David is given in the next chapter, where we learn that the unfortunate priest who had thus been imposed upon by this "man after God's own heart" was accused of conspiracy against Saul because he had given David the sword. The consequence was that fourscore and five persons, together with women and children, were put to the edge of the sword and slaughtered, and all this bloodshed was in consequence of the criminality of this favorite of God.

After this David became a bandit, and took up his residence in a cave for marauding purposes. He soon became a captain of a band of questionable characters, and in this capacity he was guilty of acts that cannot be defended on any grounds, ethical or otherwise. Finding that there resided not far from his cave a farmer who had a number of sheep and other articles of consumption, David decided upon sending some of his men to solicit the farmer to give him some of his possessions. Nabal, the farmer, very naturally refused the solicitations of a gang of strangers who were going about from place to place, and not for the best of purposes. Because of this refusal David ordered his men to prepare their swords to go and slay the whole of Nabal's household and save none alive; and if we may credit the Bible, David's barbarous intention would have been carried out, but for the presents which Nabal's wife took to him, and which he was contemptible enough to accept. Upon what principle can such conduct as this be exonerated? Certainly Nabal had no right to supply with food any band of ruffians who thought fit to ask him. While there could be no harm in David appealing for food as an act of charity, he surely had no right to resort to violence because he was refused. Another act of meanness, accompanied by a most cold-blooded murder on the part of David, was his action towards the son of a stranger, who came from the camp of Saul to inform him (David) that the obstacles to his becoming king were removed—that Saul and Jonathan were dead. After David had received all the information he required from the unfortunate man, finding he was descended from an Amalekite, he ordered one of his men to immediately kill him. Thus death was the reward this man received for his services.

David now became king, and here a sad chapter of his history opens. It is in the character of king, we are told, that he excelled. It is admitted that sometimes as a private individual he sinned, but as a monarch, Christians assure us his conduct was praiseworthy. Now this statement is as incorrect as the

reasoning based upon it is fallacious. As a king David was a merciless tyrant, disobeying alike the laws of humanity and the laws of his country. In Deuteronomy (xvii. 17), we read that kings shall not multiply wives to themselves, but we find (2 Sam. v. 13) that "David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come to Hebron; and there were yet sons and daughters born to David." As king, David numbered Israel when the lives of 70,000 men were sacrificed through his instrumentality. He was virtually king when he deceived, betrayed, and robbed King Achish, and brutally murdered his subjects (1 Sam. xxvii.). He was king when, on one occasion (2 Sam. xii. 31), after fighting and taking a certain place, together with all the spoil which existed in abundance—to his shame, he it said, David brought forth the people that were left, and put them under saws and harrows of iron and axes. What man with a spark of humanity in his nature could dare to perpetrate such infamous deeds as these—deeds which for cruelty, torture, and relentless fury are unsurpassed, even in the records of the worse forms of savage barbarity? With these accounts before us, can it be consistently urged that the conduct of David as king was commendable? Besides, to enable a king to govern justly, he should be a good man. Bad men, in most instances, make bad rulers, as the history of our Stuarts and Brunswicks amply testify.

The Rev. Dr. David Thomas, an English Congregational minister, in vol. iii. of his work on the Psalms, quotes approvingly the following from "an eminent modern scholar, thinker, and author": "Time would fail to tell of David's crimes, his treacheries, his murders, his adulteries, his grovelling in the very sty of sensuality. Murder is too mild a word. His butcheries of the Canaanites were so manifold that when he had killed them off—men, women, and little children—his hands were too red to build the temple, and the work was deferred to Solomon's reign." The rev. doctor himself then adds: "But are there no good deeds in this biblical record that should be stated as a set-off against all these revolting enormities? But what mean you by good deeds? If you mean good deeds in strict conformity with the spirit and letter of the Decalogue, as given by Moses, as interpreted by Christ, and as embodied in his life, then such deeds are sadly wanting in the records of David's life. In walking through the biography—a path stained with blood and foul with moral pollutions—I have looked on every hand for some fruit of goodness, on every spot for some flower of virtue; but I have been sadly disappointed."

It is stated in the Bible that liars, false-swearers and murderers shall have their portion in hell. Is David there? If not, why not? If yes, where is the advantage of being a man after "God's own heart" and keeping his commandments and doing only that which was right in his eyes? That David indulged in the worst forms of vice is evident from his own confession, wherein he acknowledges:

"For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart" (Psalms xxxviii.)

Now David, feeling this remorse himself, is it any wonder that others should recognise the natural result of a long violation of the physical laws? And was it not pardonable on the part of the people if they did remind this self-made victim that he had

himself to blame for his then present suffering? But David could not tolerate such reproach, hence we find him giving vent to passion, and exclaiming in a savage and malignant manner against one who dared to speak about the conduct he was pursuing:

"Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places. Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labor. Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children. Let his posterity be cut off; and in the generation following let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord; and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out" (Psalms cix).

What an exhibition of weakness, depravity, and revengeful desires we have here portrayed. What name from the great muster roll of Greek and Roman philosophers can be cited to compete successfully with St. David in every quality which stamps the life of a man whose history commenced under deceit, and whose progressive steps were cemented in the blood of his victims, memorable alike for fraud, plunder, and ingenious cruelty?

The closing scene of David's career was a fitting and appropriate culmination to a long life of the worst form of immorality and hypocrisy (see 1 Kings ii. 5-9). The incidents of this scene illustrate that the few apparent generous acts performed by this special servant of God were dictated more by policy and self-gratification than by the higher dictates of virtue and humanity. It appears that at some period during his life, two men had given David offence, and, wonderful to relate, this "upright and righteous man," decided not to punish the offenders. But as the cold shades of death approached, it would seem that this magnanimous act upon the part of David caused him deep regret; hence, with that spirit of revenge which marked his whole career, he charged his son Solomon to inflict upon these two unfortunate men whatever acts of cruelty he might think fit after he (David) was dead. Let Christians cease talking of imaginary "infidel death-bed scenes" while they have this picture before them. Here is "the man after God's own heart," at the close of a life of blood and licentiousness, just as he is about to enter the portals of death, urging the malicious lesson upon his son to bring the hoary head of a man down to the grave with blood. Is this a specimen of Godlike forgiveness, or of Bible morality as illustrated in the conduct of its chief character? Be it our choice to possess and foster that love and generosity born of man and regulated by the ethical culture of the human race. CHARLES WATTS.

FREETHOUGHT FIFTY YEARS AGO.

[CONTINUED.]

ON Nov. 6, 1841, appeared (issued from No. 6 Narrow Wine-street, Bristol) No. 1 of the first popular English atheistic periodical, the *Oracle of Reason*. Carlyle, in his *Republican* (1819—1826), had given currency to many freethought and some atheistic articles, and his *Lion* (1828-29) had been mainly devoted to the anti-Christian letters of Taylor, "the Devil's Chaplain," then in Oakham Gaol. The *Isis*, too, of Eliza Sharples Carlyle (1832) was largely devoted to the freethought discourses of Frances Wright. But the *Oracle of Reason* was the first penny weekly journal wholly freethought and frankly atheistic. Despite the famous declaration of Robert Owen that the religions of the world were false and the great obstacle to social improvement, many of the Owenite Socialists sought to give rather a

Christian character to their movement, and even to their master's great doctrine that man was the creature of circumstances. Their main organ, *The New Moral World* (1834-41), avoided religious questions, though in the last numbers it called itself *Gazette of the Universal Community Society of Rational Religionists*. The editor, Mr. Fleming, and the more "respectable" Socialists held to the doctrine of Owen, "teach truth and error will fall to the ground." They incurred enough opprobrium, without adding thereto by unnecessary attacks on theology. Certain others, like C. J. Haslam, Ed. Walker and Robert Buchanan did not scruple to carry the war into the enemy's camp, in return for the denunciation by ministers of Owenism. Southwell, the editor of the *Oracle*, agreed with this policy, and had indeed fallen out with Owen and Fleming. In turn pianoforte maker, soldier, actor, orator and Socialist missionary, his restless activity delighted in combat. With William Chilton, a thoughtful composer, who had educated himself from being a bricklayer to becoming an expositor of the "Theory of Regular Gradation," he determined to start a freethought journal. The first numbers were entirely written by these two, and were decorous, not to say dull. But the bigots were alarmed, and soon talked of putting it down. This at once roused Southwell. Sprightly and impulsive, with great energy in a little body, he threw himself into the work of the *Oracle* with characteristic impetuosity. In No. 4 appeared a slapdash article on "The Jew-book." At the beginning appeared the motto—

The stupid cant "He went too far" despise,
And know that to be BOLD is to be wise.

The article which followed this motto was bold enough. Southwell, indeed, had studied the two first inscriptions recorded in Spenser's *Fairy Queen*, "Be bolde," "Be bolde," but he never digested the third one, "Be not too bolde." It began:

"That revoltingly odious Jew² production called BIBLE has been for ages the idol of all sorts of blockheads, the glory of knaves and the disgust of wise men. . . . It is a book which contains passages so outrageously disgusting and scandalously indecent, that were it not called the word of God, no modest woman would suffer it to be read in her house. . . . The truth is, more rubbish has been written about this rubbishy collection of allegories, lies, murders, rapes, etc., called Bible than all other books together. . . . Every one knows that the Jews were literally a nation of vagabonds; such a lot of rascals, runaways, as *Richard* describes making up the army of *Richmond*: 'People that o'erloyed countries had vomited forth, to desperate adventure and destruction.' Here was a fine soil for the flowers of philosophy! A lot of cutthroats, who nicknamed themselves the chosen of some god, whom they pretended to carry about in a kind of sedan chair, called an ark; before which one of their monster-kings, a great favorite with their god, and one after his own heart, danced naked! to the great edification of the virgins of the household. Well might Voltaire say, 'that these tales have been written by fools, commented upon by simpletons, taught by knaves, and given to children to be learned by heart; yet the sage is called a blasphemer because he becomes indignant, and is irritated at the most abominable fooleries that ever disgraced human nature.'"

At the end Southwell cites Luther's coarse expression against the Pope and Papists, which he says "will free us from the imputation of being the most vulgar writer on divine subjects."

This article gave the bigots the opportunity they wanted. Within a few hours from the appearance of the paper the author was dragged to a cold dungeon. Legal and respectable bail was refused as long as possible, and Southwell remained for seventeen days in solitary confinement. Meantime Chilton continued the *Oracle* and raised money for the defence. He printed and sold at one halfpenny each, copies of the warrant—a document that set forth all the passages indicted. These included one in which, as the

Recorder reminded the jury, Atheism is promulgated. It read:

"Metaphysics teach us that God is a pure spirit; but wherein is modern theology superior to that of savages? The savages acknowledge a great spirit for the master of the world. The savages, like all ignorant people, attribute to spirits all the effects of which their experience cannot discover the true causes. Ask a savage what moves your watch, he will answer it is a spirit. Ask our divines what moves the universe, they answer it is a spirit."

The trial took place before Sir Charles Wetherell on Jan. 14, 1842, and occupied two days, the greater part being taken up with an exhaustive defence, occupying altogether over ten hours, in which Southwell vindicated his right to free expression of opinions. William Carpenter had been engaged to report the trial, and Southwell, convinced that he would be convicted, determined to make his defence a complete exposition of his Freethought views. "My opinions," said he, "are antagonistic to all religions, and I think that mere morality is all sufficient for human purposes." Again and again was his defence interrupted by the counsel for the prosecution, a now forgotten wig and gown rejoicing in the name of Smith. The Recorder prevented him from reading from Voltaire on the ground that it would be "making this trial a vehicle for diffusing the atheistical opinion of other men," thus showing his fitness to judge the question before him by participating in the common belief that Voltaire was an Atheist. He asked the jury if blasphemy had been defined.

"Do we know as well what it is, as we know what murder, robbery, or other offences against society are? Certainly not. All men who have published new opinions upon religious matters have invariably been called blasphemers. Were not Socrates and Aristides blasphemers? Nay, was not Jesus Christ a blasphemer? That is, these great men were called blasphemers by those in authority. They were called blasphemers by the priests of those times, who acted as many priests act in these times; that is, they cried out, 'Blasphemy! Blasphemy!' whenever an opinion was put forth at all likely to overturn the opinions upon which they lived."

In concluding his lengthy and able defence, Southwell said:

"Gentlemen, I trust you will do your duty. I ask for no mercy. I never beg. I ask for simple justice. If you consign me to a dungeon, it shall be without a groan from me. I will suffer cheerfully, and without the slightest complaint. Only do not suppose that by putting me in prison you will put down the opinions which I believe to be true. No; you will make men sympathise and inquire. And you will do more for the advancement of these opinions than I could do if I lived for a thousand years. As it is one of the bulwarks—nay, as the bulwark of English liberty—I look to the box for a verdict which shall for ever establish the right of man to exercise full freedom of opinion. I appeal to you to do an act that shall be remembered in all time, and that shall be greeted by all lips. Let not the bigots, but the liberal and enlightened men, who look on this day's proceedings with intense anxiety, say that your verdict is one which at once does yourselves honor and serves mankind."

Sir Charles Wetherell, the Recorder, in summing up the passages already given, declared the libel "the concentration of everything scandalous, blasphemous, and atrocious—a wicked attack upon everything held sacred in this country." After this the jury needed little time for meditation. After an absence of ten minutes, they returned with a verdict of Guilty, and the Recorder, declaring that "the Christian religion is part and parcel of our law and government," gave the sentence of imprisonment for twelve months and to pay a fine of £100, to be further imprisoned until that fine was paid.

(To be concluded.)

A new book, in French, on the Religions of China is written by O. de Harlez, and published at Leipsic.

TO THE FREETHOUGHT PARTY.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—

Were it possible to choose my own time, I would defer this address for another week. My attack of illness, though not dangerous, has left me weaker than I expected. It shows me that I have been working up to the limit of my strength. I would gladly, therefore, wait a few days longer before writing to you on the following subjects; but there is too much to be lost by delay, and I must face the unpleasant task at once.

The Liberal Unionists of our party were from the very first opposed to my policy of purchasing the London Hall of Science. Their opposition was ostensibly based on certain objections to it as a Bradlaugh Memorial. They even affected a readiness to help my scheme if it were dissociated from the name of our great leader. But the course of events has shown the hollowness of this profession. No assistance has come from that quarter. Instead of help, there has been opposition, as was indeed expected; and the opposition has grown more and more malignant. While it made sinister suggestions as to my own motives it was beneath disdain. But when it openly writes of the Hall of Science as a place of "disgusting performances," and broadly hints that only self-interest would lead me to modify its worst features if the premises came into the hands of the National Secular Hall Society, I am bound to repel the public slander and the personal insult.

Last week's issue of what was once Charles Bradlaugh's paper contained the following answer to a correspondent:—

"CHARLES QUINTON.—We do not know any reason for supposing that when the National Secular Hall Society takes over the Hall of Science the 'club' element will be got rid of. On the contrary, we understand it is intended to retain it. Something may be done to put down 'disgusting performances' such as you speak of: self-interest would suggest that; but the free-and-easy policy will doubtless be continued."

Had this been written by a declared enemy of our party it would not have excited surprise, nor perhaps even indignation. We are accustomed to every species of libel, and are grown callous. But this appears in a Freethought journal; it is aimed at the National Secular Society, as is obvious from a sentence in another column; and the persons responsible for it are the "only true friends" of the man by whom that Society was established and led for nearly a generation.

When these persons and their supporters began to inveigh against the Hall of Science and its proprietor, I warned them that all the dirt they threw at it would fall upon Charles Bradlaugh's grave.

But I have two things to notice before I justify that warning.

First, the author of this odious paragraph does not himself charge the Hall of Science Club with permitting "disgusting performances." He fathers the charge upon Mr. Quinton, who expresses his surprise to Mr. Forder at standing sponsor for the libel. The proceeding is cowardly as well as malicious. "Disgusting" is a word that carries an obscene significance in the public mind; and before a Freethinker uses it at the direct or indirect expense of his own party, he is bound at least to have personal evidence of its justification. It will not avail to plead that the missile was supplied by other hands.

Secondly, I am told by several persons who have attended the Hall of Science Club concerts, after the Sunday lectures, that the entertainment is exactly the same as is given at a great many other London Clubs affiliated to the Club and Institute Union, the "companies" going the round of the Clubs on Sunday evenings. I am not a connoisseur in such assemblies, and I cannot speak from my own experience; on the other hand, I have never heard of any "disgusting performance," or I should have investigated for myself. For the rest, smoking-concerts are smoking-concerts; and whatever their demerits, they are none the worse, in my moral code, for taking place on a Sunday. There may even be Secularists who regard them as a relaxation after two Sunday doses, morning and evening, of

intellect from the platform. When lecturing at Leicester, I have sometimes gone into the Club room at the close of the meeting and chatted for a few minutes with Secular friends. Some smoked, some sipped a glass of something stronger than ginger-beer, and a lady or gentleman "obliged with a song." Why do not our Liberal Unionists denounce the "free-and-easy" at the Leicester Secular Hall after the Sunday evening lecture? Because it would not hurt the President of the National Secular Society.

As a matter of fact, the National Secular Society does not carry on the Club at the London Hall of Science. At present it rents the large hall on Sundays until 9 p.m., and on Thursday evenings for an indefinite time. While it occupies the hall it is responsible for what goes on; when it vacates the hall its responsibility ceases.

Of course a different position will obtain when the National Secular Hall Society takes possession, as it will do at Midsummer. With that I will deal presently. Meanwhile I want to ask why—except to harass me, insult the National Secular Society under my leadership, and prejudice the Freethought party against the acquisition of the Hall of Science—this attack is made at this particular moment.

Who took the Freethought party to the Hall of Science? Who made it, in a limited though real sense, the headquarters of the National Secular Society? Who rendered it famous over the English-speaking world? Who practically controlled its Sunday platform for twenty-two years? Who made the agreement with Mr. R. O. Smith as to the Freethought party's right to use the large hall on Sundays, and its first claim to use it on other days of the week, subject to certain financial conditions?—CHARLES BRADLAUGH.

When I joined the Secular party I found Charles Bradlaugh at the Hall of Science. When he resigned the Presidency, and nominated me as his successor, he did it at the Hall of Science. At the last lecture he ever delivered (I think) I took the chair; it was in aid of the Testimonial to Mr. R. Forder, the old secretary of the N. S. S., and it was at the Hall of Science.

I am not blaming Charles Bradlaugh. Far from it. I believe there was nothing to be ashamed of in his connection with the Hall of Science. I only say that if there is anything to be ashamed of in our party's connection with the place, as his "only true friends" are now asserting or insinuating, the blame does not rest on me. Up to the hour of his death, Charles Bradlaugh was the only person who had an understanding with Mr. R. O. Smith. I had no such understanding, and no sort of control.

Charles Bradlaugh died on January 30, 1891. Within six months I had proposed a scheme for purchasing the Hall of Science for the exclusive use of the National Secular Society. Could I have acted more promptly? And in what way am I responsible for the situation I did not create, and which I am striving to change?

It is said that Charles Bradlaugh "repeatedly and warmly protested against" the "policy"—I presume of Mr. Smith—at the Hall of Science. Really this is Charles Bradlaugh in a new light. It was a different man that I knew. His protests were of a very emphatic character; he generally protested by *doing* something; and his "protest" against Mr. Smith's policy would have taken the form of lecturing elsewhere. That he did not do, and I am not aware that a word of protest ever dropped from his lips or pen in public.

Absolutely no change, I am assured, has taken place at the Hall of Science Club since Charles Bradlaugh's death. Do my opponents mean, then, that he was justified in lecturing there, and holding N. S. S. meetings there, *in the circumstances*; and that I am bound to walk out of the place and take the N. S. S. with me, in the *same* circumstances?

I cannot see my duty in that light. Like my great predecessor, however humbly, I will hold on to what I have until I can find a better; and I ask the Freethought party to continue to assist me and my trusty colleagues in securing this Hall of Science for eighty-six years, and converting it into an Institute that will be a substantial Memorial to our dead President.

Need I say that the Directors of the National Secular Hall Society, including men like Mr. George Anderson and Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, are not likely to tolerate "disgusting performances" on their premises, or anything of a degrading character. Certainly it is our intention to let a portion of the premises be used as a Club; but it will not be a disorderly one, and I at least cherish a hope that some day it will be entirely confined to Secularists.

Let not these promises, however, be construed as any reflection on Mr. R. O. Smith. He has carried out a difficult work with great judgment and patience. I believe he has done the best that man could do. He has shown me letters from Charles Bradlaugh which convince me that he entertained the same opinion. It was Charles Bradlaugh who nominated him as a Vice-President of the National Secular Society; Charles Bradlaugh who appointed him election agent in the abortive Finsbury candidature; Charles Bradlaugh who saw him placed on our Organisation Committee; Charles Bradlaugh who, year after year, sanctioned the affiliation of the N. S. S. to the Hall of Science Club. Our great lost leader was a judge of men; and I know that since I took the presidency I have found no more prudent, loyal, and assiduous colleague in the Society's hardest work than Robert Owen Smith.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, I have a word to say on the Bradlaugh Memorial Hall Company. I cannot say whether I shall attend the Special General Meeting on Monday, although a large number of shareholders have sent me proxies, including two of the Company's directors. The resolution the Directors desire to carry is now purely platonic. The N. S. S. Executive has resolved that the subscribers to the Memorial Fund shall decide the disposition of the money for themselves. The resolution will be found in the report of the last Executive meeting, and it will be acted upon forthwith. Those who wish their subscriptions devoted to the Hall of Science scheme, and those who wish them held over for the Bradlaugh Memorial Hall Company when it has a practical proposal, will have an opportunity of saying so. There, I think, my responsibility ends. I may well leave the Company to its own fate, and push on with the National Secular Hall Society, which is happily receiving a most gratifying support. Any further reply sought from me will only be given when I sit in the President's chair at the National Secular Society's Conference. In this journal "the rest is silence."

G. W. FOOTE.

GOD: CUI BONO?

BAKOUNINE, the celebrated Russian Anarchist, gave expression to a profound truth when he said that, if there should be a God, it would be necessary to abolish him. The banishment of God from human affairs has indeed become essential for the formation of a healthy state of social feeling, and for the elimination of the superstition and tyranny that exist in our midst. Even should the argumentations of Theists ultimately bring us to a recognition of the abstract fact of the existence, somewhere abouts, of a Divine First Cause, we should only bow him a cold acknowledgment for past favors received, and promptly request the cessation, on his part, of all future intervention in human affairs. For, on any conceivable theistic theory, the action of deity is clearly mischievous, and its influence a mystifying and a pernicious one. We feel convinced, therefore, that only when the thoughts and sentiments of men have become extricated from the entanglements and ensnaring delusions begotten of the notion of God will a genuine pursuit of social happiness actuate the great masses of mankind, and then—and then only—will their efforts be turned into the channel through which social happiness may be realised.

The alleged interference of deity in the affairs of the world is evidenced, we are assured, by the happening of miracles—the proved reality of which, even in a single instance, would render illusory all scientific calculations of future events based on the results of

past experience. Nor is the intervention of God less disastrous on the religious plane than on the purely physical plane; it ever breeds bloodshed or bigotry, or both combined, at the same time that it upsets every rational notion of right and wrong by putting morality on the altogether arbitrary and absurd basis of the divine *ipse dixit*, which has no necessary relation to the social needs of mankind out of which morality arises. It is therefore plainly evident that, inasmuch as God's ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts, a ceaseless conflict of interest must ever take place between worldliness and other-worldliness (*i.e.*, between what *is*, without doubt and what *may be*, only very doubtfully)—in short, between the requirements of God and the wants of man. Hence, even if God be not an actual objective stumbling-block in our path, still the belief in him acts prejudicially in a thousand ways owing to the mischievous mal-direction of human effort which constantly and consequently goes on. The injury also of this baleful belief is that the unthinking believer is led to repose trust in an imagined being who, whether real or fictitious, has never justified such confidence, with the result that the natural means of happiness that lie within man's reach are often neglected, and wasted efforts and blighted hopes bestrew the path of many thousands of God-intoxicated men.

Let us take the Theists on their own chosen ground, and, for the nonce, admit the hypothesis that the universe of men and things was conceived and fashioned by a God. At their suggestion we will at once indulge in all the stereotyped praises of the mere physical aspect of nature—mountains, seas, shining stars, resplendent sun, and the well-advertised wonders with which the cosmos is garnished. All this magnificence may be admitted as evidencing the cunning workmanship of the divine artisan. But when we have sounded the last note of customary adulation and thanksgiving, the next and most logical step to take will be to submit to the ordeal of a close scrutinising the other side of the cosmical picture. Hideous sights of suffering will, as a result, everywhere meet our gaze. Every inch of space will display a vast field of carnage in which might tramples down all resistance and myriad forms of life are ruthlessly stamped out. At once every instinct of pity and justice within us will prompt us to protest that this unparalleled profusion of waste and misery serves only to impeach the wisdom and goodness of the creator, and makes his veneration an impossible act of folly. The exceeding cleverness of the artisan will make poor atonement for his unmindfulness of the welfare of the creatures whom, for his own selfish satisfaction, he recklessly summoned into being. If, therefore, there is a God he must unquestionably be vastly inferior in goodness to the best amongst fallible men and much more obnoxious in character than the worst.

If, however, no God exists, with the dread responsibility of an universe of woe on his shoulders, an intolerable burden of dread is, *ipso facto*, lifted from our minds. The veil of theological mystery is torn to tatters; the mind is no longer haunted with ghastly fears or buoyed up with fantastic hopes. We learn to look at a matter-of-fact world in a matter-of-fact manner, neither borne aloft on the buoyant wings of an optimism that sours above facts, nor hurled down to the despairing depths of a too gloomy pessimism.

Again: the elimination of God from human affairs is urgently required, having regard to the grotesque misconceptions of the prime essentials of morality occasioned by the imposition of the will of deity, as the sole, supreme, and all-sufficient guide of conduct. We hold that instead of morality depending upon God, or upon the retention of belief in him, clear and consistent ethical conceptions can, and will, only be perceived and entertained after the definite banish-

ment of "our Heavenly Father" from the usurped position of despotic rule and authority in which he sits enthroned to-day. The "will of God" has always been invented as the convenient sacro-sanct justification of the most hideous crimes and monstrous absurdities—as may be seen from the fact that "holy men of old" murdered, robbed and lied, or made fools of themselves and of other people, without stint, compunction, or sense of shame, "as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." God, like charity, covers—and condones—a multitude of sins. The sanction of God's approval stamped on an act of vileness or folly serves to justify that act in the superstitious eyes of the true believer, and would shield both the actor and the divine instigator from the shafts of adverse criticism. How mischievous are the effects of authority in the realm of ethics may be gathered from the fact that—though in the Bible monstrous crimes are aided and abetted by God, social injustice justified, brutal treachery extolled, and dangerous, impracticable teaching imparted—the Christian is required to hush the murmurings of an outraged conscience and to quench the light of his intellect whenever these attempt to raise the standard of rebellion against the preposterous usurpations of a God whose prerogative it is that he can do no wrong even in committing or ordaining the worst of evils. We contend that the existence of God has nothing at all to do with the quality of human acts. If God is after all a mere myth—as unreal as Mumbo-Jumbo—his disappearance from the realm of thought will leave the intrinsic quality of our acts absolutely unaffected thereby. The qualitative distinction between human actions into categories good and bad is and can only be determined by the sole consideration of the results to society flowing from those actions. No criterion of right and wrong is philosophically conceivable except the criterion of social welfare, the promotion of which is, and must be, a good thing whether a God smiles approval or frowns objection upon it. In a word, morality is above, beyond, and independent of God. If he exists morality can exist without him; if he is a real existence and loves the thing that is good, his approval is not essential to the ascertainment of its goodness, nor adds any strength or beauty to it. If, on the other hand, he is dead, or sublimely indifferent to the sea of troubles by which poor humanity is buffeted about, morality still persists, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. Gods may come, and gods may go, but good goes on for ever. If therefore God is the creator of the world he is unquestionably not the creator of morality—that is a task beyond the omnipotence of God himself. In any case, morality goes sublimely on its course independent of the favor or disfavor of deity—as independent of him as the Rule of Three is of any ratification or endorsement by a village schoolmaster: they exist, and will exist, by the very nature of things.

WM. HEAFORD.

(To be concluded).

BOOK CHAT.

The last two volumes of the "Sacred Books of the East," edited by Max Muller (vols. 39 and 40) are *The Texts of Taoism*, translated by James Legge, the translator of the Confucian "Chinese Classics." We presume Dr. Legge's translation may be equal to the previous ones by Dr. Chalmers, Mr. Balfour, and Stanislas Julien; but we must say we find his notes so often written in the disparaging spirit of a missionary that it makes us wish to see a translation of the New Testament annotated by a Chinese.

The most important of the Texts of Taoism is the Tao-teh King of Laotze, the old philosopher, who was born rather more than half a century before Confucius (B.C. 604). This Dr. Legge accepts as a genuine production of the age to which it has been ascribed. In this little book alone (which is shorter than even the gospel ascribed to Mark) may be

found ample evidence that the so-called Christian virtues are by no means peculiar to Christianity.

Among the sayings of the Tao-teh King, as translated by Dr. Legge, are the following—"The sage puts his own person last." "The highest excellence is like (that of) water. The excellence of water appears in its benefiting all things, and in its occupying, without striving (to the contrary), the low place which all men dislike." "In the sequence of great armies there are sure to be bad years." "He who knows other men is discerning; he who knows himself is intelligent." "He who overcomes others is strong; he who overcomes himself is mighty." "The sufficiency of contentment is an enduring and unchanging sufficiency." "To those who are good (to me) I am good, and to those who are not good (to me) I am also good; and thus (all) get to be good. To those who are sincere (with me), I am sincere; and to those who are not sincere (with me), I am also sincere; and thus (all) get to be sincere." "I have three precious things which I prize and hold fast; the first is gentleness, the second is economy, and the third is shrinking from taking the precedence of others."

The rest of the Taoist texts given in these volumes are the writings of Kwang-tze and the Thai-shang tractate of Actions and their Retributions. In these we have a somewhat degenerate Taoism. Kwang-tze gives a variety of anecdotes mixed with and illustrating its doctrinal teaching. Dr. Legge speaks of the writer's "Agnosticism." He gives as part of his doctrine—"To man, neither in nature nor in the sphere of knowledge, is there any other 'heaven' but what belongs to his own mind; that is his only 'True Ruler.' . . . Things come about in their proper course. We cannot advance any proof of Creation. Whether we assume that there was something 'in the beginning' or nothing, we are equally landed in contradiction and absurdity. Let us stop at the limit of what we know, and not try to advance a step beyond it."

The tractate on Actions and their Retributions has the following on the duty of the good man: "He ought to pity the malignant tendencies of others; to rejoice over their excellencies; to help them in their straits; to rescue them from their perils; to regard their gains as if they were his own, and their losses in the same way; not to publish their shortcomings; not to vaunt his own superiorities; to put a stop to what is evil, and exalt and display what is good; to yield much, and take little for himself; to receive insult without resenting it, and honor with an appearance of apprehension; to bestow favors without seeking for a return, and give to others without any subsequent regret." This was the teachings of heathen who lived long before Christ. No doubt their works were displeasing to God and they were all infallibly damned.

It is noteworthy that the Cambridge University Press issues a short Commentary on the Book of Daniel, written by Dr. Beaven, in which that production is assigned to the first part of the second century B.C. Put plainly, this means that the document is a forgery.

Mr. Bernard Quaritch sends us a specimen page of the *Shelley Concordance*, arranged and edited by Mr. F. S. Ellis. The manuscript has for some time been in the printer's hands, the work is already printed up to page 714, and the volume is expected to be on sale in May. The price to subscribers is to be 25s. From the specimen page ("Throng—Thunder") before us, it is evident that Mr. Ellis has done his work thoroughly.

Mr. W. M. Knox, the able and energetic secretary of the Ulster Branch, has issued a pamphlet on *Man's Alleged Spiritual Nature*. It deals chiefly with the sentimental arguments for Immortality, which have "grown to immense dimensions" since the days of David Hume, and concludes with a vigorous reply to Dr. Wallace. We heartily recommend the pamphlet. It is published at Crown Chambers, 64 Royal-avenue, Belfast, price twopence.

Christianity is a good deal like the old Irishwoman's stocking, which was just the same as when it was new twenty years ago, although re-footed, re-legged and re-darned in different colors several times over. Jesus would no more recognise his faith than the original maker of the old lady's hosiery.

ACID DROPS.

It appears that religion is at the bottom of the horrible case of cruelty by "the lady" of the North of Ireland. Mrs. Montagu is a pious Catholic, and Esther Emma James, formerly nurse at Cronmore, in giving evidence of previous cruelty to other children, said she saw cords hanging in dark closets near the children's bedroom. Two days later she saw Gilbert Montagu, aged five, with marks on his elbows and back, and pieces out of his toes. In October last, Austin Montagu was locked in the wardrobe. The accused told her that was her way of punishing children. *She did it to save their souls, and did not mind their bodies.*

Only religion is capable of this cruelty. To save souls, bodies have been systematically made to suffer, and deeds perpetrated which irreligious humanity would shudder at. The punishments in Catholic convents and schools are invariably brutal.

Father McDonnell, of Portrush, defends Mrs. Montagu, and says "there appears to be a regular conspiracy against Mrs. Montagu and her husband, and it is almost entirely on account of their religion."

The Rev. Dr. Mair, of Morningside, Edinburgh, has been lecturing at Ayr on the Contributions of Christianity to Science. Science, he declared, owed a large and unpaid debt to Christianity. It does, indeed; it owes it exactly what a traveller owes to a highwayman who has stopped, robbed, and wellnigh throttled him. This is not what Dr. Mair means. Oh dear, no. But Christians, if not Christianity, have done much for science. Look at the eminent Christian scientists, and see how Christian nations—not Abyssinia of course, but Scotland—"stood in the forefront of scientific advance." So, because Christian nations use the telephone, the telephone is to be as much ascribed to Christianity as if it had been invented by Jesus Christ.

Darwin's hash is settled at last. No doubt his vile remains will be dug up like Oliver Cromwell's from Westminster Abbey and flung away as rubbish. And who is the hero of this exposure? Why, Mr. John Dignum, of Warrington, whose refutation of Darwin is summarised in the local *Examiner*. His first objection to Darwinism is this, that it represents "the divine Creator as not knowing what he was about." But is that really a misrepresentation when John Dignum walks the earth?

Curiously enough, Darwin has also been demolished at Newcastle-on-Tyne. The Rev. Mr. Fairbourn, at Dilton-road Chapel, told his easy-eared audience that "Evolution had no evidence at all." After a long list of equally authoritative statements, a vote of thanks was passed to the man of God, who did not wait for questions, much less for discussion. We advise him to deliver the lecture again—in the presence of the Rev. Dr. Dallinger, and let the Wesleyan scientist tell him afterwards whether "Evolution has no evidence at all."

The sky-pilots of Minneapolis, Minnesota, are advanced Protectionists. Their attitude does honor to the land of the American spread-eagle. They have drawn up and presented to the Common Council of the City an ordinance in regard to Sunday amusements. No doubt exists in their minds that, according to a proper system of Protection, the sky-pilots should have Sunday to themselves for trading purposes. What the City Fathers think remains to be seen.

More clerical Protectionists! The Nonconformist ministers of Bow and Bromley have considered "the attitude of the London Council candidates in relation to moral questions, particularly with reference to safeguarding the Sabbath." "Particularly" is good! In the professional eyes of these men of God the chief "moral" question is how to keep up their own special day of business. Hallelujah! There's nothing like leather.

These Bow and Bromley ministers have issued a manifesto on this all-important question. They ask the candidates "to pledge themselves not to vote in favor of any resolution, measure, or petition to Parliament that shall have for its object the opening of museums, galleries,

or other places of amusement on the Sabbath." That is, on the Lord's day; that is, on *our* day; the day when we, the Lord's holy representatives to a sinful world, put on clean chokers, and sell our spiritual medicines for material cash.

Note, reader, how these East London sky-pilots class public museums and art galleries under the head of "amusements." No doubt when *they* go to such places they indulge in a fine, broad, simian grin; and it does not seem to occur to them that other folk, of a less godly disposition, may be educated and profited by looking at the records of man's past, and his highest achievements in art.

These clerical Protectionists go still further. They turn an eye of sour envy upon the very "pubs." All the lushingtons in those places should, of course, be recruits for the house of God. Accordingly, the London Council candidates are asked to "support any action that aims at the total prohibition of the drink traffic during the Sunday." Six days shalt thou get drunk on Gin, and on the seventh day thou shalt get drunk on Gospel.

George Sullivan has many *aliases*. Once he gave himself up as "Jack the Ripper." More recently he appeared in the Whitechapel-road and announced himself as Jesus Christ. He added that the dead in Bow Cemetery had got up and shaken hands with him. According to the doctor his condition was due to drink. But is this a fair way of treating the poor man? Perhaps he has only been drinking too much gospel.

The *Drapers' Record* reports an inquest on the body of Annie Sophia Miles, aged nineteen, assistant to Mr. Ashford, draper, Shepton Mallet. Deceased drank half a tea-cup of carbolic acid on Sunday evening. The reason of her suicide seems to have been this—"she had strong religious feelings."

"I feel very keenly that God has not permitted me to make you my wife to-morrow." So wrote Mr. Hutt, Sunday-school teacher and district visitor, to a young lady whom he jilted for an elderly one with considerable means. Now, however, he "feels very keenly" the loss of £100. This sum the jury awarded the female victim of Mr. Hutt's "tip from God"—as Mr. Stead would call it.

The Rev. J. Ogmore Davies, of Blackburn, expired suddenly when just on the eve of his marriage with a lady of large fortune. Some divine moral may lie here, but it is too deep for us to dig it out.

The Bath parson, the Rev. J. Casper Clutterbuck, Doctor of Divinity, was brought up from prison where he is confined for swindling to the extent of £35,000, to be examined about his bankruptcy. This follower of the Lord had as liabilities, £23,000, and as cash, assets £1 15s., a gold watch valued at £1, and a number of debts.

At Darlington police court it was alleged that the Paradise Schools had been used for debauching Sunday scholars after a tea party.

At the Roborough police court J. H. Symons, a Sunday school superintendent, of Buckland Monachorum, was summoned for having indecently assaulted a girl of thirteen. Prisoner is organist of the parish church.

The Rev. George A. Andrews, a regularly ordained Free-will Baptist minister, was on Jan. 30, at Salem, Mass., convicted of setting fire to his store to secure the insurance money. He had shipped large quantities of goods to unknown parties a few days before the fire.

The Rev. Richard Page, Congregational minister of Chalfont, St. Giles, Bucks, is an exceptional member of his profession. Being in a real hurry to go to heaven, he tried to hang himself in a railway carriage; but a dunderheaded porter cut him down, and the intending emigrant is not only left in this vale of tears, but is in the hands of the prison doctor.

A constant reader of the *War Cry*, who has a mathematical head, has calculated that if all the conversions claimed by

the Army are genuine, there ought no longer to be a single unsanctified soul left in Great Britain.

This calculator takes up the verse John xxi. 25, which says that if the other things which Jesus did should be written, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written." He finds that in the three years of Christ's ministry there were 94,608,000 seconds. There are in one square mile 27,878,400 square feet. If every second had a book that took up a square foot devoted to it, they would not have covered $3\frac{1}{2}$ square miles.

The *Truthseeker* has a cartoon depicting her most gracious Majesty clasping a Bible with one hand, while with the other she gives an Anglo-Indian official a "License to poison the heathen with opium."

The Emperor of Germany is, in the phrase of Browning, "very sure of God," and it will take more than the recent riots to undeceive his belief that he is under the special protection of Providence. He is bent on cramming sectarian education down the throats of non-sectarians, and is heedless that bigotry and militarism are combining to drive out of Germany its more enlightened and progressive spirits, who in America and Africa show themselves Republicans and Freethinkers. When their influence reacts on the Germans in Germany, and when the country finds itself being crushed between Russia and France, pious Billy may not be quite so sure of God after all.

A blizzard on the Newfoundland coast drove nineteen fishing boats out to sea. Thirteen fishermen were literally frozen to death, and every other man of the other sixty-eight of the crews was terribly frost-bitten. Another instance of divine providence.

The clergy and ministers of Cleckheaton gave pulpit references to the recent disasters of Marsh Mills. One would think if they had any regard for the character of their God they would avoid bringing him into a business where his *role* appears to be that of wholesale murderer.

Clergymen head the list of healthy occupations. They show the way to heaven, and keep out of it as long as possible. No doubt their friends will say it is their superior morality that gives them superior longevity. In our opinion it is their easy life, free from the hard struggles and cares of so many other professions.

The personality of the late Bishop of Worcester is of the value of £60,857. Of such is the kingdom of heaven!

Even the colonial bishops feather their nests pretty well. Dr. Field Flowers Goz, Bishop of Melbourne, has departed to glory and left £34,000 behind him. As he did not take it with him, it will of course be no hindrance to his entrance to the kingdom of heaven.

The Rev. Burman Cassin, rector of Southwark, has a majority of Dissenters in his parish vestry, and he cannot get them to collect his church rates for him. The law does not seem to help him, and the poor man will probably have to resort to prayer.

At Mr. Ramsey's lecture at Battersea a learned Christian opponent objected to his citation of a passage in the gospel ascribed to John. He said the lecturer must be very ignorant or he would know that in the original *Hebrew* it meant nothing of the kind.

Bishop Vaughan, who has been selected to succeed Manning as Archbishop of Westminster, and who may also be made a cardinal, is undoubtedly an astute and able man. He is proprietor of the *Tablet*.

Lent is once more upon us, but good Christians, instead of jumping into a suit of sackcloth embellished with ashes, are receiving dispensations from their bishops, both Anglican and Roman, to dispense with fasting. What would the apostolic fishermen say at this blow to their business?

Last year the Jesuits celebrated the four-hundredth anniversary of the birth of their founder, Ignatius Loyola, by issuing a new life of their sainted hero, by E. Rose. It is

noticeable, however, that the miraculous stories related of Ignatius in earlier lives are toned down. Father Dominick Bouhours, whose life of Saint Ignatius used to be considered authoritative, gravely related that he raised to life one Lisano, who had hanged himself. Lisano, however, did not tell any more of his experiences than did Lazarus, for he simply confessed his sins and died again.

Parson and squire are generally good friends, and unite in putting down poaching. But the Rev. T. M. Wetherall, rector of Stocking Pelham, Herts, with his dogs, chased the hares on grounds belonging to Mr. Seabrook, of Berden Priory, and has been fined in consequence by his brother magistrates. It never struck them that he was only looking for a "hare that cheweth the cud," as the Bible describes it. Thus the pious and laudable researches of a learned clergyman are misunderstood and derided.

The *Weekly Dispatch* reports that while a family were seated round the fire, singing "Safe in the arms of Jesus," the boiler exploded and sent several children there.

The poor wretches who have to seek a night's repose on the boards of the Salvation Army Shelter have their hearts cheered by a huge and suggestive placard, "Are you Ready to Die?"

The Peter's Pence, collected from poor Catholics in all parts of the world, has been so badly administered that it is said a sum of two millions of pounds has been wasted. Monsignor Folchi, the administrator, has been forced to resign, but he has published a memorial showing that he has acted throughout under the Pope's orders.

The Irish have lost Parnell, but Archbishop Walsh promises them a fresh crop of saints instead. What a glorious exchange!

The *Southern Echo* gives space to letters on "The Escaped Nun Controversy." Protestants and Catholics join in the fray. We shall not. It is a domestic quarrel amongst the Christians. Let them fight it out.

A poetic genius rejoicing in the name of A. Pettipher is encouraged by the insertion of some lines on "Atheism Let Loose" in the *Longton County Times and Echo*. They open thusly:

Atheist, I despise thee, and abhor
The tactics thou dost use in making war.

Great things may be expected from one beginning with so original and spirited a couplet.

The Methodist Conference, in the interests of Mr. Hugh Price Hughes and others with wealthy congregations, contemplates altering its rule of ministers being only allowed to stay three years in one place. This alteration will put a new complexion on Methodism, and lead it still farther away from what John Wesley intended.

Dr. Stevenson, the president of the Wesleyan Conference, does not hold out much prospect of reunion with the Church of England. He strongly rebuked the Bishop of Truro for speaking patronisingly of Methodists as good but mistaken people, and told him that the Methodist Church was the largest in the world. He surely forgets the Catholic Church. Dr. Stevenson, in conclusion, said—"The Church of England had intimated its desire for Christian unity, and its willingness to receive Methodists into its fold. The Methodists also desired unity, but, being the larger Church, they claimed to do the absorbing."

Dr. Parker repudiates with "intense aversion" the idea that the doctrine of eternal torment is "a vital part of the Evangelical faith." This is creditable to his sentiment or his gumption. But why does he claim to be orthodox? If Jesus did not teach eternal torment it is impossible to say what he *did* teach. But, after all, what does it matter? It is high time to act on Carlyle's phrase—"Exit Jesus."

Said a Blairgowrie divine with a magnificent accent—"As Messrs. Moody and Sankey are to be in this church next Wednesday I would advise any of you who have valuable Bibles or hymn books in your pews to take them home with you till next Sunday." And he wondered why the congregation smiled.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, March 6, Drill Hall, Merthyr: at 11, "Theism, Atheism, and Agnosticism"; at 3, "Is Christianity the Friend of the People?"; at 8, "Mr. Gladstone's Defence of the Bible."

Thursday, March 10, Hall of Science, Old-street, London: at 8, "Jesus of Nazareth."

March 13, Wolverhampton; 20, Manchester; 21, Warrington; 27, Hall of Science.

April 3, Hall of Science.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS' ENGAGEMENTS.—March 6, Birmingham; 7 and 8, Mechanic's Institute, Nottingham; 13 and 20 (morning and evening), Hall of Science; 22 and 23, debate at Sheffield; 27, Birmingham; 29 and 30, Newcastle-on-Tyne. April 3, Manchester; 10 and 17, Birmingham; 21, Sheffield. May 1 and 8 (morning and evening) Hall of Science; 15 and 22, Birmingham.—All communications for Mr. Watts should be sent direct to him at Baskerville Hall, The Crescent, Birmingham.

W. KNIGHT.—As the production of one so young, the poem is decidedly promising; but you will have to practise a good deal before you reach the standard of publication.

J. KEAST.—See "Sugar Plums." We hope you will succeed in re-forming the Bristol Branch. Call a meeting of intending members as soon as possible. Mr. Jones has sent the forms.

H. J. GABROW.—Cuttings are always welcome.

G. DOBSON.—Thanks. See "Sugar Plums."

J. SCULLARD.—Could not be dealt with last week owing to Mr. Foote's absence from London. See paragraph.

J. MAUDE.—Your ten shares in the Bradlaugh Memorial Hall Company entitle you to one vote; Mr. Hepworth's two shares carry the same voting power. The rule is, one vote for every ten shares up to a hundred; ten votes being the maximum. We have filled in the blank in your proxies.

A. WHEELER.—Your ten shares give you one vote. Your Branch knows a great deal more about the Hall of Science than most of those who are throwing mud at it now they think that Charles Bradlaugh is not there to sweep them off the pavement.

ANONYMOUS SHAREHOLDER.—Sorry you are too obtuse to see the obvious differences. The directors printed and posted with the shareholders' money, and as it was a special meeting every shareholder was morally entitled to a proxy form that he could use according to his own judgment. Mr. Foote printed proxy forms at his own expense and for his own purposes, as his circular stated, and he had a clear right to use them as he pleased.

G. E. O. NAWWIGER, secretary of Hull Branch, has removed to 9 De La Pole-terrace, Bean-street, Hull.

The official address of the Battersea Branch is now 48 Park-grove, Battersea-park-road.

G. G. O.—Thanks. We are not alarmed. There is no appeal against natural selection. Still, the approval of veterans is grateful.

J. NICOLSON.—Mr. Foote's lecture on "Who Wrote the Bible?" is not published. He may do a pamphlet on the question shortly. "A bar sinister in the escutcheon" is a metaphor for illegitimacy.

R. EDWARDS.—Proxy to hand. As your shares are fully paid up, we understand your feeling it "shameful that the shareholders' time and money should be so wasted." Glad to have your opinion that we are "clutching the substance" instead of "chasing a shadow."

J. ETCHHELLS.—Of course there is not room for two Companies. You are in favor of "the old Hall," like so many other shareholders in the Memorial Company, but a partisan body of directors, taking advantage of the fact that a three-fourths majority is necessary for winding the Company up, insist on retaining, and trying to use, the capital of a large body of dissentient shareholders.

C. M.—That religious bill is a very old one. It has appeared in heaps of papers, including the *Freethinker*.

W. MANN.—Your paper is not without merit, but the parallel between the Salvation Army and primitive Christianity has often been pressed in this journal.

H. M. RIDGWAY.—Sorry your name got spelt wrongly. It is always risky to correct the lists of Branch secretaries.

A. FORSTER.—See paragraph.

W. CLARKSON.—You will see from another column that we do not intend to hasten the decease of the Company. When it does wind up we are glad to know that your ten shares will be available for the Hall of Science scheme as "the only one the Freethought party can realise in our lifetime."

F. S. SWARTZ.—Thanks for cuttings. Pleased to hear that our article on Cardinal Manning is so highly appreciated. Buddhism started in the sixth century before Christ; Mohammedanism in the seventh century after Christ.

J. H. STOLE.—It may be useful some day. We prefer to deal with more recent cases in special paragraphs.

JOHN HARKIS, 38 Spittal, Aberdeen, is the new secretary of the local N. S. S. Branch, in place of P. Lunan resigned.

B. INGHAM.—Your support is the more valuable because you once differed.

CANTAB says that A. T. Stevens can get the *Freethinker* in Cambridge at Rosendale and Clamp's, 3 Fitzroy-street.

H. E. SMITH (Clevedon).—Sorry we misrepresented Mr. Logan's height by half an inch. We did not catch the half. The best reply to the noisy Christians of Bristol will be to carry on a Freethought propaganda in the city. The debate was not reported because the local price was too high. We offered eleven pounds by telegram for a verbatim report, but the offer was declined.

A. MANN.—No doubt you are "an honest man," but you are not the editor of this journal. The person you ask us to notice may be a Christian, but his vulgar abuse will never gain him an advertisement in the *Freethinker*.

KUNIKOS.—See "Acid Drops."

R. DOWDING.—Thanks. The correction should have been made before.

A. WOLGEMUTH.—Translation received.

JOSEPH BROWN, 86 Durham-street, Bentinck, Newcastle-on-Tyne, acknowledges the following for the North Eastern Secular Federation:—J. Saunderson, 5s.; J. Robinson, 5s.

J. G. B.—It is doubtful if Christian churches could be turned into public libraries, technical schools, baths, and opera houses. They are mostly constructed for their present uses, and could hardly be converted as you suppose. Here and there, however, it could be done. Both at Manchester and at Portsmouth the hall of, the N. S. S. Branch is a converted chapel.

WE have received the following for the London Secular Federation Fund:—Edward Goodwin, 10s.; F. Goodwin, 10s.

W. SIMONS writes that the Ball's Pond Hall is still used for Secular lectures on Sundays, the Branch being then the Company's tenant. The Mildmay Radical Club, which taboos Freethought lectures, controls the hall during the week.

EDINBURGH.—We do not understand the complaint. Lecture Notices have not appeared in the *Freethinker* for the simple reason that they have not reached us. There must be some mistake.

JAMES HOOPER.—You do not enclose particulars for a paragraph. We hope Mr. Watts will have good meetings at Nottingham on Monday and Tuesday.

W. H. WHITNEY.—Contents-sheets shall be sent. We are sorry that Christian roughs make open-air Freethought work so difficult and dangerous at Derby.

E. PARKER.—We do not remember his ever taking the chair for us. We do not always know the chairman. The West Ham Branch could probably tell.

S. H. ALISON.—We have advised the support of Mr. Ivatts in any case. If Mr. Maurice Russell is a member of the N. S. S. he should benefit by any votes that can be spared from Mr. Ivatts.

R. O. SMITH, hon. treasurer of the London Secular Federation, acknowledges:—S. Hartmann, £1.

J. GIBBONS.—Always glad to receive cuttings.

J. G. BARTRAM.—Sorry to hear that the Newcastle spiritualists seem inclined to draw out of the debate, but pleased to hear that Mr. Morse is personally anxious to meet Mr. Watts.

J. R. WILLOCK.—£25 for the Hospital was one good result, at any rate, from Sam Standing's debate with Celestino Edwards. We note your statement that at Manchester "everybody thinks Mr. Moss has improved."

J. JACKSON.—See "Sugar Plums."

T. PHILLIPS.—Thanks for your "extra copy" trial with the newsgang, which has obtained us three fresh subscribers.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Fritankaren—Truthseeker—Lichtfreund—Freidenker—Liberator—Two Worlds—Western Figaro—Boston Investigator—Freedom—Liberty—Der Arme Teufel—Progressive Thinker—Cosmopolitan—Flaming Sword—Better Way—Echo—Ironclad Ago—Lucifer—Crossbearer—Twentieth Century—New Hampshire Telegram—Retford, Workop and Gainsborough News—Clifton News—Star—Daily News—Helping Hand—Longton County Times and Echo—Irish Independent—Yorkshire Post—North Star—Glasgow Weekly Herald—Beverly Guardian—Cosmopolitan—Rock—Bucks Standard—Derry Standard—Devon Evening Express—Northern Daily Telegraph.

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.

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.

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.

SUGAR PLUMS.

Mr. Foote's debate with the Rev. J. M. Logan, at Bristol, had at least two good results. The first is the payment of a goodly sum to the Children's Hospital. The second is the resuscitation of the Bristol Branch of the National Secular Society. After the last night's debate Mr. Foote met a large number of Freethinkers in the anteroom. They resolved to have a good working Branch, and Mr. Foote promised them, on behalf of the N. S. S., all possible support in the shape of lecturers, etc. A secretary *pro tem.* was elected, Mr. J. Keast. His address is 32 Morgan-street, St. Paul's, Bristol. All who wish to join the Branch and help on the Freethought cause, either actively or financially, should communicate with Mr. Keast at once.

The third result of the Bristol debate is less satisfactory. Mr. Foote overheated himself in shouting down a lot of noisy Christians, got chilled afterwards, and returned to London with a nasty cold, which grew worse, until he was obliged to take to his bed and fight a beastly attack of bronchitis with partial lung congestion. Of course he was unable to fulfil his engagement on Sunday at the Hall of Science. Mr. Sam Standing kindly lectured for him in the morning, and Mr. R. Forder in the evening.

Mr. Foote was able to get up on Monday morning and sit near a good fire. His throat and chest are getting easier, and with proper care he should soon be himself again.

Mr. Foote is mapping out a lecture tour in the far north before the next N. S. S. Conference. The first Sunday in May is booked for Glasgow. If possible, the tour will include Edinburgh, Aberdeen, and other Scottish towns, and wind up with three Sunday lectures at Belfast.

Free admission will be discontinued at the London Hall of Science during March. Mr. Foote is to deliver four special lectures, and admission will be charged. We invite the attention of our London readers to this course. A special invitation is sent to the Christian Evidence Society to be represented. See the advertisement in another column.

It is now arranged that Mr. Charles Watts will debate in Sheffield on Tuesday and Wednesday, March 22 and 23, with the Rev. Dr. James McCann upon the following proposition—"That Secularism is Superior to Christianity for Meeting the Needs of Mankind." The Rev. Dr. McCann is put forward as the representative of "The Christian Evidence Society." On March 29 and 30 Mr. Watts will discuss two nights with Mr. J. Morse on "Is Spiritualism a Fact?" in Newcastle-on-Tyne.

This (Sunday) evening, March 6, Mrs. Charles Watts will give her "Dramatic Recitals" at the Working Men's Institute, Leicester; and on Sunday, March 13, she will be at Sheffield: in the afternoon "An Hour with Col. Ingersoll," and in the evening "Dramatic Recitals." We shall be pleased to hear that Mrs. Watts is well supported on both occasions.

Mr. A. B. Moss went to Manchester early on Saturday and tackled the negro champion of Christianity at St. James's Hall. Celestine Edwards discoursed on "Liberty." There was hardly a reference to the Bible. Mr. Moss, however, in half an hour's reply, wanted to know how Liberty could be advocated by a Bibliolator. His reference to certain Bible texts was not relished; and when he declared that Liberty was only a mockery if hell and damnation awaited honest thinkers at the finish, the Christians tried to shout him down and the chairman ruled him out of order. Mr. Moss stood his ground, however, and made a good impression.

A debate will take place at Chatham Hall, Battersea, on Monday, March 14, between the Rev. T. Sunderland and Mr. W. Heaford; subject, "Is Secularism a Better Guide than Christianity?" Mr. W. R. Smith, a local schoolmaster and Christian, will take the chair. The charges for admission will be 3d. and 6d. Tickets can be had at the Battersea Secular Hall and at outdoor meetings on Sunday mornings.

Chatham Secular Hall Fund.—We desire gratefully to acknowledge the receipt of £50 from Maria de Bois in answer to our appeal for assistance.—W. B. THOMPSON, Hon. Sec.

E. dos Santos, hon. sec. of the Trinidad Branch of the N. S. S., forwards a list of nineteen members, two being new ones. "For every Freethinker in the ranks," he says, "there are fifteen outside."

We frequently receive gratifying assurances that our propaganda of Freethought has rescued many from the grip of superstition. Here is a case in point. A gentleman who orders a photograph of Mr. Foote writes as follows:—"About two years ago a copy of a Christmas Number of your paper, the *Freethinker*, was lent me by a friend, the consequence being that I was greatly interested in the article upon Judge North, and learnt for the first time the noble part that you have taken for opinion's sake. From the advertisements on the wrapper I was enabled to obtain and read for myself the greater part of your writings, and I have now been for more than a year a subscriber to your journal, of which I am very fond."

The Children's Party at the Hall of Science was a roaring success. Some three hundred and more youngsters enjoyed their fill of tea and cake, followed by oranges, bonbons, etc. A capital entertainment was provided, including a children's play, performed by the children, and dancing round the maypole. As usual, at the end, prizes and toys were distributed by Mrs. Foote, Mrs. Standing, and others.

The following is a further list of subscriptions:—Per J. Anderson: J. Robertson, 10s.; S. Stalder, 2s. Per J. Searle, 9s. 6d. Per J. Enderby, 10s. 9d. Per A. Guest, 1s. Per Miss Hudd, 5s. 6d. Per Miss Robins, 15s. 6d. Per G. J. Warren, 4s. Mrs. Donoghue, 2s. Collection at Hall of Science, £2 10s. 2½d.—ROBERT FORDER, Treasurer.

The Finsbury Park Branch have been compelled to abandon their hall in Rock-street owing to the landlord having been served with a notice by the district surveyor to carry out certain alterations called for by the Metropolitan Building Acts, and which he refuses to comply with. This is most unfortunate, seeing that over £40 has been spent in the fitting-up of the hall, and also that when entering into negotiations for renting the premises the landlord's surveyor distinctly stated that they were in every way suitable for public lectures, and had been previously used for religious meetings. Until other arrangements are made the lectures of the Branch will be delivered in the park.

Mr. Sam Standing has arranged with the Manchester Branch to devote himself to the organisation and propaganda of Freethought in Cottonopolis, and if possible in South Lancashire. It is impossible for him to do so with any measure of dignity unless he has a guarantee of subsistence, and the Branch is trying to raise a guarantee fund of £100 for the first year. This fund might well be supported by Freethinkers in the whole of the South Lancashire district. Subscriptions can be forwarded to A. Hemingway, president, 25 Higher Chatham-street; or to S. King, treasurer, 12 Dorset-street, Hulme, Manchester.

The recent annual report of the West Ham Branch is encouraging. Work has been pushed on vigorously, and the financial position shows an improvement. We are glad to see that the "profit from the sale of literature is 50 per cent. better than the previous year." In closing the report, attention is drawn to the proposed statue of Charles Bradlaugh at Northampton; and it is pointed out that "three monuments have been reared to the memory of declared Atheists during the year"—Bruno, Garibaldi, and Marlowe. Our West Ham friends will pardon us for saying that this is an exaggeration. The Bruno memorial was not erected in 1891, but some years earlier; nor was Bruno a declared Atheist; and the Atheism of Marlowe, while resting on fair evidence, is not so positive as it is here represented.

Southampton Freethinkers may see this paragraph before the local School Board elections on Saturday, March 5. If they do, we hope they will not fail to vote for Mr. P. R. Domoney, the present Chairman of the Board, who is the only candidate running on the "secular" ticket.

A Secular Debating Society has been formed in connection with the N. W. London Branch. Young men willing to join are invited to apply to the Branch secretary, or any of the Committee, at Milton Hall on Sunday evenings.

Mr. F. Millar and the Rev. Dr. Duffy debated at the Secular Hall, Camberwell, on Sunday evening. The hall was crammed.

This evening (March 6) the Camberwell Branch has a social party in aid of the London Secular Federation's funds. Tea at 6, entertainment at 7. Tickets (1s.) can be had at 28 Stonecutter-street, or of the Branch secretary.

The Ball's Pond Secular Sick and Tontine Society has insured the lives of its members through the Post Office Assurance, to the extent of the Society's liability to each member at death, so that the death payment is now practically guaranteed irrespectively of the state of the Society's funds.

The New York ministers who sought to boycott the *New York Telegram* for inserting in its columns the infidelity of Col. Ingersoll, deserve the hearty thanks of all Freethinkers. They have drawn the Colonel out, and like a Triton among the minnows he makes his clerical critics caper.

The *Independent Pulpit* has completed its ninth volume, and with its March number enters upon its tenth year with better prospects of success than ever. We congratulate Mr. J. D. Shaw upon the ability and success with which he has maintained this worthy Freethought organ in the Lone Star State of Texas.

The Philadelphia *Press* reports by special telegram from Pittsburg a Secular wedding that took place there after the celebration of Thomas Paine's birthday. The young couple were "spliced" on the stage, in the presence of the meeting, by Alderman Beinhauer; and President Pierce, of the Pittsburg Secular Society, presented them with a full-length portrait of Thomas Paine in a costly frame, as a memento of the occasion.

The Freethinkers of California celebrated Paine's birthday by a convention at Union-square Hall, San Francisco, under the presidency of S. P. Putnam. A message by telegraph from Robert C. Adams, president of the Canadian Secular Union, was welcomed with rousing cheers—"Canada's Freethinkers greet California's convention. May you hasten the day when the *Rights of Man* and the *Age of Reason* shall control the continent from the St. Lawrence to the Golden Gate."

The *Ironclad Age* of Feb. 6, gives portraits of its founder, the late Dr. Monroe, and his successors, Dr. V. H. Monroe, Harry C. Monroe, and Mrs. Lulie A. Monroe Power, all of whom Dr. Monroe had well trained for the work they are now doing, which is carrying on his paper with the old verve and vigor.

Dr. Monroe suffered from that common editorial trouble, the budding poet. To one he wrote the following letter, which is reprinted as a warning to others:—"Dear Sir,—Anything is more acceptable than 'poetry.' Poetry, that very rare article, I like. About one man in nine millions can write poetry. I have a crate full that almost drives me mad to contemplate. I have a desire, an insatiable desire, to please and accommodate all my friends. But sing-song doggerel so excites my disgust that I almost determine upon suicide whenever a yard arrives. You shall have a fair deal, however. But bear in mind that no *genuine poet* is of sane mind, and that all imitators are idiots."

Speaking of the traditions and customs of the peasantry of Europe. Mr. J. G. Frazer, the author of the *Golden Bough*, says in *Folk-Lore*: "The two great historical influences that have moulded our modern civilisation—the Roman empire and Christianity—have left hardly a trace in the genuine beliefs and customs of the folk. Christianity has slightly changed the nomenclature, and that is all." Mr. Frazer goes on to show that while there is nothing in Roman civilisation or the Christian religion to account for the origin of the popular tradition, there is in the customs and ideas of existing savages almost everything that is needed fully to explain and account for it. He urges that the resemblance between the ideas and customs of our European peasantry, and the ideas and customs of savages is so great as almost to amount to identity.

The Huddersfield Branch has decided to sell Freethought literature for its own profit, and the secretary, G. Dobson, 53 Thornton-road, will be glad to hear from those who wish to be supplied. We hope this movement will considerably improve the circulation of Secular publications in the vicinity.

Freethought is taking a fresh turn in Sheffield. A local Freethinker, in co-operation with the Secular Society, has taken Sanger's Circus (a very large building) for three lectures by Mr. Foote on Sunday, April 17. The town is to be splendidly billed.

Mr. Philip Wright, one of the trustees of the Leicester Secular Hall, is a County Council candidate in the Sibley division. His address is an admirable one, and we hope he will have a big majority.

The Spennymoor Branch holds a social gathering on Monday (March 7) in the Victoria Hall. There is to be a supper, concert, and dance. The tickets are miraculously priced at sixpence. Of course there will be a crowd.

The *Clifton Free Press* devotes a column of paragraphs to the recent Logan and Foote debate. On the whole the tone is fair. It is illogical, however, to suppose, because the Christians were in the majority, that Secularism has no public influence in Bristol.

ON THE STATE OF FREETHOUGHT IN HOLLAND.

FREETHOUGHT in Holland is steadily increasing. The Dutch Society "De Dageraad" does a good deal of work. At the end of 1889 we printed a circular, which we scattered in thousands over the country. There was to be a census, and *De Dageraad* wished to know precisely the number of Freethinkers in the Netherlands. We invited all who no longer believed in God, all who no longer went to church, to write on the cards in the column "geloof" (creed) "No creed." Some of the daily papers inserted our circular in their columns, so that almost everyone in the country knew the wish of our society. At the previous census (1880) the number of persons who had written "no creed" was 6,000; and now the results of the census are just published, there were 66,085 men "without religion"!

Notwithstanding the great number, it was proved in the beginning of 1890 that the number of men without creed should be much greater than the official result. In many country towns, in great cities, in barracks and in workshops, was exercised a pressure on the poor to write on the cards what the burgomaster, the clergyman, the officer of the army, or the principal desired. So we think that the true number is at least twice as numerous as the official figures.

In the same year (1889) we published a sixty-page pamphlet entitled *Dominée Pastoor of Rabbi* (the names of Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish clergymen in Holland). We sold it at a very low price, viz., a single copy 10 cents (two pence); 100 copies at once for 3.5 cents (7-10ths penny) each. It was a very good Freethought pamphlet, spurring men to think on matters of religion; to think wherefore they believe in the religion they do—a pamphlet well calculated to make of every reader a Freethinker. At present 35,000 copies are sold and scattered all over the country. Great was the fear of the clergymen of every sort; several attacks on it were made, but they were of very little worth. At a meeting of Protestant clergymen it was decided to publish a cheap pamphlet against it; but nothing yet has appeared.

The Sunday in the Protestant churches of the greater towns is almost like the other days. The clergyman has some ten or twenty auditors, and his voice is a *vox clamantis in deserto!* Freethought is spreading over all ranks and classes of society. Much of this we owe to the works of our greatest writer, Douwes Dekker ("Multatuli"), who died just five years ago to-day. "De Dageraad" publishes this week a new book to his memory.

JAN VAN DER ENDE.

Amsterdam, February 19, 1892.

A school boy asked what Bible knowledge he had acquired, summed it up thusly: "Once on a time God made Adam of nothing, and woman from his rib. Then he sent a flood and drowned everybody 'cept those in Noah's Ark, and Noah got drunk and cursed Ham in his tent."

WAS CHRIST CRUCIFIED?

BY A MEMBER OF THE CHICAGO BAR.

(From the "Truthseeker," New York.)

(CONTINUED.)

But whether or not the Jews had power to try Jesus for a capital offence, the trial was not according to Jewish law, and Jewish writers generally insist that it could not have taken place as related.

In the first place, the preliminary examination of Jesus before trial by Annas or Caiaphas was illegal, it being the right of the accused to be free from any personal investigation whatever until brought for trial before his congregated brethren (Salvador's Institutions, i., 366). The Jewish law, instead of providing for a preliminary examination, as some modern States do, expressly prohibited it. And yet we are informed in the gospel of John that Christ was taken before the High Priest, who asked him "of his disciples and of his teachings." The other gospels also mention a preliminary examination.

As there is an apparent conflict between the gospels as to this preliminary trial, it has been maintained that the preliminary hearing was the only trial had, and that it was at this trial that Jesus was condemned by the Sanhedrim. But, besides the fact that this is in direct conflict with the account of John, which represents Jesus as being sent to Annas and by him examined and then subsequently sent to Caiaphas and tried by the Sanhedrim, there is a greater difficulty, inasmuch as the whole trial would, on that supposition, be contrary to Jewish law and Jewish custom.

For in the next place the trial could not, according to Jewish law, have taken place at night, as related by Matthew and Mark. Capital trials, says the Mishna (De Synedrus iv. 1), are commenced only in the daytime, and must also be concluded only in the day. They may be concluded in the same day if there is a sentence of acquittal, but must be postponed to a second day if there is to be a condemnation. Here, however, the trial appears, according to two gospels, not only to have been held at night, but to have been commenced and ended on the same day (or night rather), without any intermission, both of which were illegal. The following is the regulation contained in the Mishna—"If a man is found innocent the court absolves him; but if not, his judgment is put off to the following day. Meantime the judges meet together, and, eating little meat and drinking no wine during the whole day, they confer upon the cause. On the following morning they return into court" and vote over again (Mishna, De Synedrus v. 5, and vi. 1).

It was also provided that capital trials should not be held on the day before a Sabbath or a fast day (De Synedrus iv. 1). The meeting of the council, however, at which Christ was finally condemned, took place on Friday morning, a day before the Sabbath (being the same day on which Christ was crucified). Or if it met, according to some, on the previous day, it was continued into Friday. If the trial was on Thursday, it was illegal because it was held at night; if on Friday, it was held on a day before the Sabbath. It could not, accordingly, have taken place on either day. According to the gospel accounts Jesus was arrested, tried, condemned, and executed before two days had expired, all of which was illegal, and, according to Jewish writers, could never have occurred: and the question arises whether, when a transaction is related which in so many essentials is improbable, there is any truth in it at all. For while some may say that the Jews simply acted illegally, there is a legal presumption, which we shall presently consider, that it is less probable that the great Sanhedrim, which was composed of seventy-one members, would wholly disregard its own laws and precedents, than that this story is a fiction invented in after times like the miracles.

There are other legal difficulties in the way of accepting the story of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

One is that Jesus was questioned in his own case, which was not permitted in Jewish law. For the Jews could not even plead guilty. "Our law," says Maimonides, "condemns no one to death upon his own confession." Nor could the judges make any judicial use whatever of his testimony. "It is a fundamental principle with us," says Bartemore, "that no one can damage himself by what he says in judgment." And yet Matthew represents the High Priest as not only questioning Jesus, but persisting in

his efforts to get him to testify: "Answerest thou nothing?" he says, "What is it which these witness against thee?" and the evangelist says that when Jesus held his peace "the High Priest said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the son of the living God," and that when Jesus answered that he was, the High Priest said, "He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy."

It is also related in the gospels that those who constituted the court—"the chief priests and the whole council"—went out of their way to find witnesses against Jesus, and false witnesses at that. That is, the judges made themselves the prosecutors of the accused, and worked up the case against him. They are represented as having determined on the death of Jesus in advance, and then manufactured evidence to accomplish it, thus not only deciding the case before the trial began, but suborning witnesses for the purpose of giving it an appearance of legality. Such proceedings on the part of judges are unprecedented, and especially on the part of such a large body of them. A lawyer could hardly believe the assertion. And yet Matthew says: "Now the chief priests and the whole council sought false witness against Jesus that they might put him to death." This is all the more strange since in the administration of the Jewish law the judges were understood to have somewhat the character of the advocates of the prisoner, like our judges-advocate at a court-martial, and to be charged with preventing any undue influence from prevailing against him. Even if the judges were corrupt enough to do what is here charged, it is hardly credible that they would have deemed it safe to do so, and especially that so many would do so—the whole Sanhedrim.

A further incredible procedure is that no witnesses for the defence were allowed to testify. We are told that as soon as the case for the prosecution was made out the high priest asked, "What further need have we of witnesses . . . What think ye?" and we are told that "they answered and said, He is worthy of death." Now, in all Jewish times the right to put in a defence was guarded with most scrupulous care for the protection of the accused; and to condemn one on the completion of the prosecution's testimony alone, would be to end the trial in the middle, in fact to give no trial at all.

In the next place, Jesus could not have been legally condemned to death by the Sanhedrim for the offence alleged. Blasphemy was not then punishable by death, although that is the charge on which, according to the Gospels, he was condemned. Nor was any similar offence into which his conduct might have been construed, punishable by death.

Nor was the utterance blasphemous for which he was declared guilty of blasphemy. Blasphemy among the Jews had a strict technical meaning, and the law had to regard the technicality in criminal trials. Blasphemy consisted in the mention of the divine name, and the Mishna states that the blasphemer was not guilty until he expressed the name. To claim that he was the Messiah was not blasphemy. The Jews looked for a Messiah, and they would have been extremely illogical to put to death one who should present himself as the man whom they wanted. Even a false claim to be the Messiah was not blasphemous, and at the trial the Jews did not even consider the truth of his claim, but, according to the Gospels, pronounced him guilty from the fact that he made the claim, saying, according to Matthew, "He hath spoken blasphemy. What further need have we of witnesses?" Nor was it blasphemous to claim that he was the son of God. Every son of Israel was sometimes called a son of God, and the term had too many meanings to be legally criminal *per se*.

It will thus appear that no such trial as that recorded in the Gospels could have taken place had the Jews observed their own regulations. If any trial occurred at all, it was a very different or else a wholly illegal one. It is hard to believe that such a body as the Sanhedrim, the high ecclesiastical council of a great people, would act so contrary to so many of their laws and traditions, and with most remarkable unanimity; and it is still more difficult to believe that they would do this when they could in most respects have just as easily complied with their law, and so made their acts at least technically legal.

(To be continued.)

NATIONAL SECULAR SOCIETY.

MONTHLY meeting of Executive at the Hall of Science, February 24, Mr. Foote in the chair. Present: Miss Vance, Mrs. Thornton Smith, Messrs. Moss, Reynolds, Standing, Truelove, Wheeler, Forder, Brumage, Ivatts, Hunt, Warren, Bater, Heaford, Wehrle, Roger, Hartmann, Heard, Davies, Quinton, Larkin, Snell, and Jones, sec.

The minutes of previous meeting were read and confirmed; also minutes of the Organisation Committee. The latter included permission to form Branches in Arbroath, Ebchester, and Derby; also permission to the secretary to lecture for those Branches that had applied for his services.

A letter was read from the Battersea Branch, dealing with the system of nominating a place for the Annual Conference of the Society. A few suggestions were thrown out, and the President promised that the subject would be dealt with by the Organisation Committee and remitted to the Conference.

The Secretary reported that Newcastle and Portsmouth had been nominated for holding the next Annual Conference. Newcastle had nominated itself, and the secretary was instructed to inquire of the Portsmouth Branch if it is prepared to make the usual guarantee to the Executive.

The President announced that a Branch was in course of formation in Bristol, as a result of his two nights' debate in that town. The President also informed the meeting what progress had taken place during the month in the Liberty of Bequest movement.

A letter was read from Mr. Sam Standing, dealing with the condition of the Lancashire Branches. The subject was remitted to the Organisation Committee.

The President informed the meeting that the old form of diploma was not suitable for the recently appointed special lecturers, and suggested that a new form be obtained. Mrs. Thornton Smith proposed, and Mr. Truelove seconded, the suggestion; carried.

The President then made a statement concerning the Bradlaugh Memorial Fund; after which Mr. Roger proposed, and Mr. Warren seconded, the following resolution—"This Executive of the National Secular Society, considering that a number of subscribers to the Bradlaugh Memorial Fund are anxious that their subscriptions should not be indefinitely locked up, resolves that the said subscribers shall be allowed to decide for themselves, and as far as possible individually, whether their subscriptions shall be invested by the N. S. S. in the National Secular Hall Society, or held over by the N. S. S. until the Bradlaugh Memorial Hall Company puts forward a practical proposal for carrying out its object; and this Executive further resolves to leave the trustees of the Bradlaugh Memorial Fund to ascertain and give effect to the wishes of the subscribers."

Mr. Hartmann proposed, and Mr. Hunt seconded, the following amendment—"That the donations and subscriptions given for a Charles Bradlaugh Memorial should be left undisturbed for the purpose it has been solicited and given, so long as the Bradlaugh Memorial Company has a legal existence." The amendment was negatived, only three voting for it.

Mr. Larkin then proposed the following further amendment, which was seconded by Mr. Hunt—"That the question as to the disposal of the funds of the Bradlaugh Memorial be left undecided till the next meeting of the Executive, so as to allow the members of the Council to confer with their Branches upon the matter." Also negatived by 3 to 13. The resolution was then put to the meeting, and carried with three dissentients.

STANLEY JONES, Sec.

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.
- (6) Distribute some of our cheap tracts in your walks abroad, at public meetings, or among the audiences around street-corner preachers.

OBITUARY.

Died, at Forest Gate, after a long illness and suffering, Dr. J. Baxter Langley, well known as a Radical and progressive speaker in days gone by. Dr. Baxter Langley was a leading spirit in establishing the National Sunday League, and debated with ministers on the Sunday question. He contested Greenwich in 1865, 1873, and 1874.

With feelings of deep regret I record the death of Mr. Charles Callaghan, of Malton-street, Oldham, on the 23rd ult., after a short illness. He died as he had lived, an advanced Radical and a convinced and avowed Atheist. He was for many years a fervent supporter of the late Mr. Bradlaugh. Thinking out the problems of life for himself, he always stood up fearlessly for what he believed to be right and true. We interred his remains at the Chaddeston Cemetery on Saturday, the 27th ult. At the graveside Mr. C. Pegg, of Manchester, read the Secular Burial Service by Mr. Austin Holyoake, in a very effective and impressive manner.—R. QUINN.

I deeply regret to record the death of John Hallam, one of the youngest members of the Newcastle Branch. The knowledge of his death unfortunately only reached me three weeks after burial, which was conducted with Christian rites, in spite of deceased's request to have a Secular funeral, and which request had been promised by his parents. Deceased knew that his end was fast approaching, and two days previous to death he poked fun out of his ability to twang a harp. Deceased died of consumption, but retained his faculties to the last, and on the day of his death he wrote in a book, "Good-bye, friends; I die a steadfast Freethinker," and requested that the book be given to his friend, a fellow-member of the Branch.—J. G. BARTRAM.

The Chatham Branch N. S. S. has suffered a sad loss by the death of one of its brightest and most promising members, Mr. Charles J. Cannon, who died of a most painful and incurable disease on Wednesday, Feb. 24, at the early age of 34. He retained almost full possession of his intellectual faculties to nearly the last, and was fully aware of his approaching end. The principles of Freethought, of which he was an able exponent, were sufficient to sustain him in that most trying ordeal of one's opinions—the sad passage from life to death. The devoted attention of an affectionate wife and mother was ably assisted by the constant ministrations of several of the lady members of our society during the weary months of his painful illness. The burial took place on Sunday last in Gillingham Cemetery in the presence of an immense gathering of spectators. There were Secularists, trade unionists, friendly societies, politicians, and co-operators, attending to pay their respects to one who had labored so much and earnestly with them in those various societies. The Secular Funeral Service was read by Mr. F. J. Boorman. Mr. J. J. Taylor and the undersigned expressed in short speeches the feelings of the local Secularists, and Mr. T. Williams the Amalgamated Society of Engineers. It can be truly said that the world is better for his life, and that human progress has lost an enthusiastic and able worker.—W. B. THOMPSON, Hon. Sec.

NATURE OR GOD?

To what we call good and evil, nature as such is indifferent and nature submits to man's control, not as he is just or unjust, believing or sceptical, but as he understands the law, by which the operations of nature are directed. The piety of the captain does not save his ship from the reefs; he depends on his knowledge of navigation. Prayer does not avert the pestilence, but an understanding of the conditions of health. The lightning strikes the church, but spares the gambling house provided with a conducting rod. Disease and misfortune, or the more mighty visitations of the earthquake, the famine, the inundation, make no distinction between the deserving and the base.—J. A. Froude.

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PROFANE JOKES.

Teacher—"Can anyone help Johnny to finish the fourth commandment?" Small Boy—"Yeth'm. And the Lord blessed the Thaturday, and made it a holiday."

The Minister's Wife (to industrial scholar)—"Eliza Jane, I'm sorry to hear from your schoolmistress you are not diligent at your needlework. You know who it is finds work for idle hands to do?" Eliza Jane (intensely anxious to propitiate)—"Yes, 'm; please, 'm, you do!"

Parson Hardshell—"I hopes, Bre'r Amos, dat you ain't gwine to do nuffin wid dat pole dis Lawd's day." Amos—"Oh, no, I hain't gwine ter use it. I jes' gwine ter hold it in my hand down by the ribber. If any fool fish gits cotched on de' udder end ob de string, sarve dem 'right fer bein' snootin' round on de Lawd's day."

A careful mother had impressed upon her little boy the necessity of ejecting the skins of grapes, and a few days afterwards she told him the story of Jonah and the whale. "The whale is a very large monster," said the mother, "and he swallowed Jonah." "Did he swallow other men too?" asked the boy. "Well, I suppose he did," continued the mother, who was somewhat in doubt; and while she was hesitating about the continuation of the story the boy interrupted and said, "And, mamma, did he spit the skins out too?"

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, 38 Newington Green-road: 7, J. M. Robertson, "Whitewashing Christianity."

Battersea Secular Hall (back of Battersea Park Station): 7.45, B. Hyatt, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (preceded by dramatic study from *Hamlet*). Tuesday, at 8, social gathering. Wednesday, at 8, dramatic class. Thursday, at 8, committee.

Bethnal Green—Libra Hall, 78 Libra-road, Roman-road: 3, members' special meeting; 7, musical entertainment; 7.30, C. Cohen, "Miracles"; 9.30, free concert and dance.

Camberwell—51 New Church-road, S.E.: 11.30, debating class, impromptu speaking; 8, tea; 7, entertainment.

Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.: 11.15, Touzeau Parris, "The County Council Fight" (free); 6.45, music; 7.15, Touzeau Parris, "The End of the World" (3d., 8d., and 1s.). Thursday, at 8, G. W. Foote, "Jesus of Nazareth."

Hammersmith—Hammersmith Club, 1 The Grove: Thursday, at 8, Stanley Jones, "God, Man, and Nature."

Milton Hall, Hawley-crescent, Kentish Town-road, N.W.: 7, orchestral band; 7.30, Dr. T. R. Adinon, "Food and Feeding."

Tottenham—Lecture Hall (corner of Seven Sisters'-road): 3.30, Mr. May, "The Truth about the MSS. of the Gospels."

West Ham—Secular Hall, 121 Broadway, Plaistow: 7, T. Thurlow, "Christian Evidence Dodges." Thursday at 8, open debate.

West London—Clarendon Coffee Palace, Clarendon-road (close to Latimer-road Station): Friday, at 8.30, members' monthly meeting.

Westminster—Liberal and Radical Club, Chapter-street: 7, H. Snell, "Has the Religion of Christianity been of Benefit to the World?"

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Battersea Park-gates: 11.15, Stanley Jones, "The Creation."

Finsbury Park (near the band-stand): J. Rowney, 11.30, "Jesus" 3.30, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Hyde Park (near Marble Arch): 11.30, W. Heaford, "Why we Attack Christianity."

COUNTRY.

Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge-street: 7, Charles Watts, "The Church: ought it to be Disestablished?"

Chatham Secular Society, Old George Inn: 6.30, J. Taylor, "Remember Lot's Wife."

Derby—Mr. H. McGuinness, 20 Newland-street: 7, G. Harper, "The Development of Life."

Glasgow—Ex-Mission Hall, 110 Brunswick-street: 12, discussion class, Mr. Thomson, "Materialism"; 6.30, R. Shaw, "Man's Sacred Books."

Hanley—Secular Hall, John-street: Sam Standring, 11, "St. Paul the Apostle"; 3, "The Sunday-school Evil"; 6.30, "Christ on the Labor Question."

Heckmondwike—Mr. John Rothera's Bottoms: 2.30, members' quarterly meeting.

Hull—Cobden Hall, 6 Story-street, Albion-street: 6.30, G. Smith, "Who and what are the People?"

Hull Sunday Association, Cobden Hall: 2.30, G. E. O. Naewiger, "Atheism Philosophically Considered."

Leeds—Crampton's Temperance Hotel, Briggate: 7, members' meeting; 7.30, Mr. Youngman, "God's Doings and Omissions."

Liverpool—Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street: 11, Tontine Society; 12, committee meeting; 3, discussion class; 7, L. Small, B.Sc., Readings from Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*.

Manchester N. 8. 8., Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints': 6.30, social evening, Farley, Turner, etc. Free.

Merthyr Drill Hall: G. W. Foote, 11, "Theism, Atheism, and Agnosticism"; 3, "Is Christianity the Friend of the People?"; 8, "Mr. Gladstone's Defence of the Bible."

Newcastle-on-Tyne—Eldon Hall, 2 Clayton-street: 3, Mr. Kerpel's logic class; 7, A. Dawson, "What a Spiritualist Believes."

Nottingham—Secular Hall, Beck-street: 7, A. Lord, "Some Wonderful Babies."

Plymouth—100 Union-street: 7, a meeting.

Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington-street, Southsea: 2.45, reading circle; 7, Mr. Pinhorne will lecture.

Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham-street: Miss Ada Campbell, 3, "Labor and Poverty: Why do Men Starve?"; 7, "Truth v. Christianity"; tea at 5.

Southampton—Philharmonic Hall, Above Bar: C. J. Hunt, 3, "Materialism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy"; 7, "God: when and what?"

South Shields—Capt. Duncan's Navigation School, King-street: 3, mutual improvement class, impromptu speeches; 7, Mr. Kerpel, "Christianity, from a Religious Standpoint, a Failure."

Spennymoor—Victoria Hall, Dundas-street: 6.30, business meeting. Monday, at 7, social evening.

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Newcastle-on-Tyne—Quayside (near big crane): 11, a meeting re the Loader case.

Nottingham—Sneinton Market: 11, A. Lord, "Christianity in England."

LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

TOUZEAU PARRIS, 28 Rivercourt-road, Hammersmith, London, W.—March 6, Hall of Science; 24, West Ham. April 3, Merthyr; 17, Hall of Science; 24, Milton Hall.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.—March 6, 13, 20, 27, Deptford. April 24, Hornsey. May 1, Camberwell; 8, Clerkenwell. June 5, Camberwell; 12, Clerkenwell; 19, Hornsey.

C. J. HUNT, 48 Fordingley-road, St. Peter's Park, London, W.—March 6, Southampton; 13, Woolwich; 20, Westminster; 27, Camberwell. April 3, Hyde Park; 10, Kilburn; April 17 to May 1, Annual Tour. May to Sept., all mornings booked.

H. SNELL, 6 Monk-street, Woolwich.—March 6, Westminster; 20, Camberwell; 27, evening, Newington Reform Club. April 3, Southampton; 10, morning, Bethnal Green; evening, Battersea; 24, morning, Victoria Park; evening, Camberwell. May 1, morning, Victoria Park; evening, Battersea.

C. COHEN, 154 Cannon-street-road, Commercial-road, E.—March 6 and 13, Libra Hall; 20, morning, Battersea. April 3, afternoon, Victoria Park; 10, morning, Bethnal Green; afternoon, Victoria Park; 17, morning, Mile End Waste; 24, afternoon, Victoria Park.

STANLEY JONES, 28 Stonecutter-street, London, E.C.—March 6, morning, Battersea; 10, Hammersmith; 13, Nottingham; 17, Walthamstow; 20, Woolwich; 27, West Ham. April 3, morning, Finsbury Park; 17, morning, Battersea. May 1, morning, Clerkenwell Green; 8, Newcastle.

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