

The Free Thinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

[Sub-Editor, J. M. WHEELER.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.

"Under whatever name it may be known to the real students of every sect, the only field of Progress is now that of positive philosophy."

—HARRIET MARTINEAU.

WILL CHRIST SAVE US?

[CONTINUED.]

LET us first look at the example and the teaching of Jesus from the domestic standpoint, which is of incalculable importance.

The unit of the human race is neither the man nor the woman; it is the family, in which the supplementary natures of men and women find free scope, as husband and wife, and as parents, whose various functions, alike on the physical and on the moral side, are equally necessary to the nurture and education of their offspring. The family, indeed, is the ark of civilisation, containing the sacred elements of humanity, and preserving the germ of all social organisation amidst the worst disasters that flow from the folly and wickedness of nations or their rulers.

In this respect the example of Jesus is worthless. He was certainly not remarkable for filial devotion. Of his relations with his brothers and sisters we know next to nothing. He was not married, and was therefore unacquainted with the duties of a husband and a father. Whatever else his example may be worth, it is entirely valueless in regard to domestic obligations. Men, and even gods, can only be an example to us so far as they have been in our positions. Without this qualification their very advice is apt to provoke laughter or impatience; a truth which we find reflected in the proverb that bachelors' children are always well brought up.

The teaching of Jesus, on this point, is as barren as his example. It is a singular fact, which rarely attracts the attention of believers, that the domestic ethics of Christianity are not to be found in the Gospels, but in the epistles of Saint Paul. Jesus does occasionally condescend to touch the question of sexuality, which lies at the basis of all our social life; but on such occasions he is either enigmatic or repulsive. He appears to have regarded sexual relations in the spirit of an Essenean. One of his sayings went still farther; it prompted the great Origen to emasculate himself as a candidate for the kingdom of heaven. Another fervent disciple of Jesus in our own age, the great Russian writer, Count Tolstoi, argues that no true Christian can enter into the marriage relation. He quotes a number of the sayings of Jesus in support of his argument. And what is the answer of the Churches? Their only answer is silence. They dare not meet him on this ground. They trust his article will be forgotten, and they act on the maxim "the least said the soonest mended."

In a certain sense the virtue of industry is a part of domestic morality. Although every worker may be regarded as a cell of the entire social organism, it is not for society that he primarily labors, but for

his own subsistence and the maintenance of his family. Now Jesus never taught the virtue of industry. "How could he," asks Professor Newman, "when he kept twelve religious mendicants around him?" Here again it is to Saint Paul that we must go for ethical teaching. So far as Jesus can be understood, he taught a doctrine of special providence which cuts at the roots of thrift and foresight. "Take no thought for the morrow," and similar maxims, would, if acted upon, reduce civilised communities to the condition of the lowest savages, who live from hand to mouth, and feast to-day and starve to-morrow.

The only escape from this difficulty is to treat such maxims as mystical, hyperbolic, or allegorical. It is difficult, however, to regard them in that light, when we remember the whole drift of Christ's teaching. We have not a few isolated texts to deal with, but a whole body of inculcations, culminating in the advice to a rich young man to sell all he possessed and give the proceeds to the poor; advice, indeed, which was universally acted upon by the primitive Church, if we may trust the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles.

We may further remark that if Jesus did not mean precisely what he said in these numerous instances, the Churches are bound to tell us two things; first, what he did mean; secondly, why he spoke in a misleading or perplexing manner. Was it worth while to cloud the path of salvation with dark sayings? And if a writer or speaker does not mean what he says, is it really possible for anyone to be certain what he *does* mean? Unless language is used with its ordinary significance, every man will interpret it according to his fancy, and the conception of its meaning will vary with taste and temperament.

So much for Christ's example and teaching with respect to domestic morality. We will now, before examining his other teaching, briefly consider his claim as "the great exemplar" in the more general sense of the words.

Not only is it impossible for us to imitate his miracles; not only does he afford us no practical example in the ordinary duties of life; his example in all other respects is perfectly useless. As a god, we cannot imitate him; as a man we cannot imitate him either, since it is impossible to ascertain his real character; and the very fact that he *has* been worshipped as a god precludes his serving as a human model.

Let us elaborate these propositions a little. When a king is dethroned it is undignified to take a part in public affairs. He should retire into private life. In the same way, as Professor Bain observes, a dethroned God should not set up as a great man, but retire into the region of poetry and mythology. "He who has once been deified," says Strauss, "has irremediably lost his manhood." This is the reason why Unitarianism, despite wealth, learning, and ability, achieves no success amongst the people. It is also the reason why Christian panegyrists of the character of Jesus indulge in such hectic eloquence. They *must* maintain a certain

feverishness; a lapse into cool reason would betray the hollowness of their cause.

Jesus as a man is one of the most shadowy figures in history, and his outlines perpetually shift as we read the Gospel narratives. It was this confusing fact which prompted the following objection of Strauss to regarding the Prophet of Nazareth as a human model: "I must have a distinct, definite conception of him in whom I am to believe, whom I am to imitate as an exemplar of moral excellence. A being of which I can only catch fitful glimpses, which remains obscure to me in essential respects, may, it is true, interest me as a problem for scientific investigation, but it must remain ineffectual as regards practical influence on my life. But a being with distinct features, capable of affording a definite conception, is only to be found in the Christ of faith, of legend, and there, of course, only by the votary who is willing to take into the bargain all the impossibilities, all the contradictions contained in the picture: the Jesus of history, of science, is only a problem; but a problem cannot be an object of worship or a pattern by which to shape our lives."

Thus the "great exemplar" vanishes in the light of rationalism; it can only exist in the twilight of faith.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

CHRISTIANITY IN TRANSITION.

"Unsectarian Christianity can no more exist than there can be a triangle which is neither scalene, nor isosceles, nor equilateral. All Christians might conceivably be converted to one sect; but if you strip off from the common creed all the matters that are in dispute between them, the residuum is at most the old-fashioned deism, if, indeed, it amounts to that."—Leslie Stephen, "*Free-thinking and Plain-speaking*," p. 119.

THE evidence that Christianity is slowly but surely passing away is contained in its history since the Renaissance. Every effort to reform it has resulted in the formation of numerous sects, each lopping off some of the old Christian doctrines. The ancient structure may in the various Protestant sects be found in ruins, and by a careful archæologist may be pieced together. To the historian, Christianity in its totality exists only in Roman Catholicism. In setting up the right of private judgment, Protestantism really undermined Christianity. The ultimate issue of private judgment must be Freethought and the removal of all creeds. Luther, as Catholics are fond of saying, opened a road for Voltaire. Of course he never would have opened it if he knew that it went so far. The Protestant Reformers took up the Bible as the base of operations against the Catholics, and they erected it into as veritable an idol, and regarded it with as much superstition, as any they protested against. But in their doctrine of the right of private judgment they supplied the antidote to all idolatry. Catholicism, moreover, which makes so much of the variations of Protestantism, has, though in a less degree, been moved and altered by the spirit of the ages through which it has passed. Catholicism has had numerous modifications, and their history would make as telling a volume as Bossuet's *Variations of Protestantism*.

The process of the disintegration of a religion is necessarily a slow one. Paganism is not yet extinct among the peasantry of Europe. Indeed, as Whately pointed out, the old beliefs remain among many even when Christianised in name. Creaking doors hang long upon their hinges, and threatened faiths take long in departing. But it is safe to say that Christianity is played out so far as its vital effect upon the masses is concerned. It holds mainly a nominal existence, being professed by millions who never realise their beliefs or seek to carry its doctrines into practice. Among cultured people, one who really believes that God was born of a virgin in Palestine, and that he died to save us after we are dead for sins committed before we were born, is becoming as rare

as a dodo; and if he seeks to carry Christianity into his life, he will be considered as fit for a museum of curiosities.

No one who takes an extended view of human history, or who contemplates the various faiths which have engaged the beliefs and aspirations of man, can suppose that Christianity is the final and perfect consummation which abideth for ever. If, indeed, anyone studies the history of that religion, he will find that it only continues to exist by constantly modifying and endeavoring to adapt itself to the growing science and intelligence of man. But the hope of permanency is vain. Savagery is bound up in its essential doctrines, and it must share the fate of all those other religions which have preceded it. When we compare the present with the ages of faith in which Christianity ruled the lives and moved the hearts of men, we see the gradual progress that has been made.

To have an idea of the extent to which Christianity has been whittled away, take up any treatise of theology, say of the Puritan period, and compare its doctrines with those now taught in the churches. It will soon be seen that all that gave the old faith its life and value has disappeared. What is left should indeed be infinitely precious, for it is infinitesimally small. All the distinctive dogmas are being slowly abandoned. Satan is superannuated, hell refrigerated. The god of gore is replaced by the god of gush. Instead of blood and thunder the sky-pilots, aping Matthew Arnold, speak of sweetness and light. Treacle is substituted for brimstone; inspiration is toned down; the miraculous allegorised. The old creeds are melted up till, like the boiled sugar of the confectioner, they are capable of being stretched almost indefinitely and moulded into any form. If anyone can call himself a Christian, it is only because Christianity means anything or nothing. The wriggling Christian, in his efforts to elude the grasp of Freethought, has strained words out of all meaning. He is an advocate of freedom of speech in the sense of taking the liberty to use words in any sense. Inspiration no longer means that "men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." "Every teacher of everlasting verities," observes Dr. Gleig, "deserved to be spoken of as an inspired man." "Morning and evening" no longer make a day, but an indefinite geological period. "Everlasting" does not mean never-ending, nor does fire imply heat or flame. When we read of the fire which never shall be quenched we may construe it that, as there is no fire, there of course is no quenching. So much water has been thrown on hell-fire that nothing can be perceived but vapor. Even those who still think there must be a hell are shocked if it is supposed they think anyone will be damned. The doctrine of salvation by blood is spiritualised till it loses all definite meaning. The Holy Ghost has been spirited away into a nebulous cloud, and the very Devil is so etherialised that his divine antagonist must also be in danger of melting into thin air.

As Secularism advances, we hear more and more of the re-union of Christendom. The pleasant holiday assembly of sky-pilots at Grindelwald this summer will take holy communion together, though the question of who is to administer it has already excited some controversy. But there is a universal desire to sink sectarian differences. It is lamented that Protestants burnt Papists and Papists Protestants; that Luther denounced Zwinglius; that Calvin burnt Servetus, and that Anglicans imprisoned and cropped the ears of Dissenters. It is forgotten that those who did this acted so cruelly just because they held their religion to be of vital importance; because the torture of the body on earth was as nothing compared to eternal punishment in hell. To say, as they do now, that dogmas matter nothing is to imply that they are not true.

We have small fear of the fuss about Christian re-union. Bred as they are in ideas of exclusive salvation through their own faith, the only idea of union held by the majority of Christians is of the unity which would spring from the submission of others to *their* beliefs and customs. Such approach to re-union as can be made can only be arrived at by stripping off one by one of Christian dogmas until nothing but bare humanity is left, and on this ground Atheist, Buddhist and Jew can agree as much as Protestant and Catholic. It is possible to conceive that all Theists should band themselves as against Atheists, as attempted in France by the *Ligue de la Paix Sociale* under Jules Simon. But when Christians, as they are already doing, hold out their hands to Theists, to join them as against Atheists and Agnostics, they can only do so from the Theistic and not from the Christian platform, which they must subordinate. Jews must ever reject the hateful term. To Mohammedans Christianity is only known as a cruel and ambitious enemy. To the heathen it is chiefly known as the creed of usurping despots. The world is not advancing towards Christianity, but rather receding from it.

J. M. WHEELER.

ORTHODOX PERVERSIONS.

ORTHODOX defenders, in their puerile attacks on Secularism, are frequently guilty of gross perversions which tend to mislead those who are not acquainted with our principles, and also to embitter against us those who are guided by prejudice rather than by reason. The exponents of popular Christianity, failing to substantiate their claims among the impartial thinkers of to-day, resort not only to misrepresenting Secular teachings, but they seek to pervert our policy and to distort the facts upon which we rely to justify our advocacy. Ignoring our positive principles, which we are constantly expounding, theological disputants erroneously assert that the main object of Secular propaganda is to destroy existing faiths, instead of endeavoring to stimulate new ideas and to assist in the formation of noble characters. It appears to be entirely overlooked by such reckless special pleaders that useful conduct can never be guaranteed from minds impregnated with errors and deteriorated by follies and fanciful figments. The object of Secularism is to get rid of all impediments to a pure and lofty conception of human duty, by acting as an educational agency; by favoring and advocating the diffusion of practical instruction; by creating a sound public opinion in favor of free and unbiased inquiry; and by awakening the popular mind, as no other system attempts to do, to the fact that the most painful and most degrading of all ignorance is the want of knowledge of the great truth that every form of theology is purely of human invention, and that all real and lasting reformation must emanate from the energies and discipline of mankind themselves.

We grant that Secularism is a militant system in so far as it seeks to remove from society superstition, ignorance and vice, for, notwithstanding the progress that has been effected during the present century, we still find superstition powerful, ignorance widespread, and vice too often triumphant. To combat these evils is the external polity of Secularism. In the performance of this work we do not attack persons, but systems; our weapons are keen and powerful, our arsenal is as wide as the world's literature. Science, philosophy, history, criticism and common sense are the agencies we employ in our work of amelioration.

It is sometimes asked, "How is it, then, that Secularism does not at once overthrow superstition?" The reply is, because superstition is so bound up with the system of the daily life of the higher and middle

classes. It is identified with the Government; supported by the powerful landed interest; and the Christian ministry is the sphere of livelihood and means of support of younger sons of the upper class and of many ambitious young men in the middle class. Only a violent revolution could *at once* subvert this; but Secularism, depreciating violence, seeks only to educate the people to a frame of mind in which it would be possible to dispense with all theological systems.

Of course the intellectual process for remedying long standing evils must necessarily be slow in producing its results, but the lessons of history prove that it is the most effectual in its operation. For while theology, with wealth and fashion on its side, has had a fair and long trial and has failed to regenerate society, secular education and scepticism have proved to be the saviors of the world, so far as that salvation has been achieved. The diffusion of knowledge has taught man his duties, his responsibilities, and the advantages of a well-informed mind, and its absence has ever been, and still is, the great barrier to all progress—the prolific cause of intellectual prostration, submission to despotic power, and of the lack of self-reliance. Ignorance has deprived individuals of the ability to understand the consequences of certain actions; hence the physical diseases and the immorality that are associated with the ages of faith. Education, which has become more powerful as it has become less theological, has largely removed these impediments to progress, and has thereby assisted the advent of true civilisation. The advantage of scepticism cannot be over-estimated. Without it a high degree of civilisation would have been impossible. It has liberated thought and been the precursor of all reform. Through its agency instruction has been rescued from priestcraft, science has been popularised, politics have been divorced from theology, and religion itself has been purified. Instead of obeying the dictates of the Church, mankind are now beginning to rely upon their own efforts, having learned from a long and painful experience that this is the surest method of practically assisting human progress, augmenting human happiness, and promoting the civilisation of the world.

A familiar orthodox perversion is that we are indebted to Christianity for our sense of duty and willingness of self-sacrifice. What an absurd distortion of truth this is will be apparent to all unbiased readers of history. A high sense and an active love of duty existed and were manifested long before the dawn of the Christian era. It was a prominent characteristic of the old Romans, and they obeyed its call as tenaciously, to say the least, as professing Christians do to-day. As the Rev. Dr. Temple, in his "Essay on the Education of the World," observes: "It is in the history of Rome rather than in the Bible that we find our models of precepts of political duty, and especially of the duty of patriotism. . . . To the Greeks we owe the corrective which conscience needs to borrow from nature." If it were asked how do we know that we owe any duty to our fellow-men, we should answer, because our sense of justice and experience prove that the happiness, welfare, and the advancement of our race depend upon the fulfilment of human obligations and a manifestation of fair and proper behavior one to another. It was not Christianity that inspired Confucius to write—"When thou laborest for others, do it with the same zeal as if it were for thyself." Cicero needed not Christianity to induce him to exclaim: "The two best gifts of the gods to men are to do good to others and to follow truth." The truth is, that the motive supplied by Christianity for doing good is the quintessence of selfishness, arising, as it does, from a desire for personal happiness in some future world? The hope of heaven is the all-absorb-

ing incentive furnished by Christianity to correct conduct. Secularism, on the other hand, teaches that the most exalted conception of duty is based not merely upon the advantages derived by the individual, but upon the benefits conferred on the general community in the life we now have.

As to the principle of self-sacrifice, is it possible that any ordinarily-intelligent person can be so forgetful of the Freethought heroes and martyrs of the past, and those of the present, as to claim for Christianity the monopoly of such self-denial? Not to mention the names of the "noble army of martyrs" who, having had no faith in Christianity, sacrificed their lives in the cause of what to them appeared to be the truth, we would ask, What of the noble-hearted Pythias, who offered to sacrifice his own life for his friend Damon? Did not the philosophic Plato refuse to forsake his friend Chabrias, saying: "When I fought for my country I ventured my life, and now again, for my friend's sake, I care as little what befalls me." History teems with grand illustrations of self-sacrifice apart altogether from Christian inspiration. Where in modern times can be found a nobler instance of self-sacrifice than in the life and services of that disinterested benefactor to his race, Robert Owen. In this brave man we behold one who is unsurpassed in the theological annals of the nineteenth century for benevolence and true devotion to humanity. His deeds of heroism and his great educational work will remain as one of the finest monuments of Secular service that honor the memory of the mighty dead. He sacrificed wealth, comfort, rank, patronage, and all that the world holds dear, to improve the conditions of his fellow-men. With him it was not love to God, but service to man, that inspired him in his good work and that prompted him to perform such noble acts of valor and self-denial that he left behind a legacy which makes his character worthy of the highest praise and the truest emulation.

CHARLES WATTS.

COL. INÆRSOLL ON THE DOCTRINE OF HELL.

Now, where did the doctrine of hell come from? It came from this fellow in the dugout, and he got it from his animal forefathers. This doctrine of hell was born of the grin of hyenas. It was born of the eyes of snakes—snakes that hung in fearful coils watching for their prey. It was born of the obscene chatter of baboons, and I despise it with every drop of my blood, and defy it. I make my choice now to-night. If there is any hell, I want to go there, rather than to go to heaven and keep the company of a God who damns his own children. I heard a little story the other day about hell which is somewhat cheerful. There was a man who died and went to heaven. In a day or two afterward he came to St. Peter, and said: "Do you know, I have had a great desire to see some men I used to hear talked about in the world. I was a member of the Young Men's Christian Association, and I used to hear about these men. There was a good deal of discussion about whether they were in hell or heaven. The most of us thought they were in hell."

"Whom were you talking about," said Peter.

"Why," said the applicant, "there was Voltaire, and Humboldt, and Darwin."

"My dear man," says Peter, "they are all in hell."

"Yes," he says, "I thought so, but I've kind of got a desire to see them."

So Peter says: "You can go down there any time you want to and see 'em. Trains run regularly every day. All you have got to do is to buy a round-trip ticket and go there."

So he got his ticket and went. All at once the brakeman or the conductor hollered out: "Hell!" He looked out and he thought they were fooling him. It was a nice-looking country, but he didn't think he had got there yet. So he sat there while the others got out, and finally the brakeman came to him and says:—

"Get out! This is the place, and we don't run any further."

He got out, and he says to himself: "What a magnificent place! Grass everywhere—billows of it! Trees, birds singing, and flowers blossoming, and fountains playing, and gentlemen and ladies riding around—O, everything beautiful. This is the most wonderful thing I ever saw." Then he saw a very tall man, and he went up to him and he says: "Mister, excuse me, but what place is this?" And the man says: "It is hell."

"Well, you know, I was up in the other place, and I came down here, and my particular object was to see three men—Voltaire, Darwin, and Humboldt."

"Well," said the man, "young man, I am glad to see you. My name was Voltaire when I lived in the world."

The young man says: "You have no idea how delighted I am to see you, Mr. Voltaire, but is this hell? It doesn't look anything like what we thought it was."

"You ought to have seen it when I came here," said Voltaire. "It was horrible—brimstone, fire, smoke, and everything horrible, but you know every scientist for the last hundred years or so has come here. All the genius of the world is here, and about fifty years ago we set to work to improve the place. We turned the lake of fire and brimstone; we conveyed it in pipes, and it does our cooking. We bored artesian wells, and we have got millions of water—the finest you ever saw. The whole country is splendidly irrigated, and we are having what you would call in your country a real-estate boom. We are getting ahead of the other place. I see by the papers that a lot was sold on the corner of the Square of Public Glory for taxes."

The young fellow said to Voltaire: "Do you know anybody that would like to buy my return ticket?"

I have insisted that in this life and in any other man will have an everlasting opportunity of doing right, and that there can be no hell in which a man will not have the privilege of behaving himself, and that there can be no heaven in which a man will not have the liberty of acting like the devil; in other words, that there must be freedom in all worlds. That is my doctrine. One tear of pity has in it more refreshing power than all the fires of perdition. There is more goodness in one ray of light than in all the hells that have been conjured, more goodness in kindness than in all brute force possible to conceive. This doctrine of hell—as long as I live I shall denounce it. I shall do what little I can to get that fear out of the human heart, out of the breasts of mothers.

LIBERTY OF BEQUEST IN SOUTH-WEST HAM.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—Mr. Joseph Leicester writes me as follows: "If elected, I shall feel it my duty to support the Bill (Liberty of Bequest) which you have submitted to my notice. I regret the necessity of such a measure, as I claim equal rights for all, and believe every man has the right to follow the dictates of his own reasoning, and that no man ought to assume that his judgment is the standard of thought for others to bow to."

"I must confess to being ignorant upon the subject, and your Bill has awoken my perceptions upon this matter. But I am with you in your laudable desire to remove all inequalities from the statute-book of our country."

I have also sent a copy of the Bill to Mr. Keir Hardie, the Socialist candidate; but, though the application has been repeated and stamped envelopes enclosed, he has not seen fit to answer. This, combined with his attention to the religious bodies' public doings, should make Secularists here careful that they do not vote for a bigot.

ERNEST ANDERSON.

MALTHUSIAN DEFENCE COMMITTEE.—Since the publication of last list I have received the following subscriptions: J. F. Hampson, 2s. 6d.; T. Holstead, 2s. 6d.; G. Smith, 2s.—JOSEPH BROWN, Hon. Sec., 86 Durham-street, Bentinck, Newcastle-on-Tyne.

THE HALL OF SCIENCE SCHEME.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I beg to be granted space in your paper on the question raised by Mrs. Bonner in last week's issue of her paper on the Hall of Science scheme to perpetuate the memory of Mr. Bradlaugh, as I find my name introduced there. So far as I have moved, the history stands thus:—

1. When it was proposed to do something to commemorate our great leader, I joined the Bradlaugh Memorial Hall Company, with a seat on the Board.

2. I subsequently attended several meetings, G. W. Foote in the chair; and, whether rightly or wrongly, I came to the conclusion that the amount of support we had received, and were likely to receive, would be wholly inadequate to carry out the wishes of some of the members—that the site on which to build a hall should be a freehold.

3. I considered that a freehold site in a position to command audiences, and thus be of use to the cause, could not be got for less than £3,000 or £4,000; that to build a hall with club rooms and class rooms, as had long been in action at the Hall of Science, would probably cost £10,000; and I did not see any probability of our obtaining any such sum.

4. Some members thought that if we went to allotment of shares the public would soon readily respond, and the chairman proposed that we should do so. I opposed this on the ground that we were not warranted in going to allotment with the small number of shares subscribed, and the motion was not then put to the vote.

5. I subsequently joined a syndicate to effect the purchase of the Hall of Science, where Mr. Bradlaugh had labored so long. To this I had at first objected, thinking the place not good enough to comply with my feelings. A meeting was convened and the Hall of Science tenant, Mr. Smith, requested to attend.

6. I stated my objections, one of which was that there was only one entrance, while I thought there should be two, as is usual in other similar places of public resort, and I raised the question Mrs. Bonner now does—namely, that the party had formerly subscribed for enlargement and improvement of the place.

7. This was admitted by Mr. Smith, who assured us that he was not asking near what he could obtain if he were to put it on the market.

8. We came to no decision at that meeting beyond that we would consider the matter, and we asked him to produce his books to confirm statements he had made as to the reasonableness of his offer.

9. Mr. Smith also stated that he had got an extension of the lease for some eighty years on condition of agreeing to expend within ten years £2,500 on rebuilding the street front.

10. We considered that, if our inspection of Mr. Smith's books proved satisfactory, we should entertain his proposition, because of the following advantages:

- (a) The place was well known.
- (b) It had been the chief centre of Mr. Bradlaugh's labor for many years.
- (c) We would be buying a going concern, with the N.S.S. a tenant, paying £250 per annum rent.
- (d) The reconstruction of the portion of the premises facing the street would enable us to make it a place worthy of the memory of Mr. Bradlaugh.
- (e) We would be able to carry on the work without any interruption or break, which could not be done were we to wait for an indefinite time for a freehold site—a hall to be built on it—and at a cost which we saw no signs of meeting; and we would save the Secular body from the disgrace of the chief scene of Mr. Bradlaugh's labors being sold to others, and perhaps passing into such hands as those of the Salvation Army.

11. Mr. Smith in person produced his books, they were examined by the assistance of Mr. Forder, who had been the secretary of the N.S.S. for years and was familiar with the accounts. They sustained Mr. Smith's previous statement as to the earnings of the place for 10 years, upon which Mr. Smith retired, offering to have the undertaking valued if we wished.

12. We considered Mr. Smith's offer was one to be entertained, though perhaps modified both as to amount and terms of payment, keeping in view that although he was the only legal tenant and possessor of the

lease, yet he had been assisted in former years by the subscriptions to which Mrs. Bonner has drawn attention.

13. Mr. Smith modified the terms of payment considerably, and without a dissentient vote we closed with him.

14. As to subscriptions by the party to rebuild the Hall of Science, Mr. Smith stated that a great deal of them was by way of loans which he had since paid off.

15. During Mr. Bradlaugh's time the proceeds from lectures were divided between the lecturer and Mr. Smith, as landlord. This has been changed. The N.S.S. have always paid for their use of the hall, and it is supposed that they will continue to do so.

16. Our action in supporting the Hall of Science scheme has been to carry out the statements made by Mr. Bradlaugh, as quoted now by Mrs. Bonner, namely, to secure the hall to the party, not only for the thirty years named, but for three times that period.

17. I do not gather from Mrs. Bonner's quotations that Mr. Bradlaugh said that the hall was secured to the party for thirty years free of rent. The N.S.S. paid for the use of the hall in Mr. Bradlaugh's time; this they will continue to do.

18. I contend that the only practical step taken to preserve the memory of Charles Bradlaugh has been the step to secure the Hall of Science—to rebuild the frontage to the street, on which I hope to see the name of Mr. Bradlaugh on a frontage worthy of his great name.

19. I will allow no one to step in front of me saying, "I revere the memory of Mr. Bradlaugh more than you do." I never met his equal either in intelligence or uprightness of conduct. I loved him and must ever regret him. I, too, would have preferred a freehold site—and it could not have been too good—but we had to face the present condition of things. The Hall of Science lease being about to expire—no expectation of getting either a freehold site elsewhere or money to pay for it, and in the meantime the home of the party broken up—so far, the memory of Mr. Bradlaugh obliterated, because some of his too enthusiastic disciples blocked the way with an impracticable scheme.

20. I know of no one in the Hall of Science Scheme who would not be glad that a freehold site were obtained and money subscribed to build on it a hall to the memory of Mr. Bradlaugh; and when the first event happens, I hope to give it my support. But meantime the work of the cause has to be carried on. By the Hall of Science Scheme it will be carried on, and give those who can accept nothing short of a freehold site time to make their plans. London is large enough for several such halls, and we wish them every success.

May 24, 1892.

GEORGE ANDERSON.

P.S.—A copy of this letter has been sent to the editor of the *National Reformer*.

THE BIRMINGHAM DEBATE.

ON Tuesday, May 17, the debate took place, as announced, between Dr. McCann and Mr. Charles Watts at Baskerville Hall, Mr. Daniel Baker presiding. It was somewhat of a novelty, it being the first debate since the town became the City, and the only one that has been held for many years past. It was the result of a general challenge to the Christian party to discuss questions upon which they and Secularists are divided—Dr. McCann being the only respondent.

The local secretary of the local O.E.S. acted as herald by writing to the local *Tory Gazette*, giving his unasked-for opinion about the matter. One of his generous proposals was that the Secular debater should give his time and ability, and that the proceeds should be handed over to some charity. Now to test this matter, put by him in the most offensive manner possible, I undertake that Mr. Charles Watts shall meet in debate any recognised minister of religion, in any church, chapel, or other meeting place (seeing that Baskerville Hall is so objectionable to the local secretary) on the terms named. If this is not at once taken up, Mr. Aston may at least signify that he will bring the matter before his society.

The subject of the present debate was the Existence of God—not the God of the Bible, the Church, and the Sunday-school, of whom all have heard and been taught to believe in, but a God that Dr. McCann infers and is conscious of. He had a lecture upon the subject the week before, as well as half time on the night of the debate, so that it was two to

one against Mr. Watts as regards time. Yet a gentleman, who never heard him before, said that he would have cut more chaff, if the Doctor had supplied more hay and straw.

The final issue was that Dr. McCann admitted he knew nothing about it, only inferred God; and in reply to "Where is God?" he said in nature, and nature was in him. The position he took was that nature could not produce all the phenomena we see; hence some power behind it was necessary. Yet being pressed, he was unable to say what nature could not produce, but he did not think it could make cells.

An incident in the debate brought across the table the following:—

Dr. McCann: If there is not God behind nature, what is there?

Mr. Watts: I don't know; do you?

The objection to Mr. Watts from the doctor's standpoint was that he would persist in using the word *knowledge* instead of *inference*. But Dr. McCann maintained that this inference was presented to his consciousness, which comes very near what we call knowledge. Mr. Watts pointed out that this was what Dr. McCann himself said *was* knowledge; so that their difference consisted only in what their consciousness consisted of—a contradiction. Dr. McCann intimated that earthquakes and all kinds of disasters were intended for our good! It is singular that the *same source* should furnish man with such a strong aversion to them. He evidently don't know what is good for him, or he would be grateful for being swallowed up.

Mr. Watts, of course, was throughout merely on the defensive as to nature and critical as to God, and did his part to the entire satisfaction of his friends and supporters. Not only so, but several Christians spoke of their entire approval of his method in dealing with the question, although they differed. This being so at the present debate, what may we not expect from the two to come on morality and Christianity?

The audience was remarkably attentive and well-conducted, not a single hiss being heard. The hall was inconveniently crowded, the passages being occupied and the private apartments being invaded by anxious listeners, while the front entrance had to be closed early, many having to be turned away.

With regard to Dr. McCann, he is entitled to the credit of having set an example to his brethren in the ministry, not only by having the courage of his opinions, but in maintaining them in good temper, without vituperation, and free from all personalities. This in itself is justification enough for holding the debate, dissipating as it does the old notion that to be opposed to the orthodox teachings of the day renders public conversation upon them between opponents impossible without regarding the unbeliever as undeserving the consideration that is due from one gentleman to another.

Of old, the heretic was burnt or imprisoned; he is now the subject only of lying and slandering. Finally, he will claim equality, and will get it. The treatment of him by Dr. McCann is only an instalment of what will be the rule instead of the exception in the controversies of the future.

CHARLES C. CATTELL.

OBITUARY.

We regret to announce the death of Mrs. Cookney, one of the old workers at the London Hall of Science. For many years she acted on all sorts of committees; and always on the annual Children's Party committee, in whose object she was particularly interested. Deceased was in her fifty-second year. The funeral took place on Monday afternoon at Chingford Cemetery. A number of Hall of Science friends were present, including Mr. and Mrs. Forder, Mr. G. Fowler, Mr. Kemp, Mrs. Grout, Mr. H. Smith, and Mr. Allen. Old Dan Chatterton was also there. Mr. G. W. Foote delivered a brief address at the grave.

NORTH-EASTERN SECULAR FEDERATION.—I beg to acknowledge the following subscriptions:—Conference Guarantee Fund: Sunderland Branch, £1. Propaganda Fund: Mr. A. Baxter, 2s.—**JOSEPH BROWN**, 86 Durham-street, Newcastle.

After the services, the American revivalist went up to an Irishman and said: "We hope that you have found consolation in the services. And now we should like to know in whom you put your faith?" "That's an aisy one," said the Irishman. "I put me faith in the national dimmycratic party, begorra!"

ACID DROPS.

Deeming was executed on Monday morning. He slept well during the night, smoked a cigar at seven, and said he had made his peace with God. The wretched creature, however, died with a lie upon his lips; he once more denied being guilty of the Rainhill murders. So much for the purifying influence of "peace with God."

Deeming's last words on the scaffold were "Lord, receive my spirit." Perhaps he has gone to glory. Who knows? David went there, and his crimes were as bad as Deeming's and on a larger scale. There would, indeed, seem to be a precious collection of hung and unhung scoundrels in the beautiful land above.

On Sunday the wretched Deeming spent some time in reading the Bible. What a crowing there would have been in religious circles if he had read the *Age of Reason* or one of Ingersoll's orations!

Mr. Scott, the chaplain of the prison, received from Deeming a letter of farewell and some original verses. The verses were entitled "To God I call." The letter says, "I die a fully penitent sinner and a Christian."

Now then, Christian reader (for we have such), do not rave and use strong Bible language. We are not insinuating that Christianity made Deeming a murderer. He was, in fact, a striking type of the instinctive criminal. What we desire to convey is that he belonged ostensibly to the Christian faith, and that the Christian faith did not check his infamous career. The lesson of this is obvious. Let Christians cease talking nonsense about the "immorality of infidels," and we will cease reminding them of their black sheep.

The Australian papers contain a pious letter from Deeming, who suddenly left this world last Monday, addressed to Miss Rounsevell. It tells her "God has always been my friend, and I have always trusted in God for all the wants of life, and should death, which I do not fear, be my fate in the present case, I know he will not forsake me, and with my Katie's love I shall be strong enough to face it all. Oh, Katie dear, look to God for all your wants, remember me in your prayers, and ask him, for your sake, to carry me through this fearful trouble." His last words are "God will see us through." Such are the consolations of religion!

Sky-pilot Dixon, of Brooklyn, as our readers will recollect, is being prosecuted for libel by Colonel Ingersoll. His attorneys have filed their defence. Among other things they assert that at the Convention of the National Liberal League, in 1879, Ingersoll attacked the U.S. postal laws, especially the laws against mailing obscene literature. Of course this is a monstrous absurdity, as may be seen from the following resolutions passed at the Convention:—

"Resolved, That we are in favor of such postal laws as will allow the free transportation through the mails of the United States of all books, pamphlets, and papers, irrespective of the religious, irreligious, political, and scientific views they may contain, so that the literature of science may be placed upon an equality with that of superstition.

"Resolved, That we are utterly opposed to the dissemination, through the mails or by any other means, of obscene literature, whether 'inspired' or uninspired, and hold in measureless contempt its authors and disseminators.

"Resolved, That we call upon the Christian world to expunge from the so-called 'sacred' Bible every passage that cannot be read without covering the cheek of modesty with the blush of shame; and until such passages are expunged, we demand that the laws against the dissemination of obscene literature be impartially enforced."

If Dixon has no better defence than this he will be a sorry spectacle in court, and worse afterwards.

A reporter of the *Burnley Express* has visited a certain spiritist painting medium in Glasgow named D—, and come to the conclusion that he painted the pictures himself. Our sub-editor has seen the feats of the same medium, but could not give his opinion of them without risking the law of libel.

A man living in Racine ordered from a firm of booksellers in Chicago a copy of Archdeacon Farrar's *Seekers after God*. His letter came back with a clerk's endorsement: "No *Seekers after God* in Chicago."

"One who Knows" writes from Booth's S.A. farm colony to the *Weekly Times and Echo*. He says the colony is infested with broken-down officers, neither fit for the field nor anything else. The patients get badly fed and have plenty of religious abuse. He says he does not blame the General. "Very good care is taken to blind him, whose duties are so nefarious [*sic*] that he must trust both those who dishonor his name and the uniform they wear."

The *Halstead Times* reports a discussion of the [committee about the Sunday letting of the Assembly Room. In the course of the discussion Mr. J. Ward "inquired whether upon the occasion when the room was hired for a Secularist lecture all charges were honorably paid; and, further, whether it was a fact that the room was hired upon another occasion by a Christian evangelist, who left without paying for the hire of the room, and whether the debt was still unpaid?" The secretary answered both questions in the affirmative, and added that the so-called Christian Evangelist was a black man. A black man! Ahem! Name, please. Is it the great—but no matter.

They are heavy on spiritist frauds in Germany. Frau Tönfer, a well-known and much frequented medium, has been sentenced to two years' imprisonment for fraud. She was detected at a dark séance personating a spirit.

The Rev. Kennedy Bell, curate-in-charge at Little Bedwyn, Hungerford, is committed for trial on a charge of assaulting two young ladies in a Great Western Railway carriage. The "reverend gentleman" is married and has three children.

The churches preach that if one's coat is stolen the cloak should be given also, and that an erring brother should be forgiven seventy times seven. But this is not meant for practice, as Edward Fry found when he went stealing the offertories from a church at Greenwich. He has got twelve months' hard labor.

The Rev. Hugh Allen, residing in Copeland-road, Peckham, has been fined 20s., with the alternative of fourteen days' imprisonment, for being drunk and disorderly.

A nun, known as Sister Ermelind, of Pavia, and supposed to be entangled in a love affair, made her escape last week from the convent of Santa Maria del Orto, outside the walls of Rome. The priests applied to the police to get back their bride of Christ for him, or them, but the police commissary declined to interfere on the ground that the girl was of age, and therefore within her rights in choosing her own place of residence.

A missionary correspondent writes reporting the complete stoppage of Catholic missionary work at Uganda in consequence of the recent bloodshed, and charges the English Protestant missionaries with preaching hatred against the Catholics, and being responsible for all the bloodshed. How they love one another!

A great massacre appears to have occurred at Uganda, a number of Catholic women and children being drowned in the lake while escaping from slaughter, others were captured and sold as slaves. Altogether 50,000 Catholics are said to be either murdered, sold or dispersed, and religious strife is to be held responsible.

Mr. Benjamin Waugh, secretary of the Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children, in his annual report, states that the worst cases of cruelty which come under the notice of the Society have been committed by persons of means. The secretary says they found that the practice of religious rites by large numbers of these people goes hand in hand with cruelty to their children. The worst of it is that these detected torturers, as in the case of Mrs. Montagu, when by law they are obliged to be sent to prison, are treated as if prison was an hotel, and all the public servants specially engaged to wait upon them.—*Reynolds*'.

The porters and others in the employ of the London and North-Western Railway, convicted of extensive robberies at the Huddersfield railway station, found witnesses to testify that they were of good religious standing and attendants at Sunday-school.

Mr. Dalgleish, the Conservative candidate for Dundee, asked by Mr. J. Duncan if he would support a bill allowing Secularists to receive money bequeathed for the promotion of Secularist principles, replied that he would give the subject his most serious consideration. Our friends will doubtless accord a similar consideration to his candidature.

Does a man lose his natural rights when he works for a Railway Company? It would seem so when a railway servant is solemnly ordered to stop circulating the *Freethinker* on the ground that he is "a servant of the public." Of course the rule is not applied all round. It is only imposed upon Freethinkers. Christians are free to "serve the public" and their religion too.

It was Scripture Examination time in a Suffolk school. Examiner—"What was the first thing Adam did when placed in the Garden of Eden?" Little Boy, four years old, after a pause—"Raked it, sir."

Archdeacon Denison is one of the good old sort who wishes the Bible swallowed whole and without asking any questions. He has resigned all connexion with the English Church Union, with which he has been connected for 47 years, because that body refuses to officially condemn *Lux Mundi* and the higher criticism. This action he thinks subversive of the Church of England's belief in the integrity of Divine Authority of Holy Scripture. But the tide still continues to flow even in the High Church E. C. U., and leaves good old Archdeacon Denison high and dry behind it.

The vagaries of lawgivers are unending, but it is some time since we heard of a more ridiculous law than the Act just passed in Newfoundland. It is to legalise seal fishing on Sundays, but to give to those fishers who, from conscientious scruples, refuse to go out in the boats on Sundays a share of the catch. This is worthy of Sancho Panza.

The leading Catholic journals wish it to be known that educated Catholics only laugh at such stories as that of Father Aurelian casting out a devil from a boy in Wending, reported in our last week's issue. That is to say, they laugh at the gospels and the doctrines of their own Church, for possession by devils is clearly taught in both.

The Capuchin monk who has gained some fame by his attempt to "exorcise" an evil spirit from a boy of twelve in a Bavarian village, has, according to the Berlin correspondent of the *Standard*, been transferred to the Capuchin monastery at Lohr. He is said to have been an officer in his youth. The husband of the woman accused of "bewitching" the boy has brought an action for libel against the monk and the boy's parents.

Though the Wesleyans are not an established body, they have to go to Parliament for liberty to modify the constitution of their church. And this they have decided to do, though John Wesley drew up a deed poll to prevent such alteration. The agitation has been got up at the instance of Hugh Price Hughes and other well-to-do ministers who, being settled in comfortable quarters, want to alter the rule which compels every minister to shift his circuit at the end of every three years. But it was just to prevent the growth of well-to-do ministers of the Hughes type that Wesley instituted his rule. Methodism has vastly altered since the days of the indefatigable John.

The catalogue of the Lord's doings during the past week is an extensive one. Mississippi floods, resulting in appalling loss of life, and rendering some fifteen thousand out of employment and from four to eight thousand houseless and destitute; hurricanes doing immense damage to life and property in Mauritius; cholera spreading in Harrar, one hundred deaths from the disease occurring daily; the loss of the Brazilian ironclad; threatened failure of crops in Northern India; plague of reddish brown mice, which the cats will not touch, in Prussia; and continuance of the mice and vole plague in Scotland. Verily his tender mercies are over all his works.

The recent floods in Western America have been among the worst known, and are causing widespread ruin and misery, the losses already amount to many millions of dollars, and for hundreds of miles the land has been rendered useless and

the seed rotted. To add to the suffering of the homeless people the rain turned to snow.

After these instances of Divine Providence, we read that the bodies of three fishermen were frozen in their boat, drifting in the ice of Lake Superior, a few days ago.

Holy Trinity Church, Lambeth, needs "restoration," and the cost will be £500. To raise this amount cadging circulars seem to be sent indiscriminately to all parts of London. The gentleman who forwards us a copy he has received is a well-known East London Secularist. He is appealed to not to "let the church go to rack and ruin," and he doesn't at all mind seeing it in that condition.

The Rev. J. Stroud Williams, pastor of the Sanford-street Congregational Chapel, New Swindon, has stirred up the orthodox by joining the ranks of those who say hell is not quite as hot as it used to be. The traditional belief, he holds, is "inconceivably horrible," but he will not convince everybody that it therefore follows it is not taught in the gospels. Mr. Williams of course appeals to the Revised Version, but he cannot get over the fact that the same term is used for the punishment of the wicked as for the life of the saved.

The Rev. Moffat Logan knows what will take, and follows the letters in the *Bristol Mercury* on "Eternal Punishment" by drawing a crowd to a conference on the subject, upon which he lectured and answered questions. We should say that Mr. Logan is doing something to unsettle the foundations of theology in Bristol.

Mr. Logan's address was of the usual vague type of "advanced" Christianity. Man, he said, was composed of body, soul, and spirit. Questioned as to the spirit, he said it died a death analagous to that of the body. Being asked how, if it was not material, it could be resolved into its elements, he replied that he had never said it had elements. (Loud applause, which silenced the questioner.) Asked what was the nature of the punishment the spirit would undergo, Mr. Logan said, "I don't know." Would the spirit be united to the body? Yes. How? "I don't know." Mr. Logan's "don't knows" were rapturously applauded. His supporters felt he was safe there.

The Wesleyan Methodists of the Oxford District have been holding their sessions at Swindon, and lamenting the spread of infidelity. The Rev. G. F. Rose delivered a speech against Secularism. "Apart from God they had no promise that the progress of man would ever be forward." Mr. Rose would have some difficulty in showing that the idea of God makes any difference to the facts of life. The Rev. W. Price, of Witney, said the Bible was the great antidote for all the evils which were scourging humanity, so we suppose it is infallible for colds, corns, floods or famine. When the men of God get together what buncome they will talk!

While 14 young ladies, belonging to the convent at Wurm-spach, were crossing the Lake of Zurich, on their way to Einsiedeln, a discovery was made that the boat had sprung a leak. Consternation seized the occupants. The craft was capsized owing to the excitement of the girls, and only seven out of the 14 were saved.

The *Catholic Times* approves of the threatened Anglican crusade against divorce, which it says the Church has always discountenanced. This is pretty good, since the Church usually allows it to wealthy people for a heavy consideration. It is not so long since the present Pope sold a dispensation to the Duke of Aosta to marry his own sister's child, and the union was specially blessed by Cardinal Alimonda, Archbishop of Turin.

Let those who doubt that the State Church is a fraudulent imposition upon the people read the proceedings in connection with the vicar's rate at Coventry. For the purpose of a forced rate to support a parson of the State Church a Non-conformist refreshment purveyor at Coventry has had three hams seized; at a grocer's two cases of salmon were seized; at a boot store a number of boots, and so on with the other tradesmen in the town. What a shocking outrage in the name of religion! This so-called "Church of England" is so desperately disliked by the people, that for its support the

clergy have to go out and forcibly seize the goods of the tradesmen in our towns, just as they seize the crops of the farmers in Wales, or of the hop growers in Kent. Surely the time has come when the connection between the State and this brigand Church should be dissolved.—*Reynolds'*

The Sunday Society having converted the Bishop of Rochester into the belief that the Sunday opening of museums, etc., will do no harm to the Church, got him to present a petition to the Upper House of Convocation in favor of their movement. But the majority of the clericals are more astute than the Bishop of Rochester, and remitted the petition to a committee for investigation.

St. Michael's Church, Lower Sydenham, seems to be languishing. We are informed that the sky-pilot announced that unless people attended more regularly his gospel-shop would have to be closed on Sunday evenings. Sooner than see that done we will pay a small rent for the place and use it for Secular lectures. Perhaps the people would come then.

"Stranger," he said, as he presented a pocket pistol, "join me in a drink. You will find that the real stuff." "Thanks, no liquor," was the reply. "Well, will you smoke a cigar?" "Not any cigars." A good old clergyman who had observed all this grasped the stranger warmly by the hand. "Sir," he said, "it fills my heart with joy to see a young man like you turn away from such vile destroyers." "Yes, sir," the young man replied, "you see I'm a prize fighter in training and I've got to go slow."

Three hundred years ago Protestants and Catholics were roasting each other alive for the glory and honor of God. Last Sunday morning the Mayor and Corporation of Southampton, all Protestants, went in state to St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church, where Canon Scannell preached a sermon on the beauty of charity. It was all very charming, and no doubt a few eyes shed maudlin tears. But we suspect the tolerance, at least on the Catholic side, is merely a matter of convenience. Catch a Catholic Mayor and Corporation, in a Catholic country, going in state to a Protestant church! They would see the church in Hades first, and the congregation with it.

Father Treacy, of Burlington, N.J., told Matthew Gaynor that he must forbid the attentions of a Protestant young man named Charles Massey to his daughter Nellie or quit the priest's church. On the 1st Gaynor was driven out of his pew and out of the church by Father Treacy at the point of a revolver.—*Truthseeker*.

Considerable dissension has arisen in a Baptist Church in New York, which was the first to establish a class for Chinese in the Sunday school. It worked well for fourteen years, but of late the Chinese scholars have objected to teachers who were in the least plain of face. The lady superintendent has been constantly assailed by such complaints as "Me no like gal. Me want pretty gal teaches." This was not found conducive to harmony among the teachers, and the state of affairs is described as poignant.—*Daily News*.

"So old Grabhard, the miser, has got religion? Well, well, wonders will never cease. It must have been an eloquent tongue that reached his heart. Who was it that led him to embrace Christianity?" "Nobody. It was a hymn that converted him." "A hymn?" "Yes. He was passing the church one evening when they were holding a praise meeting, and he heard them singing 'Salvation is Free.' He could not let anything go that could be got for nothing, so he went in and got religion at once. You don't catch old Grabhard letting anything pass him that's free."

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. Ford will send them on application.
- (5) Leave a copy of the *Freethinker* now and then in the train, the car, or the omnibus.

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Thursday, May 26, Hall of Science: at 8, "A Night with Byron."
 Sunday, May 29, Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.: at 7.30, "Why I Cannot be a Christian."

June 5, N. S. S. Conference; 12, Hall of Science; 19, Birmingham; 26, Hall of Science.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS' ENGAGEMENTS.—May 29, Liverpool; 31, debate with Rev. Dr. J. McCann at Birmingham. June 5, N. S. S. Conference at Newcastle; 12, Sheffield; 15, debate with Rev. Dr. J. McCann 19, Bristol; 26, Birmingham. July 3, Hall of Science; 4 and 5, public debate with the Rev. P. F. Duffy; 10, Hall of Science; 17, Birmingham; 24, South Shields; 31, Newcastle. August 7 and 14, Birmingham; 21, Manchester; 28, Grimsby. Sept. 3 and 4, Rushen; 11, Town Hall, Birmingham; 18, Birmingham.—All communications for Mr. Watts should be sent direct to him at Baskerville Hall, The Crescent, Birmingham.

E. JAMES.—A Buddhist version of the story of the judgment of Solomon may be found in the *Fortnightly Review* for August, 1871.

W. COSFORD.—The price of *Old Testament Stories Critically Illustrated* is one dollar. It is published at the *Truthseeker* office, New York. The blocks of our old Comic Bible sketches were destroyed in the fire on our premises a few years ago.

L. SPURGEON.—Thanks. See "Acid Drops."

C. TURNER.—See "Sugar Plums." We hope the paragraph will bring you strong support on Sunday.

A. BOOCOCK.—Thanks. See paragraph.

J. HONEYMAN.—Shall appear.

H. JONES.—There is a mistake somewhere. Pleased to hear from you always. Thanks for cuttings.

J. E. LING.—(1) There is, unfortunately, no means of representing the non-Branch members of the N.S.S. directly at the Conference. We have often thought of the matter, but could never find a solution. Indirectly such members are represented by the President and Vice-Presidents, who sit on the Executive without belonging to Branches. (2) There *did* seem a great many new faces at Mr. Foote's lecture on Sunday. (3) Thanks for your good wishes *re* Hall of Science scheme.

E. SMEDLEY.—We have never denied that there were Christians in the first century, which is all the passages in Tacitus and Pliny can possibly prove. The passages in both have been disputed by some able critics. Not being omniscient, we are unable to decide the controversy.

A. W. DAVIS.—No doubt some Freethought lectures on Hampstead Heath would do good, but it is hardly possible to open fresh stations at present.

H. R. CLIFTON.—Thanks for the verbatim report of Mr. Foote's address at Chingford Cemetery. Unfortunately we have not room for it at present in the *Freethinker*.

JAS. MILLER.—You have a right to your opinion. But is it wise to live so much in the past? The movement has to be carried on with the material which exists. We act for the best, and regret that we cannot please every member of the party in everything we do. There will always be dissent on some points.

W. B. THOMPSON.—Pleased to hear of Mr. Moss's success at Chatham, but sorry to hear your Branch will not be represented at the Conference, owing to the obligation to clear off the mortgage on the hall within six months.

SAM STANDRING.—Go on, and prosper. We hope to see you in good health at Newcastle.

CONSTANT READER.—It is good news. See paragraph.

HUBERT BROWN.—Impudent letters like yours go into the waste-basket.

J. GORRIEL invites Freethinkers willing to join in reorganising the Sheffield Branch of the N.S.S. to attend a meeting this evening (May 29) at 8.30 at the Hall of Science, Rotherham-street.

G. STEVENS.—We are obliged. See "Acid Drops."

INQUISITOR.—"A Freethinker at Large" is a general title for such articles. Mr. G. Standring adopts it, and it was explained in his first article.

J. CLOSE.—It is simply a confusion of pronouns, not at all uncommon in the English Bible. The first "they" refers to the chosen folk, the second to Sennacherib's dead soldiers. As the text stands it is a gross Hibernicism. Your second question is one that each reader must answer for himself.

J. W. GOTR.—See "Sugar Plums." Glad to have your good report of Mr. Sam Standring's work at Bradford and the vicinity.

W. PALMER.—See paragraph.

A. STANLEY.—Your cutting did not say where the meeting was held. The fact in the report, however, is gratifying. Scottish Students are losing their love of Calvinism.

A. J. RUSSELL.—We get a copy of that old bill about once a month.

W. BALL.—You have our best thanks.

DOMESTIC SERVANT.—Of course women can take shares in the Hall of Science scheme. Your responsibility will end with the paying up of your share or shares, the liability of the shareholders being thus limited by the Act under which the Society is registered.

CENTAUR.—We cannot pretend to judge. The incident is too trivial for discussion.

R. VICKERY, 7 Foubert's-place, Regent-street, London, W., supplies this journal and other Secular publications.

J. FISH.—In Catholic countries to this day Bible reading by the laity is censured rather than commended. The Church tried to suppress all versions of the Bible in the vernacular of the people. William Tyndale, who made an early translation into English, was strangled and burnt as a heretic in 1536.

T. NOBLE.—The last person put to death in England for religion was Edward Wightman, who was burnt at Lichfield, April 11, 1612, for anti-trinitarian heresy. Executions for witchcraft took place as late as 1716. Sprenger, in his *History of Witch Trials*, a German work, computes that nine millions were put to death for witchcraft. The majority of these were women.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Fritankaren—Two Worlds—Western Figaro—Boston Investigator—Der Arme Teufel—Flaming Sword—Ironclad Age—Lucifer—Progressive Thinker—Twentieth Century—Clarion—Watts's Literary Guide—Echo—Cambria Daily Leader—Bristol Mercury—Secular Thought—Huddersfield Examiner and Times—Dundee Advertiser—Evening North Wilts Herald—Dundee Courier—Volkstimme—North Wilts Herald—Gazette Piemontese.

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.

The *Freethinker* will be forwarded, direct from the office, post free, at the following rates, prepaid:—One Year, 6s. Half Year, 3s. 3d.; Three Months, 1s. 7½d.

IT being contrary to Post-office regulations to announce on the wrapper when the subscription is due, subscribers will receive the number in a colored wrapper when their subscription expires.

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.

A PLAIN STATEMENT.

UNDER the old arrangement which obtained at the London Hall of Science during Mr. Bradlaugh's presidency, the admission money taken at the Sunday meetings was equally divided between the lecturer and Mr. R. O. Smith. Mr. Smith carried out all the lecturing arrangements and received one half of the proceeds as rent. After Mr. Bradlaugh's death he felt unable to continue carrying out the lecturing arrangements, and I also felt that they ought to be in the hands of a representative body. A proposal was made to the N.S.S. Executive to accept the responsibility. The Executive accepted it, and agreed to pay Mr. Smith a fixed rent for the use of the hall on Sundays and Thursday nights, with certain uses of other parts of the premises. As regards the Sundays, therefore, the change is simply one from a sliding-scale to a definite rental. This being so I was naturally astonished to see a statement by Mrs. Bonner in her journal to the effect that the N.S.S. was paying Mr. Smith £250 a year for no consideration. I felt obliged to ask Mrs. Bonner for a personal interview, to talk over the matter she had raised. This she assented to, and the interview took place last Saturday morning; Mr. Robertson being present with Mrs. Bonner, and Mr. Forder with myself; each side agreeing to regard the discussion at the interview as private. Whatever statement Mrs. Bonner may decide to make with respect to the matter she raised, I have to say that I abide by every word of the answer to "Novice" in the *Freethinker* of May 15, to which Mrs. Bonner objected. Proofs can be furnished without discussing extracts from the *N. R.* of twenty-three years ago.

G. W. FOOTE.

SUGAR PLUMS.

Notwithstanding the glorious weather, Mr. Foote had a fine audience on Sunday evening at the London Hall of Science. Mr. Robert Forder presided. Prior to the lecture Mr. Foote read James Thomson's "L'Ancien Regime," which was lustily applauded. The lecture was on "After Death—What?" It was followed with the closest attention, and there was a big outburst of cheers at the finish. Then a Spiritist ascended the platform to oppose. His name was Taylor. He was as serious as a death's-head, but he sent the audience into convulsions of laughter. He said he was quite familiar with spirits; he had shaken hands with dozens of them. So he went on, and by the time he had finished, or rather by the time he had to be pulled up, many members of the audience must have felt their sides aching. It was a little piece of roaring farce after a legitimate drama.

Mr. Foote lectures at the Hall of Science again this evening (May 29), his subject being "Why I Cannot be a Christian." Prior to the lecture he will give another poetical reading.

Both the Sunday morning and Thursday night meetings will be discontinued at the London Hall of Science during the summer. Last Thursday "A Night with Shelley" was given by Mr. Foote, whose rendering of the poems was much enjoyed, the "Ode to the West Wind," in particular, eliciting a tempest of applause, though from a rather scanty audience. Next Thursday (May 26) Mr. Foote gives "A Night with Byron." That ends the Thursday meetings till September.

The National Secular Society's Conference takes place next Sunday (June 5) at Newcastle-on-Tyne. We hope to see a large delegation from Branches all over the country, and a goodly number of individual members. Delegates or members wishing to secure accommodation should write to Mr. Joseph Brown, 86 Durham-street, Bentinck, Newcastle. They will, as far as possible, be met at the station, if they send word when they expect to arrive.

The Newcastle friends mean to "do the thing" in style. They have arranged for dinner and tea for the delegates and other visitors on Sunday at the Grand Hotel, Barras-bridge, which is about the best appointed hotel in the city. The dinner tickets will be 2s. 6d.; the tea tickets 1s. 3d. A reception room is also to be engaged as near as possible to the Central Station for the convenience of those who arrive on the Saturday. Final arrangements will appear in next week's *Freethinker*. Mr. Joseph Brown, 86 Durham-street, Bentinck, Newcastle-on-Tyne, would be glad to know how many delegates and friends will remain in the city on Whit Monday. He also desires, on behalf of the reception committee, that visitors arriving at the Central Station will carry a copy of the *Freethinker* in their hands, so that they may be recognised.

On Tuesday morning the President of the N.S.S. signed 126 fresh members' certificates. It is an irksome bit of work, but it has its compensations. So many new members are joining the N.S.S., despite the reports of the Society's death or decay!

A year or two ago the London Secular Federation could not get any company to let it have a special train for its annual excursion. But a change has come over the scene. The Federation has now a choice of lines. This year's excursion will take place on Sunday, July 17. A special train—or two trains if necessary—will leave London Bridge at 9.45 for Worthing, a delightful health-resort on the Sussex coast. The cost of the return ticket will be only three shillings.

Probably the London Federation excursionists will meet at Worthing with Secular friends from Brighton, Portsmouth, Hastings, and other places within easy distance. It will be a fine opportunity for a *rendezvous* of the south-eastern forces of the real Salvation Army.

Subscribers to the Bradlaugh Memorial Fund who have not yet informed the trustees how to apply their donations are requested to do so *immediately*. A number of letters have been received, and the result will be announced shortly. The trustees (Messrs. Foote, Anderson, and Reynolds), as stated in

their circular, are anxious to be relieved of their responsibility in this special matter before the N.S.S. Conference (June 5).

The Malthusian League held its annual meeting at South-place Institute on Tuesday evening, May 17. There was a very large attendance. Dr. C. R. Drysdale presided and delivered an interesting address. Other speeches were delivered by J. M. Robertson, H. S. Young, G. W. Foote, Dr. Alice Vickery, Dr. T. R. Allinson, R. Hember, T. Bonser, and Mrs. Heatherley. Only one hand was held up against the main resolution, which was carried amidst enthusiastic applause.

Mr. H. S. Young explained that his case had been postponed by the Attorney-General, and he was afraid it would be postponed *ad infinitum*. It is to be hoped that the Attorney-General's action means that the Government is ashamed of this monstrous interference with personal liberty. In that case, it is rather ironical that a Tory Government should be more sensitive than the Liberal Town Council of Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Prior to the League's public meeting there was a meeting of the Free Discussion Defence Committee. Mr. Foote desired the appointment of a sub-committee to draw up a report as to the publications and persons the Committee should defend in case of attack. This was agreed to, Dr. Drysdale, J. M. Robertson, and G. W. Foote consenting to act as the sub-committee.

We are glad to hear that probably as the result of the debate now going on in Birmingham between the Rev. Dr. McCann and Mr. Charles Watts, the number of strangers attending Baskerville Hall on Sunday evenings when Mr. Watts lectures increases. Last Sunday night many persons were present for the first time. The demand for the *Freethinker* was again in excess of the supply. This Sunday (May 29) Mr. Watts lectures three times in Liverpool, and we shall be pleased to hear that he has had crowded audiences.

We congratulate Mr. Watts upon his success at the first night of his debate with Dr. McCann. As may be seen from the report in another column, the hall was crowded, and many persons were unable to gain admission. The second night's debate takes place next Tuesday (May 31). Subject, "The Moral Nature of Man."

A Christian Evidence lecturer contributed one shilling last Sunday to the funds of the Finsbury Park Branch of the N.S.S. It happened in this way. The lecturer was as usual commenting on the vileness and ignorance of Freethinkers, when he foolhardily said he would give a shilling to any Freethinker who could spell "anthropomorphic." When opposition time came Mr. Guest claimed to compete. The C.E.S. man tried to crawl out by asking if he was a *bona fide* Freethinker, then if he was a member of the N.S.S. The crowd were amused, and the C.E.S. man very ruefully and reluctantly had to fork out the shilling, which was at once handed over to Miss Robins for the Finsbury Park Branch, though the C.E.S. partisans thought that society should go shares in the division of the lecturer's spoil. Let us hope Mr. Engstrom will give him a word of advice and raise his salary.

The Christian Evidence man will ruin himself if he goes on advocating Christianity in that way. If the method spreads, the C.E.S. itself will be bankrupt—minus enough to pay the secretaries' salaries. That will be found, anyhow, or Messrs. E. and W. will know the reason why.

Mr. Cohen is bravely maintaining his ground in Victoria Park. We regret to say that the Christian opposition there is becoming more and more malignant. Last Sunday there was deliberate violence. Our esteemed friend and old colleague, Mr. W. P. Ball, was struck a vicious blow on the head. Mr. Cohen was hustled about, and two keepers had to protect him. We beg the local Freethinkers to check this rowdiness *immediately*. Let them surround the lecture-stand and protect the lecturer. A fair show of broad-shoulders will cow the roughs, for bullies are always cowards. Should this violence continue and the Freethought meetings be broken up, Mr. Foote will have to go to Victoria Park himself.

Miss Vance reports that an attempt was made on Sunday by J. H. Mitchell to break up the N.S.S. meeting in Regent's Park. The lecturer (Mr. Heaford) was annoyed during the whole of his lecture, and in consequence the chairman refused to allow Mitchell to oppose. He then made a rush for the platform, but the members pluckily held their own. Messrs. Rowney, Cotterell and others were kicked in the scuffle, but, with the assistance of the park-keepers, Mitchell was ejected. The Branch will be glad of support next Sunday.

During the past twelve months the N.S.S. Branches have enjoyed one advantage that will not appear directly in the balance-sheet. Mr. Stanley Jones, the paid secretary, has lectured in London and the provinces under the auspices of the central Executive. All the Branches have paid for his services is out of pocket expenses, and these have generally been met by collections or charges for admission. Mr. Jones has recently been lecturing "with acceptance" on the Tyne-side, visiting Newcastle, North and South Shields, Houghton, Chester-le-Street, and Sunderland. Many of his lectures have been delivered in the open air.

Mr. Sam Standring has opened up ground at Pendlebury, lecturing in the open air last Thursday. Freethinkers in that district are requested to communicate with Mr. Adam Hough, 174 Bolton-street, Pendlebury. Arrangements are being made to take a room for regular Sunday meetings.

The Lancashire and Yorkshire Secular Federation was formed at Bradford last Sunday. Mr. Sam Standring is to be organising secretary. A council meeting will be held in Newcastle on the eve of Whit Sunday, to which all members of Lancashire and Yorkshire Branches will be welcome. Several Branches have joined.

Mr. E. H. Jones re-opened the Gorton lecturing station on Sunday. Gorton is just outside the famous Manchester pleasure grounds, Bellevue.

A class for instruction in preparing lectures is held on Friday nights at 2 Morton-street, Manchester, by Sam Standring, commencing at eight o'clock. Subject, "The Thirtynine Articles Taken Consecutively."

Letters protesting against the open-air meetings of the Manchester Branch, on the ground of disorder occasioned by the horse-play of some lads, having appeared in the *Manchester Examiner and Times*, Mr. Sam Standring vigorously replies, denying responsibility for rowdiness, or that those who wish to hear him should be prohibited because a score of youths choose to sing the Doxology in order to interrupt his lecture.

The new Dundee Branch of the N.S.S. will be formally inaugurated this evening (May 29) at the Hall, 7 Tally-street, at 6.30. Local Freethinkers are earnestly invited to attend. Three fresh names of intending members have been received since Mr. Foote's visit, making nineteen in all. A good deal of support has also been promised by persons not in a position to become members.

Next Sunday (June 5) the West Ham Branch will have a tea and concert in aid of the funds, which are rather low at present. Tea and concert, 9d.; concert only, 3d. Freethinkers are earnestly invited to attend.

Dr. T. R. Allinson recently visited the Secular Hall, at New Brompton, and lectured on behalf of the Hall fund. We are glad to hear that £2 14s. 6d. was realised. At this rate the Chatham Branch will soon clear off the mortgage.

Mr. John Bell, a well-known Secularist, has been returned at the head of the poll in the School Board elections for Netherfield and Carlton. He received 1,467 votes. The second successful candidate only polled 779 votes. One sky-pilot was unsuccessful, and another, who polled 422 votes and just got in, is so cut up by the "infidel's" triumph that we hear he has since retired.

Thirty-one members of the Huddersfield County Council voted that the Finance Committee be empowered to let the Town Hall on Sundays, against twenty who voted for the negative.

The members of several of the Nonconformist churches of Swansea have during the past week been admonished by their pastors to abstain from pleasure trips on the Sunday. Any member so offending is to receive the fate of excommunication accorded to Alderman James Jones. This gives rise to a vigorous letter to the *Cambria Daily Leader* from the pen of "Junius."

Secular Thought, of Toronto, culls from the *Freethinker* a column of Plums and Acid Drops under the heading "Echoes from the Old Country."

De Dageraad opens with an article on "Christianity in Netherland-India." "Daybreak in the Fine Arts" follows. There is also a free translation from our columns of Mr. Foote's article on "Sky-pilots," who will soon be known in Dutch as Hemel-Loodsen. *De Dageraad* continues to give its readers a translation of Lecky's "History of Rationalism in Europe," in the form of a supplement.

BELIEVE OR BE DAMNED.

THE other day I came across the following in a miserable little print, published, I believe, monthly, whose mission it is "to cure infidelity": "We should embrace Christianity, even on prudential motives; for a just and benevolent God will not punish an intellectual being for believing what there is so much reason to believe; therefore, we run no risk by receiving Christianity, if it be false, but a dreadful one, by rejecting it, if it be true.—*Colton.*"

Now, it may be thought by some to be undignified to descend into the gutter to notice so mean and despicable an "argument" as this. But as this kind of thing is frequently served up on Christian Evidence platforms, a few words on it may be excused.

In the first place, the people who argue thus have a curious notion of the basis of belief. They seem, or pretend, to imagine that a man can believe anything he choose—that, in fact, belief depends absolutely on the will, and that one can believe the greatest absurdity as easily as he can drink a cup of tea. The late Mr. Spurgeon, in a little tract before me, with the appropriate title of *Leaves of Healing*, speaking of Christ, says: "He bids you receive, he commands you to believe, and he threatens you if you do not. He says to his servants, 'Compel them to come in;' and as to those who refuse to come he says, 'He that believeth not shall be damned.' What fuller leave or licence can be imagined?"

Mr. Spurgeon calls this "full leave or licence"—the same leave or licence that the highwayman in the stories gives to his victim. "Your money or your life," says Dick Turpin. "Believe or be damned," in effect, says Jesus Christ. Of course, be it understood, I am not making an affirmation that Jesus ever said these words, or indeed that he ever said anything at all. It is sufficient that Christians allege he said them.

But what nonsense this, that one can believe anything he likes! I might very much like to believe that someone would leave me a fortune to-morrow, but fact does not warrant the belief. Suppose someone had gone up to Mr. Spurgeon and, putting a pistol to his head, said, "Believe that two and two make five, or I'll shoot you," would Mr. Spurgeon have believed it? Of course, if the man were a dangerous lunatic, Mr. Spurgeon might, to pacify him, pretend to believe it; but all the same he would know it to be false. The threat would not convince his intelligence. Then how can I be expected to believe, say, that three times one are one; that a Trinity is a Unity, even if I am threatened with some terrible consequences for being unable to believe it? But, of course, it is unnecessary to labor the point. It is clear that belief does not depend on the will alone. What then becomes of the threats? It is seen they cannot affect real belief. One thing, however, they may do—they may coerce or frighten weak people into a sham belief, a pretended belief; they may make hypocrites. But then, is it suggested that a hypocrite stands a better chance with this "just and benevolent God" than one who honestly proclaims his convictions?

To return to the original extract, however, it will be seen that the writer bases his conclusions on his conception of what "a just and benevolent God" would do. But evidently I have an equal right, logically, to form my opinion, and to me it seems a "just and benevolent God" would not punish people for belief or disbelief; in fact, a

just and benevolent God punishing people for their opinions is, I confess, a conception beyond my powers to form.

But mark how ridiculously the writer's assumption recoils on his own position. He assumes, in the first place, that "there is much reason to believe" Christianity true. But I have again an equal logical right to assume there is "much reason to believe" it false. Then he says "a just and benevolent God will not punish an intellectual being for believing what there is so much reason to believe"—*i.e.*, that Christianity is false, say I. And I claim that my position is logical where the writer's is not. I admit all round that belief does not merit punishment. The writer claims that it does not in one case, but thinks it may in another. That is, if the Christian turns out to be mistaken, he will get off scot free; but if the poor Freethinker is mistaken, he will be damned. How supremely "just and benevolent"! The justice is positively overpowering, while Mathews is not in it with the benevolence.

The entire futility of this "safe side" business is, however, perceived when we remember that, after all, Christianity is not the only religion, for which the same claim might be made. Nay more, the rival sects of the Christian religion have each an equal right to the plea. As Mr. Symes remarks: "Who is heretic and who is not, it is impossible to say. Every believer can prove his doctrine correct by the test of his own creed; but all other creeds prove him a damnable heretic. There are against him a hundred witnesses to one for him. If all unbelievers are damned, nobody can be saved, for every believer doubts more than he believes, that is, all creeds except his own." You go into a room and meet a Protestant, who says: "Look here, come over to my side; you can run no risk if it's false, but a terrible one if it be true." The Catholic meets you and says: "Don't go over to that other chap. Remember the danger you incur if my creed is correct." On which side is the balance of "safety"? Evidently, as Taylor points out in one of the discourses in the *Devil's Pulpit*, this argument "would oblige us to believe all the absurdities and nonsense in the world; inasmuch as if there be no harm in believing, and there *be* some harm and danger in *not* believing, the more we believe the better; and all the argument necessary for any religion whatever would be, that it should frighten us out of our wits; the more terrible the more true; and it would be our duty to become the converts of that religion, whatever it might be, whose priests could swear the loudest, and damn and curse the fiercest." Instead of threatening and damning, what God (or his agents) should do is to produce the evidence which would render unbelief impossible.

Enough has been said to show that this safe side argument is the silliest, as it is the most dishonest, that was ever concocted to prop a tottering creed. But one thing should be borne in mind. This talk of safety on the part of the priests is an admission that their creed is unable to stand on its own merits. An honest man doesn't threaten. Fancy Darwin threatening people with pains and penalties if they disbelieved his theories! Truth doesn't require a threat to back it, it can stand alone. The Freethinker, who believes he has truth, presents the evidence on which he bases his conclusions and appeals to reason. Christianity, on the other hand, produces little or no evidence, and appeals to fear. It may be left to impartial men to judge on which side the truth is most likely to be.

This argument is an admission of defeat. It is an attempt to shift the controversy from the high ground of truth to the low ground of expediency. When the Christian is beaten on the question of the truth of his creed, he answers: "Well, you know, even so it is well that people should believe it all the same; it protects morality." Nonsense! Under no circumstances can it be expedient that men should be taught systematically to believe a lie, from their cradles to their graves. Since fact can never contradict itself, Truth is the highest expediency; and the morality which rests for its support on a lie, is in so far a false morality.

But the terrorising game is almost played out. It is the truth or falsehood of the thing that people want to know, and it is the vital point; for, if Christianity be proved false, then the foundation on which these safe-side arguments are reared is gone for ever.

F. RYAN.

What was the first thing Adam planted in the Garden of Eden?—His foot.

CAIN AND ABEL.

A TILLER of the ground was Cain;
A cattle-breeder, Abel;
The latter did God's smile obtain;
The former was not able.

The Lord intended them to eat
A vegetable diet;
But Abel hankered after meat,
And so resolved to try it.

Said Cain to Abel: "If you do,
You'll make the Maker savage;
Take my advice, all meat eschew,
And stick to fruit and cabbage."

But cruel Abel took a lamb,
And with a stick did strike it;
Whilst roasting, God came down to damn,
But sniffed, and seemed to like it.

He hid himself behind a shrub,
And watched with rapt attention,
Then said, as he his paunch did rub,
Roast meat's a prime invention!

"Look here! young man, I like your meat,
And though I'm not a glutton,
I quite look forward to the treat
Of daily sniffing mutton."

"No more of pippins now for me!
And just you tell your brother
That I will give him 'beans' if he
Should offer me another!"

"All garden muck I now despise!
And henceforth I shall hate those
Who bring to me in sacrifice
Their carrots and potatoes!"

So God disdained the bloodless fruits
That graced Cain's votive table;
But gloated o'er the bleeding brutes
Destroyed by heartless Abel.

Said Cain, "They're both so fond of blood,
I'll offer something gory."
He then gave Abel such a thud
As smashed his "upper story,"!

Next day, the Lord sniffed all in vain
For his expected breakfast;
Found out the cause, then collared Cain,
And held him by the neck fast.

Said he, "You cabbage-breeding lout!
Where's all my mutton gravy?
Cain felt inclined to say, "find out!"
But said instead, "peccavi!"

"Because you've killed my cook," said God,
"I'll give you such a twister!
I'll send you to the land of Nod,
And make you wed your sister!"

G. L. MACKENZIE.

SCHOOL BOARD ELECTIONS.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."
I AM sure that all Freethinkers and friends of secular progress must have been delighted with the results of the elections at South Shields and Tynemouth, and especially with the position that Mr. S. M. Peacock and Mr. Leslie Johnson have attained on the School Boards. It is to be regretted that in the South of England, especially at London and Portsmouth, our friends have not been so successful. I wish to state, for the information of our party, that in my opinion the seats were not secured because the candidates entered into the contest too late. If Mr. R. Forder, of London, and Mr. R. Skipton, of Portsmouth, had been at least from three to four months before the public, I feel assured that in both cases it would have been different. I found at Portsmouth that many of our staunch friends and workers had attended meetings of other Progressive candidates, and had pledged their support and were even working in committee to secure their election. As men of honor they could not withdraw altogether at the eleventh hour. I do hope that at the future elections our Secularist candidates will be in the field at least nine to twelve

months before the elections, so that all Freethinkers and Radicals can be continually working up friends and be fully prepared when the time for action arrives. Such defeats are disastrous to our cause, and injurious to others of the most advanced candidates. In my opinion, Mr. Forder and Mr. Skipton would have been elected had they been earlier in the contest. Mr. R. Forder, being well known, needs no commendation of mine. The other gentleman I have known for many years. He was once the secretary of the Branch. A more capable man could not have been nominated for the position. In each case it shows that it is not the fault of the men as to qualifications. These are two cases to which I can testify, and probably there are others. I feel that our friends should be constantly on the move in our towns and county districts in securing positions on our School Boards, and County or Town Councils. It must be apparent to all who wish to defeat bigotry that we have no time to lose, even between the elections. When we read almost daily the disgraceful manner in which our opponents, especially the clergy (both of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches), are acting to retard progress, we know it is a death struggle with them. We must not slacken but hasten their doom.

JOHN E. BRUMAGE.

BOOK CHAT.

Jesus Christ is not the only Messiah, if we are to believe "Clelia," the author of a striking book entitled *God in Shakespeare*. Our majestic poet is, it appears, a second and greater Messiah. With remarkable knowledge of Shakespeare's writings, and often with great poetical and psychological insight, "Clelia" seeks by a comparison of the dramas with the sonnets to show that the crowning genius of this planet was a manifestation of the divinity. And really there is much to be said for it—much more than for the messiahship of Jesus Christ. It is in the *Tempest* that Shakespeare finally "assumes the robe of the Messiah" to "convert the world from error to virtue and to love." From our point of view, of course, "Clelia's" thesis is fantastic. He finds what Shakespeare never meant. But he is not of the Donnelly order of interpreters; he does not reduce Shakespeare to a mechanical puzzle; and every student of the great dramatist will find in this volume something to interest and perhaps something to instruct him.

"Once again," says "Clelia," "a wondrous man, in a wondrous way, is unfolding to the world the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. He presents not merely the finished product of thought, a lesson of love, trusted to men's memories as to Sibylline leaves, though stamped upon their hearts for ever with the seal of the cross and crown of thorns; but with all inspiration of beauty and truth, with all power of art, and all science of human nature, he upholds the vast evolution of his mind and of the ideal to perfect love and virtue. He works out the reason and marks out the plan of the perfect human life. And his star is not the Star in the East that went before the Magi in their way, the morning star of the heart to be the evening star of the mind. It is the Northern Star." After which he quotes the majestic passage, beginning "I am constant as the Northern Star," from *Julius Caesar*.

Mr. Percy Gardner, in his *New Chapters in Greek History*, has a chapter on the famous Eleusinian mysteries. He says: "If prayer and sacrifices were the ordinary ritual of the Greeks, and purifications and the like their special services, the Mysteries were their sacraments, and in fact they bore in many respects a rather close likeness to the most solemn rites of the Latin and Greek Churches." Mr. Wheeler will shortly write a paper on Ancient Mysteries and their Connection with Christianity.

The Rev. Joseph Rickaby, of the Society of Jesus, has issued a translation of "Aquinas Ethics" from the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. From this we learn (vol. i., p. 333) how the angelic doctor would deal with an heretic. It says if the Church has no hope of his conversion he is to be excommunicated from the Church and left to the secular power, "to be exterminated from the world by death."

Mr. W. E. Imeson bursts out into verse against Mr. Gladstone's attack on Woman Suffrage. The result is *Woman's Vote: a Vindication* (Murby, Ludgate Circus-buildings; 1d.) Mr. Imeson's verse is vigorous, but somewhat harsh. One

merit cannot be denied him; he puts in a pointed, forcible way all the best replies to the opposition to Woman's Suffrage. After all, prose is the best vehicle for argument and propaganda.

Mr. Joachim Kasparly has sent us a pamphlet entitled, *Salvation General Humbug and the Book "In Darkest England."* We expect William Booth would pronounce it libellous.

SUNDAY MEETINGS.

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

LONDON.

- Battersea Secular Hall (back of Battersea Park Station): 8.15, free entertainment and dance. Tuesday at 8, social gathering. Wednesday at 8, dramatic class.
- Bethnal Green — Libra Hall, 78 Libra-road, Roman-road: 7, music; 7.30, Rev. S. D. Headlam, "Some Popular Mistakes about the Church's Teaching"; 9.30, free concert and dance.
- Camberwell—61 New Church-road, S.E.: 5.30, debating class, Elocution; 7.30, J. B. Coppock, "The End of the Present Phase of Nature" (illustrated with magic lantern).
- Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.: 6.45, G. W. Foote, "Why I Cannot be a Christian."
- Hammersmith—Hammersmith Club, 1 The Grove: Thursday at 8, Mr. St. John will lecture.
- West Ham—Secular Hall, 121 Broadway, Plaistow: 7.30, Mrs. Thornton Smith, "Responsibility, from a Freethought Standpoint."

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

- Battersea Park-gates: 11.15, W. J. Ramsey, "St. Paul on Tour"; 7, G. Shambrook, "Holy Lies."
- Bethnal Green (opposite St. John's Church): 11.15, H. Snell will lecture.
- Camberwell—Station-road: 11.30, J. B. Coppock, "Re-incarnation: what Science says on the Question."
- Clerkenwell Green: 11.30, C. Cohen, "Evolution v. Special Creation."
- Columbia-road (near Columbia Market), Hackney-road: 11.15, C. J. Steinberg will lecture.
- Edmonton (corner of Angel-road): 7, C. Cohen will lecture.
- Finsbury Park (near the band-stand): 11.30, A. Guest, "Paley's Evidences of Christianity"; 3.30, W. Heaford, "The Inutility of Christianity."
- Hammersmith-bridge (Middlesex side): 6.30, C. J. Hunt, "Theism and Atheism."
- Hyde Park (near Marble-arch): 11.30, Lucretius Keen, "The Origin of Man"; 3, debate between Messrs. Jones and Bowles on "The Prophecies Concerning Jesus Christ."
- Kilburn—Salisbury-road (near Queen's Park Station): 6.30, H. Courtney, "The Apostles' Creed."
- Kingsland Green (near Ball's Pond-road): 11.30, F. W. Dowdall, "Christian Symbols and their Origin."
- Lambeth—New Cut (near Victoria Hall): 11.30, W. Heaford, "Why we Attack Christianity."
- Leyton (open space near Vicarage-road, High-road): 11.30, J. Marshall, "Pardon: how and when?"
- Midland Arches (near Battle Bridge-road): 11.30, G. Standring, "The Christian Evidence Society."
- Mile End Waste: 11.30, F. Haslam, "Modern Science and Revelation."
- Old Pimlico Pier: 11.30, C. J. Hunt, "The Bible God."
- Plaistow Green: 11.30, R. Rosetti, "The Origin of Man."
- Regent's Park (near Gloucester-gate): 3.30, H. Snell, "Is the Bible the Inspired Word of God?"
- Tottenham (corner of West Green-road): 3.30, a lecture.
- Victoria Park (near the fountain): 11.15, J. Rowney will lecture; 3.15, C. Cohen will lecture.
- Walthamstow—Markhouse Common: 6.30, T. Thurlow, "The Bible as a Whole."
- Wood Green—Jolly Butchers-hill: 11.30, Stanley Jones, "The Creation."

COUNTRY.

- Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge-street: 7, R. S. Bransby, "The Right to Rebel."
- Bristol—Shepherd's Hall, Old Market-street: 6.30, business; 7, R. Waere, "Socialism."
- Chatham—Secular Hall, Queen's-road, New Brompton: J. M. Robertson, 11, "The Meaning of Atheism"; 7, "Christianity and the Social Question" (3d. and 6d.)
- Derby—20 Newland-street: 7, H. McGuinness, "Christianity and Slavery."
- Heckmondwike—Mr. John Rothera's Bottoms: 2.30, a meeting.
- Huddersfield—Friendly and Trades Societies' Club, No. 9 Room: Tuesday at 8, A Member, "Animal Intelligence."
- Hull—St. George's Hall, 6 Story-street, Albion-street: 6.30, Mrs. M. A. Saunderson, "Is the Bible the Friend of Woman?"
- Liverpool—Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street: Charles Watts, 11, "What Christians have to Defend, and why they Avoid Debate"; 3, "Reply to Mr. Celestine Edwards and the Christian Evidence Society"; 7, "Secularism, Atheism, and Theism."
- Manchester N. S. S., Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints: 6.30, J. Hooper, "The Concessions of Theology to Science" (free). Monday at 8, Sam Standring, "Secularism as Stated by the Christians" (free).
- Newcastle-on-Tyne—Eldon Hall, 2 Clayton-street: 3, monthly meeting of members; 7, G. Selkirk, "Faith or Reason?"
- Nottingham—Secular Hall, Beck-street: 7, A. Lord, "The Gospel Truth."

Plymouth—100 Union-street: 7, a meeting.
 Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington-street, Southsea:
 7, W. Jannaway, "The History of Astronomy."
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 7, Newcastle Conference Agenda.
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 Conference Agenda.
 Sunderland—Bridges End Vaults, Bridge-street: 7, W. R. Stan-
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 Leeds—Roundhay Park (new entrance): 11, Sam Standing,
 "Why we are Secularists." Woodhouse Moor: Sam Standing,
 3, "Christ on the Labor Question"; 7, "Man's Search for God."
 Manchester (corner of Denmark-road and Oxford-road): 11,
 J. Hooper, "Is the Bible True?" Stephenson-square: 3, J.
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C. COHEN, 154 Cannon-street-road, Commercial-road, E.—May
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