

The Freethinker

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THE CURSE OF PRIESTCRAFT.

SECULAR advocacy should not be confined merely to the exposition of its positive philosophy, which is the endeavor to inculcate sound principles, to aid in the formation of exalted character, and to guide human actions in daily life. In addition to this useful work, the Secular propagandist has to discover the obstacles that impede ethical culture and intellectual freedom, also to do his utmost to expose and remove such impediments. The human mind will be ever slow to receive new truths while mentality is clouded with old errors and misdirected by theological delusions.

Among the many obstacles to human progress and intellectual liberty, none has been more potent than priestcraft in its various forms and under its different disguises. It has imposed the worst kind of fetters upon the human race, and its influence has been more injurious to man's emancipation than any other form of despotism. Priestcraft not only misdirects human action; it injures the human mind, which is the controlling power of man's activity. It impresses the young with false and mischievous notions, it surrounds middle age with vain imaginations, and invests the evening of life with baseless hopes. Thus at every stage of existence the welfare and interests of mankind have been systematically subordinated to the vain and grovelling figments of a priest-created imagination.

The origin of priestcraft is obscured in the mist of pre-historic antiquity. We find, however, that man in his primitive state was a fetichist—that is, he was a worshipper of those imaginary deities whose presence he recognised in the whirlwind and in the earthquake; in the fire and in the water; in the sun, moon, and stars; in the river, grove, and mountain. Each of these he considered, in his ignorance, to be animated by its special god or goddess; and as a means of guarding himself from all evils by sea or land, he sought to propitiate his deities by gifts. Hence arose the custom of sacrifice, the offering being conducted by the head of the family. Under the patriarchal system these tribal heads also fulfilled the sacrificing functions. When, however, men formed societies and built villages and towns, the tribal system was gradually swallowed up and engrossed by the civic. Instead of being a tribesman, each person was now a citizen. As, however, the custom of sacrifices was perpetuated, the sacrificers were set apart to perform their special duty of pacifying the gods. Thus, undoubtedly, originated sacerdotalism; and the application of the hereditary principle to priests led of course to the definitive establishment of the sacerdotal or priestly caste.

Mysticism has ever been the atmosphere in which priests have carried on their thought-destroying avocation. In ancient times they divided knowledge into two parts—the exoteric, that was for the laity; and the esoteric, that was for themselves. The great Roman orator, Cicero, is reported as having said that two augurs, or priests, could not look into each other's

face without laughing. The sarcasm was very severe, but it was probably true. All these reverend gentlemen were acquainted with esoteric religion, which was their own, and exoteric religion, the creed they taught the people, who relied upon what was told them—like the credulous old lady who expressed her readiness to believe that Jonah swallowed the whale—"if the Bible said so"; and knowing how the ignorant masses were deluded was enough, thought Cicero, to make the two priests smile at each other.

The folly of priestcraft, however, is not by any means its worst feature. Wherever it has exercised its blighting influence human effort has been paralysed and the cruellest instincts of mankind have been stimulated. In India millions were fascinated with the idle dreams of the Brahmans, and as a result stagnation was engendered. The world has swept on in its resistless course; empires have arisen and decayed; Egypt, Nineveh, Babylon, Greece, Carthage, and Rome have flourished and then expired from inanition; systems of theology have succeeded one another; Osiris has given place to Jupiter, Jupiter to Christ; but the dusky Hindoo still worships Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva, still believes in the transmigration of souls, and still mortifies his flesh to please the deities. If we come down to the Middle Ages we find there was one unceasing round of mortifications, slaughterings, burnings, and extirpations. Men made martyrs of themselves on pillars, or chastised themselves through the streets with whips, in obedience to priestly teachings. Princes, kings, and people were excommunicated and interdicted by the central hierarch, the Pope; every land was stripped of its wealth by the avarice of the clergy; the East was overrun by hordes of sanguinary soldiers, who recklessly massacred at priestly dictation; the Inquisition sentenced thousands of persons to be burned at the stake; the Albigenses and Waldenses were nearly rooted out; England, France, Germany, Holland, Spain, and Italy became the theatres of civil war; in one day the streets of Paris were strewed with dead bodies of persons of all ages and both sexes; thousands of persons were put to death in the Netherlands; the fires of Smithfield were too frequently burning; and the valleys of Scotland and the glens of Ireland flowed with human blood.

We are hearing much just now from Protestant Ulster as to the danger of the priestly power of Rome, in case Home Rule should be granted to Ireland. Whatever grounds there may be for these prophetic wailings, Orangemen themselves are not so free from priestly intolerance as to justify them in making such statements. Whenever they have had the power, these Protestant fanatics have not been remarkable for their tolerance towards those who differed from them. Personally, we would as soon trust ourselves to the power of Roman Catholics as to the mercy of Orange fanatics. It is six of one and half a dozen of the other where Freethinkers are concerned. Let there be no misunderstanding as to our position. We have

no word to say as an apology, even of the mildest kind, for Roman Catholicism. That monstrous hierarchy, has been the foe of freedom wherever its hydra head has been raised. It has trampled under foot the liberties of peoples, and crushed with the iron heel of its despotic power all nobility and independence out of human nature wherever it has held undisputed sway. It has strangled thought, persecuted science, obstructed progress, fettered literature, and blasted all that is lofty in man. A veritable upas tree it has been in history, poisoning the nations in every soil where it has taken root, and its deprivation of further power to persecute should be hailed with delight by every lover of his race. We assert, however, that according to history, Protestants have perpetrated as heartless cruelties as have the Catholics, and from our personal experience we should say that certain sections of the Protestant Church are as much opposed to Secular rights as is the Roman Catholic Church.

Instead of either the one or the other, we prefer Secularism, which enjoins the right of self-dependence and the duty of self-reliance—of thinking and acting for ourselves, and of loving and serving our fellow creatures from motives of philanthropy, and not from the dictates of autocratic domination, or through slavish submission to any form of ecclesiastical usurpation.

CHARLES WATTS.

ANCIENT MYSTERIES.

[CONTINUED.]

MITHRAIC.

"A knowledge of the ideas embodied in the Mithraic system is as essential to the due understanding of Christianity as it is valuable for throwing light on the moral and religious notions anciently prevalent among Asiatic people generally."

—C. S. WAKE, *Evolution of Morality*, v. ii., p. 348.

THE Mithraic mysteries are obscure but important, for they appear to connect the Eleusinian mysteries with those of the Magi of Persia and the East Aryan races.* The name Mitra appears even in the Rig-veda of the Hindus, where it signifies friend. In Persia *Mihra* is the name of the sun. Mithras is the god of light and day, and, by transition, of those virtues of purity, benevolence, and intelligence of which light is still the symbol.† The mysteries of Mithras represented progress from darkness to light. Their scene was a cave on a hill. Mr. C. W. King says their rites "bore a very curious resemblance to those subsequently established in the Catholic Church" as well as to those of later secret societies.

"The neophytes were admitted by the rite of *Baptism*; the initiated at their assemblies solemnly celebrated a species of *Eucharist*; while the courage and endurance of the candidate for admission into the sect were tested by *twelve* consecutive trials called "The Tortures," undergone within a cave constructed for the purpose."

The Mithraic term of probation lasted forty days, and was perhaps the origin of Lent. Justin, in the middle of the second century (1 Apol. 66), tells that in the mysteries of Mithras the wicked devils initiated the Eucharist. Tertullian too, early in the following century, says (*On the Proscription of Heretics*, chap. x.): "The Devil, whose business it is to pervert the truth, *mimics the exact circumstances of the divine sacraments in the mysteries of idols*. He himself *baptises* some—that is to say, his believers and followers; he promises forgiveness of sins from

the *sacred fount*, and thereby initiates them into the religion of Mithras. Thus he *marks on the forehead* his own soldiers; there he celebrates the *oblation of bread*; he brings in the symbol of the Resurrection [Rev. C. Hodgson translates 'introduceth a representation of the resurrection'], and wins the crown with the sword." Mr. King observes: "But every dispassionate observer will perceive that these overzealous Fathers proceed to beg the question when they assume that the Mithraic rites were devised as *counterfeits* of the Christian sacraments; inasmuch as the former were in existence long before the first promulgation of Christianity—unless, indeed, to imitate by anticipation be considered as merely another proof of the mischievous sagacity of its diabolical opponent."

The bread used in the Mithraic mysteries was a round cake, emblem of the solar disc, called *Mizd*. Seel, the German author of *Die Mithrageheimnisse*, discovers here the origin of *Missa*, as designating the bloodless sacrifice of the Mass, assuming that this *mizd* was the prototype of the Host (*hostia*), which is of precisely the same form and dimensions. A portion of the Mithraic mysteries consisted in the pretended death of the candidate. It is said the emperor Commodus profaned them by doing a real murder. Another curious item was giving the *mark* of Mithras. This was a stigmata made finally before the candidate received the stone talisman with the image of Mithras. St. Augustine, in his 7th Homily in John, thus alludes to it: "Therefore, by way of hitting off a sort of likeness and counterfeit of the truth, some spirit or other chose that blood should be told down in purchase of his own image, because he knew that precious blood was at some time or other to be told down in redemption of the human race." The Apocalypse alludes frequently to bearing the name or mark (Rev. xiii. 16, 17; xiv. 9, 11; xv. 2; xvi. 2; xix. 20; xx. 4), and Paul, in closing his epistle to the Galatians, touchingly alludes to his bearing on his body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Mr. King connects the Mithraic mark with the caste marks of the Hindus.

St. Augustine (John i., dis. 7) says: "I remember that the priests of the fellow in the cap (*illius pileati*) [Mithras] used to say, 'Our Capped One is himself a Christian.'" Mr. King, who notices this, adds: "In this asserted affinity probably lay the motive that induced Constantine to adopt for the commonest type of his coinage (the sole currency of the Western Provinces), and retain long after his conversion, the figure of Sol himself, with the legend 'To the Invincible Sun, my companion (or guardian).'"* Both the Sun-day, the Lord's Day, and Christmas were taken from the feasts of Mithra.

Prof. J. H. Worman, in his article on "Mithras" in McClintock and Strong's *Cyclopædia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, says: "The most important of his many festivals was his birthday, celebrated on the 25th of December, the day subsequently fixed—against all evidence—as the birthday of Christ." Mr. C. W. King, a still higher authority, says: "The old festival held on the 25th day of December in honor of the 'Birthday of the Invincible One,' and celebrated by the Great Games of the Circus, was afterwards transferred to the commemoration of the Birth of Christ, of which the real day was, as the Fathers confess, totally unknown."† Chrysostom, for example, declares (Hom. xxxi.) that the Birthday of Christ had then *lately* been fixed at Rome upon that day, in order that, whilst the heathen were busy with their own profane ceremonies, the Christians might perform their holy rites without molestation.

Julius Firmicus Maternus, a Christian writer of the fourth century, in an oration on the errors of

* On Mithraic mysteries see Windischmann in *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlands*, bk. 1, § 82; Sainte Croix, *Recherches Historiques*; Hammer, *Mithriaka*; Lajard, *Recherches sur le Culte Public et les Mystères de Mithra*; Seel, *Die Mithrageheimnisse*; C. S. Wake's *Evolution of Morality*; King's *Gnostics and their Remains*, part ii.; and J. M. Robertson in *Religious Systems of the World*.

† The oath of Artaxerxes Mnemon was "By the light of Mithras," a counterpart to that of William the Conqueror, "Par le Splendeur de Dieu."

* *Gnostics and their Remains*, p. 119; 1887.

† *Ibid.*, p. 119.

profane religions inscribed to the emperors Constantius and Constans, § 18, thus describe a portion of the Adonian and Mithraic mysteries. He says he will discover the artifice by which the demon seeks by a false imitation to corrupt the truth of *our* mysteries. "For by night they lay an image on a couch, and then mourn it in measured lamentation. When satiated with their fictitious weeping they light the torches. Then the priest, having anointed the throats of the weepers, solemnly whispers, 'Be of courage initiates, for the god being saved salvation shall come to you.'" Hence the mysteries were a representation of the death and resurrection of the god in the person of the initiate. Similar representations took place in the mysteries of Osiris, Thammuz, Adonis, Attys and Dionysos, and it is noteworthy that to this day in Palestine the alleged scene of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, a symbolical corpse is laid out mourned and supposed to rise again.* In the Catholic Church on Good Fridays the churches are draped in black, and the faithful worship and mourn over a crucifix laid out, till on Easter Sunday the huge candle is illuminated and hymns of joy are chanted.

Originally of a Bacchic character, for the King of Persia was allowed to get drunk only on the Feast of the Mysteries, under the influence of what we may call the Buddhist philosophy, Mithraism took a more severe and sombre tone. Life was a great warfare between the principles of good and of evil, in which triumph was only gained by probation and sacrifice. The initiate was a veritable Salvation Army Soldier. He was called a soldier of Mithra, a new born child of light, and was instructed to put on the whole armour of Mithra, the breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith, and the sword of the spirit to slay the bull of lust. He passed through a series of grades, each representing a higher stage. One of the rites was the offering of a crown, which the initiate had to refuse saying, "Mithras is my crown." Mithraism became like freemasonry, a moral fraternity binding together those of different races and faiths in a common cult. It included women. The corn myth was retained in the Mithraic mysteries, though they partook of higher development. In the Mithraic monument in the central hall of the British Museum, the astronomical signification is apparent. The bull is having his strength sapped by the scorpion, and as Mithra stabs him to the heart, three ears of corn gush out instead of blood. In some of the monuments the corn springs from the bull's tail. The allegory of the seasons is apparent.

J. M. WHEELER.

(To be concluded.)

Ethel used to play a good deal in the Sabbath-school class. One day she had been very quiet. She sat up prim, and behaved herself so nicely that after the recitation was over, the teacher remarked: "Ethel, my dear, you were a very good little girl to-day." "Yes'm. I couldn't help being good. I dot a tif neck."

The Reverend Russell H. Conwell, of the Baptist Temple, is the young man's friend, and exerts himself to turn aside every young man whom he beholds "treading the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire." Last week, in his peregrinations, his eyes fell upon one needing his holy admonition to save him from going down to bottomless perdition. So, approaching him, Doctor Conwell placed one hand impressively upon his shoulder, and exclaimed, "Young man, Satan hath hold of thee!" What the effect of this startling declaration upon the young man was cannot be described; but certain it is that when Doctor Conwell, totally unconscious of the humor of the occasion, reported to his congregation how he took hold of the young man and addressed him, a very perceptible titter surprised the pastor. By this time he is probably laughing, too, at the droll attitude in which he made himself pose.

* See an account in the *Church Times*, May 11, 1888.

A THANKFUL PARSON.

A PIOUS parson, good and true,
Was crossing o'er the seas,
When suddenly there fiercely blew
A wild and sweeping breeze.
He feared the storm the ship would wreck,
His heart was sore afraid.
He sought the captain on the deck
And found him undismayed.

The captain saw his awful fear
And led him up to where
The servant of the Lord could hear
The sailors loudly swear.
"You clearly see," the captain said,
"If danger hovered nigh,
They'd all be on their knees instead
And asking grace to die."

The parson felt his words were true,
And when the skies grew fair,
He marvelled how the sailors knew
Just when to pray or swear.
But when the seas which wildly flowed
Had ceased to plunge and spout,
Unto himself he said, "It showed
They know what they're about."

But later on another storm
Came fiercer than before,
The parson heard with wild alarm
The ocean's angry roar.
He sought the deck in awful dread
To near the sailors get.
He listened—then he bowed his head—
"Thank God, they're swearing yet."

MR. GLADSTONE ON THE BIBLE AND SLAVERY.

I HAVE found unexpected confirmation in Mr. Gladstone's election address to the "worthy and independent electors of Newark" in 1832 of the fact repeatedly referred to in these columns, that one of the chief arguments used by the anti-abolitionists was the support given to slavery by the Bible. He wrote:—"As regards the abstract lawfulness of slavery . . . I rest it upon the fact that Scripture, the paramount authority upon such a point, gives directions to persons standing in the relation of master to slave for their conduct in that relation; whereas, were the matter absolutely and necessarily *sinful*, it would not regulate the manner." And he then goes on to contend that conversion to Christianity must precede freedom for the slave. "To this end I desire to see immediately set on foot, by impartial and sovereign authority, an universal and efficient system of Christian instruction. Let *fitness* be made a condition for emancipation." He advocates "fitness" before freedom, missionaries before mercy, Jesus before justice, religion before right.

Of course, I am not for one moment assuming that Mr. Gladstone would endorse these views now. On the contrary, in his *Nineteenth Century* article on "Robert Elsmere," he argues that Christianity abolished slavery. In 1832 he believed as his co-eligionists did; in 1892 he also believes as his orthodox companions do, although one belief involves the direct contradiction of the other, and the "paramount authority" for slavery of one year becomes its destroyer in the other. W. C. J.

A minister, while visiting his hearers in Coatbridge, one day met a little boy, and asked him if he knew the best book in the world. "No," replied the boy, "but I ken the warst." "Well," said the minister, "what is it?" "It is the store book, for every time my father looks at it he hits my mither."

The other evening a cold-water orator was at a supper. Opposite to him sat a well-known divine of the Church of Scotland. "Do you not think it wrong for men in your position to set so bad an example by drinking alcohol?" asked the orator. "No," replied the divine; "I only follow Scripture." "How so?" questioned the orator. "Why, the Bible says," replied the divine, "wine maketh glad the heart of man, but with water do the wild asses quench their thirst."

THE DESIGN ARGUMENT.

FREETHINKERS trying to convert Christians find that one of the arguments most difficult to remove from the minds of the latter, and the one affording their religion its most substantial support, is the argument that there is a design in nature evidencing an intelligent personal creator. Even some who have rejected the Christian revelation still halt as Deists, and though denying Jehovah affirm a superintending, beneficent personal god. But the argument from design has been totally exploded in a dozen different ways. It is well that Freethinkers should familiarise themselves with these refutations for use against Christian neighbors.

When the child who was told that "God made everything," asked, "Who made God?" there was asked a question sufficient to silence every Christian in the world. This question has never been answered. It cannot be answered. After hearing it once every Christian should close his mouth in silence and never be heard to speak on religion again. No further argument should be required. Consider it. We find a watch and we say, "So curious and wonderful a thing must have had a maker." We find the watchmaker, and we say, "So curious and wonderful a thing as man must have had a maker." We find God, and we then say, "So curious and wonderful a thing must *not* have had a maker." What kind of reasoning is this? If it is the wonder of the thing that first suggests the necessity of a creator, must not that necessity for a creator increase just as the wonder increases? This is precisely the reasoning of the Hindoo in accounting for the position of the earth. "Whatever exists," said he, "must have some support; the earth exists, and is therefore supported"; so he said that it rested on the back of an elephant. The elephant needing support, he said that it rested on a tortoise. Then he forgot that according to his own premiss, that whatever exists must have some support, the tortoise must have something upon which to rest. Just as the Hindoo stopped reasoning when he got to the tortoise, the theologian stops when he gets to his God. The Christian generally uses the words, order, harmony, as describing that in the universe which he says evidences a God. Order, harmony—these must equally exist in the divine nature to enable him to reflect and design. Or suppose the Christian affirms—though where on earth he arrives at his knowledge about it nobody can tell—that his deity does not reflect, reason, cogitate, but perceives truth without the labor of investigation and contrivance, then two more words appear—adaptation, fitness. Deity must still possess an adaptation or fitness thus to perceive and to execute his designs. And this adaptation and fitness would presuppose another intelligent designer capable of producing that adaptation and fitness. This one would necessitate another; this one another, and so on. An endless succession of gods is the logical consequence. The common-sense decision is simply to confine ourselves to the affirmation of a universe, for we have daily evidence of it and know that it is here; as for any creating, designing, self-existent God, he is disproved by the very argument by which it is attempted to prove his existence.

Another argument establishes that if such a God did exist, he could not be a beneficent God, such as the Christians are for ever prating about. What effrontery is it that talks about the mercy and goodness of a nature in which all animals devour animals; in which every mouth is a slaughter-house and every stomach a tomb! "Observe," said the minister to his son, "with what beneficent design is the crane so fashioned, in legs, bill, and feet, as to catch fish with ease and provide its means of subsistence." "Yes," replied the boy, "I think I see the beneficence of God, at least so far as the crane is concerned, but don't you think the arrangement a little tough on the fish?" What about that wonderful adaptation of means to ends, that

exquisitely contrived mechanism, by which the cancer fastens and feeds upon the body of the loving and beautiful girl?

Let us ask another question—If, when we perceive results similar to those that might be due to a wise man, we conclude that they have been produced by a being similar to a wise man, then, when we see results similar to those that might be due to an idiot, shall we not conclude that they have been produced by a being similar to an idiot? Proceedings such as if seen in a man would be pronounced idiotic, may be seen to constitute almost the whole working of nature. We will mention a few.

An egregious slowness of process is found to have characterised the production of things as they are. "Suppose," says Colonel Ingersoll, "that upon some island we should find a man a million years of age, and suppose that we should find him in the possession of a beautiful carriage, constructed upon the most perfect model. And suppose, further, that he should tell us that it was the result of several hundred thousand years of labor and of thought; that for fifty thousand years he used as flat a log as he could find before it occurred to him that by splitting the log he could have the same surface with only half the weight; that it took him many thousand years to invent wheels for this log; that the wheels he first used were solid, and that fifty thousand years of thought suggested the use of spokes and tires; that for many centuries he used the wheels without lynch-pins; that it took a hundred thousand years more to think of using four wheels instead of two; that for ages he walked behind the carriage when going downhill in order to hold it back, and that only by a lucky chance he invented the tongue; would we conclude that this man, from the very first, had been an infinitely ingenious and perfect mechanic? Suppose we found him living in an elegant mansion, and he should inform us that he lived in that house for five hundred thousand years before he thought of putting on a roof, and that he had but recently invented windows and doors: would we say that from the beginning he had been an infinitely accomplished and scientific architect?"

Again. To make a machine adapted to serve a purpose and then to wantonly destroy it without allowing it to fulfil its functions, would be conduct such as we could expect only from a fool. Now, in nature we see the immense majority of the seeds of plants produced but to perish, and the immense majority of the young of animals formed but to die. A thousand are born where one lives; where one attains perfection a thousand are wretched miscreations. What shall we say of this stupendous prodigality of waste? What should we say of a like waste in man? If we say that success in nature is the work of a man—like intelligent beings, why not say that failure in nature is the work of a man-like idiot?

Again, many animals have what are called purposeless organs—some rudimentary and never developed sufficiently for use; others suppressed and degenerated, others aimless and inactive, others positively injurious to their possessors. What kind of design is this? Why do some animals, like the dugong, have tusks that never cut through the gums? Why has the guinea-pig teeth that are shed before it is born? Why has the whale teeth that it never uses? Why has man in his eye a remnant of the *membrana nictitans*, or third eyelid of birds and reptiles—not of the slightest use to the human being? Why has man that useless organ—about which so much has been said lately in this paper—the vermiform appendix? Evolution shows us that these are remnants of a former state which once served a purpose, and are not yet eliminated from succeeding forms of life. Theology requires us to believe that a God of omniscience made all these animals just as they are now.—*Truthseeker.*

(To be concluded.)

CHRISTIANITY IN ABYSSINIA.

SOME time ago we referred to the state of Christianity in Abyssinia as conclusively proving that Christianity, when separated from the civilising influences arising from doubt and competitive contact fails in any way to elevate its devotees. We recently came across the elaborate report on the state of Abyssinia, submitted to Parliament by Mr. Plowden who resided there many years, and we find it contains various items confirming our opinion.

To see what early man was like we have to study races whose isolation in islands or mountain fastnesses have preserved them from the evolution which comes from competition. In Abyssinia, which by sea, desert and Nile cataracts is shut out from the rest of the world, we may study both Christianity and Judaism in some of their early aspects. Leaving aside for the present the Falashas or Jews of Abyssinia, we will look at what Christianity has done for that country.

Abyssinia boasts and with truth, not only of being a Christian nation, but of having been Christian longer than most of the nations of Europe. In civilisation it is as far behind as these nations were when they had Christianity but no science. It is claimed that as early as 330 the Egyptian Bishop Frumentius introduced Christianity into Abyssinia, and since religion when without competition is the most unprogressive thing, the present state of Christianity in Abyssinia may be fairly said to throw light on Christianity as it was in the days of Constantine. It looks most like an amalgam of Buddhism and Judaism. It is a huge monastic system coupled with circumcision and other Jewish rites and fables. But let us see what their religion has done for them. Mr. Plowden says:—

"The Abyssinians are superstitious; they believe in the efficacy of amulets, of writings in jargon mixed with scripture; in the charms of Mussulmans to control the hail and the rain; in spirits of the forest and the river; in omens, in fortune-tellers; and in devils that may be cast out by spells from their human victim, quoting the authority of the New Testament for their belief. To these they attribute epilepsy and other incurable diseases.

"As a nation they have never had any element of progress within themselves, nor do they appear ever to have wished for it. Coinage and architecture in solid masonry have never been attempted, though the Ptolomies set them the example of both, as shown by the remains of Axum, and the gold and copper coins found in those ruins to this day. The Portuguese introduced the art of brick-burning, and built towers and bridges of excellent workmanship; no person in Abyssinia can now make mortar. No purely national antiquities of any kind exist. Their kings and their people two thousand years ago must have passed their lives as now, seeking only for daily splendor or enjoyment, and indifferent to the perpetuation of their memory by any monument.

"Though the feudal power of the military chiefs is so great, it may be doubted if the influence of the priesthood be not more important. That body holds in chains the mind of the people, moulds at will customs, morals, and all the social ties, which have consequently remained almost unchanged, amidst the change of dynasties, the ruinous shocks of international war, and the gradual crumbling away of a wide and Christian empire.

"No one save the priest himself is ever instructed in the gospel in any tongue. Great adoration is paid to the Virgin Mary and to numberless saints and angels. Their churches are filled with pictures, to which, when unveiled, the multitude bows with reverence. Fasting is rigidly insisted on, sometimes, however, compounded for by money.

"The churches are very numerous, and each church is itself an object of devotion, as it is firmly believed that the saint whose name it bears actually resides in its sanctuary. The stones are kissed with awe, and offerings are deposited, which the priest receives. Vows are registered and prayers are made with equal fervor to the Virgin, our Savior, or some traditional martyr of the Abyssinian Church, from which they expect immediate benefit in this world as well as

salvation in the next. Miracles, I need scarcely say, are not unfrequent, and certain spots of peculiar sanctity perform them almost daily. Whenever offerings slacken, and the numbers that kneel at the shrine decrease, a picture rolls its eyes, a leper is cleansed, or the blind are restored to sight.

"Great respect is paid to all who wear the white turban, the mark of priesthood; they are always addressed as 'father,' and as superiors in the second person plural, even by chiefs of the highest rank. Any person dying without having chosen a father confessor is denied Christian burial, and so jealous are the priests of this great means of power that they extend the rule to strangers. The confessors of the great men are usually indulgent, and they are permitted to compound for their frailties by the endowing of a new church, or handsome gifts to an old one. Nor are monasteries wanting to complete the resemblance to the Roman Catholic Church, and to the middle ages, where every immorality is practised; nor solitary hermits who dwell in gloomy forests, feeding on roots, and exposed to ferocious animals, and who are sometimes as sincere as they are useless. Nunneries alone are absent from the picture, though vows of celibacy are sometimes taken, if rarely kept, save at an advanced age.

"Numbers of Abyssinian priests and monks visit Jerusalem yearly, and it may be deemed singular that these, receiving much kindness at the hands of Europeans, do not awaken their countrymen to some knowledge of the world beyond, and some better feeling towards their fellow Christians than contempt or indifference."

Bishop Gobat, in his *Three Years in Abyssinia*, says that the three sects of Christians are "so inimical to each other that they curse one another and will not partake of the Sacrament together. It is one single point of theology that disunites the unceasing dispute about the unction of Jesus Christ." The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says, "Legends of saints and works of religious controversy form almost their entire literature." This is also true of Christian Europe before the Pagan Renaissance when Christianity was in possession of complete power. Abyssinia has been Christian as long as any part of Europe. Its conversion to Christianity dates from the days of Constantine, but being largely shut from the rest of the world it exhibits what Christianity comes to when existing apart from progressive secular influences.

J. M. W.

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE IRISH RELIGIOUS QUESTION.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—I was sorry to see the article in last week's *Freethinker*, headed "The Irish Religious Question," by Mr. W. M. Knox, the talented secretary of the Ulster Branch of the N.S.S. (of which I am a member), warning English and Scottish Freethinkers against taking too seriously the great Ulster Convention of June 17, which he represents as being merely an Orange and Tory gathering of a minority that has hitherto been in the ascendancy, and resents being put in the position its value entitles it to. Now, I may say that I have a better opportunity than Mr. Knox of knowing the opinions of Ulstermen generally outside of Belfast, where he resides, and I know he is altogether mistaken in this matter. It is evident he can neither have been present at the meetings nor have read the speeches, otherwise he should know that, instead of being Orange and Tory (as he describes the demonstration), not less than half of both the delegates and speakers were Liberal Unionists who had been, like myself, enthusiastic supporters of Mr. Gladstone up to his unfortunate surrender to the party of disorder in 1886, and have always been, and still are, opposed to Orangeism and Toryism. But this does not prevent their joining their opponents in averting what they have every reason to consider would be an overwhelming disaster to both.

The Unionists of Ulster comprise almost the whole Protestant population of every sect, which forms a large majority in the six counties of the plantation, with a few Catholics who have anything to lose; and there is no ground for representing them as braggarts, or anything but calm, resolute men, who are determined that, come what may, they will never be ruled by a Dublin Parliament.

JOHN KENNEDY.

ACID DROPS.

Our readers will well remember the vile calumny of Mr. Waugh and the Bishop of Chester. These goodly gentlemen declared at a public meeting that the parents who were most cruel to their children belonged to the Secularist portion of the working classes. Since then the Society these reverend calumniators represented has prosecuted hundreds of cruel parents, but where are the Secularists among them? This, at any rate, is certain that the cases reported in the papers are of a very different complexion. Mrs. Montagu, who tortured her child to death, and is now rather petted in an Irish gaol, was said to have been animated by a high sense of religious duty. She was bent on saving her children's souls at any expense of suffering to their poor little bodies.

Down in Warwickshire a clergyman's wife has just been sentenced to three months' imprisonment with hard labor for gross cruelty to a domestic servant. Mrs. Marian Lilian Humphries is the wife of the vicar of Warton. Had she been the wife of a Secular lecturer we should have seen "Another Secular Scandal" on the newspaper bills. But as she is a clergyman's wife her cruelty is not considered remarkable, and instead of having a column or two of exposure she is disposed of in a paragraph.

Here is another case of cruelty on the part of a Christian. On June 28 the Venerable Archdeacon Bathurst, of Holywell, was prosecuted at Hitchen and fined £5 and costs for working a horse while it was in an unfit state. A "venerable" Archdeacon indeed!

In respect to animals Judaism is vastly superior to Christianity. It is the Old Testament which says "The righteous man is merciful unto his beast." It is the New Testament which says "Doth God care for oxen?"

"God's ways are not our ways," is it not somewhat singular that the master should strike down one of his servants and thus cut off his usefulness in behalf of religion? The Rev. A. Helton, aged seventy, was struck by lightning, near Casner, Ill., on last Saturday evening and instantly killed. He was a minister of the united brethren church, and leaves a large family.

The good old Bible belief in witchcraft is not extinct at Callicoon, N.Y. An inoffensive old man was recently murdered, says a dispatch, because he was believed to be a wizard. An old man named George Markert, was killed by his brother-in-law, Adam Heidt, because he believed he had cast a spell upon him.

A correspondent in an Omaha paper has made the important discovery that the Great Pyramid of Egypt was built by Noah. When the old mariner ceased to sail he tried his hand in imitating "the great white throne," and the pyramid, "incased in polished marble," dispensing an electric light from its summit, was the product. Pity the old fellow planted a vineyard, drank of the wine and made himself drunken when his task was ended, for he set a shameful example to his posterity, which many of them have copied.

The *Northern Daily News* tells a story in connection with Mr. Champion's candidature in opposition to Mr. Bryce at Aberdeen. A shopkeeper said to a granite mason, "I hear y'are a strong supporter of Champion's, and gaun t'gie him yer vote." And the stone mason replied, "Look ye, John: I wad suner vote for the Deil hissel' than for Champion, for then I'd ken *wha I wis votin' for.*"

This is good in its way, but how far behind the *bon mot* of John Wilkes! This eighteenth century Bradlaugh (in many respects) was canvassing voters, and one of them exclaimed that "he would sooner vote for the Devil." "Yes," said Wilkes, "but in case your friend doesn't stand?"

In the Hon. Lionel Tollemache's article on Lord Tollemache and his Anecdotes, in the current *Fortnightly*, he tells not a bad story himself of a pious *marquise* who attended to the spiritual wants of her servant, Jean, who died young. When the old lady went to heaven she deigned to inquire whether "mon valet de chambre, ce bon Jean," was also among the

elect. "Comment vous ne savez pas? Monseigneur Jean est archange," was the reply. When told, moreover, she must bow to the ground if she met so great a personage, it repented her she had taken so much thought for the religion of her household.

Priests have always had a high notion of their own merits and privileges. In some ages, and some parts of the world, they reckon they confer an honor upon you by lying with your wife. To strike one of them is an awful crime, even if he strikes you first; entailing sometimes the penalty of a thousand years in hell. It is still a mortal sin to strike a Catholic priest; though the pride of the Protestant man of God has been so humbled that, when he is assaulted, he adopts the prosaic remedy of applying to a magistrate for a summons.

Just now the priests are taking a very active part in Irish politics, and when blows are flying about, as is customary in the Green Island, the men of God come in for a share of the bruises and black eyes; for your blackthorn is no respecter of persons, and drops impartially on any skull that happens to be handy.

Now the Irish priests don't like this. They claim their "constitutional right" to attend political meetings as "citizens," but when the row begins they claim to be treated as "priests." The Parnellites, however, look at the question in a different light. They regard the men of God as priests in church and politicians at meetings; and it takes all the life out of the finest shindy if you have to be too discriminating in the use of your shillaly.

Such a damnable looseness as this cannot be permitted in the land whose snakes were exterminated to make room for priests. Therefore on Sunday last, in all the Catholic churches in North Galway, a letter was read from Archbishop McEvilly, denouncing the attacks on his underlings, and declaring that those who have offered deliberate violence to a clergyman have incurred "the awful penalty of excommunication."

Excommunicate them, then, Archbishop McEvilly! Damn them everlastingly; curse every part of their bodily and spiritual anatomy; in short, give them hell. Keep up the good, old game while you can. Unfortunately your worst terrors are filched from you by the growth of liberty and humanity. You can still excommunicate, but you have lost the power of torturing the excommunicated person in *this life*; you can only glare at him, and promise him a warm billet in the *next life*.

Recently we reported that the editor of the *Neue Freie Presse*, of Vienna, had been prosecuted for blasphemy and acquitted. He had inserted an irreligious poem which has caused a stir both in Austria and in Germany. We now see from the *Athenæum* that the Austrian Minister of Justice has issued an injunction to the various Staatsanwalten to subject all novels and purely literary articles published in newspapers to a strict supervision, and to proceed rigorously against the authors of any objectionable productions. The "friends of order" are the same in all countries. Their object is to fetter the human mind with penal laws against free thought and free speech. They dread the light and love the darkness because—well, we refer them to their own Book.

"I want to see how many souls I can gather for God," said Talmage before leaving for Europe. He should have added, "and how many shekels for myself." His terms are £50 and all expenses paid for each lecture.

At the meeting of the London School Board last week the Rev. Stewart Headlam drew attention to the report of an inspector of religious education in schools which set out that the children were found to give "great prominence to the idea that the Deity was an avenging one, and that one was to do right because of the fear of eternal punishment." The Board would not express its opinion on this teaching, but resolved to pass on to the next business, as though this were a matter of no importance.

Mr. Harry Hems, the sculptor of Exeter, in a note on "Miserere Carvings" in old cathedrals, throws a little more light on the ages of faith. He says: "Some old misereres

were of lewd design. I remember during the restoration work at Chichester Cathedral, about thirty years ago, we destroyed some very gross ones, and a few years afterwards made one more decent than it ever had been heretofore in Wakefield Church."

An enthusiastic believer was relating to a sceptic some spiritual performances to which he could testify, and among other things said that on a certain occasion the spirit of his wife, who had been dead several years, returned to him, and, seating herself upon his knee, put her arms around him, and kissed him as much to his gratification as she used to do when living. "You do not mean to say," remarked the sceptic, "that the spirit of your wife really embraced you and kissed you?" "No, not exactly that," replied the believer; "but her spirit took possession of the body of a female medium, and through her embraced and kissed me!"

The Christian Evidence Society systematically refuses to countenance a set debate between one of its representatives and a leading Freethinker. No wonder, therefore, that the Black Champion, whose color and audacity have caused such a stir among the lower sort of Christians, most carefully avoids this kind of encounter. At the same time, however, he boldly declares that no one will meet *him*; and so the farce goes on, the Black Champion posing as a "warrior bold" on the least possible modicum of prowess.

A few weeks ago, when Mr. Watts was at Sheffield, he was waited upon by a devotee of the Black Champion, who wanted to know if a public debate could be arranged. Mr. Watts declined to discuss the matter unless this person brought something from Mr. Edwards *in writing*. The real or pretended messenger went away, and returned with a pencil scribble, bearing neither date nor signature. It ran as follows:—"Mr. C. Edwards says he will meet Mr. Watts in a public debate on one condition; that is, that they shall each pay one-half expenses of the Hall, and the proceeds of the debate shall go to some charitable institution in Sheffield; and for the audience to declare which is the victor by show of hands, and for the loser to accept the belief of the victor."

Either the Black Champion is a bigger fool than he looks, or he is a practical joker. What chance has the Freethinker of having the majority on his side in a Christian town? And how is a man to change his convictions at a moment's notice, or by *any* notice. The Black Champion seems to have a childish view of the formation of opinions. But it is just possible, as we have hinted, that he is a practical joker, whose proper scene of triumph is less the platform than the circus arena. This at least is certain; the final condition was not invented by the intermediary, for it has been reported to us from several quarters in connection with the Black Champion.

The Conservatives have issued a squib on "The Gladstonian Creed," which can scarcely be pleasing to good Churchmen, since it is a parody of the creed falsely ascribed to St. Athanasius. It commences: "Whoever will be elected, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Gladstonian Faith"; and goes on to recite that "there are not three Incomprehensibles, but one Grand Old Bill Incomprehensible," etc. It was for issuing a similar parody that in 1818 William Hone was tried for blasphemous libel.

Lord Lonsdale is not only a patron of the prize ring and the ballet, but at the same time of the Church as by law established. As he holds the right of presenting to thirty-eight livings, he may do something for muscular Christianity beside presiding at glove-fights.

Men of God of various denominations are enjoying the scenery at Grindelwald and expatiating on the beauties of Christian reunion, and how aggressive they might be if only reunited. Meanwhile the American census returns show that the Methodists have split into fifteen branches, the Presbyterians into nine, and the Baptists and others into even more. The only thing Christians unite in is in calling themselves by the same name and in hating all unbelievers.

Cholera is spreading in Persia and Russia and is approaching Moscow. It has also shown itself in France. At home fever is alarmingly rife. How good of our father to make disease and not health contagious.

A servant girl named Emily Cowen was struck, killed, and disfigured by lightning at Rusholme. Just prior a girl had remarked that she did not like the lightning, and Cowen replied, "Oh, never mind; God has sent it for some good purpose." The sapient jury returned a verdict that the deceased died from the visitation of God. Perhaps they thought their heavenly father wanted to take to himself so pious a girl.

His own side will perhaps be the first to admit that the Rev. Father Behan went a little beyond the mark at the anti-Parnellite meeting on St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. Not content with the Christian expression in regard to Mr. Parnell that "God had thrust him down into the grave, and there his bones were rotting and his flesh putrid," he went on to declare, "When we are your masters, we will crush you when we get the power." No wonder Father Behan is castigated and repudiated by his own party. He is altogether too frank.

Archdeacon Wilson, in a brief letter to the *Contemporary Review*, in reply to the Bishop of Colchester on the subject of inspiration, asks for his opinion on John v. 4 and Matt. xxvii. 52, 53. If he swallows the angel coming down to trouble the pool, and the story of the Jerusalem saints coming out of their graves, he should stick at no absurdity. But if he does not credit these tall stories—and evidently Archdeacon Wilson does not take them literally—what better reason has he to believe in any of the miraculous records of the Bible?

We regret to see that Signor Cipriani has been sentenced to twenty months' solitary confinement for his share in the May Day disturbances at Rome. We met Signor Cipriani at the last International Freethought Congress in Paris. He spoke eloquently and filled the chair one evening with marked ability. The sentence upon him is a very savage one, and will only tend to exasperate the Italian Socialists against the party of "order."

Dr. Dale, the popular Birmingham Nonconformist, says of the book of Jonah in the July *Expositor*—"I regard the book as an imaginative creation, based on the tradition that Jonah—an old prophet of Israel who lived 450 or 500 years before it was written—was charged to warn Nineveh of coming judgments, and that he refused to do it." Dr. Dale is very angry with those who mock and ridicule this story, which he compares to *Pilgrim's Progress*. But whose is the fault of this pernicious mockery? Surely it is those who put forward the story as literally true and divine. It is only because the fish yarn will not stand ridicule that men like Dr. Dale discover that it is "an imaginative creation"—that is to say, *fiction*.

It is a singular thing that those who most pride themselves on their strict adherence to the principles enunciated in the New Testament are the people, as a rule, who show the least regard for Christian charity. The daughter of a Lancashire "local preacher" was charged with theft; but on account of her youth and previous good conduct the magistrate decided to let her off, if her father would undertake to look after her. But this the saintly preacher declined to do, and publicly disowned the girl, with the result that she was sentenced to two months' imprisonment, and has thus had her character blasted for life. The same night, I daresay, the "local preacher" prayed that he might be forgiven his trespasses as he forgave those that trespassed against him, and went to rest with the calm assurance that he would one day sleep in heaven. Well, if there's many of that kind there, may I — (Topical Times).

The daughter of Deacon C— was a trifle "slow" both of speech and understanding, but "as good as the day is long." After her father's death she was talking with a neighbor who had just "dropped in," concerning some of the characteristics of the departed. "Father," said she, "was always a great hand to 'tend fires. He just enjoyed puttin' in wood 'n then spreading his hands out to feel the warmth. I do hope"—reflectively, and with considerable tenderness in her tone—"I do hope they'll have a good fire where pa's gone."

The Glasgow *Weekly Herald* reports that a sensation has been caused at Sunnyside, Coatbridge, by a man in clerical dress being hotly pursued by a railway guard. To elude his pursuer, the man snatched a cap off a working man, and

placed in its stead a soft felt hat. The clergyman then doubled along some side streets, but the guard captured him. It seems a young lady belonging to Coatbridge had been visiting a relative at Shettleston, and had joined the train there at 10.33 for the purpose of returning home. On arriving at Easter-house, the lady left the carriage weeping bitterly, and complained that the minister attempted to indecently assault her. He is known as a minister of a church in the neighborhood of Coatbridge.

Dr. Munger's article in the *Homiletical Magazine* is largely quoted from in the *Christian World*, which says "it would be difficult to find within the same compass of words a statement so comprehensive of the latest results of the working of the enlightened Christian consciousness" on the Old and New Testaments. Turning to the extracts from Dr. Munger's article we find them to be substantially the same teaching as Thomas Paine's; but Paine was a "blasphemer" and Dr. Munger is an exponent of "enlightened Christian consciousness."

Genesis, for instance, according to Dr. Munger, is not the sublime scientific revelation that Mr. Gladstone supposes it to be. To insist that its statements shall be read literally and as veritable history "is to violate all the canons of criticism and to sink the pulpit below the average intelligence of the people."

Of the Song of Songs, which is *not* Solomon's, Dr. Munger says that "the attempt to find Christ in it is to bring the pulpit into contempt." But the headlines to the chapters of the Song of Songs in our English Bible do "find Christ in it." Thousands of commentators and myriads of preachers have "found Christ in it." And we presume they have all brought their rostrums into contempt! Verily the orthodoxy of one age becomes the laughing stock of the orthodoxy of the next. Yet Christianity never changes, and Freethought never makes any progress. Oh dear no! Still, it looks as though it did, and Freethinkers may be excused for thinking that appearances are not always deceitful.

Dr. Munger makes a clean sweep of the old ideas of prophecy, which have addled the brains of so many Christian divines. He says the prophets "are not foretellers except as they utter universal truths that must some time have fulfillment." Practically speaking, the prophets had no greater power than other people of seeing through millstones. Of course this is true enough, but what a world of time would have been saved, and how much controversy and bad temper would have been avoided, if Dr. Munger's view of prophecy had prevailed from the beginning!

The laity will not stomp up sufficient to provide Church dignitaries with a sumptuous club. Hence the long-projected Church House remains in abeyance. The Archbishop of Canterbury, at the annual meeting last week, did his best to raise the wind, and the Bishop of London was also eloquent on the occasion. If these worthies would put their hands in their own pockets for their own club they would be less a spectacle to the heathen.

The Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland advertise a Memorial addressed to both Houses of Parliament, in which they declare that they "feel themselves compelled by scriptural and conscientious reasons to decline to vote for members of Parliament." The reasons assigned are "the rejection of the Word of God as the standard of national action and legislation; the invasion of Christ's Headship of the Church by the investiture of the Sovereign with the headship of the Church of England; the establishment and endowment of the episcopacy; the endowment of Roman Catholicism; and the elevation of the enemies of the true religion to places of power and trust in the state—by all which the supremacy of Christ is violated, and the civil and religious liberties of the empire imperilled."

The Memorialists complain that they cannot take oaths since they oblige the swearer to the recognition of the Ecclesiastical Supremacy of the Sovereign, and so involve him in an act of dishonor to the Lord Jesus Christ. They further demand abolition of the Ecclesiastical Supremacy of the Crown—the Withdrawal of National Endowments from all Unscriptural Systems—the Exclusion of Atheists, Roman Catholics, and other enemies of Truth from Political Office—

the acknowledgment of the Authority of God, and the Universal Supremacy of Jesus Christ; and the acceptance of the Word of God as the Standard of National Legislation and Administration. Altogether the Memorial of the Reformed Presbyterian Church deserves preservation as an interesting relic of the days departed.

According to the *British Weekly* there are about forty volumes of Dr. Parker's sermons. Our contemporary "challenges anyone to find in all that vast array one single sentence transferred from the writings of any preacher in the world." We decline the challenge. We don't mean to read Parker's forty volumes. We would rather die than read all the preachers in the world.

The Church of England Funeral Reform Association is doing a good work in his way. It protests against wearing black, spending lots of money on funerals, and big tombstones and massive granite erections in churchyards and cemeteries. This Association might also turn its attention to the inscriptions. Walking in Chingford Cemetery the other day, we noticed an intimation in Latin that a certain dead gentleman had *emigrated*. Perhaps so, but what if he found a Destitute Aliens Bill on the other side?

Rabbits are such a pest in New South Wales that poisoned water is advocated as the only remedy. On one property no fewer than 10,050 rabbits were caught in four traps in four nights.

Superstition is still rampant among the pious Dutch in South Africa. According to the *Cape Times*, Mr. M. P. de Jager, a member of the Free State Volksraad, during a recent debate on the question of exterminating locusts, stated that he considered the pest a punishment from heaven, which ought to be accepted without a murmur, and against which nothing ought to be done.

There appears to be a wag in Dalziel's agency. According to a Paris telegram in the *Daily Graphic*, a certain Dr. Grotte has found two stone slabs at the foot of Mount Sinai—perhaps in the Grotto. These bear traces of an inscription, which is almost entirely effaced, and they will be submitted to experts in deciphering the indecipherable. Meanwhile the Dalziel man concludes that "the tables of the ten commandments seem to have been found at last." Yes, and by and bye Dr. Grotte, or someone else, will find an instantaneous lightning photograph of Moses on a flat rock of Mount Sinai.

But see how these slab-finders read their Bibles! The first two tables of stone were *broken* by Moses when he saw the Jews worshipping their golden calf. The duplicate pair were placed in the Ark and carried into Palestine. How the deuce then could any reader of the Bible expect to find them at the foot of Mount Sinai?

"Come here, Frances, and let mamma tell her little girl about heaven." "That's where the Lord lives, isn't it, mamma?" "Yes, and it is such a happy place. All the good people go there when they die, and they all have harps and sing day and night." "Will everybody sing, mamma?" "Yes, my dear." "Will papa sing?" "Oh, yes!" "All the time?" "Yes, love." "Then I don't care to go."

QUESTIONS FOR PARLIAMENTARY CANDIDATES.

- (1) Are you in favor of the fullest extension of Civil and Religious Liberty?
- (2) Do you consider that Secularists and Freethinkers should be liable to prosecution, fine, and imprisonment for disseminating their principles?
- (3) Do you consider that Secular Societies should be kept without legal security for their Funds and Property?
- (4) Do you think it right that legacies left to Secular Societies should be withheld from them under sanction of the law?
- (5) Will you vote, if you have the opportunity, for the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws, under which Freethought is a crime?
- (6) Will you vote for such a measure as the Liberty of Bequest Bill?

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

July 24 and 31, Hall of Science, London.
August 7, Manchester; 14, Failsworth; 21 and 28, Hall of Science, London.
Sept. 4, Glasgow.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS' ENGAGEMENTS.—July 10, Hall of Science, London; 17, Bristol; 24, South Shields; 30, Oxhill; 31, Newcastle. August 7, Birmingham; 14, Liverpool; 21, Manchester; 28, Grimsby. September 3 and 4, Rushden; 11, Town Hall, Birmingham; 18, Birmingham; 25, Hall of Science. October 2, Hall of Science; 9 and 16, Birmingham; 23, Glasgow; 25 and 26, Belfast; 30, Edinburgh. Nov. 6 and 13, Birmingham; 20, Sheffield; 27, Hall of Science. Dec. 4, Hall of Science; 11, Manchester; 18 and 25, Birmingham.—All communications for Mr. Watts should be sent direct to him at Baskerville Hall, The Crescent, Birmingham.

T. BIRTLEY, Chester-le-Street, writes:—"Mr. Joicey promises to vote for the Liberty of Bequest Bill if returned again as our member, which is pretty certain. Mr. Joicey voted with Mr. Bradlaugh in his attempt to repeal the Blasphemy Laws."

E. G. BILLINGTON.—Thanks. We are glad to see that parliamentary candidates are so freely heckled in regard to the Blasphemy Laws. Sorry that Worcester is such a hotbed of religious bigotry. No wonder you feel lonely there.

J. ROBERTS.—The answers are perhaps as good as can be expected, at present. Many Christians shy at abolishing the Blasphemy Laws, even though they don't wish to use them. In the old debate, more than two hundred years ago, on abolishing the law for burning heretics and infidels, some of the Bishops objected on the ground that it was well to preserve the law, as it helped to keep heretics and infidels in order.

A. G. KYLE.—Always pleased to receive cuttings.

J. BARRY.—Thanks. See "Sugar Plums."

GEORGE WARD, Finsbury Park Branch, has removed from 1 Green-lanes; his new address is 91 Mildmay-park, N.

T. FARQUHARSON, South Bank, Yorkshire, writes:—"Our Liberal candidate, Mr. Robson, will vote for the Liberty of Bequest Bill and the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws."

L. TRENCHARD.—(1) It is a mistake. Mr. Foote has not and never had any official connection with the Malthusian League. But he was always a Malthusian, and he is not aware that by accepting the Presidency of the N.S.S. he forfeits his right to advocate his own political and social views, so long as he does not advocate them as President or use the Society's machinery for alien purposes. (2) The N.S.S. never had any connexion with Malthusianism. Many of its members, though not as members, are Malthusians, and both are within their rights. (3) We have never discussed Malthusianism in this journal, and we do not intend to. Certainly we should not begin by replying to persons who are incapable of understanding it, or persons who think calling names is the perfection of controversy.

J. KEAST.—See Mr. Foote's statement in another column. He reciprocates the good wishes of his Bristol friends.

H. W. JONES.—Pleased to hear of Mr. Sam Standring's successful meetings at Blackburn; also to learn that you intend to have more open-air lectures this summer.

F. A. DAVIES.—Mr. H. M. Stanley's answer is perhaps as good as you could expect. He is a pious gentleman, who has what Mr. Stead calls "tips from God," and could hardly be expected to abolish the Blasphemy Laws at one fell swoop. But half a loaf is better than no bread.

E. BAKER, Finsbury Branch, has removed to 11 Grafton-place, Euston-square.

JAMES GLASS.—Thanks. See paragraph.

T. MILLAR (Belfast).—It was acknowledged in this column. Shall appear as soon as we find room.

R. CROWTHER.—A good answer. See "Sugar Plums."

W. B. NICHOLS.—Mr. Oldroyd's answer seems evasive.

B. INGHAM.—Much obliged. See paragraph.

S. SOPER.—Thanks. The joke has already appeared in a slightly different form.

J. E. BRUMAGE, one of the N.S.S. vice-presidents, has removed to 25 Eukel-street, Holloway, N.

R. DAVIES (Cardiff).—Received. Mr. Foote awaits further communication.

H. H.—(1) How many times more must we state that the verses you send us have for many years been issued on one of our Tracts at sixpence per hundred? We now issue the following proclamation:—"Be it known to all and sundry the readers of this journal that a certain piece of verse beginning 'Money, O money, thy praises I sing,' has long been in our possession; that we have circulated about 100,000 copies of it in the form of a Tract; and that we do not wish our readers to waste their time in copying it out for our benefit." (2) Glad to hear you highly appreciate "Will Christ Save Us?"

J. BURRELL.—Pleased to hear the Westminster Branch is progressing so favorably.

W. H. WHITNEY.—You have done a real service in obtaining the answer from Sir William Harcourt.

S. G. GRANT (Bristol).—Mr. C. Townsend's reply is most unsatisfactory. "Give it careful attention" is clap-trap. Mr. Lewis Fry's silence is contemptible.

H. WILLIAMS.—Your letter escaped notice last week. We hope you obtained Mr. Costelloe's definite promise.

J. WILLIAMSON.—We never saw the verses before, and should not like to print them as Colonel Ingersoll's without being sure of his authorship. Glad to hear you have been so successful in promoting our circulation. Many thanks.

A. TRUTHSEEKER.—(1) Mr. Watts is neither a mountebank nor a bruiser. Asking the audience to vote "who's won" at the end of a debate is a vulgar absurdity. (2) The book Mr. Watts quoted from is American and out of print.

A. JOHNSON.—The matter seems to have been badly handled. The prosecution should have been carried through by the persons who were assaulted. However, a "caution" from the magistrate is *something*; and perhaps it will have a deterrent effect on the rowdies.

J. LITTLE reports that Sir J. W. Pease and Mr. Wm. Rolley, the Liberal and Unionist candidates for the Barnard Castle division, have both answered the N.S.S. election questions entirely in our favor.

A. N. STAGER.—(1) We note that Captain Norton, the Liberal candidate for West Newington, promised his hearty support to the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. (2) It is inaccurate to say that even savages believe in God. They really believe in ghosts and a multitude of superhuman beings. They universally believe in witchcraft. Does that prove that witchcraft is true? "Everybody believes it" is no argument in the high court of reason. Besides, everybody does not believe in God. The Buddhism of Buddha is Atheistic.

D. HENRY.—Pleased to hear that Mr. Fyfe Stewart is opposed to the Blasphemy Laws. The difference between Catholic and Protestant may be dropped for the moment.

J. G. FRISHER.—Send us particulars of the picnic to Ilkley on August 14, and we will insert a paragraph.

JAMES NEATE, Bethnal Green Branch, thanks the Freethinkers who rallied round the Freethought platform in Victoria Park on Sunday. He thanks Mr. Rowney also for the collection of 17s. 6d. taken up in Regent's Park. The station will be closed on July 17, the date of the L.S.F. excursion. Nine excursion tickets were lost in the park; the numbers are known, and they will be stopped if not returned.

J. LOWTHER.—We were already informed to the same effect.

C. E. SMITH.—Thanks for cuttings, which are always welcome. FREETHINKERS' BENEVOLENT FUND.—E. W. O., "Conscience Money," 7s. 6d.

The Freethinker and all Secular literature can be obtained at the Battersca Secular Hall every Thursday evening from 7.30 to 8.30.

FRIENDS who send us newspapers would enhance the favor by marking the passages to which they wish to call our attention.

PAPERS RECEIVED.—Der Lichtfreund—Boston Investigator—Lucifer—Ashore and Afloat—Twentieth Century—Moralist—Echo—Church Reformer—Flaming Sword—Liberator—Liberty—West Sussex Gazette—Der Arme Teufel—Natural Food—Progressive Thinker—Humanitarian—Commonweal—Secular Thought—Freidenker—St. Louis Republic—Cape Times—Salt Lake Herald—Weston Super Mare Gazette—Liverpool Sentinel—Clarion—Manchester Evening News.

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.

SPECIAL FROM MR. FOOTE.

I STATED last week that the Committee of Inquiry, appointed by the N.S.S., to ascertain whether the Freethought party had any moral claim to the London Hall of Science, had presented its report, which would "probably be published next week." I have now to say that the publication of the report, or some portion of it, as may be determined, is still further delayed. A meeting of the Executive was held at my house last Wednesday night (June 29), and I got out of bed to attend it. The Inquiry Committee's report was presented by Mr. J. Samson; it was unanimously adopted by the Executive, and, with the Committee's minutes, was ordered to be placed in the Society's archives. A discussion then arose as to how much of the report should be published, and finally the meeting was adjourned till next Monday

(July 11), when the matter will be decided. This will render it possible for the report to appear in the next issue of this journal. I awaited this report with absolute serenity, and my mind is still unchanged. More than this cannot be said at present without a breach of confidence.

My state of health has considerably improved. I am up and about, but I am still weak, and unpleasantly conscious that I have a breathing apparatus. No article appears from my pen in this week's *Freethinker*. Paragraphs and correspondence have taken as much time and strength as I can give. I hope, and indeed expect, to be in better trim next week; and meanwhile I am sure I may rely upon the readers' indulgence.

This knock-down blow is a warning against playing further tricks with a naturally strong constitution. I intend to heed the warning. This week I am spending a few days on the South coast; I return for the Executive meeting on Monday; after that I shall stay at some sea-side place as long as possible.

Two friends have sent me donations—Mr. George Anderson, £3 3s.; and W. McC., £5. My position is such that I accept these gifts, and accept them thankfully. The presidency of the N.S.S., which so heavily taxes my time and energy, is an unpaid office; my work upon the *Freethinker* brings me absolutely no financial return—indeed, by the time I have paid regular contributors I am money out of pocket; and for the present I can neither lecture nor do any literary work beyond the weekly demands of this journal.

For some time I have been seriously asking myself whether I ought to go on bearing these heavy burdens; but Prudence whispers, "Regain your strength before you come to any decision."

G. W. FOOTE.

SUGAR PLUMS.

Mr. Charles Watts had an enthusiastic audience last Sunday evening at the Hall of Science. Mrs. Watts's recitals met with a splendid reception, the audience demanding two encores. This (Sunday) evening, July 10, Mr. Watts lectures upon the important subject, "Man: his Origin, Nature, and Destiny." Previous to the lecture Mrs. Watts will again recite.

August 4 is the hundredth anniversary of Shelley's birth. It is our intention to have the event celebrated in some way at the London Hall of Science, and we hope to give full particulars in our next issue. Meanwhile it should be noted that the Shelley Society has dropped the project of a *Cenci* performance. Not a single theatre dares to open its doors to the Shelley Society, the poet's great drama being under the ban of the Lord Chamberlain.

Shelley the Atheist has waited one century for recognition, and can well afford to wait another. The Philistines can stand anything but his Atheism. Even the *Weekly Dispatch* critic tries to make out from Mr. Salt's book that Shelley was not an Atheist. But he called himself one, and he presumably knew his own mind.

The *Echo*, in noticing Mr. Salt's *Shelley's Principles* and the new Aldine edition of the poet's works, says that "Shelley was 'the poet of the future' in a far more comprehensive and intimate sense than that of Mr. Birrell's application of the title to Matthew Arnold."

A tablet to Shelley's memory will be unveiled in Horsham parish church on August 4, the centenary of the poet's birth. The Shelley Society are going to have an excursion to Marlow, and a Shelley museum and library is spoken of.

Joseph Symes, we are glad to say, has received a legacy of £50. Mrs. Rennard, who left him the money, has also bequeathed £25 "for the free distribution," says J. S., "of Bradlaugh's, Ingersoll's, Foote's, and my own pamphlets in Baildon (her native place), near Bradford, Yorkshire." Mr.

Symes would like Mr. Foote to select one or more Yorkshire friends to distribute this literature. Mr. Foote, however, would first like to hear something about Baildon, and whether £25 worth of Freethought literature could be distributed there without finding the inhabitants in waste paper. Better let friend Joseph keep the money in Australia than waste it on Baildon. Perhaps one of our Yorkshire friends will inquire about Baildon and let us know the result.

Mr. Swinburne's somewhat tardy "Elegy" on Captain R. F. Burton appears in the July *Fortnightly*. The following vigorous verses will interest our readers:

Priests and the soulless serfs of priests may swarm
With vulturous acclamation, loud in lies,
About his dust while yet his dust is warm,
Who mocked as sunlight mocks their base blind eyes.

Their godless ghost of godhead, false and foul
As fear his damn, or hell, his throne; but we,
Scarce hearing, heed no carrion church-kite's howl:
The corpse be theirs to mock; the soul is free.

A correspondent of the *Pall Mall Gazette* recently called upon Kossuth at Turin. The great Hungarian patriot is now ninety years old; he reads and writes without spectacles, and still takes his daily walks. He "continues a consistent Freethinker."

The Rev. Stewart D. Headlam devotes a paragraph in the *Church Reformer*, to asking that candidates be heckled on the question of the Blasphemy Laws and complete religious liberty.

Messrs. Kearley and Morton, parliamentary candidates for Devonport, have promised to support the Liberty of Bequest Bill and vote for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. They allow that all men have an equal right to maintain their opinions.

Mr. R. W. Burnie, Liberal candidate for Swansea, writes to Mr. James Glass—"Being strongly in favor of the fullest extension of Civil and Religious Liberty, you may rely on my voting for any measures that may be introduced in that direction, in the event of my being returned to Parliament."

Mr. Mellor, candidate for the Sowerby division, was questioned by Mr. R. Crowther, of Todmorden, on the basis of the National Secular Society's pamphlet on Laws Against Religious Liberty. Mr. Mellor replied that he would vote for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, and his answer was cheered by the meeting.

Mr. A. E. Hutton, Liberal candidate for the Morley division (Yorkshire), writes to Mr. W. B. Nichols—"In reply to your letter, I shall support any measure which seeks to place upon the same ground all men to whatever religion or school of thought they may belong." Mr. Hutton had been supplied with a copy of the N.S.S. election pamphlet.

Mr. Arthur Clayden, Liberal candidate for Dulwich, writes to Mr. B. Ingham—"My broad views make me unable to attempt the safeguarding of truth by any stupid legal enactments. I go dead against all State infringement of the sacred right of absolute religious liberty. If the heavens fall for want of 'Blasphemy Laws' let them fall." Mr. Blundell Maple, the other candidate, merely promises to "give the subject his attention and careful consideration." Freethinkers will find it easy to choose between these two candidates.

Mr. E. M. W. Howard, Liberal candidate for Worcester, gives a satisfactory answer to all the N.S.S. questions as to the Blasphemy Laws and Liberty of Bequest.

Mr. Channing, Liberal candidate for East Northants., after addressing a meeting at Rushden, was asked by Mr. Scropton if he would vote for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, and gave an answer in the affirmative. Mr. Potter, the Conservative candidate, said he "would not act without deliberation."

Mr. Husband, candidate for Swindon, would "give to all (including Freethinkers) the full rights of citizenship with legal protection for their opinions and property."

The Sunderland candidates were questioned by Mr. R. Weightman, the N.S.S. Branch secretary. Messrs. Gourley and Storey gave satisfactory answers to all the N.S.S. questions relating to the Blasphemy Laws and Liberty of Bequest.

Mr. W. H. Holland, the Liberal candidate for North Salford, writing to Mr. J. Roberts, promised to support the Liberty of Bequest Bill. His answer was less direct with respect to the Blasphemy Laws, although he objected to "any man suffering any disability by reason of his faith, or want of faith, in any religious creed."

The Hull candidates were questioned by Mr. Naewiger, the N.S.S. Branch secretary, and their replies were as follows:—Mr. H. S. King (C) "I am in favor of liberty for all opinions, and should further any measure to extend it." Mr. Clarence Smith (L), "I am in favor of absolute religious equality before the law." Mr. Maddison (Labor) "I am a strong advocate of perfect religious liberty, and should support the Bequest Bill, and I am in favor of equal treatment of belief, whether positive or negative."

Messrs. John Morley and James Craig, the Liberal candidates for Newcastle-on-Tyne, gave Mr. Joseph Brown perfectly satisfactory answers to the N.S.S. election questions. Mr. John Morley's answers could hardly be otherwise.

Satisfactory answers to all the N.S.S. questions were given by Captain H. T. Fenwick, the Liberal candidate for the Houghton-le-Spring division. The Conservative candidate tried to make fun of Mr. J. E. Menzies; but being further heckled, he said he would give Freethought Societies legal security for their property; but he would not abolish the Blasphemy Laws, for Freethought lectures were blasphemous enough already, and what would they be then?

Other candidates who have pledged themselves are S. Woods (Wigan), C. Wright (Leigh, S.W. Lancashire).

Sir William Harcourt and Mr. Thomas Roe (Derby) both promised to vote for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws. Sir William Harcourt struck us an almost unpardonable blow when we were in prison; and he and he only was the obstacle to our release. He was personally responsible for nine of our twelve months' incarceration. But if he votes for the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws, we will forgive him and close the account.

Mr. Stanley Jones lectured in Victoria Park on Sunday morning. There was a large and orderly audience. Mr. Cohen lectured in the afternoon, and again there was quietude. It would appear that the rowdiness at this station is not spontaneous; it seems to be planned whenever it occurs. The Christians were busy at their own meetings on Sunday. They had a regular field day, and put forward as a martyr the young man charged at the police-court with riotous behavior and the demolition of the Secular platform.

Mr. Stanley Jones is arranging a lecture tour in the north of England and Scotland in September. He will be glad to hear from all the towns that can possibly avail themselves of his services on week-nights as well as Sundays.

The London Secular Federation's annual excursion to Worthing takes place next Sunday (July 17). A special train leaves London Bridge Station at 9.45 a.m. A large party is expected, and it will be a glorious outing if the fine weather continues. Return tickets (3s.) can be obtained, and should be obtained soon, of any London Branch secretary, at the Hall of Science, and at 28 Stonecutter-street.

Mr. Pownceby is endeavoring to make arrangements whereby holders of tickets may travel from Victoria Station to meet at Norwood Junction the excursion train leaving London Bridge.

The Lambeth Branch held its annual meeting on Sunday. The following officers were elected: President, V. Roger; vice-president, Mr. Pattinson; secretary, F. A. Davies; delegate to Secular Federation, H. Rowden. We should like to see this Branch better supported in its uphill fight. The secretary's address is 31 Hayles-buildings, St. George's-road, S.E.

The Balls Pond Branch call for support at their meeting at Kingsland Green this morning, as a crowd of roughs broke up the meeting last Sunday.

A proposition of law has been placed before the French Chamber by M. Rivet for the purpose of having the word "God" suppressed in the form of taking oath. At present in France the form is: "On your honor and conscience, before God and man, you swear. . . ." and the reply is: "On my honor and conscience, I swear. . . ." M. Rivet desires the words "before God and man," to be left out.

Though not a year old, the new Bristol Branch held its first annual meeting on Sunday. A good quarter's work has been done since Mr. Foote's visit. Sunday lectures have been delivered by Messrs. O. Watts, J. M. Robertson, and A. B. Moss. Mr. Watts and Mrs. Watts are engaged for next Sunday (July 17), and Mr. Foote will soon revisit the city. The treasurer's report showed a fair balance on the right side. Messrs. J. Keast and K. Hunt were unanimously re-elected as secretary and treasurer.

The North Eastern Secular Federation held its annual meeting on Sunday. Mr. S. M. Peacock was re-elected president, and Mr. Joseph Brown secretary. Messrs. H. Nicholson, G. White, and A. Lawson, were added to the list of vice-presidents. It was resolved to pay the secretary an honorarium in future. The annual picnic was fixed for the first Sunday in August at Durham. A vote of condolence was passed with the relatives of the late Mr. Dawson of Spennymoor, who was one of the Federation's vice-presidents.

According to the Catholic *Univers* over a quarter of the children born in Paris are not baptised, and the proportion of civil marriages and funerals has also risen to 25 per cent. This does not mean that three quarters of the Parisians are religious, but only that the women take to the time-honored forms on these occasions, and this they are gradually relinquishing.

Civil marriages are also on the increase in Germany, despite the Emperor's churchiness. Even 12 per cent. of Catholic marriages are civil marriages only, while the mixed marriages between Catholics and Protestants 55 per cent. have only a civil ceremony.

M. Hector Denis, a leading Belgian Freethinker and Social Democrat, has been elected Rector of Brussels University, where he has for many years held the chair of political economy. M. Denis, who is fifty years of age, has written largely and contributed to the leading progressive organs. He is one of the Council of the International Federation of Freethinkers. We think this is the first time an acknowledged Freethinker has been placed at the head of a great European university, though most of the leading professors in Italy have entirely broken with religion.

Another item by which the Brussels University has distinguished itself is the election of M. Elisée Reclus to the professorship of geography. M. Reclus is well known as Anarchist and Atheist, but he is also the first geographer in the world, his *Universal Geography*, in thirteen volumes, being the best compendium on the subject. M. Reclus is now sixty-two years of age, and as distinguished for his adherence to Freethought principles as for his knowledge of the world and its inhabitants.

Secular Thought, founded by Mr. Charles Watts in Canada, has now reached its twelfth half-yearly volume. Under the editorship of Mr. J. Spencer Ellis, it fully maintains its high standard, and is a worthy exponent of Secularism. *Secular Thought* is in good hands, and we trust the paper will receive proper financial support, which appears to be the one thing needful.

Some indication of the progress of opinion as well as of fashion may be gathered even from the study of names. In a paper on this subject by Mr. R. Hudson, in *Notes and Queries*, he analyses the different names on the register of a typical country parish near Birmingham, from the sixteenth century to the present. One result is that the good old Bible names, John, Elizabeth, Mary, etc., are declining before William, Frank, Edith, Ellen, etc.

CREEDS AND CREED-MAKERS.

[From the *Independent Whig*, February 24, 1720. Written by THOMAS GORDON, the translator of Tacitus; an ardent advocate of mental and political liberty.]

I think it but justice to the goodness of God to affirm, that belief or disbelief can neither be a virtue or a crime in any one, who uses the best means in his power of being informed. If a proposition be evident, we cannot avoid believing it; and where is the merit or piety of a necessary assent? If it be not evident, we cannot help rejecting it, or doubting of it; and where is the crime of not performing impossibilities, or not believing what does not appear to us to be true? Are men, who have good eyes, the more righteous for seeing? Or do they offend in seeing too well? Or do blind men sin, in not distinguishing colors?

When we clearly see the connexion of a proposition, or know that we have God's word for it, our assent is inevitable. But if we neither comprehend it ourselves, nor see God's authority for it, and yet swallow it, this is credulity, and not divine faith, which can have nothing less than divine truth for its object. When we are sure that God Almighty speaks to us, we readily believe him who cannot lie, nor be mistaken, nor deceive us; but when men speak, though from God himself, our belief in them is but human confidence, if we have only their own authority that they had it from God; their being Bishops, their being learned, their meeting together in Synods; all this alters not the case. We can judge of their opinions no other wise, than as of the opinions of men; and of their decisions, but as of human decisions.

When the articles of any creed appear to be contained in Scripture, whoever believes that, does in consequence believe them; and then such creed is unnecessary. But when we cannot, or think we cannot, find them in Scripture, and yet give equal credit to them, we depreciate and profane the divine authority itself, by accepting the words of man's invention as wiser and more significant than the words of God's own choosing.

Besides, as the imposition of human creeds is contrary to reason, so is it also to charity. They were generally made in a passion, not to edify, but to plague those for whom, or rather against whom they were intended. They were the engines of wrath and vengeance, nor could they serve any other purpose. Those who believed them already, did not want them; and those who disbelieved them, were not the better for them. But this was not the worst of it; for they who did not receive them against their conscience, were cured; and they who did, deserved it. So that either the wrath of God on one hand, or the wrath and cruelty of the clergy on the other, was unavoidable. If people said they believed, and did not, they mocked God and shipwrecked their souls; and if they did not believe and owned it, though they saved their souls, they provoked their reverend fathers, and were destroyed.

Whenever these dictators in faith had a mind to be mischievous, and to undo one who gave them signal offence, either by his good reputation, or good bishopric, they began his ruin by their great care for his soul; and so invented a creed for him, which ruined him effectually, by giving him, as they said, to Satan, but, in truth, to beggary, stripes, or flames. He therefore who had any virtue or religion, was a certain sufferer by these systems of faith, which were contrived for that purpose. The man that had no conscience nor honesty, was not worthy of their anger; or, which is most likely, was on the orthodox side, or at least quickly became a convert to it, being, like themselves, able to swallow anything.

Thus creeds, as they were the result of revenge, pride, or avarice, were the constant preludes and introductions to ignorance, cruelty and blood; and the wretched laity were craftily, as well as inhumanly, made the deluded and unnatural instruments of butchering one another, to prove the infallibility of the faith-makers; who, while they were wantonly shedding Christian blood, and dooming to damnation those who called upon the name of the true God, had the shameless assurance to miscall themselves the ambassadors of the meek Jesus.

And indeed, what better could be expected from men so chosen, so unqualified, and so interested, as the members of these general creed-making councils for the most part were? They were chosen from several parts by a majority of votes;

and they who were most aspiring, factious or crafty, carried it: They sprung from the meanest of the people: They were bred in cells: They popped into the world without experience or breeding: They knew little of mankind, and less of Government, and had not the common qualifications of gentlemen: They were governed by passion, and led by expectation: And, either eager for preferment, or impatient of missing it, they were the perpetual flatterers, or disturbers of princes.

These were the men, this their character. When these reverend fathers were got together in a body, by the order of a prince or a pope; who, having his necessities, or the ends of his ambition to serve, chose proper tools for those purposes; they were directed to form such creeds and systems of faith, as his present views or interests made requisite for mankind to believe.

In this new employment every member, we may be sure, was forward to show his talents in starting new tenets, or in contradicting those already started, and so to make himself considerable enough for that preferment which he was resolved to earn one way or another. And this being the great aim of them all, jealousies and hard words were carried to the most violent pitch. There was no end of their wrangling and reviling. Not content to abuse each other by word of mouth, they sometimes scolded in writing; and every reverend father drew up a bitter *Billingsgate* petition against another reverend father. Sometimes, not satisfied with volleys of scurrility, unheard of in assemblies of gentlemen, they had recourse to club-law, and made good their inventions and distinctions with blows and blood. And if the truth could not be found out by scolding, contradiction, and battle, it was not found out at all.

Thus any emperor or pope might have what creed he pleased, provided he would be at the pains and price of it. And for the rest of mankind, they had this short choice, *To comply, or be undone.*

THEOLOGICAL DESPOTISM.

For centuries the Church has claimed to be the viceregent of Deity, authorised to enforce on mankind by the sword and faggot whatever it assumed to be the will of God, as though the Deity could not enforce his own purposes. The substantial exercise of this power has been abolished in this country; but the claim has not been given up, for it still lingers in Sunday legislation, the pre-eminent impudence of which consists in the fact that it is a mere assertion of corporate authority—the authority of the Church to enforce on the entire community ceremonial regulations established by the unprincipled despot, Constantine, for which it has no countenance in its pretended guidance, the teaching of Jesus Christ, or any evidence whatever of the divine will.

It is the continued maintenance of this false and impudent assumption of authority which is sinking the Church lower and lower every century, and will carry it to its final wreck unless it submits to reason and justice, and recognises the equal rights of fellow citizens.—*Dr. J. R. Buchanan.*

CHRISTIANITY AND PERSECUTION.

In Russia they have been murdering old men; they have thrust daggers into the breasts of women; they have violated maidens—because they were Jews. Thousands and thousands are sent each year to the mines of Siberia by the Christian government of Russia. Girls eighteen years of age, for having expressed a word in favor of human liberty, are to-day working like beasts of burden, with chains upon their limbs, and with the marks of whips upon their backs. Russia, of course, is considered by Mr. Talmage as a Christian country—a country utterly destitute of liberty; without freedom of the press, without freedom of speech, where every mouth is locked and every tongue a prisoner; a country filled with victims, soldiers, spies, thieves, and executioners. What would Russia be in the opinion of Mr. Talmage but for Christianity? How could it be worse when assassins are among the best people in it? The truth is, that the people in Russia to-day who are in favor of human liberty are not Christians. The men willing to sacrifice their lives for the good of others are not believers in the Christian religion. The men who wish to break chains are infidels; the men who make chains are Christians. Every good and sincere Catholic of the Greek church is a bid citizen, an enemy of progress, a foe of human liberty.—*Ingersoll.*

CHRISTIANITY AND SCIENCE.

THE general mind perhaps hardly realises, even at this day, what a tremendous blow was dealt at human self conceit and to the Ptolemæan religions founded to suit it by the discovery of Galileo. Well might the priests of the old orthodoxies stand aghast at him, and even go so dreadfully far as to burn the gentle and wise Giordano Bruno! At a stroke the Florentine astronomer's ejaculation, "E pur se muove!" swept away all the theology of Dante and his sacerdotal doctors, made the cosmology of the *Divine Comedy* impossible and grotesque, and dethroned the race and the planet which it inhabits from its imagined pre-eminence to an obscure and insignificant position.

Old-fashioned Christianity had taught that our world was the centre of things round which the sun revolved, for the sake of which the stars were hung up like Japanese lanterns in the firmament, and in direct relations to which all the forces of infinite space were established. The "scheme of salvation," as then understood, fitted in well enough with the egotistical view, as well as did Dante's basin-shaped hell and conical purgatory with concentric circles of Paradise upon the top. But as soon as Copernicus and Galileo exploded the theory and proved that we are almost the "last of the least," dwelling on one of the smallest bodies in space, invisible to all but a small number of our closest neighbors, religions had to suppress them, or else, as will need to be done, to expand their doctrines and contract their own previous pretensions. At present they have only partially done all this. The boldest and truest even have not yet come into step with "star-eyed science." These ancient, mediæval, and so-called orthodox absurdities of a local "hell" and "heaven" and Joshua's miracle, and of Hezekiah's reprieve linger still, like our popular expressions of "sunrise" and "sunset" and the belief in the Mosaic cosmogony. Christianity itself has not yet sufficiently assimilated Copernican and Darwinian doctrines. When it does it will earnestly thank science for showing how much more glorious it is to be "least in the kingdom of heaven" than greatest in that petty sub-kingdom of nature which the priest constructed, and of how much nobler promise to be a descendant of a mollusk and afterward of an ape, with all the heights of creation to ascend to, than a creature suddenly made out of clay to occupy a garden. But astronomy, which has so rudely thrust man down from the pinnacle of his bygone ignorant arrogance, certainly owes him the reparation of such a scientific solace, and will, year by year, bring him more and more of this, perpetually extending his knowledge of the vastness and splendor and wonder of the visible universe, of which to be a portion, even the most humble, is to be incomparably higher and grander than to be feebly and fixedly alone in that old absurd cosmogony and to have the stars for candles.

H A G A R.*

She went along the road,
Her baby in her arms.
The night and its alarms
Made deadlier her load.

Her shrunken breasts were dry;
She felt the hunger bite.
She lay down in the night,
She and the child, to die.

But it would wail, and wail,
And wail. She crept away.
She had no word to say,
Yet still she heard the wail.

She took a jagged stone;
She wished it to be dead.
She beat it on the head;
It only gave one moan.

She has no word to say;
She sits there in the night.
The east sky glints with light,
And it is Christmas Day!

* From *Songs of the Army of the Night*, by F. Adams.

THE RETREAT OF THEOLOGY IN THE GALILEO CASE.

IN 1870 a Roman Catholic clergyman in England, the Rev. Mr. Roberts, evidently thinking that the time had come to tell the truth, published a book entitled *The Pontifical Decrees Against the Earth's Movement*. In these were exhibited the incontrovertible evidences that the Papacy had committed itself and its infallibility fully against the movement of the earth. The Rev. Mr. Roberts showed from the original record that Pope Paul V., in 1616, had presided over the tribunal condemning the doctrine of the earth's movement, and ordering Galileo to give up the opinion. He showed that Pope Urban VIII., in 1633, pressed on, directed, and promulgated the final condemnation, making himself in all these ways responsible for it. And finally, he showed that Pope Alexander VII., in 1664, by his bull—*Speculatores domus Israel*—attached to the Index, condemning "all books which affirmed the motion of the earth," had absolutely pledged the Papal infallibility against the earth's movement. He also confessed that under the rules laid down by the highest authorities in the Church, and especially by Sixtus V. and Pius IX., there was no escape from this conclusion. Various theologians attempted to evade the force of the argument. Some, like Dr. Ward and Bouix, took refuge in verbal niceties; some, like Jeremiah Murphy, comforted themselves with declamation. The only result was that in 1885 came another edition of the Rev. Mr. Roberts' work, even more cogent than the first; and besides this, an essay by the eminent Catholic, St. George Mivart, acknowledging the Rev. Mr. Roberts' position to be impregnable, and declaring virtually that the Almighty allowed Pope and Church to fall into complete error regarding Copernican theory, in order to teach them that science lies outside their province, and that the true priesthood of scientific truth rests with scientific investigators alone.

In spite, then, of all casuistry and special pleading, this sturdy honesty ended the controversy among Catholics themselves, so far as fair-minded men are concerned.—*Professor Andrew D. White* in "*Popular Science Monthly*," June.

IT BROUGHT BACK THE UMBRELLAS.

A man was denouncing newspaper advertising to a crowd of listeners.

"Last week," said he, "I had an umbrella stolen from the place provided for them by the side of my pew at church. It was a gift, and, valuing it very highly, I spent double its worth in advertising, but I have not recovered it."

"How did you word the advertisement?" asked a merchant.

"Here it is," said the man, producing a slip cut from a newspaper.

The merchant took it and read—

"Lost from ——— Church last Sunday evening, a black umbrella. The gentleman who took it will be handsomely rewarded by leaving it at No. — High-street."

"Now," said the merchant, "I am a liberal advertiser, and have always found it paid me well. A great deal depends upon the manner in which the advertisement is put. Let us try your umbrella again, and if you do not acknowledge that advertising pays, I will purchase you a new one."

The merchant took a slip of paper from his pocket and wrote—

"If the man who was seen to take the umbrella from a pew of ——— Church last Sunday does not wish to get into trouble and have a stain cast upon the Christian character which he values so highly, he will return it at once to No. — High-street."

This duly appeared in the paper, and the following morning the man was astonished when he opened the front door of his residence. On the steps lay at least a dozen umbrellas of all shades and sizes that had been thrown in. Many of them had notes attached to them saying that they had been taken by mistake, and begging the loser to keep the little affair quiet.

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

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.]
Secretaries may send in a month's list of lectures in advance.

LONDON.

Battersea Secular Hall (back of Battersea Park Station): Saturday, Sunday, and Tuesday at 8.15, social gatherings. Wednesday at 8, dramatic class. Thursday at 8, committee meeting.
Bethnal Green—Libra Hall, 78 Libra-road, Roman-road: 8, T. Thurlow, "Secular Propaganda v. Anti-theological Propaganda"; 9.45, free concert and dance. Monday at 8.45, quarterly meeting.
Camberwell—61 New Church-road, S.E.: 4.30, quarterly meeting; 6, tea and entertainment (members 6d., friends 9d.)
East London—Swaby's Coffee House, 103 Mile End-road: 8, F. Haslam, "Mahomet and his Koran."
Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.: 7.30, Charles Watts, "Man: his Origin and Destiny"; preceded by dramatic recital by Mrs. Charles Watts.

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Battersea Park-gates: W. J. Ramsey, 11.15, "The Prince of Whales"; 7, "God's Pets."
Bethnal Green (opposite St. John's Church): 11.15, S. H. Alison will lecture.
Camberwell—Station-road: 11.30, C. J. Hunt, "Society and Slavery."
Clerkenwell Green: 11.30, A. B. Moss, "Farewell to the Gods"; members' meeting after the lecture.
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, Mr. St. John, "Belief and Unbelief—a Reply to the Rev. A. J. Harrison of the C.E.S."; 3.30, C. J. Hunt, "Christianity and Science."
Hammersmith (corner of The Grove): Thursday at 8, a lecture.
Hammersmith-bridge (Middlesex side): 6.30, H. Snell, "Is the Bible the Inspired Word of God?"
Hyde Park (near Marble-arch): 11.30, J. Rowney, "Prophecy."
Kilburn—Salisbury-road (near Queen's Park Station): 7, J. Fagan, "The Efficacy of Prayer."
Kingsland Green (near Ball's Pond-road): 11.30, J. Fagan, "What is Sin?"
Leyton (open space near Vicarage-road, High-road): 11.30, T. Thurlow will lecture.
Midland Arches (near Battle Bridge-road): 11.30, a lecture.
Mile End Waste: 11.30, F. Haslam, "How I became a Secularist."
Old Pimlico Pier: 11.30, W. Heaford, "A Better Creed than Christianity."
Plaistow Green: 7, S. H. Alison, "Anthropology and Primitive Theology."
Regent's Park (near Gloucester-gate): 3.30, F. Haslam, "Bible Stories: are they True?"
Victoria Park (near the fountain): C. Cohen will lecture at 11.15 and 3.15.
Walthamstow—Markhouse Common: 6.30, W. Heaford, "Christ and Freethought." Thursday at 7.45, C. Cohen will lecture.

COUNTRY.

Bristol—Shepherd's Hall, Old Market-street: 6.30, business; 7, R. Weare, "Socialism."
Crook—35 Gladstone-terrace, Sunnyside, Tow Law: 6.30, business meeting.
Derby—20 Newland-street: 7, business meeting.
Farsley—Stanningley Baptist School Room: Monday at 8, Miss Ada Campbell, "The Rights and Wrongs of Labor."
Heckmondwike—Mr. John Rothera's Bottoms: 2.30, a meeting.
Hull—St. George's Hall, 6 Story-street, Albion-street: 7, J. Hooper, "How I became an Atheist and why I remain one."
Liverpool—Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street: 11, Tontine Society; 7, Mr. Doeg, "The Devil—II."
Manchester N. S. S., Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints': Mrs. Annie Besant, 11, "The Miracles of Modern Science"; 3, "Theosophy and Ethics"; 6.30, "Creation Stories: False and True."
Newcastle-on-Tyne—Eldon Hall, 2 Clayton-street: 7, H. Keppel, "Distribution."
Plymouth—100 Union-street: 7, a meeting.
Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington-street, Southsea: 7, Mr. Googe, "Dean Swift's Argument Against the Abolition of Christianity in England."
Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham-street: 3, members' quarterly meeting; 7, music, etc.
Sunderland—Bridge End Vaults, Bridge-street: 7, W. R. Stansell, "What is the Use of Prayer?"

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Bradford—Sackville-street (the top), Westgate: 6.30, J. G. Fisher, "Will Atheists Go to Hell?"
Manchester—Denmark-road: Monday at 8, Sam Standring, "Is Dr. Moorhouse a Real Bishop?—a New Plea for Disestablishment."
Hull—Corporation Field: J. Hooper, 11, "Is the Bible True?"; 3, "Christianity Impractical"; if wet weather, in the hall.

LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

H. SNELL, 6 Monk-street, Woolwich.—July 10, m., Lambeth; e., Hammersmith; 17 to 31, Holidays. Aug. 7, m., Battersea; a., Finsbury Park; 14, m., Westminster; a., Regent's Park; 21, m., Camberwell; 28, e., Camberwell.
C. J. HUNT, 48 Fordingley-road, St. Peter's Park, London, W.—All mornings booked to September.
ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.—July 10, Clerkenwell; 17, m., Westminster; 24 to 31, Annual Tour. Aug. 7, Camberwell; 14, Southampton; 21, Westminster.

C. COHEN, 154 Cannon-street-road, Commercial-road, E.—July 10, m. and a., Victoria Park; e., Edmonton; 14, Walthamstow; 17, m., Mile End Waste; a., Tottenham; e., Edmonton; 21, Walthamstow; 24, m., Lambeth; a., Victoria Park; e., Walthamstow; 28, Walthamstow; 31, m., Clerkenwell; a., Victoria Park; e., Edmonton.

SAM STANDRING, 106 Oxford-road, All Saints' Manchester.—July 10, Salford; 13, Chester; 14, Pendlebury; 16, Huddersfield; 17, Bradford; 31, Manchester. Aug. 7, Rochdale; 14, Hull.

C. J. STEINBERG, 103 Mile End-road, E.—July 10, m., Columbia-road; 17, m., Lambeth; 24, m., Bethnal Green; 31, a., Finsbury Park.

S. H. ALISON, 52 Chant-street, Stratford, E.—July, all mornings booked; July 10, e., West Ham; 24, e., Battersea. Aug. 7, m. and e., Chatham; 14, m., Bethnal Green; e., Walthamstow; 21, m., Victoria Park; 28, m., Wood Green.

T. THURLOW, 34 Wetherell-road, South Hackney.—July 10, m., Leyton; e., Libra Hall; 24, m., Camberwell. Aug. 14 and Sept. 11, mornings, Kingsland Green.

JAMES HOOPER, 11 Upper Eldon-street, Sneinton, Nottingham.—July 10, Hull; 11, Grimsby.

J. GREEVZ-FISHER, 78 Harrogate-road, Leeds.—July 17, Leeds

STANLEY JONES, 28 Stonecutter-street, London, E.C.—July 17, m., Kingsland Green; 24, m., Plaistow Green; 31, e., Battersea. Aug. 7, e., Hammersmith; 14, a., Tottenham; 21, Halstead; 28, m., Lambeth.

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