

# The Free Thinker

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## THE MISTAKES OF JESUS.

It is an ungracious task to point to flaws and blemishes in any character that is revered. Only when such a character is revered to the exclusion of all others, placed on a preposterous eminence, and indeed worshipped as an idol, it becomes, not only justifiable, but necessary. If Jesus were a man, it should go without saying that he had the frailties and imperfections of humanity. But he is regarded as a God, and even Unitarians, who do not so regard him, exalt him as the pinnacle of perfection of humanity. Do the gospels bear out even this estimate? In considering this question we must bear in mind that we have only Christian portraits of Christ. If flaws are found in these, the critic will feel amply justified in rejecting these exalted pretensions, for the bias of his biographers was in the direction of making him appear perfect and of concealing his weaknesses. When, therefore, they suffer human frailties to be perceived, their unconscious testimony is, as Viscount Amberley observed, entitled to great weight. Of course what may now be regarded as faults may not have appeared so to the Evangelists. Monkish chroniclers delight to relate of their saints how they repudiated the ties of family and kindred. What appears to us unfeeling inhumanity, they considered to be evidence of pious devotion. In making Jesus renounce his relations, and give utterance to such an atrocious statement as "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and his brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26), the gospel writers doubtless thought they were exalting their hero by putting him out of the category of common men. In the same spirit they make him say, "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers" (John x. 8); "I am the light of the world" (John viii. 12); "Whosoever shall deny me before men will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. x. 33); "I and my Father are one" (John x. 30), etc. Such sayings, if really ever uttered by a man, look much like arrogance carried to the point of insanity. Some of these sayings may be susceptible of a mystical interpretation. But here again is another indictment of the teacher, that many of his utterances are of an enigmatical character, liable to be mistaken by simple-minded people. His own explanation of this hardly accords with the idea of universal beneficence often ascribed to him. He says to his disciples, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing, they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them" (Mark iv. 11, 12). Some of his parables, notably those of the unjust judge and the king's feast, are of questionable morality.

No man can divest himself entirely of his environment. Jesus was a Jew, and, according to his Jewish

biographer in Matthew, showed himself emphatically so, saying he was but sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and telling the Syrophenician woman it was not fit to give that which is holy unto dogs. He partook of the errors of his day. He believed diseases were the work of demons, and that they could be cast out by prayer and fasting. He promised "That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 19), and "all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. xxi. 22). He declared that if his disciples had sufficient faith they would be able to remove mountains into the sea. "And these signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark xvi. 17, 18). In such matters we think candid people will admit he was mistaken. A yet more serious error was the expectation he shared and held out to others of the close approach of the end of the world, and his own immediate return with great glory. "Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt. xxiv.) "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. xvi. 28). If ever man lived under a delusion, Jesus was mistaken in this matter.

In the choice of his disciples Jesus certainly did not exhibit the infallibility of judgment which would be expected from a divine being. They displayed the utmost obtuseness as to the drift of his teaching. They quarrelled among themselves as to who should be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They were anxious for their own personal rewards. One of them betrayed him so shamefully that he, foreknowing it, said it was better for that man that he had never been born. The one upon whom he founded his Church perjured himself in denying him, and in his distress "they all forsook him and fled."

Those who disapprove of intoxicants must surely think Jesus in error in creating a large quantity of wine for guests who had already well drunk. Yet more reprehensible was the opprobrious epithets with which he assailed the Pharisees. He could scarcely expect to do them any good by calling them fools and blind, whited sepulchres, generation of vipers, children of hell, etc. In any modern public teacher such abuse would be taken as evidence of a lack of balance, and to curse a fig-tree for not bearing fruit when the season of figs was not yet, would be regarded as an unreasonable exhibition of temper, almost warranting an inquiry as to the person's sanity. But the correct conclusion, from an investigation of the gospels, is probably only a conviction of the fallibility of the writers; for as to their hero, he is less an actual personage than a hero of romance.

J. M. WHEELER.

## WILL CHRIST SAVE US?

(Continued from page 518.)

CHRISTIANITY has always lent itself to the arts of priestcraft. All its ethical teaching—which is scattered, various, and sometimes self-contradictory—has been overshadowed by its supernatural elements. There have ever been some, it is true, who have made a faith for themselves out of the finer maxims of the New Testament, and held it up as the real Christianity. But these have been only as a few loose stones lying about a mighty edifice. The great mass of Christians, in every age, have been under the dominion of priests; a body of men who, except in very low states of barbarism, where superstition comes to the aid of such culture as is then possible, are always in a common conspiracy against the progress of mankind. Strife for precedence and authority took place at a very early period in the primitive Church, and continued until Christendom was a vast hierarchy. Popes, cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, have lorded it over the common herd. Even in our own age, when the spirit of democracy is abroad, the most successful novelty in Christian organisation—namely, the Salvation Army—is a sheer tyranny; a fact which shows that Christianity, despite a few convenient texts paraded by “advanced” Christians, is in natural harmony with the principles of despotism.

It is idle to cite particular texts against this perennial tendency. We must judge a system by its general spirit, and its general spirit by its prevalent practice. Even if we were to admit, for the sake of argument, that there is no obvious connexion between the doctrines of Christianity and the existence of priestcraft, it would still remain a fact that the religion of Jesus Christ has been manipulated by priests for their own advantage, and the robbery and oppression of the people; and surely a religion which, during eighteen centuries, has not been able to save *itself* from this disgrace, is never likely, either in the immediate or in the remote future, to effect *our* salvation.

Everywhere in Europe, America, and Australia, at the present moment, *Priestcraft*, in some form or other, directs the energies of the Christian faith. If they were ever separate, the two things are now in absolute alliance. Practically, they are one and the same; they stand or fall together. Do we not see that those who break away from Churches, swim or drift down the stream of Rationalism? Quakerism itself, after two centuries of sturdy protest against priestcraft, is now dwindling. Christianity arose quite naturally in a superstitious age, when the old national religions of the Roman Empire had fallen into discredit, and the populace was ready to embrace a more universal religion; but it could never have been upheld in subsequent ages without the combined arts of political and ecclesiastical despotism; the altar supporting the throne, and the throne the altar; and both exploiting the ignorance and credulity of the people. Had freedom prevailed, and had free scope been allowed to inquiry, the Church would long ago have perished, with the whole system of Christian supernaturalism.

After liberty of thought comes education. The one is necessary to make the other fruitful. And Christianity has never been a true friend of education. We are often pointed to the colleges it established in the dark ages; but it *made* the darkness of those ages, and it did *not* establish the colleges. It simply took possession of them, and made all permitted learning its subject. Even the study of ancient literature, which followed the Reformation, was a sheer accident, at least in religious circles. In order to maintain their challenge of Rome, the Reformers had to appeal to antiquity; and thus, as Bacon

observed, the “ancient authors, both in divinity and humanity, which had long time slept in libraries, began generally to be read and revolved.” Those sleeping authors were only roused for the purpose of contention, not from any desire to extract their wisdom for the welfare of mankind.

Why, indeed, were those ancient authors allowed to sleep so long in libraries? Why was the dust of so many centuries allowed to accumulate upon them? The proper answer to this question is to be found in an appeal to Christian history.

Gibbon remarks that the primitive Christians “despised all knowledge that was not useful to salvation.” Some of their leaders, in the second century, were obliged to study “human wisdom” in order to reply to their Pagan adversaries; but a great majority were opposed to this policy. They wished, as Mosheim observes, to “banish all reasoning and philosophy out of the confines of the Church.” After the triumph of Christianity under Constantine it became unnecessary to oppose the advocates of Paganism by any other weapons than proscription and imprisonment. From that moment the darkness crept over the face of Europe. The Council of Carthage, in the following century, forbade the reading of Pagan books. “The bishops,” says Jortin, “soon began to relish this advice, and not to trouble their heads with literature.” Some of the Byzantine emperors, less bigoted than the Church dignitaries, tried to cherish learning; but they were defeated by the ecclesiastics, who, as Mosheim tells us, “considered all learning, and especially philosophic learning, as injurious and even destructive to true piety and godliness.” What wonder that in the fifth century “learning was almost extinct” and “only a faint shadow of it remained”?

After a dismal lapse of hundreds of years the clouds of intellectual darkness began to lift from the face of Europe. Mohammedan learning slowly spread through Christendom. “All the knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, medicine and philosophy, propagated in Europe from the tenth century onward,” says Mosheim, “was derived principally from the schools and books of the Arabians in Italy and Spain.”

After the Reformation the Jesuits carried on the work of education among Catholics. Their object was simply to train promising young men for the service of the Church. And the same policy obtained in Protestant seminaries. The clergy and the privileged classes, as far as possible, monopolised the extant learning. The wealthier middle-class gradually gained a share of it, but the common people were left in the outer darkness. Even in the early part of the present century they were still excluded. The student of history is aware that the Christian Churches steadily opposed popular education. English Bishops, in the House of Lords, voted against the first Education Acts; a famous Bishop of Exeter remarking in debate that the education of the lower classes would render them proud and discontented, and unwilling to work for their superiors.

When it was seen that popular education was bound to come, the Churches resolved to take time by the forelock. To prevent secular education they set up schools for Christian education. And this is still the secret of their interest in the working of the present Education Acts. Their real anxiety is about their own dogmas; they care not for education, but for theology. Church and Dissent fight each other at School Board elections. The real issue between them is what sort of *religion* shall be taught to the children. Were religion banished from public schools; were State education made purely secular; parsons and ministers would no longer display any interest in the matter.

G. W. FOOTE.

(To be continued.)

## INGERSOLL AND PAINE.

[CONCLUDED.]

"We cannot look," observes Carlyle, "however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something from him. He is the living light-fountain which it is good and pleasant to be near." These suggestive words have special force when applied to Colonel Ingersoll and Thomas Paine. For no one can seriously and fairly study the writings of these pioneers of mental liberty without gaining a vast fund of information, and deriving therefrom a considerable amount of intellectual pleasure. The greatness of Colonel Ingersoll is not confined to one phase of existence, it includes the whole range of life. In him is concentrated those many qualities which make man noble and render his character sublime. He has the wisdom of a philosopher, allied with the simplicity of a child—the intellect of a giant moulded with the sweet tenderness of a woman. His mental grandeur is illuminated with ethical purity, and his practical nature is enriched by the benevolence of his heart. With a deep yearning to be useful to his weaker brethren, he has, during the best years of a ripe and vigorous life, fought for liberty, justice and truth. Gifted with a rare genius and a distinct personality, that might have carried him to the pinnacle of any ambition, he has preferred the hard life of a pioneer in the forest of superstition, laying the axe of Reason to the withered tree of antiquity which obstructs the growth of the living present. Thus has he caused the wilderness to blossom, kindling anew the torch of thought in thousands of minds, inspiring hope for and belief in the dawn of a period on earth when freedom, truth and joy shall supplant serfdom, falsehood and mental gloom.

Thomas Paine was also a truly great man. His labors were of unprecedented force. The greatness, however, that adorned his life was not that of military renown or martial glory, neither was he influenced by the allurements of wealth, by political intrigues, or by royal affluence. These professions and conditions were with Paine, but hollow shows and the symbols of an artificial grandeur. His idea of greatness consisted in the exercise of benevolence, in striving to secure justice for the human race, in a valorous defence of liberty, and in ridding the world as much as possible of bigotry, superstition and oppression. With him there was no vacillation; he said what he meant and he meant what he said. He was not only strong in opposition, but his analytical power was equally potent. As in theology, so in politics, he was keen in perception, just in design, prolific in resources and brilliant in execution. With him there was no ambiguity, his principles were clear and their application was distinct. Thus he accomplished a marvellous work and the results of his labors are still being manifested. He was a genuine reformer, one who pandered not to please a friend, or to conciliate an enemy. This force of character was equally felt in England, France and America.

Paine, more than any other man of his day, strove to make humanity its own priest and its own king. To the believers in democracy he was the seer, the prophet of modern political thought. He was an original thinker and an expounder of principles that since his time have permeated society among almost every progressive people on the face of the earth. Paine was one of the few reformers who never sought individual distinction nor personal emolument. With all his influence over millions of his fellow men, including generals, armies, and statesmen, he never attempted to sacrifice the interests of the community to his own ambition. The representative form of government which he so uncompromisingly advocated, dispensed with the rule only of the few and instituted the rule of the many. This is the method

of government to which, in modern times, we aspire. Col. Ingersoll puts the position of Paine with the greatest precision. He says that he "contended for the rights of the individual, the jurisdiction of the soul [mind]. Above all religions he placed Reason, above all kings Men, above all men Law." Among the American statesmen, four of the greatest—Franklin, Jefferson, Sumner, and Lincoln—Ingersoll enumerates as being "believers in the creed of Thomas Paine."

The account of Paine's latter days, after he had retired from the field of battle, has been told hundreds of times by his enemies, whose mouths were full of falsehood and misrepresentation. Apart, however, from all these slanderous tales, the real truth of the evening of his life furnishes a melancholy story of political ingratitude and religious bigotry. Escaping from the jaws of death during the turbulent scenes of the French Revolution, he crossed the sea to the country of his adoption, and to which he had rendered brilliant services. He went "unto his own, and his own received him not," at least not in the manner in which it was their duty to have done. The sympathy and affection due to him they did not tender, and the love and reverence that he had every reason to expect from a nation, whose gratitude he had undoubtedly earned, he did not receive. Ingersoll, referring to this eventful period in Paine's career, says: "Even those who loved their enemies hated him, their friend—the friend of the whole world—with all their hearts." Great interests were then at stake, and those in whom they were vested looked upon Paine as their destroyer instead of as their savior. Property in man was in danger, the Bible and the Church, which sanctioned and protected that property, were also in peril. The conservative instinct then dominant regarded the reformer of abuses as a man with the crowbar and the axe, bent upon uprooting the very foundations of society. Since Paine's time we have seen how men, when struggling for human emancipation, have been hunted from place to place, refused a platform from which to utter words of justice to a down-trodden race, and denounced as enemies to society. While denunciation of errors in the past cannot undo the wrongs suffered by a noble army of Freethought martyrs, and inflicted by those who are now beyond the reach of blame, yet to recall the injustice done towards the brave ones of the earth, who are now no more, may produce a healthier feeling in living minds, and tend to refine their conduct towards those who are devoting themselves to the task of pointing out to their fellows a better way. So long as personal interests are allowed to predominate over the public good all proposals of change will continue to meet with aversion, however rational and benevolent such proposals may be.

Thomas Paine, with the strictest regard to accuracy, may be pronounced as the greatest political and religious reformer of the eighteenth century. True, against his character the venom of slander and the poison of malice have been hurled, and the waves of superstition have been ruthlessly dashed, and around his memory the fire of bigotry has been kindled. But notwithstanding all this calumny and abuse—born of political envy and theological jealousy—the hero of Thetford lived a useful life and died a heroic death, leaving a name to be honored and a record that should serve as

Footprints that perchance another  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main—  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother  
Seeing shall take heart again.

CHARLES WATTS.

It appears from a posthumous brochure that the late Field Marshal von Moltke was not a believer.

## PROFESSOR HUXLEY AND SPECIES.

I do not profess to be a student of Professor Huxley, but in recent years his writings on controversial questions have arrested my attention. These are now collected and issued this year in a handsome but rather expensive volume. Many of his arguments will no doubt be used by Freethinkers in support of their views. I do not know whether Prof. Huxley believes in the unity of mankind, but Dr. E. B. Tylor (*Anthropology*, p. 5) tells us that that view best accords with the conclusions of modern zoologists, who from their studies are the best judges. The main reasons in its support are the similarity of all races of man in their bodily structure and in the workings of their minds; and further, that, so far as I have read, they can breed races unlike themselves by intermarriage. By this means, in the course of a few hundred years, the results are the production of a race of negroes which have advanced three parts of the way to the European type. The difference between some negroes and some Englishmen is as great as between the brown and white bears; one having rounded foreheads, and the other flattened long skulls. Some naturalists call these different species, although they are both *bears*. The same may be applied to man, if all the race divisions deserve such a dignified title. I for one think they do not. Man, whether black or white, whatever the shape of his nose or his lips, is still only man, forming a distinct species in the animal kingdom. This view appears to me necessitated by the assumption of Darwin that man and certain apes had a common ancestor. To separate man from all other animals, and name all his *variations* species, seems to strike at the root of the Darwinian theory, which Prof. Huxley says he holds in high estimation. Holding these views, I was much struck by the following allusion in Prof. Huxley's new book: "The objection sometimes put forward, that no one yet professes to have seen one *species* pass into another, comes oddly enough from those who believe that mankind are all descended from Adam. Has anyone, then, yet seen the production of negroes from a white stock, or *vice versa*? Moreover, is it absolutely necessary to have watched every step of the progress of a planet, to be justified in concluding that it really does go round the sun? If so, astronomy is in a bad way" (*Controverted Questions*, p. 39).

Now my principle objection to this is that the illustration of black and white men, both being *men*, does not meet the case as intended by the objector. The intention of the objector is to denote the absence of any example of one animal, say an ape, becoming another animal—say a man. That is what the objector has in his mind, and not the production of *one man* from another *man*.

I am not disputing the fact that one species passes into another, only objecting that Professor Huxley's illustration does not prove it. He must be as fully aware of this as I am, hence my difficulty to account for what he has written. Of course he may not deem this matter worth his notice, but nevertheless our friends will do well to avoid giving his illustration of the transmutation of the species. The illustration from astronomy appears to be admirable. Because if the Descent of Man depends on our *seeing* the production of man and ape from a common ancestor, the doctrine is "in a bad way." The event by its very nature is excluded from actual observation of man, who is one concerned in the process to be observed. The origin of man is a theory based upon other observations, on facts which cannot be disputed, although it can never rise to a higher point than an *inference* well sustained by facts. Man can never *see* his origin.

CHARLES C. CATTELL.

THE CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE SOCIETY  
"UNMASKED."

WE hear so much of the brilliant success attending the work of the out-door lectures of the Christian Evidence Society, that I am tempted to place on record an experience of my own.

Last Sunday morning (Sept. 18), I paid a casual visit to Clerkenwell Green, with no definite object in view. I found Mr. Groom, a fluent evangelist of the ordinary type, addressing his customary congregation. At 11.30, Mr. Haslam commenced his lecture from the N.S.S. stand, and soon attracted a large audience, which he held despite the manifold distractions incident to the place. About 11.45 Mr. Groom departed into other regions, leaving the field clear for the Freethinkers and the Christian Evidence Society.

Now from the stand of the latter body, it had been announced in print that a certain Mr. Pryor would lecture on "Secularism Unmasked" at 11.30. At noon, the chairman stated that for some reason (which I did not gather) Mr. Pryor was unable to attend, and that his place would be taken by the Rev. T. T. Waterman, B.A., one of the secretaries of the C.E.S. The rev. gentleman then commenced his address to an audience, which, including three Freethinkers, at no time numbered more than fifteen, reckoning two children as one man. Mr. Waterman said that he would *not* speak upon the subject selected by Mr. Pryor, to wit, "Secularism Unmasked"; and for about five minutes he repeated some pulpit-platitudes as to the "insufficiency" of Secularism. Then the rev. gentleman found that he had run to the length of his tether, and, in despair, begged that questions might be asked, or special difficulties stated, in order that he might reply to them to the best of his ability. The chairman then repeated the invitation, and, there being no response, addressed himself to me by name, urging me to "come up." I ignored the flattering request, for I do not conceive that it is my duty to act as a crutch for tottering Christian Evidence lecturers. This last hope having failed, the lecturer and chairman held a brief consultation, after which Mr. Waterman walked briskly away, leaving the chairman to announce that the rev. gentleman was "obliged to leave," and he was sorry to say the meeting would have to be closed. And closed it was forthwith.

All this time Mr. Haslam was addressing an audience that numbered at least 200 people, whose interest in his lecture was unmistakably shown by their close attention and frequent applause. Mr. Haslam commenced long before the Christian Evidence "lecture" began, and continued long after it had flickered out.

Thus, my brethren, was "Secularism Unmasked" at Clerkenwell Green last Sunday morning. This is no solitary instance of Christian Evidence fiascoes at Clerkenwell Green or elsewhere; but it is the first case in which I have been able to give that close attention which would warrant me in placing the facts on record.

GEORGE STANDRING.

It is but true that a man who once becomes deaf seldom enjoys a happy hereafter.

"Who do you suppose will lead the singing in the next world?" "St. Peter, of course; he has the key."

Last Christmas day the vicar of a church in a large manufacturing town had been kept busy the whole morning owing to the large number of weddings. He was just leaving the church when another couple came. The vicar was very angry, and told them they were too late, and would have to come another morning; but both pleaded so hard to be married then that he consented at last, saying, "I will marry you this time, but don't let it occur again."

## MIRACLE-MONGERING.

VERITABLY superstition dies hard. One is apt often to think that, because he himself and his surroundings are emancipated from its influence, it is therefore dying rapidly. But this optimism is often rudely checked when we are brought face to face with a case like Lourdes. Last year it was the holy coat at Trèves; this year it is Lourdes. There is a pilgrimage to Lourdes every year, it appears; but this year it has attained a special notoriety, on account probably of the visit of M. Zola, who is on the hunt for material for a new book. Now it is, at any rate, well that Zola has taken up the subject. In his last fine book, *La Débâcle*, he has knocked a good deal of the gilt off the "gunpowder and glory" business by exposing, in all their naked horror, the brutality and wretchedness of the battlefield; and we may expect that, in dealing with the Lourdes pilgrimage, he will throw some light on the darker side of the picture.

What we wish to deal with more particularly, however, is an article which appeared recently in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, written evidently by a friendly hand, on the subject of the Lourdes affair. Now this account is extremely interesting in many ways, though, of course, there is a great deal of maudlin sentiment about it, usual to such productions. The stereotyped talk about the "simple faith, touching devotion, radiant hope and sublime resignation" which are as beautiful to "the most hopeless sceptic as to the most fervent and believing Christian," flows through the article. Here, for instance, is one exhibition of the simple and beautiful faith. The writer is describing the "procession of the Blessed Sacrament":—"First come some hundred priests, all holding lighted tapers; then another hundred, also with tapers, but wearing surplices. These are followed by the higher dignitaries in their robes, and finally by the great canopy, under which walks a priest carrying the sacred Host. As the Host draws near, the excitement grows greater, the priest ever straining his voice more and more, and the answering shouts rising constantly higher and louder. Thousands of hands are held aloft, every head is uncovered, all who are able on account of the press sinking on their knees as the Lord passes by. Mothers with their sick children on their laps strain them forward, holding up their arms in adoration. Every now and again one of the unfortunates breaks from among the crowd and rushes towards the Blessed Sacrament, falling on his knees right under the very canopy."

Now is there really, rationally speaking, anything specially admirable or edifying in this exhibition of ignorance and credulity? In all probability, the writer would not be able to see any beauty or simplicity in a similar "heathen" devotion; he would probably pity the poor wretches who took part in it. Yet what real difference is there between the car of Juggernaut and "the great canopy with its great swinging lamps?"

As showing some of the less roseate sides of the business, here is a picture of the suffering endured by some of the unfortunate people:—"Over 12,000, bringing with them 1,100 sick, had come from Paris and the north, in seventeen special pilgrimage trains. The sufferings endured by these poor people, in every stage of sickness and disease, during those long two days, packed in suffocating and crowded carriages, one cannot readily imagine. It is horrible to contemplate what they must have undergone on their return journey, wearied out by the strain of the last three days, and many of them with the hope of cure, so long and patiently cherished, destroyed for ever or deferred another dreary year."

The patients are bathed in water taken from the grotto, and this is the description given of the bathing-place by one who is enchanted with the beauty and simplicity of the whole affair.—"The water in the piscina is only renewed twice a day, and very soon presents a turbid, brothy aspect, which, in persons of somewhat finer susceptibilities than the majority of my patients, would have lent, in my eyes, a spice of heroism to the determination to take a plunge therein. Yet, even so, there was, indeed, no lack of heroism. The patient, after he is divested of his clothing, is enveloped in a wet loincloth just discarded by his predecessor, plunged in the same bath which he knows has done duty previously to fifty other sufferers from every kind of human affliction, and then dressed again at once without any pretence of drying."

And now we come to the question of the "miracles." Two or three cases of alleged cures are given by the writer. One, a girl, Marie R—, had one leg three centimetres shorter than the other. "In her second bath she felt something give way in her leg, and, on emerging from the water, found herself able to walk." For that again we are told of a Capuchin friar, blind and almost stone-deaf, who was not cured, and the writer says: "Alas, though, I saw his sad face four times returning to the piscina and I thought, 'Surely if any man deserves healing, this is he'; the water had no virtue for him, and he went away uncured."

But now the writer asks, Can imagination invent a cancer, or suggestion cure a tuberculous tumor? We wish to know, then, if prayer *can* cure a cancer (as the writer implies it can), why it cannot replace an amputated limb, say? There has, the writer says, been a case of a leg being lengthened—has there been any case of a limb being renewed altogether; and if not why not? Surely it ought to be as easy for God to make a whole leg as three centimetres of one. When you get outside the reign of natural law, you might as well go the whole hog. Or else, are we to believe that there are degrees of difficulty in miracles with the Lord? How is it, otherwise, that the only cures alleged even are those which, on the face of the thing, there is the possibility of natural causes having effected?

But after all, what does it all amount to? What are the paltry cures alleged at the grotto but a drop, nay half a drop, from the vast ocean of human suffering. Is God's generosity or mercy, or whatever name you call it, measured by the price of a return ticket to Lourdes? What, then, of the millions who cannot go there? Must they still suffer and weep because the Lord, "who is everywhere," has taken up his abode in France? And, supposing we admit that the miracles are true, what does it come to? But this, that God has removed an infinitesimal part of the pain he never should have inflicted. If a man robs another, you do not lavish praises on him for giving back a millionth part of what he robbed. And is not this a precisely analogous case on the orthodox assumption? Why doesn't God cure the thousands who now groan and die of cholera throughout Europe? Nay, why did he send the cholera at all? What is a miserable three centimetres of a leg to this terrible scene of suffering and of death! Why before this spectre, Lourdes with its pettifogging humbug becomes a hideous farce.

F. RYAN.

## CAN GHOSTS BE PHOTOGRAPHED?

Can ghosts be photographed? Spiritualists, who want us to believe in the appearance of ghosts, say they can, and actually produce 'spirit photographs,' that is, photographs of persons in the flesh around whom are dimly visible shadowy forms. These have been made much of in this country and in America, but even some scientific spiritualists have been sceptical. Professor Elliot Coues, in *The Californian*—an illustrated magazine of very high standard—tells 'how it is done,' and boldly sets down the well-known spirit photographers as frauds and scamps. Some of the earlier spirit photographers were exposed as frauds beyond all doubt, but the trade went on because it was profitable. Spiritualists were eager to believe they were surrounded by guardian angels, including the spirits of their loved ones, who, though invisible to them, were detected by camera. Professor Coues made a collection of about fifty pictures by the most prominent artists. Some were given to him by ardent spiritualists, and with pain to himself and to them he proved to them that they were in every case frauds. Then he went to Mr. Fallis, a photographer who had found out the whole process, and made it his business to expose it. Mr. Fallis showed him many of his own 'spirit photographs,' and specimens of these are reproduced in *The Californian*, along with the so-called genuine ones, and a weird collection they make. 'It is a matter of prepared plates, repeated exposures, and peculiar management of the lights and shades. Any one can do it who can catch a live sitter for the centre-piece, acquire a number of photographs or cuts of other people, and apply Mr. Fallis's methods of manipulation.' Professor Coues has done it himself, and a relative of his and a lady friend, after seeing his 'rogues' gallery, disappeared, and later in the day showed him a photograph of the young lady, with a 'guardian angel' behind her.—*Christian World*.

### HURL THEM DOWN!

Proud priests of the "bloody faith," dealers in lies,  
You've blasted the green earth, and darkened the skies,  
Created the Devil, and made for us hell:  
The people are rising, they've cast off your spell;  
And Justice exclaims with an ominous frown,  
"Too long have ye bowed to them,—hurl them down."

"Great God" of the orthodox, cruel and grim,  
The Devil an angel compared unto him,  
The jailer of hell, as relentless as fate,  
Eternity cannot his cruelty save;  
The Lord, or Jehovah of Jewish renown,  
Humanity rises, and hurls him down!

W. DENTON.

### ACID DROPS.

The *Methodist Times* has interviewed Mr. A. R. E. Burton, Organising Secretary of the National Scripture Education League. The object of this League is to introduce the Bible in the public schools of the colony of Victoria, where, according to the Education Act of 1872, no State school teacher is allowed to give "other than secular instruction in any State school building." This proviso is repugnant to the bigoted Christians, who cannot understand why their religion should be maintained and propagated at their own expense. They have therefore established the above League, to introduce what they call "undogmatic religious teaching"—that is, just as much religious teaching as the Christian sects can agree about in opposition to sceptics.

Mr. Burton, the secretary of this League, makes an ignominious confession. He says they have Sunday-schools in Victoria, but Sunday-schools don't do the business properly. They only get at the children who attend them—and they are a small minority—once a week, and only for a limited time. It is necessary to get at the children every day; in short, to dose them regularly; otherwise they don't imbibe religion as they should do. No doubt this is true enough. But what a comment it is on the Christian boast that man is a religious animal, that he will have a religion, and that nothing will divert him from it! The fact is, children are forced into religion, and they continue in it as they grow up through habit and mental laziness.

Mr. Burton states the following result of Secular Education in Victoria:—"A large proportion of our children thus not only grow up ignorant of Scripture, but, I fear, worse than that, with a distinct bias against Christianity, on account of the publicity given to the banishment of the Bible and all Christian teaching from our schools." In other words, deprive Christianity of the assistance of the State, and children grow up with a bias against it, instead of a prejudice in its favor. Which means, in effect, that if Christianity is made to stand on its own legs, without extraneous support, it wobbles, and staggers, and falls.

Mr. Hodge, the chairman of the recent Trades Union Congress, is a Glasgow man and a Christian. In his presidential address he opposed the opening of museums, libraries, and art galleries on Sundays. His remarks on this point, however, were received very coldly by the Congress.

We had an order a few days ago for two of Mr. Foote's *Bible Romances*—"God in a Box" and "Jonah and the Whale." It was from a well-known lunatic asylum, and for a moment it made us "sit up." But the signature of the sender was followed by "attendant." This caused us to breathe a sigh of relief. Two such Romances might cause a dreadful ferment among the orthodox residents of that asylum, and the death-rate of the district might be considerably increased.

One of Mr. Foote's *Letters to the Clergy* is addressed to the Rev. R. F. Horton. This gentleman was invited to attend the forthcoming Christian Convention in Dublin, but the committee has since cancelled the invitation on the ground that he does not believe in the inspiration, authority, and sufficiency of scripture. Mr. Horton is orthodox to Mr. Foote; he is heterodox to the Christian Convention.

The vicar of Hamble, near Southampton, excluded four men and their wives from a parish treat, given by a benevolent lady of the neighborhood. Each of the four men had committed the awful crime of marrying his deceased wife's sister. We read that Jacob married two sisters, and that God "loved" him; but he would have been "chucked out" by the vicar of Hamble.

A suggestion that a spiritist "mejum" should be employed to unearth the Althorp mystery received no encouragement from the police. A short while ago the Northampton spiritists came a dreadful cropper. A policeman had been injured in a street row, and it was reported he was dead. His spirit turned up at a séance, and the believers reported the fact to the police office, where they were met with derision, for the man was alive and rapidly recovering.

The Rev. W. E. Gunn, late vicar of St. John's, Egremont, Cheshire, was one of the great guns of the Church. He has, however, got into the Bankruptcy Court, and admits the teachers in the schools have not been paid, owing to his having otherwise disposed of the money for their salaries.

The Rev. Joseph Weedow, of Morton Vicarage, Bingley, eloped with his cook to Rhyl, ran up a heavier hotel bill than he could pay, and then committed suicide in the presence of his mistress. Verdict: Temporarily insane.

Parson Weedow left a wife behind him in eloping with the cook. Nevertheless he entered himself and paramour in the hotel book as the Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Weedow. We don't suppose the religious journals will say much about this sordid case; but how many columns they would have printed if Weedow had been a Freethought lecturer!

Manktlow, the man who is charged with murderous outrage on Miss Edith Philbrick and Miss Hilda Wood, seems to be of unsound mind. He was asked if he would like a book to read, and he said yes, if it was a religious one. After that there should be little trouble in giving him a certificate of insanity.

It is curious how these abnormal specimens of humanity turn to religion. They have a strong natural taste for it. Did not the Bishop of Exeter note this fact at Star Cross Asylum, and exclaim (substantially) that he had not found such great faith, no not in Israel?

Father Kenelm Vaughan, who has returned from Africa, of course endorses the Catholic version of troubles in Uganda. But this amounts to giving the lie to Captain Lugard.

Jesus Christ would have a poor show if he re-incarnated in West Prussia. A person who professed to cast out devils, and who did it by belaboring his patients with a magic wand in the form of a cross, has been sent to prison as a rogue and a vagabond.

In consequence of the increase of poverty among clergymen, it has been suggested that they should be allowed to go into trade. Earning a honest living would make a great change to most of them.

The confirmation of Ritualism by the judgment of the Privy Council in the case of the Bishop of Lincoln, has resulted in one solitary secession from the Church of England. This honest Evangelical is the Rev. C. Sterling, M.A., vicar of New Malden. He holds that now the idolatrous sacrifice of the Mass is constantly practised in the Church and upheld by law, the Church of England ought to be disestablished, and the Prayer Book purged of every vestige of sacerdotalism and sacramental error. Other Low Churchmen grumble but retain their billets.

Public prayer is simply button-holing God Almighty. Some ministers hold him for quite ten minutes while they tell him what he knows already. It is a dreadful infliction. We feel inclined to "pity the sorrows of a poor old God."

This button-holing business is often carried on with a judicious regard for earthly affairs. Two words for God and ten for other folk, is sometimes the mixture. The *Pall Mall Gazette* gives the following from one of Prier Hughes's prayers:—"Forgive us, O Lord, if at any time

we have given pence when we should have given silver; if we have given silver when we ought to have given gold; and if we have given gold when we might have given bank-notes." All this, of course, was meant or the congregation. God Almighty was only a stalking-horse.

The Duke of Argyll is not happy as a controversialist. Some of our readers will remember the snubbing he got from Professor Huxley. Recently he wrote some insulting nonsense about Mr. Frederic Harrison, who in return calls him "the Panjandrum of Biblical Science and Scotch Presbyterianism."

Talmage says that Heaven is a place where rent-day never comes. What a Hell for landlords!

We don't meddle with politics in this journal, but we are always concerned about freedom of speech. For this reason we refer to the brutal proceedings at Leeds, where a meeting of Mr. J. L. Mahon, the Independent Labor candidate, was broken up by a Liberal mob, and serious wounds were inflicted on the candidate and two of his supporters. This sort of thing is a perfect scandal. We had almost said it is worthy of savages, but that would be a libel—on the savages, who always listen patiently during a palaver. Some of the Leeds people might learn something from African negroes.

Mr. Moss, Mr. Steinberg, and other Freethinkers attended Dr. Harrison's lecture at Exeter Hall on Monday night. Finding that "discussion invited" only meant five minutes for each speaker, they decided (after a protest) not to discuss under such conditions. Dr. Harrison was, however, subjected to a good deal of questioning. He was good enough to say that Buddhists would not go to hell, as, not knowing the gospel, they would not be judged by it. A Buddhist's risk, therefore, begins when the gospel is introduced to him. If this be true, we ought to have a Society for the Protection of the Heathen against Missionaries and Hell.

The Rev. Wm. Lewis, of Bontddu, Barmouth, has sent out circulars complaining that the parishioners will not attend his ministrations because the Dissenters ridicule them if they do. He winds up with a Christian hint that Church people should equally boycott Dissenters. He says: "The Nonconformists or Dissenters of the chapelry should take care not to persecute and ridicule working folk for going to church. It would be well for them to remember that Church people have it in their power to give their farms only to Church tenants, and to build village shops of their own, and employ only Church servants." How they love one another!

God has been riding on the storm with a vengeance in Japan; 42,000 houses were destroyed and 300 persons killed as the result of his exploit. The harvest on his cholera farms is hardly so plentiful as last month.

The Catholic *Month*, in an article on "Spiritualism in its True Character" in this month's issue, does not scruple to represent that character as diabolic. It believes that the manifestations at séances are the work of devils. This is because the teachings of spiritualism are in opposition to the orthodox Christian doctrine of eternal torment in hell.

Upon the occasion of the birth of a daughter to the imperial house of Germany, a Vienna paper reminds its readers of an old prophecy said to have been made hundreds of years ago by a northern necromancer. The prophecy stated that the German Empire would attain the greatest power and glory under a wise monarch who would be beloved by his whole nation and would be sincerely regretted at a great age; that the son who would follow him would die after a few months' reign only, and lay his noble head in the grave in the same year as his father. He would be followed by a young and dashing monarch who would have seven sons, and soon after the birth of the seventh son would be robbed of the empire created by his grandfather. This seventh son's advent would signify terrible misfortunes to the German Empire. The birth of a daughter has so far annulled the threatening prophecy.

The run on the Birkbeck revived an old Bible conundrum. Why are the pickpockets whose operations were so successful outside the Birkbeck like Pharaoh's daughter? Because they drew a little profit from the rashes on the bank.

Monday's *Star* exposed a nice little case of pious cadging, unearthed by the Charity Organisation Society. Letters were sent out right and left, begging for money to "evangelise" the world's inhabitants. Remittances were to be sent to a Miss Baker, who turns out to be a domestic servant. She says she sent on the money to a Mr. Caldwell, Missionary Bureau, London. The envelopes and letters received were sold as waste paper, and weighed nearly a quarter of a ton. This will give some idea of Mr. Caldwell's harvest. What he will do with it is open to speculation. Perhaps he will spend most of it in "evangelising" himself.

There is something irresistibly comic in the railway to Jerusalem. It is so incongruous with the old-world superstitions attaching to the locality. Even the *Christian Commonwealth* sees this. "What," it asks, "will the Millenarian think of this new departure? Can he, if he possess a grain of humor, repress a smile at the notion of the Jewish people returning to their own land—to found a new kingdom of Israel—by rail?"

"Do not ask who wrote the first books of the Bible. Do not care whether Jonah is history or fiction. Do not be troubled about the miracles of the Old Testament or the New." Brave words! And who uttered them? A sceptic? Oh no. They are taken from a recent sermon, preached in London, by the Rev. Amory H. Bradford, D.D., of New Jersey. Coming from this gentleman the words are simply scandalous. They display a new form of the old confidence-trick. We are to think nine-tenths of the Bible rotten, only we must cling to Christ, and keep the old business going.

Dr. Bradford tells an English interviewer that Unitarians are losing ground in America. But the Unitarians say that "their principles have pervaded other denominations, and they are doing their work in that way." Dr. Bradford admits this to the extent of confessing that they are leading other denominations to "a more distinctly ethical presentation of Christian truth." Which seems a euphemism for neglecting the miraculous parts of the New Testament, and sticking to as much of its morality as can still pass current in civilised societies. On the other hand, Dr. Bradford says that a supernatural basis for religion is "indispensable." But, in the case of Christianity, how is he to get this without resorting to the New Testament miracles. The worthy doctor seems to us to be playing fast and loose. Some people would call it hocus-pocus.

Christian England is a nice old huckster. Fancy selling Nelson's flagship, the *Foudroyant*, to a German contractor for breaking up for £1,000! We are no friends of war; on the contrary, we hate it. But while so many millions are spent on new ships, whose warlike capacity is a mere matter of conjecture, it is disgusting to see Nelson's ship disposed of in this way. Nelson was a very great Englishman, with all his faults; and the Admiralty gentlemen who sold the *Foudroyant* like an old hat are hardly fit to black his boots.

Catholics don't mean to persecute any more—at least till they get the chance. The Rev. Herbert Thurston, of the Society of Jesus, writing in the *Times*, declares that the Romish episcopal oath to persecute heretics is a mere form. Of course it is! But what has made it a mere form? Not any intellectual or moral change in the Church itself. Oh dear no! The Church is *semper eadem*—always the same. The oath to persecute heretics is a mere form because civilisation, in despite of the Church, has outgrown the infamous absurdity. The Church does not persecute when it cannot. When it can it always does—and always will.

The inhabitants of Fire Island, about forty miles from New York, are splendid specimens of the sort of human nature fostered by Christianity. If there is anything the average Christian is in a mortal funk about it is death. He pretends that his religion is the only one that has conquered the fear of dying, and he is always ready to exclaim, especially in church, "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" But somehow, while Brahmins take death quietly, and Buddhists gladly, and Mohammedans in the spirit of Kismet, your average Christian fears it greatly, and will do almost anything to keep out of heaven. No wonder, then, that the inhabitants of Fire Island refused to let hundreds of delicate women and children land through dread of the cholera. There was really little to fear, the passengers

being only in quarantine, but the wretched Fire Islanders were deaf to all appeals of humanity. "Let the women and children rot to death," they said in substance, "rather than one of us shall run the slightest risk." This attitude was kept up till the very end, when the passengers were landed under the protection of troops; the Fire Islanders making off at that point, being apparently more afraid of rifles and bayonets than even of the cholera.

We like accurate quotations. For this reason we take the *Christian World* to task. It says of the poet Whittier that "With Novalis, he might be called a God-intoxicated man." Now, he couldn't be called anything of the sort with *Novalis*, who was never called a God-intoxicated man. That is a description which Novalis applied to Spinoza.

It would be a pity to keep this religious gem from the knowledge of the world. At present it lies imbedded in the obscurity of the columns of a provincial Irish newspaper:

"FOR THE LOVE OF MARY, may I ask an alms towards the Daily Exposition. I have for four weeks appealed *in vain*. Pray do light a candle of Thanksgiving, or of Reparation (1s. each), and help the good works. When you send it ask for the Beautiful Badge of the Sacred Heart, or a Miraculous Picture of our Lady of Good Counsel, which I give away. You can also have Scapulars, Rosaries, with Dominican Indulgences, or Rosaries Elect by the Canons of the Holy Cross, with 500 days' Indulgence on each bead. Send at once to

"Rev. PHILIP JAMES M'CARTHY,  
Shrine of our Lady of Dale, Ilkeston, Derbyshire,  
England."

When we hear of the conversions of Protestants to the Church of Rome, about which so much is being said at present, we can see the kind of thing that attracts them. A man must have a soft place in some part of his brain to believe in this kind of rubbish.—*Reynolds's*.

At the Ebenezer Baptist Church, Oakland, California, over which the Rev. G. W. Gray presides, there was high words among the brethren on the question of pastoral discipline. Deacon Dixon did not like the way the pastor was running things and advanced on him with a chair. Pastor Gray quickly drew out a bowie knife and the deacon retreated. The matter was brought before the examiners, and the Rev. Gray acquitted on the ground that he had only imitated Simon Peter, who drew his sword in self-defence against Malchus.

Why hatred to Christians exists in China from the highest to the lowest, and from one end of the country to another, is a complex question. A missionary at Mingpo casts some light on it by reporting the utterance of an old Chinese woman—"You foreigners bring opium in one hand and Jesus in the other."

The anti-Christian crusade in China reminds us of the crusade against the Jews in the Middle Ages. Equally unscrupulous statements are made against the hated race, but the Chinese have never proceeded to such wholesale violence as the Jews suffered in the time of the Crusades, and afterwards when expelled from Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella.

The Arabs in Palestine asks what God is about that he permits a railway train to be brought into Jerusalem. They say it is the work of Satan; and when the Christians hear of a refreshment buffet being put up at the Mount of Olives, they will think so too.

The *Flaming Sword* announces the union of the Koreshans and the Shakers of Mt. Lebanon. Both sects believe in the motherhood of God and practise celibacy and communism. Whether the Shakers accept Koresh Teed as a new Messiah and adopt his astronomical theory that the earth is concave, is not stated.

Archduke Eugen, youngest brother of the Queen Regent of Spain, and a colonel in the Austrian army, is to be made Archbishop of Olmütz, an archbishopric which, by custom, carries with it a cardinal's hat. In the Middle Ages it was quite customary for bishops to be soldiers also, and Pope Julius II. prided himself upon being a better soldier than a priest.

It is reported that the action for libel against the Rev. J. P. Foster, secretary of the Clergy Fees Reform Association, will be allowed to drop, as that gentleman can bring forward a number of shady transactions on the part of episcopal secretaries and other ecclesiastical dignitaries.

Whittier, the recently deceased poet, told a story of an Hibernian resolution passed at an old Quakers' meeting:—"It is the sense of this meeting that John Gould speak no more in meeting until the Lord speak through him to the satisfaction of this meeting."

Mr. W. T. Stead got some big guns to attend his Rochdale meeting, the object of which was to consider his proposal of a Civic Church, which he fondly hopes will include Christians and Atheists. The Mayor of Rochdale was present, and Archdeacon Wilson presided over the evening meeting in the Public Hall. One gentleman, however, a Mr. Whitehead, broke the silly harmony of the proceedings. Like an honest man, and not an enterprising humbug, he said he could not, in face of the New Testament, accept the idea of Christians and Atheists working together. Mr. Stead will never succeed in this effort. He may open a door for Atheists, but they won't walk in. They have better business outside.

Mr. Stead wants all the sects to form a sort of Happy Family, like those we occasionally see in the streets—hostile and sulky, until stirred up to a semblance of harmony by the showman's stick. The Happy Family is to be called a Civic Church, and we suppose the stick is to be wielded by Mr. Stead.

By the way, we see that there is a Socialist "Church of the Carpenter" at Boston, in the United States—the Boston, the hub of the universe. There is a Bible Class in connexion with it "whose members are of all shades of faith or no faith." More happy family business! We should like to attend a meeting of that Bible Class when a good subject is on the table—say Jonah's sub-marine excursion or the miraculous birth of the "Carpenter."

"Be ye wise as serpents." Quite so, says the parson of St. Luke's Church, Bolsover. He is raising an organ fund, and is going to make a profit out of athletic sports; and although a prominent temperance advocate himself, he has authorised eleven publicans to book entries for the competitions.

God began by interdicting the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Whatever interpretation be put on these matters, there can be no doubt they reflect the priestly disposition, and indicate the kind of character priests would like to cultivate.

Talmage finds the English people naturally more religious than the Americans. We fear it is a true discovery. Colonel Ingersoll has a great popularity in America. He would never gain it in England.

"To bow to human authority," says Talmage, "is to go far towards bowing to divine authority." Yes; and *vice versa*. Making the people bow to divine authority—that is, to the gabble of priests—is the best way to make them submissive to their rulers.

"There is no more impious blasphemy upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ," says a Walsall Wesleyan minister, "than to make religion pleasant." We quite agree with him. Jesus wept. He never smiled. We also hope the Walsall Wesleyan minister's view will prevail. The more unpleasant the religion of Jesus Christ is made the more rapidly it will decline.

A young woman who was recently "confirmed" told me that the minister told her that when she took communion she need not drink any of the wine, but merely touch the cup to her lips. She also showed me in her prayer book the following: "And if any of the consecrated bread and wine remain after the communion, it shall not be carried out of the church, but the minister and other communicants shall immediately after the blessing reverently eat and drink the same." Strange coincidence, isn't it?—*American Paper*

## MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, Sept. 25, Shepherds' Hall, Old Market-street, Bristol: at 11, "Why I Cannot be a Christian"; at 3, "Who Wrote the Bible?"; at 7, "Why I am an Atheist."

October 2, Liverpool; 7, Chatham; 9 and 16, Hall of Science, London; 23, Newcastle; 30, South Shields.

Nov. 6, Camberwell; 13 and 20, Hall of Science; 27, Manchester.

Dec. 4, Grimsby; 11 and 18, Hall of Science, London.

## TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS' ENGAGEMENTS.—September 25, Hall of Science, London. October 2, Hall of Science, London; 9 and 16, Birmingham; 19, 20 and 21, Aberdeen; 23, Glasgow; 25 and 26, Belfast; 30, Edinburgh. Nov. 1 to 8, Chester; 6 and 13, Birmingham; 20, Sheffield; 27, Hall of Science, London. 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.

Sept. 25, Bristol.

J. COOKE.—We note your report that Dr. Harrison only allowed five minutes for discussion at Exeter Hall. We guessed there would be some restriction. If Dr. Harrison is open for a set debate we shall be very happy to meet him. It would be better (for both sides) than skirmishing.

JOSEPHUS.—Jesus always enjoins "doing the will of your Father which is in heaven," adding "great is your reward in heaven." We know nothing of "the divine method." You must apply elsewhere for information on that point.

T. W. WILD.—Darwin *did* subscribe to a missionary society in extreme South America. Probably he thought Christianity was fit for the savages there. He did not subscribe to societies for spreading Christianity in civilised countries. Read Mr. Foote's *Darwin on God*.

F. E. LOVEGROVE.—(1) We do not "deny the existence of God," or assert that there is no higher intelligence than man's. We simply say that man's is the highest intelligence we know, and that all definitions of "God" are either self-contradictory or at variance with the facts of nature. "Atheist" means "without God" as all must be who have no knowledge of such a being's existence.

ASTRONOMY.—We don't pretend to any authority on the subject. You should consult an elementary treatise—say Lockyer's. The bulging at the equator, and the flattening at the poles, are due to the earth's rotation while in a less rigid state than at present. If the earth "stopped" revolving, the subsequent events would be of little interest—to us. We shouldn't survive the catastrophe.

W. C. CLARKE.—Prophecy is too big a subject for this column. You will find a lot of "Unfulfilled Prophecies" in the fourth part of our *Bible Handbook*. Bishop Newton's book is reckoned a standard in orthodox circles. Thomas Paine deals to some extent with prophecy in the *Age of Reason*. You had better ask your Christian friend to name a single clear prophecy (not written after the event, mind) in the whole of the Bible which came to pass; or which, if it did come to pass, was clearly beyond the foresight of a sagacious observer.

A. E. R.—Mr. Foote could not see his way to attend Dr. Harrison's meetings. It would be rather undignified for the President of the National Secular Society to scramble for five minutes after Dr. Harrison's lecture. Mr. Foote debated with him for four nights at Newcastle in 1877, and is quite willing to meet him now in London.

J. W. GOTT says Bradford newsgagents complain that they have to pay tenpence per dozen for the *Freethinker* while they get ordinary London papers for ninepence. This is not our fault. The *Freethinker* is supplied from our publishing office on the usual terms—eighteen-pence per quire (27 copies). This leaves fifty per cent. profit, to be divided between the wholesale agents and the newsvendors. If the wholesale agents take too much, the newsvendors should protect themselves. It is difficult for us to do it for them.

R. O. SMITH, treasurer London Secular Federation, acknowledges:—J. Rowney, £1 2s. 6d.; West London Branch, 11s. 11d.; Camberwell Branch, 8s. 3d.; Finsbury Branch, 4s. The Federation is urgently in need of funds, and London Freethinkers should see that it is supplied with them. Address treasurer, 142 Old-street, E.C.

D. HERBERT MARSHALL, of Boston, U.S.A., in sending us a good budget of American jocularities, writes as follows:—"I take this opportunity of saying how much I appreciate the *Freethinker*, and hope it will in the future yield you a handsome return for the outlay of money, time, and brains that you have expended on the ablest and cheapest Freethought journal which it has been my good fortune to read."

E. F. REMINGTON.—We will look through the volume, and notice it if we find it advisable to do so. Freethought, as you say, is making great progress among the educated and thoughtful.

CLARKE, newsagent, 18 Virginia-row, Shoreditch, supplies the *Freethinker* and other Secular publications.

W. FARMER.—Pleased to hear you are delighted with *Comic Sermons*. The pamphlet is selling very well.

SERGEANT J. MCKAY, a member of the N.S.S., sends 20s. for his annual subscription, and wishes he could make it much more. He desires some member to correspond with in shorthand. His address is, 2nd York and Lancashire Regiment, Eshowe, Zululand.

ROBERT FORDER, our publisher, will be happy to supply copies of Conway's *Life of Paine*.

H. GUTHRIE.—We had already seen it. Thanks all the same. See "Acid Drops."

J. NEATE reports that another attempt was made on Sunday to break up the Freethought meeting in Victoria Park. We hope this open-air station of the Bethnal Green Branch will be loyally supported by the local Freethinkers.

H. S. H. is advised by R. Jones to go to Aston's, High-street, Birmingham, where he can get the *Freethinker* on Thursday afternoons.

JOSEPH BROWN, sec. N.E. Secular Federation, acknowledges the following:—Samuel Seal, £1; W. F. Johnson, 3s. 1d.; Ralph Young, 5s.; Sunderland Branch, 1s.; Newcastle collection, 19s. 8d.

D. MACLAREN.—Pleased to hear from you as hon. secretary of the Australian Secular Association. We had already brought the opening service at the Sydney Freethought Hall to our readers' attention. Thanks for the enclosures—report and Almanack notice.

REPUBLICAN.—Paine's *Rights of Man*, Bradlaugh's *House of Brunswick*, Foote's *Royal Paupers*.

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—Open Court—Freidenker—Two Worlds—Der Arme Teufel—Liberty—Liberator—Progressive Thinker—Flaming Sword—Secular Thought—Modern Thought—Twentieth Century—Correspondenz blatt des Deutschen Freidenker Bundes—Für Unsere Jugend—Freethinker's Magazine—Truthseeker—Western Figaro—Clarion—Church Reformer—Ironclad Age—Birmingham Daily Mail—San Francisco Telegram—Partick Star—Eastern Province Herald—Sheffield and Rotherham Independent—Manchester Saturday Telegram—Liverpool Echo.

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.

CORRESPONDENCE should reach us not later than Tuesday if a reply is desired in the current issue. Otherwise the reply stands over till the following week.

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

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

## SUGAR PLUMS.

We have just ordered a fresh supply of *Freethinker* paper, which comes to us in bulk from the paper-mill. It is of the old quality. For the present, at any rate, there will be no change in the price of this journal. We believe it will pay eventually on the present lines. Its circulation has increased by more than fifty per cent. in the last three years, and there is no reason why it should not go on increasing. It will be some time, however, on the most favorable estimate, before it ceases to be a loss to us; and a longer time before it remunerates us for our editorial labors. We beg to thank those who have subscribed to our Sustentation Fund, which we hope will not be lost sight of by our friends in all parts of the world.

"FREETHINKER" SUSTENTATION FUND.—(To enable us to maintain this journal at its present size and price until its increasing circulation reaches the paying point).—Daniel Baker, £5; P. Condon, 1s.; R. Green, 5s.; J. Barnaby, 1s.

Mr. Foote's new lecture on "Men, Women, and Children," at the London Hall of Science on Sunday evening, was listened to with deep attention, and very earnestly applauded. A good many ladies were present, who seemed greatly interested.

Mr. Foote's principal object in debating with the Rev. J. M. Logan, at Bristol, was to resuscitate the local Freethought movement and to form a new Branch of the National Secular

Society. This object was achieved. A good Branch was established, and it has been doing excellent work. Mr. Foote returns to Bristol to-day (Sept. 25) to deliver three lectures in the Shepherds' Hall. St. James's Hall would have been engaged, but the directors still adhere to their timid and foolish policy of not permitting discussion on Sunday. Mr. Foote regrets to say that he has twelve fully paid-up shares in the St. James's Hall Company.

Mr. Charles Watts lectures at the London Hall of Science this evening (Sept. 25), his subject being "The Blight of Superstition." We hope he will have a good meeting.

Mr. Watts's lecture in the Birmingham Town Hall has not been followed by cholera or earthquake. The local *Owl* (a wise bird) says that Mr. Watts is "a person of courteous manners" and feels "quite sure the public will approve the conduct of the Mayor." "In the past," the *Owl* writes, "there has, we believe, been some hesitation in granting the use of the hall to Secularists for the purpose of Freethought lectures, and it is pleasant to think the ignorant prejudice is on the wane".

The Jews' "Yom Kippur" falls on Saturday next (Oct. 1). The Freethinking Jews of London—and there are a good many of them—will celebrate the day in a very heterodox fashion. They have taken the Hall of Science for the occasion, as they have done for three or four years past. Speeches will be delivered in Yiddish and English. Messrs. Foote, Watts, Parris and Standring will probably address the meeting (it is sure to be a big one) on behalf of the National Secular Society.

London Freethinkers should flock to the Hall of Science on Wednesday evening, when a Social Gathering will take place in commemoration of Charles Bradlaugh's birthday. There will be brief speeches in the large hall by Messrs. Holyoake, Watts, Parris, Standring and Foote; and afterwards a concert and ball. The tickets are one shilling. All profits will go to the funds of the National Secular Society.

Mr. Bradlaugh's birthday really falls on the Monday (Sept. 26), but it was impossible to arrange for the gathering on that evening at the Hall of Science. The celebration will be just as effective on the Wednesday. Thomas Paine's birthday has often been celebrated a day or two after date.

Miss Vance informs us that Mr. Ernest Anderson will sing a song he has written for the occasion, entitled "Bradlaugh and the Right," at this gathering. Applications for further supplies of tickets should be made to Miss Vance at 28 Stonecutter-street.

Mr. George Anderson is again sending parcels of literature through Mr. Forder to about twenty soldiers and sailors for distribution among their freethinking comrades, and two parcels to fishermen in the North Sea. Each parcel is of the value of more than ten shillings, and, judging from the pleasure the former consignments gave to the "saints" in the army and navy, these will be most welcome to them.

A general meeting of the Nottingham Branch will be held this evening (Sept. 25) at 7 in the usual place. All members are earnestly invited to attend.

Colonel Ingersoll, like other Freethinkers, is represented by reckless Christians as an enemy of domestic virtue. For the edification of these gentry we extract the following from a writer in the *New York Press*:—"One of the strongest and best things that I have witnessed in the Colonel's career occurred at a supper given by an uptown club in New York several years ago. Around the table there were gathered actors, authors, newspaper men, dramatic writers, and club men. Colonel Ingersoll was one of the honored guests of the club. It was the habit of this club at dinners thus given to have a special subject for discussion. This night the subject was 'Is Marriage a Failure?' The tone of the talk was commonplace, vulgar, inane, almost idiotic. One guest after another made some commonplace attempt to be witty at the expense of the institution of marriage. In the midst of this talk the Colonel's turn came, and I have never seen a more triumphant display of the influence of serious and dignified treatment of what is the most serious and dignified thing in

life. It was like a cool wind displacing an atmosphere of malaria. The Colonel with a brush of his hand waved aside the idle talk of the moment and said that the man who says that marriage is a failure has never stood with his hand locked in the loyal grasp of a wife and mother at the side of a child's grave. The tribute which followed to marriage, to love and its duties was so eloquent, so convincing, and so touching, that there was hardly a dry eye in the room when he finished. His speech put an end to the discussion. The Colonel is by nature a loyal enthusiast. He is a firm friend, and does not understand friendship clouded by personal interest. His devotion to his family is one of the most marked traits of his nature."

The Arbroath Branch had its first country jaunt on Sunday. The members and friends enjoyed themselves thoroughly. They also did some propagandist work, taking back numbers of the *Freethinker*, etc., and distributing them on the road.

The South Shields Branch is going to make a presentation to one of its members, the veteran Captain W. B. Duncan. It will be made after a tea at the Royal Hotel on October 5. The tickets (1s. 6d.) can be obtained to-day (Sept. 25) at the lectures in the Free Library Hall, or afterwards at Mr. Peacock's, 35 Baring-street. Those who cannot attend the tea at 7, will be admitted free to the presentation at 8.

Miss Luna E. Monroe, of Indianapolis, was married at her mother's residence, on Sunday, September 4, to Mr. Charles Vernon Webb, of Pittsburg. She is the daughter of the late Dr. J. R. Monroe, editor of the *Ironclad Age*—a paper which is now gallantly sustained by his son, Mr. Harry C. Monroe. During her father's lifetime she contributed many bright articles to its pages, and it is to be hoped that marriage will not cause her pen to lie idle.

Mr. Maclaren, secretary of the Australian Secular Association, favors us with a document which we shall preserve. It is the Program of the Shelley Centenary celebration at the School of Arts, Pitt-street, Sydney, of which we have already given an account.

In the *Liberator*, of Aug. 6, Mr. Symes gives an account of his journey from Melbourne to Sydney to the opening of the new Freethought hall, which he describes as a really beautiful building, compact and nice, and a capital place to speak in. Mr. Symes himself spoke from the text, "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former."

The *Liberator* for Aug. 13 contains a full report of the proceedings at the opening of the new Freethought Hall at Sydney, N.S.W. In the lecture which Mr. Symes delivered upon the occasion, he gave some account of the progress of Freethought. Here is an extract: "When those two great contemporaries, Matthew Tindal and John Toland, wrote their books, the one, *Christianity as old as the Creation*, the other, *Christianity not Mystical*, they little dreamt of the tremendous and long-continued intellectual and moral agitation they had commenced. They never dreamt that the thought-wave they raised would break upon the coast of France and sweep over that land, leaving Infidelity and Atheism in possession. They never foresaw that the wave would sweep round from France to Germany and rouse the ponderous Teuton to such a course of destructive criticism as the world had never seen. Nor did they imagine that the reflex of that wave would roll back again to England in the shape of open Atheistic propaganda; and thence sweep on to America, to Australia, to India and to Africa."

Mr. Wallace Nelson was presented with a purse of money at a highly successful concert and ball, given by his Brisbane Freethought friends, previously to his departure for New Zealand.

The London *Echo* has been giving space to a correspondence on Eternal Torment. Some of the correspondents belong to the Roasters, but others disbelieve that a benevolent God will cook his own children. The discussion will do good. It will sow the seeds of doubt in many orthodox minds.

The *Daily Chronicle* has a tardy notice on W. M. W. Call's *Final Causes*. It is chiefly remarkable for speaking of the refutation of Paley's *Natural Theology* as a slaying of the slain. But controversialists know that the old design argument shows more signs of life than any of the metaphysical alleged evidences of a creator.

The Bethnal Green Branch holds a public tea next Sunday (Oct. 2) at the Libra Hall, 78 Libra-road, Roman-road, E.—to be followed by a dramatic entertainment. Tea at 5.30; entertainment at 7; tickets sixpence.

The *Review of Reviews* for Sept. 15 is as scrappy as usual. Freethinkers, however, may care to see the portraits of Frederic Harrison, Bjornson, and Dr. R. L. Garner, who is investigating ape language. Some extracts from Ingersoll's *Paine the Pioneer* are given under the vulgar heading, "In Praise of Tom Paine."

Mr. Wheeler's *Bible Studies* is having a steady, if not a rapid sale. We helped him to select the essays for this volume, and we heartily recommend it to all studious Freethinkers. We do not know where they will find so much valuable information about the Bible in so small a compass. It is a book that should be on the shelf, and often in the hands, of those who really want to understand the Protestant Fetish.

Mr. Foote's *Royal Paupers* is out of print. Three editions, of thirteen thousand copies altogether, have been exhausted. A fourth edition is in the press and will be ready next week. Mr. Foote will shortly publish a companion pamphlet on *Aristocratic Paupers*.

#### THE DECLINE OF METHODISM:

THE publication by the *Methodist Recorder*, a month or two ago, of a census of Methodism, somewhat discounted the interest we should otherwise have felt in the official figures presented to the Conference recently held at Bradford. When the *Recorder* statistics were published, the Rev. Thomas Waugh, who is one of a number of specially selected soul-snatchers belonging to the connection, said that "Methodist census had nearly broken his heart, and caused him what they called in Yorkshire, one or two 'good cries.' Methodism had a drawer full of prescriptions, and she was sick through taking nostrums. She wanted her native air." When physicians decry their own physic it is a bad look out for the patient. What Methodism's "native air" might be we are not able to glean, but if it should have any relation to the windbags in the ministry the supply should be plentiful enough.

The *Methodist Times* said it "confessed to a great sense of relief that there is any increase at all." The organ of the much-lauded "forward" movement in Methodism is evidently thankful for very small mercies. It remarked, too, that if it hadn't been for the work of special "missions," which, we may say, are generally assisted by brass bands and fiddling orchestras, the results would have been deplorable. "If these missions had not been established," says the *Times* "the retreat before now might have become a rout. But God called them into existence in the very nick of time." How thoughtful of God! As the editor of the *Methodist Times* was one of the principal founders of these "missions," how good it is of him to allow God to have the credit of the initiative in the matter, whilst he, with characteristic modesty, plays second fiddle to the Almighty. But it seems we want something even more than the "missions" which God was good enough to call into existence in the very nick of time. "Oh!" exclaims the *Times*, "Oh! for a great blast of the Breath of God [capital B for breath] to sweep us all out of our studies and vestries into the very midst of the millions and millions for whose souls no man practically and effectively cares." Let the blast of a Breath with a capital B come, say I, and sweep them all anywhere so long as it sweeps them! Perhaps the cholera is a sample of the Breath with a capital B, and will do more sweeping than the pious editor bargains for if it gets a good footing in our midst.

Coming to the Conference, there was the usual time allotted to the usual "Conversation on the work of God," which, being interpreted, means a discussion on the position and prospects of Methodism.

The proceedings were very appropriately opened with the singing of the hymn beginning, "Holy Spirit, pity me," after which the Rev. John Walton wrestled with the Lord in prayer, "led" them, the report says, which perhaps is the more fitting term, and regard the Rev. John as the bell-wether. Then the Rev. W. D. Walters, who opened the Conversation or discussion, said that "what they wanted in their sanctuaries was more of the raw material. They needed in some way to lay hold on the non-worshipping classes," which was a very sensible observation, but he wasn't very clear how this was to be done. However, "he was confident the connexion was looking forward to important and blessed results," and those results would certainly follow if they "waited upon God and cultivated a passion for the salvation of men." As the Connexion has been looking forward to those blessed results for a considerable time past, and they haven't come, it is rather disheartening. But we presume a deputation will wait upon his celestial majesty and lay the case before him, and meanwhile they will go on "cultivating" the passion.

The Rev. Mr. Posnett "said he had been studying the numerical statistics for 107 years, in periods of seven years, and he was grieved to say that the last septennial period was, with regard to increase, the lowest of them all. . . . In 1783 the total number of members was 39,902, and in 1790 the number had risen to 58,673, showing an increase at the end of that period of 18,771. The increase at the end of the second period was 23,840, at the end of the third period 14,602, and at the end of the fourth period 49,399. This was followed by an increase of 49,487. In 1825 the increase reported was 33,545 on the same period (seven years). Other septennial increases were as follows: In the period 1832, 27,626; 1839, 50,796; in 1846, 34,400. . . . Seven years after that (1856) an increase was reported of 65,879—a single year (1860) showing an increase of 17,516. The septennial periods following that showed increases respectively of 18,767, 33,818, and 28,077. He regretted to say that during the last eight years the net increase amounted to no more than 14,591. Those figures were to his mind startling. He was no pessimist; he was disposed generally to look at the hopeful side of things; but the figures he had given were very significant." Mr. Posnett's remedy for this lugubrious state of affairs was—two or three days' fasting and self-denial! He prayed that God would send down upon them "a gracious rain of righteousness," and remarked that "it was not very creditable to a minister for it to be said that he was skilful in playing lawn-tennis and fishing and shooting, if he was not skilful in saving souls."

The Rev. Mr. Middleton agreed with the Rev. Mr. Waters on "cultivating a passion for souls," and the Rev. Burrows thought they needed humiliation, and confession and rededication to God. "The weakest part of Methodism," said he, "was in the ministry," at which there were indignant cries of "Oh!" for the Rev. Burrows had evidently touched them on a weak part.

The Rev. H. Price Hughes did not think they wanted just now a time set apart for fasting and prayer. He did not even think there was any occasion for depression, as "the prospects of British Methodism were never brighter than they were to-day." Mr. Hughes, by the way, is always telling us this, but somehow the figures don't accord with the prospects and Methodism continues to lose ground. "They should," said the oracle of the "forward" movement, "set the risen and living Christ before the people. That would produce such a sense of sin as nothing else would." Yes, Mr. Hughes, if the Churches could only set a real live Jesus before us it would create a sensation equalling in intensity the production of a Mahatma. Fetch on your Jesus, Mr. Hughes. But why a look at that unfortunate young fellow should produce such a "sense of sin" we fail to comprehend. It would, at any rate, produce a sense of curiosity to see how he would look in nineteenth century attire. One wonders how he would look in trousers. It would never do for him to walk the streets of our large towns in the sheet and blanket fashion he is generally pictured in, or the small boys would lead him a livelier time of it than their predecessors of old led the bald-headed prophet. Would he don the uniform

of the Salvation Army, dress in the melancholy garb of a Methodist parson, or affect the newest cut of collar, the latest thing in ties, and the most approved shape in hats? One thing is certain: it is highly improbable that he would ever know anything about carpentering; the odds are that he would have been either a tailor or an itinerant glazier. Jesus with glass on his back, or wrinkles in the knees of his trousers, would hardly be an edifying figure. No, the "living Christ" would scarcely be a success, and Mr. Hughes was nearer the mark when he hinted that what they wanted was "sanctified common sense," though one would think ordinary common sense would do.

The Rev. Mr. Barber suggested that they "didn't pray as their fathers did," and that what they wanted was "more conferences," whereupon the president of the conference, Dr. Rigg, said it was "time they brought that conference to a close. . . . He quite agreed with Mr. Hughes, who said they wanted sanctified common sense. . . . At the same time he thought they wanted a great deal more religion. . . . He did not believe they were as consecrated as they ought to be, that they were as consistent as they ought to be, or as prayerful as they ought to be. In fact," said Dr. Rigg, "he felt there was something wanting. They wanted much more than sanctified common sense. . . . He felt humbled at the results of the last three or four years. He was sure there was something wanting, and his prayer was that God would make them all in earnest, and that they might have such a spirit of prayer and consecration as should give them abounding fruit."

If the "spirit of prayer and consecration"—which seems to be the hope of Dr. Rigg, and an application of which is to flog the old Methodist horse into the semblance of a gallop—is to be no more successful in the coming year than in the past, we fear the progress of Methodism will be exceedingly slow indeed. The ancient quadruped of the good old revival days cannot be galvanised, let alone flogged, into the pretence of a gallop. It is blind, spavined, and broken-winded. The older it gets the slower it gets. It can neither be coaxed nor driven into anything approaching its previous "form," and there is nothing left to do but to consign it to the skinyard of played-out old "crocks."

There is one fact we wish to draw attention to in connexion with the decay of Methodism in particular, and religion in general in this country, while the churches generally are bewailing the decline in attendance at places of worship, our judges and magistrates throughout the land remark the improved state of public morality. Coincident with the decline of religion is the decrease of crime. To hear religious people talk, there can be no morality worth speaking of without religion, consequently the country should, according to them, be going to the dogs from a moral point of view. Yet we see the exact reverse is the case. Only the other day Mr. Justice Matthews, speaking on the immorality prevalent in Wales (which is nothing if not a religious country), remarked that "he did not know where to look for a remedy for this state of things unless"—unless what? unless to religion? No. But "unless it was to education." Here then is an admission by one of our judges who is himself a religious man, that it is to education, not to religion, that we are to look for an improvement in our morals. The question naturally suggests itself—If religion is not to be looked to, to improve morality, what is it good for?

As a matter of fact, Education, which has always been a prominent plank in the Secular platform, has done more for the elevation of the country within recent years than all the revivals, and missions, and churches, and parsons, and religious movements generally, that ever existed.

H. J.

### THE ATHEIST.

"TELL me a story, uncle," said a child.  
A Christian's fair-headed child one day to me.  
My mood was sorrowful and yet I smiled  
That beaming joyous countenance to see,  
And told a story while he bore me company.

Of how there lived a youth in days gone by,  
A gallant youth of spirit, true and brave,  
Who served his race and fought most famously  
With word and sword his countrymen to save  
From giants grim and gaunt—from slavery's dark grave;

Of how the men and women whom he served  
Still hated him with fierce untiring hate,  
While he from virtue's path no moment swerved—  
Of scorn no whit afear'd but of their fate  
If only he should leave them to the weight  
Of fear of God and Hell, oppress'd and desolate.

And while the tear was rising in mine eye  
Moved by mine own sad tale—the younster kist  
My hand and whispered "Was it Jesus?" I  
Answered "Ah, no, it is not as ye list,  
The Christian tale hangs round you like a mist,  
The youth I tell you of was a bad Atheist."

RON MAHON.

### RAILWAYS AND CHRIST.

CURIOUS palimpsest found on excavating for station for the Jaffa and Jerusalem Railway. One side has the appearance of having served as a time-table in the remote past, and seems to bear a date, very faint but still legible, of December, A. D. 1—of course, in Aramean. Translated by Schapira Ben Zoline, L.Y.R.E., etc. :—

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, behold there came wise excursionists from the East to Jerusalem, Saying, where is he that is born, for we heard the news by the last down engine, and have come by the first cheap trip to purchase a season ticket for the son of God.

When Herod the King heard these things he was troubled and all those near the terminus at Jerusalem also. And when he had gathered all the chief porters and ticket clerks together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

And they said unto him, Bethlehem of Judea, for there the excursion trains run for the lowly shilling return.

And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least station amongst the railways of Judah, for out of thee shall come the fiercest whistle and the boldest tourist of Cook, who shall regulate the time-tables of my people Israel. . . .

[Here the parchment becomes undecipherable; but still this is quite enough to show "there is nothing new under the sun."]

### SHELLEY AN ATHEIST.

In religion, Shelley was an Atheist. There is nothing uncommon in that; but he actually called himself one, and urged others to follow his example. He never trifled with the word God: he knew that it meant a personal First Cause, Almighty Creator, and Supreme Judge and Ruler of the Universe, and that it did not mean anything else, never had meant anything else, and never whilst the English language lasted would mean anything else. Knowing perfectly well that there was no such person, he did not pretend that the question was an open one, or imply, by calling himself an Agnostic, that there might be such a person for all he knew to the contrary. He did know to the contrary: and he said so. Further, though there never was a man with so abiding and full a consciousness of the omnipresence of a living force, manifesting itself here in the germination and growth of a tree, there in the organisation of a poet's brain, and elsewhere in the putrefaction of a dead dog, he never condescended to beg off being an Atheist by calling this omnipresent energy God, or even Pan. He lived and died professedly, almost boastfully, godless. In his time, however, as at present, God was little more than a word to the English people. What they really worshipped was the Bible; and our modern Church movement to get away from Bible fetishism and back to some presentable sort of Christianity (*vide* Mr. Horton's speech at Grindelwald the other day, for example) had not then come to the surface. The preliminary pickaxing work of Bible smashing had yet to be done; and Shelley, who found the moral atmosphere of the Old Testament murderous and abominable, and the asceticism of the New suicidal and pessimistic, smashed away at the Bible with all his might and main.—*G. B. Shaw*, in "The Albemarle."

Let us, then, abandon the pretence of following our old guides. The Churches do but formulate their ignorance both of the starting-point and of the goal of morality; dead to the needs and hopes of the present, their theories are of interest now only as historical relics.—*J. F. Yorke*, "Notes on Evolution and Christianity."

## A NEW AND STARTLING INVENTION.

To the Editor.

I WRITE to you because I suppose you know all about advertisements and those who bring out new inventions. I am a deacon in the Presbyterian church in this place. Our pastor left us a year ago, and we have been "trying" candidates ever since. Our people are hard to please; some have been too tall, others too short, one is too fiery, the next too tame. "Too much of a dude," "a careless man in his dress," "much too liberal," "far too conservative," "preaches too long," "hurries through with his sermon," were among the various criticisms. Our pew committee were discouraged. No combination of excellencies could be obtained for the 1,000 dols. a year we could offer.

While we were talking over this matter one day, a spruce young man appeared and announced himself as agent for the "Automatic Pulpit Supply Company, Limited," of New York City. He explained that it was a new use of the phonograph, by which an automatic figure could conduct the entire service. Fresh sermons could be furnished every week and the taste of the parish fully met. The preacher could be of any size and style, and his pulpit oratory could be fervid, moderate, or classical, as desired. We went over all the expressed views of our congregation, and decided on a man of about forty-five, faultlessly but not showily dressed, flowing side whiskers, medium build, with expressive gestures, strong yet silvery voice and graceful manner. The sermons were to be equal to those delivered by the late Mr. Beecher or the living Mr. Spurgeon; 500 dols. was the price asked for a year's supply. This was economy—no presents, no donation parties, no "special appeals," and a saving of fully one half our appropriation. We closed on the spot. Our sexton was surprised to find the minister in the pulpit before he arrived. He smiled and graciously bowed to the worthy pew-cleaner. The congregation filed in; all were charmed with the appearance of the supposed candidate. The service began. A sweet, melodious voice gave out the hymns, read the scriptures, made the prayers, and announced the collection. Then began his sermon. Such a discourse! The people were spell-bound. He had got to fifthly when an accident occurred. We had hired Deacon Smith's son Bob to turn the crank in the adjoining room. He became tired of turning one way and reversed the motion. The effect was certainly electrical. The words were repeated backward. He returned to fourthly, and then in turn to thirdly, secondly, and firstly, and then announced another collection. The people were amazed to hear a minister so quickly "go back on his own sermon." I and the other members of the supply committee rushed up the pulpit and neatly tripped up the backsliding figure. We then announced that a sudden illness had overtaken the clergyman, which accounted for the strange performance, and the congregation were dismissed. Deacon Smith stopped to settle with his erring son, but the others of the committee hastened home. The apparatus is now hidden away in the loft. We have no use for it. We have not the address of the Automatic Pulpit Supply Company, and do not know how to recover the 100 dols. we paid in advance. Can you help us? Certainly our contract is not fulfilled, and besides disadvantages to the use of a dumb figure we did not think of at first now suggest themselves to us. We are sick of our bargain. We want our money back, or will sell the apparatus cheap. Please to advise us in the matter, and if possible, furnish us the address desired.—

Yours truly,

JAMES TODD.

—Phonographic World (N.Y.)

## HOW TO HELP US.

- (1) Got your newsagent to exhibit the *Freethinker* in the window.
- (2) Get your newsagent to take a few copies of the *Freethinker* and try to sell them, guaranteeing to take the copies that remain unsold.
- (3) Take an extra copy (or more), and circulate it among your acquaintances.
- (4) Display, or get displayed, one of our contents-sheets, which are of a convenient size for the purpose. Mr. Forder will send them on application.
- (5) Leave a copy of the *Freethinker* now and then in the train, the car, or the omnibus.
- (6) Distribute some of our cheap tracts in your walks abroad, at public meetings, or among the audiences around street-corner preachers.

## PROFANE JOKES.

Johnny—"Do you say your prayers every night?" Freddy—"I do whenever I've gotter sleep in the folding bed."

Scene—a Restaurant (two little boys dining at a public place for the first time. Waiter just giving change for bill). Little Boy—"I suppose, father, we don't give thanks to the Lord when we pay for our dinner, do we?"

Visitor (at dinner)—"How do you know I'm the new minister, my little man? Did your mamma tell you?" Small Boy (destined for the gallows)—"No! I knew you by the chicken." "By the chicken? What do you mean?" "Why, that's the sick chicken that ma was cooking."

A young man recently bought a cornet with the intention of learning to play. The man who sold it to him met his little brother. "By the way," he inquired, "how is Charlie getting along with his cornet playing?" "He ain't gittin' long at all," sniffed the youngster. "He's been blowing away at it every night, but this morning one of the neighbors came over and told him in plain language that he'd better be learnin' to play the harp, for he might need it soon, and I think Charlie is going to give up music altogether."

## 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): 3, members' quarterly meeting; 5.30, tea, entertainment and dancing (6d.) Monday at 8, free social gathering in commemoration of Charles Bradlaugh's birthday. Thursday at 8.30, C. Gater opens discussion on "Is Life Worth Living?"

Bethnal Green—Libra Hall, 78 Libra-road, Roman-road: 7.30, Mrs. Thornton Smith will lecture. Monday at 9, C. Cohen's science class (astronomy). Friday at 9, reading class, "Spencer's Ethics."

Camberwell—81 New Church-road, S.E.: 7.30, H. Snell, "Programe of Christianity."

Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.: 6.30, musical selections; 7, Charles Watts, "The Blight of Superstition."

Milton Hall, Hawley-crescent, Kentish Town-road, N.W.: 7.30, Mrs. Louisa Samson, "Prayer."

## OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Battersea Park-gates: 11.15, C. Cohen, "Christianity and Morality."

Bethnal Green (opposite St. John's Church): 11.15, S. H. Alison will lecture.

Camberwell—Station-road: 11.30, H. Snell, "There were Giants in those Days."

Clerkenwell Green: 11.30, G. Standing, "Secularism: Humanity's only Hope."

Edmonton (corner of Angel-road): 6.30, J. C. will lecture.

Finsbury Park (near the band-stand): 11.30, H. Courtney, "Peace on Earth"; 3.30, E. Calvert, "The Soul."

Hammersmith (corner of The Grove): Thursday at 8, a lecture. Hammersmith-bridge (Middlesex side): 6.30, C. J. Hunt, "The Bible God."

Hyde Park (near Marble-arch): 11.30, J. Rowney, "The Sermon on the Mount."

Kilburn—Salisbury-road (near Queen's Park Station): 6.30, a lecture.

Leyton (open space near Vicarage-road, High-road): 11.30, a lecture.

Mill End Waste: 11.30, W. Heaford, "The Holy Bible: is it a Divine Book?"

Old Pimlico Pier: 11.30, C. J. Hunt, "Prayer."

Plaistow Green: 6.30, C. J. Steinberg will lecture.

Regent's Park (near Gloucester-gate): 3.30, W. Heaford will lecture.

Victoria Park (near the fountain): 11.15, C. J. Steinberg will lecture; 3.15, C. Cohen will lecture.

Walthamstow—Markhouse Common: 6.30, C. Cohen will lecture. Wood Green—Jolly Butchers-hill: 11.30, E. Calvert, "Is Matter able of itself to Produce its Phenomena?"

## COUNTRY.

Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge-street; Mrs. Annie Besant, 11, "Theosophy and Ethics"; 3, "Miracles of Modern Science"; 7, "Hell: do Christians Believe in it?" Monday at 8, soiree in commemoration of Charles Bradlaugh's birthday.

Blackburn—Spinners' Institute, Peter-street: 3, a meeting.

Bradford—Unity Lodge Rooms, 65 Sunbridge-road: 3, a meeting and tea in commemoration of Charles Bradlaugh's birthday, speeches by Messrs. Grange, Smith, and Wakefield (tickets 9d.); 6.30, John Grange, "The Coming Slavery: a study in Politics."

Bristol—Shepherd's Hall, Old Market-street; G. W. Foote, 11, "Why I Cannot be a Christian"; 3, "Who Wrote the Bible?"; 7, "Why I am an Atheist."

Glasgow—Ex-Mission Hall, 110 Brunswick-street: Stanley Jones, 11.30, "Jesus Christ"; 3, "The Fall of Man"; 6.30, "Is there Evidence for the Existence of a God?" Sept. 26 and 27, debate between Stanley Jones and H. A. Long; first night (122 Ingram-street) at 8: "Is Genesis in Conflict with Science?"; second night (110 Brunswick-street) at 8: "Is Genesis in Accordance with Science?"

Leeds—Mr. Winter's, 10 Sheepscar-grove, Benson-street, North-street: 7, committee meeting, important business.

Liverpool—Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street: 3, philosophy class, Mr. Small, B.Sc., "Bain's *Mind and Body*"; 7, Mr. Small, "Christianity and Progress."

Manchester N.S.S., Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints': A. B. Moss, 11, "Bruno and Spinoza;" 3, "The Drift of Darwinism;" 6.30, "The Life and Teachings of John Stuart Mill."

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

Rochdale—Secular Hall, Milkstone-road: 6.30, Sam Standing, "Stead's Civil Church."

Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham-street: Ernest Evans, 3, "Food and Digestion;" 7, "Cholera and how to Prevent it." Sept. 28, at 6, tea, soiree and ball in commemoration of Charles Bradlaugh's birthday.

South Shields—Free Library Hall, Ocean-road: J. M. Robertson, 3, "The Heaven Myth;" 7, "Right and Wrong."

Sunderland—Bridge End Vaults, Bridge-street: 7, music and lecture.

#### OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Rochdale—Town Hall-square: Sam Standing, 11.15, "Secularism and Socialism;" 2.45, "The Wesleyan Methodist God."

### LECTURERS' ENGAGEMENTS.

TOUZEAU PARRIS, 28 Rivercourt-road, Hammersmith, London, W.—Oct. 2, Leicester; 23, Hall of Science.

H. SNELL, 6 Monk-street, Woolwich. — Sept. 25, m. and e., Camberwell. Oct. 2, e., Battersea; 16, m., Camberwell; e., Lambeth; 23, Chatham; 30, e., Camberwell. Nov. 13, e., Camberwell; 20, e., Lambeth; 27, e., Libra Hall. Dec. 11, Camberwell; 18 Libra Hall.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.—Sept. 25, Manchester. Oct. 2, Camberwell; 9, Westminster.

C. J. HUNT, 48 Fordingley-road, St. Peter's Park, London, W.—Sept. 25, m., Westminster. Oct. 2, m., Hyde Park; e., Hammersmith; 9, m., Camberwell; a., Finsbury Park; 16, a., Hammersmith; 23, m., Westminster; e., Lambeth; 30, m., Mile End Waste; a., Finsbury Park; e., Edmonton.

C. COHEN, 154 Cannon-street-road, Commercial-road, E.—Sept. 25, m., Battersea; a., Victoria Park; e., Walthamstow. Oct. 2, m., Bethnal Green; e., Edmonton; 6, Walthamstow; 7, Battersea; 9, m. and a., Victoria Park; e., Edmonton; 13, Walthamstow; 14, Battersea; 16, m., Mile End; e., Edmonton; 20, Walthamstow; 21, Battersea; 23, m., Hyde Park; a., Victoria Park; e., Libra Hall; 27, Walthamstow; 28, Battersea; 30, m., Camberwell; e., Libra Hall.

SAM STANDING, 106 Oxford-road, All Saints' Manchester.—Sept. 25, Rochdale.

C. J. STEINBERG, 103 Mile End-road, E.—Sept. 25, m. and a., Victoria Park.

S. H. ALISON, 52 Vassall-road, Brixton, S.W.—Sept. 25, m., Bethnal Green. Oct. 9, m., Finsbury Park; e., Lambeth; 16, m., Victoria Park; 23, m., Finsbury Park; 30, m., Bethnal Green.

STANLEY JONES, 28 Stonecutter-street, London, E.C.—Sept. 25, Glasgow. Oct. 1, Bradford; 2, Grimsby; 9, Hull; 16, Sheffield; 18, Cheltenham; 23, Bristol; 30, Cardiff. Nov. 3, Swansea; 6, Liverpool; 13, Manchester; 14, Pendlebury.

J. GREEVZ-FISHER, 78 Harrogate-road, Leeds.—Oct. 3, Bradford.

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