

The Freethinker

Edited by G. W. FOOTE.]

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

MRS. BESANT'S MIRACLES.

MRS. BESANT'S conversion to Theosophy was a surprise and a grief to many of her friends. Few of them, however, saw the end of the course upon which she had entered. Some of them hoped that Madame Blavatsky's influence over her would decline; others trusted that her mind would recover its old tone, and bring her back to the fold of reason. For our part, we were under no such delusion. We prophesied that Mrs. Besant's ardent nature would take her far on the path of mystery. No very extravagant foresight was needed for such a prediction. At any rate the prophecy has been realised; which is a justification of the attitude we assumed at the outset. Mrs. Besant as a Theosophist-Secularist was an inconsistency and an absurdity. She herself could not or would not see it. But that did not alter our vision or our duty. Outside the Secular camp, Mrs. Besant might still be an object of sympathy and respect, and even of tender affection for the sake of old memories; inside the Secular camp, she was only an occasion of perplexity and embarrassment. Perceiving this most plainly, we acted upon what has proved to be a rational judgment of the situation. Mrs. Besant has gone her way, and what it has led her to may be seen from a recent report in the *Daily Chronicle*.

Before dealing with that report we desire to make a remark on a secondary, yet rather important, aspect of Mrs. Besant's conversion—or perversion, as you please to call it. While a Secularist, and a colleague of Charles Bradlaugh, she was out in the cold. "Respectable" society tabooed her. She was a creature of the wilderness. But all that is changed. Mrs. Besant has found—we mean it in no unfair sense—that Theosophy (like godliness) is great gain. Not only has she become a fresh object of public curiosity; not only have her meetings been swollen by sympathetic Spiritualists and hopeful Christians; but "Society" has opened its arms to her now that she has turned her back on Atheism and accepted a God who is at least "a sort of a something." "Society" pays as much as five shillings for seats at her discourses, and rich, fashionable, and titled people associate with her, who at one time would not have let her stand between the wind and their nobility. All this, we dare say, is very grateful to Mrs. Besant's feelings after so many years of the life of an Ishmael. Most assuredly, however, it indicates the decisiveness of the breach between her old faith and the new.

It appears from the *Chronicle* interview that Mrs. Besant is no longer a Socialist. When she debated with the present writer she was very strong, and even dogmatic, on the policy of legislation. State Socialism was to bring about the millennium. But she has cast that belief behind her. "Municipal collectivism," she told her interviewer, "would be beset in time with all the old bad things of an individualist society." Reform must first be interior.

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"External legislation," she says, "leaving men themselves unchanged, would sooner or later bring all the old evils back again." There cannot be a brotherhood without brothers, and "this is the rock on which Theosophy splits off from Socialism."

The general substance of all this was pointed out to Mrs. Besant in the debate. She smiled at it then; she solemnly preaches it now. Her mental evolutions are astonishing. They show how little of a thinker she is. Her faculty is that of the born advocate. She only recognises what is within the scope of her present purpose. She changes her attitude first, and her arguments afterwards.

Mrs. Besant still harps on the brotherhood of man, as though it were a Theosophic discovery. There is something irresistibly comic in the solemnity with which she touches this string. "We have no test," she says; the only condition we lay down for membership is "acceptance of the doctrine of the universal brotherhood of man." Years ago she said nearly as much of Secularism. She knew then, if she conveniently forgets now, that Thomas Paine declared, long before the Blavatsky was born—"The world is my country, mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion." As a matter of fact, the brotherhood of man has been taught by nearly every moralist in history.

"Will you walk into my parlor," said the spider to the fly. Mrs. Besant's parlor is Theosophy. Her web is the brotherhood of man; her fly the silly man, or more often the silly woman, who pricks up ears at the word "brotherhood," as though it were a fresh stroke on the gong of the universe.

After telling the *Chronicle* interviewer that Theosophy regards the universe as "fundamentally spiritual"—in common, we remark, with every other religion on the face of the earth—Mrs. Besant said that its second principle was the reign of law "in morals as well as in physical nature." This again is no discovery; it was a commonplace of Secularism before Mrs. Besant's accession, and remains so after her defection. The third and last principle was "the doctrine of Reincarnation"—a familiar doctrine in all the religions of antiquity. It does not commend itself to the Western mind. Mrs. Besant allows that at first she could not mention it without "a ripple of laughter passing over the audience." She is happy to say, however, that "Theosophy is no longer ridiculed." We are happy to say the contrary. Mrs. Besant may not observe so much laughter; but that may only mean that the public has got over its first surprise, and has greater command over its risibility.

The interviewer was very anxious to get a little knowledge of Mrs. Besant's "miracles." But she smiled at his exoteric ignorance. There is "nothing supernatural" about her "miracles." It is simply a case of "using a law of nature not commonly understood." Our readers will remember that this has long been a trick of Christian advocacy. Theosophy borrows it—being always a borrower. Freethinkers are gravely told that a miracle is not a violation of a law of nature; it is the interposition of a higher

law, and of superior knowledge and ability. Similarly, the Theosophists tell us that their miracles are not supernatural. Exalted beings, such as *Mahatmas* and high-class *chelas*, work them with the greatest ease. They say to this atom come, and it cometh; and to another go, and it goeth. Inferior beings, not up in the business, can only act through mechanical agencies.

Christian and Theosophic miracles are alike in another respect. They are inaccessible. Christian miracles happened long ago. Theosophic miracles happen a long way off. Successful investigation, in both cases, is impossible without faith.

Mrs. Besant is not a Mahatma. Even the great Blavatsky was not one. We believe they are all of the male persuasion. Still, Mrs. Besant claims to be able to work what Huxley and Tyndall would call "miracles." By means of teetotalism, vegetarianism, and celibacy, she has become a "practical occultist." She is able to "start two currents of ether revolving in different directions." Apparently they go on revolving for any required distance. When they come together (as per order) they make a sound. Mrs. Besant says "we call it the astral bell." It is a pretty little trick. But, alas, the outside world must take it on faith—or leave it. "Believe me, or disbelieve me," Mrs. Besant seems to say, "and remember I am a lady." Her interviewer asked her, "And are you, Mrs. Besant, able thus to communicate astrally?" "Yes," she replied. His nose was in the air at once. "And are you willing to give me an example of it?" "No." "Why not?" "Because," the lady said, "these things must not be done as signs and wonders." Shade of Joseph Balsamo! shade of Helena Blavatsky! yea, shade of Sludge the Medium! behold your promising disciple! Truly the confidence trick is everlasting. As the boy rings the bell and runs away, the Theosophist makes her big assertions and walks off, holding her skirts majestically, when she is asked for a little evidence. And as she vanishes she exclaims (her very words to the interviewer), "No one of our Society would do them to convince sceptics." Poor sceptics! Mrs. Besant treats them as haughtily as Jesus Christ. It is the same business from Jerusalem to St. John's Wood.

Mrs. Besant also professes to be a mesmeriser, though we doubt (and not without reason) if she would earn a pound a week by performances. She says that she has cured a young girl nearly blind who was given over by the oculists. Again the interviewer asked, "Will you allow me to investigate this case?" And again the answer was "No." Mrs. Besant objected to dragging the poor girl into the light of publicity; which is the very reason given by Mr. Price Hughes for keeping back the proofs of his converted Atheist story. We do not say that Mrs. Besant is wilfully romancing. We only say it is unfortunate that she cannot hold her tongue, or will not produce her evidence.

Naturally enough, Mrs. Besant picks up the "demonstrations" of M. Louis, a French hypnotist. She is ready to pick up anything that appeals to the bump of wonder. M. Louis "transfers the sensibility of a hypnotic subject to some other object, say a plate, and then by scratching the plate he scratches the body." What an excellent recipe for itchy people tired of scratching themselves! As a matter of fact, however, M. Louis does nothing of the kind. It is obviously a case of mere suggestion. But the "astral-bell-ringer" is not to be put off in that way. She says that M. Louis forces away the astral body of his subject, and scratches it instead of the plate!! But we will go no further. Mrs. Besant seems hopelessly lost. She has thrown in her lot with the party of mystery, jargon, and pretension. She has joined one of the wings of the army of reaction.

G. W. FOOTE.

THE JERUSALEM GHOST AGAIN.

"If Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."—1 Cor. xv. 14.

The Most Certain Fact in History. Such is the title given to a series of addresses on the alleged Resurrection of Jesus, by the Rev. T. P. Ring, rector of Hanley, and recently published by Skeffington and Son. The work is a good specimen of Christian controversy, in which bounce and bluster take the place of evidence and argument. The very title shows Mr. Ring has no correct conception either of evidence or of history. Distance as necessarily decreases the certainties of history as it does those of vision. A Scotch mathematician, John Craig, saw this so clearly that he calculated the time when, assuming Christianity to be true, it would be nevertheless necessary to have a new revelation. We should say that time has already come. When a learned scholar like Mr. Edwin Johnson, M.A., in his big work on *The Rise of Christendom*, can set down the whole of early Christian literature as forgeries of the monks of the so-called Middle Ages, it is surely time God Almighty should vouchsafe a little fresh testimony to what looks like the most stupendous fable in history. For look at the evidence. Outside the New Testament there is not a scrap or shred of testimony to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The earliest manuscripts, taking the orthodox dates, cannot be assigned to earlier than the middle of the fourth century, and the oldest of these omits the story of the resurrection at the end of the gospel attributed to Mark. There is absolutely no proof that any of the gospels were written by the parties to whom they are assigned.

Are their stories inherently credible? Not to the present writer. Surely the resurrection of any person from the dead should be attested by such evidence that it should be impossible to gainsay it. It is not even pretended that the resurrection of Jesus was as public as his crucifixion. Could not Jesus have shown himself to the rulers of the Jews, and to Pontius Pilate who would have recorded this most stupendous fact in the imperial archives, and it would have received the attention of the entire Roman world. Matthew (xxvii. 52, 53) relates that "the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept, arose, and came out of their graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Where is the evidence? Surely such mighty miracles must have confounded all opposition. But the Jews to this day remain unbelievers. Matthew's story is flagrantly fabulous. He says that the chief priests and Pharisees asked that a watch might be set, because they remembered "that a deceiver said, while he was yet alive, after three days I will rise again," although the very disciples did not understand this saying. And when the priests found he had risen, they bribed Roman soldiers who had witnessed this miracle, to say they had slept at their post—the punishment of which was death—and while sleeping the disciples had stolen him away. *Credat Judæus.* What this story shows is not that the chief priests or the soldiers ever acted so ridiculously, but that the Jews of the time when the narrative was written, said the body had been stolen away. And, allowing that there is any truth at the bottom of the story at all, this appears to me still to be a more plausible hypothesis than that of resurrection from the dead, which, be it remembered, was a dogma already believed in by the Pharisees.

Abundant ground for scepticism can be found in the stories themselves. Mark (xvi. 12) says "he appeared in another form" to two of them. So that any stranger may have been taken for Jesus. Even Herod thought that Jesus was John the Baptist

risen from the dead, such a belief falling in with the superstition of the time. Yet when Mary told the disciples, they considered her words idle tales, and believed them not. Matthew (xxviii. 17) says, "when the disciples saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted." If some who were present, and who knew him personally and intimately, doubted, it is hard to credit that those who were not present will be damned for following the disciples' lead.

In the story of Susannah and the elders found in the Catholic Bible, the witnesses to the lady's alleged breach of chastity, when questioned separately, disagreed on one minor point. One said it was under a mastic tree they saw her, the other that it was under a holm tree. For this discrepancy their evidence was dismissed. Yet the witnesses to this alleged most certain fact in history are in flagrant contradiction. The discrepancies between the gospel writers are multitudinous. They differ as to the number of women who went to the tomb. John mentions only one, Mary Magdalene; Matthew two; Mark three; Luke several. They differ as to time: In Mark the sun had risen; in John it was yet dark. They differ as to the number of persons in white who appeared to the women. Mark speaks of one "young man"; Matthew of an angel; Luke of two men; John of two angels. According to Matthew, Luke, and John the women at once told what they had seen to the disciples; according to Mark "they said nothing to any man." They differ as to whom he appeared: According to Matthew it was first to the two women and then to the eleven; according to Luke it was first to no woman, but to Cleopas and his companion, then to Peter; according to Mark and John it was first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils. They differ as to locality: According to Matthew the disciples saw him in Galilee; according to Luke it was at Jerusalem, and he positively commands them "not to depart from Jerusalem."

Will any candid person say that such evidence is sufficient to establish an event which might certainly be classed as one of the most extraordinary and unprecedented in history? Would it be even sufficient to establish any ordinary event? Suppose the question were one of a disputed will—the descendants of a person publicly put to death claiming to inherit certain property on the ground that, though really dead, he had come to life again. Would any honest juryman give a verdict in favor of the descendants on such evidence? Yet Mr. Ring affirms the Resurrection to be the most certain fact in history—more certain than the battle of Sedan or the Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Surely, if serious, Mr. Ring is more fitted to be an inmate of Hanwell than of Hanley. It must be admitted, however, that Mr. Ring and the whole ring of the Christian Evidence-mongers have one strong fortress—the people's ignorance. Few think of questioning legends put forward in the guise of religion, or none would dare to assert that a story so discrepant and ill attested as that of the Resurrection is "the most certain fact in history."

J. M. WHEELER.

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- (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.

A UNIQUE GATHERING OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS.

THE echoes of the voices of the Established Church representatives at Folkestone, and also those of the Nonconformists at Bradford, have scarcely passed away before we have the Free Church taking up the same strains, and sighing for "Unity" among Christians. On Monday, November 7, "A Free Church Congress" was opened at Manchester, when between three or four hundred members of seven different denominations attended, but, it is worthy of note, that among them there were no Roman Catholics or Unitarians. The object of the Congress was to discuss "Common Christianity," whatever that may mean. The chairman, in opening the evening meeting, strongly urged that all present should drop their "peculiar views," and confine themselves to the "great principles" found in the Bible, where we suppose their "peculiar views" are not to be found. If, however, this advice is taken, the fate of the seven denominations will soon be sealed, for it is only by their "peculiar views" that their separate existence is maintained.

The chairman regretfully referred to the time of the apostles, who, he said, were not troubled by divisions; they worked for the common faith, which he believed would "sooner or later compass and enclose the whole world." Evidently the gentleman had not been a very careful reader of the New Testament, for there we learn that among the Apostolic Christians, divisions existed of a most important character. In "the Acts" (xv. 39) we are told that the contention between St. Paul and Barnabas "was so sharp that they departed asunder one from the other." And in Romans (xvi. 17); 1 Corinthians i. 11; iii. 3; and xi. 18), we find that St. Paul reproves his brethren for the strife, contentions and divisions among them. From that period to the present day, the Church has never been free from divisions, which have increased with years until they have become so serious, that the very existence of even nominal Christianity is endangered. This is felt to be so much the case, that special efforts are being made by all branches of the Church to remedy the internal discord, which for nearly eighteen hundred years has marked its history. But judging from the reports of this Congress in Manchester, the panacea for these dissensions has not yet been discovered by Christians, for there were manifestations of divisions among them from the commencement to the end of the proceedings. The first difference arose as to the desirability, or otherwise, of discussing the subject of religious equality. This caused, what a local paper termed, a "little breeze" in the Christian camp. Then it was asserted that the "Free churches were not free," and that more liberty was required than they were prepared to grant. One speaker pleaded for unity upon the questions of the Deity of Jesus and the Atonement, which, of course, could not be secured without excluding the most intelligent section of the Christian fold. Other members of the Congress wished it to be made clear that they would have nothing to do with the Anglican or with the Roman party. The Rev. Dr. Mackennal hoped they would soon cease to speak of denominational Christianity, but the Rev. Dr. Randles thought undenominationalism was outside the new fold. These divisions augured ill for the realisation of unity, harmony, and freedom among modern Christians.

In answer to the chairman's statement of his belief that "sooner or later" the faith would dominate the whole world, we should say that if such a thing occurs at all, it will be much "later." This prophecy, like many of the orthodox beliefs, is not supported either by facts or by justifiable inference. The faith has existed for nearly two thousand years, with every

opportunity in its favor, and yet to-day two-thirds of the human race have not even heard of it; and among the one-third where it has been proclaimed an important section rejects it, while those who profess to accept it never act up to its teachings. Truly "out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh."

Bishop Baker, of the "Liverpool Free Church of England," was prepared to shake hands with at least two of the seven denominations represented at the Congress. But then the bishop could afford to be generous, for he said he believed his Church had "got the cream of both the Church and Nonconformist parties." At this the Congress laughed. Perhaps they felt delighted that the bishop had been good enough to leave them the skim-milk. The Rev. Dr. Mackennal seemed to be in earnest, for he wanted them all "pledged to action." His reason was that "in the villages of England they are treading on each other's heels, while the large towns and foreign missions are crying out for laborers." In our opinion the "village parsons" had better stay where they are, unless they prefer to go to "foreign missions" or come to the large towns with the determination to do some useful work for the welfare of mankind. Had Dr. Mackennal been reading the recent statement of the secretary of the London Congregational Union to the effect that 160 more places of worship are wanted to meet the alleged wants of the increased population of Greater London? If so, probably he was impressed with the idea that the servants of the Lord are more likely to get congenial employment where they are wanted rather than where they are not. It is news, however, to many of us to hear that the villages of England are so crowded with Dissenting ministers of different denominations that they are ruining the trade of each other. One cannot help having sympathy for poor Hodge, with his surplus of spiritual food and his deficiency of the necessaries of life. His peace of mind must be greatly disturbed by so many black-coated gentry buzzing about his ears like a swarm of bees, each one imploring him to take an insurance ticket to a "better land" from his own particular office. This may throw some light on the suddenly-developed desire for "unity" among Christians. The late Church Congress desired a united army to fight "the world, the flesh, and the Devil." But the Free Church Congress aims at establishing a sort of Spiritual Trades Union, by which its members may be enabled to find more scope in other markets than in those of their own over-done country villages.

It is curious to read in the report that while the secretary of the Congress advocated making the organisation march with the times, one of the evening sermons was "Jesus the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." True, the Rev. Dr. Johnson had discovered "that there were many questions . . . upon which Jesus Christ himself, while he was with us on earth, gave no express opinion." This is doubtless true; and the reverend doctor might have gone further and said that there were many vital questions upon which the happiness and progress of the human race depend, that Christ never referred to in any way. It is this fact that prevents Jesus from being "a perfect guide" in daily life, or even a satisfactory authority upon general mundane affairs.

The Rev. Charles Williams did not believe that it was the will of Christ that the present divisions in the Church should exist. Then we may ask, Whose will is it? We are told that in every town and village there are rival churches with services held and doctrines taught differing from each other. Now, if such divisions are not sanctioned by Christ, his alleged followers are unfaithful to the will of their Master, which proves what we have frequently urged, that Christianity exists only in name. No wonder that Mr. T. Snape, M.P., asked, in his address to the Congress, "Why had the Christianity of the schools

and the Christianity of Christ been severed?" And he added, "the power of the pulpit had been a little on the wane of late." Perhaps the Rev. T. Allen furnished the real cause of this severance and falling off in avowing his fear that men of great intellectual power are a source of weakness to the Church. The Rev. Dr. Gibson, too, believed in "faith, not logic which would not only split hairs, but the Church also." This possibly will explain why Mr. Lee's suggestion, that ministers should keep themselves "ahead of the topics of the day if they wish to be successful in the practical work of life," was received in silence.

This unique gathering of Christian professors presented a curious spectacle. Here a number of orthodox enthusiasts met to close the divisions in the Church, and they were so divided in opinion among themselves as to how the thing was to be done, that the only practical result arrived at was the showing that "a house divided against itself cannot stand." Even in their principal resolution on the third evening of the Congress, the representatives of seven denominations left the question of religious equality to be observed as "should commend itself to the judgment of their several communities." What that judgment has been is well known to all who are acquainted with the persecuting tendency of many orthodox Christians.

CHARLES WATTS.

A WICKED, MALIGNANT GOD.

A LITTLE wordy skirmish has recently taken place between Mr. Thomas Hardy and Mr. Andrew Lang which is somewhat interesting. Mr. Hardy is a novelist of considerable reputation, and his latest and greatest book, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, has elicited, it seems, almost unanimous applause. Mr. Lang is a literary critic, and, in an article in the *New Review*, he found fault with *Tess* on various grounds. Mr. Hardy had a fling-back, in the preface to a second edition of the book, and now Mr. Lang has a parting shot in his notes in *Longman's*.

Mr. Hardy referred to Mr. Lang as "a gentleman who turned Christian for half an hour the better to express his grief that a disrespectful phrase about the Immortals should have been used." But Mr. Hardy protests that exclaiming against the gods is not such an original sin on his part, and he quotes the lines which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Gloucester:

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport.

Mr. Lang, in his retort, says: "Mr. Hardy has no means of knowing what my private shade of theological dogma is. He cannot tell whether I am, as a matter of creed, a Christian or not." And Mr. Lang very scrupulously abstains from giving the slightest inkling on this point. In fact, the whole gist of his remarks is, that "one need not be a Christian, nor pretend to be a Christian," to take the position he does.

It seems the sentence which raised Mr. Lang's ire was this: "The President of the Immortals (in *Aeschylean* phrase) had ended his sport with *Tess*." "This," says Mr. Lang, "was the moral and marrow of his romance, as I supposed, and the phrase must seem equally illogical to an Atheist and a Christian, to a Buddhist and a Bonze. For nobody in his senses now believes in a wicked, malignant President of the Immortals, whatever Gloucester may have said in his haste. . . ."

Now, in the first place, we do not see that exclaiming against the gods is so heinous an offence as Mr. Lang seems to think. True, when an Atheist points out the evil in the world and exclaims against the alleged author of that evil, he is only exclaiming against a hypothesis in which he does not believe. In fact, Lord Brougham has pointed out that, from

the nature of the case, Atheists are not capable of committing blasphemy, whoever else are.

Mr. Lang says that nobody in his senses believes in a wicked, malignant God. Now, we do not know so much of that. It was out of such a belief that all godism originally grew. All the early gods who were worshipped were more or less malignant deities, whose anger could be bought off by praying and fasting and sacrificing. In fact, the primary object of all worship was to placate the gods and secure their pleasure.

In actual terms, perhaps, no one now believes in a wicked deity, but in substance they do—if they are orthodox Christians. For the God the Christians worship is essentially a revengeful and a wicked God. Without quoting from the Old Testament at all, is not the central doctrine of Christianity one of revenge, of sacrifice, of blood? Witness the Lord's Prayer! There he is expressly asked to deliver his worshippers from evil, or the Evil One; he is asked not to lead them into temptation; and he is conjured, by the example of his worshippers themselves, to forgive them their trespasses. All of which show that the Christian God is as much a malignant deity as any that savages ever bowed before. When there is an epidemic of disease, is he not prayed to stay his hand? And would it be necessary to make such a request of a good deity? Besides, is he not the author of all evil? Did he not create the Devil? Does he not maintain hell?

In substance then, as we say, orthodox people believe in an evil deity. If, therefore, when Mr. Lang says that "nobody in his senses" now holds such a belief, he merely means to convey that orthodox people are *not* in their senses, possibly the statement may be true. Mr. Lang has better opportunities of knowing than we have. Recently we had a bishop telling us that lunatics made excellent Christians; now we have Mr. Lang insinuating that orthodox people are insane. So that soon, despite our manifest charitableness, we shall have it forced upon us that orthodoxy and lunacy are synonymous.

But, after all, we may ask what is the particular nonsense attaching to the belief in an evil Almighty which does not also attach to the belief in a good one? To us, it seems, one is no more and no less rational than the other. To take the evil in nature and personify it is no more foolish than to do the same with the good. As a matter of fact, Nature is both good and bad—nay, more correctly, she is neither. Good and evil are subjective, and not objective. The same phenomenon works both good and evil, according to the way we look at it; and, relatively to man, wrong is woven as deeply into the texture of things as right. And herein lies one of the very sharpest of the rocks on which Theism is wrecked. As Darwin said, "This very old argument from the existence of suffering against the existence of an intelligent First Cause seems to me a strong one." The God of the universe cannot be all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good. All nature belies such a God. True, we see goodness, and wisdom, and beauty and love in the world around us, but, side by side with these, we see badness, ignorance, ugliness and hate. A Theist who would bring his Theism into harmony with the facts of nature must choose between either of these positions. Firstly, a God all-powerful, all-good, but not all-wise—in which case the evil in the world would be the result of his ignorance. Secondly, a god, all powerful, all-wise, but not all-good—in which case the evil would be the result of his defective moral character. Thirdly, a god, all-wise, all-good, but not all-powerful—in which case, however, there would manifestly be some power outside and above god. This last case includes, of course, that of two gods, one good, the other bad, pulling against each other—a belief which seems to run through most religions. For really, in the popular theology, Satan

is quite as powerful as Jehovah, more so indeed, if we are to judge by the success which we are told each of them achieves. We offer the Theist this selection. Between these positions he is forced to choose—there is no other alternative. But the difficulties and absurdities that surround all of them, render Theism, judged as we would judge any hypothesis which claimed to explain ascertained facts, utterly worthless.

FREDERICK RYAN.

THE FOLLY OF THEISM.

Man for his God sets on the shelf
A plaster image of himself.

—GERALD MASSEY.

MOST of the gods pictured in the imagination of Theists will be found, upon examination, to be man-like in their attributes. Theologians may talk learnedly about God being the "infinite will" behind phenomena; or the "infinite mind" to which all effects in the material universe owe their origin; but if they are asked to define precisely what they mean by these terms, they are immediately lost in a wilderness of thought that leads to no definite result.

In common with most theological controversialists, Dr. Sexton attempts to show that all material phenomena are referable to a force external to matter, which he calls Mind—with a capital M—and which Mind, he says, is the God he and other Theists believe in. Observe how he attempts to demonstrate this point.

"Each part of the material universe," says Dr. Sexton, "shows itself to be an effect, and must therefore owe its existence to a cause outside itself. The Atheist cannot point to a single object in physical nature which does not bear upon it marks of having been caused by some power exterior to itself. Suns and stars, and trees and flowers, and rolling waters, the violent tornado and the soft gentle zephyr, the thunderstorm and the dewdrop, the pebble-stone on the sea-beach and the mightiest range of mountains on the earth, the colossal mammoth and the tiny animalcule that deports itself in a drop of water—all cry out 'Not in me will you find the cause of existence.' No; material nature is simply a series of effects—nothing more. Even man himself, the highest of all created things, feels that he owes his existence to *somewhat* or to *someone* higher than himself."

So that after all his parade of words in the attempt to belittle nature, Dr. Sexton has to sing rather small, and say that his God "is somewhat or someone higher" than man. But how does Dr. Sexton know that a being who is only a *somewhat* or a *someone* is a god at all? A *somewhat* is a very indefinite sort of being, and a *someone* may be anyone, and it makes very little difference whether the *someone* is higher or lower than man. What does all this amount to? Why simply this—that Dr. Sexton knows no more what is behind phenomena than the Agnostic or the Atheist; but whereas these, with becoming modesty, acknowledge their ignorance, Dr. Sexton lays claim to a knowledge which he does not possess.

Dr. Sexton then formulates another proposition which appears to me to be altogether unsound, although there is an air of plausibility about the appearance of it. "That which is not the result of thought," says Dr. Sexton, "cannot be translated into thought; and as the universe displays thought in every part, it must be the work of a Supreme Thinker." This looks very like our old friend the "Design argument" in a new dress. Let us look for a moment at Dr. Sexton's illustrations. "Take a book in your hand, open it, and you see at once the orderly arrangement of letters into words, and of words into sentences. This bespeaks a certain amount of thought on the part of the author, and on the part of the compositor who sets up the type. By no stretch of the imagination can you conceive this arrangement to be the result of chance or accident. The types might have been thrown down at random ten million times and they would never have fallen into the order in which they were placed in the printer's forme, which was laid on the machine, when a single sheet of the volume was worked off. The book in question may not be a treatise on a very important topic, and the author may have dealt with his subject very imperfectly; but still it is impossible to imagine that the arrangement can be other than the result of mind. A volume of Shakespeare,

of Newton, or of Kant, will differ greatly from an elementary school-book, or from the immature production of an ignorant and uninformed man; but the difference will, after all, be one of degree only; in both cases thought must have been at work to produce a book at all. Chance is incompetent to form a single sentence, to say nothing of writing several hundred pages. And the amount of thought contained in the volume will be the measure of what can be extracted from it."

Is it not rather late in the day, for a man of Dr. Sexton's ability, to write of the Atheist as though he attributed natural phenomena to chance? As a matter of fact, all Atheists from D'Holbach downwards, have believed in the doctrine of Universal Causation. If all the changes (phenomena) that happen in the material universe take place because under such and such conditions certain results *must* follow, what is the use of talking about chance? If each effect is preceded by a cause without which it could not happen, and with which it is bound to happen, the doctrine of chance is simply an absurdity.

It will be admitted at once that natural forces undirected by human intelligence could not be reasonably expected to set up the type, and so arrange it, that when complete it should constitute a work of Shakespeare. Dr. Sexton, indeed, in his illustration, assumes that there is a perfect analogy between the spontaneous productions of nature, and the artistic work of man which result from the wise exercise of human reason. But does such an analogy hold good? The spontaneous working of natural forces, it is true, have produced many wonderful things. Natural forces, for instance, produce what we call "wild flowers," which, by the intelligence of man, or what Darwin calls "artificial selection," are improved into the beautiful flowers that grow in our public gardens. But if there is an intelligence behind nature, it must be admitted that it does not always arrange results that can in any sense be regarded as wise or just towards sentient beings. An earthquake may be produced by an intelligent *something* behind matter, but it would puzzle the cleverest Theist to explain what humane purpose an earthquake can serve which swallows up a city of inoffensive and unoffending people? Famines, disease, pestilence, etc. are the productions of natural forces, and these undoubtedly play a necessary and important part in the great economy of nature; but theologians will scarcely dispute that the effects they produce upon human beings and animals are anything but beneficial in the character.

There is another aspect of this doctrine of chance that Dr. Sexton's argument ignores. Diderot said that there was nothing that nature could not conceivably perform. Nature had an infinity of time in which to perform her works; and eternity was surely long enough in which to correct all her blunders! But let us take an illustration to show the absolute futility of this doctrine of chance. It is sometimes said that one might throw up a penny a hundred times, and it would be a million chances to one against it falling head ninety times out of the hundred. But the reason is obvious enough. It could not be thrown with precisely the same force each time, nor could it be thrown under precisely the same conditions. If, however, it could be calculated exactly the number of revolutions it would make, then the chances of determining accurately what it would be would be greatly improved. The acrobat who dives from the roof of a music hall into a net beneath, a distance of about fifty feet, calculates how many somersaults he will make in his descent, and thus he can tell exactly how he will fall in the net. In this, as in all other cases, there is no such thing as chance; everything is certain; but of course it depends upon the conditions as to what the result will be. If the acrobat's calculations are correct he will fall with safety; if not, the accident that will result will be as much the effect of a cause of known conditions as though the performer had descended unhurt.

ARTHUR B. MOSS.

ACID DROPS.

According to the *Methodist Times*, there are many very worthy Christians among Trade Unionists, only "they are not blatant like some infidel agitators, who know how to keep themselves in evidence." Most people would allow that Mr. Hughes knows how to keep himself in evidence. There are men in his Church with ten times his brain-power who have not a tenth of his notoriety. His triumph over them is a triumph of viscera and cerebellum.

"Unspeakable folly and stupidity of a certain kind of infidelity" is a brilliant flower of speech from a further effusion on Tennyson by *Methodist Times* Hughes. It is hard to see the difference between folly and stupidity, and how can it be "unspeakable" when Mr. Hughes talks so much about it? Then we have "spurious infidelity"—whatever that may be, and "vulgar men" and "incredibly idiotic," and so forth, in Mr. Hughes's slap-dash manner. Finally, he declares that J. C. is "the only Pilot who can guide us out of the tempestuous storms of this life into the quiet haven of eternal peace." "Tempestuous storms" is good; so is "a quiet haven of peace." They show that Mr. Hughes is sustaining his slipshod reputation. And they are peculiarly appropriate to Tennyson's career. We all know how "stormy" his life was.

The Rev. Professor Beet says the "progress of the world is confined to those nations where the Bible is received as the authority and voice of God." Abyssinia, for instance? Oh no. Dr. Beet would make a better selection than that. Well then, how about Japan? That is a very progressive country, and it is not Christian.

Dr. Beet is taking advantage of a mere fact of the hour. A thousand years after Jesus Christ progress was confined to the nations that accepted the Koran as the voice of God. Had the argument been used then it would have proved the truth of Mohammedanism and the falsity of Christianity.

The Caucasian race was the progressive one before Christianity appeared. It is the progressive race now. The question is one of race, geography, and climate, and not one of religion. This has already been pointed out to Dr. Beet, but he goes on ignoring it; which may be prudent, but is scarcely honest.

The Bishop of Durham is a nice pretended friend of the people. At the end of the last miners' strike, when the men were starved out, he offered his services as a mediator, and got the matter settled as the masters wished. We say he *offered* his services, but we have heard enough of the secret history of that affair to satisfy us that Bishop Westcott was acting entirely in the interests of the pit-owners. Besides, the ecclesiastical revenues of Durham are chiefly derived from mining royalties, and thus the Bishop was also acting in the interest of his own profession.

Bishop Westcott has now taken to holding forth on the unequal distribution of wealth in England. Now this is as pretty a piece of hypocrisy as we have met with for a long while. Physician, heal thyself! Let the Bishop make a beginning. His immense income is an insult to every working man in the county of Durham. When a mere preacher of Kingdom-Come gets £7,000 a year—£2,000 more than the Prime Minister—and then whines about the unequal distribution of wealth, and makes out to pity the poor working man, we are tempted to cry in the language of Jesus Christ, "Woe unto you hypocrites!"

We referred a week or two ago to St. John's Wood Chapel, which is maintained by the Marylebone Vestry. The congregation has dwindled down to a handful of women and children, and the vestry does not see the use of burning seventy-five gas jets for them every Sunday evening. According to the incumbent, the Rev. H. Sandham, it is not altogether his fault that the congregation has almost diminished to the vanishing point. He points out that in 1883 the vestry deprived St. John's of an organist and organ, and "from that moment the congregation visibly and rapidly decreased." Yes, it generally takes something more than the gospel to fill a church.

THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN.—The constitution of man is such that, for a long time after he has discovered the incorrectness of the ideas prevailing around him, he shrinks from openly emancipating himself from their domination; and, constrained by the force of circumstances, he becomes a hypocrite, publicly applauding what his private judgment condemns.—*J. W. Draper.*

At the trial of the petition against the return of Mr. Fulham for South Meath, Mr. Sawin, a magistrate, gave evidence that Father O'Connell at mass warned people against the curse of Parnellism, and said no Parnellite could receive the sacrament worthily. He commanded his parishioners to attend the neighboring anti-Parnellite meeting. Witness said he was obstructed by anti-Parnellites when he went to record his vote, and priests were present.

On June 29 Bishop Nulty delivered a sermon from the altar of Trim, in which he stated that he would approach the deathbed of a drunkard with greater confidence in his salvation than he would that of a Parnellite, and stated that "women with the least Parnellite sympathies were worse than abandoned women."

The Pope has done a wise thing in elevating Dr. Theodor Kohn, a converted Jew, to the rich Archbishopric of Olmütz. He will become the envy of his former co-religionists.

At Palermo two peasants are on trial for putting corrosive sublimate into a chalice used by a priest during the celebration of the mass. Though it was supposed to be changed into the blood of Jesus, the priest, after drinking it, fell dead on the altar steps. The motive of the crime is believed to have been personal vengeance.

Scotland is particularly pious, and Glasgow the godliest of great cities. Yet, says a correspondent of the *Church Times*, "you may see more reeling drunkards on a Saturday in Glasgow or a Lanarkshire mining town than you would if you searched London for a month." The same writer rejoices that "one scarcely ever encounters an avowed Atheist or unbeliever."

The Primitive Methodists at Accrington have been squabbling. The local preacher read an anonymous letter from the pulpit, when a member of the congregation protested, declaring that they came to listen to the Gospel, and not to such "rot." A scene followed, interruptions coming from different parts of the chapel. The original interrupter and his family left the chapel in disgust, and were followed by another member of the congregation.

A female Sunday-school teacher, named Gough, has been remanded at Northampton Police Court on a charge of sending threatening letters to her fellow school teachers. The letters were signed "Jack the Ripper," and threatened death and mutilation.

The Rev. C. F. Nightingale, preaching at the Wesleyan Chapel, Stoke Newington, said that a census had been taken in the East-end of London, and it had been found that there had been a large decrease in attendance at their places of worship. Mr. Nightingale thinks earnest prayer is the one thing needful. Christians waste their cash in vain attempts to convert Jews, Mohammedans, and heathen abroad, and are invited to waste their prayers on Whitechapel.

Dean Lefroy says there are 6,000,000 people in England who go neither to church nor chapel. In the face of this fact how absurd are all the missionary societies for converting the heathen.

Father Aurelian, who was said a few months ago to have exorcised a demon out of a boy, has had to pay a fine of fifty marks for libelling the Protestant mother, who, he said, had bewitched the child. Evidence was given in defence that, according to the teaching of the Church, the possibility of demoniac possession was indisputable. Indeed, it is founded on the New Testament. If an action had been taken against Jesus, say for destroying a quantity of pork in the country of the Grdarenes, the proof of the devils being in pigs might have been as absent as in the case of the Bavarian boy. After all the Devil seems the chief person libelled. But he is used to it.

Christian civilisation is making wonderful progress. During the Chicago Exhibition the great Yankee revivalist, Mr. Moody, is to conduct daily service in the city. We see also that a 124-ton gun is to be one of the most striking exhibits. Krupp is making it, and the resources of Christian civilisation will be taxed to transport it to the World's Fair. However, it will doubtless arrive all right, and show the Yankee

Christians what European Christians can do in the gunpowder-and-glory line. Mr. Moody should mount that 124-ton gun, and harangue the multitude on the gospel of "peace on earth."

Man and dog fights have often been reported in our newspapers. Now we have a *bona fide* man and kangaroo fight at the London Aquarium. "Professor" Linderman and his long-legged friend box with gloves. What a pity our old friend Balaam is dead! A conversation between Professor B. and his jackass would be a great attraction.

The Rev. J. Caspar Clutterbuck, who was sentenced to four years' penal servitude for frauds to the extent of £16,000, has just died in prison.

Mr. Finn, the secretary of the Society for the Relief of Persecuted Jews, says that the order that Jews in Roumania shall remove from the villages to the towns has suddenly reduced 50,000 Jews to beggary. The peasantry were prevented from paying their just debts to the poor Jews; and lads left in charge by their fathers, while they themselves went to appeal for mercy, were cruelly beaten and marched off to prison. One Jew is believed to be dying from a beating inflicted by order, and in the presence of an official notorious for his brutal treatment of the Jews.

Gabriel Marchand, who, a short time ago, murdered his grand-uncle and grand-aunt, aged respectively eighty-one and sixty-seven years, was executed at Epinal. On being informed that his last hour had come, the convict said, "I am going to get drunk first." He drank two glasses of rum and smoked a cigar. Marchand then heard Mass and took the Holy Communion, and was sent to glory with his Savior inside him.

Wolves in Russia, like tigers and snakes in India, are a perpetual reminder of the Almighty's care. In one year alone, according to the data carefully collected by provincial governors, the loss of domestic animals by wolves amounted to 800,000 head, valued at eight million roubles.

The Church always steps in for its pickings at death. The Battersea Vestry opening a new cemetery at Morden, Canon Clarke claims it is only an extension of the parish cemetery, and claims burial fees on all interments. The Putney Board had a similar remonstrance from the vicar, and settled the matter by giving him £250 per annum up to 200 interments, and 25s. for every interment above that number. Surely it is time municipalities got rid of these incubi.

Dr. Rizal, a Freethinker, has been imprisoned at Manila, in the Phillipine Islands. His offence is having published some pamphlets exposing the evils prevailing in the Phillipines, and tracing them to the influence of the priesthood.

Count Tolstoi says that famine again threatens the district where he resides, as the rye harvest has been no better this year than last, while oats have entirely failed. The Czar is a pious man, and knows that when the Lord is wroth he always visits his anger on poor people.

The Rev. J. J. Coxhead, a leading Conservative member of the London School Board, in a letter to the *Guardian*, complains that Unitarianism is being taught in the Board schools. He thus describes a Bible lesson given by the mistress of an infant department. "I heard," he said "these questions: What was the name of the mother of Jesus? What was the name of His father? Every child that the teacher called upon answered 'Joseph.' Not a word was said to imply the existence of our Lord's Divine nature." Mr. Coxhead's letter illustrates what we have often insisted upon, viz., that religion cannot be taught in school without its taking some sectarian color from the teachers and the manner in which it is imparted.

Bishop Perowne's son, Mr. J. T. Woolych Perowne, is getting up ecclesiastical excursions to Rome and Chicago. The *Church Times* says: "The visit to Rome appears to be purely heathen in its purpose, which is to hear a lecture on 'Ancient Rome, its Art, Social Life, and Politics.' Well, we may be thankful that Hartlebury Castle is not to be responsible just at present for any more attempts to combine injudicious projects of Church Reform with the attraction of touring, and pleasant dinners and dances in Continental hotels."

The Rev. Dr. Wickham Legg says: "If the anti-vivisectionist view is to prevail it means the suppression of historical Christianity," which has never recognised the rights of animals.

The Rev. C. Ware, writing in the *Two Worlds*, questions if the persons said to have been raised from the dead in the New Testament had any of them been actually dead. He does not, however, deal with the passage in Matthew which says that the bodies of the saints came out of their graves and went into the city.

The Rev. W. J. Adams, vicar of All Saints, Dorchester, is another clergyman who has seceded from the Church of England in consequence of the authority given to Ritualism by the Lincoln judgment. He is reported as having joined the Congregationalists.

The Church of England Working Men's Society has always been somewhat of a farce. It appears to have been run chiefly in the interest of one individual, and the finances were so muddled that, to restore confidence and get subscriptions, it has been necessary to remodel the society and appoint new officers.

The South Shields *Free Press*, in the course of an interview with the black champion, writes as follows: "Mr. Edwards denies the statement that he received a challenge to meet Mr. Foote on Sunday last; and he claims that if the Secularists had agreed to his conditions, that each side should contribute one half of the expenses, and that the receipts at the doors should be handed over to some local charity, he would have met any of the nominees of the Secularists in debate. There must, however, be some misunderstanding here; for the Secularists advertise, for the third time, a public challenge to Mr. Edwards, on substantially the same conditions as he seems to have stipulated for. But Mr. Edwards says he is not a great advocate of debates, and alleges as his reason that disputants, as a rule, do not enter into debate for the purpose of ascertaining truth, but merely for the sake of gaining hollow and empty victories."

Mr. Peacock, who inserted the challenge in the local *Gazette*, has written to the black champion's chairman and other prominent supporters. They say it is not their fault that he does not debate, and they will find some other Christian advocate to hold a set discussion if he continues to regard discretion as the better part of valor.

When Mr. Foote lectured at Bolden Colliery the whole of the surplus proceeds were for the benefit of a disabled miner. Despite this fact, the black champion hastily got up a rival meeting for the same evening. His South Shields supporters were given to understand that he was going over to oppose Mr. Foote. They were much disappointed, however, for he simply delivered an opposition lecture in another building. Still, they go about saying they got the best of it. But what are the facts? Mr. Foote's lecture yielded £2 13s. 1d. for the disabled miner, and the black champion's £1 5s. for a blind man.

Catholic priests in Hungary are much incensed at the proposed program of the new government, which includes civil marriage. On the first Sunday in Advent, sermons against civil marriage are to be preached in all Catholic churches, and that ceremony is to be stigmatised as mere concubinage. Those who are not married by the Church are not to be buried with Christian rites, and the children are to be regarded as illegitimate. The Court of Justice has just sentenced the parish priest of Komorn to a month's imprisonment for refusing to give baptismal certificates for children born in mixed marriages.

Some amusement at the expense of a missionary was created at a Birmingham meeting recently. While contrasting the happy lot of civilised races compared with the darkness of heathen lands, the speaker's teeth dropped out in the midst of one of his most telling passages. He soon shut up his mouth.

The Rev. Joseph Cook says: "We need less agnosticism, and more meragnosticism." That's it, that's it. We knew all along there was something the matter with us, but for the love of us we couldn't guess what it was. Joseph must be right.

A newspaper proprietor in Kingston is threatened with an action for libel, by a widow, for publishing an obituary notice of her husband, in which it was stated, amongst other things, that he had "now gone to a much happier home."

This epitaph occurs in an old west-country churchyard in a district where it may be presumed the mural decorator charged extra for punctuation:—"Erected to the memory of John Phillips, accidentally shot as a mark of affection by his brothers."

Holy Russia has 875 gaols, and at present 950,000 persons are imprisoned in them. God bless the Czar! Hallelujah. Amen.

The Thompson paternity case has occupied a great deal of attention. Mr. Thompson says he is the father of Mrs. Thompson's children. She says he isn't. It is an awfully mixed affair. No doubt the famous Nazareth case would have been a bigger puzzle than this one, had it come into court.

The Rev. J. F. Cornwall, rector of Barton, Beds, is a political parson who objects to the *Daily News* being taken in at the Working Men's Reading Room, on the ground that it is "too Radical." The members declined to give up the paper, and the man of God resigned his presidency in a huff.

Mrs. John Clarke, an Indiana woman, gave a curious explanation to the court of her husband's black eye. She got on a chair to pray to God to remove John, and in gesticulating her fingers grazed his face. The rest was the work of the Lord, who smote John through the cracks of her fingers.

Some particulars have transpired relative to the conduct of Neill during his last days. So far from renouncing the ministrations of the chaplain, he completely changed his former demeanour, and indulged in fervent prayer. At times he would burst into tears, and, going down on his knees, would remain in that attitude of supplication for half an hour at a stretch. The gaol authorities were inundated with pamphlets and religious tracts for the convict, as well as telegrams containing expressions of hope that he would make a full confession.

There seems to have been a good deal of confusion at the opening of the new Victoria University buildings, Toronto. The students sang—

There'll be no more faculty there:
In heaven above where all is love,
There'll be no more faculty there.

The organist did not turn up, and the inaugural anthem had to be dispensed with. When the "portion of scripture" had to be read no one could find a Bible; and as none of the sky-pilots present could remember the "portion," one of them recited the first five verses of the fourth gospel—"In the beginning was the Word." But in *this* beginning there *wasn't* the Word.

Christianity doesn't appear to bring about any tolerable brotherhood between blacks and whites in America. John Oliver, of San Antonio, Texas, has been murdered and horribly mutilated. He was the leader of the colored people of Texas in their efforts to obtain civil and social equality with the white population. It is reported that not long before his tragic death he got involved in a church dispute. The religious quarrel seems to have put the finishing touch to his enemies' brutality.

The Mahdi is said to be a distinguished-looking man, with a commanding influence over his followers, who believe him to be inspired. He is very severe on sins of the flesh, but he does not practise what he preaches. Such a holy man is allowed some little privileges. He drinks liquid a great deal tastier than water, and has a host of wives and concubines, of all shapes, sizes, and colors. In time, of course, this will bring him to grief; and another favorite of heaven will then spring up, to go through the same round of audacious imposture and personal indulgence.

A negro insisted that his race was mentioned in the Bible. He said he heard the preacher read about "Nigger Demus, who wanted to be born again."

MR. FOOTE'S ENGAGEMENTS.

Sunday, Nov. 27, Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, Manchester; at 11, "Is the Bible a Safe Guide?"; at 3, "Hell, and the Bishop of Chester"; at 6.30, "Our Father which art in Heaven?"

Dec. 4, Grimsby; 8, Islington; 11 and 18, Hall of Science.
January 1, Birmingham; 8, Leicester; 15 and 22, Hall of Science; 29, Bristol.
February 5, Hull.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MR. CHARLES WATTS' ENGAGEMENTS.—Nov. 27, Hall of Science, London. Dec. 4, Hall of Science; 11, Manchester; 18, Birmingham.—All communications for Mr. Watts should be sent direct to him (with stamped envelope for reply) at Baskerville Hall, The Crescent, Birmingham.

W. H. KINGHAM.—Pleased to hear that one of our friends gave you a copy of the *Freethinker* on Ramsgate Pier. You do not know the early writers of your own Church accurately. Justin Martyr does not "mention" the gospel of Matthew, or any other gospel.

J. J. BROWN.—You seem to us to be chasing will-o'-the-wisps.

W. T. STEELE.—Sorry we cannot find room for it. You will have to read a great deal, and spoil much good paper with literary efforts, before your productions are up to the level of publication. But you are young and can afford to wait.

W. BIRRELL.—Bronson Keller's *Short History of the Bible* is published in America, and can be procured through the Truthseeker Company, 28 Lafayette-place, New York. Price 50 cents paper, 75 cents cloth.

W. J. SAUNDERS.—Chemists are not able to convert a mineral into living matter. Your Theosophic friend is romancing. Madame Blavatsky was no authority on such matters.

W. GRIFFIN.—The verse you mention was written by Robert Burns. See any complete edition of his poems. We do not know what book Mr. Watts was quoting from. Ask him yourself. His address is at the head of this column. Read Mr. Foote's *Atheism and Morality*.

W. B.—We do not know any newsagent in Canterbury who supplies the *Freethinker*. Perhaps some reader can oblige you.

W. MACKERELL.—We cannot say whether the original is copy-right. You might safely, we should think, supply a few copies to your Freethought friends in the neighborhood. The previous letter you refer to did not reach us.

FEDERAL.—Under Mr. Bradlaugh's Oaths Act you can claim to affirm in any court. You must declare that you have no religious belief, or that the taking of an oath is contrary to your religious belief. If you find any difficulty send us full particulars.

A. STANLEY.—Received.

JOSEPHUS.—In the phrase "First Cause" the term is often used ambiguously. "Cause" really means, in the language of logic, invariable and unconditional antecedent, and applies simply to the succession of phenomena. A first cause in this sense is unthinkable. In the other sense, first cause means the moumenon—whatever it is—underlying phenomena. Keep this in view, and always make sure of the sense in which the writer is using the term "cause."

E. H. B. STEPHENSON.—One of the two pieces was inserted; the other, we believe we said at the time, was unsuitable. Shall appear.

JAMES HORNE.—Gambetta did say "Je suis perdu," and the literal translation into English is "I am lost"; but the French phrase has no religious significance. The doctors gave Gambetta up, and the words he uttered to a friend really meant "It is all over with me, then." See *Infidel Death-Beds* for a fuller account. It is a great mistake to suppose that French workmen have no weekly holiday.

R. SHAW.—Waiting for room. Mr. Foote lectured at Glasgow in September. He has received no application for another date, and does not understand the complaint.

W. ROBSON.—See "Acid Drops."

A. WHEELER.—Pleased to hear that Mr. Foote's lecture at Wellington Hall made such a good impression on your two Christian friends. No wonder they were astonished at the opposition. The course Mr. Foote took was the only one to defeat the enemy's tactics. He saw what was intended and acted accordingly. A momentary strain upon himself was better than a scene of hopeless disorder, which might have prevented the hall from being let again to the Secular Federation. We agree with you that steps must be taken to check certain Christian rowdies, and the matter will be dealt with at the Federation's next monthly meeting.

H. NICHOLSON.—As you say, the only possible answer to a fellow like Bailey is a thrashing. But that is undignified, and would be really paying the blackguard too much honor. The best thing is to leave him severely alone. For our part, we can afford to despise his statement that we "whined and shrieked for mercy" before Justice North. It is so opposite to the truth that it only provokes laughter. What we said

to Justice North, on receiving his sentence of twelve months' imprisonment, was simply this—"Thank you, my lord, the sentence is worthy of your creed." For the rest, we are decidedly of opinion that Christians who applaud a fellow like Bailey are not worth a moment's trouble.

E. H. C. O.—The verses are somewhat defective in workmanship. We like your prose better.

S. GREENHORN.—Thanks. See paragraph.

W. L. PROSSER.—Probably the editor won't insert it. If he does, send us a copy.

J. W. WITTERING.—Subjects sent. Be sure you forward us a bill.

ANTI-HUMBUG.—The story in *Vanity Fair* is certainly broad. We shouldn't like to print it, but "respectable" papers have greater licence.

W. K.—The Balls Pond Branch had the dice loaded against it at that place. Secular work will still be carried on in the district.

L. W. WILLIS.—See Matthew viii. 21, 22; xix. 29; Luke xiv. 23. We really cannot answer such questions by post. You should obtain a copy of our *Bible Handbook*—the Freethinker's Concordance.

W. BRADBURN.—Thanks for your efforts to promote our circulation. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* is a good authority. Its articles are written by the leading men in science, art, and literature. We cannot tell you if your newsagent is boycotting the *Freethinker*. Ask him yourself.

W. WHITCHER.—The London Secular Federation would be happy to carry on an active propaganda in every part of London if the London Freethinkers would only supply the means. Certainly it should not neglect Hackney. Can you tell us what hall is available there for such lectures?

W. ADAMS, who advertises on our last page, is an old friend of Charles Bradlaugh's. Many years ago his name was often to be seen in the Freethought press. We are no authority on watch-making, and do not intend to puff any tradesman's goods; but we are quite sure of Mr. Adams's honesty, and certain that he would always try to do justice to his customers.

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—Für Unsere Jugend—Freethinker's Magazine—Truthseeker—Western Figaro—Clarion—Church Reformer—Ironclad Age—Independent Pulpit—La Vérité Philosophique—Echo—Watts's Literary Guide—Freedom—Cosmopolitain—Star—Consett Guardian—Newcastle Evening Chronicle—Hackney and Kingsland Gazette—Newcastle Daily Leader—Newcastle Daily Chronicle—Freethought Messenger—Bolton Weekly Guardian—San Francisco Call.

LITERARY communications to be addressed to the Editor, 14 Clorkenwell-green, London, E.O. All business communications to Mr. R. Forder, 28 Stonecutter-street, London, E.O.

SCALE OF ADVERTISEMENTS.—Thirty words, 1s. 6d.; every succeeding ten words, 6d. *Displayed Advertisements*:—One inch, 3s.; Half Column, 15s.; Column, £1 10s. Special terms for repetitions.

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

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

SUGAR PLUMS.

The foggy weather on Sunday evening did not prevent a good audience from assembling at the London Hall of Science. Mr. Rowney occupied the chair, and gave out the notices with excellent emphasis. Mr. Foote's lecture was very warmly applauded. To-day (Nov. 27) the platform is occupied, morning and evening, by Mr. Charles Watts. No doubt he will have good audiences and a hearty welcome.

Judging from the sale of tickets up to the present, there will be a large gathering at the annual London Freethinkers' Ball, which takes place next Wednesday (Nov. 30) at the Hall of Science. Miss Vance and Mr. Ward have arranged for a capital entertainment in the minor hall, to begin punctually at 8.45. Dancing will go on in the large hall. During the evening brief addresses will be delivered by Messrs. G. W. Foote and Charles Watts. Those who attend will have every opportunity of spending an enjoyable evening, and they will also help the London Secular Federation in carrying the light of Freethought into the more benighted parts of the metropolis.

There should be a good and rapid sale of the National Secular Society's *Almanack* for 1893. It is the Society's property, and all the profit realised will be spent on Secular work. The articles are written by a goodly list of leading Freethinkers, and should prove very interesting. A new feature is the portraits of the Organisation Committee. Mrs. Louisa Samson kindly offered to do half a dozen or so for reproduction by the photo-zinc process. How to select was a difficulty. At last the president-editor decided to have a definite circle—the Organisation Committee. Next year there will probably be a circle of the contributors worked in at the head of their articles.

Mrs. Samson had to draw the portraits rather hastily, through the pressure of other work. Some of them, however, are done extremely well. Those who receive least justice are W. H. Reynolds and G. Standing. Mr. Reynolds has greater breadth of head and face than is indicated. Mr. Standing supplied Mrs. Samson with a photo. taken when he was not in good health, and the indisposition is reflected in the portrait. We assure our provincial friends that his habitual expression is one of greater geniality.

The London Secular Federation's course of Free Lectures at Islington opened well on Thursday, November 17. Wellington Hall was well filled, and Mr. Foote's discourse on "Why I Cannot be a Christian" was listened to with deep attention. Mr. A. Guest took the chair and made an earnest appeal on behalf of the Federation. The collection was an unusually good one. Unhappily the discussion was far from excellent. Several Christians opposed, but only one spoke like a gentleman. One well-known brawler, aided by a few of his friends, did his utmost to create disorder. They were not as successful as they evidently intended, however, and the meeting broke up after ten o'clock without confusion.

Mr. Touzeau Parris follows Mr. Foote in this course, and is in turn to be followed by Mrs. Thornton Smith. We hope they will have good meetings. No doubt the local Freethinkers will see that they are properly supported. Mr. Foote winds up the course with a lecture on "Why I am an Atheist." One good Christian has promised to come and "send him flying."

After Mrs. Smith's lecture at Wellington Hall on Dec. 1, a meeting will be held of persons intending to join the proposed Islington Branch. Local Freethinkers are requested to attend.

Mr. Charles Watts had three capital audiences at Sheffield last Sunday, the largest he has ever had in the local Hall of Science. Friends attended from the surrounding districts, and two gentlemen came from York to hear the lectures.

Mr. Touzeau Parris lectures next Sunday evening (Dec. 4) at the Battersea Secular Hall. There are few Sunday lectures in the West End, and Mr. Parris should have a crowded house.

Mr. Cohen lectures for the first time at Birmingham on Sunday. His subjects are attractive, and should draw good audiences.

The Melbourne *Liberator* begins to give a full report of a four nights' debate between Messrs. Symes and Selby on the questions "Is Christian Theism More Rational than Atheistic Secularism?" and "Is the New Testament Jesus a Myth?" Mr. Symes has since gone on a lecturing tour to Adelaide.

Since the death of D. M. Bennett, the *Truthseeker* (New York) has been under the able editorial management of Mr. E. M. Macdonald. The business management devolved upon Mr. C. P. Somerby. This gentleman, however, has just retired, and Mr. Macdonald undertakes the double duty. We wish him strength to bear it.

Mr. Israel Zangwill, author of *The Bow Mystery*, is adapting Gutzkow's German play, *Uriel d'Acosta* into English for production at the Haymarket. Uriel d'Acosta was a real character of the early sixteenth century. The son of a Portuguese Christianised Jew, he was brought up as a Christian, but on reaching maturity rejected faith in the carpenter's wife's son. He went to Holland, where he published a work criticising both Moses and Jesus. For this

he was excommunicated by the synagogue, and fined and imprisoned by the Christian authorities and his work suppressed. He suffered so much persecution at the hands of the Jews that, after many years, he made his submission on the false assurance that he would be let off cheaply. He was, however, lashed in the synagogue, and had to lie down at the door where all who passed out went over him. At length, in despair, and probably in contrition for his recantation, he committed suicide.

At Berne, M. Steck, the newly-elected Socialist deputy to the Grand Bernese Council, refused to take the oath. On the question being put to the House, it was decided by 136 against 40, that Steck should not be allowed to take his seat. The new deputy thereupon announced that he would apply to the Federal authorities, claiming his seat, and basing his claim upon Article 40 of the Federal Constitution, by which it is declared that it is not permissible to impose a religious test upon any citizen.

The Welsh members are determined that the question of Disestablishment in Wales shall come forward next session. Even the Conservatives are said to wish the question disposed of, as they have no chance until something fresh is on the carpet.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

THE parable of the Prodigal Son is the most tender and humane of all scriptural stories. It has that touch of human love and forgiveness which comes home to all hearts, and which is so sadly deficient in the mass of the Bible. It is, however, in blank opposition to orthodox Christianity. The father, who in the parable represents God, wants no atonement from his sinning son; says nothing of the need of religion or reliance on anyone's merit or anyone's blood; never thinks of temporal, still less of eternal, punishment for his sins; but, "when he was a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." That is beautiful. That will for ever stir the hearts of fathers, mothers, and sinning sons. Though the elder brother grumbles, the picture of the feast at the son's return is a pleasant conclusion to a touching little story. But, as closing the last volume of a novel, with the marriage bells pealing over the at last united hero and heroine, the cynical philosopher sometimes wonders how it will be with them a dozen years hence, when, perhaps, they have more children than they can do justice to; so one wonders how affairs went on with the prodigal after the feast was over. An orthodox friend, who evidently resents the features of the story to which I have alluded, pretends to have discovered in an old volume of the *Jerusalem Chronicles* a continuation of the narrative. It runs as follows:

The prodigal was melted by his father's affection, and felt at first that a life's devotion could never repay his kindness. But one cannot live for ever in the fever heat of emotion; and as his nature cooled it ran into the old grooves. Improvidence, love of pleasure, and proneness to rambling ran in his blood. On trying his hand at farm work, the sense of his own incompetence was soon succeeded by disgust for the occupation. Sowing wild oats had unfitted him for the monotonous drudgery of tilling the ground. Nor could he avoid the reflection that he had had a high old time. Then came the thought that one at least of his harlots may have loved him. Salome had been very loving and alluring. Had she been carried off by the famine? Was it not selfish in him to be in prosperity without a thought of her? His brother's diligence and frowns shamed him. His father's goodness shamed him still more. After the husks that the swine did eat, the fatted calf was too rich a change for his stomach, and in a day or two he sickened at the sight of cold fat veal. Life at home, in short, became intolerable, and the first week was not finished when he told his father that he felt it his duty to go and seek Salome. He went off with many promises, the rich robe, his father's best ring and a pocket full of gold pieces, and was never seen more. But this was not the worst. The elder brother, the mainstay of the house, dissatisfied that so much should be bestowed upon the prodigal son who had already wasted in riotous living his fair share of the patrimony, thought

if this scoundrel, when reduced to husks, has but to swallow a petty leek to share better than myself, why should not I, too, see something of the pomps and vanities of this wicked world? He had done more than his share of the work, why should his brother not take his turn? On the very morn of that brother's departure, he left a message to his father that he had long needed a change, and had gone to town to find it. Pestilence there followed on the heels of famine, and he too was never heard of more. The father was left to moan "Behold my house is left unto me desolate."

LUCIANUS.

OH, WHAT MUST IT BE TO BE THERE!

WHEN old Gabriel sounds his bugle for the "gathering of the clans,"

I'll spread my wings and soar aloft, high o'er the chimney cans;

And no doubt I'll see some old familiar faces on my way, Resuscitated for their trial upon this Judgment Day.

What a strange admixture it will be—the lowly and the meek Going up with those who went around the world upon their "cheek";

Charley Peace, Lefroy, and Wainwright I suppose will all be there,

And that dainty brace of charming lady-killers, Burke and Hare;

Mrs. Maybrick, Catherine Webster, Jessie King and Thomas Barr,

Will render sweet selections on their heavenly guitar.

Doctor Pritchard, Doctor Palmer, Doctor Lamson, Doctor Cross,

And the Inquisition monsters, who slew people by the gross;

Mrs. Percy, Jack the Ripper, Barber Fish and Storey too,

With Laurie and Mrs. Flannagan among the murd'rous crew;

The Phoenix Park assassins, tell-tale Carey, and the rest,

Will be with scabby Lazarus, on old Abraham's hairy chest;

Guiteau, who murdered Garfield, will be there in robes of white,

And when yelping out Hosanna he will be a comely sight;

Three-fingered Jack, the Mannings, Dick Turpin and Tom King,

Will swell the heavenly chorus till they make the welkin ring.

The Glasgow Bank directors will be there, you may be sure,

And all the swinish breed who while on earth betrayed the poor,

Who never missed the slightest chance to stuff their yawning fobs,

Regardless of the orphan's tears and helpless widow's sobs;

Deeming the Rainhill Octopus, Neill Cream and Sweeny Todd,

Will emulate the Trinity around the throne of God.

All these, with countless others who, imbued with fiendish rage,

With the life-blood of their fellow man ensanguined history's page.

I could not stand such company, so I'll skip from heaven pell-mell,

And take up eternal quarters with the decent folk in hell.

NOAH LOT.

ORIGIN OF THE RAINBOW.

The Bible explanation of the rainbow, that it was set in the sky by Jehovah as a reminder: in his own words, "That I may remember the everlasting covenant," not to again destroy all flesh (Gen. ix. 15), is neither very creditable to God nor credible to science. The Turks have a story far more poetical and pleasant. They call the rainbow "the girdle of Allah." The sun is the eye of God and heaven his body. The story, as told by Friedrich Bodenstedt in his *Morning Land, or Thousand and One Days in the East*, tells how all day long Allah looks down and beholds the foolish doings of men on earth. He sees how the pious refrain from wine in the illusion of pleasing him; how the saints practise mortifications in the vain expectation that he likes it; he continually hears the discordant prayers and petitions of all sects, each seeking their own advantage while vainly pretending to serve him. But Allah is too wise to spoil his eternal life with indignation at human pettiness or chagrin at human stupidity. He laughs at everything; and sometimes, when he can hold out no longer, he clasps the seven-colored girdle round his body, so as not to burst with laughing at the follies of mankind.

CORRESPONDENCE.

THE THIRSK ACCIDENT AND THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

TO THE EDITOR OF "THE FREETHINKER."

SIR,—In your issue of Nov. 13, I observed amongst "Acid Drops" a particularly sour looking one regarding "a young gentleman of Darlington, almost an Atheist," upon whom the providence of God had been resting so heavily, that it prevented him from entering the ill-fated train. This, as remarked, may be a story of *fancy*; will you now allow me to present to your readers a story of *fact*. Amongst those travellers who passed beyond that bourne from which they shall never return, were a Mr. and Miss M'Culloch, and a little niece from Vale of Leven, Scotland. As it was known in the village that they were going on a somewhat protracted journey, the Sunday previous to so doing prayers were *put up publicly* in the kirk (of which they were members), that "God would carry them in health and safety to their journey's end." And the answer given was, the roasted little body of the child, recognisable only by a small silver coin twined around her neck, clasping within her wee hands the burned remains of her little doll; the bruised and mangled body of her aunt (Miss M'Culloch), and the battered, almost senseless, but living body of her uncle, (Mr. M'Culloch). Candidly, sir, could the Devil (presuming he is as black as Christian brushes have painted him) have returned such an awful mockery of an answer?

I cannot, and need not say anything further. The efficacy of prayer in its absurdity seems infinite, and believers therein hopelessly illogical.—Yours, etc.,

Glasgow, Nov. 20, 1892.

A. S.

EXPOUNDING SCRIPTURE.

IN a village in one of the smaller states of Germany there lives a parson and a clerk who had often quarrelled about some trivial matters relating to church affairs. In the midst of these petty broils the parson wished to introduce something new in the order of service, to which the clerk objected, on the ground that it had never been so and never should be, if he could prevent it. Long and heated discussions followed, in which the clerk, not being so well educated as the parson, was generally ignominiously defeated, his sole argument being that it never had been so.

On a subsequent Sunday morning the minister chose as his text, "Whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." When he had concluded a very eloquent discourse on this subject, he brought the service to a close and proceeded on his way home. The clerk, whose route lay also in the same direction, took a short cut across the fields, and thus met his old adversary the clergyman. Thinking that the opportunity had at last arrived for avenging past injuries, he confronted the parson, saying:

"Let us see if you can practise as well as you can preach." He then gave the parson a smart blow on the right cheek.

The clergyman, determined to act on his text rather than allow the clerk to deride and sneer at him, so he offered him the left cheek, upon which the clerk, thinking the parson thoroughly cowed, promptly administered a heavier blow than before.

"Now," said the parson, who was a man of rather large dimensions, "there is another text which runs thus—'For with the same measure ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again;' and, suiting the action to the words, he gave the clerk such a sound thrashing as he had never before received in his life, and never wished to receive again.

The squire of the parish happening to pass in his carriage, and desirous of knowing the cause of the scuffle, sent his footman to ascertain what it was about.

The footman quickly returned, and, touching his hat, said: "Oh, sir, it is only the parson and the clerk expounding Scripture to one another."

MARRIAGE.

SMITH—CHADNEY.—On the 12th inst., at Brixton, Mr. C. E. Smith, a member of Lambeth Branch N.S.S., to Nelly, daughter of the late Edwin Chadney, of Camberwell.

BOOK CHAT.

The *Bolton Weekly Guardian*, in a leader devoted to Mr. Conway's *Life of Paine*, says: "On all lovers of liberty Tom Paine has claims for gratitude, as Mr. Conway unmistakably shows, and in thus bringing clearer light to bear upon his character, his biographer has done great service, not only to the memory of Paine, but to the cause of truth and political liberty." The *Daily News*, in a short notice of the same work, calls it "a useful and valuable contribution to the history of the latter part of the last century."

* * *

The *Memories of Dean Hole*, among its anecdotes, mentions a church hymn which was growled out thus:

O turn my pi—O turn my pi—O turn my pious soul to thee.
This was nearly as good as the famous
O send down Sal—O send down Sal—Salvation from on high.

* * *

The writers on the *Clarion* are a lively set who mingle high humanitarian aims with their frivolity. The frontispiece to the *Clarion Christmas Number* which depicts some school-boys snowballing Bumble, may be said to illustrate them, as the number throughout does, in their lighter aspect. Wilson Barrett, Edward Carpenter, James Bailey, William Wade, The Bounder, Dangle, Quinbus Flestrin, Nunquam, and Mont Blong, make up a piquant sixpenny Christmas feast of smart writing, spiritedly illustrated, by W. Palmer, Slawkenbergius, and other artists.

* * *

Theosophy and the Society of Jesus, by Annie Besant, F.T.S., is a slight eight-page tract, which tells us that the Jesuits, "sitting in a circle, concentrate on a particular person and 'will' him or her into an agreed-on line of action," and that a small group "attend a lecture given by any well-known and dangerous speaker, and endeavor to hypnotise him or her sufficiently to confuse, or at least weaken the argument." We believe their methods are more commonplace and more effective. We are surprised that Mrs. Besant should quote against the Jesuits the *Monita Secreta*. That work is now generally allowed to be not an adopted book of instruction, but a skit upon the order written by an enemy.

* * *

A Paris house is about to issue a new volume of hitherto unpublished letters by Heinrich Heine. In one of them he speaks of his wife as "music transformed into woman."

* * *

Pernicious Parodies is the title of a neat brochure by P. H. Echlin, published by A. Hemingway, 25 Higher Chatham-street, Manchester, at one shilling. The parodies are all in the metre of Sankey's hymns. They will hardly be sung at Moody's meetings.

* * *

"Agnostic" issues a brief reply to a published lecture on *Is there a God?* by the Rev. J. M. Logan, of Bristol. The writer conceals his identity for personal reasons, but he is obviously better versed in science than the reverend gentlemen. Mr. Logan argues that if matter were infinite it would be one solid block. He supposes that the possibility of movement shows that matter is finite. "Agnostic" easily replies to this astonishing argument. Just as a few marbles will move in a bottle otherwise full of water, so solid matter will move in an elastic medium like ether. The pamphlet contains other shrewd replies to Mr. Logan, and ends by remarking that, as a Christian minister, he should defend the God of the Bible.

* * *

Dr. Charcot, the famous French pathologist, will contribute an article on "Faith-healing" to the December number of the *New Review*. We shall give our readers some account of it in an early issue.

MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN HEAVEN AND HELL.

The Turks tell their people of a Heaven where there is sensible pleasure, but of a Hell where they shall suffer they do not know what. The Christians quite invert this order; they tell us of a Hell where we shall feel sensible pain, but of a Heaven where we shall enjoy we cannot tell what.—*Selden's "Table Talk."*

THE PRAYER OF THE PAMPERED PESSIMIST.

LORD, I cuss my daily cuss,
I don't believe things could be wuss;
For, if they could, O Lord, I know
They would have been so long ago.

Our life is but a living death:
Champagne bills take away one's breath.
We're corpses grinning in a row
First-class hotels do bleed us so.

Our days are but an idiot's dreams,
Where nothing is, but only seems;
Where good Havanas cost a quarter,
Twenty a hundred, nothing shorter.

O thou that hearest prayer, 'tis said,
Give me this day my daily bread;
But if I don't get turkey too,
I'll cuss things wuss than now I do.

HARRY LYMAN KOOPMAN (in *Liberty*).

MISTAKEN FOR A PARSON.

There is a good story told of the elder Compton, the comedian. He had been to a party. Next day, on his way home, he stopped at a village inn and ordered dinner. He wore a long black coat over a dress suit, and having also a white necktie on, the landlord mistook him for a clergyman. "There is a meeting of the clergy here to-day, sir, and they are about to dine; I'm sure the dean would be glad to have you join them." "Thank you," said Compton, who was very hungry, "I shall be glad." "I will take in your card," said the landlord. "I have no card," replied Compton; "you can say, 'The Rev. Mr. Paine, who is passing through the town.'" The dean said they would be very glad to give a strange brother a seat at the table. The "Rev. Mr. Paine" appeared, and the dean, with courtesy, placed him at his right hand, and asked him to say grace. Compton felt a cold thrill run through him, but with perfect presence of mind recalled the opening portion of the Church service, and hit upon the very words for his purpose. In his rich, melodious voice, he said, "O Lord, open thou our lips, and our mouths shall show forth thy praise."

THE POOR SHEPHERD.

When hungry wolves had trespassed on the fold,
And the robbed shepherd his sad story told,
"Call in Alcides," said a crafty priest,
"Give him one half, and he'll secure the rest."
"No," said the shepherd; "if the Fates decree
By ravaging my flock to ruin me,
To their commands I willingly resign,
Power is their character, and patience mine;
Though; troth, to me there seems but little odds
Who prove the greatest robbers—wolves or gods.

—MATTHEW PRIOR.

IMMORTALITY.

Nothing in this world is perpetual; everything, however seemingly firm, is in continual flux and change. The world itself gives symptoms of frailty and dissolution. How contrary to analogy, therefore to imagine, that one single form, seeming the frailest of any, and subject to the greatest disorders is immortal and indissoluble. What a daring theory is that! How lightly, not to say how rashly, entertained! How to dispose of the infinite number of posthumous existences ought also to embarrass the religious theory. Every planet, in every solar system, we are at liberty to imagine peopled with intelligent mortal beings. At least we can fix on no other supposition. For these, then, a new universe must, every generation, be created beyond the bounds of the present universe; or one must have been created at first, so prodigiously made as to admit of this continual influx of beings. Ought such bold suppositions to be received by any philosophy; and that merely on the pretext of a bare possibility.—*David Hume, "Of the Immortality of the Soul," Works, vol. 4, p. 504, 1875.*

PROFANE JOKES.

Little Dot—"Mamma, what's this cake called angel cake for?" Mamma (meaningly)—"Because little girls who eat too much of it become angels." "Don't angels get this kind of cake to eat?" "No; angels never get anything to eat." "Then I dess I don't want to be a angel."

"Well, Johnny," said the Sunday-school teacher to one of her little pupils, "I understand there's a new baby at your house. What do they call it?" "Why," said Johnny, with childish frankness, "mamma calls it a little angel, but this morning papa called it a darned nuisance."

A mother was giving her little boy a lesson on the creation, and, after describing the darkness which covered everything, she said—"God first made light." "Light that you see by?" inquired the youngster. "Yes." "Well, where did he get his matches?"

"Mamma, what did you pray for?" said the little five-year-old son of a Brighton man. "Why, for papa and mamma, and for God to make you a good boy," she replied. "Well, that's just what I've been praying for too," said the young philosopher, "and if you are going to keep on I may as well stop."

It was a colored preacher who said to his flock: "We have a collection to make this morning, and for de glory of heaven whichever one stole Mr. Jones' turkeys las' Thanksgiving don't put anything on the plate." The result was that every blessed nigger in the church came down with the shekels.

A preacher, of the Celestine type, addressed his flock with great earnestness on the subject of miracles as follows: "My beloved friends, de greatest of all miracles was 'bout de loaves and de fishes. Dere was five thousand loaves and two thousand fishes, and de twelve 'postles had to eat dem all. De miracle is dey didn't bust!"

"What makes people, mamma?"

"You are too young to understand."

"Why can't you tell me?"

"Your Sunday-school teacher tells you that God made you, doesn't she?"

"Yes! Can we see God?"

"No! He is a spirit."

"You can buy spirit, can't you?"

"Not that kind."

"Is God a he or a she?"

"Don't ask such questions."

"Did God make himself, mamma?"

"I guess so."

"How could he when he hasn't any arms?" etc., etc.

EPITAPH ON AN UNBELIEVER.

The following lines are given by Mr. B. F. Underwood as composed by Dr. Crawford, of St. Charles, Illinois, for his father's epitaph:

A man was he, whate'er his faults might be,
Who worshipped Justice—adored Humanity:
The World his country—all mankind his kin,
His love included all who dwelt therein.
How to live right with steadfast aim he tried,
And reck'd but little in what mood he died.

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): 7.45, musical and dramatic entertainment and dancing (free). Tuesday at 8, social gathering. Wednesday at 8, dramatic class. Friday at 8, a lecture.

Bethnal Green—Libra Hall, 78 Libra-road, Roman-road: 7.30, H. Snell will lecture (free). Monday at 9, C. Cohen's science class (geology). Wednesday at 9, C. Cohen's class on "Spencer's Ethics." Thursday at 8.30, debate, "France 1790—England 1890," opened by H. Snell (free). Saturday at 8.30, free concert and dance.

Camberwell—61 New Church-road, S.E.: 11, debating class, Andrew Liddle, "Is the Christ of the Gospels an Historical Character?" 7.30, W. Heaford, "A Substitute for Christianity."

Hall of Science, 142 Old-street, E.C.: 11.15, Charles Watts, "Cromwell and the Commonwealth" (free); 6.30, musical selections; 7, Charles Watts, "Theosophy: from a Secular Standpoint" (3d., 6d., and 1s.) Wednesday at 8.30, ball, dramatic sketches and music, in aid of London Secular Federation (1s.)

Islington—Wellington Hall, Almeida-street, Upper-street: Thursday at 8, Mrs. Thornton Smith, "Creation Stories, Old and New" (free).

Milton Hall, Hawley-crescent, Kentish Town-road, N.W.: 7.30, Stanley Jones, "Is Genesis in Conflict with Science?"

Walthamstow—Workmen's Hall, High-street: Thursday at 8, C. James, "Immortality—Does Man Survive Death?" (free).

West London Ethical Society, Princes' Hall, Piccadilly: 11.15, Stanton Coit, Ph.D., "Renan, the Sophist"; preceded by instrumental music.

OPEN-AIR PROPAGANDA.

Battersea Park-gates: 11.15, C. J. Hunt, "The Uselessness of Prayer."

COUNTRY.

Aberdeen—Oddfellows' Hall Buildings (Hall No. 4, upstairs): 6.30, W. S. Renzie, "The Character and Career of Jesus Christ."

Belfast—Crown Chambers, 64 Royal Avenue, Belfast: 7, R. Carroll, "Agnosticism and Christianity."

Birmingham—Baskerville Hall, Crescent, Cambridge-street: C. Cohen, 11, "Evolution v. Special Creation"; 7, "Christianity and Morality."

Blackburn—Spinners' Institute, Peter-street: Greevz Fisher, 3, "Will Atheists go to Hell?"; 6.30, "Is Blasphemy Wrong?"

Bradford—Unity Lodge Rooms, 65 Sunbridge-road: 6.30, Robert Law, F.G.S., "Wonders of Geology."

Bristol—Shepherd's Hall, Old Market-street: 2.30, a meeting.

Glasgow—Ex-Mission Hall, 110 Brunswick-street: 12, discussion class, T. Robertson, "Some Aspects of the Social Question"; 6.30, social meeting (6d.)

Glasgow—St. Rollox Eclectic Society, Toynbee Hall, Parson-street: Tuesday at 8, G. Faulkner, "Christianity and Slavery."

Leeds—Crampton's Temperance Hotel, Briggate: 7, T. McGuire, "Trade Depressions."

Liverpool—Oddfellows' Hall, St. Anne-street: 11, Tontine Society; 2.45, Hebrew class; 3.30, philosophy class; 7, Mr. Doeg, "Man, Nature, and God—a Criticism of Baring Gould's *Religious Belief*."

Manchester N.S.S., Secular Hall, Rusholme-road, Oxford-road, All Saints: G. W. Foote, 11, "Is the Bible a Safe Guide?"; 3, "Hell, and the Bishop of Chester"; 6.30, "Our Father which art in Heaven."

Newcastle-on-Tyne—Eldon Hall, 2 Clayton-street: 3, monthly meeting; 7, G. Storey, "Christianity and Secularism: from a Christian Standpoint."

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

Portsmouth—Wellington Hall, Wellington-street, Southsea: 3, mutual improvement class, Mr. Vincent, "Materialism"; 6, committee meeting; 7, Mr. Armsden.

Sheffield—Hall of Science, Rockingham-street: 7, Thomas Garbutt, "A Reply to Celestine Edwards' Christianity."

South Shields—Capt. Duncan's Navigation School, King-street: 7, business meeting; 7.30, Mr. Bowe, "Did Christ Rise from the Dead?"

Sunderland—Bridge End Vaults, Bridge-street: 7, W. R. Staniell will lecture.

Wolverhampton—Athenæum Assembly Room, Queen-street: 3, see Saturday night's *Express* and *Star*; 7, J. Davidson will lecture.

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H. SNELL, 6 Monk-street, Woolwich.—Nov. 27, Libra Hall. Dec. 4, Portsmouth; 11, Camberwell; 18, Libra Hall.

ARTHUR B. MOSS, 44 Credon-road, Rotherhithe, London, S.E.—Dec. 6, Bermondsey Institute; 18, New Brompton.

C. J. HUNT, 48 Fordingley-road, St. Peter's Park, London, W.—Nov. 24, Walthamstow; 27, m., Battersea. Dec. 4, Edmonton; 22, Walthamstow. Jan. 1, m., Battersea.

C. COHEN, 154 Cannon-street-road, Commercial-road, E.—Nov. 25, Battersea; 27, Birmingham. Dec. 4, m., Battersea; e., Camberwell; 8, Walthamstow; 11, Libra Hall; 18, Edmonton.

S. H. ALISON, 52 Vassall-road, Brixton, S.W.—Jan. 1, Chatham; 29, Camberwell.

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